

# Survation.

## Summary of Modern Slavery Focus Groups

Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> 24

### Goal of the project

This research consisted of three online focus groups and was commissioned to help identify frames and narratives that would be more effective in increasing the understanding of modern slavery by the British public, enabling a more evidence-based and survivor-informed public debate.

Five different frames were tested (two variants of frame 3) to explore how framing can increase public comprehension of who is affected by modern slavery and why it's happening. The frames were

- Modern slavery is happening in the UK<sup>1</sup> to thousands of both UK and foreign nationals<sup>2</sup>
- Amongst adults, around three-quarters of people reported to be potential victims of modern slavery are men and forced labour is most common form of exploitation
- Modern slavery and other exploitative practices are enabled by some Government policies (for example migration, labour and welfare policies) and business practices such as undercutting suppliers with cheap prices.
- A deeper understanding of what social factors drivers 'criminal gangs', individuals and other groups (including survivors of modern slavery) to engage in exploitative practices
- And to understanding certain terms (e.g. modern slavery, trafficking, forced labour, slavery, exploitation, victim, survivor, people with lived experience) evoke.

### Approach

3x online text-based focus groups were conducted with participants from a broad range of demographics (aged 18-65 years, mix of male and female, mix of income and including representation of Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British participants in each group. Participants were split 50/50 between those living in the North/South.

Participants were split into three attitudinal groups as described below:

1. Liberal social attitudes
2. Mixed/neutral social attitudes

---

<sup>1</sup> Overall, 58% in 2021 and 48% in 2022 of potential victims claimed exploitation in the UK only

<sup>2</sup> The most common nationality referred up to and including 2021 was UK nationals

# Survation.

## 3. Authoritarian social attitudes

## Attitudinal Perspectives

To explore reactions to different frames the groups were split by attitude towards immigration any by social attitudes to crime/punishment which allowed us to segment the respondents into two attitudinal groups.

Throughout the summary the groups will be referred to by their attitudinal group.

4. Liberal social attitudes
5. Mixed/neutral social attitudes
6. Authoritarian social attitudes.

### Screening questions used for attitudinal segmentation:

On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including in your area?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>
(a) I am proud to live in a country that is multicultural, diverse and tolerant	1	2	3	4	5
(b) When lots of people make a little effort, we can make a big difference in the world	1	2	3	4	5
(c) Everybody should have an equal chance in life, no matter who they are, where they're from, or where they live	1	2	3	4	5
(d) People's outcomes in life are determined largely by forces outside their control	1	2	3	4	5
(e) The Government should redistribute income from the well off to those who are less well off	1	2	3	4	5

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
"People who break the law should be	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>

# Survation.

given stiffer sentences'						
"For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence"	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>

These different attitudes were expressed when respondents were asked what issues were important to them, the 'Authoritarian' group talked about tackling unlawful immigration as an issue of importance and spoke about ensuring that the NHS was not overwhelmed due to immigration. By contrast the socially liberal group were concerned about factors like the state of the NHS, housing and social but also expressed a more global attitude (being concerned the international situation and war in Gaza). In the liberal attitudes group there was a much more sympathetic view towards immigration - for example one participant reflecting how immigrants were unfairly made scapegoats for the problems of society.

These existing attitudes shape how participants interpret and understand the framing solutions presented in the research

*"Lack of respect for people when they come to this country and those who work the important jobs of manual labour"* (Male, liberal attitude)

## Exploitation

Before discussing and using the term 'modern slavery' specifically (as modern slavery is itself a frame), we talked about exploitation of people and Britain and what this means in Britain today.

Exploitation in all groups is a broad and encompassing term, which included a range of factors such as low pay and poor working conditions of people in insecure work through to human trafficking and modern slavery. 'Modern slavery' was a term mentioned spontaneously in all three focus groups in relation to exploitation, although not all participants were aware of the term. When talking about 'exploitation' participants did understand that it was something that impacted both UK nationals and those from overseas.

The criminal justice narrative of exploitation of illegal immigrants by organised crime groups was a theme mentioned in all three focus groups – with some talking about the trafficking of immigrants into illegal work such as the sex industry and drug syndicates/cannabis farms. This dominant narrative was clearly part of the

# Survation.

participants understanding of exploitation and most expressed concern about this issue and expressed a concern for victims.

The more 'authoritarian' social values group also framed exploitation in terms of people exploiting the benefits system through "lying" and "misuse of benefits" – a frame of less deserving people (not specifically immigrants) exploiting the system at the detriment of law-abiding citizens, which could result in higher taxes and less opportunities for the majority.

