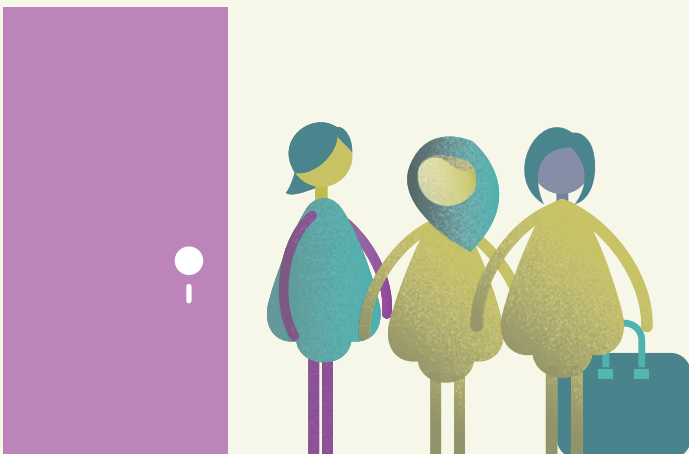


CLOSED DOORS

Inequalities and injustices in appropriate and secure housing provision for female victims of trafficking who are seeking asylum



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The research for this report was sparked as a result of conversations between Hibiscus Initiatives' (Hibiscus) clients and staff based in our Women's Centre, Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, and in the prisons in which we work. As an organisation that endeavours to be led and to listen to the voices and needs of the clients we work with, it was important for Hibiscus to respond to what our clients were telling us in regard to the inequality of their experiences. The report is dedicated to these clients and to all trafficking survivors who have experienced injustices in the provision of housing and support in the UK. In addition, huge thanks must be given to Hibiscus' dedicated staff team, thank you for listening and amplifying the voices of the women Hibiscus works with and for the passion and determination with which you fight for justice.

This report would not have been possible without the support of Commonweal Housing and their commitment to addressing injustices in housing provision. Thanks to the Housing Helps panel who selected Hibiscus' proposal as the winner of the prize, thus enabling this research. Special thanks go to Connie Muttock and Matthew Wale, who have been engaged throughout the process, have read countless drafts, and whose passion for championing the housing outcomes for trafficking victims has been evident throughout. Their patience, insight, and moral support could not have been more appreciated. Thanks also to the Commonweal Housing Board of Trustees, whose engagement was thought provoking, and whose eagerness to uncover the injustices experienced by female victims of trafficking claiming asylum served to help Hibiscus shed ever clearer light on the issue.

The research was conducted, and report written, by former Hibiscus staff members – Anta Brachou and Anu Liisanantti – who became independent consultants during the course of the project. This was a monumental undertaking and Hibiscus is grateful for their continued support and engagement in the project. Additional thanks go to Hibiscus staff and volunteers,

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Hibiscus is grateful to all those involved in provision of housing and support for victims of trafficking who helped provide evidence that has been drawn upon in this report and who made themselves available to discuss the report's findings, this includes: Crisis (London); the Helen Bamber Foundation; the Human Trafficking Foundation; The Passage (London); The Salvation Army; Snowdrop (Sheffield); STEP project employers in Croydon Council; and Unseen (Bristol). Additional thanks to the Anti-Trafficking Labour Exploitation Unit and the Helen Bamber Foundation for providing case studies which have been used in this report. Thanks also to Victoria Pogge von Strandmann, Partner at Simpson Millar, and Kate Roberts, from Anti-Slavery International, for supporting our original proposal and offering on-going support to the research.

Most importantly, Hibiscus would like to thank the women who shared their testimonies, without which Hibiscus would not have been able to produce this report and whose voice and experience must always be sought and heeded in the decisions which affect their lives. The names of the women portrayed in case studies in this report have been changed to protect identities.

FOREWORD

COMMONWEAL HOUSING



When Hibiscus entered Commonweal’s Housing Helps competition at the end of 2018, their proposal stood out to judges as one which identified a clear injustice that would benefit from better research and understanding. Crucially, it was something that fitted well with Commonweal’s aims: an injustice that could potentially be relieved through the provision of suitable housing.

At the time, Commonweal’s trustee Steve Douglas CBE – then chair of the judging panel – said: “the issue and the application met the brief perfectly and we felt it was research that simply had to be explored.”¹

Writing just over a year after we awarded funding to Hibiscus, I am delighted that Commonweal has supported this research. The wealth of evidence sourced by Hibiscus shines a light on a public system which is demonstrably not meeting the needs of all it is there to support. A lack of suitable housing, a failure to recognise the specialist needs of victims of trafficking, and a system which sees their immigration status before their status as survivors, mean far too many are falling through the gaps in support, with devastating consequences. A systemic injustice that should be addressed.

What is so powerful about this report is that it outlines clear steps needed to put this system right: the housing solutions to these social injustices. This year, we have an important opportunity to make these recommendations a reality, with the renewal of the Victim Care Contract for the provision of housing and support to victims of trafficking. Commonweal looks forward to a continuing partnership with Hibiscus Initiatives, in which we will draw attention to the injustices highlighted in this report – and continue to push for the vital changes needed to tackle them.

Ashley Horsey
Chief Executive,
Commonweal Housing

¹ Commonweal Housing, Housing Helps, Panel Judgement

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASC	Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts
AIRE	Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility
ATLEU	Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit
CQC	Care Quality Commission
Commonweal	Commonweal Housing
COMPASS	Commercial and Operations Managers Procuring of Asylum Support Services
BMER	Black, minority ethnic and refugee
DL	Discretionary leave
ECAT	Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings
ECHR	European Convention of Human Rights
FOI	Freedom of Information
Hibiscus	Hibiscus Initiatives
IRC(s)	Immigration removal centre(s)
MSVCC	Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RNA	Recovery Needs Assessment
SCA	Single Competent Authority
UK	United Kingdom
VCC	Victim Care Contract

INTRODUCTION

Each Party shall adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to assist victims in their physical, psychological and social recovery. Such assistance shall include at least: [...] standards of living capable of ensuring their subsistence, through such measures as: appropriate and secure accommodation, psychological and material assistance...

Article 12, Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT)²

Overview

Hibiscus Initiatives (Hibiscus) is a voluntary sector organisation with a track record of delivering high-impact support and advocacy services for over 30 years. Hibiscus has distinct expertise in working with marginalised foreign national and black, minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) women in prison, in the community, and in immigration removal centres (IRCs), where Hibiscus also works with male detainees. Hibiscus' current work falls into these main areas: community resettlement; international resettlement; and prisons. Hibiscus' anti-trafficking work spans all three of these areas of work.

Hibiscus' Women's Centre is a safe, women-only space, where foreign national and BMER women with experiences of the criminal justice system, immigration detention, or human trafficking, can access specialist casework support and information, learn new skills or obtain specialist advice, both in groups and during one-to-one sessions. The need for this report stemmed from the everyday experiences of Hibiscus' practitioners, working with foreign national women who access Hibiscus' Women's Centre and who have been identified as potential victims of human trafficking.

The ECAT defines human trafficking as:

"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits

to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs".

It further refers to those who have experienced human trafficking as "victims of trafficking".³ As such in this report, Hibiscus has adopted the terminology "victim" to describe those who have or have potentially been trafficked in order to align with the ECAT definition. This decision reflects the fact that this report centres on the legal and contractual obligations of the Government and service providers towards these individuals under different pieces of legislation which adopt the word "victim". That said, Hibiscus recognises that these individuals can and should also be recognised as survivors, and where the decision has been made to adopt this terminology by sources this report has referenced, the report reflects the original terminology adopted.

This report seeks to highlight the injustices and gaps in housing support provision for women who are formally identified as potential victims of trafficking by the United Kingdom (UK) Government's trafficking identification process, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The report has particular focus on housing provision for women victims of trafficking who are seeking asylum, as the evidence suggests this group experiences some of the greatest injustices as a result of their immigration status.

Funding for this research was awarded by Commonweal Housing (Commonweal) in 2019, following Hibiscus' successful application to their Housing Helps competition. Commonweal is an independent, action learning charity working to investigate, pilot and champion housing-based solutions to social injustice. Housing Helps offered £10,000 to fund a research or feasibility study into a new, emerging or overlooked area of social injustice linked to housing.

² Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12

³ Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12

The injustice

The need for physical shelter is an essential requirement for people who have experienced trauma,⁴ such as trafficking and exploitation. If a victim is homeless or is living in poor or unsafe accommodation, they may be vulnerable to: targeting by both new and familiar perpetrators of abuse; exploitation; re-trafficking; and other forms of further harm. Ensuring safe and secure accommodation for anyone with a trafficking experience must be a priority for support providers as the provision of “secure and appropriate” accommodation is a part of the UK’s legal obligations under Article 4 of the ECAT to potential victims of trafficking.⁵ However, as this report shows, there are some significant gaps in the provision of, and injustices within, the government-funded support services, particularly around suitable accommodation.

Commenting on a recent case of a British woman who was identified as a trafficking victim but who was not allocated a safe house place, Rachael Davis, a solicitor at Duncan Lewis noted:

*The failure to provide our client with the specialist support and accommodation to which she was legally entitled has had devastating consequences, including her having been repeatedly re-trafficked, sexually assaulted and financially exploited.*⁶

The majority of victims identified through the NRM are not British or European Union nationals. Therefore, most of them are also subject to immigration controls and restrictions. A decision by the NRM recognising a person as a victim of trafficking does not automatically entitle that individual to remain in the UK. As far as the Home Office is concerned, most victims of trafficking who have no leave to remain or other right to live in the UK will be expected to leave following the conclusion of their NRM process. However, those who receive a positive conclusive grounds decision – which means they are recognised as a victim of trafficking – may be entitled to a grant of discretionary leave (DL) to remain in the UK, usually for a short and limited period of time. This is sometimes referred to as a residence permit, using language from the ECAT.

In the UK, it is called DL, as it is granted under a policy that is outside the Immigration Rules.

Recent statistics show that only a small minority of cases, about 12%, will be granted DL.⁷ Research conducted with women from Hibiscus’ Women’s Centre demonstrates that DL to remain, as a result of a positive conclusive grounds decision, was not the norm.⁸ Rather, women relied on the asylum system to seek to remain in the country.

Potential victims of modern slavery, including victims of trafficking, who have received a positive reasonable grounds decision from the NRM – which confirms that there is evidence to suggest that their claim of being trafficked is valid – are entitled to a minimum of 45 days of support in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (90 days in Scotland). This is known as the reflection and recovery period. Through Hibiscus’ experiences and research, it is clear that many women who have been identified as potential trafficking victims live in accommodation unsuitable for the purpose of this reflection and recovery period, such as in asylum accommodation.⁹ This is in contravention of the UK’s legal obligations under Article 4 of the ECAT to potential victims of trafficking.¹⁰

A significant number of victims who have been referred to the NRM, including most of Hibiscus’ Women’s Centre’s service users, will access housing provided through Asylum Support, provided under Section 95 (for individuals with pending asylum claims) or Section 4 (for individuals with failed asylum claims) of the Immigration and Asylum Act.¹¹ This Asylum Support accommodation is specifically provided for people who have an ongoing application for asylum and is designed primarily to help prevent destitution. It is not designed to provide safety and specialist support to individuals who have experienced the type of trauma associated with trafficking. As a result, this accommodation cannot be seen to amount to a safe place for people recovering from the traumatic experience of being trafficked. What is more, poor-quality asylum accommodation can often be the type of exploitative environment that can further expose vulnerable women to the risk of trafficking and modern slavery, compounding both their vulnerability and, potentially, their trauma.

⁴ Elizabeth K. Hopper, Ellen L. Bassuk, Jeffrey Olivet, “Shelter from the Storm: Trauma-Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings”, *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, 2010

⁵ Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/16/british-woman-repeatedly-trafficked-for-sex-after-home-office-failures>

⁷ <https://athub.org.uk/knowledge-base/discretionary-leave>

⁸ Hibiscus Initiatives, Case Load and Focus Group Analysis, Closed Doors Report Research

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12

¹¹ Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

The limited access to safe house places, particularly for many asylum-seeking women who are instead housed in asylum accommodation, suggests that foreign national victims of trafficking are often treated as immigration cases first and as recognised victims with specific needs second. Therefore, the injustices this report seeks to address are two-fold:

- Firstly, many women with a pending asylum claim are not accessing the official safe house provision despite being identified as potential victims and, therefore, being eligible for support provisions; and
- Secondly, these women are left to live in asylum accommodation that does not adequately support the reflection and recovery period they are entitled to, which might seriously hinder their recuperation and, in some cases, might put them at risk of further exploitation.

