



On our streets

The changing face of
modern slavery in London

SEPTEMBER 2024



Foreword

As Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner I have visited communities across the UK to meet with victims and survivors of modern slavery and hear about their experiences. I have been struck by the horrific things that victims of modern slavery have endured as part of their exploitation and how these crimes are happening in all our communities, across every corner of the country. These are not crimes happening in other countries, removed from our shores, they are happening in our high streets and local areas.

In our society today people are facing exploitation of a truly awful nature. Victims of modern slavery in the UK are being exploited by criminals. Children are being forced to deal drugs and work in cannabis factories, women and girls are being sexually exploited, people are being forced to work for no pay and in horrendous conditions. We must work to change this urgently.

Despite the terrible nature of these crimes the true scale and impact of modern slavery is not recognised. As this report shows, London sees the highest numbers of victims of modern slavery referred, in every single borough. Even with these crimes happening on our streets just a quarter of the public think modern slavery is an issue in their area.

There is also a lack of awareness about the victims of modern slavery, with criminals ruthlessly exploiting vulnerable individuals from all backgrounds. Very few of the public recognise that UK nationals are also victims of modern

slavery, with vulnerable people being exploited in our communities. That is why this report is so important, in acknowledging the issues and improving our knowledge and understanding of modern slavery we can make sure that the public and first responders know how to identify victims and where to refer them for support.

I have seen deep compassion from the public who are aware of modern slavery; they want victims to receive the care they rightly deserve. Preventing people from facing exploitation, supporting victims of modern slavery, and making tackling modern slavery a priority are all areas which this report shows the public cares about greatly, and is something that policymakers should respond to as well.

This is a critical moment where we need Government to make tackling modern slavery a priority. Charities like Hestia provide invaluable support and care for victims to help their recovery journey. This needs to be supported by systemic, national attention and policy which helps victims of modern slavery and increases the prosecutions of the criminals who are inflicting these dreadful crimes. By doing this, we can all work together to help end modern slavery on our streets.

Eleanor Lyons
UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner



Introduction

Modern slavery is a brutal crime that is happening on our streets, in our neighbourhoods and across every part of the UK. And yet many of us, including our politicians and policymakers, lack awareness and understanding of this widespread issue.

In London, where Hestia has supported thousands of victim-survivors over the last 13 years, people continue to be deprived of their liberty in every single borough. For some this is experienced by being raped, beaten and abused repeatedly. For others, this may be debt bondage or being tricked into no – or low – paid labour.

Not only is modern slavery happening here and now, but it is also constantly evolving. Victim demographics change, new recruitment methods are developed, and different forms of exploitation emerge. What remains consistent is that criminals turn huge profits and face little deterrent, with only a handful of convictions each year.

When asked to define the term ‘modern slavery’, most definitions from the surveyed British public suggest an understanding that victims are ‘being taken advantage of’ for someone else’s financial gain, and are often not paid at all, or receive little remuneration. We were surprised that very few of the definitions, if any, placed emphasis on the fact victims are controlled, coerced and often manipulated via a range of tactics. The means of control endured by victims at the hands of their exploiters is key to understanding this crime, and to responding effectively.

Hestia commissioned this report to unpick the myths and misconceptions that surround modern slavery, to increase awareness and understanding,

“We cannot change what we are not aware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change.”

Sheryl Sandberg

and to highlight the role we can all play in preventing it from happening in our communities.

We know that it is not just an international issue – it is happening here, it is happening now, and it can affect anyone.

In our survey, fewer than one in five (18%) of the public said they would know how to spot someone experiencing modern slavery. Yet whilst this crime remains hidden, the criminal gangs behind it will continue to prosper.

We also know that we need to do more to tackle modern slavery at a national level. A minority of MPs surveyed believed that legislation passed by the previous Government – including the Illegal Migration Act and Nationality and Borders Act – will significantly reduce modern slavery in the UK (31%) or deter traffickers (41%).

All of this prevents us from effectively tackling this crime. We need MPs to understand that this is happening in their constituencies, we need policymakers and law enforcement to fully understand the true nature of the issue, and we need the public to be aware of the signs to look out for.

Only with a whole community response can we stop modern slavery and offer victim-survivors the support they deserve.

Patrick Ryan
Chief Executive,
Hestia

Alison Logier
Director of Modern
Slavery Response,
Hestia

Executive summary

The number of potential victims of modern slavery in the UK is at its highest level since records began in 2009. London is a central hub for modern slavery offences; the Metropolitan Police has identified an increase of 12.6% in cases of modern slavery in London over the last three years. Modern slavery is a constantly evolving crime, with increasingly sophisticated recruitment and exploitation methods contributing to the growth of offences in London and across the UK.

Hestia commissioned independent research agency Thinks Insight & Strategy to identify what modern slavery looks like in London today, and how it has changed in recent years. Central to the work was the need to bring the voices of those impacted by modern slavery to the forefront of a much-needed conversation about modern slavery in the capital.

Thinks Insight & Strategy conducted multi-method primary and secondary research to build a picture of experiences of modern slavery in London and understand public and political perceptions and assumptions.

The research included:

- ⇒ A scoping review of existing literature and data on modern slavery in the UK, including relevant data from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and from the Metropolitan Police (requested via an FOI) on instances of modern slavery in the UK and in London.
- ⇒ Qualitative research, including six interviews with Hestia service users who have previously experienced modern slavery in London, one interview with a Hestia representative advocating on behalf of two service users who have experienced modern slavery in London and two interviews with experts in the field of modern slavery.
- ⇒ Quantitative research, including a nationally representative online survey of 2,000 members of the UK public (including 265 based in Greater London) and an online survey with 99 MPs, completed prior to the dissolution of Parliament on 30th May 2024.

The research found that:

⇒ **Modern slavery offences occur across every region of the UK, including in every London borough and are becoming more frequent.**

- Three in five (59%) adult potential victims referred to the NRM in 2023 stated they were exploited in the UK.
- The number of NRM adult referrals increased by 70% between 2020 and 2023.

⇒ **However, modern slavery does not feel close to home for most. Just a quarter (25%) of the public believe that modern slavery is an issue in their local area.**

- This rises to 32% amongst those living in London. However, even here the public is underestimating the prevalence of the issue: data from the Metropolitan Police shows that numerous modern slavery offences occurred in every London borough in 2023.
- Data shows that in 2023, across adults only, British citizens were the second largest group by nationality amongst adult victims of modern slavery (behind Albanians). However, only 10% of the public agrees that British citizens are one of the most likely nationalities to become victims of modern slavery.

⇒ **Despite low understanding of the issue, the public lacks confidence that enough is being done to prevent modern slavery and to protect those impacted.**

- Seven in ten (71%) agree that more attention should be given to the issue of modern slavery in the UK.
- Prevention is high on the public agenda: 8 in 10 (81%) agree that the UK Government should do more to deter traffickers and those who commit modern slavery offences.
- Similar proportions (78%) also agree that the UK Government should do more to support those who have experienced modern slavery.

⇒ **While the public want to see the Government take more action to prevent and support victims of modern slavery, MPs remain divided on whether new UK legislation will have an impact.**

- Just under half (47%) of MPs think new UK legislation (such as the Illegal Migration Act and the Nationality and Borders Act, and Safety of Rwanda Act) will not significantly reduce modern slavery in the UK, and 45% agree that new UK legislation will not deter traffickers¹.
- Labour MPs are significantly more likely to think that new UK legislation will not have an impact on reducing modern slavery and deterring traffickers than Conservative MPs.

¹ Note that fieldwork with MPs was carried out in May 2024, before policies like the Safety of Rwanda Act were axed by the current Government.

Background and methodology

Background to the research

The number of potential victims of modern slavery referred to the Home Office are at their highest since records began in 2009. Nonetheless, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the prevalence of this issue in the UK. Stereotypes and misinformation that often conflates modern slavery with perceptions of immigration mean that survivor voices often go unheard.

As the capital, London is a central hub for modern slavery. The prevalence of modern slavery in London has been growing as criminals become increasingly sophisticated in their recruitment and exploitation methods. This is evidenced by the fact that the number of modern slavery offences identified by the Metropolitan Police in London has increased by 12.6% over the last three years, reaching 1,238 offences in London in 2023.

The hidden nature of modern slavery and barriers to reporting means that the real number of offences is likely to be much higher than the currently available data suggests. Victims may avoid reporting the crime due to fear of possible retaliation from their exploiters, of being held

responsible for crimes they were forced to commit by their exploiters or (for those trafficked into the UK) of putting their immigration status and right to stay in the UK at risk. These limitations are explored in more detail in the 'Scope of the research' section below.

Hestia commissioned independent research agency Thinks Insight & Strategy to build on existing insight into modern slavery in London, bringing the voices of those it impacts to the forefront and exploring changes in modern slavery in the capital.

Specifically, our research was designed to:

- Explore trends in the forms of modern slavery and victim demographics in London.
- Share the stories of those with lived experience of modern slavery.
- Raise public and policymaker awareness of the issue of modern slavery and those it impacts.