In all groups (as in previous research) there was a discussion around the distinction between workers being exploited by poor conditions/pay and the conditions of modern slavery. Those in the mixed/ values group neutral group talked specifically about exploitation of workers on low wages including the "*underpayment of those working in core roles, NHS, emergency services, legal aid etc*". This group also expressed the view exploitation could happen to anyone, rather than some groups being more likely to fall victim due to factors including their circumstances and systemic factors making exploitation more likely.

*"Exploitation could really happen to anyone - but it is also a bit down to vulnerability so how vulnerable people are either due to mental health, precarious living/work conditions, family situation."* – Male, mixed/neutral attitudes

When thinking about who is likely to be at risk of exploitation, participants in all three groups used the term "vulnerable people" to describe those who were at risk. Vulnerable people were defined primarily in terms of their characteristics and lifestyles those with precarious lifestyles (in terms of drug use, poverty) mental health issues, low education, or unstable family situations. In all groups there was also some recognition that people could be vulnerable due to their personal characteristics (e.g. their age) as well as their situation such as social class or immigration.

Immigrants, particularly illegal immigrants were seen as more vulnerable, and some participants talked about a lack of knowledge or understanding about '*how the country works*' as a reason why this group are at risk in the UK.

Whilst some in the 'authoritarian' group reflected on broader issues, they were more likely to focus on the vulnerabilities of individuals rather than more structural discrimination and social factors making groups more marginalised. This could also include young or elderly people who may not be equipped or able to make informed decisions. Females were mentioned as being more vulnerable than men, but this was not a strong association in these focus groups.

*"People who are less knowledgeable of knowing their rights"* (Male, authoritarian attitudes)

*"Immigrants who do know our language, culture. The poor. The elderly. Less educated"* (Male, mixed/neutral attitudes)

# Survation.

*“Illegal immigrants/asylum seekers - unable to work so get stuck in modern slavery”*  
(Female, authoritarian attitude)

*“Because people are desperate, uneducated, not sure of how our country works”*  
(Female, mixed/neutral attitudes)

Those in the more ‘liberal social attitudes’ group and some of those in the mixed/neutral group spoke about structural issues around race, class and poverty in association with exploitation, participants seemed readily able to link this to Britain and British people. However, in the ‘authoritarian’ group, some people also talked about how Britain’s benefits and health system is easily exploited and tended to look at how regulation and tightening of legislation was needed to prevent criminal gangs exploiting the system for their own gains. One of the key challenges of the framing is to bridge the gap between these perspectives to show the benefits of more regulation and tackling structural issues on both the victims as well and demonstrating this in a way that does not alienate the Authoritarian audience.

Neutral/mixed and ‘liberal’ social values audiences also applied a very British political perspective talking about corruption and lack of regulation in government and power creating an environment where exploitation can happen

*“The rich exploiting the poor and the government enabling this to happen”* (Female, liberal attitude)

*“Politicians serving their donors, friends and interest groups, so the minority at the expense of the majority”* (Male, mixed/neutral attitudes)

*“Because our laws and government allow exploitation to happen”* (Female, Liberal attitude)

*“I think it is more common here as our welfare and immigration systems are most flexible and beneficial”* Chelsea, group 2

The table below highlights understanding of key terms associated with modern slavery

Term	Associations	Quotes
Forced Labour	Associated with specific types of works such as sex workers or indentured servants (female). Also associated with people from overseas, for example those who owe money to traffickers. Most likely to happen to illegal immigrants but not exclusively as could happen to vulnerable UK citizens due to	“Probably would apply to people who have been smuggled into the UK and who owe money to traffickers - they need to pay those traffickers by working for them - no choice” (Male, liberal attitudes)

# Survation.

	“Dodgy/rogue” employers in the UK or other forms of Labour exploitation.	
Human Trafficking	<p>Most closely linked to modern slavery, and almost exclusively associated with people illegally entering the UK via criminal gangs. Non-English speaking. Associated with desperation, poor and vulnerable people. Lack of education also associated with human trafficking, and some describe the victims as ‘knowing no better’ and thinking it’s ‘normal’ to be treated in this way. There was a definite sense of removal and distance between human trafficking and ordinary people in Britain and a sense that human trafficking is something that is happening to foreign nationals not UK nationals.</p>	<p>“Lied to. targeted in other countries or camps and brought here to be employed. mainly sex work” (Male, liberal attitudes)</p> <p>“Lack of knowledge and education makes it difficult for them to understand the harmful effects” (Female, liberal attitudes)</p> <p>“They probably think its normal to be treated like that to get a better life eventually” Female, Liberal attitudes</p>
County Lines	<p>The term was not known by all respondents and was sometimes seen as a geographical boundary.</p> <p>County lines was seen as quite separate to the other issues of modern slavery, quite disconnected, associated specifically with drug gangs and exploitation of children. County lines was not associated with foreign nationals or with adult victims and was strongly associated with criminal gangs.</p>	<p>“Young, targeted children groomed into gangs to help the distribution of drugs” (Group 1, Freya)</p>

Modern slavery

# Survation.

Modern slavery is spontaneously mentioned in all groups, with many familiar with the term through work and through the media. Some in the 'Authoritarian' group mentioned that they haven't seen much about modern slavery in the media, don't know too much about it. Other respondents had quite a functional attitude to modern slavery due to learning about this topic as part of workplace training and compliance with modern slavery workplace legislation.

