

Nation

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UN Special Rapporteur: Malaysia's migrant workers often exploited, trafficked, prostituted

by [victoria brown](#)



PETALING JAYA: It is estimated that there are two million documented migrant workers, and another two million or more undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia, according to United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons Maria Grazia Giammarinaro (*pic*).

These workers are often exploited for cheap labour by unscrupulous recruitment agencies and employers.

According to Giammarinaro, migrant workers may be made to work long hours, lack rest days, not being paid their salary, or even suffer physical and sexual abuse.

“Moreover, trafficking of young foreign women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation is also prevalent in the country,” said Giammarinaro in a press release, following her six-day visit to Malaysia in February.

“They are mostly forced into the commercial sex trade following deceptive recruitment practices for legal work in Malaysia.”

She alleged that women and girls from South Asia are also said to be entering “brokered marriages with older men in Malaysia and subsequently being forced into domestic servitude and forced prostitution”.

“In addition, the trafficking of young foreign women and children from the purpose of sexual exploitation is also prevalent in the country, where they are mostly forced into the commercial sex trade following deceptive practices for legal work in Malaysia,” said Giammarinaro.

Many victims of trafficking are often detained and subsequently deported and not provided with adequate specialist support for recovery and social inclusion, the press release continued.

As a result, Ms. Giammarinaro called for the country's Government to adopt a new system of protection that provides exploited workers immediate assistance to claim compensation as well as temporary residence status and a work permit.

"No victim of trafficking should be prosecuted for crimes linked with their situation of trafficked persons, and be detained," the expert stressed.

"Shelters must be open places, preferably run by NGOs, which should be adequately funded for this purpose. Psychological, medical and legal assistance should aim to promote rehabilitation, reintegration and social inclusion of trafficked persons."

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) said that it has received constant complaints regarding human trafficking over the years.

"Although we are not an enforcement agency for transnational crimes, Suhakam has been acting as a bridge between complainants and enforcement agencies to ensure that immediate and appropriate action is taken on every complaint," said Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Hasmy Agam.

"Suhakam holds the view that human trafficking and smuggling of migrants should be dealt with great urgency by the relevant authorities," he said.

In supporting the country's effort to combat human trafficking, Suhakam has held various dialogues and roundtable discussions with relevant Government agencies and other stakeholders, as well as made submissions to the Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (MAPO) in Malaysia.

The Commission said that they also conduct periodic visits to shelters for victims of human trafficking and promotes awareness to the public of the danger of human trafficking.

Hasmy said that it is also important to ensure the human rights of trafficked victims are guaranteed from the moment they are rescued, and during their rehabilitation and re-integration into society.

"Suhakam calls on the Government to intensify its effort to prevent and combat human trafficking and smuggling of migrants," said Hasmy.

"As well as to ensure full protection and assistance for trafficked and smuggled victims at all stages, in line with international standards set by the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children."