Methodology

Our approach (outlined below) combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as a review of existing data about modern slavery.

Qualitative fieldwork

- Between 9th and 24th May, we conducted six interviews with Hestia service users who have experienced modern slavery in London.
- We also conducted two interviews with experts in the field (Tatiana Gren-Jardan, Head of the Modern Slavery Policy Unit at Justice and Care UK and The Centre for Social Justice, and Detective Superintendent Andy Furphy, Lead Officer for Exploitation), as well as an additional interview with a Hestia representative advocating on behalf of service users.

Quantitative fieldwork

- 5 questions on an online quantitative survey with 2,000 members of the UK public.
- 3 questions on an online quantitative survey with 99 UK MPs.

The primary research outlined above was complemented by analysis of existing data about modern slavery from a range of sources, including data from the Metropolitan Police and the National Referral Mechanism.

In the quantitative surveys, we used a mixture of true and false statements to explore understanding of modern slavery amongst the UK public and MPs. This is standard practice in quantitative research and allows us to capture levels of understanding among our audience by looking at whether they agree or disagree with the statements.

Scope of the research

In our research, we have specifically focused on modern slavery crimes that have taken place in London and that have impacted adults. This is because Hestia is a London-based charity supporting adult victims of modern slavery. In some instances throughout our report, we have referred to data at a broader level, e.g. at a national level or across all age groups; this is normally as a result of more granular data breakdowns being unavailable. Where we have referred to these wider datasets, we have clearly highlighted it to avoid confusion.

Additionally, where we have reported on data from our quantitative survey with MPs, we have only reported on this at a total level, or differentiated between Conservative and Labour MPs. MPs from other political parties accounted for only 13 responses in total; this base size is too small to accurately report on.

Below, we have highlighted some potential limitations of the research:

- ⊖ Whilst we were able to interview service users who had experienced criminal exploitation, county lines, cuckooing, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation in London, this does not cover the breadth of exploitation types. Nonetheless, we have supplemented our knowledge of other exploitation types through our analysis of relevant and recent literature on these issues.
- ⊖ In order to protect the confidentiality of the service users we interviewed, details such as name, country of origin and the London borough in which the exploitation took place have been changed throughout.
- ⊖ Adults must provide informed consent to enter the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), so the true number of victims is likely to be much higher than data currently available suggests. Furthermore, due to the hidden nature of the crime, and increased barriers to reporting as a result of increasingly tough anti-immigration laws and threats of deportation, many victims of modern slavery are unlikely to come forward out of fear of the possible repercussions that may put their immigration status and future in the UK at risk. In 2023, Duty to Notify (DtN) statistics were at their highest – evidence that people may be identified as potential victims but choose to remain anonymous. Our report is based on

the available data, even if actual figures may be higher.

- ⊖ Potential modern slavery victims that are adults aged 18 and over are referred through the DtN if they do not consent to enter the NRM. However, children under the age of 18 who are potential modern slavery victims must be referred to the NRM regardless of consent. We have therefore made the assumption that everyone in the DtN sample is an adult aged 18 and over, but acknowledge there may be a small number of age disputed cases in the sample.
- ⊖ In this report, we have focused only on the number of referrals of potential adult modern slavery victims to the NRM, rather than the number of conclusive decisions from those referrals.
- ⊖ For our analysis of modern slavery in London, we have analysed data from the NRM and the Metropolitan Police. The latter was focused on due to its major role in crime and justice in the capital and oversight of modern slavery offences within this. Data from the Metropolitan Police was requested through the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and analysed for this report. Data was not requested from the British Transport Police or the City of London Police, as the Metropolitan Police is likely to hold the most substantial and encompassing data set on modern slavery in London of these entities.
- ⊖ There is a disparity between NRM referrals for modern slavery offences where the Metropolitan Police has acted as the first responder, and data from the Metropolitan Police on modern slavery offences in London (broken down by borough). The NRM referrals are consistently higher. We can hypothesise that this is due to the NRM accounting for modern slavery offences that have occurred outside London (elsewhere in the UK or internationally) but have been reported in London. We have referred to both data sets in our report as both shed valuable light on modern slavery, which is a hidden crime by its nature.
- ⊖ During quantitative fieldwork with MPs (8th – 29th May 2024), we focused on existing legislation at the time such as the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and Safety of Rwanda Act. Due to the recent change of Government, this legislation may no longer be relevant in its current form.

What is modern slavery in the UK?

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 defines modern slavery as encompassing servitude, forced labour, and human trafficking. It must involve coercive behaviour for the purpose of exploitation. Modern slavery often happens through organised crime, with victims controlled through violence, financial or emotional abuse, grooming or exploitation to prevent them from escaping or reporting the crime.

Forms of modern slavery

Modern slavery can take many different forms. A victim of modern slavery may experience one or a combination of these exploitation types at any one time.

- ➡ **Forced labour:** where victims are forced to work for offenders and are often underpaid or not paid at all.
- ➡ **Domestic servitude:** where victims are forced to undertake household chores and childcare, often confined to the house of the offender.
- ➡ **Sexual exploitation:** where victims are forced into sex work or involvement in the commercial sex industry, and/or manipulated or coerced into sexual activities for another's gain.

➡ **Criminal exploitation:** where victims are manipulated or coerced into illegal activities like drug trafficking, street crimes, cannabis cultivation, and sham marriages. Drug trafficking can be conducted through county lines, where the victim is used to transport and sell drugs from major cities into the surrounding towns and rural areas. Cuckooing is also another form of criminal exploitation where the victim's home is taken over by the offender to be used as a base for drug dealing or other illegal activity.

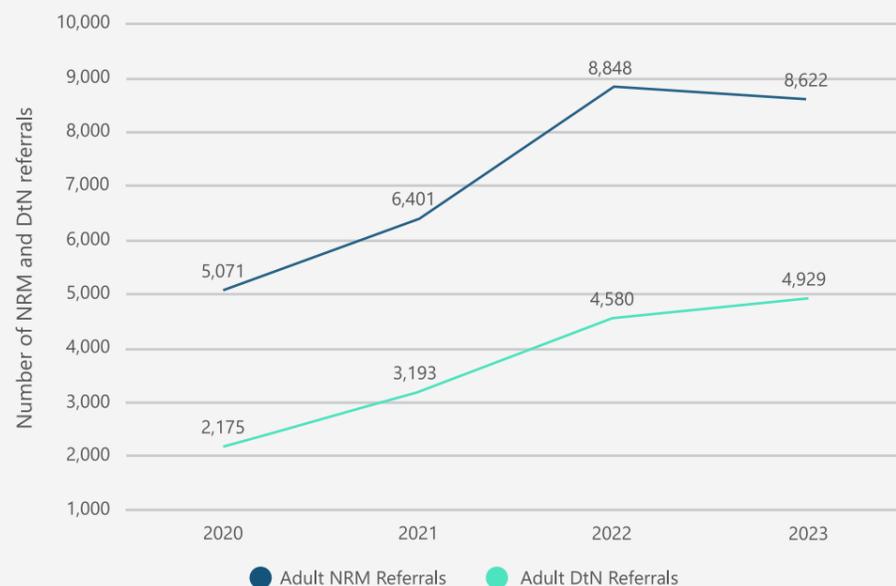
➡ **Organ harvesting:** where a victim's organs are forcibly removed for sale on the black market.

Modern slavery in the UK

The UK has a framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery called the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

Since 2020, there has been a 70% increase in the number of adult potential victims referred to the NRM in the UK, from 5,071 in 2020 to 8,622 in 2023. Adult potential victims of modern slavery account for 51% of all NRM referrals in 2023 (including adults and children).

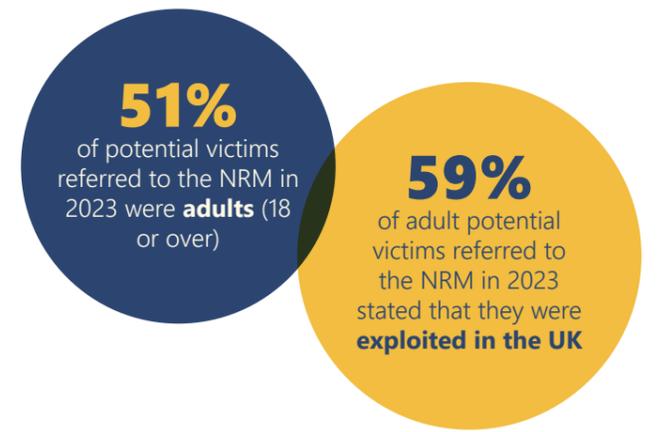
Chart 1: Total number of adult potential victims of modern slavery referred to the NRM and DtN annually



Source: Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism Statistics, Home Office

Understanding and awareness of modern slavery

Understanding of modern slavery amongst the public is limited. When asked to define modern slavery, many are either unsure or conflate it with other issues such as immigration or work that may be low paid with poor working conditions and management, but is not coercive in nature.



