

# Rapid analysis findings

Annex to Policy Brief: Modern slavery and international development



Modern Slavery PEC Policy Brief 2021-2

## Overview

This rapid expert analysis considered the following question:

**What does evidence show about the links between modern slavery and each of the development issues outlined in the UK Government's seven priorities for international development?**<sup>1</sup>

This analysis has been produced by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (the Modern Slavery PEC).<sup>2</sup> The Modern Slavery PEC was established in 2019 by the investment of public funding from UK Research and Innovation's Strategic Priorities Fund to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of laws and policies designed to overcome it.

It has drawn on a focused desk-based review of academic research and reports by NGOs, governments and international agencies. The PEC has assessed and rated the quality of the evidence available on each theme. However, due to the limited time available, it should be noted that this has not been on the basis of a systematic review and analysis of all available evidence.

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of different exploitative offences, including human trafficking, forced and bonded labour and some of the worst forms of child labour. Modern slavery refers to practices in which people are trapped, controlled and exploited in situations they cannot escape. It is a complex phenomenon that can be understood as the result of overlapping and interconnected drivers and vulnerabilities, which will vary from country to country.

## Key findings

There is compelling evidence of linkages between modern slavery and all of the development issues outlined in the seven priorities in the following ways:

1. Modern slavery and wider development issues share many of the same root causes and structural drivers, such as poverty, inequality and discrimination, gender-based violence, forced displacement and weak rule of law.
2. Modern slavery can thus be directly implicated in other development issues, implying cyclical and systemic challenges. The impacts of climate change, poor access to education, Covid-19, health inequalities and conflict and humanitarian crises all indirectly increase vulnerability to modern slavery. Modern slavery itself is linked to poor health and educational outcomes. Modern slavery arises as a direct consequence of conflicts (e.g. child soldiers) or other humanitarian emergencies, as well as weak governance and rule of law, but also limits economic development and societal resilience to future crises.
3. Given the interconnectedness of these issues, there is evidence that policies formulated to respond to other development issues may have implications for modern slavery.

## Thematic Analysis

Evidence quality was rated against the criteria in Box 1.

### Evidence quality assessment - description of ratings

#### Green

There is a well-established body of evidence on this issue; the overall landscape and evidence gaps are well understood; evidence is grounded in rigorous and peer reviewed research

#### Amber

There are some rigorous and peer reviewed research studies on this issue; evidence base is growing but there remain gaps in understanding

#### Red

There are no or very few rigorous research studies on this issue; evidence base is anecdotal; data sources are very limited

**This analysis assessed the majority of the evidence as 'Amber' in terms of its quality.**

This reflects the relative lack of maturity of the evidence base and the need for further research into modern slavery. As the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) noted in its 2020 report on modern slavery<sup>3</sup>, the global evidence base in this area is underdeveloped, with significant gaps in understanding 'what works' and with programmes often selected without undertaking a systematic review of the context or ensuring alignment with other political priorities.

## Priority 1: Climate change and biodiversity

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and climate change and biodiversity?

- **There is a growing body of research mapping and theorising the nexus between modern slavery, climate change and environmental damage.**<sup>4,5</sup> Existing evidence mainly relates to certain sectors (fishing, agriculture, forestry, manufacturing) and has identified a cyclical relationship between the issues, where social and environmental harms are intertwined.
- **Firstly, there is evidence that activities associated with biodiversity loss, environmental damage or contribute to climate change may involve forced or child labour.** This research highlights how unregulated and informal industries across multiple sectors are often linked to abuses of the environment and labour rights. Studies have focused on specific case studies, such as the correlation between forced and bonded labour and illegal logging and deforestation in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil<sup>6</sup>, and the links between overfishing and exploitative labour in the Thai fishing industry.
- **Secondly, evidence suggests that the impacts of climate change are likely to increase vulnerability to modern slavery among low-income communities in the Global South through impacts on livelihoods.** For example, sudden and slow onset climate change-induced events such as hurricanes, floods and droughts, may lead to loss of livelihoods and income for vulnerable groups. This may lead to displacement of communities and in turn forced rural to urban migration which may result in individuals being more vulnerable to exploitation and forced labour.<sup>7</sup> The International Organisation for Migration has pointed to anecdotal field reports of traffickers recruiting vulnerable groups following extreme weather events, with reports of increased rate of trafficking in areas of Bangladesh following Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and in areas of the Philippines affected by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.<sup>8</sup>
- **Thirdly, there is evidence that policies being enacted to transition to green economies in response to the threat of climate change, such as restricting polluting economic activity, or reducing emissions, may have unintentional impacts on those groups** (the rural poor, marginalised communities) that are also at greatest risk from modern slavery.<sup>9</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

##### Amber

Although this is a growing area of research, there have been comparatively few rigorous studies into the climate change-modern slavery nexus. Most studies tend to focus on examining the interplay between these issues in specific sectors or geographies, drawing on either anecdotal evidence or patterns of correlation.

