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Episode 9 – Investigating Modern Day Slavery: From Awareness to Action

Xanthe Mitten:

Hello and welcome to another episode of The VICTVS podcast. I'm your host, Xanthe Mitten. And today I'm joined by my wonderful co-host Katherine Barnett. We are both from the Events and Marketing team at VICTVS. We also look after everything comms and PR. We are very excited to be sat down today to be discussing the huge topic that is modern day slavery, and we're very lucky to be joined by two wonderful guest speakers.

Katherine Barnett:

Yes, we have two guests today. We have Marija Jovanovic, who is a lawyer and a research fellow in business and human rights at the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights at Oxford University. Marija is also a co-investigator at slavery PEC, which is a policy and evidence centre. Our second guest is Lucy Mann, who's the senior business engagement manager at Unseen.

And they are a British charity who provide safe houses and support to survivors of trafficking and modern day slavery. They also do amazing work helping businesses prevent modern slavery and look out for that within their, within their businesses and, and supply chains globally.

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah. Hi, Marija and Lucy, thank you so much for joining us. I don't know if you just want to say a quick hello.

Marija Jovanovic:

Hi, both. Thank you so much for inviting us and for giving airtime to this important topic.

Lucy Mann:

Yeah, I completely agree. It's going to be, I'm interested to see where the conversation goes with this today.

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah, so it's going to be really fascinating speaking to both of you. So to our listeners and watchers, today's focus is on modern day slavery and that's why we have both our guests who are experts in this field. So, yeah, I think to begin with, myself and Kat are going to give a few stats and facts about modern day slavery and then we're going to hear directly from Lucy and Marija.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah so I have a staggering statistic to kind of start this off.

According to the Global- Global Slavery Index, an estimated 50 million people are currently living in modern slavery worldwide, with 10 million of those being children which is obviously horrifying.

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah, it's absolutely bonkers. And there are so many reasons that have contributed to why that number is so huge. And especially since 2018, the Global Slavery Index has said that this has happened because of complex conflicts, widespread environmental degradation and disasters, climate-induced migration, a global rollback of women's rights, and the, of course, the economic and social impact of the Covid 19 disaster.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah. So when we were, talking about modern day slavery in the planning process for this podcast, it got me thinking about, 13, the the film that came out back in 2016, which obviously, I think won an Oscar. Could be wrong, but I think it did. And it made waves with its examination of the US's er, prison industrial complex, and its facilitation of modern day slavery.

· VICTVS ·

And this is still an issue today. So last December, ten current and former Alabama prisoners filed a lawsuit alleging that the state forces them to participate in work programs and threatened some with solitary confinement or violations of their parole if they refuse.

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah, it, these stories like this, and I'm sure that some of our listeners have also seen recently in news the story about, modern day slavery in places that we know and frequently visit.

Well, most of us do, McDonald's and the case that modern day slavery had gone undetected for over four years, McDonald's and another supermarket food supplier in the UK, and despite there being clear warnings such as I think there were the wages of four men going into one bank account, which is a major red flag, nothing, nothing was spotted by either company.

So yeah, we'll, we'll put the links to both these new stories in the blog post that will come out with this podcast. But yeah, I think, I think it's time that we probably hear some from something from our guests as well.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah, absolutely. So, Marija, I'm gonna go to you first. Obviously you come from an academic research background and Lucy you come from a background where you're dealing more with companies and trying to help them, prevent modern day slavery.

I guess I'll ask you both but Marija if you could go first, what is modern day slavery? Could you define that for our listeners, please?

Marija Jovanovic:

So, I think that's the great way to start this episode because there is a lot of confusion, and I think it's really important to clarify. And the words modern slavery can conjure up so many different images in people's minds.

So in one way, it is helpful because it is used as an umbrella term to cover a range of practices. And it's easier when you're talking about it on a kind of, advocacy level. But it can be also quite unhelpful in reality because we actually need to understand what it amounts to. And, it can mean many different things.

But I would maybe start by saying that at the essence of all these diverse practices is exploitation. So it's exploitation of one person by either another individual, as you just mentioned earlier, it could be another, it could be a state imposed exploitation, or it can happen within business organisations, whether they are aware of it and actively promoting it, or they just are unaware but they're perpetuating it nevertheless.