Interestingly, some of those in the 'Liberal attitudes' group expressed a rejection or desensitisation of the term 'modern slavery' *"Heard it too many times, does not mean anything to me"* (male respondent). Amongst this group there was also some challenging of the meaning of the term, what does 'modern' mean /what defines it/what makes it modern? In the liberal attitudes group, some also wondered if modern slavery includes those who are working long hours for low wages. Whilst no one mentioned the colonial associations of the term 'modern slavery' there was some pushback on the term in this specific group.

Some in the liberal attitudes and mixed/neutral group talked about how they are educated about modern slavery through work – seems to be an area where people think there is a distinction between those who are educated/informed and those who are not.

Whilst the term exploitation has a broad application, modern slavery tended to be more strongly associated with people born outside of the UK and human trafficking specifically. Many felt that 'modern slavery' is very common in the UK but closely tied to jobs done by people from outside of the UK and perpetrated by those from outside of the UK too.

*"Modern slavery and human trafficking go hand in hand"* (Female, Authoritarian Attitudes)

*"[Modern slavery is... very common..... every nail bar, hand car wash, cannabis farm]"* (Male, Authoritarian Attitudes)

*"When vulnerable people are exploited and forced into slave labour drug trade or sex trafficking"* (Male, Liberal Attitudes)

*"Immigrant who comes to the country under false pretentions"* (Authoritarian Attitudes)

As with exploitation, personal vulnerability is seen as key factor increasing vulnerability to modern slavery – in particular the vulnerability of people coming to the UK in search of a better live and the fact that these people can be taken advantage of by false promises of criminal gangs. This criminal narrative was expressed in all groups, with tackling the perpetrators and educating the victims being a common theme expressed in all groups.

# Survation.

*“The causes would be health, disability, unawareness. Sometimes the promises are too good - like people believe they will be in a much better situation” – Male, mixed/neutral attitudes*

*“The most vulnerable who don’t have much of a choice, people of all types who could be men or women.” – male, mixed/neutral attitudes*

*In terms of those affected by modern slavery, there was broad agreement on these terms:*

Terms	Associations
<i>Victim</i>	<i>Pity, sympathy, vulnerable person, feel sorry for them, uneducated/unaware/taken advantage of</i>
<i>Survivor</i>	<i>Empowered, pursuing change, strong, sharing experience and helping others. Survivor had associations of someone who had personally made it through the ordeal despite the odds being stacked against them.</i>
<i>Lived experience</i>	<i>Someone who has been through and got out of modern slavery, become an advocate/voice for the issue. Lived experience was a term that suggested the most agency to share and educate others.</i>

In all groups, perpetrators of modern slavery were top of mind associated with the criminal justice narrative, with gangs being the key perpetrators and in the authoritarian group, gangs were also associated with people outside of the UK specifically (from the country of those being exploited). In the Liberal attitudes group the role of businesses in modern slavery, particularly less regulated/smaller businesses was mentioned.

*“I feel it may be largely legal immigrants, perhaps business owners, taking advantage of mainly illegal immigrants from their same country” (Male, Authoritarian attitudes)*

## Causes of modern slavery in Britain and how to tackle it

All respondents accepted that modern slavery happens in Britain and agreed that it is something that should be addressed. Respondents in all groups commented that



# Survation.

they expected it to be more prevalent than expected and hard to detect and under the radar rather than noticeable in daily life.

Top of mind causes for modern slavery included the factors impacting on individuals – such as poor mental health, poor family background, upbringing, and educational background. In the mixed/neutral groups some talked about factors being a combination of ‘poor educational upbringing’ and ‘growing up in a deprived area’

Some respondents also reflected on corruption and greed as being an underlying factor behind modern slavery. In the authoritarian group, one participant reflected that “Someone always benefits from the misfortune of others” and greed/money was seen as a driver for perpetrators. In all groups (particularly the liberal audience) there many comments about the government and those in power being greedy and corrupt – reflecting comments about the government that we hear a lot post covid in particular after the PPE and other corruption scandals, and in relation to the fall in perceived standards in public life. Participants felt that the government was not doing very much to tackle issues like modern slavery, but they did support solutions for tackling modern slavery, suggesting that the audience is not fatalistic than nothing could or should be done.