What do the public think modern slavery is?

"Gangsters shipping certain people in at a cost to them."	"Using immigrants for cheap wages."	"Humans who are working long hours for very little salary."
"Working and living in poor conditions, i.e. no pay, long working hours, bad accommodation."	"Taking advantage of someone for financial gain."	"In a place of work, paying a worker less than what he/she deserves is definitely an act of modern slavery."
"Possibly illegal immigrants being kept in awful conditions and mistreated."	"Where people are paid below minimum wage or not at all, usually brought through people trafficking."	"People being exploited by criminal gangs."

In reality, modern slavery is much more complex than this. According to the United Nations' Palermo Protocol, modern slavery must include three key elements: an act (e.g. the act of human trafficking, including recruitment of victims), a means (e.g. the ways in which perpetrators carry out the act) and a purpose (e.g. the forms of exploitation victims are subjected to).

In addition to building public understanding of what modern slavery is, there is also a need to educate both the public and MPs on the nature and scale of modern slavery in the UK.

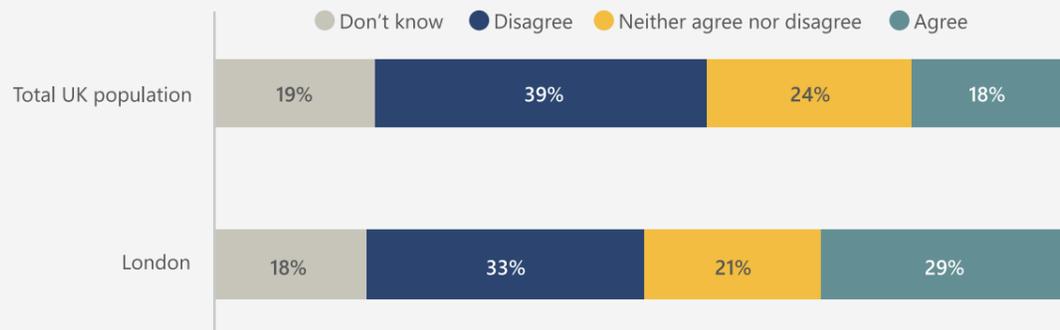
Only 18% of the public and 14% of MPs provided a correct estimate of the number of potential adult victims of modern slavery that there were in the UK in 2023.

Furthermore, despite the increasing number of NRM referrals, more than half of the public do not know whether the number of adult modern slavery victims has decreased or increased in the last 3 years. In fact, 14% of the public believe that this figure has decreased.



Base May 2024: General public (n=2,067), MPs (n=99).

Chart 2: The extent to which the public agree that...“I would know how to spot if someone was experiencing modern slavery”

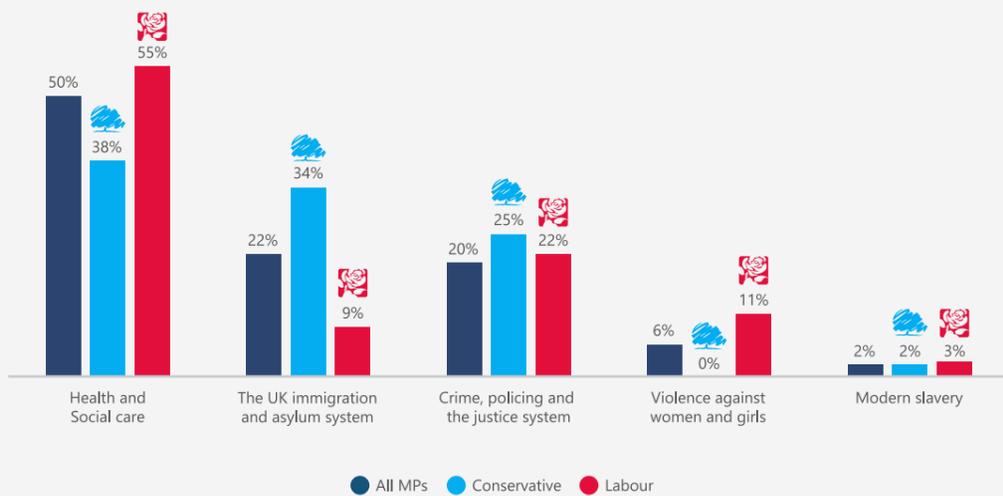


Base May 2024: General public (n=2,067), London (n=265).

Our research shows that generally, the public do not feel confident that they would know how to spot if someone was experiencing modern slavery. Those living in London are slightly more confident that they would recognise if someone was

experiencing modern slavery (29% vs 18% of the total UK population). However, confidence remains relatively low, with greater proportions disagreeing that they would know how to spot if someone was experiencing modern slavery.

Chart 3: The proportion of MPs selecting each issue as their top priority for their constituency



Base May 2024: Total MPs (n=99), Conservative (n=56), Labour (n=30).

Furthermore, MPs feel that modern slavery is not a high priority for their constituencies; 93% of MPs didn't rank modern slavery in their top three priorities for their constituency, whilst only 2% ranked it as their top priority.

- 50% of all MPs surveyed select health and social care as their top priority.
- 22% of MPs select the UK immigration and asylum system as their top priority (rising to 34%

amongst Conservative MPs), whilst 20% select the crime, policing and justice system as their top priority.

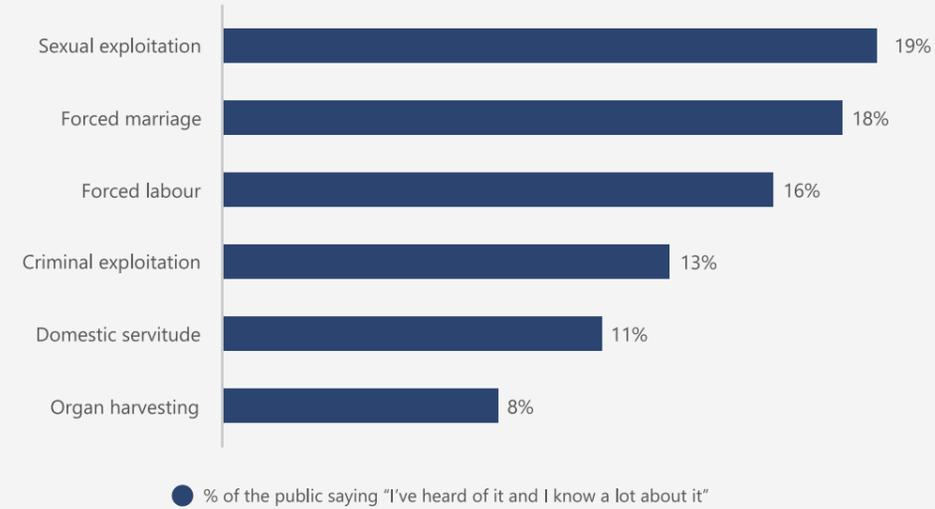
- It is important to note that modern slavery is intertwined with all of these issues. Prioritising modern slavery as an issue would therefore have important additional benefits.

Understanding and awareness of different forms of modern slavery

Even for those aware of modern slavery as an issue and with some understanding of what it entails, the complex nature of this crime means that public awareness of specific forms of modern slavery remains low. The chart below shows the proportion

of the public who say they have heard of each type of modern slavery and know 'a lot' about it – suggesting that in-depth knowledge of different types of modern slavery is relatively low.

Chart 4: Public awareness of types of modern slavery



Base May 2024: General public (n=2,067).

- According to NRM data, forced labour is the most prevalent form of modern slavery for adult potential victims, accounting for over a third of referrals in 2023 (34%). Despite this, only 1 in 6 (16%) of the UK public say they have heard of this type of modern slavery and know a lot about it.
- Criminal exploitation was the second most common form of modern slavery amongst adult NRM referrals in 2023, accounting for 16% of referrals – whilst 8% of referrals involved both forced labour and criminal exploitation. However, only 1 in 8 (13%) members of the UK public claim they have heard of criminal exploitation and know a lot about it.
- Sexual exploitation accounts for 11% of adult NRM referrals in 2023. Of all forms of modern slavery, the public report highest awareness of sexual exploitation, with 1 in 5 (19%) members of the public saying that they've heard of sexual exploitation and know a lot about it.
- On the other hand, the public are less aware of domestic servitude as a type of modern slavery. Domestic servitude accounts for 2% of

adult NRM referrals in 2023, and only 1 in 10 (11%) of the public say they have heard of this type of modern slavery and know a lot about it.

