

READY, WILLING & ABLE

The cost of not allowing survivors in the NRM to work

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Report 4
Preventing
Re-exploitation



KALAYAAN
justice for migrant domestic workers

Why we have decided to focus on those in the NRM who are prevented from working



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Issues of immigration are top of the current government's agenda.

This series of reports does not aim to answer those larger political questions; instead, they focus on those potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery languishing in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) who cannot work. We have chosen to look into the plight of these individuals, because not allowing them to work during such extensive wait times in the NRM is tortuous, pointless and a waste of human resources. Yet the issue is often overlooked by policymakers who determine that once in the NRM these survivors' needs are being adequately met.

They are not.

We hope that these reports will show how just a small change in legal policy allowing survivors of trafficking and modern slavery to work while in the NRM could have a huge positive impact on them, the economy and the country more generally.

Moreover, this policy change would **cost nothing** and take up very little of parliamentarians' time.

We acknowledge that the NRM system has its flaws (for example, one criticism is that it fails to address and prevent the causes of labour exploitation) and that other migrants and refugees in the UK (such as asylum seekers) also languish without work and purpose due to excessively long wait times. We congratulate all those who have already worked so hard to highlight these problems, and we encourage many more to continue to raise such issues and call for change.

In this series, however, we have chosen to give a voice to survivors waiting for years, essentially stuck in the NRM, who can often be overlooked among the wider discourse.

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ATLEU
ANTI TRAFFICKING AND
LABOUR EXPLOITATION UNIT



Kalayaan is producing a series of five ‘mini reports’, highlighting the benefits to be gained and costs saved in allowing those in National Referral Mechanism who do not currently have the right to work, to do so.

This report is the fourth in the series, and examines how the inability to work and support oneself and one’s family may lead some survivors to take irregular work and risk being re-exploited, all while being ostensibly protected in the NRM.

Many survivors of trafficking entered the UK believing they would be working here

The Home Office doesn't provide statistics about the immigration status or the way migrant survivors in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) entered the UK.

While some survivors will have been taken to the UK by force and have been made to work against their will, this will be extremely rare. **Most survivors in the NRM are workers who came to the UK to work and provide for their family.** The nature of their trafficking and their experience of modern slavery will most likely have involved financial coercion, deception, debt bondage, and control via threats.

For these individuals, being able to work is essential. Many have left their families at home in order to provide for them. Such a sacrifice is not taken lightly and the worker will often feel that being so far from their loved ones is worth it if they can send home money so that their children can go to school, or to pay their parents' medical bills, or even to put food on the table.

MIA* IS ALLOWED TO WORK IN THE NRM.

She misses her family but works here to support them:

"It's hard for me to work here, but I will sacrifice for that. They always telling for me: 'Come, come, come, I will maybe not see you, and then maybe I will pass away?.' I told them 'No, because I can pay for your debt. I buy your insulin, everything you need.' For my sister, I told her: 'I will support you. Even your children who are studying, I will cover this. That too, going to college. I will cover it until they've done their study.' I tell them 'You pray always for me and for being strong.'"

For many in the NRM, not working is not an option

Once in the NRM, potential victims receive financial support of £70 to £76 per week. For context, this amounts to £3,640 to £3,952 per year. This is meant to cover food, toiletries, travel costs, clothes, and any other expenses they might incur. However, for most survivors, this is not enough. The NRM provides free accommodation, but this is often shared and the individual cannot choose which region they will be sent to.

ROSE* IS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK IN THE NRM.

She hasn't been able to find a Legal Aid solicitor:

"£75.65 is not enough. I already paid my solicitor from that. I have a private solicitor and I already paid him. I need my money for myself."

PADMA* IS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK IN THE NRM.

She knows she can get accommodation in the NRM, but she would have to leave London and all the people she knows there:

"I want to have money for my room. I live in my friend's room. If I get the job, I will say 'I can pay money for you'. I'm always asking people for help. Help help. They will look for me very badly. I'm asking too much, but it is not enough. Some days I'm asking for some food, some clothes, but they don't like me asking.

They give me no life. I have no family here. Here I'm alone, but I'm changing houses so many times. Moving always. I can't stay in one place.

Every day I feel bad. I feel shame. I ask Jesus: 'What is my life?' I cry for so many days."

CLAIRE* IS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK IN THE NRM:

"I need money to support my family. It's useless if I don't work. I can work now because I'm already 55. That's why: I'm older already. That's why I want to work now."

TWINN* WAS IN THE NRM FOR OVER FOUR YEARS..

Prevented from working, she couldn't support her family back home.

"I have a big family: I have nine children. And for me to be away from my nine children not having a job that I could support them has destroyed me completely...

