

## Response to the call for input on homelessness as a cause and a consequence of contemporary forms of slavery, issued by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and its consequences

Helen Bamber Foundation

March 2023

The Helen Bamber Foundation (HBF) is a specialist clinical and human rights charity in London, England, that works with survivors of trafficking, torture and other forms of extreme human cruelty. Our work alongside survivors shows us that, with early and appropriate care and support, they can build the strength to move on with their lives. Our multidisciplinary and clinical team provides a bespoke Model of Integrated Care for survivors which includes medico-legal documentation of physical and psychological injuries; specialist therapeutic care; a medical advisory service; a counter-trafficking programme; housing and welfare advice; legal protection advice; and community integration activities and services.

### What are the main causes/drivers of homelessness in your country?

Recent research has shown that in England alone, there are currently at least 271,000 people recorded as homeless, including 123,000 children. Of these, 2,400 people are sleeping rough on any given night, 15,000 people are in hostels or supported accommodation and nearly 250,000 are living in temporary accommodation.<sup>1</sup>

Causes of homelessness include a lack of affordable housing, poverty and unemployment; and the main cause of homelessness is eviction from private rented accommodation and/or the inability to afford rent. People are forced into homelessness when they leave prison, care or others forms of support with no home to go to. Many women experiencing homelessness have escaped a violent or abusive relationship. Other causes include

---

<sup>1</sup> Shelter, [At least 271,000 people are homeless in England today](#) (11 Jan 2023)

relationships breaking down, losing a job, mental or physical health problems, or substance misuse.<sup>2</sup>

### 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?

To date, much of the evidence on links between modern slavery and trafficking and homelessness in England has been anecdotal or small-scale. Recent research carried out by the multi-agency 'Project TILI'<sup>3</sup> examined data on 331 individuals and found that:

- Survivors were mostly living in informal living arrangements, such as rough sleeping or sofa surfing, when they were recruited by traffickers showing the link between people experiencing homelessness and being forced into exploitative situations.
- However, nearly two thirds (65%) of the survivors lived in accommodation provided by their exploiters. The provision of housing had become a form of control in their exploitation.
- Less than half of homeless survivors of trafficking were referred into the government's support system, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and therefore not officially recognised as victims of trafficking by the government. Nearly half explicitly refused to be referred into the NRM.

This research highlighted that certain living situations were more closely linked with certain types of exploitation. For example people who were sleeping rough were more often exposed to labour exploitation and people who were sofa surfing more often experienced domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. Some of these patterns can be partly explained by the gendered nature of different forms of homelessness – amongst the survivors in the database, men were more often rough sleeping, and women were more often sofa surfing.<sup>4</sup> Other reports have highlighted that homeless people have been increasingly targeted by traffickers for recruitment,<sup>5</sup> with job offers/advertisements in homeless shelters, train stations, parks or on the street.<sup>6</sup>

### Is there evidence of homelessness being a consequence of contemporary forms of slavery in your country (i.e. domestic/foreign victims being made homeless after sexual and/or labour exploitation)?

The survivors with whom the Helen Bamber Foundation (HBF) works have been trafficked to the UK from abroad or have experienced trafficking while en route to the UK. The top

---

<sup>2</sup> Homelessness: Causes, Types and Facts | Crisis UK

<sup>3</sup> See Project TILI | Crisis UK | Together we will end homelessness.

<sup>4</sup> Crisis, as part of Project TILI, No way out and no way home: Modern slavery and homelessness in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, May 2021

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, Human traffickers lure UK's homeless into modern slavery: charities (30 Oct 2017)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unseenuk.org/modern-slavery-homelessness-report/>

five countries of origin of our clients who are survivors of trafficking are Albania, Nigeria, Vietnam, Eritrea and China, and 63% are female, 36% are male. They predominantly experience labour and sexual exploitation as well as often being held in domestic servitude.

In HBF's experience homeless and destitution are some of the greatest threats to survivors of trafficking because they increase susceptibility to further exploitation and re-trafficking. It leaves survivors targetable by traffickers who can more easily identify them as vulnerable and less able to ask for help. They are more likely to be psychologically controlled and manipulated, to have lost the ability to read the motivations of others or gauge the relationships that are in their best interests, and those that are not. Due to poverty and homelessness they may feel desperate to take work that is offered, or love, friendship or a home that is offered, only to suffer further deceit and be trafficked onward. They can be forced into dependency on others who violate and exploit them.

