



Migrant Worker Exploitation Rife in Middle East and North Africa: Report

6 December - Shortly after the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Walk Free Foundation (WFF) released a new report *'The Other Migrant Crisis: Protecting migrant workers against exploitation in the Middle East and North Africa'* during a regional dialogue (December 2-4) facilitated by IOM entitled "Bringing Innovation Forward: Combating Trafficking in Persons and Exploitation of Migrant Workers in MENA."

The report exposes the current conditions faced by migrant workers who are trafficked and exploited across MENA. The data compiled from 162 victims in this study reveals alarming trends:

- 100 per cent of workers had their passports withheld,
- 87 per cent were confined to their workplace;
- 76 per cent had wages withheld;
- 73 per cent suffered psychological abuse; and
- 61 per cent endured physical abuse.

This regional dialogue was organized within the framework of IOM's project on Action to **Protect** and **Assist Vulnerable** and **Exploited Migrant Workers** in Middle East and North Africa (PAVE), funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior.

Ongoing armed conflicts and economic instability across MENA create the perfect climate for modern slavery. Sectarian violence, the rise of extremism and record displacement of populations is heavily impacting the region. This unprecedented and complex humanitarian emergency can hide the critical needs of the burgeoning migrant population workforce. Emerging reports of migrant



Participants attend regional dialogue and launch of *"The Other Migrant Crisis: Protecting migrant workers against exploitation in the Middle East and North Africa."* ©IOM 2015

workers trapped in conflict zones, being used as human shields and captured by armed groups further highlight the crucial need to act immediately. Supply of and demand for cheap migrant labour shows no signs of diminishing.

Fiona David, Executive Director of Research at the Walk Free Foundation said, "This research comes at a crucial time. [It] can serve as a tool for governments and civil society groups, including the general public, to educate, lobby, and develop policies for better migrant worker protection."

Fawzi Al-Zioud, IOM Chief of Mission in Lebanon said, "We must ensure that human trafficking is given the highest priority so that criminals cannot be allowed to further exploit the vulnerable in what is already a highly complex situation."

Dr Alexis Loeber, Head of the Cooperation Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon said that, "Since 2013, the EU has been supporting the IOM

through the PAVE project to help countries in the MENA region to build a regional response to combat trafficking and exploitation and to ensure a better protection of victims. The project also aims at improving the national responses of the countries involved as much as possible".

The Minister of Justice Major-General Ashraf Rifi stated at the opening of the Regional Dialogue, "Combating trafficking in persons requires unprecedented joint efforts to take necessary measures to keep up with this fast-growing crime".

The regional dialogue brings together key practitioners and pioneers in the field of counter-trafficking, including key government officials and civil society actors to discuss challenges and strategies going forward in combating trafficking in persons.



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