



UNDERGROUND LIVES:
**ASPIRATIONAL BRITAIN:
SURVIVORS OF MODERN
SLAVERY WANT TO
WORK TOO**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Britain is in an employment crisis. Labour shortages are hitting record highs and firms are recruiting from abroad which is costly.

At the same time there are currently more than 7,000 survivors of modern slavery who are being supported by the Government, unable to work while their cases are reviewed in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

Hestia's latest Underground Lives research found that, of the 228 survivors surveyed, 96% wanted to work.

"I want to give back to England; I want to work, pay taxes and contribute to society. There is so much turmoil in the world and I want to be part of the solution."

Survivor

Many are highly skilled – 1 in 4 have qualifications at university level or above. But they are caught up in a system where bureaucracy and red tape prevents them from unlocking their potential. Backlogs and delays are increasing, with 1 in 3 waiting more than three years for a decision. During that time, they are reliant on subsistence payments, donations, and food banks. They are de-skilled and their recovery is undermined.

Analysis by Pro Bono Economics estimates that allowing survivors to work during this time could generate a net economic benefit to society of £10m to £41m per year.

This is backed by employers who, with the right support, are keen to make use of those skills.

"We currently have more job vacancies in the country than we have unemployed people. The idea that we are stopping people from working who want to work and to build a life seems to me to be absolutely bizarre. It's such a waste of human capital, such a waste of talent."

Employer

Survivors also tell us that an important part of their recovery is being able to give back, to use their skills to work and rebuild their lives.

While the benefits are clear, the current system contains too many barriers and needs to urgently change. Our recommendations are:

- ▶ Right to work: The Home Office to grant all survivors entering the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) the right to apply for a temporary right to work on receipt of a reasonable grounds decision.
- ▶ Recovery pathway to employment: The Home Office to work with survivors, the modern slavery sector and with businesses to develop a safe employment recovery pathway for all survivors entering the NRM.
- ▶ Employment support package: The Home Office to develop the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract to include a core package of employment-related assessment and support for all survivors.



INTRODUCTION

Modern slavery is a brutal and serious crime. Victims can end up working long hours for little to no payment – doing everything from washing our cars, to painting our nails, making our clothes, to picking our crops, or working in houses as cleaners or nannies. Many are sold for sex in brothels or forced to commit crimes. They are tricked or coerced into slavery. They are psychologically intimidated into thinking they cannot leave and would not get any help. Many are raped, beaten and starved.

It is a crime that is widespread in our communities – today it is estimated there are more than 136,000 victims right here in the UK¹.

The Government's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) was originally designed to offer 45 days of support to a victim from the point they were identified to the point at which they were given legal status by the Government, recognising that they had been a victim. Today, more than one third of those in the system have been waiting more than three years for a decision.

Eventually, almost all survivors (over 95% of those supported by Hestia) receive a positive decision. But during this painful waiting time, many survivors who are being supported by the Government are not allowed to work. The only exception is for British nationals.

Those who need to seek asylum as a consequence of their enslavement also cannot work, unless they are one of the very few who meet the requirements of the government's Shortage Occupation List², mostly at university graduate level or above, and only then after they have been seeking asylum for over a year³. Those survivors originally arriving in the UK on work visas usually find that these have expired during their enslavement and cannot be renewed⁴.

This is in spite of an acute labour shortage, which is forcing firms to turn abroad to find talent. It is becoming increasingly urgent to open up this talent pool to UK employers to both support our economy and improve the life chances of survivors of modern slavery.

In this latest report in its Underground Lives series, Hestia presents findings from qualitative and quantitative research with 228 modern slavery survivors on their employment experiences, skills and aspirations, bringing their lived experiences and voices to the fore.

For the first time, we also have analysis from Pro Bono Economics on the economic costs and benefits of reforming the current system which prevents many survivors of modern slavery from working despite their skills and desire to do so.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the time and input of all the survivors who took part in this research and the members of Hestia's Modern Slavery Response Team who provided insight. Thank you to Jackie Gallagher and Janet Clark for conducting this research. We also appreciate the contributions of Pro Bono Economics, organisations across the modern slavery sector including City Hearts, Sophie Hayes Foundation, and consultant Amelia Knott, and businesses including Co-op, Network Rail, Ashurst LLP, The Body Shop, and Pilgrims UK.

1 <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/country-studies/united-kingdom/#:~:text=The%20Global%20Slavery%20Index%20estimates,thousand%20people%20in%20the%20country>

2 The Shortage Occupation List (SOL) lists skilled jobs that the government deems in short supply within the UK labour market. For listed jobs, the UK immigration rules for work visas are relaxed to make it easier for overseas workers with the required skills and experience to come to the UK.

3 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01908/>

4 *Dignity not destitution*, (2019) Kalayaan

SURVIVORS' SKILLS AND ASPIRATIONS

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVIVORS TAKING PART IN THE SURVEY

The research intentionally excluded UK nationals (who have the right to work) but was otherwise representative of the overall group of survivors supported by Hestia.

Of the survivors of modern slavery identified in the UK in 2021, 75% were men and 25% were women. However in London the proportions are very different. In the same year, 40% of the survivors that Hestia supported in London were men and 60% were women. The primary reason for this is that London has a higher than average rate of sexual trafficking and sexual exploitation, which is the single biggest driver of modern slavery among women accounting for 37% of those entering the NRM (as opposed to less than 1% of men.) However, the sample size for all qualitative interviews was weighted to ensure a representation of men and women.

Of the respondents to the survey, just under two thirds (62%) were women, and just over one third (38%) were men. Nearly one third (32%) were parents with a dependent child living with them in the UK and 12% were pregnant or had been pregnant in the last 12 months.

