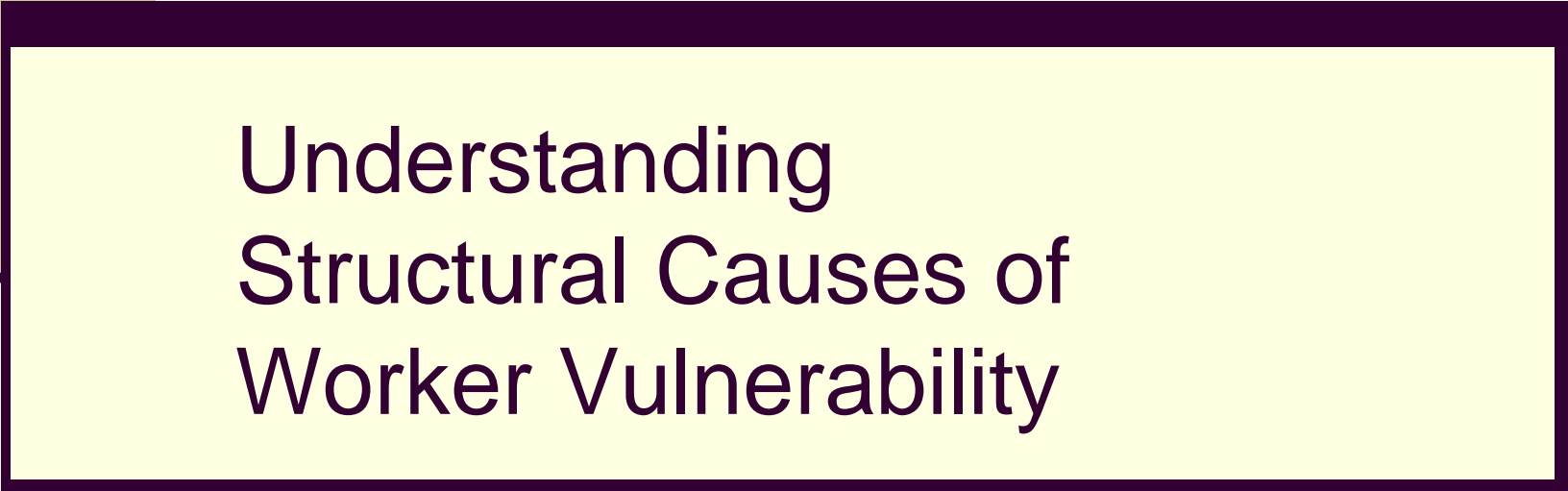




Human Trafficking in the Agricultural Sector:



Understanding
Structural Causes of
Worker Vulnerability

Why are agricultural workers vulnerable to human trafficking?

- What are the characteristics of this particular economic sector?
- What are the characteristics of the workers in this economic sector?
- How do these characteristics contribute to vulnerability to exploitation?

Common characteristics of agricultural work:

- Seasonal and/or temporary work
 - Job insecurity & instability
 - Lack of social benefits for seasonal workers
- Low-paying
 - Lowest wage levels of any sector
- Rural
 - Hard to access by public transportation
 - Workers often live on the worksite

Common characteristics of agriculture

- Unregulated or under-regulated by labour codes/inspectors
 - Agricultural work may be part of informal economy and so considered exempt.
 - Labour inspectorates lack resources.
- Limited unionization or worker organization
 - Workers hard to reach so hard to unionize
 - In some countries laws exempt agricultural sector or exempt migrant workers from collective bargaining rights.

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- Who accepts seasonal, low-paying, insecure jobs?
 - Workers who have few other economic options
 - Low-skilled workers
 - Migrants (regular and irregular)
 - For regular migrants, residency permits often tied to a specific job.
 - For irregular migrants, fear of arrest and deportation.
 - Both regular and irregular migrants may have paid high “recruiting fees” to employment agencies and labour intermediaries, so arrive at worksite already in debt.

Common characteristics of agricultural workers:

■ Physical isolation

- Workers often live at the worksite.
- No public transportation.
- Hard to access services and support organizations.

■ Social isolation

- Language and cultural barriers, especially for migrant workers.
- Lack of community support, friends, families.

Common characteristics of agricultural workers:

- Limited ability to organize
- Fear
 - Losing one's job means losing accommodations, work permit, right to stay in the country.
 - For irregular migrant, fear of employer reporting worker to police, resulting in arrest and deportation.
- Poverty
 - Low wages
 - Wages often not paid on time.
 - Debts incurred to employer for accommodation, transportation, safety gear, tools.
 - Debts to employment agency, recruiter or gangmaster.
- Racism and discrimination

What is the result?

- Lack of information about
 - Workplace standards and worker rights
 - Other jobs and how to get them
 - Services and support
 - How to bring a complaint against an employer
- High level of dependence on employer
 - Accommodation, transportation, interpretation
 - Residency permit tied to a specific job
 - “Multiple dependencies”

Example:

Estonian man on mushroom farm in Ireland

- *Andrei was told by an employment agency in Estonia that he could get a good job in the construction industry in Ireland earning €400 per week. He paid the employment agency 800, supposedly to obtain a work permit. Upon arrival, he found that he had no work permit and that he would be working on a mushroom farm.*
- *He worked 15 hours a day, 7 days a week. He was paid 275 per week and he had to pay rent of 25 per week.*
- *The location was isolated, there was no public transport, and Andrei did not speak English.*
- *When he asked for a rest day or complained about the working conditions, the employer told him he could leave. Andrei was afraid of deportation so he continued working.*

On the other hand . . .

- Agriculture is part of the legal economy.
- Agriculture is usually in a fixed location.
 - Farms don't move around (even if workers do).
- Agricultural work usually takes place outside or in a commercial location.
 - Unlike, for example, domestic work.
- Consumer interest and advocacy in food sourcing.