

# **OHCHR call for input on Homelessness as a cause and a consequence of contemporary forms of slavery.**

## **Written response submitted on behalf of the Rights Lab, University of Nottingham, March 2023**

This submission was prepared by Dr Nick Clare (Assistant Professor in Geography), Matthew Young (Research Fellow in Survivor Support), Dr Andrea Nicholson (Associate Professor in Politics), Dr Nicola Wright (Associate Professor in Mental Health), and Dr Audrey Lumley-Sapanski (Research Fellow in Migration and Displacement). The submission responds to questions 2a, 5, and 7 of the call.

### **About the Rights Lab**

The Rights Lab delivers research to help end modern slavery and human trafficking. We are the world's largest group of modern slavery and trafficking researchers, and home to many leading experts. Through our research programmes, we deliver new and cutting-edge research that provides rigorous data, evidence and discoveries for the global effort to end slavery and trafficking. More information about the Rights Lab is available at: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab). For further information regarding the contents of this submission, please contact [nick.clare@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:nick.clare@nottingham.ac.uk) and [andrea.nicholson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:andrea.nicholson@nottingham.ac.uk).

### **About the research**

1. This submission draws on ongoing research funded by a British Academy Innovation Fellowship (IF\220110) and collaborative work between the Rights Lab and Nottingham City Council, as well as research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Grant Ref: ES/T016337/1).
2. IF\220110 involved mixed methods and combines statistical analysis of the city council's Slavery Exploitation Team's (SET) referral records (611 cases) and qualitative research with a wide range of stakeholders, including those with lived experience of homelessness and modern slavery, frontline staff working in relevant statutory and charity services, and leading experts, including 67 in depth interviews. Peer-reviewed publication of the research underpinning this document is forthcoming in *The Journal of the British Academy and Social Policy and Society*.
3. ES/T016337/1 involved mixed methods and combines statistical analysis of the UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM) government data and qualitative research with frontline staff and charities, as well as 89 in depth interviews with persons with lived experience of human trafficking and modern slavery across the UK. Publication of the full report is forthcoming (July 2023).
4. While responses related to experiences of homelessness were not directly sought in interviews, the submission is based on cases where such experiences were mentioned and relevant aspects of recorded demographic data. As interviews did not directly cover experiences of exploitation, responses analysed for this submission refer to experiences following exit from exploitation.

5. Interviews were facilitated by third sector partners, and so all participants had accessed specialist support and/or advice at some point in their journey post-exploitation.

### **Background to the findings**

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6. Recent analysis of the SET referral records, carried out by Hilal Isik and Dr Alison Gardner has shown that the most common type of vulnerability apparent for people referred to the SET is homelessness, street homelessness, temporary and insecure accommodation (17% of cases). Alongside substance vulnerabilities, homelessness is the joint second most frequently recorded factor in the SET's most serious cases.
7. Linked to this the most common form of exploitation (207 out of a total 1044 types of exploitation, individual cases often made up of multiple forms of exploitation) was 'cuckooing' – defined by the UK's national crime agency as the practice of taking over another's property for criminal purposes – which, as shown below, can stem from a lack of secure housing and with it ontological security. This further links back to the need for more expansive definitions of homelessness.

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8. The data show that while a small number of survivors interviewed had experienced street homelessness or local authority emergency homeless services, a greater number had experienced hidden homelessness. These include experiences such as sofa surfing and staying with friends or members of the community and would not be recorded in official homelessness statistics.
9. Most survivors interviewed depended on accommodation provisions within the NRM or the National Asylum Support System (NASS) at some point after exiting exploitation. A smaller majority relied on NASS for accommodation following exit from the NRM.
10. The evidence suggests that people from a BME background experience differential treatment within identification and support systems.

**Question 2a:** Is there evidence of persons experiencing homelessness, being exploited in contemporary forms of slavery such as forced or bonded labour, worst forms of child labour, sexual exploitation which may amount to slavery and other forms of exploitation in your country? If so, please provide details in relation to race and ethnicity.

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11. Evidence shows the links between homelessness and modern slavery yet the majority of the research and data comes from formal channels, predominantly data gathered on those who are either rough sleeping or in temporary accommodation. This is, however, only a subset of those experiencing homelessness, and research has shown these groups to be overwhelmingly white.
12. While racialised minorities are more likely to experience homelessness than their white counterparts, they experience it in a qualitatively different way. They are more likely to be

'hidden homeless', dealing with their situation informally and, by definition, finding themselves excluded from formal statistics – see also paragraphs 19 and 20. Participants regularly referenced the lack of culturally competent support for racialised minorities experiencing (hidden) homelessness.

13. Current research into the links between modern slavery and homelessness has typically been much more attuned to nationality and migratory status rather than race, compounding pre-existing issues around the failures of research into both homelessness and modern slavery regarding race. Service providers regularly referenced concerns over insufficiently culturally competent delivery.
14. Secure housing options such as 'housing first' (a scheme that offers open ended tenancies and wraparound care for those most at need) tend to be allocated to persistent rough sleepers, and are thus overwhelmingly benefit those who are white, further marginalising racialised minorities and increasing their risk of modern slavery.
15. In summary, our research has found that hidden homelessness is a major yet underexamined driver of modern slavery that disproportionately has a impact on racialised minorities. This links to cuckooing, criminal exploitation, financial exploitation, and, overwhelmingly among women, sexual exploitation. These are the highest levels of modern slavery as seen in Nottingham, yet likely to be overlooked in, and underestimated by, official data. There is thus a need for more nuanced and culturally competent understandings of homelessness.

