



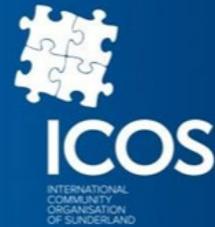
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***“Without Them, I Don’t Know What I
Would Have Done”***

**Examining Role of Back in Control 2 (BIC2) in
Tackling Modern Slavery and Labor
Exploitation**

BIC2 Evaluation

Part 2 Report

Funded by National Lottery Community Fund



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1. Introduction to the Report

Coordinated by the International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS) and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) project aims to identify and support adults in Sunderland and the surrounding areas who have been impacted by labour exploitation and modern slavery. BiC2 offers a comprehensive, one-to-one support service to help victims and survivors rebuild their lives. This holistic support includes counselling, health and wellbeing interventions, assistance with accessing benefits and entitlements, immigration advice, and volunteering opportunities, all designed to empower individuals and promote their long-term recovery.

The BiC2 project is being evaluated by academics from the University of Sunderland's Public Health Team within the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing's School of Psychology. The evaluation focuses on assessing the effectiveness of BiC2's outputs in achieving meaningful outcomes for clients. It examines whether and to what extent clients engage with the intervention activities and whether the project successfully produces positive changes in their lives.

The first Interim [report](#) provided a comprehensive overview of the BiC2 project, detailing its aims, objectives, and the broader goals of the evaluation. It also presented early findings based on client monitoring data and interviews with clients and stakeholders. This second interim report builds on those findings, offering a detailed analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with BiC2 clients between 2023 and 2024.

The insights gathered from these interviews have been used to construct a Theory of Change, illustrating how BiC2 interventions are expected to lead to positive outcomes for survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation. The Theory of Change model serves as a valuable framework for understanding how specific project activities contribute to long-term recovery, empowerment, and overall wellbeing.

By examining the experiences and feedback of clients, this report aims to identify key factors that enhance or obstruct their engagement with the programme. It will also explore the broader impact of the BiC2 project on the local community, focusing not only on individual client recovery but also on improvements in awareness, support systems, and local responses to modern slavery and exploitation. Through these findings, the report seeks to offer meaningful insights that can inform the development of future practices, policies, and interventions in this crucial area of work. Additionally, the report provides a set of recommendations aimed at improving policies and support structures for survivors, ensuring their long-term stability and protection.

2. What is Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation?

In its 2022 report, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) defines modern slavery as encompassing both forced labour and forced marriage. These situations are characterised by the exploitation of individuals who cannot refuse or leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power, depriving individuals of their autonomy and perpetuating cycles of abuse. Craig et. al. (2019) argues that contemporary slavery is part of a broader continuum of labour exploitation driven by power imbalances, economic vulnerability, and social marginalisation. The ILO (2022) emphasises that modern slavery is a severe violation of human rights, affecting individuals across all regions and economic sectors. It is rooted in factors such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of social protection. As modern slavery and labour exploitation become pressing global concerns, they have garnered increasing attention from policymakers, academia, and wider society.

2.1. Global Scale of Modern Slavery

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022) estimates that in 2021, 50 million people were subjected to modern slavery, including 28 million in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriage. Forced labour affected 27.6 million people globally, with the highest numbers recorded in the Asia-Pacific region (15.1 million), followed by Europe and Central Asia (4.1 million), Sub-Saharan Africa (3.8 million), the Americas (3.6 million), and the Arab States (0.9 million). The scale of modern slavery has worsened in recent years. In 2021, the number of people experiencing modern slavery had increased by 10 million compared to 2016, reflecting the impact of economic instability, conflict, climate disasters, and weak labour protections (ILO, 2022). The 2024 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons highlights a 25% increase in detected trafficking victims since 2019. Western and Southern Europe saw a particularly sharp rise, with a 45% increase in detected cases. However, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the most common region of origin for victims, accounting for 26% of all cases.

Exploitation occurs across multiple sectors, including agriculture, construction, domestic work, manufacturing, and hospitality, although patterns of forced labour vary across regions (ILO, 2022; Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). In the Asia-Pacific, many individuals are entrapped through debt bondage, deceptive recruitment, and coercion. In Sub-Saharan Africa, exploitation is widespread in agriculture, mining, and informal sectors, often driven by poverty, conflict, and weak labour protections. Europe and Central Asia see significant risks for migrant workers, who face withheld wages, debt bondage, and threats of deportation, with many trafficked into Western Europe for forced labour, sexual exploitation, or forced criminality. In the Americas, migrant and undocumented individuals are particularly vulnerable in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and hospitality. In the Arab States, restrictive labour systems such as kafala heighten the risk of forced labour, particularly in construction and domestic work. Even in high-income countries such as the UK, the USA, and parts of Europe, migrant workers remain at risk of severe exploitation, exacerbated by restrictive immigration policies and employer-controlled visa conditions that increase dependency and vulnerability.

According to the UNODC (2024), adults account for 62% of detected trafficking victims, while children make up 38%. In terms of gender, women and girls represent 61% of victims, with

women comprising 39% and girls 22%, while men and boys account for 39%, with men comprising 23% and boys 16%. The forms of exploitation that individuals experience often align with gendered vulnerabilities (UNODC, 2024; ILO, 2022; Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). Women and girls are disproportionately subjected to sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced marriage, frequently under coercive conditions involving physical and psychological abuse. Many are trafficked under false pretences of employment, only to be forced into exploitative conditions in brothels, private households, or informal work settings with little oversight. Meanwhile, men and boys are more commonly exploited in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and forced criminality, including coerced drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime. However, gendered assumptions often lead to lower identification of male victims, particularly in cases of forced sexual exploitation, and boys who are trafficked may face significant barriers in accessing protection and support.

The UNODC (2024) stresses that traffickers are increasingly exploiting global crises, taking advantage of displacement, economic desperation, and weak enforcement mechanisms to entrap individuals in forced labour, sexual exploitation, and forced criminality. The growing complexity of trafficking networks, including the use of digital platforms for recruitment and control, has expanded the reach of modern slavery, making it increasingly difficult to both detect and disrupt.

2.1.1. Economic and Structural Drivers of Modern Slavery

The economic drivers of modern slavery are multifaceted, shaped by globalisation, the demand for cheap labour, and the prevalence of informal labour markets. The expansion of global supply chains and the increasing reliance on low-cost, flexible labour have created conditions conducive to exploitation (LeBaron et al., 2018). Industries minimise costs by relying on informal and unregulated labour markets, where the absence of legal protections increases the risk of exploitation, particularly in sectors with extensive subcontracting and outsourcing (LeBaron et al., 2018; ILO, 2022). In developing countries, weak labour laws and the prevalence of informal employment increase these risks, as gaps in regulation enable exploiters to operate with limited oversight and accountability (ILO, 2022). The informal economy, characterised by the absence of formal contracts, social protections, and oversight, is especially prone to forced labour (ILO, 2022). Large industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and mining frequently rely on migrant labour, which is particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to precarious legal status, lack of protections, and dependence on employers (ILO, 2022).

Economic hardship is a significant driver of modern slavery, as limited financial resources often leave individuals with little choice but to accept exploitative working conditions. Poverty, restricted access to education, and a lack of stable employment opportunities contribute to heightened vulnerability to coercion and deceptive recruitment (LeBaron et al., 2018). Migrant workers experiencing economic insecurity are particularly at risk, as their dependency on income for survival, coupled with irregular immigration status, makes them more susceptible to exploitative practices (ILO, 2022). Financial precarity often means they have limited access to support systems, and additional barriers such as language difficulties, social isolation, and concerns about deportation further restrict their ability to seek help or challenge abusive conditions (ILO, 2022). Restrictive immigration policies in high-income countries contribute to economic dependency on exploitative labour, as employer-tied visa schemes limit individuals' ability to leave abusive conditions, leaving them with few financial

alternatives (ILO, 2022; UNODC, 2024). This structural dependency increases vulnerability to coercion and labour exploitation, particularly for migrant workers in low-wage sectors who lack access to legal protections and social support (IOM, 2019).

Women and children are disproportionately affected by modern slavery, particularly in sectors such as sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced child labour (ILO, 2022; UNODC, 2024). Women and girls, especially in conflict zones and displacement settings, are frequently trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced labour in domestic and agricultural sectors, with 61% of detected trafficking victims being female and 90% of those trafficked for sexual exploitation being women and girls (UNODC, 2024). Moreover, children are particularly vulnerable due to weak legal protections, making them prime targets for forced labour in industries such as agriculture, mining, and illicit economies, with an estimated 3.3 million children in forced labour globally, over half of whom are exploited in commercial sexual activities (ILO, 2022). In many regions, families experiencing extreme poverty may be coerced into sending children into hazardous work under the false promise of education or better opportunities (ILO, 2022).

Conflict and forced displacement increase the risk of modern slavery, as individuals fleeing war, persecution, and violence often face legal and economic insecurity. The UNODC (2024) identifies conflict-affected regions as areas where human trafficking, forced labour, and sexual exploitation are more prevalent, particularly among women and children. Displaced populations may be coerced or deceived into exploitative labour, domestic servitude, or, in some cases, recruitment by armed groups (ILO, 2022). Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are especially vulnerable, as limited access to legal employment and social protections can leave them dependent on precarious work arrangements (ILO, 2022). The UNHCR Global Trends 2023 report notes that by the end of 2023, over 117.3 million individuals had been forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, and human rights violations, with many facing economic hardship that heightens their susceptibility to exploitation (UNHCR, 2024). In some cases, displacement camps become sites where traffickers target individuals with misleading job offers that lead to exploitative working conditions (UNODC, 2024). The lack of legal documentation among displaced populations further limits access to formal employment and can create barriers to reporting abuse (IOM, 2023). Addressing these risks requires stronger legal protections and targeted support for displaced individuals.

2.1.2. Global Legislative Frameworks

Governments worldwide have implemented various legislative frameworks to tackle modern slavery and labour exploitation. Examples include the *UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015*, the *U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) 2000*, and similar laws across the EU, all of which aim to address human trafficking, forced labour, and exploitation (Collins, 2017). These laws typically focus on victim protection, prevention, and the prosecution of offenders. However, the implementation and enforcement of these laws have been criticised, highlighting issues such as gaps in victim support, insufficient resources for enforcement agencies, and inconsistent application (Broad & Turnbull, 2019). International frameworks like the *ILO's Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) 1930* and the *United Nations (UN) 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* are also critical in guiding global initiatives. Although challenges in compliance, monitoring, and enforcement persist, particularly in countries with inadequate legal and institutional structures (UNODC, 2024).

