Human Trafficking Foundation Online Forum
7 May 2020 2pm-4pm, via Zoom
Draft minutes

Chaired by the Human Trafficking Foundation Director of Operations, Tamara Barnett, and Specialist Adviser, Phil Brewer

1. **Home Office Modern Slavery Unit update**
   - As part of £750m announced to support charities, £1.73m funding was provided to support victims of modern slavery supported through Victim Care Contract (VCC). The funding will be used to enable organisations to change how they provide support to victims during this time, including ensuring the right accommodation is available, that victims can receive their financial assistance safely, and that support services can be accessed remotely.
   - The Home Office have been working with Care Quality Commission (CQC) to set up a dedicated email address for subcontractors to raise concerns related to accessing healthcare. They are continuing to work with The Salvation Army so support workers can adapt support flexibly to continue to support victims. E.g. contactless payment cards.
   - They have also produced a flyer for non-first responders to help identify potential victims of modern slavery.
   - You can sign up [here](#) to be added to the mailing list for weekly updates.

2. **The Salvation Army: update on adaptations to support provided to subcontractors and service users**
   - Things have now quietened down from The Salvation Army’s perspective. **In some weeks, referrals reduced by 80% or so.**
   - There are no problems regarding accommodation capacity but they would like more wheelchair accessible accommodation.
   - Where possible, the staff are working from home, which is involving additional expenditure for subcontractors. Home Office have now approved business cases for
additional laptops, mobile phones etc. for support workers to work from home and adhere to govt guidelines.
- Professional deep cleaning can also be covered by funds provided by the Home Office where required. PPE Equipment is in the process of being delivered, but some subcontractors had already been able to source it themselves. The Salvation Army are still maintaining a programme of regular briefings with subcontractors and the Home Office on a weekly basis.
- There are 65 clients currently displaying symptoms but nobody has had to be hospitalised or died from the virus, indicating the situation has been contained and less than 1% of staff across the contract are currently affected.
- Note: Daily reports are produced to monitor the number of clients and staff affected by the virus.

Questions

- Are there updates on the awarding of the contract as there was due to be an announcement on 5th May? Signposted to newsletter.
- What consideration is being given to providing funds for survivors beyond those receiving support in the victim care contract?
- Home Office: There is due to be an announcement on Big Lottery Funding that can be applied for by services outside of VCC.
- Regarding the reduction in referrals, is there work being done from the Modern Slavery Unit to understand reduction in referrals? Yes. They consider that social distancing measures make it hard for victims to contact first responders and access support.
- What is the exit policy relating to those receiving outreach support (80% of those receiving support in the contract)?
- There is no specific policy relating to outreach. There is a policy around move-on from safe accommodation and then the recovery needs assessment policy subject to the conclusive grounds decision. If the client is given a negative conclusive grounds decision and the client is unable to exit safely, the support worker can request an extension of support to remain in the victim care contract.
- Marissa Begonia, Founder Voice of Domestic Workers (VODW): Many VODW members with positive reasonable grounds decisions have lost their jobs in light of Covid-19. VODW have a hardship fund which enables them to send food, cash etc. so members can survive as the £35 per week is not enough. Is there any increase on £35 receiving?
The Salvation Army responded that if nobody should be automatically exited from support following a negative CG and this raises concerns. The NRM caseworker should request an extension of support if they consider the individual needs to remain in support.

A member received a negative conclusive grounds decision and automatically received a letter saying they will cut off £35/week support in the midst of Covid. Can this be reinstated?

- Home Office requested this question be put on the Google doc, linked here: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dI2-0jTS8lxGSGFG9rq7UA9Lqbg6YXocu?usp=sharing
- Please email rachel@humantraffickingfoundation.org or a.sereni@antislavery.org to add questions.

