

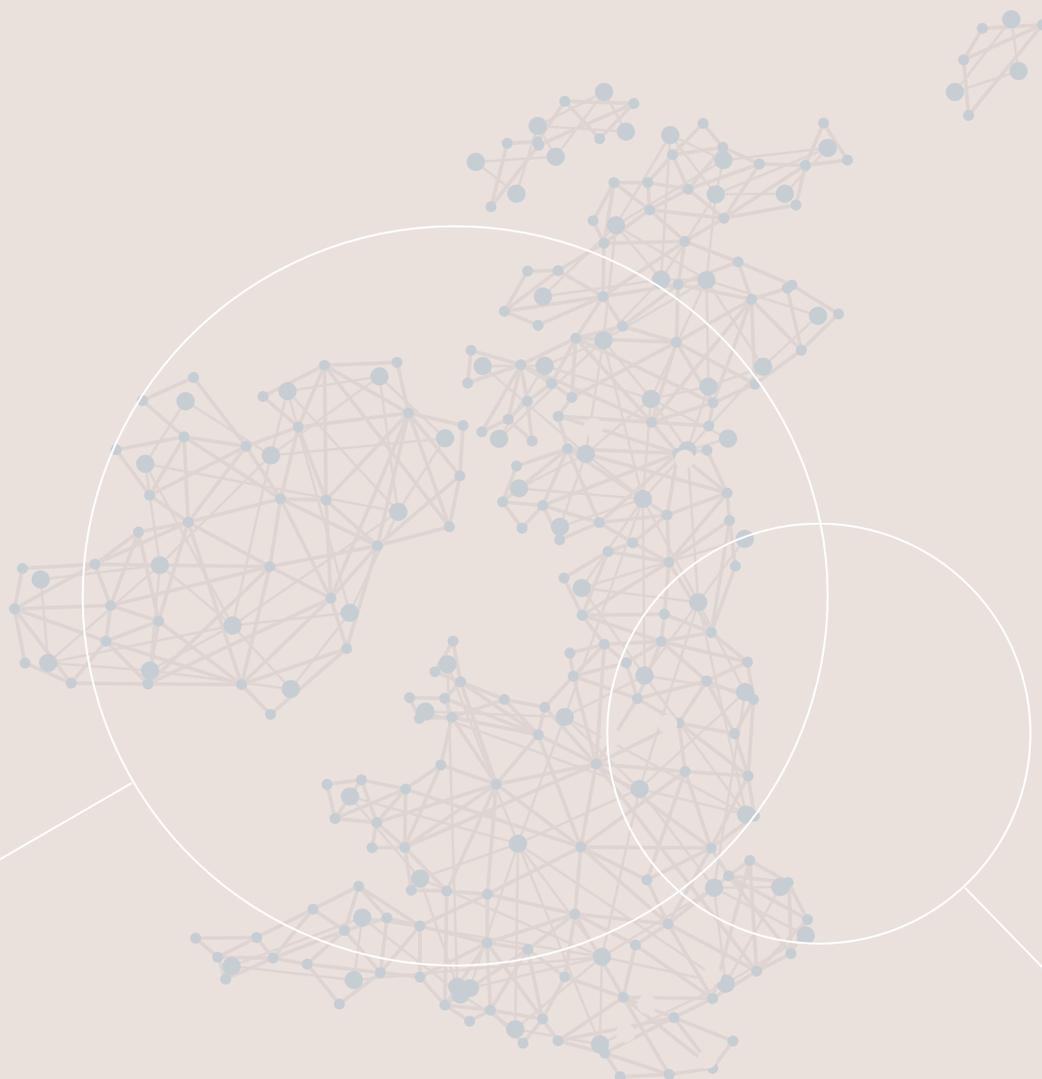
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A Path to Freedom and Justice: a new vision for supporting victims of modern slavery



“I wish I knew there was help out there. The Government needs to do something to reach out to people who are trapped like I was to let them know they can report and be helped.”

Survivor



Executive Summary



Nearly seven years after the Modern Slavery Act was passed, organised crime networks behind modern slavery are continuing to act with impunity costing the UK billions of pounds.

In *It Still Happens Here*, our report published in 2020, we estimated there could be at least 100,000 victims in the UK - 10 times the number referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for support that year.¹ This is potentially costing this country £32.9 billion a year.²

The imperative to stop slavery gangs in their tracks could not be clearer, yet prosecution rates remain low. The National Crime Agency estimates there are at least 6,000-8,000 offenders involved in modern slavery in the UK.³ But in 2020, there were only 91 prosecutions and 13 convictions for modern slavery offences as the principal offence, and only 344 prosecutions and 56 convictions for modern slavery offenders overall. Victim testimony is key to unravelling slavery networks, but too often cases are dropped due to lack of victim engagement.

