

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

A plain language guide



What is the National Referral Mechanism?

The 'National Referral Mechanism', or NRM, is a process for identifying victims who are exploited through **Human trafficking** and **Modern Slavery**. Through this process it should ensure that victims receive appropriate support and that their experiences are recognised.

What is Human Trafficking?

A young person should be recognised as a victim of trafficking if the following events have taken place:

The young person has been recruited: For example through promises of money, gifts, social status and/or giving them a sense of belonging and identity – we call this 'grooming'

The young person has been transported from A to B: This could be over long distances or short ones, including in the same village, town or city

The young person has been harboured: This means holding and hiding someone, for example on a farm for manual work, or in a house which has been take over as a base to deal drugs from (often called a 'trap house').

This has been done to exploit a young person for the gain of another individual. Examples include:

A young person may be sent on a train from one place to another to transport and deliver drugs. This is **criminal exploitation**.

A young person's bank account being used to hold money which has been gained illegally. This is **financial exploitation**.

A young person being made to 'work' without being paid. This is **labour exploitation**.

A young person being forced to engage in any kind of sexual activity. This is **sexual exploitation**.

All child exploitation involves an imbalance of power between the young person and those who are controlling them (for example, because of age or status).

If a young person is treated as if they are 'owned' (like a piece of property) by someone or if they are made to work somewhere and are unable to leave then this is Modern Slavery.

It is important to note that **any young person from any background** can be groomed into exploitation. Therefore, it is important to be able to spot the signs and know how to report it to ensure the young person gets the right support. The NRM is not an alternative to the normal safeguarding procedures, rather, the NRM process should complement these. So, reporting concerns to the police and your local social services is still crucial.

The NRM referral process

Parents cannot make NRM referrals themselves but certain organisations, such as the police and local authorities, have a duty to make a referral to the Home Office if they suspect someone could be a victim of human trafficking. The professionals who have a duty to make a referral are called **first responders**. Look here to find out [who can be a first responder](#).

- If signs of human trafficking or modern slavery (also known as **indicators**) are present, this should be enough for a first responder to make a referral to the Home Office.
- The Home Office will then decide if that person should be recognised as a victim of trafficking.
- Some charities can also make NRM referrals and can provide you with advice. For example you can call the [NSPCC helpline](#) or the [Modern Slavery helpline](#) for support.

What does the NRM decision mean?

The decision-making process has two steps:

1. A **Reasonable Grounds Decision** should be made within five days.
This means: 'I **suspect but cannot prove** that they are a victim'.
2. Following this, a final **Conclusive Grounds Decision** should be made.
This means: 'It is **more likely than not** that they are a victim'.

Additional information can be sent to the Home Office until they make their final Conclusive Grounds decision. Any relevant new information will help them with their decision. **While parents cannot make an NRM referral, they can send in new information after the referral.** We would encourage for this to be done in partnership with the person or organisation who initially made the referral, if possible. New information should be sent to nationalreferralmechanism@homeoffice.gov.uk.

If a young person is identified as a victim of trafficking, this should affect the way they are treated if they are arrested or facing charges for crimes committed as a direct result of their exploitation. In this situation trafficking victims also have the right to use a legal defense called the 'Modern Slavery Defense' and should discuss this with their lawyer.

If a young person receives a positive Conclusive Grounds Decision from the Home Office, then they should be provided with access to support to help them recover from their experiences. This could include therapy. This support should be provided by social services and the NRM decision should inform their safeguarding response. Parents can also use the positive decision to advocate for support from social services. The young person may also be able to access support from the [Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service](#).

If a young person is seeking asylum or protection in the UK then the NRM decision can also impact this. In some cases, a positive NRM decision may lead the Home Office to grant a young person discretionary leave to remain in the UK. It is important that the young person's immigration solicitor is involved at the earliest opportunity, ideally before the NRM has been submitted. They can then provide advice on the NRM and its connection to the young person's protection claim.

What if you are not happy with the NRM decision?

The young person and their parents/carers are entitled to ask for the NRM decision to be reconsidered by the Home Office if they are unsatisfied with the outcome. They also have the right to legal representation to challenge the decision. This would need to be done by a Public Law solicitor (legal aid may be available for this depending on the circumstances). You can find a Public Law solicitor [here](#).



Where to get Help

If you are ever concerned that any child is at risk of harm, please contact the **Police** on **101** (non-emergency) or **999** (emergency), then explain that you are concerned that a young person is being trafficked.



For more information on child criminal exploitation or modern slavery, find more information on The Children's Society website (www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information). To get help or talk through any concerns you have you can call the **Modern Slavery Helpline** on **0800 121 700** or the **NSPCC Helpline** on **0808 800 5000**.

If the young person doesn't feel comfortable talking openly about their situation, or perhaps they want to talk, they can always call **Childline** on **0800 1111** or [chat to them online](#). In some areas of the UK children can access the support of the **Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service**. To find out if a young person can receive this support you can call **Barnardo's 24-hour Helpline** on **0800 043 4303**.

We would also encourage you to call **your local authority safeguarding team**.