



# Modern Slavery Act 2015 Committee

## Corrected oral evidence: The Modern Slavery Act 2015

Monday 20 May 2024

3.30 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness O'Grady of Upper Holloway (The Chair); Baroness Barker; The Lord Bishop of Bristol; Baroness Butler-Sloss; Baroness Hamwee; Lord Hope of Craighead; Lord Kempsey; Baroness Shephard of Northwold; Lord Smith of Hindhead; Lord Watson of Invergowrie; Lord Watts; Lord Whitty.

Also present: Robert Wilson, Policy Adviser.

Evidence Session No. 17

Heard in Public

Questions 193 - 220

### Witnesses

**I:** Laura Farris MP, Minister for Victims and Safeguarding, Home Office and Ministry of Justice; Matthew Bligh, Deputy Director for Enforcement and Criminality Policy, Home Office; Rebecca Wyse, Joint Director for Tackling Exploitation and Abuse, Home Office.

### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on [www.parliamentlive.tv](http://www.parliamentlive.tv).

## Examination of witnesses

Laura Farris MP, Matthew Bligh and Rebecca Wyse.

Q193 **The Chair:** Hello, and welcome everybody to a public evidence session for the House of Lords Modern Slavery Act 2015 Committee. Thank you for joining us. My name is Frances O'Grady and I am the Chair of the committee. We are very pleased to welcome from the Home Office Laura Farris MP, the Minister for Victims and Safeguarding; Matthew Bligh, the deputy director for enforcement and criminality policy; and Rebecca Wyse—you are back again; thank you—the joint director for tackling abuse and exploitation.

I will kick off with the first question before sharing the other questions with colleagues. Modern slavery is obviously a complex area that needs a whole-government response and approach. Do you think you have achieved that? We have received a fair bit of evidence from those attending this committee who have been anxious about the conflation of immigration and modern slavery, with the recent legislation, and questioned whether the Home Office is the right place to put modern slavery policy.

**Laura Farris MP:** Thank you, Baroness O'Grady, and the whole committee for inviting me. I have been the Minister since November last year, so I will give you my reflections on what I have learned about modern slavery. I will try to contextualise it a bit and square off my answer as to where it sits in the Home Office vis-à-vis other government departments. As we come through the body of this session, I will also try to give a sense of where I can be most useful, because my role is discrete, as I think you implied with your question.

When you look at the whole terrain of modern slavery, there are three different categories. There is the classic Section 1(1)(a) category of slavery whereby somebody might be working in agriculture, shellfish, domestic servitude or sexual slavery. When one of those people is identified, very often in the place where they are enslaved, it is pretty clear what is happening to them and what has been going on. That cuts across the Department for Business and Trade, because it engages labour rights and non-payment of the national minimum wage. Sometimes those cases are even identified by HMRC, which suspects that it is not getting national insurance contributions from a certain employer, which uncovers the fact that people are either getting no wages at all or getting minimal wages that are nowhere close to the national minimum wage—those sorts of issues.

The second category is a sort of domestic category—essentially child criminal exploitation and county lines—which is very much under the purview of the Home Office. That is inherently a matter for policing. In speaking about it, I feel quite confident about saying that about 44% of all the people referred into the NRM last year were children. Half of those were British, and the majority were working through county lines, so they were identified that way.

The next category is a more nebulous one—the individual identified in a way that is connected to immigration. That, I have to say, is the most porous element of the modern slavery regime. To talk you through what might happen with a small-boat arrival, of the small-boat arrivals last year, 9% were identified as potential victims of modern slavery on arrival, but following their admission into detention or whatever came next, a further 65% were identified as potential victims.

Let me talk you through what the Home Office has to go on on that. First, it is an inherent feature of all small-boat arrivals that they arrive without documentation. Evidence that we heard when I was a member of the Home Affairs Committee is that that is not an accident; it is part of an instruction given to them by the people smugglers. You pay your fee and you dispense with any identifying documents in the channel en route. Your account of who you are is based on your assertion. Yes, of course, you are subjected to questions and tested about the country that you say you come from, but ultimately you are asserting that you are who you say you are.

The other area that is weak in that regard is the age assessment process. We are the only country in Europe that does not use a scientific age assessment. We changed the law on that through the Nationality and Borders Act and firmed it up again through the Illegal Migration Act, and we have regular meetings at the Home Office. I used to practice as a barrister before I became an MP. It was not the whole of my practice, but a small part of it was public law, and some of it was asylum. The problems with ascertaining age were an issue even then, going back seven, eight, nine years.

The Home Office works from something called the Merton assessment, which is a test that was introduced in common law. It is over 20 years old, and it is basically background questions that are put to the individual. It is not good enough, which is why we have changed the law. It flows both ways as a problem: you could have children being incorrectly identified as adults, and adults being incorrectly identified as children.

In that terrain around the immigration section, there is a much weaker evidence base, because you have not identified the person actually doing the enslaved work or the forced labour; you are basing it on what they have told you. I recall that from my days in practice, but we also know for example from some of the videos that went live and viral last year, that there are certain solicitor firms, which have now been referred to the SRA, the Solicitors Regulation Authority, which advise clients, "Say that this has happened to you. Say that you've been trafficked and you've got a good modern slavery claim".

That bracket of people are the most difficult, because we do not have the hard evidence to go on to support their claim. That is why there is some inevitable overlap between immigration and modern slavery issues: because there is one category to which both issues apply.

**The Chair:** Can you explain a little more about how responsibilities have been divided between you and the Immigration Minister? I understand that some of those responsibilities have been reassigned recently, so understanding why that has happened would be helpful.

**Laura Farris MP:** It is probably fair to say that there was a bit of churn from the moment I arrived. Immigration was cut into two ministerial roles: an Illegal Immigration Minister and a Legal Immigration Minister. It would be true to say that Michael Tomlinson, in his role as the Illegal Immigration Minister, has the closest correlation with what I do, but I am the point of contact with the Anti-Slavery Commissioner and I have the most regular meetings with the GLAA, with the director of labour market enforcement, and with the organisations doing the most predictable side of modern slavery. I always meet the director of labour market enforcement with a Minister from the Department for Business and Trade. Those are the two other Ministers I work with.

Q194 **The Chair:** I understand that you are updating the Government's strategy. It would be helpful to know when that will be published, and to understand why it has taken so long.

**Laura Farris MP:** That is a good question. I cannot answer the second part, but I can say that, when I came in, I wanted to get a new strategy published. I hope you do not mind my saying this in a more informal way, but it is clear, and I think it is a matter of public record, that there will be a general election in the second half of this year. By the time we began those conversations in earnest about what the strategy would look like and what shape it would take, officials said, "Look, it's probably more than a year's work. Is it the appropriate way for us to be using our time leading into a general election?"

