Home Office

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

This statistical bulletin gives a summary of the number of **potential** victims of modern slavery referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in 2019.

Key results

In 2019, 10,627 potential victims of modern slavery were referred to the NRM; **a 52% increase** from 2018.

Of the potential victims referred in 2019, two-thirds claimed that the exploitation occurred in the UK only, whilst 26% claimed that the exploitation took place overseas only.
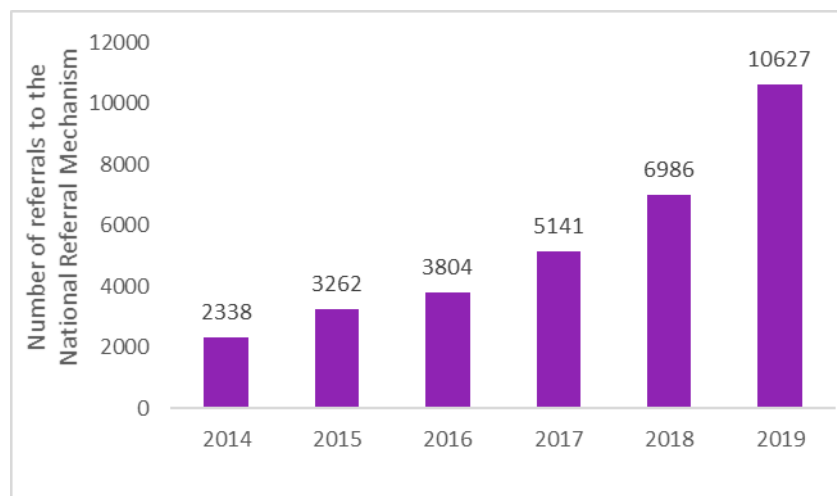
Just over half of referrals were for individuals who claimed they were exploited as adults, whilst 43% were for individuals who claimed they were exploited as minors.

The most common type of exploitation for both adults and minors was labour exploitation.

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

The majority (91%) of NRM referrals were investigated by police forces in England. Police Scotland received 5% of referrals, Welsh police forces received 3% and the Police Service of Northern Ireland received less than 1%.

Number of NRM referrals from 2014 to 2019

Contents

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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 are 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. Adults (aged 18 or above) must consent to being referred to the NRM, whilst minors under the age of 18 do not need to give consent to be referred. NRM referrals can also be made for individuals exploited as minors but who are now adults.

Once referred to the NRM, the Single Competent Authority (SCA) within the Home Office is responsible for making a 'reasonable grounds' decision on whether or not an individual could be a victim of modern slavery.

Adults who are given a positive 'reasonable grounds' decision have access to support (including accommodation, subsistence, legal aid and counselling) until a 'conclusive grounds' decision on their case is made. Minors are supported by local authorities.

Adults with 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 nine days of support. Several improvements to the NRM have been committed to as part of the [NRM Reform Programme](#) and are in the process of being implemented. See [further information regarding the NRM process](#).

USER FEEDBACK SURVEY

As part of the NRM Reform Programme, a new digital system for the NRM has been rolled out. The online referral form was launched for all first responders at the end of August 2019, and the case management system for the NRM went live in January 2020. Due to changes to some recording practices in this new system, the format of NRM data and associated publications has changed to adapt to the new digital system. Additionally, following the transfer of the responsibility for publishing the NRM statistics from the National Crime Agency (NCA) to the Home Office, we are looking to gather views and opinions on how the publication of future NRM statistics could be improved and adapted to best meet user needs. Please email NRMStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk for more information on how to provide feedback.
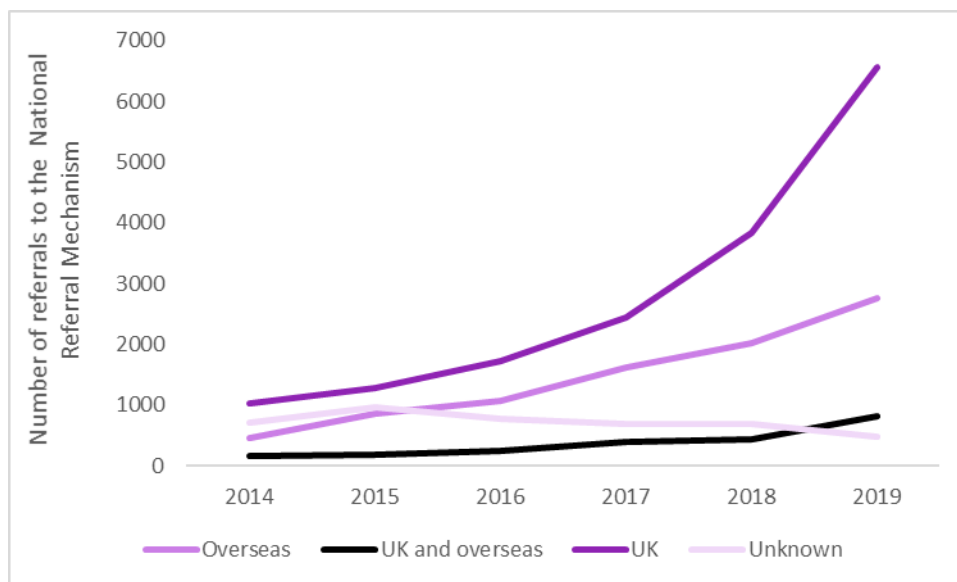
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NUMBER OF REFERRALS

