

## What is Coronavirus and who's vulnerable?



Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a newly discovered virus that has spread to nearly every country in the world, causing a global pandemic.

Covid-19 disproportionately affects vulnerable people, including those with underlying health conditions, poor access to hygiene facilities, or the inability to self-isolate from others.

As a result, The Salvation Army is especially concerned for modern slavery victims, particularly adults and children who remain in situations of exploitation during this time. We know that many victims experience health problems from enduring exploitative conditions and poor access to health care. Victims might be unable to wash their hands or remain at a distance from others whilst they are forced to work.

## What is the Government doing about Coronavirus?

In the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Government has worked closely with The Salvation Army, the prime contractor for support provision for adult modern slavery victims in England and Wales, to make sure all identified victims can continue to be supported to recover from their trauma and be protected from Covid-19. All operations providing support to modern slavery victims are following guidance from Public Health England to minimise the risk of spreading the infection to residents and staff at safe houses and in outreach services. New ways of working are also being introduced which include:



- telephone and skype consultations between support workers and survivors;
- electronic payment of weekly benefits; and
- holding some accommodation in reserve for new referrals displaying symptoms.

The Government also announced that from 06 April to the end of June 2020, victims living in safe houses, who ordinarily would have been assisted to move on, can continue to have access to this accommodation for the next three months.

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Additionally, the Government has brought in measures to aid the process of applying for asylum during the Covid-19 outbreak. This is of potential benefit to survivors of modern slavery as many submit a claim for asylum because it will be unsafe for them to return to their home country. The Government is:

- temporarily suspending face-to-face asylum screening interviews and most reporting requirements;
- temporarily suspending evictions and terminations of asylum support for three months until the end of June 2020;
- introducing the ability to receive further information relating to asylum cases by post; and
- pausing the Assisted Voluntary Returns Service.

Survivors of modern slavery who are eligible to receive public funds are able to apply for benefits. In recent weeks, the Government has made a number of temporary changes to the social security system, which will be of assistance to some survivors of modern slavery. These include:

- confirming that people do not need a national insurance number to apply for benefits or a job, if they have the right to work, whilst national insurance number interviews are paused for three months from 17 March; and
- increasing the value of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to cover the full rental cost of three in ten of the most affordable homes within a given area.

For survivors of modern slavery already living in the community in social or private rented housing, the Government has also suspended all evictions for the next three months. This suspension applies to all tenants not just victims of modern slavery.

### **What does the Government still need to do?**

The Salvation Army welcomes the recent steps taken by government to ensure that victims of modern slavery are supported during this difficult time. However, to ensure that this support is as comprehensive as possible, The Salvation Army is calling on the Government to go further still.

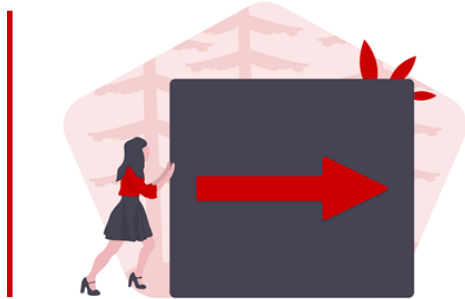
To further protect modern slavery victims and those vulnerable to exploitation during this critical time, The Salvation Army asks the Government to:

- support local authorities to take all possible steps to ensure that victims of modern slavery receive access to any necessary assessments for care and support.
- It is also essential that following these assessments, any necessary support to meet all eligible care needs in order to maintain wellbeing is provided as swiftly as possible.
- These recommendations are especially important in light of the temporary easements to parts of the Care Act 2014 introduced by the Coronavirus Act 2020. Due to these easements, local authorities are no longer legally obligated, as they were previously, to carry out detailed assessments of people's care and support needs, to prepare or review care and support plans, or to meet all eligible care needs;
- support local authorities to relax local connection rules for modern slavery victims needing housing and/or care and support; and

- remove current eligibility restrictions to support for people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Without this, those with NRPF will be at an increased risk of exploitation.

### How can we sustain long-term progress?

Whilst pro-active steps have been taken by the Government to support modern slavery victims in the UK during the Covid-19 outbreak, The Salvation Army believes that the Government must set out its plans to reduce the consequences of Covid-19 on poorer countries internationally. These countries will be disproportionately impacted by the resulting global economic downturn.



The Salvation Army is already hearing concerns from its international projects across the world that those most vulnerable to human trafficking will be faced with deepening poverty and precarious circumstances. This in turn will expose them to greater risk of exploitation, trafficking and

modern slavery.

We, therefore, ask the UK Government to strengthen its commitment to combatting modern slavery by incorporating anti-trafficking work into their international aid efforts to address the Covid-19 pandemic.