

annual assessment 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





introduction

This report provides an assessment of the UK-wide Modern Slavery Helpline's operations in 2023. The assessment details the number, type, and nature of calls, webforms, and app submissions received between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023, and the potential victims indicated as a result. The assessment builds on previous years assessments and highlights the increase in contacts to the Helpline and the trends that are being identified.

comparison of 2022 and 2023 data

Despite the year-on-year increase in the number of contacts received into the Helpline the volume of modern slavery-related cases raised in 2023 has declined. This could be due to a range of factors such as individuals feeling unable to seek help, more situations being assessed as not meeting the high threshold of modern slavery, or more people simply wanting advice and guidance about their current personal circumstances or immigration status.

2023 summary of Helpline data

Calls

During 2023, the Helpline received **8,367 calls** indicating **5,876 potential modern slavery victims** from 106 different nationalities, **a rise of 14% on 2022's call totals**.

The highest monthly call volume in 2022 (708) was surpassed in each of five months during spring and summer 2023, peaking in March where 820 calls were received.

Webforms

The number of webforms received has increased significantly to **3,233**, a rise of 40% on 2022. There was an upward curve during the summer months, likely due to the seasonal nature of work in several sectors. The peak was in June when 425 webforms were received. The Helpline continues to expand the breadth of partner websites that host the Helpline webform, which may account for the sustained increase.

App submissions

App submissions throughout the year have been steady, without any significant peaks. This includes submissions from The Clewer Initiative's Safe Car Wash app as well as Unseen's own app aimed at frontline professionals, which was redeveloped at the end of the year. Higher numbers were received during the spring and summer months, possibly due to lower usage of car washing facilities during wetter months. Overall, there was a 38% decrease in app submissions since 2022. Numbers were much higher in 2022, resulting from a month-long campaign which accounted for almost half of the annual total. We expect app submissions to increase in 2024 as usage of Unseen's newly redeveloped app goes up.





victim demographics

Within each call and contact made to the Helpline, the demographics of potential victims and exploiters are captured to create a deeper understanding of those involved in modern slavery.

In 2023, the Helpline raised a total of **2,185 cases** which was a 16% reduction on the number of modern slavery cases raised in the previous year. In addition, the total number of potential victims indicated in these situations was 10% less than the total indicated in 2022, with 5,876 individuals in total.

what we know about potential exploiters

The Helpline receives limited information and detail relating to the demographics of potential exploiters involved in modern slavery situations. This is quite often because the caller or contact may not be able to provide information that is specific enough for the Helpline to record. Where a contact is unsure, the Helpline will always record information such as adult/minor status, their gender or age as unknown to avoid unnecessary inflation of figures.

In 2023, the Helpline indicated a total of **339 (23%) female potential exploiters, 1,187 (77%) male and 1 transgender female (<1%)**. This is similar to the gender distribution in 2022 where 79% of potential exploiters were indicated as male.



exploitation types

Sexual exploitation

Following three consecutive years of increases in sexual exploitation cases, **the Helpline has seen a 33% reduction from a high of 479 in 2022 to 319 in 2023**. This corresponds with an overall drop in modern slavery cases. Interestingly however, the number of potential victims indicated in sexual exploitation does not mirror this decrease and remains consistent at 827, only seven fewer than in 2022 (-1%). In 2023, **sexual exploitation cases comprised 15% of all modern slavery cases reported to the Helpline**.

Labour exploitation

Labour exploitation remains the most prevalent form of exploitation indicated to the Helpline. **3,416 potential victims were indicated** across 759 cases of labour exploitation raised by the Helpline in 2023. **This comprises 35% of all modern slavery Helpline cases and 58% of potential victims during the year**.

Criminal Exploitation

Criminal exploitation comprised 10% of all modern slavery and 7% of all potential victims indicated to the Helpline in 2023. **226 criminal exploitation cases were reported** involving 385 potential victims, **a 21% increase in potential victims** since the previous year.

referrals and signposts

Although referrals to other agencies and third-party organisations have also reduced our strong partnership model remains. More than ever, we're using our experience, influence, and collaboration to bring together strategic actors in the sector, and beyond, to tackle this heinous crime. Our unique data continues to inform decision-makers and is recognised as a significant benefit to strategic discussions where data and evidence is often lacking or anecdotal.

In 2023, the Helpline submitted **1,845 referrals** and **7,222 signposts**. This totals **9,067**, an 8% increase on the 8,387 referrals and signposts in 2022.

other cases

International cases

Although the Helpline is a UK-wide service, it continued to receive calls from abroad as well as calls relating to situations overseas.

