

Modern Slavery in Britain

Slavery still thrives in Britain.

British Government estimates that there are up to 13,000 people in modern day slavery in the UK today.

Whilst most people are trafficked into the UK from overseas, there is also a significant number of British nationals in slavery. The most common countries of origin are Albania, Vietnam, Nigeria, Romania and Poland.

The most common purpose of trafficking is forced labour in



Photo: Dalia, 20, has been sold into sexual exploitation by her fiance
Photo: Dana Popa

10 things you didn't know about slavery in Britain

1. UK Government estimates there are up to 13,000 people in slavery in Britain today.
2. Only 1% of enslaved people in the UK have the chance of seeing their exploiter brought to justice.
3. In 2015, over 3,000 people, including nearly 1,000 children, were referred to British authorities as potential victims of slavery.
4. But, nearly 40% of them were still awaiting a decision about their victim status at the end of the year.
5. From those who have received a final decision, only less than half were recognised as victims.
6. Victims of slavery are four times less likely to be acknowledged as victims if they are non-European.
7. Up to a third of victims of slavery are estimated to be re-trafficked.
8. Children are often deliberately targeted for their vulnerability
9. Every fourth victim of slavery in the UK is a child.
10. 2016 saw the first conviction and sentencing of a British businessman for human trafficking.

industries such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and car washes. A significant proportion of women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Many people, mostly women and girls, end up in domestic slavery, others, especially children, are being forced into criminal activities such as cannabis production, petty theft, or begging.

How does it happen?

Typically, a person, often coming from a situation of poverty and the lack of employment opportunities, is offered a 'good job' in the UK. Often the victim has to take a loan from an agent to pay the recruitment fees and for the journey.

When the person arrives in Britain, the job and the conditions they were promised are completely different.

The passport is typically taken away, and they're told they need to pay off the debt before they can leave. Violence or threats are often used, both against the victim as well as their family back home.

"I worked without pay paving driveways. Men who tried to leave were beaten up by the gang who employed me."

Krzysztof, 50, from Poland

I had no time off, sometimes working from 7am until 4am. I slept on the floor of the children's room and was never allowed to leave the house.

Lara*, from Philippines

Story of Grace*, 20, from Nigeria

When I was ten-years-old, my parents died in a car crash. I slept on the streets, when a woman I met who took me home and made me work in her house.

When I was 15, she sent me to England and said I would work as a domestic worker.

On the first day in England, a man came, raped me and beat me – I was terrified. He said that if I didn't do what he said then they would keep beating me. He forced me to have sex with lots of different men he brought to the house.

Finally, I managed to run away and was found by the police.

Even though I was pregnant, and then had a baby, I was twice sent to live in an immigration detention centre. I didn't get any healthcare.

Only thanks to an organisation supporting trafficked women, I was taken to a safe house where I finally felt safe and had lots of support.

Fact sheet: slavery in the UK

The response

The UK's response to modern slavery has been slowly improving in the last few years.

In 2009 the government set up the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), to which potential cases are referred and through which victims can access relevant support.

However, the legislation wasn't fit for purpose and slavery cases weren't dealt with properly, victims were not supported and traffickers were getting away with their crimes. Anti-Slavery International's calls for a new comprehensive law led to the passing of the new Modern Slavery Act in 2015.

Modern Slavery Act

- makes prosecuting the traffickers easier by consolidating the existing slavery offences
- increases sentences for slavery offences
- bans prosecuting victims of slavery for crimes they were forced to commit by their traffickers, such as drug production or petty thefts.
- introduces child trafficking advocates to better protect trafficked children
- makes big UK businesses publically report on how they tackle slavery in their global supply chains
- establishes an independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to overlook the UK's policies to tackle slavery

Although the Modern Slavery Act was a step in the right direction, it is too heavily focused on policing, and doesn't provide enough victim protection safeguards. As a result, many victims don't have their rights upheld and are treated as immigration offenders rather than victims of a serious crime. They are also less likely to act as witnesses in court and help prosecute the perpetrators.

Challenges today

Policing. Awareness of modern slavery amongst the police has risen considerably over the last few years. However, there are still cases where people can be turned away from the police station and not believed.

Anti-slavery investigations, due to their complexity, are often given less priority than other crimes and many cases are not investigated.

I was locked up in the house where I had to water cannabis plants. But when the police raided the house I was arrested.

Hai*, 15, from Vietnam

Identification. The NRM often looks at victims of slavery through the context of their immigration status, with those from outside of the EU four times less likely to be recognised as victims of trafficking than those from the EU.

Of the identification decisions given in 2015 less than half were positive, but non-EU nationals were even less lucky, for example only 11% Vietnamese and 10% Nigerians were recognised as victims, both being major source countries of trafficking into Britain.

It means that many of them are ordered to be deported rather than protected, many crimes not recognised, and perpetrators let off the hook.

Protection. For those identified as victims, England and Wales don't provide long term support beyond the 45 days of so-called 'reflection period'. In effect, many victims who receive a positive NRM decision have fourteen days to move out of a safe house without any further support.

Support services are patchy and often tied to immigration issues. Many people are left to deal with their vulnerabilities and traumas alone, often leading to them being re-trafficked.

Protection of children is also of great concern. Although a Child Guardianship scheme has been included in the Modern Slavery Act, the full implementation of it is scheduled for as late as mid-2019.

Finally, the tied visas preventing migrant domestic workers from leaving abusive employers and seeking out new ones often leads them to suffer abuse in silence or face deportation or homelessness.



Photo: Domestic worker protesting against tied visas

What we do

- We campaign to improve the system protecting all victims of modern slavery regardless of their immigration status, through our Victim Protection Campaign
- We monitor the implementation of the Modern Slavery Act and international legislation, particularly by leading the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group.
- We work with British businesses to help them fulfil their obligation to report on efforts to tackle slavery in their supply chains
- We research emerging trends and new forms of slavery, and recommend solutions
- We raise awareness of the public about modern slavery

Join our campaign at www.antislavery.org/victimprotection