So we have decided instead—by the way, I think a strategy is necessary, particularly as we are nearly at the decade point from the passing of that Act—to publish a 2023 annual report this year. In conjunction with that, we will do a progress report. As we are getting to the 10-year point, it seems the right moment to review where we think the successes and the failures are. I have areas of specific interest in the modern slavery terrain that I have discussed with my officials. I know that the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner shares some of those, because we met last week. I want sections in that progress report that will, I hope, set the springboard for future legislation that could improve modern slavery laws. However, I do think that the full strategy will come after the election. I agree with you that it is probably beyond time, because it is such a rapidly changing area of the law and the ways in which exploitation evolves need to be identified and reviewed periodically.

**The Chair:** And it has not been.

**Laura Farris MP:** It has not been reviewed, and I accept that, but I hope that this progress report, which will be part of our annual report, will set some sensible markers. We will be quite unflinching in what we think has worked really well, where we think excellent progress has been made,

and where there are areas for improvement. I hope that it will be a tool and, as I say, a springboard not just into legislative improvement but probably into the future modern slavery strategy.

**The Chair:** Will it achieve that cross-departmental push and co-ordination that is clearly needed?

**Laura Farris MP:** I hope so, but I think—just to gear it back to my original answer—that there is an inevitable cross-departmental flavour. The work that you are doing, particularly on slavery in the context of things like domestic servitude or agriculture, naturally fall under the department that would have responsibility for employment and employment rights, and things like county lines would involve a combination of local authorities, bringing in MHCLG and, obviously, the police. Even the DfE has a role in keeping children safe in education. That is part of it, too. The whole issue has an inherent cross-government characteristic.

Q195 **Baroness Butler-Sloss:** First, I ought to declare that I am co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and vice-chair of the Human Trafficking Foundation.

As a Government, you have passed quite a lot of recent legislation that has had an effect on the Modern Slavery Act. I am rather assuming that it is partly due to the belief at least that there has been significant abuse in the modern slavery system, so perhaps I could ask you a bit about that. I think the Government believe that the NRM has been, to some extent, abused. What data do you have of the abuse of the system? That is my first question.

The second question I am interested in as a former barrister, like you, is whether there is any data on those whom you have deemed a victim but who have then been identified as not being a victim and have gone on to commit criminal offences. We should have data on that, certainly from the MoJ, and from the Home Office. I am afraid that I have a third question when you have answered those.

**Laura Farris MP:** First, let me say thank you. I read your 2019 review, so I knew about your expertise.

On the data relating to abuse, we do not hold the data, but I will give you one illustration of something that I think is relevant to your investigation. About 7,500 people who were treated as children were admitted into the NRM last year. Of those, approximately half were British nationals, so there is no issue with identifying their age, because it can be ascertained from a publicly held document or from a birth certificate. Of the other half, there is often no documentation to support the age that they claim to be.

The majority of those children were treated as 16 or 17 years-old, but 40% of that cohort had had their age contested by the Home Office, so they went on to satisfy the Merton compliance test, which is when the background questions are asked, but the Home Office had challenged

their age. What that means in the most simple terms is that they did not look like they were under 18.

That is a problem not just with referrals into the NRM but across the entire asylum system, as I said in my first answer. Without having scientific age assessment in train yet, that creates a problem. It creates a problem in both directions: you can have a problem with a child being wrongly assessed as an adult, and an adult wrongly assessed as a child.

I think 40% of the age 16 to 17 cohort is quite a lot of children who do not look like they are under the age of 18. You may say that we cannot know for sure, and I would make that concession immediately, but I still think that is quite a worrying statistic. I do think we will improve that very quickly once we get to a position where we are using scientific methods. To be honest, the most straightforward one would be an X-ray. A wrist X-ray can provide much greater specificity. We had a meeting on it very recently in the Home Office. There is a high degree of confidence within about a two-year range. Using the Merton test of a person's age is much, much looser than that.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** And—my second question—do you have data on people who were expected to be victims who have gone on to commit offences?

**Laura Farris MP:** We do not have data, which is a weakness, but that is because the Home Office does not access MoJ data. As a Minister, I have to say that there have been some shocking moments in this. A case came to my attention recently through different channels and in relation to a different matter. I am also the Minister who is responsible for rape and rape prosecutions, and this was a particularly complex rape and attempted murder case. It was about the sentencing of the individual. I asked the Home Office for some background on the person. I have to say, because it shocked me, that the person had a reasonable grounds decision and had been referred into the NRM, and the attack, which, by the way, the individual has been convicted and sentenced for, happened only days later.

So of course it concerns me when you have this very heightened vulnerable-victim status, and then immediately—with my other hat on, which is through the criminal justice system and the prism of that—you are dealing with the most serious type of offending you can imagine. I have two cases like that. Those are small examples, and of course I am not saying that that is reflective of the whole, but it shocks me when I am dealing with both those things in the context of my brief. Of course it does.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** I will take you back to my first question. I understand the issue about age but, apart from those who said that they were under 18 and may well have been over 18, do you have any evidence of actual adults abusing the system?

**Laura Farris MP:** Well, no, we do not. I was talking about the immigration pathway, and we have only what they tell us. The Home Office will make some decisions in the affirmative and some in the negative, but the Home Office cannot be totally sure that those decisions are always good ones. That is because people, particularly the small-boat arrivals, arrive without any documents, so it has to do the best it can, of necessity, to reach a just outcome, but it cannot be certain in the way that it can, say, on entering a carwash and finding that every person working on the premises has not been paid, is working in a certain way and is a product of bonded labour, with no control over their movement and no salary or freedom whatever.

That is a much clearer case for referral into the NRM and all the protections that apply in that regard than the ones that come through the illegal migration route in particular. That is why, regrettably, those two issues have to be treated as part of a whole in relation to that cohort only.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** So the simple answer, Minister, is that there is no data, and it is the view of civil servants that certain people who may or may not be let through may be abusing the system.

**Laura Farris MP:** It is not just the view of civil servants. I encountered this regularly when I was in practice. It was common. In that context, it was more in the context of asylum. It is very difficult to say for sure whether you are dealing with a good or bad claim when the person has no paperwork to support who they say they are. That is a weakness in that part of the system.

Q196 **Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Since the three Acts—the Nationality and Borders Act, the Illegal Migration Act and the Rwanda Act—will the NRM be used for illegal migration of people coming through on the boats?

