"The main success was the ability to reach out to people who would otherwise really struggle to find the support they need."

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

Evaluation Report 3

Contents

1. Background and Context

This is the third interim evaluation report of the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) project, a targeted initiative supporting adults affected by modern slavery and labour exploitation in Sunderland and the surrounding areas. The report presents findings from semi-structured interviews with BiC2 stakeholders. These interviews are part of a wider evaluation, which aims to assess the effectiveness of BiC2 intervention activities, identify gaps in service provision, and explore the broader policy and social context in which modern slavery and labour exploitation occurs. Together, these insights are intended to inform future practice, shape policy development, and strengthen support strategies for victims and survivors of exploitation.

1.1. Back in Control 2 (BiC2)

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, seeking to empower individuals and promote their long-term recovery.

1.2. BiC2 Evaluation

The evaluation of the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) project is being carried out by academics from the University of Sunderland's Public Health Team, within the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing's School of Psychology. It examines whether BiC2's activities lead to meaningful outcomes for clients, the extent of client engagement, and whether the project contributes to positive changes in their lives.

The first evaluation report (Harvey-Golding & Payne, 2024)[1], published in August 2024, outlined BiC2's aims and objectives and presented early findings based on monitoring data and initial interviews with clients and stakeholders. The second report (Harvey-Golding & Payne, 2025)[2], published in February 2025, built on these findings through analysis of semi-structured interviews with BiC2 clients conducted between 2023 and 2024. Insights from these interviews

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[1] Back in Control 2 Interim Evaluation Report 1
[2] Back in Control 2 Interim Evaluation Report 2

informed a Theory of Change (ToC) model, which shows how BiC2 interventions are expected to deliver positive outcomes for survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation. The ToC offers a framework for understanding how project activities support recovery, empowerment, and wellbeing.[3]

This third evaluation report examines the perspectives of BiC2 stakeholders. It explores their views on effectiveness, identifies gaps in provision, and considers how survivors experience support. The findings aim to inform future practice, policy, and intervention design. The report also makes recommendations to strengthen support structures and ensure long-term stability and protection for victims and survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation.

1.3. Updated Review of Evidence and Literature

Since the second evaluation report, new evidence and policy developments on modern slavery and labour exploitation have emerged in the UK and internationally. Updated prevalence data, evolving policy frameworks, and international regulatory approaches have shaped the context in which exploitation is addressed. This updated review of the evidence and literature focuses on the UK perspective, while integrating global trends, to highlighting emerging risks and implications for service provision.

1.3.1. Scope and Patterns of Modern Slavery in the UK

According to the Home Office 2025 annual report of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) [4] 2024 end-of-year statistics, the scale of modern slavery in the UK has continued to increase. In 2024, the NRM recorded 19,125 referrals, the highest since its inception and a 13% increase from 2023 (Home Office, 2025a). Adults accounted for 68% of referrals, of which 72% were men and 28% were women; while children represented 31%, predominantly boys (78%) compared with (22%). The most common nationalities referred to the NRM in 2024 were UK (23%), Albanian (13%) and Vietnamese (11%) (Home Office, 2025a). Despite these official figures, independent estimates indicate that a substantial proportion of victims remain outside formal identification and support systems. The Walk Free Foundation's Global Slavery Index (2023)[5], using 2021 data, estimated that on any given day approximately 122,000 people were living in modern slavery in the UK. Globally, the report estimated that 50 million people were in modern

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[3] See Evaluation Report 2 (Harvey-Golding & Payne, 2025) for BiC2 ToC model. See here

[4] NRM is the UK framework for identifying and supporting victims. See here

[5] The 2023 Global Slavery Index provides an assessment of the extent to which a country's population is vulnerable to modern slavery for 160 countries. See here

slavery, including 27.6 million in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriages, representing nearly one in every 150 people worldwide. The number of people affected has increased by an estimated 10 million in less than six years.

The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)[6] Intelligence Pictures for Q1 (April–June 2024) (GLAA, 2025a) and Q2 (July–September 2024) (GLAA, 2025b) show that labour exploitation in the UK remains concentrated in the care sector, with additional cases in retail, food service, and hospitality. Victims are predominantly Indian nationals, with Zimbabwean nationals reported as an emerging group in terms of prevalence in Q1 but not Q2. Gender distribution shifted from mostly male in Q1 to near parity in prevalence of male and female victims in Q2. Many individuals are vulnerable due to visa or sponsorship dependencies, exposing them to threats and financial exploitation such as debt bondage[7] or withheld wages. Recruitment and transport of victims remain major intelligence gaps for the GLAA, with limited reports of trafficking from locations including Mauritius, Nepal, Romania, and overseas. Recorded methods of travel into the UK were mainly by plane or container with no further detail, though not all victims are trafficked. Exploiters are mainly male and British, often managers in care homes, though Q2 reported some exclusively female exploiters in social care. Accommodation provided by exploiters is often substandard and used as a tool of control.

Further emerging evidence indicates that the UK's post-Brexit immigration system has increased migrant workers' vulnerability to labour exploitation and modern slavery. Policies such as the Skilled Worker visa[8] tie migrants' right to remain in the UK to a single employer, restricting mobility and creating dependency, while higher English language requirements and an extended settlement period from five to ten years introduce further barriers (Sumption & Brindle, 2024). The health and social care sectors account for around a third of Skilled Worker visa grants, with care workers among the most common recipients, whilst evidence suggests widespread exploitation in these roles (Sumption & Brindle, 2024). The Work Rights Centre[9] argues that the UK government's 2025 Immigration White Paper[10] prioritises reducing net

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[6] Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) is a UK government agency tasked with protecting vulnerable individuals from exploitation, forced labour, and modern slavery. See here

[7] Debt bondage is a form of modern slavery in which a person is forced to work to repay a debt under exploitative conditions, often with terms that make the debt impossible to clear.

[8] A Skilled Worker visa allows foreign nationals to come to or stay in the UK to do an eligible job with an approved employer. This visa has replaced the Tier 2 (General) work visa. See: here

[9] Work Rights Centre is a charity that helps migrants and disadvantaged Britons access employment justice and improve their social mobility. See here

[10] The White paper sets out the government's plans to create an immigration system which promotes growth but is controlled and managed. See here

migration over addressing exploitation, proposing vague measures without providing mechanisms to empower migrant workers to leave abusive or coercive employment (Sehic & Vicol, 2025). Combined, factors such as restrictive visa conditions, rising living costs, and policy weaknesses, exacerbate the risk of modern slavery and labour exploitation, particularly in sectors reliant on low-paid or isolated migrant labour, highlighting the need for robust protective measures.

1.3.2. Policy and Enforcement Responses

Policy responses have sought to address these issues, although gaps remain. The Home Office updated statutory guidance for frontline responders under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, issuing version 4.1 in late 2024 (Home Office, 2024b) to promote more consistent identification of victims. Despite this, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) report persistent delays and barriers in the NRM, particularly for foreign nationals. In the first half of 2023, positive Reasonable Grounds (RG) decisions for foreign nationals declined significantly from 90% in 2022 to 53% in 2023 (IOM, 2023). In addition, the IOM (2024) updated NRM analysis report notes persistent gender disparities, with women and girls more likely to receive negative decisions, regional differences in support provision, and ongoing gaps in data collection that limit effective responses (IOM, 2024). Moreover, the IOM's updated 2024 analysis shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected by negative decisions in trafficking and exploitation cases, particularly in sexual exploitation. Similarly, child victims are significantly under-identified, indicating gaps in detection and support for both children and female survivors of modern slavery.

The report Refusal to Consent (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2025) examines why many potential victims of modern slavery in the UK decline support under the NRM. Key factors include fear of authorities and immigration consequences, difficulty in self-identifying as a victim, limited understanding of the NRM, and fear of retaliation from exploiters. Stricter evidence requirements under the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and inconsistent Home Office decision-making have increased rejection rates[11], further deterring victims and undermining confidence in the system. Some individuals access alternative support, though it is often insufficient. The report recommends trauma-informed training for First Responders, separating the NRM from immigration enforcement, mandatory reporting of potential victims who refuse consent, and

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[11] In 2024, 5,598 adult potential victims did not consent to NRM referral, highlighting ongoing challenges with self-identification and understanding of the process (Home Office, 2025a).

survivor-led research to improve understanding and accessibility of support. It stresses that listening to survivors' experiences is crucial to ensuring effective protection and assistance.

In response to these issues the UK Government launched a call for evidence on NRM reform in September 2025 (Home Office, 2025c), aiming to eliminate the backlog of conclusive grounds decisions by 2026 and gather input to improve early identification and ensure victims receive timely and appropriate support. Additionally, the UK Government has introduced a series of measures to combat modern slavery and labour exploitation. The Labour Market Enforcement Strategy (LMES) 2024-25 seeks to strengthen monitoring, coordination, and data sharing across enforcement agencies, improve targeting of enforcement activity, and support both businesses and workers to encourage compliance (DBT, 2024a). Central to this strategy is the Fair Work Agency (FWA), an Executive Agency of the Department for Business and Trade, which consolidates the functions of HMRC's National Minimum Wage Enforcement Team, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate. The FWA will oversee key employment rights, including National Minimum Wage, holiday pay, statutory sick pay, employment agencies, and modern slavery, with powers to investigate, issue penalties, and take businesses to court, providing a single point of contact for workers and employers (DBT, 2024b).

