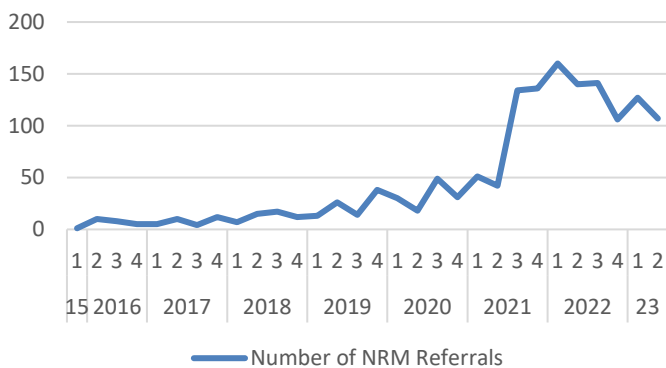


This briefing provides an analysis specifically on referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) made in **Northern Ireland** using the UK Home Office disaggregated NRM data which is now available from the UK Data Service (UKDS).¹ The NRM is the UK's official system through which victims of modern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

This is the second briefing focused exclusively on cases of NRM data in **Northern Ireland** produced by IOM UK. The briefing focuses on the data from Quarter One (Q1) and Quarter Two (Q2) 2023, but also uses historical NRM data for context. It provides an analysis of key highlights, ongoing trends, and data gaps identified by IOM UK.

234 potential victims of human trafficking were referred to the NRM in Q1 and Q2 of 2023; this was less than the same period in 2022 when 300 referrals were made.

In Northern Ireland (NI), 234 potential victims of human trafficking were referred to the NRM in Q1 and Q2 of 2023, of which 65% (152) were male and 35% (82) were female. As illustrated in Graph 1, while there has been a 22% decrease in NRM referrals in the first half of 2023 compared to of the same period in 2022 when there were 300 referrals, numbers still remain higher than previous years and more than double compared to the first half of 2021 (93 referrals).



Graph 1: NRM referrals in Northern Ireland per year & quarter (2015 – 2023 Q2).

In terms of primary exploitation type, 188 NRM referrals (80%) reported some form of labour exploitation,² whilst 57 (24%) reported a form of sexual exploitation.³ Other forms of exploitation included 'Criminal' (2), 'Domestic' (4) or 'Unknown' (15). The most reported form of exploitation among male referrals was 'Labour' exploitation (only) accounting for 82% of all male referrals. In comparison with the rest of the UK, the most reported form of exploitation

HOW NRM DECISION-MAKING OPERATES (Q1-Q2 2023)

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has a two-stage decision-making process for identifying potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. 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. On 30th January 2023, the Reasonable Grounds decision making guidance changed for decision makers to, "base their decision on objective factors to have real suspicion and therefore meet the RG threshold. An "objective" factor is a piece of information or evidence that is based in fact." 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) within the Home Office. Further information on the NRM is available [here](#).

NORTHERN IRELAND HIGHLIGHTS

234 potential victims of human trafficking were referred to the NRM in Q1 and Q2 of 2023; this was less than the same period in 2022 when 300 referrals were made.

38% of reasonable grounds (RG) decisions made during the period received a positive outcome, compared to the UK average of 53%. Furthermore, only one conclusive grounds (CG) decision was made in Q2 2023.

94% of NRM referrals in the first half of 2023, reported exploitation 'overseas', the highest recorded since 2018, with 100% of child referrals reporting exploitation 'overseas'.

51% of all Somali NRM referrals and 19% of all Eritrean referrals throughout the UK were made in Northern Ireland, despite the region making up just 3% of all total UK NRM referrals in 2023.

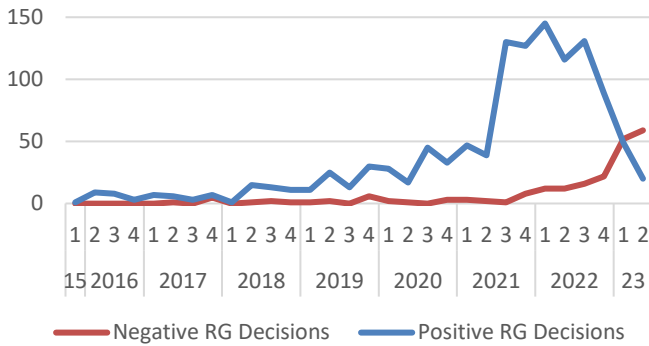
among male referrals was also 'Labour' exploitation however, this accounted for only 32% of all referrals. The most reported form of exploitation among female referrals in NI was some form of 'Labour' exploitation, accounting for 63% of all female referrals. This is significantly higher than the proportion of female referrals reporting labour exploitation in the rest of the UK, at 30%. The most reported form of exploitation among females in the rest of the UK was 'Sexual' exploitation, making up 38% of all referrals.

38% of reasonable grounds (RG) decisions made during the period received a positive outcome, compared to the UK average of 53%. Furthermore, only one conclusive grounds (CG) decision was made in Q2 2023

In NI, 38% of RG decisions received a positive outcome in Q1 and Q2 2023. This rate is considerably lower than previous years, with an 89% positive RG rate in 2022, 96% in 2021, and 95% in 2020. This could be a potential consequence of recent policy changes for RG decision making which changed on 30th January 2023. Changes required decision makers to base their decision "on objective factors to prove a real suspicion of modern slavery such as a piece of information or evidence based in fact". Prior to this, the threshold for decision makers was based on the test, "I suspect but cannot prove" that the person is a victim of modern slavery. Whereas previously a victim's own account by itself would have been sufficient to meet the threshold, this would no longer be the case.

