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| |  | | --- | | **Five myths about modern slavery in rural areas** | |

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| |  | | --- | | **Myth 1: Modern slavery is an urban thing.**  **Wrong!** Modern slavery is present in all communities. In cities, when streets are full of people and activity, it can be hidden amongst the hustle and bustle. In rural areas, it is often hidden in remote locations, off the beaten track.  **Myth 2: The only form of modern slavery in rural areas is forced labour** **Wrong!** Every form of modern slavery is possible in rural areas. Forced labour is common but so is sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and county lines. In fact, over the last few years, there has been a growing trend for criminal gangs to rent remote holiday cottages and turn them into “pop up brothels”, keeping women against their will and selling their services online.  **Myth 3: Forced labour is only present on farms and in factories** **Wrong!** Labour exploitation is the second most common form of modern slavery in the UK and can occur in every sector and industry. It is particularly prevalent in the agriculture, horticulture, food processing and packaging, shellfish gathering, warehousing and logistics, beauty, hotels, catering, cleaning, construction, manufacturing, and car wash sectors.  **Myth 4: If slaves are found in a business, it is the fault of the employer** **Wrong!** It can be extremely hard to spot signs of modern slavery and criminal exploiters go to great lengths to hide the evidence. They are extremely savvy and sometimes provide forged documents to get past reputable employers who are doing the appropriate checks. What’s more, workers who are employed in lawful employment can still be subjected to exploitation outside of their working environment, in their home lives. That is why it is so important that employers know the signs to look out for.  **Myth 5: There is nothing that can be done to prevent modern slavery in rural areas** **Wrong!** We all have a part to play in knowing what to look out for. Spotting signs of modern slavery and reporting suspicions to the Police could result in victims being rescued and criminal networks thwarted. Also, if employers know how to follow best practice recruitment policies and find licensed labour providers, they will be able to avoid traffickers and illegal labour providers. | |

**Last Summer, The Clewer Initiative and partners launched the Farm Work Welfare App.**

The content has recently been updated, ready for the 2021 picking season. If you work in the rural economy, it is an essential tool to help you navigate the challenges of seasonal recruitment.

*What?*

The Farm Work Welfare App (FWWA) was created to provide helpful information and guidance to employers and workers involved in the fresh produce supply chain. It is focused on the welfare and well-being of workers, recruitment best practice and recognising, reporting and preventing modern slavery and labour exploitation.

It provides employers with easy access to information on how to follow best practice, find licensed labour providers, guard against worker exploitation and report concerns. It helps workers, particularly those who are new to seasonal work or working in the UK, find out what to expect from the work, understand their rights, learn how to spot the signs of labour abuse and where to get help if they are concerned.

*Who?*

The FWWA was developed last year by The Clewer Initiative, in partnership with the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), the National Crime Agency (NCA), the Fresca Group, the National Farmers Union (NFU), the Modern Slavery Helpline (MSH) and the Church Commissioners for England.

*Why?*

Seasonal, labour intensive sectors, such as agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering and food packaging and processing, are particularly vulnerable to labour exploitation by criminals. Businesses need to recruit huge numbers of workers and often rely on third party labour providers such as gang masters or recruitment agencies. This provides a window of opportunity for traffickers, illegal labour providers and criminals in the community to exploit. Exploited or abused workers are often hidden amongst a larger workforce where their circumstances can go unnoticed.

Many seasonal workers come from overseas, are not fluent in English and do not understand their worker rights within the UK. This can make them particularly susceptible to exploitation.

Pressure on these sectors has intensified due to restrictions on movement caused by the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit-related immigration changes. With fewer legal migrant workers available, criminal exploiters see a greater opportunity for profit.

All these factors have created a perfect storm and mean there is even more urgency for farmers, growers and processors to have the very best employment practices in place and know how to recognise signs of modern slavery.

To find out more about the Farm Work Welfare App, click [here](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/farmworkwelfare)

You can also download [posters](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/resources) about the Farm Work Welfare App to display in places where employers or workers may congregate. The posters are available in English, Albanian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian and Vietnamese. Please help us spread the word.

31 MARCH 2021

**AN EMERGING TREND - MODERN SLAVERY OUTSIDE THE EMPLOYMENT CHAIN Over the last couple of years, modern slavery organisations have come across slaves that have been lawfully employed but exploited in their home life.**

This means ethical employers need to be even more vigilant to spot warning signs as any of their workers could be affected.

