Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics

UK, End of Year Summary, 2020

This statistical bulletin provides a summary and breakdown of the number of **potential** victims of modern slavery referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) or via the Duty to Notify (DtN) process from 1 January to 31 December 2020. Please also refer to the data tables published alongside this bulletin for further data.

Key results

In 2020, **10,613 potential victims** of modern slavery were referred to the NRM; a similar number to 2019. The plateau in referral numbers is primarily thought to result from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions.

Of these, 63% (6,716) claimed that the exploitation occurred in the UK only, whilst 26% (2,722) claimed that the exploitation took place overseas only.

Just under half of referrals (48%; 5,087) were for individuals who claimed they were exploited as adults, whilst 47% (4,946) were for individuals who claimed they were exploited as children.
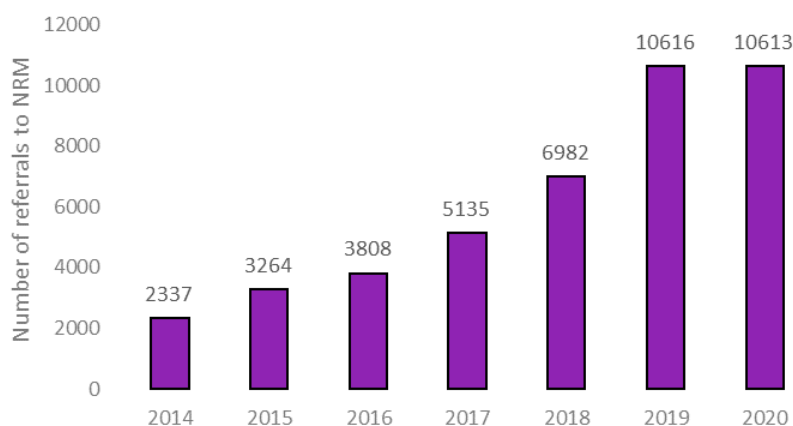
The most common type of exploitation for adults was labour exploitation and for minors was criminal exploitation.

Potential victims from the UK, Albania and Vietnam were the three most common nationalities to be referred to the NRM.

The Single Competent Authority made 10,608 reasonable grounds and 3,454 conclusive grounds decisions in 2020. Of these, 92% (9,765) of reasonable grounds and 89% (3,084) of conclusive grounds decisions were positive. Of the 2020 referrals, 8,665 are awaiting a conclusive grounds decision.

During 2020, the DtN process referred 2,178 adults to the Home Office, a similar figure to 2019.

Number of NRM referrals from 2014 to 2020

Contents

1   Introduction

Modern slavery is a term that includes any form of human trafficking, slavery, servitude or forced labour, as set out in the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Potential victims of modern slavery in the UK that come to the attention of authorised First Responder Organisations may be referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Authorised First Responder Organisations include local authorities, specified non-governmental organisations (NGOs), police forces and specified government agencies.

The NRM is the UK's framework for identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery, details of which are set out in: Modern Slavery: Statutory Guidance for England and Wales (under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) and Non-Statutory Guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Adults (aged 18 or above) must consent to their referral to the NRM, whilst children under the age of 18 need not consent. First Responder Organisations can also refer adults who were exploited as children. As specified in section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, public authorities in England and Wales have a statutory duty to notify the Home Office when they come across potential victims of modern slavery. This duty is discharged by either referring a child or consenting adult potential victim into the NRM, or by notifying the Home Office if an adult victim does not consent to enter the NRM.

When referred to the NRM, the Single Competent Authority (SCA) within the Home Office makes a 'reasonable grounds' decision on whether an individual could be a victim of modern slavery.

Adults given a positive reasonable grounds decision have access to support (including accommodation, subsistence, legal aid and counselling) pending a 'conclusive grounds' decision on their case. Local authorities support children.

Adults receiving a positive conclusive grounds decision are currently entitled to at least a further 45 days of support to allow them to 'move on' from NRM support, whilst those with a negative decision receive 9 days of support. See further information regarding the NRM process.

USER FEEDBACK SURVEY

The user feedback survey on NRM statistics ran for 6 weeks and closed on 1 May 2020. We received 50 responses from a range of stakeholders and would like to thank those who responded. We have made some suggested changes and will consider further changes to future bulletins, which we will highlight in each of the releases.

