Fair Work Agency

Tackling Modern Slavery Conference 2026

Keynote | Fair Work Agency

Strengthening Labour Market Protections to Prevent Modern Slavery

9 September 2026

Matthew Taylor CBE
Chair, Fair Work Agency Advisory Board

We are the Fair Work Agency

Launched 7 April 2026 · Executive agency of the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade

WORKERS
Help workers and those impacted by labour exploitation understand and access their rights, and raise concerns with confidence

EMPLOYERS AND PARTNERS
Work with partners and employers to make compliance simpler and help business understand and act on their obligations

ENFORCEMENT
Take tough action against rogue employers who exploit workers and/or undercut legitimate business

Employment Agency Standards

Gangmasters licensing

Serious labour exploitation

Strategic enforcement

Year 1 priorities
Deliver for those who need us · Build the organisation · Innovate our approaches

What's next
National Minimum Wage enforcement transitions from HMRC into the FWA, spring 2027
First three-year Enforcement Strategy, spring 2027

Why this matters now

371,000
workers estimated to be underpaid the minimum wage, April 2024 (Low Pay Commission)

£5.8m
NMW arrears identified for 25,200 workers in 2024/25 — enforcement transfers to the FWA in 2027

23,411
NRM referrals in 2025; labour exploitation the most common type among adults

WHERE NON-COMPLIANCE SHOWS UP IN OUR REMIT

- Underpaid wages
- Unlawful deductions
- Holiday pay
- Recruitment fees
- Unlicensed labour supply
- Labour exploitation

Five ways the FWA can make a difference

- Identity
- Impact
- Intelligence
- Innovation
- Influence

Fair Work Agency and spectrum of non-compliance

Poor practice — c.85% of non-compliance

Unclear payslips, unexplained deductions, weak records, poor oversight of labour providers

Serious non-compliance

Non-payment, misleading recruitment, excessive fees, dependency on employer housing or transport, retaliation

Exploitative practices — c.5%

Labour exploitation, debt bondage, coercion, control of documents, forced labour and modern slavery

The FWA takes action across the spectrum through our range of powers including: licensing, agency standards, labour exploitation, Fraud Act 2006, inspections, penalties, recovery of money owed and prosecution.

Fair Work Agency – labour supply licensing

22
cockle pickers died at Morecambe Bay, 2004

Our powers under the Employment Rights Act 2025

The Fair Work Agency now operates the licensing scheme as a single body, bringing together powers first created by the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 after the Morecambe Bay tragedy.

Agriculture

Horticulture

Shellfish gathering

Food processing

LICENCE REQUIRED
Anyone supplying labour into these sectors must hold a licence — and users must only use licensed suppliers.

FIT AND PROPER
Every application gets thorough background checks before a licence is granted.

A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT
A licence carries real commercial value, so holders must stay competent and fit and proper.

One agency, one front door: the protection of workers is at the heart of everything we do.

Our international work

Labour exploitation is a global challenge. The FWA works with international partners to strengthen enforcement, share expertise and promote compliance with UK labour standards.

Partnerships

Working with governments and regulators worldwide

*IOM have supported the UK Seasonal Worker Scheme since 2022

Intelligence

Sharing intelligence, expertise and good practice

*80% of scheme workers are recruited from four Central Asian countries

Fair recruitment

Promoting fair recruitment and stronger worker protection

**11,114 workers contributed to the 2025 worker survey

Compliance

Supporting compliance and preventing exploitation

**99% of growers achieved positive worker experience scores

Expanding cooperation with overseas partners in 2026/27

shared intelligence, shared standards, shared responsibility

*International Organization for Migration (IOM), UK

** SWS-Taskforce-Worker-Survey-2025

Victim Navigators

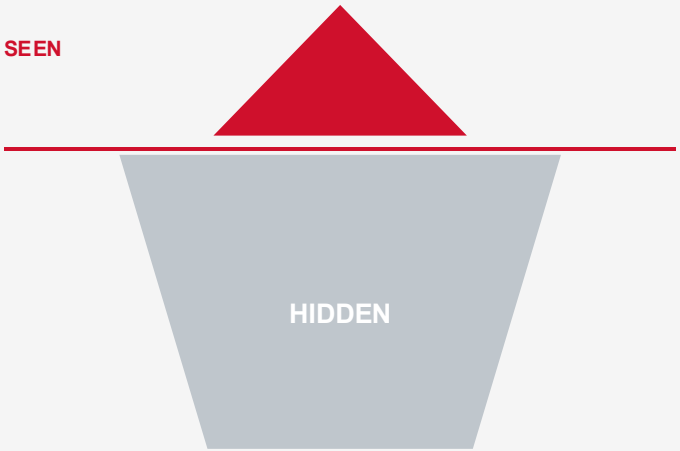
Two victim navigators are funded by the Fair Work Agency and employed by Justice & Care. They are embedded within the FWA and law enforcement to stand alongside victims of modern slavery throughout the investigation and criminal justice journey.

1. **First contact**
2. **Immediate needs**
3. **NRM referral**
4. **Justice and recovery**

“As well as providing reassurance throughout the criminal investigation, we also focus our efforts on the victims, recovery journey and building their lives back up to a point where they are more independent, knowledgeable and less vulnerable to exploitation. A stronger victim makes a stronger witness.”

FWA Victim Navigator

How we can work together



Understanding the true scale of harm is like looking at an iceberg — so much sits beneath the surface.
Work with us: contact@fairworkagency.gov.uk

HELPING WORKERS understand their rights

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD
Support businesses to make the right choices and compete fairly

REPORT
Where harms are seen

PARTNERS HELP TO BUILD THE PICTURE
Better data, intelligence and information from partners gives us a more accurate view of the scale and nature of non-compliance.

HARDEST TO REACH
Working through partners, charities and community groups in regions and high-risk sectors.

Contacting the Fair Work Agency

EMPLOYERS AND BUSINESSES

contact@fairworkagency.gov.uk

Advice on obligations, licensing and compliance

INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION

contact@fairworkagency.gov.uk

Share concerns, third-party information and intelligence with us

PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

contact@fairworkagency.gov.uk

Joint working, speaking requests and events

SIGNPOSTING WORKERS

Worker-facing helplines and the online complaint form are published on GOV.UK

Please signpost workers there rather than to these routes

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Everything you send us is acknowledged and triaged

Cases are routed to the right team for assessment and action