In these situations, homelessness is a result of the combination of increased vulnerabilities, a survivor leaving their trafficking situation, and crucially of a failure in the current systems of support for survivors of trafficking. This is discussed below in the answer to the question about remaining challenges.

#### Case study

Isaac is a male victim of trafficking who had been subject to sexual exploitation since he was a child. He claimed asylum shortly after his arrival in the UK and was referred into the NRM. His asylum and trafficking claim was pending for over two years, during which time his solicitor made repeated requests for him be granted the right to work while his case was pending but these requests were ignored. Isaac had been living in asylum support accommodation but did not feel safe there because of his sexual orientation. He also struggled to survive on asylum support payments he received each week and this resulted in him turning to some of his old 'clients' for accommodation and financial support. Isaac subsequently resumed exploitative sexual work in order to meet his basic needs, placing himself in extreme danger. HBF did extensive work to get him out of this exploitative situation, which included regular contact with him to discuss his options and working closely with his legal representative and support worker.

Among the survivors on which Project TILI collected data, most (83%) whose NRM support had ended had not secured suitable permanent accommodation upon exiting, with a fifth still homeless and at risk of re-exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

**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?**

---

<sup>7</sup> Crisis, as part of Project TILI, [No way out and no way home: Modern slavery and homelessness in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#), May 2021

At the Helen Bamber Foundation (HBF) we estimate that a third of the survivors of trafficking we work with are at high or moderate risk of further exploitation or re-trafficking. HBF works to prevent the re-trafficking and further exploitation of survivors, with each department working collaboratively to identify and reduce potential risks for our clients. This includes using trauma-informed methods of working to establish and maintain a professional relationship of trust, conducting a specialist trafficking assessment and evaluating needs and risks on an on-going basis. We take steps to reduce pre-existing and arising risks through, for example, ensuring a person is receiving quality legal advice to give the best possible chance of a grant of leave to remain or ensuring they have access to appropriate housing and can move from accommodation with known risk factors. Our multi-disciplinary clinical team seeks to address the physical and mental health problems that our clients are experiencing via medical advice and specialist trauma-focused therapeutic care. We also offer community, education and integration activities and a social support network to aid individual recovery, wellbeing and independence. HBF has written a Trauma-Informed Code of Conduct<sup>8</sup> which is a professional guide for best-practice when working with survivors, and co-authored the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Handbook 'National Referral Mechanisms - Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons', which provides an overview of the working methods, procedures and services that are required across the four NRM 'pillars': identification and protection; individual support and access to services; social inclusion; and criminal justice and redress.<sup>9</sup> This Handbook includes guidance on the provision of safe and appropriate accommodation for victims of trafficking.

The Passage is an organisation that provides year-round community services for people experiencing homelessness. It has a dedicated Anti-Slavery Team that delivers Modern Slavery Service to support survivors of modern slavery who experience or at risk of experiencing homelessness in Westminster. The Passage provides this holistic support in partnership with Westminster City Council. In 2020, this partnership established a Multi-Agency Case Conference (MACC) approach to safeguarding potential victims of modern slavery who are experiencing homelessness, including people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). In addition, the Passage also supports other charities and local authorities to create their own Modern Slavery Support Service through their Modern Slavery Toolkit.<sup>10</sup>

### **What are remaining challenges – in law and practice - in preventing persons experiencing homelessness from being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery and to prevent and eliminate homelessness in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 11.1 and international human rights law?**

A key factor in preventing persons experiencing homelessness from being subject to forms of slavery is to ensure that those who have already been victims of trafficking and modern slavery and not left at further risk and receive the support and protection they need.

---

<sup>8</sup> [Trauma Informed Code of Conduct \(TICC\) | Helen Bamber](#)

<sup>9</sup> [ODIHR National Referral Mechanisms Handbook, 2nd Edition | OSCE](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Modern Slavery and Homelessness \(passage.org.uk\)](https://www.passage.org.uk)

HBF's clients will generally either be referred into the National Referral Mechanism (the NRM) - the UK's framework for identifying and protecting victims of trafficking and of modern slavery - and/or will claim asylum. It is through these systems that the survivors we work with will be able to access support, assistance and protection, but ongoing problems with both leaves them vulnerable to further exploitation and re-trafficking.