The UK's legal frameworks for victims of trafficking

The UK Government signed the ECAT on the 23rd March 2007. The Convention was ratified by the UK on the 17th December 2008 and came into force on the 1st April 2009. This led to the creation of the NRM in 2009. The 2015 Modern Slavery Act was brought into force with a clear commitment from the Government to combat modern slavery and protect those who are subject to it, although the Act itself does not cover support provisions for victims. Therefore, the criticism of current provision for victims in this report relies on international legal framework and government guidance. For example, Article 12 of the ECAT stipulates that sufficient support, including “appropriate and secure accommodation”, should be provided to victims of trafficking.¹² Therefore, the overall legal framework for this report is made up of three main provisions:

- Article 12 of the Anti-Trafficking Convention;¹³
- Article 11 of the Anti-Trafficking Directive;¹⁴ and
- Victims of modern slavery – Single Competent Authority (SCA) guidance.¹⁵

At the time of writing, the legislation and policies around modern slavery, and the UK political landscape overall, are going through major shifts and changes. Brexit in the UK and the potentially long-lasting and far-reaching impacts of the novel coronavirus including a possible global recession, increase the overall uncertainty about all areas of policy and legislation relating to modern slavery. The impact of these events on outcomes for victims of trafficking will need to be closely monitored but are not topics addressed in this report. The recently renewed (September 2019) asylum housing contracts and related support have also had an impact on the lives of many victims of modern slavery. The sector is also witnessing potentially significant changes in trafficking-related policies, such as the ongoing NRM reform and the announcement of changes to the Victim Care Contract (VCC) made in June 2020 by the Government. To fulfil the UK's obligations to provide assistance to adult victims of modern slavery detailed in the ECAT, the Home Office has provided support to victims of modern slavery, including victims of trafficking, through the VCC, which has been operated by The Salvation Army and their eleven sub-contractors for the last eight years.¹⁶

Under the current contract, potential victims are supposed to be offered “a comprehensive package of support, including access to safe house accommodation, outreach support, and medical care including counselling as required”.¹⁷ However, the UK's commitment to meaningful and sustainable support provision has been called into question by victims themselves and many working in the sector:

*The UK Government does not plan or enable needs-based support for trafficked people to rebuild their lives, or even collect any data on outcomes for trafficked people, including those who have been through its identification and support systems. On the contrary, its reluctance to guarantee even a year-long recovery period undermines those individuals' attempts to build a life after trafficking.*¹⁸

K. Roberts, “Life After Trafficking, A Gap in UK's Modern Slavery Efforts”

¹² <https://rm.coe.int/168008371d>

¹³ Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12

¹⁴ EU Anti-trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU

¹⁵ Modern slavery: how to identify and support victims, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>

¹⁶ See full list of sub-contractors in section: Reflection and recovery period and the Victim Care Contract

¹⁷ see e.g. Slavery: Written question – HL14174 available at <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-03-04/HL14174>

¹⁸ Roberts, K. 'Life After Trafficking, A Gap in UK's Modern Slavery Efforts' in Anti-Trafficking Review, issue 10, 2018, pp. 164-168

*...while targets for immigration removal are maintained as high-level political targets, we will see vulnerabilities, and the care side of the Home Office will be completely swept aside.*¹⁹
Jess Phillips, Member of Parliament

*We urge you to understand the poor conditions provided under the Victim Care Contract and to ensure survivor expertise informs the Home Office's process of selecting the next NRM victim care provider.*²⁰

Written evidence from Survivor Alliance

The June 2020 announcement noted that the new contract – the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) – will see improvements to address some of the failings of the current contract.²¹ Yet, as far as Hibiscus can tell the so-called improvements outlined are vague. They do not seem to address the core issues laid out in this report relating to the unsuitability or asylum accommodation for victims of trafficking, and the inequalities experienced by female victims of trafficking who are also seeking asylum. As such, the findings and recommendations in this report are critical to ensuring accountability for victims of trafficking and the delivery of MSVCC services that uphold the ECAT definition of appropriate and secure accommodation.

Since the opening of Hibiscus' Women's Centre in December 2016, Hibiscus witnessed an increasing number of women with trafficking concerns, primarily at the Centre, but also in Yarl's Wood IRC and the prisons in which Hibiscus works. The research Hibiscus conducted shows that, despite being eligible for safe house accommodation, a majority of these women were staying, or had been staying, in asylum accommodation or other unsuitable and precarious accommodation during their reflection and recovery period. Evidence shows that these women remained in unsuitable accommodation while awaiting their conclusive grounds decision from the NRM, a decision that can take months, sometimes years to be reached.

One of the few women from Hibiscus' Women's Centre who was provided a safe house during this process, was transferred to asylum accommodation in a different city as soon as she made her

asylum application. This type of transition can be unnecessarily difficult for victims, in part because the mainstream asylum support system does not recognise the unique and vulnerable position of victims of trafficking.

The experience of many of the women Hibiscus supports implies that the current Government's "hostile environment"²² approach, with its focus on immigration restrictions, prevents asylum-seeking victims of trafficking from accessing the appropriate support. There may be cases where there is a potential breach of Article 12 of the ECAT and Article 4 of European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)²³, where the asylum support accommodation is not appropriate or secure. The Government is required to adopt measures necessary to assist victims in their "physical, psychological and social recovery".²⁴ Where the measures in place appear not to do so, then the individual could be referred for legal advice and they may need to resort to litigation to resolve the issue.

The scope of the report

While there have been numerous compelling reports and discussions highlighting the gaps in support provision for victims of trafficking, Hibiscus believes this study to be the first one to focus specifically on the injustices within the provision of government-funded safe houses under the VCC. Crucially, it attempts to shine a spotlight on the challenges experienced in securing suitable housing for potential victims of trafficking who are simultaneously claiming asylum whilst moving through the NRM.

By engaging with Hibiscus' clients, various local and national organisations supporting victims of trafficking including: The Salvation Army; their sub-contractors; safe house providers; homelessness agencies; and statutory bodies, this report shares crucial learnings with other organisations working with victims of trafficking. The report puts forward recommendations designed to address the gaps in provision experience and to deliver best practice support to victims of trafficking. It also highlights areas of policy change needed to implement these recommendations.

¹⁹ Jess Phillips MP during a Westminster Hall debate regarding victims of human trafficking in detention, 11 July 2019

²⁰ Written evidence submitted by Survivor Alliance – United Kingdom Network, May 2019

²¹ Home Office, "Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC)"

²² In 2012 Theresa May, who was the Conservative Home Secretary at the time, introduced the Hostile Environment Policy with remarks including that: "The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants"

²³ Article 4 of European Convention on Human Rights on Prohibition of Slavery and Forced Labour, available at https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

²⁴ Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapidly changing landscape of preventing and combatting modern slavery and human trafficking, and the related laws, policy, and practice, have been an increasing focus for academic research across the UK. Several academic institutions have devoted whole departments to the study of modern slavery and trafficking, both in the UK and internationally. Much of the research in UK organisations focuses on the different ways that slavery and trafficking manifest in the UK, how they are understood and represented, and factors that can increase vulnerability or the risk of being exploited and/or trafficked.

This report focused on recent academic research addressing the support provided to victims of trafficking in the UK. Given the changing nature of the systems, processes, and legislation around this support, as well as the current Government's focus on immigration restrictions, some recent key reports and resources produced by statutory and voluntary sector agencies have also been consulted.

A cost-benefit analysis from experts at the Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham found that the benefits and savings of providing longer-term support to survivors of modern slavery considerably outweigh the initial investment costs.²⁵ The analysis was carried out to provide evidence in the analysis of the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, put forward by Lord McColl of Dulwich CBE, to increase support to survivors of modern slavery. Support proposed in the Bill includes appropriate and safe accommodation, medical treatment, material assistance, support work, translation services, and assistance to obtain legal advice for a period of twelve months from when existing support ends. The report found that had the Modern Slavery Bill²⁶ been implemented in 2017, the support provided would have produced a net direct estimated financial benefit of between £1m and £6.6 million, and net direct and indirect benefit of between £10.4m and £25.1million.²⁷

Furthermore, research from the University of Hull's Wilberforce Institute has highlighted the UK Government's failure to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees who have experienced trafficking, demonstrating that government systems actively encourage exploitation if specific safeguards are not in place.²⁸

A recent evaluation report *Hope for the Future*, published by the British Red Cross, Ashiana and Hestia,²⁹ highlights the many challenges in support provision. It includes evidence from frontline practitioners on the significant delays experienced by potential victims of trafficking in being provided safe and settled accommodation. It reveals victims of trafficking end up facing poverty and struggle alone with complex mental health needs – with 66% needing ongoing mental health support.

While some developments have taken place since the publication of these reports, the recognition of the specific needs of female victims of trafficking and their children, as well as the unsuitability of asylum housing and other temporary forms of accommodation, remain. Whether moving out from safe house accommodation or within asylum housing, this transition is identified as being unnecessarily difficult for victims, in part because the system does not recognise the unique and vulnerable position of victims of trafficking.

Both the Labour Exploitation Advisory Group and After Exploitation have published reports on victims of trafficking who are being detained in IRCs. Echoing many other voluntary sector organisations' concerns, they suggest that victims of human trafficking are being treated first as immigration offenders and secondly as victims, which risks leading to long-term and severe consequences to their health and the outcomes of their victim status under the NRM.³⁰

²⁵ University of Nottingham Rights Lab, The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, A Cost-Benefit Analysis, July 2019

²⁶ The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill – A bill to make provision about supporting victims of modern slavery, to complement section 48A of Modern Slavery Act (2015): Provision of assistance and support before reasonable grounds determination and during recovery and reflection period

²⁷ University of Nottingham Rights Lab, The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, A Cost-Benefit Analysis, July 2019

²⁸ 'How UK asylum system creates perfect conditions for modern slavery and exploitation to thrive', a blog by Alicia Kidd, Elizabeth Faulkner and Lorena Arocha

²⁹ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/press-releases/lack-of-home-office-support-places-trafficked-victims-at-risk>

³⁰ Labour Exploitation Advisory Group (2019) Detaining victims: human trafficking and the UK immigration detention system and After Exploitation: Supported or Deported. Understanding the deportation and detention data held on human trafficking and slavery, July 2019

The National Audit Office's 2017 report *Reducing Modern Slavery*³¹ highlights some of the main issues with accommodation support for victims of trafficking:

The Salvation Army and its subcontractors are not subject to independent inspections or standards of care...The Home Office told us that it operates on a 'trust basis with The Salvation Army and does not actively check the performance information it receives... In the absence of care standards and a robust inspection regime, the Home Office has no way of evaluating the quality of care provided.

Echoing Hibiscus' own findings, with regards to provision of safe houses, the report stated: "At the end of the year to June 2017 only 21% of clients were accommodated in safe houses. Most clients (79%) received only outreach support."³²

In 2018, David Bolt, Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, published his inspection of the Home Office's management of asylum accommodation provision through the Commercial and Operations Managers Procuring of Asylum Support Services (COMPASS).³³ The inspection found that a significant proportion of stakeholder submissions focused on poor property standards, including complaints of pest infestations, leaks and damp. And almost half of the submissions for the report focused on the unsuitability of accommodation provided for particular groups of asylum seekers. This included those suffering with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), victims of torture, and victims of human trafficking, who were required to share rooms with strangers or were placed in accommodation where men could easily access female areas.

Data from years of support has shown that people who are left without appropriate care and support after escaping modern slavery, remain specifically vulnerable to further harm and exploitation. Mounting evidence from clinical and support practitioners and academics³⁴ demonstrates that mental health problems – including depression, anxiety and PTSD – occur frequently in victims, regardless of the form of slavery to which they

have been subjected. For example, in their report *Understanding and Responding to Modern Slavery Within the Homelessness Sector*, homelessness charity, The Passage, listed a number of mental health patterns observed in their clients who had experienced trafficking. These included paranoia, psychosis, suicide ideation, suicide attempts, distrust of authorities, hostile behaviour, depression, sleep disorders, anxiety, personality disorder, and addictions.³⁵ Prioritising the mental health needs of victims is, therefore, essential to help them recover from traumatic experiences and to increase their capacity to protect themselves from further harm. The Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU) have launched a new online resource hub – ATHUB – aimed at professionals working with victims of trafficking. The site includes up-to-date information, case studies and practical advice on the NRM and immigration processes and captures any changes in the law and practice affecting victims of trafficking.³⁶

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, this report will frequently reference a key resource – the Human Trafficking Foundation's Survivor Care Standards³⁷ – the most comprehensive set of standards produced in the UK. The standards were originally drafted in 2014, including contributions and consultations with 25 non-governmental organisations to ensure common standards and procedures in all shelters where victims were accommodated. In 2018, they were comprehensively updated by 32 expert organisations and agencies to take account of changes in law and best practice. This report relies heavily on Chapter 8, which focuses on accommodation, to inform the recommendations made at the end of this report.

