

Anti-Trafficking and the Harm of Funding

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Abstract

This article argues that the UK government's anti-trafficking funding is mostly harmful, because anti-trafficking emulates and extends other arms of the immigration system—a system financed to engage in practices of impoverishment. After explaining the *slow violence* at work in the asylum system, I show that UK anti-trafficking work expands the reach and extends the length of that impoverishment. I finish by making two recommendations: defunding government anti-trafficking work and organising through community building.

Keywords: modern slavery, bureaucracy, funding, slow violence, NRM, impoverishment

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Introduction

While doing my doctoral research on the anti-trafficking sector, I volunteered at a drop-in service run by the Salvation Army. During the first COVID-19 lockdown, we moved our client sessions onto Zoom. After a while, the local programme coordinator told the volunteers that because of the reduced costs of running the service, there was a pot of money available. She asked if we had any ideas for what to do with it. I suggested we distribute it as cash payments to the service's clients. The response was immediate—there was no way we could do that. She did not think it was a terrible idea, she just knew that such a suggestion would certainly not be given the green light by those she answered to. I was not surprised by the response, and if we consider anti-trafficking funds within a wider context, we can see why.

This article makes the counterintuitive argument that the United Kingdom (UK) government's funding for anti-trafficking is more harmful than helpful. To explain why, I discuss the role of bureaucracy—in particular, an expanding apparatus of criminalisation—in the production of inequality and impoverishment.

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This includes a burgeoning ‘industry’ of immigration controls, including the humanitarian sector, financed through government contracts.

The article then turns to the equivalency between UK anti-trafficking and other arms of the immigration system. In particular, I build on Lucy Mayblin’s argument that the asylum system is a process of *slow violence* and intentional impoverishment.¹ Drawing on my doctoral research,² I show that rather than ameliorating the harms of the immigration system, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) expands the reach and increases the duration of that impoverishment (delegitimising some asylum claims in the process), while the growing bureaucratic apparatus is funded through more contracts, worth hundreds of millions of pounds.

After demonstrating how government-financed anti-trafficking enacts slow violence through its decision-making processes and the kinds of work it does and does not fund, I support the anti-bureaucratic arguments of the article with two recommendations: de-funding the NRM and organising support through community building.

Bureaucracy and Inequality

In this era of rising debt and inequality, the expansion of bureaucracies has been a common way of spending money, extracting wealth and stabilising power, (re)producing inequality and impoverishment.³ A particularly significant form of bureaucratic expansion is the policing and penal system. The apparatus of criminalisation functions to produce neoliberal policies like deregulation and reduced welfare and to control the people that are targeted by these policies.⁴ In the UK, as elsewhere, criminalisation and administration have been imposed

¹ L Mayblin, *Impoverishment and Asylum: Social policy as slow violence*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2020.

² J Findlay, *Putting the ‘Slave’ in ‘Anti-Slavery’: A critical analysis of the UK National Referral Mechanism*, Doctoral thesis, University of Salford, 2023, <https://salford-repository.worktribe.com/output/1561926>.

³ D Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On technology, stupidity, and the secret joys of bureaucracy*, Melville House Publishing, New York, 2015; D Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A theory*, Penguin, London, 2018.

⁴ M Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*, The New Press, New York, 2010; A Karakatsanis, ‘The Punishment Bureaucracy: How to think about “criminal justice reform”’, *The Yale Law Journal Forum*, vol. 128, 2019, pp. 848-935; L Wacquant, ‘The Penalisation of Poverty and the Rise of Neo-Liberalism’, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, vol. 9, 2001, pp. 401-412, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013147404519>; L Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The neoliberal government of social insecurity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2009.

through a growing apparatus of enforcement that has itself become profitable through privatisation, often receiving substantial government contracts to run and expand the use of prisons, security and pertinently, immigration controls.⁵ Across Europe, an array of stakeholders, including border forces, police, international organisations, defence contractors, policy institutes, humanitarians and NGOs, are funded to facilitate and prevent the movement of people. Privatisation has opened up markets for private companies to profit from anything, from asylum accommodation to detention centres and deportation flights.⁶

This industry is further fuelled by media that insists we must increase border controls to defend the country from immigrants who are presented as cultural and economic threats,⁷ while the narratives provided to employees within this industry encourage them to believe that by ‘securing the border’, they are making the UK a safer place and responding to ‘national priorities’.⁸ Yet the growth in immigration has occurred within the context of mounting immigration controls,⁹ and attempts to curtail migration have produced more problematic forms of ‘illegal migration’, which the same industry insists must be responded to with more funds for border security.¹⁰ As I will illustrate, rather than serving a wider social and economic benefit, the expanding bureaucratic apparatus lowers efficiency and increases harm.-

⁵ M Bhatia and V Canning, ‘Misery As Business: How immigration detention became a cash-cow in Britain’s borders’, in K Albertson, M Corcoran and J Phillips (eds.), *Marketisation and Privatisation in Criminal Justice*, Policy Press, Bristol, 2020, pp. 262-277; A S Day and S O McBean, *Abolition Revolution*, Pluto Press, London, 2022; T Gammeltoft-Hansen and N Nyberg Sørensen, *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013.

⁶ L Arbogast, *Migrant Detention in the European Union: A thriving business*, Migreurop, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2016; J Darling, ‘Asylum in Austere Times: Instability, privatization and experimentation within the UK asylum dispersal system’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 29, issue 4, 2016, pp. 483-505, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/few038>; Corporate Watch, ‘Air Partner: The Home Office’s little-known deportation fixer’, Corporate Watch, 6 January 2023.

⁷ J Tong and L Zuo, ‘Othering the European Union Through Constructing Moral Panics Over “Im/migrant(s)” in the Coverage of Migration in Three British Newspapers, 2011-2016’, *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 81, issue 5, 2019, pp. 445-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048518802237>.

⁸ Home Office, ‘Immigration Enforcement’, Home Office, 2022, <https://careers.homeoffice.gov.uk/role/frontline-and-operational/immigration-enforcement>.

⁹ C Gilligan, ‘The Public and the Politics of Immigration Controls’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 41, issue 9, 2015, pp. 1373-1390, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1021584>.

¹⁰ R Andersson, ‘Europe’s Failed “Fight” Against Irregular Migration: Ethnographic notes on a counterproductive industry’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 42, issue 7, 2016, pp. 1055-1075, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1139446>.

