

After Exploitation
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Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP,
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Westminster,
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Anti Slavery Day: Joint open letter to the Prime Minister, copied in the Secretary of State, regarding the risks facing modern slavery survivors

Dear Prime Minister

We, the undersigned, are advocates, researchers, and experts by experience challenging the impact of modern slavery through our work.

This Anti Slavery Day, we write with urgency.

The UK's emphasis on immigration control, at the expense of human dignity and safety, is threatening efforts to identify and support survivors of trafficking.

Modern slavery deprives people of their liberty, and often leaves victims with the life-long legacy of physical, mental or sexual abuse. Yet, too many victims who seek help from the authorities are subject to harmful immigration control measures rather than support.

1,256 potential trafficking victims were held in prison-like detention centres, last year alone, due to their immigration status. Many will go on to become 'confirmed' victims, with 42 already recognised as having been trafficked¹. Conversely, the State only convicted 35 traffickers in the same period.

In practice, we hold more survivors, than perpetrators, behind bars.

Modern slavery is routinely referred to as a 'hidden crime' but, with no immigration protection in place for survivors, it is little wonder that victims of exploitation are so rarely counted. It is well documented by Non-Governmental Organisations that traffickers use the threat of detention and forced removal to ensure compliance from those they abuse. An exclusive focus on immigration control is playing into traffickers' hands, making it harder for victims to come forward.

To ensure that victims report this crime, receive support, and pursue justice where it is right for them, the Government must provide at least 12 months' support and immigration protection for survivors, as outlined in the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill. The Government must also introduce an absolute bar on the detention of confirmed and potential victims of slavery, and address the high numbers of vulnerable people deemed suitable for detention.

We are concerned that traffickers will also be emboldened by proposed policies to prejudge asylum claims on the basis of the time at which they are made, or the route by which the claimant arrived. Victims of trafficking often have no choice but to claim asylum months or years after first entering the country. This will impact many survivors, for whom the factors that made them vulnerable to traffickers in the first place will pose further threats upon removal. Worryingly, even under the current asylum process, many trafficked people already struggle to secure the international protection they need from a system notorious for disbelief.

Lastly, we must challenge the narrative that tougher borders stop human trafficking. On the contrary, trafficking is made profitable through a lack of safe and legal routes, and made sustainable through policies which deter victims from seeking help.

We ask for the UK Government to turn the tide.

This Anti Slavery Day, we call for a commitment to ensure that victims of trafficking do not face punitive immigration control measures if they come forward for support. Asylum applications must be considered on merit, in a framework that acknowledges that many who make asylum claims, including survivors of modern slavery, have no choice but to arrive spontaneously or claim asylum after having been in the UK for some time. First and foremost, any reform to our immigration system must seek to remedy, rather than entrench, the wrongs committed against survivors of modern slavery.

The UK has played a crucial role in sounding the alarm on this heinous crime, at home and on a global stage, with the passage of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. However, without action, traffickers will continue to benefit from hostile immigration policies.

Signed:

1. After Exploitation
Maya Esslemont, *Director*

2. The AIRE Centre
Matthew Evans, *Legal Director*
3. African Rainbow Family
Aderonke Apata, *Chairperson*
4. Amnesty International UK
Kate Allen, *Director*
5. Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU)
Carita Thomas, *Solicitor*
6. Association of visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID)
Ali McGinley, *Director*
7. Baca
Jimmy Zachariah, *Chief Executive*
8. Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)
Celia Clarke, *Director*
9. Birds Solicitors
10. Choose Love
Josie Naughton, *CEO*
11. City of Sanctuary
Siân Summers-Rees, *Chief Executive*
12. Deighton Pierce Glynn
13. Doughty Street Chambers
Immigration and Anti Trafficking Teams
14. Duncan Lewis
15. Equality Now
Jacqui Hunt, *Eurasia and Europe Director*

16. Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT)
Patricia Durr, *CEO*
17. Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)
Lucila Granada, *CEO*
18. Freedom From Torture
Sile Reynolds, *CEO*
19. Freedom United
Joanna Ewart-James, *Executive Director*
20. Garden Court Chambers
21. Govan Community Project
Traci Kirkland, *Head of Charity*
22. Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
Denise McDowell, *Chief Executive*
23. Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)
Satbir Singh, *Chief Executive*
24. Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)
Sarah Teather, *Director*
25. Kalayaan
Avril Sharp, *Policy Officer*
26. Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN)
Dr Razia Sharrif, *CEO*
27. Law Centres Network
28. Leigh Day
29. Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Rosario Guimba-Stewart, *Chief Executive*

30. Medact
James Skinner, *Access to Healthcare Campaigner*
31. Migrants' Rights Network
Doriam Leatham, *CEO*
32. Migrant Voice
Nazek Ramadan, *Director*
33. Migrants at Work
Ake Achi, *Director*
34. The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM)
Renaë Mann, *National Director*
35. One Pump Court Chambers
36. Reading Refugee Support Group
Nick Harborne, *CEO*
37. Refuge
Lisa King, *Director of Communications*
38. Refugee Council
Maurice Wren, *Director*
39. Scottish Detainee Visitors (SDV)
Kate Alexander, *Director*
40. Solidarity With Refugees
Rosalind Ereira, *Director*
41. South London Refugee Association
Celia Sands, *Director*
42. Southwell & Partners
43. St Chad's Sanctuary
Abigail Martin, *Project Manager*

44. Survivor Alliance
45. Unseen
Andrew Wallis, *CEO*
46. The Voice of Domestic Workers
Marissa Begonia, *Director*
47. Waging Peace
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48. Women for Refugee Women
Natasha Walter, *Director*
49. Women's Aid
Nicki Norman, *Acting Chief Executive*

Academics

50. Dr Ella Cockbain, *Associate Professor in Security and Crime Science*
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51. Dr Carole Murphy, *Deputy Director of Centre for the Study of Modern Slavery (CSMS)*
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52. Neena Samota, *Programme Director - Criminology and Sociology*
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¹ Figures on the immigration detention of both potential and recognised victims of trafficking have been taken from Home Office responses to Freedom of Information requests by After Exploitation. The most recent figures on the detention of victims can be viewed in the organisation's report *Hidden Futures: How Data Denial Threatens the Fight Against Slavery* (2020).