

# HMG Response

24 November 2020

## **HMG Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme, October 2020**

The Government welcomes the review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact of HMG-led work on tackling modern slavery through the aid programme. Independent scrutiny is important to ensure that our policy and programming deliver maximum impact and value for money.

Modern slavery remains a priority for the UK Government. As the Independent Commission for Aid Impact acknowledges, the UK's leadership and sustained international campaign to raise awareness drew global attention to modern slavery through the Call to Action to end modern slavery and human trafficking launched in 2017, now endorsed by over 90 countries. In October 2019, the Government appointed the UK's first International Modern Slavery and Migration Envoy, to help drive forwards efforts in tackling modern slavery in partnership with other Governments and multilateral organisations.

We will establish a periodic cross-Government review of HMG's efforts to tackle Modern Slavery to ensure continued progress on this agenda.

**Recommendation 1:** Develop a more systematic approach to filling knowledge and evidence gaps, including sex-disaggregated and sector-specific data, gender analysis and more comprehensive evaluations, to guide the choice of interventions.

### **Accept**

The global evidence base on modern slavery remains underdeveloped, with significant gaps in understanding on issues such as the prevalence of modern slavery, drivers of exploitation, and what works. Addressing knowledge and evidence gaps on modern slavery remains a key priority for HMG. HMG's modern slavery research priorities were set out in the [2018 UK annual report on modern slavery](#). We will consider the best way to develop a systematic approach to filling knowledge and evidence gaps and set this out in the public statement on our international objectives that we will publish in 2021 (as per our response to recommendation 3).

We are committed to investing in monitoring and evaluation to ensure high quality evidence for learning and improvement of development interventions. All our programmes are closely monitored, and many of our programmes have strong research components. As programmes are implemented, evaluations conducted, and lessons learned, our programmes will help to strengthen the global evidence base and help policy makers to make better evidence based decisions. We will continue to use emerging research and evidence such as the recently published Modern Slavery Innovation Fund Review and the forthcoming review of the Modern

Slavery Fund, to work in sectors and with partners in a way that we know we can make a difference.

In July 2019, the Government announced that it would invest £10 million to establish a new Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre (MSPEC) to enhance the evidence base underpinning UK policy responses to modern slavery. In 2020, MSPEC launched a call for research proposals on the impacts of COVID-19 on modern slavery. The successful projects will be looking at the impact of modern slavery on global supply chains, vulnerable sectors and country specific case studies. In addition to MSPEC, we will continue to work closely with other research partners and academics, including the global research hub Delta 8.7, also funded by HMG. Delta 8.7 publishes regular analysis on global anti-slavery efforts, which is used by policy makers worldwide to inform policy and programme development.

UK Aid is governed by The International Development Act which places a duty on the government to promote gender equality through development and humanitarian funding in the countries receiving aid. We will continue to ensure gender outcomes are embedded into our modern slavery policy and programming.

**Recommendation 2:** Do more to draw on survivor voices, in ethical ways, with a particular focus on inputs to policy and programme design, and to deepening understanding of lifetime experiences and gender dimensions of modern slavery.

#### **Accept**

While we do actively engage survivors in our programmes, we acknowledge the need to improve the integration of survivor voices into the design, implementation and review of the HMG modern slavery portfolio. We are exploring the appointment of survivors to advise Ministers on how we can make our interventions more effective. We will build on good practice already developing in our programmes, such as the strong focus on participatory action research, and promoting children's voice and agency in the Asia regional child labour programme.

We will review the lessons from the way in which we engage with survivors to understand their experience of the UK support system to assess the degree to which these lessons can be applied to our international work. Examples include the user research we undertook as part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) transformation programme, and the work of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to identify how survivors could feed back on the quality of the support they receive through the Victim Care Contract across England and Wales.

**Recommendation 3:** The UK government should publish a clear statement of its overall objectives and approach to using UK aid to tackle modern slavery internationally.

#### **Accept**

HMG published its first Modern Slavery Strategy in 2014, and subsequently passed the Modern Slavery Act in 2015. The Government reports annually on activities taken to deliver its modern slavery objectives. The most [recent Annual Report](#) was published in October 2020.

