

Tackling modern slavery

A guide for landlords

The Home Office estimates that there are around 13,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK. There could be many more. Many will be living in private rented accommodation.

This guide has been designed to help landlords:

- reduce the risk of modern slavery in their properties
- look for the signs of modern slavery
- take action if they have concerns that victims of slavery may be living at their property.

Not all housing issues involve slavery, but perhaps the majority of cases of slavery will involve some form of housing issue, whether that's poor quality housing; overcrowding, noise, waste or anti-social behaviour; breaches of the Immigration Act; or other forms of illegal activity.

Clearly, no responsible landlord would want to have modern slavery associated with their property. In addition to the moral basis for this, there are also a number of practical and financial risks for landlords when victims of slavery are living at their properties.

One particular risk is that in cases of modern slavery, landlords become victims of illegal sub-letting, with criminal gangs renting properties in order to rent them out again or house their victims.

Alongside this, some forms of modern slavery may involve activities such as cannabis cultivation, which can cause significant damage to property and invalidate insurance, potentially a major cost.

Finally, landlords can be criminally liable if they are aware illegal activity is taking place and do not report it or takes step to prevent it.¹

What is modern slavery?

Modern slavery is an umbrella term, encompassing human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced labour.

Slavery	Someone is in slavery if they are forced to work through mental or physical threat; owned or controlled by an 'employer', usually through mental or physical abuse or the threat of abuse; dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'; physically constrained or have restrictions placed on their freedom. ²
Servitude	Servitude is similar to slavery, in that a person is under an obligation to provide a service which is imposed on them, but there is no element of ownership.
Forced work	Forced work is defined as 'work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily'. ³ Forced work has been uncovered in a number of different industries including manufacturing, food processing, agriculture and hospitality.
Human trafficking	Human trafficking is when adults and children are moved and forced into exploitation. The movement could be international but also within the country, from one city to another or even just a few streets. A person is a victim of human trafficking even if they haven't yet been exploited but have been moved for the purposes of exploitation.

Victims of modern slavery can be exploited in many different ways and may experience more than one type of exploitation at the same time.

Sexual exploitation: victims may be forced into prostitution, pornography or lap dancing for little or no pay. They may be deprived of their freedom of movement and subjected to threats and violence.

Labour exploitation: a victim is made to work with little or no pay, and may face violence or threats. If they are foreign nationals, their passports may be confiscated by their exploiters and they may be made to live in terrible conditions and under constant threat.

Forced criminality: victims can be forced to participate in a range of illegal activities including pick pocketing, shop lifting, cannabis cultivation, county lines⁴ exploitation and other activities.

Organ harvesting: victims are trafficked in order for their internal organs (typically kidneys or the liver) to be harvested for transplant.

Domestic servitude: victims work in a household where they may be ill-treated, humiliated, subjected to exhausting hours, forced to work and live under unbearable conditions or forced to work for little or no pay. In some cases forced marriage can lead to domestic servitude.

Forced marriage: where people are forced into marriage for a range of reasons including exploiting the rights conferred on them by citizenship or for domestic servitude.

Financial exploitation, for example: benefit fraud, where benefits are falsely claimed by perpetrators on behalf of their workers; bank accounts being opened in a victim's name but used by perpetrators; or workers' wages being paid directly into the exploiters own bank accounts by companies who think they are paying a worker individually.

Debt bondage can be present in many forms of exploitation, and can take a range of forms. Debts may arise out of the exploitation itself, for example in relation to accommodation or travel fees, with victims having little or no control over their debt and little or no way to pay it back. Costs may be deducted from their wages, leading to further debts being accrued. A person may be forced to work to pay off the debt and it can also be used as a means of controlling a victim and keeping them enslaved.

Who does it affect?

Anyone can become a victim of modern slavery. In all types of exploitation victims can be women, men, girls or boys.

Of **6,993** potential victims in 2018:

2,728 were female

4,261 were male

4 were transgender

3,856 were adults

3,137 were minors

Potential victims came from a huge number of different countries, but were most commonly from the UK, Albania or Vietnam.⁵

There is no single type of victim or pathway into modern slavery. However, certain groups are recognised as particularly vulnerable to exploitation:

- unaccompanied, internally displaced children
- children accompanied by an adult who is not their relative or legal guardian
- young girls and women
- former victims of modern slavery or trafficking
- vulnerable men, such as those who are homeless, or with substance misuse issues, debts (in their country of origin or as a result of their illegal migration), mental health problems or learning disabilities.

How can you identify modern slavery?

There are a number of ways landlords can help identify modern slavery.