As we set out in our 2020 report, good care for the exploited and abused is not a luxury extra - it unlocks progress against organised crime. Those exploited and abused on British soil, whether UK citizens or foreign nationals, deserve care and a chance to recover. They also often crave justice. Failure to support survivors increases re-trafficking rates and hinders our ability to dismantle the criminal networks responsible because their vital intelligence is lost.

The NRM, the UK's system for identifying victims of modern slavery and providing them with support, was introduced in 2009. But the landscape of modern slavery in the UK has changed considerably since then. Despite numerous reviews and incremental changes over the years the system is still not fit for purpose. The pressure on wider services such as addiction support, mental health provision, asylum systems and local authority social care and housing present additional challenges for successful victim recovery.

Too often victims of modern slavery are treated as somehow different from victims of other crimes. The provision of specialist support through the NRM is a great resource, but it is not an alternative to the services other victims of crime can access, especially those with wider and complex needs. The approach of the Nationality and Borders Bill, which incorporates modern slavery support with immigration reform, will entrench this position. It effectively creates a hierarchy of victims by putting a time limit on when victims of slavery in the immigration system can come forward to talk about their abuse and saying that victims with criminal convictions can be denied access to support. We would never do this for other victims of serious crime. It is time to reframe our response to victims of modern slavery and treat them as, first and foremost, victims of crime. This is for their benefit as they seek justice, and for the sake of relentlessly pursuing those committing these appalling crimes, who too often act with impunity.

¹ *It Still Happens Here: Fighting UK Slavery in the 2020s*, Justice and Care and the Centre for Social Justice, July 2020

² In 2018 the Home Office estimated an economic and social cost of £328,720 per modern slavery victim: *The economic and social costs of modern slavery Research Report 100* July 2018, Home Office

³ *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2021* National Crime Agency



The challenge

Early engagement: Fear of reprisals from their traffickers and worry about deportation keep victims from trusting the authorities. Getting engagement with the victims of modern slavery right from the moment of rescue is crucial. It takes time to build trusted relationships and encourage them to engage with support services and the police.

Needs-based support: Meeting victims' needs and protecting them from re-exploitation is essential to enabling them to share their intelligence, which can lead to the break up of criminal slavery activities. Too often eligibility for services, not need, dictates what victims receive, leaving support providers and mainstream services struggling to meet victims' increasingly complex needs.

Quality and efficient NRM referrals and decision-making: Chronic and extensive delays impact significantly on victims' recovery, their mental health and their ability to move on to a safe, independent future. They also offer poor value for money by unnecessarily extending victims' time in support. Bold steps are needed to tackle the backlog to move us from a crisis point to proactive leadership in this fight.

Bridging gaps between support and criminal justice systems: Modern slavery victims are first and foremost victims of crime. Many victims see restoring justice as part of their recovery process, but there is a disconnect between victims, the support system and the criminal justice system and few get to see their traffickers behind bars. Wrap around support programmes like Justice and Care's Victim Navigator programme demonstrate that with appropriate care more victims can engage with the criminal justice system.

A window of opportunity

The 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy is under review with a refreshed strategy expected in 2022 and the Nationality and Borders Bill introduced to parliament in July 2021 will establish identification and support for victims of modern slavery in law for the first time in England and Wales. These are both significant opportunities to set a new vision, leadership and framework for victim support. The Government must seize this moment, not just because we have a moral duty to victims who have been so horribly exploited on our shores, but it is essential if we are to tackle the true criminals and bring more organised crime groups to justice.



Principles for reform and summary of recommendations

1. Renewed vision and strategic approach delivering better outcomes for victims and value for money

- The Government must develop a cross-departmental victim support strategy with implementation of the NRM Transformation Programme overseen by the Number 10 Delivery Unit.

2. Identifying and supporting victims of slavery from the earliest moment

- The Government must urgently establish places of safety at a local level to accommodate and support potential victims of modern slavery before they are referred to the NRM or receive a reasonable grounds decision.
- The First Responder role needs to be strengthened to improve identification and safeguarding of victims.
- To meet victims' complex or long term needs, access to mainstream services should be integrated with support under the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC).
- The Home Office must ensure that the MSVCC is focussed on victims' outcomes in terms of recovery, reducing vulnerabilities to re-exploitation and preparing them for independence, not limited to 'needs arising from exploitation'.

3. Delivering a timely and meaningful decision that enables victims to move on safely into recovery

- The Home Office should put NRM decision-making on an independent footing and require decision-makers to have modern slavery qualifications and expertise.
- The Home Office must disband the new Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority and put those resources into tackling the backlog of all NRM cases through deployment of specialist teams and fast track protocols.
- The SCA must establish improved systems to gather more, higher quality information.
- The SCA should be relieved of the burden of support-related decisions.