The Government has, at different times, stated it would adopt³⁸ or at least be influenced by this resource in its future support contracts. This includes statements regarding it being incorporated into the new MSVCC that has been announced, though any overt reference of the standards in relation to the changes to the contract was conspicuously absent from the announcement regarding the new MSVCC.³⁹

³¹ Reducing modern slavery, Report by the Controller and Auditor General, December 2017, Sir Amyas Morse KCB Comptroller and Auditor General National Audit Office, 12 December 2017

³² Ibid

³³ An inspection of the Home Office's management of asylum accommodation provision, Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, November 2018

³⁴ See e.g. Addressing Mental Health Needs in Survivors of Modern Slavery: A Critical Review and Research Agenda, Helen Bamber Foundation, 2015

³⁵ The Passage Report 2019

³⁶ www.athub.org.uk

³⁷ Human Trafficking Foundation, 'Modern Slavery Survivor Care Standards'

³⁸ Reducing Modern Slavery – Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmpubacc/886/88607.htm>

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-contract-to-deliver-improved-support-for-modern-slavery-victims>

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The research approach adopted for this report consisted of a desk-based review of secondary sources, such as current literature and reports from organisations supporting victims of trafficking, as well as a review of responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.⁴⁰ The primary research for the report consisted of analysis of Hibiscus caseload, interviews and focus groups with women at Hibiscus' Women's Centre, as well as other stakeholders with understanding or experience in supporting trafficking victims.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were held in Hibiscus' Women's Centre in London. Attendees included women who had experienced both the NRM process and were living in asylum accommodation. The topics covered in the focus groups included an overview of the women's experience of and with: the NRM, the asylum process and Asylum Support, housing, local authority support, demographics, and their support needs. Themes from the discussions were drawn together and notes were produced by Hibiscus Project Workers who were present in the groups. A total of six women attended the focus groups.

Interviews

In addition to focus groups, three one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with clients who had experienced the NRM process. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with professionals working with other voluntary sector organisations supporting victims of trafficking, frontline staff working in safe houses and outreach services provided under the VCC, legal professionals, and staff from a local authority in London piloting a project tailored for victims of trafficking.

Interviews were conducted with The Salvation Army; the Helen Bamber Foundation; the Human Trafficking Foundation; The Passage (London); Crisis (London); Snowdrop (Sheffield); Unseen (Bristol); solicitors Victoria Pogge von Strandmann at Simpson Millar and Victoria Marks at ATLEU; and STEP project employers in Croydon Council.

Case studies

The case studies used in the study were gathered through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and from client case notes. The case studies were selected to highlight the specific, housing-related vulnerabilities of foreign national women who go through the NRM. In addition to evidence gathered from Hibiscus, further case studies were obtained from the Helen Bamber Foundation, ATLEU, and other organisations working with victims of trafficking.



⁴⁰ Available upon request

THE VICTIM CARE CONTRACT AND NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM

Overview

The NRM is the official government framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery. It was first introduced in 2009 to meet the requirements of the ECAT. The NRM is a voluntary process for adults and can only be carried out if a potential victim gives their permission to be referred into the NRM. Only staff in certain organisations and institutions can refer cases to the NRM; they are known as First Responders.

To establish whether a person is a victim of any form of modern slavery (such as trafficking), two decisions are made by the SCA which operates as part of the Home Office:

1. A reasonable grounds decision to establish whether someone is a potential victim; and
2. A conclusive grounds decision on whether they are in fact a victim.

NRM and immigration status for third-country nationals

A positive conclusive grounds NRM decision (the second decision made) does not guarantee that the victim will be given the right for further stay in the UK. Where a conclusive grounds decision is made (whether positive or negative) and the person is not eligible for a grant of leave they are expected to leave the UK.⁴¹ In the majority of cases, however, victims will also have an ongoing asylum case. NRM decisions and asylum decisions are, in theory, two distinct and separate decisions.

Leave to Remain

Under the European anti-trafficking convention, the UK Government has a legal obligation to give people who have been trafficked temporary leave to remain in the UK. This discretionary leave (known as ECAT leave) is generally granted for up to 30 months and enables people to work, study and claim mainstream benefits “to facilitate recovery from trafficking and/or to facilitate co-operation with a criminal investigation into trafficking”.⁴²

Refugee leave is a longer-term form of leave granted, in principle, because the person granted asylum cannot safely return to his or her country of origin. A person with a refugee status is able to access the labour market, education, and mainstream benefits. The refugee status is generally granted for five years, and it is a route to settlement in the UK. Accordingly, refugee leave is a more favourable form of leave than ECAT leave.

Reflection and recovery period and the Victim Care Contract

The Victim Care Contract operates as a bridge, to lift adult victims out of a situation of exploitation and to set them on a pathway to rebuilding their lives.

Modern Slavery Act 2015 – Statutory Guidance for England and Wales, 2020.⁴³

The reflection and recovery period describes the period in the NRM process following a positive reasonable grounds decision, during which the individual is waiting for their conclusive grounds decision. Due to delays in the NRM process, this wait can be months and sometimes even years.

⁴¹ Home Office, “Modern Slavery Act 2015 – Statutory Guidance for England and Wales”, 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875281/March_2020_Statutory_Guidance_under_the_Modern_Slavery_Ac_2015.pdf

⁴² <https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/JP-BS-v-SSHD-final-judgment-002.pdf>

⁴³ Home Office, “Modern Slavery Act 2015 – Statutory Guidance for England and Wales”, 2020

As part of the process, the Home Office provides support to potential victims of human trafficking and modern slavery through the VCC. The VCC outlines the support provision for adult victims of modern slavery in England and Wales, stipulating that the Government will provide subsistence and support to all potential victims. All individuals identified as potential victims in the NRM are entitled to a minimum of 45 days⁴⁴ supported reflection and recovery period in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.⁴⁵

Trafficking victims are entitled to safe house accommodation under the VCC

The VCC is designed to provide a comprehensive package of support during the reflection and recovery period offered to victims, to assist in their recovery. This includes

access to safe house accommodation, outreach support, and medical care including counselling, as required. According to The Salvation Army's 2019 report *Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery*,⁴⁶ between July 2018 and June 2019 a total of 2,251 individuals entered their service to receive support following a positive reasonable grounds decision from the NRM. 1,247 of these service users were women. Out of these women, 59 were British, and 1,188 women were foreign nationals.⁴⁷ This means that 95% of the women entering the service in this period were foreign nationals.

The current VCC is worth £53.2m over 5 years

The value of The Salvation Army's current five-year contract with the Home Office to deliver the VCC, totalled £53.2

million.⁴⁸ The Salvation Army currently subcontracts 11 providers to provide safe housing to victims of trafficking, with many of them also providing outreach support. The current sub-contractors are: Ashiana; Bawso; Black Country Women's Aid; Bournemouth Churches Housing Association;

City Hearts; Hestia; Medaille Trust; Migrant Help UK; Palm Cove Society; Saint John of God Hospitaller Services; and Unseen. It is yet to be announced who the subcontractors will be under the MSVCC.

With the new MSVCC announced in June 2020 and with The Salvation Army once again winning the contract, there is a real, if brief, opportunity to address the current issues within the system before the new contract is implemented in winter 2020/21. Under the newly termed MSVCC, there are some small but positive signs of improvement announced by the Government, such as confirmation that when a potential victim is referred into the NRM, they may enter the MSVCC service before a reasonable grounds decision is made if there are immediate accommodation needs, alongside six "new" services that are being introduced such as the incorporation of Recovery Needs Assessments into the contract (which had already been introduced in 2019) and increased provision of move-on support to support individuals exiting services.⁴⁹

However, when dissecting this, it becomes clear that some of these services are not "new" at all, rather they are services which have already been implemented and which will be either codified in the contract or else expanded. More importantly, at no point does the available MSVCC documentation confirm that all victims of trafficking will be provided safe house accommodation during the 45-day recovery and reflection period. Rather it states that "A successful contract will ensure that Service Users... requiring accommodation are accommodated in a manner that best meets their needs and reflects their level of independence".⁵⁰ In fact, many of the markers of success that are described are done so in vague terms such as ensuring "basic needs are met",⁵¹ without explanation of what constitutes basic needs and how they must be met to ensure success.

⁴⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875281/March_2020_Statutory_Guidance_under_the_Modern_Slavery_Ac_2015.pdf

⁴⁵ In Scotland potential victims are supported for the period set by Ministers, currently 90 days, or until a conclusive grounds decision is made, whichever comes earlier, however in some cases support may be offered beyond the 90 days where a conclusive grounds decision has not yet been made

⁴⁶ The Salvation Army, "Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery: Year eight report on The Salvation Army's Victim Care and Co-ordination Contract", 2019, p.6.

⁴⁷ The Salvation Army, "Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery: Year eight report on The Salvation Army's Victim Care and Co-ordination Contract", 2019

⁴⁸ <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/finance-watchdog-says-salvation-army-contract-cost-doubled/finance/article/1452945>

⁴⁹ Home Office, "Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC)"

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

This makes accountability difficult to achieve and fails to address the inequality of experience of victims of trafficking, who are also claiming asylum under the NRM.

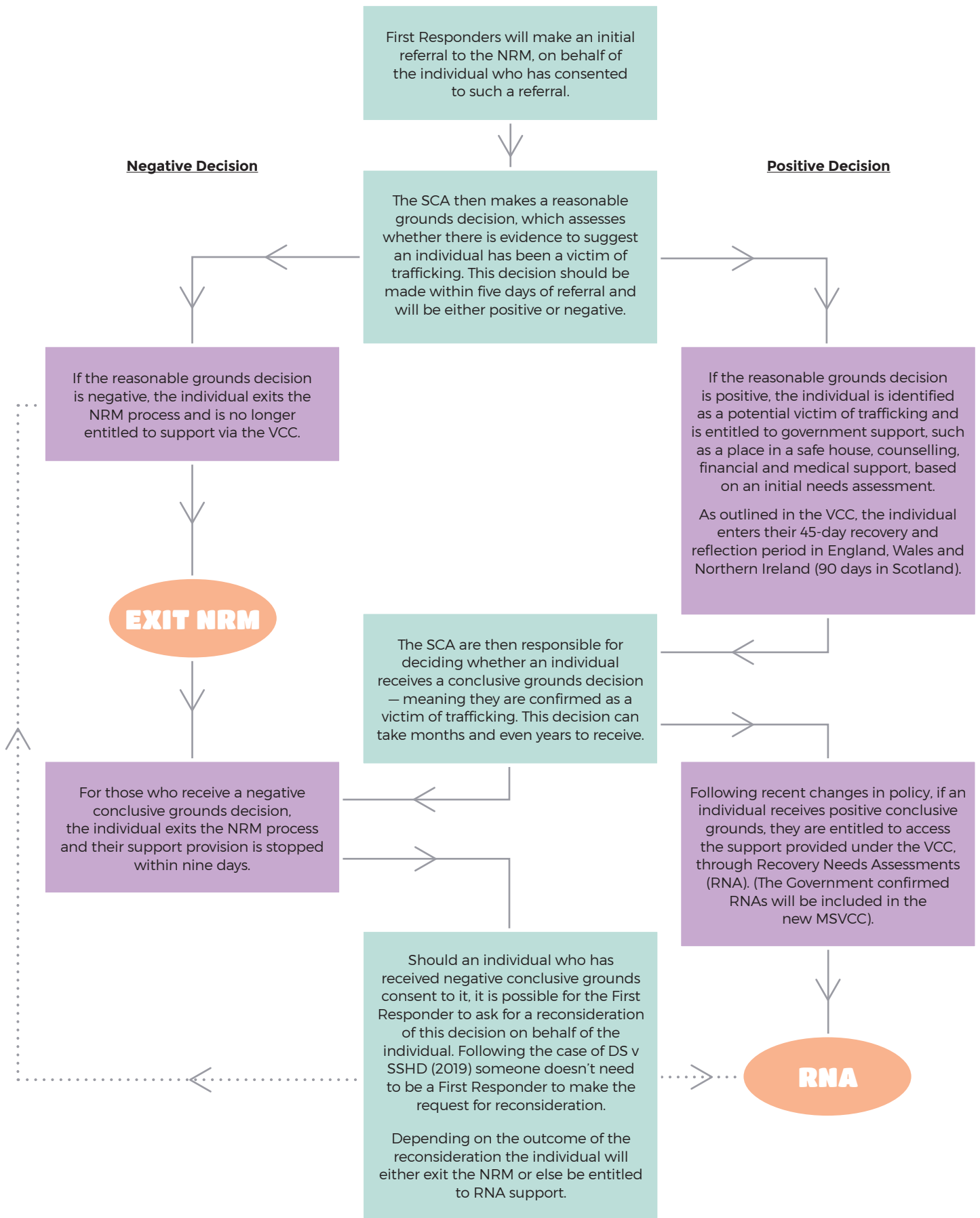
In the announcement regarding the new MSVCC, the Government has committed to ensuring that “the Authority fulfils its victim support obligations under the ECAT and the Modern Slavery Act 2015”.⁵² Yet, at present, the information available regarding the new MSVCC, leaves far too much room for interpretation by The Salvation Army and its sub-contractors and needs to urgently be further developed in line with the recommendations of this report or else injustices and inequalities will transfer from the VCC to the MSVCC without being adequately addressed and eliminated.



