



# **Back in Control 2 (BIC2) Project Evaluation**

## **Executive Summary Report**

**2022 – 2025**

*Without them, I don't know what I would've done.*

**Supporting Victims and Survivors of Modern Slavery and  
Labour Exploitation**



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## Executive Summary

Back in Control 2 (BiC2), delivered by ICOS and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, provides trauma-informed support for adults affected by modern slavery and labour exploitation. It assists people facing barriers such as distrust of authorities, insecure immigration status, language difficulties and trauma. As a trusted and culturally competent service, BiC2 reaches individuals who may not engage with statutory agencies, making it crucial for early identification, safeguarding and long-term recovery.

## Evaluation Approach

This executive summary draws upon evaluation studies undertaken by the University of Sunderland's Public Health Team (2022–2025). The evaluation explored BiC2's effectiveness, examined client and stakeholder experiences and developed a Theory of Change describing how the programme promotes safety, stability, resilience and independence.

## Key Findings

Between 2022 and 2025, BiC2 supported 92 diverse survivors of modern slavery who faced significant linguistic, legal and economic vulnerabilities but showed clear improvements in safety, stability, independence and wellbeing, especially after a year of support. Interviews revealed that exploitation was driven by deceptive recruitment, financial control, coercion and violence, while escape often led to acute crisis requiring immediate practical and emotional assistance. Long-term recovery depended on sustained help with welfare, legal status, housing, English, skills and employment. Stakeholders described exploitation as complex and multi-layered, reinforced by structural inequalities and policy barriers, and stressed the need for coordinated, trauma-informed support despite major constraints such as limited funding, language barriers and unsafe accommodation.

## Policy Alignment and Strategic Importance

BiC2's model aligns with national priorities on safeguarding, early identification, prevention and reducing re-exploitation (Home Office, 2025a; 2025b; DBT, 2024). These frameworks emphasise trauma-informed, culturally responsive support that strengthens stability, emotional recovery and survivors' agency (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2025a; 2025b; IOM, 2024). As a key part of the regional response to modern slavery and labour exploitation, continued investment in BiC2 is vital to sustain progress and address emerging risks.

## Introduction

This executive summary report summarises findings from the evaluation of the Back in Control 2 (BiC2) project, led by the University of Sunderland's Public Health Team. The evaluation examined how effectively BiC2 supported individuals affected by labour exploitation and modern slavery, focusing on client engagement, outcomes achieved, and the project's capacity to create positive change.

## Project Overview

BiC2, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund until August 2025, supports adults in Sunderland who have experienced labour exploitation and modern slavery. The project provides holistic one-to-one support including counselling, health and wellbeing interventions, welfare and immigration advice, advocacy, and volunteering opportunities.

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### Project Partners and Stakeholders

The project is led by the International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS), with Impact North-East CIC, delivering therapeutic mental health support. A wide multiagency network, including legal services, addiction support, seafarer charities, Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), local voluntary and community sector organisations, GP practices, and faith groups, contributes specialist services, referrals, and community intelligence.

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### BiC2 Project Aims and Outcomes

BiC2 aims to ensure the safety, stability, and long-term support of victims and survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation. Key outcomes include:

- Improved wellbeing
- Improved financial situation
- Greater individual and family stability
- Prevention, discovery, and rescue of exploitation cases
- Increased involvement through volunteering

These outcomes are achieved through a person-centred, holistic support model tailored to individual needs.

## National and Global Context

Modern slavery and labour exploitation remain major UK challenges. The 2024 National Referral Mechanism (NRM) recorded 19,125 referrals, the highest to date, and a 13% rise from 2023 (Home Office, 2025a). Adults, particularly men, formed the majority, though children, especially boys, also remain at risk. Independent estimates suggest substantial under-identification. An estimated 122,000 people were living in modern slavery in 2021 (Walk Free Foundation, 2023). Moreover, a recent scoping review highlights ongoing uncertainty in prevalence despite improved methods (Landman et al., 2025).