Therefore, there was a tendency (in all groups) to suggest education as a potential solution – showing focus on the victim being able to spot or avoid the situation and a sense that respondents felt that they were able to ‘know better’ or spot the signs. This is a result of a lack of awareness of the systemic factors underpinning the reasons why some people are more vulnerable to modern slavery. In some cases there was a sense of lack of cultural knowledge and ‘savvy’ which placed the responsibility on the victim.

In the mixed/neutral and liberal attitudes groups a combination of factors tended to be mentioned as allowing modern slavery. Participants in the ‘liberal attitudes’ group spoke about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and lack of company regulation, lack of investment in policing and corruption in government. Cost of living was highlighted largely in terms of the impact of individuals (food/housing costs) forcing them to seek unregulated and at-risk working situations. In the liberal group, the role of the government in applying legislation and regulation was mentioned more readily, but some participants also talked about the role of the government in the mixed/neutral group also.

*“[what causes modern slavery] the corruption of the government and other bodies”*  
Female, liberal attitudes group

*“Money and effort is being put elsewhere and maybe those who are vulnerable such as people suffering with addiction or mental health issues are overlooked and they may be targets for modern day slavery”* Female, liberal attitudes

*“Insufficient legislation, overall governance & proper monetary regulation of this, by those employment official bodies who responsible to do just that”* (Female, mixed/neutral attitudes)

# Survation.

The mixed/neutral group also talked about the mix of factors, such as the role of 'bad people' in criminal gangs, and people feeling that they can 'get away' with exploitation due to lack of regulation and lack of support and funding from government in tackling the roots of the problem.

*"Sometimes vulnerable people are unable to say no and are exploited - the Government for not making it a priority to support - their family and maybe the community"* (Female, mixed/neutral attitudes)

Solutions put forward to tackle for modern slavery did differ by attitudinal group, whilst all groups were quick to suggest punishment for perpetrators and criminal gangs as being one solution, this solution was more prevalent in the 'authoritarian' group. The authoritarian group also proposed stemming the volume of immigrants as a potential solution, whereas this was not mentioned in other groups.

*"Try and stem the huge wave of economic migrants illegally entering the country who are automatically vulnerable as they cannot work officially so end up on conditions of slavery"* Male, authoritarian attitudes

In all groups there was also agreement that tightening regulation, particularly on businesses and law enforcement were potential solutions. In the mixed/neutral group they spoke about regulation for online businesses where people can be groomed and enticed into modern slavery. These solutions were suggested but were often not as immediate as suggestions that focused on the criminal narrative around punishing criminal gangs.

## Framing modern slavery

Five frames were tested to see which framing is most effective in expanding understanding of modern slavery amongst the broad audience of participants – including what modern slavery means and who it impacts. Each frame used a different aspect to modern slavery to communicate the message (forced labour, human trafficking, county lines, process primed for exploitation). Each frame included a shared value, problem, solution and a metaphor to communicate the idea.

Reactions to the frames were quite nuanced and sometimes quite contradictory, showing the complexity of communicating this topic.

None of the frames tested fully met the objectives of expanding knowledge of who is impacted by modern slavery (including UK nationals, men) but some were more successful at landing the idea government policy plays a part in the conditions where modern slavery occurs and what structural factors can play a part. At the end of the sessions one of the key take-aways for most people was the role of government and regulation in the solution to modern slavery.

# Survation.

Each of the frames is addressed below with a summary of how each component of the frame was interpreted and understood.

## Frame 2: forced Labour migration

2

No matter who you are or where you're from, wanting to guarantee the safety and well-being of your family is as ordinary as breathing. However, the government has chosen to withhold the right to work from those seeking to rebuild their lives in our communities after being forced to leave their homes overseas. With no wage to support their families, people often resort to working off-the-books in car washes, construction, and agriculture. This sets the stage for exploitation, where the threat of being reported and forced to leave the UK holds them captive, working in harsh conditions for little or no pay.

We can begin to prevent modern slavery in the UK by placing a firewall between immigration and labour market rule enforcers so that people who are exploited can speak up and get support without worrying about being put back into harm's way. Long term the government must create a fair and effective asylum process that allows families seeking sanctuary to safely reconstruct their lives in our communities

- The Low Pay Commission estimates that over 420,000 workers received less than the national minimum wage in April 2019
- There is clear evidence that workers are deterred from making complaints for fear of being referred to immigration enforcement (Barnard, C, Ludlow, A, Fraser-Butlin, S. (July 2018). "Beyond Employment Tribunals: Enforcement of Employment Rights by EU-8 Migrant Workers", *Industrial Law Journal*)

Forced Labour/Migration was (across all focus groups) the least successful of the ways to communicate modern slavery, and most likely to elicit more negative reactions and more polarised views across the groups.