While critical literature long ago concluded that anti-trafficking work is integrated into and contributes to the violence of immigration systems,¹¹ such conclusions are not usually applied in literature that discusses the centrepiece of the UK anti-trafficking framework, the National Referral Mechanism. For instance, while the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG)¹² critiques the way the NRM is affected by anti-migrant politics, its recommendations still advocate for measures that scholars have shown perpetuate harm,¹³ like anti-trafficking identification and protection measures at ‘all UK borders’ and more ‘unified’ NRM data collection,¹⁴ both of which bolster immigration control.¹⁵ The NRM is nominally the system for identifying, referring and supporting victims of what has been termed in the UK ‘modern slavery’. Government departments and agencies, police forces, local authorities and some charities function as first responders—those authorised to refer ‘potential victims’ into the system. While the Home Office gathers evidence to decide whether someone is a ‘genuine victim’, support provisions are outsourced to the Salvation Army and an array of subcontracting organisations.¹⁶

As the ATMG’s recommendations exemplify, the NRM is typically framed by the anti-trafficking sector as separate from, but subordinated to, the immigration system. That is, key aspects of the NRM, like victim identification, data gathering and support services, are discussed as factors positively intended for emancipatory purposes but which are limited or harmed by immigration control agendas, rather than as activities that extend immigration controls because of the bordering

¹¹ B Anderson and R Andrijasevic, ‘Sex, Slaves and Citizens: The politics of anti-trafficking’, *Soundings*, vol. 40, 2008, pp. 135-145; W Chapkis, ‘Trafficking, Migration, and the Law: Protecting innocents, punishing immigrants’, *Gender and Society*, vol. 17, issue 6, 2003, pp. 923-937, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243203257477>; J O’Connell Davidson, ‘New Slavery, Old Binaries: Human trafficking and the borders of “freedom”’, *Global Networks*, vol. 10, issue 2, 2010, pp. 244-261, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2010.00284.x>; N Sharma, ‘Travel Agency: A critique of anti-trafficking campaigns’, *Refuge*, vol. 21, issue 3, 2003, pp. 53-65, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21302>.

¹² A coalition of organisations working in the UK anti-trafficking sector.

¹³ N Sharma, “‘The New Order of Things’: Immobility as protection in the regime of immigration controls’, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 9, 2017, pp. 31-47, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121793>.

¹⁴ ATMG, *Before the Harm is Done: Examining the UK’s response to the prevention of trafficking*, ATMG, 2018.

¹⁵ B Anderson, *Us and Them? The dangerous politics of immigration control*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013; C Aradau, ‘Human Trafficking Between Data and Knowledge’, Keynote talk for the conference on ‘Data Protection and Right to Privacy for Marginalized Groups: A new challenge in anti-trafficking policies’, Berlin, 25-27 September 2013.

¹⁶ Home Office, *National Referral Mechanism Guidance: Adult (England and Wales)*, Home Office, 2024.

nature of anti-trafficking work. This has a problematic effect on evaluations of the mechanism, as the harms of the NRM are commonly externalised onto an immigration system that is seen as separate. As Waite *et al.* have recently discussed in their study of the effects of the government's anti-migrant agenda on anti-trafficking care providers, the NRM is much more integrated into border violence than the anti-slavery sector's grey literature usually suggests. Government-funded support organisations are brought into close relationship with the state and typically feel unable to challenge or obstruct imperatives of the immigration system. The common, pragmatic approach of frontline workers embeds organisations into statist, bureaucratic structures.¹⁷ As this article will show, funding for anti-trafficking work is not seen for what much of it is: funding for the expanding apparatus of the immigration system. Of the many equivalencies between UK anti-trafficking work and other arms of immigration control, I will focus on the most pertinent example to the present discussion: the role the NRM has played in exacerbating the impoverishment already subversively at work in the asylum system, and the way the inefficiency of these systems is proving profitable.

Methodology

This article draws on my doctoral research on the UK National Referral Mechanism. Given existing evidence of harms caused by the NRM,¹⁸ its facilitation of harms caused by other parts of the immigration system,¹⁹ and evidence of resistance to entering the NRM,²⁰ the research primarily aimed to discover how and why increasing numbers of people were entering into and staying in the mechanism.

A charity facilitated interviews with two participants who had been through the NRM and confirmed as 'victims of modern slavery'. I conducted both interviews. Neither of them knew what the NRM was and therefore did not specifically recall the circumstances of their referrals. The normality of this was affirmed by existing work²¹ and by participants in this research, like a support worker I interviewed: *'People I work with...have no idea what the NRM is...they don't know they've been entered into it...I'd say, I've experienced like at least 50% of people don't know they're*

¹⁷ L Waite *et al.*, 'Faith, Bordering and Modern Slavery: A UK case study', *EPC: Politics and Space*, 2023, pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231212208>.

¹⁸ ATMG, *The National Referral Mechanism: A five-year review*, ATMG, 2014; A Sharp and N Sedacca, *Dignity, Not Destitution*, Kalayaan, 2019.

¹⁹ ATMG, *In the Dock: Examining the UK's criminal justice response to trafficking*, ATMG, 2013.

²⁰ Home Office, *Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2023*, Home Office, 2024.

²¹ JRS, *Survivors of Trafficking in Immigration Detention*, Jesuit Refugee Service, 2019.

being entered into it.' The research was focused on explaining how and why people were entering into the NRM. Interviewing people who did not know what the NRM was and the specific factors of their own referrals, suggested such interviews were less likely to reveal details about the causes of referrals. There was already a significant degree of caution and refusal among charity gatekeepers to facilitate the interviews because of the stress interviews can cause survivors. Recollecting past harm can cause distress,²² and one of the two survivor participants did experience distress in the interview. Given these factors, I ceased requesting interviews with those who had been referred into the NRM and increased the number of practitioner interviews.

These participants were mostly recruited through heterogenous purposive sampling, to include a diversity of roles from different parts of the NRM. People were approached directly wherever possible, rather than through their organisations, usually through direct emails, with the hope of reducing the extent to which practitioner interviews were selected and mediated by organisation administrations. Two participants were introduced to me by other participants. Practitioner interviews were conducted throughout 2020. Ethical clearance for the survivor and practitioner interviews was given by the University of Salford prior to the interviews taking place. Anonymity was assured in participant information sheets and reaffirmed verbally prior to interviews. Identifying details were removed in the published work following data collection. Where details like organisational affiliations could not be hidden, these were discussed and agreed with the participant. Interview questions were removed if participants wanted to avoid certain topics.

