



Secure Reporting What is it and why is it needed?

May 2026

"I didn't want to leave at first because my employer threatened me with imprisonment for a long time if I did escape and she would have me deported."

- Colette, Southeast Asian live-in care worker

"Secure reporting", also referred to as "safe reporting" or a "firewall", is a set of principles, practices and procedures which ensure that when people report being a victim or witness of a crime to a public authority their personal data is not shared with the Home Office or Immigration Enforcement, unless there is a clear legal duty to do so, and that the circumstances in which such duties apply are clearly communicated to the victim or witness from the outset.

The sharing of personal data by public authorities—such as the police, local authorities, hospitals, schools or the Fair Work Agency—with the Home Office can have serious and far-reaching consequences for individuals whose immigration status is insecure. This includes asylum seekers, refugees, individuals on temporary visas (particularly those tied to a sponsor or partner), and those without leave to remain in the UK, as well as their colleagues and wider communities. For example, it may lead to victims or witnesses of crime being detained, removed, or deported, or to children being separated from their families and placed into care. It can also trigger immigration enforcement actions, such as raids in local communities.

As a result, many people with insecure immigration status are deterred from reporting crimes or safeguarding concerns—such as labour abuse, modern slavery, trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, wage theft, unsafe working conditions and sexual exploitation—due to well-founded fears that doing so may negatively affect them, their colleagues or their communities in multiple and unpredictable ways.

These fears are actively exploited by perpetrators, who use the threat of deportation or immigration enforcement as a tool of control. This dynamic is widely recognised as a key driver of labour exploitation and abuse in the UK. Employers who underpay, coerce or abuse workers can continue to operate without consequence, gaining an unfair competitive advantage over compliant businesses. This creates a downward pressure on labour standards across entire sectors, as law-abiding employers are forced to compete with those who cut costs through exploitation. Over time, this distorts the labour market, normalises poor conditions, and drives a “race to the bottom” in wages, job security and workplace protections.

By enabling people to report crimes without fear, secure reporting mechanisms strengthen the ability of public authorities to detect, prevent and address abuse, support fair competition between businesses, and uphold labour standards across the economy. In doing so, they contribute not only to the protection of fundamental rights, but also to a fairer and more resilient labour market overall. Secure reporting mechanisms are therefore essential to ensuring that all victims and witnesses of crimes and abuse can come forward safely.

Matthew Taylor, Chair of the Fair Work Agency (said when Director of Labour Market Enforcement, 2021):

“It [is] vitally important to maintain a clear dividing line between labour market enforcement and immigration enforcement”.

Margaret Beels, former Director of Labour Market Enforcement (2025):

“We need to have arrangements in place where workers are not in fear of losing their right to be in this country as a result of putting their hands up about labour exploitation. [...] There needs to be an expectation on the part of workers that if they go to an authority to demonstrate that they are being exploited, that will not prejudice their right to be in this country.”

Eleanor Lyons, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (2025):

“From speaking to victims, I know that they have a real fear about coming forward if they do not have documentation to remain in this country [...] We need to be able to give these victims the confidence that if they do come forward their perpetrators will be held to account and that they will continue to receive the support and care that they need.”

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EXPLOITATION**