## Priority 2: Covid-19 and global health security

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and Covid-19 and global health security?

- **Evidence demonstrates the damaging effects of modern slavery on health** – both physical and mental health of individual victims, and population level health. Survivors often have unmet health needs and poor access to health services and modern slavery both exacerbates and may lead to intergenerational health inequalities, with disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable, such as women and girls.<sup>10</sup>
- **There are growing calls in the research literature for taking a 'public health approach' to addressing modern slavery**, for example borrowing from public health concepts such as mapping the distribution of risks at a population level and taking a preventative approach.<sup>11</sup> However, there is limited evidence about how to translate this into effective action. Suggestions include addressing the structural determinants of modern slavery (which also determine poor health) such as poverty; promoting victims' rights; training for healthcare professionals on indicators of modern slavery; and trauma-informed treatment.<sup>12</sup>
- **Emerging evidence suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating existing vulnerability to exploitation**, particularly among those working in low paid and less protected sectors and work<sup>13</sup>, including migrant workers.<sup>14,15</sup> ILO analysis found that global unemployment increased by 33 million in 2020<sup>16</sup> which will increase vulnerability, and there are concerns that school closures may lead to increases in child labour, child sexual exploitation and child marriage.<sup>17</sup>
- **The pandemic has significantly disrupted global supply chains**, with reports of large-scale cancellation or non-payment of production orders by large brands as demand dropped. There are reports of suppliers being unable to pay wages, and many have furloughed workers or terminated their employment, leaving migrant workers stranded, then re-hiring workers on a more casual basis.<sup>18</sup>
- **There are concerns among experts that the effects of the pandemic may disrupt the response to modern slavery by Governments and businesses**. For example, reductions in law enforcement opportunities and school closures may result in missed opportunities to identify victims<sup>19</sup>; there are questions about how businesses will prioritise modern slavery risks as they manage additional supply chain pressures; and there may be reductions in Government funding allocated to addressing modern slavery.<sup>20</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

##### Amber (on health impacts)

There have been several studies examining the health impacts of modern slavery, but evidence is limited on effective health-based interventions.

##### Red (on Covid-19)

The effects of Covid-19 across the globe are still ongoing and the full impact of the pandemic on modern slavery is yet to be examined thoroughly. However, the evidence base is expected to grow over the next six months.

## Priority 3: Girls' education

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and girls' education?

- **Estimates show a significantly higher prevalence for women and girls in most forms of modern slavery due to systemic, structural and cultural factors.**<sup>21</sup> Women and girls are more likely to be subject to forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation and domestic servitude.
- **Research suggests women who experience modern slavery are likely to have a lower level of education.**<sup>22</sup> A combination of lack of access to education and poor educational outcomes leads to inter-generational poverty, and greater vulnerability to modern slavery, suggesting a preventative value of improved access to education. However, due to low economic returns, there may be a lack of incentive to complete basic schooling in rural settings.<sup>23</sup>
- **Gender disparities in education persist in Africa, Middle East and South Asia,**<sup>24</sup> often alongside higher rates of child marriage and negative effects on women's empowerment.<sup>25</sup>
- **There is mixed evidence about 'what works' to both increase school attendance and reduce child labour.** There is good evidence of the benefits of education interventions,<sup>26</sup> but the 'Promising Practices'<sup>27</sup> database of evaluations suggests that use of cash transfers as incentives for school attendance may often have limited or short-lived effects.<sup>28</sup>
- **There is growing evidence of the gendered nature of impacts relating to Covid-19.** Women and girls face particular vulnerabilities during health emergencies (repeating patterns seen with the Ebola crisis) through isolation during lockdown, effects on financial and food security, educational and workforce participation.<sup>29</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

#### Amber

There is strong evidence that greater gender equality in education has a range of social, economic and other benefits for girls and women and for the societies in which they live. Policies and programmes that target girls' education may result in reduction of prevalence of modern slavery and forced marriage, but there is as yet little direct evidence of the effectiveness of such programmes on modern slavery outcomes.

## Priority 4: Science, research, technology and data for development

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and science, research, technology and data for development?

- **There is growing interest in the role of research and technology, such as artificial intelligence and data science, to better estimate and understand modern slavery.**<sup>30</sup> There are examples of innovative partnerships between businesses and NGOs seeking to use 'big data' to address modern slavery,<sup>31</sup> or by academics using satellite technology to measure prevalence,<sup>32</sup> but it is still too early to assess the tangible benefits of this work.
- **A number of specific initiatives using technology to address modern slavery are being developed with UK involvement,** for example, mobile phone apps and worker feedback technologies designed to prevent modern slavery and protect those who are vulnerable, but the effectiveness of these is, as yet, unproven.<sup>33</sup>
- **Scientific advances, new technology and financial practices can also generate opportunities for criminals.** There is evidence of increased exploitation of women and children online during the pandemic.<sup>34</sup> Mobile phone hardware may rely on minerals where production can involve slavery via small-scale and artisanal mining, e.g. Coltan in DRC.<sup>35</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

Amber

Red

While there are a growing number of projects and initiatives seeking to use the latest technology and data-driven methods to address modern slavery, the field is very new, without strong evidence of benefits and thus a high risk one.

