

# Seeing beyond the negative:

An examination of key variables in the different reasons for the decisions not to formally recognise people as survivors of modern slavery

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Research by:

# Executive summary

This briefing was commissioned by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (MSPEC), part of the University of Oxford, which in turn is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The briefing is the first of a three-part series based on analysis of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) data by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The briefings are focused on improving understanding about referrals and decision making by the competent authorities in the UK. The second briefing examines negative Reasonable Grounds and Conclusive Grounds decisions which have been reconsidered against the context of changes to policies for reconsiderations. The third briefing investigates potential hotspots of different forms of human trafficking in the UK and differences in reporting and exploitation types between different geographies.

This briefing explores the different reasons for negative Conclusive Grounds (CG) decisions from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) (the UK's system for formal identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery) for people referred between 2020 and 2024. A negative CG decision means that the person is not recognised as a victim of modern slavery by the UK government and thus not eligible for modern slavery protections in the UK which give effect to the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT). When an individual receives a negative CG decision they have up to fourteen working days of move-on support before they fully exit the support provided through the NRM.

The briefing provides the findings of quantitative analysis of the publicly available disaggregated UK NRM data on potential victims of modern slavery from the UK Data Service (UKDS).<sup>1</sup>

A focus on negative CG decisions is important at a time when more people than ever (both in absolute and percentage terms) are receiving a negative CG decision. 2024 saw a record 7506 negative CG decisions, an increase of 1067% compared to 643 such decisions in 2022. In comparison, positive CG decisions in 2024 increased by 77% compared to 2022. In 2024, 44% of CG decisions were negative compared to only 10% in 2022.

Focusing on these decisions is also timely given the UK government has made ending the backlog of cases waiting for a CG decision a priority of modern slavery policy.<sup>2</sup> This prioritisation is welcome given the harmful impacts of long

1. Home Office, Modern Slavery Research & Analysis. (2024). National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, 2014-2024. [data collection]. 14th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8910, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8910-14>

2. See Headline 4 in the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (2023) Survivor support Based on the Modern Slavery PEC funded research portfolio. [MSPEC\\_SurvivorRecovery\\_Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](#)

waiting times for people in the NRM. On Anti-Slavery Day 2024<sup>3</sup> the Home Office announced that it would recruit 200 new Home Office staff to support NRM decision making, pledging to “eradicate the backlog of decisions on modern slavery cases within two years, giving thousands of women, men and children who may have suffered traumatic sexual, physical and economic abuse the clarity needed to assist with their recovery.”<sup>4</sup> This was an ambitious task given there were more than 23,000 people waiting for a CG decision when the announcement was made.<sup>5</sup> However, by the end of March 2025 the number of people waiting for such a decision had fallen to just over 14,000.<sup>6</sup>

The analysis finds that nearly two-thirds (65%) of negative CG decisions for NRM referrals between 2020 and 2024 were given the reason of “Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required.” A fifth (19%) of the decisions were given the reason of “Not credible” and 15% had “not met the definition” with only 1% recorded as “Not credible and not met the definition”. However, it is only in the past two years that “Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required” has been the most common reason.

## Some key findings in this research are:

### Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof<sup>7</sup> decisions by competent authority

- Decisions made by the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) have a higher likelihood of receiving a negative CG decision compared to the Single Competent Authority (SCA), and cases decided by IECA are 2.67 times more likely to receive a negative CG decision for insufficient information (more information on the two competent authorities follows in below sections).
- People referred to the NRM by a Government Agency were 1.53 times more likely to be given a negative CG decision for insufficient information compared to non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and third sector organisations.

3. Anti-Slavery Day is marked on 18th October. The first Anti-Slavery Day was in 2010 following the introduction of the Anti-Slavery Day Act in the UK parliament that year. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/14>

4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/modern-slavery-victims-to-be-supported-in-fresh-measures>

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/18/home-office-hires-staff-clear-backlog-uk-modern-slavery-cases>

6. [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-january-to-march-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-1-2025-january-to-march#:~:text=From%20January%20to%20March%202025%2C%20the%20NRM%20received%205%2C297%20referrals,to%20March%202024%20\(4%2C517\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-january-to-march-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-1-2025-january-to-march#:~:text=From%20January%20to%20March%202025%2C%20the%20NRM%20received%205%2C297%20referrals,to%20March%202024%20(4%2C517))

7. The standard of proof for Conclusive Grounds decisions is discussed on page 7 of this briefing in the section on these types of decisions.

## Not met the definition decision type

- Cases that were recorded as “domestic exploitation” were 1.52 time more likely to receive a negative CG decision for the reason of not met the definition compared to those not recorded as domestic exploitation.
- “Not specified or unknown” was the fourth most recorded type of exploitation between 2020 and 2024 after criminal exploitation, labour exploitation, labour & criminal exploitation.

## Not credible decision type

- For males, there is a 78% increase in the likelihood they will receive a not credible CG decision, compared to female referrals.
- Adults referred to the NRM were eight times more likely to receive a negative CG decision for the reason of not credible compared to children.
- The analysis finds that the variables of Albanian and Vietnamese nationality were more likely to get a negative CG decision recorded as not credible and less likely to get a negative CG decision on the grounds they had not met the definition or because there was Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required.

## The key recommendations of the briefing can be grouped into:

1. Recommendations for the first responder NRM referral process
2. Recommendations to improve operational decision making within the NRM system
3. Recommendations for further research and data analysis

## Recommendations for the first responder NRM referral process

### The Home Office should consider:

1. Assessing the capacities of government agencies to submit high quality NRM referrals and to provide the competent authority with further information as required (including considering requests for extensions for additional time to provide such information) and follow up with providing training and capacity building as required.
2. Amending the NRM referral form to allow for “at risk of sexual/labour/etc exploitation”.
3. Providing training to FROs on how exploitation type is recorded to ensure that the existing options of sexual/labour etc are appropriately utilised.
4. The Home Office/Forced Marriage Unit could design and deliver training for First Responder Organisations on forced marriage and domestic servitude and how to signpost such cases to the Forced Marriage Unit and other forms of support and assistance.

