SECURE HOUSING GUIDANCE

Why is Housing Important?

Home is where one builds a life. It should offer safety, shelter and privacy; a place where one can experience dignity and freedom. Without a home address, it can be hard to obtain independence, difficult to secure a job or open a bank account. As a signatory on The United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UK recognises 'the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate ... housing'.[1]

Many victims of human trafficking often find themselves in precarious housing situations either during their exploitation or following their exit. For many, fleeing a trafficking situation often leads to immediate homelessness and destitution which increases a victim's risk of being further exploited or re-trafficked.

> **'Trafficked persons are highly vulnerable to re-trafficking immediately after having exited a trafficking situation and en route to assistance. Victims of trafficking (VoTs) are frequently re-trafficked within two years or less of having exited a trafficking situation.'**[2]

Types of Housing Available for Victims of Human Trafficking

Victims may access housing through a range of support either through the varied types of government provisions or through charities. The UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which established the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), exists to house individuals who do not have any eligibility for alternative housing provision; this accounts for less than 15% of those in the NRM, the majority of whom leave the NRM without stable accommodation.[3] The main types of housing provisions for victims are listed below:

- **Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract / NRM**
  The NRM is the UK Government's framework for identifying victims of modern slavery and providing temporary support through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC).

[1]United Nations. (1966). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In United Nations. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cescr.pdf

[2]Jobe, A. & International Organization for Migration. ([2]0[1]0). The Causes and Consequences of Re-trafficking: Evidence from the IOM Human Trafficking Database. In S. Craggs & A. Serojitdinov (Eds.), IOM Human Trafficking Database. International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/causes_of_retrafficking.pdf

[3]Lived Experience Advisory Panel, National Network Coordinators' Forum, & Anti-Slavery London Working Group. (2023). The key issue: housing for survivors of modern slavery. In An Overview of the Housing Landscape for Survivors of Modern Slavery and Exploration of a Whole Housing Approach. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599abfb4e6f2e19ff048494f/t/652fbc39f06d942876ff36e3/1697627193987/The+Key+Issue+Report+Oct+2023.pdf

- **Asylum Accommodation**
  The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) provides access to support based on a set of defined criteria outlined in the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999.[4]
  - **Section 98:** Emergency accommodation is available for those who are destitute, or due to be destitute in the next fourteen days and have an ongoing asylum claim.
  - **Section 95:** Accommodation is available for anyone with an ongoing asylum claim.
  - **Section 4:** Accommodation is available for failed asylum seekers who meet a specific set of criteria.

- **Local Authority**
  Each local authority is independently responsible for understanding their legal requirements and delivering homelessness support for those eligible.

- **Charities**
  A varied range of support is available through charities that have specific criteria and do not always require an individual to be recognised by the government as a victim to access support.

Current Issues and Challenges with Secure Housing

Many barriers and challenges exist for a victim to access support that can impact their physical and mental well-being as they seek to begin the recovery process.

One challenge is the temporary nature of many accommodation provisions which limits a victim's ability to put down foundations to establish long-term independence. Many of the provisions do not allow for victims to have any agency over the location, often leading to them either being accommodated outside of areas where they have support networks or being placed in areas of risk.

Additionally, many housing accommodation options often require someone to be identified by the government (UK NRM) in order to access emergency support. Other factors such as cultural and recovery needs may not be taken into account creating further barriers for victims.

EXAMPLES OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

EXAMPLES

- → *A female who has exited sexual exploitation and is provided a room in a mixed gender occupancy might experience distress as a result of their exploitation.*
- → *A Muslim individual is placed in a catered accommodation but is not provided food at the appropriate times during Ramadan.*
- → *A young individual who does not speak English is placed in accommodation where all induction information is provided in English and there is no one who speaks his language.*
- → *A mum is moved to an area that is an hour and a half from where her children attend school.*

[4]The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/33/contents c 4, c 95 & c 98. (Accessed: 13 May, 2024).

Key Considerations for Secure Accommodation

- **Agency and Empowerment:** Including victims in discussions and decision making is a key element of the recovery process to help restore individual agency. Empowerment takes into account what the victim would like to achieve and decisions are made to best facilitate this.
- **Safety:** All interventions and decisions made in the support process should consider the safety of the victim.
- **Personalised:** Cultural, gender and disability needs should be considered for all victims to remove barriers to access to support.
- **Trauma-Informed Care**: Trauma-informed care acknowledges the physical and psychological impact of trauma on an individual and considers that trauma when interacting with the individual. It considers the complex repercussions of the individual's experience and seeks to minimise re-victimisation.

More information on considerations when communicating or engaging with a potential victim of trafficking can be found in Resource Victim-Centred Approach.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

What Is The Current Guidance?

The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (LA) states that a victim of human trafficking is currently only deemed to have 'Priority Need' if they have left their current accommodation due to violence or threats of violence from another person. However, recommendations state that 'Priority Need' can also be extended to anyone vulnerable for 'any other special reason'.[5] A victim of human trafficking has a significant vulnerability due to the likelihood of re-trafficking.

Access to support is available to victims through the NRM; however, the Homelessness Code of Guidance describes the NRM housing provisions 'as a bridge, to lift adult victims out of a situation of exploitation and to set them on a pathway to rebuild their lives.'[5] The accommodation provided through the NRM is designed to be transitional. Housing authorities are encouraged to explore alternative options for housing which may provide a more long-term solution for applicants.[5]

Best Practice Recommendations

- **Appoint a Modern Slavery Lead** within the LA who acts as a single point of contact to enable collaborative work. Their role should include developing a council's local response to modern slavery by creating referral pathways and protocols, and ensuring first Responders are trained and aware of their statutory duties.
- **Facilitate a coordinated community response** where those with housing expertise can work alongside modern slavery specialists through a multi-agency case conference.
- **Provide professional training** for LA staff to enable them to recognise indicators of human trafficking, assess vulnerability with understanding, and ensure greater safeguarding through trauma-informed care.
- **Victim-Centred Approach:** A victim-centred approach prioritises the needs and concerns of the victim above all else. Professionals should be able to equip victims with knowledge of all housing options so that they can make an informed decision, acting without judgement and in a compassionate and sensitive manner.
- **Deliver reciprocal housing provision** across out-of-area LAs to ensure the safety of individuals where necessary.
- **Emergency Bed Protocol:** LAs should consider providing an Emergency Bed Protocol for victims of modern slavery. This could include accommodation for a minimum period regardless of local connection, NRM status or recourse to public funds.
  - Case Study: Four councils in the Humberside region identified a need for emergency accommodation for victims of human trafficking. They have developed an Emergency Bed Protocol which has been successful in meeting the immediate housing needs of victims in their region.[6]

[5]MHCLG & DLUHC. (2023). Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities [Guidance]. In Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities. DLUHC. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ddabd1cf7eb10015f57f6f/Current_Homelessness_Code_of_Guidance_3_May_2024.pdf (Original work published 2018)

[6]Local Government Association (2022). 'Humberside emergency bed protocol' https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/humberside-emergency-bed-protocol#:~:text=The%20councils%20in%20the%20Humberside,National%20Referral%20Mechanism%20(NRM) Published: 28 February 2022.

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