

BREAKING THE CHAINS

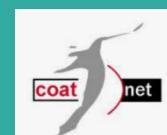
COATNET AGAINST LABOUR EXPLOITATION

2023



1° MAY

We thanks for their contribution to: Caritas Albania, Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Lebanon, Caritas Malawi, Caritas Myanmar, Caritas Nepal, Caritas Nigeria, Caritas Rwanda, Caritas Spain, HAART Kenya, RENATE and Secours Catholique-Caritas France.



Introduction

The Palermo protocol¹ defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a person by force, coercion, deception, or other means of exploitation. Exploitation takes many forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labor, reduction to servitude or slavery, and exploitation of begging. Due to the pandemic and global technological expansion, human trafficking has even entered cyberspace, increasing the risk for vulnerable people.

Modern slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. Factors that make people more vulnerable to trafficking include difficulties in accessing rights, lack of security and protection, psychological distress, exclusion, indebtedness, migration, conflict, and problems of environmental degradation.

According to data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2022 Report², 49.6 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021, of which 27.6 million were in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriage. Of the 27.6 million people in forced labour, 17.3 million are exploited in the private sector (generating over \$150 billion in illicit profits each year); 6.3 million in forced commercial sexual exploitation, and 3.9 million in forced labour imposed by state.

Women and girls account for 4.9 million of those in forced commercial sexual exploitation, and for 6 million of those in forced labour in other economic sectors. 12% of all those in forced labour are children. More than half of these children are in commercial sexual exploitation. The Asia and the Pacific region has the highest number of people in forced labour (15.1 million) and the Arab States the highest prevalence (5.3 per thousand people).

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³ aims to eradicate forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labor by 2030. The economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have worsened this problem, especially in the poorest countries and neighborhoods and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations. Millions of workers risk losing jobs and becoming more vulnerable to labor exploitation.

COATNET (Christian Organisations Against Trafficking NETWORK) links over 25 Christian organizations fighting worldwide to combat human trafficking and assist survivors of modern slavery. Its affiliates cooperate with other

¹ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, General Assembly resolution 55/25, 15 November 2000

² Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, ILO – International Labour Organization, Geneva, September 2022

³ TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, United Nations, September 2015

faith and civil society organizations internationally. COATNET members work to eliminate conditions that deny individuals their fundamental labor rights and put workers' health, dignity, freedom, and safety at risk.

This paper intends to give a global picture of the crime of trafficking from the point of view of labor exploitation. By collecting data from the field through the contribution of COATNET affiliates, the document provides a snapshot of the COATNET members' tangible actions in terms of protection of victims and survivors of labor exploitation, together with advocating at national, regional, and international levels to give a voice to the voiceless and raising awareness on the crime.

Asia: the continent with the highest prevalence of forced labour in the world

Asia has the highest prevalence of forced labor globally, accounting for over two-thirds of all cases. The report notes that forced labor is prevalent in various industries, including agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Approximately 15.1 million people in Asia are victims of forced labor exploitation, including thousands of children. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation.

Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) partners with Caritas member organizations to promote safe migration and prevent human trafficking, focusing on avoiding labor exploitation in Myanmar. Workers in Myanmar face poor working conditions due to outdated laws and policies that leave them without access to fundamental labor rights. Ongoing conflict and movement restrictions exacerbate these risks, with increasing reports of forced recruitment of boys and girls by armed groups.

KMSS advocates for labor rights through various campaigns and coordination with UN agencies, UNICEF Myanmar, Save the Children, and World Vision Myanmar. At the national and community levels, KMSS implements advocacy activities through events such as Anti-human Trafficking Days and Prayers a Day for survivors. KMSS is committed to ensuring that every migrant is protected from violence and exploitation in the Greater Mekong Subregions and works to give a voice to those trafficked.

The Nepal Labour Migration Report 2022⁴ highlights poor working and living conditions, lack of social protection, and forced overtime labor faced by Nepali migrants. Women face particular vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, over 1.1 million Nepali labor approvals were issued to 172 countries, but

⁴ Nepal Labour Migration Report, jointly launched by the Nepal's Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, IOM, ILO, and Safer Migration Programme (SaMI), 2022

only 110 countries legalized foreign employment. The countries where migrant women migrate for a better future in jobs are Croatia, Cyprus, Jordan, Malta, Romania, and Turkey.

Health, safety, and exploitation risks are high, with over 1395 migrant worker deaths, injuries, and illnesses reported in 2021/22. Exploitative labor practices and abuse of employers are common in Nepal.

Although remittances contribute to Nepal's economy, current policies do not adequately support vulnerable undocumented workers. Caritas Nepal collaborates with local governments and NGOs to help vulnerable individuals and families address unsafe migration. They offer various services to assist migrants, returnees, families, and youths, providing access to information, skill training, access to justice, and health support. They advocate nationally and internationally through the Caritas Confederation and the National Network for Safe Migration (NNSM).

Caritas Nepal's 'Agriculture Calling' program trains migrant family groups in modern farming techniques, building confidence to engage in commercial farming and use received remittances effectively.