Complementing these measures, the Employment Rights Bill, announced in the King's Speech in July 2024, introduces reforms such as banning exploitative zero-hour contracts, establishing day-one rights for parental leave, sick pay, and protection from unfair dismissal, making flexible working the default, abolishing "fire and rehire," and updating trade union legislation. The UK Parliament's Business and Trade Committee report, *Make Work Pay: Employment Rights Bill* (2025), supports these reforms while recommending clearer rules on shift notice and compensation, prioritising worker status reforms, developing a long-term industrial relations strategy, amending the Modern Slavery Act (2015) to improve transparency, and ensuring the FWA is adequately resourced. The LMES strategy itself notes that limited resources may constrain full implementation, and success will depend on sustained political commitment. Together, these initiatives aim to enhance enforcement, strengthen oversight, and provide comprehensive protections for workers vulnerable to exploitation (DBT, 2024a).

1.3.3. Global Context and Implications for UK Practice

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that in 2021, 27.6 million people were trapped in forced labour worldwide, generating US$236 billion in illegal profits annually (ILO, 2025). Women and girls made up 39.4% of victims, and children 12%, over half of whom were subjected to forced commercial sexual exploitation. Migrant workers faced a threefold higher

risk, and 63% of forced labour occurred in the private economy, mainly in services, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. Forced labour was most prevalent in Asia and the Pacific and most prevalent in the Arab States. A 2024 ILO report highlights that profits from forced labour have risen by 37% since 2014, with traffickers earning an estimated US$10,000 per victim annually. Moreover, forced commercial sexual exploitation, while accounting for only 27% of victims, generates 73% of total illegal profits. Europe and Central Asia account for the highest total profits (US$84 billion), followed by Asia and the Pacific (US$62 billion), the Americas (US$52 billion), Africa (US$20 billion), and the Arab States (US$18 billion). A forthcoming ILO report, set to be released on 23 September 2025, is forecast to provide an updated analysis of global progress and persistent challenges in achieving social justice, including issues related to forced labour and exploitation.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Report on Trafficking in Persons report (UNODC, 2024) provides comprehensive global data on modern slavery, forced labour, and labour exploitation. Detected trafficking victims have risen 25% since 2019, with Europe seeing a moderate increase. Women and girls account for 61% of detected victims, reflecting their disproportionate exposure, particularly to sexual exploitation. Forced labour affects millions, mainly in agriculture, domestic work, construction, and manufacturing. Emerging forms of exploitation, including forced criminality and online scam operations in Southeast Asia, illustrate evolving patterns of risk, with victims coerced through manipulation, debt bondage, or false promises. Vulnerable populations, including migrants, women, and children, remain disproportionately affected. The report also includes court case summaries and, for the UK, data on victims of forced labour and forced criminality, highlighting how trafficking cases are detected and prosecuted. The findings in this report emphasise the need for coordinated strategies to prevent modern slavery worldwide.

The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EU, 2024)) 2024/1760, which took effect in July 2024, requires large EU and non-EU companies operating in the Union to conduct due diligence to identify, prevent, and address adverse human rights and environmental impacts across their operations and supply chains. These obligations explicitly cover labour rights, including the prohibition of forced and child labour, and extend to both direct and indirect business partners. Member States must transpose the Directive by 2026, with implementation phased in from 2027, beginning with the largest companies. Although the UK is not legally bound to adopt the Directive post-Brexit, large UK firms with significant EU turnover will fall directly within its scope, and others may be indirectly affected as EU companies demand equivalent standards across their supply chains. However, the Directive's scope is limited to very large firms, meaning many smaller companies in high-risk sectors fall outside direct

regulation, raising concerns that significant areas of modern slavery and labour exploitation may remain unaddressed.

In addition, regulation (EU, 2024a) 2024/3015, adopted on 27 November 2024, prohibits the placing, making available, and export of products made with forced labour on the EU market, regardless of their origin, sector, or whether they are domestic or imported. It aligns with the International Labour Organization's definition of forced or compulsory labour, including forced child labour, and aims to strengthen the internal market while combating forced labour. Member States must designate competent authorities to enforce the regulation, with powers to investigate and withdraw non-compliant products. Although it does not impose additional due diligence obligations beyond existing EU or national law, it emphasises the responsibility of economic operators to ensure their products are not made with forced labour and encourages international cooperation to address the issue. While the UK is no longer legally bound by EU regulations following Brexit, UK businesses exporting to the EU must comply with the regulation to access EU markets, and it may also influence domestic standards and practices in addressing forced labour.

1.3.4. Implications for Service Provision

The UK's experience of modern slavery and labour exploitation is shaped by both domestic vulnerabilities and global trends in forced labour and human trafficking. Recent policy developments, including updates to the Modern Slavery Act (2015) guidance, the Labour Market Enforcement Strategy, and the Employment Rights Bill, aim to enhance identification, oversight, and protections for vulnerable individuals (Home Office, 2024b; DBT, 2024a; 2024b; Business and Trade Committee, 2025). However, gaps remain, particularly for migrant populations and workers in sectors reliant on low-paid, isolated labour, highlighting the ongoing challenges in preventing exploitation and ensuring access to justice. International frameworks, such as the ILO's analyses of forced labour profits and the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (2024/1760), alongside regulations prohibiting products made with forced labour (EU, 2024/3015), underscore the importance of aligning domestic practice with global standards.

These findings carry significant implications for service provision. Effective support for victims requires timely identification, culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions, and coordination across statutory agencies, NGOs, and enforcement bodies. Restrictions in the NRM, backlogs in decision-making, and barriers posed by visa-dependent employment demonstrate that service providers must navigate systemic limitations while safeguarding victims' rights. Strengthened training for frontline professionals, improved referral pathways, and enhanced resourcing of specialist services are therefore critical to ensure that victims receive

comprehensive support, protection from re-exploitation, and pathways to recovery. Addressing modern slavery in the UK thus demands not only robust policy and enforcement but also responsive, well-resourced service provision that can adapt to evolving patterns of exploitation.

2. Methodology

The evaluation of the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) project was commissioned by ICOS to assess the delivery, effectiveness, and sustainability of the intervention in supporting survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK. A key component of the evaluation focused on capturing the perspectives of organisations collaborating with BiC2, to identify programme strengths and challenges and generate learning to inform future provision and funding. This report specifically presents the qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews with BiC2 stakeholders. The overall methodology for the BiC2 evaluation is detailed in the first interim report.

2.1. Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this component of the evaluation was to explore the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders from organisations providing support as part of the BiC2 project. The objectives underpinning this aim were to:

a) Assess stakeholders' understanding of modern slavery and labour exploitation and how this informs their work within BiC2.

b) Examine the types and contexts of support provided through BiC2, including counselling, mentoring, advocacy, and legal services.

c) Identify perceived strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement within the BiC2 model.

d) Explore mechanisms through which BiC2 support facilitates positive outcomes for survivors.

e) Provide evidence-based insights to refine and improve support mechanisms for survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation.

2.2. Sampling and Recruitment

A purposive, non-probability sampling approach was employed to recruit stakeholders from organisations collaborating with ICOS in the delivery of BiC2. Invitations to participate were sent via email to all organisations, agencies and authorities involved in the delivery of the BiC2 Project, seven of which agreed to take part. Participants were all senior representatives of organisations involved in supporting BiC2 clients.

2.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives while maintaining consistency across key areas of questioning. All interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams, lasting between 30 and 50 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were anonymised during transcription to protect the identities of both individuals and organisations.

2.4. Data Analysis

Interview data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. This involved familiarisation with the transcripts, generating initial codes, identifying patterns across the data, and organising these codes into themes and sub-themes reflecting stakeholder perspectives.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The evaluation adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Participants received information on the purpose of the evaluation and how the data would be used before providing consent. Identifying details were removed to protect anonymity, and data were stored securely in accordance with data protection regulations. The evaluation has been authorised and approved by the University of Sunderland Ethics Board.

2.6. Limitations

The findings reflect the perspectives of seven stakeholder organisations directly involved in BiC2 and therefore provide an important but partial account of the programme. Findings should be considered alongside other monitoring and evaluation evidence collected by ICOS.

3. Stakeholder Interview Findings

This section presents insights from service providers on the nature, impacts, and support needs of victims and survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK. Drawing on stakeholder accounts, the findings illuminate the complexity and overlap of exploitative practices, the multifaceted vulnerabilities and lived experiences of survivors, and the strategies and challenges involved in providing effective support. Key themes address the forms and drivers of exploitation, the immediate and long-term support needs of survivors, structural and resource barriers faced by service providers, and ongoing risks of re-exploitation. Collectively, these findings highlight the necessity of holistic, flexible, and multi-agency approaches that respond to the diverse and intersecting needs of survivors.

3.1. Part 1. Nature and Realities of Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation

This section presents the perspectives of service providers on the nature, realities, and impacts of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK. It explores the complex and overlapping forms of exploitation experienced by survivors, highlighting both visible and hidden abuses, including labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, criminal coercion, and debt bondage. The findings emphasise how structural vulnerabilities, such as migration status, legal precarity, and social marginalisation, interact with these abuses, shaping survivors' experiences and complicating identification and intervention. The section also considers the multidimensional impacts on survivors' daily lives, psychological wellbeing, and opportunities for social and economic participation, underlining the importance of tailored, trauma-informed, and holistic support.