They have to be moving from house to house. Feeding my children takes quite a lot, so they would go to school without food, then go to bed without food, and every time that happens, it sends the trigger back to me.

I feel like I can't do anything... If I can't do it, I don't want to be here because I don't want to face it. I don't want to live with it.

The majority of what I have and give it to the kids. I don't have anything, but I can't go to anybody and say I don't have enough because they're gonna tell me 'I give you something. It was meant for you'. So I've been forced to go out there and survive."

ANDREA* IS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK IN THE NRM.

She has a young daughter. Andrea receives weekly financial support of £75.65 for herself and £49.18 for her daughter. Andrea and her daughter live in accommodation provided by the NRM..

“The money we receive from the NRM covers food, but it doesn’t stretch to things like clothes or items for my daughter. She sometimes gets sick, and occasionally we’re not attended to at the GP, or she quickly outgrows her clothes, and sometimes the charity shop doesn’t have what we need. If I had the right to work, I could buy the essentials for both of us.

I would like to work so I don’t have to constantly worry about meeting my daughter’s basic needs.

[This has affected our health:] my daughter lacks some vitamins, and I likely do too. I can’t afford to buy more meat or iron-rich foods for her because it’s too expensive, and the money just isn’t enough.

If I had the right to work, I wouldn’t feel so restricted in buying things for my daughter. I could get her essential items like clothes, food she enjoys, such as cereals and yoghurt, and even shoes.

Having the right to work would give me a sense of security that there would be no more abuse. With this assurance, I could work hard to meet my daughter’s needs and perhaps even save up to buy things that we often go without.”

“Not having the right to work allows people to take advantage of you and your situation, manipulating your emotions and mental state. They make you feel small.

Because of everything I’ve been through, I wouldn’t take a job. I am afraid that people will take advantage of me again. If the government supported us by giving us the right to work, it would be a form of validation, showing that we have their confidence and protection, and that we have rights that prevent exploitation. Having the right to work would make me feel protected; without it, I wouldn’t feel safe.”

While potential victims understand that they are in breach of the law by working when they do not have the right to do so, many organisations supporting these victims have confirmed that it is fairly common practice for potential victims to take irregular jobs even when advised against doing so. Indeed, of the survivors we spoke to, to prepare and promote this series of reports, **of those who did not have the right to work, more than 70% admitted to having worked while in the NRM.**

Sadly, and as highlighted by Andrea in her testimony above, by taking irregular jobs, these potential victims place themselves in a vulnerable position in which it is easy for an unscrupulous employer to exploit them, all while they are in the NRM, a system ostensibly set up to protect them from further exploitation.

PADMA* IS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK IN THE NRM.

She has been working on and off to make ends meet, taking work covering her friends who go on holiday. In one job, she worked in someone's garden for 5 hours a day, for £20 a day. As she was always outdoors, Jaya often got ill. In another job, Jaya worked inside the house: cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry. She would work 10 hours a day for £25 per day. She slept on the carpet, which gave her a rash and worsened her allergies.

TWINN* WAS IN THE NRM FOR OVER FOUR YEARS AND WAS NOT PERMITTED TO WORK.

"I started thinking about ways that I could try to do something, just trying to think about every possible solution to support my children.

I was working in a home for patients with mental health issues for at least £4.16 an hour because I had to do a 24-hour shift for £100. **The job is like you being a slave all over again.** Because it's me alone for 24 hours looking after four people with mental health issues, so you have to clean, you have to wash, you have to cook, you have to do everything. And I was attacked once by one of them.

Would I go back to doing that job? Yes, because it put food on the table for the kids. It helped me in some way that I could take some of the stress off of me and put it down, even though I've only been paid that tiny bit of money. In as much as it was not a good experience, I would say it helped me.

Did I feel safe? No. Would I come back, still? Yes. I'm just trying to paint a picture to show that even though you feel like you're in danger, **even if you feel like it's not safe, you go there because you're still under pressure for something that you can't get from the government.**"

The only effective way to prevent re-exploitation is by granting the right to work

The current laws attempting to prevent irregular work are, clearly, incredibly punitive on victims of trafficking and modern slavery, and in many instances, counterproductive. When these individuals need to make ends meet, and to do so, work illegally, employers use the law, holding it over their workers, as a threat, in order to control them. The re-exploitation cycle then starts all over again.

As the waiting times for potential victims in the NRM are excessively long and are expected to remain so for the next two years at least, while the Home Office works on clearing the backlog, the only solution against the risk of such re-exploitation is to grant all potential victims a temporary right to work while in the NRM. Doing so will not cost anything and involves a simple change in policy. We set out this solution in the final installment of this series:

Report 5: The Solution which will be available on 8 January 2025.

*All the names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the individuals' identities.



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