



Cross-border Labour Recruitment: Research findings from Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Sweden

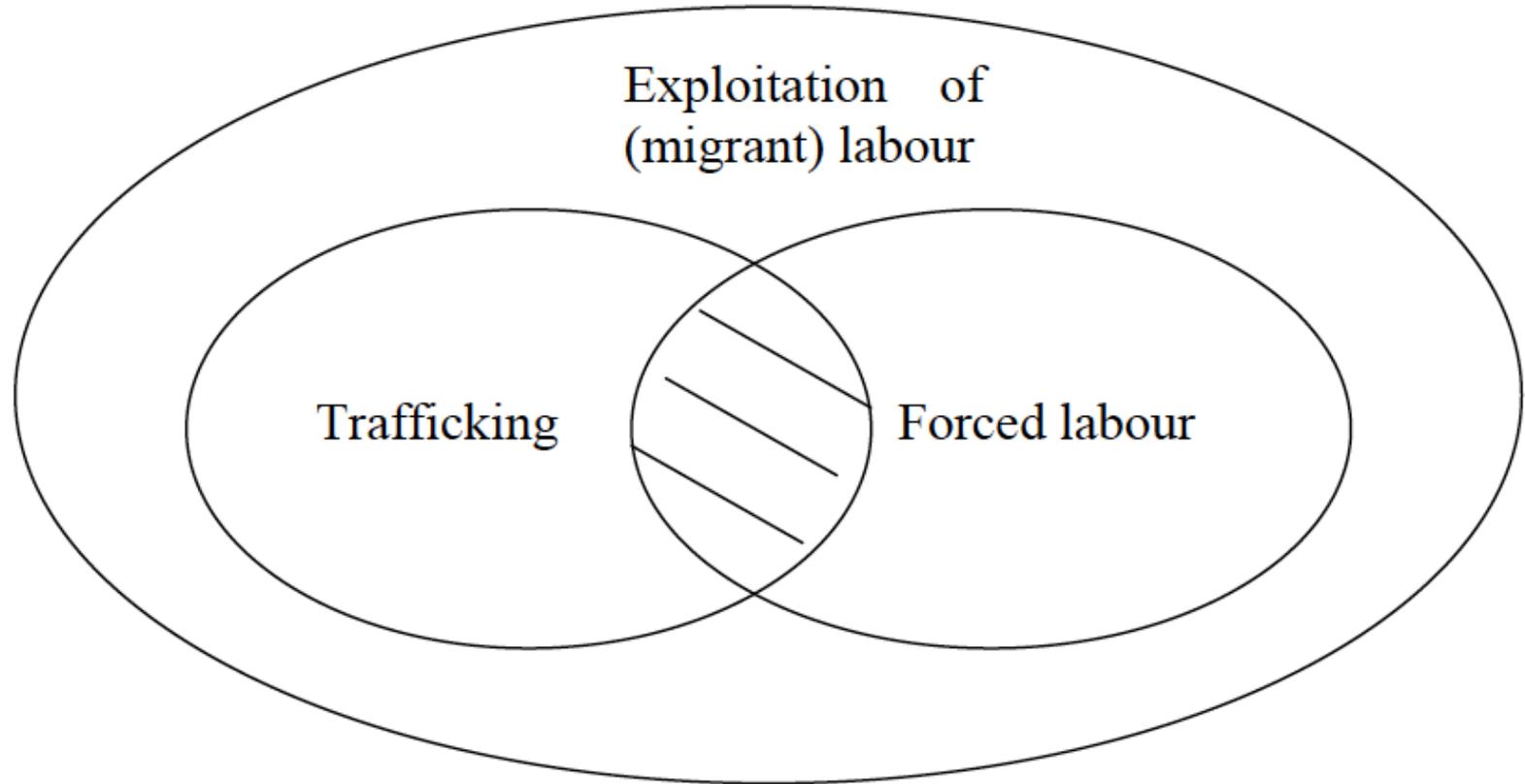
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24th April 2014, Tallinn

