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800,000 Modern-Day Slaves Are Living in Russia, Report Says

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Nearly 800,000 people live as modern-day slaves in Russia, working under conditions of forced labor, debt bondage and human trafficking, according to the 2018 Global Slavery Index, a worldwide analysis of slavery.

There are 40.3 million people enslaved across the world, according to the 2018 Global Slavery Index compiled by the Australia-based Walk Free Foundation. The index documented several incidents of labor exploitation around stadium construction preceding Russia's World Cup this summer.

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Russia ranked 64th in the index's 2018 report, with 5.5 people living under slavery out of every thousand residents. In total, the report found an estimated 794,000 people living in conditions of modern slavery in Russia.

Discrimination, undocumented migration, displacement due to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and government corruption are all risk factors contributing to modern slavery in Russia, the report said.

The number of modern-day slaves in Russia is down from 2016, when the index estimated that 1.05 million people out of 45.8 million worldwide were enslaved in Russia, placing it 16th overall.

To tackle slave labor, Walk Free recommended for Russia to begin publishing statistics on victim numbers, grant asylum to North Korean laborers and minimize imports of goods made using forced labor.

North Korea remained at the top of the exploitation rankings, with 10 percent of its population living in slavelike conditions, followed by Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic and Afghanistan.

Walk Free highlighted the "higher than previously understood" number of modern slaves living in rich countries.

"[E]ven in countries with seemingly strong laws and systems, there are critical gaps in protections for groups such as irregular migrants, the homeless, workers in the shadow or gig economy and certain minorities," it said.

An annual U.S. State Department trafficking report ranked Russia alongside 22 countries with the worst records of fighting forced labor and sex trafficking this year.The Global Slavery Index, meanwhile, gave Russia a 'CC' rating for its government response, which is among the lowest ratings.

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