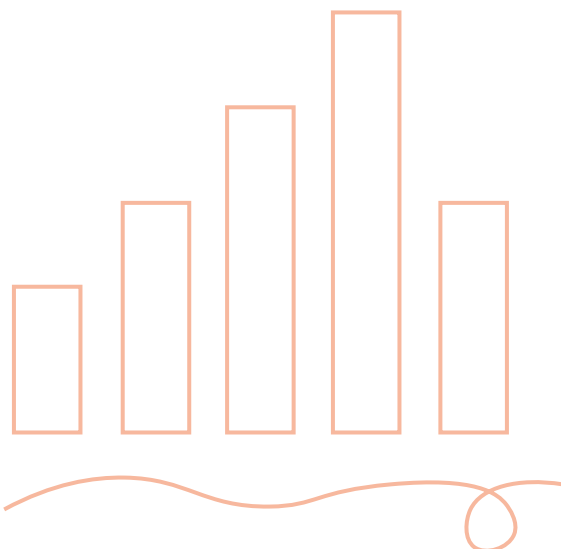
## Recommendations to improve operational decision making within the NRM system

### The Home Office should consider:

5. Revisions to the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance which increase the requirements for steps that decision makers must take to obtain evidence and strengthen the opportunities for individuals and their representatives to provide evidence before a decision is made.
6. Identifying ways for improving information sharing for cases where people are in prison or detention.
7. Amending the section on evidence gathering at CG stage in the Modern Slavery Act Statutory guidance to recognise and address the specific challenges for people in prison or detention to provide evidence. This could include the policies on timelines to respond to requests for evidence and specifically including people in prison or detention to the list of examples where extension requests may be granted.
8. Re-establishing a Single Competent Authority.
9. Updating the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance to more broadly address issues affecting disclosure for males which could impact their credibility.
10. Further scaling up devolved decision-making panels for children referred to the NRM which have been piloted across thirty local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland and explores what such a model could look like for adults referred to the NRM.

## Recommendations for further research and data analysis

11. The Home Office should consider regular audits of negative CG decisions due to insufficient information to identify the types of information which is not provided.
12. Research could be commissioned that can help to better understand different challenges in relation to the definition of domestic servitude.
13. The Home Office should consider publishing anonymised analysis of the types of responses in the free-text fields of not specified or unknown exploitation to better understand how that function is being used and to potentially identify whether there are any new and emerging forms of exploitation which are not compatible under the current categorisation.
14. Further research and analysis of anonymised CG decisions to better understand the reasons for males receiving negative decisions on credibility grounds.
15. It is recommended that the Home Office explore opportunities to enable internal and external analysis of anonymised NRM decisions and the potentials of utilising Artificial Intelligence tools such as Large Language Models to better understand the circumstances of both negative and positive CG decisions.





# Introduction

The NRM is of central importance to the UK's international obligations to identify and protect people who have experienced modern slavery. The 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT) entered into force in the UK on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and the operation of the NRM began on that date in-order to meet the UK's responsibilities to identify potential survivors of modern slavery and provide support and protection while such persons are formally identified. There are two stages for decision-making within the NRM: reasonable grounds (RG) and conclusive grounds (CG). The RG decision is expected to be made within five working days and is met when it is assessed by the Home Office that there are reasonable grounds to believe that an individual is a victim of modern slavery. The CG decision is made whether, 'on the balance of probabilities', there are sufficient grounds to decide that the individual is a victim of modern slavery. There is no appeals procedure for a CG decision but decisions can be requested to be reconsidered in certain circumstances.

The agencies with responsibility for making RG and CG decisions are the Single Competent Authority (SCA) and the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA). Both the SCA and IECA sit within the Home Office. The SCA was established in April 2019 to replace the two separate decision-making authorities which existed at that time (UK Visas and Immigration which was responsible for non-EEA nationals and the UK Human Trafficking Centre which was responsible for EEA nationals). The SCA made decisions for all cases until the establishment of the IECA in November 2021. The IECA is responsible for specific cohorts of adults. The cohorts are listed in the statutory guidance for the 2015 Modern Slavery Act (hereafter Statutory Guidance).<sup>8</sup>

The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 was the catalyst for changes to how RG decisions are made and these were operationalised through a revision to the Statutory Guidance on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023.<sup>9</sup> Prior to that date the test for RG decisions was whether the decision maker suspects but cannot prove that the individual is a victim of modern slavery. The revision on 30<sup>th</sup> January required the decision maker to agree there are reasonable grounds, based on objective factors, that a person is a victim of modern slavery. A further revision to how RG

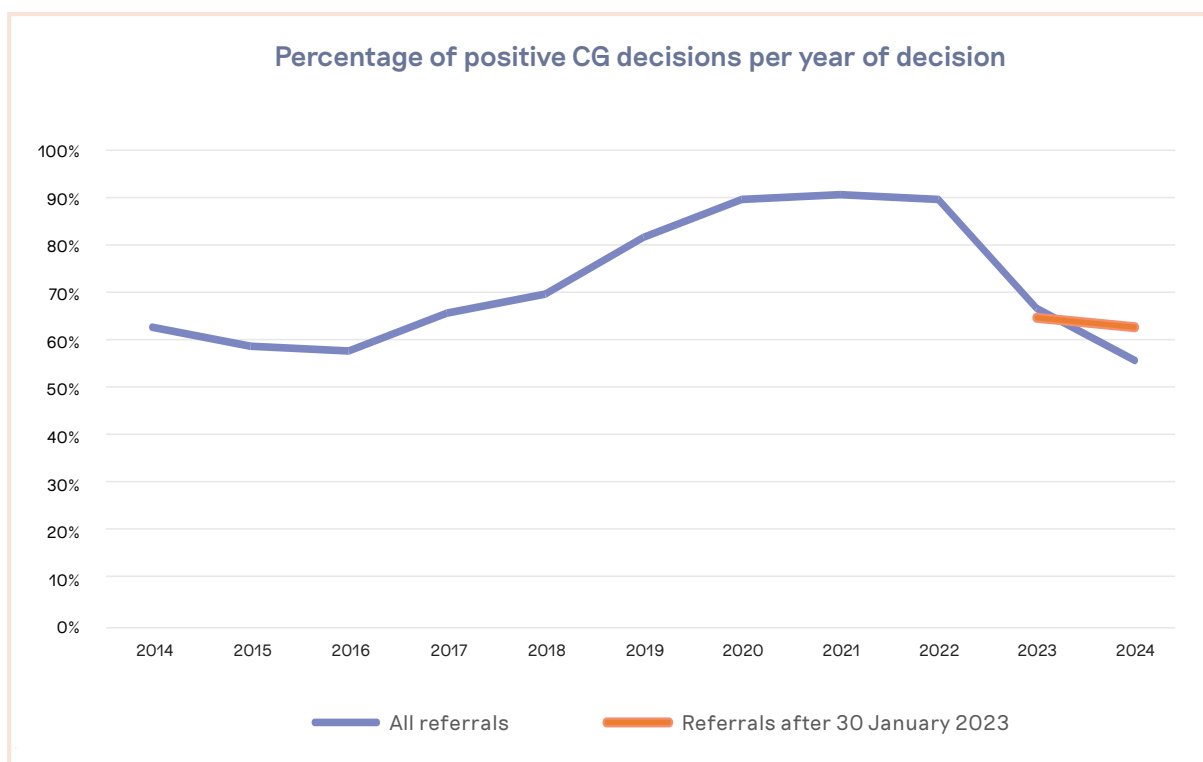
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8. All adult Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) detained in an Immigration Removal Centre, All adult FNOs in prison where a decision to deport has been made, All adult FNOs in prison where a decision has yet to be made on deportation, Non-detained adult FNOs where action to pursue cases towards deportation is taken in the community, All individuals detained in an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) managed by the National Returns Command (NRC), including those in the Detained Asylum Casework (DAC) process, All individuals in the Third Country Unit (TCU)/ inadmissible process irrespective of whether detained or non-detained.

