



# Facts About Migration and Human Trafficking

In today's global economy, poverty and lack of viable economic opportunities at home drive men, women, and children to leave their homes in search of work and a better life. But these forces also leave workers vulnerable to exploitation. The worst abuse is trafficking—the use of fraud, deception, or coercion to recruit, transport, buy, and sell human beings into virtual slavery.

## Who Are Migrant Workers?

A migrant worker is defined as a person who travels from one area to another in search of work. The International Labor Organization estimates the migrant worker population at 120 million, with roughly 20 million migrant workers, immigrants, and members of their families in Africa, 18 million in North America, 12 million in Central and South America, 7 million in South and East Asia, 9 million in the Middle East, and 30 million in Europe. On average, about half of all migrant workers are women; although in some countries the percentage is much higher. Migrant workers contribute to the economies of countries in many sectors. Specifically, however, particularly vulnerable migrant workers may be:

- Domestic workers
- Construction workers
- Contract laborers
- Low-skilled service sector workers
- Agricultural workers
- Export production factory workers

## The Push and Pull of Migration

### **Push Factors**

- ⇒ Income, wage, and employment disparity due to globalization and industrialization.
- ⇒ Income earned by migrant workers can help their families attain a decent standard of living
- ⇒ Global economic policies, initiated through market liberalization and World Bank and International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies that require governments to cut programs and reduce social service spending on pensions, health care, and other benefits, and that displace workers from their traditional or local livelihoods.
- ⇒ Job insecurity and unemployment for hundreds of thousands of workers following global trade agreements such as the phase-out of international textile and garment trade quotas.

### **Pull Factors**

- ⇐ Demand for cheap labor. In the UAE nearly all 500,000 construction workers are migrants, earning about \$175 per month, compared to the average \$2,106 monthly per capita income.
- ⇐ Migrant workers' willingness to take dangerous and dirty jobs such as meatpacking, food processing, and construction, rejected by the domestic workforce.
- ⇐ Sending countries' use of migration as part of an economic strategy to ease unemployment problems and accumulate foreign currency.
- ⇐ Aging populations, and low birth rates in industrialized countries result in higher numbers of people reaching retirement than the rate of entry by nationals into the domestic workforce.



## Trafficking: A Point on the Migration Line

At any point along the migration line, workers are vulnerable to being trafficked.

- **Recruitment:** Recruiters may mislead workers about the type of job or how much it pays. They also may supply false documents.
- **Pre-departure:** Workers are kept in holding centers, sometimes for months, while their documents are processed. The longer the workers stay in the holding centers, the more indebted they become. The living conditions are poor, and women may be sexually harassed, assaulted, and even raped.
- **Transit:** Trucks, boats, and other transport are often unsafe and overcrowded. Migrant workers may change agents at the border, so that although an agent in the sending country may recruit a woman for domestic service, the agent in the receiving country traffics her into sex work or other forced labor.
- **Destination:** Host countries may use sponsorship systems in which workers are tied to a particular employer or a rotational system of expatriate labor to limit the duration of foreigners' stay. There are limits on migrant workers' ability to bring their families with them, and curbs on naturalization rights. Employers may deduct migrant workers' debt from their pay and turn it over to the agent. With no formal recordkeeping, the worker has no way of knowing the extent of the debt or when it has been paid off. Migrant workers may be detained and imprisoned with no access to legal counsel or translation assistance, treated like criminals by law enforcement officials poorly trained to recognize and deal with trafficking victims.
- **Return:** Poor currency exchange rates, demands for illegal fees from sending governments, private agents, and thugs who extort money and force them to use their transportation at inflated prices await returning migrants. Deported workers may not be allowed to recover unpaid wages or seek recourse for abuse.

### International Migrant Worker Rights Protections

All workers, whether migrant or from the domestic workforce, whether documented or undocumented, are covered by the core ILO labor standards, which provide rights such as freedom of association and freedom from discrimination and forced labor. There are also specific international instruments designed to protect migrant workers.

- UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families [<http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cmw.htm>]
- ILO Convention No. 97 on Migration for Employment [<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C097>]
- ILO Convention No. 143 on Migrant Workers [<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C143>]

### Solidarity Center Migration and Trafficking Programs

The Solidarity Center works with unions, businesses, governments, and non-profit organizations worldwide to promote and protect the rights of migrant workers. For more information about Solidarity Center migration and trafficking programs, visit our website at [www.solidaritycenter.org](http://www.solidaritycenter.org).