In recent years, the UK government has focussed on introducing increasingly restrictive and punitive immigration policies, including plans to remove people seeking asylum to Rwanda;<sup>11</sup> Home Office powers to deport rough sleepers;<sup>12</sup> and the Illegal Migration Bill that would effectively block survivors of trafficking from protections under the asylum and trafficking systems.<sup>13</sup> This prioritisation of immigration control results in the failure to identify, protect and support survivors of trafficking, leaving them more vulnerable. Fears of being reported to the authorities – with the possibility of being detained and/or removed – makes it easier for traffickers to keep people in exploitative conditions and recruit others.

In many cases, after leaving situations of slavery survivors of trafficking are left destitute or homeless. Those who claim asylum or enter the NRM may have access to temporary accommodation,<sup>14</sup> but there are too few 'safe houses' to meet the current need,<sup>15</sup> and most of the existing accommodation is unsafe and inappropriate. Many of HBF's clients are housed in 'contingency' asylum accommodation, including hotels, for prolonged periods – more than 37,000 people seeking asylum are currently stuck in hotel accommodation,<sup>16</sup> which is damaging to their health and well-being, causing depression and suicidal ideation.<sup>17</sup> The government is looking to provide temporary accommodation in mass asylum accommodation centres in former military sites despite a wealth of evidence about how unsuitable and harmful this type of accommodation can be. This is compounded further by the severe shortage of appropriate safe houses for survivors of trafficking<sup>18</sup>.

Patchy support provided under the NRM can also result in homelessness. The report 'One Day at a Time'<sup>19</sup> by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group raises significant concerns that the current support system for confirmed victims of trafficking (Recovery Needs Assessment process), with reports of survivors being forced to leave their accommodation, provided under the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract, with minimal notice and subsequently feeling they had no option but to return to exploitative situations. In one case, HBF was supporting a young person who had been forced to work illegally on a construction site. He was extremely unwell and exhibiting suicidal ideation. He was sofa surfing but despite our

---

<sup>11</sup> [Human trafficking survivors could be sent to Rwanda, new guidance says | ITV News](#)

<sup>12</sup> Aaron Walawalker and Mark Townsend, '[Home Office: New Deportation Law May Discriminate against Ethnic Minorities](#)', The Guardian, 4 April 2021

<sup>13</sup> [Briefings on the Illegal Migration Bill 2023 | Helen Bamber](#)

<sup>14</sup> Under the [Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract](#)

<sup>15</sup> There is also a lack of clarity as to how 'safe houses' are allocated and the criteria for accessing them

<sup>16</sup> [Colchester council criticises government over asylum seekers in hotels - BBC News](#)

<sup>17</sup> Refugee Council, [Lives on hold](#), July 2022

<sup>18</sup> <https://hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk/resource/closed-doors-report/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RNA\\_One\\_Day\\_At\\_A\\_Time.pdf](https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RNA_One_Day_At_A_Time.pdf)

advocacy about his ongoing vulnerability, there was no consideration of a safety plan, or provision of interim accommodation.

### What practical recommendations would you propose to overcome these ongoing challenges?

There is a clear need to tackle the link between homelessness and trafficking/modern slavery for those who have come to the UK from abroad and may have uncertain immigration status. This requires asylum and trafficking systems that function properly and treat those going through them fairly and humanely, providing long-term support and protection. Survivors of trafficking need:

- An asylum system and National Referral Mechanism that are accessible and focus on protection and support, with staff trained to engage with survivors in a trauma-informed way.
- Sufficient safe-house accommodation and asylum accommodation in the community with access to specialist healthcare, legal advice and other services.
- Timely and fair asylum and NRM decision-making that leads to secure immigration status so that survivors can recover and rebuild their lives, with access to education, employment and mainstream benefits.
- Secure reporting pathways and a significant reduction in the use of immigration detention so that more survivors are identified and protected.

For more information please contact Kamena Dorling, Head of Policy, Helen Bamber Foundation at [kamena.dorling@helenbamber.org](mailto:kamena.dorling@helenbamber.org)