



RESPONSIBLE SOURCING TOOL

Seafood Tool 10:
Conducting Migrant
Worker Interviews

PROTECTIONS AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS: Conducting Migrant Worker Interviews

Migrants are a particularly vulnerable class of workers due to their migrant, often contingent, status. They are frequently insecure socially and economically, likely do not speak the local language, may lack the social and legal protection local workers hold, and may be in a situation of forced labor¹ due to unethical recruitment and employment practices such as indebtedness or lack of access to their identity documents.

This tool provides a set of sample interview questions to use when conducting targeted interviews of migrant workers and other employees provided by labor agents.² and labor contractors.

Companies can use this tool to help shape their own worker interview questionnaires, thus improving their ability to identify possible cases of abuse or agent-induced forced labor and human trafficking at company, supplier, and subcontractor facilities. The conditions explored in this tool are consistent with the core indicators of forced labor identified by the International Labor Organization. Many of the topics related to working conditions included in the following questions apply to all workers, not just migrant workers, and could be asked in the process of conducting general worker interviews.

Note: When planning worker interviews, companies need to recognize that migrant workers are a particularly vulnerable class of workers due to their non-resident status. Because of this vulnerability, foreign migrant workers may understandably be reluctant to talk openly about how they were recruited or their current situation. In order to increase the likelihood of gaining the trust of migrant workers, companies should consider using independent,

¹ **Note:** The United States recognizes two primary forms of trafficking in persons: forced labor and sex trafficking. For the purposes of this and other tools in the set, several terms are used such as “trafficking in persons,” “human trafficking,” and “forced labor.” In relation to these tools, they refer to a crime whereby traffickers exploit and profit at the expense of adults or children by compelling them to perform labor.

² **Note:** The combination of services provided by third parties to find, place, and/or directly contract labor to work in company owned or supplier operations are varied, as are the terms used by different industry sectors and standards organizations to describe the providers. These include: labor agents, recruiters, recruitment agents, sub-agents, labor providers, private employment agencies (PEAs), staffing agents, manpower agents, brokers, contractors, crew leaders, and gangmasters. For the purposes of these tools, “labor agent” is generally used as the umbrella term, with “recruitment agent” used as a subset.

specially trained native language-speaking interviewers and avoid the use of translators provided by the employer or labor agent. Conduct the interviews away from the work site, when feasible. Additionally, the following considerations should be taken for all worker interviews:

1. Inform workers of the purpose of the interview, including how the information they provide will be used.
2. Explain to workers that it is entirely at their discretion to participate and that they can withdraw their consent to participate freely at any time.
3. Assure the workers that any information they provide will be kept confidential and that they will not suffer any retaliation for participating in the interview.
4. Assure workers that they will be paid in full for the time taken for interviews conducted during working hours.
5. Explain to workers that the interview is not necessarily a means to resolve all individual grievances or to improve general workplace conditions. The grievance process should be used for that purpose.
6. Conduct interviews in a place with adequate privacy from supervisors, who, depending on the sector, may serve as an informal labor agent for the supplier.
7. For workers on vessels, it is crucial to conduct interviews in a place with adequate privacy from the captain.
8. Keep in mind that with vessel-based workers on long-haul vessels, the most vulnerable workers may not have regular access to ports, and therefore may not be included in worker interviews.
9. Finally, keep in mind that some of the most vulnerable workers may work outside of normal working hours with the least desirable work schedules. For example, migrants and other vulnerable workers may be found working “graveyard” shifts cleaning offices and manufacturing and processing areas, often under pressured time frames. Measures should be taken to accommodate the working hours of these most vulnerable individuals.

The following is a list of potential questions that could be asked during workplace assessments. Auditors should select those questions most appropriate for the situation being evaluated.

Recruitment and Hiring Process

There are many stages in the recruitment and hiring process for workers, and there may be many labor agents involved along the way. It is important to discuss the recruitment and hiring process with workers in order to better understand the process, the actors involved, and circumstances involved in placing them at the work site. In the seafood sector, workers may be recruited in their home village, or they may utilize the services of a labor broker once they arrive in the port.

Like in other sectors, workers in the seafood sector may pass through a series of agents, each adding an additional debt burden through fees for their services.³ Workers may be recruited through formal or highly informal labor recruiters, to whom they owe debt for their job placement. Often, workers recruited through brokers will have no advance knowledge of their actual employer, with whom they may be required to spend months at sea.

In many sectors, labor subcontracting is common and not limited to migrant workers. Facing pressure to keep prices low, suppliers in facility services, transportation and warehousing, construction, and agriculture may rely on labor agents to recruit and/or provide temporary and seasonal workers. All interviewers should be aware of local terms used for labor agents.

