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# Faith responses to modern slavery



“ I believe in  
Jesus and God,  
*not people.* ”

—Lea



# Summary

Faith actors and faith-based organisations (FBOs) involved in the UK's anti-modern slavery sphere are mainly Christian. But there is no one 'Christian response' to modern slavery. The picture is complex.

A mapping of anti-modern slavery organisations and analysis of parliamentary debates revealed that faith actors and FBOs represent around 30% of analysed responses to modern slavery.

FBOs are more likely to be single-issue anti-modern slavery organisations delivering direct service provision than their secular counterparts, and particular faith actors and FBOs make a significant contribution to political lobbying.

FBOs feel there is mistrust and doubts over their professionalism and that they have to 'go the extra mile' to develop relationships of trust in the sector, particularly with secular organisations.

Some FBOs are distinctive from secular organisations in the anti-modern slavery field through the subtle use of a 'faith lexicon'; such as extolling 'love' through practice, and 'having a heart' for work in this sphere. Many Christians would consider this to be a form of indirect evangelism that spreads the Christian message but which avoids the coercive nature of proselytism.

Evidence that FBOs working within the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are riddled with direct evangelism, proselytism and spiritual abuse was not found, despite some fear that this is the case. Credible

reports were articulated of this occurring in isolated parts of the NRM and in peripheral and pre- or post-National Referral Mechanism (NRM) arenas.

People exiting modern slavery asserted the importance of religious worship and spirituality to their recovery. They were confident in seeking this out for themselves in parallel with support services. This underlies the potential damage in support environments of undue influence in trying to shape the religious identities of people with past experiences of severe exploitation.

Issues with standards and quality of care affect both secular organisations and FBOs within the anti-modern slavery field, and the key problems facing people exiting modern slavery require detailed, long term, sensitive and dedicated responses.

Our key recommendation is for organisations, projects and services working to support people exiting modern slavery to implement the Human Trafficking Foundation (HTF) Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards, including 1.1.5 on Freedom of thought, religion and belief (see page 24).

The images used in this report are from the collection 'Unhidden in Plain Sight' by Jeremy Abrahams. They feature actor Justina Aina.

# Key terms

- » **Asylum seeker:**  
Someone who makes a claim for asylum and is awaiting a decision on this claim.
- » **Asylum Support:**  
People who make a claim for asylum are eligible for accommodation in dispersal sites in towns and cities across the UK on a no choice basis, and limited cashless support. This is known as 'NASS' (National Asylum Support Service), the part of the Home Office that is used to administer support.
- » **Conclusive Grounds:**  
Recognition following an assessment by the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) that an individual more likely than not is a victim of modern slavery.
- » **Evangelism:**  
Promoting the Christian gospel by public preaching (direct) or through personal action (indirect).
- » **Faith-based organisation (FBO):**  
An organisation with ties to a religious institution and/or an underpinning faith ethos.
- » **Home Office:**  
A ministerial department of the UK government, responsible for immigration, security and law and order.
- » **Human trafficking:**  
The movement of a person from one place to another, or recruitment or harbouring of a person for the purposes of exploitation.
- » **Limited leave to remain:**  
A term to refer to temporary leave to remain in the UK, usually with recourse to public funds. A positive Conclusive Grounds decision may result in a grant of Discretionary Leave (up to two and a half years). People who make a claim for asylum may be granted refugee status (five years), Discretionary Leave (up to two and a half years) or Humanitarian Protection (five years). Before expiry of a limited leave period, an application needs to be submitted for permission to remain in the UK to be renewed or plans made to depart the UK.
- » **Modern slavery:**  
Not defined in any international legal instrument, but is generally understood as an umbrella term encompassing human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced labour (defined as such in the UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015).
- » **National Referral Mechanism (NRM):**  
The NRM is a framework for identifying potential victims of modern slavery. Individuals recognised as potential victims have access to at least 45 days of support, which may include legal advice, accommodation, emotional and practical help.
- » **Proselytism:**  
The attempt to convert someone to a faith tradition, sometimes as a condition of receiving aid or support.
- » **Secular:**  
In this research, we use secular to mean not faith-based.
- » **Spiritual abuse:**  
Using religion and religious teachings in a way that causes fear, distress and trauma.
- » **Third sector:**  
A term covering a range of organisations that are neither public sector nor private sector.

The first use of key terms are in bold.



## Section 1

# Introduction

This report discusses the key findings from a three-year research project to investigate the roles of **faith-based organisations** (FBOs) in responses to **modern slavery** in the UK.