Please email NRMStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk if you have any further comments or questions regarding these statistics.
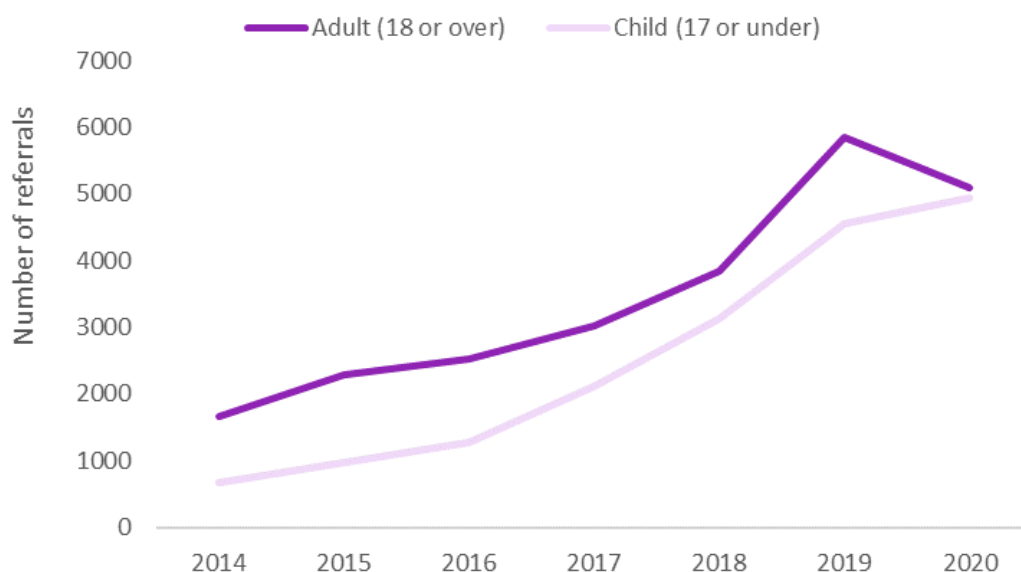
2 National Referral Mechanism (referrals)

NUMBER OF REFERRALS BY AGE GROUP

In 2020, the NRM received 10,613 referrals of potential victims of modern slavery, which is very similar to the number received in 2019 (10,616). This is the first year that has seen NRM referrals not increase compared to the preceding year, which is primarily thought to result from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions (data table 1). Several factors are likely to have influenced referral rates throughout the year, such as lockdown measures in the UK meaning victims were less likely to interact with first responders, or reduced travel to the UK.

Overall in 2020, referrals for adult potential victims (48%; 5,087) decreased compared to the preceding year (5,852), whereas referrals for child potential victims increased (4,547 to 4,946; Figure 1, data table 2). There was a sharp decline in quarterly referrals for adult potential victims from the end of 2019 through to quarter 2 (Q2) 2020, whilst child potential victim referrals declined to a lesser extent. The age group at exploitation was unknown in 5% of cases (580).

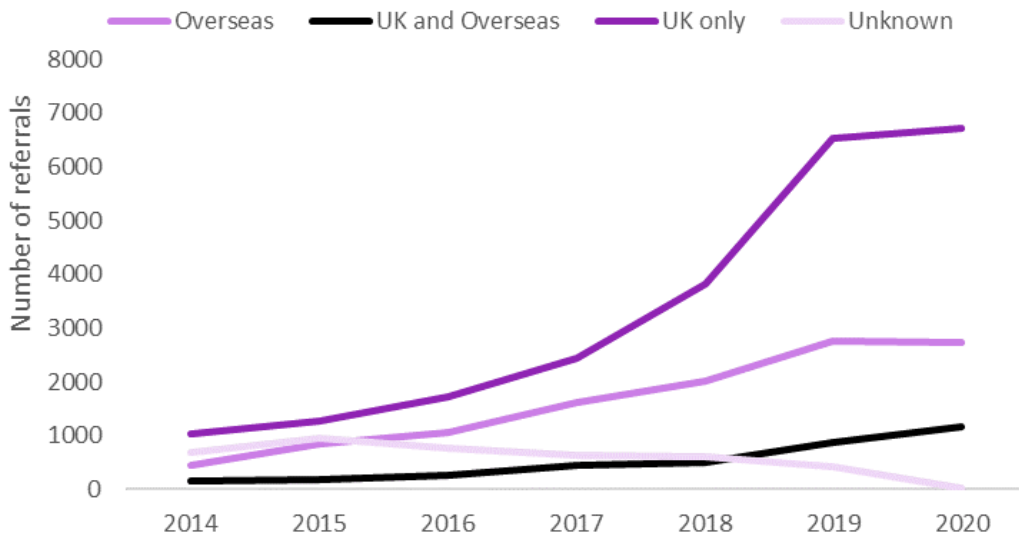**Figure 1: Number of annual NRM referrals by age group of exploitation, 2014 to 2020**

Source: SCA
Notes: Excludes data pre-2014 due to data reliability. Excludes referrals where the age group at exploitation is unknown.

