

Journalists aim to curb human trafficking

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Image source: Gallo/Getty.

Sierra Leone has been wracked by violence, civil war and Ebola in its recent history. Poverty is endemic. So is a high level of joblessness. Both feed a scourge: trafficking in forced labour.

“More than half of the youth population is unemployed, so when an exciting offer, especially to go abroad, is presented, most young people seize it, often without checking its authenticity,” explained Sanusi Savage, head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) office in Sierra Leone.

“Young people’s desperation in the face of hardship often blinds them to the scams that permeate the recruitment sector,” Savage added.



400 West African journalists trained on migration reporting

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Earlier this month, 27 journalists from community and national radio stations in Sierra Leone established a unique kind of national network against trafficking in persons (TiP) in the country. Through radio broadcasts, the network will contribute to educate Sierra Leoneans on the identification of fake job offers, and report suspected cases of trafficking to the national anti-trafficking task force.

The establishment of the network is the result of a three-day (5-7 March) workshop on Communication for Development (C4D) during which 27 Sierra Leonean radio journalists debated on the best practices to reporting and raising awareness on trafficking in persons in Sierra Leone.

“This is a first step towards what we hope will be a long-term strategy to help Sierra Leoneans better understand the dangers of trafficking in persons,” said Mohamed Sajuma of Radio Mojcar.

According to the US Department of State [2018 Trafficking in Persons Report](#), Sierra Leone is both a source and destination country. Forced labour and sexual exploitation are the main purposes of human trafficking in and from the West African country. Traffickers recruit boys and girls as young as nine years old from rural provinces to urban and mining centres for exploitation in sex trafficking and forced labour in domestic service, artisanal diamond and granite mining, petty trading, rock quarrying, street crime, and begging.

Some Sierra Leoneans, especially young women, are also coerced by sham recruitment and placement agencies, and then smuggled across international borders to be subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking, primarily in Gulf countries.

Over seven weeks, the journalists will collaborate on the development and broadcasting of a seven-episode radio series to raise awareness on the risks and dangers of both domestic and transnational trafficking in Sierra Leone, as well as the methods for identifying and reporting suspected cases of trafficking.

“This is the first time that such a network is established in Sierra Leone. I hope that it will be a place where we can learn from each other, and that it will foster good journalistic practices with regard to trafficking in persons in Sierra Leone,” said Margaret Mansaray from Radio Bintumani, a community radio located in Kabala in Northern Sierra Leone.

The Communication for Development Workshop was organised through the Africa Regional Migration Programme, implemented in Sierra Leone with funding from the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

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