So I guess it might be helpful to talk about different aspects. We often talk about labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, there are new and emerging forms of exploitation, such as criminal exploitation, where people are forced to commit and engage in and criminal offenses. For people in the UK, that's an aspect of this criminal exploitation they might be familiar with is county lines, and it usually involves children.

There are types of exploitation where children are used as soldiers in conflicts. They're used even, as camel jockeys believe it or not. Then there is an whole aspect of online sexual exploitation. So you can see that it can cover, you know, it can be hard to pinpoint where the concept begins and where it ends.

There are types of exploitation that involve benefit frauds. And so the problem really is in deciding where the threshold lies. Where where what is the level, the minimum amount of severity, if you like to call something slavery as opposed to very bad working conditions? or, or something else. So, I don't want to bore you or your listeners talking about legal definitions, but that's also quite important because if we are going to deploy the government's law enforcement structure, we need to have very clear legal definitions.

· VICTVS ·

And if somebody needs to be prosecuted and punished, these boundaries of the concept need to be very firmly determined. But there is also like an everyday conversation. So you mentioned the numbers like 50 million people and that number floats around a lot. But I have to say it's, it's not necessarily fully empirical because it's very hard to determine. So I think it can be even more or less, again, depending on what kind of definitions you actually deploy. So, it's, it's complex. That's what I wanted to say, but I hope I have elucidated a little bit about.

Katherine Barnett:

Great. Thank you, Maria. That was super interesting. And I think you've kind of accurately covered how hard it can be to, to define something. Yeah. Especially when you mentioned, like things can just be bad working conditions as well. So where do you draw the line?

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah, I totally agree. And I think it's really interesting that you brought up the legal definition of modern slavery as well. And I'd be interested, Lucy, to hear from you, because obviously with Unseen you work alongside corporations to hold them accountable or to train them in, in ways to identify modern slavery so, yeah, what's your definition of modern slavery and the work that you do, I guess.

Lucy Mann:

Yeah, thank you. I think for us, I mean, obviously Maria then touched on the different types of exploitation. I think with the work we're doing with businesses there is a kind of key focus on forced labour or labour exploitation. So when we're looking at this, it's basically looking at someone being forced to work against their will for some kind of commercial or financial gain. So that's kind of what we see it as, where someone's kind of being forced or controlled to commit an act, generally in like a working environment where there is a kind of a physical, financial benefit for the exploiter who's involved in that.

So that's what we see as and I think in terms of the kind of touch points for businesses, I think there's, people don't really think about it and actually it's huge. I think, using that kind of number of the kind of 50 million people worldwide, it's estimated that there's 27.6 million people within forced labour, so being forced to work, and then of that it's estimated that around 17 million are being forced to work within the private sector in some form. So I think there is just, people often see it as like a faraway problem, or particularly with businesses they see it as something that's linked with the kind of more generic examples that we think of if we think of car washes or we think of nail bars or we think of sexual exploitation, those sort of things, and actually it's, it's much more in front of people's faces than they know. I think when looking at businesses it's, it can be anything to do with a business. So you're looking at, you know, I'm in an office today, who's providing the cleaning services for this office? Where was the chair manufactured that I'm sitting on? who's provided the materials that are needed for this laptop that I'm using?

Like there's so many different touchpoints that can be considered. And I think from our point of view, it's the businesses responsibility to care and to know about this. And there's also a lot of legislation that's changing, that Marija might touch on further as well, but there's changing legislation that's also putting this responsibility on the business as well.

And it's interesting you touched on the McDonald's case because we actually are now working with McDonald's to support them with strengthening their due diligence around modern slavery. And I think obviously it's, it's highlighted McDonald's and other kind of supermarket brands but this, this can be happening to any company. It just happens to be that they're the ones that have been kind of outed this time.

But I think every single business should take, take this case as an example and look inward and be like, could this happen to us? Where are weak links within our own business operations as well? So yeah, I think there's touch points everywhere within business. I think people just have to look a little bit harder. And it's not maybe not quite so blatantly obvious in the first instance.