**Laura Farris MP:** I will bring Matthew in if I have said anything incorrect. An assessment will still be made of the individual but, obviously, things like their right to remain in the United Kingdom are impacted on by that legislation.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Will they go through the NRM, or will there be a separate assessment? I am sorry, but I have not quite understood.

**Rebecca Wyse:** The Government continue to have a duty to identify victims of modern slavery. Those will be referred to the national referral mechanism and will receive a reasonable grounds decision, and at that point a decision will be made whether to apply the public order disqualification in the Illegal Migration Act.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** So that means that they are likely to go to Rwanda.

**Laura Farris MP:** Or to be repatriated. It does not specify removal to Rwanda. It is about whether you can stay in the United Kingdom.

Q197 **Lord Kempsell:** Minister, I am alarmed to hear the case you highlighted of an individual who had been afforded some of the protections that come with referral who went on to commit a very serious offence, and the suspicion that that might be widely known among practitioners dealing with these cases and that the modern slavery system is somehow being abused in this way.

Would it be useful for the Government to publish some data to aid public understanding of that phenomenon, if it is indeed taking place? I know there are limits to the data that can be published, but if there is no data that we can point to on this, as we have heard before—you are not the first to say it—what might help our understanding of this phenomenon that everybody seems to be pointing to?

**Laura Farris MP:** That is a really good question. There is a case for that, and I think it would illuminate rather than obfuscate what is going on. This is now a quite regular discussion in the Commons. We know that 12% of the prison population, for example, are non-British nationals, so it would be helpful to know how that breaks down and whether there is an irregular immigration route to the United Kingdom that has preceded it, and whether there has been admission into the NRM, and the date of that, as a prelude to the offending—if indeed there is a conviction. Yes, I do think that would be helpful.

Q198 **Lord Kempsell:** I will move on to the question of supply chains, which I understand is partially within the purview of the Department for Business and Trade. Officials from that department gave evidence to this committee suggesting that the Government's position continues to be supportive of voluntary increased transfer on supply chain due diligence. Is that also the position of the Home Office?

**Laura Farris MP:** You are correct to say that we sit behind another department on this. It is exactly the kind of issue that should be addressed in a full modern slavery strategy. Baroness Butler-Sloss covered this in her 2019 review, and the Government accepted a lot of what was put into that review—for example, the potential reporting responsibility of public bodies. That has never seen its way into legislation, and there is probably room to look at that again.

At the moment, it is true that what happens is more incremental. For example, there was a Home Office announcement in April that essentially tried to make the reporting requirement simpler and more transparent, and it involved reminders to qualifying companies that they needed to do so. But you are right to say that that is not a root and branch reform, and I do think there is room for improvement in this area.

**Lord Kempsell:** Would you agree that, although these responsibilities fall on a certain stratum of private companies, there is a duty on public procurement and public sector buyers to be similarly transparent in their supply chains, given the huge weight that they have and can have in the market?



**Laura Farris MP:** Yes, I do think that. It is happening anyway through the Cabinet Office. That transparency is something that the public rightly expect. I think the proposal was for public sector bodies with a budget of £36 million, mirroring the private sector arrangement. I thought there was wisdom in that.

With regard to the registry and what that has achieved, I will give you some examples of best practice. Marks & Spencer does a really good job. It not only has a really robust statement of ambition but is robust in how it monitors modern slavery. No company that relies on imported products can be absolutely sure that there is no sub-contracting in a factory abroad, but they can do an awful lot to show what safeguards they have in place to prevent that—everything from who they are working with to who is advising them overseas, as well as the ways in which they audit, do spot checks, and try to enforce compliance.

When we look at the way the public use the registry, they are particularly interested in things like supermarkets. You are already seeing the public becoming much more interested in this, and that has increased markedly over the past couple of years.

Q199 **Lord Hope of Craighead:** I would like to ask you some questions about the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. Would you agree that she has an important function in overseeing the policy in relation to modern slavery?

**Laura Farris MP:** I do agree with that.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** That gives rise to two questions. First, is there not possibly the risk of a conflict of interest, given that the appointment is made by the Home Secretary? You have described in answer to earlier questions that there is an overlap between your department in the Home Office and the other side of it, but the Home Secretary has an overriding responsibility for the entirety of this system. That gives rise to whether there is not an element of conflict of interest there, which suggests that perhaps the appointment should be in somebody else's hands.

**Laura Farris MP:** First, the power for the Home Secretary to appoint the commissioner is in the Modern Slavery Act, and I do not think that is the only commissioner role that the Home Secretary has. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner, for example, is also appointed by the Home Secretary. My working relationship with both of them has some parallels, and I see no hint that they are constrained in the criticisms that they might launch in any part of their brief—including of the Government and my department—by virtue of the fact that they are appointed.

There is also a safeguard under the Act that they have to have a senior independent person on the panel. Furthermore, it is true that the current commissioner has worked for the Conservative Party in the past, but the last Victims' Commissioner, Vera Baird, had been a Labour MP, and I found her a hugely constructive presence as Victims' Commissioner when

I first came in as an MP. So I do not think it is a pure Civil Service-type role whereby the impartiality has to be absolutely pure. It is really about whether they can rattle the cage and feel absolutely free in how they express themselves. I think that Eleanor Lyons, like Sara Thornton before her, is demonstrating amply that she is able to do that. I do not get any sense of constraint.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** Of course, you are quite right that it is provided for at the moment in the statute that it is the Home Secretary's responsibility, but can you enlarge a little bit on the process? Have you had anything to do with the process, or have you been aware of how the process of appointment has been conducted in practice?

**Laura Farris MP:** That is a good question. No, I have not. She was appointed at the same time I came in as a Minister.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** Do you have any information as to how the process is handled?

**Laura Farris MP:** I imagine that, in keeping with all other public appointments, there is a sort of independent process. I have no sense from her of somehow trying to conform to a government line, being limited in what she can and does say, or advocating for any particular government position that might otherwise be only one that is held by one political party or another. My interactions with her do not reflect that. I think she is really good at identifying gaps in modern slavery law and bringing them to my attention. I find it a really constructive working relationship, but I am challenged in it.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** I think you will understand that the point is not just who appoints but that the person who appointed you might have a feeling about your continuing in office if you are criticising the policy. That is the problem.

**Laura Farris MP:** It is difficult for me to prove a negative. The only thing I would say is that she is not the only person working in a role at the Home Office who is appointed by the Home Secretary. One of my officials will correct me if I am wrong, but I am pretty sure that that applies to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner too. Again, we have never really encountered a problem with her expressing her concerns, criticisms and recommendations for improvement, as well as the necessity for improvement in certain areas.

