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Evaluation of Modern Slavery in Organised Immigration Crime Victim Navigator Role August 2024

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Background to the project

The Modern Slavery in Organised Immigration Crime Victim Navigator (MSOIC VN) role was funded by Comic Relief's Change Makers programme. The programme began in July 2021 and lasted for three years concluding in November, 2024. In part, the role follows on from the success of Justice and Care's broader Victim Navigator role, which supports survivors of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) by providing a crucial connection between police and survivors. Victim Navigators offer strategic advice to law enforcement and deliver support plans to survivors in their caseload. The initial aim of the MSOIC VN was to bring an Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) focus to MSHT offences. This included working at the ports and supporting vulnerable migrants as well as victims of slavery. Originally, the MSOIC VN was slated to only work with Essex Police Force, embedded in the newly formed Organised Immigration team; however, across the lifetime of the pilot, the MSOIC VN role expanded to support other forces nationally in their fight against OIC.

The Evaluation

ATD Research and Consultancy were commissioned to undertake a three-year independent evaluation of the MSOIC VN role to consider the extent to which it has achieved the intended outcomes, identify barriers and facilitators to success, and whether the role could be expanded to other forces.

At the operational level, the evaluation sought to measure and assess:

- The number of victims of trafficking and vulnerable migrants who have been identified and triaged as part of the MSOIC VN role.
- The extent to which those identified have been engaged to understand their rights and entitlements and work with survivors to understand how to protect themselves from future exploitation.
- The extent survivors supported have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) or other relevant support services and have had tailor-made care-plans created for them.
- The extent to which survivors have been safely repatriated to their countries of origin.
- The extent to which survivors remain engaged with services (e.g. immigration) and police investigations and associated outcomes (e.g. prosecutions).

At the systemic level, the evaluation sought to measure and assess:

- The extent to which standard operating procedures have been developed and their impact on identifying victims and vulnerable migrants.
- The impact of the specialised training package for victim-centred care that has been implemented locally and nationally by the Border Force.
- Consider the impact of the lessons shared and advocacy with government and front-line practitioners.
- The development and coordination of pathways for intelligence gathering and sharing between Police, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and the connection between Border Force and Police to their European counterparts.
- Where the Modern Slavery Policy Unit leverages learnings, evidence, and research to share with the Home Office and other key stakeholders, informing policy and practice to implement systemic national change, identifying examples.
- Any evidence of shifting public attitudes and negative narratives regarding migrants or refugees.

The evaluation ran throughout the lifetime of the MSOIC VN pilot, and this report is the third and final; a baseline and interim report have previously been produced. In addition, a context report was produced in December 2022 to address the changing political landscape since the MSOIC role commenced.

Methodology for current report

A total of 16 participants were interviewed for the report. A number were interviewed longitudinally at multiple times throughout the project. This includes external stakeholders such as police, Border Force and Immigration, Justice and Care staff and two survivors supported by the MSOIC VN. In addition, written feedback was submitted by three survivors whom the MSOIC VN supported.

The evaluator has also participated in meetings with the Justice and Care team to receive updates on progress and data from the team, including a log of the MSOIC VN's activities, training feedback and outputs from the case management system. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, allowing an accurate record of the discussion. Transcripts have been read and coded for the purposes of the interim report.

We also asked Essex Police for OIC-related case numbers throughout the evaluation. However, due to the changing nature of the role and discrepancies in how the police record this, this yielded minimal useful data. For reference, it is included in Annex A.

Findings

Operational context

The changing political climate

The context report, written at the end of December 2022, highlighted the changing landscape in relation to OIC. More than ever, the MSOIC VN role is particularly important in the current political climate and heightened attention and focus on immigration. Since the MSOIC VN commenced their role, the evolution and changes in legislation have reportedly made the UK considerably more 'hostile' to migrants. The MSOIC VN, alongside other stakeholders, reflected that immigration had become much more process-driven rather than considering whether people are vulnerable or victims. In many ways, this was said to have made it harder to be a champion for survivors and yet made the role more crucial.

'I think especially with the way politics and the government's going at the moment, there's a lot more of a focus on Organised Immigration Crime and people are sort of often overlooked as victims. I think it's really important to have someone who's coming from that victim side, and also has a big awareness of monitoring human trafficking and can recognise the difference between this is someone who's coming to claim asylum, this is someone who's now stuck in a debt bondage situation or this is now someone who's really extremely vulnerable and you can see that they are going to end up in exploitation...' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

'As the National Borders Act¹ starts to become more restrictive over things, how does that affect our day to day work? Well I think it's even more invaluable at that point to have someone such as [MSOIC VN], out there talking on behalf of police, but independent from police, to reassure potential victims, because I think without that gangs are going to be using things like the National Borders Act to really instil into their victims a fear of deportation for coming forwards' (Interviewee 006, External Police Interview)

Police officers also noted the new challenges since the baseline report regarding the identification of victims and providing the subsequent support available for them.