LOCATION OF EXPLOITATION

As in 2019, the majority (63%; 6,716) of individuals referred to the NRM claimed exploitation in the UK only, whilst a quarter (26%; 2,722) claimed exploitation overseas only (Figure 2). Some (11%; 1,156) claimed exploitation both within and outside of the UK, and the location of exploitation was unknown in a small number of referrals (19).

Figure 2: Number of annual NRM referrals by location of exploitation, 2014 to 2020
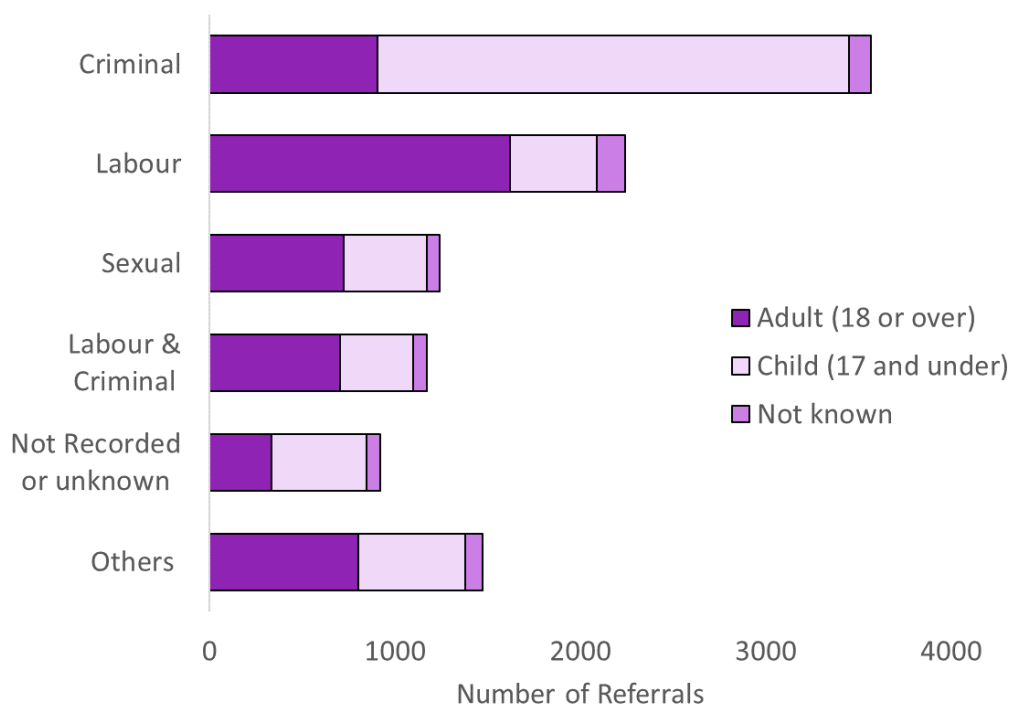

Source: SCA
Notes: Excludes data pre-2014 due to data reliability.

Of those referrals for UK-based exploitation only, in 2020 a higher proportion were child potential victims (57%; 3,811) than adults (40%; 2,661), whereas in 2019 a higher proportion were adult potential victims (51%). As in 2019, a large proportion of referrals in 2020 for exploitation overseas were adults (63%; 1,713) and 28% (768) were children.

REFERRALS BY GENDER AND EXPLOITATION TYPE

Of the 10,613 potential victims referred in 2020, 26% (2,752) were female and 74% (7,826) were male. Compared to 2019, males overall have increased as a proportion of all NRM referrals (68% in 2019), with child potential victims slightly driving this trend. For adult potential victims, 70% (3,540) were male and 30% (1,538) were female, whilst for child potential victims, 78% (3,843) were male and 22% (1,079) were female.