The following are some of the issues an interviewer should discuss with workers:

- Where were you recruited for your current job; in your home country, or here where you work?
- Did you have to work with any labor agents either in your home country or here? If so, how many?
- Do you know the name of each labor agent or agency you dealt with in your home country? What about here, in the country where you are working?
- At the time you were recruited, were you given accurate details about the job location, length of your contract, wages and benefits, working and living conditions?
- Was this information communicated in a language you understand?

³ [International Labour Organization. Caught at Sea: Forced labour and trafficking in fisheries. 2013.](#)

- For workers recruited by formal labor agents:⁴
 - Before you left your home country, were you given a pre-departure orientation? If yes, do you remember what that orientation included? Did it review:
 - your contract obligations;
 - terms and conditions of work;
 - your rights and responsibilities on the job, and those of your employer;
 - housing and living conditions;
 - company workplace policies; and
 - ways that you could report concerns or complaints about work practices and working conditions? (grievance mechanism)
 - Was the orientation given in your native language or a language you understand?
 - Upon arrival here, were you:
 - provided with housing;
 - given an orientation session at the worksite;
 - given a medical examination; and/or
 - helped to open a bank account?
 - Did you receive orientation training on your employer's workplace policies or rules? If yes, did it review:
 - regular wages and hours;

⁴ Some of these questions may not be relevant or may need to be modified where informal recruiters are present in a hiring supply chain. For example, rather than asking about orientation, workers can be asked whether and in what format they received information about conditions of work, rights, and responsibilities, etc.

- overtime hours and rates;
 - benefits and deductions from wages;
 - vacations, sick, and personal leave;
 - grievance procedures;
 - health and safety hazards and rules;
 - discipline and termination;
 - harassment and abuse?
- Were these policies, procedures, and work instructions communicated to you in language you understand?
 - Were you given a copy of your employer's policies or an employee handbook? If yes, is this handbook written in a language that you understand?

Recruitment Fees and Expenses

In assessing risk factors for forced labor and human trafficking, it is essential to obtain a thorough picture of all expenses incurred by workers to obtain their jobs, as well as the manner in which workers finance these fees.

The questions below will help you determine the full array of fees and expenses that workers may have incurred, and the terms of any financing arrangements into which the worker may have entered. While migrant workers are at increased risk of paying illegal recruitment fees or expenses, any worker engaged by an agent may have encountered fees in the hiring process. The interviewer should be sure that the following issues are included in any assessment:

- If you responded to an advertisement for your job, did it say that you would need to pay anything to get the job?
- Were you told by the agent, agent or labor contractor that you would have to pay any recruitment fees or other costs to obtain your job?
- Did you pay any fees to an agent in your home country? If yes, how much was this fee?
- Did you pay a fee to anyone else, like an individual or a sub-agent? If yes, what was it for and how much did you pay?
- Did the labor agent give you a written itemized breakdown of the fees and expenses paid? If yes, what did the fees and expenses cover? How much was each fee or expense?
- Who arranged for the processing of your required travel documents, such as work permit, visa, and passport? Was a fee charged for this service? If so, how much was this fee?
- Did you pay fees for any of the following?
 - to register for a skills test or certification;
 - for language-training;
 - for a medical exam or test; and/or
 - for a pre-departure briefing?
- How much did you pay for travel to get here for your job?

- Was this included in the fee you were charged by the labor agent or did you pay it directly to a travel agency?
- Do you know if return travel will be paid by the employer or by you?
- Did you pay anything to a labor agent or labor contractor when you arrived in this country?
 - If yes, how much was it?
 - Did you pay it up-front or is it deducted from your pay?
- Were you required to pay any sort of levy or tax to obtain the job? If yes, how much and to whom?
- Did you pay the fees and expenses, and levies you described up-front or are these deducted from your pay?
- Did you have to borrow any money or mortgage any property to pay for recruitment fees and expenses?
 - If yes, how much was borrowed?
 - Who did you borrow it from?
 - What is the interest rate on the loan?
 - How do you repay the loan? Is it taken from your pay? Is your family responsible for repaying it?
 - What is the repayment schedule?
- Were you given receipts for any of the fees and expenses you paid to get your job?
- Have you been repaid for any fees or expenses you paid to the agent or others to get your job? If yes, who reimbursed you and when did that happen?

Red Flags:

- Recruitment fees were paid by workers: Charging of recruitment fees is often limited or prohibited by law and has been shown to be one of the biggest contributors to forced labor and human trafficking risk. Best practice is that workers should not be charged any recruitment fees.