⁵² Ibid

The National Referral Mechanism Process

The NRM follows the below process:



Move-on support

In addition to the support during the reflection and recovery period, the Home Office is committed to providing so-called move-on support to individuals who are recognised as victims of trafficking following a positive conclusive grounds decision. The length of this support provision was extended from 14 to 45 days in 2019 following a judicial review. Following a recent court case *NN and LP v SSHD*⁵³ the Home Office accepted that support should be provided in line with each victim's needs rather than over a specific time period.

Whilst the recognition of more complex support needs requiring longer-term support is welcome news, the change has led to new challenges with capacity and the quality of service provision, limited by a lack of funding to match the costs of the extended support provision.

Following the case, the Home Office is formulating a sustainable needs-based system, referred to as Recovery Needs Assessment (RNA), for supporting victims of trafficking. The RNA enables support workers to consider whether a recognised victim has any ongoing recovery needs arising from their modern slavery experiences following the reflection and recovery period and positive conclusive grounds decision and, if so, whether continued VCC support is required to meet these needs.

The suitability of Recovery Needs Assessment in determining ongoing support after a positive conclusive grounds decision

In September 2019, the Home Office produced new guidance on the use of Recovery Needs Assessments (RNA) for recognised victims of modern slavery for what is termed 'the period of move-on support'. At present, the RNA guidance is not part of the current VCC.

The RNA, which is conducted after a positive conclusive grounds decision is received by an individual (confirming them as a victim of trafficking), enables support workers to work with victims to develop recommendations for support where they have ongoing recovery needs arising from their modern slavery experiences.

The guidance itself and the process of developing it, however, have been criticised by a number of anti-trafficking organisations.

Criticisms mainly focus on the failure to consult with victim groups and specialist organisations providing support services to trafficking victims during the production of the guidance. In a written evidence letter to the Home Affairs Committee, the Co-Chairs of Victim Support Task and Finish Group Human Trafficking Foundation and Anti-Slavery International, together with a group of organisations stated:

We are extremely disappointed that in advance of the production of the Guidance, the Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Group's (MSSIG) Victim Support Task and Finish Group were not consulted... It is plain that the RNA guidance falls squarely within the remit of Victim Support Group's expertise.

The RNA guidance states that the VCC provides accommodation for those victims who require a high level of security and access to support workers, indicating that there are victims who have lesser needs, despite official confirmation of their status as a victim of trafficking:

The provision of such accommodation may be necessary for a victim's recovery where the purpose is, for example: an ongoing need to safeguard victims from exploitation reoccurring, to provide a secure base from which victims can start to rebuild their lives and become more self-sufficient following exploitation; a stepping stone to longer term stability, to facilitate access to other services to assist with recovery needs arising from their modern slavery experiences.

The guidance goes on to state that it is only appropriate for a trafficking victim to remain in VCC safe accommodation where this is necessary to meet a recovery need arising from their modern slavery experiences which cannot be adequately addressed through other accommodation options, for example where a secure VCC safe house is necessary to keep the victim safe from re-exploitation. Interestingly, asylum accommodation is listed as one of the housing pathways that is classified as "sufficient" for victims as part of the move-on support process. This echoes the findings of this report that asylum accommodation continues to be treated as a suitable housing option in ensuring recognised victims' recovery and safety.

⁵³ Judgment available online at <https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NN-and-LP-v-SSHD-2019-EWHC-1003.pdf>

Reform of the NRM

At the time of writing, the NRM is being reformed to ensure:

- Quicker and more certain decision-making that stakeholders and victims have confidence in;
- Improved support for adult victims before, during, and after the NRM;
- Improved identification of victims; and
- Improved support to child victims of modern slavery, who are supported outside the NRM.

In April 2019, as part of this reform process, the SCA was given the power to make all NRM decisions, regardless of nationality or immigration status of the potential victim. The newly created SCA sits within the Serious and Organised Crime Unit of the Home Office, which given the application of the hostile environment approach towards immigration, could call into question the independence of NRM decisions going forward.

...behind many of the problems [in the system] is the way in which two separate responsibilities — for modern slavery and for immigration enforcement — sit uncomfortably within the Home Office.⁵⁴

Paul Blomfield, Member of Parliament

Implemented and proposed changes in support provision for victims of trafficking

Furthermore, according to the Home Office, the latest changes implemented in support provision for victims are as follows:

- The move-on period of support has been extended from 14 to 45 days for recognised victims of modern slavery, following a positive conclusive grounds decision, and from two days to nine days following a negative decision;
- Following *NN and LP v SSHD* [2019], the Government recognised that support should be provided to a victim of slavery in line with their needs and not be terminated after a set amount of time. As a result, the RNA policy was introduced, and it sets out how the SCA will decide if a confirmed victim of slavery is entitled to continued support under the Home Office's system (provided through the VCC). This support can include accommodation, basic financial subsistence, and the help of a support worker;

- Provision of a weekly drop-in support service for all confirmed victims (who have leave to remain) for up to six months after leaving government-funded support, to aid their resettlement into local communities;
- Work with local authorities to develop and disseminate best practice for victims to transition into a community and access local services. This is currently being piloted in six local authorities;
- Introducing minimum standards of care in all future contracts providing support to adult victims of modern slavery and an associated inspection regime of the support provision based on the Human Trafficking Foundation's Trafficking Survivor Care Standards. However, these are yet to be implemented;
- Creating "places of safety" to ensure that adults leaving immediate situations of exploitation have a safe place to go for up to three days where they can access assistance and advice while they decide on whether to enter the NRM. (This was confirmed as part of the new MSVCC)⁵⁵; and
- Aligning the subsistence rates for potential victims of modern slavery with those received by asylum seekers, following the ruling of *AM and K v SSHD* in November 2018.



⁵⁴ <https://www.jrsuk.net/news/parliamentarians-debate-the-urgent-need-to-protect-victims-of-trafficking-from-indefinite-immigration-detention>

⁵⁵ Home Office, "Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC)"

HOUSING CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN ACCESSING HIBISCUS' WOMEN'S CENTRE

Between April 2018 and April 2019, Hibiscus supported a total of 235 foreign national women in the Women's Centre. As with previous years, the main concerns and support needs clients raised during this time related to housing provision.

In Hibiscus' Women's Centre, more than 50% of clients in this period had either been identified as a potential victim of trafficking through the NRM process; were waiting for a conclusive grounds decision (which serves to confirm their status as a victim of trafficking); or were awaiting a reconsideration of a previous negative decision of their status as a victim of trafficking. These women were referred to Hibiscus' services predominantly from Hestia or from Hibiscus' Project Workers engaged in providing support services at three women's prisons, as well as at Yarl's Wood IRC.

145 of the women (61%) accessing the Centre were either in the NRM process at the time of extracting the data or had, at some point of their lives, been referred to the NRM as potential victims of trafficking. And of these 145 women, 64 women either lived or had lived in asylum housing, despite being identified as potential victims of trafficking, through either a positive reasonable grounds decision or a positive conclusive grounds decision.

Only 2% of Hibiscus' clients referred to the NRM were allocated a place at a safe house

While there are limited data available on some of the cases, only three women in Hibiscus' Women's Centre's database had been recorded as having

been allocated a government-funded safe house during their NRM process, representing just 2% of the women referred to the NRM. Only one of these women accepted a place. The woman who was provided a safe house during her NRM process, was transferred to asylum accommodation in a different city as soon as she made her asylum application. This type of transition can be unnecessarily difficult for victims, in part because the mainstream asylum system does not recognise the unique and vulnerable position of victims of trafficking.

The experience of many of the women Hibiscus supports implies that the current Government's "hostile environment" approach, with its focus on immigration restrictions, prevents foreign national victims of trafficking from accessing the appropriate support.

The table below contains a breakdown of the 64 women from Hibiscus' Women's Centre who had a pending asylum application at the time of data collection and who had also been referred to the NRM. There were an additional eight women who had gone through the NRM and were accommodated in asylum housing, but information with regards to their NRM status was not available at the time of this report's publication.

National Referral Mechanism Decision Outcomes	Number
Negative Reasonable Grounds Decision	1
Positive Reasonable Grounds Decision – Waiting for Conclusive Grounds Decision	24
Negative Conclusive Grounds Decision	16
Positive Conclusive Grounds Decision	23
TOTAL	64

The remaining 74 women – for whom we had data – had, to our knowledge, no asylum case pending, and were staying either: with friends and family (47 women); in local authority temporary accommodation (16); privately rented accommodation (seven); or were without permanent residence (four).

The evidence we have gathered for the study suggests that foreign national women's immigration status is playing a crucial role in determining whether or not some victims are offered safe house accommodation, with many asylum-seeking victims of trafficking not accessing this type of accommodation.

CASE STUDY

DORA'S* EXPERIENCE OF ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

When she joined Hibiscus, Dora, a young mother of a baby daughter going through the NRM process, explained that she was living with a friend and was happy with that arrangement. However, while still waiting for her conclusive grounds decision, she was forced to apply for asylum accommodation, as she could no longer stay with her friend.

While in asylum accommodation, Dora had ongoing problems with her housemates. On one occasion, she received a warning letter from the house manager stating that she had broken the terms of her tenancy agreement by allowing overnight guests to stay with her. Dora was very upset and explained this was not true and likely to be a malicious report by one of her housemates with whom she has had previous disagreements.

Dora sought help from Hibiscus to dispute the facts of the warning letter and to report various problems both that her housemates had caused her and some general complaints about the poor state of the property.

Dora was still waiting for the NRM decision when she gave birth to her second child. She notified the asylum housing provider about this change of circumstances and was assured that she would be moved to more suitable accommodation. However, she remained at that same accommodation for over a year, resulting in her feeling continuously low due to its unsuitability. During this time, she was sharing a small room with her two children, and she had her baby-walker, which she had left in the storage area, stolen.

There was a clear failure to meet her needs (such as providing her with a suitable cot for the new-born baby or a new mattress for the toddler) unless her support workers chased the housing provider.

When Dora received the happy news that she was granted refugee status, she was unable to rejoice as she was immediately evicted from asylum accommodation and, despite having submitted a homelessness application to the local authority in the London borough she was residing, she was dispersed to Leeds for [temporary] accommodation, where she had no support network.

This negatively impacted Dora's mental health and she had to instruct a housing solicitor to assist in this matter.

She is still waiting to be relocated back to London.

As this case study and the findings demonstrate, challenges regarding accommodation under the VCC are at least two-fold. Firstly, though there is not a clear policy regarding decisions around safe house allocation for asylum seekers, the data gathered in this study suggest that safe house places are allocated primarily for individuals without pending asylum claims. Secondly, large numbers of women who are recognised as potential victims of trafficking, are residing in asylum accommodation owing to a dearth of safe house places. This suggests that asylum accommodation is deemed secure and appropriate for the recovery and reflection period of these women.

**name changed to protect identity*

LACK OF SAFE HOUSE SPACES UNDER VICTIM CARE CONTRACT

Support should be accessible to all survivors, including those with specialist or complex needs. It may not be possible for every safe house to cater for the differing needs of every victim but for every victim there should be provision and a pathway to appropriate provision. All safe houses should be aware of provision and pathways available within the overall service for the wide range of differing survivor needs.