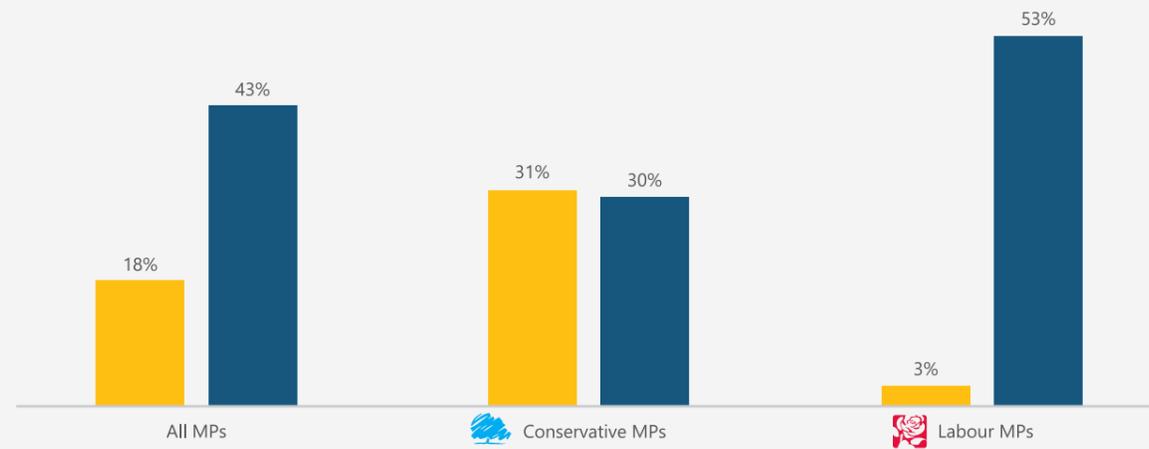
- No data is available on the prevalence of forced marriage and there are very few referrals for organ harvesting (<1% of NRM referrals), potentially due to the more recent and hidden nature of this form of exploitation. Whilst the public report higher familiarity with forced marriage – almost 1 in 5 (18%) claim they have heard of it and know a lot about it - the public are the least aware of organ harvesting; less than 1 in 10 (8%) of the UK public say that they've heard of organ harvesting and know a lot about it.

Modern slavery as a policy issue

Whilst data shows that modern slavery is happening in all parts of the UK, almost 1 in 5 MPs (18%) see this as primarily a foreign policy issue. Opinion on this is split along party lines; a third (31%) of Conservative MPs think modern slavery is primarily a foreign policy issue compared to only 3% of Labour MPs.

Chart 5: Proportion of MPs who agree with the statement...

● Modern slavery is primarily a foreign policy issue ● Modern slavery is primarily a domestic UK policy issue



Base May 2024: Total MPs (n=99), Conservative (n=56), Labour (n=30), Scottish National Party (n=8), Other (n=5).
Note: Figures do not add up to 100% as some MPs opted not to answer this statement.

Who is impacted by modern slavery?

Modern slavery can happen to anyone, regardless of age, gender, nationality or other demographics. However, there are some misconceptions amongst the public and MPs around groups that are more likely to be victims of modern slavery.

For the past three years, considerably more adult men have been referred to the NRM than adult women. In 2023 alone, 73% of adult NRM referrals were for men.



Myth: "Modern slavery victims are most likely to be women."

50% of the UK public think adult victims of modern slavery are most likely to be female, rising to 52% amongst those in London. Similarly, a majority of MPs, regardless of party, believe that victims of modern slavery in the UK are more likely to be women (53% for Conservative MPs, 69% for Labour MPs and 62% in total).

"I think that there would be a lot of confusion between human trafficking and smuggling of migrants by small boats among the general public. In recent years both media and politicians have been using the terms interchangeably and it's usually trafficking people into the UK by boats instead of smuggling. Modern slavery has been absorbed by the immigration rhetoric, so I fear now the general public's perception [of modern slavery] could be different."

Tatiana Gren-Jardan



Victoria's story

Domestic Servitude

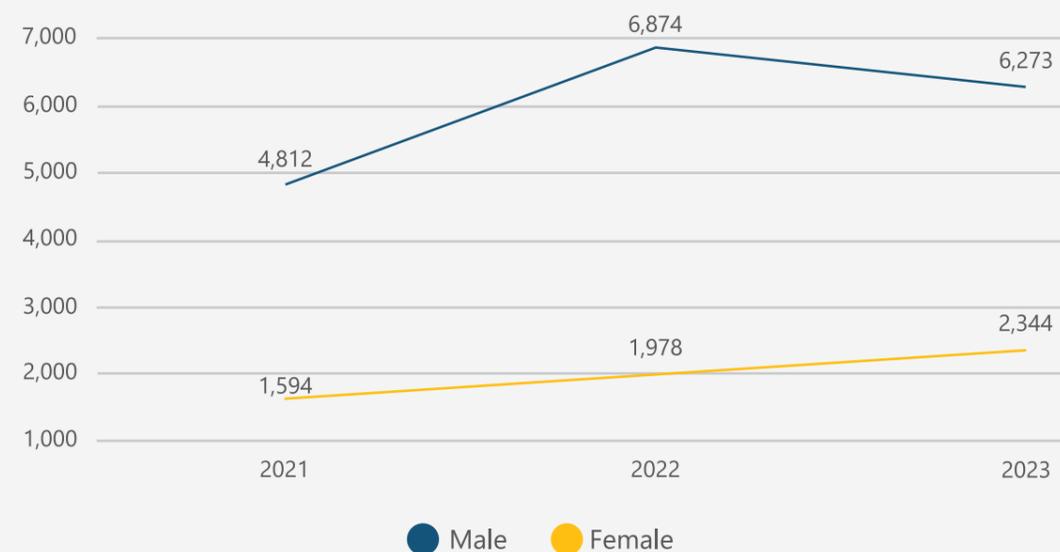
I worked in a house in Chelsea. I had to sleep on the floor without a mattress or duvet - and I didn't have proper food.

I'm originally from Nigeria and grew up in poverty. When my children were young, money was a struggle, so I decided to get a job abroad. It was very different to what I expected, with many more responsibilities than were in my contract. I didn't have a room in Chelsea - I had to sleep on the floor without a mattress or duvet - and I didn't have proper food. Sometimes I had to steal fruit just to survive. If my employer saw us sitting and resting at any point, they would be angry. My employer took my phone away from me for weeks at a time, which meant I couldn't contact my family and it made me so sad. When the employer started to hit and kick me, I decided to run away - I was so scared. I found a local church on Google and decided to go there. It took me a while to gain the courage to ask for help, but once I did, a volunteer took me into their home and supported me. I was eventually referred to Hestia who helped me. It was such a huge relief. I felt like I was finally free, because for almost two years it felt like I was in jail.

"There was no bed or mattress or duvet to cover your body. We worked seventeen hours every day and we didn't have breaks. If our employer saw us sitting and resting, she would be angry."



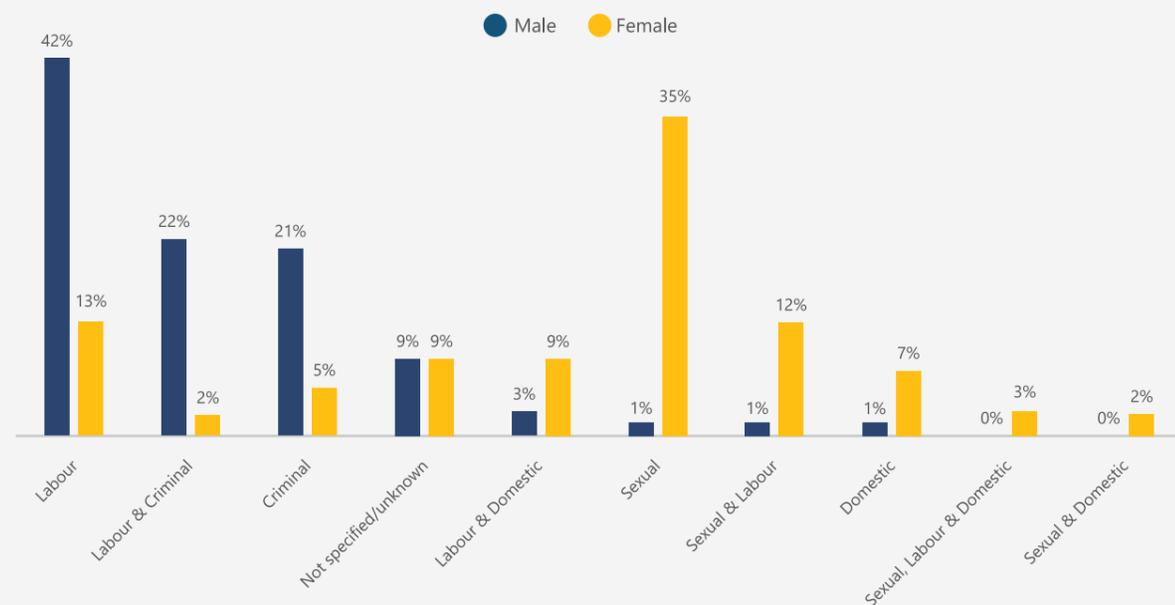
Chart 6: The number of NRM referrals by gender for adult potential victims



Source: Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism Statistics, Home Office

There are however differences in the prevalence of men and women in the different forms of modern slavery.