Figure 3: Number of NRM referrals, by exploitation type and age group in 2020

Overall, potential victims were most commonly referred for criminal exploitation only, which accounted for 34% (3,568) of all referrals (Figure 3). An additional 15% (1,590) of referrals stated that potential victims had been referred for criminal exploitation combined with other exploitation types (primarily labour). Criminal exploitation was most common for child potential victims (51%; 2,544), and the majority (93%; 2,362) of those were male.
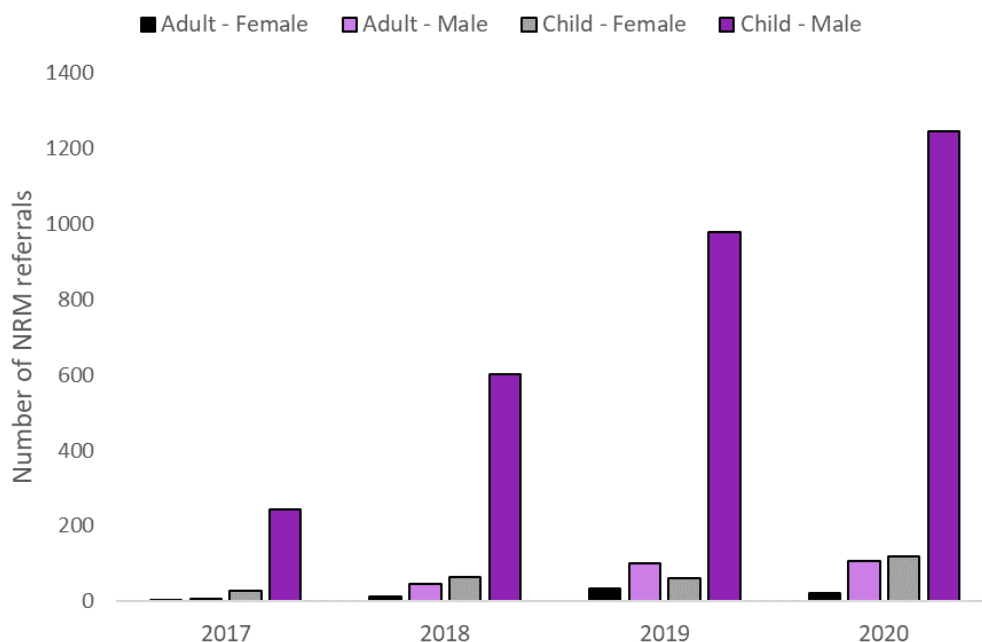
Labour exploitation accounted for 21% (2,241) of all referrals and was the most commonly reported type for adult potential victims (32%; 1,622); most of those (90%; 1,464) were male. For both adult and child potential victims, most referrals for sexual exploitation (90% and 85% respectively) were for female potential victims.

It is important to note that 'Unknown exploitation' is no longer a distinct category on the online form that first responders use when submitting a referral; instead, they can put data for unclassified exploitation in a free text box field, which for statistical reporting is grouped as 'Not specified or unknown'. See further information on types of exploitation.

For those exploited as children, an increase in the identification of 'county lines' cases has partially driven the rise in the number of cases categorised within the 'criminal exploitation' category, with 40% of all child referrals for criminal exploitation being flagged as county lines. The term 'county lines' is used to describe drug gangs in large cities expanding their reach to small towns. Often, drug gangs exploit vulnerable individuals to transport substances, and mobile phone 'lines' are used to communicate drug orders. See further information on county lines.

In 2020, 1,544 referrals were flagged as county lines referrals, accounting for 15% of referrals received (data table 27) and an increase of 31% from 2019. The majority (81%; 1,247) of these referrals were for male children.

Figure 4: Number of NRM referrals flagged as county lines, by age group at exploitation and gender
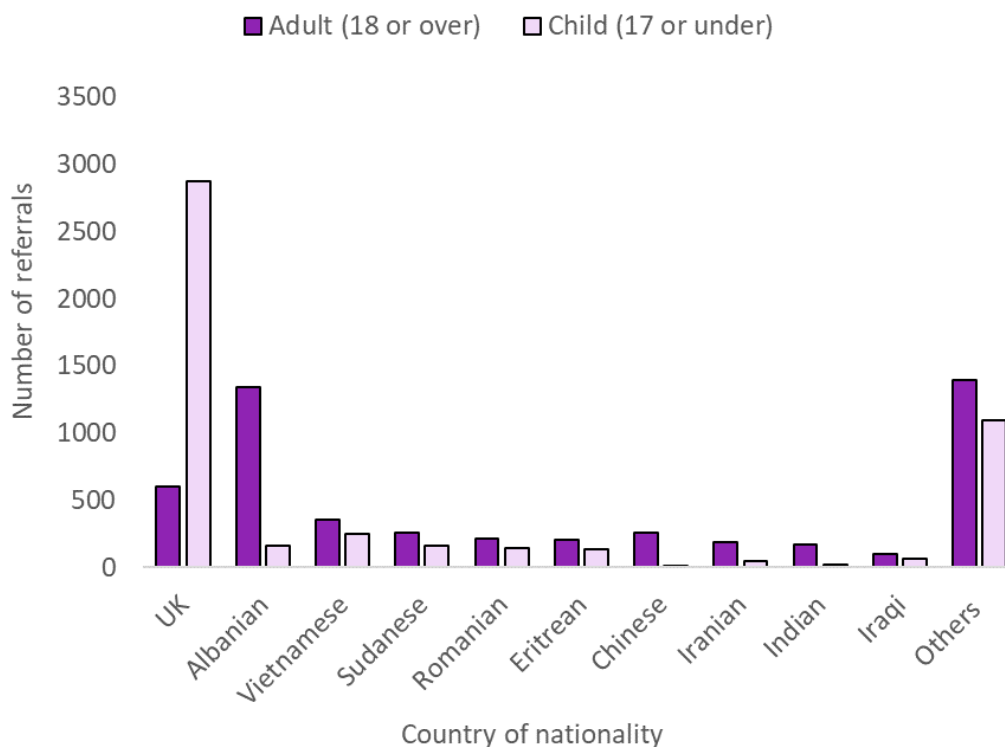