Twenty theoretically informed, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with: two people who had been through the NRM, two NRM decision-makers, two police detectives, two border force officers, two people in social work roles in local councils, two NHS doctors involved in modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) training, a legal aid solicitor, an advisor to migrants, a senior staff member at the Salvation Army (which holds the government care contract for adults in the NRM), a senior advisor at the Modern Slavery Helpline and four people directly involved in support work, one of whom then worked in a police training and networking role. Practitioner interviews focused on the values, opinions, and practices of the participants. All practitioner interviews were conducted through online video calls or phone calls.

²² J-P Legerski and S L Bunnell, 'The Risks, Benefits, and Ethics of Trauma-Focused Research Participation', *Ethics and Behaviour*, vol. 20, issue 6, 2010, pp. 429-442, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2010.521443>.

Both interview design and analysis were shaped by theoretical perspectives on the NRM, which in turn shaped my interpretation of findings. Existing evidence on the NRM²³ conformed to discussions of other areas of immigration control²⁴ and intersected with other parts of the immigration system.²⁵ Widespread resistance to the NRM, already recorded²⁶ and described²⁷ in the literature, was logically explained by research on undocumented people's resistance to immigration controls and the police²⁸ and even frontline services.²⁹ There is also broader literature on the normality of everyday resistance that people have always shown to the controlling practices of statist projects.³⁰ Though evidence of such resistance appeared in my findings, my analysis was already premised on these ideas, and focused instead on the questions of how and why people were being entered into the NRM, and what motivated frontline staff to facilitate the mechanism given these factors.

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- ²³ ATMG, *Time to Deliver: Considering pregnancy and parenthood in the UK's response to human trafficking*, Anti-Slavery International, 2016; J Gallagher and J Featonby, *Hope For the Future: Support for survivors of trafficking after the National Referral Mechanism*. UK integration pilot - evaluation and policy report, British Red Cross, 2019; UK Government, *Victims of Modern Slavery: Government response to the committee's twelfth report of session 2016-17: Fourth special report*, House of Commons, 2017.
- ²⁴ P Hynes, 'Contemporary Compulsory Dispersal and the Absence of Space for the Restoration of Trust', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 22, issue 1, 2009, pp. 97-121, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen049>; Mayblin, *Impoverishment*; N Yuval-Davis, G Wemyss and K Cassidy, 'Everyday Bordering, Belonging and the Reorientation of British Immigration Legislation', *Sociology*, vol. 52, issue 2, 2018, pp. 228-244, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517702599>.
- ²⁵ After Exploitation, *Supported or Deported? Understanding the deportation and detention data held on human trafficking and slavery*, After Exploitation, 2019.
- ²⁶ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, *An Inspection of Border Force's Identification and Treatment of Potential Victims of Modern Slavery*, ICIBI, 2017.
- ²⁷ K Hadjimatheou and J Lynch, 'UK Anti-Slavery Policy at the Border: Humanitarian opportunism and the challenge of victim consent to assistance', *European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 17, issue 5, 2020, pp. 678-698, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370818820645>.
- ²⁸ A Bloch, N Sigona and R Zetter, *Sans Papiers: The social and economic lives of young undocumented migrants*, Pluto Press, London, 2014; A Ellermann, 'Undocumented Migrants and Resistance in the Liberal State', *Politics and Society*, vol. 38, issue 3, 2010, pp. 408-429, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329210373072>.
- ²⁹ F Thomas, P Aggleton and J Anderson, "'If I Cannot Access Services, Then There is No Reason for Me to Test": The impacts of health service charges on HIV testing and treatment amongst migrants in England', *AIDS Care*, vol. 22, issue 4, 2010, pp. 526-531, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540120903499170>.
- ³⁰ J C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985.

The analysis followed a broadly thematic approach.³¹ I transcribed all interviews, making extensive notes and attaching code labels to the text, including both latent and semantic themes. Some codes were drawn from theoretical insights on the NRM, while others emerged during interviews and analysis. Analysis began while interviews were still being conducted. In thematic analysis, writing is an integral part of the analysis and not just something that happens at the end. In-depth notes included reflections on how the extract contributed to planned and emerging themes.

I did not focus the research on either minors or UK nationals. Consent is not required for minors to be referred into the NRM, so the dynamics of their referrals are significantly different, and participants affirmed that the NRM support was not targeted at either of these groups. These practitioner interviews are considered in the context of the NRM as it was when I conducted them in 2020. However, in this article, I also discuss the significance of recent changes in UK immigration legislation and NRM policy and the increasing number of UK nationals being referred into the system.

Slowing Down the Slow Violence

Lucy Mayblin's important examination of the asylum system has shown that the housing and support provided should not be conceptualised as an uncomplicated positive in the midst of evidently harmful negatives.³² Rather, her work (which focuses on the UK but describes a more widespread phenomenon) carefully shows how the discourse on asylum seekers has shifted from humanitarian or political constructions to an economic one, in which policies are designed to avoid functioning as 'economic pull factors' that encourage more immigration and asylum applications. Even though there is no evidence to support the notion that a country's reception policies affect levels of asylum applications, this logic has turned the asylum system into a purposeful process of gradual impoverishment. Most asylum seekers do not expect to be prevented from working or to be made dependent on asylum support, yet these realities create for people a state of constant stress, anxiety, shame, and poverty. Utilising Nixon's concept of *slow violence*,³³ Mayblin describes the structural harms that are gradual, out of sight, and that perpetrate a delayed destruction that is stretched out over space and time. Rather than asylum being a positive agenda with unintended negative

³¹ V Braun and V Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, 2006, pp. 77-101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

³² Mayblin, *Impoverishment*.

³³ R Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Harvard University Press, London, 2011.

consequences, policies that claim to help, support, and protect asylum seekers are actually doing serious harm.