'The new music from the Home Office is that it is a lot more stringent to ascertain whether somebody is a victim [...]. I think to access that [NRM] support is harder based on the steering we've had.' (Interviewee 003, External Police Interview)

'That priority at an operational level is being pushed on to Immigration Crime [...]. I think it's even more important to have someone [like the MSOIC VN] in that space, who is flying the flag for potential exploitation and

¹ The National Borders Act, 2022¹ implemented changes to the asylum system which meant that "those who arrive in the UK via irregular means may receive less protection and support." The Law Society (2025). URL: <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/immigration/nationality-and-borders-act#:~:text=The%20Nationality%20and%20Borders%20Bill,voices%20of%20solicitors%20were%20heard>

looking for it and making sure that there's still sort of emphasis on it and that officers know and understand that' (Interviewee 010, Justice and Care)

Law enforcement stakeholders and Justice and Care have noted that since the Nationality and Borders Act (2022), the emphasis has shifted to addressing boat entries and implementing an approach that 'treats everyone the same.' This shift indicates a broader systemic approach that is less victim-centric. The cost-of-living crisis exacerbated this situation and decreased wider public sympathy towards migrants. Additionally, the VN observed that migrants entering the UK via airports were treated differently than those arriving by lorries or boats. There seemed to be more sympathy for those in lorries compared to the media's depiction of migrants crossing the channel. Overall, however, having the MSOIC VN was said to allow victims to remain at the heart of investigations, affording police and other agencies time to focus on the other parts of the process.

'It means there is a 100 percent victim focus at that point. It also offers an impartiality, and that impartiality is brilliant at bringing rapport to the victims and bringing them on board. While again, we'll then look at other partnership agencies and intelligence camps, detectives will be looking at building the case file and dealing with the suspects and it's just allowing more time' (Interviewee 006, External Police Interview)

Expansion of MSOIC role

The MSOIC VN role was expanded throughout the pilot, and the VN subsequently supported jobs in the Metropolitan police, Leicestershire, Bedfordshire, Surrey and Kent, as well as working with police based at Stansted airport. Since the first interviews were conducted at the inception of the pilot, the multidisciplinary team that was first envisaged within Essex Police did not come to fruition. This was said to be because the dedicated OIC police team was smaller than planned and the office space identified was not suitable. Further, the nature of the jobs within the OIC team at Essex Police were largely 'level two' jobs which derived from intelligence rather than being reactive (e.g. responding to a lorry drop). At the time of the interim report, the OIC team in Essex reported having three commissioned jobs. The jobs were complex and sprawling, and the team said they were unable to take on any more jobs due to staffing issues. Overall, these identified challenges resulted in fewer direct victim support cases for the MSOIC VN to engage with.

This provided extra capacity for the MSOIC VN to support cases elsewhere across the country, including work with the Border Force, the Met, Surrey and Kent Police forces, and officers at Stansted airport. Over the course of the pilot the MSOIC VN has become well known and synonymous with offering critical support and advice not just in Essex but nationally.

In addition, the MSOIC VN reported an increasing number of enquiries from other Justice and Care MSHT Victim Navigators seeking advice on immigration law. Since the current MSOIC VN has a background in immigration law, it

afforded the opportunity to evaluate the contribution of this expertise. Feedback confirms this is a critical component of any future MSOIC VNs.

‘...it’s hugely complex legislation. There’s people that have been in this job for 12/13 years and still can’t get their head around some of it. And it’s, you know, to have that sort of understanding and have that kind of independence [...], I think it’s just really, really helpful’ (Interviewee 006, External Police Interview)

Police stakeholders reflected on the added value in having the MSOIC VN as a resource, even in forces where another Justice and Care VN is embedded, especially in cases where there is a crossover of OIC and MSHT offending.

‘I think the benefit to the victims for having the victim navigator team there is just invaluable, honestly. [...] because not only does it [...] [mean] that we get much better engagement rate from victims, but the actual difference it makes to their personal lives, while they go through that really difficult process, you can’t really put a price on that, [...] and having that multiskilled approach to it, and like that flexibility of MSHT and OIC, I think is like really helpful’ (Interviewee 006, External Police Interview)

The MSOIC VN reported throughout her post, that she felt extremely supported by Justice and Care as an organisation, given that it provided opportunities to broaden her knowledge of wider asylum and immigration issues and forge relationships at an international level. At the time of the final evaluation report, she was also getting further qualifications in immigration law. This will further her ability to train and advise other colleagues.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine following the Russian invasion posed some additional opportunities for reactive assistance from the MSOIC VN. It was noted that the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme, launched in March 2022, meant there was an increase in potentially vulnerable asylum seekers arriving through airports compared to other modes of transport. This is because the hosting scheme was not well regulated and there was a risk of rogue ‘hosts’ exploiting individuals under the guise of sponsorship. The MSOIC VN and police at Stansted airport identified individuals with unsuitable sponsors and given support and advice. The MSOIC VN was able to continue to check in on these individuals beyond the conversations at the airport, which was reported to be of added value, especially as airport police stated they were unaware of what should happen next in terms of safeguarding the migrant.

‘I had a couple that Border Force had raised concerns for. I went up to do various checks and spoke with them. And they were more than willing to engage so that was a real positive. But I was able to phone [MSOIC VN], speak to her, and she was absolutely brilliant, because they were happy for me to pass their details on to her. So she then linked in with them the following day [and followed up on their wellbeing], So yeah, that’s huge’ (Interviewee 002, External Police Interview)

The Diversity of the Role

Throughout the pilot, the MSOIC VN worked towards improving outcomes for vulnerable migrants and victims of human trafficking (HT) through the provision of specialised support, providing a crucial connection between survivors and police, and promoting best practice in victim identification and care on a systemic level.

Data received in August 2024 indicated the MSOIC VN achieved the following throughout the lifetime of the pilot:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Support plan cases | 62 |
| Strategic advice cases | 40 |
| Total police/law enforcement trained | 648 |
| Total other stakeholders trained | 138 |
| Repatriations supported | 5 |
| Operations Attended (including Operation Aident ²) | 79 |

As was noted at the outset of the MSOIC VN role, the ambition was to support individuals and pursue systemic change. This has been achieved through the MSOIC VN supporting individuals directly (support cases), through training and strategic support to law enforcement, as well as liaising with other key stakeholders and agencies across the country.

