



the economic cost of modern slavery: policing



unseen

contents

Foreword	3
Executive summary	4
Call to action.....	6
The economic cost and prevalence of modern slavery	8
Policing.....	8
The impact of modern slavery on police forces – financial	10
The impact of modern slavery on police forces – POCA	12
The impact of modern slavery on police forces – prevalence.....	16
The impact of modern slavery on police forces – contributing factors.....	20
The impact of modern slavery on police forces: questions and observations	21
Key recommendations.....	22
About Unseen.....	24



foreword

Andrew Wallis OBE, CEO of Unseen

Nearly two decades have passed since Unseen was founded. One of the key contributors to the founding was a conversation with a senior police officer who revealed the scale of human trafficking, not only in Bristol, where we are based, but across the UK. They challenged us to positively and constructively respond to the issues. From the outset, we have always worked closely with police forces throughout the UK, supporting and collaborating with them to improve responses to modern slavery. We are grateful to the police forces for their collaboration with Unseen. This collaboration includes victim identification and support, problem profiling, joint operations, anti-slavery partnerships, training, and, since 2016, sharing intelligence from the national Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline – the most unique and large non-governmental data set and early warning system for current and future exploitation trends in the UK, as well as assisting victims who wish to engage with law enforcement for support in escaping exploitation, and providing information on modern slavery cases not yet known to the police.

In the decade since the passage of the Modern Slavery Act (2015), much has changed from being a cross party political priority, with a task force headed by the Prime Minister, on the National Security Risk Assessment, and accordingly, on the threat assessment of every police force, to one of declining importance and focus despite the rapid increase in identified victims and the scale of modern slavery across the UK not being fully appreciated. Alongside this, in recent years, there has been the intense political and media conflation of immigration, smuggling and human trafficking, which are separate but interrelated issues. Modern slavery is an economic crime with victims and perpetrators. Operating in this arena has brought complications for policing. There has been a large turnover in personnel as well as recent recruitment, resulting in an inexperienced workforce, which, when dealing with the complexities of modern slavery cases, has an impact. The decimation of financial investigators has resulted in minuscule use of POCA (Proceeds of Crime Act) when tackling this economic crime. Yet media and societal priorities and the demands on policing continue to rise.

Against this backdrop, we hope our analysis and spotlight on the economics and prevalence of modern slavery in the UK and its impact on police forces sheds light on the fact that this is a serious economic crime costing the UK somewhere in the region of £60bn in terms of socio-economic impact. This is even more critical in the current economic climate, effectively a 2% of GDP drag factor on the UK economy. We argue that for policing, there is a strategic and operational case for classifying modern slavery as an economic crime. The primary motivation of perpetrators involved in modern slavery is to make money; therefore, to target and confiscate their assets is the most effective and impactful response. The true scale of modern slavery in the UK will never be fully known, but the numbers and financial impact of this economic crime are continuing to rise. The cost of policing modern slavery, which was around £210m last year, is significant and set to continue rising. However, without further investment in policing to tackle this crime effectively, the economic drag on the UK will continue to grow precisely at a time when it is not needed.

executive summary

This document emphasises the significant and increasing economic burden that modern slavery imposes on UK police forces and society. Using 2024 data and methodologies from earlier Home Office research¹, the estimated costs and prevalence rates highlight the necessity for a strategic reassessment of how this crime is tackled.

Key findings:



Vast socio-economic cost: the estimated socio-economic impact of modern slavery in the UK ranges between £52bn and £60bn annually. This represents a significant and previously unidentified economic burden on the country, amounting to around 2% of the UK's GDP. The UK government recognises that the cost associated with each victim exceeds £400,000. At Unseen, we suggest this figure is closer to £450,000 when considering the appropriate inflationary adjustments since 2016, when the figures were last calculated by the Home Office.



Low Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) recovery: despite modern slavery being classified as a lifestyle offence under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the recovery of funds through POCA in modern slavery cases remains strikingly low². In 2024, only £854,000 was recovered through POCA in connection with modern slavery, which accounts for just 0.4% of the total amount recovered by police and represents only 0.4% of the estimated total cost of modern slavery to law enforcement. This low recovery rate is significantly hindered by factors such as cuts to policing budgets, which have reduced access to financial investigators, as well as poor engagement with and support of victims.



Significant and rising policing costs: The estimated total cost of modern slavery on UK police forces in 2024 was in the region of £210m. This figure equates to recruiting approximately 7,500 new police officers. The overall cost to UK police forces in 2024 represents a substantial 141% increase since 2018.

1 The economic and social costs of modern slavery. Ref: ISBN 978-1-78655-695-0, Home Office Research Report 100

2 Asset recovery statistical bulletin: financial years ending 2019 to 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/asset-recovery-statistics-financial-years-ending-2019-to-2024/asset-recovery-statistical-bulletin-financial-years-ending-2019-to-2024#annexes>



Impact on police budgets: The reported ‘cost to policing’ for modern slavery varies significantly among police forces in 2024, representing different percentages of their total budgets. For example, Kent Police has the highest percentage at 5.71% of its budget. In contrast, Northamptonshire reports 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%.