Almost half (48%) were aged between 25 and 34 years; a quarter (27%) were aged between 35 and 44; 15% were aged 45 and over; and 9% were aged between 18 and 24 years.

A third were white (33%); just over a quarter (28%) were Asian or British Asian; and a fifth (22%) were black African, Caribbean or black British. The remainder (16%) were from other ethnic groups or mixed/multiple ethnic groups.



Joel's* Story

Joel is not employed and has been out of work for eleven years. He came to the country through abduction as a child and has lived in the UK most of his life.

I used to do IT and was working for the NHS. I started off computerising GP practices for one of the London NHS trusts, helping GPs to go paperless, introducing them to computers and arranging computer courses for the doctors and practice nurses.

I stopped being able to work when it became apparent that I had been a victim of modern slavery when I first arrived, and my identity couldn't be proven. We're going through the courts now to try and prove who I am and that I've been here all my life and that will take a while.

IT is my hobby and was my job, so it was a great job, because I was going to work to do something I loved. But then afterwards I lost interest, so I haven't really been keeping up with it for three years now. Whereas before I was on a computer every day, now I don't touch a computer.

The only reason I'm not working is because I'm not allowed to. Any job would do really, but I would like to work in IT again. Being unemployed made me appreciate the benefit of working, of any job. If it was sweeping the street at least I've got a job. Any job is better than staying home.

**Not his real name*



Luis'* Story

Before arriving in the UK, Luis had worked in numerous roles, including as a choreographer and a children's coach.

Luis came to the UK on a working visa before his exploitation. He has been in the NRM for four years and has not been able to work during this time, though he is very keen to do so. He is recovering from PTSD and in recent years he has found volunteering, particularly gardening, a very comforting part of his life.

"I'm changing my mind to positive things because otherwise I just wait, just wait, wait. I've come to love gardening. It gets my mind clear. I like to create, and now the way I'm doing gardening, everything is art, everything is creation. I feel happy, I forget everything."

He has been volunteering at a centre for refugees, where he teaches others gardening skills and has also worked with other volunteers to convert a dumping ground into a community garden.

"I'm teaching them how to plant and I get a lot of new people who've never touched the soil, they've never done anything. And now we are growing food for the community, for everyone. So, for anyone in the community, if you feel hungry, you just go and take some food, because I have been there too."

**Not his real name*

KEY FINDINGS

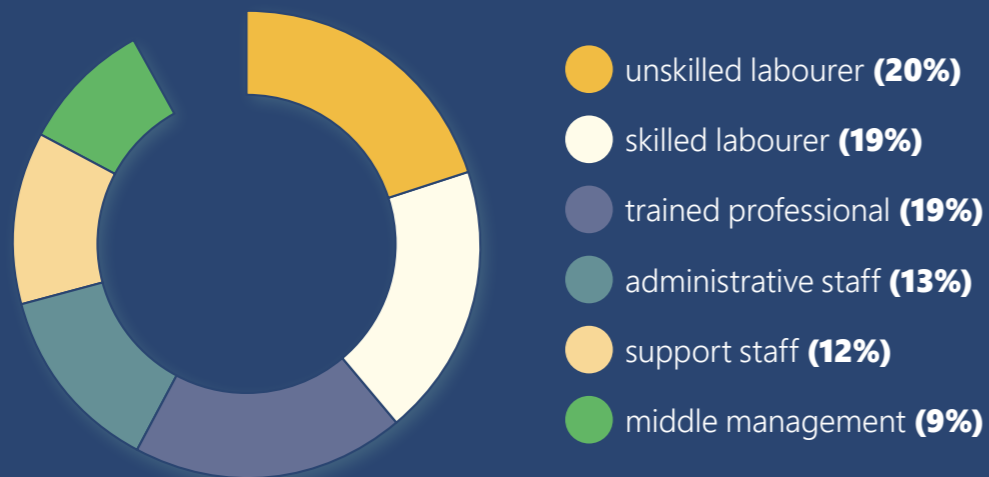
The research identified a wide range of skills and experience, ranging from people with post-graduate education and qualifications and experience of employment at managerial/professional levels, through to people with work experience as unskilled labourers or domestic service and those who had never had the opportunity to work.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

HALF OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS HAD BEEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN THE PAST.



The most common previous roles were:



The most common industries or sectors for these roles were:



QUALIFICATION LEVEL



23% were qualified at university graduate level or above



31% had either a technical or vocational qualification or a certificate or diploma at undergraduate level.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

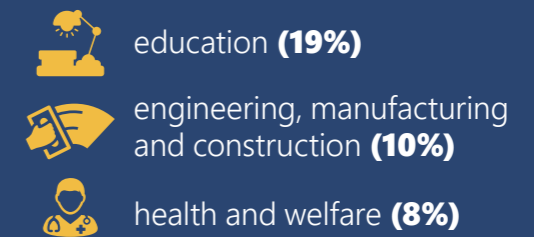
77% needed to study English to improve their study or employment options. Only **38%** were already on a course.

CURRENT STUDIES AND EDUCATION

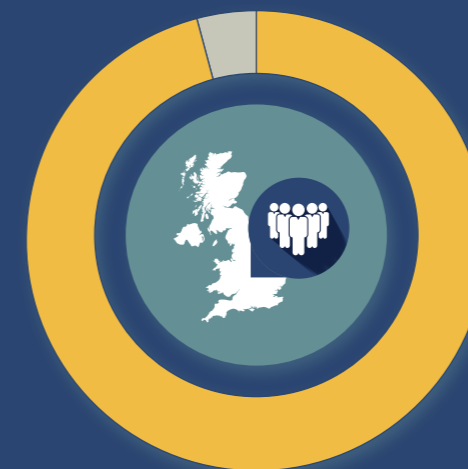


(26%) were currently studying

The most common areas of study were:



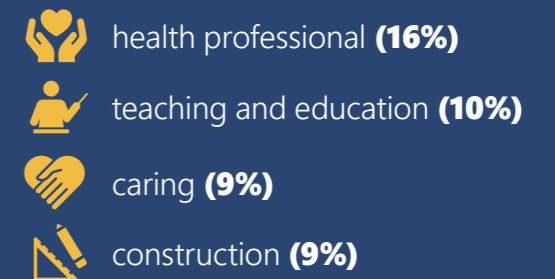
ASPIRATIONS



(96%) of survivors hoped to work in the UK in the future.