The majority are sympathetic to people who find themselves in forced labour (and it could be said that forced labour itself is a good way to broaden understanding of modern slavery), but in this particular frame there was a degree of being unsympathetic to those who have broken the law, particularly if not UK nationals. It was hard for people in the 'authoritarian' values group to condone a situation when people break the law, no matter how desperate their situation and the reason why they may have done so.

This frame also introduces or alludes the more divisive issue issues and policies around migration (particularly those granted right to work vs. those who are not, perhaps if they have entered the country by illegal means), this created annoyance and lack of sympathy in the 'authoritarian leaning group'. The focus on the government has 'chosen to withhold' immediately draws people into the politics of the migration and asylum policy, which does lead participants to polarise along their political lines – as shown by the quotes below.

"I believe that currently most people claiming asylum in the UK have not genuinely been forced to leave their countries, so the first paragraph annoys me." (Male, Authoritarian views)

In terms of solutions there was some suspicion and doubt in the proposed solution of creating a 'fair and effective asylum process' as many pointed to the issues in achieving this over the last few years. The focus on immigration status/right to work

# Survation.

dominated and tended to detract from the issue of forced labour. This frame also did not address the issue of UK nationals being vulnerable to forced labour as well as those from overseas.

	Elements of frame	Reaction to frame
Value	<b>Security values:</b> No matter who you are or where you're from, wanting to guarantee the safety and well-being of your family is as ordinary as breathing	<b>Strong</b> – resonates to talk about safety and wellbeing of family
Scale	n/a	n/a
Problem	Denied the right to work by our government	<b>Weak</b> – can be divisive to focus on migration and the right to work
Metaphor	Set the stage for exploitation	<b>Neutral</b> – not used specifically but some ideas linked to this metaphor like “ripe for exploitation” were used.
Solution	Better regulate industries and create a fair and effective asylum system	<b>Weak</b> – generic solution, lacking details and creating a fair asylum process is problematic
Emotional reaction	Divisive	Angry, depressed, tense, distressed

# Survation.

## Frame 1 – Forced Labour

1

Everyone, regardless of who they are or where they're from, deserves a life free from abuse and exploitation. Yet in the UK, a small stadium's worth of people are trapped working for little or no pay in harsh conditions, facing threats and violence if they try to escape. Often these are people facing financial hardship who resort to working off the books, labouring, cleaning or harvesting to meet the rising cost of essentials like food, heating and rent. The government's choice not to properly enforce labour laws throughout our economy has left the back door open to everyday exploitation in our workplaces.

We can begin to stop the spread of modern slavery by ensuring there's enough workplace inspectors to make sure no one is being exploited and the rules are being followed. Long term, the government must secure and expand the social safety net to ensure the freedom and dignity of every individual in the UK.

- In 2022, labour exploitation was the most common form of exploitation of adults in the UK reported to the governments' National Referral Mechanism for Modern Slavery ([39%; 3,433](#)), most of these were men.
- According to [the TUC](#), the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate is currently expected to regulate around 40,000 employment agencies operating in the UK with just 19 inspectors - this means British employers are likely to face minimum wage inspections only once every 500 years

This frame was less divisive than the previous frame (because it did not focus so heavily on migration) and took a more balanced and less divisive stance that people across the three groups were more likely to broadly agree on, with the liberal leaning group being the more positive.

The opening value statement was generally agreed with regardless of the political perspective, although the equality framing has less salience with the 'Authoritarian' leaning audience. The use of the scale 'small stadium worth of people' metaphor was felt to trivialise a serious issue and was often given a reason to switch off from the communication.

This frame was less likely to evoke a polarised political perspective (again due to the fact it was less focused on migration) and the solution being proposed emphasised the need to enforce the law to protect, which was less likely to evoke the negative response because it talks about enforcing the law rather than those who are forced to break the law. Participants in the liberal leaning group emphasised how they liked that a clear solution was being proposed - workplace inspectors to stop the crime of modern slavery.

To improve this frame a bolder and more impactful solution could help. There was some scepticism that workplace inspectors would be able to tackle such as big problem but overall pleased to see a clear solution put forward in this frame. The more balanced tone led some to describe how they expected that this frame was written by a church, charity or immigration group.

*"This becomes positive as it outlines solutions to the treatment people are facing"*  
(Female, Liberal attitude)

# Survation.

“I put a cross by 'small stadium' as it was a vague statement and I wanted figures. The only thing I worry about this is it talks about 40,000 employment agencies but what about all the underground networks? How would this be tackled?” (Male, mixed/natural attitude)

