

Trafficking in women and girls (A/RES/73/148):

Domestic Response

The UK government is committed to tackling the heinous crime of modern slavery, ensuring that victims are provided with the support they need to begin rebuilding their lives, and that those responsible are prosecuted. The Government is identifying more victims than ever before. When victims are identified, they are referred to the National Referral Mechanism, which is the process by which the UK identifies and supports potential victims of modern slavery by connecting them with appropriate support. This support may be delivered through the specialist Victim Care Contract, local authorities, and asylum services. In 2019, 10,627 potential victims were referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a 52% increase on 2018. Of those referred to the NRM, 3,391 (31%) were female and 4,550 (43%) were referred for exploitation that occurred as a child.

Prosecution of traffickers

The [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) consolidated existing modern slavery offences. The Act also gives law enforcement agencies the tools to tackle modern slavery, including maximum life sentences for perpetrators, and enhanced protection for victims. At the last count, the number of live (and thus subject to change) police operations has increased from 188 in December 2016 to 1,811 in January 2020. Consequently, more potential victims are being identified and protected, because of a greater awareness and improved understanding of modern slavery. In the year up to September 2019, the police recorded 6,544 offences of Modern Slavery. This is a 53% increase compared with the previous year (4,268 offences).

The UK government is heavily engaged in the fight against organised criminal networks, including through disrupting the business model and untangling the trafficking chain. Increasing the number of investigations and prosecutions is a key priority. The Government made £8.5m of additional funding available from the police transformation fund to support the establishment of the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit in October 2016. The Government is continuing to support the programme through an additional £3.1m of funding for the current financial year.

The additional funding was aimed at helping to transform the policing response to modern slavery. The programme supports a bespoke modern slavery intelligence hub, regional analysts and operational coordinators, improved training, and dedicated thematic experts. These thematic experts have access to a range of evidence which they use in collaborative and innovative ways to support individual police forces in tackling modern slavery. The current annual Northern Ireland Modern Slavery Strategy includes the delivery of a significant programme of training

and awareness raising to increase the capacity of public and frontline professionals to identify and report instances of modern slavery. There has been excellent progress with training for medical professionals and other statutory bodies.

Protection of adult victims

Adults identified in the NRM can receive accommodation, financial support, assistance in accessing mental and physical health care including counselling, and access to legal support. The UK government recognises the particular vulnerabilities of child victims of modern slavery, including those of trafficking. This vulnerable group of children is entitled to support and assistance and requires tailored support which addresses children's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

In April 2019, the UK government launched an expert case-working unit, the Single Competent Authority (SCA), to handle all NRM cases and provide high quality, timely decisions for victims. In August 2019, the Home Office introduced a digital system to support the NRM process, making it easier for those on the frontline to refer victims for support by providing a single point for referrals across the UK. We work to ensure that individuals referred into the NRM receive an initial decision within five working days. Adults identified as potential victims of modern slavery can receive accommodation, financial support, assistance in accessing mental and physical health care including counselling, and access to legal support. The Government has also introduced independent panels of experts to review all negative Conclusive Grounds decisions made by the SCA, adding significantly to the scrutiny which such cases already receive.

The UK government is committed to tackling the harm and exploitation that can be associated with prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls, and our priority is to target those who exploit vulnerable people involved in prostitution and sexual exploitation. The Government continues to work closely with the police, Crown Prosecution Service, other front-line agencies, and wider partners to ensure that legislation achieves these aims. To aid this, the Government has funded organisations supporting sex workers who have been victims of sexual violence. This includes the Home Office's £17m Violence Against Women and Girls Transformation Fund.

Impact of COVID-19

The UK government is working with the providers of the [Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract](#) who are engaged in their own contingency planning to keep accommodation and associated support services available to victims, in line with Public Health England advice. The Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service has amended its ways of working so that it can continue to support child victims of modern slavery remotely in early adopter sites. The UK government continues to be committed to providing support for victims of modern slavery and to

ensuring that they have access to the services they need during this time. Existing sources of advice and support remain available to victims, including the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

All individuals working on the direct management and delivery of the Victim Care Contract and ICTGs are included in the definition of key workers for the purposes of access to school places. This will be subject to decisions from head-teachers, who will be working locally to prioritise school places where there are teacher shortages. The Single Competent Authority will maintain its decision-making operations during this time, but the current circumstances may have an impact. This is particularly the case where there may be staff shortages and limited access to offices.

The UK government is continuing to consider alternative ways of issuing financial support to victims. In order to comply with social distancing measures, support workers are providing essential support services through virtual means where possible, and we are working at pace with The Salvation Army to explore alternative card payment options. The Home Office will provide additional funding as required to implement these changes to ensure that victims receive their support payments in an appropriate manner. To ensure victims feel supported and safe, we announced on 6 April 2020 that all individuals in accommodation support provided by the Victim Care Contract will not be required to move on from their government-funded accommodation for the next three months.

Overseas Response

The UK government is committed to driving change through the multilateral system to help achieve sustainable development goal (SDG) 8.7 to end modern slavery and human trafficking and other relevant goals covering human trafficking of women and girls (SDG 5.2) and exploitation of children (SDG 16.2).

The Government has committed over £200m in UK aid to tackle human trafficking and modern slavery. Our programmes work to reduce vulnerability to exploitation including women and girls and address the permissive environments that allow human trafficking to thrive.

We are supporting countries' efforts to tackle the root causes of trafficking by: creating jobs and livelihoods; changing business and recruitment practices to eradicate exploitation in supply chains; helping build law enforcement capacity to increase detection and prosecution of perpetrators; and improving services to protect victims.

The £13 million **'Work in Freedom'** programme is working to reduce vulnerability to trafficking and forced labour of women and girls across migration pathways leading

to the care sector and textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear industries of South Asia and the Middle East.

The **‘Children on the Move Programme’** (£10 million, 2017-2020) (in partnership with UNICEF) works to protect up to 400,000 children at risk of violence and slavery in the Horn of Africa and to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of children, including adolescent girls. By December 2019, 377,003 children had been reached with protective services under phases one and two of the programme. The £12 million UK Aid Connect **‘Effective Approaches to End Worst Forms of Child Labour’** Programme (2018-2022) is addressing child labour in fragile and conflict-affected states in Africa in order to enable boys and girls to be protected from child labour.

The **AAWAZ 2: Inclusion, Accountability and Reducing Modern Slavery (2018 – 2023)** programme aims to reach 7 million beneficiaries with community awareness-raising activities on early and forced marriage and child labour, to support 450 Agaahi Centres in South Asia to work on cases of modern slavery and support potential victims, and to strengthen government systems for protecting individuals at risk of modern slavery.

Impact of COVID-19

Women and girls account for more than 70% of the total number of modern slavery victims globally. They are disproportionately represented in low-skilled, low-paid work sectors and are at increased risk of other forms of exploitation in the private economy. Early assessments show that there may be an increase in sex trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation by trafficking rings and criminal gangs, particularly if chances of detection, prosecution, and arrest are reduced. There is also a risk of increase in negative coping/survival strategies that will have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, such as child and early forced marriage.

We are analysing the impact of COVID-19 across our development programmes and are exploring options to provide targeted assistance to relieve the immediate impacts and protect the most marginalised and vulnerable individuals, such as women and girls.

We are also commissioning further research and analysis of impact on specific groups to help inform short, medium- and long-term responses.