



**TAKE A STAND FOR
SURVIVORS OF
MODERN SLAVERY +
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

MAY 2026



HEAR

SURVIVORS.

SUPPORT

SURVIVORS.

About this resource

This briefing outlines the challenges facing survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK, and outlines the ways in which a compassionate government can hear survivors and support survivors. This resource is developed jointly with professionals with and without lived experience of exploitation.

This briefing is authored by After Exploitation, with the support of our campaign steering group.

Contributors

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Contact

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SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS:



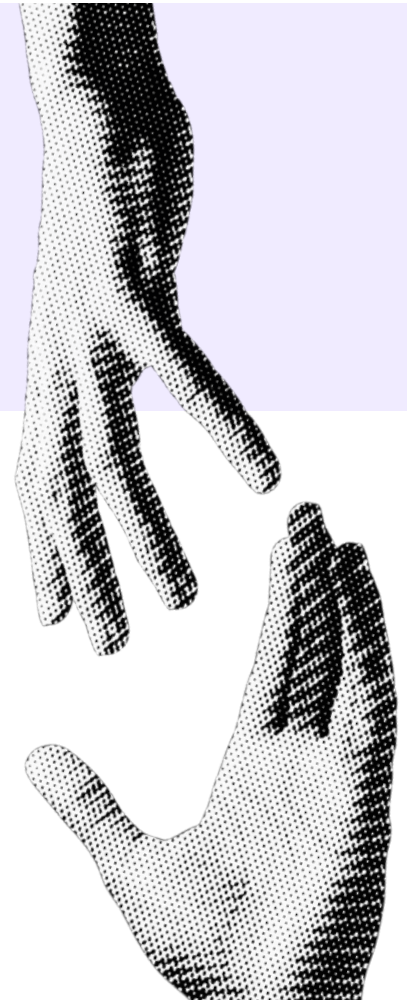
WE ARE CALLING ON PARLIAMENTARIANS TO:

HEAR SURVIVORS



- Ensure survivors are **believed** when they come forward.
- Reverse newer, higher **evidence burdens** on survivors.
- Turn back **victim-blaming policies** which punish survivors for their offending history or immigration status.
- Fund, train and support first responders to **identify and assist survivors** who come forward.

SUPPORT SURVIVORS



- Place **survivor rights** (including access to safe and secure housing, mental health support, compensation, legal advice and immigration leave) into law.
- Ensure children can access **dedicated** modern slavery and trafficking services.

JOIN SURVIVORS, CHARITIES + EXPERTS:

SIGN THE PLEDGE >



We are asking MPs and peers to adopt the following pledge, and post this publicly on their website, so that constituents are in no doubt that their representative stands with survivors

As a member of Parliament, I stand with survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking. Where possible, I will use my platform to advocate for a UK which:

- **Hears survivors** when they come forward, breaking down the barriers stopping victims from being recognised.
- **Supports survivors** when they come forward, placing survivor rights into law.

To sign the pledge, simply post this statement on your website or reach out to Maya@afterexploitation.org to log your support





WHAT IS MODERN SLAVERY + HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Modern slavery is the exploitation of one person for another person's benefit, such as status, money or power. Human trafficking is a type of modern slavery, where the victim is transported, harboured, recruited, and/or received by another person.

Modern slavery can happen in any industry, to people of any age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or class. In the UK, modern slavery includes:

- Human trafficking
- Sexual exploitation,
- Labour exploitation,
- Criminal exploitation,
- Domestic servitude,
- Organ harvesting

Exploiters use a number of tactics to control victims, from violence and threats to invented debts. Sometimes a person's identity, age or immigration status is weaponised to exploit them. After exploitation, survivors face a higher risk of mental and physical ill-health, poverty, repeat exploitation, and homelessness than the wider population.

However with early support survivors can, and do, rebuild their lives.

LAURA'S* STORY

“IT’S ONE MORE THING YOU CAN’T COPE WITH”

Laura* is a survivor of child sexual exploitation who was only recognised as a victim of human trafficking many years later. She was trafficked by men she knew and trusted.