**Global multi-faith initiatives for social action are not unprecedented, but the emergence of a global faith alliance on modern slavery is a newer phenomenon; one that resonates with faith-inspired abolitionist movements to eradicate transatlantic slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

**A contemporary indication of the growing global faith response in this arena occurred in March 2014 when representatives of major global faith traditions convened at the Vatican in Rome to sign a Memorandum of Agreement to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking across the world by 2020.**

**There has been research into religious responses in some Global South countries and the U.S., but the roles of FBOs in responses to modern slavery in the UK has received little scholarly attention compared to faith engagement with other social issues.**

### 1.1 | The research

**The project was designed to:**

- » Identify the roles and motivations of FBOs offering services to support people exiting severe exploitation, and the impact of receiving support
- » Consider whether there are distinctive faith-based representations of anti-modern slavery in campaigns and work to raise public awareness
- » Explore links at the level of government policy between austerity, increasing roles for FBOs, and religious affiliations among statutory actors involved in anti-modern slavery
- » Explore religious affiliations among statutory actors involved in anti-modern slavery activities
- » Consider the uniqueness of the UK case by exploring faith dimensions in anti-modern slavery efforts in Spain and the Netherlands
- » Further academic study of the postsecular and welfare pluralism

This report offers initial findings from our research, with a particular focus on the case studies of support organisations and experiences of people receiving support. We anticipate that this report will be useful to anyone involved in the field of anti-modern slavery and researchers exploring religion in the public sphere.

### The report covers:

- » faith actors responding to modern slavery;
- » FBO distinctiveness;
- » professionalisation;
- » experiences of support;
- » and conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.2 | Methodology

The research involved a multi-method approach to investigate anti-modern slavery practice and activities undertaken by faith-based and secular organisations, and statutory and civil society figures, primarily in England. The research also included a comparative element with key informant interviews in Spain and the Netherlands.

Six case studies, consisting of 30 interviews, into organisations (faith-based and secular) offering support to people identified as 'victims' of modern slavery

Interviews with people who have experienced support from anti-trafficking organisations

Analysis of the presence of FBOs/faith actors in key modern slavery debates and committees in Hansard

Content analysis of visual representations in anti-modern slavery

30

14

Hansard



Content Analysis

115

UK-based anti-trafficking organisations, active in raising awareness or providing services were mapped using publicly available information

21

Interviews with civil society and government key informants

Interviews with 20 representatives of key **third sector** anti-modern slavery organisations in Spain and the Netherlands

### 1.3 | Case study organisations

In 2011, The Salvation Army (TSA), an evangelical Christian charity, was awarded the government contract to deliver victim care support, advice and accommodation under the NRM. TSA subcontract services to 12 organisations (eight **secular**, four faith-based organisations).

At the time of this decision, concerns were publicly raised about the loss of expertise of the previous contract holder, the Poppy Project, and the ability of a Christian organisation to offer equitable services to a culturally and religiously diverse and vulnerable client group, as well as to critique government policy.

TSA consider themselves early adopters having been active in precursors to contemporary anti-trafficking advocacy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Limoncelli, 2017). In recent years, and particularly in response to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, new faith-based initiatives are emerging in the UK; almost all are Christian. This project was designed to explore the roles of faith-based organisations in anti-modern slavery.

We conducted six case studies, the basic profiles of which are shown in the table below. In each organisation, we aimed to interview a cross section of staff across different positions: the chief executive/director or other senior manager, staff involved in managing casework, staff delivering case work, and, where relevant, a volunteer. The two organisations providing services outside the NRM provide casework, and one offers counselling; neither offer their own accommodation.

Case Study	Faith Identity	Remit	In NRM?	Interviews
CS1	Christian	Modern slavery only	NRM	4
CS2	Christian	Vulnerable adults	NRM	4
CS3	Christian	Modern slavery	Non NRM	7
CS4	Secular	Adults in crisis	NRM + non NRM	4
CS5	Secular	Domestic and sexual violence	NRM	5
CS6	Christian	Modern slavery	Non NRM	6

#### What is a faith actor or faith-based organisation?

'Faith actor' refers to individuals, institutions and organisations that have a faith background. 'Faith-based organisation' is an organisation with ties to a religious institution and/or an underpinning faith ethos.

#### What is modern slavery?

In the UK the term 'modern slavery' has come into common use to refer to a grouping of forms of severe exploitation collected together in the definition in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 which includes forced and compulsory labour, human trafficking, domestic servitude and criminal exploitation. Human trafficking is a concept developed in international law to incorporate three key elements: recruitment (deception, coercion), movement or harbouring, for the purposes of exploitation.

#### What is the NRM?

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) offers accommodation, psychological support, health care and legal and immigration advice to a person considered to have 'reasonable grounds' to be a victim of modern slavery.

