

# Forced labour: contemporary slavery in the UK

**Investigations**  
Work in progress

Start date: April 2009

**How can we reduce  
forced labour in the UK  
and support its victims?**

Journalistic accounts, research studies and experience from organisations working on the ground indicate that forced labour occurs in the UK. We know that migrant workers in particular are vulnerable to this extreme form of exploitation and that it exists in a range of industries. However, we need to know a lot more about forced labour to be able to make the changes that would prevent its incidence in the UK.

## **This programme:**

- will seek to influence the development of policy and practice that reduces the incidence of forced labour in the UK and which supports better services for its victims.

## **We aim to:**

- highlight the issue with new, robust evidence on the extent of forced labour and interventions that might contribute to its eradication; and
- identify practical solutions and share knowledge on best practice in supporting victims of forced labour.

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**For the latest information, visit:**

**[www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/contemporary-slavery](http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/contemporary-slavery)**

## At a glance

**Programme title:** Forced labour: contemporary slavery in the UK

**Aim:** Influencing the development of policy and practice to reduce forced labour in the UK

**Timescale:** 2009-2011

**Budget:** £730,000

**Contact:** Louise Woodruff (Programme Manager)

In April 2009, the JRF launched a programme of work looking at forced labour. This paper outlines what we are doing, why, and what we hope to achieve through this work.

This information is correct at the start of the programme. However, our programmes of work develop throughout their course. For the most up-to-date information, visit: [www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/contemporary-slavery](http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/contemporary-slavery)

## What is the issue?

Forced labour in the UK is related to a number of factors, some or all of which may combine to create conditions of forced labour. These include: UK immigration policy; the demand for cheap goods and services; a highly flexible, deregulated labour market; weak enforcement and inspection regimes; cultural traditions in some nationality groups; and higher levels of absolute poverty outside the UK.

Most people in forced labour are migrant workers. But the relationship between immigration policy and vulnerability to forced labour is complex: it may be affected not only by policies on border control and status but also by the framework of rights and welfare available to different categories of migrants. The problem is not restricted to undocumented migrants or those with a precarious immigration status; migrant workers from the EU, who have the right to live and work in the UK, can also be victims.

Sectors where forced labour has been identified include: agriculture, construction, food processing and packaging, care, domestic work in private homes, hospitality and the restaurant trade. However, it could also occur in other sectors.

We lack the substantive, robust evidence on the extent and experience of forced labour in the UK which policy-makers and practitioners need to make changes for this vulnerable group of workers:

- What are the numbers involved?
- Which groups of migrant workers are vulnerable and in which sectors?
- What are their experiences and how do they find themselves in forced labour situations?
- What drives the market in forced labour?

## Defining forced labour

The International Labour Organisation has suggested the following indicators of forced labour:

- threats or actual physical harm to the worker;
- restriction of movement and confinement, to the workplace or to a limited area;
- debt bondage, where the worker works to pay off debt or a loan, and is not paid for his or her services;
- provision of food and accommodation by an employer at such inflated prices that the worker cannot escape the debt;
- withholding of wages or excessive wage reductions that violate previously made agreements;
- retention of passports and identity documents, so that the worker cannot leave or prove his/her identity and status;
- threat of denunciation to the authorities, where the worker has an irregular immigration status.

Reference: International Labour Organisation. (2005) Human Trafficking and Forced Labour Exploitation: Guidelines for Legislation and Law Enforcement. Geneva: ILO.

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## What do we want to achieve?

The aim of this programme is to influence the development of policy and practice that:

- reduces the incidence of forced labour in the UK, and
- supports the development of better services for victims of forced labour.

We are seeking to do this by:

- highlighting the issue with new, robust evidence on the extent of forced labour and interventions that might contribute to its eradication; and
- identifying practical solutions and sharing knowledge on best practice in supporting victims of forced labour.

We wish to work with a wide range of stakeholders on this programme. These will include national governments, faith and community organisations, regulators and law enforcement bodies, national non-government organisations, local government and international bodies concerned with the eradication of forced labour.