	Elements of frame	Reaction to frame
Value	<b>Equality and Freedom:</b> Everyone, regardless of who they are or where they're from, deserves a life free from abuse and exploitation	<b>Medium</b> – resonates most with mixed/neutral audiences but accepted by all
Scale	A small stadium's worth of people	<b>Mixed</b> – whilst some commented that they didn't like the stadium (too trivial), the sense of how much modern slavery is happening did hit home.
Problem	The government's choice not to properly regulate industries	<b>Strong</b> – broad agreement that government should do more to regulate and enforce laws – works across all audiences
Metaphor	Safety net	<b>Neutral</b> – not picked up in feedback (not a strong metaphor)
Solution	Make our labour laws stronger and increase the number of inspectors	<b>Medium</b> – clear making labour laws stronger is good, but increasing inspectors may not be to be far reaching
Emotional reaction	Mixed/neutral	Tense, alert, neutral, angry, sad

## Frame 3 – County Lines

# Survation.

**3A** Most of us believe that with the right support, all children can thrive. Now, picture a packed sports arena filled with thousands of British children and young people – that's about how many are currently trapped and exploited against their will in the UK. These are often kids who've been expelled or suspended from school and cast adrift in the streets where they're swept into a current of crime and exploitation. Drug traffickers might use the promise of new trainers, fast food or easy money to manipulate them into growing, selling or moving drugs across the country. If they try to quit, they face threats of violence or their actions being reported to the police.

Children in the UK have been let down by our government's decision to cut school budgets and social services for those with additional needs and a cost of living scandal that means more families are finding it hard to afford things like school uniforms, a good breakfast, or internet for homework. To begin to stop modern slavery in the UK, we need a schooling system that prioritises young peoples' well-being and ensures every child gets the support they need to fulfil their potential. Long term, we need to keep teenagers in schools and off the streets and bolster the social safety net for struggling families.

- In 2022, children suspected of experiencing modern slavery were most often referred for criminal exploitation involved in county lines cases ([43%; 3,013](#)) the vast majority of these were UK nationals.
- [Government statistics](#) show that children with special educational needs are up to five times more likely to be expelled
- More than 1 in 5 people were in poverty in 2021/22 [source](#)

This frame grounded the conversation around 'British children' and speaking about children was a way in which many participants felt involved, and some described it as 'hitting home' particularly in the 'authoritarian' attitudes group. As before, the metaphor of a 'sports arena' or concert hall, could jar with the seriousness and tone of the message and was felt to lack appropriateness'. In the neutral attitudes group, being grooming was also associated with country lines but not with modern slavery in broader terms.

*"I think this one hit home as I feel I am seeing the impact of this one more visibly"*  
(Female, Authoritarian Attitudes)

*"Think when it comes to children, nobody can really argue that more needs to be done"* (Mixed/Neutral attitudes)

Most participants from across political backgrounds broadly agreed with the problems being outlined including holistic approaches with funding for social services, activities for children outside schooltime, as well as directly addressing poverty to remedy the cause. A link was also made to lack of services such as of youth clubs and acknowledged it affected people from poorer backgrounds

In the 'authoritarian' attitudes group, whilst the structural solutions were accepted some did focus on the responsibility of parents rather than government as expressed by the quote below and some felt that the proposed solutions were quite vague/broad – leading to a general call for more support for children and education for parents.

*"I also think some of this responsibility should be placed on parents"* (Female, authoritarian attitudes)

In terms of who would create a message like this, the balanced and sympathetic tone led some in the liberal group to suggest NSPCC or Oxfam.

# Survation.

The main issue with this framing is that the focus on 'British children' is narrow and 'county lines' as a frame does not expand understanding to the wider population impacted – such as adult men. As a framing 'county lines' is quite contained and isn't as easy to link to broader issues of modern slavery beyond the county lines theme.

	Elements of frame (3A)	Reaction to frame
Value	<b>Opportunity:</b> Most of us believe that with the right support, all children can thrive	<b>Strong</b> – resonates to talk about the right for children to be supported and thrive
Scale	Picture a packed sports arena filled with British children	<b>Neutral</b> – wasn't picked up on or played back
Problem	The government's decision to cut school funding for those with additional needs and a cost of living scandal	<b>Strong</b> – all agree that this is a problem and cost of living crisis is agreed to have impact.
Metaphor	Cast adrift and swept into the undercurrent of crime	<b>Neutral</b> – not picked up in feedback (not a strong metaphor)
Solution	Stop expulsions and proper safety net	<b>Medium</b> – not strong reactions to the solution as seen as quite broad, but agreement with the idea of supporting vulnerable children
Emotional reaction	Negative, mix of active and passive emotions	Tense, angry, sad, depressed, distressed

## Frame 4 - Human Trafficking



# Survation.

## 4

No matter who you are or where you're from, wanting to guarantee the health and well-being of your family is as ordinary as breathing. But imagine if you worked non-stop and still couldn't afford to send your child to school or get your sick mum the medical help she needs. In some countries, where there's no free healthcare or education and a shortage of decent jobs, this can be a reality. The lack of government investment in public services creates a hotbed for exploitation. Without other options for supporting their families, people may feel pushed to seek opportunities overseas but end up trafficked into forced labour, stripped of their passport, paid next to nothing and become trapped in modern slavery.