## High-Risk Sectors and Vulnerable Groups

Labour exploitation is concentrated in care, hospitality, food service and retail (GLAA, 2025a; GLAA, 2025b). Workers tied to restrictive visa routes, especially the Skilled Worker pathway, face heightened vulnerability due to employer dependency, limited mobility and debt (Sumption and Brindle, 2024). Women, girls and children remain harder to identify and are more likely to receive negative NRM decisions (IOM, 2023; IOM, 2024).

## Policy Developments and Ongoing Gaps

Recent efforts include updated statutory guidance under the Modern Slavery Act to improve frontline consistency (Home Office, 2024b) and strengthened labour market oversight through the Labour Market Enforcement Strategy and the Fair Work Agency (DBT, 2024). However, barriers persist including fear of immigration consequences, limited awareness of the NRM and inconsistent decisions continue to deter victims (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2025a; 2025b). A 2025 parliamentary inquiry also highlights inadequate protection for workers in insecure labour markets (Business and Trade Committee, 2025).

## International Influences and Emerging Risks

Global trends add further complexity. The ILO reports rising profits from forced labour and increasingly sophisticated exploitation models (ILO, 2024). EU measures on due diligence and forced-labour-free supply chains are likely to affect UK exporters. New forms of cyber-enabled coercion and forced criminality are emerging, requiring adaptive and forward-looking responses (UNODC, 2024).

## BiC2 Evaluation Aims, Approach and Methods

The BiC2 evaluation assessed how effectively the programme supports victims and survivors of modern-day slavery and labour exploitation, examining programme processes, outputs and outcomes to strengthen future delivery and inform policy.

### Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The evaluation had three main aims:

1. Assess the efficacy of BiC2 outputs and outcomes
2. Identify indicators demonstrating programme impact
3. Provide evidence to guide BiC2's continued development

### Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was employed, with quantitative methods measuring client change over time and qualitative methods capturing in-depth experiences and contextual insights.

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#### Data Collection

Quantitative data included demographics, BiC2 outcome survey scores (covering safety, housing, financial stability, independence, crisis knowledge, work readiness, English proficiency and securing legal employment), and the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS).

Qualitative data comprised semi-structured interviews with clients and stakeholders exploring experiences of exploitation, support received, perceived progress, and recommendations for improving services and system responses.

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#### Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed in JASP using descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests to assess baseline-to-follow-up changes. Qualitative interview data was transcribed, anonymised and examined through thematic analysis, generating detailed narratives on client experiences, stakeholder perspectives and programme satisfaction.



## BiC2 Client Demographics 2022-2025

Between 2022 and 2025, BiC2 supported 92 individuals affected by modern slavery and labour exploitation, reflecting a highly diverse client population across age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, and legal and employment status.

### Gender and Age

The majority of clients were male (58%), with females making up 42%, and ages ranged from 18 to 72. Most were of working age, particularly those aged 35 to 44 (34%) and 25 to 34 (24%). BiC also supported a notable number of older adults, demonstrating the broad age span of those experiencing exploitation.

### Countries of Origin and Ethnicity

Clients came from a wide range of global regions. Of the 89 who shared their country of origin, over half (54%) were from Eastern and Central Europe, with Poland the most frequently reported country. A further 31% were from Sub-Saharan Africa, including many from Sudan, while the remaining 15% represented the Middle East and West Asia, East and South-East Asia, North Africa, Southern Europe, and South Asia.

### Language Profile

Linguistic diversity was significant. Ninety clients reported a first language, with Polish (31%) and Arabic (20%) the most common, followed by Slovak, English, Bulgarian, Tigrinya, and Ukrainian. In total, clients spoke more than 20 first languages. Among the 38 clients who reported a second language, English dominated (68%), highlighting differing levels of proficiency and the ongoing need for accessible, multilingual services.

### Immigration Status

Immigration data showed a complex mix of legal statuses. The largest group were EU/EEA/Swiss nationals with settled status (30%), followed by refugees (20%) and asylum seekers (19%).