Corporate responsibility in addressing modern slavery has gained significant attention in academic research, particularly regarding the role of businesses in either perpetuating or alleviating labour exploitation within global supply chains (LeBaron et al., 2018; De Felice, 2015). Regulations such as the *UK Modern Slavery Act 2015* and the *California Transparency in Supply Chains Act 2010* require companies to disclose their efforts to combat slavery within their operations and supply chains. Despite these requirements, research by LeBaron et al. (2018) shows that many companies fail to implement meaningful changes, often providing reports that lack substantive actions. It is argued that stronger regulatory mechanisms and enhanced corporate accountability are essential to ensure that businesses eliminate exploitation from their supply chains (De Felice, 2015).

2.2. Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation in the UK

Modern slavery and labour exploitation persist as critical challenges in the United Kingdom, despite the establishment of comprehensive legal and policy frameworks aimed at their eradication. The UK Home Office (2021a) reports that labour exploitation remains prevalent in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and hospitality, underscoring the enduring nature of these issues. Furthermore, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (2022) highlights the necessity of effective enforcement mechanisms and a victim-centred approach to ensure substantive progress in addressing modern slavery. While legislative measures have contributed to increased awareness and policy development, enforcement challenges and gaps in victim protection continue to hinder efforts to combat exploitation. Addressing these entrenched issues requires a sustained, multi-sectoral response involving governmental, regulatory and institutional bodies and agencies, corporations and businesses, third sector organisations, and wider society.

2.2.1. Scale of Modern Slavery in the UK

Despite the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015, modern slavery remains a persistent and evolving issue in the United Kingdom. Official data from the Home Office and the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) indicate that thousands of suspected cases are identified annually. The NRM, the UK's framework for identifying and supporting potential victims, recorded 17,004 referrals in 2023, the highest annual figure since its establishment in 2009, representing a marginal increase from 16,921 referrals in 2022 (UK Home Office, 2024a; Hope for Justice, 2024).

Separately, the National Crime Agency (NCA) reported 8,377 referrals in 2023 for cases of exploitation occurring exclusively within the UK, reflecting a 4.6% rise compared to previous years. However, the NCA statistics differ from NRM figures in both scope and methodology. While the NRM records all referrals made to the system, including cases of exploitation that may have occurred overseas, the NCA's data focuses solely on incidents taking place within the UK. Additionally, the NCA figures are based primarily on law enforcement investigations and intelligence reports, whereas NRM referrals are often initiated by first responders, including local authorities, charities, and law enforcement agencies, and rely on self-reported experiences from potential victims. This difference in data collection methods contributes to the variation between the two figures, with the NCA's statistics capturing only a subset of the cases recorded in the NRM.

Despite these official statistics, independent estimates suggest that the true scale of modern slavery in the UK is substantially higher. The 2023 Global Slavery Index, which incorporates survivor surveys, multiple system estimation, and statistical modelling, estimated that approximately 122,000 individuals were living in conditions of modern slavery in the UK, equating to a prevalence rate of 1.8 per 1,000 population (Walk Free Foundation, 2023). This figure is significantly higher than the combined cases identified through the NRM and NCA, reflecting fundamental differences in methodology and scope.

A key reason for this discrepancy is that official statistics only capture detected cases, those identified through law enforcement, frontline services, or self-reporting, whereas the Global Slavery Index attempts to estimate the total number of people experiencing modern slavery, including those who remain undetected. Many victims do not come into contact with authorities due to the hidden nature of exploitation, fear of repercussions, or lack of awareness of available support. Additionally, certain forms of exploitation, such as forced labour in private homes or informal sectors, are less likely to be reported and are therefore underrepresented in official data. The Global Slavery Index also incorporates broader indicators, such as risk factors linked to migration policies, economic conditions, and systemic vulnerabilities, which contribute to a higher estimate.

The disparity between the NRM's 17,004 referrals, the NCA's 8,377 UK-based cases, and the Global Slavery Index's estimate of 122,000 individuals underscores the challenges in measuring modern slavery. Exploitation frequently occurs in informal and unregulated sectors where oversight is limited, and barriers to reporting, including fear of retaliation, lack of awareness of legal rights, and mistrust of authorities, further hinder identification and support efforts (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). As a result, while official figures provide insight into detected cases, they likely represent only a fraction of the true prevalence of modern slavery in the UK.

2.2.2. Economic and Structural Drivers of Modern Slavery in the UK

Modern slavery in the United Kingdom is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, legal, and structural factors that create conditions for exploitation. The Centre for Social Justice (2020) highlights the growing complexity of modern slavery in the UK, driven by shifts in labour markets, rising economic inequality, and the broader effects of globalisation. Global economic integration and neoliberal policies have reinforced the demand for low-cost, flexible labour, particularly in high-risk sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, and domestic work (Scott, 2018; LeBaron, 2021). These industries frequently rely on subcontracting and outsourcing arrangements that obscure accountability, increasing the likelihood of exploitative practices, including forced labour (Shamir, 2012; LeBaron et al., 2018). The widespread use of informal and precarious employment further heightens vulnerability to coercion and abuse, particularly for those in temporary, seasonal, and insecure work (Strauss, 2013).

Migrant workers are particularly at risk due to restrictive immigration policies that limit access to formal employment and social protections (Lewis et al., 2015b; Dwyer et al., 2011). The UK's agricultural sector has faced increasing labour shortages, exacerbated by post-Brexit immigration restrictions, which ended free movement from the EU and reduced the availability of seasonal workers. In response, the sector has become more dependent on temporary visa schemes, which provide limited protections and heighten the risk of

exploitation. Many of these workers experience poor wages, substandard living conditions, and deceptive recruitment practices, as their restricted legal status limits their ability to seek redress or change employment. Intermediaries involved in recruitment processes further entrench these exploitative conditions by misrepresenting job opportunities, imposing excessive fees, and manipulating vulnerable individuals, leaving them financially trapped and unable to leave abusive situations (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority [GLAA], 2022; 2024; Forde et al., 2021; Cockbain et al., 2022).

Weak enforcement of labour regulations, combined with resource constraints and inconsistent application of labour laws, enables exploitative practices to persist largely unpunished (LeBaron, 2021). Regulatory bodies often lack the capacity to effectively monitor labour conditions, allowing many cases of forced labour to go undetected. Gaps in oversight create an environment in which exploiters can operate with relative impunity. Addressing these structural drivers of modern slavery requires a multifaceted approach, including stronger regulatory enforcement, enhanced supply chain transparency, and expanded legal protections for at-risk workers (Crane et al., 2017; Cockbain et al., 2022). Greater collaboration between government agencies, civil society organisations, and international bodies is also essential to closing enforcement gaps and providing more effective support for individuals subjected to forced labour.

2.2.3. Legislative Frameworks in the UK

In the UK, modern slavery and labour exploitation are primarily addressed through a combination of legislative frameworks, with the *Modern Slavery Act 2015* serving as the central legal instrument. The Act consolidates offences related to slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, and human trafficking, enabling the prosecution of offenders and establishing protections for victims, including support for individuals who have been trafficked or exploited. Additionally, it requires businesses to report on steps taken to eradicate slavery from their supply chains, aiming to increase corporate accountability for labour practices.

Alongside the *Modern Slavery Act*, the *Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015* specifically addresses trafficking and exploitation in Scotland, providing tailored legal measures and victim support. Other legislation, such as the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*, plays a role in offering assistance to trafficking victims, particularly those with precarious immigration status, while the *Equality Act 2010* provides protections against discrimination and harassment, which can be particularly relevant in the context of labour exploitation.

In response to ongoing concerns regarding enforcement, the *Labour Market Enforcement Strategy 2024 to 2025* builds on previous efforts to combat labour exploitation and improve working conditions (UK Home Office, 2024b). The strategy emphasises better data collection, targeted enforcement actions, enhanced coordination between regulatory bodies, and improved support for both businesses and individuals vulnerable to exploitation. It includes specific recommendations for key enforcement agencies, including the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), which works to prevent forced labour and ensure compliance with labour standards, the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate, and HMRC's National Minimum Wage team.

While these legislative measures collectively provide a framework for addressing modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK, challenges remain in ensuring their effective enforcement, particularly in detecting and addressing cases of exploitation that occur within informal and unregulated labour sectors.

2.2.3.1. Critiques of the Modern Slavery Act 2015

The UK's *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, while an important legislative step in combating modern slavery and human trafficking, has faced several critiques regarding its effectiveness in practice. The Walk Free Foundation's *Global Slavery Index (2023)* highlights various issues that have hindered the Act's success, particularly the inadequacy of victim support services. Despite the introduction of the Act, many victims continue to face barriers in accessing timely and adequate support, including safe housing, healthcare, and legal services. Additionally, the report points out the weak enforcement of supply chain transparency, particularly the lack of penalties for businesses that fail to comply with the Act's reporting requirements under *Section 54*. Walk Free (2023) also emphasises the challenges in data collection, which make it difficult to assess the true scale of modern slavery in the UK or to measure the effectiveness of current anti-slavery measures. The Walk Free Foundation calls for improved coordination between law enforcement agencies, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and more resources to ensure that victim services are comprehensive and accessible.

Similarly, the *Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (2019)*, commissioned by the UK government to evaluate the effectiveness of the Act and identify areas for improvement, provides a comprehensive evaluation of the Act's shortcomings, particularly focusing on the gaps in victim support and corporate accountability. One of the main critiques from the review is that, while the Act has provisions for identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery, these are often underfunded and inconsistently implemented. The review recommended strengthening victim identification processes and ensuring that support services are better integrated and more accessible to those in need. Another major concern is the enforcement of corporate transparency, with the review noting that businesses' slavery and trafficking statements often lack substance and are not adequately scrutinised. The review called for the introduction of penalties for non-compliance with the business reporting requirements and urged the government to focus more on prevention, tackling the root causes of modern slavery, such as poverty, discrimination, and the vulnerabilities that lead individuals to exploitation. It also recommended the establishment of an independent body to monitor and assess the Act's implementation and effectiveness.

In response to these concerns, the UK Government's response to the House of Lords, in the *Modern Slavery Act 2015 Committee Report (2020)*, acknowledged the need for improvements in victim support and pledged to strengthen the measures for corporate transparency under *Section 54*. While the government agreed that victims require better support and that businesses need to be more transparent, it stopped short of agreeing to introduce penalties for businesses that fail to comply with the reporting requirements. The Government also committed to enhancing law enforcement efforts and improving training for officials involved in modern slavery investigations. Despite recognising the gaps in the current framework, the Government's response suggested that further legislative measures or penalties may not be the immediate solution, advocating instead for a more strategic and multifaceted approach to combating modern slavery (UK Government, 2020).