· VICTVS ·

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah no, absolutely. And I think it's really interesting how you've brought up the fact that McDonald's have just been the, the people that have been caught out and almost brought into the public eye and it makes everyone think about how modern slavery isn't just in sweatshops or, you know, faraway countries, that companies they, in the UK, don't have to worry about or don't have to look out for these key signs.

But it is all around us in the, in the, you know, the products that we buy online and, and everything so we have kind of a responsibility to pay attention to that. So I guess I'd be interested to learn, how what the, the work that you do, how you help your clients identify modern slavery and what do you do with your clients to help them and, say with McDonald's, to form check points or ways that you can improve?

Lucy Mann:

Yeah. So what we do, I guess you touched on the introduction and kind of overview of Unseen more generally, and we utilize all of the, the information we get from the work we do directly with survivors. So we utilize - we also run the National Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline, which is a kind of a key service for the UK and the only service of its kind.

So we use all of the data that we're getting from there, so any emerging trends that we're seeing, to kind of support anything we do with businesses. But we're basically looking at how we can strengthen a business's approach to modern slavery, and that could look like a lot of different things depending on the size and the sector of that business.

But I think from our side, the first step is looking at whether they have, do people within their own operations know about modern slavery? Is there any kind of understanding of this topic, and is there the kind of governance in place, as a kind of are senior leadership taking this issue seriously? Because that's often a barrier that we get where we've got the kind of, the people that are really passionate that we're speaking to within an organisation, but often then the challenges are kind of getting things through and getting kind of people maybe further up to kind of really take the issue seriously.

So it's looking at that kind of initial governance piece and awareness piece within the organisation first so we support with that. And then we start looking at, okay, now what are your business's touchpoints? Where are your risks? What kind of risk do you have within your supply chain?

Marija Jovanovic:

I think that goes back to the point of where the cut off is, and a lot of people feel uncomfortable and especially businesses with the term modern slavery being associated with, with them.

And it's really important to underline that it is a continuum. And so it doesn't happen that that, you know, you go into modern slavery from day one, but it's like a slow erosion of standards and labour conditions or, that can then over time turn into something more severe. So where businesses really can help and step in is not to say "we have anything to do with modern slavery" or "that's too extreme, a type of conduct that we, we don't endorse."

But it can look at how they can improve the conditions that will prevent against these practices. So that's often like early intervention that would stop something from deteriorating into, And if if you look at people who are, and Lucy probably has had more experience with them, if you talk to survivors, it's always a process and there are people who can go in and out of it over time, and then fall back because there are not enough support structures,

And the government is not doing what they promised to do or pledged to do by signing up to international agreements to protect and, and prevent again, against modern slavery. So you have you see people going through, it's like a cyclical process. So that's where I think businesses can help the most by not looking for the worst practices, but, but looking at where can they actually improve their practices to not allow that to happen.

· VICTVS ·

So that's just one remark. And I guess I wanted to say also, when Lucy was talking about specifically labour exploitation and that, the hallmarks if you like with it, would be that people are forced to do something for financial gain. But in fact for all types of modern slavery, these are the hallmarks. So there is always a financial gain in any type of exploitative practice.

It might not be always monetary gain, but it will, it will be nonetheless some kind of disproportionate, disproportionate advantage taken over vulnerable individuals. And then, when we talk about coercion, just not to confuse that for bare force. So there are so many different levels of involuntariness, I guess that's probably the best word to describe it.

A lot of times there is no coercion or no force applied. People are simply, in legal terms, we call it abuse of the position of vulnerability, which is a means to trap people in exploitative situation. So that is insufficient to sort of trigger these protections, just abuse of the position of vulnerability. And I think that's one of the, I know that you want to talk about misconceptions, that people assume there is a coercion involved, and it's often not the case, only actually in very small number of cases you have actual coercion, and otherwise it's much more subtle.

So I just wanted to, kind of clarify that that exists in all types of modern slavery, but it's perhaps the most evident in labour exploitation.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah. I think that's a really, it's really good to hear you talk about that and highlight it specifically. Because I, I also wanted to ask Lucy about, or I can ask you both, but I'll start with Lucy about, like, the more subtle types of modern day slavery.

