

Trafficking in women and girls (A/RES/77/194)

The UK Government is committed to tackling modern slavery and human trafficking, ensuring victims and survivors are supported and that those responsible are prosecuted. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the system through which the UK carries out its obligations to identify and support victims and survivors. In 2023, 17,004 potential victims were referred into the NRM, the highest number of annual referrals to date and almost half of whom (44 percent) were children. Of those referred into the NRM during 2023, 4,088 (27 percent) were female, the highest on record. The most common exploitation type for female referrals was sexual exploitation (1,470; 36 percent). Between 2017 and 2022 the proportion of male referrals has increased substantially. However, in 2023, the proportion of female referrals increased.

Measures to address trafficking in women and girls, as per resolution A/RES/77/194, including on efforts to prevent and address the root causes that lead to all forms of exploitation of women and girls including through addressing demand.

The UK Government is committed to driving international coordination and eradicating modern slavery in line with SDG 8.7 and related goals to eliminate trafficking and gender-based violence (SDG 5.2), harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage (SDG 5.3) and trafficking and exploitation of children (SDG 16.2). Ending the trafficking and exploitation of women and girls is a priority for the UK, recognising the inextricable links with gender inequality and violence.

In March 2023, the Foreign Secretary launched the UK International Women and Girls Strategy, outlining how we are putting women and girls at the centre of everything that we do. Ending all forms of gender-based violence, including modern slavery and trafficking, is one of the three inter-related priorities of the strategy. Our programmes have worked to reduce risks and tackle the root causes of modern slavery, with significant investment in preventing the exploitation of women and children:

The UK has provided over **£20 million to the Work in Freedom Programme from 2013 to 2023** to reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking and forced labour across migration pathways in South Asia and to the Gulf. The programme reached over 770,000 women and girls in local communities and worked with governments on over 27 laws and policies to help better protect vulnerable migrant workers. This has helped to generate a valuable body of evidence on how to address the drivers of exploitation, which the UK is now supporting the International Labour Organization to disseminate.

The AAWAZ 2: Inclusion, Accountability and Reducing Modern Slavery (2018 – 2024) programme works with the UN and British Council to reduce child labour, early and forced marriage and other forms of exploitation and abuse in Pakistan. In 2023, the programme set up 870 village forums in 37 programme districts. 228,896 people were informed of government services and 61,893 accessed state services. 44,491 trained Aawaz Change Agents implemented social action projects to address gender-based violence, early / forced marriage and community conflicts.

Between 2022 and 2025, the Home Office is investing £24 million in the Modern Slavery Fund to reduce modern slavery in the UK and overseas, including through the Modern Slavery Innovation Fund. The fund aims to identify and protect victims from re-trafficking; strengthen national responses and criminal investigations, improve transparency in supply chains; and reduce vulnerability to exploitation. Partnering with civil society organisations, the UK works to prevent modern slavery by empowering women in local communities in East Africa, improve the access to services for female victims of human trafficking and survivors

of gender-based violence in Europe and championing female survivors of human trafficking in Asia.

The UK is also committed to empowering and engaging survivors and those with lived experience of modern slavery. The UK's five pledges to mark the 75th Anniversary of the UDHR included a pledge on modern slavery to engage and empower survivors in the UK's international policy and programming work. Our work in line with the pledge has included support for two projects to facilitate engagement of survivors in the development and updating of Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Roadmaps in Kenya and DRC.

Prevention continues to run downstream, throughout the whole domestic response, and depends on multi-agency partnerships and coordination across local regions. In 2022/23, the UK Government invested £600k to deliver the UK's first Modern Slavery Prevention Fund (MSPF). Through the fund, the Home Office worked with several organisations to deliver targeted prevention interventions to help build the evidence base for where the greatest impact can be made.

Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 made the UK the first country to require businesses with a turnover of £36m or more to report annually on the steps they have taken to prevent modern slavery in their operations and supply chains. The Government engages with businesses, civil society and industry experts in the sector to understand and learn about emerging best practice, evidence and innovations which might support businesses in their efforts to tackle modern slavery.

Impacts of conflict, crisis, COVID, climate change or other emergency contexts on the trafficking of women and girls and specific measures undertaken to address these risk factors.

Climate change, humanitarian crises, conflict, and instability continue to increase the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking. Women and children are often disproportionately affected, and UK bilateral programming is targeted at the intersection between modern slavery and such issues where appropriate.

In Ukraine, as well as other countries currently hosting refugees from Ukraine, the UK works closely with delivery partners to prevent modern slavery. The UK has committed £357 million in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and the region since the start of the invasion, with a focus on protecting those most at risk, particularly women and girls. We are providing life-saving assistance, including targeted gender-based violence services, legal support, and crisis accommodation to help tackle safeguarding concerns and trafficking risks.

