Equity in Evidence:

fusing lived experience and community knowledge into research to end human trafficking

Final report of the conference

Executive summary

The conference **"Equity in Evidence: fusing lived experience and community knowledge into research to end human trafficking"** brought together 93 anti-trafficking experts from around the world. This group included people with lived experience of modern slavery, researchers, policymakers, donors and other professionals in the global movement to tackle modern slavery. The event aimed to address gaps in how current research is funded, designed, implemented and disseminated – often without the involvement of, or alignment with, the priorities of people with lived experience, slavery-affected communities and local research experts. This objective guided the discussions on topics such as aligning research agendas with the priorities of people most affected by slavery, survivor-led and child-centred approaches, global definitions and local realities of modern slavery, and using research to help people empower themselves.

There was a clear consensus about the need to include people with lived experience in all stages of research, especially during the formative phases of setting research agendas and in deciding which projects are to be funded. Truly engaging them not only leads to higher quality and more realistic research products but is also a powerful mechanism for people with lived experience and for slavery-affected communities to find their own solutions and drive change. Building trust, sharing skills and providing resources and care for them should be included in project budgets and timelines to assure meaningful and consequential engagement.

Getting consent should be an ethical undertaking that involves a genuinely informed process, using the language of the participants and avoiding academic jargon. This process also requires holding researchers accountable, examining power dynamics and returning control to people with lived experience.

The way in which research results are disseminated is crucial for shifting the power of research back to people with lived experience. To make findings useful for impacted communities, they should be disseminated using a broad range of media, such as video, audio, and graphics, and presented using accessible language and formats that are relatable to the intended audience. If authorised by the participants, publications should be accompanied by appropriately anonymised data to encourage repurposing and thereby reduce the need to gather information repeatedly from the same community.

Definitions of modern slavery affect which types of exploitation are criminalised and which are not. Countries must ensure their definitions can adapt to evolving forms of slavery and incorporate inputs from people with lived experience. It is essential to develop a context-specific set of indicators that align with global definitions, national standards and local conditions. Governments and service providers should also acknowledge their responsibility for perpetuating injustice when implementing actions that do not include care and aftercare measures.

The conference report includes the key findings and insights from the nine panel discussions, as well as recommendations on how to define, measure, record and share evidence and lessons from anti-trafficking research. It also describes ways to improve collaborations between researchers from different regions and between experienced and emerging researchers. The report also outlines good practices and serious challenges in implementing and utilising research in slavery-affected communities. Finally, the report presents feedback from our participants regarding good practices for future events regarding logistics, networking and, from those with lived experience, advice on how others can more meaningfully engage them.

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent those of all participants.

Contents

Photo credit: Photos from the conference were taken by Barney Newman Photography and shared with the permission of the individuals featured.

I. Foreword by the Advisory Group

To inform the planning of this conference, the organisers recruited a diverse group of experts either with lived experience of modern slavery or who live in or work with particularly affected communities. More than 100 applications were received; the organisers invited seven people to join, with the aim of ensuring the group had the greatest possible diversity and inclusion, particularly in terms of the geographical location of the members and the types of modern slavery research each had experience working on. Five global regions were represented in the group as well as a significant breadth and depth of expertise.

The overall objective of the Advisory Group was to provide guidance and ensure the conference responded to the needs and priorities of people with lived experience of modern slavery. We met monthly as a group from January 2023 and provided input at each stage of organising the conference.

In particular, we provided input into the overall theme of the conference, the topics to be discussed, and the design, timings and environment of the event. In each case, we worked to make the conference more responsive to the needs of different people, including those with lived experience of modern slavery.

The appointment of an Advisory Group ensured that a diverse set of views was heard, discussed and considered during the process of making this conference a reality. Ultimately, we hope this made the conference respond to the diverse needs of both researchers and people with lived experience of modern slavery, as well as the funders, policymakers and other stakeholders who attended. Being part of the Advisory Group also provided us with peer learning opportunities, both through our regular meetings and through our participation in the conference itself.

We have continued to meet as a group following the conference to reflect on our experiences, and we have shared our main reflections in a blog post which you can read here: https://freedomfund.org/blog/equity-in-evidence-AG/. We hope that these reflections will help to inform similar endeavours in the future.

Chris Ash (United States)
National Survivor Network –
CAST
They/them

David Baguma Kagoro (Rwanda)
Never Again Rwanda
He/him

Hmayak Avetisyan (Armenia)
National Trans Coalition Human
Rights NGO
He/him

Mamta Mehar (India)
Independent
She/her

Rogers Mutaawe (Uganda)
Uganda Youth Development Link
He/him

Victoria Capriles Moreno (Venezuela)
Universidad Metropolitana's
Human Rights Centre
She/her

Willz (Kenya)
Jafari Jata Solution
They/them

II. Background of the conference

a. Introduction

The conference **"Equity in Evidence: fusing lived experience and community knowledge into research to end human trafficking"** was organised by the Freedom Fund, the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) and the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC). This conference intended to:

- Improve how researchers define, measure, record and share evidence and lessons from anti-trafficking research, particularly by drawing on the expertise of researchers with lived experience and those who are from communities most affected by trafficking.

- Cultivate new connections and foster future collaborations between researchers from different regions, and between experienced and emerging researchers.

- Identify good practices and serious challenges in implementing and using research in communities most affected by trafficking, to highlight and drive concrete actions towards making anti-trafficking research more centred on the priorities of front-line researchers and especially people with lived experience.

