

Police launch campaign to raise awareness of modern slavery

Communities and businesses are being urged to be vigilant and report signs of modern slavery as Police Scotland launches a new campaign to raise awareness of the issue.

During 2020, 228 referrals were received by police warning of people across Scotland who may have been the victim of labour exploitation. The number of referrals received each month fluctuated throughout the year as Covid-19 restrictions were lifted and imposed, and there are fears many potential crimes have gone unreported as a result of victims being less visible. This figure is also expected to significantly increase as restrictions ease again.



Men, women and children of all ages and backgrounds can fall victim to exploitation at work being paid little or no legal wage, being controlled and their choices limited with poor working conditions putting their safety at risk. Victims of labour exploitation are mostly – but not exclusively – men and boys, and intelligence shows traffickers target the most vulnerable such as migrants and people without jobs.

Both UK residents and foreign nationals can be targeted, with many victims controlled long before they reach the UK. In other instances victims are targeted after they arrive either as legitimate workers or illegal migrants.

Labour exploitation often occurs in criminal enterprises but it can also happen in legitimate industry sectors, with agriculture including fruit picking and food processing, construction, packaging, and offshore fishing regarded as being most at risk in Scotland.

Today, Police Scotland is launching a campaign to highlight the issue, asking people to be aware and vigilant of the signs of exploitation, and explaining what people should do if they have concerns. Over the next five weeks, adverts will run on television and social media, while a dedicated website has been created containing further information and advice.

Assistant Chief Constable Judi Heaton, Police Scotland's lead for Major Crime, Public Protection and Local Crime, said: "Modern slavery is a crime and it's happening here and now, in Scotland. Many people may think it won't happen where they live or work, however the reality is it can happen anywhere – in your community, in your industry – and you can help stop it.

"Not all victims see themselves as victims – they may have made a choice to come to Scotland on a promise of a better life, fallen into the hands of traffickers and then found themselves victims of horrific deception and exploitation.

"It is absolutely vital that we increase awareness of the warning signs so that reporting can increase. In particular it is absolutely crucial that the business community is aware of the important role they must play in identifying and reporting exploited workers and business owners, employees, trade unions, bank and benefits staff to name just a few, can all play a vital role by reporting their concerns.

"Take a close look at supply chains, tell your customers and suppliers what you're doing to prevent exploitation, and make it your duty to protect all workers.

"Police, other enforcement agencies and partners cannot tackle

this issue alone. We also need the public to work with us if we are to identify and help vulnerable individuals being exploited. If you suspect exploitation is happening in your community, please report it to police.”

Key signs to look out for include:

Individuals who work but have little or no money to buy their basic necessities

Workers who are made to live in poor and dirty conditions

Workers who have their time both on and off duty dictated to them

People who are nervous and scared of authority