9. Home Office, 'Modern Slavery: Statutory Guidance for England and Wales (under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) and Non-Statutory Guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland' Version 3.0 (30 January 2023)

decisions are made was included in the guidance on 10 July 2023<sup>10</sup> following a judicial review at the end of June 2023.<sup>11</sup> The test since 10 July 2023 is whether decision makers agree there are reasonable grounds to believe, based on all available general and specific evidence but falling short of conclusive proof, that a person is a victim of modern slavery.

The Home Office's own analysis of the NRM statistics has acknowledged that the change to the guidance has "led to a reduction in the proportion of positive [RG] decisions issued."<sup>12</sup> The extent of the dramatic and unprecedented fall in the number of positive RG decisions has been well documented in reports and briefings on the UK's response to modern slavery. However, to-date there has been less attention on the significant fall in positive CG decisions which has occurred at the same time, hence the focus of this briefing.<sup>13</sup>



**Graph 1.**

10. Home Office, 'Modern Slavery: Statutory Guidance for England and Wales (under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) and Non-Statutory Guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland' Version 3.3 (10 July 2023)

11. <https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/news/sshd-withdraws-new-evidential-test-for-reasonable-grounds-decisions-in-modern-slavery-statutory-guidance/>

12. [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-july-to-september-2024/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-3-2024-july-to-september#:~:text=From%20July%20to%20September%202024%2C%20the%20NRM%20received%204%2C758%20referrals,to%20September%202023%20\(4%2C132\).](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-july-to-september-2024/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-3-2024-july-to-september#:~:text=From%20July%20to%20September%202024%2C%20the%20NRM%20received%204%2C758%20referrals,to%20September%202023%20(4%2C132).)

13. IOM UK published analysis showing differences in the percentage of positive decisions made by the different competent authorities and between different nationalities. [https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1381/files/documents/2024-10/iom\\_uk-nrm-briefing-2024-mid-year-review\\_0.pdf](https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1381/files/documents/2024-10/iom_uk-nrm-briefing-2024-mid-year-review_0.pdf) <https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1381/files/documents/2024-04/iom-uk-nrm-2023-annual-review.pdf>



Graph 1 above shows the percentage of positive CG decisions for all referrals to the NRM since records began and referrals which were made after the change to RG decision making on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The graph shows that the percentage of positive CG decisions reached a record low of 56% in 2024. The graph also shows that only 63% of CG decisions were positive for people who were referred to the NRM after the changes to RG decision making.

A fall in the rate of positive decisions at both RG and CG stage should be unexpected considering the nature of the two-stage process. If it is made ostensibly more difficult for people to receive an initial positive RG decision, we would expect to see positive CG decisions rising. This is because cases going to CG stage should have more information and detail to support recognition as a potential victim of modern slavery than cases in the past (and The New Plan for Immigration explained that reforms to how RG decisions are made were necessary to, "Identify victims as quickly as possible and enhance the support they receive, while distinguishing more effectively between *genuine and vexatious* accounts of modern slavery."<sup>14</sup> [emphasis added] However, what has happened since the reforms specifically for how RG decisions are made has been a fall in both the percentages of positive decisions at both RG and CG stage. Since the changes to the test for RG decisions emphasising the availability of evidence and information, the majority of negative CG decisions are owing to insufficient information. However, (as will be discussed in detail later in this briefing) this situation with CG decisions follows other revisions to the Statutory Guidance on the requirements for decision-makers to gather evidence to make decisions and the timelines for potential victims or their representatives to provide evidence and information to support the CG decision-making process.

This briefing is focused on analysis of the reasons given for the negative CG decisions. It uses the NRM data from the UK Data Service which records types of reason for a negative CG decision. The recorded reasons are, "Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required", "Not credible", "Not credible and not met the definition" and "Not met the definition".

The briefing discusses some of the most significant variables (e.g. nationality, exploitation type) for three of the four most common reasons for negative CG decisions. The purpose of the briefing is to share new data analysis that is relevant and useful for policymakers, practitioners and researchers.

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14. Home Office, New Plan for Immigration, 2021, available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/605b141cd3bf7f2f146949df/CCS207\\_CCS0820091708-001\\_Sovereign\\_Borders\\_Web\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/605b141cd3bf7f2f146949df/CCS207_CCS0820091708-001_Sovereign_Borders_Web_Accessible.pdf)

The UK government's claims about abuse of the system were widely rebutted at the time of the NPI and throughout the development of the legislation.

# Methodology

The sample size of cases which were analysed for the briefing is 9,695. That is the total number of cases where a reason is recorded for a negative CG decision issued to people referred to the NRM since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020. The primary reason for this focus is that prior to 1 October 2019, potential victims were recorded as having a single 'primary' exploitation type but after 1<sup>st</sup> October could be recorded as having experienced multiple exploitation types.<sup>15</sup>

To analyse the factors associated with negative CG decisions, we used a binary logistic regression model (see Formula 1). This model predicts the log-odds of an event occurring (e.g., receiving "Insufficient Information" as a negative CG reason) based on multiple explanatory variables and their interactions. Interaction terms allow us to examine how different factors jointly influence the probability of a negative CG decision. For example, the model can assess how being male and having experienced exploitation as an adult together affect the likelihood of receiving a particular CG outcome. Each  $\beta$  coefficient represents the effect of an individual variable (or combination of variables) on the log-odds of the outcome "Y=1"  $\text{logit}(P(Y=1)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 (X_1 X_2)$ .<sup>16</sup>

The analysis focused on the top twenty most common nationalities of people given a CG decision to ensure both analytical depth and a practical sample size.<sup>17</sup> Including only the top 20 nationalities allows for a manageable approach, while still enabling an in-depth examination of nationality as a factor in CG decision making, as it is essentially comparing each of the top 20 to all other nationalities combined. For exploitation type, the model considers the twelve most common types experienced by people within the NRM dataset. Additional control variables analysed include waiting time, age group (adult or child) at the time of exploitation and referral, first responder organisation (FRO), gender, and competent authority.

There are four categories of reasons given for negative CG decisions: "Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required", "Not credible", "Not credible and not met the definition" and "Not met the definition". This analysis does not include those negative CG decisions which were recorded "Not credible and not met the definition" because there were only just over 100 such cases.

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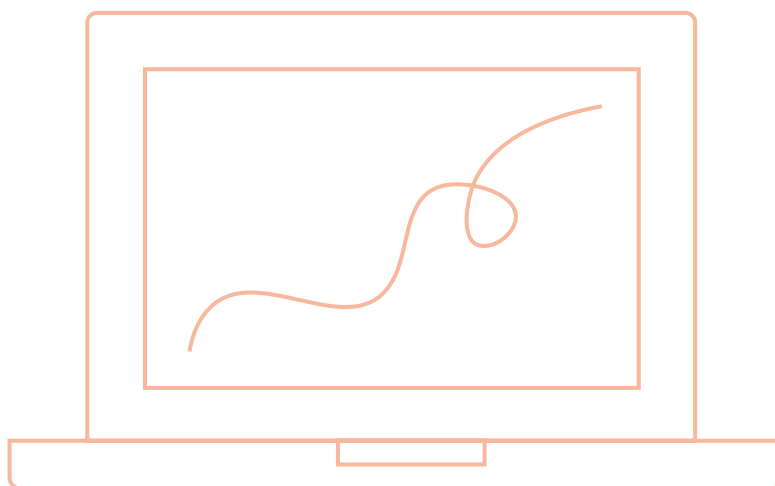
15. Home Office, National Referral Mechanism Statistics End of Year Summary 2019, Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e81c863e90e0706f4cfcc7a/national-referral-mechanism-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2019.pdf>

16. In this model, the different negative CG reason types should be coded as dummy variables. For instance, if a potential victim received a negative CG decision due to "Insufficient Information," the corresponding variable is coded as 1, while the variables for other CG reasons are coded as 0. Similarly, all independent variables, except for continuous measures such as waiting time, are also coded as binary dummy variables.

17. The UKDS NRM dataset includes 188 different nationalities that have been referred to the NRM since 2014. Analysis of all these variables would have taken significantly more time to complete. Furthermore, some of the nationalities have been referred in such small numbers to make analysis of those cases inconsequential.

The regression model was applied to estimate the likelihood of a negative CG decision being recorded as one of the three recorded reasons (the dependent variables) based on different independent variables selected: waiting time, age group at time of exploitation, age group at referral, gender, exploitation, first responder type, location of exploitation (UK, UK and overseas, Overseas) and competent authority. For this study it was not feasible to include all of the different independent variables from the UKDS NRM dataset in the regression model, e.g. the country the NRM referral was made (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland), the specific age groups at referral, or the police force sent the NRM referral.<sup>18</sup> Beyond the feasibility of including all the possible variables it was also felt that variables like the police force sent the NRM referral would not have any significance on the types of reasons for negative CG decisions.

The p-value for the variables which are discussed for the different reasons for decisions in this briefing are all  $p < 0.01$  with one exception (domestic servitude cases receiving not met the definition decisions which is  $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value of  $p < 0.01$  indicates strong statistical significance and a very low probability that the result occurred by chance. A p-value of  $p < 0.05$  still indicates statistical significance and a low probability that the result occurred by chance. The results in this case mean that the relationships between these variables and the decisions are not occurring by random chance.



18. The NRM referral will be transferred to the responsible geographic police force for investigation based on the information provided in the referral form. See 3.7 of Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2024, (2025) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2024/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2024>

# Insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required

The most common reason for a negative CG decision for referrals between 2020 and 2024 was “insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required”. These represented nearly two-thirds of negative decisions. That was despite it being the least common of the three reasons examined in the briefing for negative CG decisions in 2020, 2021 and 2022. In comparison it represented 51% of negative CG decisions in 2023 and 76% in 2024.

The Statutory Guidance explains the standard of proof for decisions at the Conclusive Grounds decision stage,

*“the relevant competent authority must consider whether, ‘on the balance of probabilities’, there is sufficient information to decide if the individual is a victim of modern slavery... The ‘balance of probabilities’ essentially means that, based on the evidence available, modern slavery is more likely than not to have happened. This standard of proof does not require the relevant competent authority to be certain that the event occurred.”<sup>19</sup>*

There are two changes in policy and practice which have occurred during this period when this reason for negative decisions went from being least common to the overwhelming majority of negative decisions. The first change concerns the revisions to the section on ‘evidence gathering at the Conclusive Grounds stage’ in the Statutory Guidance. The second change is the abolition of the Multi-Agency Assurance Panels (MAAPs).

The updated Statutory Guidance published on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023 (Version 3.0) made several amendments to the section on evidence gathering at CG stage. Prior to this amendment the Statutory Guidance (dating back to version 1.0) said,

19. See 14.134 and 14.135 of Version 4.1 of the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

*“There may be insufficient information in the NRM Referral Form in order to make a Conclusive Grounds decision” and explained that the relevant competent authority “must make every effort to request all available information that could prove useful in establishing if there are Conclusive Grounds.” [emphasis added]<sup>20</sup>*

*Version 3.0 of the Statutory Guidance was updated to reduce the extent of the required effort that competent authorities should take. They are now required to “make every reasonable effort”.<sup>21</sup> [emphasis added]*

Furthermore, the Statutory Guidance prior to 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023 included important text that was removed from Version 3.0 onwards. This included the requirement that if the competent authority “cannot make a Conclusive Grounds decision based on the evidence available, they must gather evidence or make further enquiries during the recovery and reflection period.” It also included text explaining that,

*“In cases where it is likely that the person will be issued a negative Conclusive Grounds decision, the relevant competent authority should ensure all relevant questions have been asked. This might include asking another frontline agency, the potential victim’s legal representative or the support provider to obtain further information or answers to any outstanding questions on behalf of the relevant competent authority as appropriate<sup>22</sup>*

The removal of those requirements from Version 3.0 of the Statutory Guidance significantly reduced the expectations on competent authorities to ensure that they had sought the information required to reach a decision, and placed additional burden on the presumed survivor.

The other significant change in Version 3.0 of the Statutory Guidance was the addition of text introducing timelines and deadlines for information to be provided to the competent authorities. Since 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023 the Statutory Guidance states,

20. See 14.86 and 14.87 of Version 1.0 of the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20200327181246/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>

21. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230130154837/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>

22. Version 1.0 of Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20200327181246/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>

*“the relevant competent authority may ask the potential victim (or their legal representative) to provide any further evidence or information as early as possible to help with the Conclusive Grounds decision making process. At any point, the relevant competent authority may request that this information is provided within (a minimum) 14 days.”<sup>23</sup>*

The guidance then explains that the competent authority may follow up seven days after requesting further information and warns of the implications of not responding,

*“This communication will also set out the consequences of not engaging with the request to provide information or if the potential victim is unable to be located at a permanent residence. For example, a Conclusive Grounds decision will be made on the basis of the information and evidence available to the relevant competent authority.”<sup>24</sup>*

Whereas the guidance had previously required decision makers to maximise the opportunity for individuals and their representatives to provide information that could result in a positive decision, Version 3.0 makes it clear that the competent authorities can and will make a decision based on whatever is available to them at the time.

