

## News story: Home Office provides £2m to stem human trafficking in Albania

A £2m boost to deliver work in Albanian human trafficking hotspots has been announced today (Thursday 11 October), by Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins.

The programme will help tackle the flow of modern slavery to the UK by supporting victims to rebuild their lives and by deterring vulnerable people from falling into the hands of traffickers in Albania. The UK will also support criminal justice officials to ensure perpetrators of this awful crime are brought to justice.

The package was agreed as part of a meeting held in London, between Victoria Atkins and Albanian Deputy Minister of Interior Rovena Voda, yesterday. In 2017, over 770 potential modern slavery victims were referred to UK authorities and identified as Albanian nationals – the highest figure for a country outside Britain.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Modern slavery is an abhorrent crime that entraps the most vulnerable people globally and denies them their liberty.

The UK is regarded as a world leader in tackling this crime, not only due to our tough laws and support for victims at home, but also our work abroad to support victims, ensure offenders are caught and stop vulnerable people falling into the hands of traffickers.

By working with our Albanian partners, we can make a crucial difference to the lives of those who have had some of their most basic rights stolen from them.

Government research has highlighted that the capital Tirana and the 3 northern districts of Diber, Shkoder and Kukës, in Albania, are where the majority of victims originate. It is in these districts where the UK will focus its support.

Testimonies from Albanian victims who have been trafficked into the UK highlight the importance of working to tackling modern slavery in the region:

First there was no life, because I was held against my will.

When I accessed services my life started, because now I am free and

now I can laugh and I can make friends, I can chose to do what I want, all because of my support workers.

The funding runs until March 2021 to assist Albanian victims with their reintegration into society once they are identified, as well as educating vulnerable communities about the dangers of trafficking.

Kathy Betteridge, Director of Anti Trafficking and Modern Slavery for The Salvation Army, said:

In recent years The Salvation Army has seen a continued growth in the number of potential victims of modern slavery from Albania. It is overwhelmingly the country from which we receive the highest number of people, mainly women, referred for support to recover from the exploitation they have experienced. This trend shows no sign of abating.

Their stories tell of organised crime and sexual exploitation which will require a coordinated effort to address. We therefore welcome the willingness of the Albanian government to engage with the UK in tackling this issue at source.

We hope this funding will effect a reduction and ultimate end to the flow of vulnerable people from Albania to be exploited across Europe and into the UK.

The Salvation Army has held the government contract to provide specialist support to adult victims of modern slavery in England and Wales for 7 years and has supported more than 7,000 victims in that time.

The package, from the Home Office's Modern Slavery Fund, also includes training for Albanian criminal justice officials so that they are better prepared to deal with human trafficking cases, meaning those responsible are more likely to face justice.

Albania has endorsed Prime Minister Theresa May's international Call to Action to end modern slavery. The UK is committed to working closely with Albania to combat the issue.