To begin to stop human trafficking we need to create safe ways for people to find work in other countries abroad under fair and worker-friendly regulations. All while aiming for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to reduce inequality, discrimination, and gender-based violence, and to ensure decent jobs for everyone, everywhere in the long run.

- India spends barely 1.5% of its GDP on healthcare for its 1.3 billion population, but which is amongst the lowest in the world.

- In 2015, all the members of the United Nations welcomed the Sustainable Development Goals as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future

This frame was one of the most accepted because the security value tapped into participants own values and encouraged them to reflect on their own family situation – creating empathy, particularly around ‘health and well-being of your family’. Therefore, the opening paragraph and security value did help to build a bridge between victims of human trafficking and participants - which usually feels very remote. Some also talked about the frame having a “normal person” and more down to earth tone than some of the other framing ideas.

There is also a general sympathy and concern about the issue the human trafficking, and it reinforces what most people already understand by modern slavery – something that happens to people outside of the UK and the dominant conversation was around cross border trafficking. For those in the liberal group this frame fitted most closely with their understanding of modern slavery and why it happens, and paternalistic instincts seen among the respondents toward victims as well as laying blame more squarely on foreign governments and gangs. It was understood through this frame that trafficking could be into different forms of exploitation e.g. not just sex work.

For some participants in the ‘authoritarian group’ this framing should take care not to evoke divisive views that the UK is picking up for other countries problems. This was a theme and a concern for some of those in this group and there was concern where migration was a theme.

*“As long as there are countries caring less about their citizens, UK should take extra care not to become the world's shelter to make up for other countries poor systems” (Male, authoritarian group)*

The mixed/neutral group were the least convinced by this frame and felt that it was government scaremongering – thought government were behind the message – and were using it to further political goals by shifting blame onto other countries (e.g. India that don't provide as well for their citizens). However, these associations could be quite unhelpful leaning into blame of foreign governments.

# Survation.

This frame was one of the most accepted, but this was potentially because it fits most closely with current understanding of modern slavery (human trafficking, people from outside of the UK), but it could antagonise some 'authoritarian' attitudinal audiences with a focus on migration (sometimes this was overlooked) and the focus on human trafficking didn't expand who was felt to be vulnerable to modern slavery.

	<b>Elements of frame (3A)</b>	<b>Reaction to frame</b>
Value	<b>Security values:</b> No matter who you are or where you're from, wanting to guarantee the safety and well-being of your family is as ordinary as breathing	<b>Strong</b> – creates empathy and connection across all audiences
Scale	n/a	
Problem	Lack of access to universal education and healthcare/ lack of safe migration routes	<b>Mixed</b> – most focused on the problem of human trafficking and people being pushed to seek other opportunities due to poverty/desperation. Problem being out people overseas.
Metaphor	A breeding ground for exploitation	<b>Neutral</b> – not picked up in feedback (not a strong metaphor)
Solution	Migration pathways and the sustainable development goals	<b>Medium</b> – Receives mixed reactions, supported by Liberal and mixed group, but can be divisive for the 'authoritarian group'
Emotional reaction	Negative/activating	Tense, angry, sad, depressed, relaxed

**A process primed for exploitation – frame 5**

# Survation.

## 5

Everyone deserves a life free from abuse and exploitation, regardless of their background. However, currently, when the UK invites people from overseas to fill workforce gaps, particularly in crucial sectors like agriculture and social care, the government's policies set the stage for exploitation.

Firstly, a lack of oversight allows unscrupulous agents to charge unfair recruitment fees, trapping workers in debt. Then, because their visas tie them to specific employers, these workers can't seek other jobs even if they're mistreated. With too few labour inspectors in the UK to ensure compliance with regulations and limited avenues for workers to voice concerns, daylight exploitation is all too common.

Together we can begin to stop modern slavery in the UK by allowing those who've been invited to work and live in our communities to switch jobs like anyone else and ensuring there are enough workplace inspectors to prevent exploitation

This frame tackled some of the same issues as frame 1 (forced Labour) but did so in a more factual and less emotive way – presenting an issue and a solution which brought participants onside. In the 'Liberal' attitudes group, the positive response was that the frame felt clear, solutions focused, comforting, direct and accountable.

The success of this frame is that it clearly presents the issue as a systemic failure focusing on process which helps to shift perspectives towards a solution focused approach. This was a frame which edged the 'Authoritarian attitudes' group more towards understanding the systemic factors at play.