The equivalency of the asylum system with the NRM is unsurprising, as the two systems share much in common. It is evident in government claims, for instance, that a positive conclusive grounds decision³⁴ cannot come with a guaranteed period of discretionary leave,³⁵ because '[t]he Government believes that having a blanket policy of granting discretionary leave to all victims risks incentivising individuals to make false trafficking claims in an attempt to fraudulently obtain leave to remain or delay removal'.³⁶ This refusal to give conclusively identified victims of modern slavery the very thing many of them need most is dismissed for exactly the reasons Mayblin raises—the system is not supposed to be pleasant or helpful because to be so would be incentivising the 'undeserving'. The increasing hostility, the numerous categorisations and the fractioning of protection systems are confusing for those within these mechanisms, whose vulnerability to exploitation and distrust of authorities can be increased by bureaucratic delays.³⁷ With few exceptions, being in the NRM does not give someone any right to work they did not already possess. Without that right, people in the mechanism are drawn into destitution, while uncertainty over immigration status exacerbates emotional and mental health conditions, feelings of worthlessness and the sense that they are being 'punished by a system meant to protect them'.³⁸

Crucially, the asylum and NRM processes do not happen in tandem. Rather, the asylum process is put on hold, sometimes for years, until the conclusive NRM decision has been made. Many people do not receive positive conclusive grounds decisions, and those that do will not necessarily receive any status as a result.³⁹ Nevertheless, all will have their asylum decision delayed by their entrance into the NRM. Indeed, there now exists a potential 'disqualification decision' to be made

³⁴ The final government decision confirming whether someone is recognised as a 'victim of modern slavery'. The first government decision is called a 'reasonable grounds decision'.

³⁵ Discretionary leave is a policy sometimes enabling people to remain temporarily in the UK when they are otherwise unable to obtain immigration status.

³⁶ UK Government, *Victims of Modern Slavery*, p. 4.

³⁷ P Hynes, 'Exploring the Interface between Asylum, Human Trafficking and/or "Modern Slavery" within a Hostile Environment in the UK', *Social Sciences*, vol. 11, issue 6, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11060246>; Waite *et al.*

³⁸ C Beddoe, L Bundock and T Jardan, *Life Beyond the Safe House*, Human Trafficking Foundation, 2015; Sharp and Sedacca, p. 6.

³⁹ Human Trafficking Foundation *et al.*, *Supporting Adult Survivors of Slavery to Facilitate Recovery and Reintegration and Prevent Re-exploitation*, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2017.

between the reasonable and conclusive grounds decisions,⁴⁰ inevitably increasing delays. The government's insistence on dragging out a decision-making process (one that has no clear purpose and does not exist for victims of other crimes) prevents people from moving on from their past and settling, particularly in relation to housing and employment.⁴¹

These delays are rationalised within the NRM through the widely proclaimed notion that positive NRM decisions can benefit asylum applications.⁴² Not only is there no evidence for this, but it is also directly contradicted by government policy that clearly outlines the grounds for discretionary leave, and being a confirmed victim of modern slavery is categorically not one of them.⁴³ Furthermore, entering the NRM can do damage to asylum applications. The process by which this damage is done is widely misunderstood but quite straightforward to describe. The threshold for referring somebody as a 'potential victim' is very low indeed, with generic signs and indicators highlighted as grounds for a referral, along with advice to frontline staff that if they have any concerns, it is best to make a referral. Referrals are commonly motivated more by frontline staff than they are by the people being referred.⁴⁴ But when their case receives a negative decision because it does not meet an ambiguous but higher threshold, it is then returned to an asylum decision-maker who may view a negative NRM decision as evidence of the claimant's untrustworthiness. As a decision-maker said to me:

If you're saying you're a victim of sexual trafficking and that gets rejected and then you're claiming asylum because you believe that you'll be killed and raped by someone in Afghanistan, then I'm going to be like, 'well you're not really a victim of trafficking, if this proven all to be false, then how can I believe the rest of your story', which isn't always the case, because the person could have a genuine fear of something else.

⁴⁰ Home Office, *Modern Slavery*, 2024: 'From 30 January 2023, disqualification requests could be made for individuals if they are deemed to have met criteria for disqualification from the NRM. These criteria may be based on either grounds of public order, bad faith, or if the individual has already received a support period in the NRM.'

⁴¹ S Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, *Day 46*, Human Trafficking Foundation, 2016.

⁴² For instance, the government's claim that the NRM is being 'rampantly abused' by people in order to gain asylum, suggests that the NRM helps with asylum claims: Home Office, 'Alarming Rise of Abuse within Modern Slavery System', GOV.UK, 20 March 2021.

⁴³ M Gower, *Briefing Paper Number 4786: Calls to change overseas domestic worker visa conditions*, House of Commons, 2016.

⁴⁴ J Findlay, 'Modern Slavery, Victim Identification and the "Victimized State"', *British Journal of Criminology*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azae061>.

This is less a process of recognising victimhood than it is another process of de-legitimising a migrant population that is already subjected to anti-migrant discourses which rationalise their oppression and deny them rights. Nor are people free to avoid entering the NRM. Whether or not the person has mentioned trafficking, if the Home Office thinks their case includes signs of trafficking and they choose not to enter the NRM, this is regarded as suspicious, as was recounted by a legal aid solicitor I interviewed:

*'Because you don't want us to investigate that...why should we believe you?'
And that is generally the point that the Home Office takes, so I try and explain to them [her clients] the Home Office perspective on that, and say that the NRM at the end of the day, if you don't enter it, it will affect their credibility...and the Home Office will be less likely to take anything they say seriously.*

Therefore, having 'signs of trafficking' in one's life story means that, whether one enters the NRM or not, the Home Office have grounds for de-legitimation. Given that the leading source of referrals into the NRM is UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)—in 2023, 5,218 of the 17,004 referrals into the NRM came from that department⁴⁵—for thousands of people, the NRM functions to delay their asylum, sometimes for years. More time in these systems can mean more time experiencing slow violence.⁴⁶ UKVI and other first responder organisations detour their application through an extra bureaucracy of de-legitimation before it returns to UKVI. Indeed, the very design of the NRM, being crafted into a two-stage decision-making process, guarantees an unending narrative that the NRM is filled with people who should not be in it.⁴⁷ Designing a system in which people receive a positive reasonable grounds decision followed by a negative conclusive grounds decision, suggests that those people should not have received the support that they did during the interim period. The mechanism is designed to project fraudulence onto those who are, often unwillingly, funnelled into the system.

For those not already in the immigration system, frontline workers are encouraged to advocate referrals into the NRM, commonly foregrounding positives and potential positives, while encouraging people to disassociate the NRM from their valid fears about the harms of the immigration system. Consider these quotes from four employees of four separate subcontractor organisations in the NRM:

Ok, I would explain to them that [...] it's not about getting deported, or anything. This is separate, it's just...a framework for the government to

⁴⁵ Home Office, *Modern Slavery*, 2024.

⁴⁶ Sharp and Sedacca.

⁴⁷ Home Office, 'Alarming Rise'.

identify potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring that you get the support that you need.

I've always had to say to my clients as well what they do have to understand is that the NRM and the Home Office, they are completely separate organisations.

