

Modern Slavery in Construction Industry

The Modern Slavery Act came into force in 2015 but the non-compliance of UK construction firms is still a problem. Some companies have to run an internal audit to produce an annual slavery and human trafficking statement about the measures undertaken to ensure modern slavery does not exist in their business or supply chain.

According to the Home Office, there are approximately 13,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK. Construction sector is prone to labour exploitation due to engagement of the temporary labour.

In the UK thousands of migrant workers face dangerous working conditions, work without proper contract, verbal and physical abuse. According to recent survey by Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) migrant construction workers from nations including Romania, Hungary, Poland or Albania have done jobs for no pay. Labourers are too scared or do not know how to make complaints.

Recently a Romanian man who enslaved up to

15 men, offering demolition work and then using violence to trap them, has been jailed for seven years. David Lupu, 29, promised the men £50 per day as well as accommodation, but instead paid them just a fraction of the wage, housed them in cramped conditions and confiscated their ID papers.

Metropolitan Police detectives began an investigation – supported by CITB's Fraud Team – in September last year, after two Romanian men reported to Forest Gate police that they had been treated like slaves after coming to work in the UK. On 23 March at Inner London Crown Court, David Lupu was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment after being



convicted of multiple offences of holding a person in slavery or servitude.

During the trial, seven Romanian men said they had been offered jobs in July last year, but after travelling to the UK, were expected to live in a small one bedroom flat in Leyton, east London. Up to 15 men slept wherever they could in the kitchen, bedroom, hallway and storage cupboard, on mattresses found in the street. Victims said they were only allowed out of the house two at a time, and warned that they would be arrested if discovered.

They were told that they owed Lupu hundreds of pounds and were forced to work long hours in the demolition sector in order to repay the costs. Meanwhile, Lupu was paid a significant wage by the building site's employers for the men's labour. When the men discovered their wages from the building site had not been passed on by Lupu, they confronted him, only to be beaten and threatened to be killed if they insisted on being paid before they had paid their 'debts'.

Ian Sidney, CITB's Fraud Investigator who assisted the Met Police investigation, says: "Modern slavery is a horrific injustice that unfortunately is becoming more commonplace in the UK's construction industry. Forcing people to work illegally not only deprives people of their human rights, it also

harms the reputation of the industry, puts employers at risk, drives down wages and denies employment opportunities to many others. "CITB has been working with industry, implementing measures to ensure that modern slavery is eradicated from the UK construction industry. We will also continue working with law enforcement agencies to bring offenders to justice."

What are the obligation under the Modern Slavery Act 2015?

Engaging in any form of modern slavery is a criminal offence. Large companies with an aggregate annual turnover not less than £36m have to publish an annual statement called the Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement (the SHT statement) detailing the steps taken to eliminate slavery and human trafficking in their organisation and the whole supply chain. In reality the so called no-notice site inspections by public authorities are rare as there is estimated 0.4 labour inspectors per 100,000 workers. Prime Minister, Theresa May has announced the plan not establish a Taskforce to crackdown on modern slavery.

Here is a checklist for your business

- Did you implement any rules and policies to prevent modern slavery in your business?

- Do you assess your company and your supply chain complies with these rules?
- Have you done any risk assessment with regards to the modern slavery within your business and supply chain?
- Do you assess your new subcontractors and suppliers on the basis of working conditions?
- Do your existing contracts include any references to modern slavery prevention policies or rules?
- Are there any rules on ethical requirements for your business, employees and subcontractors?
- Do you check your building site conditions with regards to modern slavery?
- Are your employees aware on the procedures how to identify and report modern slavery?

To report call the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority on 0800 432 0804 or Modern Slavery Helpline on 0800 0121 700 or at <https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/report>.

For more information on modern slavery visit www.stronger2gether.org

