

News story: Modern Slavery Taskforce agrees new measures to support victims

Three new measures to improve the way in which victims of modern slavery are identified and supported have been announced, following a meeting of the Prime Minister's Modern Slavery Taskforce on Monday 16 October 2017.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the system by which victims of modern slavery are identified and provided with support, will be reformed to improve both the decision-making process and support offered.

The first measures to be announced, as part of a broader package of reforms which will be announced in due course, include:

- a single, expert unit to be created in the Home Office to handle all cases referred from front line staff and to make decisions about whether somebody is a victim of modern slavery, this will replace the current case management units in the National Crime Agency and UK Visas and Immigration, and will be completely separate from the immigration system
- an independent panel of experts to review all negative decisions, adding significantly to the scrutiny such cases currently receive
- a new digital system to support the NRM process, making it easier for those on the front line to refer victims for support and enabling data to be captured and analysed to better aid prevention and law enforcement

Several of the reform proposals have been shaped and influenced by the findings of a pilot scheme testing a new approach to the NRM process, and in consultation with the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

The new measures were agreed at a taskforce meeting today, chaired by Home Secretary Amber Rudd.

The Home Secretary said:

The taskforce agreed that reform of the NRM was essential to make sure the best interest of victims is at its heart. Those people who are dealing with victims on a daily basis must continue to be properly trained and have access to the right information to provide high-quality support tailored to the unique needs of victims to help them begin to rebuild their lives.

Members of the taskforce are absolutely determined to deliver a more efficient decision-making process, with robust quality assurance, and for all partners to keep working together to protect victims and pursue offenders. The UK has led the world in exposing and fighting modern slavery and, as our understanding of its scale and nature evolves, so must our response.

Anti-Slavery Commissioner Kevin Hyland OBE said:

Reforming support for victims of modern slavery has been a top priority for me as the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. I have previously shared recommendations with the government to address gaps in support for victims, so I am extremely pleased that we have been able to rectify shortcomings, develop solutions and commit to improve the lives of those who have suffered.

This is a significant step forward in the fight against modern slavery and reflects the important work of the Prime Minister's Modern Slavery Taskforce and the commitment of the Home Secretary.

Director of the National Crime Agency's Vulnerabilities Command, Will Kerr, said:

We welcome the review and digital streamlining of the NRM, and also the introduction of a dedicated unit to examine referrals with the appropriate level of expertise. These developments will enhance the UK's ability to identify, safeguard and support potential victims of trafficking and slavery. For example, in May and June of this year alone, there were 111 arrests and 130 potential victims identified in the UK; the NCA will continue to lead and co-ordinate UK law enforcement activity to disrupt traffickers and prevent the most vulnerable being exploited for profit.

The Prime Minister's taskforce brings together ministers from relevant government departments, senior police officers, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, the heads of intelligence agencies and key practitioners. It was established in September 2016 and aims to do more to bring perpetrators to justice and to support victims both domestically and overseas.

Subject to discussions in the taskforce, the Prime Minister will bring forward more detailed reform plans in due course.