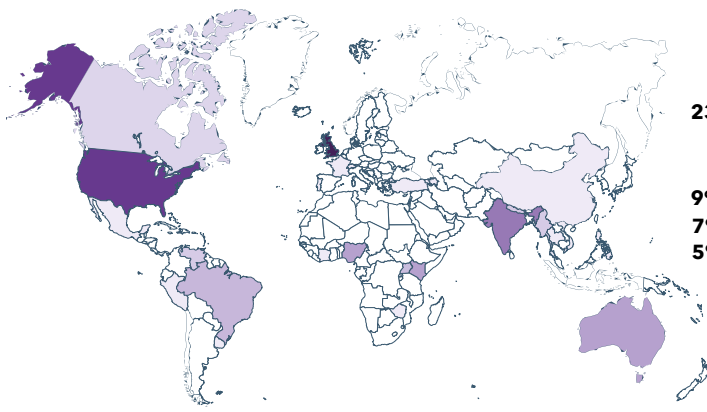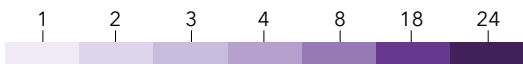For two days, we had insightful and inspiring conversations across nine prioritised topics with 93 conference participants from 30 countries. Their expertise and openness to learning from others provided an excellent environment for exchanging good practices and lessons that will spur further collaborations on research that is centred on the priorities of people with lived experience and communities most affected by modern slavery.

b. Profile of participants

In total, 93 participants from 30 countries and 58 organisations joined the Equity in Evidence conference:

Participants per country

Types of organisations represented

1	2	3	4	8	18	24

23% Research institutions

51% NGOs and Charities

9% Independent
7% Government
5% Donor

3% United Nations agency **2%** Other
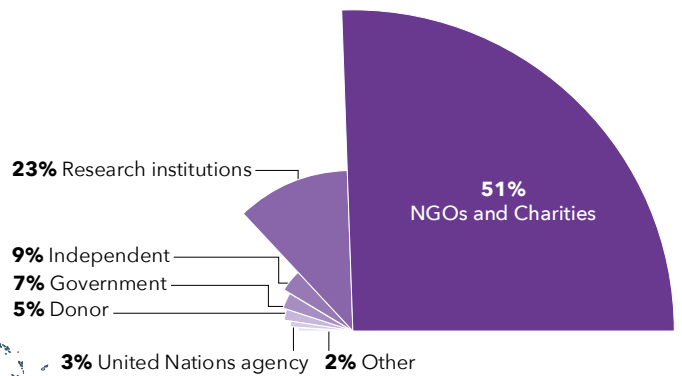
Based on the information provided during registration, these are the topics that the conference participants have been working on:

Topics in modern slavery

Topic	%
Forced labour	61%
Sex trafficking	52%
Child labour	50%
Domestic servitude	44%
Debt bondage	36%
Forced marriage	35%
State-imposed forced labour	15%
Other forms of exploitation	13%
Organ trafficking	5%
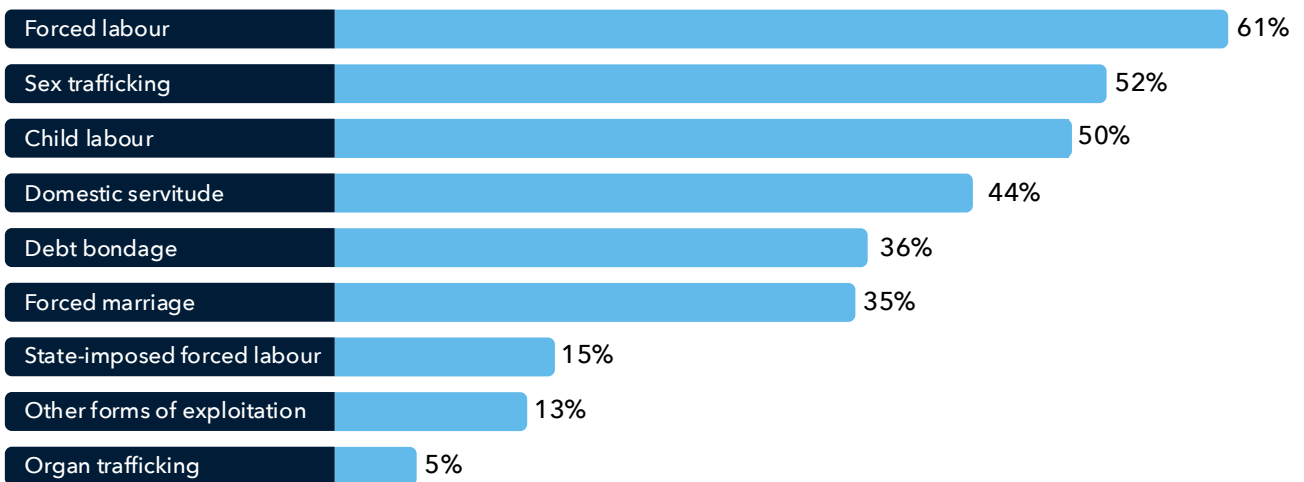
c. Organisations represented

+ African Migration and Development Policy Centre
+ AFRUCA Safeguarding Children
+ Almajiri Child Rights Initiative
+ Aviva Consulting
+ Azadi Kenya
+ Children Unite
+ Children's Investment Fund Foundation
+ Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking
+ Diginex
+ Equidem
+ Freedom Network
+ George Washington University
+ Global Fund for Children
+ Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
+ Innovations for Poverty Action
+ International Justice Mission (IJM)
+ International Labour Organization (ILO)
+ International Organization for Migration (IOM)
+ Jafari Jata Solution
+ Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health
+ Justice and Care
+ Kachin Women's Association Thailand
+ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
+ Migrants At Work
+ Mila - Quebec AI Institute
+ Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC)
+ Monitoring and Evaluation of Trafficking in Persons (METIP)
+ National Survivor Network, USA
+ National Trans Coalition Human Rights NGO
+ Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research
+ Never Again Rwanda
+ New York University, Marron Institute of Urban Management

+ NORC at the University of Chicago
+ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
+ Population Council
+ Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices
+ Promundo Institute
+ Raks Thai Foundation
+ Survivor Alliance
+ The AfriChild Centre
+ The Freedom Fund
+ U.S. Department of Labor, International Labor Affairs Bureau
+ U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
+ Uganda Youth Development Link
+ UK Arts and Humanities Research Council
+ UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
+ UK Home Office
+ UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight
+ Union Afirmativa
+ Universidad Metropolitana's Human Rights Center
+ University College London (UCL), Institute for Global Health
+ University of Georgia, Center on Human Trafficking Research & Outreach
+ University of Hull, Wilberforce Institute
+ University of Liverpool, Centre for the Study of International Slavery
+ University of Massachusetts Lowell, School of Criminology and Justice Studies
+ University of Nottingham, Rights Lab
+ University of Oxford, Bonavero Institute of Human Rights
+ Unseen UK
+ Walk Free