Variation in policing costs by region: The estimated cost of policing modern slavery varies significantly across different regional areas and devolved administrations in 2024:

- Eastern Region: £17,172,480
- East Midlands Region: £9,814,320
- South East Region: £41,857,920
- South West Region: £7,801,920
- West Midlands Region: £17,523,360
- North West Region: £18,472,800
- Yorkshire and Humber Region: £14,685,360
- North East Region: £5,737,920
- Wales: £5,139,360
- London: £55,150,080
- PSNI: £6,873,120
- Police Scotland: £9,649,200



Prevalence disparities: an analysis of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and Duty to Notify (DTN) statistics reveals significant disparities in reported prevalence rates of modern slavery across different police force areas. For instance, areas such as Kent (127.90 per 100,000), the City of London Police (122.22), and Bedfordshire (79.10) report significantly higher rates compared to others. These variations in reported prevalence may reflect differences in policing focus, awareness, effectiveness, and prioritisation, rather than solely representing the actual number of victims. Additionally, these rates do not consistently correlate with overall crime rates or with the prevalence identified through the confidential Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline.

call to action

The document calls on the government, local government, mayors, chief constables, and police and crime commissioners (OPCCs) to recognise the significant economic impact of modern slavery. Modern slavery is a serious economic crime that leads to severe human rights violations.

We must understand the full range of economic factors involved and their effects not only on victims but also on society. Failing to acknowledge the true economic costs will impede our ability to effectively advocate for and implement an adequate response. It is crucial to secure investments in prevention efforts and partnership approaches to strongly promote innovative solutions for funding a comprehensive approach to combat this issue.

Key recommendations include:

-  **Classifying, monitoring and treating modern slavery as an economic crime** against the UK and its citizens who bear the cost.
-  **Primary actions**
 - **Government:** policy and strategy development, and the government task force reconstituted.
 - **Home Office:** NCA tasking
 - **Ministry of Justice:** CPS tasking
 - **HM Treasury:** monitoring and ring-fencing of funding
 - **Local Government:** mayors, local authorities and OPCCs to prioritise investigation and enforcement.
-  **Boost financial investigations** into modern slavery cases. Police must give greater priority to tracing the money behind exploitation. Financial investigations are transformative in dismantling criminal networks and supporting prosecutions.
-  **Strengthen multi-agency collaboration**, including with NGOs, to increase victim engagement and help secure more successful prosecutions.
-  **Invest in prevention and early intervention** to reduce long-term demand on police resources.
-  **Ring-fence POCA-recovered monies** related to modern slavery for further anti-slavery work across not only policing but all of society. This will help reduce the economic burden, support survivors, and allocate additional resources to what is currently an unequal fight.



The data showing varying prevalence rates across the country should encourage broader, thoughtful discussions about the effectiveness of current anti-slavery strategies and how resources are allocated. Ignoring the true economic costs and operational challenges will result in escalating expenses and a growing societal burden. We urge the UK government to acknowledge the significant economic impact of modern slavery on the nation, especially during these challenging economic times. The costs associated with modern slavery affect all aspects of our society and have devastating consequences for the lives of victims.

We also hope this will encourage a re-evaluation of resource allocation and the development of new strategies to combat this crime.



the economics and prevalence of modern slavery

Policing

The UK Government now recognises that the cost to each victim of modern slavery involves a socio-economic burden exceeding £400,000. At Unseen, we estimate this figure to be closer to £450,000 after accounting for the appropriate inflationary uplift since 2016, when the figures were last calculated by the Home Office. It is also widely recognised that, at any given moment, the number of victims in the UK exceeds 130,000. The stark mathematics demonstrate that the total socio-economic impact of modern slavery in the UK ranges between £52bn and £60bn. In essence, this represents 2% of the UK's GDP, emphasising the substantial economic weight modern slavery imposes on the country.

Modern slavery is a grave economic crime that results in severe human rights violations. We must acknowledge the full scale of the economic factors at play and their impact not only on victims but also on the taxpayer – we estimate that the total global profits of modern slavery are now more than USD 0.5 trillion per annum. Failure to recognise the true economic costs will hinder our ability to argue successfully for and deliver an adequate and proportionate response. It is essential to secure investments in prevention and robustly advocate for innovative solutions to fund a comprehensive approach to combat this issue.

In this series, we highlight the economic costs to different parts of UK society to emphasise the enormous expenses already incurred and set to continue rising, while the number of identified victims keeps increasing, up 13% year-on-year in 2024. Unfortunately, despite more than 20,000 victims being identified in 2024 through the NRM, they will likely have already been replaced, and are being exploited once again, generating huge profits for their exploiters and significant costs to support their recovery from exploitation. If they are not being replaced, then we will have eradicated modern slavery in the UK by 2031 – just one year after SDG 8.7.



The figures for policing are not precise; they are an estimation based on the work of the Home Office from 2017/18, which examined the socio-economic costs of modern slavery. We have applied inflation to these figures³ and have used the NRM statistics from 2024 to calculate the costs to police forces. Again, these figures assume average costs, and we acknowledge that there are significant discrepancies from victim to victim and case to case.

However, the overall figure for each police force presents a stark picture and a total cost that should concern not only chief constables and OPCCs but also the government.⁴ We hope that by illuminating the costs⁵ that it will provoke wider, thoughtful discussions and drive focus on prevention and how we can resource anti-slavery work. If we carry on as is, then the costs will continue to rise, the socio-economic drag on the UK will increase and have a greater impact on the country's economy and continue to result in lives torn asunder by this vile economic crime.

Additionally, we have considered the prevalence rates to further enlighten the debate. We have used ONS figures for the police force population, crime rates and used data from the UK's Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline to further illuminate the issue.

