

Press release

Thursday 18 April 2024

Record number of calls reported by Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline, with 30% rise in the number of potential victims indicated in the care sector

The number of calls to the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline in 2023 have risen significantly for the fourth year running, according to new data by anti-slavery charity Unseen.

Calls to the Helpline and contacts via the service's web form and app in 2023 rose by 20%, up from 9,779 in 2022 to 11,700 in 2023.

Calls were from potential victims, the public, businesses, and professionals working in organisations such as the NHS, local government and the police.

Labour exploitation remains the most prevalent exploitation type, followed by sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and domestic servitude. This has remained consistent since the Helpline was founded in 2016.

Key findings from the Helpline's 2023 data include:

- 918 potential victims of modern slavery indicated in the care sector, up from 708 in 2022 (a 30% rise).
- An 11% increase in labour abuse cases (1), up from 464 in 2022 to 516 in 2023.
- A 21% increase in potential victims of criminal exploitation, up from 317 in 2022 to 385 in 2023.
- A 5% increase in cases involving minors and a 3% increase in minor potential victims (340 minors across 223 modern slavery cases, up from 331 potential victims across 213 cases in 2022). 10% of modern slavery cases raised by the Helpline in 2023 involved minors.
- Four cases of organ harvesting reported, following the first such case being indicated in 2022.
- Forced surrogacy reported to the Helpline for the first time last year, with a total of three potential victims indicated.
- Situations of forced scamming have doubled, from 11 potential victims in two cases in 2022 to 41 potential victims across four cases in 2023.

The figures 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 106 countries, up from 99 in 2022. The most common nationalities reported as being potential victims were Indian, Romanian, Albanian, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

India was the most prevalent potential victim nationality for the first time, predominantly due to labour exploitation within the care sector. Since the Helpline was founded in 2016, Romanian nationals had been the most indicated potential victims every year until now.

Justine Carter, Director of Unseen and co-author of the report, said: “Modern slavery and exploitation are heinous crimes that have no place in a modern, progressive UK that cares about human rights.

“It is encouraging that we are continuing to see rising numbers of calls and contacts to the Helpline, indicating that we are succeeding in raising awareness of the issue and mobilising more people to act.”

The rise in calls and contacts to the Helpline comes despite an overall fall in the number of potential victims and modern slavery cases reported.

In 2023:

- The number of potential victims indicated to the Helpline was 5,876, down 10% on 2022 (6,516).
- The number of modern slavery cases raised was 2,185, down 16% on 2022 (2,588).

Justine Carter added: “We remain concerned that the ever-increasing hostile environment in the UK towards migrants and foreign workers means that fewer people feel able to raise concerns and seek the help and support that they desperately need.

“More needs to be done to encourage victims to come forward and to properly resource efforts to stamp out modern slavery and exploitation for good.”

The findings, which include figures for every UK nation and region¹, are used by charities, the police, local and national governments, and businesses to inform policy and approaches to slavery and human trafficking.

The Helpline is a free, independent and confidential service staffed by trained advisers and operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

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.

You can see the signs of slavery to look out for on Unseen’s website (unseenuk.org) and call the Helpline on 08000 121 700.

¹ By police force area

Notes to editors

More information

The Annual Assessment [executive summary](#) and [full report](#) are available.

For all media enquiries, contact media@unseenuk.org or call 07951 678152.

Request interview with modern slavery leading expert

To request an interview with a modern slavery expert from Unseen, please contact the media team using the details above.

Attend our free webinar launch event to learn more

You are invited to [register](#) for the launch of the 2023 Annual Assessment at our webinar which takes place from 11.30am to 12.30pm on Thursday 18 April.

About the UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline

- The UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline is run by the leading anti-slavery charity Unseen.
- The Helpline is staffed by specialists, is free to use, and can take calls in more than 250 languages.
- People can also contact the Helpline via the Helpline website and the Unseen App.
- Since its launch in October 2016, the Helpline has indicated more than 36,000 (2) potential victims of modern slavery.
- Anonymised aggregate data from the Helpline is used to inform academic research and policing and government strategies, and help Unseen's Business Portal members identify trends in their sector.
- The Helpline is independently funded, relying on grants from trusts, businesses, fellow charities and other organisations, and donations from the public.

Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline: www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

Unseen website: www.unseenuk.org

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- (1) These cases involve worker rights abuses without the level of force or coercion of modern slavery situations.
- (2) Figures from October 2016 to December 2023.