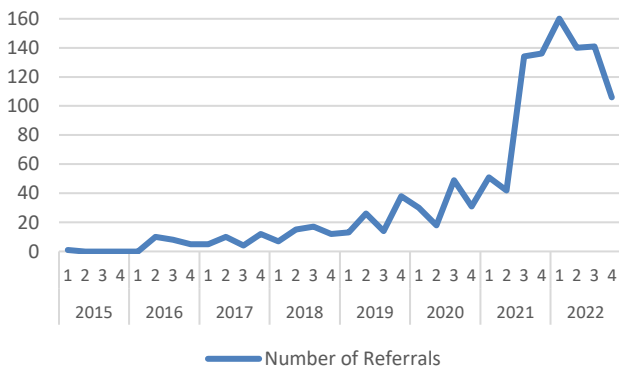


This briefing provides an analysis specifically on referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) made in **Northern Ireland** using the UK Home Office disaggregated NRM data which is now available from the UK Data Service (UKDS).<sup>1</sup> The NRM is the UK's official system through which victims of modern slavery are identified and supported.

This is the first briefing focused exclusively on cases of NRM data in **Northern Ireland** produced by IOM UK. The briefing focuses on the data from 2022, but also uses historical NRM data for context. It provides an analysis of key highlights, ongoing trends, and data gaps identified by IOM UK.

### 547 Potential victims of trafficking were referred to the NRM in 2022 in Northern Ireland.

Graph 1 shows the number of referrals made to the NRM in Northern Ireland steadily increasing between 2015 and 2020, followed by a rapid increase from 363 referrals in 2021 to 547 referrals in 2022, of which 340 were male (62%) and 207 female (38%). This is higher than any previous year and a 151% increase on 2021 NRM referrals. There were 160 referrals made to the NRM in Q1, 2022 in Northern Ireland which is the highest on record.



Graph 1: NRM referrals in Northern Ireland per year & quarter (2015 – 2022).

In comparison, in the rest of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales) there were 16,367 NRM referrals in 2022, of which 12,930 were male (79%) and 3,424 female (21%) (12 unknown). Northern Ireland makes up 3.2% of all NRM referrals in the UK in 2022.

Graph 2 shows that 66% of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland reported 'labour' exploitation, whilst 12% reported 'sexual'

### HOW NRM DECISION-MAKING OPERATED IN 2022

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has a two-stage decision-making process for identifying potential victims of modern slavery. The first stage is the Reasonable Grounds (RG) decision, which should be made within 5 working days of a potential victim being referred to the NRM. The test currently in use for the RG decision is "I suspect but cannot prove" that the person is a victim of modern slavery. A positive RG entitles a person to a reflection period of at least 45 days to receive specialist support and assistance. The second stage Conclusive Grounds (CG) decision should be made no sooner than 45 days after the RG decision, and is made on the 'balance of probabilities' threshold. Both the RG and CG determinations are made by the Single Competent Authority (SCA) and Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) which both sit within the Home Office. Further information on the NRM is available [here](#).

### NORTHERN IRELAND HIGHLIGHTS

547 potential victims of modern slavery were referred to the NRM in 2022 in Northern Ireland, higher than any previous year.

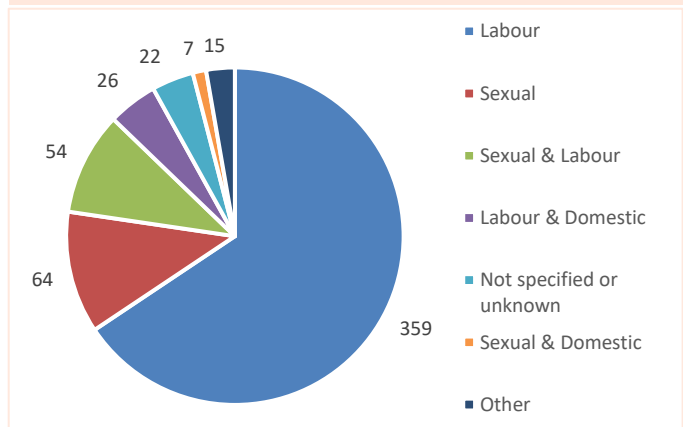
93% of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland in 2022 reported exploitation taking place overseas and not in the UK.