3.1.1. Theme 1. Complex and Overlapping Forms of Exploitation

Modern slavery in the UK is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing a wide range of exploitative practices that often intersect and overlap. Stakeholders described situations in which victims experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously, including labour exploitation[12], sexual exploitation[13], criminal coercion[14], and less visible abuses such as debt

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[12] Labour exploitation is the forced or coerced use of people for work under abusive, unsafe, or unfair conditions, often with little or no pay and restricted freedom.

[13] Sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of individuals into sexual activity for the gain of others, often involving threats, control, or lack of consent.

[14] Criminal coercion is the use of threats or intimidation to force individuals to commit crimes against their will.

bondage[15] or cuckooing[16]. These forms of exploitation are compounded by structural vulnerabilities such as migration status, language barriers, and limited knowledge of local systems, which increase susceptibility to abuse. Together, these factors increase the likelihood of abuse and complicate identification and intervention.

3.1.1.1. Sub-theme 1.1. Pervasive Control and Economic Exploitation

Stakeholders emphasised that modern slavery is not limited to isolated incidents but is a systemic issue affecting multiple communities. Control over victims frequently involves deprivation of autonomy and legal rights, leaving individuals without a voice to report or challenge their circumstances: "Modern day slavery is like an indirect way of slavery. People have their papers confiscated and they're somewhere existing, but they don't have a voice to say it." (S2) This control is closely tied to economic exploitation[17]. Individuals may be legally employed yet remain subject to coercion and abuse. While some migrant workers experience labour exploitation without it reaching the threshold of modern slavery, others, face severe restrictions on freedom, particularly those trafficked into the UK:

> "Modern day slavery is a broad term. So, limiting somebody's freedom, acting against their free will. It manifests itself in various forms. I have seen various types of work exploitation as well, which spans lots of aspects. A lot of Polish clients, for example whom I work with are affected by work exploitation rather than modern day slavery. Modern day slavery relates more to people coming from Africa to England. But it's also related to work exploitation because they have suffered that as well." (S3)

The overlap between trafficking, abuse, and economic exploitation is evident in cases where survivors endure both physical abuse and underpayment in the workplace:

> "Trafficking from Africa to England … Most of them they have had some kind of trafficking experience. Physical abuse, as well work exploitation, in England, when the employers have been dishonest, they have been underpaid by their employers." (S3)

Even after leaving initial abusive circumstances, survivors may encounter further exploitation in legal work environments:

> "Often the boundary between modern day slavery and work with exploitation is a bit fluid. In terms of modern-day slavery, that is about people being abused and controlled, and exploitation is more about people being abused. Often, we see overlap, and we have

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[15] Debt bondage is a form of modern slavery where individuals are forced to work under exploitative conditions to repay a manipulated or unending debt, leaving them unable to leave.

[16] Cuckooing is a form of exploitation in which criminals take over a vulnerable person's home to carry out criminal activities, controlling and intimidating the resident.

[17] Economic exploitation is the unfair or coerced deprivation of the financial benefits of a person's work or resources, keeping them in poverty or dependency.

also seen overlap with people who have who were previously victims of modern, and several survivors of modern slavery who survived that process, and they went on to actually work somewhere legally, but then they were still exploited." (S4)

Daily life for survivors is often strictly controlled, with limited freedom, restricted access to housing and food, and long working hours. These patterns of control extend beyond work, shaping every aspect of survivors' lives:

> "So again, it's usually a that's kind of pattern. There's links to exploitation in terms of housing, food and even their freedom as well. They can't go. They can't just go take off and go somewhere. And they're told exactly what to do, what time to do it. And somebody's working 15 hours and then once they finish, they go to flat upstairs from the shop. They don't go anywhere. So again, that's part of it." (S6)

These accounts demonstrate that control and economic exploitation are deeply intertwined, extending from employment into the daily living conditions of survivors.

3.1.1.2. Sub-theme 1.2. Hidden and Emerging Forms of Exploitation

Modern slavery also takes less visible forms, which can be legally and socially complex. Stakeholders reported criminal exploitation[18], organ harvesting[19], sexual exploitation, and cuckooing:

> "In terms of modern slavery, you have criminal exploitation, you have sexual exploitation, and labour exploitation, which the project mostly focuses on, although there has been some overlap as well with things like sexual slavery and in some cases criminal exploitation things. There is also organ harvesting, which fortunately is quite rare in the UK, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't happen and it's something very invisible. There's also cuckoo thing, which has only just become legislated against, which is about people exploiting vulnerable adults. It's usually where they take the premises or are using the premises for some type of a trade or just trying to live their rent free." (S4)

Sexual exploitation, including trafficking of women for sexual purposes, was highlighted as part of the overlapping forms of abuse survivors experience: "I've seen instances where women are sex trafficked." (S6) These examples illustrate the breadth of exploitation that may go unnoticed and reinforce the need for services to remain alert to both traditional and emerging forms of abuse.

Findings showed that workplace abuse often intersects with racial or physical abuse, particularly for migrant and refugee populations:

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[18] Criminal exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of individuals into criminal activity for the benefit of others, often under threat or intimidation.

[19] Organ harvesting is the illegal removal of a person's organs through force, coercion, or deception, without their informed consent.

"The other group of people is people who've been exploited, abused at work. So, for example, we've had people who've been physically attacked or abused or racially abused at work." (S4)

"It's also about asylum seekers, refugees who have been exploited and brought to the UK, which is often a topic forgotten about and not talked about. Where people are forced to work for free somewhere, because otherwise the smugglers wouldn't take them." (S4)

Certain industries, including car washes and informal employment schemes, were identified as particularly high risk, often operating under the appearance of legitimate work:

"We often hear from our clients about car washes, for example, and some of the current clients actually have been exploited at car washes. But it's not just one industry. It's not just car washes." (S4)

"You have dodgy job agencies, for example, where employment is seemingly legitimate. So, if someone has a National Insurance number, they can get a bank account, but either they don't have access to it or someone else uses that bank card account and that money is withdrawn." (S4)

These accounts highlight how hidden and emerging forms of exploitation overlap with more visible labour and housing abuses.

3.1.1.3.   Sub-theme 1.3. Criminal Exploitation and Debt Bondage

Criminal exploitation frequently overlaps with labour exploitation. Victims may be coerced into criminal activity through artificial debts, reinforcing cycles of abuse:

"There's also overlap with criminal exploitation. So, in some cases there are these artificial debts created by the abusers and then they say, oh, you can't pay it via your employment, so you now have to go and steal something and then it would be wiped out, but obviously of course it never is because they want to continue exploiting." (S4)

Structural vulnerabilities such as nationality, language skills, and unfamiliarity with local systems compound exploitation:

"For example, we have clients from Eastern Europe who were being exploited at work because of them not being British citizens… Basically being treated inferior, in an inferior way because of their language skills, lack of understanding of local structures, lack of understanding of local roles." (S4)

Debt bondage is a common method for maintaining long-term control, keeping victims trapped in exploitative situations for years:

"I've seen instances where people are brought into this country under a false pretext, that they're gonna have this land of honey and gold and all that kind of stuff… And they're, you know, in a shop, behind the counter somewhere, being told to do a job they're not paid for… They're sharing awful accommodation with about 20 to 40

people… All the money they make goes back to the person who's exploiting them. We've seen lots of instances where people have come to us and they owe money to these people who they have worked for years and years and years…They'll owe £500, but five years later, you still owe £500 lbs. So, whatever you do or pay it just doesn't work at." (S6)

"We used to work with Riverside Health project in West of Newcastle. We saw a lot of a lot of people from that project who were victims of modern slavery and often they were telling us exactly that scenario…where they work for people who brought them to the country, saying you're going to get a fantastic job as a secretary and this and that… Ten years on the line, they still can't speak English, they have no rights, they have no accommodation… They have nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just what they're wearing." (S6)

3.1.1.4.   Sub-theme 1.4. Drivers and Broader Context

Exploitation is driven by migration patterns, criminal gangs, and, in some cases, extends to non-migrant populations:

"I mean this it just snippets, so I know there's a lot. There's a lot of migrants who get brought across by criminal gangs and the criminal gangs pay for their voyage, so to speak, but then they're expected to work it off. I think that there was a big sting, wasn't there a couple of weeks ago across the country. And there was a lot of people there who were being exploited, who'd come across the channel and had obviously been charged an extortionate amount of money by the gangs who run it and then basically they just use them as a cheap source of labour. If they pay them at all." (S7)

"I think there was there was a couple of high-profile cases probably 10 or 15 years ago in the traveller community where people had been mentally abused and coerced into free labour. Those people were white British, so it probably had more of an impact." (S7)

These examples demonstrate that modern slavery affects a wide range of populations, including local communities, migrants, and refugees, often driven by systemic inequalities, criminal networks, and social vulnerabilities.

3.1.1.5.   Theme 1. Summary

Overall, findings demonstrate that modern slavery in the UK involves multiple, overlapping forms of exploitation that intersect with vulnerabilities related to migration, legal status, and social marginalisation. Survivors may continue to experience exploitation even after leaving initial abusive situations. Stakeholders' accounts underscore the importance of recognising the nuanced and interconnected nature of abuse, highlighting the need for coordinated, multi-agency responses that address both immediate risks and longer-term vulnerabilities.

