

Focus on Labour Exploitation Statement on the impact of immigration control measures on vulnerability to exploitation.

Fifth Thematic Consultation on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: “Smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and contemporary forms of slavery, including appropriate identification, protection and assistance to migrants and trafficking victims”

Dear Moderators, Dear Co-Facilitators,

[Focus on Labour Exploitation](#), or FLEX, is a UK based organisation working to prevent human trafficking for labour exploitation.

These remarks focus on the impact of immigration enforcement measures on vulnerability to exploitation.

[Research published](#) by FLEX in early September shows that many EU citizens in the UK following the UK’s referendum vote to leave the EU are being told they no longer have the same rights as UK citizens or in the words of a would be exploiter ‘you are no longer legal’.

Hate crime against migrants has also increased markedly since the referendum. As a result many frontline organisations have seen workers facing worsening working conditions, abuse and exploitation.

Not only are conditions worsening but some workers are scared that their future status in the UK will depend upon evidence of on going work and so they will not leave abusive conditions for fear of deportation once the UK has left the EU.

Frontline organisations are not only finding more cases of abuse but some have seen as much as a 700% increase in demand for information about the legal status and rights of workers – such is the confusion.

This rise in abuse and exploitation demonstrates the impact on precarious workers of uncertainty or vulnerability of migrant status.

To be clear, whilst right now these workers have the same rights on paper as UK citizens, the absence of information, uncertainty this causes, hostility many are facing in society at large and fear for the future means people are being threatened and coerced into exploitative working conditions.

FLEX and many other experts in this field know that uncertainty, misinformation and hostility create the conditions in which exploitation can thrive. Traffickers tell stories of terror at the hands of immigration control to their victims and as a result migrants in exploitation express a strong fear of the authorities.

This is compounded where there is a heavy presence of immigration enforcement in anti-trafficking operations, those that might come forward are terrified that they will be treated as undocumented migrants rather than victims. Sadly all too often this is the case in the UK.

Those that seek world leading responses to human trafficking must not only seek model legislation on human trafficking but also to assess immigration control measures for their impact on an individual's vulnerability to exploitation.

Migrant workers need easily accessible information about their labour rights, their immigration status and the avenues for redress should they face abuse or exploitation. They need well-resourced support organisations and access to legal assistance.

States Parties to the Human Trafficking Protocol have made laudable steps forward in the fight against human trafficking in recent years, now is the time to review those policies and laws that directly undermine these efforts.

We will not end exploitation if migrant workers deeply distrust the State, if the State is seen to prioritise immigration control over human rights and if anti-trafficking efforts are dominated by immigration enforcement.

Thank you.