

summer 2022

# unseen

## IN FOCUS

sex trafficking:  
the ugly truth



CLIMATE CHANGE AND SLAVERY | SLAVERY IN NUMBERS |  
ETHICAL CHOCOLATE | DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE HELPLINE



# welcome



**Rebecca Wingate-Saul**  
Editor

Welcome to the first edition of Unseen In Focus, your supporter magazine. With global issues so prominent at the moment – be they the conflict in Ukraine, the effects of Covid or the climate crisis – we explore how modern slavery is related to the bigger picture. We all share a desire to end slavery, and I hope this issue not only gives you ideas on how you can help, but also shows there is hope for those caught up in exploitation.

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# contact us

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# how ethical is your chocolate?

It's estimated that a staggering 11kg of chocolate is eaten per person per year\*. And according to a recent international study of the chocolate industry, there are approximately 1.56 million victims of child labour caught up in its production.

The study, the Chocolate Scorecard, rated the social and environmental impact of 38 of the world's major companies that control global cocoa production, including chocolate traders, processors and manufacturers.

These organisations account for 80-90% of global chocolate products and include giants such as Mars, Lindt, Nestlé, Mondelez (Cadbury), Ferrero and Hershey's. The 38 companies were rated on the six most pressing sustainability issues facing the chocolate industry: child labour; traceability and transparency; living income policies; deforestation and climate; agroforestry; and agrichemical management.

## **making an informed choice**

Ranking highly in ethical terms were US-based Alter Eco, Beyond Good, New Zealand-based Whittaker's and the Netherlands' Tony's Chocolonely, which is now widely available in the UK.

Only three businesses – Starbucks, General Mills and Storck, manufacturer of Werther's Original – chose not to take part in the study, eschewing transparency and opting instead to conceal their practices.

The Chocolate Scorecard, and its dissemination is a collaboration between 29 organisations from around the world. These include Australia's Macquarie University and the Open University in the UK, and charities such as Unseen. It is coordinated by our friends and partners at Be Slavery Free in Australia.

Unseen's CEO Andrew Wallis says: "When faced with the issues surrounding child labour, individuals often feel overwhelmed by the problem and ask, 'What realistically can I do?' The Chocolate Scorecard is a brilliant way to help consumers choose wisely and eat chocolate with a clearer conscience."

**To read more about this story, search on the internet "Unseen UK Chocolate Scorecard"**

\* Source: Divine chocolate





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# let's talk about sex trafficking

**With reports of sexual exploitation on the rise, what makes a woman vulnerable to it? And how does Unseen help victims turn their lives around?**

It's gone midnight. The kettle has just boiled and a staff member is making a new arrival a cup of tea. It's a small gesture, but with it comes many nuanced meanings – "you are welcome here", "your needs come first", "you can trust us", "you are safe".

It's the first thing a survivor is given when they arrive at Unseen's Women's Safehouse. They might not have received any type of kindness in years, and it helps to signal a new beginning.

Unseen's Women's Safehouse has welcomed 193 women through its door since it opened in June 2011. Across our services, we have welcomed survivors from over 50 different nationalities, which demonstrates the nature and scale of trafficking in the UK today. Sadly, it shows no signs of slowing down.

The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline, which Unseen operates, recorded a 15% increase in reported cases of sexual exploitation between 2020 and 2021\*. With the war raging in Ukraine, and increasing numbers of refugees seeking safety, the likelihood is that calls will increase yet further this year.

### how do women become victims of sexual exploitation?

We are often asked: how do women and girls become victims? Why are they not able to leave their exploiter? How do they escape? What help do they need to turn their life around?

No two victims are alike. Every story Unseen staff hear is unique. Exploiters are extremely devious and will find and exploit any vulnerability or chink in someone's armour.

Victims might be fleeing war, economic hardship, family breakdown, abuse, forced marriage, or persecution because of their gender. Or they might believe they are in love with a man, only for him to turn around and "sell" them to a pimp or a gang. Women have seen their boyfriends receiving a large wad of cash before being dragged away by strangers and forced to work in a brothel.

With increasing globalisation and access to the internet, victims are often lured by bogus online ads promising a new life abroad with a good job, accommodation thrown in and the opportunity to learn English in the evenings. A few years ago, Unseen saw a number

of Albanian women university graduates come through its safehouse doors. They had answered job adverts online and flown to the UK only to find they had been totally deceived and were forced into sex work.

### devastating effects

Many women we work with have experienced physical or sexual violence from a young age. They have little trust in adults or authorities.