In 2019, the NRM received 10,627 referrals of potential victims of modern slavery. This represents a 52% increase in referrals compared with 2018 and continues the upward trend in referrals that is thought to be partly as a result of increased awareness of modern slavery and the NRM process (reference table 1).

LOCATION OF EXPLOITATION

As was the case in 2018, the majority (6,564) of individuals referred to the NRM claimed they were exploited in the UK only, whilst a quarter (2,762) claimed to have been exploited overseas only (Figure 1). Some (817 referrals) were exploited both in and out of the UK and, in a small proportion of cases, the location of exploitation was unknown (484 referrals). The increase in NRM referrals is largely driven by the continued rise in identification of potential victims that were exploited in the UK only.

Figure 1: Number of annual NRM referrals by location of exploitation, 2014 to 2019

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

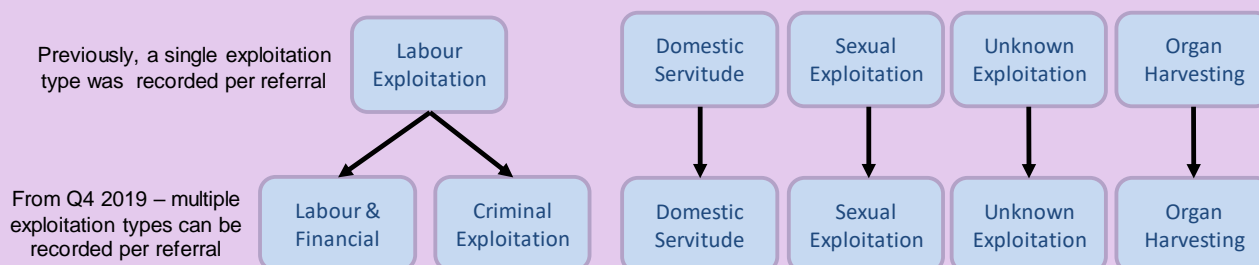## REFERRALS BY AGE GROUP, GENDER AND EXPLOITATION TYPE

Just over half (5,866) of the referrals were for individuals who were potentially exploited as adults, whilst 43% (4,550) were for potential victims who were exploited as minors. These proportions remain similar to 2018.

Of the potential victims referred in 2019, one-third (3,391) were female; two-thirds (7,224) were male; one individual was transgender; and the gender of 11 potential victims was not known. Compared to 2018, males have slightly increased as a proportion of all NRM referrals.

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 (Figure 2). Following changes to the way NRM data is 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 has been split from labour exploitation. In addition, potential victims can be also be recorded as experiencing multiple exploitation types and, as such, caution should be taken when comparing exploitation type statistics from quarter 4 with previous quarters, as the primary exploitation type is unknown. Furthermore, some breakdowns provided in previous statistical releases by certain characteristics and exploitation type have not been provided in the data tables to avoid comparisons with previous quarters.

Figure 2: Changes introduced to recording procedure of exploitation types in the NRM, from 1 October 2019

Prior to 1 October 2019, the most common form of exploitation for both adults and minors was recorded as labour exploitation (though referrals for criminal exploitation were not recorded separately during this period). In quarter 4, labour exploitation was the most common form of exploitation for adults, whilst criminal exploitation was most common for minors. It is important to note that this does not reflect changes in exploitation type in real-terms, rather the change in the way in which exploitation types are recorded. See further information on types of exploitation.

For those exploited as minors, criminal exploitation is driven by an increase in the identification of 'county lines' cases. 'County lines' is used to describe drug gangs in large cities expanding their reach to small towns. In many cases, vulnerable individuals are exploited to transport substances, and mobile phone 'lines' are used to communicate drug orders. See further information on county lines.

Overall, female potential victims were most commonly referred for sexual exploitation, whilst males were most often referred for labour and criminal exploitation.

REFERRALS BY NATIONALITY

As was the case in the previous year, the most common nationality of all referrals to the NRM in 2019 was UK nationals, accounting for 27% (2,836) of all potential victims. The second most commonly referred nationality was Albanian (1,705 referrals) followed by Vietnamese nationals (887 referrals).

A change to data recording means that as of 1 October 2019 the dual nationality of potential victims is reflected in NRM data.

REFERRALS BY LOCATION OF CRIME INVESTIGATION

Once the SCA receives an NRM referral, it determines the responsible geographic police force for investigation. Once the relevant police force is identified, the referral is transmitted within one working day for investigation.

