Our Research and Policy Priorities 2025-27

Our main research and policy priorities covering the period from now until April 2027 are summarised below. These cover research and policy work that we plan to do during that period as well as work that is already under way.

These priorities were developed following extensive consultation with our key policy partners and other key stakeholders, assessing the rapidly changing UK policy landscape (adhering to our principles for policy impact of relevance, timeliness, trustworthiness and accessibility) and building on findings from our portfolio of research. They were also co-produced with lived experience experts from our Lived Experience Engagement Team and the Lived Experience Advisory Panel, who have played a critical role in the consultation process, including leading sessions with policymakers.

These priorities also reflect the way in which the PEC works in its current phase, producing more research in-house from within our collaborative research partnership (the Universities of Oxford, Liverpool and Hull, together with one Independent Research Organisation, the Bingham Centre), with fewer projects funded through open calls, allowing for greater agility in responding to a rapidly changing policy environment. We will keep our priorities under constant review to ensure that we are able to respond to any significant changes in the policy environment.

Strategic and other cross-cutting work

Providing evidence-informed recommendations to improve the strategic legal and policy response to modern slavery at national and local level

- A **PEC Policy Report setting out recommendations on a new Bill on modern slavery**, which will consider how the UK's legal framework could be strengthened and grounded in its human rights obligations.

- **Research on labour exploitation** to inform the legal and policy response across several domains (labour law, criminal law, immigration law, supply chain regulation and international trade policy). This research stream investigates **the coherence between these multiple legal regimes** in how they affect labour exploitation and **the role of human rights law** in governing States' responses to labour exploitation, both at home and in global supply chains. It analyses in particular **the impact of immigration regulation on labour exploitation** in both a negative sense (the criminalisation of migration and migrant labour, restrictions on freedom of exit, and how breaches of immigration law circumscribe an individual's enjoyment of labour rights) and positive sense (embedding safeguards against labour exploitation in visa regimes, the design of the Fair Work Agency and its relationship with the National Referral Mechanism and Immigration Enforcement). This enquiry includes **historical, conceptual and legal analysis, empirical study, as well as comparative analysis of selected jurisdictions**.

- **Undertake pilot work in Oxfordshire to map local anti-slavery initiatives**, including the role and capacity of relevant local authorities as well as the nature and function of anti-slavery partnerships or collaborations to inform wider work on the role of regional and local authorities.

Providing new insight into the scale and nature of modern slavery across the UK

- **Ongoing analysis of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) statistics** to provide new insight into patterns of exploitation and how the system is operating, to drive the policy and operational response.

- **A study examining complex patterns of child exploitation** in an English semi-rural county to determine offender profiles, victim demographics and environmental risks

- **Research into the scale and nature of recruitment and exploitation that takes place online**, to inform the ongoing implementation of the UK's Online Safety Act.

Supporting policymakers and researchers to meaningfully and ethically involve the perspectives of people with lived experience of modern slavery

- **Practical and accessible guidance on ethics in modern slavery research,** for researchers, funders, and people with lived experience building on PEC's previous research.

- A **Survivor Payments Toolkit**, digitally available, to provide information on remuneration for people with lived experience and organisations seeking to work with lived experience experts.

- **An ongoing series of roundtables with officials and Ministers** to **inform specific government policies,** for example to inform the Home Office's planned consultation on improving identification methods for victims of modern slavery

Prevention

Building the evidence base on the effectiveness of prevention approaches and interventions

- **Evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent modern slavery before it happens or at early stages.**

- **Evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent re-trafficking.**

- **Evidence on the variety, benefits and efficacy of upstream prevention interventions,** informed by an international network including experts with lived experience.

Improving understanding of the risk factors for modern slavery, to inform the legal and policy response to modern slavery and linked policy agendas

- **Research on the intersection of modern slavery and homelessness in the UK,** to inform both modern slavery and homelessness policies.

- **Exploring the evidence base on [risks of modern slavery in the construction sector in the UK](#)**, to provide evidence relevant for policy ambitions to increase the scale of housebuilding and in the design of the Fair Work Agency.

- **A synthesis of existing research on risk factors for modern slavery and re-exploitation** as an overview of evidence in the area.

Supporting policymakers to put prevention principles into practice

- **Supporting strategic use of the 'BETR prevention' framework (Before, Early, Treat, prevent Re-trafficking) developed in [previous PEC research](#).**

Legal Enforcement

Building the evidence base on outcomes for survivors in the criminal justice response to modern slavery

- **Evidence on the needs, expectations and challenges faced by people with lived experience of modern slavery in engaging with the [criminal justice system](#)**, and what a successful criminal justice outcome looks like from the perspectives of people with lived experience.

- **Research exploring how financial investigations could enable modern slavery prosecutions** while reducing the often-burdensome reliance on survivor evidence

- **Research into compensation for survivors of modern slavery**, exploring how existing policies could be improved to take a more trauma-informed approach to promote redress for survivors.

Improving evidence on the operation of the non-punishment principle for people affected by modern slavery to inform legislative and practical improvements

- **Research to explore the application of the statutory defence in practice**, to inform improvements to how it operates, which will build on the PEC's previous research into the statutory defence in the Modern Slavery Act.

- **An expert roundtable to explore use and understanding of the non-punishment principle in Northern Ireland,** including the operation of the statutory defence available in NI legislation.

Improving understanding of the use and effectiveness of the Modern Slavery Act's ancillary orders to inform legislative and practical improvements

- **Research into the use and effectiveness of Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders, Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders and Reparation Orders**, including what is currently known about their use, their strengths and weaknesses and alternative methods of redress other than conviction which will inform recommendations for legislative and policy change.

Survivor Identification and Support

Improving understanding of child trafficking and child exploitation across the UK to inform the legal and policy response

- **Research exploring definitions of child trafficking and child exploitation in the UK and how this impacts the response**, to inform the Home Office's planned reforms to the identification system.

- **Supporting a convening of experts to bring together key insights for policymakers emerging from recent research on child trafficking and exploitation.**

- **A PEC Policy Report exploring the implications of the creation of a new criminal offence of child criminal exploitation** in the Crime and Policing Bill.

Informing the reform of the UK's modern slavery identification and support system for modern slavery (the National Referral Mechanism) through evidence

- **Inform the Home Office's planned consultation on improving identification methods for victims of modern slavery**

- **Research exploring the effectiveness of different models of safehouses for survivors** of modern slavery, across the UK.

- **Exploring the effectiveness of digital support for survivors**, and issues around **digital inclusion,** convening experts to build on previous PEC research.

Business and Supply Chains

Building the evidence base on the effectiveness of different approaches to addressing modern slavery in supply chains, focused on impacts on workers

- **Synthesising evidence on the effectiveness of worker driven approaches** for addressing modern slavery.

- **Exploring what methods could be used to measure the impacts of regulatory measures (such as mandatory human rights due diligence laws) on workers on the ground**, to inform possible future empirical work.

Informing the business response to modern slavery in supply chains through evidence

- **Convening expert roundtables to discuss** directly with **business aspects of their response to modern slavery**

- **Synthesising evidence on best practice in remediation in business supply chains**.

- **Refreshing [evidence synthesis on the effectiveness of public procurement](#) in addressing modern slavery,** to inform the ongoing implementation of the Procurement Act 2024.