### Employment Status

Employment outcomes further demonstrated structural vulnerability, with 38% unemployed and 18% having no right to work. Around a quarter were in paid employment, underscoring the significant barriers survivors face in achieving economic stability.

## BiC Client Stability and Independence Indicators

This section summarises findings from the BiC Outcome Survey, which assessed client progress in safety, stability, independence, employment readiness, English proficiency, and awareness of legal work options. Baseline and follow-up data were compared at 3-12 and 13-24 months after registration. Small and variable sample sizes limited significance testing to indicators with sufficient paired data, and gender analysis was only feasible for the 3-12-month group. The results highlight emerging outcome trends as well as the challenges of collecting longitudinal data from a highly vulnerable, mobile population.

### Stability and Independence Improvements

Table 1 highlights consistent improvements in stability and independence over time. Overall scores increased from 46% at 3-12 months to 67% at 13-24 months, showing clear long-term progress. The strongest gains appeared in financial situation, housing, safety, and English language skills, all of which show substantial increases by the second assessment period. Areas such as independence, employment, and readiness for work show steady but more modest improvements, while ability to do basic daily things saw little change. Overall, the results suggest that continued engagement beyond the first year contributes to substantial and sustained improvements in key aspects of stability and independence.

Table 1: Improvements in stability and independence indicators at 3-12 and 13-24 months.

BiC Outcome Measure	% Increase 3-12 Month	% Increase 13-24 Month
Safe in current situation	40%	61%
Financial Situation	38%	72%
Housing Situation	44%	67%
Basic Daily Things	29%	28%
Seek help in crisis	40%	56%
Independent	44%	44%
English Language skills	35%	67%
Finding Legal Employment	40%	44%
Current Employer (if in work)	44%	-
Readiness for work	39%	38%
Total Scores	46%	67%

Several key areas, including safety, legal employment knowledge, financial stability, housing, crisis support and English language, showed statistically significant improvements where matched data were available, as reported in the final interim evaluation report (Harvey-Golding, 2025b).

## Gendered Differences in Stability and Independence

Between months 3-12, both male and female participants demonstrated substantial improvements across all stability and independence indicators, although the areas of greatest progress differed by gender. Female participants recorded stronger gains in measures related to safety and stability, including feeling safe in their current situation, housing conditions, ability to seek help in a crisis, and readiness for work. They also showed greater advancement in English language skills. Male participants exhibited more pronounced improvements in indicators associated with independence and economic participation, particularly legal employment, overall independence, and the completion of basic daily tasks. Men also achieved a higher overall increase in total scores (48%) compared with women (42%).

Table 2: Percentage improvements in stability and independence indicators at 3-12 by gender.

BiC Outcome Measure	% Increase 3-12 Month (Male)	% Increase 3-12 Month (Female)
Safe in current situation	36%	42%
Financial Situation	36%	38%
Housing Situation	40%	46%
Basic Daily Things	32%	25%
Seek help in crisis	36%	42%
Independent	44%	42%
English Language skills	32%	38%
Finding Legal Employment	44%	33%
Readiness for work	38%	43%
Total Scores	48%	42%

Many of these changes were descriptive rather than statistically significant, due to small and variable follow-up sample sizes. Only safety reached significance for women, and no domains reached significance for men, but the percentage increases point to clear positive early trends (Harvey-Golding, 2025b).

## BiC Client Wellbeing Indicators

This section reports wellbeing outcomes for BiC clients using the SWEMWBS at baseline and follow-up. It examines changes across seven wellbeing dimensions and total scores for the overall cohort and by gender at 3-12- and 13-24-months post registration. Descriptive statistics and paired t-tests assess the size and significance of changes, highlighting patterns of improvement and the consistency of outcomes across client groups and programme durations.