Survivor Support

Over the duration of the pilot, the MSOIC VN provided support to 62 survivors and support plan cases. In addition to the survivors, 10 related children and close, vulnerable family members received support. The MSOIC VN has been able to ensure victims have their immediate and long-term needs met; offering holistic support and linking them with a variety of specialist services, including help with accommodation, education, healthcare, legal aid, and support engaging with police investigations and prosecutions, including taking them through the court process. The Navigator role is effective at meeting the needs of survivors and vulnerable migrants and helping them to gain access to vital services due to a strong network and knowledge of accessing and navigating state and private services.

Although there are numerous charities that exist to support vulnerable migrants, there are often long wait times and there are limitations in the help and support that can be provided. The advantage of the MSOIC VN role lies in its ability to be tailored to the unique requirements of each case while also enabling swift action effectively. In part, this is supported by a flexible budget, which allows the MSOIC VN to determine the best use of resources and what may need to be spot purchased.

² Operational activity focusing on labour and sexual exploitation co-ordinated by the National Crime Agency.

'I think this one size fits all system doesn't really work because every case is so different. And so I think that's where the value of the VN role comes in is because it is so flexible. You can adjust what you're doing each day to that individual person's needs, whether that's phoning doctors, because they don't speak the same language or printing off resources, or getting someone some clothes because they came in the middle of winter, and they've got some flip flops on. I can go and do that there and then whereas I think when they go through other charities, which are amazing, they're just so underfunded and under resourced, that would probably take two or three weeks to get done.' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

One survivor was able to explain the impact that the MSOIC VN has had on her longer-term recovery and well-being, by supporting access to therapy which has helped address her trauma. As the MSOIC VN explains that finding specialist providers who can speak a survivor's first language was critical, especially in ensuring trauma-informed care principles (such as choice), which facilitate engagement.

In these cases, specifically, it has been crucial to the girls' recovery, the level of trauma that they experienced from the sexual exploitation that they went through, they need that specialist support. [...] The fact that we have a directory where we can pick up the language that is suitable to our clients as well, is really extremely important...obviously, within the NHS and the waiting list, you sort of take the first one you can get otherwise you're gonna be waiting another few months' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

'The therapy has helped me to cope with the trauma and I am learning techniques that can help me cope with what I have been through' (Written Feedback, Survivor)

As a result, this survivor also reflected that the support from the MSOIC VN has enabled trust in others, encouraged trying new things and fostered a solutions-oriented mindset.

'You helped me with a lot of paperwork I wasn't able to complete on my own. We sat down for over 2 hours and went through the forms. I wouldn't have known how to answer the questions or face going through it on my own...Thankfully to you I always know there is a solution and we will find a way' (Written Feedback, Survivor)

'I have also learnt on working to trust other people and that I can talk to people about things. In most areas of life, I have learnt that my voice matters' (Written Feedback, Survivor)

The MSOIC VN also outlined how Justice and Care were able to advocate for more suitable housing to support a survivor's recovery. This involved writing to the local authority with a recommendation from the counsellor, to explain how the accommodation was impacting her ability to progress.

'One of [the survivors], her housing was not appropriate at all, she had severe damp issues and she also struggles with PTSD and she was in a ground floor flat, and people walking past and seeing strangers, it was quite triggering for her. [...] So we finally managed to push with the local authority and get her new housing, which she'll be moving into soon' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

In another case, the MSOIC VN was able to reflect on a survivor's substantial progress due to her support. In part, this was because of the VN pushing for an age assessment through social care. As a result, he was considered a child rather than an adult, allowing him to access additional support and live with a nurturing foster family.

'When I first met him, I think it was two years ago, he wasn't able to speak English very well and he was extremely shy. He was quite traumatised from what had happened. I went to see him a month ago, and he's opened his own nail salon, he is now the manager of a nail salon. He's fully moved his life across to the UK. He is his own individual person with complete freedom, he can make all the decisions that he wants. And just the fact that from two years ago, he couldn't speak a word of English and was so shy and not confident at all. And now he owns his own nail business, fully fluent in English. It's just amazing to see the growth. And that's one of the cases where it's like, this is why you do the job you do. Because his recovery has just been amazing' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care).

To monitor survivor recovery and reintegration over time, Justice and Care developed a standard assessment that measures wellbeing across six key domains of recovery: mental health, physical health, financial stability, social connection, safety, and legal status. Assessments take place at case intake and then at four-month intervals. Over the course of the pilot, 89% of survivors demonstrated improved overall recovery scores, as assessed by themselves, and by our Navigators. This demonstrates the importance of the offer of practical and emotional support over time to facilitate sustainable recovery and reintegration outcomes.

Supporting Operations: Prevention, identification and engagement

Throughout the duration of the pilot, the Navigator provided strategic advice to an additional 20 police investigations and participated in a total of 79 'days of action' at airports, brothels, nail bars, car washes and care homes, and asylum welfare checks.

One of the key functions of the Navigator on 'days of action' is to assist with the early identification of victims and potentially vulnerable individuals. Having the MSOIC VN to support individuals identified through haulier companies contributed to preventing exploitation. Met police emphasised that the specific knowledge and skills of the MSOIC VN were crucial and complementary to the support provided by the already established VNs in the force.