1. Home Office, Modern Slavery Research & Analysis. (2023). National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, 2014-2023. [data collection]. 9th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8910, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8910-9>
 2. Forms of labour exploitation include, 'Labour', 'Labour & Criminal', 'Labour & Domestic', or 'Sexual & Labour' exploitation.
 3. Forms of sexual exploitation include, 'Sexual', 'Sexual & Domestic', 'Sexual & Labour', 'Sexual, Labour & Criminal' and 'Sexual, Labour & Domestic' exploitation.

A positive RG rate of 38% in NI is also 15% points lower than the UK average of 53% and lower than any other region in the UK. It is unclear as to why the rate in NI is lower than the rest of the UK, but it could be linked to the higher rate of NRM referrals reporting exploitation 'overseas', which is likely to make it harder to provide objective evidence and subsequently the recent policy changes may have a greater impact in NI.



Graph 2: Number of positive & negative RG decisions in NI (2015 – 2023 Q2)

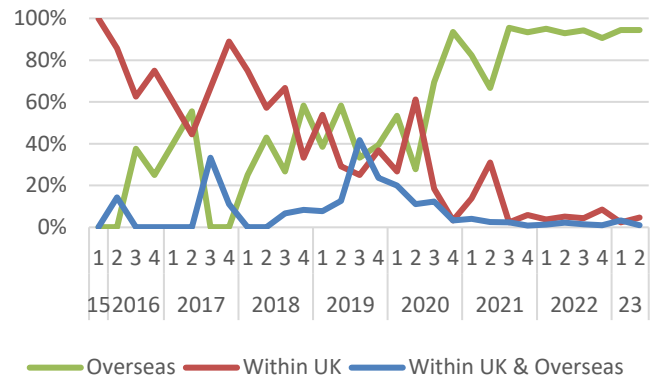
There were 16 people who received a Conclusive Grounds (CG) decision in Q1 and Q2 of 2023 in NI, of which 9 (56%) were positive and 7 (44%) negative. Only one CG decision was recorded in Q2 of 2023 for an individual referred in NI, while 15 were recorded in Q1. This is the lowest number of CG decisions in the first half of any year since 2018. There have now been a total of 268 CG decisions made for individuals referred from NI since records began, of which 197 (74%) were positive decisions and 71 (26%) were negative.

Of the CG decisions made in this period, the median wait time between reasonable grounds decision (RG) was 501 days. This included one individual who waited 2,451 days, nearly 7 years, to receive a negative CG decision. This is shorter than the median CG wait time in 2022 (527 days), but longer than any previous year recorded in NI. However, in comparison with other UK devolved nations, NI has a continuously lower median CG wait time than England and Scotland.

94% of NRM referrals in the first half of 2023, reported exploitation 'overseas', the highest recorded since 2018, with 100% of child NRM referrals reporting exploitation 'overseas'.

In NI, 94% of NRM referrals in Q1 and Q2 2023, reported exploitation taking place 'overseas', the highest recorded since 2018. Only 6%, (13 referrals) reported exploitation taking place 'within the UK'. As illustrated in Graph 3, this is the lowest number of NRM referrals reporting exploitation 'within the UK' since 2018, suggesting a lower number of potential

victims being identified in situations of exploitation in NI.



Graph 3: Percentage of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland reporting exploitation 'Overseas', 'Within the UK' or 'Within the UK and Overseas' (2015 – 2023 Q2)

Of the 51 child referrals, 100% reported exploitation taking place overseas. No children were referred as potential victims of modern slavery in the first half of 2023 in NI claiming exploitation 'within the UK'. There has still never been a UK male child referred to the NRM in NI, despite 1,158 UK male children referred to the NRM in England in the first half of 2023 alone. Given the scale of this issue in England and Wales, the continued non-identification of any UK male children in NI is notable and may indicate a lack of awareness of the issue of modern slavery among British male children in NI.

In general, in NI, there remains a low number of UK or Irish nationals identified as a potential victims of modern slavery, with only one referral of a UK national in the first half of 2023 which was a female reporting sexual exploitation.

51% of all Somali NRM referrals and 19% of all Eritrean referrals throughout the UK were made in Northern Ireland, despite the region making up just 3% of all total UK referrals in 2023.

Of all NRM referrals throughout the UK, 51% of all Somali nationals and 19% of all Eritrean nationals were referred in NI in 2023, despite NI making up just 3% of total UK referrals. In addition, since 2016, while NI has made up 2% of all NRM referrals across the UK,⁴ 32% of all Somali referrals and 19% of all Eritrean NRM referrals have been made in NI.

All Eritrean and Somali NRM referrals in Q1 and Q2 2023 in NI reported exploitation taking place 'overseas' and of this cohort, 85% were referred by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). There remains a lack of understanding about why and how so many are being detected in NI, however referral by UKVI suggests this is happening during the asylum process.

ABOUT IOM

Founded 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 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 is one of over 150 country offices, promoting cooperation and dialogue on migration issues. (See www.unitedkingdom.iom.int for more information). To contact IOM UK about this briefing, email achisholm@iom.int or ctuk@iom.int.