4. Better protecting victims and preventing re-trafficking, either in the UK or in their home country

- The Home Office must issue guidance to support providers and police on reporting and flagging victims who go missing.
- The Home Office should require and fund support providers to prepare victims for independence through work-preparedness training and work with other departments to engage businesses in providing work opportunities and skills training for victims.
- The Home Office should amend the Nationality and Borders Bill to provide all confirmed victims with an additional 12 months of support after the NRM, including leave to remain and recourse to public funds for those with irregular immigration status.
- The Home Office should develop a Fast track Government to Government Safe Return and Reintegration scheme for potential victims who do not enter the NRM.



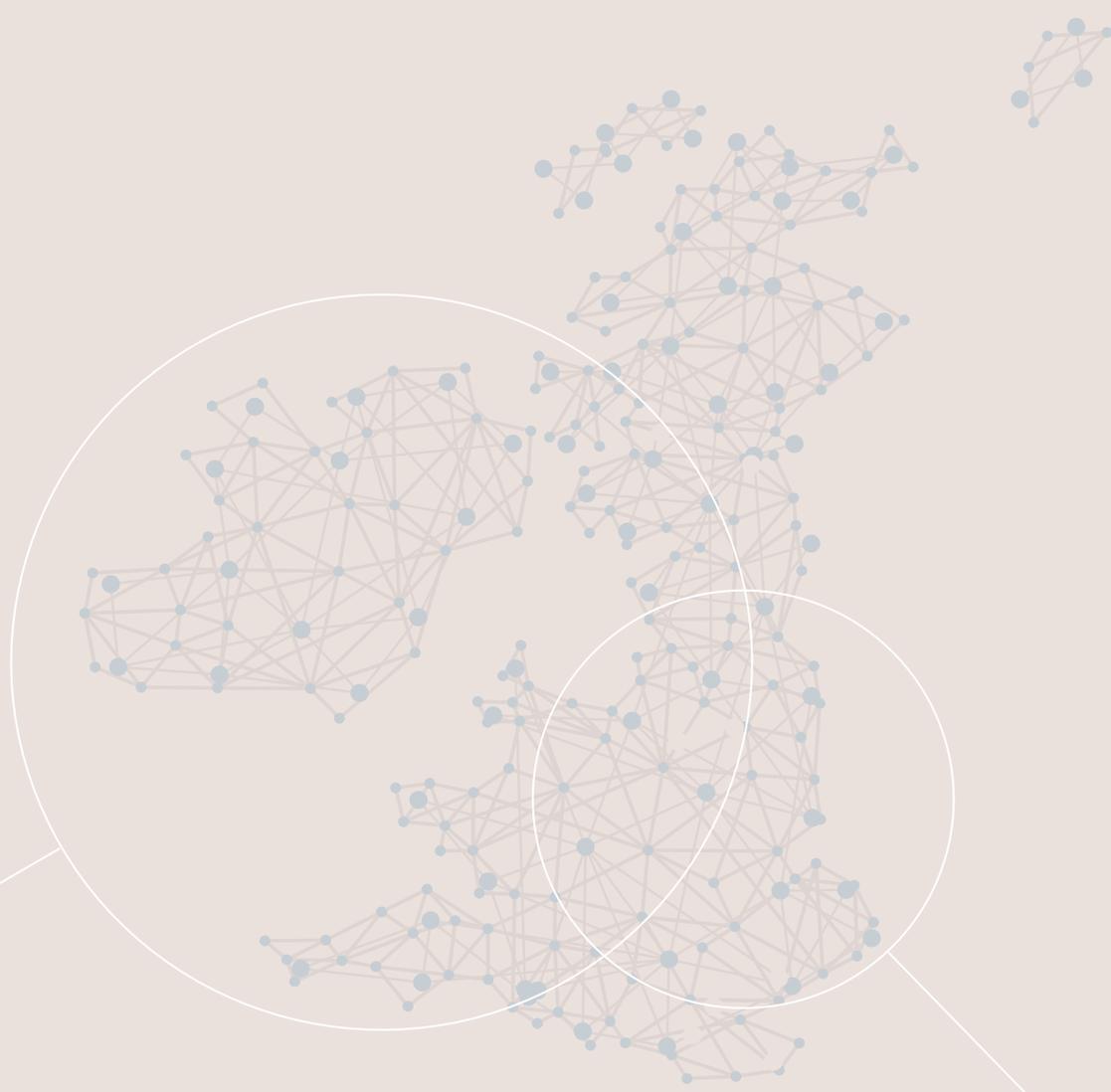
5. Enabling pursuit and prosecution of the traffickers

- Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners must make modern slavery a strategic priority for their forces and the Home Office must guarantee the long term future and slavery-focus of the NPCC Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit to ensure these crimes receive sufficient attention and resources.
- All police forces should partner with specialist charities to deliver victim support through joint welfare visits and roles such as Justice and Care's Victim Navigator programme to enhance the police response to victims and facilitate participation in investigations.
- Police forces should increase the number of specialist investigation teams and victim liaison officers.



“Having a place of safety is having someone who I can trust and being in an area where no one knows me, somewhere I can start a new life and have a new start.”

Survivor



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