

PROFITS AND POVERTY: The economics of forced labour

International Labour Office (ILO)

Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL) Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FPRW) Copyright © International Labour Organization 2014

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Preface

Since the ILO's International Labour Conference adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up in 1998, much progress has been made toward achieving respect for, and promotion and realization of, its four principals: freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect to employment and occupation. In particular, the ILO's two Conventions on Forced Labour have today received almost universally ratification, and enjoy wide recognition and support.

Shortly after the adoption of the 1998 Declaration, the ILO Governing Body established the Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL), which is located in the Fundamental Principles and Rights Branch of the Governance and Tripartism Department. Since its establishment in 2001, SAP-FL has prioritized research and statistics to enhance the global understanding of forced labour and related practices, such as human trafficking and slavery, to support the development of evidence-based policies and programmes to address forced labour, human trafficking and other forms of involuntary, coercive work.

The publication by the ILO of new estimates on forced labour in 2012 created a sense of urgency on the need to address implementation gaps regarding the ILO's Forced Labour Conventions. In addition, it also prompted calls to consider the adoption of supplementary standards by the 103rd International Labour Conference in June 2014.

The power of normative pressure against those who still use or condone the use of forced labour is essential. National legislation needs to be strengthened to combat forced labour and penalties against those who profit from it need to be strictly enforced. However, a better understanding of the socio-economic root causes as well as a new assessment of the profits of forced labour are equally important to bringing about long-term change.

The purpose of this report is to do just that. It highlights how forced labour thrives in the incubator of poverty and vulnerability, low levels of education and literacy, migration and other factors. The evidence and results presented in this report illustrate the need for stronger measures of prevention and protection and for enhanced law enforcement as the basic responses to forced labour. At the same time, it also provides new knowledge of the determinants of forced labour that can help us develop and expand policies and programmes to not only stop forced labour where it exists, but prevent it before it occurs.

The report is based on the efforts of a multi-disciplinary research team, led by SAP-FL and supported by the ILO's Research Department, ILO experts and external peer reviewers. The publication of this report was possible thanks to the generous contributions of the Government of Ireland (Irish Aid) that provides core funding to SAP-FL. The U.S.

Department of Labor and UK Department for International Development (DFID) provided funding for the implementation of surveys.

It is hoped that this new report will contribute to greater awareness and effective action against forced labour as well as further research in this area.

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