2.2.3.2. UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a key component of the UK's strategy for identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. It facilitates referrals from a wide range of frontline professionals, including police officers, social workers, and healthcare providers, ensuring that potential victims receive a formal assessment. Through this process, individuals can access essential support, such as legal aid, accommodation, and psychological services. Additionally, the NRM plays a crucial role in gathering data to inform national policy on modern slavery (Home Office, 2020).

A 2023 Home Office report highlights a significant increase in NRM referrals, with 17,004 individuals identified as potential victims. The report notes improvements in victim identification, particularly among women and children, and an upward trend in conclusive grounds decisions, suggesting greater recognition of modern slavery cases. However, despite these advancements, persistent delays in processing referrals remain a critical challenge, leaving victims vulnerable for extended periods before they can access necessary support. These findings underscore the need for improvements in efficiency and resource allocation to ensure timely interventions (Home Office, 2023).

While the NRM has contributed to enhanced victim identification, it has also faced considerable criticism. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2023) raises concerns regarding delays and inconsistencies in decision-making, particularly affecting foreign nationals and those referred by the Home Office. These inconsistencies heighten the risk of re-trafficking for individuals left in prolonged uncertainty. The IOM calls for more efficient and equitable decision-making processes to ensure that victims receive appropriate protection and support.

Concerns have also been raised about the NRM's effectiveness for child victims. End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) UK (2020) highlights systemic delays and a lack of coordination between relevant authorities, leaving vulnerable children without timely support and increasing their risk of further exploitation. Similarly, Kalayaan (2024), a UK-based charity supporting migrant domestic workers, reports that delays in the NRM process have placed significant strain on frontline support services, limiting victims' access to essential assistance. Both ECPAT and Kalayaan advocate for improvements in the efficiency of the NRM, an expansion of First Responder Organisations (FROs), which include law enforcement, social services, healthcare professionals, and NGOs; and increased funding and training to enhance the system's overall effectiveness in protecting victims. Expanding the network of FROs would strengthen early victim identification, ensure frontline professionals are adequately trained, and improve access to support services within the NRM (UK Home Office, 2021b).

2.3. Conclusion

Modern slavery and labour exploitation persist as significant global and domestic issues, affecting millions of individuals across various sectors and regions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that in 2021, 50 million people were subject to conditions of forced labour or coercion, with structural factors such as economic insecurity, weak labour protections, displacement, and restrictive immigration policies contributing to their vulnerability. The complexity of global supply chains, the prevalence of informal economies,

and the increasing use of digital platforms in recruitment and control present ongoing challenges in identifying and addressing these forms of exploitation.

While legal frameworks such as the UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015 and international conventions provide mechanisms for addressing modern slavery, gaps in enforcement and implementation remain. Corporate accountability measures have been introduced in some jurisdictions, but research suggests that many companies fail to implement substantive changes to mitigate exploitation within supply chains. Additionally, structural barriers often limit access to justice and protection for those affected.

A more effective response requires strengthened enforcement, enhanced protections for individuals at risk, and improved mechanisms for corporate accountability. Further research and policy development should focus on addressing the underlying economic and structural drivers of modern slavery and labour exploitation, ensuring that legal and institutional responses are comprehensive and adaptable to evolving challenges.

3. Methods

The overall methodology for the BiC2 evaluation is detailed in the first interim [report](#). This report specifically examines the qualitative component of the evaluation, which explores BiC2 clients' views, perceptions, and experiences. The focus is on gathering detailed, in-depth narratives that provide a richer understanding of the BiC2 project and its impact.

The overarching aims and objectives of the BiC2 evaluation are outlined in the first interim [report](#). This report focuses specifically on the qualitative component of the evaluation, which centres on semi-structured interviews with BiC2 clients.

3.1. Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this qualitative arm of the evaluation is to explore the experiences of victims and survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation. This includes examining the nature of the exploitation they endured and evaluating the support they received as BiC2 clients. To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been identified:

- I. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the types and contexts of exploitation experienced by BiC2 clients.
- II. Assess the accessibility, relevance, and effectiveness of the support provided through BiC2.
- III. Explore the challenges faced by survivors in accessing and benefiting from the support services.
- IV. Examine the impact of BiC2 support on the recovery, reintegration, and overall well-being of survivors.
- V. Identify the mechanisms and pathways through which BiC2 support facilitates positive change for survivors, resulting in the development of a robust theory of change.
- VI. Provide evidence-based insights to refine and improve support mechanisms for survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation.

3.2. Sampling and Recruitment

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to recruit BiC2 clients for semi-structured interviews, focusing on individuals whose experiences are central to the BiC2 project. This approach is commonly used in exploratory research, as it allows for subjective judgment in selecting participants who can provide in-depth insights into the studied subject. Participants were chosen from the BiC2 client base to ensure a diverse representation of

views, considering factors such as gender, age, nationality, and length of time receiving support from the project. All participants were over the age of 18.

3.3. Data Collection Methods and Measures

The qualitative methods used in this evaluation included semi-structured interviews with BiC2 clients, conducted by the evaluation team. Semi-structured interviews were preferred because they provided a clear framework while allowing for flexible, open-ended discussion. These interviews aimed to gather detailed, in-depth accounts of clients' experiences with modern slavery and/or labour exploitation, the support they received from the BiC2 project, their plans for the future, and their recommendations for improving support for victims and survivors.

3.3.1. Interview Process

Interviews with clients were conducted by a qualified and trained member of the evaluation team. All interviews took place in a private room at ICOS premises. Independent interpreters were provided for clients who required interpretation services. Participants were asked questions based about their experiences of modern slavery and labour exploitation and the support received from the BiC2 intervention. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour.

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews with BiC2 clients were analysed using a thematic analysis framework to develop a detailed narrative of client views, perceptions, and satisfaction with the BiC2 project.

The first stage of analysis involved listening to the recordings in their entirety and transcribing the interviews verbatim. During this stage, the transcripts were anonymised by removing client and stakeholder names and any other identifying information to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The interview transcripts served as the main units of analysis.

The next stage involved an in-depth, line-by-line reading of the transcripts, during which sections of text were coded to assign meaning. A master list of codes was then created, and these codes were refined into preliminary themes using a constant comparative method. The preliminary themes were further refined into master themes and subthemes through additional comparative analyses.

4. Findings from Interviews with BiC2 Clients

The findings of this report provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of individuals affected by modern slavery and labour exploitation. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with participants engaged in the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) programme, the findings explore key themes that illuminate the systemic challenges, mechanisms of entrapment, and pathways to support. This section presents qualitative insights into the lived realities of individuals navigating these exploitative conditions, highlighting financial manipulation, coercion, legal exclusion, and barriers to accessing justice and support services. By examining these themes, the report aims to inform policy recommendations and enhance support structures that promote long-term stability and independence for survivors.

4.1. Participant Demographics

A total of N=17 BiC2 clients took part in semi-structured interviews between May 2024 and December 2025. All participants were adults, over the age of 18. Nine participants reported their gender as female and eight participants reported their gender as male. The majority participating clients (70%) reported their nationality as Central or Eastern European, including participants from Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Slovakia. Smaller proportions of participants reported their nationality as North African, Middle Eastern and South East Asian.

4.2. Part 1: Mechanisms of Entrapment and Exploitation

This section examines the mechanisms that underpin entrapment in modern slavery and labour exploitation. Through deceptive recruitment, financial coercion, legal exclusion, violence, and psychological manipulation, individuals find themselves trapped in exploitative conditions with limited means of escape. The findings reveal how exploiters systematically leverage vulnerabilities such as economic insecurity, immigration status, and misinformation to maintain control over individuals. Additionally, institutional barriers and inadequate protections further reinforce these exploitative conditions. By exploring these mechanisms in depth, this section aims to provide a clearer understanding of how individuals become entrapped and the systemic challenges they face in seeking support and justice.

4.2.1. Deceptive Recruitment and Entrapment in Exploitative Systems

Deceptive recruitment plays a significant role in drawing individuals into situations of modern slavery. Exploiters frequently misrepresent the terms of employment, offering assurances of stable work, secure accommodation, and fair wages, which later prove to be misleading. One participant shared their experience with deceptive recruitment:

“I was looking for a better life. I was looking for safety. And when I went there, I discovered that this is not the way things are. Yes, they promised us, ‘You’re gonna have a better life,’ but we find out it’s not like what they say” (Male, P13).

This statement reflects how deceptive narratives influence individuals to pursue opportunities they believe will improve their circumstances, only to encounter difficult realities. The promises of a better life were a central element of the recruitment process. The participant’s words highlight how exploiters capitalise on individuals’ hopes for a safer, more stable life, yet ultimately deceive them, leaving them disillusioned and trapped in exploitative circumstances.

Further examples illustrate how deceptive recruitment goes beyond promises of stable work and fair pay, also manipulating the perception of what constitutes "legitimate" employment. One participant, who thought he had secured a legitimate position at a UK car wash, explained: "The man told me that it's a legal job and everything is fine" (P1, Male). However, his belief in the legitimacy of his employment was challenged when, after falling ill, he was denied statutory sick pay. He noted, "And I was refused pay. I had a sick note, but then I was refused a payment" (P1, Male). This experience highlights how exploiters use the appearance of legitimate work to draw individuals in, only to later deny them their rights and protections.

In another instance, a participant and her husband, having spent their savings upon arrival in the UK, were referred to an intermediary who promised well-paying driving jobs. She recalled, "He said that the working conditions were very good, that the pay was very good, that we would be very happy" (P2 Female). However, they soon discovered that they were being exploited: "However, it transpired that we were actually working without a contract of employment" (P2 Female). The exploitative conditions persisted when the employer claimed to have no money, despite the couple's repeated requests for payment:

"The excuses of the employer were always that he had no money. We were asking him, just as a normal human being, for some payment, as we had no money to buy food. However, he would insult us and say there's no money" (P2 Female).

This account demonstrates how exploiters capitalise on individuals' financial desolation, promising favourable working conditions but failing to meet their commitments, which further contributes to their exploitation. The employer's refusal to pay, combined with the repeated excuses, reveals how exploiters create a sense of helplessness, further entrenching the individuals in exploitative situations.