III. Program

	Tuesday 20th June	Wednesday 21st June		Thursday 22nd June	
9:00		Registration		Registration	
		Opening remarks and keynote speech		Recap from Day 1	
10:00				Handling of sensitive data, consent, disclosures and confidentiality	Compelling funding proposals, reflections from funders
		Speed networking games			
11:00		Break		Break	
12:00		Opening plenary: Beyond tokenistic involvement of people with lived experience in anti-trafficking research		How to collaborate with affected communities in difficult settings	Global definitions of modern slavery and local realities
13:00		Lunch		Lunch	
14:00		'Ignite' presentations		'Ignite' presentations	
15:00		Aligning research agendas with the priorities of people most affected by slavery	Alternative measurement methods: survivor-led, child-centred approaches	What happens after publication? Turning research into actions	It's the journey, not the destination: research as a form of empowerment
		Break		Break	
16:00		Reflections & conclusions from Day 1		Closing plenary and conclusions from the conference	
17:00	Welcome reception and drinks				
18:00					
19:00					
20:00					

IV. Summary of the discussions

a. Opening plenary: Beyond tokenistic involvement of people with lived experience in anti-trafficking research

Chair: **Allen Kiconco,** Consultant, University of Liverpool

Chris Ash, Survivor Leadership Program Manager, National Survivor Network - Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking

David Baguma Kagoro, Senior Researcher, Never Again Rwanda

Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, Deputy Director and Head of Global Research, Walk Free

Minh Dang, Executive Director, Survivor Alliance

Sheldon Zhang, Professor, School of Criminology and Justice Studies, University of Massachusetts Lowell

1. **People with lived experience should be engaged at all stages of research**: this includes prioritising research topics, ethics, recruiting participants, conducting research, analysis and dissemination.

2. Research publications are often inaccessible to the people who may benefit from them. We need to consider **how we can make accessible outputs to accompany the research that we produce** so that more people can benefit from it.

3. We need to **consider epistemic justice**: recognising "how we know what we know" and how that knowledge can include experiential, professional and community knowledge. The knowledge that is inherent to lived experience is something that cannot be accessed through any other means; research is more complete when it includes this perspective and is informed by it. **Academia is not the only site of knowledge production, and it need not be considered the primary or even the most legitimate site.** "Academic border patrol strategy" exists as gatekeeping in academia when methods of community-based participatory research expect participants to fit structures that are already in place and were built without them in mind. This approach risks replicating tokenisation.

4. **Engaging people with lived experience in research is not just about equity and inclusion from an ethical perspective; it can also capture nuances and context that might be missed otherwise and improve academic excellence.** When we include people with lived experience, it is not just about incorporating their narratives, it is about considering what findings people with lived experience think are significant, as well as what recommendations they think are actionable and respond to real-world context.

5. We need to start talking about the **ethics of interviewing people with lived experience about their trauma without compensating them fairly**. We talk about the ethics of financial

compensation and how it may appear that we are bribing people to share their stories, but we do not talk about the further exploitation that occurs through traumatic re-experiencing and how expensive quality care and treatment can be.

6. Funding does not typically come until the acceptance of research proposals. Funding at earlier stages to support engaging people with lived experience in the co-authorship of research proposals could be powerful and improve the quality of research. However, **there is a need for relationship/trust-building and for supporting networks that is not often understood by funders**. Building the capacity of peer researchers to develop relationships and trust can have a valuable impact on the work itself.

b. Aligning research agendas with the priorities of people most affected by slavery

Chair: **Alex Balch,** Director of Research, Modern Slavery PEC
Andrew Clayton, Senior Social Development Adviser, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Benedetta Wasonga, Regional Consultant - Africa, University of Liverpool
Casey Risko, Senior Advisor, Contractor on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
Yuki Lo, Head of Research & Evaluation, the Freedom Fund

1. What is a research agenda? Agendas exist at every level - from the individual researcher to a funding institution to a government. **While it is straightforward to come up with "a" research agenda, it is much more difficult to agree on "the" research agenda between all the stakeholders involved.**

2. **Aligning individual research agendas with the priorities of those with lived experience** is not just the right thing to do but also the **necessary starting point for research to make a positive impact on those who are directly affected by the issue**. While we rely on research evidence to make policy and programming decisions, those decisions are less effective if research is disconnected from the affected community.

3. Donors have a key role to play in setting research agendas. They **should champion the meaningful engagement of people with lived experience, while also ensuring that the resultant evidence feeds into broader policy discussions**. Funders must also recognise that responsible engagement requires ample investment of time and financial resources; for example, researchers need time to navigate complex ethics processes.

4. At the same time, all parties should fully understand the broader implications of linking research funding with the goal of ensuring that **the starting point becomes what people most affected by modern slavery tell us is important to them**. Doing so can change what research questions

are prioritised and how they are answered. For example, what if research focused more on the capabilities, ambitions, and abilities of people with lived experience and not just their negative experiences? For funders in particular, this approach can bring challenges, such as how to report on the cost-effectiveness of research to improve the resilience of and shift power to communities affected by slavery, rather than narrowly focusing on documenting harm or service delivery or survivors reached which are easier to quantify.

c. Alternative measurement methods: Survivor-led, child-centred approaches

Chair: **Varsha Gyawali,** Research & Evaluation Manager, The Freedom Fund
Annabel Erulkar, Country Director Ethiopia, Population Council
Clare Bangirana, Director, Research and Knowledge Development, The AfriChild Centre
Pradeep Narayanan, Advisor, Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices
Ramya Subrahmanian, Chief, Child Rights and Protection, UNICEF Innocenti - Global Office of Research and Foresight