Chart 7: Adult NRM referrals by gender and exploitation type



Source: Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism Statistics, Home Office



42%

Potential adult male victims are most likely to report **forced labour**



35%

Potential adult female victims are most likely to report **sexual exploitation**

Sabir's story

Criminal Exploitation

I came from Sudan to the UK on a student visa. When I finished studying, an agency found me a construction job, and told me I didn't need any papers.

I was driven far away from Southwark to a remote warehouse. I was all alone, and I had to put drugs in bags for seven hours a day. Two people supervised me; they said if I stole anything or tried to escape, they would kill me and no one would know that I was gone. They injected me with drugs. I soon became addicted. I was in the warehouse for six or seven months. My body was weak, and I was scared for my life. One night I managed to escape. I ran for hours until I reached a motorway and found an HGV driver. He offered to call the police but I said "No I'm in this country illegally", so he bought me a train ticket back to London instead. I got in trouble trying to fund my drug habit and was sent to a deportation centre. In the centre I heard about modern slavery, and I thought "That's what happened to me!". A charity helped me make an application to the Home Office as a victim of modern slavery, and within two days I was released from detention. This was four years ago but I'm still waiting for the outcome of my application. I don't know what the future holds for me.



"They said from now on, you have to do this, otherwise we'll kill you. **They gave me drugs to put in bags and said if I don't, I won't get food.**"



Myth: "Modern slavery victims are unlikely to be British."
46% of the UK public and 40% of those in London disagree that **British citizens are one of the most likely nationalities to become victims of modern slavery.**

In reality, British citizens were the second most common nationality represented amongst potential adult victims of modern slavery referred to the NRM in 2023. The most common nationalities for adult victims referred to the NRM in 2023 were:



36%
Albanian



10%
British



7%
Vietnamese

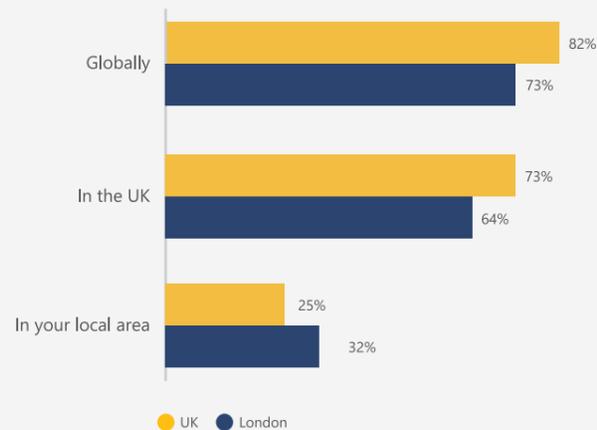
Modern slavery in London

Though data shows that modern slavery occurs in every region of the UK, the capital sees the highest numbers of referrals out of any other county: between January and March 2024 alone, 25% of NRM referrals for those reporting exploitation in UK counties (including adults and children) were in Greater London.¹ In 2023, the Metropolitan Police identified 1,238 modern slavery offences for adult victims in London.

“London sees around 40% of all the demand for modern slavery across the country. It has more pockets of displaced diasporas than anywhere else in the UK. When you come to the UK, you likely have a connection with someone in London, so you plan to settle there. It happens a lot, someone will fly to London because they’ve been promised a job but when they get here they’re put into debt bondage. County lines is also much more of an issue in London, it’s criminal exploitation.”

Detective Superintendent Andy Furphy

Chart 8: The extent to which the public agree modern slavery is an issue...



Base May 2024: General population (n=2,067), London (n=265).

Only a third (32%) of those living in London agree that modern slavery is an issue in their local area – whilst 36% of those in London ‘don’t know’ whether it is an issue in their area. In reality, data from the Metropolitan Police indicates that modern slavery exists across every borough in the capital.

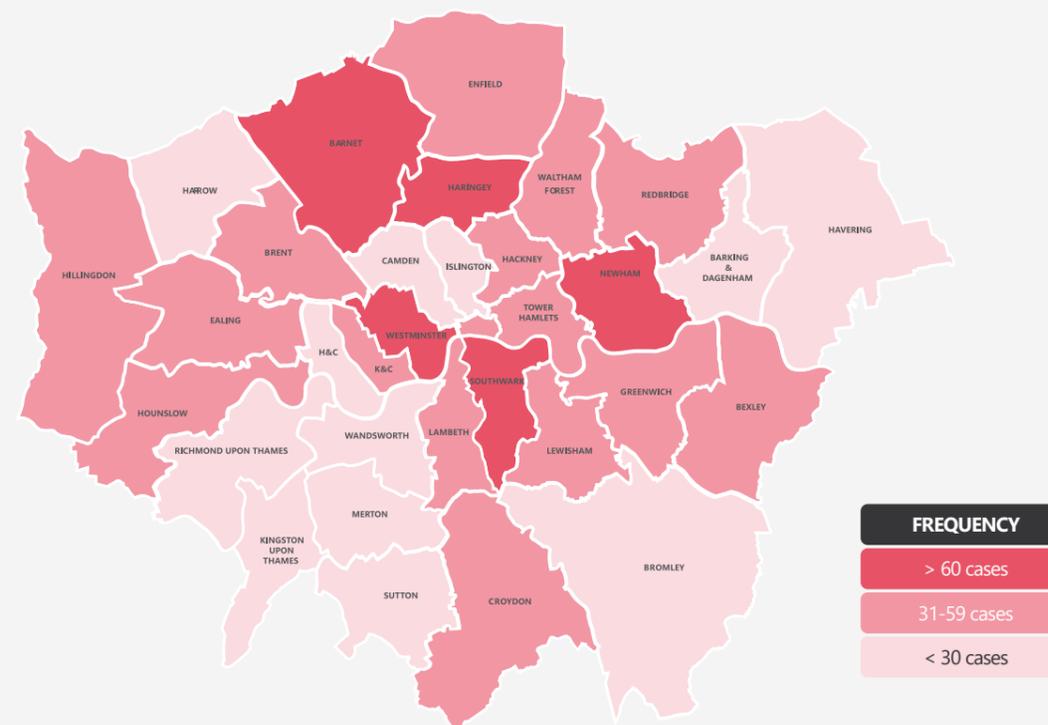


Myth: “Modern slavery is not an issue in my local area.”

The public are significantly less likely to believe that modern slavery is an issue in their area versus in the UK or globally.

Chart 9: Prevalence of modern slavery cases by London borough in 2023

2023



In 2023, the lowest number of cases were recorded in Richmond Upon Thames (10 cases) and Bromley (12 cases), whilst the highest number of cases were in Westminster (104 cases), Barnet (69 cases) and Newham (67 cases). In total, 20 out of the 32 London boroughs had more than 30 recorded cases across 2023.

As stated previously, the real number of offences in London is likely to be much higher than data currently available from the Metropolitan Police

due to this data being based on proven offences of modern slavery and barriers to reporting for victims. Furthermore, Duty to Notify data is not currently available by London borough, so actual figures of modern slavery cases in London are likely to be much higher as this data is based on instances of referral of suspected cases of modern slavery into the NRM.

¹ Note that this data includes both child and adult referrals, as data is unavailable for adults only.



Safiya’s story Sexual Exploitation

“They don’t force you [to engage in sex], but they take advantage of you and coerce you. They threatened to turn me in to the police.”

I met some men in a coffee shop in Newham, and one of them agreed to house me as long as I worked for him.

I come from a small town in Tunisia. When my father passed away, my brother ‘took over’ as head of the house. He was extremely abusive, so I began planning my escape. I was granted a visa to visit the UK and arrived with £500 in my pocket. I desperately needed money, but I had no work permit, and I was scared of being deported because I thought my brother would kill me. One day, I met some Tunisian men in a coffee shop in Newham, and one of them agreed to house me