New text was added to Version 3.0 to show consideration to the circumstances of people not able to respond to the requests of the competent authority,

*“they should contact the Competent Authority as early as possible and request an extension, providing their reasons (with evidence which supports their reasons for not meeting the deadline) and a timeframe by which they expect to have obtained the relevant information. In deciding whether or not to grant an extension, the relevant competent authority should consider all the factors and reasons for the request.”<sup>25</sup>*

23. See 14.138 of Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance Version 3.0 – Version 4.0 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northe>

24. Ibid.

25. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230131174823/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>



However, this text acknowledges that the decision whether to accept such a request is at the discretion of the competent authority. There is no data available on the extent to which such requests have been accepted by the competent authorities.

The other significant change to the policy and procedure of how CG decisions are made in the context of the significant increase in negative decisions based on 'insufficient information' was the abolition of the Multi-Agency Assurance Panels (MAAPs) in December 2022. The MAAPs operated between April 2019 and December 2022 to externally review all negative CG decisions. The Statutory Guidance explained that MAAPs helped provide "robust and consistent" decision-making and emphasised the additional scrutiny these provided to negative decisions,

*"MAAPs add a further level of scrutiny into the decision-making process, meaning that all negative Conclusive Grounds decisions on referrals made to the competent authorities are considered by three separate individuals or groups (the competent authority decision maker, the competent authorities' "second pair of eyes", and the MAAP)."*<sup>26</sup>

The "second pair of eyes" describes the internal quality assurance system in place where all negative CG decisions are reviewed by a different caseworker or manager in the competent authority. This internal 'second pair of eyes' arrangement is still used. A review of the MAAPs published in 2021 by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group suggests that despite the requirements in the guidance which existed at the time there were still issues with information gathering and decisions which had been made which could have benefitted from further evidence. The review described,

*"There appears to be no standardisation or guidance for determining which steps are taken by decision makers to gather information. Some potential victims are interviewed, some are not, some police forces are chased for information, some are not. Panellists reported reviewing negative conclusive decisions that they felt would have benefitted from an NRM interview."*<sup>27</sup>

26. Version 2.11 Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance

27.25 [https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MAAPs\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MAAPs_report_final.pdf)

MAAPs did not have any power to overturn negative decisions but they were able to “ask the relevant competent authority to review a case.”<sup>28</sup> Such requests could be made on a number of grounds including where “in the MAAPs view, evidence that would add value and clarity has not been sought.”<sup>29</sup>

The “further level of scrutiny” of negative CG decisions and opportunities to encourage the competent authorities to seek further evidence and to emphasise the importance of having all the relevant information available before issuing a negative decision which existed under the MAAPs has not been present since the start of 2023.

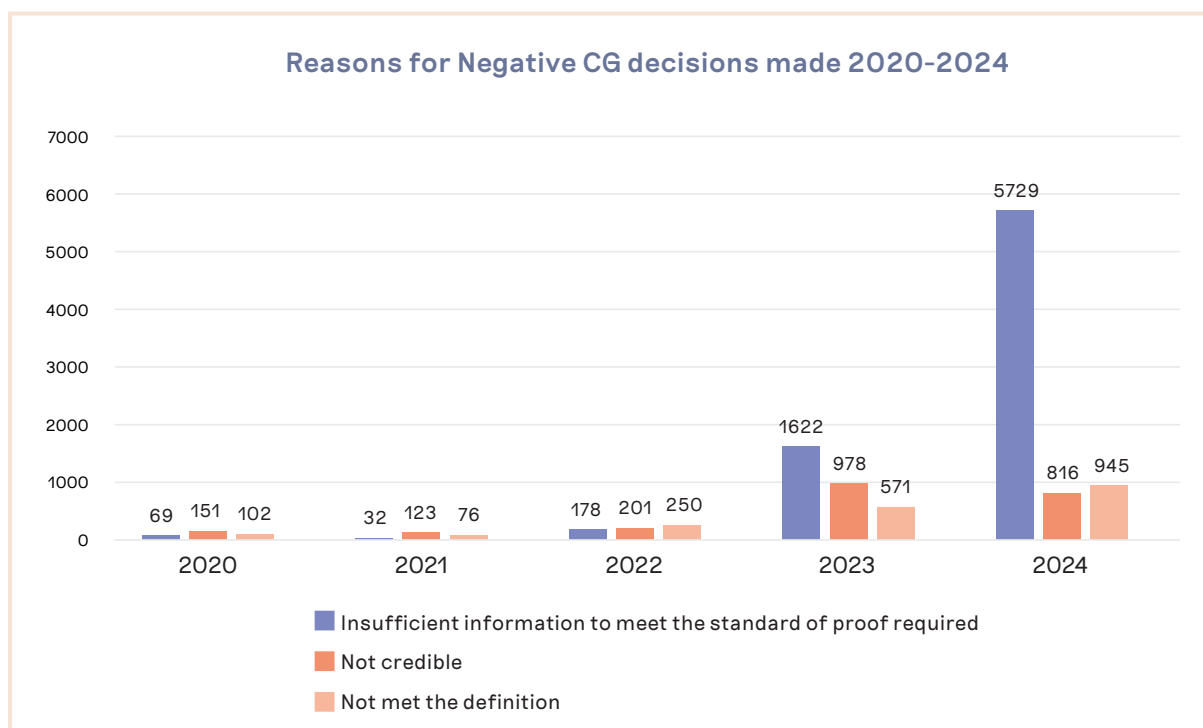
Graph 2 shows there were 5729 negative CG decisions made because of insufficient information in 2024 for people referred at any time, a 3000% increase on such decisions in 2022.

A negative CG decision because of insufficient information is distinct from the other two reasons because it is reached in the absence of facts or information. Negative CG decisions made because the case is “not credible” or has “not met the definition” on the other hand are based on consideration of the information that has been provided. The decision maker reviews the information and facts about a case based on all the information provided by the Case Preparation Team and concludes that the events did not amount to modern slavery, or that particular facts or significant inconsistencies in a person’s account lead them to the judgement that the claim to be a victim of modern slavery is not credible. While other reasons are based on information that is present, the competent authorities reach this decision because of information they *don’t* have rather than the information they *do* have.

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28. See 14.124 of Version 2.11 of the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20221130193343/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>

29. Ibid.



Graph 2.

## Recommendation

- It is recommended that the Home Office considers revisions to the Statutory Guidance which increase the requirements for steps that decision makers must take to obtain evidence and strengthen the opportunities for individuals and their representatives to provide evidence before a decision is made.

