



House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee

Human trafficking

First Report of Session 2023–24



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to the report*

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Home Affairs Committee

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Summary

Human trafficking is primarily a profit driven crime; perpetrators exploit their victims for financial gain. Under international law, set out in the ‘Palermo Protocol’, trafficking in persons is defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”.¹ However, the definition in the UK’s Modern Slavery Act 2015 is narrower. According to the Act, a person commits the offence of human trafficking if the person “arranges or facilitates the travel of another person (“V”) with a view to V being exploited”.² The term ‘modern slavery’ is often used as an umbrella term which encompasses human trafficking, slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour.

Human trafficking is an abhorrent crime, the true scale of which is unknown in the UK. The Home Office does not hold a definitive data source on the number of victims in the UK and while the number of referrals into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has grown substantially since its creation in 2009, there is still likely to be underreporting of the true number of victims.

While human trafficking was already illegal in the UK, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 brought together existing legislation into one Act and was commended globally as the first legislation of its kind in Europe. The Act delivered enhanced identification, protection, and support for victims and placed a unique transparency requirement on businesses to show that human trafficking and modern slavery is not taking place in their supply chains. Yet we were told when we began this inquiry how a lack of progress in the implementation of this legislation means that now “nobody in the world would think that we were a leader”. On the basis of the evidence we have heard, we conclude that improvements must be made in utilising sanctions for non-compliance of publication of transparency statements.

We have been very concerned throughout this inquiry that the fight against human trafficking is, in practice, no longer a priority for the UK Government, notwithstanding the Government’s claims to the contrary. Recent prioritisation of irregular migration policies over those concerning human trafficking, claims of migrants ‘abusing the system’, the lack of outputs from the Home Office modern slavery unit, the lack of an updated modern slavery strategy, and the 18-month delay in appointing a new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner demonstrate a disappointing lack of commitment on the part of the Home Office for tackling human trafficking in the UK.

We were particularly concerned that this de-prioritisation of human trafficking in favour of attention on irregular migration fails to reflect that UK nationals, particularly children, are consistently one of the most common nationalities referred to the National Referral Mechanism. We heard how UK national victims often fall through gaps in

1 [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime | OHCHR](#)

2 [Modern Slavery Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

support, as they face challenges with the lengthy National Referral Mechanism process and in gaining suitable accommodation, as a narrative persists that support systems for victims of human trafficking are centred around migrants.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) made it clear that the main priority in this arena is combating 'small boats' and organised immigration crime - within which modern slavery and human trafficking can be considered. This is despite human trafficking being identified by the NCA as a national priority threat. We welcome the fact that 4,500 police investigations are underway, but concerned that, in 2022, only 286 referrals were made to the Crown Prosecution Service. It is of note that both the Organisation for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) at the Council of Europe have expressed concern at the low number of prosecutions and convictions of human trafficking in the UK compared to the high number of identified victims.

It is clear to us that the Government must not only improve prosecutions and support for victims but strive to prevent human trafficking occurring in the first place. Yet it appears that current prevention efforts are woefully inadequate, in particular to tackle the demand that leads to human trafficking. Prevention must be at the heart of the Government's anti-trafficking strategy. In particular, action to discourage the demand that leads to trafficking for sexual exploitation has been wholly inadequate. There is a consistent under-use of relevant law enforcement, and a lack of law enforcement to tackle sexual exploitation that is facilitated by technology or prostitution advertising websites.

The number of child victims of human trafficking being identified through the NRM is increasing at an alarming rate and it is primarily UK nationals being criminally exploited. There is an overall lack of a joined-up approach across the NRM, child welfare and protection and criminal justice systems for identifying and addressing trafficking-related needs for potential victims.

Introduction

1. This inquiry recognised the wide range of exploitation that modern slavery encompasses and aimed to focus on the issues specific to human trafficking. The Home Office has identified 17 types of modern slavery offences, though this report focuses primarily on sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and criminal exploitation as the three most reported forms. Although the forms of exploitation are distinct, they often overlap, and it is not uncommon that victims will experience multiple forms of exploitation at a given time.

2. The number of potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)—the UK’s framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support - has increased substantially since its creation in 2009. There were 16,938 referrals in 2022, five times as many as the 3,263 referrals in 2015 when the Modern Slavery Act was passed. Nonetheless it has been estimated that there are at least 100,000 victims of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK.

3. Of the 16,938 potential victims referred to the NRM in 2022, 78% (13,290) were male and 21% (3,634) were female. This is primarily due to the large number of male victims referred for criminal exploitation and labour exploitation. However, female victims are disproportionately impacted by sexual exploitation. Several international anti-trafficking instruments currently acknowledge the need for gender-sensitive approaches, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (“Palermo Protocol”), and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings - both of which the UK is party to.

4. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is the main domestic legislation on human trafficking. The Act consolidated and clarified existing modern slavery and human trafficking offences and increased the maximum sentences for committing these offences from 14 years to life imprisonment. Amongst other things, it also introduced a defence for victims of slavery or trafficking who commit an offence, slavery and trafficking prevention orders and slavery and trafficking risk orders, a requirement for certain businesses to produce and publish a modern slavery statement, and created the role of the UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC). There have been several criticisms of the Act in recent years which we discuss throughout this report, mainly regarding the sanctions for those who fail to comply with the regulations on transparency in supply chains. In our opinion, the Modern Slavery Act does not include an adequate definition of sexual exploitation, as it does not reflect that sexual exploitation may constitute the exchange of money, employment, accommodation, services or other goods in return for sex acts. Furthermore, as we discuss in chapter 5, there is no definition of child criminal exploitation.

5. After receiving royal assent on 28 April 2022, Part 5 of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 introduced significant changes to the modern slavery framework. Furthermore, shortly after the launch of this inquiry in February 2023, the Illegal Migration Bill was introduced in the House of Commons. This new Act removes protection for potential victims of human trafficking who arrive in the UK irregularly. Upon introduction of the Bill the former Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP, said: “Modern slavery laws are being abused to block removals. [...] That is why this Bill disqualifies

illegal entrants from using modern slavery rules to prevent removal”. Yet former Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, who, as Home Secretary, sponsored the Modern Slavery Act 2015, told us that the Government’s Illegal Migration Act wrongly prioritises tackling irregular migration over combatting modern slavery and human trafficking and removes protection for potential victims who arrive in the UK irregularly. Therefore, we conducted our inquiry amid changing policies regarding protections for victims of human trafficking. Within this landscape, we recognised that we would not be able to cover, in detail, all facets of human trafficking.

6. The inquiry aimed to explore:

- a) how effective the UK’s approach to discouraging demand that leads to trafficking is;
- b) how well support services meet the needs of victims;
- c) what evidence there was that the NRM process is being exploited by individuals seeking asylum in the UK;
- d) how legislation, policy and criminal justice could be improved to prevent and address human trafficking in the UK.

7. We received a large number of written submissions and held seven oral evidence sessions. We also held a roundtable with survivors of human trafficking, and an informal virtual roundtable exploring the factors leading to human trafficking specifically from Romania to the UK.

8. We would like to thank all those who took the time to contribute their views. We extend particular thanks to the ten survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking who spoke to us about their experiences, and the staff at Human Trafficking Foundation, Hestia, and Unseen who facilitated this. These conversations emphasised the sober reality of this politicised issue, and the how important it is to make the right change for those who are subjected to this horrific crime. Finally, we would like to extend thanks to our three specialist advisers - Christine Beddoe, Colin Carswell, and Ryszard Piotrowicz – whose expertise has been invaluable throughout this inquiry.

Note on terminology

9. ‘Modern slavery’ is often used as an umbrella term which encompasses, amongst other things, human trafficking. Many stakeholders use modern slavery as an inclusive term, and others use the combined term ‘modern slavery and human trafficking’, abbreviated to ‘MSHT’. Therefore, this report may use the term ‘modern slavery’ to include reference to human trafficking. Particularly in referring to evidence, we have sought to use whichever term has been favoured in the original.

10. When referring to people who have experienced human trafficking, modern slavery, or exploitation, we may use the term ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’. This recognises that people will identify themselves differently depending on how they feel about these two terms. We have also used ‘potential victim’ whereby an individual has been identified—either through a referral to the National Referral Mechanism or a Duty to Notify report—and are suspected to be a victim of human trafficking or modern slavery.

1 Work of the Home Office

Prioritising human trafficking

11. Throughout our inquiry we heard consistently from numerous stakeholders that the Government is prioritising work to tackle irregular migration issues at the expense of the abhorrent crimes of human trafficking, notwithstanding the fact that since 2018 over 16,000 British nationals have been referred to the national referral mechanism (NRM).³ Furthermore, some stakeholders told us that in doing so, the Government is conflating human trafficking and immigration, thus undermining the gravity of the crime of human trafficking.⁴ Criminal law barrister, Caroline Haughey OBE KC, argued that progress would not be made on the UK Government's approach to tackling modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) until it stopped viewing MSHT policy through the lens of immigration and acknowledged that human trafficking is not an "immigration offence" (an offence against the State) but an "exploitation offence" (an offence against an individual).⁵ She reported "egregious" exploitation in some of the human trafficking cases she has prosecuted, including victims who felt that "the only freedom they had was whether or not they were breathing". She added:

They were told when they could eat, what they could eat and how much they could eat. Their living conditions were beyond poverty and squalor. They were paid about £10 a week if they were lucky. They were told when they could go to the loo. They were given no running water and were washing in Birmingham canal. For me, from where I stand, the only thing they do not have taken off them is the right to breathe. Everything else has been taken, so I see it as not far away from murder, but that is not this Government's policy.⁶

12. The Government's policy focus on immigration rather than human trafficking is reflected in law enforcement priorities. We heard evidence from Rob Jones CBE, Director General National Economic Crime Centre and Threat Leadership at the National Crime Agency (NCA), who confirmed that human trafficking is "a national priority threat". Despite this, he told us that while "the NCA's response to organised immigration crime is very significant for the agency", and that although modern slavery sits as part of that response, human trafficking and modern slavery "is not the highest priority". He argued that by investigating organised immigration crime, the NCA is "also going to be, hopefully, collecting intelligence on and investigating modern slavery".⁷

13. Much of the evidence we received conveyed concerns about recent legislation, specifically the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and the potential negative impact its provisions could have on victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. The Illegal Migration Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 7 March 2023. Upon its introduction, the former Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP, said: "Modern slavery laws are

3 Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery - Hansard - UK Parliament; [Home Office modern slavery statistics for 2020](#)

4 [Q45](#).

5 [Q504](#).

6 [Q504](#).

7 [Q483](#). We consider the National Crime Agency's response to tackling human trafficking and modern slavery in chapter three.

being abused to block removals. (...) That is why this Bill disqualifies illegal entrants from using modern slavery rules to prevent removal”.⁸ We consider the Government’s position that people are “gaming” the modern slavery system in chapter four.⁹

14. Some stakeholders, including the former Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, who, as Home Secretary, sponsored the Modern Slavery Act 2015, told us that the Government’s Illegal Migration Bill (now Act) wrongly prioritises tackling irregular migration over combatting MSHT and removes protection for potential victims of MSHT who arrive in the UK irregularly.¹⁰ She said:

The Illegal Migration Bill risks people being left in or consigned to exploitation. They will be fearful of seeking help because the traffickers will use this legislation to control them further, and they won’t trust the authorities. Under the current provisions of the Illegal Migration Bill, victims of trafficking not from the UK who arrived here illegally will ultimately have a choice to make; remaining exploited or coming forward to report the circumstances of their trafficking in the UK and being deported to their country of origin or to Rwanda. As a result, I believe if the Illegal Migration Bill is enacted as it is currently proposed, it will leave more people in slavery unwilling to come forward to UK authorities.¹¹

15. On 28 March 2023, during a parliamentary debate on the Illegal Migration Bill, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP argued that all those who have been victims of modern slavery and trafficking in the UK should be excluded from the legislation, “recognising the intention of the Modern Slavery Act 2015: that those who have been in slavery in the UK should be protected by the Act regardless of their immigration status”.¹²

16. Dr Katarina Schwarz, Associate Director of the Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham, also expressed deep concerns about the premise for the Illegal Migration Bill, asserting that “modern slavery is not inherently an immigration-related offence”. She said, “it is a massive concern that we would fold modern slavery legislation and provisions into an immigration context [...]”.¹³ While recognising that migration could make people extremely vulnerable to modern slavery, Dr Schwarz emphasised, along with a number of other witnesses, that many of the victims identified and supported are UK nationals and not victims of transnational trafficking.

17. In the same vein, Professor Dame Sara Thornton, the former Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, told us that “when people talk about trafficking, they often assume it has to be cross-border; it does not have to be, and the law is clear on that”. She highlighted that, in 2022, the second largest identified group of victims in the NRM was UK nationals (4,185) who were being trafficked within the UK.¹⁴ Furthermore, in the most recent quarterly statistics, UK nationals were the most commonly referred nationality.¹⁵

⁸ Home Office, [Home Secretary statement on the Illegal Immigration Bill](#), 7 March 2023.

⁹ See chapter four: Abuse of the NRM; [Alarming rise of abuse within modern slavery system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#); [Our plan for law and order \(conservatives.com\)](#).

¹⁰ [Q45](#) Dr Schwarz; [\(HUM0104\)](#) Rt Hon Theresa May MP.

¹¹ [\(HUM0104\)](#) Rt Hon Theresa May MP.

¹² [Illegal Migration Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament](#) column 888, 28 March 2023.

¹³ [Q45](#).

¹⁴ [Q15](#).

¹⁵ [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, Quarter 3 2023 – July to September - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Expressing concern about the Illegal Migration Bill, Professor Dame Sara Thornton told us that the legislation is not compliant with Article 4 of the Europe Convention on Human Rights—prohibition of slavery, forced labour and servitude,¹⁶ “in terms of the absolute right that people have not to be held in slavery, and not to be required to perform forced labour”, and that it will “undermine victim protection”.¹⁷

18. Dr Carole Murphy, Director of Research at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery at St Mary’s University, argued that, at the time of publication of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, “the narrative focused on the issue as a crime affecting migrants, with modern slavery and immigration crime being merged”. She said that only two mentions of British victims were made in the Government’s 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy.¹⁸ She called for the Modern Slavery Strategy to be reviewed given that the number of UK nationals identified as potential victims of modern slavery in the UK has been rapidly increasing in recent years, with UK nationals being the most common nationality of potential victims referred to the NRM for four consecutive years since 2018.¹⁹ Similarly, in his 2022 visit to the UK, the former OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey, reported that the Government’s shift in priorities is “particularly worrisome” given that British nationals continue to be one of the largest groups referred into the NRM, including children who are exploited in criminal activities.²⁰

Modern Slavery Strategy

19. The Government’s Modern Slavery Strategy²¹ is almost ten years old and, according to much of the evidence we received, is in need of an update. Published in 2014, the Strategy set out a comprehensive strategic framework which aimed to significantly reduce the prevalence of modern slavery in the UK, as well as enhance the international response. The Government announced in March 2021 that it would review its 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy in order to develop a revised strategic approach by spring 2022.²² However, at the time of writing, a revised strategy has not yet been published and the status of that commitment is unclear.

20. Stakeholders have contributed to the development of a revised strategy, with Dame Sara Thornton commenting on the second revised draft of the strategy in 2022. She told us that “it is a great regret that the strategy has not seen the light of day, not least because it did attempt to think about prevention”.²³ A number of other stakeholders, including the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), have called for the Strategy to be updated urgently to better reflect the human trafficking situation in the

16 [European Convention on Human Rights \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/t/ratification/ECHR/Convention/Convention_en.asp).

Council of Europe, [Convention Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings](#), (2005).

17 [Q27](#).

18 [\(HUM0068\)](#), Dr Carole Murphy.

19 [\(HUM0068\)](#), Dr Carole Murphy

20 [Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022](#), published 19 July 2023.

21 The Home Office’s modern slavery strategy sets out the cross-government approach to fighting modern slavery, which includes human trafficking.

22 [Alarming rise of abuse within modern slavery system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), 20 March 2021; [2021 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

23 [Q15](#).

UK, including specific measures to address the increasing prevalence of exploitation of children and adults in the committing of crimes, as well as exploitation facilitated by technology.²⁴

21. The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG) reported in 2018 that, as the UK continues to lack an overall strategy to prevent trafficking in adults and children, there is an inconsistent and fragmented approach to the prevention of trafficking. The ATMG argued that the UK is “leaving the response to trafficking and modern slavery fragmented, weak and ineffective”.²⁵

22. On 29 March 2023, during a Westminster Hall debate on MSHT, the former Safeguarding Minister, Sarah Dines MP, asserted that the UK is “still regarded as a world leader” with regard to its Modern Slavery Strategy. She responded to a number of issues raised about MSHT and the Illegal Migration Bill, as it was then, but ran out of time to discuss the progress of the Strategy specifically:

[...] There is a need for reform. I need to wind up, so I cannot say as much as I wanted to, but I will say that there will be protection, and vulnerable people will not be removed unless the disqualifications under the Nationality and Borders Act apply.²⁶

23. In oral evidence to us on 19 July 2023, the same Minister was reticent about committing to a publication date for the Home Office’s new Modern Slavery Strategy. She told us that, despite its age, “the principles in the strategy are still very good” and that the Home Office had been “looking very carefully at it”. However, she emphasised that it had also “been spending a lot of time” on the Illegal Migration Bill: “At the moment, we are focusing on the operational way of going forward with our new piece of legislation”.²⁷

Ministerial responsibility for human trafficking

24. In 2022, the UK Government moved responsibility for modern slavery and human trafficking from the Minister for Safeguarding to the Minister for Immigration.²⁸ In the OSCE’s 2022 report on its assessment of UK anti-trafficking legislation, policies and practice, the former OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey, reported that he was not “provided with clear reasoning behind the move” during his visit to the UK and expressed concern that the Government’s decision to shift that responsibility was a “downgrade in the country’s modern slavery response” reflecting “a clear sign of the UK Government’s shift from regarding modern slavery as a protection issue to an irregular migration concern”.²⁹ The Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss similarly expressed concern to us that part of the modern slavery portfolio was held by the Immigration Minister, remarking that “we are talking about immigration in the spirit of modern slavery, which is entirely wrong”.³⁰

24 [\(HUM0096\)](#), OSCE.

25 [\(HUM0048\)](#), the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

26 [Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery - Hansard - UK Parliament](#); 29 March 2023.

27 [Qs526–528](#).

28 [Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022](#), published 19 July 2023.

29 [Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022](#), published 19 July 2023.

30 [Q12](#).

25. When we asked Professor Dame Sara Thornton about this change, she said that she thought the responsibility was split between the Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick MP, and the former Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines MP:

Sarah Dines has been speaking on it, and Robert Jenrick has when it is something to do with immigration, so it seems to be split across the two Ministers³¹.

26. Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding, told us that she is “very proud” that the UK was “world leading in bringing in the Modern Slavery Act” and that she thought the Act works well. However, she said that the Government has to be “mindful of how, in operation, it can be abused”.³² We asked her whether she accepted that immigration offences (an offence against the State) and exploitation offences (an offence against an individual) were two very different legal entities. In response she said that modern slavery and immigration “are distinct areas in a linked arena”.³³

27. **We are deeply concerned that the Government is prioritising irregular migration issues at the expense of tackling human trafficking. The Government’s de-prioritisation of human trafficking is not reflective of the scale of the threat it poses or the gravity of the crimes involved. As was expressed by several stakeholders, human trafficking and modern slavery is not an immigration offence (an offence against the State), it is an exploitation offence (an offence against the individual).**

28. *The Home Office must not conflate immigration with human trafficking and modern slavery at the expense of protection of victims of human trafficking.*

29. **The Home Office’s shift in policy focus to irregular migration is also demonstrated by the Government’s long delay in producing a new Modern Slavery Strategy and by the recent transfer of elements of responsibility for modern slavery and human trafficking from the Safeguarding Minister’s portfolio to that of the Immigration Minister.**

30. *The Home Office and respective public authorities should treat human trafficking as primarily a protection issue and not an irregular migration concern. Future legislation must take account of the legitimate protection and support needs of all victims including UK nationals.*

31. *The Home Office, working together with key human trafficking sector partners, criminal justice practitioners and survivors, must accelerate and scale up efforts to develop a new and overhauled Modern Slavery Strategy. This should include actions to address all forms of exploitation, including the increasing prevalence of criminal exploitation of children and adults, and exploitation facilitated by technology. To identify better the proceeds from trafficking crimes, the new Strategy should include actions to enhance partnerships with financial intelligence, the financial services industry and financial regulators. A child-specific strategy should also be developed to take account of children’s specific needs and vulnerabilities.*

32. *In accordance with the recommendation made by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in its 2023 UK country visit report, we urge the*

31 [Q12.](#)

32 [Qs 516–518.](#)

33 [Q602.](#)

Government to withdraw the issue of modern slavery and human trafficking from the Minister for Immigration and reinstate the full remit of human trafficking and modern slavery policy to the Minister for Safeguarding alone.

Home Office Modern Slavery Unit

33. The former Minister for Safeguarding told us on 19 July 2023 that the Home Office’s Modern Slavery Unit (MSU) comprises 56 staff and is the core policy unit mandated “to prevent modern slavery, to prosecute people, and to protect and support the people who have been affected by modern slavery”.³⁴ The Home Office uses the term modern slavery here to encompass human trafficking.

34. Several witnesses to our inquiry, including the Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE and the former Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), Professor Dame Sara Thornton, expressed concern about the functioning of the MSU, specifically a lack of clarity and transparency about its work to tackle MSHT, and a lack of engagement with key stakeholders. While praising the Unit for its production of statutory guidance to support vulnerable victims, the Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE suggested that it was unclear beyond that guidance what other work it was doing to address MSHT.³⁵ With regard to transparency and communication of the Unit’s outputs, Professor Dame Sara Thornton reported that, when she was the IASC, “there were always concerns across the sector about the lack of engagement with officials”.³⁶

35. When asked about the work and engagement role of the MSU, Sarah Dines MP told us that she has “hands-on sight of a huge amount of work that takes place” and that “contrary to some concerns” there is a lot of engagement with stakeholders.³⁷ We also heard that the MSU had “a leading role” in developing policy for the modern slavery measures within the Illegal Migration Bill. When we raised concerns with Sarah Dines MP which had been put to us about the Unit’s focus on immigration, she replied, as previously noted, that human trafficking and immigration are “distinct areas in a linked arena”.³⁸

36. We found little publicly available information about the MSU: there is no organogram or information about its outputs since publication of the Home Office’s last annual report on Modern Slavery in November 2021. Consequently, we sought written evidence from the Minister for Safeguarding to clarify the Unit’s key priorities.³⁹ The Minister explained that the MSU works on a “wide range of issues” including: engagement with businesses on supply chains; oversight of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and Director of Labour Market Enforcement; grant management of the Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Programme; international engagement and oversight of the Modern Slavery Fund; devolved decision-making pilots for children; the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians programme;⁴⁰ the victim support model; the operation of the

34 [Q594](#).

35 [Q6](#).

36 [Q8](#); see section on Engagement with stakeholders, later in this chapter.

37 [Q598](#).

38 [Q602](#).

39 The Modern Slavery Unit is organised into two parts, the first of which is responsible for Prevention, Enforcement, Strategy, Governance, International, and Supply Chains, and the second for Victims Policy, which includes identification and support; [Letter from Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding, 5 June 2023; \(HUM0120\)](#) Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding.

40 The devolved decision-making pilots for children and ICTG programme are discussed in chapter five.

National Referral Mechanism; and the modern slavery measures in the Illegal Migration Act.⁴¹

37. Although the Home Office has not published a modern slavery annual report since 2021, Sarah Dines MP summarised the Unit's top line achievements "in recent years" which included the allocation of funding attached to the aforementioned workstreams, as well as the funding of civil society organisations "in over 13 countries" to "build the global evidence base on what works to combat modern slavery".⁴² We asked her when the Home Office would publish its next Modern Slavery annual report. In response, she told us that she does not "support having a proliferation of continual reports in some areas". She added that the Home Office had been focusing on the Illegal Migration Bill in light of the Channel crossings crisis.⁴³ Nevertheless, she said the MSU was working very hard to tackle MSHT; and she was having "very regular meetings with the modern slavery team, police forces, stakeholders and intelligence services".⁴⁴

Engagement with stakeholders

38. As previously mentioned, we heard concerns reported by Professor Dame Sara Thornton about a current lack of engagement from the MSU with key NGOs. The Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE told us that, soon after the Modern Slavery Act was introduced, the Government established ministerial strategy groups (Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Groups) initially chaired by the then Minister for Modern Slavery, Karen Bradley MP. There were groups on transparency and supply chains, one on victims, one on prevention and one on international issues. However, two years ago the Government disbanded these groups and committed to consult on a new engagement strategy.⁴⁵

39. In April 2023, the Modern Slavery Unit proposed a new model for stakeholder engagement (Modern Slavery Stakeholder Forums [MSSFs]), dissolving the previous Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Groups. However, there is no public record of any meetings of that new mechanism. In oral evidence to the Committee on 19 July 2023, Sarah Dines MP was unable to provide details about the newly formed MSSFs, including how many of them had met, over what period and the extent of her involvement with the groups. In supplementary written evidence to us on 5 September, she wrote to tell us that the Home Office had reviewed the former Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Groups and had recently relaunched them as Modern Slavery Engagement Forums (MSEFs). However, unlike the former MSSFs, the new MSEFs will not be chaired by the Safeguarding Minister. Instead, she said that the forums would "formally bring together senior officials at Deputy Director level from across government and the devolved administrations, with third sector stakeholders, to discuss adult and child support policy, prevention, enforcement, international and transparency in supply chains". She confirmed that the first of these forums met on 5 July 2023 and that they will meet quarterly.⁴⁶

40. The Home Office's approach to stakeholder engagement has been lackadaisical. It has taken the Home Office two years to launch a new formation of stakeholder groups

41 [Letter from Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding, 5 June 2023; \(HUM0120\)](#) supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding.

42 [\(HUM0120\)](#) supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding.

43 [Q532.](#)

44 [Q532–534.](#)

45 [Q8.](#)

46 [\(HUM0120\)](#) supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding.

(Modern Slavery Stakeholder Forums), during which time key legislation affecting victims of trafficking has been enacted with minimal or non-existent consultation with key human trafficking stakeholders. This is unacceptable. It is evident that this lack of Home Office accountability has been further exacerbated by the vacancy of the post of Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner for the last eighteen months, which we will discuss later in this chapter.

