

[These statistics show a worrying increase in both poverty and inequality – Debbie Abrahams](#)

Debbie

Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, commenting on the Households Below Average Income statistics, said:

"These statistics show a worrying increase in both poverty and inequality. Four million children and two million older people are now living below the breadline. Those living with a disabled person are more likely than ever to be struggling to make ends meet.

"This is a direct result of this Government's seven wasted years of austerity and punitive social security cuts.

"The Tories' shocking failure to tackle the increasing costs of basic essentials, stagnating wages and their ruthless slashing of social security is leaving working families worse off up to 2020."

"Labour would reverse cuts to in-work support, ban the exploitative zero hours contracts being used on hundreds of thousands of workers, and guarantee a real Living Wage."

[Tory Government is not doing enough to ensure young people are on the electoral register – Cat Smith](#)

Cat

Smith MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs, commenting on today's Electoral Registration Statistics, said:

"While the increase in electoral registration numbers following the EU referendum is welcome, this Tory Government is still not doing enough to ensure that young people are on the register.

“That is why the Lords voted in favour of a Labour motion to the Higher Education and Research Bill, requiring universities to give students the option to register to vote when they sign up at university.

“If the Tories are serious about making every voice matter they need to keep this sensible addition when the Bill comes back to the Commons.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

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The total number of UK parliamentary electors increased by just over 1 million (2.3%) between December 2015 and December 2016, reflecting the high levels of public engagement with the EU referendum. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/bulletins/electoralstatisticsforuk/2016>

. A study from the Electoral Commission in 2014 found that young people were a particularly under-represented group on the electoral register http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/169889/Completeness-and-accuracy-of-the-2014-electoral-registers-in-Great-Britain.pdf

. Before the Conservatives rushed the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration, students were automatically enrolled by their universities. However, the Electoral Administration Act of 2013 did not provide for a suitable student registration to be put in place when the old system of household registration was abolished.

. On Monday 7th March the House of Lords voted in favour of Baroness Royall’s amendment to the Higher Education and Research Bill. The amendment was passed, defeating the Government, by a majority of 200 to 189. The amendment would require universities to offer students the opportunity to register to vote at the point of enrolment or re-registration as a student at their university, a proposal first made by Paul Blomfield MP in the Commons.

[News story: Innovative fibreboard recycling firm attracts £250,000 investment](#)

A North Wales company has secured a £250,000 investment from a global waste management services group to commercialise its pioneering process for recycling medium-density fibreboard (MDF).

The backing from [SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK](#) will allow [MDF Recovery](#) to take its technology to market after 6 years of research and development.

Their collaboration follows an Innovate UK project where they worked together on a 'closed loop' recycling option for waste MDF. The 2 companies established a pilot plant to refine the process and host demonstrations for potential industrial end-users.

[Find out how Innovate UK supports the manufacturing and materials sector in the UK.](#)

By allowing manufacturers to take the waste MDF back from customers and recover the wood fibre, the technology offers an innovative alternative to landfill or incineration for used MDF products and off-cuts.

Attractive option for the retail sector

MDF Recovery's solution generates a new secondary material source for the wood/natural fibre industry. Co-founder Craig Bartlett estimates it could recycle between 30,000 to 60,000 tonnes of MDF waste in the UK each year, and almost 3 million tonnes globally.

[Learn more about how Innovate UK has helped businesses to be successful.](#)

Craig said:

The SUEZ investment provides a significant boost to MDF Recovery in our quest to commercialise the technology to make single-use MDF a thing of the past. The recovered fibre produced by the process is of the same high quality as fibre obtained from virgin wood and can be used as a direct substitute in the manufacturing process.

The technology can be retro-fitted or designed into new plants and

offers a robust solution for reworking waste and increasing the yield at the MDF manufacturing facility.

The business is in discussions with potential customers and partners. The technology could be particularly attractive to the retail sector, which uses large amounts of MDF in shop fittings.

[Find out how to apply for funding.](#)

Press release: New grant for council homelessness services

The government is transforming the way councils fund homelessness services, giving them greater flexibility to prioritise homelessness prevention, Communities Minister Marcus Jones has confirmed.

The new 'flexible homelessness support grant' is a radical replacement of the tightly controlled funding currently given to source and manage temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and their families.

Under the existing 'temporary accommodation management fee', funding can only be used for expensive intervention when a household is already homeless, rather than on preventing this happening in the first place.

The new grant will empower councils with the freedom to support the full range of homelessness services. This could include employing a homelessness prevention or tenancy support officer to work closely with people who are at risk of losing their homes.

Communities Minister Marcus Jones said:

This government is determined to help the most vulnerable in society, which is why we're investing £550 million to 2020 to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

We've brought in a raft of measures over the last few months, from funding homelessness projects in 225 local authorities to changing the law by backing Bob Blackman's Homelessness Reduction Bill to support for more people at risk of losing their homes.

We're now going further and giving councils greater flexibility, so they can move away from costly intervention when a household is already homeless, to preventing this happening in the first place.

