Forced labour on the agenda of the International Labour Conference in 2014

At its 103rd Session in June 2014, the International Labour Conference will consider a standard-setting item to supplement the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), to address prevention, protection and compensation measures.

The 317th Session of the Governing Body (March 2013) selected this item following a Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Forced Labour and Trafficking for Labour Exploitation that was held in Geneva from 11-15 February 2013, with the participation of 23 Government, Employer and Worker experts, as well as several observers. The experts concluded that significant implementation gaps existed in the areas of prevention, protection and compensation that should be addressed through standards setting.

The Office has prepared a summary report for next year’s Conference that examines national law and practice and identifies gaps and opportunities in these areas. The report, Strengthening Action to End Forced Labour, is accompanied by a questionnaire regarding the possible new instrument(s). Members must submit their replies to the questionnaire by 31 December 2013, and a final report containing a summary of these replies will be dispatched prior to the Conference.
On the 15th of July 2013, ILO and UK Department for International Development (DFID) launched the Work in Freedom Programme to prevent the trafficking of women and girls in South Asia and the Middle East. The 5-year programme, funded by UK Aid, aims to prevent over 100,000 women and girls from South Asia from being trafficked into the garment sector or domestic servitude. It will target migration routes between Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates. The key objectives of this new programme are to promote fair recruitment practices and to help women migrant workers secure a legal contract and a decent wage through skills training, collective bargaining, legal protection and other measures aimed at their empowerment. Girls under 16 years of age will be supported to attend school, and law enforcement capacity will be strengthened to intercept traffickers.

UK International Development Minister Lynne Featherstone said, “Income earned from migrant workers abroad and sent back home provides a vital source of support to families in developing countries, worth billions of pounds and many times more than the global aid budget [...] It is appalling that today - hundreds of years since the abolition of the slave trade - women are still trafficked into abusive jobs in the millions.”

This was also echoed by the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, who said: “The emotional and physical impact on the individuals is terrible. And there is an economic dimension too: we estimate that victims of forced labour are being denied at least $21 billion of income a year and this is money that could be lifting families and entire communities out of poverty.

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) will be evaluating the programme. LSHTM Director, Professor Peter Piot, said, “given the large numbers of women and girls putting themselves at risk of harm to support their families, it is exceedingly urgent that we seek strong evidence on what works to prevent human trafficking and stop extreme exploitation.”

During a two-day event in London, ILO, DFID and LSHTM brought together experts from governments, the private sector, trade unions and civil society to discuss the strategy of this new programme and to build stronger partnerships.

Further Information

Video: CNN Freedom Project covering Work in Freedom programme:  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8HyV9jMv4M&feature=youtu.be

Video: Work in Freedom: Making migrant worker safer for women from South Asia:  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2yyQ_2Msv8

CNN Blog posting, including ILO Director General, Guy Ryder:  

On 17 May 2013, the ILO launched a new report entitled “Caught at Sea: Forced labour and trafficking in fisheries”. The report examines recent literature and consolidates existing knowledge about forced labour and human trafficking in the fisheries, with a focus on fishing vessels engaged in commercial marine fisheries.

In many countries the fishing sector is not only a major source of employment and household income, but also plays an important role in food security and the overall economy. A string of recent reports highlighted serious incidents of abuse in some fisheries and on board fishing vessels, which amount to forced labour and human trafficking. While not being representative of the overall working conditions in the industry, these criminal practices, which harm not only the fishers themselves, but also tarnish the image of the fishing sector, need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The report critically examines institutional and legal frameworks that can play an important role in preventing abusive practices in the industry, as well as voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives that have emerged to encourage social responsibility in the fishing sector.

The report has been published as a result of a global consultation meeting, held by the ILO in September 2012, on forced labour and human trafficking in the fishing sector. Experts invited to this meeting identified the following key areas in need for stronger global action:

- Quantitative and qualitative research to assess the scope of the problem and to better understand key determinants of abuse in the industry
- Promotion of international standards and their application in national law and practice
- Stronger cooperation and coordination of law enforcement and other efforts to prevent forced labour and human trafficking
- Communication and awareness raising
- Strengthening of workers’ and employers’ organizations in the sector and promotion of social dialogue

The report was presented at ILO’s Global Dialogue Forum for the Promotion of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) in May 2013. Participants of this tripartite Forum agreed on a number of points for follow-up action, including the holding of inter-agency meetings with UNODC and INTERPOL to address forced labour and human trafficking. The points of consensus will be submitted to ILO’s Governing Body for adoption in October 2013.

Further information

Report and Issue Brief

Video on fishing

Point of Consensus of Global Dialogue Forum
In an effort to gain a better understanding of human trafficking in the Middle East, the ILO, with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), carried out a qualitative research project from June 2011 to December 2012. The project mapped the processes of human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation, and documented national efforts to combat it. The research produced the ILO study “Tricked and Trapped: Human Trafficking in the Middle East”, which sheds light on the situation of trafficked adult workers, both women and men, in the Middle East. In total, 653 individuals were interviewed for the study, of whom 354 were migrant workers and 299 were key informants. Of the workers interviewed, 266 were assessed to have been trafficked and in a situation of forced labour. This was evaluated on the basis of specific indicators. The various trafficking situations documented in the study are based on a careful analysis of the data collected, for the most part, from four destination countries: Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and the UAE. Based on ILO’s global estimates published in 2012, there are at least 600,000 victims of forced labour and human trafficking in the Middle East.