Q200 **Lord Hope of Craighead:** The other question is a matter of resources. We have heard evidence from the commissioner herself that she is stretched in fulfilling her function by a shortage of resources. It is about money, basically. It is interesting that the Australians apparently fund their equivalent commissioner by almost twice the figure that we do; I think the equivalent in pounds sterling is £1 million per annum for a much smaller population. Is there not something to be said for looking more closely at whether she has sufficient resources to fulfil the function? If she cannot employ enough people to cover the ground, something is at

the risk of going seriously wrong.

**Laura Farris MP:** I think we should always be looking carefully at the budget that we make available to commissioners, if we are serious about them doing their work. I have to say that she has never raised that directly with me. The budget breaks down to roughly £0.5 million, which she gets for what we call RDEL, which is the resource aspect, and £100,000 for the capital budget.

I do not think she has recruited all six members of staff she wanted to, but I know that she is on track to. She has submitted a strategic plan to the Home Office that we expect to reply to very soon. That will be for the Home Secretary. At this point in time, I know what her resourcing plans are, and I have not heard that she is unable to meet them, but you are right to say that we should always be thinking carefully about the budgets that are available. We would never wish to set the commissioner up to fail by starving them of the resource they need to do the work that we ask of them.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** So would I be right in thinking that you could keep a careful eye on this and, if there were any complaints or suggestion that she was short of resources, you would look into that sympathetically to see whether something can be done about it?

**Laura Farris MP:** I think I can say that without equivocation. I know, for example, that the budget changed from last year to this year, so the budget is not fixed in perpetuity.

**The Chair:** I think a number of the staff are also on temporary contracts, so it might be good to see that regularised as well.

**Rebecca Wyse:** We are working that through.

Q201 **Lord Watson of Invergowrie:** I want to raise some issues that have emerged in your answers to questions put by Lord Hope. First, you used the phrase “rattling the cage”, which I like. You said that you did not think that the commissioner was prevented from rattling the cage. I think most people who have looked at the situation of the previous commissioner, Sara Thornton, would think that she did rattle the cage. She gave evidence to us, and she did not say that, but I think the impression is that she did. That was followed by her not being given a second term in office—and, indeed, the post remaining vacant for 18 months—so she was not given a second term just because someone else was ready to take over. Does that not give the impression that rattling the cage too much is unlikely to give the commissioner the ability to do his or her job effectively?

**Laura Farris MP:** I am not avoiding the question, but that all predates my arrival, and it is nothing that I have ever been privy to, so I would be guessing my answer. I think it is fundamentally expected of every one of the Home Office commissioners, such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Anti-Slavery Commissioner—obviously, the Victims’ Commissioner cuts across with the MoJ—that their role is to be

critical, not I hope in an unconstructive way but to identify areas that are ripe for improvement and to improve the service overall. I have never really discerned a sense that an individual is not reappointed for that reason, and I cannot comment on Sara Thornton.

**Q202 Lord Watson of Invergowrie:** I appreciate that. There is also the question of the resources available to the commissioner. You may well have seen the evidence she gave to the Home Affairs Committee last year when she said that her budget was being cut by 5% year on year. As you will know in your ministerial role, there is no less demand with regard to human trafficking and safeguarding requirements, so how does shrinking funding for the commissioner's post sit with her ability to deal with a growing workload?

**Rebecca Wyse:** Just to be very clear, I think we corrected the comments in the HAC appearance when we were last here. The commissioner's budget is £52,000 more for the money that we are giving her this financial year, from the last commissioner's full year in post, which was 2021-22. I cannot speak to future financial years; that would be subject to discussion. It is also worth saying that the previous IASC received money from the devolved Administrations. Again, I cannot comment as a Home Office official on what, if any, money this IASC will receive from the devolved Administrations, but I wanted to clarify that point. I do not think it is a reduction in budget, but I know there were some previous misunderstandings on that.

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie:** Okay, but I am quoting the minute of the meeting. For the year to which she referred, the commissioner's budget was £605,000 and it is now down to £500,000. So whatever it is year on year, it seems to me to be going in the wrong direction.

**Rebecca Wyse:** If that is from the HAC transcript—and forgive me, I do not have it in front of me—I think that has been corrected on the back of that hearing. We can follow up, if I am incorrect on that, but I think we brought the figures to the last hearing that I attended for this committee.

**Q203 Lord Watts:** The point is that the budget has been increased between the budget that was received by the old commissioner and the new commissioner, but was the old commissioner's budget reduced in previous years?

**Rebecca Wyse:** Forgive me. I have the data for 2021-22. I do not have previous data on that.

**Lord Watts:** I am making the point that if the old commissioner's budget was reduced on a regular basis, you would have to inflate it. It does not necessarily mean that by introducing the new budget with the new commissioner, she is getting the same resources as the previous one did originally.

**Rebecca Wyse:** I appreciate the point. I am afraid that I do not have the data, but we can look it up and come back to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that offer. That sense of what has happened in real terms to the budget would be really helpful.

Q204 **Lord Watts:** There has been substantial exploitation in the care sector. Can you explain why that is and what could be done to address it?

**Laura Farris MP:** I am glad you asked about that, because the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority has raised it with me as well. Care workers were added to the shortage occupation list on the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee in 2022. There seem to be three forms of exploitation that have been drawn to our attention. The first is where the individual wishes to come to the United Kingdom and work in care, but they are duped in their country of origin into thinking that they have to engage a recruiter. They are charged high fees when, in fact, they could have got the visa anyway, and they arrive in the United Kingdom and work a form of bonded labour. So that is already one form.

The other form is when a person arrives on a visa and is under the control of an unscrupulous agency, whereby various unlawful terms are attached to their employment, so there is not enough work, or the work is too peripatetic and they are moving to places that they cannot possibly hope to reach. The conditions of work are essentially more consistent with modern slavery.

We have made a few changes already, some of which have involved tightening up the ability to do that. The DHSC has published some guidance in recognition of this, so any social care provider who wishes to sponsor anybody on the shortage occupation list coming in as a care worker has to be registered with the CQC, which gives them a sort of supervisory role. But I also have to make it clear that we are looking at what more we can do on the issue of enforcement. Those conversations are happening at the moment, because it is a live issue that is being brought to our attention quite regularly, particularly in the last two to three months.

**Lord Watts:** The committee is interested in trying to come forward with a system that is easily understood by everyone: for example, that the minimum wage must be paid and that hours of work must be stipulated, with a maximum laid out; what is permissible to be deducted from someone's salary; and how secure the work is. Is the department looking at trying to work out a simple way in which to measure whether modern slavery is taking place or not? It does not seem complicated to us, but it would be useful for everybody concerned if there was more clarity in these areas.

