

Parliamentary Question about the exploitation of North Korean workers in the EU

- **European Parliament: Parliamentary Question about North Korean workers in the EU by MEPs Kati Piri and Agnes Jongerius**
- **An exceptional investigation video report in German about the exploitation of North Korean workers in Poland (32 minutes)**
<http://www.vice.com/nl/video/cash-for-kim-de-noord-koreaanse-dwanganarbeiders-die-zich-doodwerken-in-polen-293>
- **See as well HRWF Report presented at the European Parliament in 2014: *North Korean Overseas Workers - Human Rights Challenges and Opportunities*** <http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2014-North-Korea-Overseas-Workers.pdf>

HRWF (21.07.2016) - On 25 May 2016, MEPs Kati Piri (S&D) and Agnes Jongerius (S&D) addressed the following written question to the European Commission:

A recent study by the University of Leiden (Netherlands) on North Korean forced labour in Europe, as well as the documentary on the same topic broadcast on 21 May 2016 by the web magazine *Vice.com*, point to strong evidence that EU-level measures are needed to prevent this form of modern slavery taking place within Union territory. The study reveals that a total of more than EUR 70 million in EU funds intended to support Polish regions and develop local work opportunities has ended up with companies that are deliberately hiring North Korean workers and are violating EC law on working time and health and safety at work. In addition, exploited North Koreans may be moving between Member States.

- Is the Commission aware that companies benefiting from EU funds are involved in the exploitation of North Korean workers and the bypassing of UN sanctions against North Korea?

In light of the recent evidence:

- Is the Commission planning to take action at EU level to identify the Member States and companies which are hiring North Korean workers?
- Is the Commission planning to set up a systematic control mechanism concerning the work contracts offered to North Korean workers and the implementation thereof, as well as their working conditions?

Answer given by Ms Thyssen on behalf of the Commission (29 June)

The Commission is aware of reports on alleged violations of the human rights of citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) working abroad.

The Commission condemns forced labour and recalls the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which prohibits slavery, forced labour and trafficking in human beings for all forms of exploitation. The Charter also sets out the right of workers to working conditions which respect their health, safety and dignity.

The EU has developed an ambitious legal and policy framework against trafficking in human beings for all forms of exploitation⁽¹⁾ for which the level of compliance will be assessed in 2016.

In the EU and irrespectively of the status of EU or third-country national, the rules on working conditions, health and safety at work as well as legislation against trafficking in

human beings apply. It is the responsibility of the national authorities to ensure that the rules are enforced. The Commission may launch infringement procedures in case of breach of Union law.

The use of ERDF⁽²⁾ and ESF⁽³⁾ funds must be consistent with the activities, policies and priorities of the Union, including the Charter. The Commission is in contact with the Member States to check possible irregularities. In the event of infringement of EC law by an economic operator, the Commission can make financial corrections by cancelling all or parts of the financial contribution to the programme.

Finally, all EU Member States have ratified and are accountable for the implementation of the 8 fundamental Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) including Conventions 29 and 105 on the prohibition of forced labour. The Commission supports the ILO's work with its Member States to raise awareness on and eliminate forced labour.

(1) Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5.4.2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, OJ L 101, 15.4.2011.

(2) European Regional Development Fund.

(3) European Social Fund.

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