3. Palm Cove Society: challenges faced by staff and service users during the pandemic

Palm Cove (subcontracted support provider of safe house support) outlined measures put in place to continue providing support in line with Public Health England Guidelines:

- Each staff member has been provided with detailed instructions on Covid and what to do should someone be infected and the have delivered training on effective handwashing techniques. As keyworkers, all staff are encouraged to work on site as much as possible but with social distancing measures in place, e.g. distancing of desks, ready availability of hand-sanitizer and PPE available and stored.
- Identified staff members who were high-risk and these worked from home who were then paired with on-site staff to deliver keywork effectively.
- Client support is top priority but and at a minimum daily contact is maintained with each client.
- Clients high risk so contact usually made in morning and afternoon and they ensure support always available face to face, remotely, or both depending on need.
- For those self-isolating, daily contact is considered essential so to facilitate this, staff needing to work from home maintain telephone contact to support emotional health and wellbeing, while paired with an office-based support worker to provide office-based contact and face-to-face support while maintaining social distancing measures. Regularly walk around sites to provide visibility to offer reassurance. Team make contact by telephone if client is able and use interpreters if needed. Sometimes use text, email, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.
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- They source additional provisions locally, distribution agencies, foodbanks and other outlets. GP contact is facilitated and for those on medication home deliveries from a range of pharmacies.
- Created graded activity packs – English and Maths and other activities. Replicated for accommodated children. Available in print-out format.

**Key challenge faced: Clients with negative decisions continue to be subject to exit by the Home Office with no guarantee of continued support via extension requests**

- Palm Cove had accommodated and supported two clients in their safe house with reasonable grounds decisions (RG) pending. They recently received negative RG. Historically this required them to be exited within 9 days.
- However, they have no recourse to public funds so are not eligible for housing and are not eligible to support from the local No Recourse to Public Funds team as they have no proof of local connection.
- The consulate advised that due to restricted services and cancelled flights they could not be repatriated.
- If evicted, they would be destitute and street-homeless, increasing the risk of contracting Covid-19.
- Extension requests have been approved until 16 May but there is no confirmation that restrictions will be lifted soon. These clients and others in similar positions will continue to face problems until longer-term strategies are in place.

**4. Survivor Alliance: Survivor experiences during the pandemic**

Nancy has been an active member of Survivor Alliance in the last 2 years and is a leader in her community, including through providing 1-1 support to others. Nancy made the following points about survivors’ experiences in this time:

- Lockdown is not something new- survivors have been locked down by the Home Office for ages, but the challenges they face now in particular are not having enough money to get food and store it.
- How is the money being awarded by the Home Office getting to survivors personally? There is nothing available. £35 is not enough to live on.
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- Survivors are not able to go to college, which for many is vital to keep going while in the NRM and in limbo awaiting a decision.
- Survivors cannot access group meetings or other survivors to talk with.
- Survivors cannot access case workers – especially those in asylum accommodation as caseworkers are not coming to houses. Online/phone sessions are very different to face to face and this is very hard for survivors.
- Some survivors have their immigration papers but are on zero hour contracts and are not able to work due to reduced demand in certain sectors.
- For those survivors who have the right to work via the shortage of occupation list it is very difficult to get a job. Jobs on the Shortage Occupation List are If you are given the right to work, and on shortage occupation list, it is impossible to find that kind of work. There are shortages in farms, as carers, etc. but those on the Shortage Occupation List cannot do these kinds of jobs.
- Cannot access healthcare unless ‘really really ill’. Support is difficult to get.
- For survivors, the lockdown is not new. Being in limbo is a lockdown.

Maria:

- The experience of lockdown is similar to what survivors are already facing – for those with no immigration status they are living in constant uncertainty so the level of anxiety is quite high. This is amplified in the current movement restrictions.
- Most accommodation for survivors has no internet connection. Connectivity is an issue since most of our members have very little budget to buy data, therefore it is difficult to take part in online activities.
- Survivor Alliance is running all their activities online but not everyone has access to internet. Some do have laptops but not many, making social connection very difficult. One of the main things for recovery is to establish social connections, which are now not possible.
- One example was provided of a survivor who applied to work for the NHS. The NHS approved her as a worker and she had all relevant knowledge, but she was restricted to work on the Shortage Occupation List so was prevented from being employed.