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16. 93% of survivors interviewed relied on accommodation provided under the NRM or NASS systems. Provision of accommodation through these systems is dependent on assessment that the beneficiary is otherwise destitute. Support provided in both systems is terminated shortly following the conclusion of related Home Office decision making.
17. 76% of survivors interviewed continued to rely on government-funded accommodation following exit from the NRM due to unresolved immigration applications. In these cases, their long-term eligibility for mainstream housing post-NRM relied on regularising their immigration status. This demonstrates a differential experience of long-term housing between survivors from a third country national background as compared to English and EU nationals.
18. 35% of survivors interviewed spoke about experiences of informal living arrangements post-exploitation we classify as hidden homelessness (as it would not be recorded in official homelessness statistics). This can include 'sofa surfing', where survivors live in the houses of various people (often on living room sofas or floors rather than bedrooms) for very short periods. These arrangements were often coordinated by a community organisations or churches, and so was often provided by strangers who are part of wider faith-based or ethnic networks. In other cases, housing was provided on a longer term but informal basis by friends or sympathetic strangers but could be revoked at any time without any protections afforded to the guest.

19. 45% of examples of hidden homelessness came from interviews with black African survivors. These cases commonly referenced failed attempts to be identified by police, indicating a possible racial bias in the identification of survivors. In other cases, survivors were suspicious of statutory agencies due to concerns about immigration enforcement. This group, and the ethnic communities they interacted with, appeared to have a poor knowledge of modern slavery protections, indicating that this group has not been reached by awareness raising efforts. A further 19% of those experiencing hidden homelessness were Albanian, reflecting racialised depictions of this group as 'gaming' the NRM system.
20. Worryingly, 29% of examples of hidden homelessness were transactional in nature, with accommodation being provided to survivors in exchange for them cleaning, cooking food and looking after children. This demonstrates the vulnerability to re-exploitation among homeless survivors.
21. 12% of survivors interviewed had experienced street homelessness at some point following escape from exploitation, 46% of whom were white European. In these cases, interactions with community-based foodbanks, shelters or ethnic community groups linked survivors into more formal support services such as the NRM or NASS.
22. 19% of survivors accessed emergency homelessness services run by local authorities, such as hotel accommodation or homeless shelters. In some cases, this was due to gaps in mainstream housing provision, while in others this was offered to street homeless survivors through local authority COVID 19 provision. A disproportionate amount of white European survivors (41%) accessed such support.

**Question 5:** Are there examples of positive measures implemented by civil society organisations or other non-governmental stakeholders in protecting and promoting the rights of persons experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and in preventing them from being victimised in contemporary forms of slavery? If so, please provide details.

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23. Organisations that operationalise more expansive definitions of homelessness to include focus on those not just without a roof over their head, but those who have a sense of attachment. This sense of home fosters a deeper ontological security among individuals which can counteract the hyper-precarity which is associated with modern slavery.
24. For many interview participants this came with a perception of feeling 'at home'. While this is often not possible even the ability to carry out seemingly-small home-making actions – e.g. painting and decorating accommodation as desired and feeling they have ownership over their own space – makes a significant difference to wellbeing and autonomy, and with it reduce vulnerability to exploitation.
25. This can be supplemented by charities who are able to support and provide furnishings and more tailored contents for tenants beyond standard minimum provisions.
26. Similarly, efforts should be made by social housing providers to maintain a higher quality of housing to improve wellbeing, ownership, and thus reduce likelihood of exploitation – in particular cuckooing.

27. Several initiatives to address homelessness among survivors (post-exploitation) were identified in research interviews. These include services provided by selected regional police forces which offer pre-NRM accommodation to them, and those provided by the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network, and the NGO Hope for Justice. Interviewees who accessed these services were able to avoid homelessness before entering NRM support.
28. However, only 9% of survivors interviewed had accessed such services, and 89% of these survivors were white European, indicating a racial bias in quickly identifying and supporting survivors.
29. Several civil society and other non-governmental services exist that provide post-NRM support to survivors, which can help navigate on-going precarity relating to homelessness, particularly where survivors receive negative conclusive grounds (in which cases they are not eligible for government funded post-NRM support). These include Causeway's LifeLink, Hestia's Phoenix project and Hope for Justice's Independent Modern Slavery Advocate service.

**Question 7:** What practical recommendations would you propose to overcome ongoing challenges?

30. Allow and facilitate homemaking as without this those in housing first and other supportive schemes can become especially vulnerable – their secure tenure makes them especially high risk of cuckooing.
31. Train housing officers in signs of modern slavery as they occupy a unique position in being able to spot it.
32. Fund and support culturally competent services that engage with hidden homelessness so that communities of colour are not doubly discriminated against.
33. Conduct a review of the appropriateness and risks associated with existing housing provision for this group of users.
34. Lengthen the period for which survivors are able to access ongoing support via the post NRM Recovery Needs Assessment (England and Wales)