

Policy brief:

Modern slavery and international development



Future opportunities for policy and evidence in the UK

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Modern Slavery PEC Policy Brief 2021-2

To date, tackling modern slavery internationally has been a stated priority for the UK Government, backed by a commitment of £200million aid spending. However, the focus for the UK's international development policy is shifting, with the UK's overall aid budget planned to reduce in 2021/22 and Government efforts to be guided by seven new priorities for global action on development: climate change and biodiversity; Covid-19 and global health security; girls' education; science, research, technology; open societies and conflict resolution; humanitarian preparedness and response; and trade and economic development.

This Modern Slavery PEC* Policy Brief sets out the findings from a rapid evidence-based analysis of the links between modern slavery and the UK Government's seven priorities for international development. It outlines future opportunities for policy and evidence, to inform the UK Government's planned international development strategy.

Key findings and recommendations

- **Modern slavery results from multiple, overlapping drivers and vulnerabilities which are often also the same root causes of other international development issues.** Modern slavery impedes both human rights and economic development. Activity to address modern slavery is therefore important for achieving sustainable development.
- **There is compelling evidence of links between modern slavery and the UK Government's seven priority international development issues.** For example:
 - The effects of issues such as climate change, Covid-19, conflict and humanitarian crises **increase vulnerability to modern slavery.**
 - Modern slavery itself **is linked to negative outcomes in the seven priority areas**, such as poor health and education outcomes and limited societal resilience to crises
- **There are several opportunities for the UK's future international development strategy to be evidence-led in contributions to addressing modern slavery.**

We recommend as a priority:

- that **modern slavery considerations are better integrated into wider UK Government international development policies and programmes** ('mainstreaming'), particularly those focused on climate change and Covid-19;
- **the UK Government should focus international influencing efforts** to address modern slavery globally **through international trade policy**,
- there is **greater focus on 'what works' evidence in UK policy and programme choices** through impact evaluation and sharing best practice with other countries.

Methodology

The Modern Slavery PEC undertook a rapid and 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. However, given the rapid nature of this review, this assessment has not been made on the basis of a systematic review and analysis of all available evidence.

What is the UK's approach to addressing modern slavery internationally?

Continuing the UK's international influencing activity to eradicate modern slavery was a key commitment in the current Government's manifesto.¹ International efforts within the UK Government are primarily led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Home Office (HO).²

The UK Government has committed £200million Official Development Assistance (ODA) to address modern slavery internationally.³ This investment has initiated programmes to address the root causes of modern slavery within a range of countries overseas. Programmatic interventions include provision of victim support and reintegration services, capacity-building for law enforcement agencies and creating jobs and livelihoods. Alongside these programmes, the Home Office Modern Slavery Fund has focused on working in source countries from where a high number of people are trafficked to the UK. Separate Modern Slavery PEC research has considered the dynamics of trafficking to the UK from the top 20 source countries of potential victims identified in the UK.

The UK has also focused on bilateral and multilateral diplomacy efforts to encourage action on modern slavery within countries and at the global level.⁴ For example, in 2017, the UK launched a global Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking – a common set of principles to drive country action, and in 2019, the UK appointed a Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy to represent UK interests in international fora.

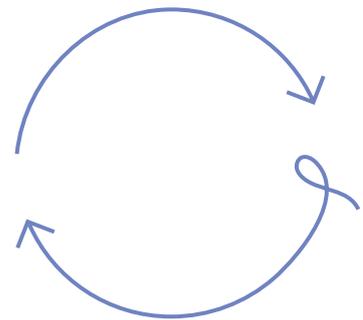
The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)'s review of the UK's approach to addressing modern slavery through the aid programme identified several areas for improvement.⁵ In their report, published in October 2020, ICAI recommended strengthening the evidence base to guide programming choices, doing more to draw on the voices of survivors, publishing a public statement of international objectives, mainstreaming modern slavery into a broader range of development programmes and strengthening engagement with other governments and the private sector. The Government has accepted or partially accepted all of ICAI's recommendations.⁶

How does modern slavery link to international development?