Questions:

- *What do Survivor Alliance do?*
  Survivor Alliance is an international network of survivors to empower survivors, through economic empowerment, building community groups and working towards
meaningful inclusion. This forum is an exercise of meaningful inclusion, but would like there to be action which follows the issues raised. [www.survivalliance.org](http://www.survivalliance.org)

- **Question to Palm Cove: when do you think you will be able to return to face to face outreach supp?**
  Palm Cove: Already maintaining some providing the correct PPE but do not know when things will return to normal.

- **Question raised as to whether there are any positive things that have come out of the pandemic.** Both Palm Cove and Survivor Alliance shared the determination to connect even when there are additional barriers to meeting and the acceleration of developing new ways of working/connecting via online means.

- **Can any of the additional funding be used to fund laptops, smartphones etc. for survivors**
  Ann-Marie, The Salvation Army: There have been requests made for clients within the victim care contract who are without telephones for example from the Home Office, so those in the contract should speak to their support workers to access funds to purchase them.

- **Question from Kent Police Volunteer, Alicija:**
  *Alicija is collaborating with innovation task force and would like to look at conducting research on human trafficking and exploitation in the UK and what challenges and issues agencies involved (including LAs, police, etc.) are facing. If anyone would like to contact to share issues being raised, please contact: [jakubowsa@aol.com](mailto:jakubowsa@aol.com)*

5. **Rebecca Hurlock from West Yorkshire PCC Office, who also coordinates the National Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery network (NATSM)**

Rebecca provided reassurance that although PCC elections have been postponed, Mark Burns Williamson remains in office and is still the national lead for modern slavery and human trafficking and remains fully committed to this agenda.

NATSM – meetings specifically for PCCs to come together with strategic leaders to discuss how they can come together. Was launched by MBW in 2016. Had most recent meeting on
4th May where they were joined by the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), the Home Office Modern Slavery Unit, Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer and Robin Brierley, Executive Director of West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network and co-chair of the National Network Coordinators Forum (NNCF). Some key headlines from the meeting were as follows:

1. The Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit (MSPTU) came to an end in March 2020. The Home Office have now agreed funding for the next 12 months of £1.9m to CC Shaun Sawyer and his team to continue supporting the policing response to modern day slavery. They are working with the Home Office on what the programme will deliver.

2. National network for PCCs will continue to engage with MSPTU work.

3. IASC is still continuing work in line with her strategic plan, which includes three key points:
   a. Impact on survivors receiving support in NRM. Acknowledged significant amount of work The Salvation Army and Home Office have done to provide additional support.
   b. Short-medium term impact of Covid-19 and how makes more vulnerable as forced into more risky work
   c. Concerns of Covid-19 on global response and disruption to work already achieved

4. Home Office announced the funding of £1.73m and details and provided reassurance that they looking at an exit strategy and how to deal with spike in reporting.

5. NNCF encouraged PCCs to increase engagement with anti-slavery partnership networks, particularly if coordinators have been furloughed. Encouragement for PCCs to engage with partnership networks and frontline agencies.

Additional points raised:

- Mark Burns-Williamson submitted evidence to IASC as part of the inquiry into the use of the Section 45 Defence. All police forces responded and gave evidence.
- PCCs were invited to submit evidence to APPG inquiry for human trafficking and modern slavery and impact seeing on survivors as a result of the pandemic and several provided evidence.

GLAA – Arm of the Home Office, Labour market enforcement body. In 2017 were given powers to investigation modern slavery and exploitation across the whole labour market

Have had to move all operation to home-based: operations and helplines, licensing. Investigators are already home-based

Still very operational and are deploying investigators to reports of labour exploitation. Have risk assessments in place – have to take account of social distancing etc. Try to do as much work as they can desk-space before they deploy so do as few inspections as possible.

