

# Chapter Insights

## Modern Slavery:

## Procurement's Call to Stop Looking Away

Article brought to you by:

*Victoria Folbigg, Co-Chair of SPP's Human Rights Chapter, September 2025*

When I heard the statistics shared at the Unseen Business Hub earlier this summer, one struck me hardest: since 2016, over 44,000 potential victims of modern slavery have been identified in the UK alone. Not overseas. Not in faraway supply chains. Here. In the fields, factories, care homes, hotels, and building sites that feed and house us.

As procurement professionals, we often think of modern slavery as something happening elsewhere, and it can feel easier to deflect responsibility when it comes to human rights in supply chains. We might assume it is “someone else’s job.” It isn’t. It is already in our countries and in our supply chains. It is already in our contracts. If you doubt that, ask yourself: do your employees use an iPhone? Do your suppliers subcontract seasonal labour? Have you ever questioned where your uniforms, catering, construction, or cleaning services come from?

Yes, it’s uncomfortable. It challenges us professionally and personally. But the answer is not to hide or to assign or take blame. The answer is to start—by noticing where we can influence, resisting avoidance, and choosing even a small act of engagement. A contract at a time. A supplier at a time. A conversation at a time.

This work is not about compliance reports filed and forgotten. It is about amplifying and quantifying the benefits of action—safer conditions for workers, stronger communities, more resilient supply chains, and businesses that attract investment, talent, and energy by how they stand on human rights. Every step we take demonstrates that procurement can be a force for good, not just a gatekeeper of cost.

Unseen’s helpline shows how exploitation hides in plain sight: 14,000 calls in a single year, spanning 94 nationalities, from labour abuse to extreme cases like organ harvesting. These are not rare outliers; they are signals of systemic issues in the very sectors many of us buy from—care, construction, hospitality, agriculture. And still, only 40% of UK companies required to comply with the Modern Slavery Act actually do so.

We cannot wait for governments to legislate their way to a solution. Legislation is piecemeal and always behind reality. Procurement has the leverage to act now. Every stage of our cycle—sourcing,

contracting, supplier reviews—offers an opportunity to ask better questions, introduce stronger clauses, demand transparency, and escalate issues responsibly.

Working with NGOs is about equipping ourselves with frontline insights we cannot get from audits alone. Their data and survivor-informed expertise shine a light on hidden risks. But it is on us to integrate that into contracts, due diligence, and supplier engagement.

This is not a one-off audit. It is a discipline of continuous improvement. And it will feel messy—because real human rights work always does. But when we measure the wins in safer jobs, stronger supply chains, and communities that thrive rather than suffer, the social return on investing in decent working conditions makes the business case undeniable.

## Take one step

So here is my challenge: take one step. Join the [SPP Human Rights Chapter](#). Review one contract. Seek help from an NGO. Open one conversation with a supplier about labour practices. Then track and amplify the benefits—show your business, your board, your investors that procurement-led action delivers results.

It is not about being perfect—it is about starting. And if you need a safe, confidential space to explore these challenges, the SPP Human Rights Chapter offers Chatham House rule discussions to support you on the journey.

---

### Contact the SPP Human Rights Chapter

Co-chairs: [Victoria Folbigg](#) and [Louise Herring](#)

SPP Human Rights Chapter website: [spp.earth/chapter/human-rights/](http://spp.earth/chapter/human-rights/)

SPP Human Rights Chapter LinkedIn group: [www.linkedin.com/groups/12988048/](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12988048/)