'...we are engaging with hauliers, and we're working with people that were potentially, not coerced into coming over, but are still quite vulnerable. Maybe they haven't actually been at that exploitation point, but [...] they've still been involved in something where they are very vulnerable to becoming a victim of exploitation. By having [MSOIC VN] there and able to build up that kind of rapport on behalf of the police a[...], it's really good for us [...] we are able to get in there before they've actually been groomed or approached by the gangs [...]. So by having a the MSOIC Victim Navigator alongside MSHT, it kind of is almost like that extra filter for us' (Interviewee 006, External Police Interview)

Officers working at Stansted airport were able to reflect on the value of having the MSOIC VN present when identifying victims, stating that this facilitated rapport and supported engagement and buy-in from victims. This was also echoed by the Met police who work with Heathrow Airport and officers in Kent. It was stated that the role of the MSOIC VN freed up time for officers to focus on the investigation, and helped officers consider the best way forward.

'[MSOIC VN] liaised with the team and then mainly myself after the first few weeks, giving regular updates on how the victims were doing, any concerns they had, putting forward any questions they needed answering and supporting them through the process. She acted as a conduit between the police and the two victims...this helped greatly as both seemed to be unsure about trusting the police and having an independent professional to be part of this process took that concern away. [...] This critical element of the investigation, liaising with the victims, being performed by the MSOIC VN in a large part, meant that investigators had more time to focus on the evidence gathering against the suspects. She has and remains to be helpful and happy to answer any questions I have, raising concerns for how certain approaches may affect the victims and how we could best

manage it instead. I feel that the input of [MSOIC VN] has added to the investigation, creating a contactable and knowledgeable point for both victims and investigator, increasing the efficiency in which we work' (Interviewee 007, External Border Force Interview)

An additional benefit of the MSOIC VN role was that she was able to sit in during Border Force interviews to provide ongoing, non-threatening reassurance to individuals.

'It was really beneficial because obviously sometimes people see that uniform and straightaway that is the biggest barrier because number one they're thinking if somebody in uniform is talking to me I'm obviously in trouble which isn't the case as we know. Number two, depending on where they've come from or their previous experiences, they may have been told or led to believe that anyone in uniform isn't going to help me, they're just, they're out to get me or they won't believe what I say or anything like that. So having [MSOIC VN] and the other teams there who are in plain clothes, that really helps because it means that people are sometimes far more willing to engage. [...] we've had people who've been, quite agitated, not wanting to engage, and she's not fazed by it...it's an absolute delight always working with her because she's always so willing to get involved' (Interviewee 002, External Police Interview)

The flexible nature of the MSOIC VN role allowed for a rapid response to requests for assistance when potential victims are identified at the early stage of an investigation. The impact on the individuals involved and the investigation in these instances was outlined in feedback from a Metropolitan Police officer.

'We unexpectedly found a female overseas national who was being exploited and suffering terrible treatment. After a quick call to the VN, ten minutes later we had her fully supported, safeguarded and on her way to a safe house placement. She is also fully engaging when offering evidence of her experience. This has totally changed the evidential picture of our investigation' (Metropolitan Police Officer Feedback)

Another area where the MSOIC provided critical strategic advice and technical assistance to law enforcement was in organising age assessments and challenging Home Office decisions that deemed someone an adult who is actually a child. This had important bearings on how a potential victim or vulnerable migrant is registered and treated under immigration law and the subsequent reported impact on the individual in this case was significant.

Where the MSOIC VN had attended operations at airports, she was also praised for being confident and comfortable in getting involved and this was

said to be particularly noticeable relative to other professionals who were said to 'hang back'. The MSOIC VN was reported to be competent and able to use initiative to capture the moment to engage people.

'On more than one occasion, as I've been dealing with something else, she's then come to me and said I'm a bit concerned by that or that person hasn't been spoken to you but I really think we should and I'm like brilliant, that's what we want particularly if I'm away dealing with something else, having someone there that's switched on and can recognise [potential victims]' (Interviewee 002, External Police Interview)

Training

The MSOIC VN trained 885 stakeholders over the lifetime of the project, including members of multiple UK police forces, the Border Force, the National Crime Agency, local council members, and anti-trafficking agencies.

The training is designed to lead to systemic change, with a shift towards a more victim-centred and trauma-aware approach to investigating MSHT cases and providing support to survivors of MSHT. It addresses using the NRM, indicators of trafficking, best practices, and challenges in aiding survivors. The training delivered to police has been well received, with officers providing feedback that they now know the signs of modern slavery and who to contact for support.

Following a training session for 100 West Community Policing team members in Essex, every participant (100%) indicated their improved ability to identify and assist potential victims of MSHT. Additionally, over three-quarters identified a relevant action or practice change based on the training.

In another session, the MSOIC VN co-delivered a training on the NRM to representatives from Chelmsford council, including safety leads and housing support officers. Reflecting on the positive impact of the training, one safeguarding lead said, *'I think this training has changed my life! if I had had that information a couple of years ago it would have made a world of a difference to the victim I was working with.'*

There has been evidence of long-term impact on trainees, who are adapting their professional practices based on learnings from the training. Since our Navigator delivered a four-day training session to the Port of Dover police in May 2022, the Justice and Care team received several calls from members of this force requesting strategic advice and assistance with victim identification. In one case, this resulted in the Head of Operations visiting the port to assist with an identification.

The MSOIC VN also collaborated with external partners to develop and implement a training package that is part of the *'Protecting the Vulnerable'* suite of courses for the National Border Force. The aim is to raise awareness of modern slavery, human trafficking, NRMs and how to complete them.

The Border Force leads estimated this will reach 8000 Border Force staff nationally as part of the suite of courses that are offered. As a result of this, the MSOIC VN received a letter of recognition from the National Border Force SAMS lead praising her *'magnificent contribution'*.