One aspect that could cause some confusion was the idea of "the UK invites people from overseas" – this idea of inviting people to the UK provoked a range of responses and some of them not helpful around benefits cheating and laziness. The invitation framing was quickly mentioned and rejected in the more authoritarian group and there wasn't a sense of why there are gaps in the Labour market as you say;

*"My honest feelings are why are we so eager and keen to invite workers from abroad and all the issues that brings..... we should be doing more to get our own residents into the workplace" (Authoritarian group).*

*"I would summarise it as the government need to be tighter on controlling / policing this issue" (Female, authoritarian attitudes)*

*"There shouldn't be any reason why they are tied to a specific employer unless that employer is vetted regularly and can prove they're not mistreating their employees" (Female authoritarian attitudes)*

# Survation.

However, in the ‘authoritarian leaning’ group there is still some scepticism and some tendency to blame foreign workers for ‘playing the system’

*“So many of these foreign workers/immigrants have false documents anyway which if only checked by these dodgy agencies means we have no clue who they are and what their background is”* Male, Authoritarian attitudes

	<b>Elements of frame (3A)</b>	<b>Reaction to frame</b>
Value	<b>Equality and freedom:</b> Everyone deserves a life free from abuse and exploitation	<b>Strong</b> – creates empathy and connection across strongest with liberal/mixed
Scale	n/a	
Problem	Lack of oversight, unscrupulous agents workers being tied to one employer	<b>Mixed</b> – most focused on the problem of human trafficking and people being pushed to seek other opportunities due to poverty/desperation.
Metaphor	Daylight exploitation	<b>Neutral</b> – not picked up in feedback (not a strong metaphor)
Solution	Allowing those who have been invited to work in the UK to switch jobs like everyone else	<b>Medium</b> – Receives mixed reactions, supported by Liberal and mixed group, but can be divisive for the ‘authoritarian group’
Emotional reaction	Positive /mixed / passive	Neutral, content, relaxed, calm, sad, depressed, alert

## Overall

- Across all audience groups modern slavery is a concern and is most strongly associated with human trafficking of non-UK nationals by criminal gangs – often to people have vulnerabilities and/or uneducated.
- There are some negative reactions of the term – potentially due to the association with slavery and lack of clarity about what it means. Talking about ‘forced labour’ is potentially a useful way to widen the audience understanding that UK nationals and men are impacted

# Survation.

- There is a heavy focus currently on the vulnerability of people exploited by modern slavery, through their circumstances and situations – including lack of education, lack of awareness, poor upbringing, deprivation, mental health. However, there was a recognition of some of the broader structural factors which may drive vulnerability as well as the individuals' characteristics and circumstances – particularly in the mixed and liberal group.
- As a result, education of victims was mentioned in all groups as a potential solution. Structural factors are felt to play a role, but these are less top of mind and needs to be brought out through the framing.
- None of the frames really hit the mark in broadening understanding of who is a victim of modern slavery, particularly landing the idea that UK nationals can be victims. Some messages (e.g., Human Trafficking) could in-fact serve to reinforce the existing perception that victims are non-UK citizens. However, when participants had been exposed to the frames they did express concern and spoke about having their understanding broadened and they were less likely to focus on perpetrators and punishment as the sole focus of solutions.
- Framing can be divisive along political lines when it focuses on migration policy particularly when speaking about how victims are forced to break the law or when the frames talk about topics related to asylum policy. Using the migration lens tends to reinforce what people already know about modern slavery.
- Framing worked better when focused more on procedural regulation and enforcement of welfare and labour policies – stamping out corruption and rule breaking by employers and criminal gangs was less emotive and more acceptable across all audience.
- Be aware that there are different interpretations of regulation and enforcement of workforce and welfare legislation. The authoritarian group focused on tightening laws on migration, whereas more liberal groups focused on using regulation to protect those at risk of exploitation.
- County lines as an aspect of modern slavery hit home with a focus on British children but is seen as quite an isolated issue, not connected to adults and not connected to the broader issue of modern slavery.
- Tapping into values, particularly security values worked well to draw engagement with participants and make a connection to a subject that can seem very removed and remote.
- The chosen metaphors and scales didn't really work in driving and cementing understanding of the issue – they seemed disconnected and sometime trivial /inappropriate and need to be reviewed.
  - I am not sure that this is very clear cut – as I think to an extent people were reflecting back some of the themes of the solutions presented, but I am not sure they had completely moved away from their perceptions of perpetrators and gang
  - Some people do come back to punishment and sentencing at the end of the group although agree, people did talk about having their

# Survation.

understanding broadened and being more sympathetic, as well as the government needing to do more as key points.

- I agree that there was little mention of gangs, benefit cheats or sex workers but there was still quite a lot of discussion at the end about migration, particularly in the Authoritarian group.
- This pattern was perhaps less clear in the liberal group – there was less talk about harsh crackdowns to begin with, and after being shown the prompts they did appear to lean towards rather simplistic solutions which did involve harsher laws and policework.