

## **Project AIDANT 2020 COVID-19 Activity Health Briefing**

### **Project AIDANT – COVID-19 Activity**

This Project AIDANT - COVID-19 activity, coordinated by both the NCA and the Gangmaster's and Labour Abuse Authority, will take place from 22 June to the end of July and will focus on Labour Exploitation, particularly in the areas of agriculture and food processing, and potential high-risk enablers such as recruitment agencies. This AIDANT phase aims to better identify and respond to the changing MSHT threat picture as a result of COVID-19. For example, there have been reports of displacement from areas such as cars washes, nail bars and hospitality into the agricultural and food processing sectors.

Law enforcement is also engaging with local authorities, health services and NGOs where relevant in order to provide an effective multi-agency response to COVID-19. Safeguarding of potential victims is of paramount importance. A coordinated multiagency approach between law enforcement, local authorities, health services and NGO's is necessary to enhance knowledge around the changing threat picture and safeguard those exploited. Early engagement with local services, is essential.

### **The role of healthcare**

We recognise that healthcare settings offer a unique opportunity to maximise public engagement and reach some of the most hidden and vulnerable victims. Under normal circumstances victims of MSHT bring a wide variety of health impacts including; mental well-being / trauma, untreated injuries or illnesses, malnutrition and sexual health or pregnancy care for sexually exploited victims.

The pandemic adds to those issues through:

- Potentially increased incidences of victims within geographic areas more vulnerable to labour exploitation, for example within rural locations. Exploiters may take advantage of labour shortages in agriculture to displace victims of exploitation, therefore increasing healthcare requirements in that location.
- Injuries to inexperienced labourers filling gaps in the market, lacking appropriate training or health and safety equipment, particularly within agricultural settings.
- Public health risks from the pandemic itself:  
Victims may lack understanding or accessibility to media information about self-isolation / testing.  
Irregular migrants may be less likely to seek help if they have symptoms, out of fear of their immigration status.

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Victims may be prevented from accessing healthcare by exploiters or only come to light when in a grave health condition.

Victims may present risks of increased transmission, through residing in overcrowded, unsanitary accommodation and may be forced to continue to work and meet others even when sick.

Exploiters may make victims homeless out of health fears or an inability to profit from their captivity, due to lockdown measures.

- The pandemic has caused a spike in domestic violence. Victims of domestic servitude are at enhanced risk of violence as they are confined within houses under lockdown, where tensions may be raised.

### **Who is most at risk:**

Anyone from any background can be vulnerable to exploitation. The National Referral Mechanism shows that some nationalities are known to be particularly vulnerable to MSHT including but not limited to: UK, Albanian, Indian, Chinese, Eritrean, Romanian, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Pakistani, Iranian, Nigerian and Bangladeshi. Within agricultural settings Romanian, Bulgarian and Lithuanian seasonal workers would appear to be more at risk of labour exploitation.

### **What you can do:**

We would like to engage as many healthcare settings as possible to take part in this period of intensified activity. Healthcare activity could include: heightening awareness with health practitioners in rural locations and those who conduct home visits. Raising awareness of how lockdown is hiding victims more than normal and encouraging health workers undertaking outreach services in the community or home visitations to be vigilant to the signs of exploitation.

We are encouraging all healthcare partners to consider the key areas where COVID-19 is having the most impact against the MSHT threat for them. This does not have to be labour exploitation if this is not a key concern for a particular area. Once the priority areas have been identified, we would encourage safeguarding leads to develop focused activity which will address these threat areas.

### **Contact**

If you would like further details about anything in this brief or have any other enquiries, please contact [MSHTU3PsTEAM@nca.gov.uk](mailto:MSHTU3PsTEAM@nca.gov.uk) referencing PROJECT AIDANT – COVID-19 Activity.