In 2019, as in the previous year, most (9,692) of the NRM referrals were sent to police forces in England; additionally, 5% (512) were sent to Police Scotland, 3% (329) to Welsh police forces and <1% (91) to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (reference table 8). As in the previous year, almost one-third of all referrals were sent to the Metropolitan Police Service, and West Midlands Police was the second most frequent police force sent NRM referrals, which accounted for 8% of all referrals in 2019. The police force was not recorded in 3 cases.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Authorised 'first responder' organisations include local authorities, specified NGOs, police forces and specified government agencies. Similar to 2018, around 4 in 10 referrals into the NRM in 2019 came from government agencies (4,643) with over half (2,494) of these referrals coming from UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). NRM referrals from Immigration Enforcement increased from 7% (511) of all referrals in 2018 to 18% (1,880) in 2019, whilst the proportion of UKVI referrals dropped from 30% (2,097) in 2018 to 23% (2,494) in 2019 (reference table 9).
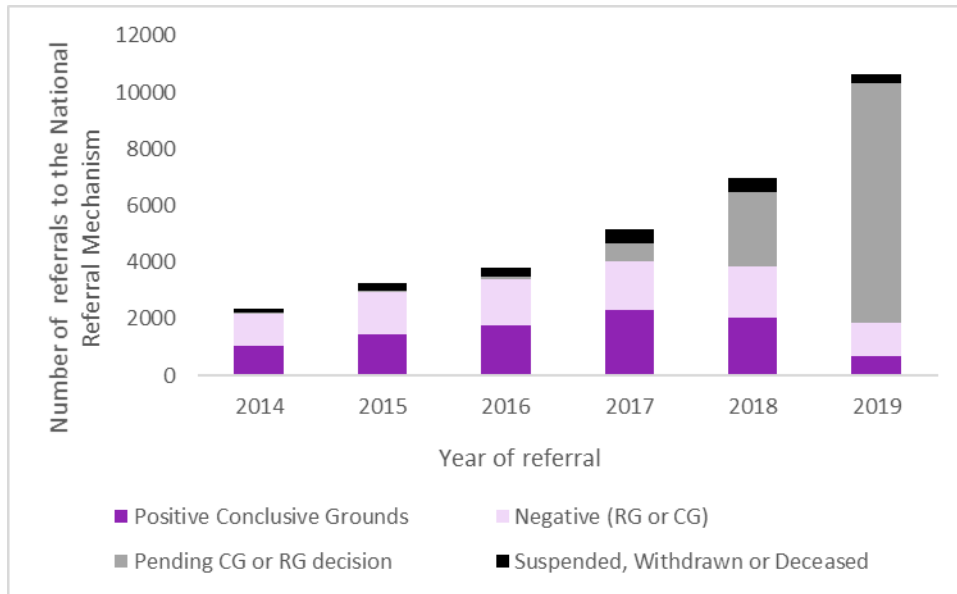
Police accounted for a quarter (2,739) of NRM referrals in 2019, a slightly lower proportion compared to the previous year (2,078; 30% of all referrals). The proportion of referrals from NGO/third-sector organisations in 2019 was 9% (909) and local authorities 22% (2,306), which is broadly similar to the previous year. For local authorities, the majority (2,087) of referrals were for those exploited as minors. The first responder was not recorded for 30 referrals.

DECISIONS

As with previous End of Year summaries, this section provides a breakdown of the decision status of referrals made in 2019 as of 10 February 2020 (reference tables 27 to 29).

Around 8 in 10 referrals made in 2019 are awaiting a 'conclusive grounds' decision (8,429) compared to 38% of referrals made in 2018. Just 26 referrals from 2019 were awaiting a 'reasonable grounds' decision when this data cut was taken, whilst 10% of referrals made in 2019 have received a negative reasonable (1,064) or conclusive grounds (90) decision. Whilst around 7% of referrals made in 2019 have received a positive conclusive grounds decision so far, this is a result of the current length of time taken to make conclusive grounds decisions.

Figure 3: Decision status of NRM referrals as at 10 February 2020

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

3　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.

The statistics provided are taken from a live management information system and based on the situation as at 10 February 2020 when an extract was taken from the system. The figures presented here may differ from previous or future reports as new information comes to light and cases are updated accordingly.

Data presented in this publication were previously published by the NCA, prior to transfer of NRM decision-making responsibilities to 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 can be found 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 Crime and Policing Analysis Unit 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 respect to all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office National Statistics products with respect to the Code, being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.

Police force data provided in associated reference 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 transmitted within one working day to the relevant Force Intelligence Bureau, or stipulated point of receipt within the force for action.

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 UK, Quarter 4 2019 – October to December

Feedback and enquiries

We welcome feedback on statistics releases. If you have any feedback or enquiries about this publication, please contact NRMStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk.

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