

Evidence Review: Assessing the nature and scale of modern slavery risk in the construction sector, with a focus on the housebuilding subsector

Research Summary

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This is a summary of the report Evidence Review: assessing the nature and scale of modern slavery risk in the construction sector, with a focus on the housebuilding subsector written by Dr Gabriela Gutierrez Huerter O, Dr Furqan Suhail, Dr Yazan Alzoubi (King's College London).

The project was co-commissioned by the Office of the Director of Labour Market Enforcement (DLME) and the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) at the University of Oxford. The research was funded by the PEC which in turn is funded and supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The full report can be accessed on the Modern Slavery PEC website at modernslaverypec.org/modern-slavery-risks-in-the-construction-sector

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Key findings

1. The evidence found on the nature and scale of modern slavery in the housebuilding subsector is not commensurate with its significance in the UK economy, nor with what might be expected given known patterns of exploitation in construction more generally.
2. There is limited quantitative evidence on modern slavery in the UK construction sector and a particular gap in relation to evidence from those with lived experience and from commercial organisations
3. Definitional challenges resulting in inconsistent application of the rules, enforcement constraints and low prosecution rates perpetuate risks of modern slavery practice.
4. There is a spectrum of overlapping labour exploitation issues that are inconsistently documented within the construction sector. Alongside long and complex supply chains, this makes it difficult to capture a holistic and accurate view of modern slavery issues. Work often happens in spaces where exploitation can be hard to detect.
5. Evidence suggests that labour shortages amplify the reliance on migrant workers, including those who are either undocumented or have limited rights to work, potentially heightening risks of exploitation associated with irregular status and limited rights.

6. The high cost of doing business coupled with employers' short-term profit orientation and low profit margins in the construction industry may contribute to modern slavery practices.
7. Existing evidence on modern slavery is predominantly concentrated in the south of England, particularly in London. There is a gap in research relating to risk outside of the London / South East region, in particular relating to the devolved nations.

Key recommendations

1. Existing data should be better utilised and effectively extrapolated to help policymakers address risks of modern slavery in construction/housebuilding. The Home Office should consider the use of specialised text analysis techniques to disaggregate NRM data by type of exploitation across different sectors, subsectors, and devolved nations. It should also provide a breakdown of instances where more than one type of exploitation occurs. Relevant Civil Society Organisations and government agencies should consider separating out data on exploitation incidents within the construction sector and should start sharing estimates and profile data on exploited workers with multiple recorded labour abuses.
2. The DLME should prioritise research that evaluates effective methods for optimising intelligence-sharing between government departments and enforcement bodies, ensuring harmonised responses that leverage all available investigative powers.
3. More research, encompassing both small qualitative research designs as well as large-scale quantitative designs is needed to generate robust primary data on the nature of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK housebuilding sector and the broader patterns and trends of the scale of exploitation. This research should also shift its geographical focus beyond London/South-East and to the devolved nations, where evidence is almost non-existent.
4. Future research should prioritise amplifying the voices of workers who experience and/or witness exploitation on construction sites and other stakeholders including frontline workers within the sector—such as labour inspectors, health and safety officers, and union representatives—who possess critical insights into exploitative practices
5. Future research should examine whether small-scale housing projects (e.g., home renovations, extensions) are more or less prone to exploitation than large scale projects (e.g. large residential projects) by exploring the differences in risk factors.

Background

The UK construction sector is a vital part of the economy, made up of several sub-sectors including industrial, commercial and infrastructure work, housing (public/private), and repair and maintenance. Employing approximately 1.4 million people, the sector reached a record high value of £139 billion in 2023, driven by growth in both public and private sector projects.¹

The current political and economic context points to significant increased demand for labour in construction; however, despite such growth, the sector is facing several challenges, such as a chronic shortage of workers. The labour shortage has already had consequences for the whole industry, including slowed project timelines and increased costs.² Additionally, the government's bold target of building 1.5 million homes in five years has raised concerns among various stakeholders that it may exacerbate the shortage of labour and create an environment for playing fast and loose in respect to workers' rights.