...despite more than 20,000 victims being identified in 2024 through the NRM, they will likely have already been replaced, and are being exploited once again.

³ <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> 2017 to present equates to a 33.9% increase

⁴ This data provides statistics on modern slavery cases and related issues across various police forces and regional units in the UK. It includes information such as population size, crime rates, the number of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals, Duty to Notify (DTN) reports, and the total prevalence of modern slavery cases per 100,000 people. The data also illustrates the percentage that modern slavery cases represent of overall crime, the number of potential victims identified by the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline, and the estimated costs of policing these cases. Finally, it translates this cost into an equivalent figure representing the number of new police officers that the budget could support.

⁵ This refers to the cost for investigations, costs on policing resources, financial crime proceeds undetected, cost of policing borders etc.

the impact of modern slavery on police forces – financial

We estimate that the total cost of modern slavery on UK police forces in 2024 was in the region of £210m. This figure translates to approximately 7,500 new police officers being recruited. The overall cost to UK police forces in 2024 represents a 141% increase since 2018, the last time an extensive Home Office report was undertaken on the cost of these crimes to public services.

The figures for each regional area

Eastern region

The estimated total cost to policing for the Eastern region in 2024 is **£17,172,480**. This regional total encompasses the costs reported for the police forces within this area, including Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk.

East Midlands region

The estimated total cost to policing for the East Midlands region in 2024 is **£9,814,320**. This includes costs from Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, and Nottinghamshire.

South East region

The estimated total cost to policing for the South East region in 2024 is **£41,857,920**. This covers costs from Hampshire, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and the Thames Valley. Notably, Kent Police's cost is reported as £24,551,280, contributing significantly (**58.65%**) to the regional total.

South West region

The estimated total cost to policing for the South West region in 2024 is **£7,801,920**. This includes costs from Avon and Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire.

West Midlands region

The estimated total cost to policing for the West Midlands region in 2024 is **£17,523,360**. This total comprises costs from Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia, and West Midlands police forces.

North West region

The estimated total cost to policing for the North West region in 2024 is **£18,472,800**. This includes costs from Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, and North Wales police forces.

Yorkshire and Humberside region

The estimated total cost to policing for the Yorkshire and Humberside region in 2024 is **£14,685,360**. This covers costs from Humberside, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire police forces.



North East region

The estimated total cost to policing for the North East region in 2024 is **£5,737,920**. This includes costs from the Cleveland, Durham, and Northumbria police forces.

Wales

The estimated total cost to policing for the Welsh region in 2024 is **£5,139,360**. This total comprises costs from South Wales, Gwent, and Dyfed-Powys police forces.

London

This includes the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police. The reported total cost to policing for London in 2024 is **£55,150,080**. The Metropolitan Police accounts for most of this total, with a reported cost of £55,036,560, while the City of London Police's reported cost is £113,520.

Devolved Governments

The total cost to PSNI was **£6,873,120** and to Police Scotland **£9,649,200**, respectively.

Turning to how much modern slavery costs as a percentage of overall policing costs, we calculated the percentage ('MS cost% to total budget'), which represents the proportion of the stated 'Police budget 2024' that the 'cost to policing' for modern slavery represents.

Here are some examples of the 'MS cost% to total budget' across different areas, as reported in the data table:

- **Highest percentage:** Kent Police, within the South East region, shows the highest percentage, with the reported modern slavery policing cost being 5.71% of its total budget (£24,551,280 cost to policing against a £429,900,000 budget).

Other notable percentages:

- **Northamptonshire** reports **1.27%** (£2,301,360 cost to policing against a £181,600,000 budget).
- **West Yorkshire** reports **1.17%** (£7,182,720 cost to policing against a £615,500,000 budget).
- **Merseyside** reports **1.02%** (£4,613,040 cost to policing against a £452,200,000 budget).
- **Metropolitan Police:** Despite having the largest 'cost to policing' figure (£55,036,560), this represents **1.56%** of its much larger budget (£3,538,100,000).
- **City of London Police:** This force has a unique situation with a small population and high crime rate prevalence relative to its size. Its 'cost to policing' is £113,520, which is **0.13%** of its £85,600,000 budget.

the impact of modern slavery on police forces – POCA

Under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) in 2024, £243m was recovered by police. However, when it came to the use of POCA concerning modern slavery cases, **only £854,000** (0.4% of the total POCA figure or 0.4% of the total cost of modern slavery to policing) was recovered. As has already been documented⁶ and recommended by the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), all modern slavery investigations should commence with financial investigations. Financial investigations should begin before or simultaneously with criminal investigations, focusing on asset seizure from the beginning to disrupt the perpetrators' economic interests.

This process has been severely hampered by cuts to policing budgets, with many forces having little or no access to financial investigators. Furthermore, by viewing modern slavery as an economic crime first, we would hope to see a significant improvement in the POCA figures. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 deemed the crimes to be lifestyle offences; therefore, the seizure of assets must be a policing priority. We welcome comments on what an ambitious POCA figure would be for UK policing in the next decade; it must be significantly beyond the current 0.4%.