I think because there is a massive fear about being deported, and it's about explaining to them that if they are in the NRM that caseworker, you know they, the government aren't just going to turn up, take them, and deport them back.

So I explain that it allows them to be assessed, and whilst they're under the NRM they're not going [...] to be detained.

Such assurances are not true. Not only does the NRM extend the experiences of the asylum system that people wish to end, not extend, but people in the NRM are also subjected to other harms of the immigration system. Between 1 January 2019 and 30 September 2020, 4,102 people who engaged with the NRM 'were held in prison-like settings under Immigration powers', while others were deported.⁴⁸ Through misinformation, the NRM is being presented as distinct from an immigration system that, in reality, it facilitates, emulates, and expands.

Since these research interviews, positive reasonable grounds decisions have been rising in number for UK nationals and declining for foreign nationals,⁴⁹ meaning more UK nationals are now experiencing the harms of this 'humanitarian' wing of the immigration system, including increased surveillance and control,⁵⁰ which matches a wider trend in immigration control, to expand and incorporate citizens and 'lawful' migrants into these same subordinating practices.⁵¹ At the same time, foreign nationals are suffering from more explicitly aggressive new measures. The UK government has introduced even more hostile legislation with the *Nationality and Borders Act 2022*, the *Illegal Migration Act 2023* and the *Safety of*

⁴⁸ After Exploitation, *Supported or Deported?*; After Exploitation, *Survivors Behind Bars: The detention of modern slavery survivors under immigration powers (2019-2020)*, After Exploitation, 2021, p. 3.

⁴⁹ IOM, *UK National Referral Mechanism Data Analysis Briefing 8*, IOM, 2024.

⁵⁰ I Koch, P Williams and L Wroe, "'County Lines': Racism, safeguarding and statecraft in Britain", *Race & Class*, vol. 65, issue 3, 2024, pp. 3-26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968231201325>.

⁵¹ M Griffiths and C Yeo, 'The UK's Hostile Environment: Deputising immigration control', *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 41, issue 4, 2021, pp. 521-544, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018320980653>.

Rwanda Act 2024.⁵² Widespread condemnation of these measures from the anti-trafficking sector includes concerns that they increase distrust of authorities, create further barriers to the identification of victims, and exacerbate vulnerability to exploitation.⁵³ They are also limiting access to support, including diminishing key legal protections to those who arrive in the country ‘irregularly’, and creating higher thresholds for positive reasonable grounds decisions, which dropped in number when new guidance was introduced.⁵⁴ These draconian measures should be objected to, but by expressing worry that they are making it harder to enter the NRM and to access ‘support’, we risk making the new goal a return to a pre-2022 system that was rejected by thousands of people who refused to be referred.⁵⁵ Those who were referred were often underinformed or misinformed about the NRM by the practitioners making the referrals.⁵⁶ And the constraints on workers’ rights leave people vulnerable to destitution, further harm and exploitation.⁵⁷ In short, people’s distrust of authorities and their resistance to the NRM should not necessarily be seen as problems to be overcome so much as indicators that solidarity might mean assisting in their evasion of state systems. Such acts of solidarity were already being enacted by some participants of my research, including by working overtime, not filling in Duty to Notify forms and directing people to alternative forms of support that do not require engagement with the NRM.⁵⁸

To summarise the function of the NRM for immigration control: it includes more people in the immigration system by using humanitarian claims to obscure the similarities and connections between the NRM and other arms of immigration

⁵² At the time of writing, the Labour Party had won the 2024 general election and promised to end the plan to deport people to Rwanda, but intended to replace it with ‘a more effective approach to tackling illegal immigration’: S Francis, ‘Starmer Confirms Rwanda Deportation Plan “Dead”’, *BBC*, 6 July 2024.

⁵³ Hope for Justice *et al.*, *Open Letter to the UK Prime Minister Condemns the Safety of Rwanda Act*, Unseen, 2024.

⁵⁴ African Rainbow Family *et al.*, *Ignoring Slavery, Punishing Survivors, After Exploitation*, 2023; Home Office, *Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, Quarter 1 2023 – January to March*, Home Office, 2023; Hope for Justice *et al.*, *Open Letter*; L C Medlicott, ‘Potential Modern Slavery Victims Sent Packing As New UK Borders Act Bites’, *openDemocracy*, 26 May 2023.

⁵⁵ Home Office, *Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics UK, End of Year Summary, 2021*, Home Office, 2022.

⁵⁶ Findlay, ‘Modern Slavery, Victim Identification’.

⁵⁷ Sharp and Sedacca.

⁵⁸ The ATMG long ago noted that some local authorities choose not to make some referrals because they fear the detrimental consequences of negative NRM decisions on a person’s immigration status: ATMG, *The National Referral Mechanism*.

control; it extends the slow violence of the asylum system for an even longer period of time; and it lowers the legitimacy of already marginalised people by producing referrals to be denied, thereby damaging their asylum claims.

Profiting from Impoverishment

This section will show that public funds are going towards the expansion of an already prolonged and harmful bureaucracy despite its wastefulness. Organisations produce this impoverishment, capitalising on an ingrained anti-migrant discourse that presents migrants, rather than the rich, as that which the economy cannot afford.⁵⁹ The political achievement of embedding the idea that social and economic exclusions of ‘the immigrant’ are necessary and economically beneficial has allowed the proliferation of private companies that exist to ensure such exclusionary treatment is enforced, even at staggering financial, material, and human expense.⁶⁰

Asylum policy has become increasingly unstable and hostile as a direct consequence of privatisation and austerity measures, intensifying in 2012 when the Home Office signed six contracts, known as COMPASS, with three private contractors. While private companies see excess money as profit, local authorities have been able to use such money for ‘wraparound services’.⁶¹ And while factors like damp and vermin infestations would cause a local authority to reject a property as unacceptable for asylum housing, private companies look at the lowest end of the market. Rather than proving the illegitimacy of these companies, increasingly austere conditions serve to cut costs for companies that have won government contracts, supplementing their extractive profits while demonstrating that they have fulfilled their supposed duty of deterring ‘illegitimate claimants’.⁶² So while Serco was fined GBP 6.8 million for contractual failings from 2013 to 2018, such as insufficient property standards and issues not being addressed quickly enough, it was still awarded some of the new asylum contracts in 2019, collectively worth approximately GBP 4 billion.⁶³

⁵⁹ A Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, Policy Press, Bristol, 2016.

⁶⁰ L Mayblin, ‘The Death of Asylum and the Search for Alternatives’, *Discover Society: New Series*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.51428/dsoc.2021.01.0003>.