Investigation response: prioritising investigations where there are safeguarding concerns and victims in need of assistance. They assess intel every morning and deploy according to intel on daily basis.

Some changes: were being told by businesses in the license sector that there would be significant labour shortages in agriculture sector, approx. 80-100,000 people. Intention – majority would be filled by UK workers out of work because of Covid-19 restrictions or responding to call for assistance, e.g. Pick for Britain, however the furlough scheme meant people being paid 80% salary to stay at home and exacerbated some of the labour shortages.

Have some flights coming into the UK specifically chartered to bring in Eastern European migrant workers by labour providers. There are concerns as have very little knowledge as to the background of these workers, living conditions etc.

Have seen a significant drop-off in levels of intel coming in around labour-exploitation and modern slavery. Most intel is now from law enforcement, e.g. police and NCA. Other labour exploitation enforcement bodies’ intel has dried up. GLAA is the only labour enforcement body still doing face to face interactions, which has caused significant intelligence gaps.

Much of work was joint-working with other partners. Traditional partners, e.g. DWP, National Minimum Wage, Health and Safety Executive, etc. work has dried up and are expecting a significant surge in intel from these areas once restrictions lift.

Many in the enforcement sector have worked on understanding that a number of sectors in the UK labour market present significant opportunities for exploitation, e.g. nail bars, car
washes, wider gig economy but these sectors have been closed for the last two months. Expected to see some displacement into other areas of labour markets but have not seen intel that this is happening. Don’t know where victims who were being exploited in these sectors have gone.

Covid-19 has affected business of traffickers but do not know where huge swathes of the UK labour market have gone. **Call to partners to help fill the gaps.** Concerns as traffickers’ that there will be a drive of those who have not been working for a long period of time in need of work and see a very high risk in levels of exploitation in the coming months as very high, especially as traffickers’ markets have been affect by restrictions on certain businesses. Will be running an intensification exercise involving partners, NGOs, enforcement colleagues into June-July around prevention and protection to reduce opportunities for rise in exploitation. Doing some work around high-risk sectors.

Many car washes have begun to re-open and neighbourhood policing teams are calling into these sites and engaging in conversations with workers about where they have been and signposting to agencies such as the GLAA.

Risks of exploitation expect are higher than will have been before the lockdown but there are serious intelligence gaps. Please do contact Ian with information around intel gaps.

**Question:**

**What strategies are in place to continue doing role as a first responder?**

Now have increased risk assessments. Get concerns raised from business owners around risk of infection. Nobody in GLAA have displayed Covid-19 symptoms. Have access to stocks of low-level PPE. Have been able to respond where they have needed to.

Concerns raised that people are making a guess as to what has happened but do not know, alongside serious concerns that people have disappeared off the radar or being held are being held. Question raised as to what blockages in intel are.

One of the biggest concerns is that if people are still being held by those that exploit them, debt bondage etc. will worsen.

**Q: Will the GLAA proactively engage with employment agencies?**

Yes do engage, however, face challenges with engaging with overseas employment agencies. There are very few powers available to deal with many of these. Do have a good relationship with the employment agencies inspectorate.
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**What safeguards are in place around temporary licensing scheme?**

- Temporary license scheme allows people to use other employment agencies to source workers for them, but need to be an established company and be sponsored by an existing license-holder.
- Temporary exemption only lasts for 3 months. If supplying workers longer than that need a full GLAA license. Conduct checks with intel from other agencies E.g. HMRC re unpaid debts etc. Example: had 15 applications for temporary licenses – accepted 2, rejected 3 and sent the rest back for further information.

Q: What will the intensification of activity look at? E.g. how will this support domestic workers?

Risks around domestic workers will be included. All high risk sectors e.g. nail bars etc. will be looked at. They will create task and finish groups to fill intel gaps. Will be sending information to employers about obligations around how they treat workers, primarily communications and awareness raising. More about prevention, reducing opportunities to be exploited and protection of workers.