We would go further and argue that, if successfully implemented, the POCA-recovered monies related to modern slavery must be ring-fenced by HM Treasury for further anti-slavery work across not only policing but all of society. This will help reduce the economic burden of preventing this crime, support survivors in their recovery, and allocate additional resources to what is currently an unequal fight. Modern slavery is heavily resourced precisely because it is such a profitable illicit trade. The UK, along with the global response to modern slavery, is underfunded, and we must find new ways to finance the response. Ignoring the stark economic realities we face will only lead to further costs and misery.

Additionally, Unseen is calling for the following action by law enforcement and the government to reduce the economic burden of modern slavery on police forces:

- **Boost financial investigations into modern slavery.**
Police must give greater priority to tracing the money behind exploitation. Financial investigations are transformative in dismantling criminal networks and supporting prosecutions.
- **Strengthen multi-agency collaboration.**
Police forces should prioritise joint working with NGOs like Unseen. These proven models⁷ increase victim engagement and help secure more successful prosecutions.
- **Invest in prevention and early intervention.**
Addressing the root causes of modern slavery not only protects people and communities in vulnerable situations but also reduces long-term demand on police resources.

6 [FINANCIAL INVESTIGATION OF MODERN SLAVERY](#) March 2021.

7 As an example, see [Victim Navigator Pilot Final Evaluation](#).



Table 1 The impact of modern slavery on UK police forces

Region	Population Size (2024)	Crime Rate Prevalence (per 100,000 people)	NRM Referrals (2024)	DTN Reports (2024)	Total Referrals (2024)	Total NRM and DTN Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)	Percentage of MS Prevalence to overall Crime Rate Prevalence	Potential Victims identified by Helpline 2024	Total Helpline PVoT Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)	Cost to policing	Equivalent number of new police officers	Police Budget 2024	MS Cost % to total Budget
Eastern Region													
Bedfordshire	670,000	8,210	516	14	530	79.10	0.96%	35	5.22	£5,469,600	195	£156,600,000	3.49%
Cambridgeshire	860,000	6,840	159	10	169	19.65	0.29%	43	5.00	£1,744,080	62	£196,700,000	0.89%
Essex	1,860,000	7,900	506	26	532	28.60	0.36%	109	5.86	£5,490,240	195	£405,500,000	1.35%
Hertfordshire	1,200,000	6,400	153	12	165	13.75	0.21%	7	0.58	£1,702,800	61	£281,400,000	0.61%
Norfolk	920,000	6,200	91	72	163	17.72	0.29%	11	1.20	£1,682,160	60	£221,700,000	0.76%
Suffolk	770,000	6,100	90	15	105	13.64	0.22%	72	9.35	£1,083,600	39	£171,100,000	0.63%
Regional Total	6,280,000	6,942	1,515	149	1,664	26.50	0.39%	277	4.41	£17,172,480	611		
East Midlands													
Derbyshire	1,060,000	7,100	148	6	154	14.53	0.20%	38	3.58	£1,589,280	57	£244,800,000	0.65%
Leicestershire	1,150,000	7,700	212	10	222	19.30	0.25%	56	4.87	£2,291,040	82	£255,500,000	0.90%
Lincolnshire	770,000	6,000	99	20	119	15.45	0.26%	64	8.31	£1,228,080	44	£163,900,000	0.75%
Northamptonshire	760,000	7,100	209	14	223	29.34	0.41%	30	3.95	£2,301,360	82	£181,600,000	1.27%
Nottinghamshire	1,170,000	7,900	224	9	233	19.91	0.25%	107	9.15	£2,404,560	86	£283,200,000	0.85%
Regional Total	4,910,000	7,160	892	59	951	19.37	0.28%	295	6.01	£9,814,320	349		
South East													
Hampshire	1,990,000	8,200	288	23	311	15.63	0.19%	54	2.71	£3,209,520	114	£464,200,000	0.69%
Kent	1,860,000	7,200	2,344	35	2,379	127.90	1.78%	74	3.98	£24,551,280	874	£429,900,000	5.71%
Surrey	1,220,000	5,400	153	10	163	13.36	0.25%	60	4.92	£1,682,160	60	£308,700,000	0.54%
Sussex	1,720,000	6,700	650	27	677	39.36	0.59%	171	9.94	£6,986,640	249	£393,900,000	1.77%
Thames Valley	2,460,000	7,000	491	35	526	21.38	0.31%	25	1.02	£5,428,320	193	£584,600,000	0.93%
Regional Total	9,250,000	6,900	3,926	130	4,056	43.85	0.62%	384	4.15	£41,857,920	1,490		
South West													
Avon and Somerset	1,720,000	7,520	260	30	290	16.86	0.22%	96	5.58	2,992,800	107	£409,700,000	0.73%
Devon and Cornwall	1,800,000	5,900	124	15	139	7.72	0.13%	52	2.89	1,434,480	51	£428,500,000	0.33%
Dorset	780,000	6,000	108	13	121	15.51	0.26%	38	4.87	1,248,720	44	£179,800,000	0.69%
Gloucestershire	640,000	6,200	65	4	69	10.78	0.17%	67	10.47	712,080	25	£157,700,000	0.45%
Wiltshire	730,000	5,800	115	22	137	18.77	0.32%	82	11.23	1,413,840	50	£161,000,000	0.88%
Regional Total	5,670,000	6,284	672	84	756	13.33	0.22%	335	5.91	£7,801,920	278		

