

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as survivors and organisations working across the UK to tackle modern slavery to express our deep sadness and concern at the passing of the Safety of Rwanda Act.

This legislation and the policy which it advances has been introduced without consultation with subject matter experts or people with lived experience of modern slavery. One survivor leader expert explained that the policy:

‘echoes the actions of traffickers - to be moved somewhere new, somewhere uncertain and miles away - the fear of something happening there and it’s like there is nothing human - dehumanising and being exported like goods. If only, this much effort was to disrupt traffickers.’

Erosion of Protection for Those Seeking Refuge including Victims of Modern Slavery

Anti-slavery organisations have long warned about the harmful conflation of modern slavery and immigration control. This piece of legislation is the latest in a series of steps which have eroded the protection of those seeking refuge in the UK and survivors of modern slavery. Rather than addressing the problem, this approach will only create barriers to identifying survivors, limit their access to much-needed support, exacerbate vulnerability to further exploitation and allow serious organised criminals to act with impunity.

The policy is an attempt to deter people from coming to the UK by irregular routes, but the notion that an individual can be deterred from being trafficked fundamentally misunderstands the exploitative nature of this crime. Traffickers prey upon those who already face multiple disadvantages and vulnerabilities and deny their victims agency. In this context, a policy of deterrence aimed at survivors is nonsensical and attempts to punish them is deeply problematic.

Lack of Evidence Based Policy

The Government’s own statistics call into question one of the central arguments it makes for its policy of removing survivors of trafficking. Data from the National Referral Mechanism showed that nobody was excluded from accessing support on the basis of ‘bad faith’ in 2023, following the passage of the Nationality and Borders Act. There is no evidence of widespread abuse of the system of support, and therefore no justification for the undermining of survivors’ rights to protection.

Breach of our International Obligations

The UK is obliged under international law to protect survivors of modern slavery and trafficking and prevent exploitation. An individual’s right to be free from slavery under Article 4 ECHR is not one from which the UK is able to derogate, even in times of emergency. By removing people to Rwanda, the UK is reneging on its obligations, and delegating responsibility to a country which is not signatory to the ECHR and ECAT and where there is therefore no accountability structure to protect those who have been trafficked.

Rwanda is categorised by the US State Department’s Office to Monitor & Combat Trafficking in Persons as a ‘tier two’ country which does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking in several key areas. How can it therefore be deemed safe for survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking?

Impact of Hostility on Survivors

The hostility to survivors of modern slavery has created a culture of fear and distrust. Survivors are increasingly fearful of disclosing their experience or trusting state authorities. Not only does this harm their recovery, but it

hinders the ability of law enforcement to hold traffickers to account. Rather than criminalising victims, efforts must be made to ensure traffickers cannot act with impunity.

We urge you to reverse this immoral, ineffective and costly plan and would welcome the opportunity to discuss what an effective anti-slavery strategy might entail.

Yours sincerely,

1. Hope for Justice
2. The Snowdrop Project
3. Flourish NI
4. Pan-African Workers' Association (PAWA)
5. Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, St Mary's University
6. Hope at Home
7. The JAM Network UK
8. The Passage
9. The UK BME Anti-Slavery Network (BASNET)
10. A21
11. Ella's
12. Medaille Trust
13. Caritas Bakhita House
14. Kalayaan
15. The Croydon Community Against Trafficking
16. Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)
17. Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU)
18. After Exploitation
19. Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG)
20. Helen Bamber Foundation
21. Tamar
22. Anti-Slavery International
23. Freedom United
24. Unseen
25. ECPAT UK (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking)
26. Walk Free
27. Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)
28. Survivor Alliance UK CIC