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Foreword

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The global pandemic of COVID-19 represents a large and sudden exogenous shock to the world, and is having a significant impact on almost every single human being's life in 2020 either in terms of their health, or those of their loved ones, or the consequences of the ensuing economic downturn. Given this, there are likely to have been severe consequences for people experiencing modern slavery; people at risk of modern slavery; survivors of modern slavery; those engaged in, or profiting from, modern slavery; and those working to combat it across the world. At the moment, however, as the pandemic continues to rage, a comprehensive understanding of the economic and social evidence of the effects is not available.

This Special Issue gives us the opportunity to highlight some of the research which is being done across the world to investigate, chart, and analyse the impact of COVID-19 on human trafficking solutions. A wealth of work is being done, both new research and the adaptation of existing projects to respond to this crisis. Researchers share insights into the impact on people vulnerable to modern slavery; those already experiencing it; those perpetrating it; those trying to fight it; and those trying to understand it as researchers and practitioners. Hanley and Gauci sound an important warning note as to how COVID-19 might push efforts to monitor and address human trafficking down the international political agenda, while Chazal looks at the specific case of the impact of COVID-19 on the abilities of relevant agencies to work on preventing modern slavery in Australia during the pandemic. Mahaffey considers the impact on anti-trafficking efforts in Oklahoma, particularly among indigenous populations.

Several researchers consider the impact of COVID-19 on those already at risk of modern slavery. Byrne, Bradley, Khumallambam and Sahariah explore how COVID-19 has impacted women in India, and how the pandemic highlights how vulnerability and resilience to modern slavery is fluid. Thinyane and Gallo track the impact of COVID-19 on companies in Southeast Asia. Hansen et al consider its impact in the Ready-Made Garment industry in

Bangladesh, while Sahai explores the impact on migrant workers from the same country. Niezna, Kurlander and Shamir scrutinise the impact on migrant workers in Israel. Ewan considers the impact on forced sexual exploitation across the world, while Iyer et al consider the specific impact on child sexual exploitation in India.

McGaughey tracks the impact of COVID-19 on increased risk of modern slavery in Australian companies' supply chains – and the question of whether these were tackled, or whether the pandemic has let some companies off the hook in meeting their obligations to tackle this problem.

Others are exploring the effects of COVID-19 on survivors. Hogan and Roe-Sepowitz explore the impact of COVID-19 on survivor-support services in Arizona, and Chazal and Raby for Australia. Cordisco Tsai and Eleccion report on the impact of survivors in the Philippines. Lastly, Brewster examines the impact on “county-lines” child exploitation for drug-trafficking in the UK.

The research in this special issue also looks at good practice, resilience and adaptation. Valverde-Cano considers good practice by some European states regarding asylum and migration during the pandemic, and what lessons could be learned from this for the future. Thinyane and Gallo explain how changes to their research due to COVID-19 led to the adoption of remote monitoring with modifications to their existing Apprise Audit tool so that working conditions could continue to be scrutinised during the pandemic. Brady, McCabe and Otiende report their methodological adaptations for working remotely with survivors of human trafficking in Kenya

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to have, a significant, negative effect on modern slavery and efforts to end it, seriously jeopardising our chance of achieving the global goal of ending it by 2030. There are important lessons to be learned from this research in order to try to mitigate these impacts as much as possible. We look forward to sharing more in-depth findings in 2021 when this on-going research has more detail, and more recommendations, to communicate.