Exploitative situations often appear legitimate at first, making it difficult for individuals to recognise the risks. Initial interactions may seem professional, reinforcing the perception of formal employment. However, discrepancies in pay, employment status, or legal protections can emerge over time. One participant described working at a UK car wash:

"I ended up at the car wash where my partner worked as well. First, everything looked fine. The manager really had professional manners. He took all my personal details, so everything seemed like it's legal, at least. But then I presented a sick note at work, and I haven't been paid, and then I thought something was wrong. So, I made a call to revenue, and I found out that I was employed only for two weeks. And he presented me with pay slips, but the insurance number was not right" (P5, Female).

This account highlights how exploiters use formal procedures to present their operations as legitimate, making it harder for individuals to identify or challenge their exploitation. The participant's discovery of incorrect employment records and unpaid sick pay demonstrates how individuals may only recognise the extent of their situation once clear discrepancies emerge.

For individuals subjected to labour exploitation, initial assurances of fair treatment may serve to obscure exploitative practices. Promises of formal employment and lawful remuneration can be used to maintain compliance, with exploitative conditions only becoming evident over time. Another participant described working in the UK delivering food:

“I worked for a company delivering donor kebabs. They told me they would prepare a contract of employment, as I wanted to pay my National Insurance contributions. But they didn’t. They would pay me cash in hand between £50 to £100 per week” (P7, Male).

This account illustrates the barriers individuals encounter when seeking to challenge exploitative conditions. The employer’s failure to provide a formal contract and the reliance on cash-in-hand payments reflect deliberate attempts to evade legal obligations.

These accounts demonstrate a recurring pattern of deception and labour exploitation. Misrepresentations about job conditions during recruitment contributed to the perception of legitimate employment, only for individuals to experience exploitative conditions upon commencing work. Various constraints limited their ability to challenge or leave these situations. The participants’ experiences illustrate the structural vulnerabilities that contribute to exploitation and the mechanisms used to sustain it. These narratives highlight how misleading recruitment practices and restrictive conditions can undermine individuals’ autonomy and access to redress.

2.3.1. Economic Exploitation and Financial Manipulation

Economic dependency was a key factor in the exploitation experienced by participants, with exploiters employing various financial mechanisms to maintain control. Wage manipulation, delayed payments, and the withholding of earnings created conditions in which individuals had little choice but to continue working under exploitative circumstances to meet basic survival needs such as food and accommodation. The following testimonies illustrate how financial control is used to enforce economic insecurity and restrict access to alternatives.

Upon arriving in the UK through trafficking methods, one participant found themselves in an unstable and exploitative work situation, where employment was neither formal nor secure, and payment was inconsistent. Despite receiving little to no wages, they had no viable alternatives and felt compelled to continue working:

“Sometimes they wouldn’t pay, but I had to work, just to earn some money. Sometimes they would pay just a little, sometimes they wouldn’t pay at all. It was not enough money to pay for everything I needed. As I already said, this was only one option for me at” (P3, Male).

This account illustrates how exploiters create economic dependency by controlling wages and limiting individuals’ ability to challenge their circumstances. The withholding or reduction of wages prevents individuals from leaving exploitative conditions, reinforcing their financial vulnerability.

Another participant described how their employer deferred payment, using promises of future remuneration as a means of control. Initially, they were told they would work for a short period, but as time passed, the employer repeatedly postponed payment, further entrenching their dependency:

“We start working for them. He said you’re gonna work for three days in the factory and later on we stayed for three months. When we ask that he should pay for us to stay, he said you have to continue on for seven months, and after that, I will pay. He didn’t pay. This is how it works” (P14, Male).

This testimony demonstrates how exploiters manipulate financial expectations, delaying payment to ensure continued labour while preventing individuals from seeking alternative employment. By shifting the timeframe for payment, they maintain control over workers, keeping them in a cycle of exploitation.

Financial manipulation was also evident in cases where exploiters avoided payment using repeated excuses. One participant described how their employer consistently claimed an inability to pay wages: “Well, the excuses of the employer were always that he had no money. He would say the same words to all of us, the employees up there. Twenty of us, there were people asking for payments, just as we did” (P2, Female). The employer’s repeated justification for non-payment affected multiple workers, making it difficult for individuals to challenge their situation

Another participant reported exploitative conditions that extended beyond withheld wages to include excessive working hours without adequate rest or food. They described being subjected to inhumane conditions while their exploiter concealed financial records and evaded legal responsibilities:

“Well, basically they were abusing people. They’re hiding taxes. They didn’t make any bank transfer payments into my account. They would only lie. There have been situations where I would be on the road driving the van for 20 hours, hungry, thirsty, and they wouldn’t even pay a penny” (P7, Male).

This testimony highlights the intersection of financial and physical exploitation, where the withholding of wages is compounded by the denial of basic needs. The exploiter’s financial opacity and avoidance of legal obligations further hinder the individual’s ability to seek redress.

Wage manipulation also took the form of employers arbitrarily reducing payments and disregarding prior agreements. One participant recounted how their employer paid them less than initially agreed and dismissed any objections: “The boss would pay me less than he said before I did the job. And the answer would be if I queried that just go somewhere else to find a job” (P11, Male). This response demonstrates how exploiters leverage financial insecurity to maintain control. Knowing that the worker lacked alternative employment opportunities, the employer used dismissal as a means to silence complaints and perpetuate exploitation.

Furthermore, gender-based wage disparities further compounded economic exploitation. One female participant described being paid less than her male counterparts despite performing the same work: “Men would have £60 per day even if they couldn’t even do their job properly, but my daily rate was £50. That because so that was men were in favour. I was a woman that was on the lower rate” (P5, Female). This account underscores systemic gender inequalities within exploitative environments, where women face additional financial marginalisation. Lower pay rates further limit women’s ability to leave exploitative situations, reinforcing economic dependency.

Another participant described working in a care home under exploitative conditions, enduring long shifts without pay and being pressured to continue working elsewhere: “At that point I was working like a slave in a care home. I would just go to work straight shifts for four nights, 12 hours then I’ll come back and he is not paying me. Then he will say you should be on the

train to another place” (P9, Male). This testimony highlights the severe working conditions, where excessive hours and withheld wages left individuals financially vulnerable. The expectation to relocate for further unpaid work reflects the lack of stability and control experienced in such situations.

These testimonies reveal the financial mechanisms through which exploitation is maintained. Wage manipulation, delayed payments, and the absence of formal employment protections create a system in which individuals are economically dependent on exploiters. Gender disparities and the systematic evasion of legal accountability further entrench these conditions. The resulting financial insecurity prevents individuals from challenging their circumstances, reinforcing their vulnerability to continued exploitation.

2.3.2. Violence, Intimidation, and Coercion in Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation

Exploiters systematically employed coercion, intimidation, and violence to exert control and prevent individuals from resisting or escaping modern slavery and labour exploitation. Participants described threats, physical assaults, degrading treatment, and severe restrictions on movement and communication. These interwoven methods reinforced a pervasive climate of fear and subjugation, ensuring that individuals remained trapped in exploitative conditions with little to no possibility of asserting their rights or seeking help. The following testimonies illustrate the range of tactics used to entrench control and the severe consequences for those subjected to them.

One participant, who was trafficked through North Africa, recounted the harsh conditions in which they were confined and forced to work. They described being held alongside other men and women in an overcrowded storage facility on a farm, with no separation or privacy. Basic needs were barely met, as they were given minimal food and had to drink directly from a tap. Meanwhile, they were subjected to forced labour, insults, and physical violence, with any sign of resistance met with further brutality. As they explained:

“Those people, they kept us in a place. The whole place is like a farm, a big farm, and they have a big storage inside that farm. That’s where they kept us inside. We were all kept in one place, female and male... men, women and all, everyone there. They kept us one place, without any divide separating the ladies and us as a male. We lived all together in the same place. We drank the water from the tap directly, and they would come and give us only one piece of dry bread. We worked inside this farm, doing cleaning and doing tidying and doing farming. During this time, they would insult us. They assaulted us and that was really bad. There was no respect for age, for nothing. And you cannot say no. If you raise your voice or do anything, they will slap you. They will smack you. They usually use a black hose to smack people if they start to talk or rumbling or making a sound because they are scared from the Government and they’re scared to be discovered, so they will just use this hose to smack people” (P13, Male).

This testimony underscores the extreme deprivation, violence, and control imposed by exploiters. The use of physical punishment, intimidation, and forced labour demonstrates the systematic methods used to suppress resistance and maintain authority over those in captivity.

Another participant, who was trafficked and forced into labour, described the harsh conditions in which they lived and worked. They were housed in the same location where they laboured, with minimal provisions for food and water. Meals were inconsistent, often consisting of dry or poor-quality food, and even drinking water was unsuitable. The presence of a gatekeeper or security guard restricted movement. As they explained:

“Sometimes they would provide food, but the food, the type of food, is likely dry. Sometimes there would be fresh bread... sometimes, but not always, and the water was salty. We were in the same place that we were working in. You have to sleep there and there is a gatekeeper, a security guard” (P14, Male).

This testimony highlights the exploiters’ control over both movement and basic necessities, reinforcing dependency and limiting any possibility of resistance. The restriction of food, water, and personal freedom demonstrates how exploitative systems use deprivation as a means of maintaining dominance over individuals.

A female participant, trafficked to a country in Eastern Europe, recounted being held in forced labour under conditions of extreme isolation and coercion. She was made to work under the pretext of repaying a debt, with promises of future opportunities used to justify her exploitation. Instead of being given legitimate work, she was confined to a basement, where her movements and communication were strictly controlled. She endured long working hours; with no pay and the constant threat of violence should she fail to comply. As she described:

“We owed a lot of money to those people, and they made us go abroad to work for them. And they said that they would bring us to Europe for us to work to pay the money back. So, in [country in Eastern Europe] they forced me to work in the basement and I was not allowed to get out, not allowed to use a telephone, not allowed to contact anybody. I had to work 12 to 15 hours a day. I had to eat there, sleep there and if I didn’t work, they would beat me up. I was kept in a basement for a long time sewing. And I didn’t get any salary or any money from that. And at the time, I was not allowed to get outside. However, because the war broke out, and people moved away from the war zone, I followed other people to get out of there” (P8, Female).

This account demonstrates the exploiters’ ability to strip individuals of their autonomy through complete deprivation of freedom, forced labour, and violence. The participant’s escape was not the result of intervention or self-determination but rather an external event, the outbreak of war, that disrupted the exploitative system. This highlights how individuals trapped in such conditions often remain dependent on unforeseen circumstances to escape, rather than being able to leave on their own terms.