⁶¹ Darling, ‘Asylum in Austere Times’; S A Hirschler, *Hostile Homes: Violence, harm and the marketisation of UK asylum housing*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021.

⁶² Darling, ‘Asylum in Austere Times’; Mayblin, *Impoverishment*.

⁶³ Home Office, ‘New Asylum Accommodation Contracts Awarded’, Home Office, 8 January 2019; F Perraudin, ‘Serco Given New Asylum Housing Contracts Despite £6.8m Fines’, *The Guardian*, 20 June 2019.

Charities have also engaged in this market competition. In the 2019 bout of contracts, the charity Migrant Help was awarded a ten-year contract worth GBP 235 million for Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE). This is meant to provide information to service users navigating the asylum system and to be an independent point of contact for housing-related issues, despite warnings that separating the reporting of repairs from the companies performing the work would slow the process and create dangerous living situations.⁶⁴ Many complaints from asylum seekers are now targeted at Migrant Help and the AIRE contract, including an open letter by 120 UK organisations to the Home Office describing the ‘drastically increased waiting times’.⁶⁵ In this way, just as privatisation provided a buffer to direct criticism of government, this new additional contract, which directs public funds to yet another external provider, functions as a barrier to direct criticism of the private housing providers. Bulman even quotes one asylum seeker saying that it was better when G4S took housing complaints: ‘It’s got much worse. Now we don’t even know who to report to.’ Another said, ‘I never thought I would say this, but I miss G4S.’⁶⁶ AIRE is therefore another private contract, in this case a charity, earning GBP 10-20 million a year from the deal.⁶⁷ Such contracts are not saving the public/government money, nor are they improving services for asylum seekers. Instead, the expensive layering of bureaucracy is making the services worse.

The extension of the asylum system’s slow violence through the introduction of another bureaucracy—the NRM—has therefore served to increase the profitable contracts available. Indeed, Migrant Help is one of two support providers to victims in the Northern Irish and Scottish NRMs, and one of originally 12 subcontractors to the Salvation Army for victim support in England and Wales. The Salvation Army were given a five-year GBP 281 million Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract for adults in the NRM, beginning in 2021.⁶⁸ A recent reduction in positive reasonable grounds decisions means fewer people are receiving support.⁶⁹ But we must remember that thousands who are referred to

⁶⁴ J Grayson, “‘Mears Must be Sacked from Asylum Housing Contract’ Demands Sheffield’s Housing Chair”, Institute of Race Relations, 22 January 2020.

⁶⁵ Refugee Action *et al.*, ‘Joint Letter to the Government: Crisis in asylum support’, Refugee Action, 5 November 2019.

⁶⁶ M Bulman, ‘Asylum Seekers Left with No Heating in Rat-Infested Homes Due to “Failing” New Home Office Contract, Charities Warn’, *The Independent*, 2 November 2019.

⁶⁷ Corporate Watch, ‘New Asylum Contracts: Mears group and Migrant Help win big, as G4S loses housing deal’, Corporate Watch, 17 January 2019.

⁶⁸ Home Office, *Home Office Annual Report and Accounts: 2020 to 21*, Home Office, 2022.

⁶⁹ Medlicott.

the Salvation Army receive no support at all,⁷⁰ while others going through the NRM are detained or deported.⁷¹ For those who do receive support services, subsistence payments do not necessarily cover essential needs.⁷² The paternalistic and controlling dynamics that have been well-recorded in literature on anti-trafficking⁷³ were discussed in my interviews as well. A police detective said:

people who are going into it are still restricted in many ways. They're still being controlled, you know they've not got that control, that full control back over their lives. So they go from one place where they've been told what to do, where they can stay, where they can sleep to the same thing really, but in a different way.

A support worker:

A lot of people that are in the safe house said that their experience of being in the safe house and going...through the NRM was sometimes more traumatising than their actual trafficking experience. Because they, they're again in a situation where they felt they had no control.

A local council worker:

majority of those that I work with are probably post-NRM, I don't think I've met one that has anything positive - or had a positive experience out of it. They haven't said, '[Oh], thank goodness I did the NRM, because otherwise, you know, what would...my life have been.'

And a senior figure at the Salvation Army said she felt 'to some extent that there are people, in inverted commas, "trapped in the NRM", and...it's actually preventing them from moving on with their lives'.

Purported positives of the NRM have to be evaluated with its harms. Instead, what are often foregrounded are individual stories of support and benefit,⁷⁴ as though these can be taken as evidence that it is right to fund and participate in the NRM in order to do some good, even if we cannot do as much as we would want. Consider the response of a support worker when faced with clients who want to leave the NRM and 'go home':

⁷⁰ Salvation Army, *Supporting Survivors of Modern Slavery*, Salvation Army, 2022, p. 13.

⁷¹ After Exploitation, *Supported or Deported?*

⁷² Sharp and Sedacca.

⁷³ L M Agustín, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, labour markets and the rescue industry*, Zed Books, London, 2007.

⁷⁴ Salvation Army, *Supporting Survivors*.

Usually what I try to say to my clients...that are wanting to go home, I do let them know, actually...there is the...potential opportunity for compensation upon receipt of a positive CG [conclusive grounds decision], so sometimes that says to them, ok, you know what, I do want to stay, because, just for a little bit until I get my decision.

This attempt to dissuade someone from leaving the NRM was in spite of the fact that none of this support worker's clients had ever received such compensation. They had a colleague whose client had received GBP 1,500 in compensation, after spending a year and half in their service, which this support worker thought was 'great'. But such a sum comes nowhere close to making up even for the wages they would have been unable to earn while having no right to work when in the NRM (if they were a non-EU citizen), let alone what they were not paid in the initial exploitation. A sum of GBP 1,500 is just over a month's wages at minimum wage. In order to understand why celebrating this figure misrepresents the value of the NRM, the wages this person could have earned during the time they spent in the NRM should be subtracted from GBP 1,500, as should the wages of everyone else who receives no such compensation at all. To further calculate the waste, we should also subtract the money spent by the government on services that only exist because the person is not allowed to work. For instance, a senior staff member at the Salvation Army told me that because asylum seekers are not allowed to work, subcontracted support workers in the NRM:

will do their utmost to keep people occupied. So they will, where possible, try to find...voluntary work for people to do, and just generally try to give them meaningful activities within the safe house.

