



Press release

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Modern slavery's £60bn socio-economic toll on the UK

Modern slavery has a socio-economic impact on the UK of up to £60bn – a staggering economic drain equal to 2% of the country's GDP.

A [new report](#) from the anti-slavery charity Unseen reveals this immense and growing burden is not only harming victims but also damaging the national economy and straining police resources.

The cost to UK police forces alone has skyrocketed by 141% since 2018, reaching an estimated £210m in 2024. That's enough money to fund the recruitment of 7,500 new police officers.

The response to this serious economic crime is critically underfunded, according to Unseen. The report 'The economic cost of modern slavery: policing' reveals a stark disconnect between the scale of the problem and the recovery of criminal proceeds. In 2024, only £854,000 was recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) from modern slavery cases – a mere 0.4% of the total amount recovered by police and just 0.4% of the estimated policing cost of the crime.

“Modern slavery is a highly profitable economic crime that results in severe human rights violations. Yet, our response is not targeting the perpetrators' primary motivation: money,” said Andrew Wallis OBE, CEO of Unseen. “We are calling for a fundamental shift to treat modern slavery as the serious economic crime it is. By prioritising financial investigations and seizing assets, we can dismantle criminal networks and reduce the devastating impact on victims and society.”

The report uncovers significant regional disparities in both cost and prevalence* of modern slavery. Kent Police report the highest impact, with modern slavery consuming £24.5m or 5.71% of its total budget.

In contrast, Northamptonshire reports a cost of 1.27%, West Yorkshire 1.17%, Merseyside 1.02%, and the Metropolitan Police, which has a much larger budget, reports 1.56%. Meanwhile, the City of London Police reports only 0.13%.

Prevalence rates also vary dramatically, with Kent (128 per 100,000 people), the City of London Police (122) and Bedfordshire (79) reporting far higher rates than areas like Cumbria (10) and Devon and Cornwall (8). These variations likely reflect differences in policing focus, awareness, and prioritisation, rather than the true distribution of crime.

Key recommendations for action

Unseen is calling on the government, law enforcement, and local authorities to take urgent action:

1. **Classify modern slavery as an economic crime** to prioritise financial investigations from the outset of every case.
2. **Boost financial investigations** to trace and seize criminal assets, disrupting the business model of exploitation.
3. **Ring-fence all POCA funds recovered from modern slavery** to be reinvested into anti-slavery work across policing and survivor support.
4. **Strengthen multi-agency collaboration**, including with NGOs, to improve victim support and prosecution rates.
5. **Invest in prevention and early intervention** to reduce long-term demand on police resources.

“Ignoring the true economic costs will result in escalating expenses and a growing societal burden,” Wallis added. “At a time of economic challenge, the UK cannot afford to carry this £60bn socio-economic drag. We urge the government to recognise this threat, reinstate modern slavery to the National Threat Assessment, and fund a response equal to the scale of the crime.”

*Prevalence rates for exploitation are calculated using figures from the National Referral Mechanism, the government’s framework for identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery.

Notes to editors

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

Request interview with modern slavery expert

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

About Unseen

Unseen is a UK charity with its head office in Bristol. We provide safehouses and support in the community for survivors of trafficking and modern slavery. We also run the UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline and work with individuals, communities, business, governments, other charities and statutory agencies to stamp out slavery for good.



About Andrew Wallis OBE

Andrew Wallis is the founding CEO of Unseen and an internationally renowned expert on modern slavery. He chaired the landmark Centre for Social Justice report 'It happens here', widely acknowledged as the catalyst for the UK Modern Slavery Act of 2015, advising on its development. He was awarded an OBE that year for his work combatting human trafficking.