From October 2022 to March 2023, the UK funded the OSCE Office of the Special Representative on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings to deliver the project, "Preventing and responding to trafficking in human beings amid the humanitarian crisis related to the war in Ukraine" alongside other OSCE participating states. The project supported the Office's engagement with 13 OSCE participating States affected by the flow of Ukrainian refugees to provide technical assistance visits, deliver country specific thematic workshops, and share expertise on how to prevent and respond to the risks of human trafficking as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Through the Home Office Modern Slavery Innovation Fund, the UK is working with IOM to deliver a project aimed at reducing trafficking risks by supporting climate resilient and trafficking-aware communities in hotspots in Ethiopia and the Philippines. This project will help to build the evidence base on the climate change-human trafficking nexus, as well as to empower women in youth led initiatives.

Impacts of technology and digitalization on the trafficking of women and girls and specific measures undertaken to address these risk factors.

The UK's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy prioritises protection of those involved in sex work from harm and ensuring that those who want to leave sex work are given every opportunity to find routes out. Tackling sexual exploitation online is also a key priority where the UK Government partners with law enforcement services to address underlying drivers.

Adult service websites are a significant enabler of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The landmark UK Online Safety Act received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023 and will ensure companies take proactive action to keep those on their platforms safe from abuse and exploitation. It will require companies to prevent their platforms being used for criminality and to proactively identify, remove and report to law enforcement suspicious activity, including that linked to trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In 2024, the UK supported the OSCE's project "Responding to Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings." The project mapped the risk of trafficking on adult services websites across OSCE participating states. Using this data, country summary reports were produced to raise awareness about online platforms with high risks of trafficking and provide evidence-based information to key stakeholders, especially law enforcement and policymakers. A model training curriculum for police academies on how to investigate technology-facilitated trafficking has also been developed for OSCE participating states.

Measures to increase access to justice and to strengthen detection, protection of victim-survivors and prosecution of perpetrators.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 consolidated existing offences of slavery and trafficking and increased maximum sentences for perpetrators to life imprisonment. It gave law enforcement agencies more tools to tackle modern slavery, including slavery and trafficking prevention and risk orders, and enhanced protection for victims. For example, the Act introduced a statutory defence to protect victims in vulnerable circumstances from prosecution for crimes they have been forced to committed or committed as a direct consequence of being a victim of slavery or relevant exploitation.

The UK Government works closely with criminal justice agencies to ensure they have the powers and capability needed to bring perpetrators to justice. We have continued to fund the police Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit in 2023/24, bringing the total investment so far to £17.8 million. The Unit has helped to strengthen the police response and ensure victims and survivors are safeguarded through the development of bespoke capabilities and deployment of thematic experts.

We have seen a substantial increase in investigations and relative increase in prosecutions since the Modern Slavery Act came into force in 2015. In March 2024 there were 4,100 live police investigations into modern slavery and human trafficking, compared to less than 200 in 2016. In 2023 there were 410 prosecutions (an increase of 1.2 percent from 2022) and 311 convictions (an increase of 10.3 percent from 2022). We are working with partners to further increase prosecutions in line with investigations. A key strand of work to support this is the Prosecutions Oversight Group, which brings together criminal justice partners to discuss barriers to prosecution encountered during investigations.

In 2022/23 the UK Government tested different initiatives to support victims and survivors of modern slavery to engage with the criminal justice system, including the Victim Navigator Programme delivered by the non-governmental organization, Justice and Care. 'Navigators'

work with law enforcement at the outset of a case to provide independent support to victims and survivors. Such schemes have had a positive impact, with some police forces and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority continuing to independently fund services. Specialist victim liaison officer training has also been delivered to develop trust and facilitate positive engagement with the criminal justice process.

Information on multi-sectoral services for victim-survivors of trafficking including any available data on access to such services.

The UK is committed to delivering personalised, needs-based support to victims and survivors of modern slavery. Through the Government-funded Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), we work to ensure that support is inclusive of all gender identities and reflects individual needs. In the year ending June 2023, there were a total of 10,704 people receiving MSVCC support.

Victims and survivors receiving MSVCC support have access to single sex or family accommodation if needed. They also have access to a dedicated support worker who provides information on their rights and facilitates access to wider statutory support services specifically related to their modern slavery experience. This can include assistance with accessing sexual health services as a result of sexual exploitation and pre/post- natal support groups. Broader support includes financial support, legal and immigration advice.

Local authorities are responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in their area, including child victims of modern slavery. Local children's services work in close co-operation with the police and other statutory agencies to offer potentially trafficked children the protection and support they require.

The Home Office has delivered the Independent Child Trafficking and Guardianship (ICTG) service in two thirds of local authorities in England and Wales. The ICTG service provides specialist modern slavery support, either directly or indirectly, in line with the child's needs. This is provided in addition to the statutory support provided to children by local authorities.

Since the ICTG service first launched in 2017 it has supported thousands of children, advocating on their behalf and ensuring their best interests are reflected in the NRM decision-making process. The Government remains committed to delivering a national ICTG service covering all of England and Wales from 2025.