Since the asylum seeker is not allowed to engage in useful paid employment, a support worker is paid money to distract them. The sum of GBP 281 million could do an immense amount of good. For that matter, so could the people being held in this protracted state of limbo. But neither the money nor the people are allowed to do that. Many practitioners certainly act with care and some anti-trafficking work involves necessary support. But by framing the NRM contract as being about support for victims of modern slavery, the dominant discourse implies that the work involves responding to problems caused by traffickers and slave drivers. In actuality, the NRM is responding to problems produced by immigration policies, but due to contractual obligations, these responses conform to, rather than undermine, those policies. In this way, as this article has been describing, the apparatus of the immigration system is expanded by anti-trafficking and the harms are extended.

Rather than these bureaucracies processing people out of the system, it would perhaps be more apt to suggest they are kettling them: the expansion of bureaucracy increases the delays that keep people in limbo, which includes being kept in spaces and circumstances they would not otherwise be in. The private

and third sectors have a vested interest in the government maintaining a constant supply of destitute people, being passed back and forth from destitution to care to detention,⁷⁵ neither deported, nor free to live and work. Groups like G4S and Serco and charities like the Salvation Army and Migrant Help profit from their interactions with all who are held in this enduringly indeterminate state. While those who work for the Salvation Army may be unlikely to be motivated by profit, the monopsonistic quasi-market creates pressures that demand contractors internalise corporate logics and accommodate government demands in ways that can ultimately challenge the value commitments the organisation once held.⁷⁶ Removing the exclusions that prevent people from living and working in the UK would mean reducing the number of people being employed to produce those restrictions—those who hold people in a state of limbo and interact with them in that state. It would reduce the industry. If the anti-trafficking sector really wishes to see a world where it is no longer needed, it has to envisage the ways in which its own end can be brought about. The industry controlling the lives of other people is expanding and becoming more and more profitable, not because it is increasing efficiency or liberating people, but precisely because it is not.

This brings us back to why my initial suggestion—on how to spend leftover money not used during the COVID period—was never going to be implemented. Profits increase as immigration controls expand⁷⁷ and immigration controls expand as the immigration industry’s ‘failures’ to control irregular migration produce more demands for the industry’s interventions.⁷⁸ The NRM, as with anti-trafficking more generally, participates in that industry, here funded by a government whose policies have produced the impoverishment. Government NRM funding is expanding the bureaucratic apparatus of control and impoverishment, creating profit in the process. If the funding is provided to expand the apparatus of control, the money must largely be spent before it hits the bottom. Subsistence payments in

⁷⁵ Participants of my research mentioned people going through the NRM more than once. Asylum seekers are sometimes detained more than once: Refugee Council, *Detention in the Asylum System*, Refugee Council, 2022; some people are made destitute upon leaving the NRM and/or are ‘re-trafficked’: ATMG, *Before the Harm*; this makes them liable to once again be identified as a ‘potential victim’ of modern slavery and referred into the NRM. Even when people only enter the NRM once, they are still likely to experience other parts of the system: After Exploitation, *Survivors Behind Bars*.

⁷⁶ This was also found to be the case in research on the Salvation Army in Australia, and the government contract it held for a system called ‘The Job Network’, which saw NGOs competing to provide labour market services to unemployed people: D Garland and M Darcy, “‘Working together?’: The Salvation Army and the job network”, *Organization*, vol. 16, issue 5, 2009, pp. 755-774, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508409339114>.

⁷⁷ R Andersson, ‘Profits and Predation in the Human Bioeconomy’, *Public Culture*, vol. 30, issue 3, 2018, pp. 413-439, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-6912115>.

⁷⁸ Andersson, ‘Europe’s Failed “Fight”’.

the asylum system and the NRM are capped to keep people in a state of precarity.⁷⁹ You cannot just give money to those most in need of money because that is a liberating thing to do, and liberation is not the goal of the immigration system.

Recommendations

1. Defund the NRM

For those who seek to support all people who are marginalised and harmed by immigration controls, the appropriate response is to call for the de-funding of the NRM. This suggestion surely sounds radical, but this is because the standard way of evaluating the NRM significantly distorts the full impact of its own existence.⁸⁰ Campaigns for change in the NRM have largely been stuck in the pursuit of ‘reformist reforms’, which, as border abolitionists observe, maintain and expand the system in the process of tweaking it. All funding for immigration control, including hiring people to deal more ‘sensitively’ with specific migrant groups, ultimately strengthens the system.⁸¹

A counterargument might be made that even if defunding the immigration system is a good idea (a suggestion many within anti-trafficking would disagree with), as long as that system exists, support services should be funded. For comparison, even if prisons should be defunded, it is still right to fund chaplains and counsellors in prisons for as long as prisons exist. The last funding to be removed should be the salaries of those involved in care-giving roles.

I think this is true, which is why it is so important to understand why this is not an equivalent analogy to funding the NRM bureaucracy in the context of the immigration system. Rather than simply funding the support services of charities, it is reorienting their practices. Funding from sources with conflicting priorities can substantially change the value commitments an organisation holds.⁸² While anti-trafficking funding provides salaries to many genuinely compassionate, hard-working people, the funding imposes restrictions on what can be done. As a former support worker said to me:

⁷⁹ Mayblin, *Impoverishment*.

⁸⁰ This argument has also been made about the anti-trafficking industry more broadly: J Mendel and K Sharapov, ‘Expanding Circles of Failure: The rise of bad anti-trafficking, and what to do about it’, *Global Policy*, 18 November 2021.

⁸¹ Abolitionists advocate instead for non-reformist reforms: G M Bradley and L de Noronha, *Against Borders: The case for abolition*, Verso, London, 2022.

⁸² Garland and Darcy, “Working together?”

I think the damage that they were causing to these women, I couldn't be a part of that anymore, I couldn't work within the rules that I had to work within...I already was bending the rules that I wasn't meant to, but...I was doing the best that I could in the limitations that I had under the structure that I had to work within, and I got...burnt out because of having to work within those restrictions.

Most significantly, a prison chaplain neither increases the number of people subjected to imprisonment, nor the length of time they are incarcerated. There is no increase in impoverishment. In contrast, as shown, the NRM both increases the number of people subjected to the harms of the immigration system and the length of time they endure these harms. There is an increase in impoverishment.

It is not acceptable to keep perpetrating these harms while foregrounding particular instances of assistance. When a sector that presents itself as an engine of emancipation decontextualises stories of help from the apparatus of slow violence in which they occur, it prevents people from seeing why the mechanism itself does more harm than good. For UK nationals also, the NRM support is often piecemeal, can have negative impacts on social networks and lead to more surveillance and social control, partly through multi-agency collaboration around young people and their families.⁸³ Only by defunding the NRM can we protect people from the slow violence it perpetrates and from other immigration harms and social controls that are enabled through this 'humanitarian' pathway.