Between 2022 and 2023 there was an **increase in the number of modern slavery cases indicated to the Helpline from outside of the UK**, the number of countries where these situations of exploitation took place, as well as an increase in the number of calls and contacts from overseas.

In 2023 the Helpline was contacted about **760 situations that took place outside of the UK** (or the UK and another country), 343 of which were assessed as modern slavery cases. This corresponds to a 33% increase in international situations reported, and a 6% increase in situations of modern slavery cases reported.

Non-modern slavery cases

Although a reduction in modern slavery cases was seen, there were increases across all other case types. **516 cases of labour abuse were indicated, 11% more than 464 the previous year**. These cases involve worker rights abuses without the level of force or coercion of modern slavery situations.

General information cases

Non-modern slavery cases are situations that relate to other high risk or related crimes and have been assessed by the Helpline as general information cases where a caller is requesting information relating to modern slavery but not in relation to a specific situation. **These cases increased by 15% from 185 to 212.**

role of business

Businesses play a key part in tackling modern slavery and ensuring that individuals are not placed into forced labour. The Helpline continues to work collaboratively with a range of businesses, offering support and guidance on modern slavery risks, the signs to spot and how to report.

challenges and opportunities

Since its inception the Helpline has reported a year-on-year increase in the number of overall contacts it receives and 2023 is no exception, **with the highest volume of incoming calls since the Helpline began in 2016.**

During 2023, the number of modern slavery cases dropped slightly which could be an indication of the fact that more vulnerable people are contacting the Helpline with issues akin to modern slavery rather than those assessed to meet the threshold. This could be because of changing policy landscape surrounding the UK Government's focus on reducing immigration, meaning more vulnerable people, who have no regularised status, contact the Helpline for support. Also, many of those who are vulnerable and want to speak with someone when other support services are closed, will often contact the 24/7 Helpline, many with mental health issues. Having a directory of local, regional and national services is vital to the operation of the Helpline as providing signposts and referrals to other more relevant services is crucial both for the Helpline and for the vulnerable person in need.

The Helpline hopes to establish referral routes with local frontline services across the UK, to ensure that all victims of modern slavery can access support, even those who become ineligible for the NRM due to the Illegal Migration Act.

Partnership working is essential to effectively tackle the insidious issue of modern slavery. As well as adding to the list of support organisations the Helpline can refer to, work is ongoing to expand the pool from which information is received into the Helpline.

In 2023, the Helpline supported the development of modern slavery training for NHS England's safeguarding leads promoting the Helpline as a reporting mechanism and resource to be utilised by professionals needing advice. Unseen also redeveloped its app towards the end of the year, and aims to roll this out across police forces, local authorities, and other organisations to further embed partnership working.

Despite an overall decrease in the number of modern slavery cases raised through the Helpline, **care sector cases and the number of potential victims related to those situations are still on the rise.** This has been a significant sector of concern throughout 2023 and continues. The Helpline will be monitoring cases related to the care sector closely to establish whether there are any new or emerging trends arising from those reported.



emerging trends

Organ harvesting

One of the lesser-known types of exploitation and one that was not reported to the Helpline until 2022 is organ harvesting. Organ harvesting is an issue that has predominantly affected those in African and Asian communities. **In 2023, the Helpline saw an increase in the number of these types of cases** which may be a very worrying trend and one that requires close monitoring.

Forced scamming

Forced scamming was also indicated to the Helpline for the first time in 2022. These cases often involve groups of individuals forced into participating in online scams to fraudulently gain funds from unsuspecting members of the public. Since this form of exploitation was first indicated to the Helpline in 2022, **the number of cases and potential victims reported in such situations, whilst still small, have doubled.**

Forced surrogacy

Another worrying emerging trend is related to force surrogacy. **For the first time, cases of forced surrogacy have been indicated through the Helpline.**

conclusion

With the changing economic and political landscape, the independent role of the Helpline is more crucial than ever. The Helpline continues to provide a single point of contact for anyone wanting help, advice, information, or support on any aspect of modern slavery. Maintaining the Helpline's confidentiality and independence is vital in ensuring that vulnerable people can seek the help and support they need and want and members of the public feel confident in reporting concerning situations.

The UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline operates 24/7, 365 days a year. It is free to use, available in more than 200 languages and confidential. Our expert Helpline Advisers are there for support and advice, not only for victims of modern slavery, but for the public, businesses and statutory agencies like the police, NHS and local government. If you need help, have concerns, or need advice, call us on 08000 121 700. www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

More information

The full 2023 Annual Assessment will be available by Friday 3 May. To request a copy, please contact media@unseenuk.org.

Request interview with modern slavery leading expert

To request an interview with a modern slavery expert from Unseen, please contact the media team at media@unseenuk.org, or call 07951 678152.