

Press release

30 April, 2025

Women and girls at growing risk of modern slavery, data reveals

The number of female potential victims of modern slavery and exploitation is higher than males for the first time, according to new data released by anti-slavery charity Unseen.

The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline, run by Unseen, indicated 1,478 female potential victims (53%¹ of total) in 2024, compared to 1,306 males (47% of total).

For the first time since the inception of the Helpline in 2016, females were the most prevalent gender for potential victims.

The main type of exploitation affecting females was sexual exploitation, followed by labour exploitation and domestic servitude.

The increase in female potential victims has been attributed partly to the rise of exploitation of migrant women in the care sector.

Justine Carter, Executive Director at Unseen, said: “These figures expose a deeply troubling trend: women and girls are increasingly being targeted in cycles of abuse, forced labour, and sexual exploitation. These individuals are not just numbers – they are real people who have been deceived, coerced, or forcibly trafficked into horrific situations. Many are subjected to physical and psychological abuse, often too afraid to seek help due to threats from their exploiters.”

More than 4,800 potential victims indicated by Helpline

The Helpline’s Annual Assessment 2024, one of the most detailed reports on modern slavery in the UK, indicated that labour exploitation remains the most prevalent exploitation type, followed by sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and domestic servitude.

In 2024, the Helpline responded to 11,464 calls, web forms and app submissions. These indicated 4,839 potential victims of modern slavery across 2,089 cases, and spanning 94 nationalities.

Data confirms growing threat of child sexual exploitation

Reports of child sexual exploitation doubled in 2024, rising from 53 to 110 potential victims indicated. Of those where gender was known, 88% were female.

Almost a quarter (24%) of all potential victims of sexual exploitation in 2024 were minors. Minors also featured heavily in figures for criminal exploitation, representing 21% of potential victims indicated in this category of modern slavery in 2024.

¹ Percentages are based only on available data. For instance, the Helpline recorded 1,478 female potential victims, but the true figure may be higher as gender was not always disclosed.

Construction sector ranks second in reported labour exploitation cases

Construction overtook services (e.g. car washes, beauty and spa services, repairs and maintenance) in the number of modern slavery cases in 2024 and is now the second biggest sector for cases and potential victims.

There was a 7% increase in cases but a 6% decrease in potential victims in construction in 2024.

Despite a drop in numbers in 2024, the care sector remains the biggest sector for labour exploitation cases and potential victims. Care sector exploitation represented 18% of all cases and almost a quarter of all potential victims (24%) in 2024.

Rise in Chinese potential victims but a fall in Albanian nationals

Other key findings from the Helpline's 2024 data include a:

- **Rise in Chinese potential victims:** China has consistently featured in the top 10 potential victim nationalities but saw a significant 67% increase to 140 potential victims in 2024. This increase made China the second most common potential victim nationality after Indian.
- **Significant drop in Albanian potential victims:** the number of Albanian nationals indicated as potential victims almost halved (-49%) to 59 in 2024.
- **Increase in Bulgarian potential victims:** Bulgaria (54 potential victims) has appeared in the top 10 nationalities for the first time since 2020, following a 575% increase from eight the previous year.
- **Fall in forced surrogacy numbers:** forced surrogacy was indicated to the Helpline for the first time in 2023 with three potential victims. Only one case was indicated that involved forced surrogacy in 2024.
- **Increase in males being sexually exploited:** the number of males who were potential victims of sexual exploitation reached 29 (4% of total) in 2024. This was an increase of 53% from 19 the previous year.

Increase in labour abuse cases and potential victims

Cases of labour abuse reported to the Helpline in 2024 rose by 54% to a record high of 794, involving 2,701 potential victims (a 50% increase).

The care sector and hospitality sector were the main sectors where labour abuse cases were reported, with notable increases in construction (43% increase).

For information, advice and guidance on any modern slavery issue, call the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline on 08000 121 700. You can also report concerns online via our [web form](#) and by downloading our [app](#).

Notes to editors

For media enquiries, 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 using the details above.

About the UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline

- The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline operates 365 days a year, 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 website and the Unseen App
- Since its launch in October 2016 and the end of 2024, the Helpline has indicated more than 41,000 potential victims of modern slavery across 15,000 cases.
- Anonymised aggregate data from the Helpline is used to inform academic research, policing and government strategies, and help Unseen's Business Portal members identify trends in their sector.
- The Helpline is confidential and independently funded, relying on grants from trusts, businesses, fellow charities and other organisations, and donations from the public. It receives no government funding.