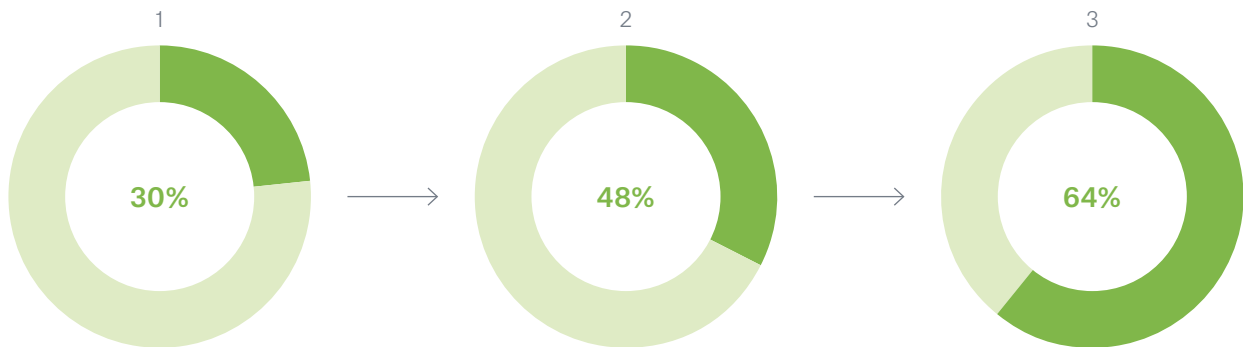
## Section 2

# Faith actors responding to modern slavery

The initial stages of this research focused on a mapping exercise to determine what proportion of third sector organisations involved in anti-modern slavery are faith-based, and whether FBOs are concentrated in particular areas of activity. We also considered the role of faith actors in key parliamentary debates.

### 2.1 | Mapping FBOs in the UK anti-modern slavery sector

The mapping examined the publicly available communications of 115 third sector organisations involved in anti-modern slavery in the UK between May and August 2017. An organisation was identified as faith-based by examining the presence of: explicit or implicit religious references in the mission statement and other documents; any links to a specific faith institution (e.g. a church); whether profiles of trustees and staff stated their faith or membership of a faith body; and any requirements for faith affiliation in job advertisements. The findings do not reflect new organisations or activities developed since August 2017, nor places of worship.



30% anti-modern slavery organisations are FBOs – 34/115.

48% of 'single issue' organisations that exclusively or primarily focus on modern slavery are FBOs – 22/46.

64% of 'single issue' organisations offering services to people in/exiting modern slavery are FBOs – 18/28.



The diagram on page eight demonstrates that the proportion of FBOs operating across the anti-modern slavery sector as a whole is significant, as they represent 30% of organisations (1). It is important to note that the majority are Christian: of 33 FBOs, 32 are Christian and one Jewish. No other religious traditions were evident in the UK anti-modern slavery activities we mapped. The prominence of FBOs becomes more apparent when activities of the organisations are subdivided according to the scope of their services.

While FBOs comprise 30% of the sector overall, they constitute 48% of the organisations established to address human trafficking or modern slavery *exclusively* rather than as part of a wider remit of housing, migrant, gender violence or other types of support. Furthermore, of the ‘single-issue’ organisations that offer services to people in/exiting modern slavery, 64% are FBOs. This indicates that FBOs are more likely to deliver direct services with a sole focus on modern slavery than their secular counterparts.

## 2.2 | Political influence of FBOs

Hansard transcripts were analysed to explore the influence of FBOs and faith actors on the development of anti-modern slavery policy in parliament. This analysis focused on oral and written contributions from FBOs and faith actors in activities related to the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Parliamentary processes	Type of evidence	Faith actor/ FBO provided
<b>Joint Committee on draft of Modern Slavery Bill (2014)</b>	Oral	2.5% (n=2)
	Written	13.7% (n=14)
<b>House of Commons Public Bill Committee stage of Modern Slavery Bill (2014)</b>	Oral	33.3% (n=3)
<b>Modern Slavery Inquiry (2018)</b> The Home Affairs Committee is looking at what progress has been made in the three years since the Modern Slavery Act came into force and what more remains to be done.	Oral	20% (n=5)
	Written	11.3% (n=16)
<b>Independent Review Modern Slavery Act (2019)</b> This government commissioned review is considering specific provisions in the Modern Slavery Act 2015: the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), Transparency in Supply Chains (TISC), Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) and Legal Application (LA) of the Modern Slavery Act.	Four reports, written contributions:	
	IASC	23.5% (n=16)
	TISC	8.5% (n=11)
	ICTA	21.4% (n=12)
	LA	19% (n=14)

The table summarising the Hansard analysis (p. 9) indicates that faith actor presence in parliamentary processes related to modern slavery is broadly proportionate with FBO presence in the sector (30%); as shown through the mapping exercise. However, high contributions from faith actors/ FBOs are seen in two of the three oral evidence sessions (House of Commons Public Bill Committee stage 2014 and Modern Slavery Inquiry 2018) and these are arguably of greater significance in the shaping of the session reports given their invited nature and more limited numbers. We can therefore speculatively suggest that *some* prominent faith actors and FBOs are 'punching above their weight' in the realm of political lobbying and influencing, and are not concentrating only on providing services as the mapping indicated.

### Summary

The mapping of 115 organisations involved in anti-modern slavery, analysis of parliamentary legislative processes and inquiries pertaining to modern slavery, and in depth case study organisation research has revealed the prominence of faith actors and FBOs as they represent around one quarter to one third of responses to modern slavery. This is not limited to direct service provision, and includes campaigning. FBOs are more prominent as single-issue anti-modern slavery organisations delivering direct service provision, than as multi-issue organisations involved in a range of activities. Particular faith actors and FBOs make a significant contribution to political lobbying and influencing.

