

## Sir Mo Farah's bravery must inspire government to act for all victims

Last night the BBC aired *The Real Mo Farah*. We applaud Sir Mo Farah, previously Hussein Abdi Kahin, for his courage in sharing his experience of being a survivor of child trafficking and shining a much-needed light on this vital issue. His action should stand as an inspiration for us all and strengthen our resolve to identify trafficking, protect children and ensure that all victims of trafficking and slavery in the UK are able to safely come forward and secure the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Tragically this experience highlights the harm caused to tens of thousands of men, women and children in the UK who are exploited and subjected to human trafficking or slavery and the nature of child abuse and these serious crimes. It shows how hard disclosure can be, how important curiosity and active identification is and how long it may take for people to come to terms with, understand and disclose their abuse. As Sir Mo Farah has explained, as a child he learned to mentally 'block out' what was happening to cope.

Shockingly, even when they do come forward themselves, many victims of trafficking, including those who were trafficked as children, will find themselves disbelieved, at risk of immigration detention, removal or incarceration at the hands of the authorities who should be proactive in offering protection. Cases of children and adults exploited to work in cannabis farms, who are convicted of drug offences, or individuals who have been trafficked to nail salons being handed over to immigration enforcement, are all too common.

This is why the government must strengthen our identification and support systems, to make sure that they work for victims in practice. There must be a safeguarding first approach to all children in the UK no matter who they are, where they have come from or how they got here. The UK must commit to guaranteed support for survivors making the difficult decision to come forward about their abuse. We must urgently implement secure reporting systems to encourage those still in a trafficking situation to know they can access justice without their data being shared with immigration enforcement; end the substantial delays in decision making that leave victims in limbo, without the right study, work or confidence to rebuild their lives. We must ensure access to key entitlements such as child protection and care, specialist legal advice and medical support as well as support to access education and employment to enable recovery.

Many children, like Sir Mo, continue to face significant issues after being identified as trafficked. Access to the care and support they need as looked after children remains limited, particularly as children's services continue to lack sufficient funding to care for children and support their recovery from abuse.

Survivors of trafficking are often more likely to be prosecuted for the crimes they were forced to commit or breaches of the immigration rules than the traffickers themselves for the abuse perpetrated. Prosecution rates are dismal, with most perpetrators going free while their victims live in fear.

Sir Mo Farah has explained that he;

*“Had no idea there are so many people who are going through exactly the same thing that I did.”*

We must act. We need to rebalance our identification and support systems in favour of all victims, making clear that the UK has a positive obligation to identify potential victims, to protect and care for all children in need and that if any victim comes forward they will be supported and helped to rebuild their lives in safety.

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