Region	Population Size (2024)	Crime Rate Prevalence (per 100,000 people)	NRM Referrals (2024)	DTN Reports (2024)	Total Referrals (2024)	Total NRM and DTN Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)	Percentage of MS Prevalence to overall Crime Rate Prevalence	Potential Victims identified by Helpline 2024	Total Helpline PVoT Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)	Cost to policing	Equivalent number of new police officers	Police Budget 2024	MS Cost % to total Budget
West Midlands													
Staffordshire	1,130,000	6,500	133	29	162	14.34	0.22%	10	0.88	£1,671,840	60	£262,700,000	0.64%
Warwickshire	580,000	6,300	104	22	126	21.72	0.34%	49	8.45	£1,300,320	46	£138,800,000	0.94%
West Mercia	1,290,000	6,400	181	21	202	15.66	0.24%	341	26.43	£2,084,640	74	£298,000,000	0.70%
West Midlands	2,930,000	9,700	1,125	83	1,208	41.23	0.43%	171	5.84	£12,466,560	444	£789,400,000	1.58%
Regional Totals	5,930,000	7,225	1,543	155	1,698	28.63	0.31%	571	9.63	£17,523,360	624		
North West													
Cheshire	1,070,000	6,500	180	40	220	20.56	0.32%	41	3.83	£2,270,400	81	£264,000,000	0.86%
Cumbria	500,000	5,600	50	2	52	10.40	0.19%	9	1.80	£536,640	19	£145,200,000	0.37%
Greater Manchester	2,850,000	9,500	706	32	738	25.89	0.27%	161	5.65	£7,616,160	271	£813,300,000	0.94%
Lancashire	1,510,000	8,000	219	15	234	15.50	0.19%	64	4.24	£2,414,880	86	£390,100,000	0.62%
Merseyside	1,430,000	8,800	409	38	447	31.26	0.36%	625	43.71	£4,613,040	164	£452,200,000	1.02%
North Wales	710,000	6,900	88	11	99	13.94	0.20%	20	2.82	£1,021,680	36	£208,600,000	0.49%
Regonal Totals	8,070,000	7,550	1,652	138	1,790	22.18	0.25%	920	11.40	£18,472,800	657		
Yorkshire and Humber													
Humberside	930,000	8,600	241	16	257	27.63	0.32%	89	9.57	£2,652,240	94	£252,600,000	1.05%
North Yorkshire	830,000	5,800	118	4	122	14.70	0.25%	15	1.81	£1,259,040	45	£203,400,000	0.62%
South Yorkshire	1,420,000	8,800	320	28	348	24.51	0.28%	44	3.10	£3,591,360	128	£355,100,000	1.01%
West Yorkshire	2,360,000	9,100	639	57	696	29.49	0.32%	39	1.65	£7,182,720	256	£615,500,000	1.17%
Regional Totals	5,540,000	8,075	1,318	105	1,423	25.69	0.29%	187	3.38	£14,685,360	523		
North East													
Cleveland	570,000	9,300	143	11	154	27.02	0.29%	9	1.58	£1,589,280	57	£177,200,000	0.90%
Durham	640,000	7,700	133	12	145	22.66	0.29%	8	1.25	£1,496,400	53	£167,000,000	0.90%
Northumbria	1,460,000	8,400	229	28	257	17.60	0.21%	60	4.11	£2,652,240	94	£392,900,000	0.68%
Regional Totals	2,670,000	8,467	505	51	556	20.82	0.26%	77	2.88	£5,737,920	204		
Wales													
South Wales	1,400,000	8,100	291	11	302	21.57	0.27%	50	3.57	£3,116,640	111	£399,900,000	0.78%
Gwent	600,000	7,400	136	10	146	24.33	0.33%	1	0.17	£1,506,720	54	£179,800,000	0.84%
Dyfed-Powys	520,000	5,000	48	2	50	9.62	0.19%	10	1.92	£516,000	18	£148,000,000	0.35%
Regional Totals	2,520,000	6,833	475	23	498	19.76	0.26%	61	2.42	£5,139,360	183		
London													
Metropolitan Police	8,960,000	10,200	5,027	306	5,333	59.52	0.58%	34	0.38	£55,036,560	1,959	£3,538,100,000	1.56%
City of London Police	9,000	11,000	8	3	11	122.22	1.11%	9	100.00	£113,520	4	£85,600,000	0.13%
Totals	8,969,000	10,600	5,035	309	5,344	59.58	0.85%	43	0.48	£55,150,080	1,963		
Devolved													
PSNI	1,900,000	5,100	651	15	666	35.05	0.69%	41	2.16	£6,873,120	245	£892,000,000	0.77%
Police Scotland	5,400,000	4,600	920	15	935	17.31	0.38%	34	0.63	£9,649,200	343	£1,550,000,000	0.62%

the impact of modern slavery on police forces – prevalence

The prevalence of modern slavery can be compared across police force areas using the 'Total NRM and DTN Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)' for 2024. This rate is calculated based on the sum of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals and Duty to Notify (DTN) reports submitted by each police force area.

Key observations:

- Among the individual police force areas listed, **Kent has the highest prevalence rate at 127.90** per 100,000 people, followed closely by **City of London Police at 122.22** and **Bedfordshire at 79.10**.
- The lowest prevalence rate is recorded in **Devon and Cornwall at 7.72** per 100,000 people. Other areas with relatively low rates include Dyfed-Powys (9.62), Cumbria (10.40), and Gloucestershire (10.78).
- Comparing the regional totals, the **South East region has the highest prevalence rate at 43.85**, while the **South West region has the lowest at 13.33**. The London area, which include the Metropolitan Police and City of London Police, show a combined rate of 59.58.