“ When people  
enslave you, *they*  
*take your identity,*  
they take the  
*real you.* ”

— Sarah



## Section 3

# Distinctiveness

Sections 3 and 4 discuss two of the main themes to emerge from 30 in-depth interviews with practitioners in the six case study organisations (see Section 1): the distinctiveness of faith-based approaches in anti-modern slavery, and professionalisation and standards.

**By the distinctiveness of faith-based approaches, we mean a difference in organisational ethos, character or in the operation of service delivery in comparison to secular organisations. Three aspects commonly identified in discussions of faith-based distinctiveness were ideas of being client centred and unconditional; questions around the lines between pastoral care and evangelism or proselytism; and access to independent resources through faith networks.**

### **3.1 | Being client-centred, unconditional and non-judgemental**

We asked everyone in our research – faith-based and secular case study organisations, key informants in civil society and government, and people receiving support – whether they felt that faith-based organisations offer anything distinctive in the field of anti-modern slavery. There was little agreement among and outside of FBOs whether they offer anything distinctive, or what this might mean. Several FBOs highlighted their client-centred ethos and offering of unconditional and non-judgemental support while simultaneously recognising that these principles would be the same for any caring individual, irrespective of their faith identity. A senior manager (CS1) said:

**I think you would be hard pushed to say what sticks out about gospel values [more] than anyone else's – any other decent human being's values.**

It was equally identified by CS4, for example, not an FBO, that being secular is more conducive to client-centeredness.

Contrary to fears of FBOs compromising quality or appropriateness of provision of support for people of other faiths or none, most practitioners in FBOs we spoke to emphasised how their religious ethos provided a framework for unconditional and non-judgemental support as central to Christian praxis. A member of front line staff (CS2) said:

**not judging... it's our way of living.**

But the extent to which an ethos of care and valuing individuals was carried through to the treatment of staff and volunteers varied. Reflecting on past experience working in another FBO, a senior manager (CS3) explained that there was an attitude that:

**we'll look after the oppressed by beating you into an early grave where you're in the foetal position because you're so stressed. I'm like, that's not right...I think there needs to be the systems in place in order to value that person as much as we do the person that we're trying to help out of a situation of oppression.**

One FBO mentioned that being available at all hours, or being willing to continue support beyond '9-5' is something that distinguished them from secular organisations, which were depicted as '*working to contract*'. At another FBO it was directly stated by a member of front line staff (CS2) that:

**our staff work overtime unpaid and they go out of their way... they do it because they love it, and I think that's unique.**

There was no doubting the strong level of dedication demonstrated by every staff member and volunteer

we spoke to in all case study organisations. However, it is ironic and potentially damaging to staff working in a difficult field if practices of decent work conditions and pay are not being adhered to by organisations seeking to reduce severe exploitation.

### 3.2 | Blurring the lines: pastoral care, evangelism and proselytism

For some people exiting severe exploitation, faith and spirituality can be an important part of the recovery process. Some FBOs argue that they are more attuned to spirituality, not just for co-religionists but for people of faith generally, and that this can play a role in the pastoral support that they provide. Some of the people with experiences of modern slavery we interviewed have affirmed that their faith was important to them in coping with their modern slavery situation and its aftermath (see Section 5).

Talking of the importance of identifying an appropriate place of worship for service users, a senior manager at secular CS5 also said:

**I think some people can find professional support or professional relationships a little bit intimidating sometimes. So, I think they find it a lot more enriching when they feel that they have got ... someone who is there and who is able to listen to them and provide them with spiritual support.**

Proselytism was discussed by some case study organisations as something that staff had heard about happening at other organisations. Three of the four FBOs in our case studies had adopted safeguards around discussing faith with clients. For one of the FBOs, a careful separation of faith from the day-to-day operations of their organisation is in



itself an important part of their faith commitment – to ensure the best possible care for everyone. Other organisations, however, appear to have laxer standards. As outlined in Section 5, Taylor had experienced pressure to attend religious services and had not wanted to do this but felt this was a requirement of the support.

The risk of being tarnished by accusations of blurring the line between providing support and promoting religion meant that proselytism and evangelism were treated almost as a taboo topic in the research. Concern to clarify the exclusion of coercive elements in support environments had two dimensions. First and foremost, all FBOs were keen to articulate a sophisticated recognition of the need to avoid secondary exploitation, through proselytism, that would replicate coercive or deceptive relations that form part of a modern slavery experience in support environments. The second dimension that emerged, in more guarded comments or reflections, was whether or not proselytism actually occurs or can be evidenced. FBOs are tarnished by this fear and this shapes their interactions with and relationships with other organisations in the sector.

### 3.3 | Faith and independence: access to resources and accountability

FBOs indicated that they are often able to mobilise resources – material and human – through their faith networks. This helps to make up for the deficit in state funding, but also raises the question of whether FBOs contribute to ‘letting the government off the hook’ by subsidising funding shortfalls. One senior manager (CS1) said:

**It’s nothing unusual for a cheque for say £10,000 or £30,000 to arrive. They’re not**

**insubstantial sums. Plus, some of the properties we’ve been given for our use, there’s one that’s valued at over £12 million.**

There was also recognition from FBOs and non-FBOs that service users frequently rely on a wider range of peripheral support often provided by churches. Some of this support may include faith elements such as prayer, but was justified as it takes place outside publicly funded activities. Four of the six case study organisations mentioned provision of clothing for people arriving with nothing, use of food banks, English classes, and emergency accommodation.