### Wellbeing Improvements

Table 3 shows consistent improvements in wellbeing from 3-12 months through to 13-24 months. Early gains are strongest in feeling relaxed (48%) and dealing with problems well (40%), reflecting rapid improvements in coping and emotional regulation. By 13-24 months, increases are even greater in thinking clearly and problem-solving (both 53%), suggesting continued strengthening of cognitive and resilience-related skills. Measures such as optimism, feeling useful, and social connectedness also grow steadily over time, with closeness to others rising from 26% to 40%. Overall wellbeing improves by 56% in the first period and 57% in the second, indicating that initial benefits are sustained and slightly enhanced as engagement continues.

Table 3: Percentage improvements in wellbeing indicators at 3-12 and 13-24 months.

Wellbeing Measure	% Increase 3-12 Month	% Increase 13-24 Month
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	34%	37%
I've been feeling useful	28%	37%
I've been feeling relaxed	48%	47%
I've been dealing with problems well	40%	53%
I've been thinking clearly	32%	53%
I've been feeling close to other people	26%	40%
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	38%	40%
Total Scores	56%	57%

These patterns align with the main report (Harvey-Golding, 2025b), which found significant gains in autonomy and usefulness in the first year, followed by improved decision-making and problem-solving at 13-24 months. Although some later changes were not statistically

significant due to smaller samples, the overall trajectory remained positive, with reduced score variability indicating more consistent wellbeing outcomes over time.

## Gendered Difference in Wellbeing

Between 3 and 12 months, wellbeing improved across all indicators for both males and females, though the size of these changes varied. Females recorded particularly strong gains in optimism about the future (40%) and clear thinking (44%), both higher than the improvements seen in males. They also showed a substantial increase in feeling relaxed (44%). Males demonstrated their largest improvement in feeling relaxed (52%), which was the highest percentage increase across all measures. They also reported slightly greater gains than females in feeling close to others and in making up their own minds, though these differences were relatively small. Some indicators showed identical progress for both genders, including feeling useful (28%) and dealing with problems well (40%). Despite variation at item level, the overall wellbeing score increased by 56% for both males and females between 3 and 12 months, indicating comparable overall improvements across genders.

Table 4: Percentage improvements in wellbeing indicators at 3-12 by gender.

Wellbeing Measure	% Increase 3-12 Month (Male)	% Increase 3-12 Month (Female)
<b>I've been feeling optimistic about the future</b>	28%	40%
<b>I've been feeling useful</b>	28%	28%
<b>I've been feeling relaxed</b>	52%	44%
<b>I've been dealing with problems well</b>	40%	40%
<b>I've been thinking clearly</b>	20%	44%
<b>I've been feeling close to other people</b>	28%	24%
<b>I've been able to make up my own mind about things</b>	40%	36%
<b>Total Scores</b>	56%	56%

In line with the wider report (Harvey-Golding, 2025b), only males showed a statistically significant improvement (relaxation) and a near-significant gain in autonomy. For females, none of the changes reached statistical significance, largely due to smaller sample size and greater baseline variability.

## Discussions with Victim-Survivors

Interviews with 17 clients participating in the BiC2 programme were undertaken examining their lived experiences of modern slavery and labour exploitation. The findings highlight the systemic mechanisms that enable exploitation, including deceptive recruitment, financial manipulation, coercion, and legal exclusion. They also show the crucial role of immediate and long-term support, particularly through ICOS and BiC2, in helping individuals secure safety, legal recognition, emotional stability, and pathways to independence.

## Mechanisms of Entrapment and Exploitation

Victim-survivors described a range of interconnected mechanisms that enabled exploiters to recruit, control, and entrap them. These mechanisms often operated simultaneously, beginning with false promises, followed by financial dependency, coercion, and fear, making it extremely difficult for individuals to leave or seek help.

### Deceptive Recruitment and False Legitimacy

Participants frequently encountered recruitment based on misleading promises of fair pay, secure accommodation, and legitimate work. Exploiters commonly used formal-looking processes, such as collecting personal details, issuing misleading payslips, or promising employment contracts, to create an impression of legality. Once individuals began work, the reality included unpaid wages, denial of sick pay, cash-in-hand arrangements, or no contracts at all. With limited English, few resources, and unfamiliarity with UK systems, victim-survivors were unable to recognise the warning signs until exploitation was well entrenched.

