



Home Office

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Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM
Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
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Reference: MIN/0234931/22

15 February 2022

Dear Sara,

Thank you for your letter of 9 June 2021, to the Home Secretary, about the returns and reintegration for victims and survivors of modern slavery. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in providing a reply to you. Unfortunately, an administrative oversight led to your letter being missed. I can assure you that steps are being taken to ensure this does not happen in the future.

The Voluntary Returns Service (VRS) was set up to provide practical and reintegration support for foreign nationals who are subject to immigration control to provide an alternative to detention. As part of this, VRS will support and provide reintegration payments for confirmed victims of modern slavery, as well as supporting potential victims who may meet other VRS criteria for reintegration assistance.

We work closely with many organisations who are supporting confirmed victims of modern slavery to ensure that they refer individuals to VRS when this is an appropriate option for them to take. Notably, we work with The Salvation Army and their sub-contractors, and also with other relevant charitable organisations and local authorities, to raise their awareness of VRS and the support that is available for modern slavery victims. You have asked us to consider having a robust system in place for the monitoring the use of VRS by victims and survivors of modern slavery. We work closely with the Salvation Army to ensure there is a joined-up approach to confirmed victims utilising VRS.

Victims of modern slavery receiving support under the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) also have access to a support worker. Throughout the National Referral Mechanism process, support workers will signpost relevant information on rights and services accessible to victims, including accessing immigration advice and the option of voluntary return.

Where a victim expresses a desire to return home, VRS works closely with victims and their support workers to arrange for the return and provide the reintegration assistance.

The Salvation Army are responsible for completing a risk assessment both in country and on return to ensure the safety of a victim who has chosen to leave through VRS or an alternative route.

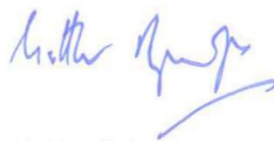
VRS has been providing both practical returns support and reintegration to confirmed victims from EEA countries since 2016. Until April 2021 this support included the arrangement of a flight home and £1000 financial assistance. Since April 2021 any confirmed victim of modern slavery, whether an EEA national or any other foreign national, will receive between £1500-£3000. All individuals returning with VRS support to a country that is defined as developing by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are now eligible to receive £3000. Again, the Salvation Army are responsible for ensuring a risk assessment takes place for the return of the victim. Our records show that none of the confirmed victims who sought VRS assistance during 2019-2021 were from EEA nations.

The ERRIN programme was paused at the beginning of the pandemic in order to protect providers in country and also to protect those on return. The UK is no longer a member of the ERRIN programme following our exit from the EU, although we continue to explore other opportunities of enabling in-country support for individuals returning.

With regard to our international engagement on returns and reintegration of modern slavery victims, our programmes through the Home Office Modern Slavery Fund provide targeted reintegration support recommended by the International Organisation for Migration. In addition, the Justice and Care Romania pilot that was referenced in your letter is being funded by the Home Office Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and will inform future Home Office activity.

As you are aware, the Government announced a review of the 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy, which we hope to publish in Spring 2022. As part of the development of the Strategy, we will continue to consider the important issue of returns and reintegration of modern slavery victims. I know my officials have been working closely with you and your office as we develop our strategy, including support for child victims, and I am grateful for your continued support.

Thank you for taking the time to write about this important issue, and huge apologies again for such an unacceptable delay.



Matthew Rycroft
Permanent Secretary