

Construction companies failing to protect refugee workers in Jordan, Lebanon - study

by The Region - 04/12/2018 13:43



Construction companies are failing to protect migrant and refugee workers in Jordan and Lebanon, a monitoring group said on Monday, calling for international organisations to pull funding if they fail to clean up their act.

A study by the London-based Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) found dozens of construction companies working on projects funded by international donors had no clear policies to protect their refugee and migrant workers.

As a result, workers in those countries - many of them refugees from neighbouring war-torn Syria - can face low pay, "rip-off" recruitment fees and dangerous working environments, the BHRRC said.

"Investors such as the multilateral banks must ensure the jobs created by their

construction projects create decent, safe work with a living wage, rather than abuse and poverty," executive director Phil Bloomer said in a statement.

More than half the 38 companies surveyed worked on projects funded by organisations including the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) or the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

On Monday the IFC and EBRD launched new guidelines to help private companies and investors tackle modern slavery in developing countries.

The BHRRC said in its report that funding organisations should require construction companies to "adopt and publicly disclose human rights due diligence and remedy policies" to be eligible for donor money.

Migrants and refugees, mainly from Syria, make up the lion's share of construction workers in Jordan and Lebanon and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation as they often do not have the right to work, it said.

Their precarious legal status opens the door to discrimination in pay, poor safety standards and other abusive practices such as the payment of high recruitment fees, it said.

BHRRC surveyed 38 companies to see what they were doing to mitigate such risks - but found most had taken little or no tangible steps to address them.

Only two, Dubai-based Alcazar energy and Denmark's Vestas Wind Systems, responded to the survey, while five more had some publicly-available human rights policies.

None had policies tailored to protect refugees or migrant workers, with only two saying they prohibited the payment of recruitment fees and required employment contracts to be translated in the worker's language.

"Companies working in Jordan and Lebanon appear both ignorant and indifferent to the acute human rights risks for refugees in their business," Bloomer said.