Widescale tax evasion and non-compliance around employment law in construction has been the target of government intervention since at least the 1970s. The sector is characterised by long subcontracting chains and a wide range of recruitment practices, with growing use of intermediaries to supply labour, and as in other areas of the economy, employer practices risk downgrading employment towards casualised and informal work. It is thought that industry practices, combined with constraints around enforcement, mean significant risks of exploitation.

There has been significant interest from policymakers, businesses, and NGOs to start focusing on modern slavery and exploitation, both on-site and in supply chains. Coupled with the UK Government's target of building 1.5 million new homes, the Employment Rights Bill and the forthcoming Fair Work Agency, there is urgency for new research. The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) and the Office of the Director of Labour Market Enforcement (DLME) have identified the construction sector – particularly the housebuilding sector – as a priority area.

The overarching research question was: what is the evidence on the nature of modern slavery risk in the UK construction sector, particularly in the housebuilding sub-sector? The three specific aims of this project were:

1. Office for National Statistics, Construction statistics, Great Britain: 2023, 2024. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/constructionindustry/articles/constructionstatistics/latest>

2. Home Office. Guidance Skilled Worker visa: immigration salary list. 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-immigration-salary-list/skilled-worker-visa-immigration-salary-list>

- To systematically analyse and examine the quality and breadth of the existing evidence base on modern slavery in UK construction, focusing on the housebuilding sub-sector;
- To consolidate the key findings from the existing evidence base on modern slavery in the UK construction sector, focusing on the housebuilding sub-sector;
- To make recommendations to policymakers and for further research.

Methodology

This project deployed a mixed-methods approach combining a rapid systematic literature review of the academic and non-academic literature (from 2010 to 2025) with semi-structured interviews with officials from UK Government agencies. This took place in two consecutive stages, with the rapid systematic review carried out first and the interviews second. Findings were then triangulated, and evidence gaps were identified.

The systematic review analysed 11 academic papers, which included journal articles, conference papers and book chapters, and 56 non-academic documents, totalling to 67 documents.³ A thematic analysis was conducted by the research team by applying a predefined template building from a set of categories developed earlier in the project. The analysis evaluated the breadth and quality of the evidence and focused on delineating 'what we know' from 'what we do not know' about the nature and scale of modern slavery risks in the UK construction and housebuilding sector.

The analysis of the available literature highlighted knowledge gaps that were then explored through interviews with key informants. Seven interviews were conducted in total, with Officials from the three labour market enforcement bodies under the DLME: the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) Inspectorate, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), and the HMRC's National Minimum Wage Unit Enforcement Team (HMRC NMW). Participants from the DLME Office, the Home Office, and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) were also interviewed.

Interviewees were asked to elaborate on their agency's role considering the spectrum of labour exploitation, their professional understanding of modern slavery and related practices, and the evidence they hold in relation to these in the construction and housebuilding sector.

This methodological approach was developed to provide a comprehensive overview of the limited existing research, along with insights into real-world governance and regulatory practice. The goal was to strengthen the evidence base for future research constructed on longer timescales with robust resourcing.

3. See main report Appendix 1 for full list of publications reviewed.

Findings

1. The evidence found on the nature and scale of modern slavery in the housebuilding subsector is not commensurate with its significance in the UK economy, nor with what might be expected given known patterns of exploitation in construction more generally.

Among the 53 non-academic documents reviewed, only 12 explicitly addressed the housebuilding subsector. In contrast, industrial, infrastructure, and commercial subsectors were more prominently featured. This limited focus is notable, considering that housebuilding – across both private and public sectors – accounts for approximately 40% of total sector output.⁴ The volume of evidence identified is therefore not commensurate with the sector's economic significance in the UK.

The gap is even more pronounced in the academic literature. Of the 11 relevant academic studies reviewed, only three focused specifically on housebuilding. The majority examined the construction industry in general, without disaggregating their findings or differentiating by subsector. This scarcity was also highlighted by participants interviewed for this research. When discussing potential reasons for the lack of evidence on modern slavery in housebuilding, participants identified several barriers mentioned below. These findings also apply more broadly to evidence on modern slavery in the construction sector as a whole.