7. **James Simmonds-Read, National Prevention Programme Manager, The Children’s Society**

on what The Children’s Society is seeing in their practice but also key national insights from exploitation leads and services in the public and charity sectors including police and social care as gathered by the Prevention Programme.

Trends they are seeing nationally:

- There has been a sharp increase in calls being taken by domestic violence services.
- Some of the reported increase in domestic violence has been perpetrated by children to adults.
- Child Sexual Exploitation abuse imagery: there has been a reduction in worldwide capacity to manage this, specifically a **89% reduction in removal of online exploitation content.**

**Missing Children**

- Fewer children are being reported missing overall, and The Children’s Society are learning of a significant number of parents not reporting children going missing because of concerns about negative repercussions including fear of being fined for breaching Covid guidance.
Children who are missing are going missing more frequently and for longer periods of time.

They are hearing from exploitation leads that the risk for the most high-risk children going missing has increased

Concerns around increase in cuckooed properties and children being held in abusive environments for longer periods of time.

Children are being seen less in public spaces and county lines activity is taking place more in tower blocks and in family homes

Children missing from other regions are being found in London but children in London are tending not to leave the city bounds. Children who historically would have been in importing areas are being expected to travel to pick up drugs themselves. There is a reduction in those ‘higher up’ in organised crime groups wanting to be seen in public spaces.

County lines

- Increase in the use of private hire vehicles to transport children. Have seen some children transported over very long distances and seeing increase in lorry drops nationally. Increase in supermarket car parks being used as places to distribute drugs. Increase in debt bondage to increase level of control, taking advantage of economic uncertainty.
- Seeing an increase in reports of children being groomed online through social media, including grooming into illicit finance connected with county lines activity.
- International human trafficking: police have shared intelligence around trafficked children who were cultivating drugs previously and are now being asked to travel outside and pick up drugs and be involved in criminality wider range of criminal activity.
- Concerns around private fostering: significant activity by OCGs who are using private fostering arrangements to hide and hold children in situations of Modern Slavery including organised child sexual abuse, criminal and labour exploitation and do so in plain sight due to inconsistent and poor scrutiny. Government have now relaxed checks on private fostering arrangements, heightening concerns further.

8. Jon Featonby, Policy and Advocacy Manager for Asylum and Trafficking work at The Red Cross
The Red Cross has been the single point of contact on behalf of voluntary sector of organisations supporting those in the asylum system, which involves tri-weekly phone calls with the Home Office and a series of questions being exchanged. In order to make sure issues raising are being informed by challenges on the ground, have set up a Google group to feed in issues and are having phone calls on operational as well as policy issues alongside other national organisations.

**Positive changes seen so far include:** Halt on eviction from asylum accommodation until at least the end of June; suspension of reporting requirements indefinitely; changing the way further submissions are being made so people do not have to travel to Liverpool and during Covid-19 can now make submissions online, which they would like to see changed longer-term.

Other issues they would like to see changed:

- The asylum sector re advocating for the asylum support rate (£37.75) to also be increased in line with Universal Credit: Asylum seekers are facing increased difficulty surviving as ASPEN cards cannot be used online, local shops have increased prices considerably, people are going through more phone data to keep connected. The Home Office has reviewed this and they are waiting to hear the outcome
- There are delays in the asylum support application process, leaving people without vital support, especially regarding section 4 support (more info here).
- There are concerns that asylum accommodation is not suitable during Covid-19
- They have seen an increase in the use of hotels and are aware of people room-sharing with people they are not related to, and people in hotels receive no financial support.

**9. Announcements and final questions**

The Human Trafficking Foundation update on the APPG Inquiry:

Thank you to everyone who submitted evidence to the APPG inquiry. All evidence was compiled and sent to the APPG Chairs along with a few key recommendations. An update will be given in the coming weeks via our newsletter.

*Question for more information around parents being fined.* A perception that due to powers given to police around breaches for staying at home, meaning that many are fearful of consequences. The Children’s Society are hearing reports including from police colleague. Concerns around unwarranted police attention as well as the fines themselves.
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Where is The Children’s Society information around county lines and Covid-19 coming from?