3.1.2. Theme 2. Impacts and Lived Experiences of Survivors

Survivors of modern-day slavery experience multifaceted vulnerabilities, shaped by both the immediate trauma of exploitation and broader social, legal, and economic disadvantages. Stakeholders highlighted that understanding these experiences is crucial for delivering effective, multi-agency support.

3.1.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1. Initial Conditions, Trauma, and Marginalisation

Service providers reported that survivors often arrive under extreme duress, which shapes both their immediate needs and the long-term support required. One stakeholder noted that survivors are frequently under direct control, which affects how they can engage with services: "People are coming to us in a situation where they're under duress and control and we seek to work with all of those people." (S1) This lack of agency often manifests in mental health difficulties, housing insecurity, and poverty, creating multiple intersecting vulnerabilities that must be addressed simultaneously: "They're impacted obviously… Stressed mental health issues… We see the poverty issues and the lack of housing […] In terms of their emotional state, they don't have a good one." (S1) The inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers among this population adds another layer of complexity, as legal precarity compounds the psychological and social impact of exploitation: "The clients that we look after are refugees and asylum seekers." (S2)

Stakeholders emphasised that legal precarity and lack of formal documentation often leave survivors in ongoing states of uncertainty and exclusion. This structural marginalisation reinforces trauma and affects survivors' interactions with social systems:

> "So, the clients we work with either have or are in the process of acquiring the refugee status. So that's people who aren't covered or protected legally, they will not have documents […] They deal with complex issues which don't just involve what they have been exposed to… be it labour exploitation or being trafficked, for example, but also the ongoing trauma of not having security not having a clear status. Very much being outsiders and made to feel by our systems, social systems as marginalised or second-class citizens." (S5)

Such experiences highlight the importance of recognising survivors' personhood. Service providers noted that restoring a sense of voice and individuality is central to recovery, helping individuals to rebuild confidence and autonomy:

> "With the clients that we have worked with, we have noticed that what these clients needed the most was to feel heard. For a long time, maybe years, maybe decades, they had no voice, their freedom was completely removed, sometimes from them, which led them feel like they are. They did not matter, their opinions, their individuality… Personhood is relevant for society." (S5)

3.1.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2. Gendered and Differential Experiences of Exploitation

Stakeholders emphasised that exploitation is often gendered, with men more likely to be affected by labour exploitation and women more likely to face sexual exploitation, sexual violence, and trauma of higher intensity:

> "Most of the clients who have experienced modern day slavery are male. Exploitation is split half in half, I would say, and the difference in experiences […] Females are more likely to experience sexual exploitation and sexual violence. Their experiences are more acute. Maybe I would say more severe, maybe more traumatic." (S3)

Women's experiences are further compounded by intersecting disadvantages, such as coercion, prior domestic abuse, and structural barriers to social and economic participation. This results in cumulative trauma that can be more complex than that experienced by men:

> "I think one problem that we have is there's often coercion and domestic abuse directed at women who have also been victims or survivors of domestic abuse. It happens more often to women than to men. So, you then have a situation where people are disadvantaged in several ways, because obviously as migrants in the UK, as well as the modern-day slavery experience, as well as maybe the experience of domestic abuse and violence." (S4)

Employment opportunities also differ by gender, with men often having more documented work experience that facilitates legal employment. In contrast, women may face both systemic and societal barriers that limit their ability to secure decent work, further reinforcing dependency and vulnerability:

> "Men often have more track record of working or work that they can document, even from abroad, and I think that helps them maybe to move into legal employment. And apart from the other societal barriers as well affecting women's employment then it means it's easier for men to move into legal employment and acceptable employment. I was going to say decent employment, but there are obviously debates what decent employment actually is." (S4)

These gendered disparities demonstrate the need for interventions that are tailored to the specific risks and barriers faced by women and men.

3.1.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3. Psychological Impacts, Trust, and Broader Community Challenges

Stakeholders highlighted that survivors often experience persistent psychological stress, with ongoing fears about traffickers and their safety. This affects initial engagement with services and underscores the importance of trauma-informed approaches: "So when you meet the client

for the for the first instant you can tell on their faces the concern, the stress… They're still worried about these people that trafficked them in the first instance." (S6) Building trust was described as a crucial aspect of effective intervention. Survivors who have been traumatised over long periods may initially be reluctant to disclose information, requiring consistent reassurance and collaborative support:

> "We had was a woman who was working for 15 hours a day and not getting paid enough… She would say, what can I do? What can I do without giving details? And again, it takes a while to build trust. That's the biggest part for these people. They've been traumatised if you imagine that… It took a while before she was able to open up." (S6)

Stakeholders also described broader societal factors that exacerbate survivors' experiences of marginalisation, including racism, stigma, and misperceptions about migrant entitlements. These factors influence survivors' ability to access support and can further entrench vulnerability:

> "The biggest issue we also have has to do with minority groups as well. Because the racism… this thing about if you amplify certain race or ethnic groups, you're racist… there's gotta be a way to talk about this. People are being trafficked, they're being exploited. We've got to start in our community… we ought to be saying this is not acceptable. Yeah. So again, building that knowledge, intelligence and saying loud and clear, if you feel exploited or being exposed to come out and let people know you have a right to protect you… we can support you." (S6)

Finally, stakeholders emphasised that organised criminal networks compound the risks faced by survivors, linking exploitation to other criminal activities such as money laundering and drug trafficking. Understanding this context is critical for designing interventions that account for ongoing threats and vulnerabilities:

> "The additional struggle that people come into the UK sometimes face, as well as being taken advantage of by a criminal element… Because I mean… obviously the riots last year played a huge part in in, in how Sunderland has kind of… well it highlighted a lot of the issues that have been bubbling under the surface should we say… What the [Back in Control] project's done is it's exposed the raw underbelly of what a lot of migrants do face… understand, you know how deep it runs, because I think it's a lot more complex than people probably first imagined. Because the gangs involved in people trafficking are normally involved in other criminal endeavours. Money laundering, drugs. You know that type of stuff. They are quite powerful people as well and gangs." (S7)

By integrating these insights, stakeholders emphasised that survivors lived experiences are shaped by trauma, legal precarity, gendered vulnerabilities, and broader structural and community factors, all of which must be addressed to support meaningful recovery.

3.1.2.4. Theme 2. Summary

The evidence demonstrates that survivors of modern-day slavery face multidimensional challenges requiring holistic, trauma-informed interventions. Supporting survivors effectively involves recognising their personhood, addressing gendered and legal vulnerabilities, building trust, and accounting for broader societal and community contexts that compound the impacts of exploitation.

3.2. Part 2. Holistic Support for Victims and Survivors of Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation

Findings show that support for survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation must address both urgent and long-term needs. Immediate interventions focus on crisis support, including safe accommodation, food, benefits, and integrated legal or immigration assistance, often delivered through multi-agency networks and drop-in hubs. Long-term support emphasises emotional and mental health, empowerment, and practical life skills, tailored to individual circumstances and family contexts. Flexible approaches, combining informal well-being checks, counselling, and guidance on employment, education, and language, help survivors regain agency and self-determination. By linking practical, legal, and psychosocial support, services create stability and promote independence, enabling survivors to engage meaningfully with society while addressing the complex, intersecting challenges they face.

3.2.1. Theme 3: Immediate and Practical Support: Crisis Intervention and Access to Basic Needs

Immediate and practical support is critical in responding to the urgent needs of survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation. Upon initial engagement, survivors often face high levels of vulnerability, including coercion, precarious living conditions, and limited access to basic resources. Stakeholders highlighted that addressing these immediate needs, ranging from safe accommodation and welfare support to food, household essentials, and mental health services, is essential to stabilise survivors' circumstances and reduce risk. Effective support often requires multi-agency collaboration, drop-in hubs, outreach, and integrated legal and immigration assistance, ensuring survivors can access both immediate relief and pathways to longer-term stability.

3.2.1.1. Sub-theme 3.1 Nature of Immediate Support

The initial engagement with survivors of modern slavery is often characterised by urgent needs and high levels of vulnerability. Stakeholders emphasised that many survivors come into

services under duress, facing coercion or precarious living situations. Immediate intervention is therefore crucial to stabilise their circumstances and provide a foundation for longer-term support. "People are coming to us in a situation where they're under duress and control and we seek to work with all of those peoples to find the alternative accommodation and additional support in any crisis measures that they may need in the short term." (S1) This focus on crisis intervention is reflected in the priority placed on securing housing, benefits, and other practical supports. Stakeholders highlighted that while long-term recovery remains a goal, the immediate task is to address basic survival needs, ensuring that survivors are safe and supported in the short term: "It's more a case of what can we do to support them… For us it's the crisis situation in the short term rather than the long-term support […] We are very much let's sort this immediately… Let's find you some housing. Let's find you some benefits." (S1) By addressing urgent requirements quickly, stakeholders can reduce immediate risks and create stability from which survivors can engage with additional services.

3.2.1.2.   Sub-theme 3.2 Addressing Basic Needs and Welfare

Practical support extends beyond housing and benefits to include essential household items, food, fuel, and mental health services. Stakeholders described a holistic approach that ensures survivors' immediate physical and emotional needs are met, preventing further harm or destabilisation during a vulnerable period.