Could you give maybe an example? Obviously, we spoke about a McDonald's, but if you could maybe highlight another example of a subtle form of slavery, Lucy. And then we'll go back to you, Marija, as well, and get your, your kind of opinions on this.

Lucy Mann:

I think an example, I guess I want to use an example that we came across in the last kind of, six months, within the construction sector to I guess highlight this, and I think the construction sector is a sector that's often kind of overlooked in terms of the number of kind of risk points it has.

And I think we were doing, completing some like worker wellbeing visits, where we kind of go to different sites and we interview workers and just check that they're being treated the way that they should be treated. And we came across at different, different locations, kind of people that were not getting paid even near minimum wage.

The money was going into someone else's bank account who was acting as their kind of agent, who was kind of finding them work for them, but they were taking kind of up to half of their pay each, each kind of week or each month, whatever they were getting paid. And I think this example highlights that this individual didn't know that that was wrong or that was kind of illegal.

They just, they just, for them, it was, it was better than not having a job than, than kind of not getting paid anything. And I think the element of control there, as Marija said, it wasn't that they were being kind of physically bounded to a certain house or a certain location, but they didn't have, the control was that they didn't have any other option and that they didn't have anywhere else to go, and that they needed any money to be able to continue kind of living.

So there was that element of control without it being super, super obvious. And also without this individual knowing that there should be any kind of recruitment fee, that should be taken. So I guess that's maybe like a bit more of a subtle example that should highlight that.

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Katherine Barnett:

Yeah. That was really interesting to hear about because I would never have considered that before.

Again, there's obviously so many different examples of this type of exploitation, different types of exploitation and how that all comes under one umbrella, um, of modern day slavery.

Xanthe Mitten:

Lucy, so I just wanted to ask, you work with the corporations and do these on site checks, do you also work with the survivors because you mentioned, the helpline before and Marija briefly mentioned the stories of survivors of modern slavery, previously. So yeah, I'm interested to also hear from your work on that side of things as well.

Lucy Mann:

Yeah so as I kind of, I guess my role, and like the business services role that's connected with how we support businesses directly, we don't work directly with survivors within our role. What we do do is offer kind of safe referral options for individuals that might be in a situation that's exploitative.

So, for example, when we go to these worker wellbeing visits, we give out the helpline number to individuals that we think might be in a potential situation that's exploitative. And then it's kind of there, they've got the option to reach out and get support if they want. I think something that Marija might agree with is so often these people have never had control over their choices or over what they are able to do. And I think sometimes kind of forcing them to, to leave a situation against their will because you think that it's the better option isn't necessarily the best option either. We don't know the kind of, the consequences of taking someone out of a situation, we don't know what kind of context they have with family members or what other kind of, issues might kind of kind of play out from that.

So for us, the key thing is making sure that the individual knows what all of their options are and that they can find safe ,safety and get support that they need, and that they can do it in their own time.

The, we do have the kind of frontline team within Unseen, and they work directly with survivors.

So they support with kind of getting individuals access to legal support or counselling services. And we obviously have the two safe houses that we run as well. So that's like slightly separate, that wouldn't be linked with anything we find within a business or a supply chain, that would be separate. Makes sense.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah we'll actually come back to that later on when we talk about resources that would be useful for anyone listening to this if they think they might be a victim or, or know anyone who's involved in this situation.

Marija Jovanovic:

Can I just briefly, when you say that people might think they are victim, and I think that's really, okay we prefer to use the term 'survivor', but 'victim' is actually used in legal terms and in legal documents so I use both. But I just wanted to say that that is actually possibly the biggest problem to overcome because people don't necessarily see themselves as victims.

They might not even be aware that there is a structure, institutions and support for their situation. And I know that because I spoke, I held workshops and focus groups with the survivors for my project on prisons, because we were looking at how many potential survivors, of modern slavery are in our prisons here in the UK.

And the outcome of that is quite staggering, because it turns out that it looks like there is more, there are more survivors in prison than there are traffickers or those who exploit. But the point being in interactions with them, it took a while before they understood what their situation, especially if they are migrants and there are a lot of them in this category, what their what their situation is and that it is wrong what they're being subject to. A lot of them are

· VICTVS ·

just thinking they're being maybe mistreated, but they don't have the vocabulary or knowledge to articulate that and understand that there is help.