**Laura Farris MP:** All those things are already the law. You have to pay the national minimum wage, so it is not the fact that the law does not exist; it is the fact that unscrupulous agencies operating often in an umbrella context are finding ways around it. Various options are available to us, all through forms of labour market enforcement. One is whether every care provider has to be registered, not just with the CQC but supervised more widely.

There is a range of options. This cuts into DBT's brief, but I am interested in this. I do think that enforcement needs to be more muscular, but it would not be as simple as saying that every contract should say that the law is the law, because that should already be the case anyway and it is already a breach of the Employment Rights Act not to provide somebody with a written contract of employment that sets out things like their pay, their rest breaks and all the rest of it. But it is still not happening, which is why we are looking at various forms of enforcement on that.

**Lord Watts:** In what you are looking at, will you look at what can be deducted from someone's salary and the fees that people will pay?

**Laura Farris MP:** Bonded labour is a straight act of fraud, because the person did not need to accrue fees to come to the United Kingdom to become a care worker. So if they paid fees abroad, the fees were obtained fraudulently, and if they were admitted into the NRM they would be treated under Section 1 of the Modern Slavery Act as a victim of slavery.

The point more widely about those who are being exploited, who are working unpredictable hours for not enough pay, is a slightly different point, and it is probably better achieved through the CQC or through a more robust form of labour enforcement, such as the GLAA.

Q205 **Baroness Barker:** We have a care market that is really well understood. The economics of it are sufficiently well understood that it attracts quite a lot of private equity investment. How come the Government did not understand when they decided to change the visa system that they were opening up this loophole for exploitation?

**Laura Farris MP:** Many of the individuals are not being recruited by, say, a separate care home as a premises; they are being recruited by a kind of cowboy agency, which then deploys them to fulfil various care contracts. That might be domiciliary care, or it might be care within a premises. So it is different from saying that we have X number of care homes in a local authority area, some private and some state funded, and this is how they are staffed. It is a looser agency-type arrangement, and that is where we are seeing the principal degree of exploitation.

**Baroness Barker:** Those care agencies existed before the change in the law.

**Laura Farris MP:** I think a number have grown up since the change in the law, and we are definitely seeing that. That is why we have this link to the CQC now.

**The Chair:** Minister, you must be aware that there are only 18 inspectors for the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate. When the visas were offered, was there any thinking about increasing the number of inspectors?

**Laura Farris MP:** I honestly cannot speak to that, because I was not a Minister at the time when that decision was made, so again I would be

speaking about something outside my knowledge. It is true that we are talking to the GLAA as just one of the potential partners on this, as you would probably expect.

**Q206 Lord Watson of Invergowrie:** I wanted to raise the issue of the changes to the Immigration Rules that were introduced in March, which prevent overseas care workers from bringing in close family to the UK. I do not expect you to argue against government policy, but I put it to you that there is at least a reasonable chance that this will make some care workers more vulnerable and therefore more liable to be at the mercy of those offering them sponsorship. In many cases, care workers are so lowly paid that they work the extra 20 hours that they are entitled to to supplement their wage. Also, quite a few care workers hitherto have had a member of the family also working here and so can supplement that wage. That will stop now.

Have you considered the possibility of this making some care workers more vulnerable, and therefore the question of their sponsorship being withdrawn for whatever reason if they complain, with the consequent effects of the 60-day rule, and so on?

**Laura Farris MP:** I think it will make the care worker visa less attractive if you cannot bring family members with you, and I would expect there to be a reduction in the number of people seeking it. It is hard to make any particular estimate about who would have come in and what they would have been doing. There are other issues with the care worker visa with these agencies. It is not just that people come in and are exploited through care; it is that some of them are bringing people and then flipping their visa into something else quite quickly. That is something that we did not expect. We have seen people coming in on a care worker visa and that visa being migrated into a different one quite quickly. That was not the objective of the scheme.

So there are a number of issues that we have had to deal with in relation to this, of which the modern slavery, or certainly the bonded labour aspect, is a part.

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie:** I take that point, and it is well made. But there is also the question of care workers wanting to change their employer and in many cases being unable to do so. The point I was making was that there was often family support for emotional reasons but also financial support, which will now be withdrawn. That is likely to lead to more people being more vulnerable. Do you see that as likely to happen and something that would impact on your ministerial role?

**Laura Farris MP:** I understand the point that you are making, but the truth of the matter is that the legal migration figures for last year were really high, much higher than the Government would wish them to be. One way of dealing with that is to remove the right to bring dependants from certain categories of worker and from students, and that is the choice the Government have made. But they are very clear that the

objective is to reduce the overall numbers coming into the United Kingdom.

Q207 **Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Will the Government consider that all care organisations should be licensed? I understand that the majority are, but a substantial minority are not licensed.

**Laura Farris MP:** I think that registration with the CQC is meant to be a way of getting some way towards that. I would like to ask Rebecca about the GLAA aspect.

**Rebecca Wyse:** The GLAA does not have the care sector as one of its key sectors on this. We would need secondary legislation to do that.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** I just wondered whether you had considered that, whether you call it registration or licensing—

**Rebecca Wyse:** There is a big difference.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** —and if you have not, why not?

**Laura Farris MP:** At the moment, they have to be registered with the CQC—in other words, they have to be eligible for an inspection—but they are not on the list for the GLAA. That decision has not been taken in government, although it has brought that issue to our attention.

Q208 **Lord Watts:** On a small point of clarification, you seemed to take note of the Chair's suggestion about enforcement and the numbers of people employed in that area. Has your department carried out any assessment of how many people would be needed to do more effective enforcement procedures in the future? If they have done that, what are the numbers?

**Laura Farris MP:** I do not think we have conducted an assessment of whether there are enough people to conduct enforcement, but I can send you some data on that, which might be helpful and inform your inquiry.

**The Chair:** There is an ILO minimum standard for labour market inspection, and we are way below it across the board.

Q209 **Baroness Hamwee:** Forgive me if I have missed this. I take your point about different departments having different areas of focus, but have you discussed with the Department of Health what issues there are with the delivery of services when those delivering the service are in fact people who are exploited, and what the CQC needs to be aware of if it is to be the body that conducts the inspection in order to identify people who are being exploited?

**Laura Farris MP:** It is true to say that this issue is pretty much under the ownership of the Department of Health and Social Care now, and it is that department that has published the most recent guidance, creating recruitment guidance for anybody who is using ad hoc carers on this basis to ascertain the circumstances in which they have arrived in the United Kingdom and how they are being paid. I have not had conversations with the CQC about what it is looking for.



