

## Press release

For immediate release

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*Press release issued by Unseen on behalf of 108 human rights and anti-slavery organisations*

# Flagship Bill is “catastrophic” for thousands of victims of modern slavery and will harm UK’s international standing

An unprecedented number of human rights and anti-slavery organisations have written to MPs urging them to scrap or amend parts of its flagship Nationality and Borders Bill to avert “catastrophic” consequences for victims of human trafficking and slavery.

The Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, is designed to address concerns about the immigration and asylum system in the UK. However, it also includes sweeping changes to the modern slavery system.

The letter, which is signed by more than 100 leaders of human rights and anti-slavery groups, says that conflating immigration with modern slavery will have “unintended negative consequences” on victims of trafficking and slavery.

It will also harm the UK’s position as a world leader in tackling the issue.

The letter quotes the barrister Caroline Haughey QC, one of the architects of the UK’s pioneering Modern Slavery Act, as saying the consequences of the Bill in its current form will be “catastrophic”.

### **British victims of modern slavery will be harmed by this Bill**

The Bill’s purpose is to address immigration and asylum concerns in the UK, but the proposed changes to the modern slavery system will affect all victims, including British nationals.

While some victims of modern slavery might be from overseas and be part of the asylum system, a significant number are from the UK: in 2020, 34% of all victims of modern slavery identified in the UK were British.

The signatories focus on two areas in Part 5 of the Bill which they say either needs to be scrapped or amended:

- **A time limit on reporting could mean thousands of victims not being identified**

Experts in policing, the courts and the anti-slavery sector agree that this Bill will make it harder for victims of slavery, including British victims, to be identified and supported.

One of the main reasons is that it puts pressure on victims to identify themselves within a limited timeframe, without consideration for the impact that trauma may have on the victim's ability to disclose their experiences.

This has echoes of the mistakes the UK has around historic rape cases: victims could feel if they have missed the timeframe that there is no point in coming forward. It means fewer victims will be identified and helped, and more criminals free to exploit the most vulnerable.

- **Victims who are forced to commit crimes, including child victims of County Lines, could receive no help and remain trapped in exploitation**

The Bill will also disqualify from support any victim of modern slavery who is considered to be a "threat to public order", using a broad definition which fails to take account of the fact many victims will be forced to commit crime as part of their exploitation (including victims of County Lines drugs gangs) or that victims can be targeted for exploitation because they have criminal convictions.

Says Tamara Barnett of the Human Trafficking Foundation, which has coordinated the joint letter: "The Government says it wants to create a 'firm but fair' approach to immigration, clamping down on criminals and those who exploit the system, and helping those who genuinely need it.

"This Bill might be firm, but it is certainly not fair. It will lead to fewer prosecutions of actual criminals, while those who genuinely need support, including children, will be failed by the new system.

"MPs need to urgently amend this Bill before it's too late."

### **Notes to editors**

#### **Further information**

For more information and interviews:

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**Full text of the letter, plus expert quotes:**

**[www.unseenuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Antislavery-Sector-Letter-to-MPs-on-the-Nationality-Borders-Bill-final.pdf](http://www.unseenuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Antislavery-Sector-Letter-to-MPs-on-the-Nationality-Borders-Bill-final.pdf)**