These figures represent the reported prevalence of modern slavery based on NRM referrals and DTN reports within each police force area and region in 2024.



The comparison between overall crime rates and modern slavery prevalence rates in police force areas can be examined through the figures presented. The data table lists both the “Crime Rate Prevalence (per 100,000 people)” and the “Total NRM and DTN Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)” for each police force area and regional unit in 2024. Additionally, a specific column titled “**Percentage of MS Prevalence to overall Crime Rate Prevalence**” is included, which directly shows how the reported modern slavery prevalence relates to the overall crime rate *within* each specific area.

Reviewing the “**Percentage of MS Prevalence to overall Crime Rate Prevalence**” column reveals the following:

- For most police force areas, the prevalence of modern slavery (based on NRM and DTN data) constitutes a **small fraction of the overall reported crime rate**. Many areas show percentages well **under 0.5%**, with the average rate across all forces 0.36%.
- There is notable variation in this percentage across different police force areas.
- The police force area with the highest percentage is **Kent at 1.78%**.
- Other areas with relatively higher percentages include the **City of London Police at 1.11%** and **Bedfordshire at 0.96%**.
- Areas with some of the lowest percentages include **Devon and Cornwall at 0.13%**, Gloucestershire at 0.17%, Cumbria at 0.19%, Hampshire at 0.19%, and Dyfed-Powys at 0.19%.

This variation in the “**Percentage of MS Prevalence to overall Crime Rate Prevalence**” suggests that the relationship between the two rates is not uniform across all police force areas. An area with a high overall crime rate does not automatically have a proportionally high modern slavery prevalence rate, and vice versa. For instance, the Metropolitan Police has a very high overall crime rate (10,200 per 100,000), but its modern slavery prevalence rate (59.52 per 100,000) accounts for 0.58% of the crime rate. In contrast, Kent has a lower overall crime rate (7,200 per 100,000) but a significantly higher modern slavery prevalence rate (127.90 per 100,000), accounting for a much larger 1.78% of its crime rate.

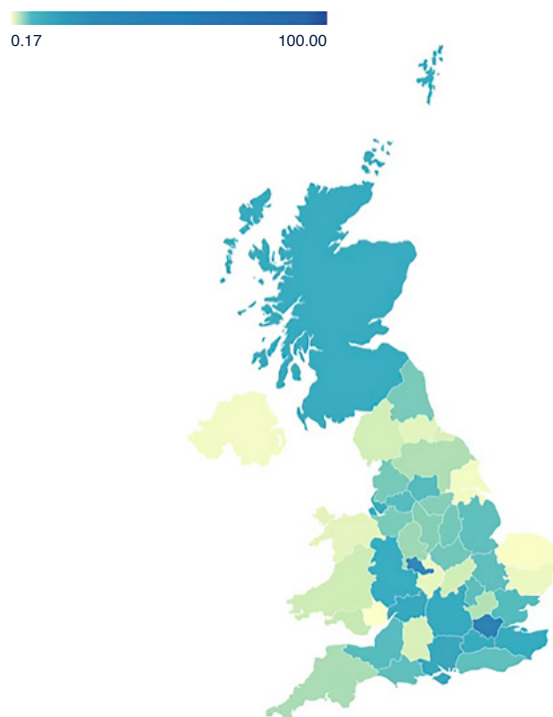
Therefore, based on the figures, while both data points exist for each area, the calculated percentages show that modern slavery prevalence rates account for differing proportions of overall crime rates across different police force areas, indicating that there isn’t a simple, direct correlation where higher overall crime rates consistently align with higher modern slavery prevalence rates. The data does not provide a formal statistical correlation analysis across all areas, but the varying percentages highlight the differences in how these two types of prevalence manifest relative to each other in different regions.

Based on the available data, we can compare the prevalence rates of modern slavery as reported through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and Duty to Notify (DTN) with the prevalence rates derived from the [Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline data](#). The sources present both the “**Total NRM and DTN Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)**” and the “**Total Helpline PVoT Prevalence Rate (per 100,000 people)**” for each police force area and regional totals in 2024.⁸

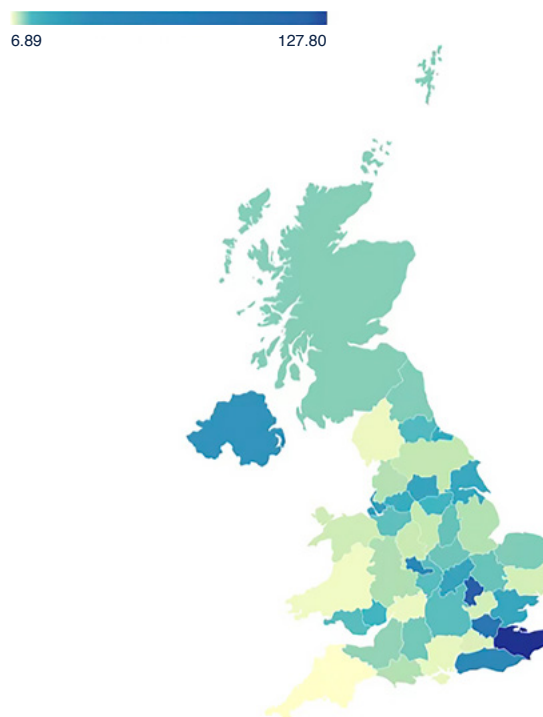
⁸ The sources do not contain a formal statistical correlation analysis, such as a calculated correlation coefficient, between these two specific prevalence rates across all the listed areas.