As an adult, she lives with the impact of exploitation. Laura experiences poor mental health, impaired mobility, and poverty. When she was finally recognised as a trafficking victim and learned she might be able to access support, she felt relief. **She hoped that talking therapy could help her process the trauma she had been living with decades.** In the UK, trafficking survivors access support through the Home Office-run Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC). Yet, even when survivors’ accounts are accepted by the Home Office, **support is not automatic.**

Laura was told she needed a letter from her GP proving long NHS waiting times for mental health support but her GP refused to write it. He did not know what human trafficking was, and didn’t believe Laura needed help. Laura collected what evidence she could and eventually secured a GP letter, months later, after a complaint.

When Laura was finally able to share the GP letter with her support worker, in the hopes of getting counselling, she was told she would need to find her own counsellor and provide proof the therapist had capacity for her. Laura was given no guidance about what type of therapy might be appropriate for someone with severe trauma.

At this point, Laura was told that the Home Office might still refuse to fund her counselling. Feeling discouraged, she stopped seeking help. Laura accessed therapy for the first time through After Exploitation’s fund for survivor campaigners, but is still waiting for specialist support through the NHS.

“It’s like you have to jump over a load of hurdles and hoops. If you can’t get out of bed and brush your teeth... they’re asking you to do one more thing you can’t cope with.”

HOW MANY SURVIVORS ARE NOT HEARD?

The number of people being exploited in the UK is growing. Last year, [23,411 modern slavery and trafficking referrals](#) were made. Yet, few survivors go on to be recognised or receive support.

Being referred

In order to get support, survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking first need to be recognised as potential victims by the Home Office. Only first responders, such as the police, Home Office, or designated charities, can refer victims. This work is specialist and time-consuming, but first responders are not given financial or practical support by government to undertake referrals, [pushing many to breaking point](#).

As survivors cannot self-refer into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), they are completely dependent on first responders to provide detailed information, and poor-quality referrals can result in the survivor being turned away from help.



Charities are overwhelmed. **They can't even do the referral for you,** so you have to reach out to so many charities.

How many people do I have to sit down and **tell my trauma to, again and again, before I can get help?** It affects my daily life and it adds to my trauma.

--Survivor campaigner

Being recognised

If survivors are referred, their modern slavery case is judged by the Home Office's NRM. Within the NRM, the Home Office makes two decisions:

- **Reasonable Grounds (RG):** First, the Home Office decides whether there are 'reasonable grounds' to believe someone has been held in modern slavery. At this stage, a positive RG decision means the survivor is recognised as a 'potential victim', and they should be able to access support including mental health support and safe housing.
- **Conclusive Grounds (CG):** Then the Home Office decides, 30 days later or longer, whether there are 'conclusive grounds' in the survivor's case. With a positive CG, the survivor is recognised as a victim.

It is now harder for survivors to get a positive decision in the NRM. A higher percentage of survivors [are now disbelieved and unable to get support or protection](#), since the government raised the evidence threshold in 2023.

In March 2026, the courts found that modern slavery cases were being decided against an [evidence bar which was too high](#). Charities warn that the evidence expected by the Home Office is difficult and expensive to produce, if not impossible for survivors to gather without a lawyer. Even if the survivor qualifies for legal help, medico-legal reports, from good-quality medical professionals, are near-impossible to pay for on current legal aid rates.



Many [survivors] are lured back by perpetrators, because the **perpetrators know survivors are in need and the government won't help them.**

If you're waiting two or three years for compensation, but the trafficker is saying "here is food tomorrow, clothes tomorrow"... it makes you want to go back to the perpetrator. That is what keeps happening. **Financial stability stops you being exploited again.**

--Survivor campaigner

Barriers to recovery for children

There is a lack of specialist support for children who have been exploited, including a lack of safe housing. Children need to find support through other pathways and, in law, [it is not clear what minimum support should be available to child victims](#). The Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) service offers some support to children without a parental figure, but they are [no longer guaranteed face-to-face time with their guardian](#).

Immigration insecurity

For non-UK nationals of all ages, a lack of immigration security undermines recovery. Both adult and child victims have no dedicated settlement pathways even after being confirmed as victims of modern slavery or trafficking. Temporary Permission to Stay (TPS) for survivors is [short-term and rarely offered](#). Some survivors end up [detained under Immigration Powers](#), or [unable to safely report exploitation](#) to the authorities due to fear of deportation.



HOW MANY SURVIVORS ARE NOT SUPPORTED?

Every year, even survivors recognised as potential victims of trafficking by the Home Office's NRM are unlikely to access dedicated support. Putting survivor entitlements like compensation, safe housing, mental health support and legal advice into law can help end the lottery of support facing survivors.