41. The Modern Slavery Unit's outputs, including belated information about its new model for stakeholder engagement (Modern Slavery Stakeholder Forums) is opaque to say the least. We deeply regret that a unit comprising 56 staff has prioritised work on the Illegal Migration Act to the detriment of preventing human trafficking, protecting victims and prosecuting offenders responsible for human trafficking.

42. *The Home Office should urgently resume publication of its annual reports on human trafficking. It should publish a Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery annual report by March 2024 to include key outputs and Home Office policies that are in development to address shortcomings, including prevention work, victim support for those in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and post-NRM, and support for UK nationals.*

The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

43. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 established the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), appointed by the Home Secretary in consultation with the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive. Part 4 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 sets out the role of the IASC and lays the duty of appointment on the Secretary of State.⁴⁷ The Commissioner's role is to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences, as well as in the identification of victims.

44. Professor Dame Sara Thornton ended her three-year tenure as IASC in April 2022. Eighteen months on, on 11 October 2023, the Government appointed a new IASC, Eleanor Lyons, the current Deputy Children's Commissioner.⁴⁸ Several stakeholders,⁴⁹ including Professor Dame Sara Thornton, Caroline Haughey OBE KC and the former OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey,⁵⁰ have expressed concern about how long this post was vacant. Professor Dame Sara Thornton told us:

Whether it is deliberate or whether it is just poor administration and poor bureaucracy, I do not know, but given the level of public discourse about modern slavery, and given that we had the Illegal Migration Bill and lots of issues about implementation of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, it seems to me that this is a key appointment, and Parliament surely should be informed by the expert views of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.⁵¹

47. [Modern Slavery Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/31/part/4) (MSA 40 (1)).

48. [Home Secretary announces new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-new-independent-anti-slavery-commissioner), 11 October 2023.

49. (HUM0021), Dr Ventrella et al., (HUM0038), Causeway Charitable Services; (HUM0050), West Yorkshire Combined Authority, (HUM0072), Metropolitan Police Service.

50. [548887_1.pdf \(osce.org\)](#), para 28.

51. [Q9](#).

45. The former OCSE Special Representative, Valiant Richey, noted that the appointment of the Commissioner is crucial not only because it is a statutory obligation, but it is also necessary as an independent voice in the heat of political debate regarding human trafficking in the UK. In a similar vein, Caroline Haughey OBE KC suggested that the lengthy absence of an IASC reflected the Government's policy approach of viewing MSHT through the lens of immigration.⁵²

46. Prior to Eleanor Lyons' appointment we had received a succession of failed commitments and assurances from the Home Office that a new IASC would be appointed imminently. For example, on 29 March 2023, during a Westminster Hall debate on human trafficking and modern slavery, Sarah Dines MP stated that advertising had concluded and there would be "news very soon".⁵³ On 5 May the Home Secretary wrote to us saying that she anticipated the recruitment process to take "approximately four months".⁵⁴ Four months later, in supplementary evidence to us, there was no clear explanation for the length of time in total for the process, yet Sarah Dines MP wrote that the "Government recognises the value and importance of independent oversight on work to tackle heinous crimes such as modern slavery" and said she could assure us "that the appointment is nearing completion".⁵⁵

The IASC Recruitment Process

47. The Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 recommended that the IASC appointment should be subject to additional scrutiny, including through a pre-appointment hearing with a parliamentary select committee. The Government's response to this recommendation stated:

Dame Sara Thornton was appointed in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code for Public Appointments and the Government will continue to ensure that this is adhered to in future recruitment rounds. It was not possible at the advanced stage of the recruitment to introduce pre-appointment scrutiny for the appointment, as the Review recommended. However, the Government has committed to consider whether the role meets the criteria for pre-appointment scrutiny for future recruitment exercises⁵⁶.

48. The Home Secretary wrote to us on 5 May 2023 to say that currently she does not consider that the IASC role meets the criteria for inclusion in the pre-appointment scrutiny process. She said that all Home Office public appointments are considered periodically for inclusion in the pre-appointment scrutiny process and the Home Office would keep this under review.⁵⁷ On 19 July in oral evidence, Sarah Dines MP said that she did not think a pre-appointment hearing was necessary, and expressed concerns that a pre-appointment hearing would mean the appointment could be vetoed by our Committee, although this is not in fact correct—⁵⁸ a pre-appointment hearing of the IASC by the Home Affairs Committee would be in an advisory capacity only. The IASC is a crucial role

52 [Q504](#).

53 [Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery - Hansard - UK Parliament](#), 29 March 2023.

54 [Letter from Home Secretary to Home Affairs Committee](#), 5 May 2023.

55 [\(HUM0120\)](#), supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding.

56 [Government_Response_to_Independent_Review_of_MS_Act.pdf](#) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

57 [Letter from Home Secretary to Home Affairs Committee](#), 5 May 2023.

58 [Q538](#).

which, to some degree, will affect how the UK tackles MSHT and our participation could help ensure that a suitable, capable candidate is appointed within a reasonable timescale. Furthermore, to ensure that such an important position is suitably filled, and for the purposes of transparency and public scrutiny, we strongly believe that such a hearing should take place.

49. We welcome the Home Office's appointment of a new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC) and look forward to inviting her to speak to us as soon as possible, to understand how she intends to prioritise the prevention of human trafficking - including tackling demand, the prosecution of offenders and the protection of victims. However, it is unacceptable and appears to be, at least in spirit, a breach of the statutory duty that there has been no IASC in post for a year and a half, during which time key legislative changes have been made and levels of public discourse around modern slavery have been high. Furthermore, there was no good reason for the delay in this appointment. The role of the Commissioner is crucial not only because of the Government's statutory obligation to have an IASC in post, but also because it provides an essential, independent voice that is vital in the current political debate about human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK.

50. There must be a pre-appointment hearing with the Home Affairs Committee, for the next IASC to be appointed which would allow that Committee to participate in an advisory capacity that better informs the Minister's final decision.

2 Prevention

Discouraging demand

51. Human trafficking can—and must—be prevented. Ultimately, the success of the UK Government’s strategy for combatting human trafficking is measured not by the rate of prosecuting offenders or supporting victims - but by its effectiveness in reducing offending and stopping individuals being trafficked in the first place.

52. Human trafficking is primarily a financially motivated crime, and it is highly profitable. Targeting the financial aspects of this crime is therefore critical to prevention.

Sexual exploitation

53. The UK has multiple legal and intergovernmental obligations to discourage the demand that fosters trafficking for sexual exploitation. These obligations arise from: The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (the ‘Palermo Protocol’); the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings; the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its General recommendation No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, which states:

Sexual exploitation persists due to the failure of States parties to effectively discourage the demand that fosters exploitation and leads to trafficking. Persistent norms and stereotypes regarding male domination and the need to assert male control or power, enforce patriarchal gender roles and male sexual entitlement, coercion and control, which drive the demand for the sexual exploitation of women and girls.⁵⁹

54. Yet, action to discourage the demand that leads to trafficking for sexual exploitation in England and Wales has been particularly inadequate. The Government’s Modern Slavery Strategy includes just two references to the need to ‘reduce demand’, and neither relate to sexual exploitation. The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Strategic Plan for 2019–2021 does not contain a single reference to tackling demand for sexual exploitation; in fact, the term ‘sexual exploitation’ does not feature in the Strategy at all, with just one related reference to the ‘sex trade’.⁶⁰ This is a startling omission.

55. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation reported: “The main profits obtained by sex trafficking gangs are from men who pay for the victims to perform sex acts on/with them. Without demand from sex buyers, there would be no supply of women and girls through sex trafficking.⁶¹ Law enforcement action against individuals who constitute the demand for sexual exploitation, and who directly abuse

59 [General Recommendation on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(docstore.ohchr.org\)](https://docstore.ohchr.org)

60 [Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner - Publication of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner’s Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021 \(antislaverycommissioner.co.uk\)](https://antislaverycommissioner.co.uk).

61 [Bust-the-Business-Model.pdf \(appg-cse.uk\)](https://all-party-parliamentary-group-on-commercial-sexual-exploitation.org.uk), How to stop sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in the UK, a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

victims, has also been woeful. Under section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act, ‘Paying for sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force.’ is a strict liability offence⁶². However, we heard that in the last three years a violation of section 53A was charged by the police three times, resulting in just two convictions.⁶³ Between 2013 – 2020, three individuals were convicted under section 53A and the maximum penalty applied was a fine no greater than £100.⁶⁴ One individual was subject to a fine no greater than £50. It is unacceptable that such low penalties should be attached to the crime of sexually abusing a trafficking victim.

56. In his recent visit to the UK, the former OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, noted “a resistance among criminal justice practitioners to implement this law or to actively seek other methods to discourage demand despite the strategic value of such approaches as well as the country’s international legal obligation to do so”.⁶⁵

57. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said that where it is able to prove that the trafficking victim has been subjected to force, it will be more likely to prosecute the trafficker:

If, for example, that victim were to provide evidence that they had been exploited or trafficked, that would lead to a bigger investigation into the exploiter. There are some challenges in terms of the evidence to prove that the individual had been exploited and trafficked, but every time we can, we will be prosecuting for more serious offences.

This was echoed by ACC Jim Pearce, Lead for Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime at the NPCC, who told us that the police’s “best efforts would be going after the organised crime gangs and exploiters”, rather than going after the perpetrators who buy sex.⁶⁶

58. Low penalties for individuals convicted under section 53A contribute to the failure to allocate police resources to prosecute perpetrators. This fundamentally undermines the potential deterrent effect of this offence. We are also concerned by the message such a low penalty sends to victims subjected to this abhorrent crime. The OSCE suggested that, if the low level of the penalty appears to be the issue, “officials should pursue increasing the penalties to reflect the serious nature of the offense and better motivate law enforcement to pursue its enforcement”.⁶⁷

59. Sarah Dines MP told us that it is hard to get convictions under section 53A, but this does not mean that the Government should not strive for them.⁶⁸ We welcome the former Minister’s endorsement of efforts to secure convictions against those that fuel demand for trafficking by paying for sex.

62 Section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act makes it a strict liability offence in England and Wales to pay “for the sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force etc”. i.e., it is not a valid defence for a defendant to argue that they did not know the prostitute had been subject to force. The maximum penalty is a level 3 fine (£1000).

63 [Q446](#), Lynette Woodrow.

64 [Sexual Offences: Convictions: 23 Mar 2022: Hansard Written Answers - TheyWorkForYou](#).

65 [Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022](#).

66 [Q450](#).

67 [Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022](#).

68 [Q554](#).

60. We also heard about wider initiatives that have been undertaken by other countries to reduce demand for sexual exploitation. Ruth Breslin, from the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme, told us that a change in the Republic of Ireland's criminal justice approach has had a positive impact on identifying victims. Under Ireland's Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, it is a criminal offence to pay for sex, while individuals exploited through the sex trade are decriminalised:

We know that women who have been trafficked and women who are in prostitution are all mixed together in the same sex trade. The police accepted that and brought together their policing of trafficking, which was happening over here, and their policing of prostitution, that was happening somewhere else. The policing approach now is to essentially take as a starting point that everyone in Ireland who is selling sex, whether they have been trafficked or not, is a vulnerable person, and they are treated and approached as such.⁶⁹

61. Meanwhile Andrea Salvoni, Acting Co-ordinator for Combating Human Trafficking, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), told us how the French authorities targeted sex buyers with education campaigns that discourage purchasing sex in an "effort to discourage harm before it even occurs".⁷⁰ This follows France's introduction of Law No. 2016-444 of April 13, 2016, aiming to strengthen the fight against the prostitution system and to support prostituted persons.⁷¹ The legislation prohibits paying for sex, decriminalises victims, establishes support and exiting services for victims, and requires the provision of education and training to aid long-term prevention of sexual exploitation.

62. We heard that a growing number of countries have adopted this 'abolitionist' or 'Equality Model' legislation, including Sweden (1999), Norway (2009), Iceland (2009), Canada (2014), Northern Ireland (2015), France (2016), Ireland (2017) and Israel (2018).⁷²

63. Enforcement of the current provisions of Section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is insufficient to deter those who buy sex.

64. *Section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 should be strengthened and penalties upon conviction increased to ensure comparability with other sexual and trafficking offences and to increase the deterrent value.*

65. *There should be much greater use of section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 by police forces and the CPS. This should be supported by additional training on the use of section 53A, provided by the College of Policing, and prioritisation by the CPS and police forces. The Government should publish annual data on prosecutions and convictions under section 53A.*

66. *The Government should conduct a comprehensive review of all legislative, policy and educational initiatives that are underway to reduce demand for sexual exploitation and report on this by June 2024. This review should compare the UK's approach with European countries and consider whether the Government should follow others in*

69 [Q76](#).

70 [Q57](#).

71 [The French law of April 13 2016 aimed at strengthening the fight against the prostitutional system and providing support for prostituted persons, March 2017.](#)

72 [\(HUM0057\)](#), Equality Now.

criminalising all acts of paying for or attempting to pay for sex and decriminalising victims of exploitation by removing penalties for soliciting.

67. *The Government's Modern Slavery Strategy, which we have recommended be updated, must set out how the Government will combat the demand for sexual exploitation created by individuals who pay for sex.*

68. *The new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner should actively consider including a strategy for reducing demand for sexual exploitation in the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Strategic Plan.*

69. *To ensure that the severity of sexual exploitation is recognised, the Home Office and law enforcement should refrain from using the term 'sex work'.*

Labour exploitation

70. On the matter of discouraging the demand that fosters labour exploitation, the Home Office told us that provisions in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 regarding transparency in supply chains⁷³ have “supported business to have senior level accountability, identify high-risk areas and introduce tailored steps to support vulnerable workers”.⁷⁴ However, we heard from several witnesses that it was “widely acknowledged” that this legislation is weakened by a lack of sanctions for failure to report, which in turn mean no sanctions for not following through on appropriate due diligence.⁷⁵ As Kate Roberts, Head of Policy at Focus on Labour Exploitation, explains:

Provisions allow companies to do minimal reporting with no real accountability or state enforcement for a lack of action. Reporting criteria remain undefined, there is no real monitoring of responses, or penalties for inadequate responses. Moreover, there is a lack of incentive for businesses which do find slavery in their supply chains to work to address the issues rather than pulling out, leaving the exploitation unaddressed and the situation of the exploited individuals likely worsened.⁷⁶

71. Despite the provision for the Secretary of State to seek an injunction with the High Court against non-compliant organisations and to impose penalties, there have been no penalties imposed against organisations to date.⁷⁷ An analysis by the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply, found that 29% of organisations which fall within the scope of the provision did not submit a statement in 2022.⁷⁸ The Institute also found that the registry of modern slavery statements recorded 46% fewer statements in 2023, compared to 2022 (8,074 compared to 15,091), which suggests that businesses may be deprioritising the submission of their modern slavery statement.⁷⁹

73 Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act (2015) requires businesses with a turnover of £36m or more to publish an annual statement on the steps they have taken to tackle modern slavery in their operations.

74 (HUM0093), Home Office written evidence.

75 (HUM0099), supplementary written evidence submitted by Kate Roberts, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX); (HUM0101), Written evidence submitted by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority; (HUM0104), written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Theresa May MP; Q68, Q79 and Q86, Sylvia Walby.

76 (HUM0099), supplementary written evidence submitted by Kate Roberts, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX).

77 (HUM0096), Written evidence submitted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

78 [Momentum stalling on tackling modern day slavery as businesses forget transparency rules \(cips.org\)](#)

79 [Momentum stalling on tackling modern day slavery as businesses forget transparency rules \(cips.org\)](#)

72. Much of our evidence suggested that labour exploitation usually begins in regulated sectors, where “demand for foreign labour to meet UK shortages in jobs... which British citizens are not keen to do (for example care work, agriculture, horticulture) creates an avenue for exploitation and human trafficking to thrive”.⁸⁰ Some witnesses highlighted “systemic gaps in various seasonal visa schemes”, such as the Overseas Domestic Worker visa, seasonal agricultural worker schemes, and care worker visas.⁸¹

73. Finally, we heard in evidence that the proportion of inspectors in the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) per 10,000 workers is lower than the international set standard.⁸² This means that proactive inspections are rare, with much of the reporting of potential labour exploitation being required from labour workers. However, many people who are experiencing labour exploitation may be fearful of reporting to the authorities for fear of reprisals on themselves.⁸³ The former OSCE Special Representative’s report following the UK country visit in November 2022 told us why there should be more resource given to the GLAA for inspections:

The UK’s GLAA has a large remit and expertise and has proven to be an effective agency with outstanding outcomes to prevent and investigate labour exploitation, protect vulnerable and exploited workers and impose the MSA. But it needs more financial support to realize its capacity.⁸⁴

74. The Government should do more to prevent human trafficking for labour exploitation in both the UK and in corporate supply chains. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 should be strengthened by enforcing fines for non-compliance with its Transparency in Supply Chains provisions and by encouraging businesses to practice due diligence when potential modern slavery is discovered. The Government should address systemic gaps in various seasonal visa schemes, and sectors with high demand for foreign labour, which are creating environments susceptible to labour exploitation. It should also ensure that the rate of inspectors within the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority is in line with, or above, the international standard to allow for proactive inspections.

75. Section 54 (publishing a transparency statement) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 must be strengthened by utilising sanctions for non-compliance. This should also be extended to the public sector, to reduce the risk of the UK purchasing goods produced using forced labour.

76. The Government must review safe visa routes for sectors with high demand for labour. This review must consider whether more safe routes can be created to address demand.

77. The Government should allocate funding for an increase in the number of Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority inspectors, so that more proactive monitoring and enforcement of labour laws can be implemented by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority.

80 (HUM0043), written evidence submitted by UK BME Anti-Slavery Network (BASNET).

81 (HUM0043), written evidence submitted by UK BME Anti-Slavery Network (BASNET), (HUM0010), Written evidence submitted by Dr Broad and Professor Gadd.

82 Q101; the International Labour Organisation recommends that Government employs at least one inspector for every 10,000 workers in the country.

83 (HUM0099), supplementary written evidence submitted by Kate Roberts, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX).

84 (HUM0096), written evidence submitted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Criminal exploitation

78. There has been a recent increase in the referral of victims of criminal exploitation to the NRM, primarily as a result of what the National Crime Agency (NCA) describes as coerced drug distribution, which is linked to county lines offending.⁸⁵ This involves primarily UK national victims and particularly UK national children.

79. Despite this notable increase in criminal exploitation in recent years, access to appropriate support remains limited. In particular, we heard how male British national victims of criminal exploitation in particular struggle to receive appropriate mental health support.⁸⁶ Intense multi-agency work is often needed to support these individuals, but the unwillingness of one agency to take responsibility has been a persistent and significant obstacle.⁸⁷

80. Additionally, many victims of criminal exploitation are arrested and charged with criminality before it is considered that they may be victims of trafficking.⁸⁸ The West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner said that this can be attributed to inadequate training for First Responders, sometimes working in favour of the traffickers:

Traffickers see these arrests and maintain the power and control by allowing victims to take criminal responsibility, particularly in criminal exploitation cannabis/county lines (adults) and cuckooing.⁸⁹

This results in victims having to live with a criminal conviction which may inhibit access to rehabilitation and reengagement in society.⁹⁰ Further, we heard that this could be perceived as law enforcement targeting ‘low hanging fruit’ - namely, those being criminally exploited - which in turn results in missed opportunities to pursue the actual perpetrators of criminal exploitation.⁹¹

81. Criminal exploitation is the most reported form of human trafficking and modern slavery, but there is insufficient training for law enforcement personnel in victim recognition and inadequate support for victims of criminal exploitation.

82. *The Home Office should review its Modern Slavery statutory guidance on criminal exploitation every six months to be inclusive of emerging intelligence for this form of trafficking.*

85 (HUM0084), written evidence submitted by the National Crime Agency.

86 (HUM0017), written evidence submitted by the Justice and Care and the Centre for Social Justice; (HUM0071), written evidence submitted by Unseen.

87 (HUM0071), written evidence submitted by Unseen.

88 (HUM0061), written evidence submitted by JustRight Scotland; (HUM0091) written evidence submitted by the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands

89 (HUM0091) written evidence submitted by the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands; ‘Cuckooing’ is the practice whereby offenders take over a person’s home and use the property to facilitate exploitation.

90 (HUM0068), written evidence submitted by Dr Carole Murphy.

91 (HUM0068), written evidence submitted by Dr Carole Murphy; (HUM0108), written evidence submitted by Caroline Haughey.

Technology-facilitated trafficking

83. We heard much about the use of technology by perpetrators to facilitate trafficking, for example, that offences of Modern Slavery are often technology-enabled.⁹² However, Andrea Salvoni, Acting Co-ordinator for Combating Human Trafficking at the OSCE, told us the UK was falling behind in tackling technology-facilitated trafficking, including websites which facilitate exploitation.⁹³ Similarly, Robert Jones, Director General National Economic Crime Centre and Threat Leadership at the NCA, explained that law enforcement needed to master digital technology to ensure that it was not “constantly on the back foot”.⁹⁴

84. In its written evidence to us, the Home Office referenced the use of the Online Safety Bill, now the Online Safety Act, to tackle human trafficking facilitated by online platforms, where “online companies will have a duty to prevent illegal content being hosted on their sites and take proactive action to remove it”.⁹⁵ However, we heard about several challenges that remain with the Online Safety Bill in relation to trafficking online. Robert Jones CBE, Director General National Economic Crime Centre and Threat Leadership at the NCA, told us how the majority of those who run technology companies are not in the UK, meaning these owners have little incentive to change current practices until there are stronger regulations.⁹⁶ Similarly, Professor Teela Sanders, Professor of Criminology at the University of Leicester, told us that there should have been more mandatory regulations for online platforms included in the Online Safety Bill.⁹⁷

85. Dr Ben Brewster, Research Fellow in Modern Slavery Perpetration at the University of Nottingham, told us that the Online Safety Act contained “lots of promising things”, but enforcement of its provisions would be difficult:

Enforcement in this domain is incredibly difficult because of the volume of content that we are talking about when it comes to large-scale platforms such as Meta and Twitter. There is the question of the capacity needed in order to enforce. That applies to the platforms and their moderation and protection mechanisms, and to the follow-up, once reports have come through to law enforcement and other services.⁹⁸

86. Dr Brewster explained that there needs to be collaboration between online platforms, the police, and third sector organisations “who have expertise in things such as child sexual exploitation and abuse material”.⁹⁹ We heard that “state regulation, rather than relying on the technology sector itself to self-regulate, has got to be the trajectory moving forward”.¹⁰⁰

92 [\(HUM0084\)](#), written evidence submitted by the National Crime Agency.

93 [Q55](#).

94 [Q473](#).

95 [\(HUM0093\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Home Office; Human trafficking is included in the list of priority offences in the Online Safety Act.

96 [Q493](#).

97 [Q218](#).

98 [Q205](#).

99 [Q230](#).

100 [Q236](#).

87. Ofcom is the designated independent regulator for the Online Safety Act. Its role includes setting codes of practice,¹⁰¹ detailing the processes that companies can follow to fulfil the duty of care, and requiring all in-scope companies to have effective and accessible mechanisms for users to report concerns.

88. *Ofcom should set out in its codes of practice the responsibility of technology companies for proactively identifying and tackling human trafficking on their online platforms, with significant penalties imposed for non-compliance with their statutory duties.*

Websites advertising prostitution

89. Websites advertising prostitution¹⁰², also known as pimping websites or Adult Services Websites (ASWs), are legal commercial online platforms dedicated solely or partly to hosting adverts for prostitution. The Home Office told us that, in the UK, “ASWs are the most significant enabler of sexual exploitation linked to trafficking” and that recruitment and exploitation online would likely increase as technology emerges and evolves.¹⁰³ Andrea Salvoni, Acting Co-ordinator for Combating Human Trafficking at the OSCE, similarly pointed to research which found that “75% of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are advertised online”.¹⁰⁴ We became increasingly concerned during this inquiry that there is insufficient action from the Home Office and law enforcement to address the high level of trafficking that occurs on these platforms.

90. We heard from Vivastreet, a prominent commercial website that hosts prostitution adverts, about what they are doing to prevent trafficking on their platform. They gave us a summary of the measures they have put in place to act against modern slavery and human trafficking on their platform.¹⁰⁵ During oral evidence they expanded:

We have a safeguarding team in our business that is dedicated to reviewing, exploring and investigating any suspicious behaviours, such as those that you mentioned. This team comprises many different skillsets, ranging from ex-law enforcement and data analysis skills to customer service skills. The team will explore proactively any potential indications of human trafficking, and then work with a law enforcement unit that we refer to as TOEX, which is Tackling Organised Exploitation.¹⁰⁶

91. Upon scrutiny, we considered these measures to have barely reduced, let alone prevented, traffickers from using these websites to advertise their victims to sex buyers. Vivastreet acknowledged that they allow individuals to advertise multiple people for prostitution concurrently, that age verification of individuals advertised on their site is not required, and that the same contact phone number can be used on multiple adverts. The Chair of this Committee highlighted the alarming number of prostitution adverts identified on Vivastreet for locations in or close to her own¹⁰⁷ and the former Home

101 [Quick guide to online safety codes of practice - Ofcom.](#)

102 This report uses the term “websites advertising prostitution” referring to sites that feature or allow offers – whether covert or overt – of sex acts in exchange for a fee. Other sources might use different terminology such as adult services websites, pimping websites, or sexual exploitation advertising websites.

103 [\(HUM0093\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Home Office.

104 [Q55.](#)

105 [\(HUM0103\)](#), written evidence submitted by Digital Ventures (Vivastreet).

106 [Q127.](#)

107 [Q132.](#)

Secretary's¹⁰⁸ constituencies that displayed very clear indicators of pimping or human trafficking, such as the same contact phone number being used in multiple adverts.