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of different exploitative offences and practices that are the result of overlapping and interconnected drivers and vulnerabilities, which will vary from country to country.

There is a growing body of research that advocates approaching modern slavery as a 'systemic issue' and moving beyond the predominant criminal justice narratives and responses that currently exist. This literature emphasises the importance of understanding then addressing the structural causes of modern slavery, such as vulnerabilities at individual and institutional levels, and their interplay with criminal offending.⁷

Modern slavery and wider development issues share many of the same root causes and structural drivers. Evidence has shown that individual and institutional vulnerabilities to modern slavery include poverty, inequality and discrimination, denial of human rights, power imbalances between workers and employers, gender-based violence, forced displacement and weak rule of law – which in turn are drivers of other issues, such as conflict. In addition, certain business models increase risk of forced labour in supply chains such as migrant workforces with limited labour rights, complex international supply chains that lack transparency or informal value chains supplying domestic markets.



UK Government-commissioned research has suggested that the international development sector has a “slavery blind-spot”.⁸ This study, 'Developing Freedom', found that modern slavery is often viewed as a social or criminal justice policy issue and considered a risk to manage, rather than anti-slavery activity being a strategic factor driving policy and funding decisions.

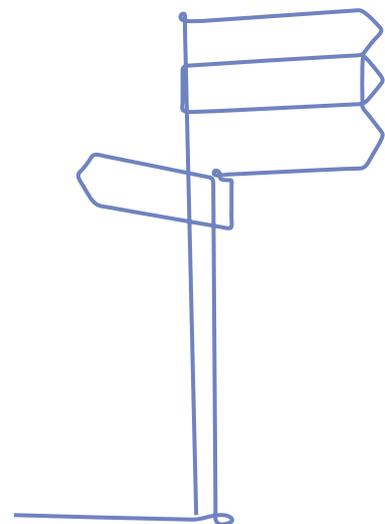
Conceptualising modern slavery as a systemic and human rights issue demonstrates that the problem of modern slavery is central to the challenge of sustainable development. Modern slavery connects to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. As well as constraining economic development, modern slavery contravenes human rights. There are specific targets on slavery and trafficking under UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, 8 and 16.⁹ The 'Developing Freedom' research suggests that anti-slavery efforts could contribute to achieving 113 of the 169 SDG Targets, especially under SDGs 1 (Ending Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work), 13 (Climate Action) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).¹⁰

How is the UK's approach to international development shifting?

- The UK's diplomacy and development efforts were integrated in a single department, the FCDO, in September 2020, linked to the ambition to create a 'Global Britain'.¹¹ The Government has stated this will enable delivery of a 'single UK strategy' for each country.¹²
- In the shorter-term (i.e. 2021/22 financial year), the UK Government plans to reduce the aid budget by around £5 billion, given the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy.^{13,14}
- The UK Government will use seven new priorities to drive international development policy and funding decisions, which do not explicitly include modern slavery.¹⁵
- The UK Government's recent Integrated Review (IR) has set out a long-term vision for the UK's strategic approach to national security and foreign policy, with plans for a new development strategy aligned to the IR. The IR re-affirms the Government's commitment to protect victims of modern slavery, human trafficking and exploitation.^{16,17}

These shifts are taking place against the backdrop of the ongoing significant health, social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and a changing world order.

Global drivers of change over the next decade include the increasing effects of climate change; the increasing reliance on technology with growing digital inequality; a shift in the global economic centre of gravity towards Asia and intensified power competition including US-China tensions.¹⁸ The UK is also facing choices about how to negotiate its relationship with Europe and the rest of the world following exit from the European Union. The change of US administration in 2021 is expected to lead to a greater focus on multilateralism and the international rules-based world order.¹⁹ On modern slavery specifically, early signs suggest the US administration will shift its focus on human trafficking to be more rooted in social justice and equity, with increased focus on labour trafficking, and will mainstream anti-trafficking efforts into other areas of Government policy.²⁰



How is modern slavery relevant to the Government's seven priorities for international development?