Background: Adstringo-project

- “ADSTRINGO – Addressing trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation through improved partnerships, enhanced diagnostics and intensified organisational approaches”
- Focused research component looks into the recruitment practices and roles of recruitment agencies and employers in the exploitation of migrant labour, which facilitates labour trafficking in Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania

Premise of research



ILO (2005) indicators of forced labour:

- physical or sexual violence or the threat of such violence,
- restriction of movement of the worker,
- debt bondage or bonded labour,
- withholding wages or refusing to pay the worker at all,
- retention of passports and identity documents,
- the threat of denunciation to the authorities

Recruitment

- Already at the recruitment stage there is potential for exploitation and deceit.
- Recruitment via friends and relatives seems to be relatively common.
- It is difficult for migrant workers to verify whether promises made during recruitment about the wages or the terms of employment and tasks are truthful→ risk of deception increases when recruitment is done in a hurry and the contents of the work and the contract are not detailed but a relatively high pay is promised.

Recruitment

- Especially the most vulnerable migrant workers are at risk of agreeing to irregular employment offers and contracts, which may ultimately place them in a situation of exploitation and trafficking.
- Sometimes migrants fall victims to unscrupulous employers or middlemen, who charge them fees for fictitious jobs. These workers arrive in the destination country only to find out that the company that had supposedly hired them does not exist.

Recruitment

- Finnish and Swedish studies found cases where migrant workers had to pay unreasonably high fees (up to 10 000 EUR) in order to secure a job and/or a work permit.
- Estonian and Lithuanian research uncovered cases where agencies had asked job seekers for an illegal fee for their services, ranging from 190 to almost 400 EUR
- Such practices make the migrant workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation, since they are often in debt to their employer/recruiter

Exploitation of migrant labour

- Many migrant workers encounter exploitative practices at work e.g. underpayment or withholding of wages, irregular or excessive working hours, hard working conditions, poor terms of employment, low-grade housing, also threats and psychological means of control (e.g. isolation) are used.
- Exploitation is systematic and intentional, different “irregular” practices of grey economy are utilised (e.g. non-payment of sales taxes or other taxes, using undeclared labour or different sub-contracting schemes).

General conclusions

- The research confirms that the forms of exploitation of migrant workers face are largely the same in the Baltic Sea Region and in Europe in general
- Exploitative practices are most often encountered in agriculture, construction, food industry and service sectors
- Especially low-skilled and low-paid jobs are built on an increasingly flexible work force which may consist to a large extent of migrant workers, who undertake work that is often characterised by uncertain terms and conditions and at worst, by exploitative practices that may amount to trafficking in persons
- Need for a public discussion on what are considered acceptable terms and standards of employment and services, and how migrant workers are regarded and treated in the labour market

Recommendations: Recruitment

- It would be important to target irregular recruitment practices in both countries of origin and countries of destination including enhanced monitoring of recruitment agencies, as well as of less formal channels of recruitment.
- One main challenge is how to intervene in irregular and exploitative recruitment practices by relatives, friends and acquaintances. Awareness-raising among migrant workers seems the most effective way of preventing such exploitation.
- Recruitment agencies and persons who charge illegal recruitment fees should be sanctioned and, in the case of recruitment companies, their license should be revoked

Recommendations: Recruitment

- Potential labour migrants should avoid job offers that do not include sufficient information on the conditions and terms of work, the name and legitimacy of the employer, and the wages as well as other benefits.
- It is the responsibility of both recruitment agencies and employers to ensure that migrant workers understand their terms of employment and the contents of their work contracts, so that no misunderstandings arise and no false information is given about the wages, the working hours or the contents of the work.

ADSTRINGO

Joint research publication:
Exploitation of migrant workers in Finland, Sweden, Estonia
and Lithuania: Uncovering the links between recruitment,
irregular employment practices and labour trafficking
is available at www.heuni.fi