92. Rhoda Grant MSP told us the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Commercial Sexual Exploitation had conducted an inquiry into Sexual Exploitation Advertising websites, concluding that the only way to really reduce human trafficking on these websites would be to outlaw them¹⁰⁹. Rhoda Grant MSP pointed to legislation in France that prohibits websites from advertising or profiting from prostitution, enabling French law enforcement to quickly tackle and shut down new websites.¹¹⁰ Indeed, in 2018, the Paris public prosecutor's office opened a criminal investigation into Vivastreet on charges of aggravated pimping. Vivastreet subsequently suspended 'erotica' advert listings on their website. The CPG's inquiry concluded that 'Sexual Exploitation Advertising Websites' are a "market-expanding force" that centralise and concentrate demand online from sex buyers:

This ready-made, instantly accessible, open online marketplace incentivises sex trafficking. The websites substantially lower the practical, financial and technical threshold for individual exploiters and organised crime groups to engage in this highly lucrative crime.¹¹¹

93. We were particularly struck by learning how closely the Home Office and law enforcement agencies work with websites advertising prostitution. The Home Office acknowledged that these websites are "attractive to offenders because they can require little user verification and provide access to a large potential client base",¹¹² while the NCA and NPCC agreed in their written evidence that these websites are "the most significant enabler of adult sexual exploitation in the UK".¹¹³ Nonetheless, the NCA and NPCC reported that they play "an active part in Industry engagement with the objective of raising safety standards".¹¹⁴ It explained that due to a lack of regulation for these platforms, they instead seek increased reporting of exploitation to help them better understand the threat and drive an improved safeguarding response.¹¹⁵ The NCA and NPCC write:

In the absence of regulation, the engagement with ASWs is our collective attempt to encourage them to only provide services which minimise the likelihood of illegal or high harm activity to prevent and detect crime and safeguard the vulnerable. NCA and NPCC do not advocate for or promote these platforms and recognise they can be an enabler of exploitation.¹¹⁶

94. In the report on his recent visit to the UK, the former OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings strongly urged the UK Government to rethink the collaborative approach with advertising websites "which has consistently proved ineffective across the OSCE region". He wrote:

108 [Q539](#).

109 [Q290](#).

110 [Q295](#).

111 [Online Pimping, An Inquiry into Sexual Exploitation Advertising Websites, Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2021](#).

112 [Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings, GRETA Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe, April 2022](#).

113 [\(HUM0110\)](#), written evidence submitted by the NCA and the NPCC.

114 [\(HUM0110\)](#), written evidence submitted by the NCA and the NPCC.

115 [\(HUM0116\)](#), written evidence submitted by the National Crime Agency.

116 [\(HUM0110\)](#), written evidence submitted by the NCA and the NPCC.

The business model of such websites is based on making money off the sex industry, which is notoriously high risk and permeated by exploitation. Time and again, the website operators have shown no interest in meaningful prevention or protection and, in some cases, actively contribute to exploitation.¹¹⁷

95. Nonetheless, law enforcement and the Home Office have collaborated with websites like Vivastreet to co-develop a set of ‘Voluntary Principles’ for websites to follow in order to reduce the risk of exploitation on these platforms. We were told about some case studies which show how children and women have been safeguarded as a result of this collaboration between law enforcement and advertising websites.¹¹⁸ However, when asked for more data on prosecutions or safeguarding of victims that resulted from this collaboration with advertising websites, we were disappointed to find there was no data or evidence available. As the NCA and NPCC told us:

Much of the engagement with ASWs is to encourage them to provide services which minimises the likelihood of illegal activity or high harm to instigate better Prevent outcome, rather than a sole focus on Pursue/Protect outcomes.¹¹⁹

96. Importantly, despite the NCA working closely with Vivastreet and the Home Office meeting with the website operators fifteen times over the last five years, the website operators still allow practices such as individuals advertising multiple women for prostitution concurrently and the same phone number being used in multiple adverts - both red flags for trafficking. We can only conclude, therefore, that this collaboration has been a resounding failure and are at a loss as to why it has been defended by the Home Office and NCA.

97. Websites advertising prostitution significantly facilitate trafficking for sexual exploitation. The threat posed by websites advertising prostitution, the continuing failure of their owners to implement even the most basic safeguards against pimping and trafficking, and the sheer scale of trafficking for sexual exploitation they facilitate, is at total odds with the National Crime Agency and Home Office’s decision to collaborate with them. We found this public partnership working inexplicable, particularly given the total absence of evidence that it has led to a reduction in the scale of trafficking facilitated by these websites—and the flagrant facilitation of trafficking enabled by, for instance, single individuals being allowed to advertise multiple women for prostitution.

98. *Legislation which bans third party profit-taking from the prostitution of another person should be extended to prohibit any individual or company from enabling and/or profiting from the prostitution of another person, including facilitation that takes place via online, digital services, websites and the internet.*

99. *The Home Office and law enforcement should be taking all measures possible to tackle trafficking for sexual exploitation online, so that it is no longer so easy or profitable for perpetrators to make money from sexual exploitation, including by ‘following the*

117 [OSCE, Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022.](#)

118 [\(HUM0110\)](#), written evidence submitted by the NCA and the NPCC.

119 [\(HUM0110\)](#), written evidence submitted by the NCA and the NPCC.

money' and exploring links to money laundering and other organised crime gang-related activities and criminality.

100. Until new legislation is introduced prohibiting profiting from or enabling the prostitution of another person, law enforcement should utilise all available legislation to investigate and hold accountable websites that facilitate trafficking for sexual exploitation. This includes legislation prohibiting companies from benefiting from the proceeds of crime and preventative measures such as Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders.

101. In order to enforce the provisions in the Online Safety Act requiring websites to take action against trafficking occurring on their sites, Ofcom should take immediate and full enforcement action against any website advertising prostitution that enables the same phone number to be used in multiple adverts, fails to independently verify the age and identify of every individual advertised on their website, allows single individuals and/or single accounts to advertise multiple individuals for prostitution, allows anonymised payments, and allows any individual to place or pay for another person's prostitution advert.

3 Policing and prosecution

102. Policing and prosecution plays a crucial role in deterring perpetrators, holding offenders to account and delivering justice for victims. The NPCC Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime (MSOIC) Unit works to support police officers, police staff and law enforcement partners to tackle modern slavery, human trafficking, and organised immigration crime. In accordance with the College of Policing investigative Approved Professional Practice,¹²⁰ all suspected modern slavery and human trafficking offences will be treated as a serious crime, even in the case when potential victims of human trafficking may not immediately identify themselves as victims or may do not wish to engage with law enforcement authorities.

Criminal justice response

103. We believe that significant changes need to be made to the substance as well as the execution of current policing and prosecution policy. Assistant Chief Constable Jim Pearce, the NPCC lead for Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime, told us that, as of 5 July 2023, there were 4,500 live police investigations into all types of human trafficking.¹²¹ Meanwhile, the CPS received 286 referrals of human trafficking cases in 2022 resulting in 405 people receiving prosecutions. The high number of referrals to the NRM (16,938 in 2022)¹²² highlights the scope of exploitation in the UK, yet we were concerned at the disparity between that figure and the number of subsequent prosecutions and convictions, particularly since we heard during our inquiry that the number of referrals to the NRM is almost certainly not a true reflection of the actual number of victims.¹²³ Both the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and GRETA, the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, have also expressed concern at the low number of prosecutions and convictions of human trafficking in the UK compared to the number of identified victims.¹²⁴

104. We heard that there are many obstacles which fall between identifying victims and convicting offenders, including lengthy NRM decision-making processes and the complexity of modern slavery cases.¹²⁵ For example, Professor Sanders told us the CPS will not look at a case until the NRM process has concluded and, due to NRM decision-making timescales, “victims have just gone—gone into worse situations, returned home, or just cannot be found”.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, Caroline Haughey OBE KC told us that modern slavery cases are complex to prosecute, as they are “entirely different from any other type of offending.”¹²⁷ As Dame Sara Thornton highlighted, modern slavery investigations often include vulnerable witnesses who may not be able to give evidence.¹²⁸ Therefore, many

120 The College of Policing (CoP) is the professional body for the police in England and Wales. It was established in 2012 to take over a number of training and development roles that were previously the responsibility of the National Policing Improvement Agency. The CoP has a range of functions including set standards for key areas of policing which help forces and individuals provide consistency and better service for the public.

121 Q455.

122 [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022](#)

123 Q109; (HUM0054), written evidence from the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Article (GRETA); (HUM0074), written evidence submitted by the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS).

124 GRETA, [Evaluation Report United Kingdom, 20 October 2021, GRETA\(2021\) 12](#), paragraph 157.

125 Q471; Q456.

126 Q210.

127 Q504.

128 Q17.

stakeholders highlighted how resource-intensive and complicated these cases can be.¹²⁹

105. Furthermore, Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall, from the human trafficking and exploitation team at Lancashire Police, told us that he believes that there is a police confidence issue when presenting cases to the CPS, and that the fewer cases which go to the CPS, the less confidence the police have in presenting them.¹³⁰

106. Evidence submitted by HMICFRS emphasises that barriers to turning investigations into prosecutions sit across many aspects of the criminal justice system. It argues that these barriers “can’t be addressed solely by police forces; it requires all law enforcement agencies to work together”.¹³¹ We heard about positive practice from the Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme, a five-year funded programme within the NCA National Strategic Assessment, which is “an important way of having an overview of what is happening nationally, because often this is all about moving around the country”.¹³²

107. The high number of referrals into the National Referral Mechanism and the number of live investigations together highlight the ability to identify human trafficking and exploitation that occurs in the UK. These cases are resource-intensive and potentially complex; however, the low prosecution rates are unacceptable. The criminal justice system faces constant competing resource demands in this area; however, it needs to be a Government priority to increase the charging and conviction rates for modern slavery and human trafficking offences, to reflect the seriousness of this crime.

108. Criminal justice practitioners, including the police in England and Wales, the National Crime Agency and Crown Prosecution Service, must urgently review and then accelerate and scale up their efforts to investigate, prosecute and effectively adjudicate human trafficking and modern slavery cases. Cross-organisation working must support the priority goal of evidence gathering.

Policing response

Policing priorities

109. Dame Sara Thornton told us that low prosecution rates were due to “the level of priority that police forces have put to this and the resources”, including expert teams. In accordance with the College of Policing investigative Approved Professional Practice,¹³³ all suspected modern slavery offences are to be treated as serious crimes, even when potential victims of human trafficking may not immediately identify themselves as victims or may not wish to engage with law enforcement authorities.¹³⁴ Additionally, as mentioned in chapter one, human trafficking and modern slavery have been identified by the NCA as a national priority threat. Despite this, modern slavery and human trafficking “is not the highest priority within that [Organised Immigration Crime] threat for the system”.¹³⁵ As Robert Jones CBE, Director General, National Economic Crime Centre and Threat Leadership at the NCA, explains:

129 (HUM0109), written evidence submitted by the National Police Chiefs’ Council; Q17; Q504.

130 (HUM0113), additional written evidence submitted by DS Stuart Peall.

131 (HUM0077), written evidence submitted by HMICFRS.

132 The TOEX Vision & Mission (toexprogramme.co.uk); Q219.

133 Modern slavery | College of Policing.

134 Investigating Modern Slavery.

135 Q483.

If you investigate organised immigration crime, you are also going to be, hopefully, collecting intelligence on and investigating modern slavery. In tackling that, we prioritise it for covert assets, and our top 25 operations will always have a large number of organised immigration crime investigations.¹³⁶

110. Robert Jones also highlighted that the NCA is currently prioritising combatting ‘small boats’, because the people involved in small boats were in “high-risk circumstances, supported by an organised criminal network that needs to be degraded and dealt with”.¹³⁷ However, thousands of UK nationals are victims of human trafficking, and many of those are children who are at significant risk of harm. Therefore, we were concerned that the NCA may be prioritising immigration issues at the expense of investigating human trafficking and recovering victims. Furthermore, it is a concern that the NCA’s tactic is to “hopefully” collect intelligence on modern slavery as a by-product of wider organised immigration crime investigation, which does very little for the thousands of UK nationals that are victimised by human trafficking.

111. Although prioritising human trafficking cases is not a nationwide priority within police forces in England and Wales, Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall told us how Lancashire police have taken a proactive role in prioritising tackling human trafficking. Yet, he acknowledged that there are many competing demands for each force:

It is around what the priority is that week. In terms of the last couple of months, county lines is a massive problem. There is child exploitation. It is about working out that balance. There is so much horrible stuff going on to people. Which one do you prioritise? That is the difficulty.¹³⁸

112. ACC Jim Pearce highlighted how police priorities can be dictated by the local community, and thus by the local PCC, meaning that “if it is important to a PCC, it will be in their police and crime plan, to which police forces will then respond”.¹³⁹

113. The National Crime Agency recognises Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery as a national threat; in consequence it should be a national priority. Yet it remains unclear the extent to which police forces prioritise the detection and investigation of human trafficking and modern slavery offences.

114. All Police and Crime Commissioners should actively consider setting modern slavery and human trafficking as a priority in their police and crime plans.

115. In collaboration with the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the Home Office should direct the College of Policing to collate learning from forces that are effective in pursuing and investigating modern slavery and human trafficking and work with the Crown Prosecution Service to secure convictions. This record should be then shared with all other forces.

136 [Q483.](#)

137 [Q483.](#)

138 [Q508.](#)

139 [Q468.](#)

Training and specialist units

116. We heard that, due to the complexity of human trafficking and modern slavery cases, there is a need for a coordinated response and adequate training across law enforcement agencies.¹⁴⁰ Both Dame Sara Thornton and ACC Jim Pearce told us how there were “better results” and more successful prosecutions if there were dedicated teams of experts working on an investigation.¹⁴¹ Dame Sara Thornton argued that it was a matter of priority to develop these sorts of expertise; while Jim Pearce argued that, if a police force has modern slavery within its force control strategy, “you will see better and more focused results”.¹⁴²

117. Caroline Haughey OBE KC told us that the training of law enforcement agencies is not ‘sufficient or adequate’, and that there are many police officers and CPS officials who “do not understand or are fearful of the complexity of modern slavery cases”.¹⁴³ She commented that where there is “both training and appetite”, as demonstrated by work undertaken within Lancashire police, then positive results were achieved. However, in her view there is no consistent level of training or delivery of training among police forces. She argued that “a very significant contributor to the lack of appetite is predicated on the fact that modern slavery and trafficking offences have been subsumed into immigration offending when they are different things”.¹⁴⁴

118. However, Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall argued that training is not enough:

[...] you can do as much training as you want, policing will always be the same: you will not get competent in it unless you are dealing with it.¹⁴⁵

He told us in supplementary written evidence that police officers “are given a more thorough training package regarding tools to support prosecutions and evidence led prosecutions” but that good results come down instead to experience in dealing with modern slavery cases and having dedicated teams.¹⁴⁶

119. ACC Jim Pearce told us that the NPCC has trained 288 victim liaison officers, who “understand how to get best evidence and how to look after victims”.¹⁴⁷ However, he argued that it is not always about training, but about competing demands. He told us that having direction from a strategy and a new Modern Slavery Bill would focus police resources.¹⁴⁸

120. The former Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines MP, told us that upskilling police officers to understand the complexities of modern slavery has been at the centre of the Home Office Modern Slavery Unit’s work.¹⁴⁹ She told us that this has resulted in the development and rollout of multiple bespoke training programmes for police officers and benchmarking exercises for individual forces.

140 [Q456](#); ([HUM0009](#)), written evidence submitted by Dr Christopher Goard.

141 [Q20](#); [Q464](#).

142 [Q464](#).

143 [Q504](#).

144 ([HUM0108](#)), written evidence submitted by Caroline Haughey KC.

145 [Q504](#).

146 ([HUM0113](#)), additional written evidence submitted by DS Stuart Peall.

147 [Q464](#).

148 [Q466](#).

149 ([HUM0120](#)), supplementary written evidence submitted by Sarah Dines, former Minister for Safeguarding.

121. We remain unclear to what extent front line personnel and police officers are trained in human trafficking and modern slavery matters. Nor do we have data in the proportion of police forces which benefit from specialist human trafficking units. The Government's forthcoming new Modern Slavery Strategy should address both these information weaknesses.

122. *Chief Constables must ensure that their police officers and public-facing staff (including non-specialist staff, as appropriate) are supported through initial and ongoing training and learning, specialist policing resources and victim support arrangements, so that they are able to identify effectively and support potential victims of modern slavery.*

123. *Training should be centralised, for example via the National Police Chiefs' Council Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration training resources. Tackling human trafficking should be recognised as a national law enforcement priority and be resourced at a level commensurate with the harm it causes to these vulnerable victims of crime.*

124. *The Government should direct that every police force is provided with a dedicated modern slavery and human trafficking specialist team.*

Financial Investigations

125. Human trafficking is primarily a financially motivated crime. We heard in oral evidence how financial investigations can make a crucial difference in human trafficking investigations and that investigations should be better supported and resourced with financial investigators.¹⁵⁰ We were told that specialist financial investigators are vital in analysing, interpreting and providing both intelligence and evidence for cases, particularly in evidence-led prosecutions where victims may not be able to be witnesses.¹⁵¹ Following his visit to the UK in November 2022, the former OSCE Special Representative, Valiant Richey, commented:

Increasing the use of (proactive) financial investigations and enhancing the focus on the online marketplace for trafficking can reduce the burden on victims and potentially boost victimless prosecutions.¹⁵²

126. However, Caroline Haughey OBE KC told us that there is a shortage of these specialist officers and that they are costly, and therefore there is a "reluctance, when costly cases come along, to put those resources in there".¹⁵³ The NPCC told us there are currently 966 officers with the 'Financial Investigator' skill, but as they are spread across a range of departments and specialisms and have such sought after skills and expertise, this "creates

150 [Q20; \(HUM0054\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA); [OSCE, Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022.](#)

151 [Q504; Q510.](#)

152 [OSCE, Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022.](#)

153 [Q504.](#)

a challenging environment for retaining them within policing”.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the CPS told us that it is supporting the police to “establish a capability to encourage the use of more financial investigations”.¹⁵⁵

127. Financial investigations are essential to tackling organised crime and traffickers, particularly for evidence-led prosecutions. However, we heard that these specialists can be hard to resource.

128. *The Government needs to ensure that appropriate priority is placed on resourcing financial investigations within law enforcement bodies.*

129. *Every modern slavery and human trafficking specialist unit must have a dedicated financial investigator.*

Evidence-led prosecutions

130. Within the criminal justice system, a criminal prosecution where there is a physical victim, but that victim’s testimony is not part of the Crown’s case, is called an ‘evidence-led’ prosecution.¹⁵⁶ Evidence-led prosecutions are common in cases of domestic abuse, where both the CPS and UK College of Policing recommend in their guidance that a prosecution strategy or investigation should “from the outset” build an evidence-led case that does not rely on the support of the victim.¹⁵⁷

131. However, the same guidance from both the CPS and the College of Policing is not reflected in cases of human trafficking; there is no reference to evidence-led prosecutions, including in the CPS Guidance to Prosecutors on modern slavery.¹⁵⁸ The lack of reference to evidence-led prosecutions in cases of human trafficking is at odds with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT), in which Article 27 (1) states that investigations into or prosecution of trafficking offences “shall not be dependent upon the report or accusation made by a victim, at least when the offence was committed in whole or in part on its territory”.¹⁵⁹ The Explanatory Report to the convention highlights that this is to “avoid traffickers’ subjecting victims to pressure and threats in attempts to deter them from complaining to the authorities”.¹⁶⁰

132. It is somewhat surprising, indeed problematic, that the Government, CPS, and College of Policing do not reflect the objective of the Convention in their guidance, which is, in effect, instructions to police and prosecutors on how to conduct their work.

133. Despite the lack of official guidance in relation to modern slavery evidence-led prosecutions, there have been some prosecutions under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 where evidence-led prosecutions have been successful. For example, Dr Schwarz of the Rights Lab and Professor Sanders from Leicester University told us about evidence-led

154 [\(HUM0109\)](#), written evidence submitted by the National Police Chiefs’ Council.

155 [\(HUM0093\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Home Office.

156 This is sometimes incorrectly referred to as a ‘victimless prosecution’.

157 [Domestic Abuse | The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](#); [Investigative development | College of Policing](#).

158 [Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Smuggling | The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](#).

159 [CETS 197 - Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(coe.int\)](#).

160 [CETS 197 - Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(coe.int\)](#), paragraph 277.

prosecutions of alleged perpetrators of human trafficking, especially for digital forms of exploitation and for cases in which the victims do not wish to engage with law enforcement authorities.¹⁶¹ Dr Schwarz reported that:

It can be particularly useful; if there are digital payment methods being used, then that is useful evidence. We need a higher level of training on non-victim testimony evidence in modern slavery cases and to be thinking more strategically about that.¹⁶²

134. Furthermore, Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall suggested that his force's success rate was much higher than the average because it takes the stance that it "will prove it, complaint-less". As he told us:

We did a large Chinese sex trafficking case in September—no complainant. But—we would not get the convictions without it—we used everything that is open to us to prove that case, whether it be the key bits such as mobile phones or adult websites. We have had two cases where we have found the diary of the victim. While she might look me in the eyes and say, "No, there is nothing going on here. I am doing it of my own choice," or, "There is nothing happening," the diary will then tell the truth.

135. Though helpful in some circumstances, other stakeholders have advised caution on the effectiveness of evidence-led prosecutions in prosecuting perpetrators and emphasise the importance of victims providing evidence to the court. The Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE told us that the evidence that matters for a jury is the victims.¹⁶³ Similarly, Tatiana Gren-Jardan, Head of Policy at the Joint Modern Slavery Policy Unit, reported that evidence-led prosecutions are difficult to get, and that "the sentencing is very low".¹⁶⁴

136. Nonetheless, we believe that investigations into all forms of human trafficking should consider an evidence-led prosecutions approach where appropriate, with the CPS guidance on Domestic Abuse and evidential opportunities being transferable to human trafficking.

137. Some police forces have had success in investigating and charging modern slavery and human trafficking cases under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 using evidence-led investigations.

138. There is an evidence-led mindset in relation to investigating domestic abuse which is promoted by the UK's College of Policing but which does not seem to be the case for modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT): no equivalent evidence-led prosecution guidance exists for MSHT.

139. *It is the case that investigations into all forms of human trafficking should proactively consider an evidence-led prosecutions approach, with the CPS guidance on domestic abuse and evidential opportunities being transferable to human trafficking.*

140. *The Home Office should include a section on evidence-led prosecutions in its modern slavery statutory guidance drawing on Article 27 (1) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT). Similarly, the*

161 [Q63](#); [Q210](#).

162 [Q63](#).

163 [Q4](#).

164 [Q87](#).

Crown Prosecution Service should amend its Guidance to Prosecutors on modern slavery and the College of Policing should include in its Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on modern slavery training content.

International co-operation

141. The NCA is not only UK-focused, but it leads “the operational whole of system response in the UK and overseas in a way that seeks to achieve greatest collective impact end to end”.¹⁶⁵ In its written evidence, the NCA states how Director General Graeme Biggar “talked about shifting the Agency’s focus upstream, overseas and online to have the greatest impact”, meaning to disrupt those “at the top of the criminal chain”.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, the NPCC’s Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Programme has delivered 115 multi-agency operations targeting the organised criminal gangs that traffic people into the UK.¹⁶⁷

142. A joint investigation team (JIT), which consists of prosecutors and law enforcement authorities, can facilitate the coordination of investigations and prosecutions conducted in parallel in several countries or in cases with a cross-border dimension. For complex international investigations the benefits of a JIT can be substantial; JITs are able to secure the best evidence in the participating state and ensure that the investigation in one country does not compromise that of another. They can also ensure that jurisdictional issues are addressed early on and appropriate decisions are made on trial venues.¹⁶⁸ The CPS told us in written evidence, in July 2023, that the UK is currently participating in 18 live JITs on human trafficking, involving Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria and the Republic of Ireland.¹⁶⁹ It commented that, despite the UK leaving the EU, “co-operation at an international level continues to work well”. Similarly, we heard from the Attaché in the Romanian Embassy in London in our virtual roundtable how judicial cooperation between Romania and the UK is particularly strong, which aids international investigations. However, Dr Schwarz told us that more consideration needs to be given to countries outside the EU, “especially the top source countries for trafficking victims identified in the UK”.¹⁷⁰ She said:

There is more space for bilateral agreements and bilateral relations. There is more space for embassies to take a key role in anti-trafficking and identification, and repatriation services in other contexts, and things like that.¹⁷¹

143. Hearing about the ongoing international cooperation undertaken by police and criminal justice bodies in the UK has been a positive experience. However, concern has been raised that, when addressing international trafficking investigations, the Government conflates the two distinct crimes of human trafficking and people smuggling. Although it is acknowledged that “some people who are smuggled may then become victims of human

165 [\(HUM0116\)](#), written evidence submitted by the National Crime Agency.

166 [\(HUM0116\)](#), written evidence submitted by the National Crime Agency.

167 [Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Programme](#)

168 [Joint Investigation Teams](#)

169 [\(HUM0107\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Crown Prosecution Service.

170 [Q62](#).

171 [Q62](#).

trafficking”, we are concerned that the NCA and NPCC focus on organised immigration crime may detract focus from specific investigations of human trafficking.¹⁷² A similar concern was raised by the Rt Hon Theresa May MP:

I must say there has been some loose talk about people smuggling and human trafficking, and using the two terms in the same breath as if they are the same—they are not; they are two separate crimes. Someone paying their own money to be smuggled across the border is not a victim of human trafficking, which includes coercion and exploitation.¹⁷³

144. The National Crime Agency’s (NCA) remit is not only international but also includes internal organised crime group threats. The NCA’s work has been mostly diverted to focus on tackling smuggling upstream, in line with the Government’s focus on organised immigration crime. The diverting of resources away from modern slavery and human trafficking impacts the fight against both UK-based trafficking and at the international level.

145. *International cooperation should not be focused on people smuggling to the detriment of efforts to combat modern slavery and human trafficking and prevent exploitation of the victims.*

146. *The Home Office should include a clear plan of international programme work in the new Modern Slavery strategy. This should include investment in joint investigation teams that intersect with human trafficking vulnerabilities.*

Prosecutions and convictions

Low levels

147. As previously mentioned, evidence to our inquiry suggests that there is a divergence between the number of recorded human trafficking offences and prosecutions and the high numbers of potential victims (16,938) referred into the NRM. During 2022, there were 10,454 offences of modern slavery and human trafficking recorded by the police in England and Wales; yet, of these, less than 1% of cases (95)¹⁷⁴ are currently recorded as having resulted in a charge or summons.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, according to management data from the CPS, in 2022 it received 286 referrals of human trafficking cases resulting in 405 individuals being prosecuted;¹⁷⁶ the CPS stated that this equates to a conviction rate of 69.6% with only 282 individuals convicted.

148. A number of stakeholders have suggested different reasons for the low prosecution and conviction rates for modern slavery offences.¹⁷⁷ ACC Jim Pearce, Lead for Modern

172 [\(HUM0064\)](#), written evidence submitted by Challenger.

173 [Illegal Migration Bill, Volume 729: debated on Monday 13 March 2023](#).

174 The reported proportion of figures resulting in charges or summons varies between the NPCC and the CPS. The NPCC charge rate is reported as 2.3% The reason for this inconsistency is unclear.