Survivor Care Standards, the Human Trafficking Foundation

Overview

As noted, according to The Salvation Army's *Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery* report,⁵⁶ a total of 1,247 women were referred to their VCC service between July 2018 and June 2019. 95% of these women were foreign nationals, mostly from Albania, Nigeria, China, and the Philippines.⁵⁷

A response to an FOI request sent to the Home Office⁵⁸ revealed that there was a total of 581 safe house bed spaces available that same year to accommodate these referrals, of which 183 were women-only and 238 spaces were mixed/flexible spaces. Notably, only 25 foreign national women with dependent children were accommodated in safe houses over a two-year period between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2019.⁵⁹

Only 25 foreign national women were provided safe house allocation in a two-year period

That only 25 foreign national women were able to access safe house accommodation in this two year period, despite foreign national women accounting for 1,188

of the women referred to The Salvation Army in the year July 2018–July 2019 alone, evidences the clear inequalities and bias in access to safe house provision experienced by foreign nationals. It further demonstrates that the majority of female potential victims of trafficking are not accessing the safe house accommodation which they are entitled to and suggests flaws in filling available beds.

1,188 foreign national women accessed services under the VCC from July 2018–June 2019 – most were not allocated a safe house

While it is plausible that the available spaces change according to the requirement of victims and the level of demand in the system, these figures suggest that, at best, most foreign national women, some with children, are not

accessing the safe houses they are entitled to under the VCC and, at worst, these women are being disadvantaged and marginalised owing to their status as foreign nationals.

Foreign national victims' needs, including access to housing, depends largely on their personal circumstances, in particular their immigration status or status in the asylum system. Therefore, at various stages and through different agencies individuals may access the safe houses provided under the VCC, independently funded safe houses, or shelters and hostels. Although the Home Office and The Salvation Army were unable to provide figures on trafficking victims living in asylum accommodation when asked,⁶⁰ evidence suggests that a number of victims, including a majority of Hibiscus' clients, live in asylum accommodation, not safe house accommodation. As yet, communications regarding the new MSVCC have not clearly confirmed how asylum accommodation will be utilised in the new contract. However, as there is no specific commitment to housing all trafficking victims in safe houses, use of asylum accommodation looks set to continue.

According to The Salvation Army's 2019 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery, the number of people referred to the support services is lower than the total NRM referral numbers because "not all potential victims referred to the NRM wish to access support; many referrals are for children who are supported by local authorities, or the potential victims receive a negative reasonable grounds decision and are therefore not able to access NRM support."⁶¹

⁵⁶ The Salvation Army, "Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery: Year eight report on The Salvation Army's Victim Care and Co-ordination Contract", 2019, p.6

⁵⁷ Salvation Army, *Supporting Adults Victims of Modern Slavery*, 2019, October 2019

⁵⁸ Freedom of Information Request reference: 55528 on 19th September 2019

⁵⁹ Freedom of Information Request reference 53798 on 27th June 2019

⁶⁰ Freedom of Information Request reference 53798

⁶¹ UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery, published in October 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840059/Modern_Slavery_Report_2019.pdf

Lost in the system

An additional issue of concern is the number of people getting lost in the system after initial contact with The Salvation Army. A total of 934 individuals were not supported in this period after their referral to The Salvation Army.⁶² This was despite them being recognised as potential victims of trafficking through a positive reasonable grounds decision and, thus, eligible for support. The Salvation Army notes in the same report that this is because they could no longer be reached after initial contact. However, this is a significant number of people to disappear in this process and warrants further investigation into how follow up retention rates can be improved.⁶³

Despite some justifications provided by The Salvation Army for the discrepancy, given the number of people going through the NRM system each year and the above figures from the SCA, there are clearly not enough safe house bed spaces to meet need, resulting in a failure of the VCC to fulfil its purpose. This gap between provision and need must be critically addressed before implementation of the new MSVCC.

The Salvation Army recognise that there is a need for more resources for safe house places and that the current system is not ideal, particularly for people with complex mental health needs. They also observed that some people do not accept an offer of a safe house because they are not prepared to move out of the area they know (e.g. London), even when there may be a risk of re-trafficking; the fact that safe house space could be anywhere in the UK can be a discouraging factor.

Where people are being offered accommodation outside an area where they may have an important support network or are receiving on-going treatment, they can request that they be accommodated somewhere appropriate for them. If appropriate accommodation is not provided, the decision can be challenged with the help of a lawyer. Understandably, such cases will depend on the strength of the case and the ability of the victim

to access legal advice. Furthermore, according to The Salvation Army, there have also been cases where potential victims with a pending asylum claim worry about the negative impact this would have on accessing a safe house, but Hibiscus found no evidence of this in the research for this report.

Eligibility – who gets a safe house?

This chapter has highlighted the discrepancies between the contractual obligations of the VCC and application of those obligations by The Salvation Army. Under the VCC, The Salvation Army as “the contractor” is required to “conduct Face-to-Face Detailed Needs Based Assessment of all Service Users within 48 hours of a positive reasonable grounds decision, ensuring that the staff who undertake these assessments are suitably qualified professionals”.⁶⁴ Accommodation and other support are provided on the basis of this initial needs assessment, which takes into account an individual’s needs, wishes and any risk issues or specialist support requirements. The initial needs assessments (which assess the immediate needs of a potential victim of trafficking) are conducted by The Salvation Army, together with over a hundred of First Responders and volunteers. The purpose of the assessment, according to the VCC, is to “ascertain the immediate welfare needs of the Service User (and their dependents); and to determine whether the Service User (and their dependents) need to be accommodated.”⁶⁵

When asked about the official criteria for allocation, a Home Office representative stated the following:

*Any individual who is eligible for support through the National Referral Mechanism, has been referred to The Salvation Army, and who may otherwise be destitute or whose current accommodation would put them at risk of returning to their situation of exploitation, is eligible for safe house accommodation. Any safe house space allocated to a specific individual is determined following an initial needs assessment and the risk assessments conducted by The Salvation Army upon their referral.*⁶⁶

⁶² The Salvation Army, ‘Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery: Year eight report on The Salvation Army’s Victim Care and Co-ordination Contract’, 2019, p.17

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Victim Care Contract, Volume 3, Schedule 2, Core Service Requirements A001

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Communication from Home Office

Failure to conduct face-to-face needs assessments

As Hibiscus' research has uncovered, the initial assessments undertaken fall short of the obligations of the VCC. At present, the vast majority of these assessments are conducted over the phone unless the individual in question specifically requests a face-to-face assessment, or they are in a prison or an IRC. The assessments – which are usually conducted over the phone – are carried out by volunteers working for voluntary sector organisations that support vulnerable individuals and who have been designated as First Responders.

The Salvation Army provides one-day training for the volunteers who wish to act as First Responders. The training provided covers how to take referrals to the NRM and how to conduct the initial needs assessments with potential victims. While First Responders are continuously liaising with The Salvation Army on referrals and assessments, the level of training is not comprehensive enough to equip volunteers to engage fully with people who have potentially experienced a significant trauma. Potential victims can present with multiple and complex needs, which are not easily discerned during a one-time phone assessment.

According to The Salvation Army, all potential victims of trafficking should be informed about a safe house provision in their initial assessment. However, evidence from Hibiscus' engagement with clients from Hibiscus' Women's Centre shows that many women were not made aware of the safe house provision during the assessment or felt that this option was not explained properly enough to enable them to make an informed choice when being assessed for their support needs. Furthermore, evidence collected from Hibiscus' clients indicates that many important details about potential victims' circumstances, and their needs, can go undetected over a phone assessment due to language barriers, which are not always easily overcome by interpreters. For instance, questions over safety are often reduced to a simple 'Are you feeling safe where you are?', with victims not being made aware of a safe house option if the person replies positively to that question.

Lack of clarity around provision for potential trafficking victims seeking asylum

According to the Home Office figures provided in a FOI request response, a total of 343 women applied for asylum whilst going through the NRM process between 2018 and 2019. That same year a total number of 915 women had a pending asylum application after they received a positive reasonable grounds decision.⁶⁷ For many women who have already claimed asylum and are placed in asylum accommodation, it seems to be automatically assumed that they feel safe, that wellbeing needs are being met and that the reflection and recovery period can be met solely by the outreach support. Yet, in practice, this might not always be the case.

The VCC stipulates that residential accommodation should be provided to everyone referred to The Salvation Army support services. However, in another clause⁶⁸ it refers to the need for a specific needs-based assessment for individuals with asylum claims and needing to access accommodation. This lack of clarity and published guidance around decisions, and whether those with an asylum claim are guaranteed safe housing through the VCC, has resulted in insecurity for those individuals, often with them being housed in unsuitable asylum accommodation.

According to a Government source, a total 334 potential foreign national female victims of trafficking were accommodated in safe houses under the VCC in a two-year period between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2019.⁶⁹ The source was not able to confirm the number of women in this period who were housed in other types of accommodation, such as asylum accommodation, following a positive reasonable grounds decision in this period; The Salvation Army were also unable to provide these figures. Given that 1,188 foreign national women accessed The Salvation Army for support last year, after being referred to the NRM,⁷⁰ this suggests that a majority of women are not accessing a space in a safe house but are instead accommodated elsewhere.

⁶⁷ Freedom of Information Request reference 54387 on 28th August 2019

⁶⁸ Victim Care Contract, Volume 3, Schedule 2, Core Service Requirements B-025

⁶⁹ Freedom of Information Request reference 54387 on 27th September 2019

⁷⁰ The Salvation Army, "Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery: Year eight report on The Salvation Army's Victim Care and Co-ordination Contract", 2019

Women going through the NRM who have a pending asylum claim are treated as asylum seekers instead of potential trafficking victims

The evidence from Hibiscus' client caseload supports this; most women were not offered a safe house option at any point during the NRM process and, instead, most were staying either in asylum accommodation or with

friends. According to both clients and frontline practitioners with experience in safe houses, the difference between the quality, safety and level of support provided compared to outreach support provided in asylum accommodation is significant.

In some cases, however, women are reluctant to opt for the safe house accommodation due to the risk of dispersal to a new and unfamiliar area, which translates into disruption of support networks for some women. There were also reports of long-term empty bed spaces in some of the safe houses, which suggests gaps in the overall coordination of spaces. Safe house providers do not make direct referrals to each other, rather, safe house provision is coordinated from The Salvation Army's Birmingham office. This suggests there is opportunity to improve coordination and communication between providers in order to ensure more women entitled to space at a safe house can access beds.

Positive developments

There have, however, been some indications of future policy changes implemented as part of the new MSVCC. In October 2017, the UK Government announced that it will adopt the Human Trafficking Foundation's Trafficking Survivor Care Standards, including them in future VCCs. The former Minister, Sarah Newton MP explained during a backbench debate on the Modern Slavery Act:

If a potential victim opts to enter the NRM, we must ensure that the care they receive is consistent and meets minimum standards, regardless of where in the country they are being cared for. That is why the Government will adopt the Human Trafficking Foundation's trafficking survivor care standards as a minimum standard for victim support.⁷¹

These standards were developed with experts in the UK anti-trafficking sector with the aim of providing a blueprint for UK-wide service providers offering high quality care to adult victims of modern slavery and trafficking. They provide a flexible framework with guiding principles and practical recommendations on different aspects of support, including accommodation, from the Government. However, we are yet to see if, or how, these standards will be implemented in practice as no mention of the standards and how they will be incorporated was made in the Government's June announcement. Furthermore, any introduction of improved accommodation standards into the new MSVCC is not likely to extend to asylum accommodation, which leaves many women still vulnerable to being housed in unsuitable accommodation until asylum accommodation is no longer deemed as meeting the appropriate and secure requirements under the ECAT.

To recognise some of these challenges, a recently launched, strategic plan of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner⁷² lists improving victim care and support as its first priority for 2019-21. The strategy also suggests a close working relationship with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the independent regulator of all health and social care services in England. At the time of writing, The Salvation Army is piloting CQC's recommendations with two of their eleven safe house providers.

In addition, with regards to victims with pending asylum applications, there have been some recent positive developments. The existing Home Office policy – known as the Scheduling Rule – means that trafficking victims who have applied for asylum have to wait until their application has been either granted or rejected before the Home Office confirm if they will be allowed to stay in the country and work. This rule was successfully challenged in the case of *R (JP and BS) v SSHD*.⁷³ The High Court ruled that the Home Office has been unlawfully forcing trafficked people to wait for months and sometimes years before granting them leave to remain in the UK. This ruling will provide potential victims of trafficking more stability going forward.