2. Organise through Community Building

Bureaucracies are often thought of as ways of administrating the allocation of naturally scarce resources. Yet often, bureaucratic rules are constructing the scarcity of resources by preventing people from accessing resources that are actually more abundant.⁸⁴ This is missed when the relative abundance or scarcity of a resource is not considered—where we assume that all bureaucratic restrictions exist for equally valid reasons. But the construction of scarcity has always been a necessary component of capitalism. Attempts to make direct use of the abundance are punished through bureaucratic violence. We must remember that care-giving labour (and the potential labour of asylum seekers), just like land, food, and so many other abundant resources, are put off-limits in the making of a false and unnecessary scarcity that does not actually exist outside of the forceful bureaucracy that constructs it.⁸⁵ Hence the funding to the NRM is restricted from doing as much good as it could. Many undocumented people would prefer to stay destitute than apply for government support because of their reasonable

⁸³ Koch *et al.*, 2024.

⁸⁴ Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*.

⁸⁵ J Hickel, *Less is More: How degrowth will save the world*, Random House, London, 2020.

concerns about government actions against them. They are also deterred from accessing support from larger voluntary organisations because of perceived affiliations with the Home Office.⁸⁶ While alternative channels of support will not come with multimillion-pound contracts, they need not come with the same threat of harm either. While such approaches can also involve harm, it is worth taking the caution of undocumented people regarding state systems as a starting logic, and focusing on what work is already being done to support people in their daily living needs and state evasion efforts, outside of the NRM bureaucracy, and to work at expanding those forms of support.

At its best, decentralised support networks can avoid coercive and bureaucratic forms of organisation, arranging things instead through the mutual aid principles of voluntary association and democratic, collaborative decision-making around shared concerns. This approach collapses distinctions between those who help and those who are helped, disrupts the hierarchies of charity culture and helps to meet needs and mobilise people for significant resistance.⁸⁷ Many faith-based groups can and do make spaces, resources, and pools of money available without applying the same conditions as state bureaucracies and can therefore fund support to undocumented people with fewer strings attached. Sometimes people can use services without revealing personal information.⁸⁸ Yet even these avenues have been threatened by increasing encroachment of immigration enforcement into such spaces.⁸⁹ These environments should be defended from such encroachment. It is worth noting, for instance, that MSHT campaigns within churches like the Salvation Army, the Church of England, and the Catholic Church, undermine this disassociation, as such campaigns have more links to the police, the NRM and the Home Office.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ H Crawley, J Hemmings and N Price, *Coping with Destitution*, Oxfam and Swansea University, 2011.

⁸⁷ J Preston and R Firth, *Coronavirus, Class, and Mutual Aid in the United Kingdom*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020; D Spade, 'Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual aid for mobilization and survival', *Social Text*, vol. 38, issue 1, 2020, pp. 131-151, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7971139>.

⁸⁸ Crawley *et al.*

⁸⁹ M Atkinson, *(Un)holy Alliances: The UK's hostile environment in faith-based spaces, and its implications for refugee protection*, Working Paper 47, Refugee Law Initiative, University of London, 2020.

⁹⁰ The Salvation Army has engaged in dubious practices of data sharing and facilitation of immigration control activities: D Taylor, 'Trafficking Victim Wins Landmark Victory in Salvation Army Data Case', *The Guardian*, 12 December 2022; D Taylor, 'Home Office "Infiltrating" Safe Havens to Deport Rough Sleepers', *The Guardian*, 15 October 2019. The Catholic Church's Santa Marta Group is an 'alliance of police chiefs and bishops from around the world working together with civil society to eradicate human trafficking and modern day slavery': Santa Marta Group, *About*, SMG, 2022, <https://>

In addition to faith-based groups, friends, community networks, and food banks too have helped where the subsistence payments of the NRM have proven insufficient.⁹¹ Frontline workers already try to find alternative avenues of support when people are either rejected by the NRM or choose not to be referred. Support workers typically engage in such activities anyway when NRM provisions end. While this is precarious, we should not imagine that a solution to undocumented people's precarity will normally be provided through the same state apparatus that is producing their instability. At the moment, and in the near future, community building and the efficient use of resources will provide more security than government-funded bureaucracies.

Conclusion

Vast profits are being made through large-scale projects of impoverishment. Understanding that government anti-trafficking funding demands that anti-trafficking practitioners assimilate into practices of impoverishment is essential for comprehending why this funding harms those in the NRM more than it helps them. Similarly, externalising the harms of the NRM onto the rest of the immigration system by constructing a myth of differentiation between the two obscures the significant harms produced by the NRM itself. Asylum decisions are delayed by entrance into the NRM, meaning the slow violence at work in the asylum system is stretched out over a longer period of time, while the flawed premises of victim identification mean that the NRM process renders some asylum applications less credible to decision-makers. Thousands of people referred into the NRM are also detained under immigration powers.⁹²

Left unaddressed, the anti-trafficking sector will continue to grow alongside an industry of control and criminalisation,⁹³ as an impoverished population are administrated and criminalised by those who have impoverished them.⁹⁴ Those who seek to support people harmed by the immigration system should therefore demand the defunding of bureaucracies that increase impoverishment

santamartagroup.org/about/the-santa-marta-group. And all of the reports submitted to the Church of England's 'Safe Car Wash App' are made available to police officers and data analysts: Clewer Initiative, *Safe Car Wash App*, Clewer Initiative, 2020.

⁹¹ Sharp and Sedacca.

⁹² After Exploitation, *Survivors Behind Bars*.

⁹³ J Chuang, 'Exploitation Creep and the Unmaking of Human Trafficking Law', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 108, issue 4, 2014, pp. 609-649, <https://doi.org/10.5305/amerjintelaw.108.4.0609>; J Musto *et al.*, 'Anti-Trafficking in the Time of FOSTA/SESTA: Networked moral gentrification and sexual humanitarian creep', *Social Sciences*, vol. 10, issue 2, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10020058>.

⁹⁴ Andersson, 'Profits and Predation?'

behind humanitarian veneers. In the UK, that means calling for the defunding of the NRM, the ending of a decision-making system that has no clear purpose and the abolition of the entire apparatus of border violence. In place of government-funded anti-trafficking work, solidarity should focus on developing less bureaucratic forms of community support with those most threatened by the immigration system.

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