### Summary

It is important to highlight that we and our participants do not view the world as one made up of two dichotomous groups of service providers – some faith-based, some secular. The high amount of and the need for partnership working has been highlighted in other research (Gardner, 2017).

Both FBOs and secular organisations need to consider the example they are setting in the field of anti-modern slavery on decent work practices if they assume unpaid overtime is a standard requirement of the job or do not provide progression opportunities or sufficient psycho-social support to staff and volunteers.

Pastoral care can provide an important element of support for some people following an experience of severe exploitation. However, it is also important to remember that people leaving a situation of severe exploitation are likely to be in a vulnerable position, so strict safeguarding is needed to prevent unduly influencing people or importuning people around religion.

“ There is *no one*  
Christian response to  
modern slavery. ”



## Section 4

# Professionalism

Section 4 discusses the emphasis in interviews with FBOs on ‘being professional’. This was argued to be important to ensure the best possible service, as well as to secure funding.

**Professionalisation emerged as part of a discussion about a de-emphasis of faith identity, in the sense that part of the bargain that FBOs enter into as they seek partnerships with government agencies is to secularise their mission and language. Therefore, this was not expressed in the same ways by the secular organisations that formed two of our case studies. By professionalised we mean the development of market-like features such as effective/efficient service delivery and improved ability to access statutory funding and highly skilled human capital.**

### 4.1 | Standards and requirements of delivering victim support

CS2 and CS5 both discussed the need to meet key performance indicators and a high level of scrutiny required of them as NRM subcontractors. A senior manager (CS2) said:

**To grow a bigger team, you’ve got to pull in the reins. It’s important for the care standard, important for the clients that we are highly professional [in] manner.**

Two of our case study organisations expressed their fear at speaking out about problems created for their clients by government policy, even though they had ideas about how to make improvements. As is typical in the co-option of non-governmental organisations in provision of government contracts, there was also a discernible sense that more radical critique was sacrificed to maintain a ‘seat at the table’ of influencing policy.

Maintaining good standards of victim support were associated with knowledge, qualifications in social care, law or benefits advice, and research-based

decisions. A member of front line (CS3) said:

**[Our] decisions are made based on objectivity. Our work is based on solid social work principles, empowering support. It's research-based, evidence-based practice. We're not getting messages from God and we're not doing all of that jazz.**

## 4.2 | What's 'love' got to do with it?

Despite a reduction in overt references to God, religion, or Christian principles (see 4.4), the subtler use of a 'faith lexicon' operates as a gauge that can reveal a faith ethos or identity. Use of phrases like 'have a heart for', and engagement with ideas of rescue and restoration, although not by any means isolated to FBOs, do appear to be more prevalent in both the public communications and rationales provided by workers in FBOs for their engagement in addressing modern slavery. This language occasionally skirted close to terminology and concepts of religious conversion, in descriptions of people while in a situation of modern slavery as 'broken', requiring repair or restoration (with the organisation or practitioner situated as the saviour). A senior manager (CS2) said:

**We're running after that freedom alongside our clients but also pursuing restoring lives at the same time... We want to put the pieces back together, help the individual find the pieces and put them back together so their life can be restored.**

The symbol of the heart was also used by secular organisations to register concerns about victim support, particularly peripheral support such as short-stop accommodation or church-based material support: *'somebody's heart might be in the right*

*place, but they may not be suitably knowledgeable to support that client group'* (CS5). This concern was also raised in CS3 (an FBO) which had a particular focus on ensuring their core staff and even in many cases volunteers, have professional qualifications in care or social work. A manager (CS3) said:

**'I've got a real heart for this area', which okay, that's great, but have you got the training and the knowledge? If not, great come and get it but don't think that just because you've got a heart for this area that therefore you are experienced or trained or able to help people. Actually, it does more harm than good in my experience.**

## 4.3 | Professionalism and religion

For several of the organisations we explored, seeking influence in public debates, discourse and policy, implementing standards of care, and appearing attractive to a broad range of funders was felt to require a de-emphasis of faith in both internal practices, policies and interactions, and in mission, purpose and public communications. To be overtly more religious was considered to limit the employee recruitment pool and to be potentially off putting to funders. Genuine openness to employing staff with appropriate skills and qualifications, irrespective of religion, was considered important, especially by CS1, CS3 and CS6.

One case study organisation was particularly clear that for them being Christian was central to their ethos of equality and to their commitment to establishing the best possible practice. Not publicly displaying their Christian religion or identity in organisation communications or in daily conversations with survivors was an integral part of their Christian-based commitment to justice and

unconditionality. The senior manager (CS3) said:

**Motivated by God’s Heart... valuing innovation and best practice. When we set up it was innovative in and of itself and we wanted to strive to lead the field in best practice. So we didn’t want to cut corners and ...to almost undervalue the individual ...being like, well that doesn’t really matter if we don’t do this, or this person maybe doesn’t get as good a service.**

Another front line member of staff at CS3 expressly rejected the idea that personal religion should come into their ‘day job’ or matter in working alongside people of different faiths or none.