I was looking for a better life. I was looking for safety. And when I went there, I discovered that this is not the way things are. Yes, they promised us, 'You're gonna have a better life,' but we find out it's not like what they say.

### Economic Exploitation and Financial Control

Sometimes they wouldn't pay, but I had to work, just to earn some money. Sometimes they would pay just a little, sometimes they wouldn't pay at all. It was not enough money to pay for everything I needed.

Financial manipulation emerged as a core mechanism of exploitation. Participants reported unpaid or underpaid wages, delayed payments, gender-based pay disparities, and exploiters' repeated excuses for withholding earnings. This economic dependency left individuals without the means to secure food,

accommodation, or transport, effectively locking them into exploitative conditions. Some endured extreme working hours without rest, food, or legal protections, reinforcing cycles of financial vulnerability and dependence.

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### Coercion, Violence, and Intimidation

Many individuals experienced threats, physical assaults, forced labour, and severe restrictions on movement or communication. Violence was used both to maintain control and punish attempts to assert rights. Several participants described being confined in overcrowded spaces, denied basic necessities, beaten when resisting, or violently attacked for threatening to report exploiters to authorities. These experiences created pervasive fear, deep trauma, and long-lasting psychological consequences.

I worked for a company delivering donner kebabs. They didn't pay my wage. And when I told them that I would go to the police to make a complaint, three individuals attacked me very brutally. They took my documents away. They took my car. It was attempted murder, and afterwards my life changed completely. I had a heart attack.

## Immediate Support and Stabilisation After Escape

Leaving exploitation often led to acute crisis, including homelessness, food and financial insecurities. Immediate, practical assistance played a vital role in ensuring their safety and preventing further harm.

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### Meeting Basic Needs and Securing Safety

I just went to the shelter because I had nowhere to live. They helped me with everything from housing, until I could stand on my own feet and provide for my family, my daughter and myself.

Escaping exploitation did not automatically lead to safety. Victim-survivors often faced homelessness, destitution, and food insecurity. ICOS and BiC2 played a crucial role in providing emergency assistance, including clothing, food vouchers, financial support, and help with gas and electricity costs. Advocacy for safe accommodation, such as

emergency shelter and council housing referrals, was pivotal in preventing homelessness and reducing vulnerability to re-exploitation.

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## Emotional and Psychological Support

Victim-survivors frequently reported severe trauma, panic attacks, anxiety, and in some cases suicidal ideation. Access to counselling, psychiatric care, and ongoing emotional support was essential in stabilising mental health. Participants highlighted the importance of trust, consistent engagement, and simply having someone to listen. The emotional reassurance offered by support workers played a significant role in rebuilding confidence and reducing isolation.

I still haven't completely recovered. I'm a different person since. I've seen a psychiatrist. I really want to go back to work. I worked all my life. However, I'm just not the same person. It has affected me mentally. It's very difficult to explain with words.

## Long-Term Stability and Independence

Sustained recovery required more than crisis intervention. Survivors needed long-term support to rebuild their lives, secure legal recognition, and develop the skills required for independence.

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## Access to Welfare, Finance, and Essential Services

My English was not good. I didn't know anything about my rights and entitlements. They helped me with translations, with Universal Credit status, with documents that required translation. They explained everything and even came with me to appointments.

Navigating the welfare system, healthcare, and public services was challenging due to language barriers and bureaucratic complexity. ICOS provided translation, assistance with Universal Credit applications, help understanding official correspondence, and support in accessing healthcare. These interventions were essential in establishing financial security and enabling individuals to function independently.

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## Legal Recognition and Pathways to Security

Legal status was a critical determinant of long-term safety. ICOS and BiC2 supported participants in securing pre-settled and settled status, accessing immigration advice, and resolving documentation issues, often arising from exploiters' misuse of workers' personal

Because I didn't have any status (settled or pre-settled status), I couldn't go to hospitals or doctors with this problem (leg injury), but ICOS helped me to get this prosthetic and I have now received status from the Home Office.



details. Legal recognition allowed individuals to work legally, access healthcare, and reduce the risk of further exploitation.