prevalence rates – helpline vs NRM and DTN vs crime rate

Socio-economic cost of modern slavery - policing
Helpline prevalence rate - Modern slavery victims 2024



Socio-economic cost of modern slavery - policing
NRM and DTN - Modern slavery victims 2024



By visually examining the data presented in the sources, we can observe the relationship between these two rates for each area.⁹

- The Helpline and the NRM and DTN datasets differ for several reasons:
 - The Helpline captures initial concerns, often at an earlier stage than official figures, acting as an early warning system.
 - The Helpline is a confidential and anonymous service, providing a secure information and advice service for people and potential victims who may be too afraid to go through official channels.
 - The NRM is used for formal victim identification and access to support services.

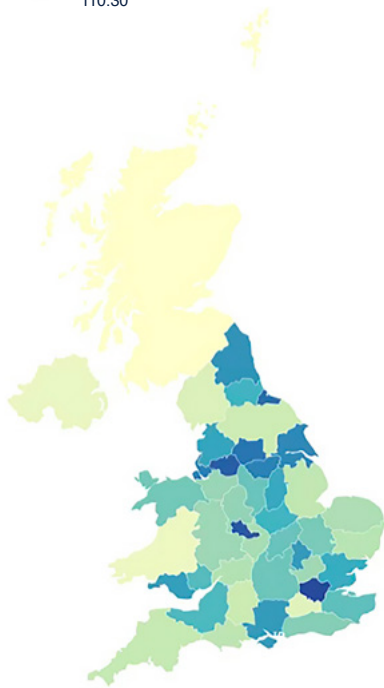
- Some areas with very high NRM and DTN prevalence rates do **not** have similarly high Helpline prevalence rates. For example, **Kent has the highest NRM and DTN rate at 127.90** per 100,000 people, but its Helpline prevalence rate is only 3.98. The **Metropolitan Police** has a high NRM and DTN rate of 59.52, but one of the lowest Helpline rates at 0.38. Bedfordshire's NRM and DTN rate is high at 79.10, while its Helpline rate is 5.22.
- Conversely, some areas show relatively lower NRM and DTN rates but proportionally higher Helpline rates. **Merseyside** has an NRM and DTN rate of 31.26, while its Helpline rate is significantly higher at 43.71. Similarly, **West Mercia** has an NRM and DTN rate of 15.66 but a Helpline rate of 26.43. **Gloucestershire** has a low NRM and DTN rate of 10.78 but a higher Helpline rate of 10.47.

⁹ We have also added the overall crime prevalence rate for wider context.

Socio-economic cost of modern slavery - policing

Crime rate per 1,000 people

45.60 110.30



- There are also areas where both rates appear relatively high compared to others, such as the **City of London Police**, with an NRM and DTN rate of 122.22 and a very high Helpline rate of 100.00. Areas with some of the lowest NRM and DTN rates, like **Devon and Cornwall (7.72)** and **Dyfed-Powys (9.62)**, also appear to have relatively low Helpline rates (2.89 and 1.92, respectively).

This variation across different police force areas suggests that there is **not a simple or consistent direct correlation** where a high reported NRM/DTN prevalence automatically means a high Helpline prevalence, or vice versa. The factors influencing NRM/DTN referrals and those leading individuals to contact the Helpline may differ, and reporting and contacting patterns vary significantly between regions.

In summary, while the sources provide the data for both prevalence rates, they do not statistically correlate them. A visual review of the data indicates that the relationship between NRM/DTN prevalence rates and Helpline prevalence rates is **not uniform** across all police force areas.

the impact of modern slavery on police forces – contributing factors

The provided sources do not offer explanations or analysis of other factors that might contribute to why one police force area might have a higher modern slavery prevalence rate than another. They present the data but do not delve into the underlying causes or contributing elements for the observed variations in NRM/DTN or Modern Slavery Helpline-identified prevalence across regions.

Looking outside of this data, research and reports on modern slavery often point to a range of factors that can influence prevalence rates in specific geographical areas. Some of these potential factors include:

- **Economic factors:** areas with concentrated industries that exploit vulnerable workers, such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, or car washes, may have higher prevalence rates. Economic hardship and lack of opportunities can also increase individual vulnerability to exploitation.
 - **Demographics:** communities with diverse populations, including migrants, might face unique risk factors. Issues such as language barriers, uncertain immigration status, and lack of social networks can enhance vulnerability to exploitation.
 - **Vulnerable populations:** the presence of many individuals experiencing homelessness, poverty, addiction, or those in the care system may correlate with a higher prevalence of vulnerability to trafficking.
 - **Policing and law enforcement focus:** higher prevalence rates of modern slavery in certain areas may indicate more effective policing, better intelligence gathering, and proactive efforts by the police to identify and report cases. This can lead to higher numbers in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and Duty to Notify (DTN) reports, rather than a true increase in the number of victims. In contrast, areas with less focus or fewer resources on this issue may report fewer cases. Police forces with specialised units and strong relationships with partner agencies are likely to identify more instances of modern slavery.
 - Police and other first responders in the area may not be as proactive as other forces in making NRM referrals.
 - Potential victims may prefer seeking confidential support via the Helpline if they've had previous negative experiences with the police.
 - Police officers may prioritise immediate safeguarding rather than formal referral to the NRM.
 - **Awareness and reporting:** higher rates could also be linked to greater public and professional awareness of modern slavery indicators in the community, leading to increased reporting via the NRM, DTN, or the Helpline.
 - **Social and community factors:** stronger community ties and support networks in some areas might help prevent or identify cases, while fragmented or isolated communities might make it harder to spot signs of exploitation.
 - **Geographic location:** Areas with major ports, airports, or proximity to international borders may experience higher rates of certain types of modern slavery, particularly related to trafficking routes. Coastal areas or regions near significant transport hubs are likely to be more vulnerable to these issues.
- These external factors can interact in complex ways, making it challenging to isolate a single cause for high prevalence in any given area. The figures presented, such as the high NRM/DTN rates in Kent, City of London Police, and Bedfordshire, and the different patterns seen in Helpline data, are likely the result of a combination of these and other underlying factors.