1. **We should not only consider the production of evidence itself but also who is using the evidence, as well as how and when the evidence is being used.** There are many gaps in the way we inform policies and rules, and we need to change the way researchers think about how the information they are producing is being interpreted by policymakers.
2. We need to give more consideration to the **ethics of engaging in research with children and how we provide agency to children** and ensure that the work being done does not have a negative effect on the children involved. Care plans should be put in place to ensure there are follow-up services that are guided by the needs of the children.
3. **Methods should be population-specific and create space for honesty about what is being observed**. When engaging with donors, organisations should avoid emphasising only the information that is important to the donor.
4. **Trust and relationship-building are important and often require additional time and funding**, especially as these objectives relate to children. Managing strict deadlines and pressure from donors can cause a breach of ethics due to the pressure to move ahead in circumstances that require more time and greater care.
5. **Institutional review boards are often designed to protect the institution and not the community**. In many instances, they try to protect the institutions by minimising their own liability, rather than considering what research is deemed necessary and impactful for affected communities. Community ethical review boards and institutional review boards often clash in their recommendations.

d. The ethics of data: Handling of sensitive data, consent, disclosure and confidentiality, including risks to people with lived experience

Chair: **Lauren Damme,** PhD candidate at George Washington University, Director of Research at the U.S. Department of Labor

Faith Wanjiku Mwangi, Program Manager, Azadi Kenya

Nicola Pocock, Honorary Assistant Professor, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Phineas Jasi, Data and Research Specialist, International Organization for Migration (IOM)

1. Appropriate anonymisation of large datasets, throughout the entire data lifecycle, is difficult and context-specific. **Participants must understand the true meaning of confidentiality and anonymisation, and understand the risks associated with non-anonymised data**, especially when attributing quotes and authorship, among other things, to children.

2. Institutional review boards sometimes shy away from approving studies with high-risk groups, including children who have experienced trauma, due to the ethical implications of working with them. However, this limits the base of evidence available for researchers and practitioners. **Institutional review boards should be sensitised to these types of studies because engagement can be done in an ethical and empowering way**.

3. **The potential for survey fatigue and for re-traumatisation of respondents who disclose their lived experiences must both be considered when designing research.** Consequently, primary data collection should be employed only when comparable data do not already exist.

4. Ethical considerations are often framed as a checkbox for compliance purposes. This mindset minimises the impact that research can have and limits the ability of researchers to meaningfully engage with research participants. **Ethics and engagement with people with lived experience apply to the entire research process, from agenda-setting to dissemination.**

e. Compelling funding proposals, reflections from funders

Chair: **Peter Olayiwola,** Lecturer in Politics of Immigration, Anti-Trafficking & Modern Slavery, University of Liverpool

David Ochieng Okech, Centre Director and Professor, Centre on Human Trafficking Research & Outreach, University of Georgia

Izzy Templer, Research Operations Manager, Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC)

Jeni Sorensen, Director, Human Trafficking Research Initiative, Innovations for Poverty Action

1. Funding is critical because, without it, researchers may lack the necessary resources to pursue their work. **Knowing how to construct a compelling funding proposal is an essential skill**.

2. Different funders have different priorities. For example, the Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) emphasises randomised control trials and impact evaluations, while the Modern Slavery PEC emphasises the involvement of people with lived experience and policy impact potential. It is key to understand the aims and objectives of your funder.

3. The panellists described some of the approaches to lived experience engagement that their organisations have undertaken, **recognising that there is still a lot to learn about the best ways to carry out such engagement and that funders have an important role to play.**

4. Research funders will be looking at whether a **proposal includes the right partners and whether the necessary relationships have been established to make the research a success**.

5. Applications should demonstrate that project teams have considered the ethics of the proposed project in a meaningful way and that the **safeguarding of participants has been factored into the project**.

6. **Applications should be written in clear language that is accessible to a non-expert reader**, as this shows the ability of the bid team to communicate results clearly to non-expert audiences.

7. Applications should **make realistic promises and clearly demonstrate that the team can deliver on them**. Refining scopes and objectives set out in research calls are encouraged, as long as teams justify why they have done so.

8. It is important that **applications include a strong rationale for the chosen focus**, in terms of the issue the research will address, where the research will take place, whom it will engage with, etc.

9. The key word is "compelling," not "successful." It is possible to write a perfect application that may not be successful; it may just be that there are too many applications to fund. Accordingly, it is better to focus on presenting a compelling idea than to focus strictly on getting funding, as **a compelling idea will likely result in a stronger proposal**, and if not initially successful it will be available for further applications.

10. Researchers should not be afraid to **challenge a funder's assumptions about what is needed or what should be done** – most are aware they do not know everything and thus are open to hearing new ideas.
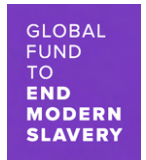
f. How to collaborate with affected communities in difficult settings

Chair: **Rituu B Nanda,** Community Driven Change and Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, Global Fund for Children and The Constellation
Jessica Nhkum, General Secretary, Kachin Women's Association Thailand
Linda Oucho, Executive Director, African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC)
Victoria Capriles, Executive Director, Universidad Metropolitana's Human Rights Centre

1. **Using participatory methods, researchers have been able to improve community action and involvement in ways that have helped members take ownership of their communities**. Researchers saw improvements in communities that participated in the research process because members were able to make a connection about how they could take actions to create positive change.

2. Migration is often viewed as a national security concern and **migrants fleeing hardship have been viewed as threats rather than being recognised as refugees**. Bureaucracy and onerous processes for migration, particularly during armed conflict or in the aftermath of a natural disaster, often make it difficult or even impossible to safely move.

3. Research institutions often send people from the Global North to the Global South to do research and analyse data, among other things, which can be costly and often inefficient. Those who are being studied often feel safer engaging with people from their own communities. **Members of impacted communities participating in local research processes can help to ensure that the data are analysed in an appropriate cultural context.**

4. Researchers have observed that the refugees they work with often produce and convey knowledge differently. It is not always done through papers and speaker presentations but through art forms such as painting, media, dance, music, etc.

5. Evidence that is considered reliable and viable, is often narrowly defined as something that is documented or recorded. In many cases, reliable, verifiable—and highly valuable—evidence is maintained in other formats, such as life stories. **We cannot assume that just because something is not written and officially recorded, it does not count as evidence**.

