

3,805

In 2016 there was a total of **3,805** potential victims of modern slavery recorded in the UK, a 17% increase from the year before

The Co-op and Tackling Slavery

You can read a full account of our approach to tackling modern slavery in our business and supply chains in our [2016 Modern Slavery Statement](#). However in this report - *The Co-op and Tackling Slavery* - we want to share a bit more about why this issue is so important to us and how the Co-op is playing its part to tackle modern slavery. We'll also introduce you to some of the men and women who have suffered the ordeal of slavery.

It's hard to believe that we even have to say this in 2017



21 million

The [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) estimates there are 21 million victims of modern slavery globally

45.8 million

The [Global Slavery Index](#) estimates there are 45.8 million victims

108

In 2016 victims in the UK came from [108](#) countries, with the top three being Albania, UK and Vietnam

\$150 billion

The [ILO](#) estimates that annual profits from the trafficking of humans generates \$150 billion

People are not property. People do not exist to be bought and sold. People should not be deceived, kidnapped, held against their will, abused, exploited, trapped, forced to work without pay, sometimes to the point of death.

We think of slavery as an injustice from long ago, something dealt with by social reformers in centuries past. Today it's outlawed in every country. But this age-old assault on human dignity and human worth has never gone away. Slavery is on the increase all over the world. There are more human beings in conditions of slavery than ever before. It's happening right now. And it's happening in the UK.

The Co-op was founded on the need to address social injustice. The birth of the Co-op was a direct response to the exploitation of factory workers living in squalid conditions in the towns and cities of the early industrial revolution. The rights and wellbeing of mill workers and their communities is what formed us in 1844 and that commitment to ethical responsibility in business has shaped our thinking and actions ever since.

That's why we're doing everything we can to make sure slavery has no part in the production, growth or manufacture of the products we sell and services we use. To achieve this we've put strong policies in place and we're making sure they're rigorously enforced throughout our supply chains and our own business operations.

But we're doing more than that. We're using our business resources to help victims of modern slavery to become survivors - survivors who are regaining their physical and mental health and relearning the self-confidence and practical skills they need to rebuild their lives.

Solidarity, old and new



Mike* grew up in the UK with a learning difficulty. He struggled to find work. Men from the local town approached him and said that they could get him a job working in a factory. The men transported him in a van on a long journey so he didn't know where he was. He then worked in a factory packing boxes for long hours without breaks and was paid a few pounds an hour. He was told that the men were taking payment for getting him a job. He did not know his legal employment rights.



Sara* from Pakistan had grown up as a domestic servant due to family debt. She was brought to the UK by her employer and kept in poor conditions - 2 pairs of clothes, working 7 days a week with no pay, sleeping on a mattress on the floor and only given small bits to eat. When she eventually escaped she was in her 40s and didn't know that what had happened to her was illegal.



* The names of victims in all case studies throughout the report have been changed

At the Co-op our decision to take a clear and active stand against slavery goes back a long way. It's an issue that's been important to Co-op Members for more than 150 years.

In December 1862, as the American Civil War raged, the founders of our Co-op showed their solidarity with those who were enslaved and those fighting slavery. They organised a public meeting of 5,000 Lancashire cotton weavers at Manchester Free Trade Hall, who agreed to support a letter to President Abraham Lincoln expressing the inhumanity of slavery and promising to stand in solidarity with him and the slaves he was seeking to emancipate.

Our Co-op founders and the weavers of Lancashire did this knowing the high personal cost the Civil War was already causing. A key weapon in Lincoln's fight was the blockade of cotton leaving the Southern States and 80% of the cotton used by the mills of Lancashire came from those Southern States. By December 1862 the Lancashire Cotton Famine, caused by the blockade, was so severe that thousands of mill workers and their families had been laid off and were starving. Some had been keen to break the blockade but owners and workers alike, led by the founders of our Co-op, chose to remain in solidarity with the American slaves.

Lincoln described this solidarity shown by the working men and women of Lancashire as an act of "sublime heroism not surpassed in any age or in any country".

In 1863 Co-operative Wholesale Societies (CWS) adopted the wheatsheaf and the motto 'Labor and Wait', borrowing the emblem and the phrase (including its American spelling) from the anti-slavery movement.

It's a heritage we're proud of, and our forebears' action in the early 1860s helps to shape our response in 2017. We know the struggle against slavery is far from won and we're going to play our part in this modern battle for liberation and freedom.



Our approach

Making sure that slavery has no part in our supply chains is a huge task. We source Co-op Food own-brand products for sale from more than 1,700 sites around the world that employ more than half a million workers. We also source other Co-op brand goods and services and a variety of third-party branded products for sale, in our other businesses. And we source a wide range of goods and services for use in our own business.

