

Press release

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Modern Slavery Helpline reveals dramatic increase in calls, with labour abuse making up the lion's share of contacts – new report

- More than 9,200 reports to the Helpline in 2019, an increase of 25% on the previous year
- 49% of reports to the Helpline concerned labour exploitation, with a 33% increase in the number of labour abuse cases raised
- 16% of criminal exploitation cases indicating child involvement, up from 9% in 2018
- Significant increase in cases involving wider exploitation prompts Helpline change of name

A new report from anti-slavery charity Unseen reveals a dramatic year-on-year increase in contacts to its Helpline, with the highest proportion of calls related to labour abuse.

Data from the 2019 Helpline Annual Assessment, published this week, reveals:

- 1,812 cases of modern slavery raised through contacts to the Helpline, with 4,739* potential victims indicated.
- 318 potential victims were indicated as children, more than 7% of the total.
- Potential victims from 85 nationalities were indicated in reported situations, with Romania being most prevalent (13%), followed by Vietnam (4%) and Albania and China (3%).

- Labour exploitation is the highest percentage of reports for every UK country, accounting for 73% of reports in England, 49% in Scotland, and 92% in both Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The most common industry for labour abuse is car washes, comprising 24% of labour abuse cases, followed by hospitality (17%), construction (9%) and beauty/spa services (7%).
- 108% increase in labour abuse cases involving construction.
- Indicators of Labour abuse: 40% of labour abuse cases cited failure to pay national minimum wage, followed by inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE, 17%), harassment/intimidation (16%) and insufficient breaks (13%).

Data from the Modern Slavery Helpline sheds light on the nature and scale of modern slavery in the UK and is used by charities, the police and Government to inform policy and to respond directly to reports of exploitative situations.

As a result of annual Helpline data, the UK is in a better position to understand and respond to the threats being faced by vulnerable individuals, including vulnerable workers.

Says Justine Currell, Executive Director of Unseen:

“We know that modern slavery and exploitation are hidden crimes. The 4,739 potential victims indicated through contacts to the Helpline in 2019 is a drop in the ocean, making any previous UK estimates of the problem seem woefully inadequate.

“This report highlights the spectrum of abuse the Helpline deals with daily, much of which does not fit the strict definitions of modern slavery. Nevertheless, it is abuse and exploitation of our most vulnerable members of society, which must be stopped.

“We must remember that exploiters are adept and will seek out opportunities to make money. With the current coronavirus pandemic, we must remain alive to the changing threats we face as governments amend lockdown rules and workers are moved from sector to sector to cope with demand.

“In recognition of the dramatic increase in reports of labour abuse to the Helpline we are renaming ourselves the Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline. This reflects the breadth of exploitation we are managing on a day-to-day basis and offers those in wider exploitation an opportunity to reach out to our specialist team for guidance and support.”

Notes to editors

More information

For a full copy of the report and all press enquiries contact: 0303 040 2888
media@unseenuk.org

To download Executive Summary graphics, go to:

https://www.unseenuk.org/resources/helpline_executive_summary_2020.pdf
https://www.unseenuk.org/resources/helpline_3_year_executive_summary_2020.pdf

Expert interviews

Quotes and interviews available with Justine Currell, Executive Director of Unseen.

About the Modern Day Slavery and Exploitation Helpline 08000 121 700

- The Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline is part of the anti-slavery charity Unseen, www.unseenuk.org
- 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 seven days a week across the UK.
- People can also contact the Helpline via the website and the Unseen App.
- Since its launch in October 2016 The Helpline has indicated more than 17,500 potential victims of modern slavery.
- The Helpline receives no Government funding, relying instead on grants from trusts, businesses, fellow charities and other organisations, and donations from the general public.

www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

*The number of cases and potential victims is different as several potential victims may be indicated in one case.