

UN World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 30 July 2019

Background

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines human trafficking in persons as “the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them”.¹ The types of exploitation faced by victims include sexual exploitation, forced labour and, to a lesser extent, organ removal.² Each year, UNODC releases a global report on trafficking in persons. Its most recent report found “more victims of human trafficking were reported in 2016 than at any time in the last 13 years”.³ The report stated that this could be due to increased levels of detection in countries that supply data and/or a rise in incidences of trafficking.⁴

Most victims of human trafficking are adult women (49%), followed by girls (23%) and adult men (21%). Overall, boys are the least likely to be victims of human trafficking (7%). The profile of victims changed depending on the type of trafficking and the region. For example, the trafficking of females for sexual exploitation is the most prevalent form of trafficking in the Americas, Europe, East Asia and the Pacific. Forced labour in adults is the most detected form in the Middle East.⁵ For the first time, the UN report showed a majority of victims being detected within their own borders.⁶

The report estimates the number of victims of trafficking reported in the UK increased from 937 cases between 2015 and 2016 to 2,325 cases between 2016 and 2017. In 2017, most victims were men. The commonest form of exploitation was forced labour.⁷

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons was established by a Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013.⁸ The first World Day Against Trafficking in Persons was held on 30 July 2014. The focus this year is on “highlighting the importance of government action in the interest of victims of trafficking”.⁹

Recent Actions of the UK Government

The UK Government stated it has had “an ambitious modern slavery strategy in place since 2014”.¹⁰ The strategy includes the:

- Modern Slavery Act 2015;
- linked transparency in supply chains legislation [The Modern Slavery Act 2015 (Transparency in Supply Chains) Regulations 2015], which requires certain businesses to state how they have taken steps to prevent modern slavery in their supply chain each year;
- introduction of independent child trafficking advocates who give support and advice to child victims;

- establishment of an independent anti-slavery commissioner; and
- national referral mechanism, which is used to identify victims of trafficking and provide support where necessary.

In July 2018, the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, commissioned an independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.¹¹ The review focused on four key areas of the Act:

- transparency in supply chains;
- the role of the independent anti-slavery commissioner;
- the Act's legal application; and
- the safeguarding of child victims.

The review's final report was published in May 2019. It included recommendations to change the name of independent child trafficking advocates to "independent guardians" and to introduce compulsory training on recognising modern slavery for those who work in the criminal justice system.¹² In its response, the Government stated it accepted "the majority of recommendations".¹³

On 29 April 2019, the Home Office took over responsibility for the national referral mechanism (NRM). The system was previously managed by the National Crime Agency. The NRM is "a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support".¹⁴ Under the system, a person thought to be the victim of human trafficking is referred by a first responder organisation to the relevant single competent authority within the Home Office.¹⁵ First responders include the police, the NSPCC and the Salvation Army. There is then a 45-day period where the victim may access support whilst the Government considers the referral. According to the National Crime Agency, there was a 36% increase in potential victims of trafficking in the UK between 2017 and 2018. The data is based on the number of potential victims that were referred to the agency in that year. Referrals increased from 5,142 in 2017 to 6,993 in 2018.¹⁶

Some organisations, such as the British Red Cross, have criticised the pace of decision making by the Home Office in NRM cases. They also argue that the termination of government support following an NRM decision leaves victims "vulnerable to homelessness, exploitation and re-trafficking".¹⁷ Some MPs have also voiced opposition to the departmental management of government policy towards human trafficking victims. In a recent debate, Paul Blomfield (Labour MP for Sheffield Central) argued that responsibility for both modern slavery and immigration enforcement "sit uncomfortably within the Home Office".¹⁸

In addition to its domestic initiatives, the Government has said tackling modern slavery is "a top foreign policy priority".¹⁹ According to the Governments' annual report on modern slavery, the UK's total spending on modern slavery was £39 million in 2017/18 and £61 million in 2018/19.²⁰ The increase in expenditure was attributed in large part to additional international spending. This is paid for by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Official Development Assistance (ODA). Projects allocated funding through ODA include:

- the Child Trafficking Protection Fund, given £2.2 million for projects in the UK and Vietnam between 2017 and 2019
- UK Aid Connect, allocated £12 million for projects across Africa between 2018 and 2021.²¹

Global Action

The UNODC global report found that 168 countries out of 181 assessed had legislation that criminalised trafficking in persons that was broadly in line with the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.²² Out of the 193 United Nations member states, four countries' criminal codes did not legislate against trafficking in persons. The status of legislation in twelve UN member states was unknown.²³

The US Department of State released its annual trafficking in persons report in June 2019. This analysed the national policies towards human trafficking in 187 countries. It concluded: "in many countries, governments are reluctant to address human trafficking when it happens at home".²⁴

As well as the UN Protocol, a number of international organisations have similar commitments to abolish human trafficking. The Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings entered into force in 2008 and has 47 signatories, including the UK.²⁵ The convention sets out "a series of rights" for victims which signing countries must uphold. These include the right to be:

- identified as a victim;
- protected and assisted;
- given a "reflection and recovery" period of at least 30 days;
- granted a renewable residence permit; and
- eligible for compensation.²⁶

In 2015 the UN and European Union launched 'Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants' (GLO.ACT), expected to run until 2019. The project targeted 13 countries across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.²⁷ Its stated objectives are to:

- develop policies specific to the individual nation;
- ensure the domestic legal framework met international standards;
- enhance the knowledge of criminal justice practitioners;
- promote knowledge sharing within the region; and
- develop assistance and support programmes for victims, including child victims.²⁸

Further Information

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018](#), December 2018
- United States of America Department of State, [Trafficking in Persons Report](#), June 2019
- House of Lords Library, [World Day Against Trafficking in Persons: 30 July 2018](#), 27 July 2018
- Margaret Malloch and Paul Rigby (eds), *Human Trafficking: The Complexities of Exploitation*, 2016
- Centre for Social Justice, [A Modern Response to Modern Slavery](#), April 2015

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- ¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, '[UNODC on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants](#)', accessed 17 July 2019.
- ² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, '[Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018](#)', December 2018, p 29.
- ³ *ibid*, p 21.
- ⁴ *ibid*, p 22.
- ⁵ *ibid*, p 10.
- ⁶ *ibid*, p 13.
- ⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, '[Western and Southern Europe](#)', December 2018, pp 62–4.
- ⁸ United Nations General Assembly, '[Resolution: Improving the Coordination of Efforts Against Trafficking in Persons](#)', 18 December 2013, A/68/192.
- ⁹ United Nations, '[World Day Against Trafficking in Persons](#)', accessed 17 July 2019.
- ¹⁰ Home Office blog, '[How the Government is Tackling Modern Slavery](#)', 22 May 2019.
- ¹¹ Home Office, '[Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act](#)', 9 July 2019.
- ¹² Home Office, '[Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015: Final Report](#)', May 2019, CP 100.
- ¹³ HM Government, '[UK Government Response to the Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015](#)', 9 July 2019, p 4.
- ¹⁴ National Crime Agency, '[Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking](#)', accessed 17 July 2019.
- ¹⁵ Home Office, '[National Referral Mechanism Guidance: Adult \(England and Wales\)](#)', 24 May 2019.
- ¹⁶ National Crime Agency, '[National Referral Mechanism Statistics—End of Year Summary 2018](#)', 20 March 2019.
- ¹⁷ British Red Cross, '[Human Trafficking and Slavery](#)', accessed 17 July 2019.
- ¹⁸ [HC Hansard, 9 July 2019, col 68WH](#).
- ¹⁹ Home Office blog, '[How the Government is Tackling Modern Slavery](#)', 22 May 2019
- ²⁰ HM Government, '[2018 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery](#)', October 2018, p 4.
- ²¹ *ibid*, pp 49–51.
- ²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, '[Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018](#)', December 2018, p 45.
- ²³ *ibid*.
- ²⁴ United States of America Department of State, '[Trafficking in Persons Report](#)', June 2019.
- ²⁵ Council of Europe, '[About the Convention](#)', accessed 18 July 2019.
- ²⁶ *ibid*.
- ²⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, '[Overview](#)', accessed 17 July 2019.
- ²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, '[Objectives](#)', accessed 17 July 2019.

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