So, what does ‘exploitation in the community’ look like? Instead of in the workplace, exploiters control workers via their home life, transportation and/or accommodation. For example, acting as a landlord, translator or 'friend' who can help the worker find work or accommodation. Exploiters will often convince workers that they are part of the worker's employment even when they are not, threatening the loss of work as a way to control them and prevent them from seeking help within the workplace. These exploiters isolate workers, restricting their freedom and controlling them - often through threats, violence or by forcing them into debt bondage.

Exploiters can force or ‘help’ workers to open bank accounts for their wages and may escort them to the bank, tell them what to say or speak on their behalf. They take control of banking documentation, bank cards and future bank correspondence and use the bank accounts to gain other credit accounts or to commit financial frauds in the victim's name.

Once in control of the bank account and therefore the workers’ wages, the exploiter controls workers through money and debt. They often inflate genuine costs, such as for accommodation and travel to and from work, and create artificial costs such as fees for finding the worker a job. Not only will exploiters make deductions direct from the wages paid into the bank account, leaving the worker with little money to survive on, they also find ways to inflate the ‘debt’ owed by the worker. This is how a worker unknowingly becomes a victim of debt bondage with the exploiter keeping them trapped in a situation where they can’t work enough to pay off the ever-growing debt.

It is therefore vital that employers know how to identify and help victims like this who are being exploited outside of the workplace, in the community.

Signs to look out for:

* A labour provider holds on to a worker’s personal documentation and identification e.g passports/ID cards/bank documents
* A labour provider insists on using their own interpreters and workers are not able or willing to communicate freely and independently
* Workers have no choice in transportation or have to travel with the labour provider and pay for transport in order to work
* Workers appear to be reliant on a third party, for accommodation and food and appear to have no choice in this
* Workers are unable to produce a contract of their terms and conditions.
* The same bank account has been provided to receive wages for more than one worker.

For more information on potential signs, click [here](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/spot-the-signs).

31 MARCH 2021

**COMBATTING MODERN SLAVERY IN SOMERSET**

**David Maggs is the Team Leader for Mission and Lead for Modern Slavery at the Diocese of Bath and Wells.**

*How long have you been focusing on modern slavery in Somerset?*

Roughly four years ago, we were one of about six dioceses to start working with The Clewer Initiative. We started with several events in Wells Cathedral aimed at schools, the Church and Diocese, local politicians and people of influence and power in the local area.

*Can you tell us a bit about modern slavery in Somerset? What sorts of numbers and businesses are we talking about?*

We have directly encountered or heard reports of most types of modern slavery. This includes a couple of cases which, while not strictly slavery (in theory a person could leave), were in effect, domestic servitude with side issues of “lending” identity documents or work in a catering business as well as childcare. The most common form of slavery in the county is labour exploitation. The industries affected have included food processing and the care sector and we have been aware of a few international cases as we have a significant port. County lines is also an increasing issue – in the last six months, it has reached endemic proportions.

Officially, 62 people from the Diocesan area (which Includes North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset (BANES)) entered the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) up until March 2020. However, national figures show that probably 90-95 per cent of potential victims do not wish to enter the NRM when offered the opportunity to do so. We believe the real number of victims in the Diocese is nearer 850-900.

*What is your vision for your role? What do you believe is possible?*

I originally thought I would run a few [Hidden Voices](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/hidden-voices) courses and this would be “job done” in terms of getting the word out about modern slavery. Instead, it is now clear that each community area above around 12,000 people (e.g. a small market town and its satellite villages) could benefit from an intensive process over about a year to enable communities to build resilience to the issue. We have a long way to go, but paid resources are limited in terms of continuing the roll out – we need to train more people to deliver the Hidden Voices material and then act as local coordinators.

Our ultimate focus is to increase the number of people identified and supported and to develop alternatives to the NRM. Ultimately, knowing many people cannot stay near their place of enslavement, I would like to see a reciprocal version of the Underground Railroad – with us supporting people in Somerset who come from elsewhere and vice versa.

We want to do more in terms of smaller rural communities, where there is a need for different types of communication but the market town/larger village model could help deliver this. The issue is everywhere – a cannabis “gardener” in a small rural hamlet was identified by someone wanting to welcome the new neighbours.

