

The “No Fees” Initiative

Each year millions of vulnerable workers, mainly migrants crossing borders in pursuit of meaningful work, become trapped in slavery through the actions of unscrupulous labor brokers. ICCR’s “No Fees” initiative, a project funded by Humanity United, seeks to prevent labor exploitation in global supply chains.

Labor recruitment serves as a vital link in the labor markets of many countries, and helps connect workers with employers in a wide range of industries. At the same time, it is a complex and shadowy system; unscrupulous brokers often exploit workers by charging exorbitant fees in exchange for jobs, by not providing work contracts or by changing contract terms, and by pocketing illegal wage deductions. It is not uncommon for workers to become indentured or debt/bonded as they struggle to repay fees and deductions.

ICCR’s goal is to minimize the risk of these human rights abuses by raising corporate awareness, pushing for implementation of formal, “no-fees” recruitment policies, and increasing transparency via corporate reporting on policy implementation.

The risk of trafficking within a given industry is influenced by several factors: the ways workers gain employment (whether or not recruiters are involved), the length of their employment (industries dominated by seasonal or short-term work are especially at risk), whether workers have job security, and whether they have freedom of association on the job.

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Corporations have a responsibility to ensure that human rights are respected throughout their supply chains, and that none of their suppliers are contributing directly or indirectly to slavery. ICCR helps companies develop and implement formal human rights policies, and seeks to create industry leaders that can serve as examples to their peers.

A number of leaders are emerging. This year, the Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition (EICC) integrated a critical “no fees” component into its code of conduct that will help protect electronics industry workers. Apple, an EICC member, has adopted a policy that prohibits the hiring of workers who have had to pay fees, and has committed to reimbursing workers for fees that they previously paid.

In January, ICCR convened a multi-stakeholder roundtable on ethical recruitment which brought together over 60 participants for a discussion of best practices. ICCR released a report summarizing key findings emerging from the roundtable, and in April 2015 published “Recruited into Slavery” which presented field research conducted in Thailand during August of 2014.

ICCR has been working with 40 companies to create and implement “no fees” policies, and after a number of successes with corporations in the seafood, agriculture and tobacco sectors, including Coca Cola and ADM, will be expanding to address trafficking in the travel and tourism, automotive, and apparel industries.