Source: SCA
Notes: County lines referrals were classified as a sub-type of labour exploitation prior to Q4 2019. Since January 2020, a 'flag' within the NRM digital casework system identifies county lines referrals.

REFERRALS BY NATIONALITY

As in 2019, the most common nationality of all referrals to the NRM in 2020 was UK nationals, accounting for 34% (3,560) of all potential victims, and who were primarily referred for criminal exploitation. The second most commonly referred nationality was Albanian (15%; 1,638), followed by Vietnamese nationals (6%; 653) (Figure 5). Both Albanian and Vietnamese nationals were most commonly referred for labour and criminal exploitation, whilst sexual exploitation was also commonly reported for Albanian nationals.

Please note, a change to data recording from 1 October 2019 means that NRM data reflects the dual nationality of potential victims in separate categories. To see total counts of a particular nationality, please refer to the data tables. A potential victim's nationality is based on information provided by the first responder upon referral, however case workers may update this as further information is gathered.

Figure 5: Number of NRM referrals for the most common nationalities of potential victims in 2020, by age group at exploitation

Source: SCA
Notes: Excludes potential victims with an unknown age at exploitation. There are separate categories for dual-nationals.

REFERRALS BY LOCATION OF CRIME INVESTIGATION

Upon receiving an NRM referral, the SCA determines the responsible geographic police force for investigation based on the information provided on the referral form and transfers the referral for investigation. Transfer between police forces can take place as further information is received, which is reflected in the statistics. Previously, British Transport Police referrals were classed under England, but have now been separated out in the data tables.
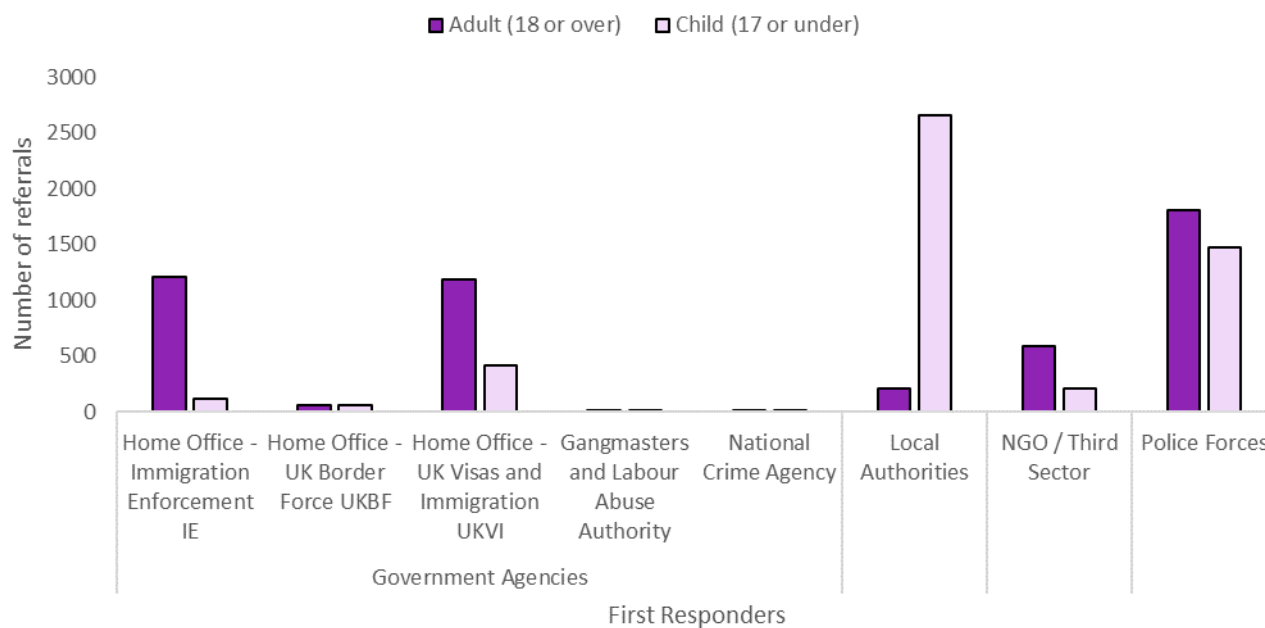
In 2020, as in 2019, most (90%; 9,586) of the NRM referrals were sent to police forces in England; 4% (387) to Police Scotland, 4% (384) to Welsh police forces and 1% (128) to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (data table 8). As in 2019, almost one-third of all referrals were sent to the Metropolitan Police Service, and West Midlands Police received the second highest amount of NRM referrals, accounting for 7% of all referrals in 2020.