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## Education, Skills, and Empowerment

I said I want to go for to college. They said OK. I was surprised. I did maths and English functional skills, and an IT class. I had the courage to go and say I'd like to become a nurse. She said I have to do an access before I go to the university. I've already got an admission. So, I'm starting in September.

Long-term stability also depended on rebuilding skills and confidence. Participants benefited from English classes, vocational courses, functional skills training, and support with employment preparation. These opportunities helped reduce isolation, enhance employability, and support long-term aspirations, including higher education and professional training.

## Discussions with Stakeholders

Findings from interviews with support providers working with Back in Control clients show that modern slavery and labour exploitation in the UK involve overlapping forms of coercion, dependency and harm. Victim-survivors often face deep structural and social vulnerabilities, while services operate within systems that limit their capacity to provide sustained help.

## Nature and Realities of Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation

Stakeholders how exploitation occurs in practice and the wider conditions that allow it to persist. Providers described exploitation as multi layered, rarely isolated, and heavily shaped by migration pressures, criminal activity and socioeconomic marginalisation.

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## Mechanisms of Control and Dependency

Support providers reported consistent control over victims' documents, movement, finances and daily routines. Many victims work extremely long hours with little or no pay and live in overcrowded or unsafe accommodation that reinforces dependency. Debt is commonly used as a tool of coercion, with inflated or fabricated debts used to keep people in

There's links to exploitation in terms of housing, food and even their freedom as well. They can't go. They can't just go take off and go somewhere. And they're told exactly what to do, what time to do it. So, somebody's working 15 hours and then once they finish, they go to a flat upstairs from the shop.

prolonged unpaid labour or criminal activity. Many individuals are brought to the UK under false promises and then prevented from leaving through intimidation and economic control.

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## Forms and Contexts of Exploitation

Alongside labour exploitation, providers described concealed forms of harm including criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation and cuckooing. These practices operate outside formal systems and often intersect with the experiences of migrant groups who face racialised abuse, language barriers and limited familiarity with UK services. Although migrant communities are disproportionately targeted, support providers noted that UK nationals can also be exploited in situations of isolation and vulnerability.

In terms of modern slavery, you have criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, and labour exploitation. There has been some overlap with things like sexual slavery and criminal exploitation, and cuckooing.

## Impacts and Lived Experiences of Survivors

Stakeholders considered the emotional, social and practical consequences of exploitation. Providers emphasised that trauma is reinforced by structural disadvantage, making recovery dependent on sustained, tailored support.

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## Trauma, Marginalisation and Psychological Impact

People are coming to us in a situation where they're under duress and control. They're stressed, they have mental health issues, poverty issues, lack of housing...

Victim-survivors often enter services in significant distress, reporting unstable housing, poverty and poor mental health. Those without secure immigration status experience heightened insecurity and exclusion, which deepens emotional harm and disrupts stability. Many are initially fearful of traffickers and require consistent engagement before feeling

able to disclose their experiences.

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## Gendered Experiences of Exploitation

Support providers highlighted that men and women experience exploitation differently. Women are more likely to experience sexual exploitation and domestic abuse, resulting in layered and often more severe trauma, while men more

Most of the clients who have experienced modern day slavery are male. Females do too and are more likely to experience sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

commonly experience labour exploitation. Women face additional barriers to employment and independence, which can prolong vulnerability.

## Immediate and Practical Support

Stakeholders contested that urgent interventions are required to stabilise victim-survivors during the first stages of support. Providers stressed the importance of rapid, multi layered responses that address immediate safety, welfare and legal needs.

Have they got some way to sleep? Is there mental health support that we could direct them to? Emergency fuel vouchers and food parcels. Have they got what they need in the next day or two, week or two, that will help them.

