

28th March 2023

"Ignoring slavery, punishing survivors"

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as organisations and individuals working across the fields of human rights, child rights, modern slavery, law and academia, urging you to withdraw your Illegal Migration Bill.

If passed, this legislation would cost lives. It would inflict harm on survivors of modern slavery and other human rights abuses who are trying to rebuild their lives.

As awareness of trafficking has grown, the prevalence of serious exploitation in the UK is beyond doubt. Yet, your Illegal Migration Bill does not tackle the issue directly. Instead, it threatens survivors with detention and removal for entering the country without immigration leave. Under the measures, many survivors would not be recognised as victims, even in cases where they were deceived with fake job offers and documents, or forced to cross borders through threats and violence. If passed, the measures would drive modern slavery underground by removing survivors' ability to report trafficking and access assistance.

We are also concerned by attempts to rob people fleeing danger from having an asylum claim processed, simply for entering the UK irregularly to claim asylum in-country. The bill would gift the Government with sweeping powers to detain people without leave for 28 days, then longer following review, overriding the courts. Unlike the United States' 'T Visa', there is no citizenship pathway for victims of trafficking to naturalise their status in the UK, meaning that survivors seeking asylum are made doubly vulnerable by this Bill.

For both asylum seekers and trafficking victims, the Bill includes no blanket safeguards against the detention of women, children, people who are pregnant or those with serious mental or physical illnesses. In this way, survivors experiencing multiple forms of vulnerability are still likely to face de facto imprisonment.

These changes come at a time when support for victims of trafficking is far from guaranteed.

Survivors trying to live independently after escaping exploitation still face heightened risk of self-harm, suicidal ideation, PTSD and depression. Yet, survivors are not guaranteed ongoing specialist support by law. Amongst asylum seeking victims, physical and mental healthcare or GP access may even be refused on the basis that asylum accommodation is not a valid proof of address.

Worse still, many victims will not be identified at all. Last year, 4,580 suspected victims slipped through the net after authorities flagged trafficking indicators with the Home Office but made no referral. Modern slavery is one of the most traumatic forms of abuse a person can suffer. Yet, victims of exploitation are left to deal with the legacy of sexual, physical, and psychological harm without guaranteed help such as specialist shelters, a basic financial allowance, or access to a caseworker to ask questions about next steps. In fact, in 8 out of 10 cases (79%), survivors are partially or completely denied this support annually.

We are concerned by the villainisation of trafficking victims by Government officials in recent years. This includes unsubstantiated claims, made by the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, that people confirmed as victims by the Home Office are 'gaming the system'. The reality is that survivors usually risk their lives, and sometimes their loved ones' safety, by reporting their abuse only to be left navigating a complicated system alone. Suella Braverman's claim that trafficking support is 'easily accessed' is the ultimate disrespect to survivors.

Trafficking support services have been limited for years, but the Government's Illegal Migration Bill would decimate what trust agencies have managed to build with survivors and communities since the Modern Slavery Act's introduction in 2015.

This bill must be withdrawn, in light of the harm it would inflict on modern slavery survivors and others in need of protection.

Signed:

Non-profits

African Rainbow Family,
Afruca,
After Exploitation,
AIRE Centre,
Amnesty International,
Anti Slavery International,
Asylum Matters,
ATLEU,
Bail for Immigration Detainees,
BARAC UK,
Big Leaf Foundation,
Bristol Refugee Rights,
CARAS,
City of Sanctuary,
Choose Love,
Coventry Refugee Centre,
Ella's,
ECAPT,
FODI,
ForRefugees,
Freedom From Torture,
English Collective of Prostitutes,
Haringey Welcome,
Hope at Home,
Hope for Justice,
ILPA,
JCORE,
Jesuit Refugee Service UK,
Kalayaan,
LAWRS,
Liberty,
NACCOM,
Play for Progress,
Rebuild Project,
RefuAid,
Refugee Action,
Refugee Council Scotland,
Refugee Women Connect,
Rene Cassin,
Reunited Families,

Room to Heal,
Safe Passage,
Slave Free Alliance,
Street Talk,
Trust for London,
UK BME Anti Slavery Network,
VITA Network,
Voices in Exile,
Women for Refugee Women,
Women's Institute,
Work Rights Centre

Politicians

Caroline Lucas MP,
Baroness Jenny Moulsecoomb,
Daisy Cooper MP,
Layla Moran MP,
Helen Morgan MP
Wendy Chamberlain MP,
Wera Hobhouse MP,
Olivia Blake MP,
Nadia Whittome MP,
Gina Miller, *True and Fair Party*,
Mandu Reid, *Women's Equality Party*

Academics

Dr Ella Cockbain, *Associate Professor in Security and Crime Science, UCL*,
Dr David Gadd, *Professor of Criminology, University of Manchester*
Dr Alicia Heys, *Lecturer in Modern Slavery, Wilberforce Institute, University of Hull*,

Unions

UNISON
Artists' Union England,