175 This excludes data for Devon and Cornwall police which has not been reported for 2022 due to IT issues; These figures are likely to change as more of the recorded offences are assigned an outcome: as at 2 May 2023, 35% of cases were yet to be assigned an outcome. House of Commons Library calculations based on Home Office, [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables](#), various years, accessed 2 May 2023.

176 Unlike Ministry of Justice official statistics, Crown Prosecution Service management data records prosecutions of individual defendants and not cases, which are likely to include more than one perpetrator.

177 [Qs455](#), [Q466](#);

Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime at the NPCC, reported that the policing and prosecution of human trafficking and modern slavery cases can be a complex and lengthy process.¹⁷⁸ He acknowledged that the charge rate for modern slavery offences appeared low when compared to the large numbers of NRM referrals, but emphasised the fact that the NRM is not a crime recording system but a protection mechanism. He told us that “[...] not all of those 17,000 referrals are crimes that the police investigate or have a chance of investigating”.¹⁷⁹ He said that 40% of those 17,000 referrals relate to crimes outside the UK which can make investigations far more challenging and time-consuming. He cited a live case as one example:¹⁸⁰

From a single report received in 2016, we now have 14 victims and a number of suspects. All of those victims are international, but we have got to the point now where we have charged and are going through the court process at this moment in time. The forensic data that is involved in that is substantial.

149. Stakeholders, including the NCA, NPCC and criminal barrister, Caroline Haughey OBE KC, told us that modern slavery cases are also likely to involve poly-criminality, where perpetrators of human trafficking are engaged in other types of offending, which makes prosecutions much more complex.¹⁸¹ According to Caroline Haughey OBE KC, perpetrators are likely to be prosecuted not only for human trafficking, exploitation and money laundering but also for other offences, including assault, blackmail, fraud and perverting the course of justice.¹⁸²

150. Robert Jones CBE, Director General National Economic Crime Centre and Threat Leadership at the NCA, said that a range of factors influence the low charge and conviction rates. He explained that, unlike other crimes, for example drug trafficking, modern slavery crime is victim-centred, which is resource-intensive and more challenging in comparison:

An illegal commodity that is moving and being paid for is very straightforward in terms of proving that, if you seize that commodity. It is illegal to possess drugs, to import drugs, to move those drugs around and to benefit from the proceeds of the sale of those drugs. There are many opportunities to intervene in that value chain. With any victim-centred crime—this happens with online child abuse as well as adult sex workers—when you have arguable points, where you have to deal with survivors, victims and very challenging offenders, it is immediately far more complex and challenging to investigate.¹⁸³

151. We raised our concerns with the CPS about the small number of human trafficking and modern slavery cases referred to it (286 in 2022) and questioned to what extent the CPS is working to increase police referrals. In response, Lynette Woodrow, Lead for Modern Slavery at the CPS, told us that the CPS works very closely with investigators before any

178 [Q471](#); [Q456](#).

179 [Q455](#).

180 [Q456](#).

181 [Q456](#).

182 [Q504](#).

183 [Q452](#).

arrests are made. She reported that regional leads are regularly liaising with their policing counterparts, questioning opportunities and missed opportunities for investigations and discussing how CPS prosecutors can support these policing challenges.¹⁸⁴

152. We also heard about the challenges criminal justice practitioners face in engaging victims of trafficking with the prosecution process. In particular, Caroline Haughey OBE KC told us that “the biggest hurdle” in engaging with foreign national victims throughout the prosecution process was cultural engagement:

We were quite properly putting them in social services care, but they were being sent to families who did not speak Vietnamese [...] When there is a lack of cultural engagement with foreign nationals who are being exploited—and I am making that distinction—there is very often a desire by them to return to what they know.¹⁸⁵

She added that for UK victims it may not be about cultural engagement as such, but as with many victims there is “simple shame and denial” and a reticence to acknowledge that someone has exploited them, which in turn makes prosecutions and convictions more challenging.¹⁸⁶

153. Owing to the complexities of prosecuting and convicting modern slavery and human trafficking cases, some stakeholders reinforced the need for a coordinated criminal justice response and for adequate training, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Caroline Haughey OBE KC told us that although training exists, some of which she has delivered to both the CPS and the police, every police officer should be trained “in identifying and understanding exploitative offending and with an emphasis in cultural awareness”. She said that, owing to a lack of understanding of the questions to ask a potential victim, in some cases “the glaringly obvious” gets missed. She also questioned whether there was desire from law enforcement to investigate and prosecute. She argued there is “a prevailing attitude to target only the low hanging fruit—easy prosecutions and convictions as it looks better on the data—this often means that the true offending is neither identified or prosecuted”. She reported that this was true in county lines cases and, in her experience, in the “vast majority of sex exploitation cases”.¹⁸⁷

154. When we asked the Home Office for its assessment of these low prosecution and conviction rates, the former Minister, Sarah Dines MP, said that “[f]our and a half thousand live investigations is getting results”, while she also acknowledged that prosecution rates are low and that more needs to be done.¹⁸⁸ She said that some of the modern slavery investigations take years to reach court and that she would like this process to be faster. She told us she is holding police forces to account within the parameters of her remit, if they are slow.¹⁸⁹ She further added that “the police and the Home Office are not standing back and watching it; they are proactive”.¹⁹⁰ Referring to evidence we heard from Detective

184 [Q471](#).

185 [Q495](#).

186 [Q496](#).

187 ([HUM0108](#)), Caroline Haughey KC.

188 [Qs568](#); [569](#).

189 [Q556](#).

190 [Q556](#).

Sergeant Stuart Peall, whose force is seeing successful prosecution outcomes, the Minister said that she would like to see more “common-sense policing” with tighter time-frames for evidence gathering and charging.¹⁹¹

155. Low prosecution and conviction rates for human trafficking and modern slavery persist despite the Home Office working with a range of law enforcement agencies and investing large amounts of funding. On 5 September, the Minister wrote to us to say that the Home Office has invested a total of £17.8 million since 2016, including £1.3m in 2023/24 to support the NPCC’s lead to improve the national response and to drive forward work to increase modern slavery prosecutions.¹⁹²

156. Despite legislative provisions being in place since 2015, prosecution and convictions rates are still comparatively low across the UK. This is unacceptable.

157. *To increase the number of prosecutions, the Government must create and supply additional training for criminal justice practitioners on identifying victims and prosecuting human traffickers.*

158. *The Government must take steps to encourage greater cross-partnership working between the Crown Prosecution Service, policing and the National Crime Agency. This should involve earlier involvement of the CPS in policing investigations.*

Non-punishment principle

159. The non-punishment principle is outlined in section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and introduces a defence for victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, including children, who are compelled to commit criminal offences as a result of their exploitation.¹⁹³ We will discuss this principle in relation to child victims further in chapter five.

160. Our evidence indicates that the non-punishment principle needs to be better understood and consistently applied to all trafficked persons who have been compelled to commit offences.¹⁹⁴ Many victims of trafficking and modern slavery have been prosecuted and convicted of offences committed due to their trafficking situation, despite the s45 defence, and in contravention of the UK’s international legal duty to at least allow in law for the possibility not to punish and prosecute for trafficking-related offences.¹⁹⁵ According to GRETA, the Council of Europe’s Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, “[c]riminalisation of victims contravenes the State’s obligation to provide services and assistance to them, and discourages them from coming forward and cooperating with the investigation into those responsible for their trafficking”.¹⁹⁶ This view was shared by the former OSCE’s Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings:

191 [Q574](#).

192 [\(HUM0120\)](#), supplementary written evidence submitted by Sarah Dines, former Minister for Safeguarding.

193 [Modern Slavery Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#), part 5, Section 45.

194 [\(HUM0016\)](#), Wilsons Solicitors LLP; [\(HUM0108\)](#), Caroline Haughey KC.

195 [\(HUM0016\)](#), Wilsons Solicitors LLP.

196 Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, [Evaluation Report United Kingdom, Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings](#), GRETA(2021)12, published 20 October 2021.

[...] by prosecuting trafficking victims, States fail to fulfil international obligations, namely, to identify, protect and assist victims of trafficking, and also to investigate a trafficking situation with the aim of identifying the trafficker and seeking to bring the true perpetrator to justice.¹⁹⁷

161. Caroline Haughey OBE KC said that there is an “overriding duty” on the part of the Crown and the police to consider all lines of enquiry that lead both to and away from the accused. However, she argued that, owing to depleted resources, an easy conviction is often sought, such as convicting “the drug runner found holding the small amount of drugs held for supply than to identify and pursue those further or indeed at the top of the chain”. She said that although law enforcement agencies were “trying” to address obligations there were many other issues including a lack of clarity in understanding to whom s45 applies.¹⁹⁸

162. In reference to criminal justice practitioners’ use of s45, GRETA said there is “insufficient understanding of the statutory defence among investigators, prosecutors and judges” and urged the UK authorities to ensure that “the non-punishment provision is capable of being applied to all offences that victims of trafficking were compelled to commit, and that the allocation of the burden of proof does not substantially hinder the application of that provision”.¹⁹⁹ In the same vein, Danny Bayraktarova, of Wilsons Solicitors, highlighted that a s45 defence is only available when a decision to prosecute is made and that a defence cannot be raised before then. However, in her experience there remains a lack of awareness among police and within the CPS that the non-punishment principle can be applied before a decision to prosecute is even made.²⁰⁰

163. We also heard evidence from some stakeholders, including the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, that consideration should be given to reducing the range of offences included in Schedule 4 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.²⁰¹ It referenced GRETA’s last evaluation report of the UK, which found that Schedule 4 contained a list of more than 100 offences of various degrees of seriousness where the statutory defence cannot be used.²⁰²

164. Concerns have also been raised regarding the potential impact of recent legislative changes in the UK. We note that a report commissioned by the Council of Europe, and published in September 2023, concludes that certain provisions of the Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) 2022, as well as the Illegal Migration Act 2023, violate the UK’s obligation to apply the non-punishment principle to trafficked people. In particular:

- a) s.58 of the NABA requiring potentially trafficked people to provide evidence of their status within a certain period; this may be impossible for the person concerned to achieve, raising the risk of them being penalised for offences they are alleged to have committed, which might otherwise not be prosecuted.
- b) s.63 of the NABA allows disqualification from protection in the UK where the competent authority is satisfied that the person is a ‘threat to public order’ or has claimed victim status in ‘bad faith’.

197 [OSCE, Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey following the country visit to the United Kingdom 7–11 November 2022](#), paragraph 64.

198 [\(HUM0108\)](#), Caroline Haughey KC.

199 [\(HUM0054\)](#), Council of Europe, GRETA.

200 [Q426](#).

201 [\(HUM0048\)](#), Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

202 [\(HUM0048\)](#), Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group; [1680a43b36 \(coe.int\)](#), p46.

- c) s.29 of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 broadens the above exclusion to disqualify from protection anyone who is not a British citizen and has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment or is liable to deportation:

165. These specific provisions in the NABA and Illegal Migration Act 2023 would therefore exclude from protection victims compelled to commit criminal offences by their traffickers/exploiters and those convicted for immigration-related offences, as well as excluding instances where victims were prosecuted and convicted due to their lack of knowledge of the availability of the defence from s45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which gives effect to the non-punishment principle.²⁰³

166. **Victims of human trafficking are continuing to be prosecuted for criminal acts they were compelled to commit. The evidence suggests that this is mainly due to an insufficient understanding amongst investigators, prosecutors, judges, and defence lawyers of the statutory defence available to such victims, and when or how that defence should be applied.**

167. *The Government should review the training and guidance available to criminal justice practitioners to ensure it includes clear and consistent information on the s45 statutory defence. This training should be provided across all bodies in the criminal justice system.*

168. *Law enforcement should make early assessments of s45 cases in areas that are known to be connected to human trafficking (for example, cannabis cultivation) to identify any indicators of trafficking and then fully investigate where an offence is apparent or alleged.*

169. *In line with the recommendations on s45 of the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings third UK report, the Government should:*

- a) *ensure that the non-punishment provision can be applied to all offences that victims of trafficking were compelled to commit, by ensuring that victims are promptly identified and receive adequate support from their first contact with law enforcement agencies; and*
- b) *ensure that the allocation of the burden of proof does not substantially hinder the application of the non-punishment provision.*

Legal definitions

170. The definition of human trafficking contained in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires travel or movement of a victim to be involved in order to constitute a trafficking offence, whereas neither travel nor movement is required in the international legal definitions of trafficking.²⁰⁴ This was heavily criticised by Dr Schwarz, Associate Director of the Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham, as “a barrier to harmonisation and cross-border practice around trafficking offences”.²⁰⁵ Meanwhile another stakeholder told

203 [Marija Jovanovic and Maayan Niezna, “Non-Punishment of Victims/Survivors of Human Trafficking in Practice: A Case Study of the United Kingdom”, Council of Europe, September 2023, pp44–48.](#)

204 For example, the Palermo Protocol, European Convention on Action against Trafficking (ECAT), and EU Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU.

205 [Q45; \(HUM0061\)](#), written evidence submitted by JustRight Scotland.

us that police officers determined this definition to be “not fit for purpose”.²⁰⁶ Indeed, it is nonsensical that, for example, whether a man who coerced a woman into prostitution and profited from her exploitation can be charged with trafficking could hinge simply on whether the victim had to go on a taxi ride to the site of her exploitation. Yet it is the exploitation - not the travel - which is the fundamental harm.

171. The former Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines MP, told us that she believed that the UK has a “very detailed definition within our legislation” and that she did not intend to change it.²⁰⁷ However, we believe that bringing the UK statutory definition of trafficking into line with international norms would strengthen law enforcement’s ability to bring the full force of the law against perpetrators of exploitation.

172. Furthermore, the definition of human trafficking contained in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 specifies that the consent of the victim is not relevant, but only in respect of their travel, whilst international legal definitions specify that consent of the victim to exploitation is not relevant.²⁰⁸

173. One stakeholder told us that the international definition emphasises that “exploitation is the core of the human rights abuse of human trafficking and, like all human rights abuses, whether the person consented is not relevant”.²⁰⁹

174. *The definition of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 should be amended to remove the requirement for the exploitation to have involved travel.*

- a) *The Modern Slavery Act 2015 should be amended to clarify that the consent of the victim is irrelevant not just in relation to the travel, but in relation to the exploitation itself.*

Victim support within the criminal justice system

175. Despite a push for more evidence-led prosecutions, many stakeholders highlighted the importance of witness testimony to successful prosecutions and convictions for adult victims. According to the NPCC, 33% of victims identified in reported modern slavery crimes in 2022 did not want to support an investigation, and many stakeholders told us that better support needs to be given to victims to ensure that they feel able to provide evidence to law enforcement.²¹⁰

176. Furthermore, Hestia told us that they made a “super-complaint” about the police response to victims of modern slavery and “remain[s] concerned that many victims are still not appropriately identified nor receiving the appropriate level of service, support and communication from non-specialist police officers”.²¹¹

177. We also heard concerns that recent legislative changes may also deter adult victims of human trafficking from coming forward to report their exploitation.²¹² The Rt Hon

206 ([HUM0019](#)), written evidence submitted by Professor Teela Sanders.

207 [Q572](#).

208 For example, [the European Convention on Action against Trafficking \(ECAT\)](#).

209 ([HUM0014](#)), written evidence submitted by Nordic Model Now!

210 ([HUM0056](#)), written Evidence Submitted by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority; ([HUM0009](#)), written evidence submitted by Dr Christopher Goard.

211 ([HUM0080](#)), written evidence submitted by Hestia.

212 ([HUM0071](#)), written evidence submitted by Unseen; ([HUM0074](#)), written evidence submitted by LAWRS

Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE argued that the effect of certain provisions in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 will mean that “we will have fewer prosecutions and fewer convictions with this legislation than we have with the current legislation”.²¹³

178. To tackle this issue, the GLAA in partnership with Justice and Care has piloted the Victim Navigator role. The Victim Navigator, an independent support worker, works with the police team to act as a trusted bridge between the investigators and the victims, helping them to navigate the criminal justice process. Through this initiative, victims can be supported to build trust in law enforcement and remain committed to the prosecution process. According to Tatiana Gren-Jardan from Justice in Care, in the first three years since the establishment of the Victim Navigator role, nine out of 10 of those victims who had a Victim Navigator engaged with the criminal justice system. Elysia McCaffrey, the Chief Executive at the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, told us that since they have had their Victim Navigator, all of their victims have stayed engaged with them:

That means they’re better able to get help, and it also helps us when we’re taking people to court, because they understand the process better, they understand how to engage, and they feel supported. It has made a real difference to us.²¹⁴

179. In supplementary evidence, the GLAA told us that “to date, the Victim Navigator has supported 18 victims. 100% of those victims have engaged in one way or another, with 39% supporting a prosecution and 33% providing a witness statement”.²¹⁵ The NPCC told us that they are looking to introduce a phased roll out over 12 to 18 months of Victim Navigator Hubs embedded within Regional Organised Crime Units to work with human trafficking regional co-ordinators.²¹⁶

180. Engaging with victims and building rapport and trust not only supports better outcomes for victims but can lead to a better evidence base and therefore to more successful prosecutions.

181. The role fulfilled by Victim Navigators is essential to supporting victims in the criminal justice process and enabling investigation teams to build evidential cases.

182. Victim support must be at the centre of the investigation and prosecution process. The Victim Navigator programme should be expanded and utilised in all cases. A victim centred approach will take account of culturally appropriate support and good communication with NRM support services.

213 [Q33](#).

214 [Q104](#).

215 [\(HUM0101\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority.

216 [\(HUM0109\)](#), written evidence submitted by the National Police Chiefs’ Council.

4 Identification and Protection

The National Referral Mechanism

183. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM), established in 2009, is the system for formally identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. It handles cases involving British citizens and people with permission to stay in the UK, as well as foreign nationals who do not have immigration permission. Potential victims are referred to the NRM by individuals from an authorised ‘First Responder’ organisation. In the NRM process, decisions on whether a person is a victim of human trafficking are made by one of two ‘competent authorities’, the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) and the Single Competent Authority (SCA), which sit within separate directorates in the Home Office.²¹⁷ Having two separate authorities was criticised by Tatiana Gren-Jordan, of the Joint Modern Slavery Policy Unit - Justice and Care and Centre for Social Justice, as people under the IECA are seen under an “immigration/asylum lens, rather than a safeguarding/crime perspective”.²¹⁸

184. Whilst under the NRM, the individual is entitled to a range of assistance meeting (at least) the minimum requirements set out in Article 12(1) Council of Europe Convention on Action against the Trafficking in Human Beings. The Home Office has made an agreement with the Salvation Army to deliver this support for victims through a network of providers in England and Wales, which is the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (“MSVCC”).

Decision-making delays

185. The NRM decision proceeds in two parts, the competent authority decides if there are ‘Reasonable Grounds’ to believe an individual is a victim of modern slavery. If this decision is positive, a ‘Conclusive Grounds’ decision is then taken on whether someone is formally recognised as a victim. The Home Office states that a Reasonable Grounds decision should be made within five days of a referral, and a Conclusive Grounds decision within 30 days following a positive Reasonable Grounds decision.

186. However, the NRM decision-making process continues to be extremely slow: the average waiting time for a Conclusive Grounds decision across both competent authorities in 2022 was 543 days. The average time taken by the SCA was longer than that taken by the IECA, at 583 and 177 days respectively.²¹⁹ For the most recent quarter (July to September 2023), the overall average time taken for a Conclusive Grounds decision was 530 days which remains unreasonably long.

217 The SCA was launched in April 2019 and the IECA was created in November 2021 to deal with an increased number of referrals from potential victims remanded or convicted on criminal charges who do not have an absolute right to be in the UK. All referrals initially go to the SCA, however they are then transferred to the IECA if appropriate. The IECA, therefore, deals with a smaller number of cases.

218 (HUM0098), written evidence submitted by Tatiana Gren-Jordan.

219 This discrepancy is said to be due to the IECA having fewer cases assigned to decision-makers in their backlog compared to the SCA, given the IECA have only taken on new referrals since November 2021.

Table 1: Average time to Conclusive Grounds decision for SCA and IECA in past four quarterly statistics²²⁰

Quarter	SCA average time taken to decision (days)	IECA average time taken to decision (days)
July-Sep 23	585	510
Apr-Jun 23	470	414
Jan-Mar 23	654	352
Oct-Dec 22	699	301

Source: [National Referral Mechanism statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-referral-mechanism-statistics)

187. We heard how waiting long periods for a decision contributes to stress and poor mental health among victims who face an uncertain future, often with limited subsistence payments if they are unable to work.²²¹ Furthermore, these delays have caused many victims to drop out of the process before it concludes, leaving them exposed to a risk of re-trafficking.²²² We heard how long waiting times can be particularly detrimental to British national victims, where they may opt to not wait in the NRM and try to receive more immediate support elsewhere.²²³

188. At the start of our inquiry, Professor Dame Sara Thornton told us that when she became commissioner in 2019–20 the delays were “a lot less, but it was obvious they were growing all the time”.²²⁴ She told us that there has been a range of operational issues including staffing and resourcing, but that in her view the NRM “has just not been the priority that it needed to be”.

189. When we asked the Home Office Competent Authorities what steps they were taking to rectify this situation, Siobhain Jolliffe, Head of the Single Competent Authority, told us that “[t]here are lots of examples of policies that are helping us to make incremental changes to what is a huge and complex system”. These examples were later provided to us and include: a new case management tool, a checking team and peer-coaching, and a new digital case working system. We hope these changes have the intended effect of reducing the time taken to complete the decision-making process, though we appear yet to see any change this year.

190. As will be discussed further in chapter five, the Home Office has recognised the efficiencies of the Devolved Child Decision Making Pilot, where decision-makers can make Reasonable Grounds and Conclusive Grounds decisions at the same time, if there is sufficient evidence to do so. The Home Office reported that this multi-agency decision making is “remarkably quicker” and results in improved multi-agency partnerships.²²⁵

²²⁰ [National Referral Mechanism statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-referral-mechanism-statistics)

²²¹ (HUM0017), written evidence submitted by the Justice and Care and the Centre for Social Justice; (HUM0038), written evidence from Causeway Charitable Services; (HUM0048), written evidence from Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group; (HUM0085) written evidence submitted by the Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU).

²²² (HUM0020) written evidence from Mission and Public Affairs Council, Church of England; (HUM0021), Dr Ventrella and Dr Pulvirenti; Q8.

²²³ Q343.

²²⁴ Q3.

²²⁵ [Letter from the Minister for Safeguarding on the removal of Multi Agency Assurance Panels, dated 4th September 2023.](#)

Consideration could also be given to whether this model might benefit decision-making times beyond the Devolved Child Decision Making Pilot.

191. The extensive time taken for Conclusive Grounds decision-making within the National Referral Mechanism is unacceptable. Lengthy decision-making is detrimental to victims' mental health and wellbeing and puts significant pressure on the services that support them during this time.

192. *We recommend that the Home Office significantly reduces the number of days taken to make National Referral Mechanism decisions and clears the backlog of National Referral Mechanism decisions. It should aim for the target timeframe outlined in the Modern Slavery statutory guidance and should set a target date for clearing the backlog of June 2024.*

193. *The Home Office should report in its annual and quarterly statistics on the waiting times for all cases within the system, the amount of time for which referrals are suspended, withdrawn, or closed, so that a better picture can be drawn of actual waiting times.*

Decision-makers

194. The strikingly long time taken for NRM decision-making is partly attributable to insufficient numbers of decision-makers. Out of c.687 staff in the Home Office Competent Authorities, there are currently around 332 full-time equivalent Reasonable Grounds or Conclusive Grounds decision-makers.²²⁶ We were informed that heavily funded recruitment campaigns are aiming to recruit a further 200 decision-makers by the end of 2023.²²⁷

195. We welcome steps the Home Office is taking to address staffing issues, including peer mentors and a “consolidation period” where new staff receive extra support.²²⁸ However, we were alarmed to learn that the decision-maker attrition rate was at 28%.²²⁹ Such a high rate of turnover raises concerns for the retention of skills from experienced staff.²³⁰

196. Recruitment campaigns and the training of new National Referral Mechanism staff are welcome, and we look forward to the Home Office notifying us when the promised 200 new staff are recruited by the end of 2023. However, the attrition rate remains unacceptably high, and the Home Office must address this urgently.

197. *The Home Office must recruit the promised 200 National Referral Mechanism decision-makers by the end of 2023 and focus on reducing the attrition rate to 15%. This should be done through increased resourcing, training and support for ongoing staff, as well as through enhanced recruitment campaigns. We recommend that the Home Office collects data on why decision-makers are leaving, to inform how to reduce attrition*

226 (HUM0119), Supplementary written evidence submitted by Siobhain Jolliffe, Head of the Single Competent Authority and Elaine Bass, Director National Returns Progression Command.

227 (HUM0119), Supplementary written evidence submitted by Siobhain Jolliffe, Head of the Single Competent Authority and Elaine Bass, Director National Returns Progression Command; Q606.

228 (HUM0119), Supplementary written evidence submitted by Siobhain Jolliffe, Head of the Single Competent Authority and Elaine Bass, Director National Returns Progression Command.

229 Q605.

230 Q3; average turnover across the whole of the civil service is 13.6% [Staff turnover in the civil service | Institute for Government](#).

rates further.

198. *The Home Office should include in its quarterly National Referral Mechanism statistics data on the number of Competent Authority staff, setting out how many are Reasonable Grounds/Conclusive Grounds decision makers, how many are new staff, and giving the attrition rate of staff.*

Decision-making assurance process

199. In 2019, the Home Office introduced Multi-Agency Assurance Panels (MAAPs) to the NRM decision-making process to review all negative Conclusive Grounds decisions prior to decisions being served.²³¹ In December 2022, due to the increasing pressure on the timeliness of NRM decision-making, MAAPs were removed from the process after consideration that their use was contributing to the length of time it was taking to issue a decision. The Home Office told us that there continued to be “a second pair of eyes” on all negative decisions by a second caseworker or manager, “the requirement for which existed prior to and during the existence of MAAPs”.²³² But there is no publicly available data on the extent to which this is being used and whether any negative decisions were subsequently overturned with the “internal second pair of eyes”.

