

Forced Labour in Industrialized Countries

OVERVIEW

Forced labour in industrialized countries is mainly an outcome of human trafficking. Trafficking is a global crime that can be characterized as the underside of globalization. Increasing numbers of people seek to leave their country in search for work, while legal channels for migration remain restricted, especially for low-skilled and women migrant workers.

Traffickers have been able to exploit this bottleneck and to derive huge profits from the deception and exploitation of migrant workers. They target impoverished communities, bribe law enforcement authorities and move people into situations of forced labour.

Trafficking can also occur in less organized ways, with recruiters, transporters and employers acting independently of each other and exploiting irregular migrant workers for short-term gain. Even regular migrant workers, such as contract or seasonal workers, can become victims of forced labour exploitation.

KEY STATISTICS

- There are an estimated 360,000 people trapped in forced labour in industrialized countries from a total of 12.3 million forced labourers worldwide;
- 270,000 forced labourers, 75% of the total, in industrialized countries have been trafficked;
- 55% of trafficked persons were coerced into commercial sexual exploitation. Almost one-quarter (23%) are trafficked for non-sexual exploitation into various other economic sectors, such as domestic service, construction and agriculture;
- The majority of victims are women and girls, as a predominant part of trafficking is into forced sex work;
- The estimated profits derived from trafficking globally are US\$ 32 billion, of which an estimated US\$ 15.5 billion are made in industrialized countries;
- State-imposed forced labour in industrialized countries accounts for 5% of the total number and consists mainly of prison labour which is involuntary and contrary to international standards.

FORMS OF COERCION AND RECRUITMENT

ILO research on trafficking and forced labour in industrialized countries has exposed the hidden and often subtle forms of coercion. For example, when the employer keeps the identity documents and threatens to denounce the workers to the authorities, they can effectively hold workers in sub-standard conditions against their will. In other cases, workers are bound to one specific employer or

trafficker through debt. In some extreme cases, mainly in prostitution, workers are locked up and physically restrained from leaving or changing employer.

Recruitment takes place in either the country of origin or a destination country. Traffickers can pose as friends or work under the cover of a private recruitment or travel agency to entrap people.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RESPONSES

In recent years, trafficking in human beings has been high on the agenda of industrialized countries. While concerns about national security and organized crime have figured prominently in this debate, it has become increasingly clear that trafficking is also a human rights and labour market issue. Recent developments reflect this more holistic approach:

- The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Action Plan and the European Union (EU) Report of the Expert Group on Human Trafficking call for more preventive action to tackle the causes of trafficking, such as unemployment and discrimination;
- Countries of Western Europe have supported the OSCE's Stability Pact Task Force against Human Trafficking which is coordinating action in South Eastern Europe;
- The US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report has consistently pointed to the socio-economic conditions leading to trafficking, such as poverty, the demand for cheap labour and low risks for traffickers.

While most industrialized countries have yet to ratify the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking in Human Beings, especially Women and Children, many have already amended their anti-trafficking legislation. Law enforcement authorities are now increasingly looking into trafficking for labour exploitation, seeking to cooperate with labour inspectors, social partners and relevant NGOs.

ILO ACTION AGAINST TRAFFICKING

The ILO focuses on the linkages between forced labour, child labour, irregular migration and trafficking. Its mandate is based on several human rights labour Conventions, in particular the fundamental convention banning forced labour (Nos. 29 and 105) and child labour (Nos. 138 and 182). These are international labour standards for the protection of migrant workers, labour inspection and regulation of private employment agencies. Based on its tripartite structure, the ILO addresses labour market issues, raises awareness of governments as well as the social partners and strengthens their role in national action plans against trafficking.

The ILO has been in dialogue with many governments of industrialized countries concerning the labour dimensions of trafficking, laws and policies. It has contributed to regional initiatives such as the Stability Pact Task Force in Europe and facilitated dialogue between social partners, in particular trade unions. While most ILO projects focus on countries of origin, activities also include major industrialized destination countries.