## Referrals by Government agencies

Only approved FROs can make referrals to the NRM.<sup>30</sup> The different types of FROs are grouped under four categories in the NRM data: Government Agency, Local Authority, NGO and Third Sector and Police.

The government agency type comprises the following individual FROs: Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), UK Immigration Enforcement (IE) UK Border Force (UKBF) and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and the National Crime Agency. However, the overwhelming majority of the referrals by 'government agency' are made by UKVI and IE which total nearly 32,500 (20,349 by UKVI and 12,122 by IE) of the 35,000 NRM referrals by a 'government agency' between 2020-2024.

30. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms/guidance-on-the-national-referral-mechanism-for-potential-adult-victims-of-modern-slavery-england-and-wales#Section-4>

The analysis of the data finds that people referred to the NRM by a Government Agency were 1.53 times more likely to be given a negative CG decision for insufficient information compared to referrals made by NGOs and third sector organisations. The FRO responsible for making a referral is highly relevant to difficulties in the provision of information and evidence for making CG decisions. The Statutory Guidance requires that competent authorities “request more information from the following parties involved in the case as far as it is reasonable to do so and ask that they provide any further information within 14 days (at the point of making the request) before taking the decision.” The first of the following parties listed is ‘First Responder Organisation’.<sup>31</sup>

## Recommendation

- The Home Office should consider assessing the capacities of government agencies to submit high quality NRM referrals and to provide the competent authority with further information as required (including considering requests for extensions for additional time to provide such information) and follow up with providing training and capacity building as required.

## A longer waiting time for a decision predicts a higher probability of receiving an “Insufficient Information” decision

It is widely recognised that long and unpredictable waiting times have a negative impact on people waiting for a decision and undermine their recovery.<sup>32</sup> The median time from referral to CG decisions made in 2024 was 637 days.<sup>33</sup> As discussed earlier in this briefing, the UK government is seeking to reduce the backlog of cases waiting for a CG decision which was just over 14,000 at the end of March 2025.<sup>34</sup> To reduce the number of people waiting for a decision to near zero requires decisions to be made more quickly.

31. See 14.143 of the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

32. M, Dang et al. (2023) Placing survivor wellbeing on the policy and evidence map. [Microsoft Word - Survivor wellbeing report PEC branded final.docx](#)

33. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2024/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2024>

34. [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-january-to-march-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-1-2025-january-to-march#:~:text=From%20January%20to%20March%202025%2C%20the%20NRM%20received%205%2C297%20referrals,to%20March%202024%20\(4%2C517\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-january-to-march-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-1-2025-january-to-march#:~:text=From%20January%20to%20March%202025%2C%20the%20NRM%20received%205%2C297%20referrals,to%20March%202024%20(4%2C517))

The data analysed for this briefing finds a statistically significant higher probability that a longer waiting time predicts a negative CG decision recorded as “insufficient information to meet the standard of proof required.”

The waiting time for a CG decision will be impacted by how long it takes for the competent authority to request and receive the information it requires to determine whether they meet the standard of proof required (‘on the balance of probabilities’) to be recognised as a victim of modern slavery. The competent authorities may require information from multiple statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, e.g. physical and psychological reports, assessments from social workers and support workers as well as evidence from solicitors and police. However, despite waiting a long time to make a decision, the competent authority reached the verdict that there is not enough information to conclude on the balance of probabilities that the person is a victim of modern slavery the longer the waiting time. The long waiting period is not resulting in information that enables them to reach the conclusion that what happened to the person did not meet the definition of modern slavery.

## Recommendation

- The Home Office should consider regular audits of a sample of negative CG decisions due to insufficient information to identify the types of information which is not provided. The analysis of the audits of such cases could be used to enhance the operations of the competent authorities and for updates to the MSA statutory guidance and first responder training.

## Decisions made by the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) have a higher likelihood of receiving a negative CG decision compared to the SCA

The IECA was established in November 2021 and is responsible for making RG and CG decisions for all adult Foreign National Offenders in prison and all adults detained in an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) among other groups. (see footnote 7)<sup>35</sup> In 2024 the IECA made 5,130 CG decisions and the SCA made 12,174 CG decisions.

The analysis finds that cases decided by the IECA are 2.67 times more likely to receive a negative CG for insufficient information than cases decided by the SCA. This likelihood occurs after controlling for the other variables of age, gender,

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35. <https://labourexploitation.org/app/uploads/2024/07/Detention-Taskforce-IECA-briefing-2.pdf>

nationality, location of exploitation, and other variables which were examined (as discussed in the methodology).

This finding is consistent with a report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration on the IECA which was published in December 2024 which identified challenges for the IECA in gathering information for their cases to make decisions. The report explains that,

“Difficulties with evidence gathering contributed to the problem of insufficient information to make a positive CG decision. DMs [decision makers] did not automatically have access to potentially relevant information, such as an individual’s detention or prison healthcare records, despite the stated purpose of the IECA being to streamline decisions by having “ready access to the majority of pertinent information”. DMs were likely to make negative CG decisions where there was insufficient evidence, rather than be proactive in requesting specific information that could inform the decision, which they saw as the responsibility of the case preparation team.”

## Recommendations

- The Home Office should consider ways for improving information sharing for cases where people are in prison or detention.
- The Home Office should consider amending the section on evidence gathering at CG stage in the Modern Slavery Act Statutory guidance to recognise and address the specific challenges for people in prison or detention to provide evidence. This could include the policies on timelines to respond to requests for evidence and specifically including people in prison or detention to the list of examples where extension requests may be granted.
- The Home Office should consider returning to having a Single Competent Authority. Modern slavery is not an immigration issue<sup>36</sup> and therefore NRM decision making should not be associated with immigration in any way.

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36. <https://labourlist.org/2024/06/jess-phillips-labour-party-modern-slavery-election-2024/>

## Not met the definition decisions

A CG decision may be negative because it has “not met the definition” meaning the definition of human trafficking or slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour.

This section focuses on the findings for two exploitation types recorded in NRM data that had significantly higher likelihoods of receiving a negative CG decision on the basis that the case had not met the definition. These were, “domestic” and “not specified or unknown.”