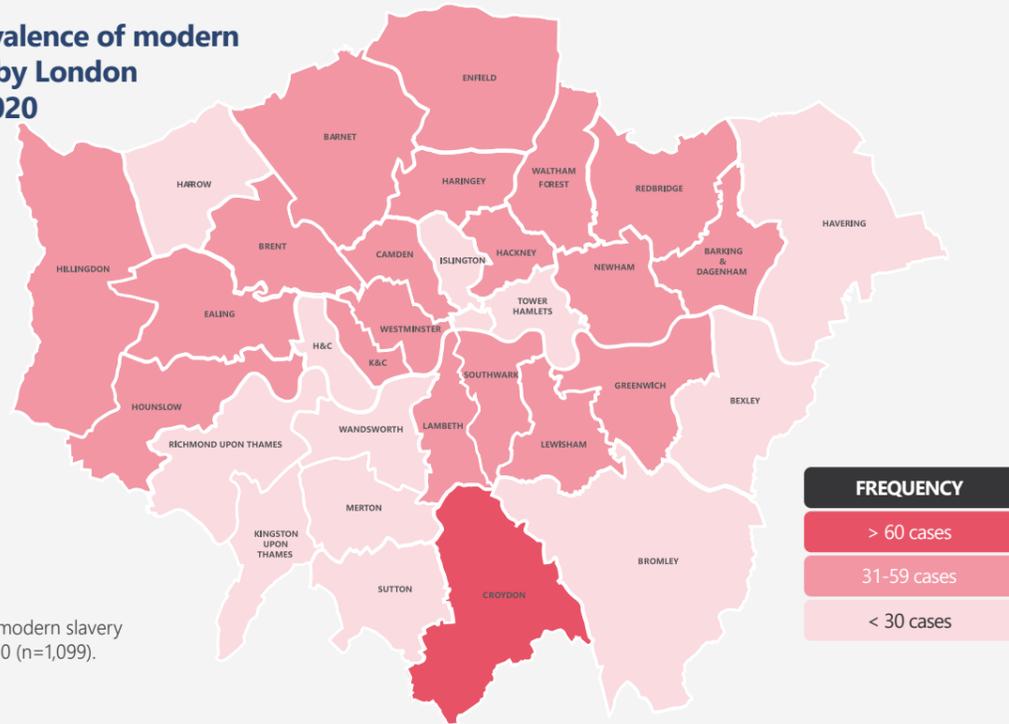
as long as I worked for him. They didn’t force me to go with men, but they took advantage of my vulnerable situation, and threatened to turn me in to the police if I didn’t go with the men. After eight months I ran away. A kind stranger took me in and found me some cash-in-hand work. After a few years, I became exhausted with hiding, and I turned myself into the police. This was five years ago, but I’m still waiting on the outcome of my asylum application. I wanted to share my story because it’s been weighing heavy on my heart – I feel ten times lighter now. I really hope that by sharing my story I will give others the courage to leave abusive situations.

The changing face of modern slavery in London

While modern slavery occurs consistently across every London borough, some years have seen spikes in the number of cases; for instance, in 2022, data from the Metropolitan Police shows that there were a total of 1,688 cases in London, compared to 1,375 in 2021 and 1,238 in 2023. The maps below show the prevalence of cases across London boroughs between the years of 2020 and 2023. Note that exact numbers of cases per borough can be found in the Appendix of this report.

Chart 10: Prevalence of modern slavery cases by London borough in 2020

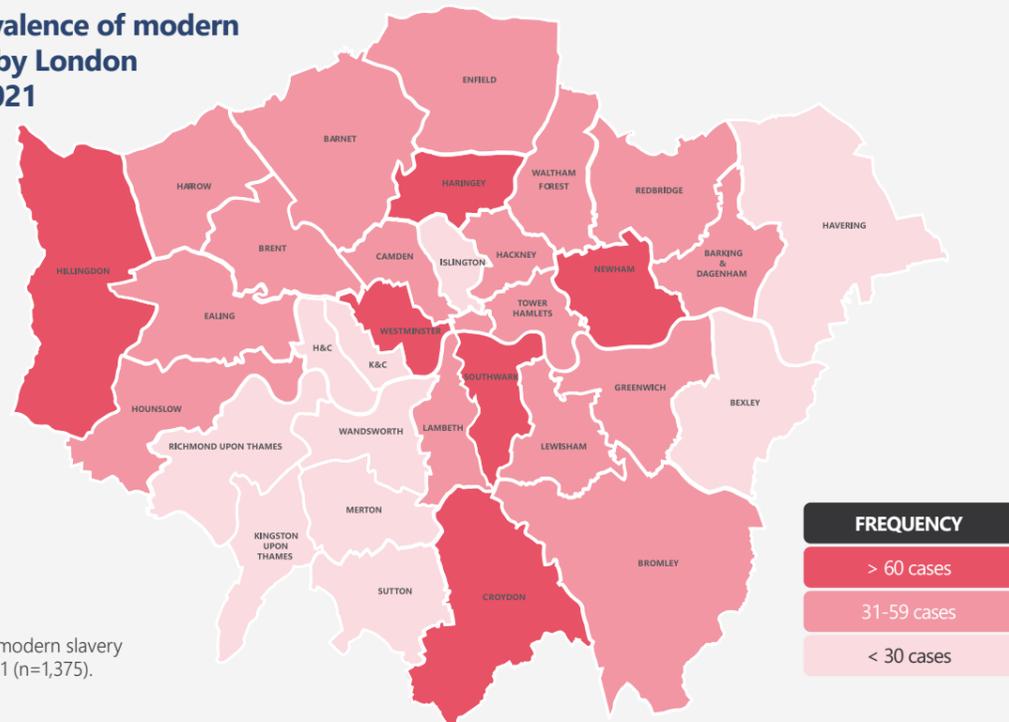
2020



Base: Total number of modern slavery cases in London in 2020 (n=1,099).

Chart 11: Prevalence of modern slavery cases by London borough in 2021

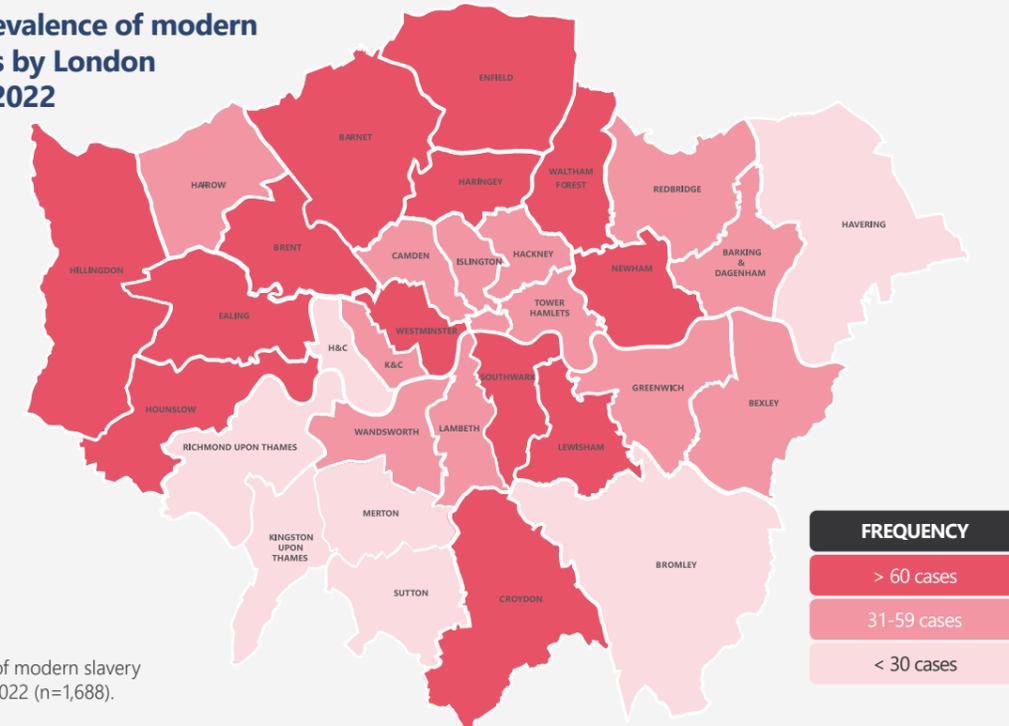
2021



Base: Total number of modern slavery cases in London in 2021 (n=1,375).

Chart 12: Prevalence of modern slavery cases by London borough in 2022

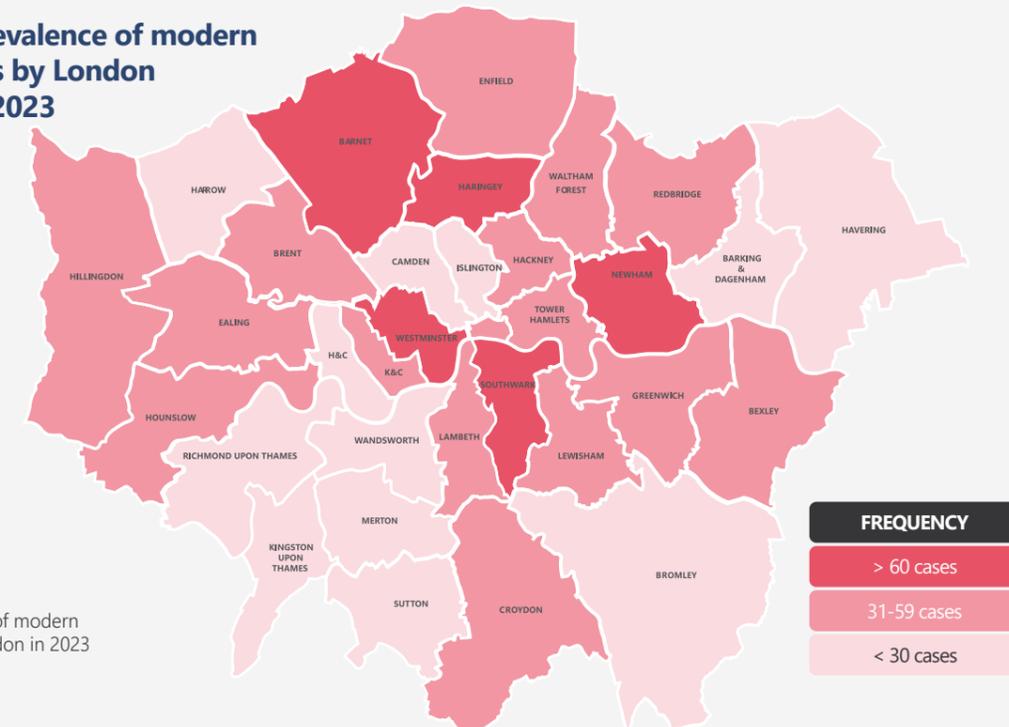
2022



Base: Total number of modern slavery cases in London in 2022 (n=1,688).