51% of referrals in 2022 in Northern Ireland were of Eritrean nationality and 24% of Somali nationality.

89% of all NRM referrals in 2022 in Northern Ireland were made through Government Agencies as First Responders.

75 Conclusive Grounds decisions were made in 2022 in Northern Ireland, the highest on record.

To date, there is no record of a UK male child referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland (2015 – 2022).



Graph 2: Types of exploitation reported in Northern Ireland (2022).

exploitation and 10% reported 'sexual & labour' exploitation.

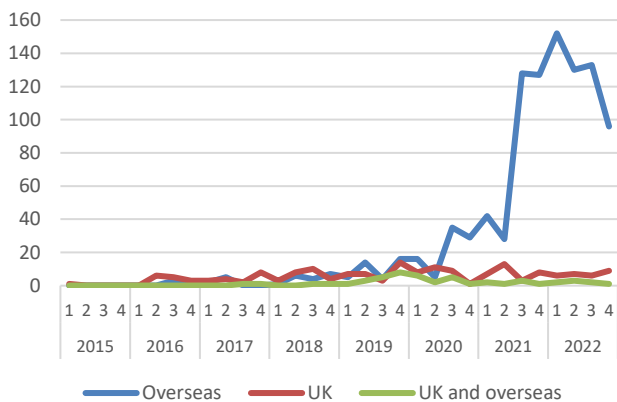
Of 207 female NRM referrals, 30% reported 'labour' exploitation, 28% reported 'sexual' exploitation and 22% reported 'sexual & labour' exploitation. The remaining 20% of female NRM referrals reported other types of exploitation including 'criminal', 'domestic', 'labour & domestic', 'sexual & criminal', 'sexual & domestic' and/or 'sexual, labour & domestic' exploitation. Of all 340 male NRM referrals in 2022, 87% reported 'labour' exploitation with the remaining 13% of male NRM referrals reporting other types of exploitation.

In comparison to the rest of UK, 'labour' exploitation also constituted 35% of NRM referrals, the highest number of referrals whereas 33% of male referrals reported 'criminal' exploitation. In Northern Ireland, 3 males reported 'criminal' exploitation which constitutes just 0.9% of all male referrals.

### 93% of referrals in Northern Ireland in 2022 reported exploitation taking place overseas and not within the UK

In 2022, 511 of 547 (93%) NRM referrals in Northern Ireland reported exploitation taking place 'overseas', while 28 of 547 (5%) referrals reported exploitation taking place 'within the UK'. The remaining 8 referrals reported exploitation in the 'UK and overseas'. Graph 3 illustrates the number of NRM referrals and type of exploitation since 2015 in Northern Ireland, with a significant increase in those claiming exploitation overseas since 2020.

By comparison, in the rest of the UK (England, Scotland and Wales) there were 16,367 NRM referrals in 2022, of which 39% (6,409) claimed exploitation 'overseas', 50% (8,212) reported exploitation 'within the UK' and 11% (1,746) claimed exploitation both in the 'UK and overseas'. This means that a case referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland in 2022 was more than twice as likely to report exploitation 'overseas' than a case referred in the rest of the UK.



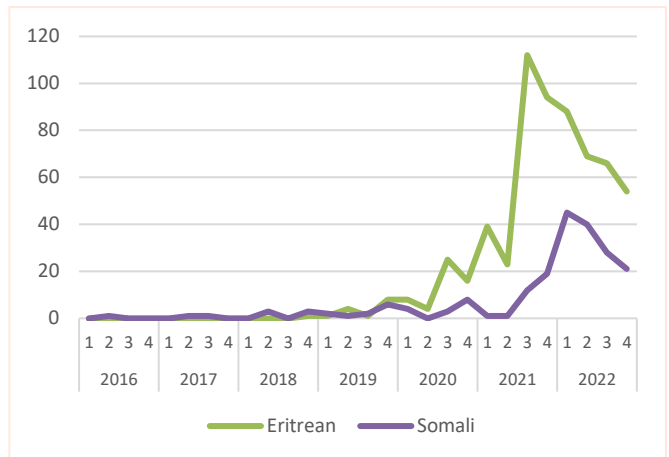
Graph 3: Location of claimed exploitation of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland

### 51% of referrals in 2022 were of Eritrean nationality and 24% of Somali nationality

In Northern Ireland there were 277 NRM referrals (51%) of Eritrean nationality and 134 referrals (24%) of Somali nationality, making up 75% of all NRM referrals in 2022. Of this number, 99.5% of referrals claimed exploitation 'overseas' and outside of the UK.

Throughout the rest of the UK, Eritrean NRM referrals account for 5% of all referrals in 2022 (compared to 51% in NI), and Somali referrals account for 1% of all referrals (compared to 26% in NI).

Graph 4 shows the increase in Eritrean and Somali NRM referrals from one Somali referral in Q2, 2016 to 112 Somali referrals by Q3, 2021, and 45 Eritrean referrals by Q1, 2022.



Graph 4: Number of Eritrean and Somali NRM referrals in NI since first identified case

The majority of the 411 Eritrean and Somali referrals in 2022 claimed 'labour' exploitation overseas (71%), while 11% claimed 'sexual and labour' exploitation overseas and 7% claim 'sexual' exploitation overseas.

### 89% of all NRM referrals in 2022 in Northern Ireland were made through Government Agencies as First Responders

In 2022 in Northern Ireland, 89% of all NRM referrals were made through Government Agencies as first responders (see box below for further information about first responders). This includes three entities within the Home Office; Immigration Enforcement (UKIE), Border Force (UKBF) and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) made 28 referrals to the NRM in 2022 (5%), and the Northern Irish NGO & Third Sector made 27 referrals (5%). The remaining 6 NRM referrals (1%) were made by Local Authority.

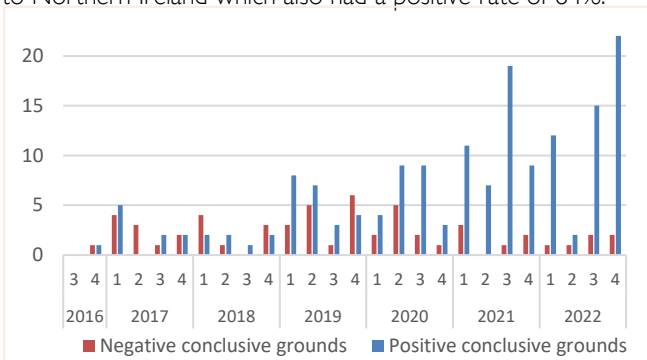
Northern Ireland has significantly higher referrals through Government Agencies than the rest of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales) where government agencies made 48% of NRM referrals, local authorities made 22% of referrals, police made 24% of referrals and the NGO & Third Sector made 6% of referrals.

#### HOW FIRST RESPONDERS OPERATE

First responders can use the NRM to report cases of modern slavery and human trafficking and refer potential victims for support and protection. First responders work for designated organisations within government and civil society and help identify and support potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. Authorised 'first responder' organisations can submit NRM forms to the competent authorities.

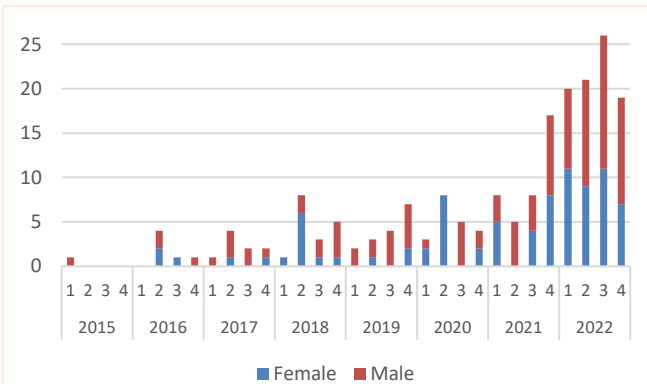
## 75 Conclusive Grounds decisions were made in 2022 in Northern Ireland, the highest on record.