⁷¹ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-10-26/debates/D9B8BD1A-F0D6-42D5-9490-741950800859/ModernSlaveryAct2015>

⁷² Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Strategic Plan 2019-2021, published October 2019

⁷³ <https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/JP-BS-v-SSHD-final-judgment-002.pdf>

CASE STUDY

ELLA'S* EXPERIENCE OF BEING TRANSFERRED TO ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION DURING HER NRM PROCESS

Following a positive reasonable grounds decision, Ella, originally from Cameroon, was accommodated in a Salvation Army-run safe house outside London, where she stayed for four months between 2016 and 2017. The house had four single rooms, and shared kitchen, living room and bathroom areas. One member of staff was always present in the house during the day and sometimes the staff member would stay the night when someone was ill. Staff members would also accompany the women at the safe house to appointments.

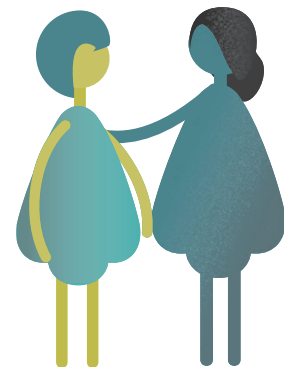
Ella explained that the house felt very safe as no men were allowed in. The women would look after the house and had created a schedule to make sure the house was clean and tidy.

Ella took English classes and counselling was also available as part of her support package. The staff also provided the women with clothes, toiletries, shoes, and basic food products.

In June 2017, Ella received a letter informing her that she had to be transferred to asylum accommodation in London, following her submission of an asylum claim. At this point she was still in the NRM process and had not yet received a conclusive grounds decision.

Ella felt isolated when she first came to Hibiscus, as the asylum accommodation in London she was moved into caused her a lot of distress due to the unfamiliar location, poor hygiene conditions and overcrowding. Understandably, she had a very hard time adapting to the new environment after leaving the safe house.

After the transfer to asylum housing, staff in the previous safe house asked Ella if she wanted to come back to the safe house on weekends, since she did not know anybody in London and had no support network – although she thought it was very nice of them to offer, she could not do this because it was too far from her new asylum accommodation and too costly for her to travel there.



**name changed to protect identity*

ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

INAPPROPRIATE AND NOT SECURE FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

Overview

As previously noted, under the ECAT's Article 12, the UK is required to provide appropriate and secure accommodation to all potential victims of trafficking. Similarly, under the current VCC, the contractor is required to "provide residential Accommodation for all Service Users that the SCA refers to receive this Service" and the contractor must "ensure that its Service Provision is capable of: providing sufficient accommodation for all service users referred"⁶⁴ following a positive reasonable grounds decision.

As suggested in the Human Trafficking Foundation's Survivor Standards and evidenced by the numerous clients Hibiscus has supported as well as case studies from other organisations in the sector, accommodation beyond safe houses, such as asylum accommodation, frequently falls far below any ideal standard; demand is always greater than supply, and there is extreme pressure on both resources and personnel across all systems of housing provision.

Hibiscus' evidence shows that there are many risks and challenges associated with a female victim of trafficking residing in asylum accommodation during their reflection and recovery period. The following examples are some of the challenges identified by women who access support services at Hibiscus and other organisations in the anti-trafficking sector, as well as practitioners working with potential victims of trafficking, including The Salvation Army subcontractors.

These include:



Safety

A potential victim of trafficking who was placed in asylum accommodation in East London, was housed alongside a violent tenant who was aggressive towards other tenants and damaged property including smashing windows. The woman had been threatened with a knife by the violent tenant and had called the police on numerous

occasions. Her recovery was seriously undermined as a direct result of these unsafe living conditions. Despite all the concerns raised over safety, it took a long time for the woman to be moved to new accommodation, though she was finally moved to a studio flat.

In addition, another common concern experienced by those in this study included the fact that other tenants were able to bring guests into the accommodation without clearance from the house managers. Some women have reported feeling uncomfortable and unsafe, in particular when guests have been drinking in the accommodation. Given the fact that there is no monitoring of these houses, it is very easy to bring people in and out unseen. One focus group participant explained that she had encountered a man in the accommodation as she tried to use the toilet very early one morning. Although the housing in question was only for women, it was revealed other tenants were regularly bringing their partners in through the window.



Lack of gender sensitivity adding to safety concerns

For women who have been at the receiving end of harm carried out by male perpetrators, it can be damaging to their recovery to be housed alongside men. During the course of the study, Hibiscus was made aware of one emergency accommodation (used to house women first applying for asylum accommodation) that was found to be a mixed-gender site. A major concern here is that there have been allegations of sexual harassment and assault by residents against potential victims of trafficking.

Additionally, in other asylum support properties there have also been alleged reports of male repair workers having unfettered access to the house, including codes to the lock systems, which has led to unannounced repair visits in a house where female victims of trafficking live. There have been reports of women feeling unsafe as the key of

⁶⁴ Victim Care Contract, Clauses B-001 and B-002

their house is outside in a locked box. The house managers and trades people in the houses have the code to the box, meaning they can enter the property at any point. In some cases, women have come back to their houses and found a male repair worker inside the property or the worker has come inside the property when they have been sleeping or in the shower, without prior warning. Sometimes these incidents have triggered a mental health crisis in women and the support workers have referred them to the local crisis team;



Overcrowding

Overcrowding is one of the most consistent problems faced by those in asylum accommodation and it is very difficult for women with fragile mental health to share rooms with strangers,

who sometimes do not even speak the same language or share the same culture or background as them. It can also be difficult for people with differing faiths to live together and share rooms. In one case a woman had reported that her roommate was performing rituals against her and removing all her religious images that were important to her. Such insensitive allocation of shared accommodation has a major impact on women's mental health and wellbeing;



Poor housing and sanitation conditions

Hibiscus has supported numerous women whose asylum accommodation was in poor condition, including where there were missing or faulty facilities, major leakages, rat infestations or

broken windows. What is more concerning, is the perceived negligence of the house managers, who take a long time to arrange repairs and, in some cases, do not take action at all. In one case reported to Hibiscus, a woman was housed in accommodation infested by cockroaches and both she and her baby got skin rashes as a result. In such cases, Hibiscus' research demonstrates that some women had no other option but to use their support money towards house maintenance.

During interviews with practitioners, it became very apparent that the complaints process for asylum accommodation is a lengthy one, often impacting the women's mental health. For instance, sometimes housing managers would promise things such as a new room which never materialised. This caused major issues of trust between the women and the professionals who are there to help them. As highlighted in the Survivor Care Standards,⁷⁵ victims who are residing in poorly maintained or unsafe accommodation may quickly lose faith in the systems and professionals intended to help them. This can result in victims becoming socially withdrawn and isolated, suffering mental health deterioration and losing contact with essential services;



Overlooked mental health needs

Despite the high number of women in the NRM that present with PTSD and/or other mental health conditions,⁷⁶ there is a clear failure to address the acute and specific needs of these individuals.

Women are often asked to submit numerous supporting documents to evidence their mental health conditions. This burdensome process itself, of evidence collection and submission, can have a detrimental impact on a person's mental health.

Anecdotal evidence from Hibiscus' research, suggests that most positive changes to their accommodation or support are usually attributed to the high level of advocacy and interventions from external advocates or support workers.

In one case, a Hibiscus client waiting for her conclusive grounds decision was required to share a double room with another woman she did not know. This living arrangement was very distressing for the client, who had a diagnosis of PTSD, and was having difficulties sleeping and resting as a result. The experience of sharing her room compounded the mental health conditions the woman was already facing. In spite of accessing support from medical professionals regularly as a result of her situation, it took several months and numerous requests to move her to a single room; and,

⁷⁵ Human Trafficking Foundation, "Modern Slavery Survivor Care Standards"

⁷⁶ <https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/home/topics/anxiety/ptsd-trauma-and-stressor-related/human-trafficking-victims-have-high-rates-of-ptsd-depression>



Lack of the adequate provision for potential victims of trafficking who are pregnant and/or mothers

Under the current VCC, women who are pregnant and/or with dependent

children are recognised as having specific needs and so the contractor is required to “provide provisions to accommodate the needs of pregnant women, nursing mothers, babies and young children”.⁷⁷ However, Hibiscus’ research suggests these needs are rarely addressed sufficiently in asylum accommodation. Hibiscus has supported many pregnant women and new mothers who have struggled during or shortly after their pregnancies due to the inadequate living arrangements provided in their asylum accommodation. One example involved a woman being moved twice within a short period of time, including immediately after the birth of her baby. Requiring a new mother and a new-born baby to move between asylum accommodation clearly puts the physical and mental health of these individuals at risk.

In one instance, one of Hibiscus’ clients who was pregnant and a mother of two other young children, was housed on the third floor of asylum accommodation which did not have a lift. In this accommodation, the kitchen was on the first floor and she found moving around extremely difficult.

Asylum seekers’ disadvantage in accessing safe houses

Under the VCC, the contractor is obliged to “undertake an Asylum Needs Based Assessment in instances where a Service User decides to make an application for asylum”.⁷⁸ It states that:

“The purpose of the Asylum Needs Based Assessment shall be to ascertain whether the Service User should be moved to Asylum Accommodation. If the Service User has specialist needs that can only be met by accommodating them in the Contractor’s Accommodation, then they should remain there. If appropriate, the Contractor shall liaise with the Authority to transfer the Service User to appropriate Asylum Accommodation provided by the Authority”.⁷⁹

Despite the commitment to safe house provision for anyone in need, many victims of trafficking cannot access safe house places, and women who are also seeking asylum are routinely accommodated in housing provided under the asylum support, both during their recovery and reflection period, as well as following a positive conclusive grounds decision.

When asked, both the Home Office spokesperson and The Salvation Army concluded that there is no separate asylum needs-based assessment in operation and that questions about an individual’s asylum claim are addressed as part of their initial assessment. This supports this report’s argument that asylum accommodation is being considered by the Home Office and The Salvation Army to be a sufficient location for the recovery and reflection period that potential victims of trafficking are entitled to.

Neither the Home Office nor The Salvation Army were able to confirm the number of potential trafficking victims living in asylum accommodation

Additionally, a response to a FOI request⁸⁰ uncovered that in 2018–19 a total of 915 women had a pending asylum application after receiving their reasonable grounds decision. However, neither the Home Office nor The Salvation Army were able

to provide figures on potential trafficking victims living in asylum accommodation. The limited numbers of safe house spaces, and evidence from Hibiscus’ caseload, suggest that a significant number of potential victims live in asylum accommodation despite it not being suitable for women recovering from a trafficking experience. This in turn suggests that safe house provision is available primarily for women who do not have asylum claims pending and are, therefore, not living in asylum accommodation.

Under the Home Office’s dispersal policy, asylum seekers are accommodated outside London and the South East.⁸¹ Accommodation can be provided in London only in exceptional circumstances. Many reports have highlighted the injustices faced by asylum seekers in the dispersal system⁸² which puts vulnerable people, including trafficking victims, at risk.

⁷⁷ Victim Care Contract

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Freedom of Information request reference 54387 on 28th August 2019

⁸¹ <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CDP-2016-0095>

⁸² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/its-a-shambles-data-shows-most-asylum-seekers-put-in-poorest-parts-of-britain>

These injustices include:

- Forcing those living in asylum accommodation to frequently be housed in an area of the country that they are unfamiliar with, losing the support of friends, local community, and others they trust;
- Those in dispersal areas do not tend to have as suitable access to specialist services as they would in bigger cities, like London;
- Losing access to existing professional support networks, such as GPs and counsellors;
- Losing the around the clock security and protections of a safe house environment and either living alone and independently, or with strangers in a less monitored setting sometimes for the first time; and
- Those in asylum accommodation can be moved to a new location at any time, and there have been cases where individuals were moved back to the place where they have been exploited.⁸³

These injustices can often result in deteriorating mental health as a result of the stress, uncertainty and loss associated with their move.

Outreach support

The current VCC outlines a list of services that should be provided to all service users, including individuals living in asylum accommodation. While in asylum accommodation, women can access outreach support provided by the same Salvation Army sub-contractors that provide safe house accommodation. These services include needs-based assessments; emergency medical treatment; material and subsistence assistance; a complaints service; referrals to specialist services (for example counselling); access to education for dependent school-age minors; and transport services. The standard outreach support sessions take place weekly either on providers' premises, in public places such as cafés or, occasionally, in the asylum accommodation. Additional support sessions are subject to service capacity.

Asylum accommodation can be isolated and removed from many of the dedicated services for trafficking victims. While outreach support may be sufficient for some women, there is a stark difference in the level of safety and 24-hour access to support provision in asylum accommodation compared to safe houses. Individuals who are only able to access outreach support in asylum accommodation are, therefore, not treated equally to those with access to 24-hour provision in safe houses.

