

Hope for the future:

Support for survivors of trafficking after the National Referral Mechanism

Report summary

When a person is recognised as survivor of modern slavery in the UK, this decision does not come with any entitlement to specialist support and does not secure their immigration status. Further support, and a secure immigration status, could allow a survivor to recover from their trafficking experiences and rebuild their lives. Without this, people face barriers to recovery and are at risk of being trafficked and exploited again.

The current support for people who have exited the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) following a conclusive grounds decision does not allow a person to recover from their trafficking experiences. People are left in a state of limbo even after they've been recognised as a survivor, and this uncertainty impedes their recovery, affects their ability to access accommodation, mental health support and financial assistance, and to rebuild their lives through education and work.

Survivors who do not have secure immigration status are particularly exposed, since they are not eligible for many forms of support. They can face homelessness and destitution, and be at risk of being re-trafficking and exploitation.

As part of a project co-funded by the European Commission called “sustainable integration of trafficked human beings through proactive identification and enhanced protection” – known as STEP – Ashiana, Hestia and the British Red Cross helped 70 people who had left the NRM

as a survivor of human trafficking between February 2018 and May 2019.

Until recently, Home Office policy was that after being formally recognised as a survivor of human trafficking people only continue to receive support – including accommodation – for a further 45 days. Following a legal challenge in 2019 the government conceded that support for recognised survivors of trafficking cannot be limited by a period of time.

The Home Office conceded that the 45-day support is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Trafficking, and that longer-term support is needed. The Home Office has committed to developing and implementing a needs-based system of support for survivors of trafficking.

But there is much that is unknown about what this system will look like. This report sets out the key elements of effective longer-term support for survivors of human trafficking and exploitation, based on the evidence from the STEP pilot.

BritishRedCross

Working in partnership with:



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The British Red Cross recommends that:

Support: people who have been found to be survivors of trafficking should continue to receive tailored, person-centred support that helps them to rebuild their lives, for at least twelve months after they leave the National Referral Mechanism – irrespective of their immigration status.

Status: survivors of trafficking should be protected, and given security, through the grant of immigration status of at least 30 months.

Safe homes: people who have been found to be survivors of trafficking should be able to access secure, appropriate long-term accommodation.

Pathways: people leaving the National Referral Mechanism with a negative conclusive grounds decision should have a care pathway in place to help them access advice and support services.

Key findings from the research

Personalised and needs-led support

- People who have been found to be survivors of trafficking should continue to receive tailored, person-centred support that helps them to rebuild their lives after they leave the NRM, irrespective of their immigration status.
- Survivors of trafficking continue to need support for at least 12 months after they leave the NRM. This support needs to be flexible, sufficiently resourced, and tailored to respond to the variable needs of survivors, which can intensify during changes of situation or accommodation.
- To be effective, support must be co-ordinated between different statutory and non-statutory agencies, and the survivor should be at the heart of decision-making.

Reducing the risk for women survivors

- Outcomes scores for women survivors supported by the STEP project show that this form of longer-term support reduces women's specific vulnerability to gender related violence, abuse, exploitation and disempowerment.
- Women survivors experienced an overall increase of 20% in stability of scores across a range of outcomes (safety, legal protection,

mental well-being, economic empowerment and education, social support, and physical well-being). 70% of women had an overall increase in stability from entry to exit, 14% had no overall change in their stability level and 16% had an overall decrease in stability level (i.e. they were more vulnerable at exit compared to entry), which also makes clear that the journey to recovery is not the same for everyone.

Mental health needs and access to treatment

- Our findings highlighted significant difficulties in getting appropriate mental health treatment within a reasonable timeframe.
- For survivors in asylum accommodation, these long waits could then be compounded if they had to move area, when they would find themselves starting from scratch again in a new location.
- Unresolved immigration status and accommodation in temporary housing exacerbates the mental ill-health of some survivors. They are prevented from accessing intensive therapies and being able to address their trauma while their living conditions remain assessed by mental health services as too unsafe.

Insecure immigration status

- After waiting for a conclusive grounds decision, many survivors were often still left without leave to remain – and their insecure immigration status meant further uncertainty while they waited for another decision.
- While there is provision to grant people with a positive conclusive grounds decision discretionary leave, it is rarely used. FOI data shows that 752 people with a positive conclusive grounds decision in 2015 to 2017 did not go on to have a secure immigration status.
- Early access to good quality asylum and immigration advice and representation is essential for the recovery of survivors. Sustained post-NRM support is essential to ensure a fair and just legal process.

Timely access to secure and settled housing

- The move to long-term accommodation is often blocked by administrative delays.

- Long-term accommodation allows survivors to access the wider support they need to recover.
- Asylum accommodation is often unsuitable for survivors of exploitation, with people placed in situations that make them more vulnerable. For example, survivors of sexual exploitation can be housed in mixed-gender accommodation.

Care pathways for those with negative conclusive grounds decisions

- People with negative conclusive grounds decisions also need to be provided with support, including helping them with the process of getting the decision reconsidered.
- The current lack of provision for people in this situation assumes that all decision-making is correct, whereas the level of successful reconsideration requests shows that this is not the case. This group is also likely to have other vulnerabilities which mean they may need other forms of support too.

Read the full report here: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/Documents/About-us/Research-publications/Human-trafficking-and-modern-slavery/Hope-for-the-Future>

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If you have any questions about any of the information contained in this document or would like to discuss further, please contact Jon Featonby, Advocacy and Policy Manager (Refugees and Asylum) by email jfeatonby@redcross.org.uk or by phone **0207 877 7364**

About the British Red Cross

The British Red Cross is the biggest independent provider of support and advice to refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. Every year we help over 32,000 people at all stages of the asylum process including providing food and clothing to 13,000 refugees and helping to reunite almost 1,000 separated families. The British Red Cross has destitution services in 58 towns and cities across the UK, providing basic support to those not in receipt of any support from statutory services.

British Red Cross

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