



The impact of Covid-19

Human Trafficking

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**Scottish Business
Resilience Centre**

Human Trafficking.

The exploitation of workers has long been a problem that has been found within supply chains and has adversely affected small to medium sized businesses. There are concerns that the COVID 19 pandemic has provided cover for increased exploitation within supply chains and that many more people may now be vulnerable to exploitation.

Human Trafficking is an offence under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Modern Slavery is a serious crime being committed across the UK and can take many forms; Prostitution/Sexual Exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude/slavery, or for committing criminal acts such as fraud and the supply of controlled drugs.

Simply put

It is the exploitation of a person for someone else's gain.

A victim of Trafficking does not have to cross international borders. Moving a person from one place to another within Scotland or the UK for the purpose of exploitation is Human Trafficking.

WHO?

It is important when we talk about Modern Slavery that we understand that it can affect anyone in society and that victims are exploited in a number of ways. It is largely a hidden problem, which is very much under reported, but we do know that whilst Modern Slavery affects foreign nationals, it also affects a large number of UK Nationals.

The 2019 NRM Stats published on 02 April 2020 by SCA showed 2,836 (27%) of the 10,627 NRM referrals were UK nationals. This reflects that we are getting better at recognising UK victims!

**The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a system for referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.*

Sara Thornton, the UK's Anti-Slavery Commissioner, warned in May 2020 that as lockdown measures ease, traffickers could seek to profit from industries looking to recruit low-paid workers, such as the hospitality or construction industries.

Recent analysis by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) showed that workers in traditional labour intensive jobs like cleaners, agricultural and fishery labourers, construction/manufacturing and transport labourers, and food preparation, were most likely to be away from paid work during the pandemic and more at risk of exploitation than others.

? DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR OWN WORKFORCE?

The full ONS report can be found here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/august2020>

WHY?

The pandemic has caused a sudden shock to traditional supply chains in the UK and other markets across the world. It is essential that when businesses are faced with unexpected disruptions to their supply chains, for an unknown duration, that they have access to reliable information outside of their own four walls to make the best decisions for the business and employees.

Workers resident in the UK have been hit hard financially. As the impact of COVID 19 persists, and the recession grows, the impact is that many people may accept exploitative conditions such as; unreasonable work requests, non-adherence to Health + Safety guidelines, non-payment of living wage, long working hours without breaks, because there are little or no alternatives.

The pandemic has also resulted in labour shortages in some sectors due to increased border restrictions affecting the availability of migrant workers. One of the most affected sectors is agriculture but the shortages have impacted other areas that rely on skilled workers such as construction.

730,000 less workers on payroll in the UK between March and July 2020

An article published in June 2020 looks at the issues within supply chains and affecting migrant workers since the pandemic started. You can read 'Survival at the expense of the weakest? Managing modern slavery risks in supply chains during COVID-19' here <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2020.1772347>

What is the issue?

It is likely that as a result of the pandemic there will be an increased number of both UK resident and migrant workers at risk of exploitation.

Many SMEs will have experienced a change in previous agreements with or entered into entirely new arrangements, with suppliers and/or customers. Over the longer term, it may be difficult for many SMEs to re-build connections with former networks once supply chains have been disrupted, and former partners have set up new alliances and business contracts. As a result, many Scottish SMEs may become vulnerable to Human Trafficking / Modern Slavery slipping into their supply chains through these new business arrangements.

It is common place that some reputable businesses may appear to be Low Risk when addressing the issue of Modern Slavery within supply chains. Only when you look deeper at sub-contractors does the risk become significantly higher.

It is believed that exploitative practices may also have become worse as social distancing measures have meant that for months, labour and health & safety inspectors were not visiting sites, having face to face conversations with workers or gathering intelligence on supply chain issues.

Detecting and preventing modern slavery in supply chains is a major challenge. It is important to understand what it is, who it can affect and how to spot the signs. Only then can you decide how to respond best.

SMEs need to take action, ask the right questions of their suppliers, and use simple solutions. There are many solutions out there, some as simple as speaking to your suppliers. **REMEMBER – It's not someone else's issue!**

WHAT MORE CAN YOU DO?

Most businesses who are successful in preventing modern slavery within their supply chains have taken a risk-based approach. This involves identifying the 'high risk' areas of the business that may be exposed to modern slavery.

High risk areas often include procurement teams or individuals dealing with contracts and sub-contracting. Contractors offering services at prices well below market competition does not always mean that they are involved in modern slavery but should act as a warning sign and trigger proper due diligence. **Remember if it seems too good to be true – it probably is!**

? Can you improve anti-modern slavery measures within your supply chain?

There are some common signs of modern slavery that you should be aware of:

- Workers being transported to work together
- Workers who do not seem to know each other or speak fluent English
- Workers who may appear lost in their surroundings
- Workers who may often be spoken for by someone else – often a contractor/supervisor
- Workers who are exhausted / not receiving adequate breaks
- Workers who are not supplied with PPE where required

Whilst not exhaustive, these are all common signs of Modern Slavery.

The following link allows you to view and download Police Scotland's [Known the signs](#) leaflet

Consider sharing this leaflet with your workforce to help increase awareness.

You can use the topic of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery as a training input for your organisation. Support is available from a wide range of organisations to assist you with this – see contacts/useful reading.

Following the training you may consider having a Human Trafficking / Modern Slavery champion within your organisation.

NEW REQUIREMENTS

In 2021 the UK Government is introducing new measures which strengthen the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and ensure that large businesses and public bodies tackle Modern Slavery risks in supply chains.

In a world first, public bodies with a budget of over £36m will be required to report on steps they have taken to pro-actively address the issue of Modern Slavery in Supply Chains. All organisations (from all sectors) with a budget over £36m will also be required to publish their Modern Slavery statements on a new government reporting service. This should encourage transparency and responsible practices

If your SME is within a supply chain network that includes a large business or public body (including local authorities) that falls under this new requirement, then you may also be asked to evidence the actions YOU have taken.

As such, the sooner you identify and begin to address any issues within your SME or wider supply chain, the better prepared and secure your business should be moving forward.

CONTACTS / USEFUL READING

There are many public, private and third sector organisations available who can provide advice on this subject.

<https://www.stronger2gether.org/> - provides information online in relation to Modern Slavery in supply Chains. They can also provide training if required.

<https://www.gla.gov.uk/> - aims to protect vulnerable and exploited workers and provide advice and information in relation to Modern Slavery.

<https://www.slavefreealliance.org/> - provides tips and advice on protecting your supply chain and managing risk from the threat of Modern Slavery.

<https://www.scottish-enterprise.com/> - provides guidance to manage the impact of Covid-19 on Scottish businesses.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/slavery-human-trafficking-guidance-businesses-scotland/pages/3/> - A current Scottish Government guidance document for businesses in relation to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/trafficking-exploitation-strategy-second-annual-progress-report/> - The Scottish Governments most recent update on their strategy for tackling Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Scotland.

<https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking> - the National Crime Agency lead the UK's fight against Organised Crime.

<https://www.scotland.police.uk/secureforms/c3/> - you can report a crime or incident to Police Scotland online here. Alternatively you can contact Police Scotland on 101 if non emergencies or 999 in an emergency.

<https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/scotland> - if you need help, advice or information about modern slavery this line is available 24hrs a day.

<https://crimestoppers-uk.org/give-information/forms/pre-form> - if you wish to report anonymously you can contact Crimestoppers via this link or on 0800 555 111.

Modern Slavery Registry - consumers can search for a company and see it's reporting under the UK modern slavery act using specific phrases such as "human rights", "Due Diligence" or "Living Wage".

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