**Baroness Hamwee:** Your department, and particularly the people who work to you in your responsibilities, will have developing understanding of the signs of exploitation and so on. It is not just domiciliary care; it will be through agencies, as Members have been saying.

**Laura Farris MP:** I was not suggesting that it was just domiciliary care. I was suggesting that, through the agency, the care worker could be deployed in a range of different settings performing a care role.

Q210 **Lord Smith of Hindhead:** Good afternoon, Minister. Before I ask my question, I would like to take you back to a comment you made in your answer to Baroness Butler-Sloss. You said the Home Office does not access Ministry of Justice data. Why is that?

**Laura Farris MP:** That is a persistent problem across the Home Office, policing and the courts. My ministerial brief cuts across both departments, and this is a constant issue for me. We know, for example, how many reports of a certain crime are made, how many of those cases the police will refer to the CPS, how many charging decisions will be taken by the CPS in relation to something, and ultimately we know what happens in court, but we do not have good data that links the whole thing.

That is a real weakness that we are in the process of trying to change across the two systems, and we talk about it regularly. I will give you a good example. Protective orders fall within the realms of slavery and trafficking and within lots of other areas, whether it is a stalking protection order or other forms of court order. The victim goes to the police and talks to them about what has happened. The police make an arrest and proceed with an investigation. In the end, the victim does not support prosecution, but the case goes to court and a protective order is made. If that person is rearrested, very often the police will not have the data to know that they are the subject of a protective order, and that cuts across the piece. That is because of the poor link-up between the court data that we have and the police data that we have that feeds into the MoJ and the Home Office. We are very focused on that as a critical area that we need to improve across this area.

**Lord Smith of Hindhead:** And that is being addressed.

**Laura Farris MP:** Yes, but it is not easy. Even the upgrades that are being made to the police national database, which is in the process of a very significant change, are huge multimillion-pound infrastructure projects that are really complicated and challenging. At the moment, it is true to say that the link between data held by the Home Office and the MoJ is not good enough, and there is not enough of an exchange of what is happening. That is frustrating in my role.

Q211 **Lord Smith of Hindhead:** As you can imagine, quite understandably, this committee has been spending a lot of time looking at and thinking about the victims, but it has spent significantly less time and attention thinking about the perpetrators of modern slavery—those who are

responsible for that. I think we get the impression that this is seen by the criminal element as being a relatively easy crime to commit, with a low chance of being caught, and, even if they are caught, with not particularly heavy sentences.

We have also had difficulty in trying to establish just what the prosecution rate is. We started off with our meeting believing that it was 1%. We were then informed by the police when they gave their evidence that it was 1.8%. When we had the Crown Prosecution Service in the other day, they said it was significantly better than that, but we are still waiting for them to send their written response as to what it actually is.

Do you have any particular view as to how we can increase the detection and prosecution of people who commit these crimes and, once we do that, whether the data on it can be shared more widely? In other words, what are the Government doing to try to address the perpetrators of these crimes on the basis that it is cause and effect? If people thought that they were going to get caught and if they did get caught they would be punished very severely, I imagine that we would see a reduction in the number of victims of modern slavery and in the amount of time and resources of care that we all have to spend looking after those victims. I do not have a concern about that, but if we can reduce the number of victims, that will be a good thing for everyone. That is the bottom line.

**Laura Farris MP:** That is an excellent question, and there are several parts to my answer. First, you are right that prosecution rates are too low. They have increased from last year to this by 10% to 15%—I think they went from about 311 in 2022 to 410 last year—so that is something. I read the evidence from Jim Pearce from the National Police Chiefs' Council when he appeared before this committee. When he was asked the same question, he said that with about 50% of the cases we do not know who the perpetrator is—we do not have that information—and in a remaining 32% of the total cases the victim no longer or does not support prosecution and does not want to give evidence, which was very unsurprising, I thought.

I will touch on a few things that we are doing in relation to that. One is the extension of special measures in court. One example is that, under Section 28 procedures, victims of modern slavery can give evidence not at the same hearing as the defendant, in advance and behind closed doors. Their evidence is recorded and played at a later date to the jury. That means they never have to go into the same building as the alleged perpetrator, which is quite important.

There is also the criminal law framework. Prevention is a massive part of this, too. You may have observed—I hope you did—that the Government brought forward an amendment last week to the Criminal Justice Bill on cuckooing. That is a helpful layer of additional criminality, dovetailing with the circumstances in which the police might go into a property that has been forcibly occupied by someone else, because they suspect it is being used in connection with drugs, running guns, the sex trade or something else. If they suspect that the house is being controlled or the

occupier of the house has given it to someone else without their free consent to be controlled, the amendment creates a free-standing offence of the gateway offence, really, and I hope that will lead to more arrests.

I will say just one other thing about prevention, and then I will come on to protection. There is quite a lot more work to be done on adult websites where women are advertised for sex work. I looked carefully at what people from Vivastreet said when they appeared before the Home Affairs Committee in the Commons, and I thought that their answers were lamentable. I had a look last night at their anti-slavery statement. They accept that they have nothing like age verification—they recognise that lots of the women are advertised online with the same phone number—but they do nothing to stop that. That is something that I am interested in. In fact, as part of the progress report, which I mentioned earlier, I want to look at adult service websites, because there is a risk that we are facilitating the sexual slavery of women by allowing them to operate in a way that is different from the kind of offline environment. That is another area where we could clamp down on perpetrators.

Finally on this, you have a problem with these offences if you do not have a victim who supports prosecution. I want to help the police to make better use of their protective powers and the protective orders they can make. In fact, the first Peelian duty of policing is to protect the public.

In a situation where you know what somebody is doing and roughly who in the area is said to be the gangmaster or running the show, slavery and anti-trafficking orders can be used. The terms of them are really practical. They can be quite long lasting and really restrict the ability of that person to bring anybody in and to contact people to go into certain workplaces or move around towns in a certain way, yet they are not used very much.

It is part of a wider piece of work that we are doing in the Home Office on protective orders at the moment, and I do not know but I hope I will be able to say a bit more on that in future. I do think that if we cannot get the case sent to court for trial, we should be looking at the police's powers to make protective orders.

**Q212 Lord Smith of Hindhead:** Thank you for that very comprehensive reply. That is very good. Mr Bligh is having an easy time of it today. He has not been asked a question once, and I am afraid that I am not going to ask him one now, but I have a follow-up question for Ms Wyse.

