# The top 20 non-UK source countries for modern slavery in the UK

Research Summary for internationally focused actors

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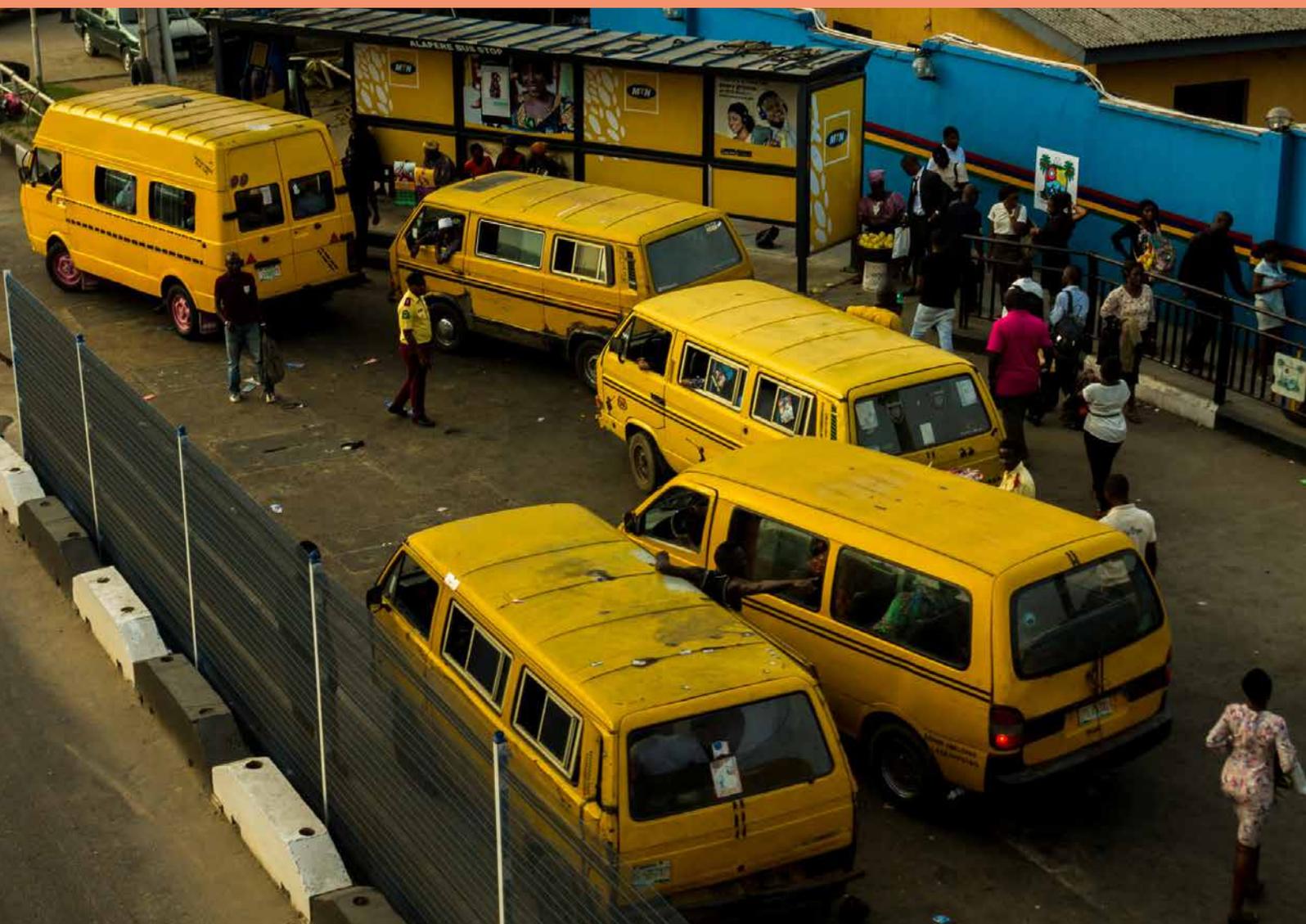
This is a Research Summary of the report *The top 20 non-UK source countries for modern slavery in the UK*, highlighting implications for internationally-focused actors, with a separate Research Summary modernslaverypec.org/resources/top-20-source-countries-uk looking at the implications of the research for UK-focused actors. This research was funded by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) and proposed, developed, and delivered by a collaboration of researchers from the Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham, the Wilberforce Institute at the University of Hull, and the Centre for the Study of International Slavery at the University of Liverpool. You can find the full report at the Rights Lab website at www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/index.aspx. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Modern Slavery PEC.