*What have you done over the last four years in terms of raising awareness?*

Hidden Voices has been an amazing tool – we have run it in three locations and we had three more in planning, prior to lockdown. This has led to many opportunities to talk to groups, local leaders, the voluntary and statutory sector and most importantly, members of our communities.

Although supported by The Clewer Initiative in multiple ways as a Diocese, we have also worked as an ecumenical programme and loose network called “Hidden Voices Somerset (HVS).” Our third Hidden Voices’ group included members of the wider community beyond the church including some local Councillors and the local Mayor.

*What have you done over the last four years in terms of working with business?*

Prior to lockdown, we had started work on “Slavery-free Sedgemoor” as a prelude to “Slavery-free Somerset.”  We plan to aim it at SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) who are based in our area – rather than big national firms who mostly have their headquarters elsewhere. It involves a series of commitments and a “joining” by businesses.

We were also hoping to start engaging with farmers and local agricultural businesses at Sedgemoor Livestock Centre – a regional market for the South West and beyond. We would like to consider this, once we are fully out of lockdown.

*What have you done over the last four years in terms of victim support?*

As the reputation and work of our Hidden Voices group grows, people start telling us about situations they are concerned about. After consultation and COVID delays, Hidden Voices Somerset is being funded by the Home Office to begin a victim support project for victims of slavery and exploitation or people at risk of being so, within Somerset and North Somerset. We especially want to help those victims who do not (initially) wish to enter the NRM.

*What challenges have you faced?*

The combination of COVID and not enough resources to fulfil the potential of this work has been a massive challenge. Sometimes people attend a Hidden Voices course to find out about modern slavery but they don’t want to continue into the active phase. While understandable, this can be discouraging. Sometimes people are surprised that modern slavery is happening on their doorstep rather than 50 miles away in a big city like Bristol. In cases of exploitation when victims are being paid £2 an hour in a car wash, I have sometimes encountered the attitude “well at least they are getting something.”

*What would you say to a church or individual who was hoping to pioneer anti-slavery work in a rural setting?*

There is an incredible opportunity to take a full/whole community approach – I would recommend contacting all the homes and businesses with leaflets and using places where people gather, to talk about modern slavery. Offer to talk to any group that is willing to have you, whether this be via the church or other means. Where possible link with other villages or your nearest market town. Be careful not to “point the finger” at any one type of business – talk in general terms recognising that employers do not often know they are employing slaves.

*What are your hopes for the next year?*

I hope the victim support pilot meets a need, and that we start many more Hidden Voices Groups. We would like to focus more on county lines resilience by piloting “door to door” contact with communities at risk.

31 MARCH 2021 **HOW VULNERABLE ARE SEASONAL WORKERS TO EXPLOITATION? In March, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)** and Fife Migrants Forum (FMF) published a [report](https://www.labourexploitation.org/publications/assessment-risks-human-trafficking-forced-labour-uk-seasonal-workers-pilot) looking into the risk of human trafficking and forced labour for people coming to Scotland on the Seasonal Workers Pilot (SWP) in the horticultural sector.

The research sought to document the voices and experiences of the people who have come to Scotland on the SWP and help the UK and Scottish governments develop strategies to protect current and future workers.

The two-year SWP was announced by the UK Government in 2018 in response to concerns raised by farmers about possible labour shortages in advance of and after the UK had left the European Union. The introduction of the SWP involved establishing a new Tier 5 sponsored visa, the Seasonal Workers Visa (SWV) and appointing two licensed scheme operators (Pilot Operators) as visa sponsors. The scheme was launched in April 2019 with an annual quota of 2,500 workers. This quota was increased to 10,000 in 2020; the SWP was extended for a further year and expanded to 30,000 workers in 2021.

FLEX believes that temporary and tied migration programmes such as the SWP have a range of risks associated with their short-term nature and the limited rights afforded to workers participating in them. In addition, horticulture is a high-risk labour sector due to the nature of its product and labour supply chain, isolated workplaces, and a large migrant workforce.

To assess the risks of human trafficking for forced labour for workers on the SWV, the team at FLEX collected quantitative and qualitative data on the experiences of seasonal horticultural workers in Scotland. This data collection took place during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and so the report also documents the impact of the pandemic on workers.