**...one of my colleagues said, well I appreciate we’re all coming from different camps and I was like oh no, no, stop you right there. I don’t think we’re coming from different camps. I said the fact that we all work for [this organisation] means that we’ve all got a desire to improve people’s lives. I think that’s enough. I don’t think we need to pinpoint what is our faith. I don’t think you can. Your faith is so integral part of your life. I’ve never thought about it in a professional context.**

The clear rejection of proselytism and direct evangelism within care and support discussed in Section 3.2 was held up as a particularly important marker of professionalism, the senior manager (CS2) said:

**I think you’ve got to be professional...we live in a day and age where [with] religion...you can’t be forceful in anything. That’s not who we are. We want people to experience their own journey of faith on their own.**

### 4.4 | The ‘dual register’

Reliance on direct funding from religious sources – even while offering unconditional, open and equal services – creates ambiguities. For example, CS1 told us that they have to be strategic when they share information at fundraising events or in publications that is directed at a religious audience. A member of front line staff (CS1) said:

**We wouldn’t have a gay story in the magazine, would we? We wouldn’t have a transgender story in the magazine, we wouldn’t have a story about abortion in the magazine, you know, a woman who’s raped and stuff. You always sort of...play your audiences, say [if] it was a group of nuns. But if it was a group of students, I could give quite a different talk.**

This demonstrates that Christians involved in anti-modern slavery appear to tolerate intolerant positions that they may not agree with, for the ‘greater good’ of ‘ending modern slavery’ – especially if it is attached to raising money. CS2 also demonstrated these strategic communications, describing how they use a ‘different clip’ of their founder for church audiences. One manager (CS2) said:

**Then [they] will mention something along the lines of ‘I feel it is my calling and I feel like God has called me to do this’. We will have that which is a truth for [them] and it is the truth of the founding of the charity... But we won’t show that in a secular public space, because that’s not – it’s not appropriate to that audience.**

FBOs may operate on a ‘dual register’ – changing how they communicate depending on the audience. When addressing religious audiences, they would change the way they speak to highlight their Christian



or religious identity and ethos. For general public audiences FBOs often conceal their religious base, origins or ethos in websites, reports, or funding applications. This was also confirmed in the mapping discussed in Section 2.

## Summary

We do not suggest there is any inverse relationship between religiosity and professionalisation in practices or public communications. However, both in our mapping and our case studies, there was an evident discomfort among FBOs about being public about their faith identity. Hence, sometimes FBOs and faith actors appear as and operate as secular organisations in certain spaces.

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*“I’ve got a real heart for this area’, which okay, that’s great, but have you got the training and the knowledge?”*

## Section 5

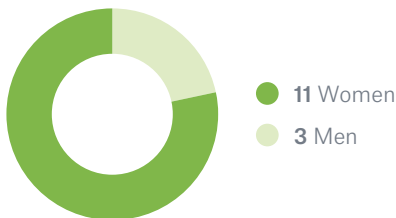
# Experiences of support

Section 5 is informed by interviews about experiences of support. Exploitation, statutory support and faith were the three dominant themes connecting their experiences.

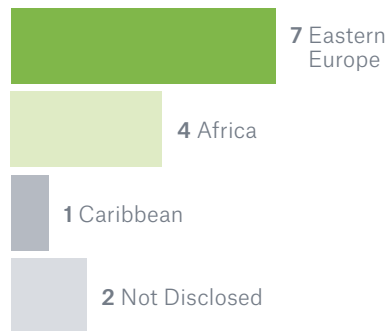
### 5.1 | Who we spoke to

We interviewed 14 people (11 women and 3 men) who left an exploitative situation and received support from anti-modern slavery organisations. The interviews aimed to discuss the support delivered by statutory and third sector providers and the role of faith identity and worship. Although we avoided discussing experiences of exploitation, these often came up as people explained how and when the support had first been accessed. Pseudonyms are used.

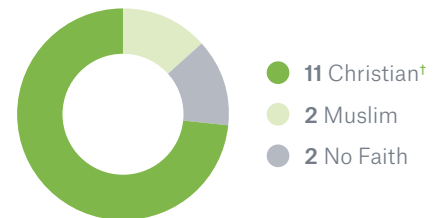
#### We spoke to 14 people



#### They were from



#### They identified as\*



\* 10 of 13 identifying as religious engaged in active worship (10 of the 11 Christians were engaged in active worship. The remaining 2 participants identified as non-practising Muslims).

† Including Catholic, Pentecostal & Greek Orthodox

## 5.2 | Exploitation

Testimony shared by the research participants highlighted the pervasive nature of their exploitation, in some instances commencing prior to being trafficked or coerced into an exploitative situation, as well as perpetuated upon exiting a modern slavery situation through informal and formal support networks and services.