'It's corroborative, it's telling our audience, our delegates, this is what the NGOs are seeing too, but at their frontline, adjacent to yours, that's the extra bit for us. So it also, organisationally, shows us joined us. What I needed therefore was a module that reflected that, and was sound in substance, and I got those things' (Interviewee 008, External Border Force Interview)

Identifying and impacting systemic changes

A key aspect of the MSOIC VN role involved evaluating and advocating for systemic changes in the treatment of survivors of human trafficking and OIC at the national and local levels. The hostile legislative changes throughout the pilot further highlight the importance of this role. At time of the evaluation, Justice and Care also have a specific policy team; the 'joint modern slavery policy unit', in partnership with the Centre for Social Justice, which aims to keep Modern Slavery high on the political agenda to complement the operational VN roles on the ground. In partnership with the policy team, the MSOIC VN was able to contribute to an inquiry from the joint Human Rights Committee on asylum seekers.

Throughout the pilot, the MSOIC VN identified gaps in support for survivors of MSOIC. Although individuals within certain agencies (e.g. police forces, border force) were observed to be victim-centred and compassionate in their encounters with victims, the wider system and processes were said not to be victim-focused.

'Our work with say Border Force or police, whoever, you can see that they are victim focused, and they really care. But unfortunately, our legislation and how they are, the rules on sort of processing people is that they are taken from a lorry, taken into custody, Immigration are called and then they go off to the detention centres or asylum accommodations. It's sort of set in stone, and there's processes that have to be followed. And so as much as you want to be victim focused, at the end of the day, they have to do these processes...unfortunately our processes and the rules that they have to stick to make it not a victim focused approach' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

It was reported that there was a lack of support for individuals waiting for immigration decisions and this rendered them more vulnerable to exploitation once in the UK. Although the MSOIC VN was able to work with individuals and families, the quote below highlighted the systemic challenges limiting the support that could be offered, with a particular challenge posed by restrictions on gaining legitimate paid employment.

'One of the biggest things that needs tackling is where people [...] who have come through illegally, say in the boat, and then they get processed, and they get put in asylum accommodations. And then they are just left, and they can't work. They don't have any access to money. So really, what are they supposed to do in those situations? And a lot of them work illegally to try and get a bit of money to maybe buy clothes or do other things. Because I mean, our government gives them money [...] but it's not enough to survive on to have a proper life and start to rebuild a life. And I think that forces people to look for this illegal work. And then unfortunately, because it's illegal, they then are exploited' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

It was recommended, because of this observation, that people who are claiming asylum and are vulnerable migrants should be given opportunities to work legally. This would reduce their risk of further exploitation. This was also discussed by Border Force who have taken advice from the Crown Prosecution Service as to whether they could give victims the right to work whilst in the NRM, in a bid to encourage more victims to come forward and stay engaged throughout the process. However, there were concerns that this could be seen to coerce witnesses to comply and contribute to police investigations. Justice and Care have found ways around this in some cases, where survivors were helped to access small amounts of financial support through other NGOs, to send back to their families.

Justice and Care can step in and find them support from things like International Transport Federation and the seafarers charity. They find little bits of money. You know, we're only talking about sending 300 pounds, that's all these guys earn and they can arrange that' (Interviewee 005, External Border Force Interview)

It was also noted that insufficient information was given to vulnerable individuals at the point of first contact regarding the process, next steps, and available support. Inability to provide this information in their native language was also a challenge. This can leave people frightened and confused. The MSOIC VN was able to access a translator instantly on her phone, which facilitated effective communication.

In response to these communication barriers, the MSOIC VN spearheaded the production of victim facing information cards, a tool to build rapport with potential victims. Individuals who were being stopped by Border Force often did not understand why they were being stopped and questioned, but victim cards helped with communication barriers. Victim cards were jointly developed with Essex police and Justice and Care and subsequently have been translated into 20 languages.

Based on this success, the project was then taken to the National SAMS Border Force team who co-funded the production of a set of 120 cards in 20 different languages. The cards read *'hello, please do not be concerned, you are not in any trouble. We are talking to people today to check they are safe and happy to be here. We just need to ask you a few questions. Thank you.'*

Alongside this, they have the Unseen QR code on the back, which, when scanned, redirects to the Modern Slavery helpline. This means a potential victim can scan the card and keep the helpline safe on their phone in case they need to use it later. The QR code has also been set up to monitor use. The victim cards have now been deployed in 23 ports including Dunkirk, Calais and Coquelle to be used by Border Force officers on the frontline.

'...quite a lot of the time, they will start by doing the checks, and they won't explain to people why they're being stopped. [...] if you're stopping them, because you've got some concerns, because they've presented as vulnerable, or you've seen something that, you need to get that person on side straightaway, and certainly offer some reassurance. [...] And then I'd be kind of running alongside with my work device trying to frantically get Google Translate to work, which, depending on where you are in the airport, it does or doesn't. And obviously, Google Translate isn't the most reliable of services. [...] And that was something that I fed back to [MSOIC VN], and she was really supportive in that. So we've actually had victim cards made up. They're almost like flip cards so that we can go alongside Border Force straightaway, find out what language is being spoken, and just quickly show that card so that immediately that person has kind of got a bit of reassurance, and that will hopefully then give them the confidence as well, to answer, truthfully or to realise that, you know, we are here to help because' (Interviewee 002, External Police Interview)

The cards were described by law enforcement partners as 'gold dust' and their production was only possible through the initial joint working relationship between the officer at Stansted and the MSOIC VN and required buy-in from both sides to be initiated and effective. Again, because Justice and Care had a flexible budget for this pilot, they were able to contribute to this as well as the police. The local and subsequent national rollout of these cards is a major success of the project, leaving an important legacy.

