



# Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery

Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery (HTMS) are said to be invisible crimes but every country across the world is affected by this crime against humanity, with experts estimating that more people are trapped in slavery today than at any point in history.

Human dignity is the cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching and HTMS is an offence against human dignity as it discards the inherent rights of the individual in targeting and exploiting the vulnerable.

The Pope has highlighted the plight of those trafficked and enslaved, recognising them as the most dehumanised and discarded people in the modern world, whilst noting HTMS to be “an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ” (Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the International Conference on Combating Human Trafficking, 10 April 2014.) The Pope has called upon the global community to mobilise and combat the phenomenon of HTMS together, committing to upholding the inalienable dignity of each and every human being (Pastoral Orientations).



**“Human trafficking disfigures dignity. Exploitation and subjugation limit freedom and turn people into objects to use and discard. And the system of trafficking profits from the injustice and wickedness that oblige millions of people to live in conditions of vulnerability”.**

Pope Francis, World Day of Prayer & Reflection Against Human Trafficking 2023

# WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING & MODERN SLAVERY (HTMS)?

**Human Trafficking** is internationally defined to include the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, through the use of threats, fraud, coercion or deception. It involves the abuse of an individual's position of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation for profit. It is important to note that trafficking does not require individuals to be transported across borders and can occur within one country.

**Modern Slavery** is a term mainly used in the UK and defined in the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 to include the exploitation of a person via slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour. The Act also includes human trafficking as a form of modern-day slavery.

**Exploitation** can take many forms, with some individuals being exploited a number of times in multiple ways. Some forms of exploitation are:

- Sexual exploitation
- Forced labour
- Criminal exploitation
- Forced marriage
- Child slavery

## How many people are affected?

HTMS impacts men, women and children of all ages and backgrounds. Victims are primarily targeted due to their existing vulnerabilities which make them targets for fraud and deception. Such vulnerabilities are often the result of poverty, exclusion, conflict, and a failure by the authorities to ensure adequate support and protections.

**It is estimated that there are almost 50 million people trapped in slavery worldwide, and the Covid-19 pandemic alongside other world crises, including climate change, further exacerbate the risks and adversely impact the most vulnerable in society. Another such factor is the cost-of-living crisis which has impacted many families across the UK and made people more vulnerable to exploitation[1].**

The UK Government estimates that around 10,000 people in the UK are in modern slavery, but HTMS experts have estimated a much higher figure of 100,000 people. Given the nature of the crime, it is difficult to know the exact figure, however, the number of people identified as victims of HTMS has been increasing yearly, with over 12,000 referrals to the authorities in 2021 alone [2].

The HTMS Helpline noted that 2022 was its busiest year on record with 9,779 calls, indicating 6,516 potential HTMS victims from 99 different nationalities.

# WHAT IS BEING DONE TO TACKLE HTMS?

Within CSAN we have a number of dedicated organisations working to support survivors of HTMS, including **The Medaille Trust** and **St John of God Hospitaller Services (SJOG)** who are two of the largest safe house providers across the UK. Another is **Bakhita House**, a safe house for women and part of Caritas Westminster. **Stella Maris** is the largest ship visiting organisation in the world and working to combat HTMS in the maritime industry. There are many other organisations within the Network who employ a HTMS lens in their work to identify vulnerabilities and potential for exploitation, such as **The Passage**, a homelessness charity. You can learn more about our members on our website: <https://www.csan.org.uk/member/>.

Internationally, there are a number of organisations working across countries to support vulnerable communities and raise awareness of HTMS at all levels. **The Santa Marta Group** brings together leaders from civil society, law enforcement, business as and faith communities to tackle HTMS. The Arise Foundation works on the frontlines to tackle the root causes of HTMS, providing support to local communities to empower them.

In the UK, **The Clewer Initiative** also provide some great resources for individuals and communities to utilise and raise awareness, whilst helping to create safe spaces. Unseen UK is a nationwide charity running the HTMS helpline and supporting survivors, whilst also working closely with communities and government to tackle HTMS.

## What can you do in your community?

### **SPOT THE SIGNS:**

There are many signs which may indicate someone is being exploited and a potential victim of HTMS. Some general signs include:

- Isolation
- Restricted freedom of movement
- Resistance to seek help
- Poor living conditions
- Signs of physical or psychological abuse

You can learn more about this on the Unseen website:

<https://www.unseenuk.org/about-modern-slavery/spot-the-signs/>

If you believe someone to be in immediate danger, please call the police on 999.

If you wish to report a crime anonymously, you may call Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111.

## **SAFE SPACES:**

If each community is able to take charge and ensure local businesses are free from HTMS, we can create change across the UK.

We ask you to reacquaint yourself with your high street and your local community. Are there any businesses that raise suspicions? Car washes and nail salons have featured in the news regularly due to HTMS concerns, with many of these businesses found to be trafficking people into the UK and exploiting them for their labour. Whilst this is not the case for every car wash and nail salon on the high street, if you have any concerns about any business, we encourage you to report it to the police and ask them to follow up.

Have a look at the sample letters provided by **Santa Marta** in their handbook for ideas on what to include in letters to Police heads, council leaders and MPs.

## **SUPPLY CHAINS:**

Reflecting on Pope Francis' words about 'our common home', we encourage you to utilise your purchasing power and consider the origins and supply chain of the products you purchase – your clothes, your groceries, and your technology.

There are many alternatives available thus allowing for an easy switch, but we also encourage you to question the businesses you purchase from about their choices and encourage them to change their practices. This can be as simple as speaking to the owner of your local shop or writing to big businesses in your area to express your concern.

Large businesses are required to publish Modern Slavery Statements – you can check their compliance online: <https://tiscreport.org/>.

**“We recognise that trafficking and slavery are exacerbated by a lack of accessible alternatives for migratio or seeking sanctuary - efforts to tackle trafficking and slavery must therefore go beyond more active law enforcement; we also need to support people to flourish in their homelands, establish more safe routes for migrants and refugees, and work to eliminate the demand for those services that slave labour continues to meet.”**

Principle 18, Love The Stranger

## **REFERENCES:**

[1] Walk free report, <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

[2] <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/slavery-uk/>.