The Children’s Society Prevention Programme is funded by Chief Constable Simon Bailey’s office in Norfolk. Some info is coming directly from police forces, some from Simon Bailey directly, social care exploitation leads, police and engagement with other specialist organisations, some from direct engagement. Information provided is where there is evidence of patterns and trends.

A request was made for the Home Office decision letters on positive Reasonable Grounds decisions to outline rights to work where people have them to support in getting work while in the NRM.

Discussion of some challenges faced by domestic workers during the lockdown and how these could have been prevented:

- Domestic workers are experiencing increased workloads and worse treatment; all members of the household are at home all day, increasing the workload and working hours. Workers are not being fed properly, and some have salaries cut off. Domestic workers have no evidence of employment and for those who face termination of work, there is no evidence they can be employed by others. Employers are taking advantage of increased vulnerability of domestic workers.
- GLAA confirmed there are increased risks for domestic workers in Covid-19 as much intel usually received is from neighbours but it is harder to spot unusual behaviour around homes, so identifications is wholly reliant on self-disclosure. GLAA will be looking at other prevention opportunities.
- It was raised that challenges being seen now are due to failings to put necessary measures in place at the proper time following recommendations in the Ewins Review in December 2015, after which the government committed to information sessions to allow workers to learn about entitlements under UK employment law once they arrive and where to get assistance. An update was requested. Home Office asked to include this on the shared Google document. GLAA noted that they publish information on workers’ rights on their website.
- Question to GLAA: if domestic workers do want to disclose, does the GLAA have the powers to investigate private households? GLAA confirmed they do, but even if people come to the GLAA with information, they might not be able to respond directly, and in this case can put in contact with the right people.
- Request to the Home Office to implement information sessions to resolve confusion around rights of migrant domestic workers in the UK
- Voice of Domestic Workers, a voluntary organisation, raised they are doing more in the pandemic to support workers than many first responder organisations.

What timeframe will the Home Office respond to questions? Try to answer questions in weekly newsletters.
Questions for HO from Chat and Discussion:

1. From Anna Sereni: can you provide more detail on funding around £1.73m? I’m unsure how this extra £ is any different to someone support might continue in light of RNA policy and or reconsideration of -CG? Specifically, the contract operates exponentially, in terms of meeting need, so costs are never 'set' surely this money is the SSHD meeting her obligations as per ECAT/is an process of an extension request, albeit for a larger cohort of people than usual?

2. Confirmation of whether RNAs can be done effectively over-the-phone and if not how subs are being prepped for the likely surge in workload when the interim stop on move-on policy comes to an end (currently end June)

3. Are they seeing survivors in outreach support being exited from their accommodation (e.g. if living with family and friends) and if so have they been able to house in VCC accommodation?

4. C19 ACT has reduced duties on local Government and responsibilities under Care Act...

5. www.survivoralliance.org

6. I think asylum housing contractors (serco mentioned this recently anyway) are looking into wifi in accommodation to assist with this

7. When will wifi come into NASS accommodation do you think? And is there any funds for survivors living in NASS accommodation to get smartphone to stay connected?

8. Home Office have told Red Cross that they want to put wifi into initial accommodation, but there are some practical problems working with BT to install. People on asylum support and in hotels should have access to wifi (but only some of the providers are helping with phones etc)

9. Alicja email: jakubowsa@aol.com

10. This is Question for MSU/TSA - just doing some maths, (and its not my strong point) but based on the 5,866 adults referring into NRM in 2019, if subsistence was uplifted to in line with universal credit so to around £57 per week, £20 uplift would cost an average of £240 per client which over 12 weeks would cost: 1.2 Million - surely this is a good way to spend the 1.73 million, given that the allocation of the spending announced appears to be the SSHD meeting the normal, fluctuating demands on service provision? (please correct the maths if wrong!)