'With Stansted Airport, we produced victim cards. And I think, and I showed those to one of the national SAMS Border Force leads, and he wanted to expand those nationally. So if we can get that through, then that's gonna have such longevity to the project. Those cards will be continued to be used by Border Force for years and that will then bring the victim centred approach [...] I think definitely, that's a huge step towards working towards systemic change' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

Border Force was able to reflect that these cards highlight, to victims, the potential risk they are exposed to, and may encourage people to engage with Victim Navigators and enforcement agencies, but it also exposes individuals to support services that they may go on to access in the future if not immediately.

'Victims are briefed, don't trust anyone in uniform, they're all corrupt, they're gonna try and trip you up and send you back. I'm your boyfriend, I'm the person of your dreams...So if we can break down that barrier, and get

even just a handful of additional people identified at the border, then the impact is exponentially good [...], because we're preventing at the border, rather than allowing [...] crime and action across the border' (Interviewee 008, External Border Force Interview)

This was reinforced by the MSOIC VN herself:

'Border Force are the people that most of the victims that I work with will encounter straightaway. And if we can create an environment where people feel open and can begin to build trust and start that rapport straightaway [...]. You don't know what you could have prevented?' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

At a systemic level, the MSOIC VN has established herself as a trusted expert in the field of OIC and victim care, and her input has been welcomed in a wide range of forums. As well as the key long-term achievements of victim cards being rolled out nationally and the development of a national training package for Border Force, the MSOIC VN kept a record of documents and forums that contributed to achieving systemic change throughout the lifetime of the pilot. This included:

- Producing 'golden cards' detailing best practices in lorry drop cases rolled out in Essex police
- Providing feedback to the Home Office on a document pertaining to 'adults at risk in immigration detention',
- Providing feedback to a review being completed by the 'Immigration Enforcement Vulnerability team',
- Providing feedback on 'Debriefing Migrants in Asylum accommodation and Debriefing Migrants in Police Custody,'
- Working with MSOIC on developing a debriefing script for migrants to help ensure they are approached in a trauma-informed way by law enforcement and that any potential victims of trafficking are identified
- Sharing intelligence in a national forum for MSHT and OIC about particular methods certain nationalities use in OIC
- Meeting with the National Crime Agency to inform and provide information for force wide project Aident operations to help them better tackle and further understand the issue
- Provided information and guidance on the 'Adult Victim referral pathways for Heathrow Airport'. The guidance will be disseminated to all authorities and partners who work within Heathrow to help streamline the approach of support offered to Adults of MSHT.
- Participated in a research discussion led by IOM Hungary on best practice and providing support to survivors of MSHT in a meeting including the National Bureau of Investigations, Victim Support Centre for Hungary and Baptist Aid charity.

- Attended the IOM international exchange conference in Barcelona to develop an international 'toolkit' for European countries to improve access to justice for victims. The MSOIC VN contributed to numerous recommendations for best practice within the toolkit, and the VN programme was highly praised throughout the conference.
- Participated in a research project where key stakeholders were interviewed and asked to provide recommendations/front-line experience in the context of the report. This report was written to support Commonwealth Housing in their development of a potential work programme in the field of migrant, asylum, and trafficking housing injustices.
- Attended a workshop to answer questions on the direct impact of the Nationality and Borders Act on frontline work, policing and how it is directly impacting people affected by Modern Slavery. The MSOIC VN was invited by The Human Trafficking Foundation and the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG) with the British & International Institute of Comparative Law (BIICL).

A cohesive victim-focused network: Police, Border Force and Immigration

As outlined earlier in the report, the initial vision of the pilot was to promote effective collaboration among various law enforcement agencies through a multi-agency hub based in Essex. Although the hub did not develop as planned, the MSOIC VN nonetheless succeeded in fostering connections among key national stakeholders.

At the time of the baseline report, it had been difficult to build relationships with immigration and Border Force. However, in the interim phase, considerable progress had been made, and by the final evaluation report, this had progressed even further, as evidenced by training developments and airport cards.

'I just think the thing that I am most proud of is this path we've taken with Border Force. And I just think how at the beginning, we couldn't even get a contact. And now I've produced something that's going into every port and border across the UK and across to France...so I am super proud of the national and systemic change that's gonna have' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

'You've generated a lot of friends within Border Force through the work you've done on this, and the Victim Navigator cards. Not least too all the case-specific work you do so tirelessly also. You're an absolute credit to Justice & Care. It continues to be a huge pleasure working with you' (Interviewee 008, External Border Force - letter of recognition)

The Navigator reported that Border Force contacts are now engaged and focused on victims. In particular, Border Force highlighted the significant value that the MSOIC VN role brings, given their lack of investigation capability. They also noted that, particularly in the maritime industry, there has been a shift in culture, educating the sector about acceptable and unacceptable

working conditions and what may constitute modern slavery or exploitation. It was reported that knowing a victim will have the support of the MSOIC VN has been immensely valuable for the agencies that have encountered them (e.g. Border Force).

'...you would never put up in an office with the conditions that you see on a fishing boat, but there's a perception that it's just a tough industry. It is a sector where we allow a certain amount of poor conditions, 16 hour days, very poor wages, hard manual work, that probably doesn't happen in any other sector. Because we don't have things like hours of work and rest. We don't have Working Time Directives. Everything that applies on land doesn't apply offshore. So we haven't been helped by the culture, but equally by the legislature. And I think I get it specifically to Border Force for my officers where we don't have any investigation capability. We'll board a fishing vessel, we might identify two illegal workers who are also victims of modern slavery. And then we'll refer that to the local police force, gangmasters labour abuse authority and the victim navigators. And that's kind of our work done, we don't then support any of the investigative part, which is where I think the victim navigators really come into their own' [...]
'I don't know where all these people would go if it weren't for those sort of caring for them because they'd end up in a detention centre with us' (Interviewee 005, External Border Force Interview)

Police interviewees emphasised the impact and value of having an individual who can nurture relationships with other agencies. They were clear that the value lies in fostering these relationships to build a foundation for collaboration.