Chart 13: Prevalence of modern slavery cases by London borough in 2023

2023



Base: Total number of modern slavery cases in London in 2023 (n=1,238).

Metropolitan Police data shows that the issue of modern slavery in London is not going away. However, there have been some changes in where modern slavery is most likely to happen. For example, in 2020 Croydon was the only London borough with >60 recorded cases. The number of boroughs with >60 recorded cases increased to six in 2021 and thirteen in 2022. In 2023, Barnet, Haringey, Newham, Southwark and Westminster had the highest number of cases, with Croydon no longer a hotspot. This does not mean that modern slavery is declining, but that it is being spread very differently across the London boroughs.

Modern slavery is constantly evolving. Victim demographics change, new and increasingly complex recruitment methods emerge, and new forms of modern slavery appear. Interviews with victims of modern slavery and experts working in the field point towards a number of trends, two of which we explore below.

Nationalities

Whilst modern slavery can happen to anyone, demographics of key groups change over time. One observed shift in recent years relates to the nationality of victims, with the data suggesting that growing numbers of British nationals are becoming victims. 2023 saw the highest number of British nationals referred to the NRM since records began; this group represented 10% of all adult referrals.

This trend plays out in London too. In 2020, Metropolitan Police data of adult victims of modern slavery showed that British people were the fifth most commonly represented nationality (after Albanian, Chinese, Nigerian, and Indian nationals). The same data shows that in 2021 and 2022, British nationals were the second most commonly represented nationality amongst adult victims. In 2023, they were the third most common nationality amongst adult victims, accounting for 4% of all Metropolitan Police cases.¹

“Since about 2017, we’ve started seeing more British nationals being referred into the NRM – they became one of the top nationalities. Nationalities [of victims] have changed significantly – back in 2014/15, Nigerians were at the top and now I’m

not even sure they’re in the top 10 [most prevalent]. We had a lot of European nationals found and referred to the NRM – Romanians, Hungarians, Polish nationals – now they’re lower on the list.”

Tatiana Gren-Jardan

“The top nationality we see is always British, largely due to county lines. This is a huge issue in London, across every borough.”

Detective Superintendent Andy Furphy

Forms of modern slavery

As well as changing victim demographics, forms of modern slavery also change with time – whether this is related to recruitment or forms of exploitation. Traditionally, modern slavery has been most likely to consist of forced labour (more likely amongst males) and sexual exploitation (more likely amongst females). Now, however, newer forms of criminal exploitation are both on the rise and constantly changing – including cuckooing, county lines, debt bondage and online sex work.

“We’re constantly busting myths around modern slavery because of conflation and traditional perceptions that it only happens to women that are forced into sexual exploitation. There’s still a lack of understanding and stereotyping in this field.”

Tatiana Gren-Jardan

“There are thousands of women being advertised online that are being forced to have sex 10 times a day, every day of the week against their will. They’re trying to get out of debt bondage and they’re being openly advertised online.”

Detective Superintendent Andy Furphy

Robert’s story Cuckooing

I was in a vulnerable situation when I met Vinnie in Ealing.

I was a full-time carer for my girlfriend, who was dealing with health problems, and working full time. I’ve smoked weed daily since I was 14 to help me cope with my anxiety. Vinnie was a drug dealer I picked up from, and to make ends meet, I began running drugs for him in the evenings. The money was good, and it meant I could smoke for free, so I started selling drugs for him full-time. After a few weeks Vinnie and his gang moved into my house and started using it as a base. There were drugs and guns everywhere, but I was too scared to ask them to leave. I didn’t know who could help me, and I was scared to go to the police because I’d been breaking the law too by selling drugs. One day Vinnie assaulted me in my own home, and enough was enough. I told them to leave and take



everything with them. They tried to get me into bondage debt, saying there was £5000 worth of drugs missing. My family offered to help me with the money – but the value of the drugs that were apparently missing kept going up and up. I got sick of the threats and ended up going to the police. They installed a panic alarm in my house, but lots of members of the gang are still walking free and still live in the area, so I’m always feeling paranoid they’ll get me.

“I stayed working for the gang because they had threatened me on numerous occasions, and I was in fear for my life! I don’t want to live in fear anymore.”

Jaden’s story County Lines

I moved to Barnet when I was very young.

I used to play basketball at the park, and made friends with this guy, George. He told me he sold drugs and could get me involved if I ever wanted to make some quick money. I received an allowance from my mum, and wasn’t interested in drugs, so I said no. A couple of weeks later George asked me to do him a favour and drop something off for him. I said okay, because I was naïve and wanted to fit in. When I went to drop it off, some very dangerous people made me get in their car and said I had to do more runs for them. They started coming to my house and forcing me to sell more and more. I tried to tell them no, but they said they’d kill my



mum if I stopped. I was so scared. They constantly threatened me, and once they even pushed me out of the car and ran me over. When I was in the hospital I was referred into the National Referral Mechanism and Hestia. They helped me and my mum move out of the area where the gang is. I’m still scared that they’ll find us.

“I thought the gang would come to my house and hurt my mum. I felt like I had no choice.”

¹ Note that this is based on where the nationality of victims is available in the Met Police data. In 2023, 55% of adult modern slavery cases identified by the Met were of an unknown nationality (n=684).

Looking to the future

Referrals of victims of modern slavery continue to rise. This issue is not going away. What is more, research suggests that NRM referrals are only the tip of the iceberg. In 2023, the Global Slavery Index estimated that around 122,000 people in the UK are experiencing modern slavery. Several factors play into this disparity between figures: for instance, victims of modern slavery may be scared to report their experience – particularly if they have been forced to commit a crime – or they may not even recognise themselves as a victim of a crime.

“It depends a lot on what we see and what we find – it’s the tip of the iceberg. What’s happening underneath?”

Tatiana Gren-Jardan

Furthermore, our research has highlighted some of the emerging trends in modern slavery, including different forms of modern slavery. It is clear that modern slavery is ever-changing, with traffickers using increasingly complex means of exploitation.

“Crime types are changing and there are newer ways that traffickers exploit people [...] It’s changing as we speak.”

Tatiana Gren-Jardan

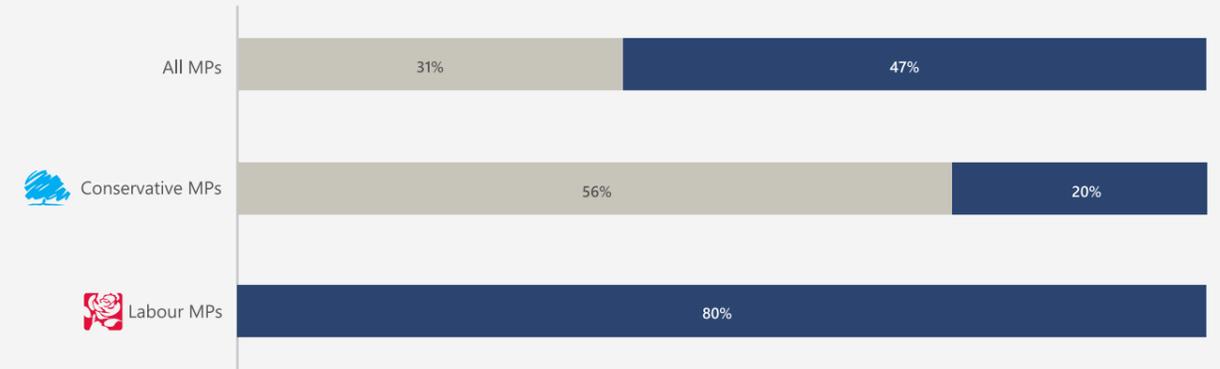
Amongst the general public, there is uncertainty as to whether modern slavery is currently being dealt with effectively. Over a third (36%) of the public disagree that the issue of modern slavery in the UK is being tackled effectively, whilst almost a quarter (23%) say they ‘don’t know’.

Meanwhile, MPs are split across party lines as to whether or not new legislation will reduce modern slavery and deter traffickers. Conservative MPs are overwhelmingly more likely to agree that new legislation (including the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and the Safety of Rwanda act) will reduce modern slavery and deter traffickers, whilst Labour MPs do not. On the whole, MPs are more likely to think that new legislation will not reduce modern slavery and deter traffickers.