Some examples: Milan believed that his problems began when he became an orphan age 10. Ana escaped her modern slavery situation and was provided with accommodation by a woman, in return for which she was expected to cook and clean.

It transpired that Ana was pregnant and as she approached full term, she was taken by the woman to the **Home Office** to seek asylum and referred to the NRM. Ana effectively moved from sexual exploitation to domestic servitude and her access to statutory support and antenatal care were delayed.

Maria, in spite of her experiences of modern slavery being validated by a specialist reports in evidence for her asylum claim, had never been referred to the NRM. Maria's asylum case had been active for over seven years and during this time she was groomed and subsequently sexually exploited, by a member of staff responsible for supporting her in **Asylum Support** accommodation:

**To get to the sex point, he had to go through first to make the women believe in him, trust in him. Maybe fall in love with him.**

Maria was not alone in her experiences, as she discovered that other women had been targeted by this individual. The actions of this member of support staff served to compound the abuse already inflicted by the people involved in trafficking her.

These findings highlight the vulnerability of this group and the inherent dangers of returning to severe exploitation in or after a support period. This emphasises the need for support that focuses on replacing exploitation and coercion with person-centred support promoting individual agency.

## 5.3 | Statutory support

Although the UK Government is keen to promote their response to modern slavery as world-leading, the testimonies of those we spoke to highlighted the damaging effects of uncertainty and lengthy periods waiting for decisions on immigration status *after* accessing support. This was particularly the case for the 11 participants who made a claim for asylum (five of which had been granted some form of leave to remain at the time of the interview), but also extended to the three participants who had EU citizenship yet struggled to secure permanent residency to gain access to welfare and housing. Participants waited between four months and two years for NRM decisions, considerably longer than the 45 day target decision making period (see also Burland, 2015; Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2016).

Victoria described waiting as: *'emotional torture... I nearly went mad'*. She attributed the significant improvement in her mental health to receiving a positive **Conclusive Grounds** decision (and **limited leave to remain**). Anila described how her close friend was hospitalised for an extended period due to mental health issues after receiving a negative NRM decision. Caroline delivered the following advice, in response to the disbelief she encountered in her interactions with statutory services:

**I'm just speaking for everybody. I'm speaking for the women, when she says she's trafficked, she's telling the truth, she's not lying. Whatever she said, just believe her.**

### 5.4 | The role of faith

Religion was an integral part of the identity of 10 participants who frequently cited faith as playing a powerful role in surviving and recovering from experiences of exploitation. As Lea articulated:

**I believe in Jesus and God, not people.  
I don't believe no one.**

Finding a suitable place of worship was a need the participants often knew instinctively how to meet. However, Xavier's traffickers expected him to attend an evangelical church; as a practising Catholic, the services failed to meet his own spiritual needs. Xavier's experience of enforced worship, in the context of his modern slavery situation, reinforces the importance of not replicating this within support arrangements.

Taylor was expected to attend church services with her NRM support provider. Although a practicing Christian, she experienced fear during services: they were too loud, the sermons uncomfortable, and she was concerned she would be recognised in such a public place. Milan participated in a bi-monthly service almost exclusively attended by people from the same country of origin, yet purposively avoided communicating with members of the congregation. Significant unease was expressed about the dangers of being recognised at church and for some there was an ongoing tension between wanting to worship while not jeopardising their personal safety.

Indeed, Sarah's experience demonstrated how faith networks can result in the perpetuation of exploitation. One year after arriving in the UK, Sarah sought help to leave her exploitative situation. She approached a 'pastor at the Church of England', he refused to help her, which served to deter Sarah from seeking help for another three years: *'it almost cost me my life'*.

Sarah estimates she endured approximately 20 different exploitative situations, prior to negotiating her exit. Later, Sarah connected with an anti-modern slavery charity and left her exploitative situation after recognising indicators of modern slavery promoted through the media.

### Summary

Each narrative conveyed the need for timely immigration and modern slavery decisions, which minimise further or compound the harm and distress already endured.

Where religious practice and worship was important to participants, they felt confident to seek this out and wanted to engage with their religion on their own terms.

## Section 6

# Conclusions and recommendations

This report has discussed the key findings from a three-year research project to investigate the roles of faith-actors and FBOs in responses to modern slavery in the UK.

### 6.1 | Conclusions

The detailed mapping of organisations involved in anti-modern slavery, analysis of modern slavery parliamentary legislative processes and inquiries, and in-depth case study organisation research has revealed the prominent and significant role played by faith actors and FBOs in responding to modern slavery through service provision, campaigning and political lobbying or influencing.

Faith networks provide access to alternative resources. So while some FBOs expressed anxiety about identifying their faith-identity in their public materials for fear of harming opportunities for funding, they also benefited from non-restricted funds from direct funding (individual donations). This allows them to offer critical services and often longer term support before or beyond the timeframe of the NRM funded period. However, by ‘filling the gaps’ FBOs may unintentionally prop up government underfunding. Access to unrestricted funds also provides FBOs with some freedom from government’s

or funders’ whims about the extent to which modern slavery is a funding priority.