We will continue to engage partners regularly through civil society and private sector forums, including the Modern Slavery Strategic Implementation Group (MSSIG) and the Business Against Slavery (BAS) forum, as well as bilateral and multilateral events to communicate our approach and bring together international efforts to tackle modern slavery. Details of our portfolio is published on the FCDO 'Development Tracker' (<https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/>). The UK Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy regularly meets government, private sector and civil society partners to explain the UK's approach to combatting modern slavery. We will continue to support donors to strengthen coordination efforts and review how we work bilaterally and multilaterally to further increase impact.

We agree that a public statement will help us to explain better our international modern slavery objectives. We are considering the most appropriate way to take this forward and will set this out in 2021.

**Recommendation 4:** Increase the future impact of programming by examining the scope for more interventions in neglected areas of modern slavery, and mainstreaming modern slavery into other development programmes, including in the COVID-19 response.

#### **Partially accept**

Many of our modern slavery projects form part of larger development programmes in sectors such as migration, education, economic empowerment, human rights, and decent work/employment, and are therefore already integrated with other workstreams. For example, the Work in Freedom programme has a specific focus on women migrant workers engaged in domestic work in the Middle East and India. We are also investing in research on how education and social protection can protect children from child labour and will use the findings from this research to target interventions in the most effective way possible. The UK will continue to play an active role in Bahrain through engagement and technical assistance to support Bahrain-led reforms on human rights.

Many of our modern slavery programmes were adapted during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. We saw the disproportionate effect which the pandemic was having on those vulnerable to, or already victims of modern slavery. For example, the Asia Regional Child Labour Programme worked to identify and track vulnerable children in India and Pakistan and link them to social protection systems. We also funded The Freedom Fund to provide humanitarian support to vulnerable communities in India, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand. We will continue to assess the impact of the pandemic and work with partners – including through the MSPEC work noted above - to ensure that we are supporting victims and those at increased risk of exploitation.

We will continue to target our resources in the areas where we think we can make the most difference and to assess what more we can do to strengthen the efficacy of our interventions. Further programming and integration will, however, depend on the outcome of the spending review.

**Recommendation 5:** To strengthen partnerships on modern slavery, including deepening engagement with the private sector and working with partner

governments to develop locally owned action plans covering origin, transit, and destination countries.

### **Partially accept**

Engaging the private sector is a key component of HMG's work to combat modern slavery. We do this in partner countries, at the multilateral level and with British businesses.

The review noted the positive impact of our [Responsible, Accountable, Transparent Enterprise \(RATE\) programme](#). This enhanced dialogue with companies on how to identify modern slavery and child labour within their supply chains, helped to improve company purchasing practices and trialled innovative tools and instruments that used new technology to identify and tackle forced labour.

The review also noted the Work in Freedom programme's work with recruitment agencies in South Asia to ensure safe migration corridors for female migrant workers, reducing vulnerability to exploitation, and supporting decent work.

In addition to working directly with businesses, we work closely with partner governments, for example those which have endorsed the [principles](#) for tackling modern slavery in supply chains (New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the US), and multilateral initiatives such as Alliance 8.7 and Pathfinder countries, to strengthen international work to tackle modern slavery. We encourage governments to work in partnership with the private sector to develop policy and will continue to support the delivery of national action plans to tackle labour exploitation in global supply chains.

We acknowledge the value of increased engagement with UK businesses on modern slavery. The Home Office's Modern Slavery Fund supports UK businesses working overseas to help eradicate exploitation in supply chains and set global standards for workers' rights', and partner with businesses overseas to provide skills trainings and jobs for survivors.

We regularly engage with private sector organisations through the [Business Against Slavery](#) (BAS) Forum, which represents some of the largest companies in the UK, to galvanise action and share experiences. Going forward, we will use the BAS Forum and work with other partners to explore what more we can do in this area and we will examine the scope to do more with the private sector depending on the outcome of the spending review.