We expect all our suppliers to share our commitments to ensuring fair treatment and respect for human rights of people in our supply chain - as set out in our [policies](#) including our Ethical Trade and Human Rights Policy Position Statement, our Sound Sourcing Code of Conduct, our Sustainable Procurement and Supplier Policy, and our Human Rights and Trade Policy.

However, we put particular emphasis on Co-op Food own-brand products as these are where we have most responsibility and can make the most difference in trying to ensure our standards are met.

Co-op Food has long been committed to ethical trade and human rights. In 1997 we were one of the first organisations to join the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), an alliance that brings together companies, campaigning groups and trade unions, with support from the UK Government, to improve labour standards for workers throughout the world.

We require visibility of our suppliers and supply chains and for over 10 years all Co-op brand suppliers in our food business have been required to join the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (Sedex) and complete self-assessment questionnaires (SAQs) on labour and environmental standards. This means that we can put in place appropriate [risk assessment, auditing and monitoring processes](#). In 2016, 100% of sites had completed SAQs and 100% Tier 1 high-risk suppliers had a valid audit.

This robust approach helps identify areas where our suppliers do not meet the standards we and our members and customers expect.

Where we find that practices are not good enough, we don't stop trading with a supplier, leaving the problem unresolved. Where issues are identified, we expect them to be put right, and we work collaboratively with suppliers and other partners to find sustainable solutions. You can read more about our capacity building and collaborative programmes in our 2016 [Modern Slavery Statement](#).

In 2017, we will begin to implement our strategy to improve visibility of our suppliers and supply chains of other Co-op brand goods and services we sell and for the goods and services we use in our own businesses, including insurance, funerals, legal services and electricals. This includes introducing high-risk suppliers to Sedex.

Openness and honesty are part of our Co-op values - and we want to be absolutely transparent about our approach to modern slavery and how we're doing. We've provided lots of detail in our [Modern Slavery Statement](#) so you can see exactly what we've done in 2016 - down to the number of supplier checks we've carried out and the training our suppliers and colleagues have undertaken. We believe that providing this level of detail helps demonstrate how seriously we take the issue and that we are taking appropriate actions to tackle modern slavery.

Our ambition

We can't promise that there will be a time - despite all our efforts - where modern slavery isn't happening. We believe that making such a promise would be dishonest - and honesty is something we value and our members expect.

What we can promise is that, wherever the Co-op's brand is seen, we will have done our best to prevent modern slavery happening and that if we discover modern slavery, we will work with our suppliers and others to put things right. We won't pretend it hasn't happened - to do so would prevent others who need to know, from learning and taking action themselves.

We are proud that when it comes to the products which carry our brand in our food stores this promise is real. There is more work to do in other parts of our business and this will be [our focus in 2017](#). But we commit to deliver this promise across all of the Co-op brand products we use in our businesses, and for all the services provided as part of the Co-op brand products we sell, such as repairs undertaken to the vehicles and homes of our insurance customers.

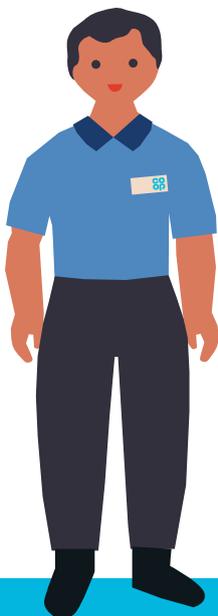
We also know that there's more we need to do when it comes to the goods and services we use in our business. Over the course of 2017 we will be ensuring that the standards we expect are met.

From victims to survivors

Making sure our own house is in order has to be our first priority. But that's the least our members and customers should expect of us as a Co-op.

Our tradition of Co-op solidarity with slaves, dating back to the 1860s, is finding its modern expression in the work we've undertaken to support the victims of today's slave trade. We're using our business resources, in partnership with expert agencies, to help victims become survivors.

Victims of modern slavery need to be supported so that they can rebuild their lives. Central to that is the dignity that paid and freely chosen employment provides. Without this, there is a real chance that they could fall back into the hands of those who exploited them and for the terrible cycle of enslavement to begin again.



In 2016 we formed a partnership with the charity City Hearts to develop our 'Bright Future' programme.

City Hearts is a charity that provides support to victims of human trafficking in the UK. It operates a number of safe houses for victims and is part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) - working closely with the Salvation Army. The NRM, managed by the Home Office, is the government framework which identifies and supports potential victims of modern slavery and provides them with appropriate support during a six week time frame. City Hearts continues to work with individuals who have been confirmed as victims after this six-week period, offering practical support to help individuals and their families rebuild their lives.