'She's a negotiator, like a facilitator, and she builds bridges. There are people in departments in Home Office agencies that I would never have heard of, had [MSOIC VN] not reached out to them, put them in contact with me and vice versa. And so she, this area of work, where you're trying to knit together Border Agency, Immigration, police, regions, NCA, and all the rest of it, somebody that can reach out to people, that sort of person can be worth their weight in gold when it comes to getting their cooperation' (Interviewee 003, External Police Interview)

'Over the last couple of months, [MSOIC VN] has actually attended, with us, meetings with Westminster local authority, intervention, like the National Crime Agency and UK Border Force, she's kind of part of a joint task force at Heathrow that we're setting up as well. And it's a fantastic conduit for people that are first arriving in the UK' (Interviewee 006, External Police Interview)

Further, during the pilot, Justice and Care was invited to speak at the European SAMS Border Force conference and at one of the Organised Immigration Crime events in Scotland. This points to other legacy outcomes from the pilot. This has taken a considerable amount of time to establish and has required consistent and persistent relationship building. Having a pilot funded for

3 years was important for allowing enough time for these relationships to flourish and to contribute to systemic change. The MSOIC VN highlighted the value of being physically present and visible to other agencies when fostering professional relationships.

'...doing operations at Stansted Airport, Heathrow Airport, Gatwick Airport. And chatting with different Border Force officers and seeing what contacts you can make, just getting out there, being involved, I think that's really worked well' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

The MSOIC VN role has facilitated networking and supported multi-agency connections to be built nationally. For example, the MSOIC VN has brought together the detective sergeant from Essex Police OIC team and the Safeguarding Against Modern Slavery (SAMS) lead within Border Force. They visited the frontline in Calais to understand what tactics are being used and how that is impacting the UK border.

'In a couple of months, I'm supposed to be going with some people from the Home Office to France to see their juxtaposed controls. It's sort of like a liaison context building type thing. It's entirely facilitated and arranged by [MSOIC VN]. She's the one that's reached out in both directions and will make the arrangements' (Interviewee 003, External Police Interview)

Justice and Care's work in other countries, such as Romania, also had added value. A case example was provided where an individual was turned away by UK immigration and returned to Romania. However, thanks to joint work between the MSOIC VN and liaison with the Romanian Embassy, intelligence was shared with immigration resulting in a perpetrator having his visa revoked here in the UK and future victims being prevented.

Court Cases

One noteworthy development since the baseline report is the progress of certain MSOIC cases to court and the Navigator's role in achieving successful convictions of traffickers.

The MSOIC Navigator has noted that, unlike other MSHT cases, victims of human trafficking relating to OIC are often limited in their ability to provide intelligence about the larger organised crime groups sitting behind the offence. A high level of victim and witness intimidation is also a barrier to prosecutions.

'What I've noticed [...] is that whether they're involved or not, they don't know who the bigger OCG is, they don't know who's running it. They don't know who's talking through the phones, they're just directed into a lorry, come over the other side so really there's not too much other than [...] a witness account of what happened. There's not a huge amount that they can evidentially bring to that investigation' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

Despite these limitations, at the time of the final report, the MSOIC VN had supported three cases through the court process which had resulted in

convictions of eight perpetrators and combined prison sentences of 34 years. At the time of writing, the MSOIC VN is supporting a fourth case as they await trial. Three of these four cases had been subject to significant delays and revised timescales, with one case going to trial for 9 weeks in 2023 before ending in a mistrial and rescheduled for a year later. This demonstrates the complexity of bringing OIC perpetrators to justice and the importance of keeping victims engaged. The way the MSOIC VN role has been constructed permits a freedom and autonomy regarding the length and nature of support. This enables victims to remain engaged in the justice process.

'I spent 7 hours in a car and travelled over 1000 miles because the flexibility of my, role allowed me to do that' (Interviewee 001, Justice and Care)

One police officer from the Metropolitan Police spoke about the difference that the MSOIC VN made in keeping a critical victim and witness engaged in the justice process for over 18 months. He described the amount of evidence he had to go through as the officer in the case and how reassured he was that the MSOIC VN could meet the survivor's needs while he focused on the case.

'I think it's [supporting the survivor] priceless because [...] you know, three weeks, four weeks down the line, when the black eye is gone and the broken nose is now straight, people just pull out and they don't go to court. Or they don't want to give evidence and then they'll go missing. And then you've got to spend three, four weeks trying to find this person to drag them to court. [...] It's almost like we charged them, we make sure they're all right and then you forget about them for six months. And then two weeks before the trial date you ring them up, you're in court next week mate, are you coming? So to keep [victim] involved for 18 months, living somewhere he doesn't want to live being with people he doesn't want to be with, could I have done that? I'd like to think so. But it would have been a hell of a lot harder' (Interviewee 009, External Police Interview)

One survivor who was supported, by the MSOIC VN, throughout his trial explained the following:

'I cannot find the words to describe her. She is a lovely lady and very supportive...She always supports me with the things that I need. She supported me with clothes, when I had issues in the accommodation, with the stuff that I needed in the accommodation, everything' (Interviewee 10, Survivor)

This includes ensuring the survivor feels safe while awaiting trial.

'She sorted out panic alarms for him, and things like that, things that I would have to do, which takes time. The MSOIC VN did all that for us, obviously [survivor's name's] safety is paramount to me from the police side, but I think his safety is paramount to the MSOIC VN as well from her side as a navigator' (Interviewee 009, External Police interview)

There were also substantial financial implications for keeping survivors engaged in the court process while investigations were ongoing or progressing to trial.