Violence and intimidation were also used as direct retaliation against those who attempted to assert their rights. Exploiters relied on physical aggression, theft, and ongoing threats to deter individuals from seeking justice or exposing their actions. One participant, exploited in the UK, described the severe consequences he faced after confronting his exploiters and threatening to report them to the authorities:

“I worked for a company delivering donner kebabs. They didn’t pay my wage. And when I told them that I would go to the police to make a complaint, three individuals attacked me very brutally. They took my documents away. They took my car. I would consider that it was attempted murder, and afterwards my life changed completely. I

felt ill. I had a heart attack as a result of the worries. And I still haven't completely recovered. Basically, I'm a different person since. I've been receiving threats, meaning that those people, they still have my identity documents. Meaning my address in [country of origin]. Recently my mum told me that some people had been [looking for me]" (P7, Male).

This account demonstrates the extreme measures exploiters use to silence individuals and maintain control. The physical attack, confiscation of identity documents, and continued intimidation reveal how violence extends beyond the immediate incident, creating lasting fear and instability. The participant's ongoing distress, compounded by threats against his family, underscores the enduring consequences of attempted resistance, highlighting the significant barriers to escaping exploitation and seeking justice.

Deception and coercion were key tactics used to entrap individuals in forced labour, as exploiters manipulated expectations and leveraged threats to maintain control. One participant, who was trafficked from a region in Africa to the UK, described how false promises of education and employment were used to lure him into exploitation:

"When I came in here, I only came to pursue my career study here, but when I got here, there wasn't any training at all. There wasn't anything. It was all lies, so my money went down the drain. OK, so when I got here, I was sort of confused. He said, 'You know what? The course you've come for has been postponed. Don't worry. Everything will be all right. You can stay here; you can work for me. I will pay you.' Then they said, 'You didn't pay me before you came to this country.' I had the alert from the bank that I paid directly to him. He denied everything. He said, 'Even if you tell the police, they can't do anything.' So, I kept on working. He wasn't paying me. He said, 'You just have to work for a week.' From one week, it became two weeks, one month, three months. And at that point, I was working like a slave. At that point, I said I'm not having it anymore. So, he threatened me. He threatened me that he was going to kill me" (P9, Male).

This account demonstrates how deception and intimidation were used to maintain control over the participant. The initial promise of training created a false expectation, while the fabricated claim of unpaid fees was used to justify withholding wages. As financial dependency grew, the participant faced escalating non-payment, extending from days to months. When he attempted to challenge the situation, threats of violence were used to suppress resistance. This pattern of manipulation and coercion reflects common exploitative tactics that limit individuals' options and make escape difficult.

One participant described how attempts to secure basic rights, such as a formal contract and regular wages, were met with violent retaliation. She and her husband had been working under exploitative conditions and, after repeatedly requesting fair treatment, indicated that they were considering reporting their situation to the police. This act of resistance was met with a brutal and premeditated attack, highlighting the extreme risks individuals face when challenging their exploiters:

"We asked for a normal contract of employment and for regular payment as promised. However, when my husband mentioned that we were quite close to reporting that to the police, that is when later on, my husband and I, we were in the vehicle when three men from the company approached us. They took us out of the car, and they started kicking us. They assaulted my husband up to the point of him losing consciousness. They stole our car, our documents, our money. We were left

with nothing. The police reacted very quickly and within five minutes arrested two of the guys. They caught them there at the scene while he was driving our car, but as far as I know, our documents have not yet been found. The assault happened near the main road. There is an establishment there and I ran there. I asked the people to call the police because my husband was being assaulted. My husband underwent surgery. He had a mild heart attack, so he had three stents inserted, and I had to be around him daily to look after him. He couldn't lift heavy items or even walk to the shop and back" (P2, Female).

This testimony underscores how exploiters rely on violence and intimidation to suppress resistance and maintain control. The physical assault, theft of essential documents, and the long-term impact on the participant's husband's health illustrate the severe consequences of speaking out. Even when perpetrators are apprehended, victims are often left with lasting trauma and financial instability, further reinforcing their vulnerability.

The testimonies reveal how physical violence, psychological coercion, economic deprivation, and social isolation were systematically employed to entrench control. These methods ensured that individuals remained trapped in exploitative conditions, unable to assert their rights or seek external intervention. The severe constraints placed on their autonomy, combined with the persistent threat of violence, reinforced a state of dependency, allowing exploiters to maintain dominance while individuals remained vulnerable and without recourse.

4.3. Part 2: Immediate Support and Long-Term Stability After Breaking Free from Exploitation

This section explores the critical need for immediate support and the challenges individuals face in achieving long-term stability after breaking-free modern slavery and labour exploitation. Immediate interventions, including safe housing, legal aid, and access to healthcare, are essential in addressing urgent needs and preventing re-exploitation. However, long-term stability requires sustained support structures, such as secure employment, psychological assistance, and social reintegration. The findings highlight gaps in existing support mechanisms and the barriers survivors face when trying to rebuild their lives. This section emphasises the importance of holistic and survivor-centred approaches that prioritise autonomy and long-term well-being.

4.3.1. Immediate Support in Securing Safety and Stability

Escaping exploitation does not immediately lead to security or stability. Instead, many individuals find themselves in precarious situations, lacking access to essential resources such as food, shelter, and financial support. Without immediate assistance, these challenges can become overwhelming, increasing the risk of further hardship or even re-exploitation. Emergency support plays a crucial role in addressing these urgent needs, providing the foundation for individuals to begin rebuilding their lives. For those who have experienced labour exploitation, organisations such as ICOS and the BiC2 project have been instrumental in offering practical assistance, ensuring that individuals are not left to navigate these difficulties alone.

For many, even basic necessities such as clothing and food are difficult to obtain after escaping exploitation. One participant, who had been trafficked into labour exploitation, described how receiving material assistance helped ease their situation: "They (ICOS) also gave us clothes and give us vouchers" (P8, Female). This immediate support was crucial in bridging the gap between escape and stability, helping to alleviate immediate distress while individuals worked towards longer-term solutions.

Beyond material aid, financial assistance is often necessary to prevent individuals from falling into destitution. One woman, who had escaped both labour exploitation and an abusive relationship, highlighted how crucial financial and material aid was, particularly during the winter months:

"I would not really manage the winter without them (ICOS). I live in private rented accommodation and the landlord is not repairing the windows. So, they (ICOS) gave me help with gas and electricity, and sometimes with financially as well with money too. I would not survive the winter without them" (P12, Female).

This testimony underscores how exploitation often leaves individuals in precarious living conditions, where external assistance becomes a critical factor in their ability to survive and regain stability.

Emergency support extends beyond financial relief; for many, securing stable housing is one of the greatest challenges after leaving an exploitative situation. One participant described how the help they received made it possible for them to establish a new life:

"When I split up with my partner and I just went to the shelter because I had nowhere to live. So, they (ICOS) helped me with everything from housing, until I could stand on my own feet and provide for my family, my daughter and myself, and to be sufficient" (P5, Female).

This account highlights how immediate assistance is not only about survival but also about laying the groundwork for long-term self-sufficiency. Without such support, individuals may struggle to break free from cycles of instability and financial insecurity.

The role of advocacy in securing stable housing is also crucial. One participant shared how ICOS intervened to ensure they had access to safe accommodation:

"And they (ICOS) helped me. They will fight for me. It was four days in the hotel. That was a temporary accommodation. I stayed for four days and after that, I moved to the other temporary accommodation. They contacted the Council regarding my accommodation for me to receive a Council house" (P13, Male).

This testimony highlights how securing housing is not simply about finding a place to stay but also about ensuring individuals do not remain in prolonged insecurity, which could increase their exposure to further exploitation or destitution.

For many, the ability to turn to a trusted organisation such as ICOS provided an essential safety net, preventing them from feeling isolated in times of financial distress. One participant explained how knowing they could seek assistance made a significant difference in their ability to cope with everyday challenges:

"I would always come over if I had any problem. They (ICOS) would always try to help me to sort it out. So, anything, if I needed any help, they would always be there.

If I had problems with my gas provider or electricity gas. They would sometimes have some vouchers like shopping vouchers if my financial situation wasn't too good" (P15, Female).

The ability to access consistent, responsive support reduces the sense of uncertainty and fear that many individuals experience after escaping exploitation.

In some cases, financial and transport assistance can be the difference between struggling to survive and having the means to take steps toward stability. One woman, who had escaped labour exploitation alongside her husband, described how even small forms of assistance had a major impact on their ability to start over: "We got some help with Tesco cards to do shopping. We had help with public transport, so we could use public transport for two months. That was a great help for both of us" (P2, Female). These forms of practical aid not only provide immediate relief but also help individuals regain mobility, access essential services, and take control over their circumstances.

The experiences shared by participants illustrate the vital role of emergency support in stabilising the lives of those escaping exploitation. Without access to food, shelter, financial aid, and basic necessities, individuals face significant barriers to independence and long-term security. Organisations such as ICOS and the BiC2 project play a crucial role in addressing these urgent needs, mitigating the risks of further hardship and enabling individuals to move forward with greater confidence. By ensuring immediate access to essential resources, these forms of support create a pathway toward self-sufficiency and a more stable future.

4.3.2. Emotional and Psychological Support

The psychological impact of exploitation is profound, often leaving individuals with severe emotional distress, post-traumatic stress, and an overwhelming sense of isolation, which can hinder efforts to regain stability, engage in social and economic life, and rebuild a sense of personal agency. Without adequate psychological support, individuals may struggle to process their experiences, exacerbating feelings of anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. Consequently, access to mental health services and emotional support is a critical component of crisis intervention, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of post-exploitation recovery. Professional mental health services play a crucial role in addressing the psychological consequences of exploitation, providing a structured means of processing trauma and developing coping mechanisms. However, the psychological ramifications often extend far beyond the initial period of crisis, with lasting effects on self-perception, emotional well-being, and the ability to function in everyday life, underscoring the necessity of sustained mental health support.

One participant, who had been subjected to a violent attack while attempting to leave an exploitative situation, articulated the enduring effects of trauma on his mental health and sense of identity:

"And I still haven't completely recovered. Basically, I'm a different person since. I still haven't recovered since. I've seen a psychiatrist. I get into panicky mode. To be honest with you, I really want to go back to work. I worked all my life. I do want to participate in public life. However, I'm just not the same person. I have mobility issues. Mentally and not the not the same person. I just want my life back. You know, I get into panic mode every time. My heart skips a beat. I get very twitchy. I don't eat

properly. It has affected me mentally. It's very difficult to explain with words" (P7, Male).