the impact of modern slavery on police forces: questions and observations

We hope this paper sparks a broader discussion about not only how we approach policing modern slavery but also about recognising the true economic costs associated with this crime. We aim to foster curiosity and inquisitiveness, encouraging us to ask better questions based on the facts and to develop more effective responses.

We encourage police forces, mayors, OPCCs, local and devolved government and the UK government to review the data and raise questions regarding the significant disparity in prevalence rates across the country.

- Modern slavery and exploitation occur in towns and cities across the UK, both in urban and rural areas. Given this widespread issue, why are there such significant fluctuations in the number of NRM (National Referral Mechanism) and DTN (Dedicated Taskforce Network) referrals?
- Could it be that some law enforcement agencies are more effective in addressing modern slavery and prioritise it more highly than others?
- If a police force is involved in an anti-slavery partnership, but the number of modern slavery referrals remains low, what questions does this raise about the effectiveness of the anti-slavery strategy?

We encourage police forces to classify modern slavery as an economic crime. Financial investigations are essential for demonstrating exploitation, identifying those who benefit from it, compensating victims, and increasing the number of prosecutions. Tracking the flow of money and assets can offer valuable forensic opportunities for law enforcement, even when evidence from victims is limited. Senior investigating officers should incorporate a financial strategy early in modern slavery cases and utilise resources such as the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce.

We urge the government to recognise the significant economic impact that modern slavery has on the country, especially during these turbulent times for the economy. The economic costs associated with modern slavery affect every aspect of our society and have devastating effects on the lives of victims. We also hope this will encourage a re-evaluation of resource allocation and the development of new strategies to combat this crime. This approach would not only help reduce the economic impact but also undermine the illicit activities of the perpetrators.

More resources must be allocated to police forces to effectively combat the extensive criminal activity and its economic repercussions. This funding must be directly linked to police prioritising modern slavery investigations, with a strong emphasis on financial investigations. Furthermore, it is imperative to ring-fence POCA funds to bolster efforts against modern slavery.

We strongly recommend that modern slavery be added, as it was previously, to the National Threat Assessment and, by default, to the threat assessment for every police force area to prioritise focus and resourcing on this economic crime.

Unseen will continue to examine the economic costs of modern slavery and its impacts, and we encourage and promote further research into the economics of this crime.

key recommendations



We encourage police forces to classify **modern slavery as an economic crime**. Tracking the flow of money and assets can offer valuable forensic opportunities for law enforcement, even when evidence from victims is limited.



Boost financial investigations into modern slavery.

Police must give greater priority to tracing the money behind exploitation. Financial investigations are transformative in dismantling criminal networks and supporting prosecutions.



Ring-fence POCA-recovered monies related to modern slavery for further anti-slavery work across not only policing but all of society. This will help reduce the economic burden, support survivors, and allocate additional resources to what is currently an unequal fight.



Strengthen multi-agency collaboration.

Police forces should prioritise joint working with NGOs like Unseen. These proven models¹⁰ increase victim engagement and help secure more successful prosecutions.



Invest in prevention and early intervention.

Addressing the root causes of modern slavery not only protects people and communities in vulnerable situations but also reduces long-term demand on police resources.



We urge the government to **recognise the significant economic impact** that modern slavery has on the country, especially during these turbulent times for the economy. **Government:** policy and strategy development, and the government task force reconstituted. For **mayors, local government, and OPCCs** to reprioritise the crime.

¹⁰ For example, see [Victim Navigator Pilot Final Evaluation](#).

UNSEEN



about unseen

Unseen is a UK-based anti-slavery charity. We provide safehouses and support in the community for survivors of trafficking and modern slavery and operate the UK-wide Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline. We also work with individuals, communities, businesses, governments, other charities and statutory agencies to end slavery for good.

Building on 18 years of experience, we aim to transform society's response to modern slavery. Unseen's CEO, Andrew Wallis OBE, 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. We are presently collaborating with 12 other NGOs to craft a strategic vision for the UK Government for the next decade.

Our vision: a world without slavery. We aim to transform society's response so that all can live in a world free from such abuse and exploitation.

Our mission: we're working to end modern slavery by empowering, equipping and influencing others to bring about positive and transformational change.



unseenuk.org



make a
donation



Unseen is a registered charity no 1127620, and a company limited by guarantee, no 06754171.
Registered office: 7 Hide Market, West Street, St Philips, Bristol BS2 0BH.