(21%) hoped to use existing skills and qualifications

Preferred occupations were:



EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS



ECONOMIC BENEFITS

While previous research⁵ has looked at the economic benefits for survivors after they have left the NRM, there has been no estimate of the economic benefits to society generated if the right to work were extended to survivors of modern slavery whilst *within* the NRM.

Using Hestia's survey data from this research, Pro Bono Economics conducted an independent analysis of the economic costs and benefits of reforming the current system:

PRO BONO ECONOMICS' ANALYSIS

Most non-UK nationals in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) do not currently have the legal right to work. Hestia asked Pro Bono Economics to estimate the economic benefits to society generated if this legal right were extended to these potential survivors of modern slavery as they wait for a Conclusive Grounds decision.⁶

- ▶ We estimate that around 7,000 of these likely survivors do not currently have the right to work in the UK.
- ▶ By giving the right to work to potential adult survivors who don't currently have it while they wait in the NRM, their employment could generate net benefits to society of **£10m-£41m per year**.
- ▶ This can be broken down into benefits of £8m-£32m to the individuals via take-home pay, and £2-£8m to the taxpayer through reduced subsistence payments and increased tax revenue.

Our findings

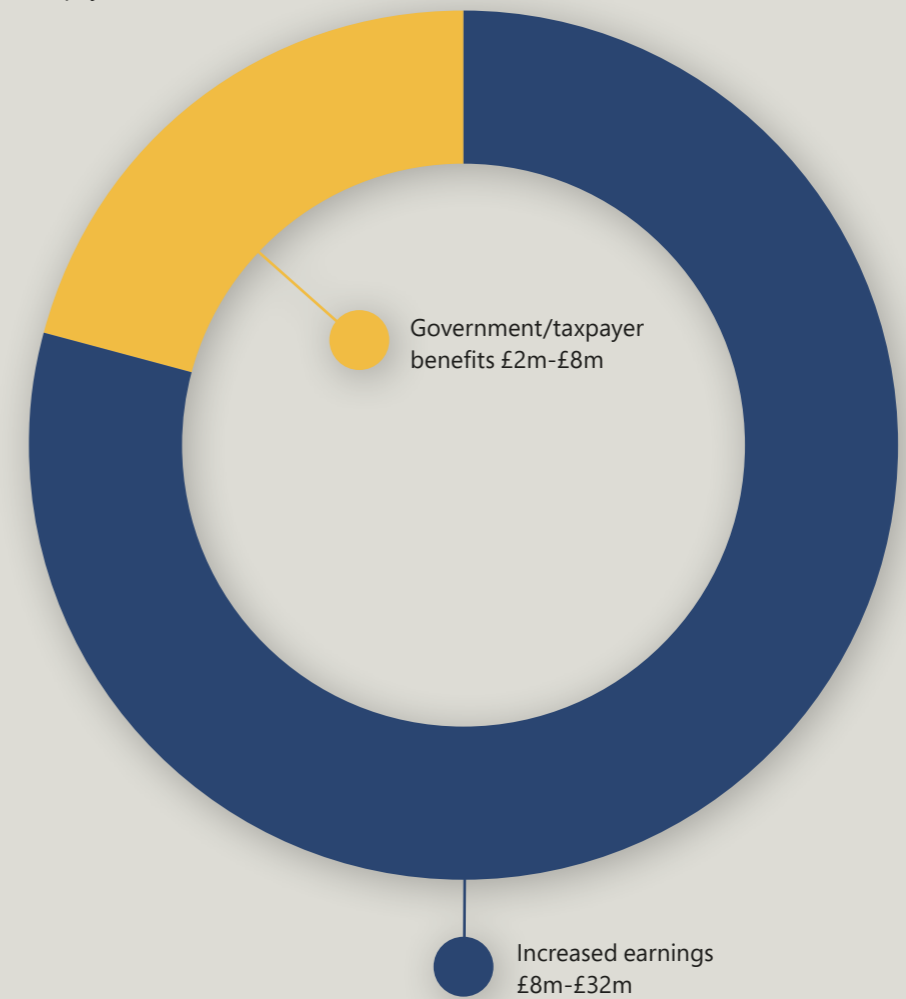
- ▶ The number of likely survivors of modern slavery reported to the authorities has increased nearly four-fold over the last five years, reaching almost 13,000 in the 12 months to June 2022.
- ▶ This growth in referrals has led to a backlog within the National Referral Mechanism with an estimated 24,000 adults and children stuck waiting for a Conclusive Grounds decision to be made at the end of 2021. Of this, we estimate that 12,000 are adults.



5 Nicholson, A., Schwarz, K., Landman, T., & Griffith, A. (2020), *The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill: a cost-benefit analysis*. Nottingham, <https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/4887518/the-modern-slavery-victim-support-bill-a-cost-benefit-analysis>

6 Due to gaps in existing evidence, we have not monetised benefits or costs for Hestia's recommendations to provide a recovery path to employment and an NRM employment support package. However, other employment support packages may help to give some indication of the magnitude of the costs of that recommendation. For example, the impact assessment for the Work Programme includes estimated costs per person of £1417 over three years (in 2020 prices); this is broken down as £667 in year 1 after referral, £417 in year 2 and £333 in year 3. For more information, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/937682/work-programme-quantitative-impact-assessment.pdf

Figure 1: Extending the right to work could result in significant net economic benefits to both the individuals and taxpayers



What does this mean?