Based on 146 responses from agricultural workers, including 97 SWP workers from the top four nationalities present on the scheme, the report identifies several worrying trends that suggest a serious risk that forced labour could take place on the SWP if action is not taken.

For example, 62 per cent of workers reported incurring debts to travel to the UK to work, which places them in a more vulnerable position and at risk of accepting work they might otherwise not have accepted. Some of those interviewed were living in unsafe caravan accommodation provided by their employer, creating an unhealthy dependency on their employers, and also posing a risk of meeting the International Labour Organization (ILO) risk indicator of “degrading living conditions.”

In addition, the productivity payment system (piece rate) applied to 62 per cent of SWV workers and presents a risk to workers when coupled with zero hours contracts and the reported withdrawal of promised work as a penalty for not meeting piece rate targets. Sixty-six per cent of SWV workers reported receiving threats of loss of work and 17 per cent reported threats of deportation from their employer. Two thirds of those interviewed reported being refused transfers to alternative employment.

FLEX’s chief executive, Lucila Granada, concludes: “The evidence calls for an urgent review of the scheme, and for the government to carefully consider and mitigate potential risks for workers on the Seasonal Worker Visa.”

To read the report in full, click [here](https://www.labourexploitation.org/publications/assessment-risks-human-trafficking-forced-labour-uk-seasonal-workers-pilot)

31 MARCH 2021 **COVID AND BREXIT HAVE CAUSED HAVOC FOR HORTICULTURAL BUSINESSES. The Clewer Initiative spoke to James Barnes, the chair of the Horticultural Trades Association about how a shortage of seasonal workers is affecting the UK’s horticultural businesses.**

*Can you tell us more about the Horticultural Trades Association?*

The Horticultural Trades Association is the trade body for ornamental horticultural businesses including garden centres, growers and landscapers. We support our members with practical advice, learning and development, networking and peer-support and by acting as a voice into government and in the media on the issues that impact the sector.

*What have been the main challenges faced by horticultural businesses post Brexit?*

The UK’s departure from the EU has presented several challenges to horticultural businesses, including the introduction of costly and time-consuming plant health regulations and inspections; restrictions around plant imports and exports which threaten long-standing trading relationships with the continent; specific issues for our Northern Irish members (and those who sell goods to NI) and, we predict, problems in sourcing seasonal labour in some areas of the sector.

*How many seasonal workers usually work within the sector and what proportion come from overseas?*

It is estimated some 9,500 seasonal workers normally take roles across ornamental plant and flower growing, of whom around 5,000 to 7,000 are seasonal workers recruited from overseas.

*How have horticultural businesses found workers for this picking season?*

One of our members, Varfell Farms, has seen a massive drop in the number of available pickers. As the world’s largest daffodil grower, producing half a billion stems each year at Longrock, Penzance, it would usually need around 700 pickers. This year because of the Covid pandemic and the end of free movement following Brexit, it only had 400 flower pickers. Alex Newey, the business owner, tried to recruit local pickers to plug the gap but in the end he had no choice but to let many daffodils rot in the fields. He told me: "We can’t harvest them, we don’t have enough pickers to pick them. We’re losing hundreds of thousands of pounds.”

*What are your fears for the coming months?*

As the year progresses and other seasonal horticultural products come through, we predict there will be even further impact. The shortage will affect seedlings and bedding plants as well as cut flowers.

*What would you like the Government to do to help horticultural businesses?*

The HTA is seeking a meeting with the Immigration Minister to discuss the issue of seasonal workers for ornamental horticulture. The objective of this, together with other lobbying on the subject, is to see ornamental horticulture included in the seasonal agricultural workers pilot scheme (which enables workers employed through an approved agency to temporarily travel to and work in the UK without the need to fulfil a points-based visa scheme) and increase the number of places available on that scheme.