FIRST RESPONDERS

In 2020, 32% (3,401) of referrals came from government agencies, lower than the 44% (4,648) in 2019. Travel restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic is largely attributed to this decrease. Over half (51%; 1,743) of the government agency referrals came from UK

Visas and Immigration (UKVI) whilst 44% (1,505) came from Immigration Enforcement (IE), both similar proportions to those in 2019.

Figure 6: Number of NRM referrals by first responder types

Source: SCA
Notes: Authorised first responder organisations include local authorities, specified NGOs, police forces and specified government agencies. Excludes potential victims with an unknown age at exploitation.
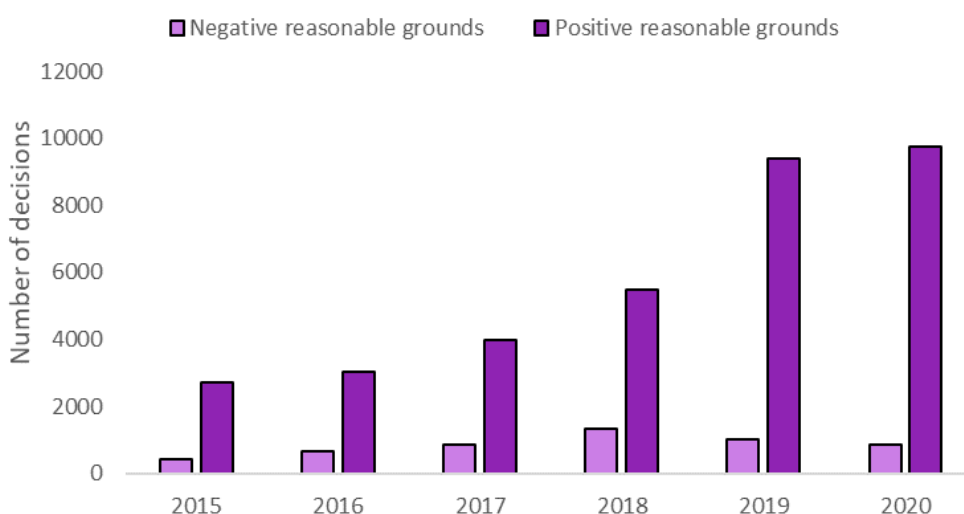
Police forces accounted for almost a third (32%; 3,431) of all NRM referrals in 2020, a higher proportion compared to the previous year (26%; 2,745). The proportion of referrals from NGO / third-sector organisations in 2020 was 8% (832), similar to the preceding year. Local authorities accounted for a higher proportion of referrals in 2020 (28%; 2,949) compared to 22% in 2019. For local authorities, the majority (90%; 2,653) of referrals were for child potential victims.

3   National Referral Mechanism (decisions)

REASONABLE GROUNDS DECISIONS

The SCA made 10,608 reasonable grounds decisions in 2020, broadly in line with the number of referrals (though some decisions were made on referrals received late in the previous year). Of these decisions, 92% (9,765) were positive and 8% (843) were negative. The proportion of positive decisions overall is slightly higher than the 90% seen in 2019. The proportion of positive reasonable grounds decisions was also higher for child potential victims (94%; 4,636) than adults (90%; 4,634) (data table 28).

