



National Referral Mechanism Statistics UK, Quarter 4 2019 – October to December

This statistical bulletin gives a summary of the number of **potential** victims of modern slavery referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) from 1 October to 31 December 2019 (quarter 4).

Key results

In quarter 4 2019, 3,350 potential victims of modern slavery were referred to the NRM; a **19% increase** from the previous quarter and a 71% increase from the same quarter in 2018.

Two-thirds of potential victims claimed to have been exploited in the UK only, whilst 26% claimed the exploitation took place overseas only.

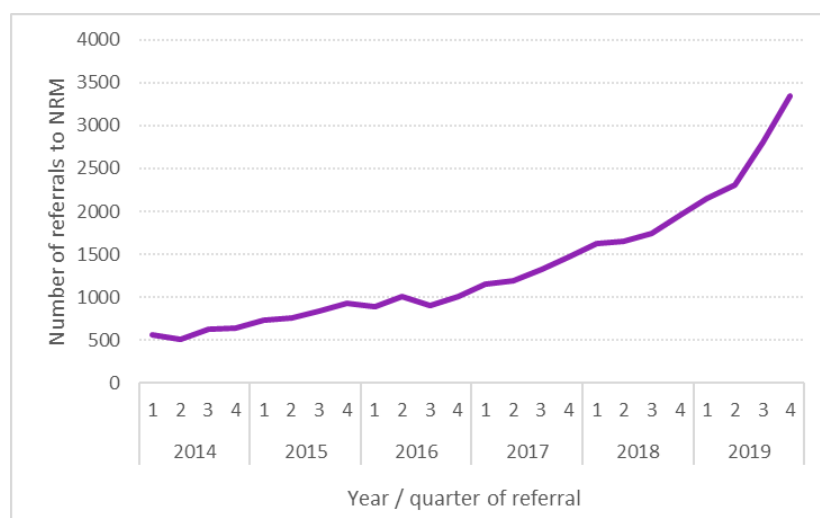
Half of the referrals were for individuals who claimed they were exploited as adults, with the remainder claiming they were exploited as minors (43%) or their age at exploitation was unknown.

Overall, criminal exploitation was the most common exploitation type, closely followed by labour exploitation.

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

The majority (91%) of referrals were transferred to police forces in England for investigation, 5% were sent to Police Scotland, 3% were sent to Welsh police forces and 1% to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Number of quarterly NRM referrals from 2014 to 2019



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Home Office responsible statistician:
John Flatley, Programme Director of
Crime and Policing Statistics

Press enquires:
pressoffice@homeoffice.gov.uk
020 7035 3535

Public enquires:
NRMStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk

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 with 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.

2 Q4 National Referral Mechanism Statistics

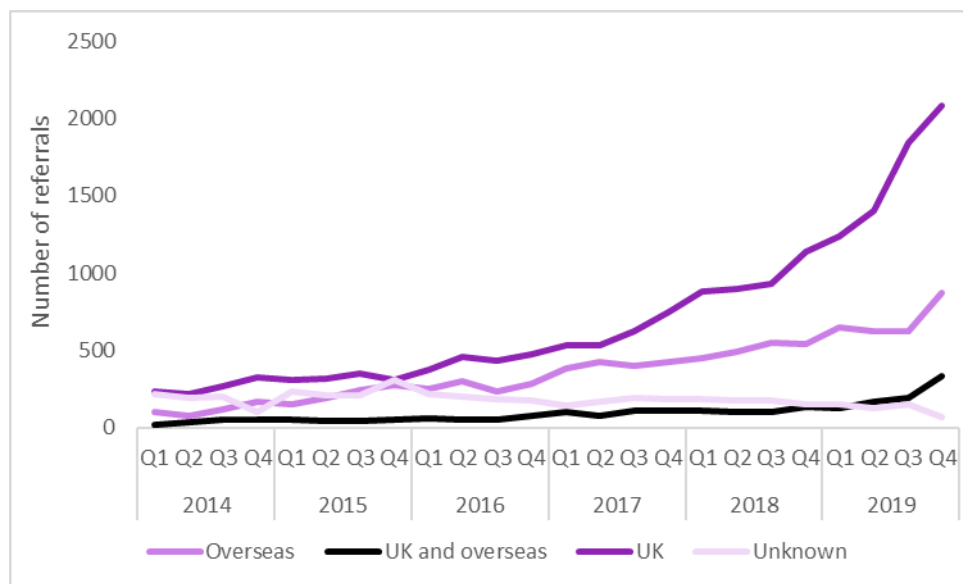
NUMBER OF REFERRALS

In the fourth quarter of 2019, the NRM received 3,350 referrals of potential victims of modern slavery. This represents a 19% increase in referrals compared to the previous quarter of 2019 (2,809) and a 71% increase from quarter 4 in 2018 (1,960). This continues the upward trend in referrals since the third quarter of 2016 (reference table 1), which is thought to be a result of increased awareness of modern slavery and the NRM process.