6. **We need to consider whose interests are at play in generating evidence.** Often, funders or research institutions already have policies in mind that they want to support, and these have an impact on how research is conducted and interpreted. This can have a major effect on the representation of demographics in data collection, leading to biased research design, selective reporting results, and cherry-picking data that align with pre-existing agendas. The pressure to appeal to a funder's agenda can discourage dissenting opinions and hinder open scientific research. **All of this can lead to diminishing the value of the knowledge that exists within**

communities, which in turn leads to broken trust between researchers and community members.

7. Often people can look at the same evidence and come up with different interpretations, particularly when the observers come from different backgrounds. **Unless you actually sit with the people that you are gathering evidence from, you cannot properly contextualise it**.

8. When trying to see the value and impact of people with lived experience, we see that once knowledge is gathered, produced and brought back to the communities originally studied/interviewed, there is often a wide gap between **what was intended to be communicated by the participants and what was understood by the researchers.**

9. In too many cases, the operators of research-sharing platforms are, knowingly or not, suppressing results and data that could provide important evidence for further research and policy initiatives. **Without the support of these platforms, there usually are no other ways for researchers to present and discuss their findings,** and they will not be available to other researchers, policymakers and people with lived experience.

10. Examine who is benefitting from the research. **Communities affected by research should be able to access the data and conclusions generated from the research in formats they can understand and relate to**.

g. Global definitions of modern slavery and local realities

Chair: **Meredith Dank,** Research Professor, New York University
Aké Achi, Founding Chief Executive, Migrants At Work
Kareem Kysia, Program Area Director, NORC at the University of Chicago
Michaëlle de Cock, Head of Research and Evaluation Unit, FUNDAMENTALS, International Labour Organization
Wasurat Homsud, Program Manager, Raks Thai Foundation

1. Modern slavery can be viewed as a colonial legacy, recognising its historical impact on people's lived experiences. Current definitions[1] stem from that history, particularly the 1930 International Labour Organization (ILO) normative definitions, which should be considered when discussing current definitions and indicators. **Modern slavery is also evolving, and its definition must be adaptable to accommodate these changes**.

2. **The ILO's definitions of forced labour and forced marriage hold value as they allow for shared understanding and a common benchmark for dialogue** that upholds the dignity of people who have endured these conditions. They also allow for meaningful discussions and decisions on human

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[1] The definitions of 'modern slavery' used by the ILO can be found at: https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_855019/lang--en/index.htm

trafficking and forced labour based on a globally approved set of definitions, with room for adaptation to local contexts using various indicators.

3. At the same time, these definitions lack inputs from people with lived experiences, **the broadness and complexity associated with the ILO's global definitions may not always reflect the realities on the ground**. Depending on the context and how countries have chosen to adopt these normative statements, **global definitions of modern slavery can have unintended consequences for individuals facing "borderline" situations that do not fit the traditional definitions of forced labour and trafficking**, as well as for those sharing perspectives that differ from globalised, standardised criteria.

4. On one hand, **despite the broad scope of these definitions, they can hinder some individuals' ability to access protection.** The definitions are used to establish what situations can and cannot be considered modern slavery, and this basis underpins the legal measures that are implemented to prevent modern slavery, prosecute perpetrators and protect people with lived experience. If an individual's circumstances do not meet the criteria set under the ILO convention, they may not be eligible to access support services. On the other hand, **these definitions could antagonise individuals who are hesitant to engage with support systems due to the potential of additional harm coming to them**, including a further loss of agency if they are deemed to be in a situation of modern slavery. There were also contrary views, as some participants shared that the ILO's definitions of modern slavery allow flexibility of adaptation based on the country's contexts.

5. The importance of contextuality and adaptability and how it may interfere with the applicability of the ILO's definitions of modern slavery is illustrated in specific scenarios highlighted in the discussion. Firstly, some panellists mentioned how **the lack of enforceability of international frameworks, which do not always align with national laws, may leave certain communities more exposed to human trafficking**. **Legislative measures to address modern slavery may also be inadequate**, failing to properly identify people affected by it and risking falling under what may be considered "state-induced" modern slavery: the legal systems and procedures that can make people with lived experience even more at risk of further exploitation.

6. A panellist provided an example of how the **United Kingdom's immigration laws dictating the requirements for applying for a sponsorship visa intersect with labour law and leave migrants in situations of heightened vulnerability - a scenario that does not fit within the traditional definition of human trafficking**. In these cases, a nexus of employers, recruitment agencies, and immigration lawyers can potentially exploit individuals who arrive with legal working visas but no jobs, thereby exposing them to human trafficking and exploitation. Migrants pay exorbitant fees to come to the UK, only to be left without employment and unable to report their situation without risking visa revocation. Often, while these individuals are exploited, they cannot be recognised as being in situations of modern slavery and their circumstances are viewed as a criminal offence. As a result, they are left without protection and caught in a precarious situation.

7. The power dynamics of the national laws respecting ILO conventions raise questions about the **relationship between countries and the consequences they face if they choose not to ratify**. Unequal power relationships are evident in this context. Beyond this, **many countries struggle to operationalise the existing definitions and implement relevant laws effectively**. One of the panellists shared an example that after the 2014-2015 Trafficking in Persons report, their national government faced urgent pressure to address human trafficking and forced labour situation in the country, reflecting it in the legislative agenda. However, despite having aligned national laws with international conventions, challenges persisted in ensuring adequate working and living conditions for migrant workers due to weak law enforcement.

h. What happens after publication? Turning research into policy, business and community actions

Chair: **Mustafa Qadri,** Founder and Executive Director, Equidem
Ana Paula Portella, Independent Consultant from Brazil
Caleb Owen, Senior International Relations Officer, U.S. Department of Labor, International Labor Affairs Bureau
Olivia Hesketh, Director of Policy Impact, Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC)

1. **Research is not the endpoint but the beginning of a conversation**; targeted recommendations can start those conversations and hopefully lead to change.

2. **There are different kinds of impact that research can have: instrumental/direct, conceptual (capacity of policymakers to access and understand evidence), and connectivity (building of relationships).** Most research projects lead to more than one kind of impact, but each type might materialise over different timeframes.