200. Although we welcome initiatives to reduce decision-making times, we do not believe this should be done at the expense of robust and transparent quality assurance processes. The former Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines MP, reassured us that:

The Home Office continues to give consideration to a possible alternative assurance process following the removal of MAAPs. This consideration includes whether the structure could be similar to that of MAAPs, with an independent Chair, or with an alternative structure.²³³

201. *We recommend that the Home Office either reinstate the multi-agency assurance process or establish a similar quality assurance process.*

First Responders

202. Statutory and non-statutory First Responder Organisations²³⁴ have several responsibilities when a potential victim is identified, including gathering information on their exploitation, referring them to the NRM, and providing a point of contact for the Competent Authority to assist with any decision.²³⁵

203. We heard that the increase in NRM referrals, combined with lengthy NRM decision-making, were greatly undermining the capacity of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) acting as First Responders. For example, Kalayaan, a charity offering advice,

231 Multi-Agency Assurance Panels (MAAPs) were introduced as a matter of policy in an advisory capacity only, with decision making responsibility remaining with the Competent Authorities.

232 [Letter from the Minister for Safeguarding on the removal of Multi Agency Assurance Panels, dated 4th September 2023.](#)

233 [Letter from the Minister for Safeguarding on the removal of Multi Agency Assurance Panels, dated 4th September 2023.](#)

234 The current statutory and non-statutory First Responder Organisations are: police forces; certain parts of the Home Office; UK Visas and Immigration; Border Force; Immigration Enforcement; National Crime Agency; local authorities; Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA); Salvation Army; Migrant Help; Medaille Trust; Kalayaan; Barnardo's; Unseen; NSPCC (CTAC); BAWSO; New Pathways; Refugee Council.

235 [National referral mechanism guidance: adult \(England and Wales\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\).](#)

advocacy and support services to migrant domestic workers, recently reported that the “situation has been deteriorating for a number of years, but it now reaches breaking point”, where first responder organisations are having to turn potential victims away as they lack the capacity to support them through the NRM process sufficiently.²³⁶ Most notably, in January 2023 the Salvation Army, which is the largest NGO First Responder, temporarily stopped accepting new referrals due to an inability to keep up with the current demand.²³⁷ Furthermore, the limited capacity of many NGOs has been exacerbated by new measures introduced in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 which placed more responsibility on First Responders to collect and evaluate evidence to support decisions within the NRM.²³⁸

204. In light of this, the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG) told us that there is a “pressing need” for an increase in the numbers of First Responder Organisations, together with the requisite resources.²³⁹ However, the Home Office is not accepting new First Responder Organisation applications “despite a willingness within the sector to assist”.²⁴⁰

205. We also heard concerns over insufficient training for statutory First Responders, with many unable to identify potential victims or unaware of their legal duties in referring potential victims to the NRM.²⁴¹ We heard that this was particularly the case for local authority staff.²⁴² The former Minister for Safeguarding, told us that the Home Office was developing a First Responder toolkit and changing the NRM referral form to help ensure sufficient information is provided upon referral and to assist First Responders with the referral process.²⁴³

206. A myriad of challenges within the National Referral Mechanism system are overwhelming First Responders’ already limited capacity to identify and support potential victims of human trafficking. However, the Home Office is not presently accepting applications for more First Responder Organisations, nor improving the resources which existing First Responders have in order to overcome capacity issues. Furthermore, statutory First Responders lack training on their legal responsibilities when encountering a potential victim of human trafficking.

207. We recommend that the Home Office develops and maintains a nationwide training programme for both statutory and non-statutory First Responder Organisations. This training should include identifying victims and recognising indicators of human trafficking; gathering information on what has happened to them in a trauma-informed way; the National Referral Mechanism referral process; and supporting the individual after a referral has been made.

236 [\(HUM0083\)](#) written evidence from Kalayaan.

237 [\(HUM0085\)](#) written evidence submitted by the Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU); [\(HUM0087\)](#) written evidence from The Salvation Army; [\(HUM0083\)](#) written evidence from Kalayaan.

238 [\(HUM0083\)](#) written evidence from Kalayaan.

239 Q318.

240 [\(HUM0031\)](#), written Evidence submitted by The Snowdrop Project.

241 [\(HUM0016\)](#), Wilsons Solicitors LLP; [\(HUM0074\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Latin American Women’s Rights Service (LAWRS); [\(HUM0031\)](#), written Evidence submitted by The Snowdrop Project; [\(HUM0071\)](#), written evidence submitted by Unseen; [\(HUM0017\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Justice and Care and the Centre for Social Justice; [\(HUM0047\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Labour Exploitation Advisory Group; [\(HUM0083\)](#), written evidence from Kalayaan; [\(HUM0086\)](#), written evidence submitted by Hope for Justice; [\(HUM0087\)](#), written evidence submitted by The Salvation Army; [\(HUM0098\)](#), written evidence submitted by Tatiana Gren-Jordan.

242 [\(HUM0031\)](#), written Evidence submitted by The Snowdrop Project; [\(HUM0071\)](#), written evidence submitted by Unseen.

243 [\(HUM0120\)](#) supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding.

208. *We strongly recommend that the Home Office recommences immediately considering applications from specialist front line organisations to become a First Responder Organisation.*

209. *We recommend the Home Office reviews, together with current First Responder Organisations, the funding for such organisations. This review should consider specifically the case for the Home Office providing further funding to First Responder Organisations supporting victims waiting on National Referral Mechanism decisions that are extensively delayed.*

Evaluating evidence

210. Part 5 of the Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) 2022 made profound changes to the way in which NRM trafficking decisions are made. It altered the threshold of the first stage Reasonable Grounds decision, which now places the burden on First Responders and victims to provide more than just victim testimony as part of the NRM process. The Home Office produced new statutory guidance which included a requirement for Reasonable Grounds decisions to be supported by “objective factors”, which could be “a piece of information or evidence that is based in fact”. This requirement for ‘objective’ evidence was criticised in our evidence for being against best practice, unworkable and likely to see more cases rejected and less referrals made from victims²⁴⁴. The Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE summed up these concerns by stating that “a victim coming out of being exploited is unlikely to have or very seldom has a passport, and they are very unlikely to have any documentation.”²⁴⁵

211. The concerns raised by the Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE and others are reflected in statistics. According to Home Office published data, in the first quarter of 2023 the percentage of referrals given positive Reasonable Grounds (RG) decisions fell from 85% to 58%. This dropped further still in the second quarter of 2023 to 48%,²⁴⁶ whilst only 6% of Reasonable Grounds decisions made by the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) were positive.

212. On 28 June 2023, the Home Office withdrew and agreed to review this statutory guidance, and new guidance was issued in July 2023. Still, between July and September 2023 only 52% of all Reasonable Grounds decisions were positive.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, between July and September 2023, the Home Office started reporting on decisions that were ‘reconsidered’ by the competent authorities; receiving 314 reconsideration requests in that quarter. Of these, 51% of Reasonable Grounds decisions and 67% of Conclusive Grounds decisions were reconsidered to be positive, supporting the concern that the Home Office may have been incorrectly rejecting cases following these changes.²⁴⁸

244 [Q44](#); [Q45](#); [Q96](#); [Q387](#); ([HUM0112](#)), additional written evidenced submitted by the Salvation Army.

245 [Q23](#).

246 [Q388](#); from April to June 2023, 3,635 Reasonable Grounds decisions were issued by competent authorities, with 48% being positive. More specifically, the SCA issued 2,749 decisions and the IECA issued 886 decisions; 61% (1,685) of Reasonable Grounds decisions made by the SCA were positive and 6% (54) of Reasonable Grounds decisions made by the IECA were positive [<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-april-to-june-2023/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-2-2023-april-to-june#national-referral-mechanism-decisions>]

247 [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, July to September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

248 [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, Quarter 3 2023 – July to September - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

213. The Salvation Army told us that the new guidance has “softened the requirements... but we remain concerned about a lack of clarity”. This is because the new measures have significantly shifted the burden of collecting and evaluating evidence away from the Home Office Competent Authorities towards voluntary First Responders, who are not paid extra to do this work. To ensure victims are identified correctly and safeguarded, the decision First Responders must make is whether they have the time and capacity to do this work before a referral to the NRM, as legal aid is not available for pre-NRM support.²⁴⁹

214. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and revisions to the Modern Slavery statutory guidance have changed the amount and type of evidence required for a potential victim to be referred into the National Referral Mechanism decision-making process. It is unclear what the impact of either of these changes will be on either victims and First Responders, but early data suggests a decline of positive Reasonable Grounds decisions for potential victims and a significantly increased draw on First Responder capacity.

215. We recommend an independent review of the implementation of modern slavery provisions (Part 5) in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, conducted by a suitably qualified and independent professional, to start in January 2024.

216. The Government should pause any requirement to provide third party evidence at the Reasonable Grounds stage until such an independent review has been concluded and has determined that the new requirements are not unduly burdensome.

Duty to Notify

217. In situations where an adult does not provide consent to be referred to the NRM, certain public authorities have a duty to notify the Home Office about suspected victims of modern slavery by submitting a ‘Duty to Notify referral’ (DtN). In 2022, there were 4,580 such referrals regarding adult potential victims. This is the highest annual number since the NRM was established and marks a 43.6% increase from 2021. Yet, there have been 3,882 DtN referrals in 2023 so far, with the first and third quarter of the year having seen the highest, and second highest, recorded quarterly numbers of DtN referrals (1,420 between January and March 2023, and 1,317 between July and September 2023).²⁵⁰

218. Professor Dame Sara Thornton told us how, as Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, she had endeavoured to understand why this increase had occurred, yet the Home Office had not engaged on the matter, despite these potential victims remaining at high risk of re-trafficking.²⁵¹ Other stakeholders echoed the theme that the majority of individuals refusing consent to enter the NRM “remained in exploitation”.²⁵²

219. Tatiana Gren-Jardan from Justice and Care said that the reasons for refusing to enter the NRM may be different for British nationals compared to non-British nationals. For non-British nationals, Justice and Care found that there is a fear of authorities and potential reprisals, as the Home Office oversees both the NRM and immigration decisions. For British nationals, there is a lack of understanding amongst potential victims and First

249 [Q96](#).

250 [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, Quarter 3 2023 – July to September - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

251 [Q3](#).

252 [Q82](#).

Responders of the benefits of doing so.²⁵³ As Ms Gren-Jarden added:

According to our police survey carried out in 2021, the top three reasons why victims refuse to engage were not seeing themselves as victims in the first place (69% of respondents), followed by fear of their exploiters (62%) and fear of the authorities (50%).²⁵⁴

Justice and Care recommended that there should be places of safety before people enter the NRM to allow victims “time to breathe”.²⁵⁵ Giving victims time to process what has happened to them and gain information about what the NRM is may better enable them to make an informed decision about entering the NRM.

220. However, we agree with the Rt Hon Theresa May MP that “evidence to prove the reasons why individuals of potential trafficking do not consent to be referred to the NRM is, however, inconclusive and could certainly benefit from a greater investigation”.²⁵⁶

221. *There has been a troubling and unwelcome rise in the number of adults choosing not to enter the National Referral Mechanism, who may be at risk of further exploitation. It is unclear why the Home Office does not collect, analyse, and publish data on why individuals are refusing to consent to enter the NRM. We recommend that the Home Office corrects this deficiency immediately.*

Abuse of the National Referral Mechanism

222. Home Office Ministers have repeatedly said that the NRM system is being abused by migrants who do not qualify for permission to stay and are trying to evade removal from the UK, often citing an increase in the number of modern slavery referrals to evidence the claim. For example, in its written evidence, the Home Office argues that NRM referrals from detention and prison have increased from 3% in 2017 to 16% in 2019 and to 27% in 2020.²⁵⁷ It also argues that NRM referrals from those who arrive in the UK on small boats and are detained for return has risen from 6% in 2019 to 73% in 2021. The Home Secretary further wrote to us in March 2023 to highlight four cases where the Home Office felt that the NRM had been misused.²⁵⁸ The only other submission we received to this inquiry that supported the Home Office’s position was from the National Crime Agency (NCA), writing:

it is highly likely that some irregular migrants fraudulently claim exploitation as a strategy to avoid removal from the UK and to enable continued illegal working or involvement in serious and organised crime. It is a realistic possibility this has included last minute claims in order to prevent removal from the country, although intelligence gaps remain on the nature and scale of this²⁵⁹

223. However, with the exceptions of the Home Office and the NCA, written evidence submissions to this inquiry were unanimous that there was no evidence of people seeking

253 [Q81](#).

254 [\(HUM0098\)](#), written evidence submitted by Tatiana Gren-Jordan.

255 [Q82](#).

256 [\(HUM0104\)](#), written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Theresa May MP.

257 [\(HUM0093\)](#), written evidence submitted by the Home Office.

258 [Letter from Home Secretary to Chair of Home Affairs Committee](#), 27 March 2023.

259 [\(HUM0084\)](#), written evidence submitted by the NCA.

asylum in the UK abusing the NRM system, arguing that these statistics do not point to specific evidence of abuse of the system.²⁶⁰ Submissions, often referenced the Office for Statistics Regulation, which stated that the “statistics do not support the claims that people are “gaming” the modern slavery system, and the source of the claim is unclear to us”.²⁶¹ We have heard that the increase in NRM referrals reflects an increased awareness among FRs and detention staff, and that there may be several reasons why victims may only access advice at the point when they were due to be deported. Professor Dame Sara Thornton rebuffed each of the Government’s arguments, particularly that of an increase in referrals demonstrating abuse of the system.²⁶²

Firstly, modern slavery is not claimed but it is identified by first responders such as police officers, border officials or NGOs. Second, significant effort has gone in to training these responders who are therefore better able to identify slavery and trafficking. Lastly, the positive decision rate at the conclusive grounds stage was 91% in 2022 and has significantly increased over the last five years. This does not suggest that the increase in referrals is being caused by an increase in false claims.

Dr Schwarz, Associate Director of the Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham, told us that evidence from the Rights Lab suggests that there is a low level of abuse of the system and “actually, many people are being denied access to protection at the [NRM] identification point because they are being criminalised”.²⁶³

224. Finally, we heard that it was unhelpful to refer to the total number of NRM referrals within the context of asylum because the figures included referrals of British citizens and people who had permission to stay in the UK as well as those who did not.²⁶⁴ We again consider that the Government is conflating victims of human trafficking with irregular migration. Nonetheless, the former Minister for Safeguarding acknowledged that gathering “reliable data is difficult” but remained adamant that, in her view, there was clear misuse.

225. The Government’s evidence for individuals ‘abusing the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) system to gain asylum’ is not compelling. There may be a few examples of individuals attempting to take advantage of the NRM, but the Home Office has failed to produce sufficient evidence to support its assertions of widespread abuse. A small number of cases cannot be allowed to jeopardise effective use of the NRM, which provides invaluable support to victims of human trafficking, nor should the Government conflate victims of human trafficking with irregular migration.

260 (HUM0017), written evidence submitted by Justice and Care; (HUM0031), written evidence submitted by The Snowdrop Project; (HUM0033), written evidence submitted by Helen Bamber Foundation; (HUM0048), written evidence submitted by ATMG; (HUM0049), written evidence submitted by The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre

261 Ed Humpherson to Jennifer Rubin: use of National Referral Mechanism statistics – Office for Statistics Regulation (statisticsauthority.gov.uk).

262 Q26, Sara Thornton; (HUM0063), written evidence submitted by Dame Sara Thornton, former UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

263 Q45.

264 (HUM0044), written evidence submitted by Local Government Association; (HUM0074), written evidence submitted by LAWRS; (HUM0086), written evidence submitted by Hope for Justice; (HUM0091), written evidence submitted by West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

226. *We recommend that the Government publishes thorough and accurate data to support its assertions of significant abuse of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to claim asylum to enable objective assessment of the scale of the problem. This data should include: NRM decision outcomes for people who arrive in the UK on small boats; the number of victims positive Conclusive Grounds NRM decisions who receive a grant of Temporary Permission to Stay (and other forms of leave) to remain in the UK; those referred to the NRM who claim asylum, and their asylum outcomes, combined with their NRM referrals and outcomes; and the number and characteristics of people in immigration detention and prison who are referred to the NRM and their NRM decision outcomes.*

Support services

227. While under the NRM and within the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), an individual is entitled to a range of assistance.²⁶⁵

228. The survivors of human trafficking who attended our public engagement roundtable spoke highly of the support received from services under the MSVCC,²⁶⁶ including Hestia, Unseen, the Salvation Army and the Human Trafficking Foundation. They expressed gratitude for the caseworkers and advocates who supported them and for the ways in which these services facilitated finding accommodation and mental health support.

229. However, we also heard that the support needs of survivors can vary immensely depending on a variety of factors, including gender, nationality, type of exploitation, and the specific circumstances of that exploitation, and that tailoring support services to meet individual needs is a significant challenge.²⁶⁷ We heard that services need to avoid a ‘one size fits all approach’ and ensure that they are trauma-informed and culturally competent.²⁶⁸

Accommodation

230. Survivors of human trafficking who attend our public engagement roundtable spoke about how they had felt unsafe in Government-provided accommodation.²⁶⁹ This was echoed in many written submissions, which described existing accommodation as ‘unsafe and inappropriate’ for victims, for example, accommodation which is contingency asylum accommodation, mixed gender, or easily traceable by traffickers.²⁷⁰ Additionally, we heard how survivors could be moved at short notice, away from support networks and with little explanation, mirroring their trafficking experiences.²⁷¹

265 This should at least meet the minimum requirements set out in Article 12(1) Council of Europe Convention on Action against the Trafficking in Human Beings (“ECAT”).

266 See Annex 1

267 Q68; (HUM0038), written evidence from Causeway Charitable Services; (HUM0089), written evidence submitted by the Human Trafficking Foundation.

268 (HUM0038), written evidence from Causeway Charitable Services; (HUM0049), written evidence submitted by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre.

269 See Annex 1.

270 (HUM0085) written evidence submitted by the Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU).

271 (HUM0051), written evidence submitted on behalf of the Rights Lab, University of Nottingham; (HUM0085) written evidence submitted by the Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU).

231. A combination of a lack of safe accommodation and prolonged NRM decision-making results in many victims being housed in ‘contingency’ asylum accommodation.²⁷² This is of particular concern given the risk of re-trafficking, as these large-scale accommodations are often targeted by traffickers.²⁷³ British nationals, on the other hand, are often expected to be accommodated by local authorities, rather than entering specialist MSVCC accommodation.²⁷⁴

232. We were told how children who are transitioning to adult services at aged 18 are also often placed in unsuitable accommodation, in what was described by several organisations as a ‘cliff-edge’ in the removal of extra protections provided by children’s services.²⁷⁵ Further still, the Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE told us how children aged as young as 16 and 17 were being placed by local authorities in independent living accommodation with no support.²⁷⁶

233. There is a shortage of appropriate safe housing for victims of human trafficking whilst they are within the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract. Accommodation provision varies significantly for children after referral to the National Referral Mechanism, and children are particularly vulnerable to having no access to specialist safe accommodation after they turn 18 years old.

234. We recommend that the Government increases the provision of safe accommodation available through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract for trafficking victims, including single-sex provision, while they await a National Referral Mechanism decision.

235. Local authorities and safeguarding partners should develop a defined strategy for child victims to be transitioned to appropriate adult services with continuity of support to ensure that there is no gap in services such as mental health care.

Legal aid

236. We heard concerns about the level of legal support provided to victims - namely, that there is a shortage of legal aid providers and that victims do not receive legal advice early enough in the NRM process.²⁷⁷

237. Trafficking cases are complex, long running, and costly, whilst legal aid fees are usually fixed. This means that taking on cases involving victims of trafficking and modern slavery is not viable or sustainable for many legal aid providers. This in turn may deter the development of specialist expertise.²⁷⁸ Dr Jo Wilding, Lecturer in Law at the University of Sussex, told us that only around 50% of legal aid applications were opened as a new case by providers in England and Wales in 2021–22, writing:

272 (HUM0033), written Evidence from the Helen Bamber Foundation; (HUM0038), written evidence from Causeway Charitable Services.

273 (HUM0085) written evidence submitted by the Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU).

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

275 (HUM0086), written evidence submitted by Hope for Justice; (HUM0028), written Evidence submitted by the STAGE Project; (HUM0058), Barnardo’s; (HUM0082) ECPAT UK; (HUM0030), Migrant and Refugee Childrens Legal Unit.

276 (HUM0094), Baroness Butler-Sloss.

277 Q96; Q113; (HUM0054), the Council of Europe’s Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).

278 (HUM0085) written evidence submitted by the Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU); (HUM0038), written evidence from Causeway Charitable Services.

The combined effect of overall shortages, geographical shortages and the lack of specialist knowledge of trafficking indicators among some immigration legal aid providers (and lack of adequate funding for this from the respective legal aid authorities) is that people do not have access to legal advice that meets their needs—and this in turn means they may be unable to access other support services.²⁷⁹

238. Access to legal aid is not standard in the NRM. Nor is it accessible until a person has received a Reasonable Grounds decision, so victims are often reliant on NGOs to support access to necessary assistance.²⁸⁰ However, one NGO told us that caseworkers “regularly struggle to support trafficking victims with a positive [Conclusive Grounds] decision to access legal advice for trafficking related issues, such as criminal proceedings, immigration and compensation”.²⁸¹

239. The Government recently announced that it had consulted on proposals to increase legal aid fees for work pursuant to the Illegal Migration Act 2023.²⁸² It agreed a 15% increase in fees to represent “an increase in remuneration and fair recognition of the expectations the Illegal Migration Act puts on practitioners”. Lord Bellamy KC states that the Government will review the fee increase within two years of implementation. He also states:

We have also listened to the sector on the other issues raised during the consultation period and are taking steps to remove additional barriers so that providers are supported in taking on this work including exploring proposals to help address the financial burden of accrediting caseworkers at senior caseworker level to conduct immigration and asylum legal aid work, paying for the time it takes providers to travel to Immigration Removal Centres for Detained Duty Advice Scheme surgeries and allowing advice to be provided remotely for DDAS surgeries, at the discretion of providers. We will continue to work with legal aid providers as the new arrangements are implemented.

240. Victims should be properly informed of their rights and options before entering the National Referral Mechanism, and access to free legal aid should be guaranteed.

241. *We recommend that the Government provides victims of human trafficking with earlier and better access to legal aid. This must include the following areas that are currently ‘out of scope’: pre-NRM immigration advice; advice on identification as a victim of trafficking and modern slavery; advice on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme; advice for non-UK nationals on applying for international protection; and advice on the application of the non-punishment principle.*

242. *The Government should also increase the legal aid rate for those dealing with human trafficking cases, not just those which fall under the Illegal Migration Act and should increase training for legal aid solicitors on human trafficking and the National Referral Mechanism process. We recommend that the Government publishes its plans*

279 (HUM0005), written evidence submitted by Dr Jo Wilding, University of Sussex School of Law, Politics and Sociology.

280 Q96.

281 (HUM0031), written Evidence submitted by The Snowdrop Project.

282 [Legal aid fees in the Illegal Migration Act: government response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/legal-aid-fees-in-the-illegal-migration-act-2023).

for doing so by June 2024.

Post-NRM support

243. Following a positive Conclusive Grounds decision, victims will receive at least 45 days of support. If a confirmed victim is considered to have ongoing support needs, then a Recovery Needs Assessment (RNA) should be completed within this period. It was clear from our lived experience roundtable that, as there is no statutory long-term support after this time, many individuals experience an abrupt halt to the support they receive after the allotted 45 days.

244. This is in part due to the current RNA process's inability to adequately assess unmet trafficking-related needs and to provide suitable support in the timeframe, causing many confirmed victims to exit the NRM with little to no support in place.²⁸³ Justice and Care told us that the RNA process is largely ineffective because "it requires victims to provide evidence of their need at repeated assessments after short periods of support creating instability".²⁸⁴

245. Furthermore, Major Kathy Betteridge, Director for Anti-trafficking and Modern Slavery at The Salvation Army, told us that there is a difficulty in accessing adequate housing when victims are leaving the support offered under the MSVCC.²⁸⁵ Secure housing is vital to reduce the risk of homelessness and re-trafficking and is listed as one of the Modern Slavery Core Outcomes.²⁸⁶ The Salvation Army wrote:

At present survivors of modern slavery are not on the Priority Need List for housing. This means that there can be great difficulty in securing appropriate housing for survivors to move on from supported accommodation. Many survivors are required to move from their place of initial exploitation to receive support, this move often means that the survivor moves to a place where they have no 'Local Connection'. Local authorities are using the lack of local connection to delay the provision of housing or avoid providing housing altogether.²⁸⁷

246. The Government committed in 2021 to providing a minimum of 12 months' support for confirmed victims of human trafficking who have ongoing support needs. This has not been delivered and Ministers have said the commitment is now under review.²⁸⁸ We believe that the introduction of long-term care would hugely support survivors of trafficking in moving on positively with their lives.

247. Survivors of human trafficking should continue to receive long-term support once they leave the National Referral Mechanism (NRM); however, there is clearly an absence of support for victims of human trafficking once they exit the statutory support provided under the MSVCC whilst in the NRM. This is in part because the

283 ([HUM0017](#)), written evidence submitted by the Justice and Care and the Centre for Social Justice; ([HUM0031](#)), written Evidence submitted by The Snowdrop Project; ([HUM0016](#)), Wilsons Solicitors LLP; ([HUM0033](#)), written Evidence from the Helen Bamber Foundation; ([HUM0048](#)), written evidence from Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

284 ([HUM0017](#)), written evidence submitted by the Justice and Care and the Centre for Social Justice.

285 [Q343](#).

286 ([HUM0089](#)), written evidence submitted by the Human Trafficking Foundation.

287 ([HUM0087](#)), written evidence submitted by The Salvation Army.

288 [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

Recovery Needs Assessment process is ineffective in assessing and meeting the needs of victims within 45 days following a positive Conclusive Grounds decision.

248. The Government should deliver on its commitment of 12 months' support for all victims with a positive Conclusive Grounds decision by the end of 2024.

249. We support Recommendation 24 of the Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and urge the Government to formalise and clarify the duties of local authority agencies to support victims of slavery and trafficking once they have left the National Referral Mechanism.

250. We recommend that survivors of human trafficking with a positive Conclusive Grounds decision be placed on priority needs lists for housing.

251. We recommend that the Home Office immediately commissions an independent review of the Recovery Needs Assessment process to determine whether it works effectively for children and young adults transitioning into adult support services.