Compared to 23,411 modern slavery referrals last year:

- **Mental health support:** Only 515 victims accessed counselling through the Home Office's fund for victims of modern slavery
- **Safe housing:** Only 15% of potential victims eligible for support were placed in modern slavery safe housing
- **Reach-in support:** 2,048 got advice and support in the community.
- **Turned away:** 4,599 were deemed 'ineligible' for help
- **Compensation:** Very few survivors applied for compensation through the government's scheme for victims of violent crime. 82-100% of applications by modern slavery survivors are refused

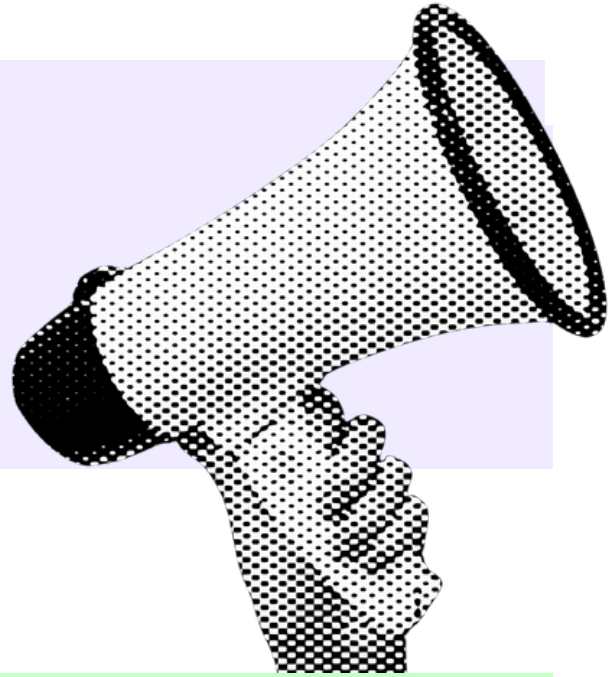


I was not offered counselling through the NRM. On the NHS, they only offer six sessions of counselling and it's not appropriate. **It can even do damage.** You open up pandora's box then you're closed off from help.

--Survivor campaigner

FULL RECOMMENDATIONS:

HEAR SURVIVORS



Roll back roadblocks **stopping survivors from being recognised**, introduced under the Nationality and Borders Act:

- Reverse the **unrealistic new evidence burdens**, preventing survivors from being accepted by the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and getting help.
- Repeal **trauma deadlines**, called 'Trafficking Information Notices', which would allow the Home Office to penalise survivors for the time it takes to disclose traumatic details.
- Scrap the **public order disqualification (POD)**, which rejects survivors based on their offending history even where they were forced to commit crime.

Revisit **regressive changes** to the Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance:

- Remove the **archaic 'framework'** for judging sexual exploitation, which weights cases as 'less likely' to be genuine depending on the number of victims and perpetrators, as well as the duration of, the exploitation.
- Ensure all survivors can access **reconsiderations**.

Empower first responders to **recognise survivors** and help them come forward:

- Protect workers who **report exploitation**, including survivors, from being punished for their immigration status.
- Provide **emergency support** (accommodation, legal advice and psychological assistance) to survivors on an emergency basis before referral.
- **Fund the vital referral work** of first responders to ensure charities, the police and local authorities have capacity to refer victims.
- Expand the **number of first responders** able to refer survivors, introducing a transparent application process for civil society groups hoping to apply.
- Introduce **funded training** and standardised wording for first responders to adopt when **explaining survivors' rights, entitlements, and options** to those who come forward.

SUPPORT SURVIVORS

Make **survivor rights and support** a guarantee

- Guarantee survivors' rights exist in reality. Bring specialist support, as per the European Convention on Action Against Trafficking (ECAT) into law. This includes safe and secure housing, legal advice and information, compensation, and at least five years' immigration leave.
- Ensure every child victim is protected, ensuring every child in England and Wales has access to support through the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) service, and can have their case considered by specialist Local Authority teams receiving the funding they need to prevent, safeguard, and identify exploitation.
- Reverse government powers to turn away victims from support, introduced under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, ensuring survivors are automatically able to access help not just when the government deems it 'necessary'.



**SIGN THE
PLEDGE
HERE**