The program also helps beneficiaries lease and farm barren land, form cooperatives, and earn profit by selling their products during the pandemic lockdown. 60% of the trained participants started kitchen gardening using Integrated Pest Management (IPM). At the same time, the group garnered knowledge of different vegetable farming strategies.



Forced Labour in Africa

According to Forced Labour and Forced Marriage ILO Report (2022), African forced labor accounts for approximately 5% of all cases globally. Forced labor is widespread in agriculture, mining, construction, and domestic work. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation, with economic decline and job losses

increasing workers' vulnerability to labor exploitation. Many child laborers are also present in various sectors across the continent.

Human trafficking in Rwanda takes the form of modern slavery, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as children, young girls, and women. Women's lack of empowerment puts them at higher risk. Refugees, returnees, and poverty-stricken men also face risks.

Caritas Rwanda works with stakeholders to combat this crime, following a "protection from Sexual Exploitation & Abuse and safeguarding policy". The aim is to raise awareness, promote empowerment, and assist victims through partnerships with the government and local stakeholders.

Child labor in tobacco production in Malawi involves hazardous work conditions, chemicals, and school absenteeism for about 38% of children aged 5 to 17, leading to debt bondage. Domestic workers in Malawi are also at risk of exploitation. At the same time, the country is a transit for trafficked victims who are sexually exploited.

CADECOM (Commission au développement catholique au Malawi) works to combat labor exploitation and human trafficking through community awareness campaigns, education rights, and vocational training programs. The Commission also addresses school quality issues and promotes water, sanitation, and hygiene access. They aim to reduce the dropout rate and empower communities to understand and claim their education rights.

The mission of Caritas Nigeria is crucial, too, to prevent too many lives from falling into the hands of traffickers. Like a 24-year-old single mother, Tunde Blessing, who fled Edo State in search of a better future to raise her children. She learned to be a hairdresser but could not start her own business due to lacking resources. In 2016, she met a man who offered to take her to Italy for work, but she was deceived. She ended up in Libya, where she slept on an insect-infested floor and did domestic jobs without being paid. She was later arrested while attempting to cross the Mediterranean and imprisoned.

Caritas Nigeria combats child labor and exploitation among refugee populations in Cross River State. They also address labor exploitation among irregular migrants from Libya to Europe, including forced servitude and organ trafficking. Collaboration with child protection actors, women groups, and community leaders is critical to mitigating the negative impact on returnee migrants. Programs to improve livelihoods through economic empowerment, school retention, vocational training, and mental health support are implemented in partnership

with CEI and GIZ. After-school clubs support vulnerable youth, while start-up kits are provided for the economic reintegration of at-risk and returned migrants.

In Nairobi (Kenya), the NGO Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART) supports victims of various forms of labor exploitation, including forced labor, child labor, debt bondage, deceptive recruitment, and begging rings. The organization implements both protection for survivors of exploitation and advocacy actions.

Regarding protection, HAART supports the reporting and rescue of victims with assistance from law enforcement, repatriation assistance, direct support such as shelter, medical care, psychosocial support, legal aid, and economic empowerment. The NGO also provides safe migration information to prevent re-trafficking.

HAART's advocacy efforts include participating in policy reviews, submitting memoranda to relevant authorities, attending meetings and workshops, training law enforcement on trafficking, contributing to training manuals for law enforcement, and working with survivors to strengthen their capacities for policy-making and program design.

Emblematic of the crime related to labour exploitation is the testimony of a social worker at HAART Kenya: *«Survivors face extreme abuse, mistreatment, and exploitation, often being referred to as "slaves". They work long hours with little support, are subjected to physical and sexual abuse, and are often told they cannot get sick.*

Survivors often have long-lasting physical and mental health effects from their exploitation, and some never fully recover. Despite the challenges they face, survivors are brave in seeking help and support».

Labor Exploitation Across Regions: Interconnections of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East

The Arab States have the world's highest prevalence (5.3 per thousand people) of exploited laborers, many of whom work in construction, domestic, and agriculture. Most domestic workers in Middle Eastern countries are female migrants from Asia and Africa.

According to ILO research, domestic workers in the Middle East face a range of abuses and exploitation, including long working hours, low wages, physical and sexual abuse, and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the kafala system binds workers to their employers, which can contribute to labor exploitation and abuse. Under this system, workers' legal status in the country is tied to their sponsor, who has significant control over their working and living conditions.

ILO research has also found instances of forced labor in the Middle East, including in the construction and domestic work sectors. In some cases, workers may be trapped in debt bondage, unable to leave their employer without paying fees or fines.

According to the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report from the US Department of State⁵, Lebanon is a source, transit, and destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Syrian refugees and domestic migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, including physical and sexual abuse, non-payment of wages, and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

The kafala system in Lebanon, which ties a worker's legal residency to their employer or sponsor, has been criticized for contributing to labor exploitation and abuse. There have been reports of employers confiscating workers' passports, restricting communication with their families, and subjecting them to long hours and poor living conditions.

