

NZ's human trafficking protections 'weak' - US government report

New Zealand remains a destination for foreigners subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour, a global trafficking report says.

The United States government's annual Trafficking in Persons Report rates New Zealand and Australia as top tier nations for complying with the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking.

However, both meet criticism for failing to offer enough protection of victims or heavy prosecution for those caught breaking the law.

The New Zealand government's victim protection efforts remain "weak" and efforts to hold traffickers to account had been only "moderately increased" in recent times.

The report, compiled by the US State Department, states that New Zealand is a destination for foreigners who are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour.

"Foreign men and women from China, India, the Philippines, countries in the Pacific, South Africa and the United Kingdom are vulnerable to forced labour in New Zealand's agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, construction and hospitality sectors, or as domestic workers," according to the report.

In particular, migrant workers are charged exorbitant recruitment fees, under-paid in wages, made to work excessively long hours and have their passports confiscated and contracts altered.

"But (they) do not file complaints due to fear of losing their temporary visas," it states.

Foreign men on foreign-flagged fishing ships in New Zealand waters are subjected to forced labour while women from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam are at risk of coercive or forced prostitution.

The report also states that a "small number" of Pacific Islands and New Zealand boys and girls, often of Maori descent, are at risk of sex trafficking in street prostitution, and some are victims of trafficking in gangs.

"Some children are recruited by other girls or compelled by family members, into prostitution," it states.

New Zealand and Australia made tier 1 in the three-tier system, acknowledging their full compliance with internationally-set minimum standards for anti-trafficking laws.

<https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/nz-s-human-trafficking-protections-weak-us-government-report-q03277.html>