*As businesses within the horticultural sector, and others who rely on seasonal workers, struggle to find employees, it is more important than ever that they stay alert to criminal gangs exploiting the situation. The* [*Farm Work Welfare App*](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/farmworkwelfare) *is designed to help farmer, growers and processors navigate this tricky situation.  It can be downloaded free from the Google Play and Apple App Store.*

31 MARCH 2021 **WHAT IS ROGATION SUNDAY?**

**This year Rogation Sunday falls on Sunday 9th May. But what exactly does it mark? Bishop Alastair Redfern, founder of The Clewer Initiative, provides an overview of this lesser-known church festival.**

Rogation is an ancient church festival to seek blessing for a community and its sustenance. The word rogation comes from the Latin verb rogare, meaning "to ask", which reflects the beseeching of God for protection from calamities. As the Book of Common Prayer puts it: “Rogation Days are the three days preceding Ascension Day, especially devoted to asking for God’s blessing on agriculture and industry.”

Since mediaeval times there has been a tradition of “beating the bounds” of the parish, praying for God‘s blessing upon the crops and thus the well-being of that particular settlement. It is still observed by some parishes today – with a procession, prayers and a sharing of hope in God‘s goodness to nourish every endeavour which enables people to flourish.

The Sixth Sunday of Easter (the fifth Sunday after Easter Sunday) is traditionally known as “Rogation Sunday” in the Church of England’s calendar of festivals.  This is because the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the following week are known as the “Rogation Days,” days for fasting and prayer. The Thursday of that week is the feast of the Ascension, which comes on a Thursday, the 40th day after Easter (when Easter Sunday is counted as the 1st day).

Rogation invites people to ask for blessing – for a particular place; for all its inhabitants; for every endeavour to promote the common good. It is totally inclusive – joining everyone in seeking sustenance and a commitment to play their part in its provision.

What could be a more appropriate occasion for recognising that modern slaves are hidden in many rural settings, as well as in urban areas, their “work” unrecognised, and their well-being ignored. As churches celebrate the opportunity to ask for blessing in each parish, may we recognise the realities of those denied a proper place in the community, and include in our prayers, and through our endeavours over the coming months, a commitment that they may be properly seen, set free, and enabled to make their own desires known, that they may be a precious part of the fuller unfolding of God’s goodness.

**Notes via Linda Ginn from Kathryn Anderson at MDS meeting**

Safeguarding reminder at the start: ‘Caring for you – County lines is emotive, upsetting; the video clips are challenging; look after you and others taking part; need to take a break, that’s ok, take a break; know where help can be found; Safeguarding training is essential.

What to do if you are concerned? ‘Work within your Safeguarding Policy, with advice, support from your safeguarding lead. Not sure who this is? Knowing who to contact is important.

Helpful numbers: Local Police 101, One of the helpful numbers is Crimestoppers 0800 555 111 because you are completely anonymous - [www.fearless.org/en,](https://www.fearless.org/en,)

Childline 0800 1111, Modern Slavery Helpline 08000 121 700, NAPAC-  National Association for people abused in childhood 0808 801 0331, NSPCC: 0808 800 5000

All calls are confidential.’   (Please sign up to the Clewer Newsletter if you have not already done so, via their website: [www.theclewerinitiative.org](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/))

If one person is helped it’s worth it: ‘We all have an opportunity to learn from each other…from Experiences, Insights, New Ideas, Context and Skills’.

Definition: ‘’County Lines’ is a term used when drug gangs from big cities expand their operations to smaller towns, often using violence to drive out local dealers and exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs’. Quote from Anne Longfield, Children’s Commissioner, Feb 2019: ‘The criminal gangs operating in England are complex and ruthless organisations, using sophisticated techniques to groom children and chilling levels of violence to keep them compliant. They prey upon marginalised children who have often been let down by multiple agencies. Many of these children don’t feel they have any choice about their situation’.

It is big business. Changes have led local children to use drugs. They are forced to aid drugs distribution. ‘’exploitation in coerced criminality continued to increase during 2019, overtaking both labour and sexual exploitation for the first time…AND Exploitation in county lines drugs supply remains the most frequently identified form of coerced criminality, with children representing the vast majority of victims’’.

2019 27,000 children in gangs and there is gang warfare. 34,000 children know a gang member and experience violence. A single line may make £800,000 to £8 million in some places. It is one of the most prevalent forms of Slavery. Most children are 15-17 years but some are as young as 8. In 2019 there were 3000 phone lines/deal lines – more now. Customers can order more quickly than a pizza. Who are the consumers? 91% of the children runners are male. The drugs ordered are mainly crack cocaine and powdered heroine + MDMA, Cannabis, Spice and Ecstasy.