



Press release
New media campaign of NGO ASTRA on Labor exploitation as a form of human trafficking



Belgrade, 19th June, 2012

NGO ASTRA – Anti Trafficking Action presented the new **media campaign “Human Trafficking. Labor Exploitation. Serious and Organized Crime”** on a press conference held today, June the 19th, 2012, at Belgrade’s Media centre.

This campaign is a response to increase in the number of identified victims of human trafficking that have been subjected to labor exploitation, registered both by ASTRA SOS Hotline and relevant state authorities in Serbia. Data presented by the International Labor Organization (ILO) stress the gravity of the problem – according to this organization there are 2.5 million victims of labor exploitation as a form of human trafficking. *Annual income traffickers make is around 32 million USD. GDP of Serbia does not differ much. So, money traffickers obtain through exploitation of other people’s work matches GDP of a whole country*, said Jovan Protic, national coordinator of ILO in Serbia.

Unfortunately, this increase has not been followed by an appropriate state reaction – alongside the evident lack of understanding of this phenomenon, procedures for handling and prosecuting labor exploitation cases are not clearly defined, either. Even though public awareness of this problem is still rather low, ASTRA first came across a labor exploitation case back in 2005. Since then, every 6th victim in ASTRA Direct Victim Assistance Program survived labor exploitation. Therefore, the inability of authorities to tackle this problem cannot be justified by a relatively short presence of this form of human trafficking in Serbia.

Trafficking in human beings with the purpose of labor exploitation is present in numerous work fields; however, victims are most commonly recruited for work in labor-intensive sectors, with large share of informal labor and/or long chains of subcontracting, like in construction industry. Sasa Simic, president of the Branch Trade Union of Construction Industry *Nezavisnost* emphasized the role of trade unions in eradication of this form of human trafficking.

Ivana Radovic from ASTRA pointed out that trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labor exploitation must be recognized as a problem which results from the situation on the labor market and which does not affect only one industry. In that respect, it is necessary to build and promote such labor market in which labor legislation will be persistently enforced with irrelevant share of unregistered labor.

For successful and efficient recognition and prosecution of cases of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation, it is necessary to ensure high level of political will as a sign of real determination and commitment of society to put an end to this form of crime, said Ms. Radovic.

Upon their return to their home country, victims of labor exploitation are to face the same problems that pushed them into the trafficking ring. This often leads them to accept suspicious job offers, which puts them under a greater risk of getting back into the trafficking ring. Additionally, the existing victim assistance programs available in Serbia are not adjusted to the new user category, and society has proven reluctant to understand, accept and support victims of labor exploitation in the recovery process.

The campaign “Labor Exploitation, Human Trafficking. Serious and Organized Crime” is supported by the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia within the “Civil Society Support” program.

Video produced for the campaign and additional information about ASTRA is available on www.astra.rs. For additional information about the conference and the campaign feel free to contact Elena Krsmanović on email: ek@astra.rs or mobile phone +38160 3347 817.



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