- **Lack of capacity and resources to gather intelligence.** For example, the GLAA does not have the resources to proactively visit places such as food banks or homeless shelters, where exploiters often recruit workers.
- **Insufficient mechanisms for affected workers to come forward,** compounded by some migrants' limited awareness of how to report labour abuse in the UK.
- **Corporate reluctance to share information** due to reputational risks.
- **Health and safety concerns for staff investigating modern slavery,** which can deter proactive inquiry.
- **Limited public engagement** in identifying or reporting suspected cases of exploitation.

The absence of targeted research, combined with structural and operational barriers to detection, highlights an urgent need for greater attention to modern slavery risks in the housebuilding sub-sector. Without improved data, reporting mechanisms, and enforcement capacity, the true scale of exploitation is likely to remain hidden.

4. Office for National Statistics (ONS). Construction statistics, Great Britain: 2023. 2024. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/constructionindustry/articles/constructionstatistics/2023>

2. There is limited quantitative evidence on modern slavery in construction particularly from those with lived experience.

As outlined in the methodology, the available literature was extremely limited, with only 11 relevant academic sources and 56 non-academic documents identified through the systematic review. Moreover, much of the evidence in the literature relies on qualitative data, typically drawn from interviews with construction firm managers, procurement officers, and senior industry representatives. While this provides valuable insight into the factors leading to increased risks of modern slavery, accounts of workers and victims of modern slavery are notably underrepresented.

While the three enforcement bodies under the DLME (GLAA, HMRC NMW, EAS) along with the Home Office and HSE, generate internal data and evidence on labour market compliance issues, much of this information remains unpublished due to its sensitive nature. As such, the current data landscape remains difficult to assess. For example, it is unclear whether public or private housing projects carry a higher risk of modern slavery since disaggregated data remains largely unavailable. Only two out of 11 academic studies reviewed provided specific insights into the types of situations victims were forced into. In the non-academic literature, police reports and journalistic investigations were the commonly cited sources. Although these can offer helpful case-level detail, they are not necessarily representative.

Representative quantitative data is particularly scarce. In the non-academic literature, only a handful of small-scale surveys (typically under 150 respondents) have been conducted with workers or businesses. In the academic literature reviewed, such quantitative studies were virtually absent. Across both academic and non-academic literature, studies often combine primary and secondary data. Most academic papers incorporate secondary sources, such as modern slavery statements, internal policy documents, training materials, and trade press articles to develop a broader understanding of how the construction industry responds to and manages modern slavery risks.

The absence of representative data, particularly from those with lived experience, and commercial organisations highlights a critical blind spot in both academic and practice-based literature. Given the project's short-term, desk-based nature, there were also limitations in this review, e.g. in incorporating lived experience insights into the existing literature—an important dimension that warrants deeper engagement in future work (see recommendation 6). Without more systematic and inclusive data collection, efforts to prevent and respond to modern slavery in the construction sector will remain fragmented and reactive.

3. Definitional challenges resulting in inconsistent application of the rules, constraints in enforcement and low prosecution rates perpetuate risks of modern slavery practice.

Participants' understanding of modern slavery was shaped by the remit of their own organisations and their familiarity with legal definitions outlined in Sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (MSA). The majority of practitioners were able to distinguish between more and less severe forms of labour abuse or exploitation; however, emerging evidence points to inconsistencies in how these definitions are applied in practice, especially in relation to children.⁵

The research continued to highlight that definitional challenges around the term 'modern slavery' contributed to the persistence of exploitative practices, particularly in businesses. There is a lack of clarity among businesses about what constitutes modern slavery and who bears responsibility for addressing it. The prevailing legal framing of modern slavery as a crime places accountability on perpetrators (traffickers) but often fails to engage the role of industry actors.⁶ As a result, many employers remain unaware of how to identify potential exploitation with their supply chains or what action to take when it is suspected.

Enforcement

Even when exploitation is identified, enforcement efforts are often hampered by capacity and coordination challenges. With the exception of the GLAA, participants noted that their specific roles and power do not allow them to directly intervene in such cases.

The three enforcement bodies under the DLME (GLAA, HMRC NMW, EAS) generate internal evidence on labour market non-compliance through public calls for evidence, data gathered from inspectors, and worker complaints or referrals.

Although this evidence informs the DLME's risk-based approach and Market Enforcement Strategy, it does not always result in visible, targeted action. For example, despite the UK construction sector being named among the top five high-risk sectors for serious non-compliance in the 2024/25 Labour Market Enforcement Strategy, this designation has not consistently translated into focused enforcement activity.

5. ECPAT UK, More than words: How definitions impact on the UK's response to child trafficking and exploitation, 2025. Available at: <https://files.modernslaverypec.org/production/assets/downloads/More-than-Words-ECPAT-UK.pdf?dm=1753107807>

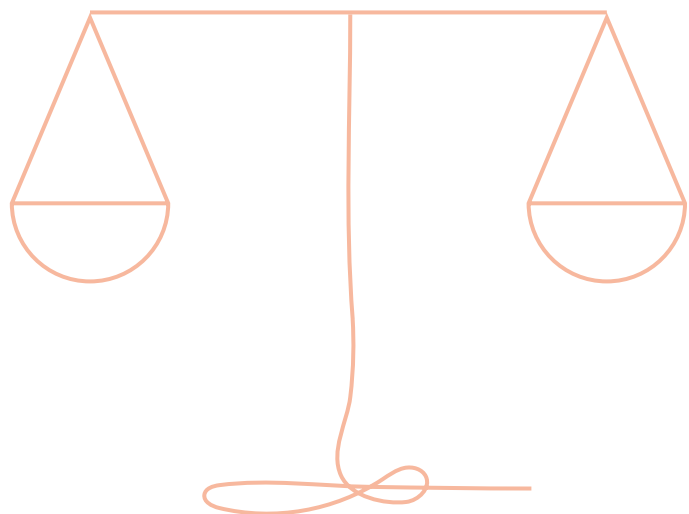
6. Gutierrez-Huerter O, G., Gold, S. & Trautrim, A. Change in Rhetoric but not in Action? Framing of the Ethical Issue of Modern Slavery in a UK Sector at High Risk of Labor Exploitation. *Journal of Business Ethics* 182, 35–58 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-05013-w>

Moreover, delays in enforcement, from reporting to action (e.g., within the Home Office or the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate) can take two to three weeks, by which time affected workers may no longer be reachable. Low inspection rates, due to a combination of limited resources and operational constraints (explored in later findings) further reduce the likelihood of detecting modern slavery in real-time.

Prosecution

There are also significant barriers to prosecution. A key concern is the high threshold required by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to pursue charges under the MSA. According to Unseen, an increasing number of reported cases fail to meet this threshold.⁷ The GLAA echoed this concern, noting that even in instances with clear and serious labour exploitation – such as multiple offences and law violations, including indications of organised criminal activity – modern slavery charges are rare. Instead, such cases are more likely to result in civil enforcement or alternative criminal charges.

This means that many instances of exploitation are not prosecuted as modern slavery, in some cases because they fall just below the legal threshold. Participants stressed the need for greater recognition and action on forms of exploitation that may not legally qualify as modern slavery but still involve serious harm to workers.



7. Unseen. Annual Assessment 2023: Working Towards A World Without Slavery. 2023.

4. There is a spectrum of overlapping labour exploitation issues that are inconsistently documented within the construction sector. Alongside long and complex supply chains, this makes it difficult to capture a holistic and accurate view of modern slavery issues. Work often happens in spaces where exploitation can be hard to detect.

There is evidence of a range of forms of labour exploitation in the construction sector, from the most severe (e.g. human trafficking, forced labour including debt bondage) to less severe (e.g. underpayment). These often overlap and occur together, making it difficult to disaggregate particular types of exploitative actions. More evidence is also needed on how and under what conditions less severe forms of exploitation may lead to or turn into more severe exploitation.