When you came to see us about 10 weeks ago with your colleague from the Home Office, you undertook to provide a Written Answer to a question that Lord Whitty raised and which I followed up on, asking about the breakdown of the different types of modern slave labour. You identified that 27% was this or 36% was that. I asked you what the remaining 47% was, and I think we are waiting for a reply. I think Lord Kempson asked for a breakdown of the work the people in your department undertook and how many were going to be dealing with a particular subject. Perhaps you would be kind enough to look back on

what was said on that day and see when the follow-up will arrive, because we are still waiting.

**Rebecca Wyse:** My sincere apologies. I have offered to write on another issue, so I will make sure that you get answers to both of those.

**Lord Smith of Hindhead:** Thank you.

Q213 **Baroness Butler-Sloss:** First, I congratulate the Government on the cuckoo clause. I am so relieved that you have done that.

I have two questions. The first is on prosecutions, and I heard with interest what you were saying about that. My experience in the law, as I am sure yours is, is that victims who are supported are much more likely to give evidence. The current system does not encourage most victims to give evidence—would you not have thought?—because they are not going to give evidence from Rwanda or some other country. Should the Government not be looking at the importance of helping victims in order to support the prosecutions and convictions in that 50% of cases where they know who the perpetrator is and can catch them?

**Laura Farris MP:** I think you are right: victim support really matters. Actually, the Government are now spending about £154 million a year on victim support compared to when we came in, when it was about £40 million. We now have nearly 1,000 independent sexual violence advisers working in the system. I do not know whether you know what they are: they are lay people who are assigned to someone who has been a victim of a serious sexual offence. I suppose that the things relating to women would definitely fall within that, because it is women in the end who are overwhelmingly victims of sexual offences. They are absolutely amazing; they can hold a victim's hand all the way through the process and act as a go-between with the police, the CPS and anybody else, but they are not lawyers or law enforcement. They are just there to support, and we know that when a victim has an ISVA, as we call them at the MoJ, they are much more likely to remain engaged in the criminal justice process.

That does not completely answer your question. One thing that we know—and we see this with rape, too—is that victims may be very fearful of the person that they are going to put into the dock, or they may have been got at at some point after they have been brought to the attention of the police. We see that with rape, particularly when the perpetrator of the rape is also the partner of the victim; they are got at and they withdraw quite quickly.

There are certain things that we can do as government and certain things that will always pose a challenge, and the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim is always acute, which is why protective orders are an underused tool. They could create better protection if we cannot persuade the victim to go into court.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** I have heard from prosecutors over several years that when there are possible victims who could be giving evidence, the police have lost contact with them. They have not been protected and

therefore they are not available. Does the Home Office know anything about that?

**Laura Farris MP:** I have not heard that, but it is shocking to hear it, and I am not going to pretend otherwise. If a victim who would bring a case against a perpetrator has lost contact with the police, that is the complete antithesis of what we would wish to happen.

Q214 **Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Can I ask a completely different question, on supply chains? Are the Government looking at, or preferably monitoring, the impact of the due diligence legislation that is starting in the EU and other parts of the world? Surely it will have an impact on a lot of business in this country.

**Laura Farris MP:** It is a good point, and I have heard it raised at the Home Office, but I am not sure exactly what we are doing. I can put that in writing to you.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Thank you. That would be helpful.

Q215 **The Chair:** I am sorry to return to this issue of the NRM and data, but you gave a very powerful and disturbing example of abuse in the system. As Victims Minister, do you listen to victims and survivors of modern slavery who tell you the impact it has on them of hearing other Ministers repeatedly say, based on anecdotes, that there is abuse in the system? Clearly, there will always be an impact on genuine victims and their attitudes towards using the NRM and the safety that provides if it is being suggested, it seems repeatedly, that the system is being abused.

**Laura Farris MP:** Let me just say again, if it was not clear from my first answer, that when I have met victims who are identified as working in conditions that are tantamount to slavery or bonded labour who are then rescued, if I can use that word, their experience of the NRM and everything that the Home Office is doing is incredibly positive. In fact, it is a real testimony to what the Government have done. You do not feel that there is resentment from them. If anything, because of the circumstances in which they have lived their lives up to that point, there is a real sense of new beginnings.

It is really powerful to see in my ministerial role not just that they are treated as victims, but that in many cases they go on to lead completely new lives. Their modern slavery experience is not the whole sum total to who they are. They go on to do really impressive things. Hestia did something in Parliament recently with some people who had worked in domestic servitude who were really well supported.

But I regret to say that, at the point of entry, particularly with the small-boats arrivals with no identifying documents, there is an issue whereby we do not have enough to go on to be absolutely sure that the person is who they say they are, and it is chaos across the channel. That is why we have had to put very strong measures into legislation. It is because it is an uncontrolled route that is completely run by people smugglers.

We cannot possibly sustain a humane asylum policy—the one we would wish to have that makes big open-door offers to countries like Ukraine, and any other country when a war breaks out and the intensity is a certain way—if at the same time we tolerate a completely uncontrolled route across the channel where we cannot be sure who is arriving and we have doubts about the veracity of their claim. We know there is a cottage industry of solicitors who are willing them to help them make those claims, and we have doubts about age assessment.

All those problems are not the total of what we are doing on modern slavery and, as I say, a big chunk of the work is incredibly impressive and we should feel really proud of that, but we have an evidential problem on one flank of it.

**Q216 Baroness Hamwee:** One of the comments that we have heard is about the delay between reasonable grounds and conclusive grounds and, in particular, the complete silence from the Home Office and a victim not being able to find out how long consideration in the Home Office will take—appearing to be off its radar for literally years. Is this something that you are aware of? I have come across this in other contexts with the Home Office—not being able to get through to find out about the progress of an application, having to pay for the phone call but still not getting the information. It is very distressing to somebody who feels a bit beyond being in complete limbo but still with no understanding or expectation of when a decision will be made.

**Rebecca Wyse:** I will take the two halves of your question, if I may: the first on timeliness, and the second on communications.

On timeliness, we recognise that we have work to do. We are starting to make progress in that space. We have recruited 200 new decision-makers under the Government's 10-point plan, and they are starting to bed in and have a demonstrable impact. The work in progress is reducing for the first time, and the latest quarter stats show a reduction of about 17% from the height. There is still more to do in that space, and I acknowledge that for certain. The average wait time in the most recent statistics has also fallen. Again, there is more to do. So yes, absolutely we have brought people on. We are reviewing our processes and are training those individuals. We are making progress. It takes time, but we are on it and are focused on it.

With regards to the communication, that is not something that I have heard, but I take it very seriously, and if the committee would like to share any information or evidence it has had on that, or a report, by all means do so. We would be very interested in that.