## Priority 5: Open societies and conflict resolution

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and open societies and conflict resolution?

- **As a human rights issue, modern slavery is a denial of individual freedoms and is linked to a lack of social protections.** Evidence highlights that there is a correlation between weak rule of law and conditions that lead to increased risk of exploitation.<sup>36</sup> The FCDO-commissioned 'Developing Freedom' report suggests that modern slavery impedes sustainable development by reducing the economic agency of those it affects, and that anti-slavery measures should be an explicit goal of development interventions to maximise sustainable outcomes.<sup>37</sup>
- **Evidence highlights that armed conflict is a direct driver of modern slavery.**<sup>38,39</sup> Conflict situations are deliberately exploited by traffickers and armed groups, for example the recruitment of child soldiers, which has been demonstrated in West African conflicts, or forcing women into sexual exploitation.<sup>40</sup>
- **Evidence also suggests that conflict situations indirectly increase vulnerability to modern slavery.** Conflict often leads to factors which increase risk of modern slavery, such as an erosion of the rule of law, increased gender-based violence or displacement of people. In addition, during conflict situations there may be an absence of protection for victims of modern slavery.<sup>41</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

#### Amber

Most evidence on this theme is based on reports from respected international organisations and considers case studies in specific geographies.

## Priority 6: Humanitarian preparedness and response

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and humanitarian preparedness and response?

- **There is a growing body of evidence showing that humanitarian crises, such as armed conflict, natural disasters and famine may lead to an increase in modern slavery and trafficking.**<sup>42</sup> Similar to findings on armed conflict (see above), the evidence suggests that crises lead to situations of increased vulnerability, due to breakdown of rule of law, displacement of people and limited social protections. In particular, children may be more vulnerable due to reduced access to education and disruption of family networks.<sup>43</sup>
- **Evidence also demonstrates that traffickers may deliberately target and exploit internally displaced people, refugees and asylum seekers,** particularly in areas where they are highly concentrated such as official and informal camps.<sup>44</sup>
- **The International Organisation for Migration suggests that humanitarian responses often overlook the risks of human trafficking.**<sup>45</sup> Experts highlight the importance of understanding vulnerabilities to modern slavery ideally before the onset of crises. Research into the ongoing humanitarian crisis in DRC pointed to lack of programmes and policies that effectively address survivors' needs.<sup>46</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

#### Amber

Most evidence on this theme is based on reports from respected international organisations and considers case studies in specific geographies. There is limited evidence on 'what works' in tackling modern slavery in humanitarian settings.

## Priority 7: Trade and economic development

### What does the evidence show about the links between modern slavery and trade and economic development?

- **There is evidence that Free Trade Agreements without protections or provisions on rights or labour standards lead to increased risks of trafficking.**<sup>47</sup> Soft law and corporate responsibility have proven ineffective in stopping human rights violations by firms in developing countries.<sup>48</sup> Analysis by the ILO points to benefits of incorporating provisions on labour standards and principles in international trade agreements, e.g. non-discrimination helping to increase women's participation in the economy, with no evidence of negative impacts on trade.<sup>49</sup>
- **Evidence from the UK suggests the harms of modern slavery generate a high social and economic cost to the state**<sup>50</sup>, and better support can have economic benefits.<sup>51</sup>
- **Interventions on modern slavery can address systemic and structural inequalities that hinder development.** The Freedom Fund's programmes on bonded labour in India have shown that a community-based, 'grass-roots' approach can tackle structural problems and deliver positive development impacts.<sup>52</sup>
- **The FCDO-commissioned 'Developing Freedom' research identified a number of ways that modern slavery impedes sustainable development.** Key findings included recommendations on approaches to trade and development to adjust the incorporation of developing economies across global value chains to reduce risks of modern slavery via 'stratification, polarisation and exploitation'.<sup>53</sup>

#### Assessment of evidence quality:

Amber

Green

There is strong evidence that approaches to trade and economic development can include policies and programmes to address modern slavery as part of a strategic approach to sustainable development.

## Endnotes

1. The seven priorities objectives are: (1) Climate Change and Biodiversity; (2) COVID and global health security; (3) Girls' Education; (4) Science, Research, Technology and data for development; (5) Open societies and conflict resolution; (6) Humanitarian preparedness and response; (7) Trade and economic development
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# MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS

POLICY & EVIDENCE CENTRE

Led by the Bingham Centre

The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to overcome it. With high quality research at its heart, the Centre brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

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

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