



Forced Labour: Facts and Figures

The Cost of Coercion: Regional Perspectives

Europe and Central Asia

Until recently, the spotlight throughout Europe has been on forced labour involving undocumented workers or those who have not migrated through regular channels. However, trafficking for labour exploitation, including forced labour, is now moving up the agenda of policy-makers as more evidence of its existence comes to light. It is the predominant form of trafficking in Russia, and possibly in some Western European countries.

Changing Patterns

Trafficking in Europe reflect shifts in patterns of economic development and the gradual enlargement of the European Union. For example, some source countries of trafficked persons, such as the Czech Republic and Poland, appear to have become destination countries following EU membership. New EU member states in south-eastern Europe are countries of transit and destination for human trafficking. Several countries in Central and Eastern Europe have recorded a growing number of trafficking victims within their borders.

While most victims identified by authorities are women trafficked for sexual exploitation, the number of identified cases involving men trafficked for labour exploitation is growing. For example, in 2004 Ukraine's identified cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation were more than double those for labour exploitation. In 2007 the gap between the two categories had almost disappeared and in the first six months of 2008, the number of labour exploitation cases exceeded those of sexual exploitation.

Ukraine is now a country of transit, destination and origin for trafficked people, whether for sexual or labour exploitation. Most foreigners trafficked into or through Ukraine over the past six years came from Moldova, followed by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation.

Moldova is a country of origin for people trafficked to a range of Western European countries as well as Russia and Turkey. A pilot survey carried out in the country in 2008 showed that 24.2 per cent of Moldovan migrants were exploited, 8 per cent were both deceived and exploited and 7.8 per cent were victims of trafficking for forced labour.

Main means of coercion included withholding of salary, obligation to perform tasks against the worker's will, threats of violence or denunciation to the authorities and confiscation of travel or personal identity documents. These findings were based on questions on labour migration that were included for the first time in 2008 in the country's Labour Force Survey.

Data from Russia and the CIS indicate that the numbers of people trafficked for labour exploitation grew between 2002 and 2006. In Kyrgyzstan, the State Committee on Migration and Employment reported that the most widespread forms of forced labour involve debt bondage and retention of wages of Kyrgyz people working in agriculture and construction abroad, mainly in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

Increased Concern in Western Europe

Western European countries are also increasingly concerned that they are home to coercive labour practices and forced labour. An innovative study carried out by Portugal's Ministry for Labour and Social Security, with ILO assistance, addressed immigrant labour exploitation Portugal as well as among Portuguese emigrants in other European countries. The findings suggest that even regular migrants in Europe can be exposed to exploitation and forced labour.

In the Portuguese case, most were poorly skilled people, including Roma minorities, working in agriculture or manufacturing. Informal recruiters and temporary employment agencies, which had tripled in number over previous years, played a key role in leading Portuguese workers into labour exploitation and forced labour situations.

In Britain, discovery of abusive labour practices involving immigrants working in agriculture and shell-fishing led to the establishment of the Gangmaster Licensing Authority. While the authority's main method of combating exploitative practices is by revoking licenses, it also has instigated criminal prosecutions and in June 2008 launched an 18-month programme of targeted enforcement through its "Operation Ajax" surprise raids.

A number of other European countries, including France and Germany, have also strengthened legal and administrative mechanisms in the fight against forced labour and human trafficking in recent years.

Programmes to Combat Trafficking

The ILO is involved in a number of programmes that aim to prevent and eradicate trafficking in Europe and Central Asia.

In Tajikistan, the poorest country in Central Asia, about 12 per cent of the population seeks employment abroad in countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Workers' remittances account for 37 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. The vast majority of migrants are men and most (85 per cent) work in Russia, often in the construction industry.

Many Tajik migrants are subject to trafficking and labour exploitation, including underpayment of wages, unregulated working hours and extortionate payments to traffickers. A significant number do not return home because of accumulated debts or their inability to earn enough while abroad. Their prolonged absence leaves Tajik families in extreme poverty and places social strains on the women who stay behind.

An ILO programme, funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security and the Japanese government, is working with migrant workers and their families, as well as Tajik and Russian workers and employers, to help protect the migrants from human rights abuses. The programme provides training both to the male migrants, including Russian language courses, and entrepreneurship training for the women who are left at home to support the families.

A recently concluded project to combat human trafficking from Moldova and the Ukraine combined work to strengthen anti-trafficking laws and policies with efforts to raise awareness about the problem among the migrants themselves and other key actors.

A joint ILO/International Organization for Migration (IOM) project on labour migration in the Balkans aims to develop and integrate efficient information, advice and referral services for migrant workers, while fostering local capacity and knowledge in the area of labour migration policy and practice. Training sessions will be held in all seven participating countries.

And, since 2007 the ILO is implementing a project in partnership with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) that supports comprehensive anti-trafficking responses in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The project, funded by the European Commission, is enhancing National Action Plans and legal frameworks against human trafficking in the three countries of the southern Caucasus. It is progressively engaging labour market institutions in trafficking prevention and promotion of safe migration, and fostering increased cooperation between stakeholders in these efforts. This work will be further strengthened in a new project, that started 1 May 2009, in which IOM is an additional partner.

Inter-Regional Cooperation

With many countries facing similar challenges in combating forced labour, the ILO also bolsters cooperation across regions. For example, a new EC funded programme will help Nigeria and Italy work together to fight human trafficking between the two countries.

Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour

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