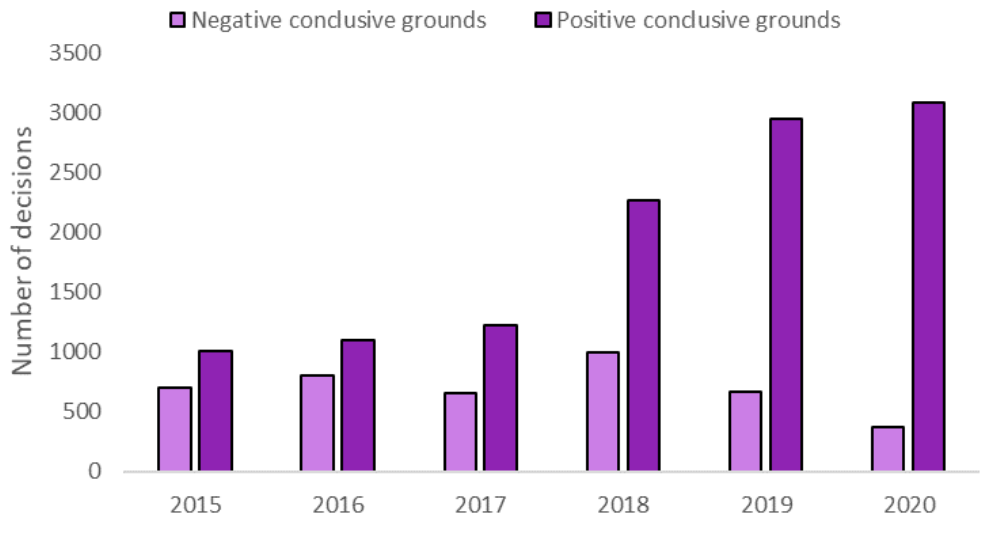**Figure 7: Number of NRM positive and negative reasonable grounds decisions**

Source: SCA
Notes: Based on the year in which the SCA made their decision.

CONCLUSIVE GROUNDS DECISIONS

In 2020, the SCA made 3,454 conclusive grounds decisions, a slight decrease from 3,616 made in 2019. It is important to note that the decisions made by the SCA in 2020 will include decisions on referrals made in previous years. Of the conclusive grounds decisions made in 2020, 89% (3,084) were positive and 11% (370) were negative. The proportion of positive conclusive grounds decisions was higher for child potential victims (95%; 1,556) than adults (84%; 1,453) (data table 29).

Figure 8: Number of NRM positive and negative conclusive grounds decisions

Source: SCA
Notes: Based on the year in which the SCA made their decision.

The average (median) time taken from referral to a conclusive grounds decision made in 2020 was 339 days, which is slightly lower than the 345 for decisions made in 2019 (data table 30). It is important to note that the decision-making times presented here are for cases that received a conclusive grounds decision from the SCA in this period, and do not reflect the waiting time of all cases within the system. Some cases that receive decisions in 2020 may have taken longer to reach a decision than those in previous years (data table 30).

CURRENT DECISION STATUS

As at 1 February 2021, the majority (82%; 8,665) of referrals made in 2020 are awaiting a conclusive grounds decision, having received a positive reasonable grounds decision (a further 9,447 referrals are also awaiting a conclusive grounds decision). Of referrals made in 2020, 8% (894) received a negative decision (815 at reasonable grounds and 79 at negative conclusive grounds stage), whilst 7% received a positive conclusive grounds decision. This is a result of the current time taken to make conclusive grounds decisions (data table 35).
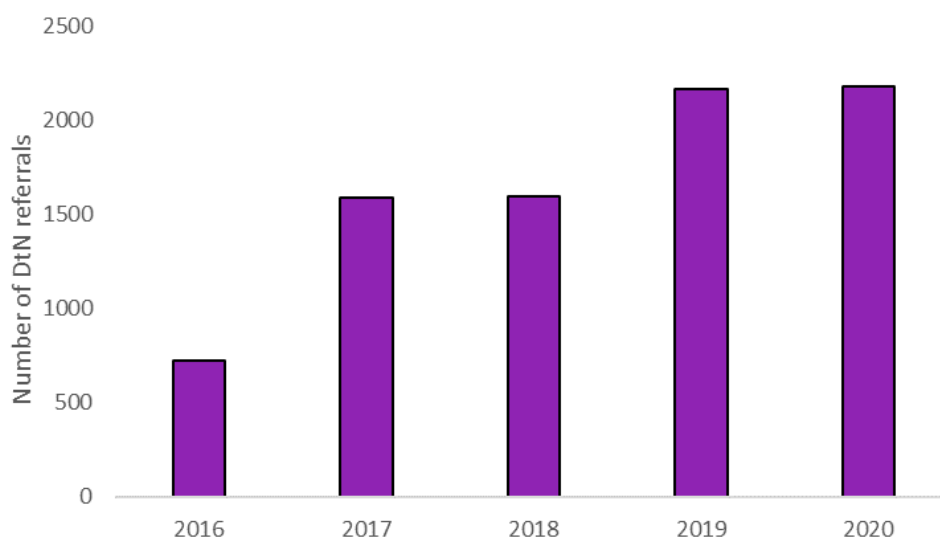
4   Duty to Notify

Since 1 November 2015, specified public authorities in England and Wales must notify the Home Office via the Duty to Notify (DtN) process of suspected adult victims of modern slavery that do not consent to enter the NRM. During this process, first responders do not collect the potential victim's personal details.