In general, systematic data on labour exploitation in the sector is lacking, though there is more robust data on some issues (e.g. health and safety breaches) than others (e.g. payment below national minimum wage). The problem of limited systematic data can be due to the long and complex supply chains typical in the sector, making visibility of abuses more difficult, as well as limitations to the remits of existing enforcement agencies. For example, the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate does not have jurisdiction over compliance by 'umbrella' companies, while the HMRC's National Minimum Wage Unit Enforcement Team does not receive many worker complaints that would trigger an investigation given the prevalence of 'bogus' self-employment – where a worker is wrongly classified as self-employed but works under conditions that resemble direct employment.

As the labour supply chain extends into lower tiers, visibility and oversight diminish, increasing the risk of modern slavery practices. The difficulty associated with lengthy supply chains is that corporate and governmental oversight can be very challenging.

5. Evidence suggests that labour shortages amplify the reliance on migrant workers, including those who are either undocumented or have limited rights to work, potentially heightening risks of exploitation associated with irregular status and limited rights.

Migrant workers are especially at risk of being deceived by recruiters. Workers who have to rely on limited information available in adverts in their home country, for example, may be particularly vulnerable to being misled by promises of job opportunities that ultimately don't materialise or diverge significantly from the conditions initially offered (e.g. much lower wages than promised). Deceptive recruitment can lead migrants, unknowingly, into situations where they are exploited.

Migrant workers who enter the UK through more structured routes such as an employer-sponsored visa may also be vulnerable to exploitation, but in this case due to the structure of the visa scheme itself. The Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme has been shown to contribute to such vulnerability in the agriculture sector, as has the Health and Care Worker visa in the care sector⁸; similar structural vulnerabilities have been reported anecdotally in the construction sector.

Some international recruitment agencies have been reported to act as landlords, and also to be involved in the collection of fees or debts from migrant workers. Where recruitment agencies hold concentrated power in this way, it may exacerbate the vulnerabilities experienced by migrant workers.

Participants interviewed also reflected that many exploited workers who have a migrant background may not identify as victims, choosing to remain in their current conditions as they may still be economically advantageous to those in their country of origin. This can complicate criminal investigations into identified situations of exploitation, making successful prosecutions and convictions less likely.

8. Thiemann et al., UK agriculture and care visas: worker exploitation and obstacles to redress. 2024. Available at: <https://files.modernslaverypec.org/production/assets/downloads/Visas-full-report.pdf?dm=1736268046>

6. High cost of doing business coupled with employers' short-term profit orientation and low profit margins in the construction industry may contribute to modern slavery practices.

Some reports argued that businesses and their supply chains may be more likely to engage in practices that increase the risk of modern slavery due to a combination of high cost of doing business, low profit margins, and pursuit of short-term profits.

Businesses may favour flexible approaches like the frequent use of self-employed workers for the benefit of cheaper employment taxes i.e., national insurance payments. Self-employment is very common in the construction sector (possibly more than 50% of workers in the sector)⁹ but a number of reports document widespread instances of 'bogus' self-employment. In these situations, workers may be inappropriately classified as self-employed, meaning that they lack many of the rights that they should have as employees. At the same time, particularly in the case of migrant workers who may have limited English language skills and/or limited knowledge of their rights in the UK, 'bogus' self-employed workers may lack the knowledge and agency to enjoy the benefits that self-employment should allow. A frequent lack of written work agreements in the sector exacerbates this vulnerability.

Anecdotally, domestic construction projects and smaller-scale developments may present particularly high risks due to less visibility or oversight, more informal work arrangements, use of cash payments, and short project timelines.

9. CITB. Migration and Construction (Industry Insights and Analysis). 2023.

7. Existing evidence on modern slavery is predominantly concentrated in the south of England, particularly in London. There is a gap in research relating to risk outside of the London / South East region, in particular relating to the devolved nations.

Existing evidence on modern slavery is predominantly concentrated in the south of England, particularly in London. Several reports suggest that there is a heightened risk of modern slavery in this region, due to a concentration of construction activities, high demand for labour, and reliance on migrant workers. The GLAA highlighted that the increased focus on this region could be linked to greater opportunities for exploitation due to migrant entry points into the UK and the high volume of construction activity.

