



Sub-regional knowledge sharing meeting: Preventing forced labour and planning future action

Bangkok, Thailand, 12-14 November 2013

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

According to ILO's most recent estimates at least 20.9 million people are victims of forced labour globally. In terms of the regional distribution, the Asia-Pacific region accounts for the highest absolute number of forced labourers – 11.7 million or 56 per cent of the global total. This means that on any given day at least three in every 1000 people in the Asia-Pacific region are in forced labour, trapped in jobs into which they were coerced or deceived and which they cannot leave.

Supporting member States in the eradication of forced labour and trafficking has been part of the strategy of many ILO projects in the Asia-Pacific region since 2001. Current projects with related components include among others, the Tripartite Action to Protect and Promote the Rights of Migrant Workers projects (GMS TRIANGLE and ASEAN TRIANGLE) and ILO-IPEC Combating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Shrimp and Seafood Processing Areas in Thailand project. Since April 2013, the **Enhanced Action against Forced Labour in Asia and the Pacific project (FLARE)** of the ILO Special Action Program to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL) has initiated activities in target countries China and Viet Nam to pilot dedicated technical assistance to strengthen national institutions and capacity to move forward on the elimination of forced labour. This November, to initiate planning for the possible second phase of the FLARE project, the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) and the FLARE project of the Special Action Program to Combat Forced Labour convene a sub-regional tripartite meeting approved by the ILO Governing Body to discuss the progress made in addressing forced labour in East and South-East Asia and to identify priorities for future ILO technical assistance on forced labour in the sub-region.

The **Sub-regional knowledge sharing meeting: Preventing forced labour and planning future action** will be organized at the Pullman Bangkok King Power Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, from 12 to 14 November 2013. Meeting participants will include representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organizations from China, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as resource persons and observers from other countries in the sub-region, including Cambodia, Mongolia and Myanmar. The meeting intends to foster experience-sharing among countries in East and South-Asia on addressing various forms of forced labour. It also provides a platform for defining priority areas for future ILO technical cooperation on addressing forced labour in the sub-region. Role of online Communities of Practice (COP) as a delivery model for technical assistance and possible establishment of a regional COP of forced labour will also be discussed during the meeting. The

meeting will also inform participants on the preparations for the 2014 International Labour Conference agenda item on standard-setting, supplementing the Forced Labour Convention No. 29.

Rationale

Forced labour is the antithesis of decent work and an extreme manifestation of gaps and failures in a wide range of policies, institutions and enforcement mechanisms that aim to protect individuals against economic exploitation and set them on a launch pad to productive employment and out of poverty. Work in freedom and dignity has been a key value of the ILO Constitution since 1919, and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) reaffirmed its status as one of the four fundamental principles and rights at work.

The Forced Labour Conventions No. 29 and No. 105 are among the most widely ratified ILO Conventions. At the same time, 7 of the 8 countries worldwide that have not yet ratified Convention No. 29 and all of the 11 countries that are yet to ratify Convention No. 105 are in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, significant application challenges remain worldwide in the effective eradication of forced labour in all its forms. Due to the need to move forward on the elimination of forced labour, protection of workers from unacceptable forms of work, including forced labour, has been identified as one of eight ILO areas of critical importance (ACIs) for priority action in 2014–15.

Many countries in East and South-East Asia have made significant efforts in addressing forced labour, often as part of their efforts to combat human trafficking. However, a review of law and practice in 133 member States carried out by the ILO in 2013 indicates that in Asia and elsewhere efforts have focused on identifying and detecting the crime and the prosecution of perpetrators, while preventive action and victim protection have been accorded lower priority. To address these gaps at its 103rd Session in June 2014, the International Labour Conference will consider a standard-setting item to supplement the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), to address prevention, protection and compensation measures.