Although potential victims from a significant proportion of the world's countries have been referred into the UK's National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[1] since its inception, a small group of countries have consistently represented the majority of cases. From 2013-2019, the top twenty non-UK source countries have represented almost 70% of all referrals into the NRM.

Our research considered the top twenty non-UK countries of origin for potential victims of modern slavery referred into the UK's NRM. It explored key demographic features of these potential victims, considering the different profiles of potential victims across the different nationality groups, as well as the different journeys and experiences of modern slavery survivors in the UK. To understand these experiences and trends, the research considered the contextual conditions, national modern slavery profiles, and anti-slavery governance frameworks operating in the source country contexts.

Key findings

- There are a number of shared drivers of modern slavery across the 20 source countries, as well drivers unique to particular States, many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Various shortcomings in anti-slavery laws and policies, victim support, and safeguarding mechanisms in source countries must be addressed to reduce people's vulnerability to modern slavery and provide effective protection and support for victims.

- There is a need for greater intervention in transit countries for individuals being trafficked to the UK, or at risk of such.
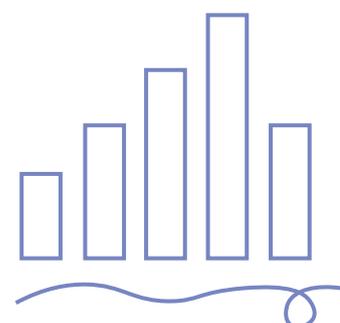
1. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK's framework for referring and identifying potential victims of modern slavery and providing support.

Methodology

The research drew on analysis of evidence reviews and secondary data, as well as previously unpublished data secured through Freedom of Information requests.

The outputs include:

1) twenty individual Source Country reports providing an overview the dynamics of trafficking from these countries to the UK; and

2) a comparative analysis report investigating common themes.

The research provides a secondary review of key dynamics and trends across the top twenty non-UK source countries, conducted over a six-month period in 2020. Reports are therefore limited by the availability of data and evidence on key points of concern, and are not an exhaustive review of all available evidence.
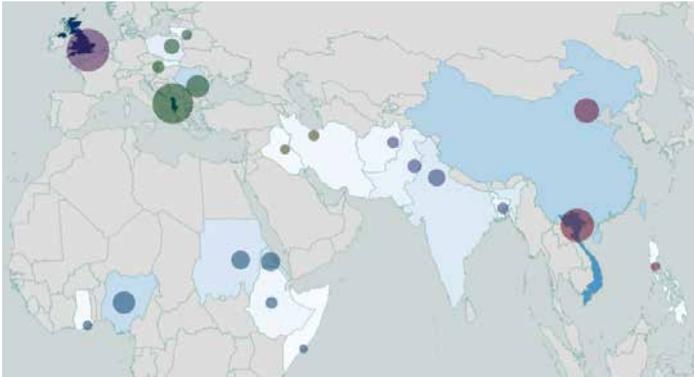
The top 20 non-UK source countries

By total referral numbers 2013-2019

1. Albania
2. Viet Nam
3. China
4. Romania
5. Nigeria
6. Eritrea
7. Sudan
8. India
9. Poland
10. Pakistan
11. Slovakia
12. Ethiopia
13. Afghanistan
14. Bangladesh
15. Iran
16. Lithuania
17. Iraq
18. Ghana
19. Philippines
20. Somalia

Shared and unique drivers of modern slavery

The top twenty non-UK source countries share a number of key drivers of modern slavery, as well as drivers unique to particular States, many of which have been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 and government responses to the pandemic.

The top twenty non-UK source countries are diverse in many respects. However, several key factors driving vulnerability to transnational trafficking and modern slavery are shared across multiple contexts. Relevant vulnerability factors identified in the research include general drivers of modern slavery, vulnerability factors operating in particular groups of source countries, and nationally and locally specific factors operating in particular States. Modern slavery drivers are considered across four levels in the report: structural and environmental factors; social and community factors; family factors; and individual factors.

