

Companies alerted to human trafficking by RepRisk report

by Brian Collett



Companies are told in a new report to investigate their supply chains more robustly so that they avoid profiting from the human trafficking that now locks in nearly 21 million workers worldwide.

Victims are lured into their jobs with false promises, and millions of these prisoners are children, says RepRisk, the Zurich-based international business data provider, which has compiled the report.

RepRisk, a data source for global banks, insurers and other corporates, draws much of the information from the International Labour Organisation.

The regions with the highest number of trafficked and enslaved workers are said to be Asia Pacific, Africa and Latin America, and the food and beverage industry is named in the report as the sector most linked to human trafficking.

The report records that in August last year the owner of the KIDCO Farms processing plant near Dawson, North Dakota, was jailed for three months

and fined \$100,000 (£78,000, €89,000) for employing illegal workers recruited in Arizona. The authorities called his offence “a serious human trafficking crime”.

In October last year migrants as young as 14 were said to have worked up to 12 hours a day in heavy jobs at Trillium Farms Holdings, a leading egg producer in Ohio. Trillium ended its contract with its sub-contractor and in June members of a trafficking ring were jailed for up to 15 years.

RepRisk quotes media and NGO reports last year that workers were trafficked from Myanmar and tricked into jobs on Thai boats catching fish for US supermarket chains.

At the same time 2,000 enslaved migrant fishermen were rescued from Thai boats.

The Payson Center for International Development, a university interdisciplinary centre in New Orleans, is quoted as reporting in July last year that 2.1 million children were “in inappropriate forms” of labour in the Ivory Coast and Ghana.

Six former young workers have filed a class action in the US claiming that food and drink companies have knowingly supported Ivory Coast cocoa plantations that systematically use child slaves.

Manufacturers and retailers at the receiving end of irresponsible employers are warned that involvement in trafficking and slavery exposes them to severe legal, compliance and reputational risks.

In a foreword to the report, which gives many more examples of exploitation, chief executive Philipp Aeby writes: “Although human trafficking is often linked to domestic service and prostitution, it is also a supply chain issue.

“Companies that source raw materials and manufactured goods need to be especially vigilant, as trafficking can occur at different stages along the supply chain.”