This account highlights the far-reaching consequences of exploitation, which not only disrupt an individual's immediate circumstances but also fundamentally alter their psychological state. The participant's description of persistent anxiety, physical symptoms, and social withdrawal reflects the long-term challenges that many individuals face after exiting exploitative environments.

In some cases, the psychological distress resulting from exploitation was so severe that it led to suicidal ideation. One participant disclosed: "I get counselling. So that has helped because I've had 12 suicide attempts" (P11, Male). This statement underscores the urgency of sustained psychological intervention. Without adequate mental health support, individuals may remain at high risk of self-harm, further exacerbating their vulnerability and preventing meaningful reintegration into society.

Beyond professional interventions, ongoing emotional support and a sense of social connectedness were essential in fostering psychological resilience. The same participant described the reassurance and stability that resulted from consistent support provided by ICOS:

"And they've helped me with everything. Also, mentally in terms of support. I would say that it's the interaction. I feel them very closely. We've known each other for over one year now. I feel they're very, very close to me. I just find their presence very reassuring. I know that they are there for me. That makes me feel calm. I don't know how to word it. And, the [name of allocated worker], she's very supportive. I share everything with her. I trust her completely. I'm really, really very happy" (P7, Male).

This testimony underscores the critical role of sustained, individualised support in facilitating emotional recovery. The establishment of trust and the presence of reliable support systems contributed to a greater sense of security and emotional stability.

In addition to formal counselling services, the availability of informal emotional support was also highly valued by participants. The opportunity to engage in conversations with trusted individuals provided a crucial outlet for expressing distress and alleviating feelings of isolation. One female participant described how simply being listened to provided significant emotional relief: "Sometimes I will just call them and talk to them. For me, it's very important. To have someone that will listen to me, so I'll call, and they will listen. Listen to me" (P15, Female). This account highlights the broader importance of emotional support beyond structured therapeutic interventions. Consistent access to empathetic listeners played a key role in helping individuals navigate psychological distress and regain a sense of agency in their lives.

The BiC2 project adopted a holistic approach to post-exploitation support, recognising that emotional and psychological recovery is as critical as meeting immediate material needs. By ensuring access to both formal mental health services and informal support networks, the project provided a vital safety net for individuals experiencing trauma-related distress. Addressing both immediate and long-term psychological challenges was essential in promoting stability, self-sufficiency, and overall well-being.

2.3.3. Access to Welfare Support, Financial Stability, and Essential Services

Ensuring access to welfare support, financial stability, and key services is essential in reducing individuals' vulnerability to further exploitation. Many individuals who have experienced modern slavery and labour exploitation face significant challenges in understanding and securing their entitlements. Limited awareness of available support, combined with bureaucratic complexities and linguistic barriers, often results in prolonged financial insecurity. Without adequate assistance, individuals may struggle to access welfare provisions, secure stable housing, or engage with essential services, increasing their risk of further hardship. The guidance and advocacy provided by ICOS and the BiC2 project have been instrumental in helping individuals navigate these challenges and access the financial and support resources necessary for stability and independence.

Several participants highlighted the critical role of ICOS in facilitating access to welfare support, particularly in relation to Universal Credit. Many individuals faced difficulties understanding eligibility criteria, completing applications, and communicating with welfare agencies. The support provided by ICOS ensured that individuals were able to secure financial assistance that they would have otherwise struggled to obtain. One participant acknowledged the organisation's intervention, stating: "ICOS helped me with Universal Credit as well" (P1, Male). Another participant similarly acknowledged the organisation's intervention: "And they (ICOS) have contacted the Universal Credit. So, I should be entitled to some support" (P2, Female). These accounts illustrate how targeted guidance played a key role in helping individuals access financial aid, alleviating immediate economic pressures and reducing their dependence on informal or potentially exploitative support networks.

A key challenge for many individuals seeking financial assistance was the language barrier, which significantly limited their ability to understand their rights and engage with the welfare system. Limited English proficiency made it difficult to complete necessary documentation, navigate bureaucratic procedures, and effectively communicate with service providers. The absence of clear and accessible information in their native language further compounded these challenges, creating additional obstacles in securing financial assistance, housing, and healthcare. One participant described how ICOS and the BiC2 project addressed this gap, stating:

"So, my English was not good. I didn't know anything about my rights and entitlements. They helped me with translations with Universal Credit status. And they've (ICOS) helped me with everything with Universal Credit, with documents that required translation, everything. I mean everything. They explained everything and even came with me to appointments" (P7, Male).

This testimony underscores the importance of tailored language support, particularly in translating official documents and providing direct assistance during interactions with welfare agencies. By addressing these linguistic barriers, ICOS facilitated individuals' engagement with the welfare system, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their financial and legal circumstances. Access to clear and accurate information was essential in ensuring that individuals were not excluded from critical support mechanisms.

Beyond securing financial aid, practical assistance with everyday administrative tasks was also a crucial component of the support provided by ICOS. For individuals unfamiliar with complex bureaucratic systems, routine tasks such as understanding official correspondence, arranging healthcare appointments, and managing financial obligations posed significant challenges. One participant highlighted the value of this ongoing assistance:

"With Universal Credit... they (ICOS) helped me with that. I could pay for housing and food without depending on anyone. If I needed to sort something out, like maybe read a letter, translate something, get in touch with the hospital or my GP, they (ICOS) help. So, it's just like mainly for like every day help" (P10, Female).

This account highlights how practical support extended beyond financial assistance, encompassing a broad range of everyday tasks essential for independent living.

Overall, the experiences of participants demonstrate the critical role of ICOS and the BiC2 project in facilitating access to welfare support, financial stability, and essential services. By addressing barriers related to language, bureaucracy, and housing, these organisations provided essential guidance and advocacy, ensuring that individuals could access the resources necessary to rebuild their lives. Their interventions not only alleviated immediate economic and administrative challenges but also contributed to long-term stability and independence. Through targeted support, ICOS and the BiC2 project played a crucial role in reducing individuals' vulnerability to further exploitation and enhancing their ability to navigate complex support systems effectively.

4.3.3. Legal Recognition and Long-Term Stability

The acquisition of legal recognition was a critical factor in ensuring long-term stability for individuals who had experienced exploitation. The absence of the necessary documentation left individuals highly vulnerable to further coercion and exploitation, reinforcing cycles of insecurity. Within this context, ICOS and the BiC2 project played a pivotal role in facilitating access to complex legal processes and providing essential support in securing legal status.

ICOS and the BiC2 project played a crucial role in assisting individuals in securing both pre-settled and settled status, enabling access to legal employment and essential services. One participant described the direct impact of this support: "I have the settled status now. I had a pre-settled status that was covering five years and then ICOS helped me for the settled status" (P7, Male). This testimony illustrates that obtaining legal recognition is not a straightforward process and requires additional support to transition from temporary (pre-settled) to permanent (settled) status. By providing this assistance, ICOS and the BiC2 project contributed to enhancing stability and security for those they supported.

For some individuals, uncertainty regarding their legal status led to significant challenges in their daily lives. One participant described their difficulties in obtaining full settled status, noting that despite believing they were officially registered as an employee, complications arose due to the absence of National Insurance contributions:

"I've got the problems with settlement status because even though I believed I was registered... I worked because I received pay slips, and everything. But, that seems like it was dodgy, because no contributions were paid for my National Insurance number. So ICOS are actually dealing with that right now. They are trying to make it happen (obtain settled status) ...sending the documents...it's ongoing" (P1 Male).

This highlights the administrative barriers that individuals faced, often unaware that their employment status did not equate to legal recognition. ICOS and BiC2's involvement in resolving these issues underscores the complexities involved in obtaining legal status and mitigating precarious situations.

Beyond settlement status, the absence of legal recognition had broader implications, including restricted access to healthcare. One participant recounted how ICOS and the BiC2 project helped to overcome these barriers facilitate access to essential medical services:

"They (ICOS) were very great helping me with to sort out some issues with documents with Home Office. Because I didn't have any status (settled or pre-settled status), I couldn't go to hospitals or doctors with this problem (leg injury), but ICOS helped me to get this prosthetic. I have now received status from the Home Office. ICOS helped me to translate documents and also write documents and to give advice for all of this" (P3, Male).

This testimony highlights the severe limitations faced by those without legal status, impacting fundamental rights such as access to healthcare. ICOS's support in navigating Home Office procedures was instrumental in ensuring that individuals were not excluded from essential services.

Securing settlement status represented a significant turning point for many, allowing them to engage in legal employment and regain a sense of stability. One participant reflected on this transition: "After I received this, I started working legally" (P6, Female). This highlights the direct link between legal recognition and economic participation, allowing individuals to move away from exploitative conditions and work within the formal economy. This statement underscores the direct relationship between legal recognition and economic participation, facilitating a move away from exploitative conditions towards formal employment. Another individual succinctly acknowledged ICOS's role in enabling this transition: "The settlement status... everything was sorted through ICOS" (P6, Female). These accounts reflect the effectiveness of ICOS and BiC2 interventions in navigating bureaucratic processes and overcoming barriers to legal employment.

In addition to direct assistance, ICOS and BiC2 facilitated access to legal representation for individuals navigating complex immigration procedures. One participant described their ongoing case: "ICOS also helped me to find me a solicitor to help with settlement status. I am still waiting for the decision. I still not have the second interview and the major interview with the Home Office yet" (P8, Female). This account illustrates the prolonged and uncertain nature of settlement status applications. By connecting individuals with legal professionals, ICOS and the BiC2 project provided crucial support in advocating for their rights and ensuring access to appropriate representation.

Even for those who had secured pre-settled status, the need for continued legal support remained significant. One participant emphasised the ongoing nature of this process: "I have pre-settled status. ICOS helped with that" (P11, Male). This highlights how ICOS's role extended beyond securing immediate status, offering ongoing assistance for individuals to eventually obtain full legal recognition. ICOS's role extended beyond securing immediate status, offering sustained assistance to ensure individuals could eventually obtain full legal recognition. Others expressed confidence in ICOS's continued support with future applications: "I have to do that towards the end of five years (to apply for settled status). At

the moment, I'm still waiting for the time to come because they're (ICOS) going to do that" (P9, Male). These accounts demonstrate how securing legal status often required long-term engagement, with ICOS providing ongoing support to prevent individuals from falling back into vulnerability.

ICOS and the BiC2 project encompassed comprehensive assistance in navigating bureaucratic complexities. One participant summarised this support: "They (ICOS) helped with status of the Home Office and then with settled status as well. They helped me to apply for it and sort it out as well" (P15, Female). This statement reinforces the multifaceted nature of ICOS's role, ensuring that individuals not only obtained legal status but also understood the process and received guidance at every stage.