3. Policymakers have different needs: strategic, overarching policy priorities requiring a wide-ranging evidence base over time, alongside more responsive, shorter-term priorities related to needing specific evidence quickly. However, it can be challenging to align research and policymaking timelines, and **research is only one factor in the policymaking process**, which also includes, for instance, legal and financial considerations.

4. **Policymakers value syntheses of existing evidence as well as new empirical evidence**. But when it comes to new evidence, it's not just large-scale, quantitative studies that count. Small-scale qualitative research can still have an impact because it conveys the nuances of particular issues.

5. While governments can seem unapproachable, it is possible to identify and work with "champions" within government who can take forward recommendations within their institutions. **Identifying relevant policymakers and building trust, credibility, and interest with them at an early stage in the research is critical**.

6. Research that is more equitable and inclusive produces better, more useful evidence, while **research that engages with relevant public bodies early is better positioned to identify feasible changes in policy/practice** to recommend.

7. Researchers need to be creative in communicating knowledge that is intended to inform policy and from the outset should **have in place a communications strategy to support that, tailoring outputs for different audiences**.

8. How do you deal with the role of evidence in a contested political environment? One approach is to **communicate research results to civil society organisations that can use the evidence to support their campaigning**.

i. It's the journey, not the destination: research as a form of empowerment

Chair: **Aditi Chatterjee,** Evidence, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Specialist, Monitoring & Evaluation of Trafficking in Persons (METIP)
Debbie Ariyo, Chief Executive Officer, AFRUCA Safeguarding Children
Hmayak Avetisyan, Programs Manager, National Trans Coalition Human Rights NGO
Willz, Founder & Director, Jafari Jata Solution

1. People with lived experience contribute to society in many ways – all of which deserve recognition. Researchers should strive to avoid defining people with lived experience solely by the exploitation they have endured and acknowledge their multiple identities and roles within their communities. People with lived experience are also service providers, mobilisers and changemakers. **Survivor-led research should, therefore, adequately consider these intersecting identities.**

2. Too often, researchers engage with people with lived experience *after* the funding has been secured and the scope of the research is already set. In other instances, people with lived experience are asked for input into the research, but it remains unclear whether, or how, their feedback is used – which can be disheartening to them. **People with lived experience need to be part of the conversation before decisions are made about what and how the research should be carried out.**

3. At the onset of a partnership, an honest conversation with research team members who have lived experience is critical to determining realistic levels of resources to support their meaningful involvement in the research. Some people with lived experience may be thriving and well-equipped, while others may be struggling with basic resources; for example, experiencing food shortages or lacking regular access to a computer. **Adequate financial compensation for people's time should be considered a minimum, and additional flexibility and support should also be discussed among project partners**. This ensures the research is truly engaging a diverse range of people with lived experience, and not solely those who are in more well-off positions.

4. **It is crucial to engage with people with lived experience and understand the potential of research to acknowledge and uplift them.** This requires assuring that their involvement is substantial and consequential, fostering their personal development throughout their involvement, respecting the principle of "nothing about us without us," acknowledging their perspectives, and including them in decision-making processes through advisory groups and boards of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), among others. **Empowerment involves shifting power and autonomy to the researcher with lived experience and providing necessary resources and skills to facilitate their access and understanding.** By providing the required resources and shining a spotlight on their existing strengths, we can unveil and discover the power within them.

5. The power of research lies in **how we interpret and assign meaning to the data we collect**. Often, certain voices dominate the analysis and reporting, while others, particularly those of people with lived experience, are pushed to the sidelines. This raises questions about how research is defined and prompts us to reconsider our approach.

j. 'Ignite' presentations

Perpetrators of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in the Recife metropolitan region, Brazil

Rodrigo Laro, Monitoring and Evaluation Leader, Promundo Institute

This study aimed to explore the characteristics, social norms and behaviours of men who perpetrate commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the Recife Metropolitan Region in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, focusing on those who exchange money or goods for sexual acts with girls under the age of 18 years. The study followed four main steps: (1) approval of an ethics protocol, (2) development of a systematic literature review, (3) 52 qualitative interviews with respondents who are part of the CSEC context, and (4) 79 interviews with men who frequent establishments or sites where CSEC may occur. The results will serve as a basis for designing a campaign to shift social norms that lead to the sexualisation of children, potentially targeting norms among "perpetrators" as well as "bystanders."
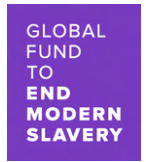
Modern slavery and capital markets research: Preliminary findings

Sofia Gonzalez De Aguinaga, Research Fellow in Business, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and Modern Slavery, Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law and Modern Slavery PEC Fellow

This research[2] was aimed at understanding the potential for capital market actors such as stock exchanges, investors and others to address modern slavery in business supply chains. It explored their main drivers,

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[2] Further information available at: https://modernslaverypec.org/research-projects/financial-markets-modern-slavery, and preliminary findings can be accessed via https://modernslaverypec.org/latest/how-effective-are-investors-at-addressing-modern-slavery-supply-chains

the data and metrics they use, and the implementation and effectiveness of their policies and practices. The preliminary findings showed that investors are using different levers, mainly corporate engagements, to influence business behaviour with some evidence of effectiveness. However, most evidence is from the Global North and investors' efforts have not been informed by people with lived experience. The final report will be published in September 2023.

Forced to scam: a new form of modern slavery in South-East Asia

Ling Li, Regional Consultant, University of Liverpool

Since 2018, online scams have escalated enormously to the point that journalists are now talking about a "scamdemic" originating from South-East Asia.[3] Stories of people being smuggled or tricked into scam compounds where they are forcibly confined have appeared on social media and evidence has been mounting that there are possibly hundreds of thousands of people working under duress and/or suffering from torture and violence in scam compounds in Myanmar, Laos, Dubai and in Cambodia, where *Voice of America* has conducted a series of reports on this issue.[4] There is an urgent need for researchers, CSOs and law enforcement to pay attention and take action against this new form of modern slavery.

