
Home Office Asylum Announcement

- Following the Home Secretary's announcement on the Government's 'Asylum and returns policy' on 17 November 2025, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC) outlines the risks and implications for victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. The Home Office policy paper proposes reforms to the modern slavery system.¹
- The Commissioner cautions that the Government must not conflate immigration policy with measures to tackle trafficking and slavery, doing so risks eroding essential protections for victims. This briefing sets out why these issues matter and how the measures could affect the identification, safeguarding, and support of victims.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 created powers to punish perpetrators of this horrendous crime and protect victims

- The Modern Slavery Act was created to give the UK the tools it needs to identify victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, support them to safety, and prosecute the criminals who profit from abusing them. Modern slavery and human trafficking involve real people being controlled, exploited and held against their will – and many of those victims are UK nationals, including children, who deserve protection and the chance to rebuild their lives.
- Human trafficking and asylum are two different things and need different responses. Trafficking is about exploitation and serious crimes, not the merits of someone's asylum claim. Victims of modern slavery who receive a 'conclusive grounds' decision from the Home Office do not subsequently receive an automatic right to remain in the UK.
- The IASC's focus is on making sure that anyone suffering horrendous exploitation can be identified quickly, supported properly, and that the traffickers face real consequences. Any policy or legislative changes to how the UK identifies and supports victims of modern slavery and human trafficking must be based on robust evidence, not assumptions, and must never make it easier for traffickers to operate or profit from human lives.

¹ [Asylum and returns policy statement - GOV.UK](#)

Overview of modern slavery in the UK

- **In 2024 19,125 potential victims of modern slavery were referred to the Home Office.** This represents a 13% increase compared to the preceding year (16,990). This data is from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the framework used to identify and support victims of Modern Slavery in the UK.²
- **The first step in the Home Office process confirms if there is ‘reasonable grounds’ someone is a potential victim of modern slavery, and this should take 5 days; a ‘conclusive grounds’ decision currently takes over 2 years for victims of modern slavery to receive.** The NRM decision making takes too long and the quality of NRM decision making is poor. The average (mean) days taken to make NRM CG decisions in Q3 2025 was 616 days.
- **The largest nationality group of identified victims of modern slavery is UK nationals.** The number of UK nationals referred in Q3 2025 was the highest on record (1,312). In 2024, UK nationals were the largest nationality of victims identified, with 4,441 potential victims of modern slavery.
- **A small proportion of people arriving in small boats are referred to NRM and most do not receive a positive identification as a victim of modern slavery.** In 2024 there were 36,077 small boat arrivals. 4,646 were referred to the NRM, the equivalent of 13%. In 2024 there were 4,493 reasonable grounds decisions. 1,589 (35%) were positive, 2,904 (65%) were negative. 39 were waiting for reasonable grounds decisions.

Victims of modern slavery need to be protected

Modern Slavery is about crime, not immigration

- Modern slavery protections deal with exploitation, control and criminality, not the merits of someone’s asylum claim.
- Conflating these systems leads to missed victims and poor decisions.
- A person can be both an asylum seeker and a victim, but the tests, processes and decision-makers are different.

Modern Slavery protections are not driving overall asylum or illegal immigration numbers

- In 2024, only 13% of people (4346 out of 36,077 small boat arrivals) arriving on small boats were referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the Home Office system for identifying potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

² [Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2024 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2024)

- Home Office data shows only 13 people in 2024 were disqualified from the NRM for ‘knowingly making a false claim’ - demonstrating that deliberate misuse is extremely rare.

There is no evidence of widespread abuse of the Modern Slavery Act

- Select Committees in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords have concluded that claims of misuse of the Act are simply not backed up by fact. The Home Office have only ever been able to produce a handful of case studies to Parliamentarians who have asked for evidence.³
- People cannot self-refer into the modern slavery system. Only authorised First Responder organisations like police, Border Force, local authorities or NGOs can make a referral.
- In 2024, 52% of negative reasonable grounds decisions were due to insufficient information, not credibility concerns; only 5% were due to lack of credibility.

Trauma makes early disclosure extremely difficult - rigid deadlines risk silencing real victims

- Treating late information as “damage to credibility” risks penalising genuine victims who are too frightened, traumatised or unsupported to speak earlier.
- Protecting victims supports border security – victims provide essential testimony for organised crime prosecutions.

A safe, functioning modern slavery system supports, not undermines, border security

- Identifying victims helps law enforcement target traffickers, who are a core driver of irregular migration.
- The public wants to see criminal gangs disrupted; that requires victims to feel safe to come forward, not pressured to stay silent.
- Weakening victim protections is a false economy: it reduces intelligence, undermines prosecutions, and allows traffickers to operate with greater impunity.

³ Home Affairs Select Committee [Human Trafficking - Committees - UK Parliament](#), [Modern Slavery Act 2015 Committee - Publications - Committees - UK Parliament](#)