Councils across England will receive £402 million over the next 2 years. No local authority will receive less annual funding under the grant than we estimate they would have received under the Department for Work and Pensions fee. First year allocations will also include an additional amount to authorities with high temporary accommodation commitments.

Compared to the old system, we estimate that London councils will receive around £20 million more next year and that other high pressure areas, including Leeds, Birmingham, Reading, Peterborough and Portsmouth, will also gain significant additional funding.

In recognition of the particular pressures which London councils face, we are also setting aside £25 million of the funding across the 2 years while we work with the Greater London Authority and London boroughs to look at how we might help councils collaborate in the procurement of accommodation for homeless families in London.

The new grant forms part of the wide range of measures the government is taking to prevent people from becoming homeless.

This includes:

- protecting and maintaining the funding for councils to provide homelessness prevention services at £315 million over the 4 years to 2019-20; £20 million to support innovative approaches in local areas to tackle and prevent homelessness
- a £20 million rough sleeping prevention fund to help individuals at risk or new to the streets get back on their feet
- a £10 million Social Impact Bond programme to help long-term rough sleepers
- £61 million for councils to implement the measures in the Homelessness Reduction Bill, which will change the law to provide vital support for more people at risk of losing their homes

The former Chancellor announced at Autumn Statement 2015 that the Department for Work and Pensions' temporary accommodation management fee would be replaced by a Department for Communities and Local Government grant from April 2017.

The new flexible homelessness support grant will come in from 1 April 2017. It is based on a completely new funding model so resources are directed to the areas with the greatest need and which allows councils to plan their homelessness services with certainty.

The funding allocated for the 2 years from 2017 to 2018 is £186 million and

£191 million. A further £25 million has been set aside for London boroughs to work together to provide accommodation for homeless families in the capital.

See the [allocations for the new grant](#).

Speech: Working together to end modern slavery

I am delighted to be here today at the launch of RUSI's new report into the role financial institutions can play in tackling modern slavery.

Events like these are so important because however hard we might try – slavery is not something that the government can tackle alone.

We need all of you in this room to collaborate – bringing your tools, expertise and knowledge together to combat what the Prime Minister has rightly called 'the greatest human rights issue of our time'.

And I want to start today by telling you a story about a young woman – I'm going to call her J.

J was a bright girl who came to the UK to study from Asia. She met a woman from her own community at a local temple who encouraged her to come to the cafe she owned to speak to customers to practice her English.

At first it went well. J spent time at the cafe and her English improved.

But slowly the cafe owner began to demand more and more and became abusive towards J.

She found herself totally trapped and forced to work for 14 hours a day, with limited toilet breaks, no heating and no food or drink at all during working hours.

Life became intolerable. She lost contact with friends and was kicked out of college because she wasn't turning up anymore because she was always manning the cafe.

She was too scared to go to the police because her captor threatened her and her family and her health deteriorated.

But in 2014, supported by a British Transport Police officer, J escaped and was referred to the Salvation Army who placed her in a safe house which helped her to rebuild her life.

And when I met J in the summer, it was clear that although she had been controlled, degraded and mistreated, a much better future was now in sight

for her.

J's story is a reminder to all of us that slavery is not consigned to history. It is happening here and it is happening now.

200 years ago Britain abolished the slave trade and the British Navy set out to eradicate slavery overseas. And yet there are currently 10-13,000 people enslaved in Britain and an estimated 45.8 million victims of modern slavery worldwide.

But as Home Secretary I am determined to do all I can to protect and support victims of this horrible crime and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

In 2015 the government introduced the world-leading Modern Slavery Act. We gave law enforcement agencies new powers to tackle modern slavery, we introduced maximum life sentences for perpetrators and we enhanced the protections available for victims.

Introducing the act sent a clear message that the UK will not tolerate this terrible crime.

We also introduced the ground-breaking transparency in supply chain provision, requiring large businesses to set out the steps they have taken in the last 12 months to ensure there is no modern slavery in their business or in their supply chains. Since these statements became compulsory, thousands of businesses have published them. Other countries now look to our work in this area as the gold standard.

But just because we have legislation in place does not mean that the problem is solved. That's why the Prime Minister personally chairs the first ever modern slavery taskforce with every relevant department attending, to keep a grip on the issue and drive forward our operational response. This is a priority for her as it is for the government.

And we are seeing the results of our efforts. More victims of modern slavery are being rescued and supported and more perpetrators are being brought to justice. There were 113 convictions in 2015 and we expect more convictions under the Modern Slavery Act this year.

At the end of January, 2 brothers who trafficked 18 people from Poland to the UK and conned and threatened them were jailed for 6 years after being prosecuted for offences under the Modern Slavery Act.

They had forced the vulnerable men to work at the Sports Direct warehouse in Shirebrook in Derbyshire and they had controlled their bank accounts and kept most of their wages.

These men had hoped for a new life in Britain but the reality was squalid living conditions and near total control by their captors.

