

## Modern Slavery in Brazil

### Introduction

The Modern Slavery Act requires large commercial organisations carrying out business in the UK to publish a statement of the steps the organisation has taken to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in any of its supply chains, or any part of its own business.

This case study highlights modern slavery that may exist in supply chains by reference to one of the risk areas, Brazil.

### Background

Brazil has a recognised problem with Modern Day Slavery, and since 2003 they have established a national action plan to eradicate slave labour, including a second plan in 2008 involving the agricultural sector. The action plan includes guidance to labour inspectors and labour tribunals, as well as reinforcement of inspections by the federal police force. Despite these efforts, the issue is still a concern for Brazilian human rights organisations as inspections tend to identify the Amazonian region as a high-risk region to slave labour, where logging and large-scale agricultural sectors are identified as sectors with the presence of slave-like like labour conditions. Human rights groups, in addition to focusing on these abuses, are actively looking at the commercial hub of Sao Paulo, where slave-like labour conditions take place, often with migrant workers, including restricting the movement of workers due to debt to the employer or an agent, or outright forced labour.

In 2003 the Ministry of Labour established a 'dirty list' of employers and individuals deemed responsible for situations of slavery. Debt bondage is the most common form of slavery in Brazil, where individuals from rural communities are lured to work on agricultural enterprises in the Amazon region, in particular in cattle ranches or sugar cane plantations. The trade involves boys and men. The workers are subjected to long hours, with little pay, including physical and mental violence, but they cannot escape their slavery due to debt owed for transport, food and lodging to agents.

### Risk for organisations

As recently as March 2016, Nestle and Jacobs Douwe Egberts admitted that it cannot guarantee that the origin of coffee in Brazil is from slave labour-free conditions because they do not know the plantations where their coffee originates. A report by DanWatch, a group of investigative journalists from Denmark, highlighted that:

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## Child labour still exists

Even though the problem is abating, child labour is far from eradicated on Brazilian coffee plantations.

“The problem still exists”, says Jorge Ferreira dos Santos Filho, coordinator for the social movement *Articulação dos Empregados Rurais de Minas Gerais*, known as *Adere*. His work consists of driving around to coffee plantations, speaking with workers, and notifying the authorities when he uncovers breaches of law. According to Santos, children work on about one out of every five plantations he has visited.

“It’s not as bad as it was five years ago”, he says, explaining that the incidence of child labour on coffee plantations varies from municipality to municipality depending on how active the local labour union is and how many inspections are carried out by authorities in the area.

The second area of slave-like labour identified by the Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Centre is that of Bolivian migrant workers in large commercial cities like Sao Paulo. They offer support and advice to people living and working in the city central region, represented by the Subprefecture of Sé, where more than 300,000 residents are squashed into 1,138 tenements. Members of this community find themselves shut out from the regular labour market with no access to housing finance. This increases their social exclusion. Many are unemployed, while those who do have work are employed in low-skill and low-paying irregular jobs. This leads to precarious conditions, sometimes sleeping rough and being in touch with the street economy which is mixed with legal and illegal activities.

Some of the workers in the Sao Paulo informal sector are migrants from Bolivia, Paraguay or other Latin American countries with poorer living conditions, and many of them lack formal work visas to work legally in Brazil, and thus face an additional layer of social exclusion due to their immigration status that denies them access to housing, public services or legal employment with better health and safety conditions.

### Miriam

Miriam is a Bolivian who has lived in Brazil for the past 10 years. She is married and has two children: a nine-year-old boy and a one-year-old girl. Miriam works at home, sewing garments for the company owned by her landlord. She receives a tiny amount of money for each item she sews and each month half of her income is paid out in rent for the cramped flat that she and her family share with 12 other people in São Paulo’s central region. Miriam is a member of an association of immigrant home workers that is being supported by Gaspar Garcia. The association is seeking to improve the working and living conditions of members like Miriam by negotiating with employers and landlords on their behalf.

Improving the situation of migrant workers in Sao Paulo requires looking at routes to legalising their immigration status as well as recognition of labour rights of migrant workers by the municipal authorities who may not be bound by orders to evict migrants from Brazil. The Association of immigrant home workers supported by Gaspar Garcia allows for migrant workers to defend their rights as a collective and via a spokesperson allowing for improving the living conditions of the migrant workers, rather than being individually judged based on their immigration status.

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## Lessons

Organisations should undertake enhanced due diligence of their supply chain in risk areas such as Brazil. Modern day slavery is so widespread in some areas, in particular the Amazonian region and Sao Paulo, that it is insufficient to rely on the Brazilian authorities to address the problem. Each organisation should try as much as possible to minimise the risk of modern day slavery in its agricultural, garments and other supply chains by promoting good practices and conducting on-site visits. However, the problems in the long-term may require promoting social protection safety-nets which provide families with enough income so that they would not send their children to work on coffee plantations as well as engage in dialogue over rights of long-term migrants from Bolivia and consider legal pathways for them to access formal labour rights.

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Nestle story:

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Meetings with Gaspar Garcia Centre for Human Rights, London, March 2016.