Legal recognition was a fundamental requirement for individuals seeking stability after experiencing exploitation. The absence of documentation not only restricted access to employment and healthcare but also heightened vulnerability to further harm. The support provided by ICOS and the BiC2 project was instrumental in securing legal status for many, breaking cycles of insecurity and enabling access to essential rights and services. Through their advocacy and practical assistance, ICOS played a transformative role in facilitating pathways towards long-term security and independence.

4.3.4. Empowering Survivors through Education and Skills Development

To foster long-term stability and mitigate the risk of re-exploitation, interventions must extend beyond legal recognition and financial assistance to include access to education, skills development, and meaningful social integration. Many individuals who have experienced modern-day slavery and labour exploitation encounter substantial barriers to securing stable livelihoods. These challenges often stem from limited formal education, inadequate proficiency in English language, and restricted access to vocational training. Such barriers not only perpetuate cycles of insecurity but also reinforce vulnerabilities to further exploitation. Addressing these issues requires targeted support mechanisms that facilitate education, professional training, and social participation.

ICOS and the BiC2 project have played a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by offering language courses and vocational training. Through these initiatives, participants acquire both practical skills and the confidence necessary to pursue economic independence. The impact of such programmes is evident in the testimonies of those who have benefitted. One participant described the transformative effect of language and vocational training:

"So, thanks to them (ICOS) I finished many courses, like the cooking courses. I have certificates. I attended the English classes. The thing was even before I could understand a lot in English. But even my boys, they know that I understand. I can actually express because there was a barrier that I was afraid of speaking because I had that thought in my head that they're not gonna understand me, or I'm gonna say something wrong, stupid or something like that" (P5, Female).

This account illustrates how overcoming linguistic barriers fosters self-confidence, enabling individuals to engage more fully in society. The ability to communicate effectively is fundamental to accessing further education, securing stable work, and participating in social networks.

Beyond language training, many individuals also face challenges in social integration, often experiencing isolation as a consequence of their past exploitation. One participant highlighted the psychological toll of these experiences:

"I got enrolled into English language courses. I've only interacted with people from ICOS and no one else out of ICOS really. And I do struggle interacting with other people. It's kind of stressful, you know, fearful feeling. Because a month after the assault, I had a heart attack" (P7, Male).

This testimony underscores the necessity of comprehensive social support that extends beyond education and employment to encompass emotional and psychological well-being. The lingering effects of trauma, combined with social isolation, can hinder full reintegration, necessitating holistic support systems that address both practical and emotional needs.

Access to formal education and vocational training has also played a crucial role in enabling survivors to establish long-term aspirations and pathways toward economic stability. One participant described how ICOS facilitated their enrolment in further education: "ICOS helped me. I'm going to college at the Women's Centre" (P6, Female). Similarly, another participant highlighted the broader impact of language training on family life: "My husband and I both attend English classes on Mondays and Wednesdays" (P8, Female). These accounts illustrate the ripple effect of educational support, benefiting not only individuals but also their families and wider communities.

In some cases, targeted guidance has enabled participants to pursue professional careers. One individual recounted their experience in accessing higher education and professional training:

"So, when I spoke to ICOS, I said I want to go for to it in college. They said OK. I was surprised. They registered my name, told me the day I should go there for enrolment. I did maths and English functional skills. I also got to go to an IT class. So, from there, I was able to ask because I would like to be do mental health nursing. I was now there. So, I had the courage to go and say I'd like to become a nurse. She said I have to do an access before I go to the university. I've already got an admission. So, I'm starting in September" (P9, Male).

The ability to access higher education and professional training is particularly significant, as it enables survivors to transition towards stable, long-term career goals, thereby reducing their exposure to precarious or exploitative circumstances.

Practical employment support has also been instrumental in fostering economic independence. Assistance with job applications, CV writing, and interview preparation has enhanced participants' ability to secure stable work. One individual described the impact of this support: "They helped me write my CV, apply for jobs, and even prepare for interviews" (P12, Female). This highlights the comprehensive nature of the assistance provided, ensuring that individuals are not only equipped with skills but also supported in translating those skills into meaningful employment opportunities.

The experiences shared by participants demonstrate the profound impact of education, skills development, and social integration in fostering long-term stability and reducing vulnerability to further exploitation. Language barriers, social isolation, and limited formal education represent significant obstacles to rebuilding a life after escaping exploitation. By offering targeted educational and vocational support, organisations such as ICOS and the BiC2

project provide individuals with the tools necessary to achieve economic independence and reintegrate into society with confidence. These initiatives do more than address immediate practical needs; they empower individuals to envision and pursue a future beyond exploitation, reinforcing the importance of holistic support systems in fostering lasting change.

2.4. Conclusions from the Findings

The findings highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals who have experienced exploitation and modern slavery, as well as the critical role of ICOS and the BiC2 project in providing essential support. Participants reported enduring a range of abusive experiences, including physical, emotional, and psychological violence. These abuses, often perpetrated through coercion, manipulation, and threats, exacerbated their vulnerability and left survivors feeling isolated and fearful. The ongoing trauma, which included anxiety, trust issues, and difficulty engaging with others, was a persistent barrier to rebuilding their lives.

Deceptive recruitment practices played a central role in individuals' exploitation, creating financial dependency and leaving them trapped in precarious situations. The lack of legal recognition further intensified their vulnerability, restricting access to healthcare, legal employment, and essential services. ICOS and BiC2 played a pivotal role in helping individuals navigate complex legal systems, assisting with securing pre-settled and settled status. This support enabled survivors to access healthcare, legal employment, and essential services, providing a critical foundation for breaking the cycle of insecurity and exploitation.

The findings also emphasise the importance of education, vocational training, and language support in empowering survivors to achieve long-term stability. Overcoming language barriers and gaining practical skills increased participants' confidence, facilitating their social integration and economic independence. ICOS and BiC2 not only provided educational resources but also addressed emotional and psychological challenges, enabling survivors to regain a sense of control and self-worth. The interventions helped individuals rebuild their lives after abuse, fostering resilience and a sense of hope for the future.

Overall, the findings underscore the necessity of a holistic, long-term approach to supporting survivors of exploitation. Legal, educational, and emotional support were key elements in facilitating their reintegration into society, breaking the cycle of exploitation, and empowering them to regain autonomy. The combined efforts of ICOS and BiC2 demonstrate the transformative impact of comprehensive support systems in helping survivors rebuild their lives, secure stable futures, and break free from the systemic nature of modern slavery and exploitation.

5. Theory of Change for Supporting Victims/Survivors of Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation in the UK

Drawing from the findings of the semi-structured interviews with BiC2 clients, this Theory of Change (TOC) illustrates how targeted interventions, spanning from immediate crisis support to long-term social integration, enable survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation to progress from vulnerability to stability and independence.

5.1. Problem Statement

Individuals who have experienced modern slavery and labour exploitation face significant barriers to safety, stability, and long-term independence. These barriers include economic dependency, coercion, deception, lack of legal recognition, and social isolation. Without adequate support, individuals remain at high risk of re-exploitation, homelessness, and further marginalisation.

5.2. Long-Term Goal

To ensure that individuals who have escaped modern slavery and labour exploitation achieve long-term stability, independence, and empowerment through a holistic support system that addresses immediate needs, legal status, financial security, and social integration.

5.3. Intervention Design: Back in Control 2 (BiC2) Programme

The Back in Control 2 (BiC2) Programme is a comprehensive support initiative coordinated by ICOS to address the complex needs of individuals who have experienced modern slavery and labour exploitation. The programme provides holistic, person-centred support to help survivors regain control over their lives. Through tailored interventions, BiC2 assists individuals in securing safe accommodation, accessing legal protections, achieving financial stability, and developing skills for long-term independence. By addressing both immediate and structural barriers, BiC2 fosters resilience and empowerment, ensuring that survivors are not only supported in the short term but are also equipped for sustainable, exploitation-free futures.

5.3.1. Intervention Objective

To establish a structured programme that ensures survivors receive immediate safety, legal protection, financial stability, and educational opportunities, fostering long-term independence and resilience.

5.3.2. Programme Components and Outcomes

This section provides an overview of the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) Programme, modelling onto a ToC, outlining its core components, key activities, and expected outcomes. By focusing on critical areas such as immediate safety, legal protection, financial stability, and social integration, BiC2 ensures a holistic approach to long-term recovery and empowerment for survivors.

5.3.2.1. Immediate Safety and Crisis Support

Activities

- Offer immediate emergency accommodation, essential food supplies, weather-appropriate clothing, and urgent financial assistance to ensure basic survival needs are met.
- Deliver specialised psychological and emotional support, including trauma-informed crisis counselling and access to professional mental health services tailored to survivors' needs.
- Develop personalised safety plans and facilitate immediate access to secure, stable environments to protect survivors from further harm.

Outcomes

- Survivors receive immediate assistance to meet their basic needs and feel safer.
- Psychological support helps survivors begin to process their experiences and reduce distress.
- Individuals gain access to safe housing, reducing the risk of further exploitation.
- Long-term stabilisation is supported through structured client monitoring and follow-up.

5.3.2.2. Legal Protection and Immigration Support

Activities

- Deliver expert legal advice and dedicated representation for immigration status, residency applications, and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) protection, ensuring survivors' rights are upheld.
- Facilitate the recovery of essential identification and legal documents while advocating for survivors in legal proceedings to secure their entitlements.
- Engage with the Home Office and relevant authorities to safeguard survivors' legal rights and streamline residency applications.

Outcomes

- Survivors gain legal status, allowing them to work and access public services.
- Increased awareness of rights and legal protections empowers survivors to seek justice.
- Reduction in vulnerability to re-exploitation through secure residency and legal pathways.
- Survivors receive sustained support in navigating bureaucratic barriers related to their legal status.

5.3.2.3. Financial Stability and Welfare Access

Activities

- Guide survivors through the process of securing welfare benefits, stable housing applications, and financial aid to promote economic security.
- Equip survivors with job application skills, vocational training, and career development resources to enhance employment opportunities.
- Support survivors in establishing financial independence by providing guidance on opening bank accounts, accessing credit, and managing finances effectively.

Outcomes

- Survivors achieve financial stability through access to welfare and employment support.
- Increased financial independence reduces reliance on exploitative situations.
- Greater access to stable housing and social security systems prevents re-exploitation.
- Survivors receive tailored financial literacy training to promote long-term independence.