Paula\*\*, who you'll read about in our latest appeal, was given up as a baby by her mother. She was brought up by her "aunt" who physically and mentally abused her until she was 16, denying Paula any schooling and forcing her to work for no money.

## Victims might be fleeing war, economic hardship, family breakdown, abuse or forced marriage

A cycle of abuse and sexual exploitation then ensued for the next 10 years. For Paula, and many like her, she believed somehow it was her fault and was shamed by her situation. Abuse and rape became normal – she didn't know any different. She lived in constant fear and had no freedoms; she was isolated with no idea how to seek help.

This emotional and psychological trauma permeated all aspects of her life afterwards – she had no self-esteem. She had constant flashbacks and thoughts of suicide.

These are all common feelings and symptoms, and they can be challenging to unravel. But Unseen has over 10 years of expert care and support to draw on and staff are ever creative in the ways they work with each survivor to help them live an independent life, free from exploitation.

A combination of tried and tested support techniques mean that the women who arrive at Unseen leave with the confidence and skills to create a brighter future.

### finding hope

A cup of tea is the first stepping-stone on a woman's journey. A survivor is then given their own ensuite bedroom, with new pyjamas, dressing gown, slippers and toiletries, and – importantly – their own key. This is hugely symbolic because it means they are finally in control of their own private space and can let whoever they like in and out.

Once settled, a planning session takes place to determine what each woman wants to achieve while at the safehouse. Staff will give them support and tools to reach their goals. This might include getting medical help for an existing condition, empowering them to develop safe relationships or learning to budget and manage bills. One woman Unseen worked with had been so controlled her whole life that she'd never handled money before.

Sometimes, we will help survivors access outside support – like solicitors, asylum services, college courses and volunteering opportunities – while other times Unseen provides in-house sessions. Yoga, gardening, cycling and art therapy are all popular and give escapism and enjoyment.

We've seen women go on to study social care at college, volunteer in the community or even start their own business. Time and again, being independent and in control of their destiny are the two key elements women tell us they want, so we help them achieve this.

Unseen has the privilege of working with women who have witnessed unimaginable cruelty. We aim to show them there is kindness in the world and that it is possible to find strength and resilience where there was once pain and hopelessness.

One survivor, Beth\*\*, summed up the support she'd had from Unseen: "There is a little bit of sunshine visible here, being in this house," she says. "I feel like I have been saved."

**If you'd like to help ensure that more women like Beth can reach safety and have the chance of a new beginning, please consider giving to our latest appeal, or donate online at [unseenuk.org/stop-sex-trafficking](https://unseenuk.org/stop-sex-trafficking)**

\* Annual Assessment, 2021

\*\* Names have been changed to protect identities

# shining a light on slavery

**For the third year running, Unseen's Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline shows an alarming rise in reports of sexual exploitation. Here we look at what else the Helpline can tell us**

The figures on these pages are part of the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline's Annual Assessment, detailing the number of calls and online reports received at our call centre in 2021.

In total, these 8,488 contacts for help and advice are from victims themselves, plus frontline professionals (working in services such as the NHS), businesses and members of the public, and therefore represent a unique insight into trends at a grassroots level.

The Helpline (available in over 200 languages through its translation services), has identified a staggering 23,000 potential victims since its inception in October 2016.

Calls in 2021 indicated that victims originated from 76 different nationalities, highlighting the ongoing diversity of those being exploited.

While reports of some types of exploitation increased during the pandemic – such as reports of County Lines and criminal exploitation of under 18s – others reduced, including domestic servitude (where predominantly women are forced to work in a domestic setting).

Alarmingly, sexual exploitation reports continue to rise. Unseen Director Justine Currell says: "The bulk of the reports we're getting are tip-offs about private addresses as well as online ads where the sex buyer has reported something to us.

"This crime is well hidden, yet often right under our noses. I therefore urge people to contact us if they have the slightest suspicions about anything they've seen."

The increase in reports is one of the reasons Unseen is launching its sex trafficking campaign, so that more can be done to tackle this crime: to better understand the mechanisms exploiters use to recruit and control their victims, and to help law enforcement tackle the perpetrators.

Dame Sara Thornton, the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, says: "The landscape of exploitation is constantly evolving, presenting new risks for vulnerable individuals and new challenges in our response to complex and often hidden criminality and abuse... The Helpline is a hugely valuable part of the UK's response to the most egregious crimes."

An encouraging development is that 51% of Helpline contacts last year came from victims themselves, demonstrating the Helpline is becoming a lifeline to those trapped in exploitation and creating a vital escape route for victims.

You can learn to spot the signs of slavery on Unseen's website (search "spot the signs Unseen UK"), but if you are worried about anything, it's always best to call the Helpline on 08000 121 700.