Structural and environmental factors	Family factors
• Poverty	• Trafficking by family members
• Lack of opportunity	• Dysfunctional family units
• Limited access to education	• Parental divorce
• Gender inequality	• Family debt
• Informal economies	• Familial marriage arrangements
• Conflict and instability	• Absent caregivers
• Urbanisation	• Cultural norms related to family responsibility
• Limited options for regular migration	• Traditional fostering practices
• Corruption and impunity	• Family socioeconomic condition
• Organised criminal networks	• Domestic violence
• Environmental factors	• Parental substance abuse
Social and community factors	**Individual factors**
• Religious and community practices	• Mental health issues
• Trafficking by community leaders and members	• Other health issues
• Community norms facilitating trafficking	• Substance abuse
• Community stigmatisation	• Disability
• Community support networks	• Homelessness
• Social connections	• Limited language skills
	• History of abuse

Membership of particularly vulnerable groups is also noted to shape the dynamics of modern slavery and transnational trafficking. This includes both general vulnerabilities across the top twenty non-UK source countries (including gender-based vulnerabilities for both females and males, and particular vulnerabilities for children and young persons) and specific vulnerabilities relevant to particular States (including particular ethnic minority and foreign national groups, refugees, people seeking asylum, and internally displaced people, returnees, and undocumented migrants). These dynamics also manifest in different ways for different source countries, requiring targeted and tailored programming in response.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the key drivers of vulnerability to exploitation and is projected to continue reshaping vulnerability over the medium and long-term.

Recommendation 1: The UK Government already funds international development programming targeted towards addressing key drivers of modern slavery identified in the report, such as conflict. Further efforts to mainstream modern slavery considerations into wider development programmes are needed to support protection and prevention. This programming should not only respond to the overarching drivers shared across the top twenty countries considered, but also engage with the specific and local dynamics identified in the report on an individualised country basis.

# Anti-slavery governance in source countries

Shortcomings in existing anti-slavery laws and policies, victim support, and safeguarding mechanisms in the top 20 non-UK source countries contribute to failures in addressing modern slavery.

The research highlights key areas of domestic law, policy, and implementation that must be strengthened in the top twenty non-UK source countries to prevent modern slavery more effectively. Key issues of concern across the twenty countries considered include:

1. Gaps in the criminalisation of modern slavery practices beyond trafficking in persons and inconsistent penalties between offences;

2. Lack of understanding of the crime of human trafficking and other crimes relevant to modern slavery, including amongst identifying organisations;

3. Excessive focus on criminalisation to the detriment of protective approaches;

4. Insufficient funding for survivor support and care;

5. Complicity of State officials in human trafficking and slavery-related practices;

6. Tensions between immigration regimes and anti-slavery objectives; and

7. Lack of inter-departmental and international cooperation.

Anti-slavery governance in source countries must extend beyond legislation, encompassing supporting policy and regulatory frameworks, implementation, enforcement, funding, specialisation and training, and coordination. Corruption and official complicity are significant obstacles for prevention and protection efforts.

Recommendation 2: the UK has an important ongoing role in encouraging a greater focus on modern slavery within source countries, building local capacity to respond effectively to challenges in protection and prevention, and supporting interventions. The UK Government should continue to advance international advocacy and programming in these areas.
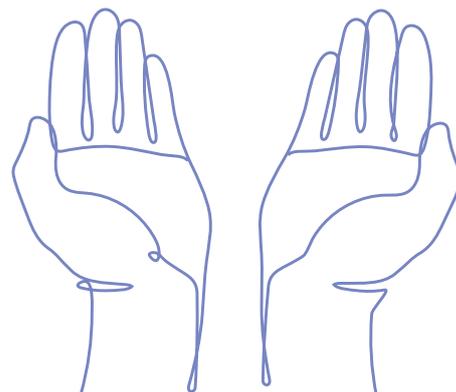
Transit country interventions

Many non-UK national modern slavery survivors in the UK travel through multiple transit countries and face significant risks of exploitation and abuse on their journeys, highlighting the need for transit country interventions to prevent modern slavery and protect victims.