To inform ongoing international development policy decisions on modern slavery in this wider context, the Modern Slavery PEC has conducted a rapid analysis of the existing evidence base to consider how modern slavery relates to the Government's seven priorities for development. The PEC has also assessed the quality of evidence against the criteria in Box 1, with the majority of the evidence rated 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 ICAI review noted²¹, the global evidence base on modern slavery is underdeveloped, with significant gaps in understanding 'what works'.

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

Overall, there is compelling evidence of links between modern slavery and all of the development issues outlined in the seven priorities (Table 1). Modern slavery is directly implicated in international 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. Experiencing modern slavery is also linked to poor health and lower educational outcomes. Modern slavery arises as a direct consequence of conflicts (e.g. child soldiers) or other humanitarian emergencies, and is associated with weak governance and rule of law. Modern slavery impedes both economic development and human rights, limiting societal resilience to future crises.

Given the interconnectedness of these issues, policies formulated to respond to other development issues may have implications for modern slavery and this presents opportunities for preventing modern slavery.

The full rapid analysis is outlined in Annex A and summarised in Table 1.²²

UK government priority for international development	What does evidence show about links between modern slavery and this priority?	Evidence strength rating
Climate change and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities associated with biodiversity loss, environmental damage or which contribute to climate change have been shown to involve forced or child labour in certain contexts and sectors, such as deforestation in the Amazon and overfishing in the Thai seafood industry. • The impacts of climate change-induced events (such as drought and floods) are likely to increase vulnerability to modern slavery among low-income communities in the Global South through negative impacts on livelihoods. • Policies being enacted to respond to the threat of climate change, such as restricting polluting economic activity, may have unintentional impacts on those groups (the rural poor, marginalised communities) that are also at greatest risk from modern slavery. 	
Covid-19 and global health security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern slavery has damaging effects on health at individual and population level. Survivors often have unmet health needs and poor access to health services. Modern slavery both exacerbates and may lead to health inequalities, with disproportionate impacts on the vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as women and girls. 	Health
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating existing vulnerability to exploitation, particularly among those working in low paid and less protected sectors and work, including migrant workers. There are concerns among experts that the effects of the pandemic may disrupt the response to modern slavery by Governments and businesses for example school closures leading to increased risk of child labour. 	Covid-19
Girls' education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimates show a significantly higher prevalence for women and girls in most forms of modern slavery due to systemic, structural and cultural factors. • Women who experience modern slavery are likely to have a lower level of education and gender disparities in education persist in Africa, Middle East and South Asia, often alongside higher rates of child marriage and negative effects on women's empowerment. • There is mixed evidence about 'what works' in the longer-term to both increase school attendance and reduce child labour. 	

UK government priority for international development	What does evidence show about links between modern slavery and this priority?	Evidence strength rating
<p>Science, research, technology and data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 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, but the effectiveness of these is, as yet, unproven • Scientific advances, new technology and financial practices can also generate opportunities for criminals. 	
<p>Open societies and conflict resolution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a human rights issue, modern slavery is a denial of individual freedoms and is linked to a lack of social protections. There is a correlation between weak rule of law and conditions that lead to increased risk of exploitation • Armed conflict is a direct driver of modern slavery. Conflict situations are deliberately exploited by traffickers and armed groups, for example the recruitment of child soldiers and sexual exploitation. 	
<p>Humanitarian preparedness and response</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanitarian crises, such as armed conflict, natural disasters and famine may indirectly increase vulnerability to modern slavery due to erosion of the rule of law, increased gender-based violence, displacement of people and absence of social protections. • 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 • Existing humanitarian responses often overlook the risks of human trafficking. Experts highlight the importance of understanding vulnerabilities to modern slavery ideally before the onset of crises. 	
<p>Trade and economic development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Trade Agreements without protections or provisions on rights or labour standards lead to increased risks of trafficking. Analysis by the ILO points to benefits of incorporating provisions on labour standards and principles (such as non-discrimination) in international trade agreements, help to increase women's participation in the economy, with no evidence of negative impacts on trade. • The harms of modern slavery generate a high social and economic cost to the state. • There are a number of ways that modern slavery impedes sustainable development. 	

