

Alarming rise of abuse within modern slavery system

Child rapists, people who pose a threat to our national security, serious criminals and failed asylum seekers will find it harder to take advantage of modern slavery safeguards under changes to be announced this week.

This follows an alarming rise in people abusing our modern slavery system by posing as victims in order to prevent their removal and enable them stay in the country.

National Referral Mechanism referrals, the government's system for identifying victims of modern slavery, more than doubled between 2017 and 2020 from 5,141 to 10,613.

In 2019, of those referred into the National Referral Mechanism after being detained within the UK (totalling 1,949), 89% received a positive initial decision which means their referral is considered further with more rigorous assessment.

Upcoming reforms to the asylum system are expected to lead to more serious criminals seeking to falsely take advantage of the National Referral Mechanism in order to frustrate their removal, making it harder for genuine victims to receive timely support.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Our generous safeguards for victims are being rampantly abused by child rapists, people who pose a threat to national security and failed asylum seekers with no right to be here.

They are diverting resources away from genuine victims of trafficking, persecution and serious harm – which is completely unacceptable.

The UK has led the world in protecting the victims of modern slavery and we will continue to support those who have suffered intolerable abuse at the hands of criminals and traffickers so they can rebuild their lives.

Under the changes proposed, frontline workers including police, local authorities and charities will be trained to better help them assess genuine accounts of modern slavery before they refer it to the authorities for an assessment.

The government will consult on whether to strengthen the threshold for deciding whether someone is a potential victim of modern slavery during the initial assessment.

The consultation will also look at the definition of “public order grounds” to enable protections to be withheld from dangerous criminals who have received prison sentences of over a year, as well as individuals who pose a threat to national security.

In 2015 the UK government introduced ground-breaking measures that equipped law enforcement with the tools to fight modern slavery through the Modern Slavery Act.

Today’s announcement introduces our intention to provide greater support for genuine victims including private counselling and setting out in legislation for the first time that confirmed victims of modern slavery with long-term recovery needs may be eligible for a grant of temporary leave to remain in the UK to assist their recovery.

The package also includes:

- a review of the government’s 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy to develop a revised strategic approach that adapts to the evolving nature of these crimes
- a new Modern Slavery Prevention Fund to bolster the efforts of external organisations to stop people being drawn into this terrible crime and eradicate slavery
- funding to support prosecutions and build policing capability to investigate and respond to organised immigration crime, ensuring modern slavery victims receive the support they need to help prosecute the perpetrators

Further details will be set out this week in the most radical overhaul of the asylum and borders system in decades.