Bright Future is providing a pathway to paid employment for victims of modern slavery. In 2017 our goal is to offer 30 people who've been rescued from conditions of slavery in the UK, the opportunity of paid work experience and, if suitable, a guaranteed job. By April 2017, we are delighted to say that four people had already completed the Bright Future Programme, all finding permanent employment as a result - three with the Co-op. Another six people joined the programme in April - the start of a brighter future.

We're proud of our colleagues who are helping victims of modern slavery to become survivors and potential new colleagues.

"I feel good, I really enjoy this job because it's the ideal working environment for me. The Co-op stands out to me from any previous employment that I have had because the people here are seriously nice."

Bright Future Co-op store colleague

Encouraging others to follow our lead



There are growing numbers of victims of modern slavery rescued every year in the UK who deserve the chance of a bright future. We're calling on other businesses to provide opportunities for them to make the journey from victim to survivor. We want to share our learning with other businesses so that many more opportunities are created for those rescued each year.

We'll also work with at least five of our key food suppliers in 2017 to get them involved in Bright Future and, alongside City Hearts, we are now working with the [Snowdrop Project](#) who mentor and support survivors as they join us. We commit to do this because we know that by working in partnership with others - including our competitors - we'll achieve more for the communities we serve and for everyone who lives in them.

The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner **Kevin Hyland OBE** has repeatedly called for greater support for victims and survivors and at the Co-op we completely support him and the inspiring work he does. **The Commissioner recently said of Project Bright Future:**

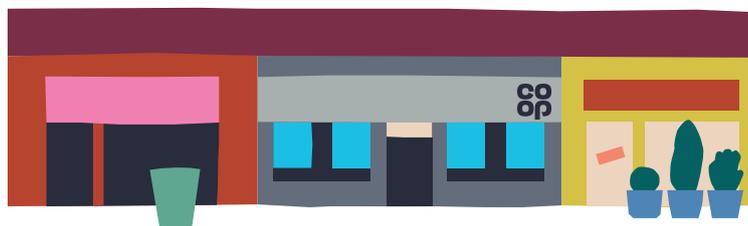
"We need more companies to respond to modern slavery like the Co-op. This pioneering approach to victim support will provide long-term care, boost opportunities for the future and, most importantly of all, prevent the risk of re-trafficking."

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 established the role of Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. The Commissioner has a UK-wide remit to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of modern slavery offences and the identification of victims. The role was created to spearhead the UK's fight against modern slavery.

We call on the Government to do more to recognise and support the needs of victims and build on the ground breaking Modern Slavery Act - more must be done to ensure that victims can rebuild their lives after being rescued.



Kevin Hyland OBE



Community

We have a unique geographical footprint in the UK with a Co-op food store in 1,500 communities. And with 4.3 million members, we also have a unique place in the nation's life.

We commit to work with our suppliers, members, customers and colleagues to raise their awareness and understanding of modern slavery. If everyone in the UK knows about modern slavery, the better the chance we have of preventing it - both in the UK and overseas. We want our members and our customers to ask questions - not only of us but of every business they buy from - about what has been done to seek out and prevent modern slavery. We hope, and expect, to be challenged to do more.

That's why in 2017 we'll focus our efforts on raising awareness and understanding of modern slavery amongst our 70,000 colleagues and 4.3 million members. We'll also work with young people through the [Co-operative Academies Trust](#) - we must educate the next generation about the issue if we are to eradicate it for ever.

Modern slavery is a stain on our society and on our communities. We all need to understand how our decisions and actions can make a difference to how businesses operate, and how individuals can be rescued and their dignity restored.



Sonny* came to the UK from Asia after being offered a restaurant job in the North. He was taken to a shared house where he lived in squalid conditions and was assaulted by people who said they owned him. He became suicidal, but after escaping, he heard his family were being threatened so he returned to his traffickers. It was three years before he escaped for good.

When Sonny came to City Hearts he was frightened, suicidal, had low self-esteem and found it hard to trust anyone or leave the safe house - he had flashbacks and drank alcohol just to get to sleep. City Hearts helped Sonny access counselling, an alcohol detox, English lessons and legal advice to start an asylum claim.

Sonny was then supported by a local charity who continued to help him, while still coming to the City Hearts drop-in as part of the Integration Support Programme. A year later Sonny was granted asylum and five years' leave to remain. The charity and City Hearts then helped him move into private accommodation and he was one of the first people to join Co-op's Bright Future programme, which placed him in a Co-op Food store after four weeks' training and a non-competitive interview. The store Manager was impressed by Sonny's work ethic and how well he related to colleagues and shoppers. Sonny was delighted to have the chance to work and rebuild his life.

"I've found the experience very rewarding. To see Sonny* start to flourish and enjoy coming to work and knowing that I've had a small part to play in that is very humbling."

Co-op store manager



