

Faster support for child exploitation victims in expanded pilot

Eight new areas join pilot scheme reducing child trafficking victim decision times from 471 to 101 days, helping children access support faster.

From: [Home Office](#) and [Jess Phillips MP](#) Published: 2 September 2025

Child victims of exploitation and human trafficking will receive specially tailored support sooner as 8 new areas join a pilot to bring about faster decisions in their cases.

The new areas, which include Birmingham, Edinburgh and the whole of Northern Ireland, will join the successful scheme that has already lowered decision wait times for victims to 101 days, compared to 471 days in non-pilot areas.

The pilot, launched in June 2021, transfers responsibility for National Referral Mechanism decisions for child victims from the Home Office to specially trained local safeguarding teams, enabling faster, more child-focused decisions about protection and care. This mechanism is the UK's framework for identifying and supporting victims of modern slavery and the pilot has improved awareness and strengthened multi-agency working.

Faster decisions mean children can begin rebuilding their lives sooner, leading to safety and stability, instead of waiting months in uncertainty about their future. The scheme puts children at the heart of decisions regarding their care, with local experts who understand their community, making choices about the support they need to recover and move forward.

Local teams of police, social workers and health professionals now work together more closely to understand each child's situation and needs. The pilot has increased awareness and understanding of modern slavery within local authorities, leading to earlier identification of potential victims and more appropriate referrals to support services.

It is also helping the government deliver on the Plan for Change, and its commitment to eliminate the backlog of cases waiting to be looked at. As of

June 2025, the backlog was just over 11,500 cases: a 61% decrease compared to its peak in 2022, and 51% lower than at the end of June 2024.

Jess Phillips, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence against Women and Girls said:

When a child falls victim to modern slavery - whether through human trafficking or in the vile county lines drug trade - they can face unimaginable trauma and lasting damage. Time is of the essence when it comes to getting them the specialist support they need to heal and be children again.

This Devolved Decision-Making pilot is delivering remarkable results - cutting waiting times by over a year means vulnerable children get the support they desperately need much faster. By expanding to 8 new areas, we're building the evidence to roll this successful approach out nationally and improve how we protect all children in our country from modern slavery.

The 8 new sites were selected through a competitive process, targeting areas that will help test the model more thoroughly ahead of a potential rollout across the entire country. Northern Ireland will operate its first pilot site covering all claims in its jurisdiction, while Hampshire will expand its existing programme to cover a wider regional model. Scotland will also receive its second pilot site, with Edinburgh joining Glasgow. Since 2021, 2 pilot sites have also operated in Wales with Cardiff and Newport.

The new areas are:

- Birmingham
- Edinburgh
- Hampshire
- Northern Ireland
- Shropshire
- Southwark
- Telford and Wrekin
- West Sussex

Wider efforts to tackle modern slavery backlogs include recruiting more than 180 new staff to reduce lengthy decision-making times and creating a more user-friendly referral form for frontline first responders.