Work as a site of agency and a site of exploitation

Maayan Niezna, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Modern Slavery and Human Rights, University of Oxford and Modern Slavery PEC Fellow

While the notion of labour exploitation is central to the modern slavery framework, there has been insufficient attention to what that means and there are significant inconsistencies in the way different actors define "exploitation." Examining work as a site of both agency and exploitation, this research project investigates how different actors in the UK understand "labour exploitation," as well as how they understand work more broadly. The research compares the understandings of lawmakers (Parliamentarians and policymakers), law enforcement (police and labour inspectors), and people with lived experience of exploitation (migrant workers and people affected by modern slavery).[5]

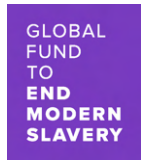## Climate change and modern slavery

Joy, consultant at Unseen UK

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 outlines businesses' legal responsibility to ensure that goods and services are sourced legitimately and ethically. It is now more widely recognised that activities that cause climate degradation can often be those in which modern slavery takes place. Businesses and organisations usually

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[3] See Faulder, D. (2022). *Asia's scamdemic: How COVID-19 supercharged online crime*. [Online] Available at: https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Asia-s-scamdemic-How-COVID-19-supercharged-online-crime

[4] See https://vodenglish.news/enslaved/

[5] Further information available at: https://modernslaverypec.org/assets/downloads/Bonavero-project-outline-Mayaan-Niezna.pdf

try to manage separately the impact their operations have on climate and the risk of modern slavery in their supply chains. This project is looking to identify opportunities to combine efforts to mitigate climate impact and modern slavery in supply chains while also safeguarding businesses' reputations and ensuring compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Survivor engagement, prevention and advocacy – a case study from the front-line area in India

Suti Sahariah, Regional Consultant, University of Liverpool

This research investigated how a community-based organisation engages survivors in programs and policies in an area where there is a high incidence of human trafficking. The findings showed that the survivors' lived experience in the rehabilitation process builds their capacity and knowledge to engage in programs and inform policy. The research also found that survivors in India like to be called "right holders" since they feel it is their right as citizens to lead a dignified life.

Prevention of modern slavery within sex work

Brandon, consultant at Unseen UK

This project shares eye-opening statistics, highlighting that although it is proven that the internet is used to facilitate modern slavery and human trafficking, very little is known about the role and responsibilities of Adult Service Websites (ASWs) in preventing and protecting individuals on their websites from being trafficked and exploited. Research suggests that ASWs can play a major role in protecting people in situations of modern slavery by identifying them and referring cases to the authorities, as well as implementing safer strict measures for sex buyers and those who organise the activities for financial gain. This project was carried out with the help of people with lived experience and will create new evidence, knowledge and understanding to inform issues on modern slavery about ASWs and sex work governance, policing and regulation in the UK.

Financial investigations into modern slavery crimes

Alicia Heys, Lecturer in Modern Slavery, Wilberforce Institute, University of Hull and Modern Slavery PEC Fellow

The UK's Court Proceedings Database shows that in 2017, 2018 and 2019 collectively, only 64 adult offenders were sentenced for modern slavery and human trafficking offences under the Modern Slavery Act. It is well evidenced that survivors may not want to be involved in criminal justice processes that involve testifying against their perpetrator, yet convictions may rely heavily on their testimony. To identify alternative methods of achieving convictions, Alicia Heys, PhD, is conducting research on financial investigations to ascertain how information may be gathered to evidence a crime of modern slavery. Her ignite session shared early findings from this research project.

Prevention and identification of children and young adults experiencing, or at risk of, modern slavery in the UK

*Ergul Celiksoy, Research Fellow, Rights Lab, University of Nottingham*

This research examines the investigation and prosecution of digital payments and cryptocurrencies used by criminals to facilitate online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) in Europe, specifically focusing on the UK, the Netherlands and Norway as the demand side and the Philippines as the country where the children are exploited. It aims to understand the steps necessary to successfully prosecute cases of OSEC in Europe facilitated by traditional payment channels with new digital interfaces and to identify methods of expanding on these guidelines to successfully prosecute cryptocurrency and other new payment technology transactions. This study is funded by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS).

Interrogating the effects of immigration policy on human trafficking: an analysis of the evidence base

Audrey Lumley-Sapanski, Assistant Professor of Geography, Colorado Mesa University and former Modern Slavery PEC Fellow

Using a systematic evidence review, this research explores the relationship between human trafficking and immigration policy. The findings are based on a review of 374 academic articles, legislative documents, and/or published grey literature including NGO reports, governmental publications, and media reports identified through keyword searches published between 2000 and 2021. The literature is overwhelmingly critical of the use of migration policy to address human trafficking. The critique frequently focuses on the ways in which crimmigration and securitisation approaches redirect the state lens from underlying structural factors to indiscriminate policing of irregular or 'illegal' migration.
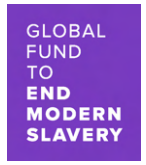
V. Results of the conference

a. Guiding principles

Here we present highlights of the approaches and values that should guide future research into modern slavery:

● **Building trust-based relationships and fostering equal partnerships between researchers and people with lived experience can allow spaces for mutual learning and effective collaboration**. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of meaningful engagement and equal partnership with people with lived experience, where they can freely express their opinions and share their knowledge.

● To bring genuine and productive change, **traditional structures and agendas of research should be deconstructed and decolonised**. Establishing equal partnerships between funders, academia, practitioners, small charities, communities, and individuals with lived experiences is crucial for doing that. People with lived experience should be included in agenda-setting and decision-making on research funding and ethical reviews, processes that are typically very exclusionary.

● **Acknowledging the importance of local and regional context is key**. Data collection methods across countries can vary significantly and thereby further complicate project implementation if they are not fully understood. Rather than discussing modern slavery purely from a Western lens, recognising and reflecting the local realities and nuances of different regions and countries is crucial.

● Funders, researchers, and other actors ought to **learn from researchers and communities who have engaged in participatory research** about their experiences and processes. Doing so will help them build recommendations and understand what ethical co-production looks like.

● Is a global modern slavery research agenda possible or something we should even aspire to? Despite concerns that it could be perceived as a neo-colonial project, a **common agenda could be built on methods and partnerships within research through a more disaggregated and decentralised approach**.

b. Recommendations

● **Funders, researchers and other actors in the research sector should engage with people with lived experience in all the stages of research**: agenda setting; setting criteria, scoring and selection of applications; ethical review; research design; data collection; care and aftercare measures. It is essential to generate evidence on the structures that will enable people with lived experience to meaningfully feed into the research process and to ensure that their input is representative and diverse.

