

Forced labour in the UK: JRF Programme Paper

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Aims

The study aims to provide an overview of the causes and extent of forced labour in the UK, what the term means in a UK context, existing policy and legal frameworks and the current capacity to tackle it.

Methodology

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with experts across the UK, including national stakeholders and frontline local service providers. There were also local stakeholder meetings in 3 areas, centred around Boston [Lincolnshire], Bristol and Dundee.

A literature review of UK publications on forced labour was also conducted.

Key issues

The report indicates the term 'forced labour' is not always easily understood because of its interrelationship with trafficking, exploitation and slavery. A majority of the focus in research studies is on links to human trafficking which may result in an over-simplification of the idea of forced labour, by focusing on border security and immigration control. Forced labour needs to be seen as part of a continuum of exploitation, and in this regard the International Labour Organisation's [ILO] definitions do not necessarily capture the complexity of the issue.

The evidence indicates migrant workers are the majority of victims of forced labour and labour exploitation, with a notable proportion from the A8/A2 countries of central and Eastern Europe. A range of existing studies have shown that the exploitative use of labour [including forced labour] is linked to structural factors, examples of which are the drive to force down costs, the widespread use of temporary agency workers, long supply chains which can hinder oversight and the extensive operation of cash in hand work, leaving workers without proof of income, and the associated benefits derived from legitimate employment [for example, tax credits etc].

The study finds that forced labour is not a policy priority, and while forced labour has been criminalised, conviction rates are low, and a 'justice gap' may be developing. The report suggests the low priority attached to the forced labour agenda is due to several factors, among which are the lack of professionals with specialist knowledge, a lack of funding to promote better awareness

of workers' rights and lack of clarity around forced labour itself.

Recommendations

The report contains recommendations for policy, business and employers and trade unions. A unified strategy is required at national Government level to tackle the issue of forced labour, which would encompass a range of measures, including a clear definition of forced labour, support programmes for employers and better guidance for the judiciary, as well as an assessment of the role of public and private sectors [for example, in monitoring supply chains]. Key to the success of such an approach is better and more available access to data on exploitation.

The authors also advocate for more detailed studies into in the labour market in what they term 'high-risk industries' [including food, construction and hospitality].

Web Link
Forced labour in the UK [link to external website]
Migrant Group
EU migrants
Non-EU migrants
Trafficked
Topic
Work and education
Exploitation
Forced labour
Labour conditions
Place
UK - inc. Yorkshire & Humber element
Year
2013
Resource Type
Report
Extra Information

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