However, this concentration of evidence may also be due to a bias in the focus of the (limited) research that has been undertaken to date. The review did not find evidence suggesting that any distinctive construction characteristics in this region were driving increased risk. It is possible that similar, or even greater, risks exist in other parts of the UK.

There is thus an important gap in research relating to risk outside of the London / South East region, in particular relating to the devolved nations, which future work should address.



Recommendations

For the Home Office, DLME, and relevant governmental and civil society organisations

1. Recommendation: Existing data should be better utilised and effectively extrapolated. Some recommendations for achieving this are provided below:

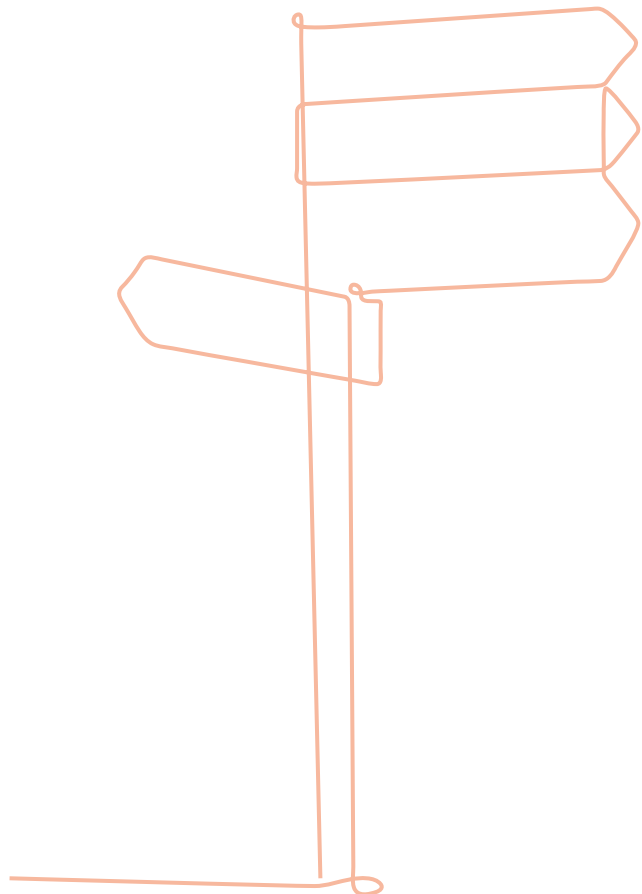
- The Home Office should consider the use of specialised text analysis techniques to disaggregate NRM data by type of exploitation across different sectors, subsectors and devolved nations. It should also provide a breakdown of instances where more than one type of exploitation occurs.
- The Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline should consider separating data on UK-specific and international incidents within the construction sector.
- The Salvation Army should provide estimates of their UK data at the sectoral level.
- The GLAA should update or review construction profile assessments annually to better track and understand trends of labour exploitation in the sector.
- Operational agencies should consider pooling their intelligence and knowledge into a single version of the intelligence assessment.
- These measures would enable the creation of a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the scale of modern slavery and labour exploitation within the construction sector, while contributing to a richer picture over time.

For the DLME

2. Recommendation: The DLME should consider funding research that evaluates effective methods for optimising intelligence-sharing between government departments and enforcement bodies, ensuring harmonized responses that leverage all available investigative powers. This research should consider how communication could be streamlined across agencies to avoid silos. Such a project could take the form of action research. The examination of real-time information holds potential to highlight gaps in agency coordination, informing more integrated enforcement frameworks across DLME bodies.

Additionally, evaluations of 'best practice' should be investigated for where multi-agency activity has been successful in the past so these practices can be adopted and built upon. This research would require substantial support from the DLME in terms of access and researchers' clearance given the sensitivity of the data. Alternatively, DLME could undertake this research internally.

In addition, the DLME should ensure that the different enforcement bodies work cohesively, with a unified understanding of labour exploitation risks and enforcement actions in the context of the Fair Work Agency.