Despite efforts to strengthen labor protections and combat human trafficking, the situation of migrant and domestic workers in Lebanon remains a concern for human rights organizations. Caritas Lebanon aims to support

⁵ 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, U.S. Department of States

vulnerable individuals and communities and protect their rights. One of their focus areas is combatting labor exploitation in Lebanon, particularly in the context of migrant domestic workers.

Caritas Lebanon provides various programs to assist migrant workers, such as legal assistance, counseling, social support, and voluntary return assistance in collaboration with IOM; also advocates for the rights of migrant workers and engages in campaigns to raise awareness about their situation.

Additionally, Caritas Lebanon provides capacity-building programs for Lebanese employers and seeks to promote ethical recruitment practices. Through its mission, Caritas Lebanon seeks to promote fair labor practices and combat labor exploitation in Lebanon, with 10 million persons served over the years.

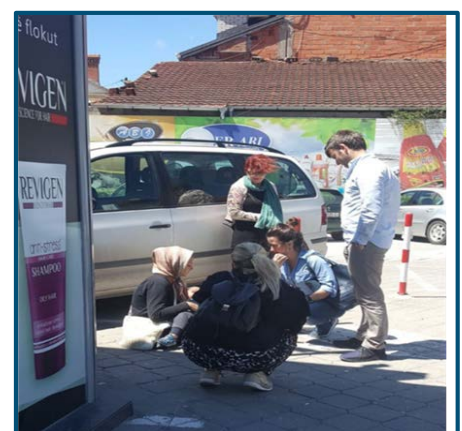


Labour exploitation from a European perspective: a crime that spares no continent

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2022 Report⁶, labor exploitation is a significant problem in Europe, with an estimated 880,000 migrant workers experiencing severe labor exploitation across EU member states. Additionally, many cases of labor exploitation go underreported or undetected due to the vulnerable status of workers and the clandestine nature of exploitation. The situation is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left many workers even more susceptible to exploitation due to job insecurity and income loss.

Albania, for example, is a source country. Still, also a transit and destination country of child labor forced labor, and human trafficking. Exploitation happens at the border. Albanian children (especially of the ethnic Roma group) beg in the streets of Kosovo for months and then return to Albania. Most of them cross the border illegally.

Caritas Albania organized roundtables to improve detection, raise visibility among authorities, and create a group of experts between



⁶ Fundamental Rights Report, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2022

Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo. The joint cross-border plan realized its objectives and was included in the National Action Plan 2021.

RENATE (Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation) works to combat labor exploitation and human trafficking in Europe, such as in Albania and Spain, providing education and awareness-raising campaigns for vulnerable populations, advocacy, and lobbying for policy change.

RENATE also works to support victims of labor exploitation. It provides practical assistance such as job training and rehabilitation programs. RENATE has played a significant role in developing cooperation between different organizations and law enforcement agencies to improve the identification, support, and protection of victims of labor exploitation and human trafficking.

Overall, RENATE is committed to addressing the root causes of labor exploitation and promoting sustainable and ethical working conditions for all. At the heart of RENATE's mission is the life and dignity of people, like that of Demir, an 18-year-old Albanian boy who was promised a job with accommodation and food by his employer but was instead deceived and subjected to exploitation.

The boy, homeless and without family support, had been referred to the employer by a friend who lived in the same juvenile home. Employed in a water packaging and trading company, he started to have problems receiving his full salary. The employer abused him psychologically and physically violated him after he demanded payment of an unpaid wage. A mobile team run by RENATE finally rescued the boy.

Caritas Spain is actively involved in the fight against labor exploitation in the agricultural sector, hospitality industry, and domestic work. The organization has specific programs aimed at assisting seasonal workers during agrarian campaigns. The organization also focuses on identifying, protecting, and helping victims of labor exploitation and promoting awareness and capacity building around the issue.

Furthermore, Caritas Spain is part of the Spanish network against human trafficking and actively participates in the call for a comprehensive law against trafficking. Caritas Spain advocates for decent work, recognizing its essential role in personal fulfillment and contributing to God's plan for humanity.

Secours Catholique-Caritas France has been working to combat various forms of labor exploitation, including child labor, forced labor and trafficking, and labor exploitation. They have developed tools and protocols to improve

identification and support for victims and work with government and non-governmental organizations to promote policy changes and support the effective implementation of laws and regulations.

Secours Catholique-Caritas France also provides services to help reintegrate victims of labor exploitation and advocates for the abolition of abusive and exploitative practices, overall focusing on addressing the root causes of labor exploitation and promoting sustainable and equitable working conditions for all workers.

Conclusion

In his encyclical letter *Laudato si'*⁷, Pope Francis emphasizes the dignity of work and workers' rights, stating that the broader objective should be to allow them a dignified life through work. In his words: *«The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. Economic life should be transformed by ethics which place human dignity, the common good and sustainable development at the forefront»*. COATNET acknowledges the importance of recognizing the dignity of each worker. Carrying forward the strong message expressed by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*, COATNET members worldwide fight against labor exploitation and emphasize the need to defend workers' rights.

⁷ ENCYCLICAL LETTER LAUDATO SI' OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME, 2015

