

Study faults Japan for inaction on modern-day slavery | The Japan Times

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Almost 46 million people are trapped in modern-day slavery, two-thirds of them in the Asia-Pacific region, according to a study released Tuesday.

The Global Slavery Index for 2016

(<http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/findings/>) said an estimated 290,200 people in Japan, or 0.23 percent of the population, are in slave-like

servitude.

This includes people trafficked for sex work or trapped in debt bondage and forced labor.

“There are concerning reports of involvement of highly organized crime in the Japanese sex industry, with well-established links for recruitment into sending countries such as Thailand,” said report author Fiona David of the Australia-based nonprofit Walk Free Foundation.

The report also reflects long-standing allegations that a state-sponsored traineeship program locks foreign workers in unrewarding labor in Japanese industry and agriculture.

It said Japan is among the richest nations doing the least about the problem within its borders. It ranked Japan with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and South Korea in this regard.

It added, modern-day slaves in Japan can expect about the same level of help as those in impoverished Myanmar and Tajikistan.

Moreover, David said Japanese businesses are buying and selling raw materials and products from countries with extreme problems of labor slavery, such as Cambodia, Bangladesh and India.

“Business and governments both have a role to play,” she said. “We call on Japan to enact laws . . . to ensure that companies and other organizations are held to account for their role in using forced labor in their supply chains, and to empower independent oversight.”

The report's estimate of 45.8 million slaves worldwide is a rise of nearly 30 percent from a similar survey two years ago. The leap was attributed to better data collection.

The figures were derived from 42,000 on-the-ground interviews conducted by pollster Gallup.

In absolute numbers, North Korea ranked worst, with 4.4 percent of the population, or roughly one in 20 people, in slavery. Its government was also assessed to be doing the least about the problem.

India had the largest total number, with 18.4 million people enslaved. However, the study's authors credited India with starting to address the matter, noting that public figures regularly speak out and saying an upcoming anti-trafficking law will represent "a huge step forward."

The Walk Free Foundation argues that employers bear a duty to prevent slavery in nations where they source products.

"Businesses that don't actively look for forced labor within their supply chains are standing on a burning platform," said Andrew Forrest, a mining magnate who founded the organization.

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