Extending the legal right to work to all adults who do not currently have it in the NRM could generate net benefits to society. These benefits persist, even if we allow for some of the resulting employment to come at the expense of other people getting a job.

In addition to the economic benefits that we have estimated in monetary terms here, further economic benefits may arise from more adults in the NRM becoming formally employed.

These may include wellbeing improvements for the individuals and their families; health improvements associated with employment; increased consumer spending by these individuals that benefits the wider economy and government tax revenue.



BENEFITS FOR SURVIVORS

Economic independence

It's very stressful not being able to work. I cannot help myself to live. Others earn because they have a right to work. You can feel self-pity and feel jealous of those that can work and buy what they want, eat what they want, do what they want. I stay with my friend and sometimes she gives me £20 for sanitary pads. It's very stressful.

Survivor

Survivors of modern slavery who do not have the right to work are entitled to a support payment from the government of £40.85 per week, increasing to £65 per week if they are also seeking asylum in the UK.

However, survivors saw this financial dependence on the state as a double punishment – being punished for escaping exploitation and being punished by the system for the crimes of others.

Achieving financial independence was therefore the most important positive impact for survivors in work, even if they were doing work well below their skill/qualification level. For survivors, any paid work was well worth doing as it freed them from financial dependence on the state and what they saw as charity hand-outs. Most significantly it gave them self-agency and autonomy which was fundamental to their recovery.

Survivors felt very strongly about wanting to play active roles as contributors to, rather than dependents on the public purse and wanted to pay their fair share of tax and national insurance.

"My feeling about myself has improved. I don't have anything to struggle with now I'm working. I have money so I can afford to buy things I need for my daughters, for me, for pay my bills. So, that makes me feel I am in peace. I'm safe."

Survivor



Maxine's* Story

Maxine, a single parent, waited almost two years before she was able to work. During this time she struggled to buy her daughter the things she needed. Now, Maxine has recently started a job as a receptionist at a health spa. Her improved income has enabled her to provide better for her daughter and her new financial independence is extremely precious to her.

"I don't want to stay in accommodation that someone else gives me, pays my rent, gives me money or gives me clothes. It's very good that they do it and I appreciate it but this is not the life I want. I want a normal life, go to work, pay my bills, pay my taxes, do everything myself, so we can be equal to everyone else."

While she waited for her right to work, she completed an employment programme, which she found very helpful.

"I learned how to build my CV, how to find my skills, what I like, how to find my strength. We were all females in the same situation, and the lady doing

the programme was so lovely. It made an impact to find our strength inside us that we can do it if we want. When I applied for this job with my new CV, they contacted me and hired me straight away. I'm so excited that finally I'm taking my life back."

The programme helped Maxine imagine a longer-term future career, and she hopes over time to be able to go to university and become a dental nurse. Her new job has helped with her emotional recovery.

"I am more connected to people, to know another world of people, I can take more experience from them and it makes me feel so positive inside – it gives me hope."

*Not her real name

Recovery, confidence and self-esteem

Employment often provides much needed purpose and meaningful activity that can help a survivor to recover and build a new sense of self-identity and self-respect⁷.

"Her outlook has changed. She feels some worth and she has some value, she is very proud of herself. She had low self-esteem and now she is a completely different person."

Hestia Advocate

Survivors believed that lawful work would be a bridge to their recovery by building a safer and healthier reality. They hoped that work would give them back their identity and self-confidence by providing structure and routine.

"When your mind is occupied with a certain responsibility it helps you mentally if there is anything traumatic you are thinking about. If your mind is occupied, it's going to help you forget about your ugly past experiences."

Survivor

Survivors who were parents stressed the importance of working because it enabled them to better provide for their children. One survivor talked about her job, which she did not particularly enjoy, but which was essential to her because she could buy her child the things that her friends had. This meant her daughter didn't stand out from her classmates and could lead an ordinary life.

Social integration

Survivors described the shame and humiliation of not being able to account for their lack of work, which perpetuated their social isolation, and risked them having to recount their previous exploitation, which can be extremely triggering and stigmatising.

"The first thing people ask you is what is your name, and the second is what do you do? It's very hard to say I don't do anything because I have no right to work."

Survivor

Survivors saw work as a way of making new and healthier, safer relationships and of developing new social networks to help them break out of the isolation caused by their past exploitation.



Anton's* Story

Anton is a biomedical scientist with a master's degree and has just started working in a haematology laboratory at an NHS university hospital. He applied for the job and was offered it, but he and the NHS had to wait for six months before he obtained his right to work on receiving a positive Conclusive Grounds decision. He has not worked for nearly five years, so he has found it very challenging, but is receiving an internal training programme, and other structured support to help him settle into the role.

"The first thing people ask you is what is your name, and the second is what do you do? It's very hard to say I don't do anything because I have no right to work. This is giving me back my identity and now I am contributing to society not just receiving. If you are young and able to work but not allowed to it's very sad."

Socially people are completely different to me – they aren't sorry for me now. It's much better, and I feel more connected to people. I love my work – I've had so much help and now I'm helping people, the public, through my work in the lab. I'm so happy, my stress has gone down."

Anton does not understand why he and the NHS were made to wait for so long before he could start work, whilst his specialist skills which would have benefited patients went unused, and so much time was wasted.

"Those in the NRM should have the right to work while they are waiting for their decision – they are not the criminals they are the victims."