'There's not just this office, there's the technical people and everybody who rescued him. It must have cost, and the Court costs, and the barristers cost because there are eight barristers, one judge, oh there's nine barristers. It must have cost [...] hundreds of thousands of pounds to get to this stage, and we've not even got to the second trial. So you've now got another nine barristers and another nine barristers fees, court costs, Judge costs. And the financial implications of not having Justice & Care on board would be huge. Because if [victim name] went rogue now and he disappeared, you can't un-spend all that money...without Justice & Care involvement, there would be a lot of public money not being spent correctly' (Interviewee 009, External Police Interview)

The benefit of having an evaluation across the lifetime of the pilot has been seeing the importance of supporting individuals through the court process, which can be protracted, intimidating and intense. Overall, stakeholders were clear that the role of the VN was essential in enabling victims to remain engaged and supported across several years, while allowing police and other agencies to build a robust case. This is also reflected in the number of successful prosecutions and lengthy sentences given out during the pilot.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future of the MSOIC Role

This multi-year, longitudinal evaluation has been able to chart the changes in the organised immigration crime landscape from 2021 to 2024. The impact of new legislation in 2021, the Ukrainian/Russia war and the need to diversify from Essex Police have challenged the original concept of the pilot. However, Justice and Care have been able to achieve huge successes despite this. Using data from Justice and Care, survivors, and critical stakeholders, it is clear that the MSOIC VN role has been able to flourish, having an impact on individuals and driving efforts to achieve systemic change in the organised immigration crime sector. The MSOIC VN has been able to offer a level of quality through direct support cases and strategic input across not just police forces but also other key partners such as border force and immigration.

The success of the pilot highlights the importance of funding pilots for a significant period. This approach allows for relationships, trust and nurturing partnerships to develop. Justice and Care continue to recruit and employ the right individuals for the role; namely, those who are knowledgeable and competent in relevant legislation, especially important for the OIC role. Additionally, they seek individuals who are tenacious, autonomous and self-motivated to persist in addressing challenges, ask difficult questions and champion the needs and rights of victims at a local and national level as well as at individual and systemic levels.

The MSOIC VN model can be seen to work because it is flexible and adaptable. This is evidenced by the expansion of the role to pivot away from focusing solely on the Essex police and to use the VN model across other forces, and work with other agencies across the country.

Reflections were made about what helps embed an MSOIC VN in a police force. It was noted that a mapping exercise should be done prior to placing an MSOIC VN in a force to check the level of OIC the force deals with, the number of victims that are generally connected to investigations, what the force wants or expects from the MSOIC VN role and whether this can be delivered. Concerns were expressed about the prospect of having an MSOIC VN embedded in regional organised crime units, as many of the benefits of the current model stem from having robust interpersonal relationships within each force. This may be 'watered down' if a regional model was widely adopted. However, at the time of the final report, the national reach was said to be working extremely well.

Regarding the original goals of the MSOIC VN role, it is evident that the pilot has positively influenced individuals and led to systematic changes.

It has created a significant legacy through the extensive training provided to numerous stakeholders, the national deployment of 'victim cards' at airports, and contributions to a national training program for Border Force. Stakeholders from various agencies have expressed that they cannot envision moving forward without the MSOIC VN role, highlighting its added value.

Recommendations:

- Continue funding the MSOIC VN role to maintain national coverage and facilitate ongoing partnerships with Border Force and Immigration colleagues.
- Consider funding an additional MSOIC VN to support this national coverage; mindful of non-social working hours and enabling coverage if one MSOIC VN is undertaking work abroad/annual leave/time off in lieu etc.
- Increase the reach of training to both police and non-police stakeholders.
- Work alongside the Modern Slavery Policy Unit to support systemic change.
- Collaborate with police colleagues to enhance the recording of MSOIC cases for more accurate documentation and monitoring.

Annex A – OIC data

At the point of the baseline report we requested data from the Essex Police OIC data analyst and repeated this exercise in May 2023. We include the figures below, but this is heavily caveated, as the data hasn't been recorded in a consistent, directly comparable manner, making direct comparisons challenging. The data analyst changed from 2021 to 2023 and it was noted that police 'scanning sheets' do not hold specific OIC data, requiring manual retrieval and analysis. This is an important learning for the type of data collected and the need to disaggregate from MSHT data. However, for this reason, we do not have an updated column for the 2024 report, but we cite it here for reference.

| | 2021 | 2023 |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| The number of investigations open into Organised Immigration Crime and MSHT in connection with vulnerable migrants | OIC – 19 (since May 2020) | OIC: 127 – 'a lot of investigations are dealt by other agencies' (NB this is ever opened since November 2021) |
| The number of investigations which were closed due to lack of victim engagement | 0 | 83 investigations 1 was recorded as Type 15 - Named Suspect Identified: Victim Supports Police Action But Evidential Difficulties Prevent Further Action 45 were recorded as being dealt with by other agencies |
| Number of victims who went on to be referred to NRM | 0 | OIC: Not recorded but would probably be accounted for under the MSHT figures |
| Number of vulnerable migrants being encountered per month/ clandestine entrants | 37 (average per month) | OIC - Approximately 37 although this number also includes accounts where the number of clandestine entrants have not confirmed or have been transferred over to another Force i.e. Kent |
| Number of mapped Organised Crime groups linked to immigration crime | Not provided | 18 mapped with a threat of MSHT and OIC |
| Number of individuals charged in relation to OIC or MSHT | 19 | Data not yet provided for OIC but 7 for MSHT |



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