### Crisis Response and Basic Needs

Victim-survivors frequently require emergency accommodation, welfare assistance and access to food, clothing and other essentials. These interventions reduce immediate risks and create the stability needed for individuals to engage with further support.

### Access Pathways and Coordinated Support

Multi agency drop ins and outreach activities provide accessible and trusted routes into services. These settings enable victim survivors to access several organisations at once, reducing barriers linked to language or unfamiliar systems. Early legal and immigration advice is crucial because status shapes access to housing, benefits and entitlements, and delays increase vulnerability.

The first point is the initial meeting, where you discuss what the problems are and what needs to be done. So that includes applying for immigration status, applying for housing, applying for benefits, resolving issues with benefits, resolving issues with immigration status and often very basic things such as GP appointments, especially at the beginning.

## Long Term and Holistic Support

Stakeholders discussed the sustained work required to support recovery, empowerment and long-term independence. Providers stressed that trauma and instability require ongoing engagement rather than short interventions.

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## Emotional Recovery and Personalised Support

Victim-survivors benefit from counselling, wellbeing checks and consistent communication that rebuild emotional safety and trust. Support plans must be flexible and tailored to different cultural backgrounds, trauma histories and personal priorities. In some cases, support also extends to family members affected by trauma.

We've had positive outcomes of people finding employment, improving well-being and mental health. They feel that they have some support, they have someone to turn to for help. They feel security, safety, comfort.

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## Empowerment, Skills and Long-Term Independence

We work hard to give them back control and agency, support them towards freedom, and also empower them through self-awareness, to make them feel like important members of society.

Activities that promote confidence and agency, including peer groups and women's empowerment programmes, help rebuild identity and autonomy. Practical guidance on housing, benefits, employment and English language learning supports long term independence and reduces vulnerability to further harm.

## Structural and Resource Barriers

Stakeholders highlighted the systemic constraints that limit effective service delivery. Providers highlighted that resource pressures, restrictive policies and fragmented systems undermine consistency of support.

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### Funding and Capacity Pressures

Underfunding, short term project cycles and rising demand significantly restrict service capacity. Uncertainty about future funding reduces the ability to plan, innovate and maintain continuous support.

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### Communication and Education Barriers

Interpreter shortages, translation costs and the diversity of languages spoken make communication challenging. Delays in accessing English classes hinder progress

We try to manage with our own resources, and using Google Translate. Sometimes languages are quite similar, so we can also communicate using our native languages. We have to provide interpreters often.

toward training and employment, reinforcing dependency.

### Policy Constraints and Partnership Gaps

Restrictive immigration policies limit entitlements and prolong instability, while long NHS waiting lists prevent timely access to trauma support. Partnership working remains uneven, with siloed practices limiting coordination across local services.

The immigration system in the UK has become very hostile to migration in general. Immigration status is often a key barrier to accessing other types of support.

## Risks of Re exploitation

Victim-survivors remain vulnerable to further exploitation even after entering support. Without stable housing and financial security, they may remain exposed to predatory individuals and unsafe environments.

Where they're living people are pretending to be friends. It's all linked in with county lines. It's a complex network and it's very difficult to get out of.

### Unsafe Housing and Environmental Risks

Victim-survivors are frequently placed in temporary or unsuitable accommodation where drugs, alcohol and predatory individuals are present. Limited tenancy history and insecure immigration status make it difficult to relocate, leaving individuals in high-risk environments.

### Financial Insecurity and Critical Transitions

Economic instability and lack of guidance during transition points, particularly when leaving safe house accommodation, increase vulnerability to further exploitation. Without sustained support individuals may return to unsafe work or enter exploitative housing arrangements.

We've seen so much exploitation. There's the risk of either being exploited again or the risk of just signing up for things they don't understand.

## Theory of Change – BiC2 Support

Victims-survivors of modern slavery and labour exploitation face economic insecurity, coercion, uncertain immigration status, and isolation, increasing their risk of homelessness and re-exploitation. BiC2, led by ICOS, provides person-centred, trauma-informed support to address immediate safety, secure legal status, build financial stability, develop skills, and support social integration, enabling survivors to move toward long-term independence.