So that's really, quite an important point I would like to make because, yeah. To, to, to, to help people understand that what's happening to them is actually not okay.

Xanthe Mitten:

That's really interesting, Marija. I'd like to unpack your research a little bit. So you mentioned that you've done some research on prisoners who are also potential victims or survivors of modern slavery. So is this how these victims end up in prison to pay, so could you explain it for our listeners?

Marija Jovanovic:

Yes. It's quite, unbelievable and something I haven't really thought about before we started doing that project. So the start, we started seeing anecdotal evidence of people and ending up in prison who are likely or, sometimes even identified as modern slavery survivors. So how can that be? Well, I said in the beginning that people can be forced to commit criminal offenses, and in fact it's quite a use a good and effective strategy by traffickers. So they force others to engage in criminal activity so and they benefit from it. And what often happens, some examples of that are, for instance, cannabis factories that exist around this country where people are brought from Vietnam or other countries with promise of work, and they simply end up in one of these factories. They don't know the language, they don't understand where they are and they're just tending to the plants. And then we have a police raid and so they end up arrested and put on trial. And there are legal protections for those people, but they're not often being triggered and used and accepted.

So these kind of people or, British nationals who are subject, often children, to county lines, and, and they're involved in drug dealing. And so, a lot of them end up convicted and sent to prison. And then there are also people who may be modern slavery survivors, and they're not forced to engage in criminal offenses, but they simply commit them for instance because they are in breach of immigration legislation that is increasingly criminalising migrants.

They might not even know that they are in breach of this legislation, or they may be destitute and they simply, like, commit petty offenses, or even sometimes more serious, because of that situation. But they're not necessarily forced in a way that we use the term 'force' when we talk about modern slavery. So, and then that's what we went to discover because, there hasn't been much research around that.

So we went to prisons and we started looking and talking to people and staff to understand the extent to which, these modern slavery survivors might be there, and what we found was quite, shocking I would like to say maybe, and prisons have become aware of this and now they're working together with many organisations and they're working on strengthening the policies to identify and support such people.

But what, what is really the most shocking thing about it is that it, it looks like, because if we look at official statistics, there are very, very few people convicted and imprisoned for modern slavery offenses, even though they carry the maximum penalty. So we end up in a paradox situation where we have more survivors of modern slavery in prisons than, than traffickers, which shows that something is not quite working with the system.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah, definitely. I mean, it's super interesting hearing you speak about it. I found you because I read your piece for The Conversation about this issue, which is really excellent. And we'll make sure that we link it in the show notes as well, so that our listeners can read it.

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah absolutely, it's fascinating.

· VICTVS ·

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah, it really is. It's something I'd never thought about and it's, yeah, because I spoke about 13th the film earlier on and that's obviously slavery, modern day slavery in a different sense. Because that's within the US prison industrial complex. And the, and this is another form that it can take within prisons, which, yeah, it's crazy that there's just so much going on under this one umbrella term.

Again, I know we said that earlier, but it's, it's it's fascinating and something that more people should definitely be aware of. I also wanted to ask Marija, what could you tell us more about the work that you do for Slavery PEC?

Marija Jovanovic:

oh, yes. Well, I've been collaborating with Modern Slavery PEC for a number of years, and now I have an official role as a co-investigator for their mega-projects, if you like, which looks at the, it tries to address modern slavery holistically but by looking at evidence and data and also analysing the legal frameworks and so on. So as a lawyer and an academic, I mostly analyse, law and decision points and I occasionally do empirical research like this project with prisons. And in the next kind of phase of this research, I will mostly focus on labour exploitation.

I've already touched upon different aspects of it that we often think this is something that happens abroad, and even if that is the case we may be linked to it through the supply chains and value chains, and so the companies have a great responsibility. But ultimately, the responsibilities on states, so if you look at the international legislation and treaties, the legal responsibility is with states.

And so how states then regulate companies and individuals in their behaviour, it is a matter of choice to some extent, but ultimately states are responsible. And that's why it's even more unsettling that we have sort of state imposed practices of modern slavery. Thankfully not in many states, but there are still states that impose, especially forced labour, and you mentioned prisons and stuff. Or they just simply allow it to happen.