Chart 14: Proportion of MPs who agree with the statement...

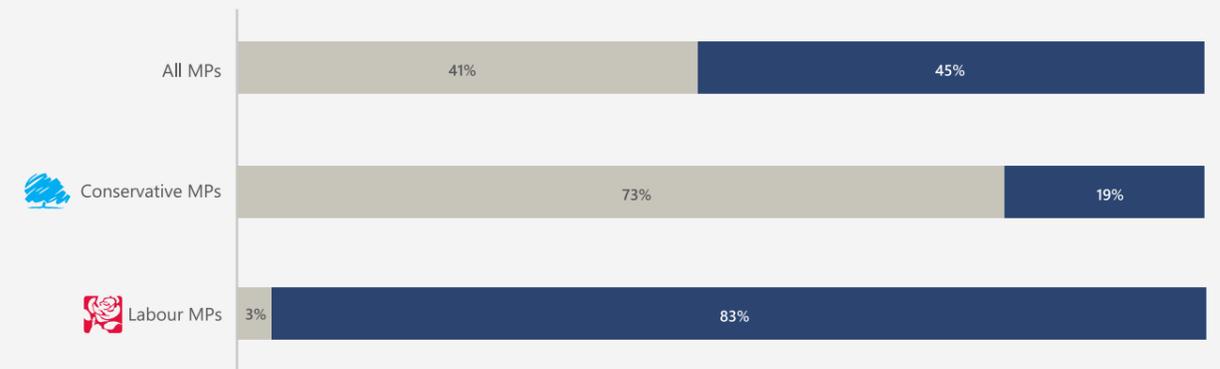
- New UK legislation (including the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and Safety of Rwanda Act) will significantly reduce modern slavery in the UK
- New UK legislation (including the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and Safety of Rwanda Act) will not significantly reduce modern slavery in the UK



Base May 2024: Total MPs (n=99), Conservative (n=56), Labour (n=30), Scottish National Party (n=8), Other (n=5).
Note. Figures do not add up to 100% as some MPs opted not to answer this statement.

Chart 15: Proportion of MPs who agree with the statement...

- New UK legislation (including the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and Safety of Rwanda Act) will deter traffickers
- New UK legislation (including the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and Safety of Rwanda Act) will not deter traffickers

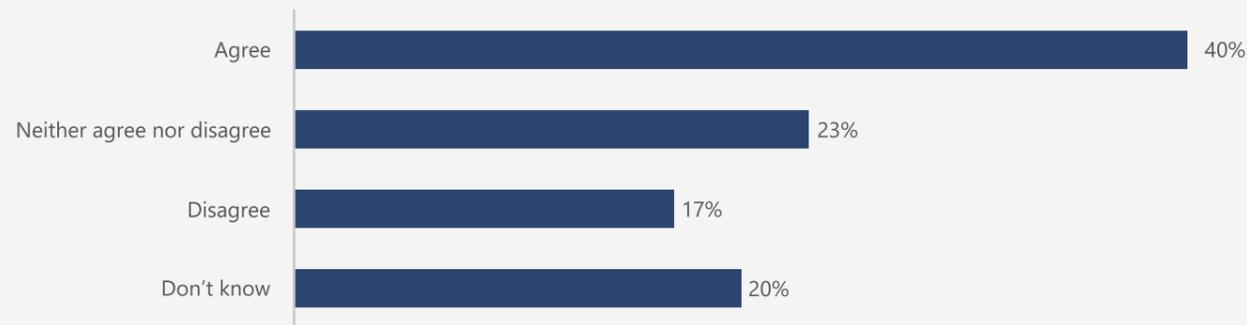


Base May 2024: Total MPs (n=99), Conservative (n=56), Labour (n=30), Scottish National Party (n=8), Other (n=5).
Note. Figures do not add up to 100% as some MPs opted not to answer this statement.

Despite relatively low awareness of modern slavery and uncertainty around how it is currently being addressed in the UK, the public want to see action taken to tackle it. This spans both deterring traffickers and providing greater support for victims.

Chart 16: The extent to which the public agree that...

● Adult victims of modern slavery who are exploited in the UK should be exempt from being deported from the UK



Base May 2024: General population (n=2,067).

The proportion of the public who think that adult victims of modern slavery who are exploited in the UK should be exempt from being deported (40%) is lower than the proportion who think that they should receive support here (69%).

However, a sizeable minority think that adult victims exploited in the UK should not be exempt from deportation (17%). This points to the need to educate the public more on the nature of modern slavery and stress that modern slavery victims only commit crimes under duress as part of their exploitation.

Conclusions

Modern slavery in the UK is a pressing and growing issue.

Common misconceptions, stereotypes and misunderstandings about modern slavery are abundant; the public lacks knowledge and understanding of the issue. However, despite low knowledge, the public lacks confidence that enough is being done to prevent modern slavery in the first instance and to protect those impacted by modern slavery offences once reported.

The political landscape is divided on this issue, with MPs split along party lines in terms of considering modern slavery a foreign or domestic policy issue. Legislation has failed to inspire confidence even among MPs, with 47% agreeing that new UK legislation including the Illegal Migration Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and the Safety of Rwanda Act will not significantly reduce modern slavery in the UK.

The widespread and pervasive nature of this crime, including across every London borough, necessitates that something must be done. It is time to see greater attention and prioritisation of this issue to prevent exploitation on our streets.

How you can help bring modern slavery on our streets to an end

Modern slavery is happening on our streets and in our communities now across the UK. We all can play a part in helping to recognise, report and bring this brutal crime to an end.

As individuals, we can all take simple steps to educate ourselves to spot the signs and report suspected cases. We urge you to read Hestia's guide '[How to Spot the Signs of Modern Slavery](#)' which sets out both what to look for and how to report it.

As a policymaker, local authority, business, or an organisation providing support via client-facing teams, your responsibility goes further.

We recommend that you:

- ➔ Use this report to help you understand the shape and prevalence of modern slavery and the breakdown of information by borough if you are in London.
- ➔ Train your staff so that they understand modern slavery and how it is relevant to their sector and role, can identify potential victims, and know how to respond – including how to make referrals into the National Referral Mechanism if appropriate. Hestia's tailored [training](#) can support you in this.
- ➔ Appoint a Modern Slavery Lead to...
 - Ensure you have an up to date modern slavery statement that sets out your role in tackling modern slavery and – if relevant – your organisation's procedure to follow should you identify potential victims.
 - Where relevant, regularly review and audit your supply chains.
 - Join a Modern Slavery Network for your sector to share best practice and learning.

In addition to the recommendations above we call on:

➔ **Local authorities** to ensure you have a borough-wide strategy to tackle modern slavery which brings together stakeholders across the public and third sector, business, and people with lived experience, and which includes public education and engagement.

➔ **Providers of customer facing services** (NHS, Local authorities' frontline teams, emergency services, pharmacies, NGOs and charities) to ensure staff are aware of organisational procedures if they suspect someone has experienced modern slavery, including whether they are First Responders (check via [this website](#)) and where they can find advice and refer potential victims for support.

If you feel you may be a victim of modern slavery or if you suspect someone might be a victim of modern slavery, call The Salvation Army's Confidential Referral helpline on 0300 3038 151. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you would like to report a suspicion, get help or seek advice, you can call the Modern Slavery Helpline on 08000 121 700.

If you or someone you are concerned about is in immediate danger please call emergency services via 999.

Please put your safety and the safety of the potential victim first at all times and do not confront the potential exploiters.



Appendix

Table 1: Number of adult modern slavery cases by borough between 2020 and 2023 according to Metropolitan Police data.

BOROUGH	2020	2021	2022	2023
Westminster	54	86	87	104
Barnet	31	50	68	69
Newham	58	82	81	67
Haringey	55	62	71	64
Southwark	55	65	71	63
Croydon	65	69	91	53
Enfield	41	55	93	52
Tower Hamlets	30	48	55	50
Hounslow	40	52	60	46
Lewisham	33	44	72	46
Ealing	57	55	70	44
Brent	38	54	68	41
Kensington & Chelsea	32	23	44	41
Waltham Forest	39	49	84	40
Lambeth	34	40	58	39
Greenwich	46	56	49	38
Bexley	26	18	31	34
Hillingdon	39	60	62	34
Redbridge	48	44	52	32
Hackney	33	34	43	31
Barking & Dagenham	47	41	43	29
Harrow	20	37	37	26
Camden	31	35	56	25
Merton	21	29	23	25
Islington	15	28	36	23
Havering	13	24	29	22
Kingston Upon Thames	15	26	29	22
Wandsworth	24	22	41	21
Hammersmith & Fulham	14	25	30	20
Sutton	11	16	21	15
Bromley	23	32	22	12
Richmond Upon Thames	11	14	11	10

The table above is ordered in descending order from the highest number of cases in 2023.



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