5 Trafficking of children

Scale and nature

252. The number of identified victims of trafficking in the UK has increased considerably over the years from 1,182 in 2012 to 16,938 in 2022. The proportion of those victims who are children has increased at an equally alarming rate.²⁸⁹ The Council of Europe's expert group on human trafficking notes in its third evaluation of the UK's implementation of the Council of Europe's anti-trafficking convention that the "most common country of origin of child victims referred to the NRM in 2019 was the UK (52%), followed by Vietnam (9%), Eritrea (6%), Albania (6%) and Sudan (5%)".²⁹⁰ While Home Office NRM data provide a good indication of overall potential victims of trafficking in the UK they do not reflect the full extent of this heinous crime. Several organisations told us that the number of children experiencing exploitation is likely to be much higher than officially reported cases, for reasons we discuss later in this chapter.²⁹¹

253. The prevalence of children referred into the NRM who are exploited in criminal activities is increasing.²⁹² In 2022, 7,109 children were referred in to the NRM, representing 41% of all referrals. This is the highest number of referrals of potential victims claiming exploitation as a child since the NRM began in 2009.²⁹³ Furthermore, in 2022, 92% of child referrals received a positive Conclusive Grounds decision.²⁹⁴

254. The Home Office chart below²⁹⁵ records that for child potential victims, criminal exploitation was most commonly reported (43%; 3,013).

289 (HUM0054), the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).

290 GRETA, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, [Evaluation Report United Kingdom, Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings](#), GRETA(2021)12, published 20 October 2021.

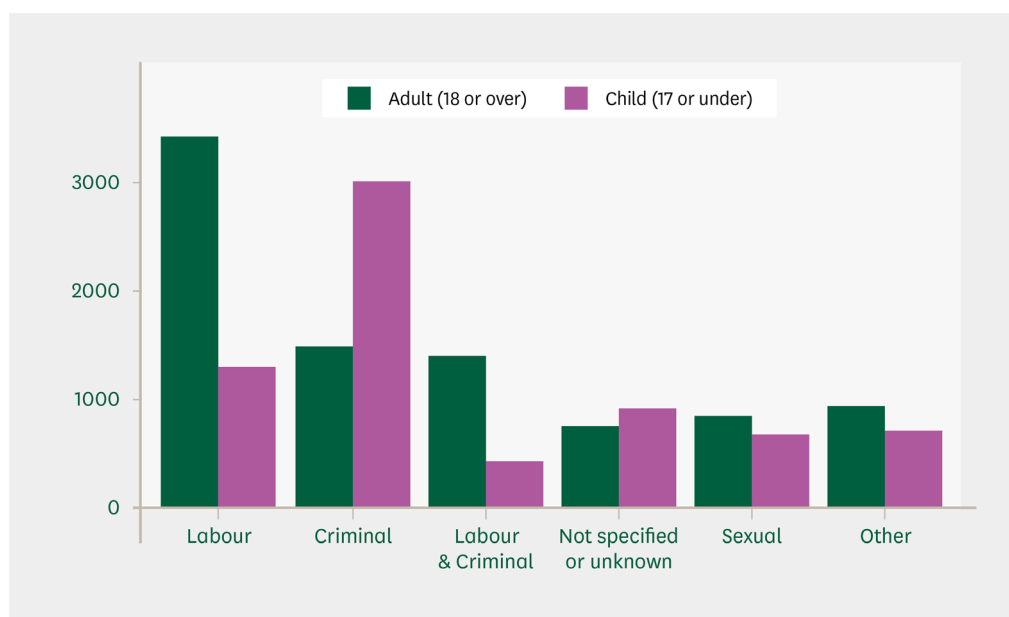
291 [Child victims of modern slavery in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#); (HUM0037), the Children's Society; (HUM0048), the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

292 See chapter one.

293 See Section 2.1 [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

294 Of the Conclusive Grounds decisions made in 2022, 87% for adults were positive and 92% for children, see: [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

295 See Table 2: Home Office: Number of NRM referrals, by exploitation type and age group.

Figure 1: Home Office: Number of NRM referrals, by exploitation type and age group.²⁹⁶

Source: [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022 - GOV. UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/modern-slavery-statistics)

255. We heard evidence that trafficked children can be exploited criminally, sexually and for their labour; and that exploitation is often multi-layered. Evidence from Barnardo's highlighted that some children experience two or more forms of exploitation with overlap between exploitation types.²⁹⁷ At the point of identification, multiple exploitation is difficult to map. It noted that official data-capture systems, such as the NRM or Local Authority data, tend to focus on the primary exploitation type, although more exploitation types can be disclosed at a later stage.

Children and the NRM

256. Several stakeholders expressed concern about the adequacy of the operation of the NRM for children because it uses a single decision-making process for both children and adults. Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT) UK argues that under the current system, decisions are made "by Home Office officials, far removed from the child and often lacking child-specific knowledge".²⁹⁸ Unlike adult victims, child victims do not have to consent to be referred into the NRM. If the potential victim is under 18, or may be under 18, they must first be safeguarded and then referred into the NRM. According to ECPAT UK, the very specific trafficking related support needs of children are not being addressed when children are encountering different authorities with no joined-up approach:

The overall lack of a joined-up approach across the NRM, child welfare and protection and criminal justice systems without any particular focus

²⁹⁶ [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022 - GOV. UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/modern-slavery-statistics)

²⁹⁷ (HUM0058), Barnardo's.

²⁹⁸ [How are children identified as trafficked in the UK? | ECPAT UK.](https://www.ecpat.org.uk/how-are-children-identified-as-trafficked-in-the-uk/)

on identifying and addressing trafficking related needs, or assessing risks posed to the child is of particular concern to us given the high prevalence of re-trafficking of children.²⁹⁹

257. We also heard concerns from some stakeholders about public authorities' ability to identify potential child victims of criminal exploitation and refer them to the NRM. Wilsons Solicitors, which represents children seeking asylum and humanitarian protection, argued that local authority failures are particularly evident in the cases of age-disputed children who are wrongly assessed as being adults. In consequence, they told us that "children are denied support by Children's Services and sent to unsuitable asylum accommodation where they are often sharing a room with unknown adults which presents a considerable safeguarding risk and makes them susceptible to re-trafficking".³⁰⁰ Similarly, ECPAT UK argued that child victims are being failed by safeguarding partners due to inadequate training and specialist knowledge about child trafficking in a local authority team.³⁰¹ It claimed that, even when identified, some safeguarding partners lack the means to make effective interventions to disrupt exploitation.³⁰²

258. The National Referral Mechanism is not appropriate for children. The support is not defined as it is for adults, universally available or applied consistently. There is an overall lack of a joined-up approach across the National Referral Mechanism, child welfare and protection and criminal justice systems.

Support services

259. Support via the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) is available only to adults: the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance suggests that support for child victims should be provided by local authorities. However, ECPAT UK argues that, while the statutory guidance "states briefly" that support for child victims should be provided by local authorities, "there is no policy or guidance" outlining the minimum support requirements for child victims of trafficking, agreed with local authorities or the Department of Education.³⁰³ This lack of detail, it argues, is in stark contrast to section 8 of the statutory guidance which sets out the minimum support that adults are entitled to receive.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, ECPAT highlights that, unlike support provided to potential adult victims in the NRM, children identified as potential victims of trafficking do not benefit from a reflection and recovery period.³⁰⁵ ECPAT further illustrates the potential negative consequences of defined and minimum requirements of support:

[...] a 17-year-old potential victim of trafficking with a positive reasonable grounds decision, arrived in the UK and has been looked after by the local authority ever since. He waited for over a year for a conclusive grounds decision and did not meet the threshold to access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). When considering the support that he

299 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

300 (HUM0016), Wilsons Solicitors.

301 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

302 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

303 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

304 [Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales \(under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015\) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), section 8, updated 9 October 2023.

305 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

is entitled to, it is clear that children are not provided with any specific entitlements to targeted trafficking support once they are referred into the NRM and receive a positive reasonable grounds decision.³⁰⁶

260. ECPAT UK considers that children experience particular difficulties and that “professionals who work with them do not usually have the knowledge or skills to adequately support them through the NRM process, including by obtaining specialist psychological support and relevant expert evidence”.³⁰⁷ A 2017 report from the Department for Education and the Home Office, based on evidence from local authorities and NGOs, reflects this experience by highlighting gaps in the provision of specialist or tailored services to non-EEA migrant children who are potential victims of trafficking.³⁰⁸

261. ECPAT UK has also expressed concern about a shortage of specific services for children when referred into the NRM, besides an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) being available in limited areas across England and Wales and only for children without parental responsibility.³⁰⁹ It also notes that children referred into the NRM are not allocated any specific funding through central government to meet their needs as victims beyond the ICTG service. ECPAT UK argues that generic provisions for “looked after children” are insufficient and lack the specialism to meet the trafficking-related needs of children in care. It notes that many children who are trafficked are also not “looked after”, and there is no resource available for those children.

Devolved decision-making pilot

262. In June 2021, the Home Office launched the first phase of a pilot programme to devolve decision making on NRM trafficking identification for children.³¹⁰ The pilot resulted from work by the former Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Professor Dame Sara Thornton, and ECPAT UK to review what worked in multi-agency decision-making and the implications of that for child victims of trafficking.³¹¹ The purpose of the pilot was to assess whether determining if a child is a victim of modern slavery within existing safeguarding structures is a more appropriate model for making modern slavery decisions for children.³¹² Under this programme, Reasonable and Conclusive Grounds decisions for children were devolved to a local authority. The Home Office notes in its guidance that ten sites were selected for the first phase of the Pilot, with an additional ten sites selected to join the second phase of the Pilot between February and April 2023.³¹³ However, on 5 September, in follow-up evidence to us, Sarah Dines MP wrote that the devolved decision-making pilot is “an on-going programme of work that was launched in June 2021” and is due to run until “at least March 2024”.³¹⁴

306 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

307 (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

308 [Local authority support for non-EEA migrant child victims of modern slavery](#), Cordis Bright. (2017).

309 [HUM0082] ECPAT UK; to note that Independent Child Trafficking Guardians are discussed in the next section.

310 Home Office. (2022). [Devolving child decision-making pilot programme: general guidance](#).

311 Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and ECPAT UK: Child trafficking in the UK 2020: A snapshot (2020); ten sites were selected for the first phase of the Pilot which launched in June 2021, with an additional ten sites selected to join the second phase of the Pilot between February and April 2023: [Devolving child decision making pilot programme: general guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), updated 20 July 2023.

312 [Devolving child decision making pilot programme: general guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), updated 20 July 2023.

313 [Devolving child decision making pilot programme: general guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), updated 20 July 2023.

314 (HUM0120) supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding.

263. Siobhain Jolliffe, Head of the Single Competent Authority, told us that the devolved child decision-making pilot means “faster and more effective decision making for exploited children”.³¹⁵ During the pilot, the expected timescale was 45 days from the point of referral to a Reasonable Grounds decision, and 45 days from that point to a Conclusive Grounds decision. Although no outcome evaluation is available at the time of writing, Siobhain Jolliffe told us that she is “not aware of any systemic issues with those timescales being met”.³¹⁶ However, in the absence of an outcome evaluation of any part of the pilot we do not have any data on the achieved timescales and how they were met.

264. ECPAT UK said the pilot has been “a welcome initiative with positive but as yet unreported findings about decision making, processes and outcomes”. Despite this, it states that concerns remained that the pilot was geographically limited, and sites excluded children within 100 days of their 18th birthday, as well as age-disputed children.³¹⁷ In summary, some of the pilot’s limitations are that:

- It does not involve decisions for children referred to the NRM before June 2021.
- The pilot scheme is not open to referrals where the child is subject to an age dispute.
- It is only open to children who are more than 100 days away from their 18th birthday where the safeguarding responsibility falls to one of the local authorities in the pilot.
- Children who are within 100 days of their 18th birthday at the time of referral will continue to have decisions made by the Home Office SCA.

265. Conversely, children in these excluded groups can potentially stay in local authority care up to the age of 25 under leaving care arrangements. It will be the local authority that has responsibility for their welfare.

266. The impact of these procedures could mean that two 17-year-olds in the same local authority could end up with one having a trafficking decision made within the pilot and the other being excluded following a trafficking decision made by the Home Office depending on the date of their birthday.³¹⁸ Instead of aligning the pilot with established safeguarding policies, the Home Office has aligned it with asylum policy.

267. Several stakeholders, including the Children’s Society, argue that changes in national policies are required to ensure that child victims of modern slavery and trafficking are “treated first and foremost as child victims”, and offered the support they need to stay safe and recover from the traumas they have experienced. The limited data available show that more children, both migrant and British children, fall victim to human trafficking each year. The Children’s Society argues that, despite the recognition that children’s experiences are “horrific, traumatic, and inhumane”, they are “too often treated first as migrants and offenders, then as children, and only then in some cases as victims of trafficking and slavery”.³¹⁹

315 [Q339](#); [Q340](#).

316 [Qs340–341](#).

317 ([HUM0082](#)), ECPAT UK.

318 ([HUM0082](#)), ECPAT UK.

319 ([HUM0037](#)), The Children’s Society.

268. Despite asking Sarah Dines MP when the Home Office would publish an evaluation of the first phase of the pilot, which ended in April 2023, she did not provide us with a clear response either in oral evidence on 19 July 2023 or in supplementary written evidence on 5 September 2023. Nevertheless, she said that the devolved decision-making pilot had been “working quite well” and had benefited children.³²⁰ In follow-up evidence to us, she wrote that the devolved decision-making pilot would run until “at least March 2024” and summarised some of the benefits seen by the twenty pilot sites:³²¹

- Significantly quicker Conclusive Grounds decision-making—this was seen as particularly beneficial for child victims who were awaiting clarity on their immigration status or who were involved with the criminal justice system.
- Increased awareness and understanding of the National Referral Mechanism process and modern slavery within local authorities.
- Improved multi-agency partnership working ensuring a range of professional voices were used to inform decisions.

269. She confirmed that, following expansion of the pilot earlier in the year, the Home Office is “working closely with local authorities and stakeholders to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the Pilot and will continue to assess our next steps”.³²²

270. We welcome the Home Office’s devolved decision-making pilot for children. However, we are concerned that more than two years into the pilot the Home Office has still not published an evaluation of its outcomes. Furthermore, we are concerned that the pilot excludes children within 100 days of their 18th birthday, as well as age-disputed children, and is only available in 20 locations.

271. *The Home office must publish an interim evaluation of the devolved decision-making pilot for children by January 2024, and thereafter a full evaluation of all phases of the Pilot by June 2024. If the outcomes are successful, all decision making for children must be transferred to local authorities within one year of the publication of the evaluation report.*

272. *The Home Office must change the criteria for eligibility to allow local authority pilot locations to make National Referral Mechanism decisions for all children in their care, including those who are age-disputed; and not exclude those who are within 100 days of their 18th birthday.*

Independent Child Trafficking Guardians

273. Support for child victims of modern slavery and trafficking, setting aside the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians service³²³ and Scottish Guardianship Service, is provided by local authorities and partner agencies under existing statutory obligations and is provided regardless of the child’s nationality or immigration status.

320 [Q604](#).

321 [\(HUM0120\)](#), supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding.

322 [\(HUM0120\)](#), supplementary evidence from Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding.

323 The ICTG service is discussed in the following section.

274. Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service manages the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service (ICTG), which is funded by the Home Office and outlined in s.48 of the Modern Slavery Act.³²⁴ The ICTG service meets the needs of victims who have been trafficked, by:

- Building trusting relationships
- Helping them navigate the criminal justice, immigration and social care systems providing practical support, such as help with housing, medical needs and education
- Providing emotional support and assisting with access to specialist mental health services, and
- Training and supporting other professionals working with children so they can spot the signs of trafficking and take the action necessary to keep children safe.

275. In written evidence provided to us, Barnardo's explained that the ICTG service currently covers two-thirds of local authority areas across England and Wales, and stated that "it would be beneficial for ICTG to be rolled out nationally to cover all local authorities in England as well as Wales; this is because children in non-ICTG areas are not able to access the same support, which creates a postcode lottery".³²⁵

276. On 5 September, in follow-up evidence to us, Sarah Dines MP wrote that the Government is "committed to delivering national rollout of the ICTG service from 2025/2026" but provided no explanation for the delay in its rollout. She said that it had rolled out ICTGs to two thirds of local authorities in England and Wales (112 out of 175 local authorities), and that in June she had agreed the Home Office would "work to extend the current grant agreement to 31 March 2025, alongside continuing work to deliver National Rollout of the service to cover all of England and Wales from April 2025".³²⁶

277. The Government has been too slow to roll out Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTG). We welcome Sarah Dine MP's commitment to deliver national rollout of the service to cover all of England and Wales from April 2025, but it is unacceptable that after eight years in operation, only two-thirds of local authorities in England and Wales have ICTGs. Children in non-Independent Child Trafficking Guardians areas are not able to access the same support, which creates a postcode lottery.

278. *The Home Office must complete the roll out of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTG) to all local authorities in England and Wales by June 2025, bringing in individual local authorities before then if they are ready.*

324 [Modern Slavery Act 2015 - Explanatory Notes \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#); the specialised Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service, provided under s48 of the Modern Slavery Act, has a statutory duty to represent child victims of trafficking, to ensure that their voices are heard and that their best interests are taken into account in all decisions about them.

325 [\(HUM0058\)](#), Barnardo's.

326 [\(HUM0120\)](#), supplementary evidence, Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding.

Transitions to adulthood

279. A number of stakeholders, including the Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE, Barnardo's and ECPAT UK, expressed concerns to us about the transition to adulthood for child victims of trafficking and the shortage of support available to these young people in care. They highlighted particular challenges for child victims who may be at increased risk of re-trafficking. This includes child victims who have insecure immigration status and who may fear they are liable for detention and removal, some of whom may have lived in the UK for many years. Additional issues raised relate to structural barriers that prevent those young people accessing education and employment opportunities.³²⁷ ECPAT UK notes this period is particularly challenging for child victims, who may be at increased risk of re-trafficking as they transition to adulthood given the sudden drop-in support for those in care.

280. There is wide variation among local authorities in the transition pathways from child to adult safeguarding services. Guidance exists for child victims and for adult victims, but it does not adequately take account of child victims who turn eighteen who have received or are waiting for a National Referral Mechanism decision and who have high-level needs not well catered for in adult safe houses.

281. *The Home Office should amend its Modern Slavery statutory guidance to include guidance on 'turning 18' to ensure that ageing out of the care system does not reduce holistic support for recovery and prevention of re-trafficking.*

Child criminal exploitation

282. Child criminal exploitation is the most prevalent form of child exploitation reported into the NRM, for the year ending 2022, with 43% (3,013) of children referred for this form of exploitation, followed by labour exploitation (1,300 referrals) and sexual exploitation (679 referrals).³²⁸ Home Office data reveals that many children (1,038 in 2022) experience multiple forms of exploitation simultaneously. However, several organisations, including the Office for National Statistics, the Children's Society and the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, report that the true extent of child criminal exploitation is not known, and is likely to be much higher than officially reported numbers suggest. The Children's Society argued that this is because children find it difficult to disclose their experiences to professionals, often owing to "fear of their perpetrators, of not being believed, or because of earlier negative experiences with police or social care".³²⁹

283. The National Crime Agency told us that criminal exploitation is "primarily as a result of UK victims of coerced drug distribution (linked to county lines offending)". It also reported that cannabis cultivation is likely to be the second most prevalent form of criminal exploitation, while other forms of criminal exploitation, such as acquisitive crime and begging occur less frequently.³³⁰ The Rights Lab, University of Nottingham, presented to us the view that the long-term impact of child criminal exploitation, particularly within drugs supply operations, remains unclear, but it is likely that lessons learned by criminals

327 (HUM0094), Baroness Butler-Sloss; (HUM0082), ECPAT UK.

328 See section 2.3, [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

329 [Child victims of modern slavery in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#); (HUM0037), the Children's Society; (HUM0048) the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

330 (HUM0084) National Crime Agency.

during the pandemic will inform practices that make offending harder to detect and increasingly resilient to disruption by law enforcement. This view was also presented by Barnardo's.³³¹

284. We heard concerns from a number of stakeholders, including the Children's Society, that the focus on identifying perpetrators of child trafficking "remains woefully inadequate", with worryingly low levels of law enforcement responses to them in comparison to the number of children who are exploited.³³² For example, in the period from April 2016 to December 2021, the CPS completed 185 prosecutions under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 where children were victims, and only half of these (51%) were successful.³³³

Defining child criminal exploitation

285. There is currently no statutory definition of child criminal exploitation in UK law or in the law of any other Council of Europe member state. However, different interpretations of this crime exist, for example the Home Office's Modern Slavery statutory guidance defines child criminal exploitation as:

Child Criminal Exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.³³⁴

The Serious Violence Strategy (2018) and the Home Office's Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit (2019) slightly expand on this definition.³³⁵

286. While these definitions are helpful, and legal instruments and other guidance contain examples of exploitation, in practice this allows for inconsistencies in how public authorities record, investigate, and prosecute this crime.³³⁶

287. Some organisations, including the Children's Society and Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, argue that the lack of a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation and the consequent different interpretations of this crime result in the continuing prosecution of children for crimes committed as a result of exploitation, such as drug- or weapons-related offences.³³⁷ This may mean that children in these situations are not considered victims of exploitation and in consequence not referred to the NRM.

288. Similarly, Barnardo's, and combined evidence from Just for Kids Law, Youth Justice Legal Centre and Children's Rights Alliance for England, argued that there is a general lack of understanding and recognition of child criminal exploitation, resulting in child

331 [\(HUM0051\)](#), written evidence submitted on behalf of the Rights Lab, University of Nottingham; [\(HUM0058\)](#), written evidence submitted by Barnardo's.

332 [\(HUM0037\)](#), the Children's Society.

333 [Child victims of modern slavery in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#), March 2022.

334 [Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales \(under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015\) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), updated 9 October 2023.

335 [Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), April 2018; [Child exploitation disruption toolkit \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).

336 [\(HUM0048\)](#), written Evidence submitted by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

337 [\(HUM0048\)](#), written Evidence submitted by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.

victims not being identified. They highlighted the concerning links between child criminal exploitation and children excluded or going missing from education.³³⁸

289. In supplementary written evidence, Sarah Dines MP told us that the Government does not currently feel there is “compelling evidence” to require the introduction of a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation. However, she did not explain what available evidence the Home Office had considered and why it was not “compelling”. She reported that the Home Office was working across Government to “identify areas of learning and improvement with regard to child criminal exploitation and county lines”.

290. Similarly, in the recent Government Response to the Home Affairs Committee’s report on Drugs,³³⁹ the Government did not accept our recommendation to consider adopting a statutory definition on Child Criminal Exploitation. In both instances they listed a range of publications in which child criminal exploitation is defined, including in some statutory guidance and that the Home Office regularly consults partners, including law enforcement, on the legislative framework for child criminal exploitation and “will act upon evidence if additional legislation is required”.³⁴⁰

Non-punishment principle

291. Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 introduces a defence for victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, including children, who are compelled to commit criminal offences as a result of their exploitation.³⁴¹ However, as highlighted by several organisations, including ECPAT UK and Wilsons Solicitors, the statutory defence only provides a defence after prosecution; it does not protect victims from being prosecuted in the first instance and is therefore not compliant with the international definition of non-penalisation, under which states should at least provide for the possibility that victims of trafficking should not be prosecuted or punished for criminal activities they have been compelled to commit as a direct consequence of being trafficked.³⁴² In light of this, ECPAT UK argued that “the statutory defence can therefore only act as a very limited safety net, rather than preventing criminalisation from occurring in the first place”.³⁴³

292. A 2017 UNICEF report found that there is a very low level of awareness among prosecutors, police, and defence solicitors of the non-punishment provision (s45 defence) for children, as well as little monitoring of the use of the presumption against prosecution or of the statutory defence across the UK.³⁴⁴ In line with these findings, Danny Bayraktarova of Wilsons Solicitors told us that children are often seen as perpetrators rather than victims of crime, which informs how the prosecution will be pursued. She reported, based on her practice, that “sometimes, criminal practitioners are not necessarily aware of the existence of the [s45] defence”, which raises subsequent challenges. In written evidence, the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group also identified inconsistency in the application of

338 ([HUM0058](#)), Barnardo’s; ([HUM0040](#)), combined evidence from Just for Kids Law; Youth Justice Legal Centre and Children’s Rights Alliance for England.

339 [Home Affairs Committee, Drugs: Government Response to the Committee’s Third Report of Session 2022–23, HC 127](#), published 14 November 2023.

340 ([HUM0120](#)), Sarah Dines MP, former Minister for Safeguarding.

341 The non punishment principle is discussed in more depth in chapter three.

342 Directive 2011/36/EU on combating and preventing trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. (taken from ECPAT UK evidence, ([HUM0082](#))); Council of Europe Convention on Action against the Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT), Article 26.

343 ([HUM0082](#)), ECPAT UK.

344 [Unicef-UK-Briefing_Victim-Not-Criminal_2017.pdf](#).

s45, for both adults and children.³⁴⁵

293. In oral evidence, Laura Duran, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Research at ECPAT UK, expressed concern to us about the detrimental impact of the criminal justice process on children who may be victims of criminal exploitation.³⁴⁶ She suggested that full respect for the best interests of the child be guaranteed at all times. This includes the complete implementation of the non-punishment principle regarding children compelled to commit trafficking-related offences, who must be recognised as such and protected from prosecution and penalization.

294. We are deeply concerned that the absence of a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation, and the consequent different interpretations of this crime, leads to children continuing to be prosecuted for crimes committed as a result of exploitation—or example, drug-related offences. There is also inconsistency in the treatment of children when a section 45 defence is raised. It should not be incumbent on children to raise a section 45 defence as the only means to get protection from prosecution.

295. We are disappointed that the Government does not currently agree that there is compelling evidence to introduce a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation. We urge the Government to read our evidence and to consider introducing a statutory definition to ensure a) that children who commit criminal offences as a consequence of their own exploitation receive appropriate support and protection as victims, and b) that people who criminally exploit children receive a proportionate law enforcement response.

296. Local authority safeguarding guidance needs include the external threats that traffickers pose to children who may be in local authority care even after they have been removed from immediate harm.

Missing children

297. The Illegal Migration Act received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023. It enshrines in statute the powers of the Secretary of State to arrange for the provision of accommodation in England for unaccompanied children. We received compelling evidence about children being accommodated in hotel accommodation paid for by the Home Office and the high degree of risk of children going missing and being trafficked from these hotels. From July 2021 to 19 October 2022, there were 391 episodes where children went missing from Home Office hotels, with over 200 children still considered missing.³⁴⁷ On 14 June 2023, the Home Secretary said in evidence to us that there were, at that time, no children in Home Office hotels. However, in follow-up evidence on 3 August she wrote to us that “as of 2 July, there were 218 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in Home Office hotels”.³⁴⁸ This suggests that Government practice of placing newly arrived unaccompanied children in hotels is continuing, with the likelihood of children continuing to go missing.