**Baroness Hamwee:** It was in a report published last year by the Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee in a different context: family migration.

**Rebecca Wyse:** I have not heard about it in relation to the single competent authority, which is the bit that we oversee from a national

referral mechanism perspective, but I will look at it and take that back and ensure that we have learned the lessons from that. Thank you.

**Q217 Lord Bishop of Bristol:** I have a more general question about pace and timeliness. We know that you are fairly recently in post, but the commissioner has arrived and has not had adequate support, for no doubt very good reasons, after a long gap. I was not clear whether there was a date for the publication of your 2023 report, and I would be glad to know that. She needs to publish her strategy, but there is no indication of a date for that. We have a general election coming up, and the risk is that all the while the victims are no longer in focus, as all this runs so very slowly and without the focus and the pace that is really needed.

**Laura Farris MP:** I hope I can provide some reassurance on that. On our annual report, what we are calling our progress report, which will be a reflection of the last nine years, my officials and I talk about this absolutely with the idea that it will be published either in July or in very early September, assuming that we are still in Parliament at that time. This is something that we have been thinking about and talking about. It is not a replacement for a new modern slavery strategy; we make that clear. But we hope it is a good hinge, as I have said, and that is the timeframe: in the coming months. We are mindful about the general election and when it might be. We could be wrong, but we hope we are not.

The commissioner has submitted her strategic plan to the Home Office, and, again, all the noises I am hearing—it is not totally my call—is that it is only a matter of weeks before there is a decision or a Statement to the House about how that will be received. We are not trying to thwart her progress. I am sorry if I was talking in general terms, but there is a timetable for all this work, and it is soon.

**Q218 Lord Watts:** A lot of focus on people coming into the country illegally is based on the fact of the victims. What about the traffickers? We have heard that partnership arrangements are being discussed with other countries. Are we considering giving amnesty to someone who provides evidence against a trafficker, and what level of prosecution and success have we had with the main source of the supply of people, which is the traffickers?

**Laura Farris MP:** That is a really excellent question. I will take it in two parts.

The channel route is incredibly difficult to crack. The operatives who are driving the boats are right at the bottom of the food chain. The people who are running those rings are incredibly hard to track down. I am sure that the people who run the boats have never met them and never will. They operate a lot of it by TikTok, for example, and various forms of bringing in their trade and advertising how they can get you to the United Kingdom, subject to a fee. You are also aware that once someone is designated for passage across the channel, they have to take the boat that is allocated to them. They can be forced into a boat, however scary

and however unseaworthy it is, sometimes at gunpoint, even though they have paid.

It is very difficult to track those gangs, and when we have intercepted parts of their supply chain and certain tools of the trade that we know they were using, we have only ever found that it has intercepted the trade across the channel for a matter of weeks before they have found an alternative supplier somewhere else. They are really versatile and incredibly difficult to identify. That is one area.

In relation to other areas where there are high degrees of trafficking, we have joint action plans with Albania, Romania and Vietnam that I think have slightly different titles according to the country. I still think you could do more, particularly in relation to the young women who leave Romania to come here, because we know that there is a really high correlation between trafficking and them finding their way into the sex trade.

We held a joint conference with Romania recently and discussed the very common techniques that are used. With a lot of the young women the lover boy technique is used whereby the young man finds her, becomes her boyfriend, she comes to the United Kingdom on a tourist visa and, before she knows it, she is being sent around doing God knows what here.

I wonder whether there should be a more rigorous visa process whereby a young woman leaving on a tourist visa from Romania has to notify of her address and her point of contact, and the point of contact should have to provide some identifying documents. There should possibly be a reporting obligation in the United Kingdom that is not too onerous—a three-year tourist visa under which they have to report twice. If nothing else, that might at least make the trafficker feel that they are on the radar. They do not really want to be. They are relying on a cheap budget airline that has got the woman into the country and then she is lost.

I raised this suggestion, and I have to say that it was not particularly popular when I did, but I still think we could be better gatekeepers for some of these countries where we know the nature of the criminality.

**Q219 Lord Watts:** What about setting up a specialist unit to go after those traffickers internationally? I am talking about people who are highly skilled who can track down the traffickers outside the normal system.

**Laura Farris MP:** That is the NCA, and it is really impressive, but there is a limit to what it can do on this.

**Lord Watts:** Has that led to many prosecutions?

**Laura Farris MP:** It has certainly led to certain interceptions. I would probably have to defer to officials on whether the NCA has had luck with this.



**Matthew Bligh:** Sorry, that is not really within my remit, so I cannot answer that.

**Rebecca Wyse:** I do not have an example for you, but Operation Aidant, for example, runs on a regular basis.

**Lord Watts:** Can you send us anything that you have?

**Rebecca Wyse:** We can certainly look and see what we have.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** I was not going to ask anything else, but I have just been checking the draft report and looking at some of our recommendations. One question you have not been asked, and which I thought in fairness I should ask, is whether you have considered producing packs informing workers of their rights. You are saying that the contract should do it, but when you get particularly care workers coming in with a care visa, should there not be a simple piece of paper that sets out the basic things and who they can apply to if they do not get it?

**Laura Farris MP:** You can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that is in the DHSC's most recent guidance. If I am incorrect about that, I promise that I will take up that suggestion.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** I just think you know that you should produce a piece of paper for each person who comes in.

**Laura Farris MP:** Oh what, saying, "This is the national minimum wage. This is what your maximum working time is. These are your rest breaks"?

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Yes, and, "If you're not being properly looked after, these are the telephone numbers you should try".

**Laura Farris MP:** Good suggestion.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss:** Good, because we are looking at it, so I thought you ought to be asked.

Q220 **The Chair:** It would be interesting to know your views on one other suggestion, about victim navigators, not just in respect of victims of sexual exploitation but whether victim navigators set up by Justice and Care should be available for all.

**Laura Farris MP:** I am sorry. You will have to remind who they are currently available for.

**The Chair:** I think it is a bit of a patchy picture.

~~**Robert Wilson:** I believe there is a pilot scheme at the moment, but it has not been rolled out nationally yet.~~

**Laura Farris MP:** I must confess that I am not familiar with that name. I have not heard it, so I will have to look up what they are doing and respond to you as to whether I think that should be rolled out more widely, and what stage the pilot is at.

**The Chair:** All right, thank you. I think that covers all our questions, so it just leaves me to thank you, Minister, and your colleagues for the time you have given us today. I know that we have overrun, so you have been generous with your time. Thank you. We look forward to the information that we have been promised, and we will follow up on that too.