### Domestic exploitation

Cases that were recorded as “domestic exploitation” were 1.52 times more likely to receive this reason for a negative CG decision. Domestic is shorthand for domestic servitude. The Statutory Guidance explains that “Domestic servitude often involves people working in a household.”<sup>37</sup>

One hypothesis for this finding is a possible impact of people being referred to the NRM as a potential victim of domestic exploitation who fall under the three examples of “unclear cases” mentioned in the Statutory Guidance.<sup>38</sup> The UK Modern Slavery Act does not recognise forced marriage as a form of modern slavery. However, there are strong overlaps between domestic exploitation and forced marriage<sup>39</sup> and some measures (e.g. the Global Estimate on Modern Slavery produced by WalkFree, ILO and IOM) do recognise forced marriage as a form of modern slavery.<sup>40</sup> The Statutory Guidance explains that, “a forced marriage alone would not necessarily mean that a person is a victim of modern slavery. Cases referred to the NRM must be considered in accordance with this guidance to see whether all components of the definition of either trafficking or slavery, servitude or forced and compulsory labour are present.”<sup>41</sup>

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37. Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance, Version 3.14, 2nd June 2025 Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland#bookmark3>

38. Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance, Version 3.12, 1st May 2025, Sections 2.65-2.76. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

39. Justice & Care, Modern Slavery and Forced Marriage: Examining the Relationship, 2022. Available at: <https://justiceandcare.org/app/uploads/2022/11/Justice-and-Care-Issue-Brief-Forced-Marriage.pdf>

40. Global Commission on Modern Slavery, 2015, p17. Available at: [https://www.modernslaverycommission.org/gcms\\_report\\_full\\_doc.pdf](https://www.modernslaverycommission.org/gcms_report_full_doc.pdf)

41. Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance, Version 3.12, 1st May 2025, Section 2.75. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>



Without data on referrals for domestic servitude which reference to forced marriage it is not possible to test this hypothesis. In 2020 the Minister for Safeguarding responded to a question of how many NRM referrals referenced forced marriage NRM by answering that the “Home Office does not currently produce data on references to forced marriage within cases referred to the NRM.”<sup>42</sup>

## Recommendations

- Research could be commissioned that can help to better understand different challenges in relation to the definition of domestic servitude. Such research could include qualitative analysis of anonymised negative CG decisions for domestic exploitation to identify references to forced marriage.
- The Home Office/Forced Marriage Unit could design and deliver training for First Responder Organisations on forced marriage and domestic servitude and how to signpost such cases to the Forced Marriage Unit and other forms of support and assistance.

## Not specified or unknown

The Home Office’s analysis of the 2024 NRM statistics explains that “first responders can provide information for unclassified exploitation in a free-text box field. This field is grouped as ‘Not specified or unknown’. The UKDS NRM data shows 7752 referrals between 2020-2024 where the exploitation type is recorded as “not specified or unknown” which makes up 10% of the total 76,287 NRM referrals during the period. This made it the fourth most recorded type of exploitation during the period.

| Exploitation type(s)     | Number of referrals |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Criminal                 | 21594               |
| Domestic                 | 1274                |
| Labour                   | 21292               |
| Labour & Criminal        | 8303                |
| Labour & Domestic        | 2862                |
| Not specified or unknown | 7752                |
| Sexual                   | 7718                |
| Sexual & Labour          | 2184                |

**Table 1. Number of referrals for eight most commonly record type(s) of exploitation between 2020-2024**

42. [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

It is surprising and concerning that so many people referred to the NRM between 2020 and 2024 had their exploitation type recorded as “not specified or unknown exploitation” given that exploitation is imperative to the definitions of human trafficking. The present classifications of exploitation which are, criminal, domestic, labour, sexual and organ harvesting, appear sufficiently broad to cover the specificities of individual cases of trafficking for new and emerging forms of exploitation. Many people are being referred to the NRM by first responders who appear not to have been able to recognise the type of exploitation the person may have experienced as consistent within those expansive categories. The Statutory Guidance explains the “essence of human trafficking is that the victim is coerced or deceived into a situation where they are exploited.”<sup>43</sup>

The analysis of the NRM data found that people whose exploitation type recorded in this way were 2.44 times more likely to be given a negative CG decision on the grounds that the case had not met the definition. At first glance this does not seem surprising, if exploitation is part of the “essence” of the definition of human trafficking then how could people meet the definition when the type of exploitation has not been specified or is not known?

However, the Statutory Guidance explains that a person can be recognised as a victim of human trafficking in the absence of having been exploited. It acknowledges that under ECAT, “a person is a ‘victim’ even if they haven’t been exploited yet, for example because a police raid takes place before the exploitation happens”<sup>44</sup> and elaborates that “under the definition of trafficking, trafficking occurs once certain acts are carried out for the purpose of exploitation. So, it is the purpose which is key, rather than whether or not exploitation has actually occurred.”<sup>45</sup>

In practice individuals may be recorded as having been referred as “not specified or unknown” exploitation type when they are encountered by a first responder before they were exploited. A Home Office presentation from November 2021 about the NRM explains, “Where there is the intent to exploit but nothing has happened, or it is unclear what sort of exploitation a potential victim would have experienced, a referral and decision can be made based on an “unknown” or suspected type of exploitation.”<sup>46</sup> Such recording of NRM referrals does not provide an accurate understanding of the nature of human trafficking. A first responder may have strong reasons to believe that an individual was intended to be subject to sexual exploitation or labour exploitation but the case may be recorded as “not specified or unknown.”

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43. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

44. See 2.23 of the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance [Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales \(under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015\) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland \(accessible version\)](#) - GOV.UK

45. See 2.24 of the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

46. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/SCA%20%20LGA%20presentation.pdf>

Despite the recognition that individuals should neither be denied protection nor excluded from recognition under the definition of human trafficking due to identification occurring before exploitation, such cases are more likely to receive a negative CG decision because they had “not met the definition.”

## Recommendations

- The Home Office should consider making an amendment to the NRM referral form to allow for “at risk of sexual/labour/etc exploitation. The data on such cases could then be included in future publications of quarterly NRM statistics.
- The Home Office should consider publishing anonymised analysis of the types of responses in the free-text fields of not specified or unknown exploitation to better understand how that function is being used and to potentially identify whether there are any new and emerging forms of exploitation which are not compatible under the current categorisation.
- The Home Office should consider providing training to FROs on how exploitation type is recorded to ensure that the existing options of sexual/labour etc are appropriately utilised.

## Not credible decisions

The guidance for competent authority staff explains that they need to “assess whether a potential victim’s account of modern slavery is credible when making a Reasonable Grounds and Conclusive Grounds decision ... they must consider both the external and internal credibility of the material facts.”<sup>47</sup>

### Exploitation type

Unlike the other reasons for decisions none of the exploitation types showed a significant influence on the likelihood of receiving a “Not Credible” CG decision.

### Not credible CG decisions for the three most referred nationalities

Between 2020-2024, the three most referred nationalities in descending order were UK, Albanian and Vietnamese. These three nationalities represented more than half of the referrals during the period.