Recent developments in asylum contracts

The Government's previous asylum accommodation provider contracts (COMPASS) came to an end in September 2019 and were replaced by the new Asylum Accommodation and Support Services contracts (AASC). These contracts were awarded to three main housing providers across the country: Serco, Mears Group and Clearsprings. In a response to a FOI request,⁸⁴ the Home Office outlined changes to the new contracts designed to safeguard vulnerable individuals.

These included:

- Better data sharing between government bodies;
- The introduction of a single point of contact for service user complaints, maintenance issues, feedback, and requests for assistance;
- Safeguarding training courses for AASC provider staff who interact with service users, which focuses on the identification and management of vulnerable service users with specific needs or at-risk service users;
- Targeted face-to-face advice and guidance for service users at risk or with specific needs; and
- An inspection regime to check the suitability of properties prior to service users moving in.

Given this recent change to the AASC contracts at the time of writing, it is too early to provide an assessment of whether the changes have had the desired impact of improving safeguarding standards for vulnerable service users in asylum accommodation.

⁸³ Tracks, Identification of trafficked asylum seekers' special needs – comparative report, 2015

⁸⁴ Freedom of Information Request reference 53799 on 6th June 2019

However, just two months into these new contracts, some major concerns were raised by a number of charities working with asylum seekers with regard to the functioning of the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) service.⁸⁵ In a letter signed by over 100 representatives of organisations across the UK, severe failures of this service were raised which included:

- Service users being dispersed without subsistence support having been set up, leaving asylum seekers destitute and unable to access emergency support to meet their basic living needs;
- Service users being unable to report urgent safeguarding issues, including those around abuse, which has left them exposed to risk and feeling unsafe in their accommodation; and
- Accommodation providers being unable to promptly address issues reported by service users relating to their accommodation, which in more serious cases has left people living in unsafe and uninhabitable conditions, including in homes without electricity, with no functioning toilet, or with flooding leading to structural collapse.⁸⁶

The unsuitability of asylum accommodation for trafficking victims

*Symptoms such as hyper vigilance, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, fear and the inability to trust others are common in people who have suffered torture and/or human trafficking. This has led to some of our clients putting themselves at risk by sleeping outside their accommodation on the streets or in parks rather than sharing a room. Those with whom they are sharing the room do not understand what the person has been through and may be puzzled, angered or frightened by their behaviour.*⁸⁷

Written evidence submitted by Helen Bamber Foundation to the Home Affairs Committee

The instability of asylum accommodation – the frequent moving between forms of accommodation and between London boroughs – were among the most common pressing issues raised by the foreign national women Hibiscus works with. In addition, numerous women who go through the NRM, including many of Hibiscus' clients, have dependent children. Through a FOI request submitted, Hibiscus learned that though asylum housing providers may have their own policies, the Government does not yet have a safeguarding policy in place for asylum accommodation, stating: "we are currently working with the providers to build a safeguarding framework which sets out a consistent approach to safeguarding all service users, including children".⁸⁸

The 2018 report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration⁸⁹ highlighted a number of overall key concerns regarding the standards of asylum accommodation in the UK. These concerns included the conclusions that asylum support housing may be inadequate, unhygienic, and unsafe, to the extent that any person would prefer to avoid living there. As highlighted in a number of reports,⁹⁰ asylum accommodation is inadequate in catering for women who have been subjected to rape, sexual violence, and other types of violence because of its lack of gender responsiveness, where women victims of trafficking are being housed alongside men. This is in spite of gender responsiveness being recognised as a best practice approach in assisting trafficking victims.



⁸⁵ <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/joint-letter-to-the-government-crisis-in-asylum-support>

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Written evidence submitted by Helen Bamber Foundation to the Home Affairs Committee on asylum housing, January 2017

⁸⁸ Freedom of Information Request reference 53799 on 6th June 2019

⁸⁹ An inspection of the Home Office's management of asylum accommodation provision, Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, November 2018

⁹⁰ Immigrant Council of Ireland, Asylum Seeking Victims of Trafficking: Legal and Practical Challenges, UN Gift sponsored report, 2011

Even if female-only accommodation is available, women living in asylum accommodation have limited privacy to recover, owing to the fact that they are required to share rooms with other service users, some of whom will not have been victims of trafficking and, so, may not appreciate the experiences and needs of this vulnerable group.

There are currently no minimum standards for the management of asylum accommodation to protect victims of trafficking, and they may continue to be at risk of exploitation or re-trafficking, as asylum accommodation is often known to the public and could, thus, be easily traced by traffickers. As highlighted by Hibiscus' clients, as well as case studies from Hestia and Ashiana,⁹¹ many victims are afraid that temporary accommodation without any supervision or regulation of the premises, could become known to criminals and targeted.

No minimum standards exist to protect victims of trafficking housed in asylum accommodation

Whilst it should be noted that these issues can affect all individuals in asylum accommodation, there are specific concerns regarding women with a history of trafficking due to risks

posed by their former traffickers, as well as from other current and future perpetrators who may target them due to their vulnerability. Furthermore, there is a stark difference between safe house and asylum accommodation in terms of monitoring the visits from non-residents. Hibiscus learned of a number of cases where other residents had brought men into the accommodation, which in turn intimidated the women with negative and traumatic experiences involving men, as noted.

The Government's announcement regarding the new MSVCC failed to address the issue of trafficking victims being placed in unsuitable asylum accommodation and in fact states "A successful contract will ensure that Service Users... requiring accommodation are accommodated in a manner that best meets their needs and reflects their level of independence".⁹² This indicates that at present the Government intends to continue to use asylum accommodation to house victims of trafficking despite it being inappropriate and insecure, and may even result in victims being put in danger of being exploited. As such, the Government must urgently address this gap in provision to ensure that the new MSVCC upholds the UK's responsibilities towards victims of trafficking under the ECAT.

⁹¹ Hope for the Future Evaluation Report, July 2019

⁹² Home Office, "Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC)", pp. 2-4

CASE STUDY

THE CASE FOR THE HOME OFFICE BREACHING THE ECAT AND ECHR

Kim,* a young woman trafficked to the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation, suffers from PTSD and depression and has attempted suicide a number of times. Initially the NRM found Kim was not trafficked. It was only after a year that her case was reconsidered, and a positive conclusive grounds decision was made. After this, Kim was moved into an NRM safe house for the first time.

Four months later, Kim received two immigration decisions: first a refusal of asylum, swiftly followed by a refusal of DL as a victim of trafficking. ATLEU – a charity providing legal representation to victims of trafficking and labour exploitation – helped Kim to prepare an asylum appeal and to bring a judicial review of the refusal of DL. Following a refusal of DL, most victims would have been moved from the NRM and into asylum support. However, it was apparent that in her fragile state, Kim continued to need the support and stability of the NRM safe house to start to recover from her experiences, and that a move would undermine this.

An application for a 14-day extension to her safe house accommodation was approved but it came with the caveat that no further extensions would be approved. In the Home Office's view, she should be in asylum support accommodation rather than remain in the safe house. However, asylum support was not right for Kim. Moving would have disrupted the small steps she was making towards recovery in the safe house. Despite the threat of a judicial review of the refusal to extend Kim's NRM support, the Home Office maintained their position.

ATLEU solicitors issued proceedings and sought interim relief, which was granted. The court ordered the Home Office to continue to provide the NRM accommodation for the next two weeks and listed a hearing to consider whether this should be extended further.

In Kim's case ATLEU solicitors argued that:

- The Home Office's decision to terminate support without carrying out an individual assessment of her needs was a breach of the UK's obligations under the ECAT, Article 11 of the Anti-Trafficking Directive, Article 4 of the ECHR and Article 5 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- The Home Office's apparent policy that victims of trafficking who have an ongoing protection claim should automatically be moved onto asylum support, is a breach of the requirement for public authorities to operate clear and transparent published criteria for decision making;
- The policy is in breach of the ECAT, the Anti-Trafficking Directive, Article 4 of the ECHR, Article 5 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the public sector equality duty under s. 149 Equality Act 2010; and
- The interim relief hearing did not go ahead as the Home Office agreed, by consent order, to continue to provide safe house support while they reconsidered the DL application.

During the judicial review, Kim's asylum appeal was successful.⁹⁵

*name changed to protect identity

⁹⁵ Case study available at ATLEU's online hub www.athub.org.uk

CONCLUSION

For years now, the government has stated it is committed to tackling trafficking and modern slavery, but this commitment is insincere when viewed alongside its hostile immigration policies.⁹⁴

Woman seeking asylum, made destitute in the UK

This report has highlighted the injustices and inequalities present in the current housing provision for foreign national potential victims of trafficking, during the time they are supposed to be adequately supported as part of their recovery and reflection period. It has shown unequal access to government-funded safe houses experienced by asylum-seeking women who are placed in unsuitable asylum accommodation and that, as a result, most female potential trafficking victims are not provided the safe houses they are entitled to under the ECAT and the VCC.

In the light of previous reports highlighting issues in asylum accommodation, and Hibiscus' own findings, it is reasonable to assert that the asylum accommodation, in its current state, is still not suitable for members of vulnerable groups, such as women who have experienced trafficking.

There is a notable lack of clear policy regarding decision-making around priority access to the limited numbers of safe houses available. Furthermore, in some cases the quality and safety of asylum accommodation, where many of the women not accessing safe houses end up spending their reflection and recovery period, might not meet the requirement of appropriate and secure accommodation, as outlined in the ECAT Article 12 as well as Article 4 of the ECHR. The Government is required to adopt measures necessary to assist victims in their physical, psychological, and social recovery. Where the measures in place appear not to do so, then the individual should be referred for legal advice and they may need to resort to litigation to resolve the issue.

The purpose of Asylum Support accommodation is merely to prevent destitution, and, so, it cannot – and should not be asked to – provide a safe and supportive housing option for trafficking victims.

The outreach support provided for women in asylum accommodation is not an equivalent alternative to a place in a safe house, where ongoing 24-hour support is available from specialist, trained staff, and where the location of the safe house is kept confidential, therefore ensuring a barrier of protection for trafficking victims from groups targeting vulnerable individuals to traffic.

Despite the new asylum housing contracts and the AIRE service being brought in to provide additional safeguarding protections to vulnerable individuals accessing asylum housing, the question remains whether these measures – even if implemented correctly – could sufficiently tackle the gap in provision between asylum accommodation and fit-for-purpose safe houses.

With uncertainties following the UK leaving the EU, it is difficult at the time of writing this report to predict the changes in legislation and how it will affect the UK's obligations and consequent victim support. What is more, the novel coronavirus pandemic, which has spread to all continents at the time of writing, will have unprecedented effects on society on a global scale and, if current evidence remains correct, will hit the most vulnerable the hardest.

In the UK, this pandemic brings the Government's "hostile environment" policy into sharp focus. Individuals with uncertain immigration status, who have been affected by trafficking and modern slavery, might be too scared to reach out to authorities for fear of detention or deportation, even when they are in dire need of accessing basic needs and essential support, such as healthcare.

As highlighted in this report, many victims of trafficking live in poor conditions, often with many people to a room, making social distancing all but impossible. Some live without access to functioning hygiene facilities, making it difficult to adhere to the Government's guidelines on handwashing. These conditions not only represent a risk to the individuals involved but represent a risk to public health, as the virus continues to spread through communities unchecked.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ "Will I Ever Be Safe" – Asylum seeking women made destitute in the UK, Priscilla Dudhia, Women for Refugee Women, February 2020

⁹⁵ See e.g. "Sex trafficking victim with lung condition refused safe house accommodation during coronavirus lockdown, says lawyer at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-lockdown-sex-trafficking-modern-slavery-victim-safe-house-home-office-salvation-army-a9424736.html>

To address the emerging challenges related to the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Government confirmed that individuals, who have been accommodated in safe houses through the VCC, were allowed to stay in their current accommodation for three months, as the Government steps up measures to protect the vulnerable from coronavirus.⁹⁶ In addition, The Salvation Army and Home Office have agreed to accelerate their plans for additional accommodation, with new safe house beds becoming available regularly, and to explore “other solutions”, currently in development.⁹⁷ The Government also introduced a series of temporary changes to asylum and resettlement policy and practice, which have been updated rapidly. This included a pause in evictions, terminations of support, and voluntary returns.⁹⁸ However, the long-term housing and other support need provisions for this particularly vulnerable group during the pandemic remain unclear. Meanwhile, the number of potential modern slavery and human trafficking victims identified continues to rise. The recently published NRM statistics for 2019 show a 52% increase in referrals compared to the previous year. Around 80% of those who received a positive reasonable grounds decision in 2019 are still in their reflection and recovery period, waiting for the conclusive grounds decision, and entitled to support.⁹⁹

In June 2020, the Government confirmed that The Salvation Army had won the contract for what is being termed the new MSVCC. Despite there being some small signs of progress in relation to the failings of the current contract, individuals with trafficking experiences, alongside anti-trafficking experts and practitioners, were hoping to see significant improvements to the support provision provided for trafficking victims and during their NRM process. In particular, there is a clear need to address the lack of sufficient safe houses places, the failure to place victims of trafficking who were also seeking asylum into available safe houses, and the substandard and potentially unsafe use of asylum accommodation for victims of trafficking during their 45-day reflection and recovery period.