LOCATION OF EXPLOITATION

As in the previous quarter, the majority (2,080) of individuals referred to the NRM claimed they were exploited in the UK only, whilst 26% (873) claimed to have been exploited overseas only (reference table 2; Figure 1) and 10% (333) claimed to have been exploited both in the UK and overseas. 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 quarterly NRM referrals by location of exploitation, 2014 to 2019



Source: SCA

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

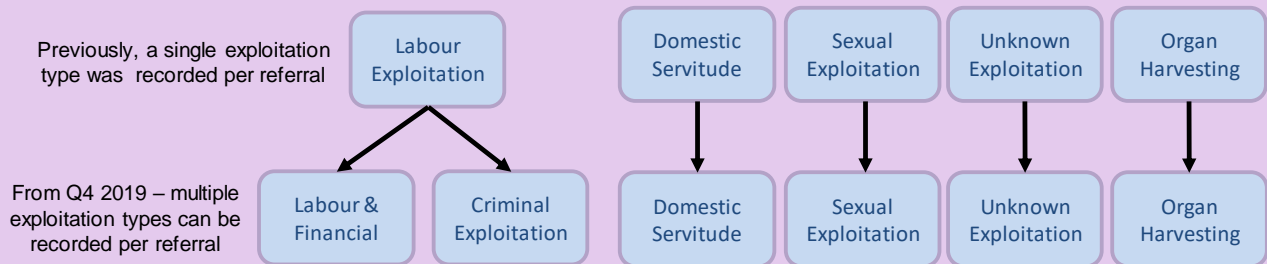
REFERRALS BY AGE GROUP, GENDER AND EXPLOITATION TYPE

Around half (1,694) of the NRM referrals in quarter 4 2019 were for individuals who claimed they were exploited as adults, whilst 43% (1,445) claimed to have been exploited as minors. As in the previous quarter, around one-third were female (1,012) and two-thirds were male (2,329).

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 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 National Referral Mechanism, from 1 October 2019



The most common form of exploitation overall was criminal exploitation (991) closely followed by labour exploitation (983). Criminal exploitation was most common for potential victims exploited as minors, whilst for adults, labour followed by sexual exploitation were most common. See [further information on types of exploitation](#).

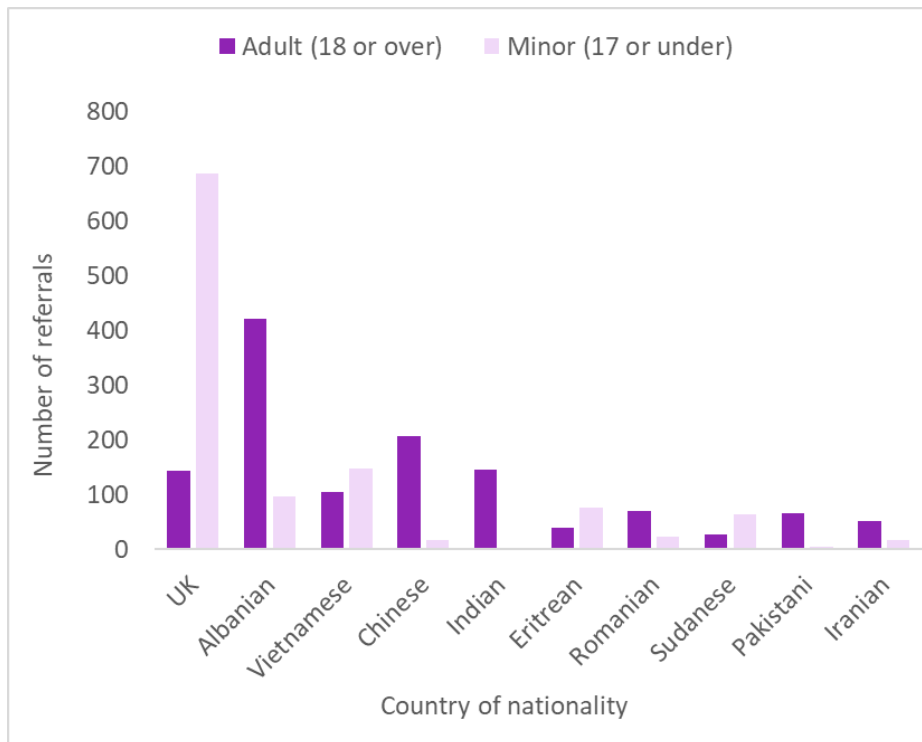
Almost 90% (888) of referrals for criminal exploitation and a similar proportion of labour exploitation (884) referrals were for male potential victims. Conversely, 88% (475) of referrals for sexual exploitation were for female potential victims. For those exploited as minors, criminal exploitation is 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](#).

REFERRALS BY NATIONALITY

The most common nationality of all referrals was UK nationals, which accounted for a quarter (858) of all potential victims referred in quarter 4 2019 (Figure 3 and reference table 4).

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

Figure 3: Number of NRM referrals for the most common nationalities of potential victims in quarter 4 2019, by age group at exploitation; the top 10 nationalities account for around three-quarters of all referrals



Source: SCA

Notes: Potential victims with an unknown age at exploitation are not shown. There are separate categories for dual-nationals.

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.

As in previous quarters, most (3,044) of the 3,350 NRM referrals were sent to police forces in England; additionally, 5% (177) were sent to Police Scotland, 3% (89) were sent to Welsh police forces and 1% (38) to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (reference table 8). Almost one-third of all referrals (1,045) were sent to the Metropolitan Police Service. The police force was not recorded for 2 referrals.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Authorised 'first responder' organisations include local authorities, specified NGOs, police forces and specified government agencies. In quarter 4 2019, almost a half (1,568) of the referrals into the NRM came from government agencies (compared to 43% in quarter 3). Of these, most came from Home Office Immigration Enforcement (847) followed by UK Visas and Immigration (617).

As in the previous quarter, the police accounted for just over a quarter (907) of NRM referrals in quarter 4. NGO/third-sector organisations accounted for 6% (206) and local authorities 20% (655), the majority of which were for minors (reference table 9).

3 Further information

QUALITY 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, End of Year Summary, 2019

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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