Previous research and analysis on NRM decision making has highlighted and discussed the significant differences in the rates of positive decisions at both RG and CG stage for different nationalities.<sup>48,49</sup> For example, analysis of RG decisions in the first six months of 2023 found that 86% of such decisions for UK nationals were positive compared to only 40% for foreign nationals.<sup>50</sup>

This analysis finds that Albanians were 2.08 times, and Vietnamese were 2.23 times more likely to receive a negative CG decision on the grounds that their case was not credible. The methodology section provided the regression model which shows the different variables which were controlled. This means that the impact was just from the nationality. Both nationalities were simultaneously less likely to receive a negative CG decision due to insufficient information (12% decrease in the probability for Albanians and 5% decrease in the probability for Vietnamese) or having not met the definition (54.5% decrease in the probability for Albanians and 54% decrease in the probability for Vietnamese).

47. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

48. <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=b5236e99-f40f-420d-871f-22ff54280954>

49. [https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NABA\\_research\\_summary\\_ATMG\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NABA_research_summary_ATMG_FINAL.pdf)

50. [https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1381/files/documents/2023-10/iom\\_uk\\_nrm-briefing\\_2023\\_midterm.pdf](https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1381/files/documents/2023-10/iom_uk_nrm-briefing_2023_midterm.pdf)

## Gender as a significant variable for not credible CG decisions

While the human trafficking of men and boys remains under-researched<sup>51</sup> and significant progress still needs to be made in recognition of the gender dimensions of human trafficking, there has been increasing recognition in the UK that men and boys can be victims and that it is not just a problem affecting women and girls. This is reflected in the NRM data which shows that in 2024 74% of NRM referrals were male and 26% were female.<sup>52</sup>

The briefing has not discussed gender until this point as it was not a statistically significant variable for the other reasons for negative decisions. However, it was a significant variable for CG cases rejected as not credible. The analysis shows that for males there is a 78% increase in the likelihood they will receive a not credible CG decision.

Despite increased referrals of potential male victims of trafficking, this data may reflect the challenges for males to be formally recognised as victims under within the current approach to identification. The Statutory Guidance recognises that “Male victims of sexual exploitation may have additional barriers to disclosure”<sup>53</sup> but it does not acknowledge that males might also have additional or different barriers to disclosure than females for other forms of exploitation. Research has highlighted the impacts of masculinity on the credibility of males referred to the NRM.<sup>54</sup>

## Recommendation

- Further research is needed about the details of the credibility issues for males receiving negative decisions on credibility grounds. Further research should factor in how they are referred to the NRM and any challenges for males (e.g. barriers to disclosure and the effects of gender stereotypes for first responders and decision makers) to help understand why males have such higher odds of being given a negative decision on credibility grounds.

51. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2023/january/briefing-sex-trafficking-of-men-and-boys.pdf>

52. [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2024/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2024#:~:text=In%202024%2C%20the%20NRM%20received,the%20previous%20year%20\(16%2C990\).](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2024/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2024#:~:text=In%202024%2C%20the%20NRM%20received,the%20previous%20year%20(16%2C990).)

53. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims/modern-slavery-statutory-guidance-for-england-and-wales-under-s49-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015-and-non-statutory-guidance-for-scotland-and-northe>

54. Noemi Magugliani, (In)Vulnerable Masculinities and Human Trafficking: Men, Victimhood, and Access to Protection in the United Kingdom, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 14, Issue 2, July 2022, Pages 726–744, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huac001>

- Analysis of anonymised CG decisions should be conducted to better understand the credibility issues of males.
- It is recommended that the Home Office considers updating the Statutory Guidance to more broadly address issues affecting disclosure for males which could impact their credibility.

## Age

The variable of being an adult at the age of referral had the most significant impact in relation to not credible decisions. The odds of an adult receiving this decision were eight times higher than children.

This finding seems consistent with the difference in definitions for the human trafficking of adults and children. Children, unlike adults, are not expected to evidence the means of trafficking. The means could be an area where credibility is questioned for adults. E.g. the means of coercion could be contested for an adult if they appeared to have some freedom of movement, i.e. leaving a cannabis farm to buy food. Furthermore, the Statutory Guidance makes numerous references of the need for decision makers to consider the specific factors impacting children when assessing the credibility of their case, which means decision makers are more understanding of inconsistencies and omissions in the details of child cases.<sup>55</sup> This is reflected in the NRM data which shows that only 76 children referred to the NRM since 2014 have received a negative CG decision on credibility grounds.<sup>56</sup>

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55. Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance, sections 9.24, 10.14 and 14.7

56. Home Office, Modern Slavery Research & Analysis. (2025). National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, 2014-2025. [data collection]. 17th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8910, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8910-17>

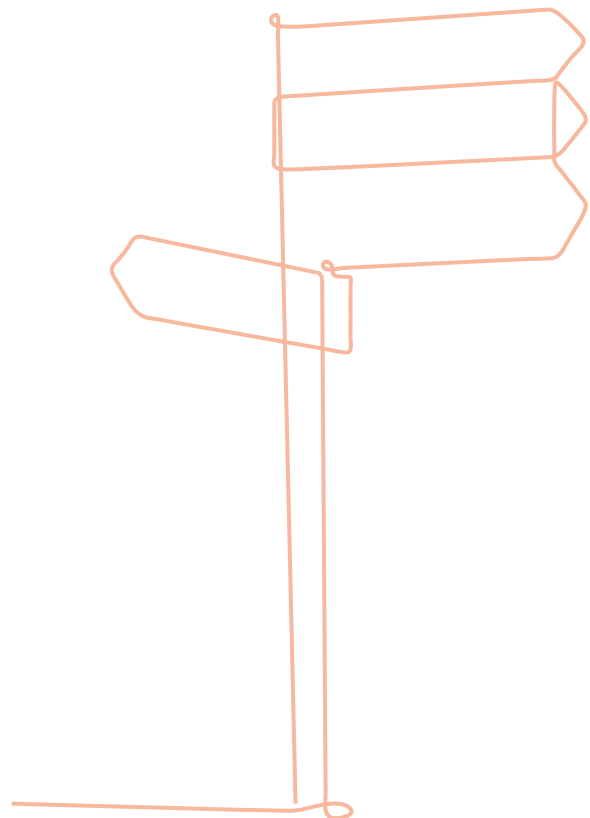
## General recommendations

This briefing has highlighted the significant increase in the percentage of negative CG decisions since 2022, and offers an attempt to analyse the findings.

- It is recommended that the Home Office considers further scaling up devolved decision-making panels for children referred to the NRM which have been piloted across thirty local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland and explores what such a model could look like for adults referred to the NRM.

This briefing has analysed NRM data to show *what* is happening and has shown that what is happening is statistically significant (not happening by mere chance) but quantitative analysis cannot tell us *why* this is happening.

- It is recommended that the Home Office explore opportunities to enable internal and external analysis of anonymised NRM decisions and the potentials of utilising Artificial Intelligence tools such as Large Language Models to better understand the circumstances of both negative and positive CG decisions. (Such technological approaches may be required given the extremely large number of cases (more than 60,000 CG decisions, negative and positive, have been made since 2014).





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