> "Have they got some way to sleep? … Is there mental health support that we could direct them to? … Emergency fuel vouchers and food parcels… Have they got what they need in the next day or two… week or two… that will help them." (S1)

> "We get them some money for beds or washing machines." (S1)

These interventions are not isolated but embedded within a network of support, allowing services to respond flexibly to each survivor's circumstances. This ensures that urgent practical needs are met while maintaining connections to broader welfare and health services. "We tend to work as a link to other stakeholders. So, we would look to the Council. We would look to any sort of emergency hospital situations… The police and things like that, so that we can relocate them […] A link to other resources really is what we would do." (S1) Such linkages allow survivors to access a comprehensive safety net, encompassing safe accommodation, welfare support, and immediate care.

3.2.1.3.   Sub-theme 3.3 Multi-agency Collaboration and Drop-in Hubs

Stakeholders highlighted that one of the most effective strategies for meeting immediate needs is multi-agency collaboration. Drop-in hubs provide a centralised point where survivors can access multiple services under one roof, reducing barriers to support and creating a safe,

welcoming environment. "Our drop in is one stop hub. We network and collaborate with different organisations. So, we have our desk, then the other desks for our partners. We've got someone from the City Council. We've got Together for Children. We've got Young Asian Voices [charity]." (S2) Outreach and recruitment strategies are equally important. By publicising services online, attending community sessions, and working with local organisations, stakeholders increase awareness among survivors and ensure they know where to seek help. This multi-channel approach allows for both formal referrals and word-of-mouth connections, widening access to urgent support.

> "So, recruitment is first of all via our website because we publicise our project on Facebook. Another channel of recruitment is drop-in sessions. We go out to places like XXXX [organisation that provides support for asylum seekers and refugees] to tell them about our project, what we do and make them aware that such a project exists to give them support and of course ask them whether they have been victims of this kind of slavery and exploitation." (S2)

> "We've used referrals from organisations including Causeway, who provide housing for survivors, for example. We've had refers from other organisations. We've had self-referrals and word of mouth situations because one person maybe told another person who were in a similar situation. We had many work walk-ins. We have also worked actively with local organisations, supporting refugees and asylum seekers." (S4)

By combining drop-in hubs, outreach, and referral networks, stakeholders can ensure survivors' immediate needs are met efficiently, while also providing clear pathways into further support.

3.2.1.4.   Sub-theme 3.4. Integration of Legal and Immigration Support

Immediate practical support often intersects with legal, and immigration needs, which are critical to survivors' long-term stability. Stakeholders described the necessity of handling multiple processes simultaneously, including immigration applications, housing, and benefits, alongside addressing health and social care requirements.

> "The first point is really the that initial meeting, where you actually discuss what the problems are and what needs to be done. We have to carry out several processes at the same time. So that includes applying for immigration status, applying for housing, maybe applying for benefits and at the same time resolving issues with benefits […] Resolving issues with immigration status and often very basic things such as GP appointments, especially at the beginning." (S4)

Legal support is particularly crucial where survivors lack immigration status or access to welfare. Stakeholders emphasised that integrated services help navigate these complex systems, ensuring that practical needs are met while survivors secure the legal recognition required to access long-term support.

"Our immigration work also looks at how we support victims of slavery. We're funded by the police and Crime Commissioner to support victims of modern slavery. We have a legal aid contract which means we can support them with legal aid as well. We support… help victims to almost navigate the system, support them because they often haven't got status." (S6)

Partnerships with organisations such as ICOS were highlighted as pivotal, allowing survivors to access legal and welfare services more efficiently than through standard channels, reducing waiting times and prioritising urgent needs.

"The clients would have to wait for ages to get referral to immigration solicitor. Now with ICOS all they have to do is ping an e-mail to us. We don't just do immigration; we do other areas of law. So again, national welfare, we do that. We give immigration advice… they get welfare rights advice, employment law. Without the partnership, they'd have to wait ages like everybody else. There are long waiting lists before clients can be seen now. We've built this partnership where they can refer to us directly and we prioritise their clients. So, I think those are the good outcomes." (S6)

This integrated approach demonstrates that immediate practical support is inseparable from legal and welfare advocacy, ensuring survivors' short-term needs are addressed while establishing the conditions for longer-term stability.

3.2.1.5. Theme 3. Summary

In summary, stakeholders emphasised that immediate and practical support is foundational to survivors' recovery. By providing crisis intervention, meeting basic needs, and linking survivors to multi-agency services, stakeholders create safety and stability that allow engagement with longer-term support. Legal and immigration assistance is tightly woven into this framework, ensuring that practical interventions are reinforced by systemic support, enabling survivors to transition from crisis to recovery.

3.2.2. Theme 4. Long-Term and Holistic Support: Emotional, Mental Health, Empowerment, and Life Skills

Modern slavery survivors face complex challenges that extend far beyond immediate safety. Stakeholders highlighted that long-term, holistic support is essential, encompassing emotional well-being, mental health, empowerment, and practical life skills. This approach recognises that recovery is not linear and requires sustained, personalised engagement, often involving multiple services and consideration of family circumstances.

3.2.2.1. Sub-theme 4.1. Emotional and Mental Health Support

Supporting emotional and mental well-being is central to helping survivors regain stability and confidence. Services focus on creating a sense of safety, providing access to counselling, and promoting well-being through structured and informal interactions. Stakeholders emphasised that the intervention also recognises the impact of family on individual well-being, extending support indirectly to relatives where appropriate:

> "We have had some positive outcomes of people finding employment, settling down in life, improving well-being and mental health. Actually, they feel that they have some support, they have someone to turn to for help, they feel a kind of feeling of security, safety, comfort. Some of them have benefited from counselling, so the mental health has improved." (S3)

> "It's spreading to other family members as well because specifically one client, she had a huge problem with her son as well. So, the project also extended indirectly to her son … The project is not only targeted at the individuals who are enrolled on this project, but also their families. And this again impacts on their well-being." (S3)

This evidence demonstrates that mental health support contributes not only to symptom management but also to broader feelings of security and social reintegration. By combining counselling with informal check-ins, providers maintain engagement with clients who may not initially seek therapy:

> "How does the Back in Control Project support client's mental health and well-being? We do it in several ways. I think one of them is more informal in making sure that people feel OK and just asking them how they are doing and checking with them every two weeks … how they are doing or either over the phone or at least sending them a text if they don't respond and making sure that they are fine in many ways because part of it is also safety, but also it's the wider safety and well-being. Obviously, we contribute to well-being through housing and advice and so providing support with housing benefits, but also, we provide counselling through our partner organisation. We also do a lot of work in volunteering around park clean ups and things like bird watching etc." (S4)

Stakeholders highlighted that some clients prefer intermediate levels of support between informal check-ins and full therapy, which helps build trust and readiness for more intensive interventions:

> "One thing that we found important in well-being was there needs to be something in between, just very a very soft approach to being just asking how you're doing and that very intensive level which is counselling. Because not everyone wants therapy, or they don't want therapy at this particular moment. Some people might have been for therapy, but maybe they don't feel they can do anything more therapy wise." (S4)

3.2.2.2. Sub-theme 4.2. Individualised and Flexible Support

Survivors' experiences are diverse, and stakeholders emphasised that interventions must be tailored to individual circumstances. Trauma varies according to country of origin, personal history, and social context:

> "Support is very much individualised because each case is going to be different, so there could be three or four clients who have been trafficked, but they will have different stories. They will maybe come from different countries, have lived in a different context. The complex trauma that they deal with requires a much more flexible approach than one-size-fits-all type of model." (S5)

Psychometric assessments and flexible therapeutic modalities are used to ensure care is responsive to mental health needs and can adapt over time:

> "We have psychometric tools and questionnaires that we complete with the client, or the client completes before the first meeting, which gives us a rough indication of what they may be dealing with… their mental state. Depending on the results of the metric forms… we have the initial assessment which makes a support plan and recommendation at the beginning of how many sessions the client might need, which can change, and we equally are flexible in repeating those psychometric scenarios and assessing how the client is progressing." (S5)

This approach also empowers clients to prioritise issues most pressing to them:

> "If the client says, 'I don't want to talk about my experiences, I just want to understand my anxiety', then we go with that. Of course, the trauma is being addressed through addressing the anxiety, but if the client has decided the anxiety is what bothers them primarily… We do try to increase their self-awareness to a point where they would be ready to perhaps to talk about their experience." (S5)

3.2.2.3. Sub-theme 4.3. Empowerment and Confidence-Building

Empowering survivors is central to promoting long-term recovery. Stakeholders emphasised initiatives designed to build confidence, self-awareness, and agency, enabling clients to take control of their lives and re-engage with society:

> "ICOS is working hard to address this inequality and to basically, put them back on… Give them back control and agency. And we are part of the… We try to support them mentally… Give them their freedom emotionally, and also to empower them through self-awareness, to make them feel like important members of society." (S5)

Peer-led activities, project steering groups, and targeted women's programmes provide opportunities for social participation and leadership, reinforcing empowerment and confidence:

> "Confidence is an area where women survivors definitely need a lot of support with. And we have actually done some work on that. But I think we would like to have more time and more resources to do more work on that. … Apart from socials and trips, they also

do a lot around empowerment, and they have a project steering group of, I think now 12 women. So that helps to empower people." (S4)

3.2.2.4. Sub-theme 4.4. Practical Life Skills and Long-Term Independence

Recovery also requires equipping survivors with practical life skills to achieve independence and integration. Stakeholders described support in areas such as housing, benefits, employment, education, and language:

