

FRA Press Release  
Vienna, 25 June 2019

## **Severe labour exploitation of migrant workers: FRA report calls for 'zero tolerance' of severe labour exploitation**

**FRA research published today highlights the urgent need for European governments to do more to tackle severe labour exploitation in firms, factories and farms across the EU. First-hand interviews with hundreds of exploited workers reveal the illegal practices in sectors including agriculture, construction, domestic work, hospitality, manufacturing and transport.**

Many exploited workers are often invisible. But the workers' perspectives in FRA's report '[Protecting migrant workers from exploitation in the EU](#)' show how their exploitation contributes to the supply chains of the everyday goods and services we take for granted – from the food on our plates, to the shirts on our backs.

Powerful accounts\* from 237 workers reveal challenges in eight EU Member States. Researchers found victims in Italy included children, one who was made to work 17-hours-a-day and paid just €60 for a six-day week.

Three-quarters of those migrant workers in Italy were subjected to violence, or threats of violence from their employers. FRA heard how some Italian employers used vouchers in place of payment, while others charged fees of up to €2,000 to provide the work contract needed to apply for a residence permit.

The report reveals that over half of the workers found their jobs by word of mouth but ended up in 'concentration camp conditions' where 'they keep us like dogs, like slaves'.

FRA researchers found that some of the EU's exploited migrant workers are:

- forced to pay debts to traffickers before earning a cent;
- working 92-hour, seven-day weeks, with no holiday or time off;
- sleeping in shipping containers, with no water or electricity;
- monitored on CCTV 24/7 by bosses;
- given no protective clothing to work with hazardous chemicals;
- face sexual and gender-based violence or forced into moving drugs;
- threatened of dismissal and deportation when they ask for their wages.

The report outlines 13 actions for EU institutions and Member States to end exploitation:

1. End fraudulent or deceptive recruitment practices.
2. Work with Europol, internet service providers and social media to tackle recruitment websites used by traffickers and exploitative employers.
3. Enforce labour laws to protect migrant workers' rights on pay, conditions and hours.
4. All EU Member States, which have not yet done so, should ratify the International Labour Organization's decent work for domestic workers Convention and include domestic workers in national laws resulting from the EU's Working Time Directive.
5. Ensure all workers, including seasonal and posted workers, have adequate living standards and fair rental agreements and that the rent is not automatically deducted from the wage, when accommodation is provided by the employer.
6. Build labour exploitation into the EU's Occupational Safety and Health Strategic Framework by 2020.
7. Include domestic workers in the EU's Safety and Health at Work Directive.

8. Enable law, inspection and monitoring bodies to identify and tackle labour exploitation through training and sufficient resources.
9. Develop regulated and targeted labour migration programmes to fill labour market shortages.
10. Reduce workers' dependency on employers, by issuing residence permits or visas not tied to a single employer, for example.
11. Enable seasonal workers to freely change employers more than once, under the EU's Seasonal Workers Directive.
12. Inform workers of their rights in a language they understand.
13. Make specialised support services available to all victims of crime, including victims of severe labour exploitation. This includes ensuring organisations supporting trafficking victims also cover victims of labour exploitation.

FRA Director [Michael O'Flaherty](#) says: *"This report shows how exploitation often starts with false promises and fraud, describes the extreme conditions the exploited workers endure, and identifies what facilitate exploitation. But it also outlines what can be done to help exploited workers access justice.*

*"We hope that our focus on this issue encourages the responsible national authorities, as well as social partners, to recognise the reality of severe labour exploitation, and to take the steps necessary to create a climate of 'zero tolerance'."*

#### **Editor's notes**

The report draws on face-to-face and focus group interviews with 237 adult workers who have been victims of severe labour exploitation between 2013 and 2017. It focuses on Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and the UK.

\* Verbatim quotes from interviews carried out in Italy are below.

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## Italy interviewee quotes...

**“Usually we used to go to the pick-up spot and ‘the Italian’ picked us up to work, because it was the normal way for us immigrants to get a chance to work in Italy. We stayed there and sometimes you can’t even negotiate the price, because you need money to buy food and so you are obliged to [accept any amount] that he proposes to you.”**

(Italy, male focus group participant from Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture, regular migrant at the time of exploitation)

**“[...] when we arrived, he said ‘you are good, but not for this work, for another job with me...’ then my brother-in-law said ‘[...] he is joking’. The first time [...] he said ‘I am joking, I am like this’, but then he continued more insistently, too much. [H]e said to my husband ‘What do you do, you are too fat, what do you do with your wife, send her to me, I will do everything’. [...] Just words, no further things.”**

(Italy, female interviewee from Eastern Europe, agriculture, EU national)

**“He [employer] said ‘if someone comes to ask you ‘how much is you[r] employer paying you?’ you say ‘7.80’; ‘How long are you working?’, ‘4 hours, 5 hours and then we go home’ [...] let’s say that since I had worked there, it happened 4 times.”**

(Italy, female interviewee from Eastern Europe, agriculture, EU national)

**“If you have a residence permit [...] you are not afraid, you know that you are regular and you know that even if you lost your job, you can find another job because the residence permit gives you an opportunity to do whatever you want.”**

(Italy, male focus group participant from Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture)

**“Earlier we didn’t know these things, we discovered them [our rights] too late because besides working in the fields and going home, we didn’t go around, if you come home at 9 or 10 at night when could I go?”**

(Italy, male interviewee from Sub-Saharan Africa, construction worker, migrant in an irregular situation)

**“[C]onstant inspection, [...] this is the solution. Instead of [...] laws, laws, laws. Because even [when] you put the laws [in force], nobody is controlling, it’s just a word that is written [o]n a sheet of paper.”**

(Italy, male focus group participant from Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture, regular migrant)

**“I am a foreigner, when they give me huge money I will send it back to my country [...] they said that I’m black, so the money (received by the employer) was (considered) enough”.**

(Italy, male focus group participant from Sub-Saharan Africa, construction, migrant in an irregular situation)

**“[I]f you are going to report, they say that you have to find somebody who you are working with [...] maybe you are working with Italians: then OK, find a witness to come to the court and sometimes they could ask you [do] not [take somebody who is] black [...] because if I am with him they say no, you are friends. [...] Maybe you give one witness, but they say ‘no -we need- 3 witnesses’.”**

(Italy, male focus group participant from Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture, regular migrant)