For researchers and research funders

3. Recommendation: More research, encompassing both small qualitative research designs as well as large-scale quantitative designs are needed to generate robust primary data on the nature of modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK housebuilding sector and the broader patterns and trends of the scale of exploitation. Such research should aim to study how variables such as the type of client, the type of housing projects, the scale of these projects, the stages of the construction process, and specific characteristics of contractors—might exacerbate the risks of modern slavery and wider issues of exploitation. Small qualitative comparative studies could, for example, examine differences in the risk of exploitation between housing projects commissioned by public versus private clients.

- a. In addition, researchers should carefully consider whether data collection techniques are appropriate to capture hard to reach populations (e.g. vulnerable workers and businesses hesitant to participate in research). Traditional probability sampling methods may not be feasible for studying these elusive populations in large scale surveys. Researchers should therefore consider purposive¹⁰, snowball¹¹ and network¹² sampling methods. Despite their inherent limitations, they may facilitate access to these populations. For qualitative studies, ethnographic methods are better suited to study these populations.

4. Recommendation: Future research should prioritise investigating the connection between less serious labour abuses, health and safety issues and the risk of modern slavery. This research could be studied by deploying a mixed methods approach combining a large-scale survey to workers in the construction sector with selected interviews. The survey should assess the incidence of abuses across the continuum of exploitation and examine how this prevalence correlates with key risk factors. The design of the survey instrument should account for potential language barriers and workers' limited understanding of employment rights. Additionally, it should consider that certain minor labour abuses may be perceived as 'normalised' by some workers, ensuring that the wording of survey questions reflects this reality. This survey could then be followed by selected interviews with workers who have experienced a variety of abuses across the continuum of exploitation to establish whether there is a causal link between less serious labour abuses and modern slavery. Recommendation 6 below provides some suggestions on how to engage with marginalised workers.

10. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question.

11. Snowball sampling, also known as chain-referral sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where current research participants help recruit future participants from among their acquaintances.

12. Network sampling in research refers to methods used to study social or other types of networks by selecting subsets of nodes (individuals or entities) and/or connections (edges) within a larger network structure.

- a. An extension of this research could also involve a longitudinal review of specific non-compliance cases using intelligence from DLME agencies. Research could also leverage specific datasets on workplace abuse (e.g., HSE's complaints and whistleblowing systems) to systematically analyse patterns of exploitation. Together, this evidence would help labour enforcement to develop indicators for spotting non-compliant businesses or modern slavery risks.

5. Recommendation: Future research should shift its geographical focus beyond London/South-East and to the devolved nations, where evidence is almost non-existent. This could include comparative studies of housing projects—similar in size and client profile—across Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and other regions of England, excluding the South.

6. Recommendation: Future research should examine whether small-scale housing projects (e.g., renovations, extensions) are more or less prone to exploitation than large scale projects (e.g. large residential projects) by exploring the differences in risk factors.

7. Recommendation: Future research should prioritise amplifying the voices of workers who experience and/or witness exploitation on sites and other stakeholders including frontline workers within the sector—such as labour inspectors, health and safety officers, and union representatives—who possess critical insights into exploitative practices. Researchers should engage with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions and representatives from vulnerable and migrant communities to co-produce worker-driven research. The HSE operates under a tripartite structure; its close relationship with trade unions presents an opportunity for researchers to develop collaborations. This type of collaboration would help researchers minimise the ethical and safety risks from collecting primary data and generate research that is inclusive and sensitive to vulnerable populations.

8. Recommendation: Since evidence from businesses is virtually absent, researchers should consider engaging with existing networks of major homebuilders in the UK, such as the Supply Chain Sustainability School homebuilder working group, participants of the CCLA construction sector roundtable on modern slavery and former supporters of the GLAA construction protocol which may be willing to take part in research projects. Given the difficulty in accessing workers, researchers need to consider more suitable methods of data collection such as ethnographies and participant action research.

9. Recommendation: Finally, future research should consider an international comparative approach. The construction sector is a highly complex industry that faces persistent challenges across the globe. Understanding of how other contexts have dealt with the demand of domestic construction capacity while ensuring decent working conditions would shed light on lessons that the UK could draw upon.

The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) at the University of Oxford exists to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of laws and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-produces high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society and survivors to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

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