There were 75 people who received a CG decision in 2022 in Northern Ireland, of which 65 were positive and 10 negative. There have been 251 Conclusive Grounds decisions made in Northern Ireland since records began, of which 187 were positive decisions and 64 were negative decisions. Graph 5 shows there were more CG decisions made in Q4, 2022 than in any previous quarter in Northern Ireland. Similarly among the rest of UK, significantly more decisions were made in Q4, 2022 than any previous quarter and a 71% increase on decision making compared to Q3, 2022. Among the rest of UK in Q4, 2022 the rate for positive decisions was 84%, similar to Northern Ireland which also had a positive rate of 84%.



Graph 5: Number of Positive and Negative CG decisions made per quarter

Since 2015 in Northern Ireland, 193 children (aged 17 or under) have been referred to the NRM of which 109 referrals were for male children and 84 referrals for female children.



Graph 6: Number of child NRM referrals in Northern Ireland per year and quarter since 2015

### ABOUT IOM

Founded 72 years ago in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration. With 175 member states and presence in over 100 countries, IOM as the UN Migration Agency is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. The Organization works with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration and to uphold the well-being and human rights of all migrants. The IOM Country Office in the UK (IOM UK) is one of over 150 country offices, promoting cooperation and dialogue on migration issues. (See [www.unitedkingdom.iom.int](http://www.unitedkingdom.iom.int) for more information).

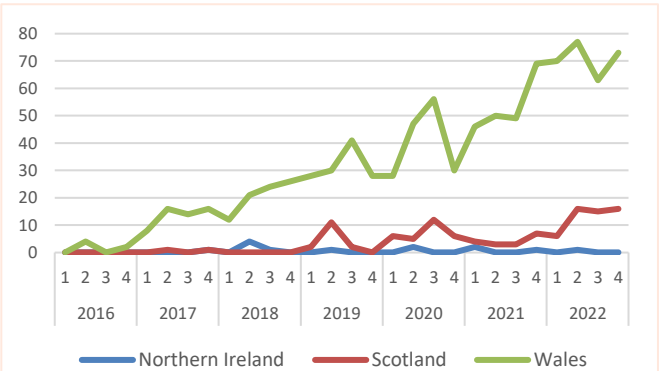
To contact IOM UK about this briefing, please email [achisholm@iom.int](mailto:achisholm@iom.int) or [ctuk@iom.int](mailto:ctuk@iom.int).

In 2022, in Northern Ireland, 86 children were referred to the NRM, this is 45% of all NRM child referrals since 2015. In 2022, 84% of children referred to the NRM were reported as having experienced labour exploitation either through 'labour and domestic' exploitation, 'sexual and labour' exploitation, or solely 'labour' exploitation. Of the total 193 child referrals in Northern Ireland since 2015, 61 are of Eritrean nationality and 54 are of Somali nationality.

## To date, there is no record of a UK male child referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland (2015 – 2022)

To date, there have been no referrals of UK national male children referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland (2015 – 2022). By comparison, in England 9,401 UK male children have been referred to the NRM since 2016, mainly reporting both 'criminal' exploitation (5,849) and 'labour' exploitation (2,322). In Wales, 657 UK male children have been referred, and Scotland 91 UK male children referred. Since 2016, 13 UK female children and only 1 Irish female child has been referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland.

In comparison to the rest of the UK, the number of total children referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland (193) is significantly lower than referrals in England (25,883), Scotland (723) and Wales (1,262).



Graph 7: Number of UK children referred to the NRM in Northern Ireland compared with Scotland, and Wales (\*Figures in England are significantly higher – 12,652 referrals)

In 2022, throughout the whole of UK, 7,019 children were referred to the NRM. Of these 7,019 referrals, 43% reported criminal exploitation. In comparison, Northern Ireland has no child referrals reporting criminal exploitation in 2022. Since 2015, Northern Ireland has only had 3 NRM child referrals reporting criminal exploitation in comparison to 8,110 reported throughout the UK during that time.