

Scotland to Backdate Support for Trafficking Survivors After Legal Challenge

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A legal challenge has prompted the Scottish Government to revise its approach to supporting human trafficking survivors, after it emerged that some were surviving on just over £6 per day. The government has agreed to backdate payments and increase financial aid following pressure from the legal advocacy group Just Right Scotland, which highlighted gaps in Scotland's support compared to the rest of the United Kingdom.

The legal action focused on a Scottish Government policy that reduced support to trafficking victims after 90 days, even if their recovery process was still ongoing. In contrast, England and Wales offer higher, needs-based support, including separate allowances for children, which Scotland previously did not match. Just Right Scotland argued that this approach did not meet the minimum standards required under international human rights law.

According to figures reported by The Ferret, 920 adults and children in Scotland entered the UK Home Office's victim identification system in 2024, a process designed to formally recognise victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. Survivors are often UK nationals, but many also come from Vietnam, China, Eritrea, Nigeria, and Albania. They are commonly exploited through forced labour, domestic servitude, sex trafficking, and drug-related operations.

Under Scottish policy, identified survivors receive a recovery allowance of £74.75 per week if living in self-catered accommodation. However, Just Right Scotland revealed that this amount dropped significantly after three months, even for individuals still awaiting final confirmation of their trafficking status.

The legal case was brought forward on behalf of a Turkish family, including an eight-year-old child. Despite entering Scotland on skilled work visas, the family was reportedly forced into unpaid labour and subjected to exploitation. After reporting unsafe working conditions to their employer, the family lost their sponsorship, were evicted from their accommodation, and received no wages for their work. Though the Home Office acknowledged there were "reasonable grounds" to believe the family had been trafficked, their financial support was cut from £149.50 to £87.94 per week before a conclusive decision had been reached.

If the same family had been living in England or Wales, Just Right Scotland estimated they would have received around £195 per week, approximately £73 per parent and £49 for the child. The disparity left the family struggling to meet basic needs such as food, despite actively seeking work within the restrictions of their visa conditions.

The mother, referred to as Alara, said the family was already grappling with trauma and had "nowhere else to go." She described the reduction in support as devastating, trapping the family in what felt like "an endless circle of despair."

Following the legal action, the Scottish Government conceded the case before it went to court. A spokesperson stated the government is committed to ensuring victims of trafficking can rebuild their lives with dignity. In response, a full review of Scotland's trafficking victim support policy is now underway, which will take into account practices in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Just Right Scotland solicitor Anushya Kulupana, who represented the family, said the case was about ensuring the law is upheld and that survivors receive "the basic minimum" needed to begin recovering from their experiences. She emphasised that supporting victims adequately is essential if authorities hope to bring traffickers to justice.

The Scottish Government has agreed to align payments with the higher rate during the ongoing identification process. Alara expressed hope that the change would benefit her family and others in similar situations.

While the government has not commented on specific cases, it confirmed the policy review is ongoing and that a revised framework for supporting trafficking survivors will be published once the review concludes.