> "So basically, helping them especially when they are about to leave the safe house to be able to make choices for themselves with regards to staying in the UK, going back to the country of origin or with regards with regards to applying for immigration status with regards applying for benefits. Then applying for housing and other entitlements and services." (S4)

The intervention relies on multi-agency collaboration to connect survivors with the services they need, highlighting the importance of coordination in addressing complex, interlinked needs:

> "The main success, I think, was the ability to reach out to people who would otherwise really struggle to find the support they need. The nature of the issues requires a multi-agency approach and the link that connects those different agencies sometimes is missing for them … and in the case of one client, had an interview with the Home Office… and the Home Office hired the wrong interpreter for a different language… Which I think this project is doing quite well in addressing and sorting out." (S5)

Proactive guidance on employment, training, and language acquisition further strengthens survivors' independence:

> "Whenever I find out about training opportunities, I send them information about it by WhatsApp. So, whenever I see an advert, an opportunity, it always brings to mind the client who needs it. So, I send this information directly to that client, so that's training and employment opportunities. Today I found some support for Ukrainians to find a job, polish up CV's and interview skills and I sent this information to my clients as well. Straight away." (S3)

> "I spread information amongst my clients about English courses and try to make them go to and try at least the first language lesson. So, it's a big success when you actually hear that a person committed, took the time actually to get there because for some it's really hard." (S3)

3.2.2.5. Theme 4. Summary

The findings demonstrate that long-term and holistic support integrates emotional support, mental health care, empowerment, and practical life skills in a flexible, individualised, and multi-agency framework. By addressing family-level impact, coordinating across services, and providing personalised guidance, the intervention helps survivors move from trauma toward

empowerment, self-determination, and meaningful participation in society. The approach balances emotional support, skill-building, and psychosocial interventions, ensuring that survivors are not only supported but equipped to thrive independently.

3.3. Part 3. Challenges in Supporting Victims and Survivors of Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation

Supporting victims and survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation is a highly complex and resource-intensive endeavour. Stakeholders consistently emphasised that structural, organisational, and policy-related barriers significantly constrain the effectiveness of support systems. From under-resourced services and unstable funding to language barriers, immigration restrictions, and fragmented partnerships, these challenges impede the delivery of consistent, holistic care. At the same time, survivors remain highly vulnerable to re-exploitation due to unsafe housing, financial insecurity, and limited access to long-term support. This section explores the structural and practical obstacles faced by providers, as well as the ongoing risks to survivors, highlighting the interplay between systemic constraints and individual vulnerability.

3.3.1. Theme 5. Structural and Resource Barriers to Support

Stakeholders consistently emphasised that the systems of support for victims and survivors of modern slavery are constrained by deep-rooted structural and resource challenges. These barriers limit the ability of agencies to provide sustainable, holistic care and can undermine the long-term recovery of survivors. The interviews revealed a complex interplay of financial, linguistic, educational, immigration, health, and partnership barriers.

3.3.1.1. Sub-theme 5.1. Under-Resourcing and Funding Uncertainty

A central and recurring theme across interviews was the extent to which services are underfunded and overstretched. Providers noted that this scarcity of resources affected every stage of survivor support, from initial engagement to long-term rehabilitation: "Every agency is under resourced, including ourselves." (S1) The lack of adequate resources meant that providers were often only able to deliver short-term crisis responses rather than the sustained support that survivors required: "I suppose we are putting a plaster on in the short term. We're doing what we can, but it's not enough ongoing support." (S1)

The issue of short term fundings is further reinforced by insecure funding streams. Stakeholders explained that uncertainty about whether projects would continue created instability and undermined innovation, with staff hesitant to develop new ideas that might not be viable beyond a short funding cycle:

> "I think uncertainty around funding is a challenge. So I could have done more with this project, but now I don't know if it will continue beyond the end of October… I might just spend resources and time chasing shadows." (S4)

> "The other problem is I find it very frustrating when the funders don't understand the project because it's too complicated for them… Funding this project really probably needs more than one year funding. It takes time." (S4)

Such fragility was seen as especially problematic given the complex needs of survivors, which cannot realistically be addressed through one-year projects. Post-pandemic pressures further widened the gap between demand and provision.

> "The challenge is getting harder and harder because I'm sure you know, post COVID demand has gone up for our services and the funding has not followed at all really. It's a very, very tough gig for us." (S6)

> "I think if I'm being very honest with you, we're still scratching the surface here… capacity is an issue. So, I'm gonna go back to the funding. Funding is a big part of it. If we were funded properly, we can do more." (S6)

Together, these reflections demonstrate how financial instability translates into limited capacity, restricted service delivery, and ultimately gaps in survivor support.

3.3.1.2. Sub-theme 5.2. Language and Communication Barriers

Another major barrier concerned the difficulties of supporting survivors whose first language is not English. Participants explained that while communication is fundamental to trust-building and effective intervention, the costs and scarcity of translation services made this extremely challenging.

> "I know that it's difficult to find a translator. We're lucky to have an operation assistant who speaks about 5 languages. It's expensive to find translators and other things… you would need to develop better strategies to make sure that the most vulnerable of those groups are not slipping through the net." (S2)

Without effective communication, providers felt that interventions risked failing altogether: "I know it's an expense, but it's communication what we're really relying upon. Otherwise, the intervention doesn't really work without the communication." (S2)

To compensate, some organisations relied on creative but imperfect solutions such as Google Translate, multilingual staff, or informal language similarities:

> "Here we try to manage with our own resources … via using Google Translate for example. Sometimes languages are quite similar, so we can also communicate using our native languages. We also have to provide interpreters often." (S3)

However, these stopgaps were far from adequate. For some groups, language differences created "huge barriers," preventing providers from accurately assessing needs or tailoring support: "I am just wondering what to do with the language barrier that I have with some clients from Africa… sometimes there is a huge barrier so it's difficult to get down to the needs." (S3) Even when staff had access to colleagues who spoke relevant languages, this support was inconsistent and often dependent on their availability: "Some kind of assistance with Arabic languages would be beneficial to me myself… if I need help, I could rely on her help on Thursdays and only on Thursdays." (S3)

This challenge was compounded by the sheer diversity of languages spoken by survivors of modern slavery in the UK, which made it impossible for even multilingual teams to meet all communication needs:

> "Language barriers is another one. So, we have used interpreters, but that also there are costs… there are so many different languages, you know, Albanian, Vietnamese, etcetera, is difficult to have so many languages." (S4)

The cumulative effect was that survivors risked being excluded from services or receiving fragmented support due to something as fundamental as communication.

3.3.1.3. Sub-theme 5.3. Educational Barriers Linked to Language

Language difficulties also spilled over into education and training, where survivors faced structural delays in accessing accredited English classes. Providers described survivors waiting months before being able to enrol in ESOL courses, leaving them frustrated and disempowered:

> "For education, we refer especially to the college, but language is a barrier… often the college provision is a twice each year, so people have to wait until January or September, so they're getting frustrated and basically they feel stuck." (S4)

Even when informal options were available, these did not lead to recognised qualifications, limiting progression into further training or work. Survivors were further disadvantaged by differences in educational systems, as the UK model was perceived as rigid and sequential compared with more flexible systems abroad:

> "Another barrier is that many of the clients we work with have the experience of a different education system… in the UK it is just taking that step and another step another step… we also need more flexibility with that as well. Especially with vocational courses." (S4)

This left many survivors facing extended delays in achieving their aspirations, reinforcing a sense of stagnation and frustration.

3.3.1.4. Sub-theme 5.4. Immigration and Policy Barriers

Beyond organisational constraints, survivors' access to support was also shaped by the broader structural context of immigration and welfare systems. Several providers pointed to the hostile environment policies as a major barrier, describing how insecure immigration status blocked survivors from accessing services and reinforced feelings of being unwanted:

> "Ohh, there are plenty of challenges. The immigration system in the UK has become very hostile to migration in general… Immigration is often a key barrier. So, their immigration status is often a key barrier to accessing other types of support. The lack of immigration support is a huge problem. The welfare rights system is also not very welcoming." (S4)

In this context, survivors faced multiple forms of exclusion: practical barriers to services, legal obstacles to entitlements, and emotional barriers linked to fear and stigma.

3.3.1.5. Sub-theme 5.5. Mental Health Provision Gaps

Mental health support was another area where provision fell short of need. Survivors were described as facing long waits for overstretched NHS services, leaving agencies struggling to fill the gap:

> "We certainly see from a psychotherapeutic side there is a great need for mental health support and that the primary care providers are overwhelmed… the demand and the waiting lists are up to a year and a half in certain trusts, so a way to expand would be to offer more of this kind of holistic support, but of course in providing it quite a bit of resources needed required." (S5)

The implication was that while holistic approaches were recognised as essential, the resource intensity of such services often made them difficult to sustain, leaving survivors without timely or adequate mental health care.

3.3.1.6. Sub-theme 5.6. Fragmented Partnership Working

Finally, while multi-agency collaboration is often presented as the cornerstone of effective modern slavery support, providers highlighted the ongoing difficulties of overcoming siloed ways of working. Efforts to build networks were acknowledged, but these were described as uneven and incomplete.

