

The [benefits and barriers of accessing employment](#) – a roundtable to discuss implementing the recommendations made by this report

Background

In October 2019, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC) convened a roundtable with key stakeholders in the anti-slavery sector to discuss access to work for survivors of modern slavery. Following this meeting, in March 2020, the IASC [wrote to](#) the Minister for Safeguarding to suggest an initiative that would permit victims of modern slavery to work whilst awaiting National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and asylum decisions. Due to the wider Home Office Borders, Immigration and Citizen System review of asylum seeker right to work, the Minister [responded](#) to say that she was not able to commit to a specific scheme for survivors of modern slavery. The IASC therefore sought to focus efforts on building the evidence base on the benefits of work and the harms of not working, commissioning a rapid piece of research from the University of Nottingham Rights Lab.

This [research](#) made the following recommendations:

- 1) Through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), the UK government should develop an evidence base to better understand the skills, qualifications, work interests, and work histories of survivors in the NRM.
- 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 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.

Since publication of this research, the Home Office has [confirmed](#) that their review of asylum seeker right to work has concluded, and that the current policy will be retained with no further changes.

The roundtable

On Wednesday 19 January 2022, the IASC chaired a virtual roundtable to discuss next steps following publication of the report in collaboration with the University of Nottingham Rights Lab.

This was attended by the following organisations: The University of Nottingham Rights Lab; the Home Office (Modern Slavery Unit); Sophie Hayes Foundation; Jericho Foundation; Snowdrop; City Hearts; The Salvation Army; InterContinental Hotels Group; St Mary's University; International Organisation for Migration; Justice and Care; Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Policy and Evidence Centre (MSPEC); Department of Work and Pensions; Care Quality Commission; Ashurst; Focus on Labour Exploitation.

To provide some context for the discussion, the roundtable featured a series of presentations from:

- 1) Kate Garbers (University of Nottingham Rights Lab) on the research findings and recommendations.
- 2) Phill Clayton (City Hearts) on the 'Restoring You' pilot programme, encouraging survivors to build confidence and recognise their strengths to support integration.

- 3) Andrew Francks (InterContinental Hotels Group) on the [IHG Skills Academy](#).

Following the presentations, the group then discussed opportunities to take forward the recommendations made by the report.

On recommendation 1

The group discussed the merits of developing a better understanding of the skills and work interests of survivors through a snapshot piece of research. The five projects around survivor recovery currently being funded by the MSPEC were highlighted, and there was an agreement to see whether any are considering employability skills. It was also suggested that the group could submit ideas for further research that the MSPEC could commission.

In addition, the group briefly considered the information that is already gathered by the MSVCC both at the initial assessment and journey planning stage. It was agreed that opportunities to adapt these processes to capture this information could be explored further, noting however that many survivors within the MSVCC are asylum seekers without the right to work.

On recommendation 2

The IASC asked if any members of the group had capacity to pull together the various resources that already exist regarding work preparation and employability. It was agreed that Helena Yeaman, who is currently seconded to the IASC office for one day per week, could co-ordinate this work and many of the organisations in attendance highlighted examples of existing practice that they could share. It was also noted that it is important to think about where employment journeys start, and that this can vary in different cultures.

On recommendation 3

The group discussed the new Modern Slavery Strategy and how re-trafficking and re-integration are important areas to be reflected within this. It was noted that The Salvation Army meet with their network of sub-contractors on a quarterly basis to share good practice, and it was agreed that employability and work preparation would be raised with this group to enable opportunities for learning to be shared. It was acknowledged that there can be other aspects to consider before survivors can look at how to find work and education, for example regarding their eligibility for work and the implications of work on benefits that they may receive.

[Since the roundtable](#)

Following the roundtable, the IASC has written to the Minister for Safeguarding and Vulnerability highlighting areas for further consideration including:

- 1) Exploring opportunities for capturing further information about survivors' skills, qualifications, work interests and work histories within MSVCC.
- 2) Supporting research that could provide a snapshot of the skills, qualifications, and work interests of those who are in the NRM to build the evidence base and better understand whether the current provisions made by the NRM are meeting the needs of survivors.
- 3) The prioritisation of prevention of re-trafficking within the UK's new Modern Slavery Strategy.
- 4) The potential of greater specificity within the MSVCC regarding the provision of support for survivors that relates to work preparation and employability.