There is no one Christian response to modern slavery. Different FBOs incorporate or exclude their religious underpinnings, ethos or identity in a range of ways in their everyday operations, mission and values. These organisations include those set up by people motivated by faith but where religion plays little further part in the workings of the organisation, through to organisations that maintain a close link to a church/churches, incorporate prayer as part of the working day, or require leadership or staff to share a religious identity with the founders.

The findings from the narratives of people receiving support conveyed the need for timely immigration and modern slavery decisions to reduce the harm and distress that people have endured. Where religious practices were important to participants, individuals generally felt confident to seek this out and wanted to engage with their religion on their own terms.



We did not find much direct evidence that religion is promoted to people being supported as suspected 'victims of modern slavery'. However, nearly all organisations could point to instances where clients disclosed that in their interactions with certain other organisations they had been encouraged to attend church or felt obliged in some way to share in worship practices of those who were supporting them. These anecdotes were typically associated with the same few organisations, and were not widespread across the Christian FBO sector. Indeed, some FBOs have very strong positions on non-proselytisation.

Openly stating that direct evangelism and proselytism should not be part of a care and support environment helps to bring this issue into the public eye in a

positive way. This can help in two important ways. First, to ensure people moving on from experiences of severe exploitation characterised by deception and coercion are never subjected to undue influencing as part of their care environment. Secondly, a clear non-proselytisation position can help to build trusting relationships in a sector where partnership working is considered vital. This would also act as an example to well-meaning individuals or groups new to the cause who have less clear understandings about the complexities of survivor care. Contributing a standard on freedom of thought, religion and belief to the Care Standards developed by the Human Trafficking Foundation (HTF) to shape the next victim care contract has been a major impact of this research.

### Human Trafficking Foundation Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards, 2018, p.21

#### **Freedom of thought, religion and belief:**

Services should be provided equally to those of any religion, or belief, or none. Survivors may wish to access religious support. Service providers should be prepared to signpost to pastoral care or religious support if requested. This might include, for example, directing to an appropriate local place of worship. Service providers must not engage in proselytisation – that is seeking to persuade someone to join a religion, cause or group.

#### **In order to enable freedom of thought, religion and belief it is important that service providers:**

- » Are careful about discussing religious views with, or offering to pray for, service users, as survivors are vulnerable persons and may experience this as an imposition or coercion;
- » Refrain from inviting survivors to participate in religious activities, unless the survivor has previously expressed an interest in doing so;
- » Avoid discussing personal religious views, unless such a conversation has been initiated by the survivor;
- » Are willing to facilitate and support access to faith-based services as requested by survivors as long as there are no identified risks in doing so.

## 6.2 | Recommendations

### For the Government and Home Office

- » Introduce evaluation, user feedback mechanisms, and care standards for all government-funded support services, including by ensuring the NRM is monitored by the Care Quality Commission.
- » First responders need more information and support to explain the possible and likely outcomes of an NRM referral, including likely waiting times, and the implications of a negative modern slavery or asylum determination.

### For first responders and NRM support providers

- » More care needs to be taken over clarifying rights, entitlements and potential outcomes to people who may be eligible for referral into the NRM and ensuring appropriate referral for early specialist legal advice.

### For all organisations in contact with potential survivors of modern slavery

- » Voluntary adoption of the HTF Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards and inclusion of the standards in training and development tools (Roberts, 2018).
- » Implementation of the non-proselytisation clause in the Standards through development of guidance for staff and volunteers in secular and faith-based organisations and initiatives.
- » Support organisations promoting an ethos of care and supporting survivors to make their own decisions need to ensure this is carried through into daily working practices and relationships. This will help avoid dependency and provide survivors with access to a range of resources

and support, and, more importantly, the tools to identify suitable livelihood avenues for themselves.

### For people of faith engaged in, or seeking to become more involved in, working with survivors or campaigning to end modern slavery

- » Engage with the Human Trafficking Foundation Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards, 2018 (see page 24).
- » Access opportunities for training and support from specialist service providers.
- » Refer potential survivors of modern slavery to appropriate specialist support.

These are broad recommendations. The key resources listed on page 26 provide more detailed service delivery guidance and recommendations.

# Our research

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/N014979/1). It is based at the Universities of Sheffield and Leeds, and is three years in duration from April 2017 to March 2020.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout this research. Of relevance to this report: the identities of the case study organisations are not revealed to protect their identity and that of their staff; trafficked persons interviewed for this research are anonymous (pseudonyms are used). Individuals were interviewed after getting a Conclusive Grounds decision to avoid encounters during periods of, and recovery from, acute trauma and to separate the interviewer role in this research from provision of NRM support/ advice or immigration decision making.

The analysis of visual representations was developed into a participatory project with photographer Jeremy Abrahams and three support organisations (Snowdrop, Ashiana and City Hearts) to produce a collection of images 'Unhidden in Plain Sight'.

[www.jeremyabrahams.co.uk/unhidden](http://www.jeremyabrahams.co.uk/unhidden)

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## Key resources

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“*I’m not  
just a trafficked  
person.*”

— Maria