Journeys to the UK for many survivors of modern slavery are complex, often travelling through multiple transit points before reaching the UK and with experiences of abuse and coercion transforming throughout the journey. Deception as to the conditions of travel and work at the destination country are commonly employed to persuade vulnerable individuals into transnational trafficking and modern slavery.

Recruitment fees and other costs associated with travel are also entry points to exploitation in many cases, as victims are indebted to their traffickers for costs associated with their travel. These debts often compound over the course of the journey and in destination states, resulting in ongoing and evolving exploitation.

Trafficking victims are not only subjected to exploitation and abuse at their final destination, but often face exploitation, abuse, violence, and degrading conditions on their journeys. Traffickers and smugglers exert increased coercion and abuse as migrants and victims become increasingly dependent on them along their journeys. Transit countries provide important opportunities for victim identification and support, as well as prevention efforts.

Many of the top source countries for trafficking into the UK are also countries of transit for victims from other top source countries. Victims from these countries also transit through other States on their journeys to the UK. This demonstrates a need for effective programming and interventions in key sites of transit, as well as source and destination countries, to prevent modern slavery and identify and protect victims.

Recommendation 3: UK international policy actors should increase programming for transit countries, including in the top twenty non-UK source countries that are also key sites of transit. Transit country programming should be targeted towards people on the move, focusing on actors, sites, and communities they are likely to come into contact with, as well as tailoring messaging to the complex realities of vulnerable migration.
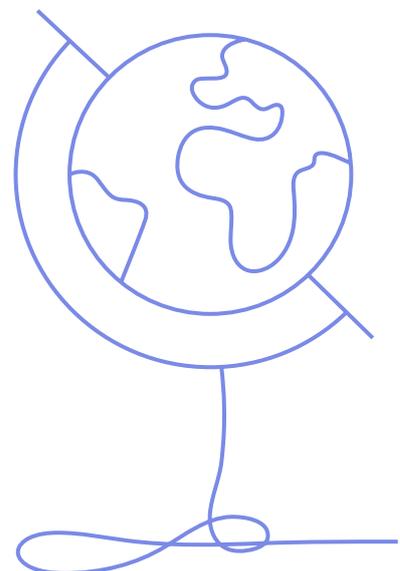
Areas for future research

Overall, there is a notable lack of specific data and research on the diverging experiences of survivors of different nationalities. This affects the design of programming to prevent and address modern slavery in relation to these different nationality groups, which are often ill-equipped to tailor interventions to these groups as a result of a lack of evidence. This research highlights key areas that require tailored programming and strengthening to help prevent modern slavery, protect vulnerable populations, and support survivors' recovery and reintegration, with relevance for source country governance and UK policymakers. The situations in countries of origin can also help to explain trends in different experiences of survivors' journeys, experiences, and interactions with officials and UK institutions.

This research is preliminary in nature, identifying key trends based on existing and emerging evidence available at the time of publication. This includes identification of key knowledge and data gaps requiring further research and interrogation to ensure effective, evidence-based prevention and protection programming for these twenty countries. In particular, further research is needed to understand the nuances of individual experiences and drivers from these twenty countries and understand what works to ensure effective prevention and protection.
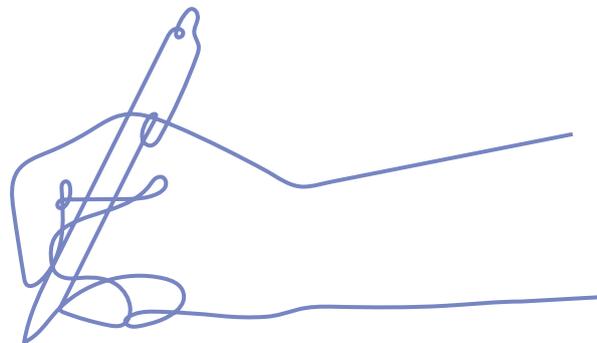
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The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to overcome it. With high quality research it commissions at its heart, the Centre brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

The Centre is a consortium of six academic organisations led by the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law and is funded by the Art and Humanities Research Council on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

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