*Not his real name

⁷ Garbers, Kate, *The benefits and the barriers to accessing employment: Considerations for survivors of modern slavery*, (2021), University of Nottingham and Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

"We currently have more job vacancies in the country than we have unemployed people. The idea that we are stopping people from working who want to work and to build a life seems to me to be absolutely bizarre. It's such a waste of human capital, such a waste of talent."

Employer

Employers highlighted that enabling more survivors to work would contribute positively to the workforce and to the economy.

In particular, employers highlighted the commercial benefits. As well as contributing towards addressing recruitment shortages, businesses are also able to meet other targets including corporate social responsibility, and diversity and inclusion objectives; demonstrate pro-active modern slavery response activity; enhance brand profile and support wider recruitment and retention.

Addressing recruitment shortages and associated costs for employers

Many employers expressed a level of frustration at the potential waste of unused labour and skill available in the UK, especially while employers in many sectors are having to recruit from abroad at additional cost. They highlighted the lack of understanding of the scale of need - *"we're seeing enormous labour shortages, huge challenges"* - across many sectors.

"There is a lack of recognition of how serious these problems are and how it is not just a short-term issue for an individual business to get over – this will drive long term decision making, and drive businesses out of the country. Businesses will invest elsewhere, and it will be very hard to bring it back to the UK."

Employer

One employer described the recruitment costs their company is having to carry to bring approximately 100 staff in from the Philippines on three-year visas, at a cost of around £20,000 per person (excluding salaries) to cover flights, visas and subsidising UK accommodation costs.

Developing a skilled workforce

Employers also highlighted the potential for developing shortage skills within their workforce, rather than having to attract people with shortage skills into the country on temporary visas.

One business employed a survivor who arrived with no English and no existing skills, so started work in a basic packaging role. He has progressed within the company and is now doing a basic English course and a butchery apprenticeship which should result in a salary of approximately £45,000 in the north of England.

This is particularly gratifying as the company is currently having to recruit butchers from abroad due to the national shortage of qualified butchers in the UK.

Contribution to recruitment and retention

Employers highlighted the increasing importance of being recognised as a caring and responsible employer as key to recruiting and retaining talent within the workforce. One legal firm now offers extensive volunteering and mentoring opportunities to its staff to support a wide range of vulnerable people, including slavery survivors.

Another employer, not yet offering any specific employment support to modern slavery survivors, could see the prospective benefits for the company:

"We have people who would like extra training and responsibility as part of their development, so employing survivors could create learning and development benefits for established employees through their mentoring of survivors."

Employer

Corporate social responsibility

"Businesses don't just want to hand money to charities to do things, but want to find ways of being active community participants, and what are they good at? They're good at employing people."

Employer

Employers described the shift that has taken place in recent years in corporate policy and practice, whereby tackling modern slavery is less seen as a tick-box compliance activity and more an integrated part of good working practice.

"Modern slavery is no longer just a niche topic talked about by the corporate responsibility teams. Because of the Modern Slavery Act and the need for Boards to sign off the Modern Slavery Statement, experts in modern slavery are all over the business now."

Employer

Changing legislation at UK, European and global level has resulted in an increased focus on modern slavery activity, particularly for those businesses seeking to comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights⁸. Employers commented that it is often difficult to demonstrate this activity. However providing decent employment opportunities for survivors in the UK is action employers can take proactively, and many have the internal resources and mechanisms to do it well, with highly skilled human resources teams.

Businesses are also keen to implement ethical policy and practice and recognise the value it can add to their brand.



8 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

"It's dehumanising. To have a woman skilled, experienced and capable, but incapacitated because of the law – it is bad. I am frozen in some place that I cannot move, I just cannot move because the law binds you like that."

Survivor

Rapid response to labour shortages

There is an immediate opportunity for government to act now to support recovery by opening up access to employment for survivors in the National Referral Mechanism. This would tap into the potential resource of labour and skills of survivors, and although numbers are small this would still provide a valuable contribution to meeting labour shortages. Some survivors in the NRM have benefited from the 12-month extension⁹ of the Shortage Occupation List from February 2022 to include care workers and home carers, but unrestricted access to all vacancies under recruitment would create more employment options for survivors.

Improving access to work placements and apprenticeships

Businesses suggested that offering survivors work experience placements should be a core element of preparing survivors for entry or re-entry to the workforce.

One company was providing work-shadowing experience across a range of jobs including reception, administration and hospitality. The company would prefer to offer their more substantive work experience programmes to survivors too:

"We'd love to see more people come in for proper work experience, but we can't do that legally unless they're allowed to work – they can't come in and do the solid work experience which would really help them unless that rule changes. We should be able to pay them, it's a bit rubbish frankly, we pay our 16-year-old students doing work experience the living wage and they are not even adults."

Employer

Work placements are particularly important for survivors who have never worked or have been out of the workforce for many years to enable them to develop their experience and skills, but survivors without the right to work are not permitted to undertake full time paid work placements. Similarly, paid apprenticeships would potentially offer a valuable opportunity for unskilled or low skilled survivors, but those without the right to work are not permitted to take up apprenticeships.

"I want to go to college and study gas heating and plumbing, as there is a shortage of plumbers, and this is well paid work. My Advocate at Hestia has found colleges which will do the plumbing courses for me. The only thing holding me back is that I've got no right. They want to see a letter from the Home Office before I can take up the offer and I have no such letter."

Survivor

Improving access to English courses

Competence in spoken and written English is essential for all survivors wanting to work, yet there is a postcode lottery when it comes to access to these courses. Due to the limited availability of courses in some parts of the country, many survivors are on long waiting lists. This was highlighted by the survey findings where 77% of survivors needed English lessons but only 38% were on a course.

Providing Transitional Support

Employers highlighted the importance of preparing survivors in advance to be ready for work, including sufficient spoken and written English for the type of work; preparation for business cultural norms and behaviour; employment rights, entitlements and safety; basic IT literacy and safety online.