**To read the annual assessment and for more statistics, go to [unseenuk.org/helpline-statistics](https://unseenuk.org/helpline-statistics)**

# 3,019

potential victims of modern slavery indicated through calls and online forms to our Helpline

# 76

different nationalities recorded as potential victims. Exploiters were from 46 different nationalities

# 15

of criminal exploitation cases involved minors (under 18-year-olds). The two most common forms of exploitation involved drugs and begging

# 51%

increase in potential victims contacting the Helpline themselves



# cruel climate

## Climate change and modern slavery have closer connections than you might think. Here's why

Many of us are familiar with the effect of climate on poorer countries. Low-income nations are exposed to some of the most severe climate impacts, have the least capacity to adapt and find it hardest to recover from the loss and damage caused by devastating floods, droughts, heatwaves, cyclones and rising sea levels.

And we might also know that, in many cases, such conditions force people to migrate and leave the lands or the jobs that can no longer provide them with a living.

But did you know that, on the move, or with an insecure home and no support network, migrants are often less able to refuse work and are more at risk of exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation and human trafficking?

The potential numbers are staggering, which makes the issue even more urgent. A World Bank report warns that the number of people forcibly displaced by climate change and environmental degradation could reach 216 million by 2050.

It's not just migration that provides the link between climate and exploitation. Forced labour is often found in climate destroying

industries, too, such as mining and agribusiness, where a cheap, unregulated workforce ensures profit for the owners.

In Brazil, for example, debt-bonded labour is a common feature in the illegal logging that's clearing massive parts of the Amazon rainforest, which helps to keep the world's climate stable.

In October 2021, ahead of the major international climate conference in Glasgow, Unseen joined more than 50 organisations calling for the link between climate-induced migration and modern slavery to be recognised, so that countries start to take action.

"Practitioners, NGOs, intergovernmental agencies and experts need to come together to gain a better understanding of the relationship between modern slavery, environmental destruction and climate change," says Professor Katherine Brickell, from Royal Holloway University of London, who has co-authored a report on the issue. "Only then can we plan future interventions."

**For more reading on the connection between climate change and modern slavery, go to [unseenuk.org/climate-change-modern-slavery](https://unseenuk.org/climate-change-modern-slavery)**





## Leave a legacy

**When you leave a legacy to Unseen in your will, you're ensuring the fight against modern slavery continues.**

We've partnered with Guardian Angel to offer you a free will-writing service. They've created a simple, step-by-step online process, and every will is checked by a legal expert.

To claim your free will online, worth £90, simply go to [bit.ly/UnseenLegacy](https://bit.ly/UnseenLegacy) and use the voucher code UNSEEN-FREE

Alternatively, if you'd like to talk it through, please call 0303 040 2888 to speak to a member of the Fundraising Team.

*"I want to ensure that Unseen can continue to support women and men who have experienced the very worst of humanity. I have left a gift in my will so that survivors can reclaim their stolen lives, and their voices can be heard."*

Anne, Legacy pledger



# a day in the life of the helpline



**Unseen's Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline team is skilled, compassionate and ready for any eventuality**

**8 am**

Helpline Advisers receive their handover from the night shift.

**8:15 am**

Straight into the day's first new case. A short message, just four lines, submitted via our website with vital information on a case of sexual exploitation. It's from someone who had responded to an advert on a website known to be used by escorts and traffickers.

When the contact got to the meeting place, the woman who greeted him wasn't the one he'd spoken to. The woman at the rendezvous was distressed and showed signs of physical abuse. She cried and begged him not to say anything in case she was made to "pay for messing up". The contact paid someone else who was there, and left.

Our Helpline Adviser logs the information and drafts a referral to Greater Manchester Police and the Metropolitan Police, flagging it as a potential case of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

**8:55 am**

A second email, this time a follow-up from someone worried about a domestic worker across the street who never seems to leave the house. Our Adviser passes on intel to the local police.

Then it's time to check shared lists of high-priority tasks that need following up today.

**9:15 am**

Other Helpline team members have begun to arrive.

One starts to work through more emails and contact forms that have come in via the website.

Another calls a local authority housing officer who had met with a potential victim the previous day. The Adviser wants to check whether the housing officer has any questions or needs further information, and to remind them of their statutory duty to notify the Home Office if they suspect someone is a victim of modern slavery.

Meanwhile, a senior Adviser begins a daily case review. There's a strict time-frame for reviewing new cases to make sure we're dealing with them quickly and appropriately.

**9:40 am**

Some quick calls come in. An anti-slavery professional wants a batch of information leaflets.

**10:25 am**

An Adviser is deep in conversation with an individual who is struggling with loneliness and feelings of abandonment. It's a tricky situation demanding active listening skills and presence of mind to offer support while working out where to refer the caller for further help.

On another line a caller is simply repeating the word "Polska". The line is breaking up and the caller sounds distressed. An Adviser dials in a Polish interpreter and tries to establish whether there's a case of exploitation going on. Together they work through a risk assessment and signpost the caller to asylum and support services who cater for non-English speakers.



**11:40 am**

More incoming. First, from a solicitor who suspects her client is a victim of criminal exploitation: he's being forced to grow cannabis in a flat where he's locked in.

The Adviser explains the statutory defence, whereby individuals who identify as victims of exploitation can claim this defence for acts they were forced or coerced to commit as part of their exploitation.

She suggest first responders already aware of the situation might help make an application to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the Government's framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery.

After the call the Adviser writes up a note and sends the solicitor more information about the NRM and links to relevant sections of the Modern Slavery Act.

**11:55 am**

Now a mother calls in, worried about her daughter – a victim of domestic violence. It doesn't fit the profile of a modern slavery situation. The Adviser talks the caller through steps her daughter can take to stay safer within the high-risk situation, and offers information about shelters and organisations that specialise in supporting victims of domestic violence.

Another Adviser is speaking with someone who's been referred into the NRM but isn't receiving any support. Getting to the bottom of where things are breaking down will help us decide what to do next, and which other agencies need to be contacted.

**12 pm**

An Adviser is following up cases previously referred to the police. One force gets back with the good news that a referral has led to the arrest of two individuals and safeguarding of a female victim. The Adviser quickly shares this news with her teammates. Positive news and outcomes from partners keep the team motivated as we face multiple reports of traumatic situations each shift.

**1:45 pm**

Offline, an Adviser dedicates two hours to reviewing cases, reading notes of phone calls and checking that every scrap of information has been logged correctly – type of exploitation, demographics of potential victims and potential exploiters, locations and what sectors are involved, how victims are recruited and controlled, types of callers, types of support needs, and more.

Accurate data is vital to the quality of the service.

**3:30 pm**

The full Helpline team gathers for a 30-minute daily meeting to run through difficult cases, updates and any changes in the sector that will affect our work.

**4:15 pm**

Back on the Helpline there's another urgent call. An individual known to be in forced labour is ready to work with police. He's just escaped his situation and wants safeguarding and assistance before his potential exploiter finds him.

Our Adviser tells the caller to hang up and dial 999 if it's an emergency, and then call the Helpline straight back. With the first Adviser helping the caller to stay calm and make safe decisions, another directs police to the location and talks them through what's happened.

With the situation under control, the Adviser immediately writes a referral to the police force involved, so that the caller can get protection and support as soon as possible.

**7:35 pm**

The phones ring late into the evening. One Adviser has been on the line for over an hour, comforting a caller who is having difficulty talking about their situation. Slowly and painstakingly the Adviser is able to piece together a history of exploitation.

**10:40 pm**

The late shift takes a call about a group of teenagers seen begging at night, and who appear cold and hungry. The Adviser notifies the on-call Helpline Manager and makes a quick referral to the police and local authority for child safeguarding. The case goes on to the list to be followed up in the morning.

**11:38 pm**

The phones are still ringing.

**Unseen's Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline is free, confidential and operates 24/7, 365 days a year. If you need help, have concerns, or need advice, call us on 08000 121 700.**

# Help us protect vulnerable women and girls



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Unseen's national Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline saw a 15% rise in reports of sexual exploitation in 2021. UK lockdowns, household economic pressures and the devastating effects of conflict all had a part to play in more and more women and girls becoming vulnerable to traffickers.

In response, we have launched an appeal so that we can tackle these horrific crimes.

We want to **raise public awareness** of the issue and, crucially, use our Helpline data to **better understand how traffickers recruit and control their victims**, so we can **prevent exploitation** before it begins.

Together we must end this suffering so women and girls can live a life they dream of.

## Please support our work today. Here's how:

- Online: visit [www.unseenuk.org/stop-sex-trafficking](https://www.unseenuk.org/stop-sex-trafficking)
- Post a cheque payable to "Unseen UK" to Unseen, 7 Hide Market, West Street, St Philips, Bristol BS2 0BH
- Call us on 0303 040 2888 to donate by phone.

## Thank you.

**unseenuk.org**

Unseen is a registered charity no 1127620, and a company limited by guarantee, no 06754171.

Registered office: 7 Hide Market, West Street, St Philips, Bristol BS2 0BH.