So, and then I'm looking also like practices of labour exploitation here in the UK. And I'm looking at how, if there is a different approach between how states regulate what's happening here versus the responsibility for what's happening somewhere else through, for instance, prohibition of importing goods produced by forced labour.

And this is hardly a settled issue because, it's a quite a popular one these days, but there are a lot of questions around it, whether these import bans are actually helping modern slavery, or they're just dislocating it to another market before we find out that it's happening also there, and again, the due diligence legislation, which I'm sure Lucy can tell you all about, so yeah, there is a lot of that going on.

And maybe, perhaps I'll just mention because Lucy already mentioned construction sector and I think that's a really good example. And what happens there is that there are some judgments of the European Court of Human Rights addressing that, where people, voluntarily go abroad to work in a construction sector in different companies. And what happens is, so they're not forced to work, they simply go, but they're not paid for their work what they are promised. And so they become destitute in a foreign country and without means to survive and without exit really. And so that is, again, an example of because they, they then are vulnerable to all sorts of abuse and they need to accept all sorts of conditions of work because they have no other choice.

So that is maybe an example of coercion which is not really a coercion because nobody's keeping them in a cage or, tied. But they simply are forced by the circumstances in which they're in.

Lucy Mann:

Yeah. I mean I think I completely agree with what you said in terms of people originally being kind of sold a job or the idea of a job that isn't basically the reality of what that job is.

· VICTVS ·

So something that we're seeing a lot, for example, things like in the care sector or within the kind of, and again, all of our work's primarily UK focus, but in the UK care sector and in the UK kind of farming sector, there's a lot of, a lot of individuals are kind of, kind of come to the UK and promised this kind of amazing job where they'll get paid a lot of money, they'll be able to kind of feed their families back home.

So they come voluntarily, they do come voluntarily, but then they arrive at the job and they're told that they're in thousands and thousands of pounds of debt because of the travel costs that they kind of, that organisation has covered for them, and then they're stuck, then they're stuck in that situation because they can't leave until they've paid off their debt.

But the amount that they're getting paid is never gonna cover that debt, and then the debt just kind of gets bigger and bigger and bigger. So I completely agree with Marija that it's not necessarily, again, that kind of misconception that people are kind of always kind of dragged to to a situation, that's not always the case, often they're very much willingly going, it's something that we call debt bondage, kind of willingly get themselves into a job, and then it's just completely not the job that they were told that it was gonna be. And then they get stuck in that situation. So that's definitely something we see. I mentioned the care sector and kind of the agriculture sector, but I would say a lot of sectors have that as a as a kind of a risk. Definitely.

Xanthe Mitten:

Okay so in terms of, you mentioned a few examples, both of you from say, the UK, obviously this happens all over the world but if we're speaking directly to our listeners, I'd like to hear from both of you, what are the signs of modern slavery that people should look out for? and that are maybe more subtle and they're not as obvious as, you know, we might think this is the first time I've heard of, say like debt bondage and things. So yeah, I'd be really interested to hear from both of you what signs of modern slavery that people should look out for and identify?

Lucy Mann:

Yeah, I can, I can go first, I guess, again, looking at it from more of a kind of a business angle, what we're looking, when we kind of work with businesses to kind of improve their own due diligence, we're looking at kind of suggesting them to look at kind of the supplier organizations they work with and what practices they have in place.

So looking at whether they, they have any kind of policies around this topic, whether they are aware of modern slavery being something that happens within their sector. So I guess an example could be if you're working with like a security company, for example, you you might be wanting to ask them a bit more about whether they have had training on modern slavery before, or whether they have any kind of policy in place or, you know, just to see what the awareness is.

Because, again, a sector particularly like security, which is, you know, one of those known high risk sectors, if the company has no awareness of this topic, then it means that that individual will have no awareness of it and therefore their people will be much more vulnerable to exploitation within that. So I guess from a business perspective, there's there's that angle. I think more of the signs to spot more like on the ground would be, I mean Marija might touch on these, but the kind of standard signs would be someone who keeps themselves to themselves, is kind of working quite alone.

