



The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

14 February 2025

Dear Home Secretary,

As Members of the House of Lords, we would like to request that you grant the right to work to all potential victims of human trafficking and modern slavery in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

The NRM provides essential support and security to many survivors of trafficking and modern slavery in the United Kingdom. However, for thousands who do not have a valid visa when they enter the NRM, often because of their exploiters, the NRM fails to empower them and fails to help them recover from what they have experienced. The time that these individuals spend waiting in the NRM, for a Conclusive Grounds decision on their status, is excessively long<sup>1</sup> and, for those who cannot work, this enforced long-term unemployment causes more harm than good.

Testimonies of individuals in the NRM without the right to work show the devastating financial, medical, psychological and social effects of the UK's current policy preventing a ready, willing and able workforce to participate in the UK economy. Survivors talk about the worsening of their mental health due to a lack of purpose and agency.<sup>2</sup> Those who must rely exclusively on financial support in the NRM can only cover the most basic of essentials, and cannot save in case of illness or emergencies.<sup>3</sup> This leads to some taking irregular work, which puts them at risk - again - of being exploited, all while they are in a system that should ostensibly be *protecting* them from exploitation.

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<sup>1</sup> Analysis of the disaggregated NRM data from the Home Office shows that for adult foreign nationals who received a Conclusive Grounds decision in 2023, the median waiting time in the NRM was 569 days (1.56 years). See Kalayaan, October 2024, "Ready, Willing and Able: The cost of not allowing survivors in the NRM to work - Report 1: Granting the right to work for all in the NRM", available at: <https://www.kalayaan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Ready-Willing-Able-Report-1-Oct-2024.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See Kalayaan, November 2024, "Ready, Willing and Able: The cost of not allowing survivors in the NRM to work - Report 3: Enabling Recovery", available at: <https://www.kalayaan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ready-Willing-Able-Report-3-Nov-2024.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See Kalayaan, December 2024, "Ready, Willing and Able: The cost of not allowing survivors in the NRM to work - Report 4: Preventing Re-Exploitation", available at: <https://www.kalayaan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Ready-Willing-Able-Report-4-Dec-2024.pdf>

This is not sustainable. It shows that in many cases the NRM impedes the recovery of many survivors, and it robs survivors of their dignity. The Government needs to help these individuals recover and become less reliant on public services by empowering them to become self-sufficient (if they are able to) while they await a Conclusive Grounds decision.

A simple change in policy would grant the right to work to thousands at no cost to the Government and result in an increase in revenue from income tax and National Insurance contributions amounting to an estimated **£36 million per year**.<sup>4</sup> This change in policy would also be a step towards the UK becoming, once again, a pioneer in the fight against human trafficking and modern slavery – just as it did when it became one of the first countries to legislate against modern slavery through the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

We would refer you to the recent series of reports produced by Kalayaan clearly laying out the argument for this group of individuals to be given the right to work. These reports can be accessed here: <https://www.kalayaan.org.uk/campaign-posts/ready-willing-able-series-of-reports-published-making-the-case-to-grant-all-survivors-in-the-nrm-the-right-to-work-with-just-a-simple-change-in-policy/>.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Alton of Liverpool, Crossbench Peer

Baroness Blower, Labour Peer

Baroness Hamwee, Liberal Democrat Peer

Lord Hannett of Everton OBE, Labour Peer

Lord Hendy KC, Labour Peer

Baroness Lister of Burtersett CBE, Labour Peer

Lord Monks, Labour Peer

Frances O’Grady, Labour Peer

Lord Prentis of Leeds, Labour Peer

The Rt Hon. Lord Randall of Uxbridge, Conservative Peer

Baroness Young of Hornsey OBE, Crossbench Peer

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<sup>4</sup> See Kalayaan, November 2024, “Ready, Willing and Able: The cost of not allowing survivors in the NRM to work - Report 2: The Economic Benefits”, available at: <https://www.kalayaan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ready-Willing-Able-Report-2-Nov-2024.pdf>