

Anti-Slavery International

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Karen Bradley MP
Baroness Butler- Sloss,
Co- Chairs APPG on Slavery and
Trafficking

Sent by email c/o HTF

Dear Karen Bradley MP and Baroness Butler-Sloss,

Rapid inquiry into COVID-19 and Slavery

Recommendation:

- **In the context of the current crisis, the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group¹ (ATMG) urges the Home Secretary to ensure that those in receipt of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) subsistence support across England and Wales, as well as asylum seekers, many of whom have been trafficked, or may be vulnerable to exploitation, also receive the same £20 COVID-related uplift as Universal Credit.**

ATMG are writing in response to your request for information regarding the effects of COVID-19 on people who are vulnerable to, in, or recovering from trafficking and modern slavery. Over the past two months, ATMG has been monitoring and collating information about the distinctive challenges posed by COVID-19, and how it is impacting on victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. For this vulnerable group, the already significant struggle of living on just over £5.00 per day in the NRM is made more severe during the crisis of COVID-19.

This issue needs addressing urgently and is adversely affecting victims.

¹ Members of ATMG: AFRUCA, Anti-Slavery International, Ashiana Sheffield, Bawso, ECPAT UK, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), Helen Bamber Foundation, JustRight Scotland, Kalayaan, Law Centre (NI) The Snowdrop Project, The TARA Service, UNICEF UK

£37.75 per week is not enough to cover essentials now, nor has it ever been. People are struggling and without this uplift they may be left destitute, and vulnerable to more precarious situations that lead to slavery such as financial coercion or even debt bondage during and when the crisis abates.

They are also at severe risk of contracting COVID-19, because:

- Buying food in significant or larger quantities while minimising travel or to prepare for self-isolation is extremely difficult.
- The Home Office report on 'Review of Cash Allowance Paid to Asylum Seekers: 2017'² confirms the basis on which subsistence for victims of trafficking and modern slavery is determined. The review centred on weekly expenditure by the lowest 10% income group among the UK population on the items that correspond to what the Home Office consider to be essential. It should be noted that since March 23rd, the number of retailer's victims rely on for food and support listed in the Home Office report are now closed as a result of COVID-19. Many markets and smaller shops have shut down, forcing victims to rely on large supermarkets that are not always accessible because of reduced transport services.
- The Office for National Statistics³ has also reported a significant rise on the cost of food since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings⁴ (ECAT)

Article 12 of the Convention states that victims of trafficking require urgent protection and the assistance. The guidance provided by Article 12 is explicit recognition of the importance of the unique needs of trafficked persons.

Presently, victims are unable to access their ECAT entitlements in full. These include:

- standards of living capable of ensuring their subsistence, through such measures as psychological and material assistance;
- counselling and information, in particular as regards their legal rights and the services available to them, in a language that they can understand;
- access to education for children.

While ATMG understands the challenges faced by the Secretary of State in discharging their duty to victims of trafficking and slavery during COVID-19, an uplift in the weekly subsistence in line with Universal Credit would also enable those in the NRM to purchase data for phones and or electronic devices, increasing their standard of living and enabling them to access psychological and material assistance.

ATMG member, The Snowdrop Project reported that people they are supporting are forced to choose between eating and purchasing data order to gain access to services and support online.

Young people aged between 18-25 in NRM or adult asylum accommodation and children of adult victims do not qualify for The Department for Education⁵ provision around digital devices, internet

² The Review of Cash Allowance Paid to Asylum Seekers 2017, available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673545/Report_on_review_of_cash_allowance_paid_to_asylum_seekers_-_2017_-_final...pdf

³ Office of National Statistics

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/16april2020>

⁴ See Article 12 Council of Europe Convention and the EU Directive 2011/36/EU preambular paragraph 21.

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access, and support to provide remote education during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. We believe this must be reviewed, urgently.

An increase to weekly subsistence would help those aged 18-25-year as well as children of victims' access education services they so vitally need, online.

People need subsistence capable of meeting their basic needs. If the continued provision of financial support is not met quickly, victims are at risk of re-exploitation, sickness and even death.

Please don't hesitate to contact ATMG should you want more information on either of these points raised.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Roberts
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Chair of the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group
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⁵ Get technology support for children and schools during coronavirus (COVID-19):
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19#who-is-eligible-to-receive-digital-devices-and-internet-access>