We look at the kind of high risk sectors generally as being ones that have kind of potentially remote working, or, kind of unusual working hours, where people can't really see them, or kind of the high use of temporary labour as well where people don't necessarily know who's at the site or the location that, again, people can really kind of slip under the radar there. So there's, I guess there's lots of different sectors and signs to spot people, kind of wearing the same clothes every day or people who might look slightly dishevelled for example. And that's not, these aren't, these don't define what it is, but these are just, I guess, kind of classic examples of it. But I would say definitely people keeping themselves to themselves is a key sign and what we've seen is quite common because they're told often by their

· VICTVS ·

exploiter to not speak to anyone about their situation, or they've been told that if they do speak to anyone that they'll deport them or they'll report them to the police or whatever it might be. So they've kind of really been, it's been kind of honed in that speaking to anyone would be dangerous, so I think that's probably a really good sign for both businesses and individuals to be looking out for. I'm sure Marija can add more to that list.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah, thank you Lucy. Marija, would you like to input there as well?

Marija Jovanovic:

I mean I agree with Lucy absolutely on the point of what signs of an individual potentially being in an exploitative situation are. But I would maybe like to rephrase this question slightly, or maybe not rephrase, but kind of invite you to consider a little bit of a bigger picture.

So I assume your listeners are probably not big businesses or very senior business executives. I'm not sure, maybe they are, but, you know, ordinary people like you and I. And so it's a misconception to say, well, to think that we can do something about it as individuals.

Often we need to think of structural conditions that entrap people in those situations. And why am I saying that? Well, you know, there are people who do not want to be discovered. And there is something like, so in the UK, the system for identifying and supporting survivors of modern slavery is called the NRM, the National Referral Mechanism.

And there is a range of organizations who are responsible if they spot people who potentially, or they encounter in whichever way, might be survivors of modern slavery, to refer them to the system. Now, this is a voluntary mechanism, person cannot be forced to be referred and supported. And increasingly we have noticed in research that people refuse to be referred and identified and supported. And you might wonder why. Well, there are structural issues around the legislation and enforcement and institutional context here in the UK that make people almost better off staying off the grid than being part of the system. And these aspects are, for instance, immigration legislation. And we have had with the previous government, a range of legislative acts, which in, in effect, deny victimhood or any protection to people who are who have come here illegally. And I use this term in parentheses. So, they might be trafficked here, they might not even know they are not legal. And so they are to be sent back or deported or sent to a third country they have never been to. And so that is that the prospect of that is even worse for them, than being in an exploitative situation.

That's an example of how immigration legislation can work against people. So they want to stay below the radar. Another example is how our labour market functions. You know, the so-called gig economy, the agency workers. And that's something that, businesses are well aware of, that these arrangements do create exploitative situations. You have people who work in the as cleaners or as carers, in the construction sector. They're not employees, they don't benefit from protections that we benefit from as employees. They work on hours and so nobody knows where they go or they where they sleep, how they come and businesses feel will this not our business because we pay this agency to supply these workers. And so the shift in how labour market is organised is a huge problem, and exacerbates the situation.

Then we have again, criminal justice legislation, for instance here you have the offense of illegal working. So a person, as Lucy was mentioning, can be brought here under the promise of some work. They might not have all the knowledge of how things work, what they are required in terms of documentation, paperwork. And so they go into work and it turns out they are, they're not employed legally, and they lose almost all the protection that is available to, to normal people who are employed. So I think the best thing we can do as individuals is actually be aware of organizations who work very hard, put very hard work to change these structures and mechanisms. Who lobby the government and the parliament and who participate in this public debate.

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And then I think that is probably would have more effect then looking for signs on the street. But of course, I mean, that is what everybody would do and trying to help that one individual. I think the effect of it is much greater. So yeah.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah, that's really great to hear more about, like the bigger picture. Obviously it goes beyond just as individuals, as you point out, to spot these things. There's a lot that contributes to modern day slavery even being allowed to take place and happen so naturally in some circumstances. So yeah, it's really great to hear you talk more about that.

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah. And I think that's why we wanted to do this episode today specifically on this, because obviously everyone wants to help each other and it's nice to know on the on the ground signs to look out for and help an individual, but only by every large corporation, or anyone that has the ability to have a voice, if we keep talking about it and keep bringing it like to the front of the conversation, that's how, these, these organisations that do run modern slavery rings will, they won't be able to get away with it so.