345 [\(HUM0048\)](#), the Anti-trafficking Monitoring Group.

346 [Q426](#).

347 [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#): Undocumented Migrants: children; [\(HUM0089\)](#), Human Trafficking Foundation; [Protect unaccompanied asylum seeking children - Good Law Project](#).

348 [Letter from the Home Secretary to the Chair of HASC](#), 3 August 2023. UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

298. Children accommodated in hotels are outside the child protection welfare system.³⁴⁹ We heard evidence that social workers are not always placed within that hotel and that there may be days before a social worker visits, meaning limited or no access to social workers for some children. It was also reported to us that, unlike in local authority care, some children accommodated in Home Office hotels do not receive adequate access to health care; interpreting services are poor; children are struggling to request help; and welfare assessments are not detailed enough.³⁵⁰ The Children's Society reported that some children had spent over two months in a hotel before being accommodated by a local authority.³⁵¹

299. The Home Secretary wrote to us on 19 April 2023 and stated that reports of UASC missing from hotels "are extremely concerning" but added that the Home Office had not seen "any evidence of children being taken against their will". She suggested that children may leave the hotels for a number of reasons "such as visiting family".³⁵² However, evidence received from ECPAT UK identified that families or individuals known to traffickers can be complicit in trafficking children once they arrive in the UK.³⁵³ Allyson Davies, Assistant Director of Children's Services at Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service, summed up how traffickers groom children by targeting and honing an offer, focussing on whatever may be potentially missing from the child's life. The offer of traffickers can far exceed that on offer from the Government.³⁵⁴ David Neal, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI), found in his inspection report, on the use of hotels for accommodating unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, that some children as young as 10, including girls aged 12 and 13, had been placed alone in these hotels with no access to legal or mental health support. The ICBI report, published in October 2022, recommended an end to that practice within six months.³⁵⁵

300. Unaccompanied children living in contingency accommodation are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked, or re-trafficked. Between July 2021 and 19 October 2022, there were 391 episodes where children went missing from hotels. This is unacceptable.

301. *Clearly it is not appropriate to accommodate children in hotels, particularly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Government needs to show greater urgency in securing more appropriate accommodation, that is suitable for the needs of children, notwithstanding the need to keep families together.*

302. *Every child who goes missing from home or care should be considered as a potential victim of trafficking, even if they are subsequently found safe.*

303. *The Committee has previously challenged the Home Office with our concerns that children have gone missing. The Home Office must update the Committee with its progress in finding these children by the end of this year, and we expect to receive regular updates thereafter until the problem is resolved.*

349 [\(HUM0082\)](#), ECPAT UK.

350 [Q418](#).

351 [\(HUM0037\)](#), the Children's Society.

352 [Letter from the Home Secretary to Chair of HASC](#), 19 April 2023.

353 [Q424](#).

354 [Q425](#); [\(HUM0037\)](#), the Children's Society.

355 [\(HUM0082\)](#) ECPAT UK; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration inspection. (2022), [An inspection of the use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children \(UASC\)](#).

Conclusions and recommendations

Work of the Home Office

1. We are deeply concerned that the Government is prioritising irregular migration issues at the expense of tackling human trafficking. The Government's de-prioritisation of human trafficking is not reflective of the scale of the threat it poses or the gravity of the crimes involved. As was expressed by several stakeholders, human trafficking and modern slavery is not an immigration offence (an offence against the State), it is an exploitation offence (an offence against the individual). (Paragraph 27)
2. *The Home Office must not conflate immigration with human trafficking and modern slavery at the expense of protection of victims of human trafficking.* (Paragraph 28)
3. The Home Office's shift in policy focus to irregular migration is also demonstrated by the Government's long delay in producing a new Modern Slavery Strategy and by the recent transfer of elements of responsibility for modern slavery and human trafficking from the Safeguarding Minister's portfolio to that of the Immigration Minister. (Paragraph 29)
4. *The Home Office and respective public authorities should treat human trafficking as primarily a protection issue and not an irregular migration concern. Future legislation must take account of the legitimate protection and support needs of all victims including UK nationals.* (Paragraph 30)
5. *The Home Office, working together with key human trafficking sector partners, criminal justice practitioners and survivors, must accelerate and scale up efforts to develop a new and overhauled Modern Slavery Strategy. This should include actions to address all forms of exploitation, including the increasing prevalence of criminal exploitation of children and adults, and exploitation facilitated by technology. To identify better the proceeds from trafficking crimes, the new Strategy should include actions to enhance partnerships with financial intelligence, the financial services industry and financial regulators. A child-specific strategy should also be developed to take account of children's specific needs and vulnerabilities.* (Paragraph 31)
6. *In accordance with the recommendation made by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in its 2023 UK country visit report, we urge the Government to withdraw the issue of modern slavery and human trafficking from the Minister for Immigration and reinstate the full remit of human trafficking and modern slavery policy to the Minister for Safeguarding alone.* (Paragraph 32)
7. The Home Office's approach to stakeholder engagement has been lackadaisical. It has taken the Home Office two years to launch a new formation of stakeholder groups (Modern Slavery Stakeholder Forums), during which time key legislation affecting victims of trafficking has been enacted with minimal or non-existent consultation with key human trafficking stakeholders. This is unacceptable. It is evident that this lack of Home Office accountability has been further exacerbated by the vacancy of the post of Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner for the last eighteen months, which we will discuss later in this chapter. (Paragraph 40)

8. The Modern Slavery Unit's outputs, including belated information about its new model for stakeholder engagement (Modern Slavery Stakeholder Forums) is opaque to say the least. We deeply regret that a unit comprising 56 staff has prioritised work on the Illegal Migration Act to the detriment of preventing human trafficking, protecting victims and prosecuting offenders responsible for human trafficking. (Paragraph 41)
9. *The Home Office should urgently resume publication of its annual reports on human trafficking. It should publish a Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery annual report by March 2024 to include key outputs and Home Office policies that are in development to address shortcomings, including prevention work, victim support for those in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and post-NRM, and support for UK nationals.* (Paragraph 42)
10. We welcome the Home Office's appointment of a new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC) and look forward to inviting her to speak to us as soon as possible, to understand how she intends to prioritise the prevention of human trafficking—including tackling demand, the prosecution of offenders and the protection of victims. However, it is unacceptable and appears to be, at least in spirit, a breach of the statutory duty that there has been no IASC in post for a year and a half, during which time key legislative changes have been made and levels of public discourse around modern slavery have been high. Furthermore, there was no good reason for the delay in this appointment. The role of the Commissioner is crucial not only because of the Government's statutory obligation to have an IASC in post, but also because it provides an essential, independent voice that is vital in the current political debate about human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. (Paragraph 49)
11. *There must be a pre-appointment hearing with the Home Affairs Committee, for the next IASC to be appointed which would allow that Committee to participate in an advisory capacity that better informs the Minister's final decision.* (Paragraph 50)

Prevention

12. Enforcement of the current provisions of Section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is insufficient to deter those who buy sex. (Paragraph 63)
13. *Section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 should be strengthened and penalties upon conviction increased to ensure comparability with other sexual and trafficking offences and to increase the deterrent value.* (Paragraph 64)
14. *There should be much greater use of section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 by police forces and the CPS. This should be supported by additional training on the use of section 53A, provided by the College of Policing, and prioritisation by the CPS and police forces. The Government should publish annual data on prosecutions and convictions under section 53A.* (Paragraph 65)
15. *The Government should conduct a comprehensive review of all legislative, policy and educational initiatives that are underway to reduce demand for sexual exploitation and report on this by June 2024. This review should compare the UK's approach with*

European countries and consider whether the Government should follow others in criminalising all acts of paying for or attempting to pay for sex and decriminalising victims of exploitation by removing penalties for soliciting. (Paragraph 66)

16. *The Government's Modern Slavery Strategy, which we have recommended be updated, must set out how the Government will combat the demand for sexual exploitation created by individuals who pay for sex. (Paragraph 67)*
17. *The new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner should actively consider including a strategy for reducing demand for sexual exploitation in the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Strategic Plan. (Paragraph 68)*
18. *To ensure that the severity of sexual exploitation is recognised, the Home Office and law enforcement should refrain from using the term 'sex work'. (Paragraph 69)*
19. *The Government should do more to prevent human trafficking for labour exploitation in both the UK and in corporate supply chains. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 should be strengthened by enforcing fines for non-compliance with its Transparency in Supply Chains provisions and by encouraging businesses to practice due diligence when potential modern slavery is discovered. The Government should address systemic gaps in various seasonal visa schemes, and sectors with high demand for foreign labour, which are creating environments susceptible to labour exploitation. It should also ensure that the rate of inspectors within the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority is in line with, or above, the international standard to allow for proactive inspections. (Paragraph 74)*
20. *Section 54 (publishing a transparency statement) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 must be strengthened by utilising sanctions for non-compliance. This should also be extended to the public sector, to reduce the risk of the UK purchasing goods produced using forced labour. (Paragraph 75)*
21. *The Government must review safe visa routes for sectors with high demand for labour. This review must consider whether more safe routes can be created to address demand. (Paragraph 76)*
22. *The Government should allocate funding for an increase in the number of Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority inspectors, so that more proactive monitoring and enforcement of labour laws can be implemented by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority. (Paragraph 77)*
23. *Criminal exploitation is the most reported form of human trafficking and modern slavery, but there is insufficient training for law enforcement personnel in victim recognition and inadequate support for victims of criminal exploitation. (Paragraph 81)*
24. *The Home Office should review its Modern Slavery statutory guidance on criminal exploitation every six months to be inclusive of emerging intelligence for this form of trafficking. (Paragraph 82)*

25. *Ofcom should set out in its codes of practice the responsibility of technology companies for proactively identifying and tackling human trafficking on their online platforms, with significant penalties imposed for non-compliance with their statutory duties. (Paragraph 88)*
26. Websites advertising prostitution significantly facilitate trafficking for sexual exploitation. The threat posed by websites advertising prostitution, the continuing failure of their owners to implement even the most basic safeguards against pimping and trafficking, and the sheer scale of trafficking for sexual exploitation they facilitate, is at total odds with the National Crime Agency and Home Office's decision to collaborate with them. We found this public partnership working inexplicable, particularly given the total absence of evidence that it has led to a reduction in the scale of trafficking facilitated by these websites—and the flagrant facilitation of trafficking enabled by, for instance, single individuals being allowed to advertise multiple women for prostitution. (Paragraph 97)
27. *Legislation which bans third party profit-taking from the prostitution of another person should be extended to prohibit any individual or company from enabling and/or profiting from the prostitution of another person, including facilitation that takes place via online, digital services, websites and the internet. (Paragraph 98)*
28. *The Home Office and law enforcement should be taking all measures possible to tackle trafficking for sexual exploitation online, so that it is no longer so easy or profitable for perpetrators to make money from sexual exploitation, including by 'following the money' and exploring links to money laundering and other organised crime gang-related activities and criminality. (Paragraph 99)*
29. *Until new legislation is introduced prohibiting profiting from or enabling the prostitution of another person, law enforcement should utilise all available legislation to investigate and hold accountable websites that facilitate trafficking for sexual exploitation. This includes legislation prohibiting companies from benefiting from the proceeds of crime and preventative measures such as Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders. (Paragraph 100)*
30. *In order to enforce the provisions in the Online Safety Act requiring websites to take action against trafficking occurring on their sites, Ofcom should take immediate and full enforcement action against any website advertising prostitution that enables the same phone number to be used in multiple adverts, fails to independently verify the age and identify of every individual advertised on their website, allows single individuals and/or single accounts to advertise multiple individuals for prostitution, allows anonymised payments, and allows any individual to place or pay for another person's prostitution advert. (Paragraph 101)*

Policing and prosecution

31. The high number of referrals into the National Referral Mechanism and the number of live investigations together highlight the ability to identify human trafficking and exploitation that occurs in the UK. These cases are resource-intensive and potentially complex; however, the low prosecution rates are unacceptable. The criminal justice system faces constant competing resource demands in this area; however, it needs to

be a Government priority to increase the charging and conviction rates for modern slavery and human trafficking offences, to reflect the seriousness of this crime. (Paragraph 107)

32. *Criminal justice practitioners, including the police in England and Wales, the National Crime Agency and Crown Prosecution Service, must urgently review and then accelerate and scale up their efforts to investigate, prosecute and effectively adjudicate human trafficking and modern slavery cases. Cross-organisation working must support the priority goal of evidence gathering.* (Paragraph 108)
33. The National Crime Agency recognises Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery as a national threat; in consequence it should be a national priority. Yet it remains unclear the extent to which police forces prioritise the detection and investigation of human trafficking and modern slavery offences. (Paragraph 113)
34. *All Police and Crime Commissioners should actively consider setting modern slavery and human trafficking as a priority in their police and crime plans.* (Paragraph 114)
35. *In collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Home Office should direct the College of Policing to collate learning from forces that are effective in pursuing and investigating modern slavery and human trafficking and work with the Crown Prosecution Service to secure convictions. This record should be then shared with all other forces.* (Paragraph 115)
36. We remain unclear to what extent front line personnel and police officers are trained in human trafficking and modern slavery matters. Nor do we have data in the proportion of police forces which benefit from specialist human trafficking units. The Government's forthcoming new Modern Slavery Strategy should address both these information weaknesses. (Paragraph 121)
37. *Chief Constables must ensure that their police officers and public-facing staff (including non-specialist staff, as appropriate) are supported through initial and ongoing training and learning, specialist policing resources and victim support arrangements, so that they are able to identify effectively and support potential victims of modern slavery.* (Paragraph 122)
38. *Training should be centralised, for example via the National Police Chiefs' Council Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration training resources. Tackling human trafficking should be recognised as a national law enforcement priority and be resourced at a level commensurate with the harm it causes to these vulnerable victims of crime.* (Paragraph 123)
39. *The Government should direct that every police force is provided with a dedicated modern slavery and human trafficking specialist team.* (Paragraph 124)
40. Financial investigations are essential to tackling organised crime and traffickers, particularly for evidence-led prosecutions. However, we heard that these specialists can be hard to resource. (Paragraph 127)
41. *The Government needs to ensure that appropriate priority is placed on resourcing financial investigations within law enforcement bodies.* (Paragraph 128)

42. *Every modern slavery and human trafficking specialist unit must have a dedicated financial investigator. (Paragraph 129)*
43. Some police forces have had success in investigating and charging modern slavery and human trafficking cases under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 using evidence-led investigations. (Paragraph 137)
44. There is an evidence-led mindset in relation to investigating domestic abuse which is promoted by the UK's College of Policing but which does not seem to be the case for modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT): no equivalent evidence-led prosecution guidance exists for MSHT. (Paragraph 138)
45. *It is the case that investigations into all forms of human trafficking should proactively consider an evidence-led prosecutions approach, with the CPS guidance on domestic abuse and evidential opportunities being transferable to human trafficking. (Paragraph 139)*
46. *The Home Office should include a section on evidence-led prosecutions in its modern slavery statutory guidance drawing on Article 27 (1) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT). Similarly, the Crown Prosecution Service should amend its Guidance to Prosecutors on modern slavery and the College of Policing should include in its Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on modern slavery training content. (Paragraph 140)*
47. The National Crime Agency's (NCA) remit is not only international but also includes internal organised crime group threats. The NCA's work has been mostly diverted to focus on tackling smuggling upstream, in line with the Government's focus on organised immigration crime. The diverting of resources away from modern slavery and human trafficking impacts the fight against both UK-based trafficking and at the international level. (Paragraph 144)
48. *International cooperation should not be focused on people smuggling to the detriment of efforts to combat modern slavery and human trafficking and prevent exploitation of the victims. (Paragraph 145)*
49. *The Home Office should include a clear plan of international programme work in the new Modern Slavery strategy. This should include investment in joint investigation teams that intersect with human trafficking vulnerabilities. (Paragraph 146)*
50. Despite legislative provisions being in place since 2015, prosecution and convictions rates are still comparatively low across the UK. This is unacceptable. (Paragraph 156)
51. *To increase the number of prosecutions, the Government must create and supply additional training for criminal justice practitioners on identifying victims and prosecuting human traffickers. (Paragraph 157)*
52. *The Government must take steps to encourage greater cross-partnership working between the Crown Prosecution Service, policing and the National Crime Agency. This should involve earlier involvement of the CPS in policing investigations. (Paragraph 158)*

53. Victims of human trafficking are continuing to be prosecuted for criminal acts they were compelled to commit. The evidence suggests that this is mainly due to an insufficient understanding amongst investigators, prosecutors, judges, and defence lawyers of the statutory defence available to such victims, and when or how that defence should be applied. (Paragraph 166)
54. *The Government should review the training and guidance available to criminal justice practitioners to ensure it includes clear and consistent information on the s45 statutory defence. This training should be provided across all bodies in the criminal justice system.* (Paragraph 167)
55. *Law enforcement should make early assessments of s45 cases in areas that are known to be connected to human trafficking (for example, cannabis cultivation) to identify any indicators of trafficking and then fully investigate where an offence is apparent or alleged.* (Paragraph 168)
56. *In line with the recommendations on s45 of the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings third UK report, the Government should:*
 - a) *ensure that the non-punishment provision can be applied to all offences that victims of trafficking were compelled to commit, by ensuring that victims are promptly identified and receive adequate support from their first contact with law enforcement agencies; and*
 - b) *ensure that the allocation of the burden of proof does not substantially hinder the application of the non-punishment provision.* (Paragraph 169)
57. *The definition of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 should be amended to remove the requirement for the exploitation to have involved travel.*
 - a) *The Modern Slavery Act 2015 should be amended to clarify that the consent of the victim is irrelevant not just in relation to the travel, but in relation to the exploitation itself.* (Paragraph 174)
58. Engaging with victims and building rapport and trust not only supports better outcomes for victims but can lead to a better evidence base and therefore to more successful prosecutions. (Paragraph 180)
59. The role fulfilled by Victim Navigators is essential to supporting victims in the criminal justice process and enabling investigation teams to build evidential cases. (Paragraph 181)
60. *Victim support must be at the centre of the investigation and prosecution process. The Victim Navigator programme should be expanded and utilised in all cases. A victim centred approach will take account of culturally appropriate support and good communication with NRM support services.* (Paragraph 182)

Identification and Protection

61. The extensive time taken for Conclusive Grounds decision-making within the National Referral Mechanism is unacceptable. Lengthy decision-making is detrimental to victims' mental health and wellbeing and puts significant pressure on the services that support them during this time. (Paragraph 191)
62. *We recommend that the Home Office significantly reduces the number of days taken to make National Referral Mechanism decisions and clears the backlog of National Referral Mechanism decisions. It should aim for the target timeframe outlined in the Modern Slavery statutory guidance and should set a target date for clearing the backlog of June 2024.* (Paragraph 192)
63. *The Home Office should report in its annual and quarterly statistics on the waiting times for all cases within the system, the amount of time for which referrals are suspended, withdrawn, or closed, so that a better picture can be drawn of actual waiting times.* (Paragraph 193)
64. Recruitment campaigns and the training of new National Referral Mechanism staff are welcome, and we look forward to the Home Office notifying us when the promised 200 new staff are recruited by the end of 2023. However, the attrition rate remains unacceptably high, and the Home Office must address this urgently. (Paragraph 196)
65. *The Home Office must recruit the promised 200 National Referral Mechanism decision-makers by the end of 2023 and focus on reducing the attrition rate to 15%. This should be done through increased resourcing, training and support for ongoing staff, as well as through enhanced recruitment campaigns. We recommend that the Home Office collects data on why decision-makers are leaving, to inform how to reduce attrition rates further.* (Paragraph 197)
66. *The Home Office should include in its quarterly National Referral Mechanism statistics data on the number of Competent Authority staff, setting out how many are Reasonable Grounds/Conclusive Grounds decision makers, how many are new staff, and giving the attrition rate of staff.* (Paragraph 198)
67. *We recommend that the Home Office either reinstate the multi-agency assurance process or establish a similar quality assurance process.* (Paragraph 201)
68. A myriad of challenges within the National Referral Mechanism system are overwhelming First Responders' already limited capacity to identify and support potential victims of human trafficking. However, the Home Office is not presently accepting applications for more First Responder Organisations, nor improving the resources which existing First Responders have in order to overcome capacity issues. Furthermore, statutory First Responders lack training on their legal responsibilities when encountering a potential victim of human trafficking. (Paragraph 206)
69. *We recommend that the Home Office develops and maintains a nationwide training programme for both statutory and non-statutory First Responder Organisations. This training should include identifying victims and recognising indicators of human*

trafficking; gathering information on what has happened to them in a trauma-informed way; the National Referral Mechanism referral process; and supporting the individual after a referral has been made. (Paragraph 207)

70. *We strongly recommend that the Home Office recommences immediately considering applications from specialist front line organisations to become a First Responder Organisation. (Paragraph 208)*
71. *We recommend the Home Office reviews, together with current First Responder Organisations, the funding for such organisations. This review should consider specifically the case for the Home Office providing further funding to First Responder Organisations supporting victims waiting on National Referral Mechanism decisions that are extensively delayed. (Paragraph 209)*
72. *The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and revisions to the Modern Slavery statutory guidance have changed the amount and type of evidence required for a potential victim to be referred into the National Referral Mechanism decision-making process. It is unclear what the impact of either of these changes will be on either victims and First Responders, but early data suggests a decline of positive Reasonable Grounds decisions for potential victims and a significantly increased draw on First Responder capacity. (Paragraph 214)*
73. *We recommend an independent review of the implementation of modern slavery provisions (Part 5) in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, conducted by a suitably qualified and independent professional, to start in January 2024. (Paragraph 215)*
74. *The Government should pause any requirement to provide third party evidence at the Reasonable Grounds stage until such an independent review has been concluded and has determined that the new requirements are not unduly burdensome. (Paragraph 216)*
75. *There has been a troubling and unwelcome rise in the number of adults choosing not to enter the National Referral Mechanism, who may be at risk of further exploitation. It is unclear why the Home Office does not collect, analyse, and publish data on why individuals are refusing to consent to enter the NRM. We recommend that the Home Office corrects this deficiency immediately. (Paragraph 221)*
76. *The Government's evidence for individuals 'abusing the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) system to gain asylum' is not compelling. There may be a few examples of individuals attempting to take advantage of the NRM, but the Home Office has failed to produce sufficient evidence to support its assertions of widespread abuse. A small number of cases cannot be allowed to jeopardise effective use of the NRM, which provides invaluable support to victims of human trafficking, nor should the Government conflate victims of human trafficking with irregular migration. (Paragraph 225)*
77. *We recommend that the Government publishes thorough and accurate data to support its assertions of significant abuse of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to claim asylum to enable objective assessment of the scale of the problem. This data should include: NRM decision outcomes for people who arrive in the UK on small boats; the number of victims positive Conclusive Grounds NRM decisions who receive a grant*

of Temporary Permission to Stay (and other forms of leave) to remain in the UK; those referred to the NRM who claim asylum, and their asylum outcomes, combined with their NRM referrals and outcomes; and the number and characteristics of people in immigration detention and prison who are referred to the NRM and their NRM decision outcomes. (Paragraph 226)

78. There is a shortage of appropriate safe housing for victims of human trafficking whilst they are within the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract. Accommodation provision varies significantly for children after referral to the National Referral Mechanism, and children are particularly vulnerable to having no access to specialist safe accommodation after they turn 18 years old. (Paragraph 233)
79. *We recommend that the Government increases the provision of safe accommodation available through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract for trafficking victims, including single-sex provision, while they await a National Referral Mechanism decision. (Paragraph 234)*
80. *Local authorities and safeguarding partners should develop a defined strategy for child victims to be transitioned to appropriate adult services with continuity of support to ensure that there is no gap in services such as mental health care. (Paragraph 235)*
81. Victims should be properly informed of their rights and options before entering the National Referral Mechanism, and access to free legal aid should be guaranteed. (Paragraph 240)
82. *We recommend that the Government provides victims of human trafficking with earlier and better access to legal aid. This must include the following areas that are currently 'out of scope': pre-NRM immigration advice; advice on identification as a victim of trafficking and modern slavery; advice on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme; advice for non-UK nationals on applying for international protection; and advice on the application of the non-punishment principle. (Paragraph 241)*
83. *The Government should also increase the legal aid rate for those dealing with human trafficking cases, not just those which fall under the Illegal Migration Act and should increase training for legal aid solicitors on human trafficking and the National Referral Mechanism process. We recommend that the Government publishes its plans for doing so by June 2024. (Paragraph 242)*
84. Survivors of human trafficking should continue to receive long-term support once they leave the National Referral Mechanism (NRM); however, there is clearly an absence of support for victims of human trafficking once they exit the statutory support provided under the MSVCC whilst in the NRM. This is in part because the Recovery Needs Assessment process is ineffective in assessing and meeting the needs of victims within 45 days following a positive Conclusive Grounds decision. (Paragraph 247)
85. *The Government should deliver on its commitment of 12 months' support for all victims with a positive Conclusive Grounds decision by the end of 2024. (Paragraph 248)*

86. *We support Recommendation 24 of the Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and urge the Government to formalise and clarify the duties of local authority agencies to support victims of slavery and trafficking once they have left the National Referral Mechanism. (Paragraph 249)*
87. *We recommend that survivors of human trafficking with a positive Conclusive Grounds decision be placed on priority needs lists for housing. (Paragraph 250)*
88. *We recommend that the Home Office immediately commissions an independent review of the Recovery Needs Assessment process to determine whether it works effectively for children and young adults transitioning into adult support services. (Paragraph 251)*

Trafficking of children

89. The National Referral Mechanism is not appropriate for children. The support is not defined as it is for adults, universally available or applied consistently. There is an overall lack of a joined-up approach across the National Referral Mechanism, child welfare and protection and criminal justice systems. (Paragraph 258)
90. We welcome the Home Office's devolved decision-making pilot for children. However, we are concerned that more than two years into the pilot the Home Office has still not published an evaluation of its outcomes. Furthermore, we are concerned that the pilot excludes children within 100 days of their 18th birthday, as well as age-disputed children, and is only available in 20 locations. (Paragraph 270)
91. *The Home office must publish an interim evaluation of the devolved decision-making pilot for children by January 2024, and thereafter a full evaluation of all phases of the Pilot by June 2024. If the outcomes are successful, all decision making for children must be transferred to local authorities within one year of the publication of the evaluation report. (Paragraph 271)*
92. *The Home Office must change the criteria for eligibility to allow local authority pilot locations to make National Referral Mechanism decisions for all children in their care, including those who are age-disputed; and not exclude those who are within 100 days of their 18th birthday. (Paragraph 272)*
93. The Government has been too slow to roll out Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTG). We welcome Sarah Dine MP's commitment to deliver national rollout of the service to cover all of England and Wales from April 2025, but it is unacceptable that after eight years in operation, only two-thirds of local authorities in England and Wales have ICTGs. Children in non-Independent Child Trafficking Guardians areas are not able to access the same support, which creates a postcode lottery. (Paragraph 277)
94. *The Home Office must complete the roll out of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTG) to all local authorities in England and Wales by June 2025, bringing in individual local authorities before then if they are ready. (Paragraph 278)*
95. There is wide variation among local authorities in the transition pathways from child to adult safeguarding services. Guidance exists for child victims and for adult

victims, but it does not adequately take account of child victims who turn eighteen who have received or are waiting for a National Referral Mechanism decision and who have high-level needs not well catered for in adult safe houses. (Paragraph 280)

96. *The Home Office should amend its Modern Slavery statutory guidance to include guidance on 'turning 18' to ensure that ageing out of the care system does not reduce holistic support for recovery and prevention of re-trafficking.* (Paragraph 281)
97. We are deeply concerned that the absence of a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation, and the consequent different interpretations of this crime, leads to children continuing to be prosecuted for crimes committed as a result of exploitation—for example, drug-related offences. There is also inconsistency in the treatment of children when a section 45 defence is raised. It should not be incumbent on children to raise a section 45 defence as the only means to get protection from prosecution. (Paragraph 294)
98. *We are disappointed that the Government does not currently agree that there is compelling evidence to introduce a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation. We urge the Government to read our evidence and to consider introducing a statutory definition to ensure a) that children who commit criminal offences as a consequence of their own exploitation receive appropriate support and protection as victims, and b) that people who criminally exploit children receive a proportionate law enforcement response.* (Paragraph 295)
99. *Local authority safeguarding guidance needs include the external threats that traffickers pose to children who may be in local authority care even after they have been removed from immediate harm.* (Paragraph 296)
100. Unaccompanied children living in contingency accommodation are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked, or re-trafficked. Between July 2021 and 19 October 2022, there were 391 episodes where children went missing from hotels. This is unacceptable. (Paragraph 300)
101. *Clearly it is not appropriate to accommodate children in hotels, particularly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Government needs to show greater urgency in securing more appropriate accommodation, that is suitable for the needs of children, notwithstanding the need to keep families together.* (Paragraph 301)
102. *Every child who goes missing from home or care should be considered as a potential victim of trafficking, even if they are subsequently found safe.* (Paragraph 302)
103. *The Committee has previously challenged the Home Office with our concerns that children have gone missing. The Home Office must update the Committee with its progress in finding these children by the end of this year, and we expect to receive regular updates thereafter until the problem is resolved.* (Paragraph 303)

Annex 1: Public engagement with the inquiry

On Tuesday 4 July 2023, the Home Affairs Committee invited ten survivors of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking to meet with the Committee as part of their human trafficking inquiry. The following themes emerged during the discussion:

Survivors want to rebuild their lives

I stay in the same house without the right to work, right to start one's life

The most pressing issue attendees described was the lack of opportunity to rebuild their lives. In particular, that several attendees were not able to gain employment. Several attendees who had received a positive Conclusive Grounds decisions, which confirmed that they were indeed victims of modern slavery, described how they were waiting years to gain the right to work. One attendee said that having no work in sight means she feels she has nothing to look towards and that she has been in limbo for years, which negatively impacts on her mental health.