The ILO strategy against forced labour is based on the assumption that greater involvement of strong labour market institutions, including labour inspectorates, is a prerequisite for upholding labour rights at the workplace and preventing the occurrence of violations that may lead to forced labour. While the primary responsibility in this respect lies with State institutions, the social partners also have a crucial role to play in mobilizing employers and workers worldwide to achieve this goal. The **Sub-regional knowledge sharing meeting: Preventing forced labour and planning future action** provides the representatives from governments, employers' and workers' organizations from participating countries the opportunity to facilitate an exchange on moving forward on the elimination of forced labour, and to discuss the best way the ILO can support these efforts.

Meeting outcomes

The meeting will offer an opportunity to discuss the various elements of combatting forced labour, by:

- Deepening understanding of different forms of forced and compulsory labour in East and South-East Asia, achievements made in addressing forced labour, and remaining challenges.
- Defining priorities for future ILO technical assistance in preventing and addressing forced labour in the sub-region. Discussion will be based on the global ILO strategy for stopping forced labour and slavery-like practices to assess how the strategy could be adapted to the Asia-Pacific region.

- Introducing the role of online Communities of Practice (COP) as a delivery model for technical assistance between constituents and countries and discussing the establishment of a regional COP of forced labour.

Selection criteria for meeting participants

Two representatives will be invited from governments and one representative from employers' and one from workers' organizations from the following four ILO member States: China, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam. Inviting two government representatives from each participating country is necessary because at the government level, forced labour and human trafficking are often under the responsibility of specialized anti-trafficking commissions or ministries other than Ministries of Labour. Therefore the representatives from each Government should include one from Ministry of Labour and one from the line ministry, such as Ministry of Public Security or Justice.

Resource persons will be invited from various organizations including national human rights institutions, industry associations and civil society organizations to share experiences in addressing forced labour. Observers will include representatives of the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organization of Employers, as well as selected programmes and UN agencies working in the area of forced labour and trafficking.

The four country delegations are invited to pursue equitable participation of men and women among their team (at least one man or one woman in the delegation from their country). Since the discussions will be technical in nature, nominating organizations from each country are advised to select participants who are knowledgeable on the subject and responsible for addressing forced labour within their organization. A good command of English is required to engage in discussions at the Forum. The Office reserves the right to propose a change of candidate should it consider such proposal to be in the best interest of productive discussions at the Forum.

Resource materials

Publications available for the meeting include:

- "Stopping forced labour and slavery-like practices - The ILO strategy"
(http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/Factsheetsandbrochures/WCMS_203447/lang--en/index.htm)
- "Strengthening action to end forced labour"
(http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/103/reports/ReportssubmittedtotheConference/WCMS_217752/lang--en/index.htm).
- "ILO indicators of forced labour"
http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/Factsheetsandbrochures/WCMS_203832/lang--en/index.htm.
- "ILO Global Estimate of Forced Labour 2012: Results and Methodology"
http://www.ilo.org/washington/WCMS_182004/lang--en/index.htm.
- "Combating forced labour: A handbook for employers and business"
(http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/ILOPublications/WCMS_101171/lang--en/index.htm) + Draft sector-specific booklets for agriculture, manufacturing and fishing.

Two other tools will be used to increase the focus and the impact of the meeting – these are:

- An online survey prior to the meeting to identify key sentiments and reflections from participants on challenges and opportunities with respect addressing forced labour in their countries – the survey will be sent to nominated participants ahead of the Forum and they are requested to contribute as a prerequisite for informed participation at the Forum.
- An interactive online discussion after the meeting, using the forthcoming Community of Practice (COP) on forced labour or one of the existing regional COPs as a host. The online discussion aims to bring together meeting participants (and possibly a broader set of interested members) to engage in sharing feedback and developments after the meeting. The online discussion will be facilitated and take place within one months after the Forum.

Participants and resource persons are welcome to bring information and guidance materials, reports and audio visuals for sharing during the Forum.

Agenda

The summary agenda is attached for information in Annex 1.

Practical arrangements

A note on administrative and travel arrangements is attached in Annex 2.