ILO hosted a tripartite regional Conference to discuss the study and to agree on follow-up action with more than 90 Government officials, workers’ and employers’ representatives, civil society groups and international experts. Most countries in the Middle East have passed anti-trafficking legislation. Several countries have established institutions that foster inter-ministerial coordination to combat trafficking. Civil society actors have mobilized to provide direct relief and legal support services to victims.

Thus, there is a growing momentum to fight human trafficking in the Middle East. At the same time, it is important to broaden the prism through which human trafficking is viewed, recognizing the close relationship between human trafficking and labour migration, and the role that failures in current labour migration governance systems play in contributing to human trafficking. The conference highlighted potential areas for follow-up action, such as the development of national statistics on forced labour and human trafficking, support for the organisation of workers, sensitization of business and promotion of good business practices, review of legislation and policies with a view of strengthening effective identification of victims, prosecution and protection measures.

Further information
Update on ILO’s work to prevent bonded labour in India and Nepal

India

Since 2005, ILO and the Ministry of Labour and Employment have teamed up to reduce vulnerability to bonded labour with a special focus on brick kiln workers. Currently, the programme is funded by the Governments of India, Canada and Flanders. The following results have been achieved over the past one and a half years, with the technical support of the ILO:

- Registration of 11,823 brick kiln workers under the ‘Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board’, 2,813 of whom now enjoy access to health security coverage under a Ministry of Labour-sponsored scheme;
- 2,909 ‘brick kiln’ children are enrolled in 113 worksite schools, most of whom receive free books, uniforms and mid-day meals in 78 schools;
- 180 water tanks, 148 toilets, and 2,556 houses have been constructed by the brick kiln owners for their workers;
- 1,104 families were provided essential commodities (such as rice, sugar, kerosene oil, lentils, and palm oil) under the Public Distribution System;
- 495 employers in Andhra Pradesh and 467 recruitment agents in Odisha have been registered under the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, thus contributing to the protection of the rights of 26,405 inter-state migrant workers.

Nepal

A recently published ILO report that examines conditions in the 12 districts of Nepal where systems of bonded labour are most prevalent found that 12 per cent of the estimated 942,000 households were affected by forced labour. The study focused in particular on three groups - Haruwa, Charuwa and Haliya.

According to the report, Haruwa-Charuwa received wages that were far lower than the prevailing rates in the labour market. There are different types of oral and written contractual agreements between the Haruwa-Charuwa and their employers, but more than 45 per cent of the Haruwa-Charuwa do not have any contracts at all and continue to work for their landlords under different systems of payment. They suffer from exploitation in various forms, including wage deductions if they are sick and cannot work, as well as physical or verbal abuse.

Some Haliyas face similar circumstances. While many released families have escaped their forced labour situation, the ILO report shows that despite their “liberation” some have no alternative livelihood options or simply cannot repay their loans. They have to pay back the initial amount of the loan plus any accumulated interest on it, which perpetuates their debt bondage. The remaining Haliyas are nearly all working in forced labour.
The Government of Nepal has taken important steps to tackle bonded labour. Following the liberation of the Kamaiyas in 2002, the Haliyas organized themselves and put up similar demands to be freed. As a result, the Government announced their liberation in September 2008 and is in the process of approving a National Plan of Action for their rehabilitation. But much more needs to be done.

With technical support from the ILO Country Office in Nepal, the Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM) has drafted a Bonded Labour Bill that addresses the elimination of all forms of bonded labour in agriculture, including the Haruwa and Charuwa system.

Further information
ILO report:

Upcoming events

19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians
The 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians will take place from the 2nd to the 11th of October 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland. It will bring together labour statisticians from all over the world to make recommendations on selected topics of labour statistics in the form of resolutions and guidelines (which will become part of the set of international standards on labour statistics, once approved by the Governing Body of the ILO). This year’s conference will feature forced labour and human trafficking, among other topics, and participants will be invited to express their views on concrete ways of developing international guidelines to harmonize concepts and definitions of forced labour for measurement purposes.

Further information

Regional Africa conference on forced labour and human trafficking
On 19-20 November 2013, the ILO will organise a regional Africa conference to assess current responses on the prevention, protection and prosecution of forced labour and human trafficking, to document good practices and lessons learnt from past initiatives, and to devise a strategy for future action. The event will take place in Lusaka, Zambia, and be hosted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. Participants will come from different government ministries, workers’ and employers’ organizations, business, and civil society.

Further information
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New ILO resource guide on forced labour, human trafficking and slavery
The ILO Library has created a new resource guide on forced labour, human trafficking and slavery that provides access to its online resources organized by theme, sector and region. The guide also provides links to ILO labour standards and relevant background material, key ILO documents, statistics, photos, videos, news articles and more.

The guide, available in English, French and Spanish, can be accessed at the following link: