

Dear Sir/Madam

We have serious concerns regarding the Illegal Migration Bill and, in particular, the potentially devastating impact it will have for survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking. It is essential that all provisions preventing survivors of modern slavery receiving support are removed from this bill.

As a group of organisations, we have directly supported survivors through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) for nearly twelve years. In this time, we have supported more than 18,000 survivors, who have been exploited for profit by criminals, often organised networks, both within the UK and internationally. Were this bill to come into effect, we fear that many of these survivors would be denied the opportunities to rebuild their lives and reclaim their autonomy.

This bill will do nothing to break cycles of exploitation or help people break free of modern slavery. Instead, it will feed the criminal networks who profit from the lives of vulnerable people. It is essential that genuine victims of modern slavery are afforded the right to seek support.

Furthermore, by closing the route to safety and support, the Illegal Migration Bill risks strengthening the hands of trafficking networks. Traffickers keep people under their control with threats that they will not receive help if they reach out to the authorities. This bill will substantiate this claim and further dissuade survivors from coming forward.

We know that successful prosecutions of traffickers rely on the testimony and cooperation of those who they exploit. By removing the reflection and recovery period, this bill will mean that survivors are not able to take the time to feel safe and build the required trust in authorities to assist with legal proceedings. Failure to support survivors will result in an undermining of criminal investigations and prosecutions.

Denying survivors the right and possibility to engage with essential support will undermine the UK's world-leading approach to tackling modern slavery. We regularly hear from international colleagues wanting to learn about the UK's National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and our world-leading systems of support. We are fearful that this bill will not only undermine the key principles of the Modern Slavery Act (2015) but will also set precedents that will damage global efforts to tackle modern slavery.

We must not renege on the commitments which were strengthened by the Modern Slavery Act (2015). We must not feed the cycle of exploitation that allows traffickers to profit from vulnerable people. We must not deny survivors access to life-changing support and we must not make it harder for survivors to cooperate with law enforcement and help bring their traffickers to justice.

Yours Sincerely,

Daljit Kaur, Chair of Trustees - Ashiana
Wanjiku Mbugua-Ngotho, Acting Chief Executive, BAWSO
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