"If we can be offered some 'ready-made' people, they've all got the requirements you need for this job, and they've gone through a preparation process so they're ready to work, then we can say great, let's take them, give them an interview and see how it goes."

"We already have a fast-track channel for certain groups as part of our diversity and inclusion work so it would dovetail well with that."

Employer

Some survivors had taken part in employment support programmes including a Sophie Hayes Foundation programme, Bright Future, Breaking Barriers and HERA. They reported finding this support invaluable. Survivors particularly highlighted the sustained longer-term approach of the programmes which ran over a year.

"I haven't worked in a long time. The programme has really inspired me and helped me explore other areas of getting back into work. It really motivated me. I've presently got an interview to go to, hopefully that will lead to work."

Survivor

Survivors stressed the importance of completing the programme with other women in the same situation, so they could be open and frank without fear. Support to navigate the cultural differences of UK recruitment was also important.

Employers considered that ongoing support during the transition into employment, which was tailored and tapered off according to the needs and vulnerability of the individual, was a critical success factor for employing survivors.

"It's not just about getting them into the job, but also about making sure they are happy, and can stay in the job. We might need to assign a mentor, and provide support above and beyond usual line management responsibilities, but we would also look for some initial support from the referring organisation, checking in with the person regularly until they were settled in."

Employer

Some employers had found that ongoing support from the referring agencies had been key:

"Where it's worked really well the referral agency has carried on supporting them after they've finished their placement and started working. They've helped with things like sorting out new accommodation if the survivor has had to move out of supported accommodation and with new travel arrangements. It's really important while they get themselves settled, then it's tapered off according to their need."

"Whereas with one agency once we gave the survivor the job, it was a cliff edge, as though they washed their hands of him, even though he still didn't have accommodation, a permanent address, and hadn't developed enough life skills to cope. Although his work was okay, because he didn't receive enough support for the transition it didn't work out."

Employer

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-shortage-occupations/skilled-worker-visa-shortage-occupations>

One employer suggested that the government should do more to facilitate access to alternative accommodation, possibly by requiring local authorities to make short term accommodation available when survivors need to move to take up work.

Many survivors received more informal support on these same key areas from their Hestia Advocates, which they valued highly. They described the practical help, encouragement and coaching they received. They appreciated the consistency of this support, even when they were at their lowest emotionally or facing serious setbacks. This enabled them to continue to make progress and helped them sustain hope.

Addressing childcare and other costs

Childcare is a major barrier for parents, predominantly women, until children are old enough to be eligible for free nursery places. Lack of childcare created an additional barrier to accessing English classes.

Travel costs to job interviews can also be prohibitive. Involuntary accommodation moves within the NRM can have a negative financial impact such as the inability to pay for travel to employment interviews. For example, one survivor had been forced to move, was not able to afford the extra cost of longer distance travel to maintain her volunteering role and was finding it difficult to find a new placement and start again.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fairly paid work in decent working conditions can restore the dignity, self-esteem, and autonomy which are fundamental to survivors' recovery from the trauma of slavery and exploitation. The majority of survivors want to work and contribute to society but are prevented, often for years, while they wait for decisions on their status. Not only does this come at a cost to our society in economic terms but these delays often compound a survivors' trauma and impedes their recovery and reintegration to society.

The escalating delays in processing cases in the National Referral Mechanism are causing years of delays for many survivors and make this a matter of urgency for policy and practice change.

This research demonstrates clear economic benefits as well as social benefits from extending the right to work to survivors within the NRM. Independent economic analysis by Pro Bono Economics demonstrates the potential for significant net economic gain for the taxpayer, the economy and survivors.

It's clear that employers want to do more to support and recruit survivors into employment. They recognise the potential value of this additional labour resource which, although relatively small, includes many well skilled and qualified individuals. This potential is being wasted while there is an ongoing labour shortage in the UK. In addition, UK businesses have demonstrated a strong ethical driver to do more to support survivors into employment as part of their modern slavery commitments.

The research shows that access to employment, and the necessary package of support to prepare for it, is not just an optional extra but should be a central component of the support offered to all adult survivors within the NRM. As survivors now wait much longer for a decision, the support provided should prepare survivors to be work-ready at the time that is right for them. This preparation should include access to education, work placements, volunteering, apprenticeships and direct entry to paid employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Right to work: The Home Office should grant all survivors entering the NRM the right to apply for a temporary right to work on receipt of their reasonable conclusive grounds decision as part of their journey plan towards recovery. The Home Office should also

consider, in consultation with the modern slavery sector, the potential impact for survivors who are able to, and want to work, of transition to employment in relation to their current subsistence entitlements.

Recovery pathway to employment: The Home Office should work with survivors, the modern slavery sector and with businesses to develop a safe employment recovery pathway for all survivors entering the NRM. This should include the full suite of support (English classes, orientation and personal development, volunteering, the right to engage in paid work experience placements, paid apprenticeships and transitional support into paid employment) which enable recovery and transition from exploitation to safe legal employment.

NRM employment support package: The Home Office should develop the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract to include a core package of employment-related assessment and support *for all survivors*.

This could mirror the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, which is a well-established model of employment support for people with mental health difficulties.

"For the thousands of individuals stuck waiting for a decision in the National Referral Mechanism, the uncertainty and confusion can compound the impact of the trauma they have already suffered."

"Allowing these people to work while they are in the NRM could generate enormous benefits to their wellbeing, alongside the vital support they receive from social sector organisations like Hestia."

"This new research from PBE shows that extending the right to work to all potential survivors of modern slavery could also deliver millions of pounds in economic benefits for survivors themselves and wider society."