What are further opportunities for policy and evidence on modern slavery and international development, for 2021 and beyond?

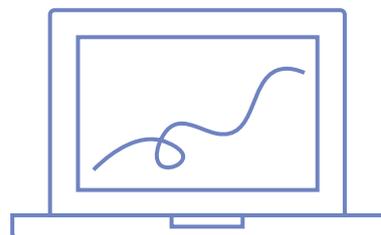
There are multiple opportunities where UK research, policy and programming, adopting an approach rooted in human rights, could maximise impact for addressing modern slavery within these seven international development priorities.

The opportunities have been grouped around three themes: mainstreaming, influencing and research, in line with themes identified in the ICAI review on modern slavery. The opportunities below should not be considered a comprehensive set of proposals for addressing modern slavery, given the rapid nature of this analysis, however, they provide a starting point for consideration of modern slavery in the future development strategy and in the PEC's future research agenda.

Opportunity area: mainstreaming

There are opportunities to mainstream modern slavery considerations into existing UK Government funded development programmes and this area offers high potential for impact on reducing modern slavery given the scale of these programmes.

- Across all countries, the impacts of climate change and Covid-19 are expected to be severe and there is evidence of strong interconnectedness between these issues and vulnerability to modern slavery. Existing development policies and programmes to address climate change and Covid-19 should be prioritised for review of opportunities to mainstream modern slavery considerations.
- Evidence suggests conflict and humanitarian crises exacerbate vulnerability to modern slavery. Countries facing humanitarian crises and conflict should consider mainstreaming anti-slavery activity into existing conflict resolution and humanitarian preparedness and response activities, including safeguarding processes and the provision of basic services.



Opportunity area: influencing

There are opportunities to leverage the UK's global role on modern slavery to influence at the international level for greater emphasis on modern slavery considerations in wider development and trade activities, for example:

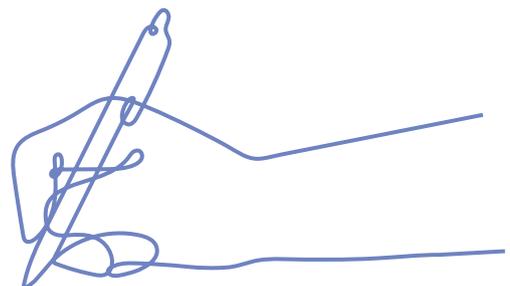
- The UK Government is shaping future trade policy with a commitment that increased trade is not based on the exploitation of workers.²³ As a priority, given the strength of evidence on potential impact, the Government should consider how to ensure free trade agreements include a strong focus on fair treatment of workers to reduce risks of modern slavery.
- Through the single UK strategies for each country, there are opportunities for the UK Government to continue and strengthen existing diplomatic efforts to influence partner governments, UK businesses in-country and suppliers to Government to take action to address modern slavery including in their supply chains.

- Building on the UK Call to Action²⁴, the Government could use upcoming international and multilateral events and initiatives to raise the profile of modern slavery and encourage relevant countries to set out how they are implementing the Call to Action within countries and across supply chains. Opportunities include UK presidency of COP26 and G7, the 2021 International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, Alliance 8.7²⁵ and Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) 2021.