Additionally, one attendee had received a positive Conclusive Grounds decision, had attempted to volunteer, to gain experience to enhance her job prospects, and was denied this as she did not have the right to work.

They give us positive decision and forget about us

Several attendees told us that they wished to gain employment so they would be able to move out of the supported accommodation that they were placed in, which is paid for by the Home Office. One attendee told the Committee how supporting survivors to start work, live independently, and pay tax, would save the UK Government money.

Despite the right to work being the main concern of many attendees, several also spoke about the lengthy delays in receiving a Conclusive Grounds decision from the National Referral Mechanism. For example, one attendee told us it took five years for them to receive a positive Conclusive Grounds decision. Attendees spoke of how waiting years for a decision impacted them negatively, as they wanted to move on with their lives but did not know what would happen to them next.

years after years, to still be in the same place we were years ago

Finally, two attendees who are British nationals described how they struggled to get access to, or to qualify for, things like legal aid or mental health support. One told us that “unless you're presenting as waving a knife, you're going to be on a waiting list”.

Trauma lasts a lifetime

traumatic experiences never leave us

Several attendees spoke about the lifelong impact of trauma, and how being able to disclose what has happened to victims can take years. Many of the attendees spoke about their use of mental health services over long periods of time, for example one attendee

described how she saw a psychologist for two years before she could start talking about what she had been through. Other attendees described in detail the severe dissociation they experienced due to their trauma, and how continued mental health support was crucial to their ongoing recovery.

how can you recover in two years?

Many attendees said that the Home Office did not understand the impact of trauma or the recovery process. They said that the NRM system lacked a trauma informed approach, as it expects victims to present in a certain way to receive support. Some attendees said that because the Home Office expects individuals to both recover and help authorities within a short time frame, this shows that they do not understand the recovery process. They told us how there should be better recognition of peoples' needs during the recovery process.

Support services provide invaluable support

I'm raising my head high because of Hestia, I can talk and hold my emotions because of Hestia

The attendees all spoke about the support that they received from support services like Unseen, Hestia, the Salvation Army, and the Human Trafficking Foundation. Many attendees expressed gratitude for the caseworkers and advocates that supported them, and how these services had facilitated accommodation and mental health support. A few attendees spoke of how their caseworkers would support them even outside of working hours. Some attendees felt that the Government relies on charities to do the majority of the support work, for example an attendee having received mental health support through these organisations, rather than the NHS. One attendee also raised concern over the low pay and long hours worked by caseworkers, arguing that the Government was exploiting the empathetic nature of these workers to support victims that the Government should be supporting themselves.

Several attendees expressed gratitude for the accommodation provided, however they did tell us about times they have felt unsafe, or experienced racism, within shared accommodation. This returned to the fact that many said they wanted to work so they would be able to live independently.

Will the Committee's work have any meaningful impact?

I wouldn't be surprised if we were round this table again in two years.

Attendees questioned the Committee on what they wanted to get from the meeting. One attendee noted that despite parliamentary attention on the issue, they [the survivors] were not seeing any changes. Another attendee said that while support organisations had given them a voice, they now wondered if there was any point talking about the issue. They asked whether the Committee's work would change anything, and how they would know if the meeting had any impact.

The Chair explained the Committee's inquiry into Human Trafficking and the contributions made to it by a wide variety of stakeholders. A Member explained that once published, the Government had to respond to the Committee's report. This would enable

scrutiny of the Government's position on the issue.

The members acknowledged the important contribution that meeting with survivors made for Committee members. These meetings allowed Members to make informed contributions when they spoke in the chamber on the issue.

One of the attendees said that they thought it was very important that Members listened to people with lived experience and that Members heard about what is and what is not working from the people directly affected by Government policies. However, he noted that he did not want his experiences to define him.

Attendees said that survivor voices should inform the work of the Home Office.

Annex 2: Informal virtual roundtable event: Romanian women and trafficking for sexual exploitation

On Tuesday 17 October 2023, the Home Affairs Committee held an informal roundtable with representatives from the Romanian Women's Lobby, Asociatia FREE, eLiberare, the Romanian Embassy, and the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-Ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings to explore the factors leading to human trafficking from Romania to the UK. In particular, the roundtable was an opportunity for the Committee to hear concerns about women who are trafficked to the UK for sexual exploitation.

The following four areas were discussed:

- a) The 'pull' factors making the UK an attractive destination for organised crime groups and individual exploiters engaged in trafficking.
- b) The 'push' factors that make women in Romania vulnerable to international sex trafficking.
- c) How to strengthen efforts to hold perpetrators to account.
- d) How to stop perpetrators exploiting Romanian women in the UK

The following themes emerged during the discussion:

Pull factors

Attendees told us that many Romanian women who emigrate to the UK are recruited with the promise of work, only to be forced into exploitation upon arrival. We heard how victims, at first, feel safe coming to the UK as a number of Romanian communities exist throughout, which makes it easier to integrate. Furthermore, we were told by one attendee who interviewed victims of trafficking who had been returned to Romania from European countries, including the UK, that despite their experience, over half would return to the UK due to better pay, better access to medical services, and better treatment by law enforcement.

We were told that the UK's "more tolerant" legislation on prostitution is also a key pull factor for perpetrators who force women into sexual exploitation. Additionally, the lack of meaningful online regulations means traffickers can easily use adult service websites (ASWs) as tools for exploitation. Attendees argued that this makes the UK an attractive destination for traffickers who can make a substantial income from forced sexual exploitation.

Push factors

We were told that a key push factor making women in Romania vulnerable to sex trafficking is their financial situation. Attendees explained that the minimum wage in Romania is incredibly low (approximately £363 per month) and that a third of children live below the

poverty line. We were told that there is a lack of access to higher education, with 68% of victims being reported to have only graduated from secondary school. Attention was also drawn to children in the care system, with 50,000 children being in the care of the state, 21,000 of whom have no parental involvement in their lives. The vulnerability of single mothers was highlighted as a particular concern, as we were told that there is a lack of Government support provided to many so they may be more likely to look for alternative income. Furthermore, we were told how shame and honour are prominent features of Romanian culture and that it is seen as honourable to financially support your family, regardless of the means used to do this. Therefore, some victims become involved in prostitution in the first place in order to care for their family. However, then they become vulnerable to exploitation.

Concerns were also raised about exploitation being facilitated through family members. Attendees told us that approximately 22% of victims of sexual exploitation were recruited by a family member and approximately 64% of female victims had a life partner who was benefitting from the money; known as the “lover boy” model, where men groom a woman for exploitation whilst acting as their boyfriend. Attendees emphasised the need for authorities to investigate family-enabled trafficking, as well as organised crime groups. However, concerns were also raised about the willingness of victims of family-enabled trafficking to partake in the reporting and prosecuting of those perpetrators due to their familial ties.

Technology-facilitated trafficking

We were told that twelve years ago, only 20% of cases had a technology component, but there are now very few cases that do not. Attendees made it clear that tech companies are not doing enough to combat exploitation done through technology, especially via social media and online platforms. We heard that as site-owners aren't responsible for third-party content at present, these companies still profit when being used by traffickers. Yet we were told that Romanian authorities are in conversation with social media companies like Meta and TikTok to better tackle human trafficking on their platforms.

One attendee told us that when reporting suspicious profiles on adult services websites to law enforcement, they find that they are rarely investigated. Furthermore, when site-owners are notified of their services being used as tools by human traffickers, the site owners are reluctant to act. Andrea Salvoni told us that if site owners acted, 20% of users and 55% of paying users would be lost, and thus it goes against their business model, and so he told us that criminal liability ought to be imposed. We heard about policy in Israel which allows prosecutors to shut down ASWs which has been successful, where the ‘popping back up’ of these sites was not as prevalent as was expected. We were told that even if these sites retreat to the dark web, which makes them more difficult to find, that was a deterrent itself as sex-buyers do not all work harder to find these sites.

How to tackle the problem

Attendees also explained that for Romanian women, the process of proving they are victims of human trafficking to the police or authorities is “cumbersome and slow.” We were told about one instance where a woman in the NRM had received a positive reasonable grounds decision and her case was being taken forward by UK law enforcement, but as her

trafficker was already being investigated for rape, the human trafficking element was not pursued. Concerns were raised as to whether this was a one-off case or standard practice.

We were told how pressure needs to be taken off the victim, and resources should be going towards tackling the sex buyers and the money associated. Expunging prostitution records, supporting the victims and their dependents, and having support schemes accessible whilst they wait for cases to be heard were all suggested as ways to mitigate the issue.

We were told how judicial cooperation between Romania & the UK is very strong, for example that Romania has 18 joint investigation teams worldwide, 10 of which are with the UK. Before Covid there were 12 embedded Romanian PCs working in UK teams, establishing direct contact. This system was seen to make it easy to verify information and start working on cases.

We were told that following and tracking the flow of the financial proceeds of exploitation was said to be critical, with the approaches taken by authorities in Canada and Cyprus being used as examples of success. Furthermore, attendees expressed that the seizure of perpetrators financial process would send the message that human trafficking is unprofitable.

Formal minutes

Wednesday 15 November 2023

Members present:

Dame Diana Johnson, in the Chair

Carolyn Harris

Tim Loughton

Alison Thewliss

Human trafficking

Draft Report (*Human trafficking*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 303 agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Annexes agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 9.00am.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 19 April 2023

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE; Professor Dame Sara Thornton, Professor of Practice in Modern Slavery Policy, University of Nottingham and Former Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

[Q1–41](#)

Wednesday 26 April 2023

Andrea Salvoni, Deputy Coordinator for Combatting Human Trafficking, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe; **Dr Katarina Schwarz**, Associate Director, The Rights Lab, University of Nottingham

[Q42–66](#)

Wednesday 10 May 2023

Sylvia Walby, Professor of Criminology, Royal Holloway, University of London; **Tatiana Gren-Jardan**, Head, Joint Modern Slavery Policy Unit Justice and Care and Centre for Social Justice; **Ruth Breslin**, Research Associate, The Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP)

[Q67–92](#)

Elysia McCaffrey, Chief Executive, Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA); **Kate Roberts**, Head of Policy, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)

[Q93–124](#)

Wednesday 7 June 2023

Neelam Patankar, Managing Director, Digital Ventures; **Professor Teela Sanders**, Professor of Criminology, University of Leicester; **Dr. Ben Brewster**, Research Fellow in Modern Slavery Perpetration, Rights Lab, University of Nottingham

[Q125–278](#)

Rhoda Grant, Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), Scottish Parliament

[Q279–305](#)

Wednesday 21 June 2023

Major Kathy Betteridge, Director of Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery, The Salvation Army; **James Fookes**, Chair, Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG); **Elaine Bass**, Director, National Returns Progression Command, Home Office; **Siobhan Jolliffe**, Head of Single Competent Authority, Home Office

[Q306–390](#)

Laura Durán, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Research, ECPAT UK; **Allyson Davies**, Assistant Director of Children's Services, Barnard's National Counter Trafficking Service; **Danny Bayraktarova**, Public Law and Human Rights Solicitor, Wilson Solicitors LLP

[Q391–427](#)

Wednesday 5 July 2023

Assistant Chief Constable Jim Pearce, Lead for Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime, National Police Chiefs' Council; **Lynette Woodrow**, Lead for Modern Slavery, Crown Prosecution Service; **Rob Jones CBE**, Director General, National Economic Crime Centre and Director of Threat Leadership, National Crime Agency

[Q428–493](#)

Stuart Peall, Detective Sergeant, Lancashire Police; **Caroline Haughey OBE KC**, Barrister, Furnival Chambers

[Q494–514](#)

Wednesday 19 July 2023

Miss Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding, Home Office; **Matthew Bligh**, Deputy Director for Policy on Illegal Migration, Home Office; **Rebecca Wyse**, Director of Tackling Exploitation and Abuse, Home Office; **Joanna West**, Director of Tackling Exploitation and Abuse, Home Office

[Q515–609](#)

Miss Sarah Dines MP, Minister for Safeguarding, Home Office; **Andrew Patrick**, Former UK Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

[Q610–628](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

HUM numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Abdo, Fighting Back with Technology Angie Hesham (PhD Candidate, University of Hull) ([HUM0025](#))
- 2 Amnesty International UK ([HUM0052](#))
- 3 Andell, Dr Paul (Associate Professor of Criminology, University of Suffolk) ([HUM0013](#))
- 4 Anonymised ([HUM0106](#))
- 5 Anonymised ([HUM0022](#))
- 6 Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU) ([HUM0085](#))
- 7 Anti-slavery International ([HUM0024](#))
- 8 Anti-slavery International; and Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG) ([HUM0048](#))
- 9 Antonopoulos, Professor Georgios (Professor of Criminology, Northumbria University) ([HUM0002](#))
- 10 Arise ([HUM0065](#))
- 11 Association of Labour Providers ([HUM0042](#))
- 12 Barnardo's ([HUM0058](#))
- 13 Broad, Dr Rose (Senior Lecturer, University of Manchester); and Gadd, Professor David (Professor, University of Manchester) ([HUM0010](#))
- 14 Butler-Sloss, Baroness (House of Lords) ([HUM0094](#))
- 15 CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) ([HUM0053](#))
- 16 CCLA Investment Management ([HUM0032](#))
- 17 Carnegie UK ([HUM0018](#))
- 18 Catch22 ([HUM0045](#))
- 19 Causeway Charitable Services ([HUM0038](#))
- 20 Changing Lives; The Angelou Centre; Ashiana; GROW; A Way Out; Together Women; Basis Yorkshire; and WomenCentre Calderdale and Kirklees ([HUM0028](#))
- 21 Costi, Human trafficking: technology & young victims Francesca (PhD candidate, University College London) ([HUM0046](#))
- 22 Council of Europe (GRETA) ([HUM0054](#))
- 23 Crown Prosecution Service ([HUM0107](#))
- 24 Davis, Dr Matthew (Law Lecturer and Researcher, University of Wolverhampton) ([HUM0003](#))
- 25 Decrim Now, English Collective of Prostitutes, SWARM (Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement), Sex Workers' Union, Amnesty UK, Freedom United, Liberty ([HUM0115](#))
- 26 Digital Ventures ([HUM0103](#))
- 27 Digital Ventures ([HUM0105](#))

- 28 Dines, Miss Sarah (Minister for Safeguarding, Home Office) ([HUM0120](#))
- 29 Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales ([HUM0081](#))
- 30 Drew , Ms Sandhya (Senior Lecturer , City, University of London) ([HUM0060](#))
- 31 ECPAT UK ([HUM0082](#))
- 32 English Collective of Prostitutes ([HUM0067](#))
- 33 Equality Now ([HUM0057](#))
- 34 Faulkner, Dr Elizabeth A. (Lecturer in Law, Keele University) ([HUM0006](#))
- 35 Freedom United ([HUM0023](#))
- 36 Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority ([HUM0101](#))
- 37 Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) ([HUM0111](#))
- 38 Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) ([HUM0056](#))
- 39 Glasgow City Council TARA Service ([HUM0088](#))
- 40 Goard, Christopher ([HUM0009](#))
- 41 Greater Manchester Combined Authority; and Challenger Partnership ([HUM0064](#))
- 42 Gren-Jardan, Tatiana (Head of the Modern Slavery Unit, Joint Modern Slavery Policy Unit Justice and Care and Centre for Social Justice) ([HUM0098](#))
- 43 Helen Bamber Foundation ([HUM0033](#))
- 44 Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, Sheffield Hallam University ([HUM0073](#))
- 45 Hestia ([HUM0080](#))
- 46 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services ([HUM0077](#))
- 47 Hoiry, Dr Xavier L' (Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Social Policy, University of Sheffield) ([HUM0012](#))
- 48 Home Office ([HUM0119](#))
- 49 Home Office ([HUM0093](#))
- 50 Hope for Justice ([HUM0086](#))
- 51 Human Trafficking Foundation ([HUM0089](#))
- 52 Independent Monitoring Boards ([HUM0078](#))
- 53 International Organization for Migration ([HUM0034](#))
- 54 Jesuit Refugee Service UK ([HUM0035](#))
- 55 Just for Kids Law (which includes the Youth Justice Legal Centre (YJLC) and the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)) ([HUM0040](#))
- 56 JustRight Scotland ([HUM0061](#))
- 57 Justice and Care; and Centre for Social Justice ([HUM0017](#))
- 58 KC, Caroline Haughey OBE ([HUM0108](#))
- 59 Kalayaan ([HUM0083](#))
- 60 Labour Exploitation Advisory Group (LEAG) ([HUM0047](#))
- 61 Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) ([HUM0074](#))
- 62 Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP) ([HUM0075](#))

- 63 Local Government Association ([HUM0044](#))
- 64 May, Mrs Theresa (Member of Parliament, House of Commons) ([HUM0104](#))
- 65 Metropolitan Police Service ([HUM0072](#))
- 66 Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit (MiCLU) at Islington Law Centre ([HUM0030](#))
- 67 Migrants at Work and Migrants' Rights Network ([HUM0117](#))
- 68 Mission and Public Affairs Council, Church of England ([HUM0020](#))
- 69 Murphy, Dr Carole (Director , Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse); Heys , Dr Alicia (Lecturer in Modern Slavery , Wilberforce Institute University of Hull); Barlow , Dr Craig (Forensic Criminologist, Craig Barlow Consultancy); and Wilkinson, Sophie (Researcher, Crest Advisory) ([HUM0068](#))
- 70 National Crime Agency ([HUM0116](#))
- 71 National Crime Agency ([HUM0084](#))
- 72 National Crime Agency; and National Police Chiefs' Council ([HUM0110](#))
- 73 National Institute for Health Research Applied Research Collaboration (NIHR ARC West), University of Bristol ([HUM0015](#))
- 74 National Police Chiefs' Council ([HUM0109](#))
- 75 Nordic Model Now! ([HUM0014](#))
- 76 One by One ([HUM0092](#))
- 77 Peall, DS Stuart (Detective Sergeant, Lancashire Police) ([HUM0113](#))
- 78 Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers ([HUM0007](#))
- 79 Rights Lab, University of Nottingham ([HUM0051](#))
- 80 Roberts, Kate (Head of Policy, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)) ([HUM0099](#))
- 81 Roberts, Kate (Head of Policy, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)) ([HUM0097](#))
- 82 SERP - The Sexual Exploitation Research Programme, UCD ([HUM0029](#))
- 83 Salvoni, Andrea (Acting Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, OSCE - Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) ([HUM0096](#))
- 84 Sanders, Professor Teela (Professor of Criminology, University of Leicester) ([HUM0019](#))
- 85 Scottish Government ([HUM0027](#))
- 86 Shiva Foundation ([HUM0059](#))
- 87 Stone, Hollie (Encompass Director, Azalea) ([HUM0079](#))
- 88 Taskforce on Victims of Human Trafficking in Immigration Detention ([HUM0039](#))
- 89 The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners ([HUM0090](#))
- 90 The Children's Society ([HUM0037](#))
- 91 The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre ([HUM0049](#))
- 92 The Salvation Army ([HUM0112](#))
- 93 The Salvation Army ([HUM0087](#))
- 94 The Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) ([HUM0102](#))
- 95 The Snowdrop Project ([HUM0031](#))

- 96 Thiemann, Dr Inga (Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Exeter); Polomarkakis, Dr Konstantinos Alexandris (Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Exeter); Sedacca, Dr Natalie (Assistant Professor in Employment Law, Durham University); Jiang, Dr Joyce (Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management, University of York); and Dias-Abey, Dr Manoj (Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Bristol) ([HUM0011](#))
- 97 Thornton, Dame Sara (Former Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner) ([HUM0063](#))
- 98 Trilateral Research ([HUM0008](#))
- 99 UK BME Anti-Slavery Network (BASNET) ([HUM0043](#))
- 100 UK Feminista ([HUM0026](#))
- 101 Uche, Dr Chinyere ; and Okwuosa, Dr Innocent ([HUM0070](#))
- 102 University of Birmingham ([HUM0036](#))
- 103 Unseen ([HUM0071](#))
- 104 Ventrella, Dr Matilde (Senior Lecturer in Law, Liverpool John Moores University); and Pulvirenti, Dr Rossella (Senior Lecturer in Law, Manchester Metropolitan University) ([HUM0021](#))
- 105 Violence, Health and Society (VISION) consortium ([HUM0004](#))
- 106 Walby, Sylvia (Professor, Royal Holloway University of London) ([HUM0100](#))
- 107 Walby, Sylvia (Professor, Royal Holloway University of London) ([HUM0095](#))
- 108 Ward, Professor Tony (Professor of Law, Northumbria University); and Fouladvand, Dr Shahrzad (Senior Lecturer in International Criminal Law, University of Sussex) ([HUM0069](#))
- 109 West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner ([HUM0091](#))
- 110 West Yorkshire Combined Authority ([HUM0050](#))
- 111 West Yorkshire Trading Standards ([HUM0041](#))
- 112 Wilding, Dr Jo (Lecturer in Law / researcher, University of Sussex) ([HUM0005](#))

Wilson Solicitors LLP ([HUM0016](#)) **List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament**

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2023–24

Number	Title	Reference
1st Special Report	Drugs: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022–23	HC 127

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Channel crossings, migration and asylum	HC 199
2nd	Asylum and migration: Albania	HC 197
3rd	Drugs	HC 198
4th	Terrorism (Protection of Premises) draft Bill	HC 1359
1st Special Report	The Macpherson Report: twenty-two years on: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2021–22	HC 274
2nd Special Report	Spiking: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 508
3rd Special Report	The investigation and prosecution of rape: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 507
4th Special Report	Channel crossings, migration and asylum: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 706
5th Special Report	Asylum and migration: Albania: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 1818

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Violence and abuse towards retail workers	HC 141
2nd	The UK's offer of visa and settlement routes for residents of Hong Kong	HC 191
3rd	The Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on	HC 139
4th	Appointment of the Chair of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority	HC 814

Number	Title	Reference
5th	The Windrush Compensation Scheme	HC 204
6th	Police Conduct and Complaints	HC 140
7th	Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Authorities in England	HC 1071
8th	Investigation and prosecution of rape	HC 193
9th	Spiking	HC 967
1st Special Report	Violence and abuse towards retail workers: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 669
2nd Special Report	The UK's offer of visa and settlement routes for residents of Hong Kong: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 682
3rd Special Report	The Windrush Compensation Scheme: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1098
4th Special Report	Police conduct and complaints: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1264

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (Coronavirus): Policing	HC 232
2nd	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (Coronavirus): domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home	HC 321
3rd	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (coronavirus): immigration and visas	HC 362
4th	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (Coronavirus): institutional accommodation	HC 562
5th	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): management of the borders	HC 563
6th	Appointment of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration	HC 1024
1st Special Report	Serious Youth Violence: Government Response to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–2019	HC 57
2nd Special Report	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (coronavirus): domestic abuse and risks of harm: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 661
3rd Special Report	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19: coronavirus: policing: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 660

Number	Title	Reference
4th Special Report	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): immigration and visas: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 909
5th Special Report	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): institutional accommodation: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 973
6th Special Report	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): management of the borders: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 974