Lord Gus O'Donnell, Chair of Pro Bono Economics



ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: CURRENT CHALLENGES IN THE SYSTEM

Increased delays in NRM decision making

Referrals into the NRM: Home Office data for 2021¹⁰ shows that 6,411 potential adult victims of modern slavery were referred to the Home Office in 2021, with a 20% increase in referrals compared to the preceding year. The number of referrals received in this year is the highest since the NRM began in 2009. Of these adult referrals, 75% (4,812) were male and 25% (1,594) were female. (It should be noted that the proportions of male and female survivors in the NRM are very different to those supported by Hestia, where over two thirds of clients are female. (See Annex 2 for detail on how this was addressed during the research).

Increasing backlog in decision making

An independent study conducted by Pro Bono Economics¹¹ in parallel to Hestia's own research, estimated that based on Home Office data on the number of referrals and final decisions for NRM cases since 2009, this trend is increasing sharply so that by the end of 2021 over 24,000 people remained in the NRM waiting for a conclusive grounds decision. This backlog of cases is up 72% on the levels from just a year before and this has been building rapidly since 2017.

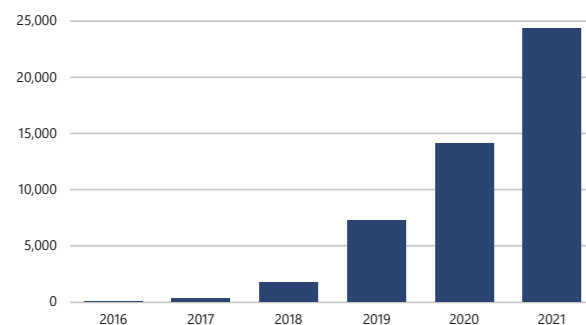


Figure 1: Number of people waiting in the NRM by year end¹²

These increasing delays in decision-making, with a minimum of 45 days set by government originally, have over time caused an extended period of limbo for survivors who can wait years in the NRM for a decision. Hestia typically supports approximately 1,700 survivors

within the NRM at any point in time. Two thirds of these survivors have been in the NRM for over a year, with 30% waiting for a conclusive grounds decision for between two and three years, and 37% waiting for over three years.

Immigration status delay

This situation is exacerbated by the additional delays that survivors of modern slavery face if they need to claim asylum in order to remain in the UK. A positive conclusive grounds decision confirming status as a victim does not give a survivor any statutory rights or entitlements. Survivors who are non-UK nationals from outside the European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) generally need to secure refugee status or humanitarian grounds for protection in the UK which confers a temporary right to remain in the UK, in order to obtain the right to work.

The British Red Cross and UNHCR (the United Nations refugee agency)¹³ report that asylum decisions are being needlessly delayed for survivors of modern slavery because asylum decision makers wait for the NRM decision to be made, even if there is no link with the asylum claim or the relevant evidence is already with the asylum decision maker.

Since Brexit, survivors from the EU or EEA have lost the right to work under European Treaty Rights and now have to apply for settled or pre-settled status. For survivors of modern slavery, producing the necessary evidence may be impossible as a result of their past exploitation, so without exemptions this is not a suitable or accessible route for them¹⁴.

Discretionary Leave (DL) to remain may be available to some survivors on exit from the NRM. There is little publicly available information on how DL is assessed and granted. However, in 2019 only 70 of 1,949 survivors without the right to remain in the UK and receiving a positive conclusive grounds decision were granted DL, with the majority of those 70 survivors (64%) receiving temporary leave of between seven to 12 months.¹⁵

ANNEX 2: RESEARCH METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

Hestia's research took a mixed methods approach:

Literature review

The research design was informed by an online review of open-source literature.

Online survey

The online survey gathered core employment data on Hestia's non-UK National NRM clients. Key data was shared with Pro Bono Economics (PBE) to contribute to its independent economic analysis. The survey incorporated standard employment questions used in other national and international research to enable PBE to draw comparisons in its analysis.

It was not possible to conduct a full survey of clients within the NRM using Hestia's client data base due to restrictions on the use of the NRM data base. The survey was therefore implemented by Modern Slavery Response Team Advocates and aimed to offer every client in the NRM the opportunity to take part.

Briefing sessions and written briefings were provided for Advocates who helped pilot test the survey form with clients. The survey was translated into the four languages most frequently used. Because of the comprehension challenge presented by use of standard economic employment¹⁶ questions Advocates supported clients to complete the form where appropriate.

The survey achieved 228 responses and was representative of the key characteristics (age, gender, nationality, employment status, UK dependent children) of the client group as a whole.

Qualitative interviews

A sample of 28 clients was purposively selected from the survey respondents for qualitative interviews (27 online and one in person), typically 45 – 60 minutes. The sample was stratified to ensure experiences were gathered from survivors across the key characteristics of Hestia's client group. The sample included: different age groups; those not working; those currently in employment; and survivors with experience of applying for the right to work through the Shortage Occupation List.

Gender considerations: Hestia's client base includes a larger proportion of females than the NRM overall, so the qualitative sample sought to ensure that a broad

range of perspectives from both men (17) and women (11) were captured.

Focus groups and interviews with staff

Two focus groups and follow-on interviews were conducted with a total of six Advocates to develop, test and validate the research findings.

Qualitative interviews with business employers and sector experts

Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 10 individuals from eight organisations including business employers and other sector experts.

Research limitations

Sample bias

Because of the restrictions on use of the NRM data base it was not possible to survey the whole client population comprehensively or draw a randomised sample. Respondents were therefore self-selected so there may be some sample bias and it is not possible to attribute the same level of generalisability from the data, although action was taken to mitigate this limitation by three follow-up rounds with clients by Advocates. There was also an administrative error which meant that during this follow up process the survey was sent to a small cohort of clients in transition out of the NRM, although data tracking confirmed that this only affected two cases.