In 2020, the Home Office received 2,178 reports of adult potential victims via the DtN process (Figure 9), compared to 2,164 in the previous year. Of the 2020 DtN reports:

- the most referred nationalities were Albanian (16%; 331), Romanian (15%; 314) and UK (12%; 266) (data table 32). In 2019, Chinese nationals were referred most often, followed by Albanian and Romanian nationals.

- the most referred exploitation types were labour (35%; 737), sexual (21%; 443) and criminal exploitation (15%; 317) (data table 33), which is similar to 2019.

- in terms of first responders, as in 2019, most DtN reports were submitted either by government agencies (53%; 1,133) or the police (40%; 852).

Figure 9: Number of Duty to Notify referrals

Source: SCA
Notes: Potential victims may be reported via DtN and subsequently also referred to the NRM at a later point in time, so these figures should not be combined due to potential double counting.

5 Further information

All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

It is important to note that the statistics presented in this publication relate to the number of **potential** victims of modern slavery that have been referred to the NRM.

These statistics are based on the situation as at **1 February 2021** when an extract was taken from the live management information system. The figures may differ from previous or future reports as new information comes to light and cases update accordingly.

NRM statistics were previously published by the National Crime Agency (NCA) prior to transfer of NRM decision-making responsibilities to the SCA in April 2019 as part of the NRM Reform Programme. Publications prior to July 2019 can be accessed via the NCA website. With this transfer of responsibility, these data are now designated as official statistics and produced in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Data tables for further analysis are online alongside this bulletin.

This statistical bulletin is produced to the highest professional standards and is free from political interference. It has been produced by statisticians working in the Home Office Analysis & Insight Directorate in accordance with the Home Office's Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which covers Home Office policy on revisions and other matters. The Chief Statistician, as Head of Profession, reports to the National Statistician with regarding all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office National Statistics products regarding the Code, being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.

Changes to recording of exploitation type

Prior to 1 October 2019, potential victims of modern slavery were recorded as having a single primary exploitation type, grouped into five distinct categories: labour, sexual, domestic servitude, organ harvesting or unknown exploitation. Following changes to the way NRM data are collected, recording of exploitation types has changed to give a better picture of the exploitation experienced by potential victims. As a result, for referrals received from 1 October 2019, criminal exploitation is separate from labour exploitation. In addition, potential victims can also be recorded as experiencing multiple exploitation types, so apply caution when comparing exploitation type statistics from 2020 with previous years, as the primary exploitation type is unknown. Furthermore, 'Unknown exploitation' is no longer a distinct category on the online form that first responders use when submitting a referral; instead, data for unclassified exploitation can be provided in a free text box field. For statistical reporting, this field is grouped as 'Not specified or unknown'.

Police force data provided in associated data tables are based on the location of the police force that received the NRM referral. Each referral is screened against the criteria below to identify the responsible geographic police force. Once identified, the referral is transferred for action to the relevant Force Intelligence Bureau, or stipulated point of receipt within the force. Sometimes, further information is received and processed regarding a referral, which

means it will be sent to a different police force. This will be reflected in the updated statistics. Criteria applied to identify the relevant police force:

- the force has acted as first responder, or the referral indicates that the force is already involved in the recording/investigation of the potential modern slavery human trafficking offences; **or**

- the potential victim has been exploited within the force area; **or**

- the potential victim has been exploited abroad, or at an unknown location and the victim's address at time of referral is within the force area; **or**

- the potential victim has been exploited abroad or at an unknown location and they have presented to another first responder within the force area.

OTHER RELATED PUBLICATIONS

National Referral Mechanism Statistics Quarter 2 2019 – April to June

National Referral Mechanism Statistics Quarter 3 2019 – July to September

National Referral Mechanism Statistics Quarter 4 2019 – October to December

National Referral Mechanism Statistics UK, End of Year Summary, 2019

National Referral Mechanism Statistics UK, Quarter 1 2020 – January to March

Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics UK, Quarter 2 2020 – April to June

Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics UK, Quarter 3 2020 – July to September

Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics UK, Quarter 4 2020 – October to December

Feedback and enquiries

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