In order to adequately address this, the Government must publish more detail on the proposed changes to the new MSVCC it has briefly described, in particular around how it will address the failings and recommendations highlighted in this report. Importantly, this must include increased resources for contractors, with a focus on increasing safe house capacity to meet need. Furthermore, the Government must provide clear guidance on how waiting times will be reduced to ensure potential victims are provided the support they need to help overcome their significant trauma they have experienced, without experiencing unnecessary and potentially harmful delays.

It is the UK Government’s legal obligation to ensure all potential victims have access to appropriate and secure accommodation. More safe house bed spaces are, therefore, urgently needed as part of the new MSVCC to ensure more individuals, who are currently being forced into unsuitable accommodation either within asylum services or elsewhere, have access to the trauma-informed services which meet their particular and complex needs. Individuals who are not being provided with access to appropriate and safe accommodation have a legal entitlement under the NRM to access legal advice, which can be covered by legal aid, in order to challenge their circumstances, as they may be unlawful.

An alternative solution could involve urgently tailoring existing asylum accommodation to better suit particularly vulnerable groups, such as victims of trafficking and modern slavery, in line with need, safeguarding principles, and in response to the concerns relating to asylum accommodation highlighted in this report. Or else groups engaged in supporting trafficking victims will need to collaborate to develop new, innovative, and independent housing solutions, which meet the needs of those not awarded safe house places.

⁹⁶ Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for victims of modern slavery. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-modern-slavery>

⁹⁷ Home Office Modern Slavery Unit COVID-19 update on 3rd April 2020

⁹⁸ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/changes-to-home-office-asylum-resettlement-policy-and-practice-in-response-to-covid-19>

⁹⁹ NRM statistics UK: End of year summary 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this report have been shaped and informed by a number of key principles from the Human Trafficking Foundation's Survivor Care Standards,¹⁰⁰ in particular its guidance on accommodation. These standards were developed in collaboration with a range of specialist agencies with experience in supporting victims of trafficking and, as such, can be viewed as the most comprehensive guidance produced in the UK on this issue.

The standards were initially introduced in 2015 and then further updated in 2018. In October 2017, the Government announced that it would adopt and include them in future VCCs. However, any mention of the Survivor Care Standards was conspicuously missing from the Government's June 2020 announcement regarding the new MSVCC.¹⁰¹

As such, the recommendations from this report are as follows:



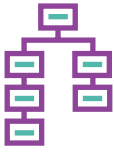
Improved Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract: The new MSVCC must include explicit policies and procedures to address failings and gaps under the current contract.

This must include:

- Written adoption of the Human Trafficking Foundation's Survivor Care Standards;
- Measures to increase gender-responsive safe house bed provision resulting in provision always exceeding the number of potential victims going through the NRM at any time;
- Comprehensive adoption of trauma-informed, gender-responsive and rights-based policies with clear procedures developed to support implementation;
- Clear mechanisms designed to support victims of trafficking, users of the NRM, and victims' groups to participate in the development and monitoring of policy, procedure, and best practice guidelines under the new MSVCC;
- Provision of appropriate and secure accommodation in line with the spirit of the ECAT. This should include a focus on ensuring victims are not housed in asylum accommodation and securing suitable, permanent homes for trafficking victims;
- Improved coordination and communication between providers in order to ensure more women entitled to space at a safe house can access beds;
- Provision of extra safety measures – beyond outreach support – for potential victims who are moved into asylum accommodation, until the required number of safe house places are established to meet need;
- Clear, best practice provisions regarding the safeguarding of dependent children to which all contractual providers of housing for trafficking victims must adhere. This must include having the stability of continuity of education, peer groups and professional relationships;
- Provision of RNAs to address the ongoing and individual needs of victims of trafficking, after the recovery and reflection period and positive conclusive grounds decision; and
- Developing a mechanism to ensure a smooth transition for victims who are leaving government-funded or independent safe houses, which addresses the differing roles of various stakeholders – including the Home Office, asylum accommodation, MSVCC contractors and sub-contractors, local authorities and outreach advocates – and how they must work together during this process.

¹⁰⁰ Human Trafficking Foundation's Modern Slavery Survivor Care Standards, Chapter 8

¹⁰¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-contract-to-deliver-improved-support-for-modern-slavery-victims>



Improved training for those delivering services: Comprehensive training must be provided to all professionals and volunteers working with trafficking victims during initial needs assessments and in accommodation settings.

This must include:

- Comprehensive initial, ongoing and refresher training for all professionals employed as part of the MSVCC, including for First Responders and for those working in safe houses, and asylum accommodation settings (for as long as victims are housed there);
- Training provided on topics of relevance to each individual's specific role working with victims of trafficking including – but not limited to – trauma-informed practice, safeguarding, domestic violence, immigration, gender sensitivity and mental health needs; and
- First Responders being required to inform all potential trafficking victims, no matter their current housing status, of safe house provision during their initial needs assessment. Training must explicitly state that asylum accommodation and staying with family or friends cannot be automatically considered as an appropriate and secure accommodation option during the initial needs assessment process.



Improved provision of appropriate and secure accommodation: Provision of accommodation for victims of trafficking must reflect the need to be appropriate and secure in line with Article 12 of ECAT and victims must be informed of their rights and be provided opportunity to participate in decisions around their housing.

This must include:

- Sufficient gender-responsive safe house bed provision which meet the needs of all individuals going through the NRM, regardless of their immigration status;
- Provision of sufficient safe houses that are tailored towards the needs of those with complex needs, including for those with mental health conditions;
- Gender responsive accommodation placing; women victims of trafficking are to be placed in female only accommodation;
- Additional measures are to be implemented at asylum accommodation where victims of trafficking are being housed until sufficient safe house bed provision is met. This must include increased security measures to address the additional risk of re-exploitation and re-traumatisation for those housed in asylum accommodation;
- Those being provided housing must be consulted before any decisions are made about the location of their accommodation and their wishes must be taken into account in all decision-making processes on housing;
- Ensuring stability in accommodation provision for victims of trafficking and their families is a priority in any decisions around initial placement and possible changes to housing provision. This means if a person/family has settled in an area in which they wish to live, and it is free from any known trafficking-related risks, they should remain there or as near as possible to it;

- All accommodation allocation decisions are to be shared in advance with victims of trafficking and their outreach advocates to enable timely support for the move and/or support to avoid any inappropriate dispersal;
- Women with trafficking concerns and their dependent children must not be required to have to share a room or be placed in large-scale Houses of Multiple Occupancy. (Several councils, including Hull and Leeds Councils have already formally banned forced room-sharing of adults in asylum accommodation, and all providers must now follow this);
- All accommodation providers must have clear procedures to address the need of individuals presenting with complex and/or acute mental health conditions;
- All housing provided to those moving through the NRM is to be habitable, clean, and appropriate for recovery at all times;
- Properties must be adequately maintained by the contractors, and the contractor must cover the cost of bills, set up, appliances etc. so that the victim's subsistence is not spent on these items; and
- Any repairs needing to be undertaken are to be carried out quickly by the contractor, to ensure trafficking victims are not left with unsuitable housing for long periods. All repairs must be carried out in a gender-responsive way, ideally with those of the same gender as the tenants making the repairs and with sufficient notice provided in advance of any repairs to those living in the property, especially if the repair is being carried out by someone from a different gender.



Strengthened monitoring and accountability mechanisms: Clearer and stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms must be implemented to ensure victims of trafficking and victims groups can challenge failure to deliver services under the MSVCC in line with relevant legal frameworks, policies, and procedures.

This must include:

- Development of a new and robust monitoring framework, produced in close consultation with the CQC, victims and victims groups. This framework must incorporate learning from the current pilots running with two Salvation Army sub-contractors, with specific focus dedicated to assessing whether vulnerabilities and mental health needs are being adequately identified and supported;
- An inspection regime developed to ensure that all housing provision meets the requirements set out in the MSVCC and standards outlined under the ECAT;
- The CQC working more explicitly with contractors on inspections of safe houses, other housing provision and outreach support;
- Regular, timely and transparent publication of relevant data relating to the performance of all stakeholders involved in housing provision for victims of trafficking, including the performance of the AIRE and AASC contract providers, to ensure standards are subject to independent evaluation and can be monitored by relevant agencies and regulators; and
- Additional transparency and ongoing information sharing between sub-contractors who provide housing under the VCC, with mechanisms designed and implemented to encourage the development and adoption of best practice interventions.

GLOSSARY

Asylum Support

This is administered by the Home Office for those who have claimed asylum. It includes housing – if needed – and basic living expenses.

Conclusive grounds decision

This is the second of two decisions made by the SCA as part of the NRM identification process. This decision determines if the person is, in fact, a victim of human trafficking or modern slavery. The decision can be either positive or negative. The test to use for the conclusive grounds decision is whether, on the balance of probabilities, there are sufficient grounds to decide that the individual being considered is a victim of human trafficking or slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour. This threshold is higher than the reasonable grounds test, but lower than the criminal standard of proof.

Discretionary leave to remain

Discretionary leave to remain in the UK is granted to people who are able to prove to the Home Office that their circumstances are compelling on compassionate grounds or are such that they can be granted leave outside the immigration rules. This can only be approved by the Secretary of State. A person can apply for discretionary leave to remain via Article 8 of the ECHR, through the argument that his or her removal from the UK will result in a breach of the obligation. It can only be applied for within the UK and not abroad.

First Responder

First Responders work for designated organisations and help identify and support potential victims of modern slavery. First Responders can use the NRM to report cases of modern slavery and refer potential victims for support and protection.

Foreign national

A person who is not a naturalised citizen of the country in which they are living.

Freedom of Information request

Under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations in the UK, members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

Human trafficking

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs¹⁰². It further refers to those who have suffered human trafficking as “victims of trafficking.”¹⁰²

Initial needs assessment

The initial needs assessment is an interview conducted by a trained First Responder with an individual referred to the NRM, to assess the needs of and potential risk experienced by the individual.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery is the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain.

Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract

The new contract between the Home Office and a provider of support services for all formally identified potential and confirmed victims of modern slavery, including human trafficking. The new contract will take effect from winter 2020/21.

National Referral Mechanism

An official framework for identifying victims of human trafficking and ensuring they receive the appropriate protection and support.

¹⁰² Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Article 12, p.3

Reasonable grounds decision

This is the first of two decisions made by the SCA as part of the NRM identification process. This decision indicates whether there is reasonable evidence to suggest that the person referred to the NRM is a victim of trafficking. The decision can be either positive or negative. The NRM team has a target date of five working days from receipt of referral in which to decide whether there are reasonable grounds to believe the individual is a potential victim of human trafficking or modern slavery.

Reconsideration (of negative NRM decisions)

The reconsideration process raises specific concerns that the decision is not in line with published guidance. This is an informal arrangement that explicitly excludes lawyers. The only legal remedy for getting a reconsideration is judicial review.

Recovery and reflection period

This is the period after an individual receives a positive reasonable grounds decision, it is a minimum 45-day recovery and reflection period in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (90-days in Scotland). During this period, the person is eligible for support services under the VCC, including access to safe houses.

Recovery Needs Assessment

The RNA enables support workers to consider whether a victim has any ongoing recovery needs arising from their modern slavery experiences following the recovery period and positive conclusive grounds decision and, if so, whether continued VCC support is required to meet these needs.

Single Competent Authority

The SCA makes the decisions about who is recognised as a victim of modern slavery. The SCA replaced the previous Competent Authorities on 29th April 2019. All referrals to the NRM from First Responders must be sent to the SCA for consideration. The SCA also manages the data on NRM referrals.

Victim Care Contract

A contract between the Home Office and a provider of support services for all formally identified potential and confirmed victims of modern slavery, including human trafficking.

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