Identifying individuals	Identifying households
Are occupants of the property in possession of their own passports, identification or travel documents, or are these documents in the possession of someone else?	Are occupants transported to and from the property jointly?
Are occupants of the property able to communicate on their own behalf? Do they allow others to speak for them when spoken to directly?	Is there evidence of poor living conditions, sub-letting or over-crowding?
Do occupants of the property act as if they were instructed or coached by someone else?	Have there been reported issues with noise, refuse etc that suggest potential issues within the property?
Do occupants of the property appear to have freedom of movement?	Are the people occupying the property, the person, or people named on the tenancy agreement?
Do occupants of the property appear withdrawn or frightened?	Is the person paying the rent different to the person occupying the property? Does one person pay rent on behalf of a number of other individuals and is that person named on the tenancy agreement? Has somebody offered to pay the full cost of the tenancy upfront?

What you can do to try to prevent modern slavery in your property?

Modern slavery is perpetrated by criminals (and often organised crime gangs) who will use deception and coercion to try to avoid detection.

Landlords will also clearly need to balance their need to understand issues in their properties with their tenants' right to peaceful enjoyment of their tenancies. Nevertheless, there are a number of steps that you can take to try to mitigate against the risk of your properties being used to house victims of slavery.

Background checks

Thorough background checks and references can ensure that landlords are clear about who will be residing in their property and that they have a previously good record of renting.

This includes complying with the legal requirement to check that a prospective tenant has the legal right to rent, although it is important to remember that modern slavery can affect those who are not subject to immigration controls as well as those who are.

Knowing your tenants

Landlords should seek to ensure they know the names of all individuals who are occupying their property, for example by requiring all those who will be living at the property to be named on the tenancy agreement and subject to background checks, and by preventing any further sub-letting.

If the occupants of the property are different to the people named on the tenancy agreement, and change regularly; and/ or if the property appears to be occupied by an excessive number of people, landlords may wish to seek clarity on this.

Monitoring payment records

Tenancies linked to criminality may not pose any issues in terms of fulfilling their rental payments, but payment records – for example, a request by tenants to play the full cost of a tenancy upfront – can sometimes flag when something is out of the ordinary.

Landlords can compare whether payments relating to the property are received from individuals named on the tenancy agreement or the people the landlord otherwise believes are occupying the property.

Again, in the case of any discrepancies between the occupants and the person actually paying for the tenancy, landlords may wish to understand why this is the case, and who the person paying for the tenancy is.

Regular checks of the property and maintaining links with the community

It is good practice for landlords to ensure there are regular checks of properties that they are renting out. Some councils recommend that checks take place every six months.

Inspections can help to identify whether there are any apparent issues with the number and identity of people occupying the property (compared to what is stated on the tenancy agreement).

They may also indicate any issues linked to the property itself, for example, if the property were being used for prostitution or cannabis cultivation.

It is also good practice as a landlord to maintain a relationship with neighbouring properties and the wider community, who may be able to indicate if there are concerns about the property, for example a state of disrepair, unusual smells, etc.

Recognising unusual behaviours

Visits to the property may also indicate whether the occupants are exhibiting any unusual behaviours that may indicate slavery (as set out in the table above).

Notification of issues

Landlords can make arrangements to ensure they are informed about any complaints made about the property, for example to a council's anti-social behaviour team, or a lettings agent (if one is being used).

This will ensure landlords know of any issues with the tenants or property, including those which could be an indicator of illegal activity.

What to do if you are concerned about a tenant and/or activity at your property

If you are concerned about the welfare of a tenant or tenants, or believe that something untoward may be taking place at your property, you should not challenge tenants yourself.

If you believe a person is in immediate danger, you should call 999.

Otherwise, if you have suspicions, this should be reported to the Modern Slavery Helpline on 08000 121 700. A false alarm is better than no alarm. The National Landlords Association advice line can provide housing specific advice to their members on 020 3870 3777.

You can also talk to your council's private sector housing team.

For more information

Immigration right to rent checks
www.gov.uk/government/collections/landlords-immigration-right-to-rent-checks

Government how to rent guide
www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-rent

Endnotes

- 1 www.walkermorris.co.uk/publications/real-estate-matters-spring-2019/landlords-liability-for-tenants-criminal-activity
- 2 www.unseenuk.org/about/the-problem/modern-slavery
- 3 www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang--en/index.htm
- 4 County lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and towns using dedicated mobile phone lines – these are the county lines. It involves child criminal exploitation as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money.
- 5 National Crime Agency (NCA) figures 2018

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