

18 October 2021

Rachel Maclean MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding)  
2 Marsham Street,  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

**Access to work for victims of modern slavery**

I look forward to meeting with you on 27 October and write in advance to let you know that I would like to discuss access to work for victims of modern slavery. In October 2019 I wrote to the then Minister for Safeguarding, Victoria Atkins MP, about the timeliness of NRM decision making and the recovery of victims. I was concerned about the impact of not being able to work on victims, and suggested we explore an initiative permitting those awaiting NRM decisions to access paid work.<sup>1</sup> In April 2020 I was advised that the Home Office would await findings from the review of asylum seeker right to work before considering any specific initiatives for victims of modern slavery.<sup>2</sup> Eighteen months later, a conclusion to this review does not seem to be imminent.

Many survivors face unacceptable delays for decisions about their trafficking status. Those claiming asylum then face a further wait and for many, structured employment opportunities are dependent on immigration status. My office has partnered with the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab to understand the benefits and barriers to accessing employment for survivors of modern slavery.<sup>3</sup> This research found that whilst employment is only a part of the equation in supporting survivors to successfully reintegrate into society and achieve sustainable independence, it is a vital part offering meaning and purpose, routine and stability, and enabling financial independence.

The report outlines four recommendations:

1. Through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract, the UK government should develop an evidence base to better understand the skills, qualifications, work interests, and work histories of survivors in the National Referral Mechanism.
2. In collaboration with survivors and the wider UK anti-slavery sector, a standardised suite of modules should be developed to form an accredited work preparation curriculum.
3. In conjunction with survivors and the wider anti-slavery sector, the UK government should draft an overarching reintegration strategy for survivors of modern slavery. The strategy

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<sup>1</sup> [iasc-letter-to-victoria-atkins-mp-october-2019.pdf \(antislaverycommissioner.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [iasc-letter-to-victoria-atkins-mp-march-2020.pdf \(antislaverycommissioner.co.uk\)](#); [letter-to-the-iasc-from-victoria-atkins-mp-april-2020.pdf \(antislaverycommissioner.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner - New research on benefits and barriers to work for survivors of slavery \(antislaverycommissioner.co.uk\)](#)

should provide reintegration pathways and durable solutions for survivors who remain in the UK as well as those who return to their home country.

4. The UK anti-slavery sector should undertake further research to address urgent data and evidence gaps related to the right to work.

I discussed the findings with Minister Atkins and she agreed that officials would consider how the recommendations align with the Victim Care Contract, but I understand that this has not yet progressed. In light of this, I would like to revisit the possibility of an initiative to permit victims of modern slavery to work whilst awaiting NRM and asylum decisions. My suggestion is that this should be attached to the Co-op and City Hearts Bright Futures project, an existing initiative offering work placements to victims and survivors of modern slavery. Results from an independent review of the scheme were promising.<sup>4</sup>

I look forward to our discussion.

Yours sincerely,



**Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner**

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<sup>4</sup> University of Liverpool, 'Bright Future: An Independent Review' June 2019



Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM  
Independent Anti-Slavery  
Commissioner  
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DECS Reference: MIN/0207614/21

22 November 2021

Dear Sara,

Thank you for your letter of 18 October on access to work for victims of modern slavery, received prior to our constructive discussion on 27 October. I am grateful for you bringing these issues to my attention and would like to assure you that we are committed to delivering needs-based support through our Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) to ensure that each individual victim, and their recovery needs, are at the centre of the support we provide.

We recognise that employment, training or educational pathways can be a key part of a victim's recovery journey and their reintegration into the community. As such, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and MSVCC already supports victims in accessing these services, where they have the right to work in the UK. This support includes signposting to information regarding education, training and access to the labour market, as well as transitional post-NRM Reach-in support for confirmed victims.

Furthermore, local Anti-Slavery Partnerships provide advice on pathways into work, through liaising with support workers. We have also worked with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that their frontline staff in Job Centre Plus are aware and sensitive to the challenges faced by victims. In areas where it is known that victims of modern slavery are being supported through safehouses, Job Centre Plus have a lead officer on modern slavery who works closely with MSVCC support providers to effectively support victims with job seeking.

The right to work in the UK is dependent on immigration status and those with the right to work are eligible to work while they are in the NRM. As part of the Government's New Plan for Immigration, we intend to make clear for the first time in legislation that confirmed victims (both adults and children) with long-term recovery needs linked to their modern slavery exploitation will be considered for a grant of temporary leave to remain to assist their recovery. This grant of leave would confer eligible victims with the right to work.

As part of our ongoing work through the Transformation Programme, my officials will consider how we can further advance access to training and employment opportunities

through the MSVCC. As noted in our 2020 Modern Slavery Annual Report<sup>1</sup>, businesses can also play an important role in a survivor's transition back into a community by providing work opportunities, as demonstrated by Co-Ops Bright Future Programme. As you mention in your letter, the Home Office is currently undertaking a review into its policy in respect of asylum seekers' right to work. This was commissioned by the former Home Secretary specifically in response to the recommendations made by the Lift the Ban coalition's report on this issue, published in October 2018. The findings of this review will be published in due course.

Asylum seekers are able to work in the UK if their claim has been outstanding for 12 months or more, through no fault of their own. This includes modern slavery victims who may also have an asylum claim pending for over 12 months or more, again through no fault of their own. Those permitted to work are restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List (SOL), which is based on expert advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Maclean', with a small flourish at the end.

**Rachel Maclean MP**

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<sup>1</sup> HM Government, '2020 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery' October 2020. Link: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/2020-uk-annual-report-on-modern-slavery](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2020-uk-annual-report-on-modern-slavery)