## What are we doing?

The programme has two phases. Phase 1 aims to develop and improve the evidence. Phase 2 focuses on support for victims of forced labour.

### *Phase 1: Research*

The first phase aims to improve the available evidence through research projects exploring the scope and experience of forced labour in the UK. Projects will be commissioned to:

- provide qualitative evidence on the experience of people currently in forced labour or who have recently experienced forced labour;
- investigate the key risk factors that cause people to enter forced labour;
- improve our understanding of how forced labour is related to national or cultural background;
- capture the full range of industries where forced labour is used and explore the nature of forced labour in each;

- examine the geography of forced labour in the UK;
- explore preventative interventions and identify changes which key agencies can make to tackle forced labour; and
- explore how the use of forced labour might change in the future, for example, in response to EU enlargement or to economic recession.

These projects started in summer 2009, and findings are expected during 2011.

To supplement this research, we plan to commission a number of papers to examine the key factors that lead to the existence of forced labour in the UK. These will also be available in 2011.

### *Phase 2: Sharing knowledge and developing solutions*

Phase 2 aims to share knowledge and develop practical solutions to support the victims of forced labour. This phase will be informed by findings emerging from Phase 1 and by consulting with a wide range of stakeholders. Our initial ideas include:

- a review of current practice in the UK, including differences in approaches in the four countries;
- a study of the approaches to supporting victims of forced labour in other EU countries. The aim of this will be to inform practitioners and policy-makers within the UK about alternative models of support and learning from elsewhere in Europe. We will fund a series of networking and knowledge exchange events that bring together a range of organisations offering services to or wishing to support victims of forced labour;
- developing practical approaches to supporting victims of forced labour.

### *Policy development and influencing activity*

Throughout the programme, we will be looking for opportunities to influence policy and practice. This will involve working closely with key stakeholders. The precise nature of this work will depend on what findings and recommendations emerge from Phases 1 and 2 of the programme. Examples might include: more detailed development of the changes required in labour regulation of a particular industry; exploring options for better procurement of services from a sector where forced labour is prevalent; and looking at models for emergency housing for victims of forced labour.

## Why is this topic a priority for the JRF?

There are a number of reasons why JRF wants to look at this issue.

### *The extreme vulnerability of this group*

Victims of forced labour live in poverty and experience serious violations of their basic rights. This topic therefore falls under one of the JRF's key overall aims: to improve the circumstances of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

### *A need for more robust evidence*

Discussions with a number of key stakeholders and reviews of the relevant literature have identified a gap in the evidence base on forced labour in the UK.

### *A gap in knowledge for services*

There is both a gap in knowledge for statutory sector officials in dealing with forced labour and a gap in services for victims.

### *The need to continue raising awareness of this issue*

Knowledge of forced labour has improved since the publicity surrounding the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007. There is a need to maintain this momentum amongst policy-makers and practitioners.

### *Our strategic plan*

The programme focuses on the conditions of forced labour, an approach that fits within our core themes of poverty, place and empowerment. It also supports our wish to understand more about the growing ethnic, racial and religious diversity of communities across the UK.

## What has informed our thinking?

In 2007, JRF commissioned a report from the Wilberforce Institute for Slavery and Emancipation and Anti-slavery International that provided an overview of contemporary slavery in the UK. The programme plan is also based on research into the topic area, stakeholder mapping and liaison with key stakeholders. The Foundation has convened an advisory group of experts to help us develop the programme.

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## About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust are two independent charities that work together to understand the root causes of social problems, identify ways of overcoming them, and show how social needs can be met in practice.

Our purpose is to influence policy and practice by searching for evidence and demonstrating solutions to improve:

- The circumstances of people experiencing poverty and disadvantages;
- The quality of their homes and communities;
- The nature of the services and support that foster their well-being and citizenship.

Most of our work centres on the interconnected themes of poverty, place and empowerment.

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