

Press release

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Anti-slavery helpline has busiest year ever – sex trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude at record high

New figures from anti-slavery charity Unseen show annual calls to its helpline are at a record high, with significant increases in reports of forced labour, domestic servitude and people being trafficked for sex in 2022.

The findings from the UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline include:

- A potential 6,516 victims of modern slavery indicated – an increase of 116% compared to 2021
- A total of 7,315 calls from victims, the public and professionals working in organisations such as the NHS, local government and businesses – an increase of 16%
- 1,046 cases of labour exploitation reported – an increase of 134%
- 479 cases of sexual exploitation, where people are forced into sex work – an increase of 66%
- 114 cases of domestic servitude, where people are forced to work as servants in a home – an increase of 75%
- A huge increase in potential victims in the care sector – 708 reported in 2022 (1,024% increase on 2021).

The figures, published this week (16 May 2023), are part of the Helpline's Annual Assessment, one of the most detailed reports on the nature of modern slavery in the UK.

It covers potential victims from 99 countries, with Romania being the most common, followed by India, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Albania, China and the UK.

The findings, which also include figures for every UK nation and regionⁱ, are used by charities, the police, local and national governments and businesses to inform policy and approaches to slavery and human trafficking.

Says Justine Carter, Director of Unseen and co-author of the Annual Assessment:

“Every call we get is one too many as slavery should not exist today. However, it's encouraging that more people are contacting us so that we can help them out of a life of misery.

“There are around 100,000 peopleⁱⁱ in the UK in modern slavery, so these figures are just the tip of the iceberg. There's still a lot we can and must do to prevent vulnerable people from falling prey to callous exploiters.”

The Helpline is free, staffed by trained advisors and operates around the clock.

Its data covers a range of sectors including hospitality, construction, retail, manufacturing and agriculture.

Says Justine Carter: “To be serious about tackling modern slavery in the UK we need much more awareness of the true size of the problem, better support for victims, and many more resources going into targeting the criminals behind the exploitation.

“Instead, the UK is bringing in new migration laws that criminalise some victims of modern slavery, forcing them underground and keeping them vulnerable to traffickers.

“We should be doing more to expose the extent of slavery – not driving it further into the shadows.”

As well as supporting victims themselves, the Helpline advises police officers, NHS workers, local government employees and businesses about what to do if they suspect an instance of modern slavery.

The Helpline also encourages members of the public to get in touch if they are worried about anything they've seen.

You can see the signs of slavery to look out for on Unseen's website (unseenuk.org) and call the Helpline, any time of day or night, on 08000 121 700.

The 2022 Assessment will be published on Tuesday 16 May 2023.

Download the Annual Assessment at: www.unseenuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Unseen-Modern-Slavery-Exploitation-Helpline-Annual-Assessment-2022-FINAL.pdf

Notes to editors

More information

For all press enquiries and to see an advance copy of the report, contact media@unseenuk.org or phone 0303 040 2888.

Expert interviews

Interviews available with Justine Carter, Director of Unseen and co-author of the report.

Regional statistics available

The Helpline includes statistics for 45 police force areas in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

About the UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline **08000 121 700**

- The UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline is part of the leading 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 staffed by specialists, 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 Unseen website and the Unseen App.
- Since its launch in October 2016 the Helpline has indicated more than 30,000 potential victimsⁱⁱⁱ of modern slavery.
- The Helpline is independently funded, relying on grants from trusts, businesses, fellow charities and other organisations, and donations from the general public.

www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

www.unseenuk.org

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ⁱ By police force area

ⁱⁱ www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/It-Still-Happens-Here.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Figures from October 2016 to December 2022