

## Press release

For immediate release

# Modern Slavery Helpline on BT Tower for Anti-Slavery Day 2021

- **Lifeline for victims of modern slavery in lights at top of BT Tower**
- **Helpline operators concerned that labour shortages and new legislation could make slavery situation worse**
- **Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime backs the initiative saying we need to get better at raising awareness**

London's BT Tower is today (18 October) raising awareness of modern slavery in the capital with a promotion for the UK's Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline on its famous 360° lighting display.

Modern slavery includes forced labour, sex trafficking, County Lines exploitation and domestic servitude. Globally it is estimated that there are more than 40 million<sup>[\[1\]](#)</sup> people in slavery, including children.

In the UK, Government figures say there are around 10,000 people in modern slavery each year\*. However, many experts estimate the figure could be closer to 100,000.

The Helpline is run by anti-slavery charity Unseen. It is not only a vital lifeline for potential victims of modern slavery, but also a place for the public to report concerns and businesses, local governments, the police and NHS to go for help and advice.

Since its launch in October 2016, five years ago this month, it has:

- indicated more than 22,000<sup>i</sup> potential victims of modern slavery
- dealt with more than 35,000<sup>ii</sup> calls and contacts via our website and app (8,000-plus in 2020)

- used our unique data and insights to inform government, police and business approaches to tackling modern slavery.

As we emerge from Covid-19, there are now serious concerns among anti-slavery campaigners that we could see more people being dragged into slavery and it becoming harder to identify victims.

**Says Justine Currell, Executive Director of Unseen:** “The ending of freedom of movement for EU citizens will have a direct impact on sectors vulnerable to exploitation, such as agriculture and distribution centres. As the pressure on businesses increases to find alternative low-skilled labour, so does the risk of UK workers being exploited.

“Our country’s hostile immigration environment means the authorities are failing to identify some victims of modern slavery. The focus is on a person’s right to be in the UK rather than spotting the signs of exploitation. Politicians routinely conflate people smuggling and trafficking, which are different things, adding to the problem. I worry that the forthcoming Borders and Immigration Bill will only make matters much worse.

“It’s important, therefore, that we spread the word about modern slavery and where people can go to get help. And it’s fitting that the Helpline’s name is up in lights on the BT Tower. BT helped establish the Helpline five years ago and has been a key supporter ever since.”

**Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Sophie Linden, said:** “Modern slavery and human trafficking are horrendous crimes affecting some of the most vulnerable people in society. As we emerge from the pandemic, I am concerned that the difficult economic climate means that the risk of people being exploited could rise. We must do all we can to raise awareness of this issue, which devastates lives and is all too often hidden in plain sight; it is vital we do more to identify those at risk of exploitation and help give those being coerced into slavery a way out.”

## Notes to editors

### More information

For all press enquiries, contact: 0303 040 2888 (out of hours 07943 498239)  
[media@unseenuk.org](mailto:media@unseenuk.org)

## **About the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline**

### **08000 121700**

- The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline is part of the leading anti-slavery charity Unseen, [www.unseenuk.org](http://www.unseenuk.org)
- Since its launch in October 2016 the Helpline has indicated more than 22,000 potential victims of modern slavery.
- It is confidential and independent, providing information, advice and guidance to potential victims, businesses, statutory agencies such as the NHS and police, and the public about any modern slavery issue.
- The Helpline is free to use, can take calls in more than 200 languages, and operates 24/7, 365 days a year.
- People can also contact the Helpline via the website and the Unseen App.
- The Helpline is totally independent and relies on grants from trusts, businesses, fellow charities and other organisations, and donations from the general public.

[www.modernslaveryhelpline.org](http://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org)

[www.unseenuk.org](http://www.unseenuk.org)

\*This is the number of people who are in the National Referral Mechanism, the Government system for identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery

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<sup>i</sup> May 2021 figures

<sup>ii</sup> September 2021 figures