5.3.2.4. Education, Skills, and Social Integration

Activities

- Offer tailored English language courses, vocational training, and professional skills development to enhance survivors' self-sufficiency and employment prospects.
- Foster social integration by facilitating community engagement, peer support networks, and confidence-building activities that empower survivors.
- Establish structured mentorship programmes and peer support networks to encourage survivors' personal growth and long-term stability.

Outcomes

- Survivors improve their language skills and gain relevant vocational qualifications.
- Increased confidence and social participation enhance survivors' ability to integrate into communities.
- Survivors secure sustainable employment or further education, supporting long-term independence.
- Peer support networks help reduce isolation and provide ongoing community engagement.

5.3.3. Programme Implementation Strategy

A well-structured and survivor-centred approach is essential to effectively support individuals recovering from modern slavery and labour exploitation. The BiC2 Programme is implemented through a coordinated strategy that ensures accessibility, personalised support, and collaboration among key stakeholders.

Multi-Agency Collaboration: Establish strong partnerships with legal aid providers, housing services, mental health professionals, and employment agencies to ensure comprehensive, survivor-focused support.

Dedicated Case Management: Assign experienced caseworkers to provide ongoing, individualised support, ensuring survivors receive tailored assistance that adapts to their evolving needs.

Survivor-Centred Approach: Design interventions that are flexible and responsive to the unique experiences, goals, and cultural backgrounds of each survivor.

Cultural Sensitivity & Inclusion: Provide multilingual and culturally appropriate services, ensuring that all survivors, regardless of background, can fully access and engage with the support offered.

Trauma-Informed Support: Implement mental health services that acknowledge and address the psychological impact of exploitation, promoting long-term emotional well-being and resilience.

5.3.4. Impact Measurement and Continuous Learning

To ensure the BiC2 Programme delivers meaningful and sustainable outcomes, a robust impact measurement and continuous learning framework is implemented. This framework allows for ongoing assessment, refinement, and adaptation of services to best meet the needs of survivors. To ensure the effectiveness of interventions, the following evaluation strategies are recommended:

- i. Conduct continuous and structured monitoring of survivors' progress, evaluating improvements in financial stability, legal status, housing security, and psychological well-being.
- ii. Implement survivor-led feedback mechanisms to identify service gaps, enhance intervention strategies, and improve overall programme effectiveness.
- iii. Carry out longitudinal impact assessments to measure long-term progress in survivors' independence, integration, and resilience against re-exploitation.
- iv. Establish structured post-programme follow-ups, providing continued guidance and resources to ensure survivors maintain stability and full social reintegration.

6. Implications and Recommendations

The evaluation of the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) Programme, alongside existing literature and UK policy frameworks, presented in this report, highlights the need for a comprehensive, survivor-centred approach to addressing modern slavery and labour exploitation. The BiC2 Theory of Change stresses interventions beyond immediate crisis management to ensure long-term stability and autonomy for survivors. Whilst legislation and frameworks like the *Modern Slavery Act 2015* and the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) offer vital structures, challenges remain in securing permanent housing, financial stability, and access to justice. Findings from BiC2 participants emphasise the importance of emergency support, legal assistance, financial stability, and social integration. However, delays in accessing services often lead to destitution, heightening vulnerability, which BiC2 addresses through rapid intervention.

BiC2's multi-agency collaboration with legal aid providers, housing services, and employment agencies reflects best practices in survivor support, aligning with UK government reports on the need for coordinated responses. The UK Home Office's *Modern Slavery Strategy (2021b)* highlights the need for a coordinated, multi-agency approach involving legal aid providers, housing services, and employment agencies to ensure comprehensive survivor support. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s (2019) report emphasises the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to address the complex needs of victims, aligning with best practices in survivor support. Legal protection is crucial, particularly for survivors with precarious immigration status, but many struggle to secure this, leaving them vulnerable. BiC2 enhances survivors' ability to navigate the immigration system, although delays in asylum or leave applications remain a barrier. Employment policies also hinder survivors, as they are often prohibited from working until their legal status is resolved. BiC2 addresses this by offering vocational training, mentorship, and financial education, preparing survivors for stable, non-exploitative employment.

While BiC2 has seen success, challenges persist, including bureaucratic delays and limited access to long-term mental health services. Streamlining legal processes and expanding access to trauma-informed care would significantly improve outcomes. The programme offers a replicable model for survivor support, aligning with best practices in policy and service provision. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2020) and Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC) (2022) reports stress that coordinated multi-agency approaches, including legal aid, mental health services, and practical support, are essential for long-term recovery and reducing re-exploitation. van den Anker (2019) further emphasizes that combining legal protection with trauma-informed care significantly improves survivor outcomes, making models like BiC2 that integrate these services best practice.

Policymakers must prioritise funding for programmes that integrate immediate relief with long-term empowerment, expand access to housing, employment, and mental health services, and address gaps in the NRM. Strengthening legal frameworks, including automatic leave to remain for identified victims and reassessing employment restrictions, will reduce dependency on welfare and facilitate survivors' integration into the labour market. The findings underscore the need for a coordinated, survivor-led approach to modern slavery support, improving outcomes and contributing to broader anti-exploitation efforts. The BiC2 Programme has made a significant impact in supporting survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation, but there is scope for further development to expand reach,

improve service delivery, and ensure long-term sustainability. The following recommendations focus on programme improvements, sustainability strategies, and funding priorities, ensuring BiC2 can continue to deliver high-quality, survivor-centred support.

6.1. BiC2 Recommendations

BiC2 has already made significant strides in supporting survivors of exploitation and trafficking, but there is a need to build on these efforts and expand services to reach more survivors, enhance long-term outcomes, and secure sustainable funding. The following recommendations focus on continuing and broadening the work BiC2 is already doing, while addressing areas that require further attention for more comprehensive support.

Short-Term Recommendations:

1. **Expand BiC2's outreach:** Continue and strengthen current partnerships with community groups, faith organisations, and frontline services to engage survivors, particularly those in migrant and undocumented situations or still experiencing exploitation. Broaden referral networks and increase efforts to raise awareness of BiC2's services. Continue offering multilingual resources and caseworker support, ensuring all survivors can access the programme regardless of language barriers.
2. **Strengthen mental health support:** Expand and deepen existing partnerships with trauma-informed therapists to ensure survivors have access to long-term, specialist mental health care. Increase survivor-led peer support networks to reduce isolation and build a sense of community. Train BiC2 staff in trauma-informed care, building on current practices to ensure that survivors receive consistent, safe, and supportive interactions throughout their journey.
3. **Increase caseworker capacity:** Continue to grow the number of caseworkers, ensuring more survivors can benefit from personalised support in areas such as legal matters, housing, and employment. Increase training for caseworkers in trauma-informed practices and continue offering follow-up support for those exiting BiC2's formal services. Build a survivor network to offer peer mentoring and advocacy, ensuring survivors have ongoing access to support after they leave BiC2's formal programme.

Longer-Term Recommendations:

1. **Build economic independence:** Strengthen and expand current partnerships with ethical employers to provide trauma-informed, survivor-friendly job placements. Increase the capacity of the employment liaison officer to cultivate more relationships with local businesses and ethical employers. Expand vocational training programmes and introduce fully funded professional qualifications, apprenticeships, and financial literacy courses. Continue offering these opportunities to survivors, ensuring they have the skills and support needed for long-term financial independence.
2. **Secure long-term funding:** Maintain and expand current funding efforts by developing multi-year funding agreements and advocating for BiC2's inclusion in local authority and government funding streams dedicated to survivor support. Continue engaging with corporate sponsors and ethical businesses, leveraging CSR

initiatives to secure financial support for employment, training, and essential services. Diversify funding sources to ensure long-term sustainability and stability for BiC2's growth and expansion.

6.2. Recommendations for Policymakers

The following recommendations build upon existing initiatives and provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the systemic barriers survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation face in the UK. By focusing on both immediate and long-term reforms, these recommendations aim to strengthen legal protections, enhance services, and promote economic independence, ensuring that survivors receive the support they need to rebuild their lives and achieve long-term stability.

Short-Term Recommendations:

1. Extend post-identification support to a minimum of 12 months to ensure survivors have adequate time to secure stable housing, legal status, and employment. This should be implemented through collaboration between the UK Home Office, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, and local authorities.
2. Guarantee priority access to housing for survivors by allocating a percentage of social housing stock specifically for them. Additionally, develop rent deposit and housing support schemes to help survivors transition into independent accommodation without financial barriers. This requires action from local councils, housing associations, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities.
3. Grant automatic discretionary leave to remain for all recognised victims of modern slavery to ensure immediate access to work, housing, and financial support. Streamline the legal decision-making process by setting mandatory processing deadlines for survivor applications, reducing delays and uncertainty. This should be managed by the UK Home Office and relevant parliamentary committees.
4. Ensure survivors receive priority access to NHS mental health services by reducing waiting times for trauma-informed therapy. Additionally, fund specialist trauma recovery programmes that provide long-term psychological support. These measures should be enacted by NHS England, local authorities, and the Department of Health and Social Care.
5. Allow survivors to work immediately upon recognition through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), removing the need for delays related to discretionary leave decisions. Expand access to vocational training, language courses, and apprenticeships to support survivors' financial independence. This requires action from the UK Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions, and the Department for Education.

Longer-Term Recommendations:

1. Develop an integrated case management system for survivor services that facilitates secure data sharing between statutory services, NGOs, and local authorities while maintaining confidentiality. This will improve coordination and reduce service fragmentation.

2. Revise the Modern Slavery Act to guarantee long-term support for survivors, ensuring that access to services becomes a legally protected right rather than discretionary. This should be addressed by the UK Parliament and the Home Office, with increased funding for frontline survivor services.
3. Increase funding for international anti-trafficking initiatives to support global efforts in reducing exploitation and enhancing survivor protections. This requires cooperation from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and international partners such as the UNODC and International Labour Organization.
4. Strengthen bilateral agreements with source countries to ensure that survivors trafficked into the UK receive appropriate legal protections, rather than being forcibly repatriated. This should involve the UK Home Office and international human rights bodies.
5. Establish survivor-led advisory panels to ensure that policy development reflects the lived experiences of those affected by modern slavery. These panels should be integrated into both national and local anti-slavery policies, with support from the UK Anti-Slavery Commissioner and local government associations.

By implementing these reforms, the UK can strengthen its support systems for survivors, ensuring they have the resources, protection, and opportunities necessary to achieve long-term stability and independence.

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