



Benefits & barriers to employment: Considerations for modern slavery survivors

Findings based on a study by Kate Garbers, May 2021ⁱ, commissioned by the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

Accessing employment can be a crucial part of a survivor's recovery process. However, access to employment-related support and to the labour market is currently based on an individual's immigration status rather than their status as a recognised victim.

Key research findings

Access to employment in the UK is only available to survivors of slavery providing they have the immigration status that affords them this access: being conclusively identified as a survivor of modern slavery confers no automatic grant of leave to remain, and therefore no right to work. Only a minority of survivors, such as UK nationals, will be able to work whilst being supported in the National Referral Mechanismⁱⁱ (NRM).

Survivors, regardless of nationality, will likely face practical, personal and legal barriers in accessing employment, and will therefore require some level of support to be 'work ready'. A range of NGOs working in the UK anti-slavery sector have established employment programmes and pathways, having recognised this as an ongoing gap in service provision. Whilst these organisations should be commended, the lack of overarching strategy is unsustainable. The benefits of long-term support and access to employment are well-evidenced; the development of effective employment programmes and pathways for survivors, should therefore form part of a wider, UK strategy on survivor reintegration.

Why is this important?

Whilst employment is only a part of the equation in supporting survivors to successfully reintegrate into society and achieve sustainable independence, it is a vital part – offering meaning and purpose, routine and stability, and enabling financial independence. Creating pathways for survivors to access decent work makes both moral and financial sense.

Survivors have educational and vocational qualifications and skills, however we are currently unsighted on survivors' skill sets and work histories as this information is not routinely collated as part of NRM support processes. We need to start collating this data and working with those with lived experience so that appropriate employment support and pathways can be developed collaboratively.

Although no blanket right to work currently exists in legislation, support services should be in place to support *all* survivors to gain employment-related skills and experiences in order to reintegrate into society, as and when they are ready. Regardless of a survivor's status in the UK, the time in the NRM should be used more productively to develop skills, prepare for employment, financial independence and economic resilience and agency.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contractⁱⁱⁱ, the UK Government should develop an evidence base to better understand the skills, qualifications, work interests, and work histories of survivors in the NRM.
- **Recommendation 2:** In collaboration with survivors and the wider UK anti-slavery sector, a standardised suite of modules should be developed to form an accredited work preparation curriculum.
- **Recommendation 3:** In conjunction with survivors and the wider anti-slavery sector, the UK Government should draft an overarching reintegration strategy for survivors of modern slavery. The strategy should provide reintegration pathways and durable solutions for survivors who remain in the UK as well as those who return to their home country.
- **Recommendation 4:** The UK anti-slavery sector should undertake further research to address urgent data and evidence gaps related to the right to work.



Research overview

This rapid research project, initiated by the UK's Anti-Slavery Commissioner^{iv}, sought to understand the benefits of working, the harms caused by not working, and the current approach to how survivors are assisted to access employment, reintegrate, and work towards stability and independence. The research involved desk-based evidence and literature reviews of academic and grey literature; surveying frontline agencies working within the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC); and informal interviews with anti-slavery organisations outside of the MSVCC and refugee rights organisations.

Access to the labour market

Within the NRM, survivors can access the labour market, education and vocational training as long their immigration status allows them to. However, survivors who are not UK nationals or do not have a form of leave/right to remain in the UK will not be able to access employment whilst in the NRM. Following a conclusive grounds decision, and support offered via the Recovery Needs Assessment^v (RNA), access to longer-term support and services is dependent on an individual's nationality and their immigration status. Currently, **being conclusively identified as a survivor of modern slavery confers no automatic grant of leave to remain and therefore no automatic right to work.**

Existing into-work programmes

The research identified a number of programmes at the local and national level offering employment-related support, ranging from those established specifically for modern slavery survivors, to more 'general' into work schemes. The types of support currently available to survivors in relation to employment include, but are not limited to; direct access to employment opportunities (for those who are ready to work and have the right to work) work placements, individual and group coaching sessions, and skills-based employability training.

Supporting survivors to be 'work ready'

The key barriers to survivors accessing employment can be summarised as:

- **Practical** – in relation to skills gaps, lack of training available, financial (including welfare benefits), language skills, stable accommodation, and availability of long-term support.

ⁱ <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/may/rights-lab-access-to-work-pathways-final.pdf>

ⁱⁱ The NRM is the government-funded system of identification and support for survivors of modern slavery in the UK.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) is the mechanism by which potential victims of slavery are offered support. Further information

- **Personal** – including levels of trauma, level of confidence, mental health status and substance issues.

- **Legal** – not having status in the UK, not having the right to work in the UK, access to routes to remain in the UK or to return home.

It was felt by research participants that the longer someone had been able to access support (via the NRM), the more time could be spent on developing independent living skills, assisting a survivor to prepare for employment. Regardless of the right to work or status in the UK, participants felt that, at a minimum, the following should be in place (for all survivors) in preparation for the time survivors can enter employment:

- Access to skills classes (personal development, employability skills, digital skills, life skills)

- Access to language classes where needed

- Support to gain understanding of health and safety, employment laws, rights and entitlements in the workplace

- Access to volunteering and paid work placements to have gained work experience.

Need for a comprehensive reintegration strategy

It must be recognised that not all survivors will be in the NRM (some may choose not to be referred) and those that are will be at different stages of work readiness. Some may not be in a position to work. However, clear pathways to employment and programmes of employment-related support need to be in place for survivors to engage with as and when they are ready and able. Whilst such programmes could be trialled within the NRM, a wider reintegration approach will be needed to ensure all survivors (including those who choose not to enter the NRM) are afforded access to such resources. Those with lived experience should be central to the development and content of any programmes, strategy or policy.

Shifting the focus from 'right to work' to 'preparation for work' would offer all survivors, regardless of nationality, the opportunity to develop the skills and experience required to enable them to re-enter the workplace a) when they are ready b) as they receive status, and c) if they don't remain in the UK.

about the support offered is available at:

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/modern-slavery/new-victim-care-contract>

^{iv} Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM is the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner - <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/>

^vHome Office (2021). Recovery Needs Assessment Guidance - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953307/recovery-needs-assessment-v3.0-gov-uk.pdf