- **Researchers should re-examine their ethics processes to reframe informed consent as a process involved in trust-building and ethical engagement, rather than as a document collected for compliance purposes**. Consent should be truly informed and may exist in different formats, including verbal consent in the participants' language, rather than a signed page written in English.

- Researchers should improve access to their research by using straightforward language, sharing data with the public and making it available in multiple formats, including video, audio, and the written word. They should also **build accessibility into plans for dissemination**.

- Whenever feasible, researchers should **publish appropriately anonymised data**. This will create more transparency around methods and allow other researchers to reproduce findings without repeatedly talking to the community about the same topic. Before seeking to collect new information, they should first ensure that their research questions cannot be answered using existing data.

- Researchers and policymakers should focus on **developing a more nuanced set of modern slavery indicators that align with both global definitions (for instance, those of the ILO) as well as local and national standards**. They should adapt data collection tools to national laws and regulations – and the local context – while still focusing on common indicators and global definitions of modern slavery. A participant shared an example of constructing survey questionnaires with indicators capturing specific causes and harm relevant to forced labour within the national and local context. Understanding the significance of each of these indicators will help in collecting local data and creating locally relevant definitions, and by ranking and analysing these indicators we can prioritise them based on their relevance and strength within the ILO definitions.

- **Donors should fund the research proposal writing process, including trust- and skill-building, and support the inclusion of people with lived experience throughout all stages of the research process**. Investing in people with lived experience and improving their research knowledge and skills, as well as providing people with lived experience with necessary resources (including adequate compensation for their time), is integral in achieving their meaningful engagement in the research process.

- Researchers should **build into their budgets the cost of best practices for participatory research and engaging people with lived experience in research**.

- Donors should consider how they can further **collaborate with one another and with researchers to avoid duplication**, ensure alignment and support building the overall research field on modern slavery.

- There is a serious need to uphold ethical standards and make every effort to prevent harm. Funders should require researchers to budget **for adequate standards of care and aftercare and should consider longer timelines for participatory research**. Researchers and funders should explore using community-led ethical review boards, which can provide insights into the appropriateness of research questions and methods, as well as help mitigate potential harms to affected communities that may come from the findings.

- Funders should build frameworks that ensure **accountability for researchers** and monitor whether affected communities, particularly people with lived experience, feel included and meaningfully involved in the research. This requires researchers (particularly from Global North institutions) to "let go" – that is, to examine power dynamics and relinquish control.

- All actors in the anti-slavery movement should increase their advocacy in the sector for research that is co-produced with impacted communities and incorporates best practices (as defined by the community). This **empowers communities to find their own solutions and drive change**.

- **It is essential to operationalise the global definitions of modern slavery that each country applies in their jurisdiction**. One of the panellists, for example, shared that the national definitions of forced labour should be prioritised to enable the criminalisation of all forms of exploitation. Harmonising laws and adapting definitions to address the evolving nature of slavery is also crucial, considering the challenges some countries face in implementing the existing definitions. To ensure inclusivity, reassessment of these definitions must involve input from individuals with lived experiences.

- **It is important to acknowledge that states can sometimes be responsible for, or contribute to, forced labour and other forms of modern slavery**. When examining the ILO's definitions and their application to national and local realities, policymakers and researchers must consider how government actions may cause or exacerbate modern slavery practices within their own jurisdictions.

- Research teams and partner NGOs should **avoid perpetuating injustice by considering potential consequences before reporting survivors of modern slavery to the authorities or attempting rescue operations**, as removing individuals from exploitative situations may lead them into even more exploitative conditions.
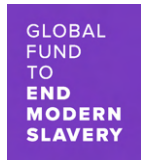
c. Good practices for future events

We asked participants about their experience at the conference and what they would like to see in future events. In this section, we share recommendations that will inform the organisation of future events by the co-hosts of this conference, as well as other events in the anti-slavery movement.

Recommendations to better engage people with lived experience (as suggested by people with lived experience):

- Include people with lived experience in **discussions related to space, location, lodging and other logistic decisions for the event**.

- Plan for **longer sessions (at least 90 minutes)** that will allow for all the questions to be answered.

- **Have the attending psychologist/therapist available not only for the conference days but also earlier in the conference planning**. This will facilitate a trust-building relationship and encourage people to look for the therapist during the in-person days.

- Consider that people with lived experience might not like to continuously revisit their past, while others would like to share part of their experience. **Set clear boundaries for what people could choose to disclose (or not disclose)**, to avoid triggering other participants of the conference who were not expecting this sharing to happen.

Recommendations to foster networking:

- **Include structured opportunities for people to mix during all the days of the conference**, like encouraging people to sit with different people each day. Grouping the table by topics tends to group people who already know each other, so creative methods for mixing people are recommended.

- Have **long breaks** (at least 45 minutes), especially after the introductory sessions.

- Plan for everyone to arrive at the location a day before the event formally starts and include **social activities** on all the days of the event.

- Have a virtual meeting with all the participants before the event so they have **a chance to meet and connect with other participants before the event**.

- In the early stages of planning an event, people from groups who are typically unrepresented at professional events, especially people from slavery-affected communities and/or with lived experience, should be given an opportunity to **recommend other peers who should be invited to the event**.

General recommendations for future events:

- Remind participants throughout the event **to avoid using jargon, acronyms, or excessively technical language**.

- Select a small working group to focus on collating and sharing **practical next steps**.

- Invite **posters or exhibitions from the participant organisations** to help share the areas and topics they are working on.

- Consider topics such as **participatory methods** and **indigenous or non-Western approaches** to research and evidence-building in future research events.

- Present more examples of **how research can inform and impact policymaking, and how to work with different actors**: policymakers, law enforcement officials, businesses, etc.

- Include sessions on how to begin and pursue a **career in the field of anti-slavery, as well as on issues of livelihood** and what happens once people with lived experience enter the job market.