Katherine Barnett:

And also there can be changes in legislation and laws, as you, you pointed out as well. That won't happen unless more people know about this topic and it's still not talked about enough. I know that we've learned so much, even just prepping for this podcast and

Xanthe Mitten:

Yeah

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah, I think hopefully our listeners feel more informed as well once this, once this comes out. I know that you have, you're both very busy people. I know Marija, you have somewhere to be shortly. So I want to ask you both, it would be great to hear, what your, what your favourite part of your job is! Marija, would you like to go first?

Marija Jovanovic:

I guess people that I work with because all of us spend a lot of time in our jobs, and so if you feel that you're surrounded by likeminded people and who are, you know, we like to think working on some great to cause and trying to to, change something in, in significant ways, I guess that's really what gives more satisfaction.

So you're not just going to do your 8 or 10 hours and then go back home and forget about it. So it's it's not really almost not just a job, it's more like a calling, a career. But I wouldn't like to claim too much for myself because I'm, again, just an academic.

Most of my work is behind the laptop and there are so many important organizations, people working really with boots on the ground helping change things, support the survivors. So I think they need to be really acknowledged. And for me, it's just a privilege to know them.

Katherine Barnett:

Lucy, what about you?

Lucy Mann:

Yeah. I think the thing that kind of inspires and motivates me most, I guess, to continue doing what we're doing, is to actually be able to see the impact of the work we're doing with these businesses. And a lot of our clients are kind of big, you know, big corporates, and we're being able to really, really influence how they look at this topic. And they are the ones that do have that influence. They've got, you know, thousands and thousands of suppliers that they're working with and if we're able to change how they view this issue, they can then really filter that down their supply chain.

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So even if we're only feel like we're touching one business, we're actually touching all of those businesses within that supply chain as well. And I think, you know, as a kind of modern slavery charity, being able to be the voice of these big corporates and getting these big corporates to really take this issue seriously is incredibly satisfying.

So I think that's probably the best part of my job. It does help that there is changing legislation in this space as well. I'm not going to sit here and say all businesses are just doing it because they they know it's the right thing to do, there is legislation that's coming, kind of not necessarily in the UK, but kind of in the, in the EU and kind of wider that's kind of putting much more pressure on businesses to really report on what they're doing in this space. So they have to actually provide information about what due diligence they're, they're doing to kind of try and find cases of modern slavery and mitigate those risks in modern slavery. So that's definitely supporting us. But sometimes it does feel like we're kind of shouting against a, against an empty door whatever that expression is. But yeah I think that's definitely, seeing seeing these big, big companies change their whole perspective on this topic is definitely the biggest win for us.

Xanthe Mitten:

Well, thank you both so much for joining us today and it's been a really, really fascinating discussion. And also great to hear from both your different points of views, but also the similarities on everything that you do and the shared mission and the shared goal that you both have. And we will make sure to link any work and the website for the Unseen and the phone line, and also the work that Marija has done in her article on the prisons that we mentioned as well, in the blog post. So yeah, I think we'd just like to say a massive thank you. And yeah, we'll keep in touch.

Katherine Barnett:

Yeah. Thank you guys. It's been really fantastic talking to you both.

Lucy Mann:

No problem. Thanks for having me.

Marija Jovanovic:

Thank you for having us! Thank you for hosting this discussion.

Xanthe Mitten:

To our wonderful listeners. Thank you for joining us this week. Please make sure to follow us on social media and sign up to our newsletter for all the latest VICTVS news. We had a wonderful discussion this week on modern day slavery. And for those of you who don't know, VICTVS Assured is a division of VICTVS which works to provide Ground Truth Reporting to clients around the world. We act as our clients eyes and ears on the ground in more than 180 countries to help them achieve ESG compliance, which includes spotting and stopping modern day slavery, and also to give increased control over supply chain risk to our clients.

Sources:

Splinter - [How Modern-Day Slavery Aids Big Businesses Like McDonald's and Wendy's](#)

Netflix - [13th](#)

International Labour Organization - [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#)

Marija Jovanovic for The Conversation - [We don't know how many victims of modern slavery are in prison – why that's a problem](#)