

Police chief warns that slavery is not a thing of the past

Today marks international Anti-Slavery Day and Assistant Chief Constable Judi Heaton is reminding everyone that slavery is not a thing of the past but continues to blight Scotland's communities

Human Trafficking is the illegal trade in human beings, both adults and children, for the purpose of commercial exploitation.



Victims of human trafficking are often the most vulnerable members of a community however, there is no such thing as a typical victim.

She said: "Today marks International Anti-Slavery day and a reminder to us all that slavery is not a thing of the past. Borders mean nothing to traffickers, their trade has a global reach.

"Last month a long investigation resulted in a day of enforcement in Scotland, England and Romania targeting a gang suspected of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

"24 people were arrested, 10 in the UK and 14 in Romania. The young female victims had been trafficked from Romania to the UK and finally here into Scotland.

"Trafficking investigations are long and complex. They involve agencies in the UK and across the world all working together.

"Last year after a long investigation involving Scotland, Slovakia and Europol, a Slovakian crime gang was sentenced to 36-years for trafficking, forcing victims into prostitution and sham marriages.

"Earlier this month we welcomed two officers from Vietnam. They will work with our National Human Trafficking Unit, NCA and Border Force identifying people who prey on others hoping for a better life.

"Modern day slavery is constantly changing, Traffickers are always looking for new ways to make money, even during a Global Pandemic.

"In Scotland we have seen a move from urban to rural settings. From car washes and nail bars to farms, fisheries and food sectors. This summer we have targeted these industries visiting premises and talking to employers.

"Being enslaved and having your freedom taken away from you must be horrific. Traffickers don't care about victims nor do they care about our communities.

"Tackling the traffickers means working together within our

communities and international borders.

“Slavery is not a thing of the past, it is happening now.

“We are increasing our capability but it is up to us all to spot the signs and help those being exploited to stand up against traffickers and protect our communities.”

Victims are known to come from numerous continents such as Asia, Africa and (Eastern) Europe. They may arrive in your community after being kidnapped, smuggled or tricked by a friend offering a job and the opportunity of a new life, however soon discover that their lives are not their own and are forced into a life of exploitation with no way of escaping.

Trafficking victims are often forced into prostitution, exploitative labour, the illegal drugs trade, stealing or domestic slavery to pay back the debt that traffickers claim they owe them for travel. Victims are trapped in this life with limited freedom or options. They regularly have their identity documents removed and are often subjected to physical and mental abuse, torture and rape.

Human Trafficking exists in communities across Scotland and also can involve people who are resident legally in the country. The industry of trafficking people has become so sophisticated that it often goes unnoticed and assistance from the public is crucial to identify potential signs of Human Trafficking within your community and reporting any concerns to the police.

Potential Signs of Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking can happen anywhere, victims could be living next to you. Look for the signs:

Sexual Exploitation

Multiple female foreign nationals living at the same address.

Occupants are rarely seen outside.

Occupants of premises change regularly.

Male callers day and night staying for only a short time.

Sexual debris such as condoms, call cards, advertisements.

Forced Labour/Domestic Servitude

Migrant workers who have the right to free movement in and around the United Kingdom, but have limitations placed on their employment may be exploited through Industries such as agriculture, factories, hotels and restaurants.

Large number of foreign nationals living in the same address.

Occupants change regularly.

Van transported at unusual times of the day and/or night.

Workers movements are monitored and/or controlled by others.

Workers may seem fearful of employers, police or any other external agency and poorly integrate with the wider community.

Employers, or someone else, is holding their passport and/or legal documents.

Workers have no days off or holiday time.

Workers display signs of physical abuse i.e. bruises, cuts and signs of untreated medical problems.

Workers display signs of malnutrition, dehydration, exhaustion and poor personal hygiene.

Domestic Servitude is where an adult or child is forced into the role of a servant. This often occurs within a residential address. Signs to look out for include:

The person is rarely allowed out of the house, unless their

employer or guardian is with them.

They have no private space or a proper place to sleep i.e. on the floor or sofa.

They have a poor diet or are given the family's leftover food to eat.

They are subject to mental, physical, sexual abuse, threats or other cruelty.

A child, may have poor attendance at school, no access to education and no time to play with its peers.

There is no interaction with the family, friends or other authorities.

If you suspect there are people who have been trafficked into your community or you have concerns about an adult or child whom you think may be being exploited, please report this to Police Scotland on 101 or alternatively to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111, where your call will be treated in confidence.