Core Component	Key Activities	Outcomes
<b>Immediate Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency accommodation, essentials, crisis funds</li> <li>• Trauma-informed support and safety planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs met</li> <li>• Reduced harm</li> <li>• Emotional stability</li> <li>• Safe housing</li> </ul>
<b>Legal &amp; Immigration Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration advice, NRM support, document recovery</li> <li>• Advocacy with statutory agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More secure legal status</li> <li>• Increased rights awareness</li> <li>• Reduced vulnerability</li> </ul>
<b>Financial Stability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support with benefits, housing applications, financial aid</li> <li>• Job-readiness, employment support, financial literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic stability</li> <li>• Reduced dependency</li> <li>• Pathway to long-term independence</li> </ul>
<b>Skills &amp; Social Integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESOL, vocational training, skills development</li> <li>• Community participation and peer networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved employability</li> <li>• Stronger social connections</li> <li>• Reduced isolation</li> </ul>

### Delivery and Impact

BiC2 is delivered through multi-agency collaboration and dedicated, trauma-informed, culturally sensitive casework tailored to individual needs. Progress is tracked through continuous monitoring, survivor feedback, and follow-up assessments to measure short- and long-term outcomes.

## Conclusion

The evaluation findings from 2022 to 2025 show that BiC2 supports a highly diverse and vulnerable population affected by modern slavery and labour exploitation. Clients face significant challenges related to immigration status, language barriers, financial insecurity, and limited employment opportunities. Despite these difficulties, the data shows clear and sustained improvements in safety, stability, independence, and wellbeing, especially for those engaged with the service for more than one year. Survivors become safer, better housed, more financially secure, and more able to navigate daily life and legal employment, with wellbeing improving in areas such as confidence, emotional regulation, and problem-solving.

Interviews with survivors and stakeholders highlight the mechanisms that enable exploitation, including deceptive recruitment, financial control, coercion, and legal precarity. Many individuals escape into crisis, facing homelessness, trauma, and isolation. BiC2's trauma-informed and person-centred approach provides essential support during these moments, helping clients meet basic needs, secure legal status, build skills, and reconnect socially. Stakeholders emphasise that recovery is often hindered by restrictive immigration policies, funding pressures, language access issues, and fragmented service provision, all of which increase the risk of re-exploitation.

Overall, the evidence shows that BiC2 delivers meaningful and lasting impact. Holistic, multi-agency support enables survivors to progress toward stability and independence, although long-term recovery will continue to depend on sustained funding, stronger coordination, and wider structural change..

## Recommendations

The following recommendations highlight the key areas of investment and service development needed to strengthen support for survivors and improve long-term outcomes. Together, they outline practical steps to enhance stability, coordination, and the overall effectiveness of local responses.

### **I. Secure Multi-Year Funding**

Long-term support is essential, as the strongest gains occur after 13-24 months. Sustained funding will ensure stability, continuity and future capacity.

### **II. Strengthen ESOL, Legal and Immigration Support**

Language development and secure status underpin recovery. Earlier and more consistent access to ESOL and specialist legal advice should remain a priority.

### **III. Improve Access to Trauma-Informed Mental Health Care**

Survivors continue to face significant emotional distress. Stronger partnerships with NHS and third-sector providers are needed to reduce delays and support ongoing recovery.

### **IV. Enhance Multi-Agency Coordination**

Clearer referral pathways, routine information-sharing and continued work through the Safer Sunderland Partnership will strengthen safeguarding and prevent re-exploitation.

### **V. Embed Gender-Responsive and Culturally Informed Practice**

Tailored approaches reflecting the differing experiences of women and men will improve engagement and outcomes.

### **VI. Strengthen Monitoring and Review**

More consistent follow-up points and simpler tools will improve the reliability of outcome data and support targeted service development.



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