These men came from Poland but were trafficked to Britain, a reminder that modern slavery spans countries and borders and we need to have an international and not just a national approach.

And I am proud that we are leading work to develop a global response to slavery and that this is one of our top foreign priorities.

We need to make sure that we are working collaboratively with law enforcement agencies around the world to stop gangs that operate across borders and across jurisdictions.

And we have committed to investing £33.5 million of overseas aid funding to tackle the root causes of modern slavery.

We will focus on those high-risk countries where we know victims are regularly trafficked to the UK. And as I announced in October, £11 million of this money is for our dedicated Modern Slavery Innovation Fund used to support, trial and test new innovative ways of tackling modern slavery overseas.

And today I am very pleased to announce that we will be spending £6 million from this £11 million fund on 10 new projects. These projects will support victims directly, tackle slavery in supply chains and help to share skills and expertise with overseas partners.

Working with NGOs, academics and international organisations, the projects will test a range of activities to build up evidence of what works in addressing modern slavery.

So let me tell you about some of these projects.

We will be investing over £1 million in UN University, the research and academic arm of the UN. Funding will allow them to gather together modern slavery data from around the world and encourage its use by researchers and policy makers.

UN University will accelerate and coordinate the global exchange of data and research on modern slavery and will therefore improve the work done to tackle modern slavery right across the globe.

We will also be giving funding of over £140,000 to St Mary's University to support research into the role of organised criminals in modern slavery. Looking at a number of countries and known trafficking routes, they will provide valuable insights into the networks that transport vulnerable people from overseas into the UK to be exploited.

And we will work with GoodWeave, an NGO transforming the South Asian rug sector with its work to end illegal child labour in manufacturing. GoodWeave has done excellent work with exporters and importers to ensure their supply chains are free from child labour. Our funding will allow them to expand this work to other sectors in India which are known to be at high risk from modern slavery.

We want to make sure that the impact of this work is carefully assessed and we will commission a full review to examine the results.

But as the RUSI paper published today sets out, human trafficking and other

forms of slavery continue to exist because they are profitable business models which are seen as relatively low risk by criminal groups. The International Labour Organisation estimates that the trade in human beings generates an enormous \$150 billion of profit a year for instance.

So if it's the money that's the incentive, then it's the money that we need to follow to really get to grips with the scourge of modern day slavery.

Indeed, following the money trail is a highly effective technique to attack organised crime.

And law enforcement agencies and the financial sector both hold information which is of great value to one another. By sharing this, law enforcement agencies can get vital intelligence to pursue the traffickers; and the banks can better understand the 'red flags' they need to look out for which could identify modern slavery, and better protect themselves.

In 2015 we launched the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce which is the mechanism that allows for this information sharing and I am very glad that so many of you here today are involved with this.

This is an example of public-private sector collaboration at its very best and we've already seen some great results.

In the last 18 months, the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce has provided tactical intelligence to law enforcement agencies on 21 human trafficking and modern slavery cases; work that has already supported a number of arrests and prosecutions.

The Criminal Finances Bill will make this taskforce even more effective, giving new protections to enable bank-to-bank information sharing as well as new powers for law enforcement to investigate the money laundering linked to modern slavery and to confiscate the proceeds of crime.

And I hope that banks will continue to support the strengthened partnership working that the taskforce has helped build and the more targeted intelligence that it is generating.

But as the RUSI paper explains, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for financial institutions in disrupting human trafficking and modern slavery.

All businesses and all banks need to ask themselves – what does modern slavery mean for us? What are we doing to prevent it?

In the audience we have representatives from the financial sector, the NCA and wider law enforcement and I want to see you all working together to combat modern slavery.

And I want to see you sharing best practice. Financial institutions are often global and those of you based in the UK can play an important role promoting best practice and encouraging partner institutions to take a similar path to your own in overseas branches.

And I want to see you all implementing due diligence – ask the questions – who are my customers? What are they up to?

And if you're a business which buys goods and services, are you taking ambitious steps to ensure your own supply chains are slavery free and are you producing detailed and thorough transparency in supply chains statements?

If you're an investor – are you asking to see the transparency in supply chains statements of businesses before you invest in them? Are you considering that modern slavery is a potential business risk and calling for the businesses which you invest in to do more to address that risk?

And if you're a lender, what due diligence are you undertaking to ensure that your money will not be used to support projects involving modern slavery?

By doing all of this, you will not only manage your own company's financial, legal and reputational risks more effectively, you will also be significantly contributing to our collective efforts to end modern slavery in the UK and globally.

Tackling modern slavery is not and will not be easy, but we have a moral imperative to do all that we can.

Two centuries ago, it was a team effort to get slavery on English soil banned. Parliamentarians, women, slave revolt leaders and Quakers all played their part. And in 2017, tackling modern slavery still needs to be a group endeavour.

The more of us involved in the fight to stop the traffickers and the slave drivers, the more winnable the battle becomes.