Data reliability

Extensive revisions were made to the survey questionnaire following the pilot. However, the necessary use of standardised questions meant that there may have been comprehension difficulties for clients on those questions which could affect the overall reliability of the data. This was mitigated however by the majority of clients being supported by Advocates and interpreters where relevant to complete the survey.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2021/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2021>

¹¹ PBE: Paying their way; extending the right to work to all survivors of modern slavery

¹² Source: Pro Bono Economics estimates based on Home Office data on number of referrals and final decisions for NRM cases since 2009.

¹³ BRC and UNHCR, 2022

¹⁴ Garbers, Kate, *The benefits and the barriers to accessing employment: Considerations for survivors of modern slavery*, (2021), University of Nottingham and Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

¹⁵ Freedom of Information Request submitted by the organisation, ECPAT: <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/news/government-failing-child-victims-of-trafficking-exclusive-data-reveals> (2020) cited by Garbers, 2021

¹⁶ See: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/ukstandardindustrialclassificationofeconomicactivities/uksic2007> and <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/>

Ethical considerations and research governance

The research was conducted to Social Research Association standards and ethical guidelines, was trauma-informed¹⁷, was compliant with GDPR¹⁸ requirements and was overseen by a small steering

group. The steering group contributed to the development of the research tools and to ensuring that survivors were protected from harm; that survivor self-agency was promoted and that research participation was a positive experience.

ANNEX 3: HOW WERE THESE IMPACTS ESTIMATED?

Analysis methodology

Step one: using Home Office data, PBE estimate the number of suspected adult survivors of modern slavery in the NRM system who are awaiting a Conclusive Grounds decision is 12,000.¹⁹ Using Hestia's 2022 service user survey, they conservatively estimate that 58% of adults have no right to work in the NRM system.

Step two: using Hestia's service user survey and Migration Centre research, they estimate that 69% of those in step one would want to work, and of them 51% would be employed.²⁰

Step three: for those who don't have the right to work, PBE estimate the potential average length of employment while in the NRM as 3-12 months if they were given the right. PBE use Home Office and Hestia data on the median length of 15-24 years spent waiting in the NRM for a Conclusive Grounds decision, as Work and Health Programme data suggests the median time it takes to find employment could be up to 12 months.²¹

Step four: using Migration Centre research, they estimate the average wage per person per year to be just under £16,000. Assuming that those that enter work are no longer eligible for the Asylum support and applying current NIC and Income tax rates, PBE estimate net take home earning per person per year employed to be £13,000, and for each person employed per year this would generate net benefits to the taxpayer of £3,000.

Step five: PBE multiply all the above together to estimate £10m-£41m of net economic benefits to society per year by extending the right to work for those who currently don't have it in the NRM.

Economic analysis limitations

PBE use the best available evidence in their analysis. However, due to gaps in available evidence, their results should be considered indicative of the broad scale rather than exact.

The main limitations include:

1. PBE assume that the Hestia survey respondents are similar enough to everyone in the NRM. For example, they assume that the Hestia respondents' responses to whether they have the legal right to work would be similar to the NRM group. However, in reality there may be some differences between the Hestia sample and the whole NRM group. PBE aim to minimise these differences by using gender weights in our analysis where appropriate to adjust for the fact that the Hestia survey respondents are majority women, but the NRM population are majority men. As survey responses (and labour market behaviours in general) differ significantly by gender, PBE have calculated gender-weighted averages for certain calculations, including in their estimate for the percentage who would like to work out of those who do not currently have the right when in the NRM.
2. Because there is no data on the labour market outcomes of survivors of modern slavery at the moment in the UK, PBE assume that their labour market outcomes may be similar to those of asylum seekers. However, they understand that again, there may be discrepancies in outcomes between the two.
3. Due to data limitations, PBE analysis does not take into account the intergenerational, productivity or other indirect effects of letting victims of modern slavery work legally in the UK. They have included labour market substitution effects in our sensitivity analysis as per DWP guidance²².

4. They have had to make some conservative assumptions about the length of time that it takes, on average to move out of unemployment into employment. This is because the Work and Health Programme's data only gives statistics on the percentage of people who move from unemployment to employment across broad categories.
5. PBE have not been able to monetise costs incurred of passing and implementing this policy.

The analysis does not take into account any future changes in the number of people waiting in the NRM, change in wage levels, or change in government policy including subsistence payment levels.

Further details of the economic analysis, its limitations and sensitivity analysis are in PBE's independent report, which is available on the PBE website:

www.probonoeconomics.com/publications



¹⁷ *The Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards 2018*, Human Trafficking Foundation

¹⁸ General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is the legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information from individuals.

¹⁹ *Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2021 - GOV.UK* (www.gov.uk)

²⁰ *Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview - Migration Observatory - The Migration Observatory* (ox.ac.uk)

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/work-and-health-programme-statistics-to-february-2022>

²² DWP (2010): *The Department for Work and Pensions Social Cost-Benefit Analysis framework* – see page 22, point 3.3.3.4

At Hestia we support adults and children in times of crisis.

We deliver services across London and the surrounding regions, as well as campaign and advocate nationally on the issues that affect the people we work with. For over 50 years, Hestia has provided support and hope every step of the way of recovery.

Last year we supported 14,007 men, women and children.

This includes victims of modern slavery, women and children who have experienced domestic abuse, young care leavers and older people. From giving someone a home, to helping them to get the right mental health support, we support people at the moment of crisis and enable them to build a life beyond a crisis. We are supported by more than 800 volunteers across London who provide specialist skills such as art therapy, yoga, IT, gardening and cooking, as well as befriending and fundraising.

Together, we can make sure people find a life beyond crisis.

*All names have been changed to protect the survivor's identity.

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