



Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your continued support and participation in the Project AIDANT COVID-19 activity which is being co-ordinated by both the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA). Local authorities play a vital role in identifying and safeguarding potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, through the hard work of colleagues across the different service areas and key engagement with members of the public who use these local services. As such, the role of local government is pivotal in helping to provide an effective multi-agency response to COVID-19, of which the safeguarding of victims is paramount.

Recently, the Prime Minister hosted a Hidden Harms summit focussing on how to tackle crimes such as modern slavery which may have been impacted by the coronavirus lockdown. The summit emphasised the importance of protecting and safeguarding vulnerable individuals who have been affected and we value the on-going work across local authorities to help achieve this.

To help raise awareness across local authorities during this period, we have provided you with some potential lines of communication that you may wish to utilise through your internal and external communication channels, reaching those who work across local government and members of the public who utilise the services provided. Communications used may include but not be limited to press releases, social media posts, intranet articles, and stakeholder engagement assets such as bulletins.

Top Lines

- Modern slavery intersects with many different areas that local authorities engage with, and local authorities have a key role to play in tackling the threat. Key areas where employees may encounter victims and/or where COVID-19 may create new or increased risks range from housing and homelessness services, to community safety work, to adult and children's services, to within customer service.
- Thousands of vulnerable people from across the world are being exploited in conditions of slavery here in the UK. Forced into the sex industry, labour or to commit criminal offences on behalf of their traffickers, vulnerable victims are controlled by fear, violence and debt bondage. Whether these victims are escaping conflict, or seeking economic, social or educational opportunities in the UK, criminals prey upon their desire for a better life, before controlling and abusing them for profit.
- Vulnerable UK nationals are controlled and exploited by criminals who seek to make money by treating human beings as commodities. Fighting MSHT is one of the government's highest priorities, and local government work together with multi agency partner agencies to protect and safeguard vulnerable victims who use our services in the community.

The nature of the MSHT threat

- Although the true scale of MSHT in the UK is unknown, it is anticipated that the number of identified victims is increasing. Many victims, both adults and children, are forced to work in unsafe conditions across industries including construction, agriculture, food production, hospitality, nail bars, car washes and the sex industry, putting both their mental and physical health at risk. As part of the local community, these individuals will have access to local government services, providing local government with the opportunity to help those most in need.
- Many victims of MSHT have been trafficked from overseas, including Eastern Europe, South East Asia, and Africa.

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- Latest figures show that British nationals make up the largest single group of victims within the UK. Many of these individuals, especially children, may use local authority services.
- Victims of MSHT are hidden across the UK, many of them with unmet health, welfare and social care needs. Local authorities play a key role in tackling modern slavery through the identification of victims in settings such as food supply and production, houses of multiple occupancy and through the provision of support for welfare, care and homelessness. Local authorities also tackle MSHT through community safety and disruption activity.

Project AIDANT COVID-19

- Since 2017, the NCA has led a series of multi-agency projects on different aspects of the MSHT threat. UK Policing has collaborated alongside law enforcement partners, government agencies, local government, the healthcare sector and NGOs which has resulted in the safeguarding of over 1,200 potential victims.
- 'Project AIDANT COVID-19' is being undertaken to identify and respond to the changing MSHT threat picture as a result of COVID-19. The safeguarding of victims during this period is of paramount importance.
- It is almost certain that restrictions on movement and activities are having a notable impact on the MSHT threat in the UK. Many of these victims are housed in local communities and may be more visible to local authority services at this time through the service provision delivered
- There have been anecdotal reports of displacement of vulnerable victims from public-facing sectors that have been closed as a result of government measures, such as car washes and nail bars, to high-risk sectors of agriculture and the wider food supply chain. As such, this is putting already vulnerable victims at risk of greater harm.

Key Challenges

- MSHT is often **hidden in plain sight**. To help identify and support those that have been affected, we need our colleagues across local government, and members of public who use these services, to recognise the signs and report their suspicions to the Modern Slavery Helpline or the police.
- MSHT **requires a comprehensive whole system response**, from local to international level. The National Crime Agency and GLAA work with a range of partners, including local authorities, in the UK and overseas to tackle this threat and safeguard those that have been affected.

Reporting MSHT

- If you suspect someone to be a victim of MSHT, please contact the 24/7 Modern Slavery Helpline on 0800 0121 700, or 999 for emergencies and clearly state that you believe the individual is a potential victim of MSHT. Remember, your information could save a life. Reports can be made anonymously through the Modern Slavery Helpline.

Contact

If you would like any further details of information on how to align your communications with partner agencies, please contact Emily-Rose.Rolfe@nca.gov.uk , copying in pressoffice@nca.gov.uk with the reference PROJECT AIDANT – COVID-19 Activity

We thank you for your continued support at this time.