> "There's some wider network of organisations working together. But I still think they're still silos. So, Sunderland sits alone then you've got Shields… there is still silo thinking. I want to see people actually accepting that this is an issue." (S6)

Limited funding and capacity often encouraged organisations to "hold onto" resources rather than share them, undermining collective impact:

"We need to think about funding. Then capacity as well, but also sharing capacity, sharing resources as well… Sometimes we don't necessarily want to share. It would be a better world to actually share and see how we can support the greater good." (S6)

The persistence of silos after years of effort suggested that stronger strategic leadership and incentives for collaboration were required to achieve genuine multi-agency working.

3.3.1.7.   Theme 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, structural and resource barriers limit the support available to victims and survivors of modern slavery. Underfunding, short-term funding cycles, language and education barriers, gaps in mental health provision, and fragmented multi-agency working all restrict the delivery of holistic care. These challenges not only hinder service effectiveness but also perpetuate survivors' vulnerability, highlighting the need for sustained investment, strategic leadership, and stronger collaboration.

3.3.2. Theme 6. Risks of Re-exploitation and Client Vulnerabilities

Stakeholders made clear that the risks of re-exploitation for victims and survivors of modern slavery remain high, even after they have entered formal support. These risks stem from practical barriers, structural inequalities, and ongoing trauma, which combine to limit survivors' ability to build stable and independent lives.

3.3.2.1.   Sub-theme 6.1. Unsafe and Inappropriate Housing

A recurring concern across interviews was the inadequacy of housing provision. Survivors are frequently placed in temporary or unsuitable accommodation that fails to provide a safe or supportive environment. In many cases, the settings themselves expose individuals to harmful influences such as drugs, alcohol, and predatory relationships.

"Ultimately it [MDS] hasn't stopped in the area, and they [victims/ survivors] are put into temporary accommodation that probably isn't suitable for the majority of them, unfortunately. If we look at drugs and alcohol… they're [victims/ survivors] unfortunately put in a situation where that's available. If they are surrounded with that it's not a good position to be in. If you are struggling and your mental health isn't good. If somebody offers you money, or they offer you drugs or alcohol, you know there is a potential to look for ways to escape the situation you're in […] And people can be very friendly and amenable. You can fall into a lot of different traps, through your choice of your own, and you haven't really had an option. So, yeah, it's not, it's not ideal. There's, there's a definite need for safer individual type accommodation, but isn't an awful lot of scope… that's the problem." (S1)

This example highlights how inappropriate placements can reproduce cycles of harm, leaving survivors with limited options and high exposure to re-exploitation. The absence of safer,

individual accommodation undermines recovery and makes it more difficult to establish a sense of security.

Stakeholders also noted that without tenancy history or secure legal status, survivors struggle to access the housing market. This lack of mobility forces them to remain in unsafe areas where exploiters are often present:

> "They're coming from situations where they have no sort of tenure at all within the city, which makes that difficult to access any tenancy. Ideally you want to move out of that one area where you are and move to somewhere and that's always difficult as well. So again, the opportunity to be mobile isn't as obvious as you would expect it to be." (S1)

The inability to move to safer neighbourhoods entrenches survivors in high-risk environments. As one participant described, individuals may find themselves in high-rise flats where exploitative networks are active, compounding the challenges of escaping exploitation:

> "Where they're living in the high-rise flats and people are pretending to be friends. It's really linked in as well, with the county line stuff… It's quite a complex network and it's very difficult to get out of." (S1).

Together, these accounts demonstrate how unsuitable housing and lack of safe options can directly expose survivors to new risks, limiting their ability to distance themselves from harmful networks and rebuild their lives.

3.3.2.2. Sub-theme 6.2. Financial Insecurity and Risk of Returning to Exploitation

Financial precarity was another central theme. Survivors often leave exploitation with little money, limited knowledge of the UK system, and restricted access to benefits or work. Stakeholders highlighted that without targeted support, survivors can be driven back into exploitative work or other high-risk coping strategies.

> "Those who have already been affected by work exploitation can very easily fall back into it. So, by providing access to services and benefits, we can prevent that because they are better equipped to manage financially. That could prevent them from doing some illegal activities and again falling victim to what they have been victim to before." (S3)

This illustrates how economic stability is a critical protective factor. Access to benefits and services can provide survivors with the means to manage independently, reducing the temptation or necessity of returning to unsafe employment.

The transition out of safe house accommodation was described as a particularly vulnerable moment. Survivors often lack understanding of local housing systems and may enter exploitative agreements, sometimes without realising the risks involved:

> "We've seen so much exploitation. We had people coming through from a safe house … who actually were leaving the safe house, and they needed support … were about to leave the safe house after the after the period of support under the National Referral Mechanism, as about to finish and there wasn't much support for them. There was no specific support for them when they were leaving, after they have left and often they knew very little about the local housing conditions. So, there was the risk of either being exploited again or the risk of just signing up for things they didn't understand. For example, renting properties where they didn't understand that they'd have to pay a deposit or they didn't understand what terms of the rental agreement." (S4)

This lack of guidance leaves survivors vulnerable to exploitation within the housing market, as well as broader financial insecurity. Without structured support at this stage, individuals can quickly become trapped in unsafe arrangements or forced to rely on dangerous alternatives such as loan sharks[20].

3.3.2.3. Theme 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this theme highlights that survivors of modern slavery remain highly vulnerable to re-exploitation due to unsafe housing, financial insecurity, and limited support during key transition points. Temporary or inappropriate accommodation exposes individuals to harmful influences, while lack of secure tenancy or financial stability can force survivors back into exploitative situations. These findings emphasise the need for safer, tailored housing options, robust financial support, and guided transitions to reduce the risk of re-exploitation and enable survivors to build more stable lives.

3.4. Findings Summary

In conclusion, the findings show that modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK take multiple, overlapping forms that are reinforced by survivors' structural vulnerabilities and social marginalisation. Accounts from service providers demonstrate how exploitation extends beyond immediate abuse into survivors' daily lives, shaping their experiences of housing, work, legal status, and wellbeing. Survivors' journeys highlight the continuing risks of trauma, poverty, and re-exploitation, even after leaving exploitative circumstances.

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[20] Loan sharks are lenders who charge excessive interest and use threats or intimidation to trap borrowers in cycles of debt.

The findings also indicate that while immediate crisis responses are essential, longer-term and more holistic forms of support are equally critical. Survivors' needs span emotional wellbeing, empowerment, and practical life skills, all of which require sustained, multi-agency engagement. At the same time, service providers emphasised the impact of resource limitations, language barriers, and fragmented systems, which constrain their ability to offer consistent support. Together, these findings underline both the scale of survivors' vulnerabilities and the challenges services face in meeting them.

4. Implications and Recommendations

This section discusses the findings from service providers in the context of wider evidence and policy debates on modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK, bringing together the evaluation findings, their wider implications, and practical recommendations. The discussion highlights the complex, overlapping nature of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK, shaped by structural vulnerabilities, restrictive immigration regimes, and under-resourced support systems. It considers the implications for long-term stability, showing how programmes like BiC2 address immediate needs while tackling systemic barriers through multi-agency, survivor-centred approaches. Finally, the recommendations set out priorities for strengthening support, including sustainable funding, improved access to ESOL, trauma-informed mental health provision, and enhanced legal and immigration assistance, to reduce vulnerability and support survivors' autonomy.

4.1. Discussion

The findings from service providers highlight the complex and overlapping nature of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK. Stakeholders described situations where individuals experienced multiple, intersecting forms of abuse, including labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, criminal coercion, and debt bondage, often underpinned by structural vulnerabilities such as insecure immigration status, language barriers, and social isolation. These accounts are consistent with wider evidence, which conceptualises modern slavery as a continuum of exploitation shaped by structural inequalities, economic precarity, and power imbalances (Craig et al., 2019; ILO, 2025; LeBaron, 2021). The blurred boundaries between legitimate work and exploitative practices, evident in survivors' continued abuse in formal employment contexts, echo findings that legal definitions of slavery often fail to capture the realities of labour exploitation, particularly in sectors reliant on low-paid migrant labour (GLAA, 2025a; Cockbain et al., 2022).

A recurring theme is the persistence of exploitation even after individuals exit immediate abusive contexts. Survivors often move into precarious work or unstable housing arrangements where further exploitation occurs, reflecting systemic gaps in protection. This aligns with UK evidence showing that restrictive immigration policies, dependence on insecure labour markets, and welfare exclusions perpetuate cycles of vulnerability (Lewis et al., 2015a; 2015b; IOM, 2019; Sumption & Brindle, 2024). Post-Brexit visa schemes, such as the Skilled Worker visa, tie migrants to a single employer and introduce barriers like higher English language requirements and extended settlement periods, increasing dependency and risk (Sehic & Vicol, 2025). The emphasis on debt bondage and coercive recruitment mirrors global patterns, where traffickers

exploit financial precarity and the absence of social protections to maintain long-term control (ILO, 2025; UNODC, 2024).

Service providers' accounts also reveal the impact of overlapping legal, social, and psychological barriers on survivors. Individuals arrive in conditions of trauma, insecurity, and legal precarity, with long-term effects on mental health and social participation. This aligns with literature showing that survivors face marginalisation through welfare exclusions, protracted immigration processes, and structural discrimination, which reinforce vulnerability to re-trafficking and inhibit integration (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2025; IOM, 2024). Providers' emphasis on restoring personhood and agency reflects the broader recognition that survivor-centred, trauma-informed approaches are critical to long-term stability and empowerment (Kalayaan, 2024; Cockbain et al., 2022).

