



Two case studies:

Exploitation of women in garment industry Economic situation and trafficking in women

FACTS ON WOMEN IN GARMENT INDUSTRY

The expansion of international trade in the garment industry and sportswear goods under the auspices of corporate giants such as Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Puma, and of retailers like H&M, C&A has drawn the Eastern European countries into their global supply chains. They have the market power to demand that their suppliers cut prices, shorten delivery times, and adjust rapidly to fluctuating orders. Inevitably, the resulting pressures are transmitted down the supply-chain to workers, leading to lower wages, bad conditions, and the violation of workers' rights.

While the industry can boast its commitment to some impressive principles, enshrined in codes of conduct, its business practices generate the market pressures that are in reality leading to exploitative labour conditions meanwhile comparable with those in Southern sweatshops and the so-called free production zones. The consequence is that the workers are being locked into poverty and denied a fair share of the wealth that they generate.

More than 1 million women all around Eastern Europe are working at the very bottom of the global supply chains. According to the Clean Clothes Campaign's local monitoring network, the average monthly earnings in Poland cover just 63% of the living expenses, in Bulgaria 55%, in Serbia 82%, in Romania 72%, in Macedonia 53% and in Turkey 34%. A seamstress in Eastern Germany, where production is closing down, still receives 900 EUR per month, while her colleagues in Romania - get 150 EUR, and in Moldavia 80 EUR for the same job. Due to these wage disparities, workers are threatened to lose their jobs, if they attempt to fight for their rights. Buyers relocate to another region or across the border, where they can source even cheaper.

The 256 interviews with workers from 55 workplaces in 6 countries (conducted between May and July 2004 by Clean Clothes Campaign) revealed a pattern of abysmally low wages, workers being forced to work excessively long hours, exploitative terms of employment, bullying, sexual harassment, and physical and verbal abuse. Involvement in trade union activity is effectively outlawed. Some of the most insidious violations of workers' rights revealed by this research include the following:

- Polish and Macedonian workers are attacked, intimidated, and harassed for participating in union activities;
- Bulgarian workers are fined or fired for refusing to do overtime work;
- workers in all of above countries have been sewing sportswear for up to 16 hours a day, six days a week;
- Serbian workers are deprived of social insurance and as a result older workers cannot retire, nor can they find another job, and are forced to continue working;
- Women reported health problems like eye damages, varicose veins, back pains, dust allergy including asthma.

FACTS ON TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN IN MACEDONIA

Trafficking in women recently has been receiving increasing attention, but frequently is not linked to vulnerable economic position of women. The rate of organized crime of trafficking in human beings and especially trafficking in women has drastically increased in the last few years in the Republic of Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia is a main country of destination within South Eastern Europe for trafficking in foreign women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation. Besides being a destination, Republic of Macedonia is also a transit country between victims' country of origin and their country of destination and can serve as a temporary destination for foreign victims.

While violence, inadequate legal systems, porous international borders, corruption and favorable punitive measures for traffickers create environment in which trafficking can flourish, the economic situation in countries surrounding Macedonia including unemployment and lack of other economic opportunities are very important factors making women vulnerable to trafficking. For example in 2003 majority of identified trafficking victims were from poorest countries of the region, with victims from Moldova constituting 49.28% and from Romania 30.89% (Statistic of IOM Skopje, July 2003). Further most of the victims are not well educated and hence it could be assumed that they would experience difficulty in securing employment in their home country: 37.64% of identified victims completed secondary education, and 25.86% completed primary education only (Statistic of IOM Skopje, July 2003).

Eighty per cent of the victims left their home countries to find employment abroad and only few of them knew that Macedonia was their country of destination and most of them believed they were going to Greece or Italy. Most victims, about 71%, were first recruited by acquaintances and job advertisements promising well-paid jobs abroad and 15% was forced. While trafficked most of the victims were forced into sexual services (70%), and low percentage of them into dancer-entertainer, waitress or domestic work.

As far as information about trafficked Macedonian victims is concerned, there is no reliable data on internal trafficking. Officially, Macedonia is *not* a country of origin. If, however, the current economic situation in the country is taken into consideration, notably the decline in the living standard and the increase of poverty, there would be a concern that Macedonia can easily become a country of origin. Currently in Macedonia women constitute nearly half of the work force but the poorest half and as such may be at great risk of being trafficked. The fact that war and ethnic conflicts impacted Macedonia in the recent past only contributes to this risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To National Governments:

To monitor the enterprises of foreign investors, especially in the newly emerging outward processing trade and the garment sector in order to ensure that they comply with national Labor Codes, ILO conventions, and guarantee the necessary protection to workers, and especially to women workers.

To CSW and National Governments

Focus on root causes of trafficking and provide countries of origin with resources to eliminate this in particular should include economic factors such as poverty and unemployment as well as discrimination of women on the labour market.

¹ Sources of statistical data: IOM Skopje, July 2003

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