

News story: Ten independent chairs announced to scrutinise modern slavery cases

Potential victims of modern slavery will receive more transparent and joined-up support thanks to plans introduced by the Home Office.

Changes to the national referral mechanism (NRM), that have now come into force, will allow an independent group of professionals to review certain cases and assess whether the right decision has been made.

People who receive a negative “conclusive grounds” decision after being referred to the NRM – the government system to identify and support victims of modern slavery – will automatically have their decision reviewed by a Multi-Agency Assurance Panel to be scrutinised.

These panels can then require the Home Office to reconsider any case where they consider an incorrect decision to have been made.

This comes as, following a pilot scheme, a new Single Competent Authority was introduced at the end of April to handle all cases referred from front line staff and to make decisions about whether somebody is a victim of modern slavery.

The expert unit within the Home Office has replaced the previous model of separate case management units in the National Crime Agency and UK Visas and Immigration.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Sadly, slavery and exploitation are not crimes of the past. They are very real and with us today.

The government is committed to stamping out this horrific crime and ensuring that victims get the support they need.

By introducing truly independent and transparent scrutiny of decisions, we can ensure that people can have confidence in the decisions taken by the national referral mechanism, and in the level of support they will receive.

Those appointed as chairs are:

- Allan Doherty
- Mike Taylor
- Joy Shakespeare
- Mary Cunneen

- Vincent Dean
- Sharon Squires
- Andrew Leonard
- Russ Middleton
- John Clements
- Alison Towns

Last year, 6,993 people were referred to the NRM.

The government is committed to ensuring victims have access to the support they need to begin re-building their lives.

In February 2019 the minimum period of support for confirmed victims was increased to 90 days, and we are in the process of implementing a range of other reforms to the NRM.

The reforms aim to improve decision-making and the support available to victims before, during and after the NRM process.

Improvements to support include introduction of places of safety for those rescued by law enforcement bodies prior to entering the NRM and implementation of post-NRM support to help victims transition to the next phase of their lives.

The improvements in support for victims sit alongside a range of measures to tackle modern slavery in the UK and overseas. These include:

- the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015, which gave law enforcement agencies better tools to tackle modern slavery and enhanced protection for victims
- requiring companies to publish transparency statements and recently announced
- a package of support to help child victims of modern slavery including a new Child Trafficking Protection Fund and the national rollout of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs), who provide specialised support for trafficked children
- £4 million in funding for initiatives to tackle modern slavery and labour exploitation overseas through the Modern Slavery Innovation Fund