Gender emerged as a key axis of differentiation. Providers reported that men are more frequently subjected to labour exploitation, while women disproportionately experience sexual exploitation, coercion, and multiple forms of abuse. This pattern is consistent with global and UK evidence, with women and girls representing the majority of sexual exploitation cases, while men are more often exploited in high-risk labour sectors (ILO, 2025; UNODC, 2024; Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). Women's experiences are compounded by prior domestic abuse, systemic barriers to employment, and cultural expectations, leading to cumulative trauma, which reflects literature highlighting the interaction of gendered vulnerabilities with migration status, poverty, and discrimination (LeBaron, 2021; Cockbain & Bowers, 2019).

A significant contribution of the findings is the insight into holistic, long-term support. Providers emphasised the importance of multi-agency, trauma-informed approaches addressing both immediate needs, including housing, welfare, and legal aid, alongside longer-term recovery, including mental health support, skills development, and empowerment. This resonates with critiques of the NRM, which faces delays, inconsistent outcomes, and insufficient victim support, particularly for children, women, and foreign nationals (IOM, 2023; IOM, 2024; Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2025). While the NRM facilitates identification, meaningful recovery requires integrated, sustained interventions addressing structural and psychosocial dimensions (LeBaron, 2021; Kalayaan, 2024; Cockbain et al., 2022). Drop-in hubs, partnership networks, and flexible, person-centred services can mitigate some NRM shortcomings, though these are constrained by resource limitations.

Structural barriers, including underfunding, language difficulties, and fragmented partnership working, were also consistently highlighted. These reflect broader critiques of the UK anti-slavery framework, where short-term funding cycles, weak enforcement, and siloed service

delivery limit effective responses (Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act, 2019; Walk Free, 2023). Limited access to ESOL provision, long waiting times for mental health services, and gaps in welfare entitlements mirror evidence that survivors' integration is frequently stalled by systemic inadequacies (Cockbain et al., 2022). Providers' accounts illustrate the disjuncture between policy commitments and lived realities, with survivors' needs often exceeding under-resourced service capacity.

Taken together, the findings and wider literature underscore that modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK are structurally embedded phenomena, sustained by systemic inequalities, restrictive migration regimes, and under-resourced support frameworks. While the *Modern Slavery Act 2015* and related initiatives have increased awareness, persistent enforcement gaps, insufficient victim support, and limited corporate accountability remain (DBT, 2024a). Addressing these issues requires moving beyond narrow criminal justice responses toward sustained investment in holistic, survivor-centred interventions and structural reforms in labour governance, immigration policy, and welfare provision, alongside alignment with international standards such as the ILO Forced Labour framework and EU due diligence regulations.

4.2. Implications

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 presented in the second interim [evaluation report](#) 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.

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[21] for identified victims and reassessing employment restrictions, will reduce dependency on welfare and facilitate survivors' integration into the labour market.

These 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 Project 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.

4.3. Recommendations

BiC2 has already made significant strides in supporting victims and 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

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[21] Automatic leave to remain is when someone's legal right to stay in the UK is extended by law, without needing a new application or decision, usually while a case or appeal is pending.

recommendations focus on continuing and broadening the work BiC2 is already doing, while addressing areas that require further attention for more comprehensive support.

I.   Facilitate Access to Specialist ESOL Provision

Language barriers continue to limit survivors' access to employment, education, and community participation, with English proficiency identified as a key barrier to integration (ILO, 2022; Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). To address this, Back in Control and ICOS can strengthen collaboration with local further education and ESOL providers to signpost survivors into accredited courses with flexible entry points, supported by wraparound provision such as childcare, transport, and trauma-informed guidance. Access can be strengthened through government funding streams including the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Adult Skills Fund[22], the ESOL for Integration Fund Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)[23], the UK Resettlement Programmes[24], the Afghan Schemes Integration Support Funding[25], and the Homes for Ukraine initiative[26], with eligibility evidenced through documents such as the Application Registration Card (ARC). The project is also recommended to draw on Bell Foundation[27] guidance to inform best practice in supporting vulnerable groups and improving access to ESOL.

II.   Secure Sustainable Successor Funding

Survivors' needs extend well beyond the project's current five-year funding horizon, and short-term provision risks undermining the progress already made. Evidence from evaluations of modern slavery interventions highlights that consistent, multi-year funding is essential for stability and effectiveness (Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act, 2019; Walk Free, 2023). To ensure continuity of support, Back in Control and ICOS can work with funders to

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[22] The Department for Education (DfE) provides funding for ESOL courses through the Adult Skills Fund. This funding is available to further education colleges and adult learning providers, which may collaborate with NGOs to support learners. The ESFA also offers additional funding for specific groups, such as Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, to support their language learning needs. See here

[23] The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) administers the ESOL for Integration Fund, which supports local authorities in delivering English language sessions to individuals with little to no English skills. This fund aims to improve social integration and community participation. While the fund is directed to local authorities, it often involves partnerships with NGOs to deliver services. See here.

[24] This funding instruction, issued by the Home Office, supports local authorities in delivering services to individuals resettled under UK resettlement schemes. A key component is the provision of ESOL childcare funding, aimed at enabling parents to attend ESOL classes by covering childcare costs. See here

[25] The Afghan Schemes Integration Support Funding is intended to facilitate the integration of individuals into UK society, with a particular emphasis on English language acquisition. See here

[26] The UK government's Homes for Ukraine scheme provides a framework for local authorities to support Ukrainian nationals and their families in integrating into UK society. This initiative emphasises the importance of English language proficiency as a key factor in employment and community participation. See here

[27] The Bell Foundation is a UK-based charity that focuses on improving language skills, literacy, and communication for people with English as an additional language (EAL), including refugees, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable groups. See here

secure a successor funding arrangement, with flexibility to scale provision in line with demand. This approach builds on the project's strong track record of delivery and aligns with funder priorities for sustainability and value for money.

III.   Continue to Strengthen Multi-Agency Partnership Structures

Survivors' complex needs require coordinated responses, yet siloed working can limit effectiveness. Evidence highlights that multi-agency partnerships are essential to overcome fragmentation in survivor support (LeBaron, 2021; IOM, 2023). Back in Control and ICOS can strengthen collaboration with statutory and voluntary partners through their engagement with the formal Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP)[28]. This approach aligns with UK government guidance, including the Home Office Modern Slavery Strategy (2014, updated 2019), the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, and advice from the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, while building on ICOS's leadership role and embedding trauma-informed, survivor-centred practice. The SSP protects victims by coordinating services, implementing Sunderland City Council's Modern Slavery Policy[29] and its Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2023–2024[30]

IV.   Address the Gap in Trauma-Informed Mental Health Support

Survivors report long waits and limited access to trauma-informed psychological support, which research shows can inhibit recovery and reintegration (Cockbain et al., 2022). Back in Control, in collaboration with ICOS, NHS trusts, and third-sector partners, can facilitate access by developing clear referral pathways, supporting survivors to navigate services, and providing wraparound guidance such as appointment support and advocacy. This approach aligns with statutory frameworks including the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, the National Referral Mechanism, and Home Office guidance on identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery, as well as local initiatives such as Sunderland City Council's Modern Slavery Policy 2023, the Safer Sunderland Partnership, and Causeway's Exploitation Risk Checker[31]. By leveraging these mechanisms, the project can prioritise survivor needs, reduce risks of re-exploitation, and

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[28] The Safer Sunderland Partnership is the city's statutory Community Safety Partnership, comprising six responsible authorities Sunderland City Council, Northumbria Police, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, National Probation Service, Northumbria Community Rehabilitation Company. This partnership collaborates to tackle crime, disorder, substance misuse, and anti-social behaviour, aiming to ensure that everyone in Sunderland is, and feels, safe and secure. See here

[29] Sunderland City Council's Modern Slavery Policy 2023 sets a zero-tolerance approach for staff, contractors, and partners. It covers safeguarding, legal compliance, reporting, and training to prevent exploitation. See here

[30] Sunderland City Council's Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2023–2024 sets out its zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery, covering policy, procurement, and partnership work. As part of the Safer Sunderland Partnership, it integrates training, supply chain checks, and community safety initiatives to protect victims and improve practice. See here

[31] Causeway has launched the UK's first free self-assessment Exploitation Risk Checker, developed with survivors, to help individuals identify signs of criminal or sexual exploitation and provide guidance on next steps. See here

support access to trauma-informed mental health care within existing statutory and local provision.

V. Strengthen Access to Immigration and Legal Support

Immigration insecurity remains a key driver of vulnerability and exploitation, limiting survivors' long-term stability, and research shows that restrictive immigration regimes increase dependence on exploitative employers and create barriers to entitlements (Lewis et al., 2015; Milbourne & Coulson, 2021). Back in Control, in partnership with ICOS and specialist legal providers, can continue to facilitate access to immigration and welfare rights advice and provide guidance to navigate complex legal systems, contingent on securing ongoing funding. This work is reinforced by statutory and local frameworks: the *Modern Slavery Act 2015* provides legal protections and duties to safeguard victims; the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) offers a formal route to specialist support; Home Office guidance outlines how agencies should identify and respond to survivors; Sunderland City Council's Modern Slavery Policy 2023 sets local procedures for safeguarding and signposting; and the Safer Sunderland Partnership coordinates multi-agency responses to ensure survivors are referred to appropriate legal and welfare services.

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