Opportunity area: research

There are gaps in understanding on key issues for modern slavery such as 'what works', prevalence and a need for further research to improve the evidence base which informs policy and programmes. The Government has accepted ICAI's recommendation to implement a more systematic approach to filling evidence gaps on modern slavery, this could encompass the following considerations:

- As a priority, given the scale of current UK Government aid investment, existing modern slavery programmes should include a greater focus on impact evaluation within programme design, to generate better evidence on 'what works' in addressing modern slavery. Impact evaluation should draw on best practice for safeguarding in international development research²⁶, to ensure that impact evaluation focuses on principles of equity and survivor involvement.
- More systematic research is needed to map the links between modern slavery and the seven priorities for international development at a more granular level within countries to inform the single UK country strategies. In line with best practice, research should involve survivors to bring a more accurate picture of modern slavery. There are opportunities to further focus existing research programmes, such as Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) research in India and Bangladesh, to give more consideration to these areas.
- Building on the UK's commitment to improving the evidence base on modern slavery, there are opportunities to work with researchers and the Modern Slavery PEC, which has a work strand on modern slavery and international development, to increase uptake of evidence in policymaking.
- There is significant potential to leverage the UK's advantage as a global science power to attract partnerships and collaboration on modern slavery research. For example, building on the achievements of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The UK Government should share best practice on 'what works' in modern slavery programming with other countries with a view to developing shared frameworks for evidence standards.



Endnotes

1. Conservative Party Manifesto (2019) https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf page 53 notes "We will continue our campaigns to promote international media freedom and to eradicate human trafficking and the scourge of modern slavery."
2. UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/927111/FINAL_-_2020_Modern_Slavery_Report_14-10-20.pdf
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2020) The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/the-uks-approach-to-tackling-modern-slavery-through-the-aid-programme/>
6. HMG Response to the ICAI recommendations on: UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme (2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmg-response-to-the-icai-recommendations-on-uks-approach-to-tackling-modern-slavery-through-the-aid-programme>
7. For example: the UN University 'Developing Freedom' research (footnote 8) conceptualises modern slavery as a phenomenon that arises from the intersection of individual-level vulnerabilities and the wider structural or institutional environment in ways that enable exploiter strategies to emerge; Public Health England [commissioned-research](#) has recommended viewing modern slavery through a public health lens in order to understand population and individual level vulnerabilities and risk factors; [IOM/Bedfordshire University research](#) has considered the IOM's determinants of migrant vulnerability model in context of human trafficking, conceptualising vulnerabilities at individual, household and family, community and structural levels; while [commentators have questioned](#) the suitability of existing global legal frameworks for addressing modern slavery as a systemic issue.
8. James Cockayne, Synopsis, Developing Freedom: The Sustainable Development Case for Ending Modern Slavery, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking (New York: United Nations University, 2021)
9. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
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11. UK Government Press Release (2020) Prime Minister announces merger of Department for International Development and Foreign Office <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-merger-of-department-for-international-development-and-foreign-office>
12. Prime Minister Oral Statement to Parliament, 16 June 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-statement-to-the-house-of-commons-16-june-2020>
13. House of Commons Library Insight (2020) Spending Review: Reducing the 0.7% aid commitment <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/spending-review-reducing-the-aid-commitment/>
14. Written Statement UIN HCWS735 Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs: Development Update (2020) <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-01-26/hcws735>
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17. Written Statement UIN HCWS735 Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs: Development Update (2020) <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-01-26/hcws735>
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19. The Economist: The World in 2021
20. [National Freedom Day: Deepening Our Resolve To Fight Human Trafficking - United States Department of State](#)
21. Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2020) The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-modern-slavery-review_FINAL.pdf
22. Underpinning evidence base for this analysis, including references, is in Annex A
23. Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner exchange of letters with Department for International Trade Ministers, September-October 2020 <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1557/iasec-exchange-of-letters-with-liz-truss-mp-secretary-of-state-for-international-trade-october-2020.pdf>
24. UK Government (2017) A Call to Action to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-call-to-action-to-end-forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking>
25. Alliance 8.7 is a global partnership committed to achieving Target 8.7 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals ("Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.") <https://www.alliance87.org/>
26. UKCDR (2020) Guidance on Safeguarding in International Development Research <https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/170420-UKCDR-Guidance-for-Safeguarding-in-International-Development-Research.pdf>

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.

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