- Costs for travel, training, medical exams, and other recruitment expenses have been charged to workers: Similar to the charging of agent fees, the charging of recruitment-related expenses is recognized as a risk for forced labor and human trafficking.
- Recruitment fees or expenses paid by workers are acting to bind workers to their jobs in any way. For example, fees are repaid by salary deductions over the length of the employment contract, preventing workers from quitting their jobs.
- Interest rates on any loans or advances taken to pay fees are acting to bind workers to their jobs. Vulnerability is particularly high when debt is owed to the employer or labor agent. In all cases, debt linked to recruitment is a strong red flag for forced labor and human trafficking.
- Workers report paying fees but cannot provide detail on the amounts paid, what the payments were for, or who fees were paid to.
- Workers report paying fees but cannot provide any written accounting (in the case of informal agents, this may be a handwritten receipt, etc.).

Note: The Federal Acquisition Regulation: Combating Trafficking in Persons prohibits all recruitment fees. For the ILO-approved comprehensive definition of recruitment fees and related costs and examples, [see the ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs](#) and [Eliminating Recruitment and Employment Fees Charged to Workers in Supply Chains: A Practical Step-by-Step Guide for Retailers, Brands, Employers and Labour Providers](#).

Bonds and Deposits

So-called “security deposits” or “runaway insurance” are sometimes used by labor agents or employers to limit migrant workers’ ability to terminate employment and find a new job. This “fee” is typically paid up-front at the time of recruitment and is kept until the contract has been fulfilled. If the worker terminates their employment prior to the contract’s end date, they run the risk of losing their money. Interviewers should be aware of this abuse and discuss it directly with workers. Here are some of the questions a company may want to consider:

- Did you pay a deposit or bond of any kind during the recruitment process?
- Did you pay a fee, levy or bond at any other time since you’ve been employed here?
- Are there any deductions from your pay for deposits, bonds, or other payments that you do not understand?

- If the answer to any of those questions is yes:
 - How much was the deposit or bond? Did you pay it all at once or is it being deducted from your pay?
 - Who did you pay?
 - When do you expect to get the deposit back?
 - Do you know of other workers who got their money back?
 - What are the conditions under which the amount will be returned to you?

Red Flags:

- Workers report paying a deposit, levy or bond of any kind.
- Workers report that a deposit or bond is making it difficult or impossible to leave their job (tying them to their job or employer).
- Workers do not understand one or more of the deductions being taken from their wages.
- Workers were not fully informed of deposits or bonds taken during the recruitment or hiring process.

Contracts Of Employment

Formal and signed contracts of employment between the worker and employer or labor agent are legally binding agreements and necessary to provide employment protection to workers. They are a cornerstone to monitoring social compliance and essential to clarifying the employment relationship and its terms and conditions. When assessing the process used for the recruitment and hiring of workers, companies must examine copies of these contracts to determine wage levels and other entitlements under the contract; it is also necessary to understand how and when the contract was signed, and under what conditions.

While the content and form of contractual agreements may differ regarding the specific nature of the terms of employment, companies should ensure the following topics are considered when conducting worker interviews: type of contractual agreement (e.g., formal employment contract, notice from a service agency for day labor), length of contract, nature of work, hours of work, wages, rates, mode of payment, payment time frames, protective clothing needed, transportation (if applicable), and housing terms (if applicable).

Many fishing sector workers, both vessel-based and land-based, do not have contracts with their employer. Because of their inherent isolation, vessel-based workers are particularly vulnerable to deception regarding conditions of work, because they may not be able to leave once on-board. In many fisheries, it is standard practice for written contracts not to be issued to workers, and for workers to lack any formal training or orientation. Agreements are likely to be only verbal, at best, and are subject to change at the discretion of the boss or employer.

Consider discussing these issues with workers as an important part of your worker interview process:

- Did you sign an employment contract for the job? If yes, with whom was the contract signed: your employer or the labor agent?
- Were the terms of the employment contract explained to you?
 - If yes, who explained these terms to you?
 - Do you fully understand the terms and conditions of the contract?
 - If not, what parts are not understood?
- When and where was the contract signed (for example, prior to departure or upon arrival at the worksite)?
- In what language is the contract written and do you understand that language?
- Were you given a copy of the contract to review before you signed it? Once signed, were you given a copy of the signed contract?
- Was the contract given to you for review at least five days before departure from your home country to the worksite?
- Did you have to sign two sets of employment contracts, for example, one in your home country another when you arrived here?
 - If yes, are the employment terms the same in both and, if no, how were they different?
 - Were these differences explained to you, and what was the reason given?
- Are the details about your job in your employment contract the same as those that were provided at the time of recruitment? If not, what was changed?

- Are the actual terms and conditions of your job the same as those that are described in the employment contract?
- Was your original contract changed in any way after you signed it?
 - If yes, did the changes improve or worsen your employment conditions?
 - Were these changes made with your prior knowledge and written consent?
- Were you pressured or threatened in any way into accepting the job or any of the terms included in your employment contract?
- Does the contract clearly describe how you can voluntarily terminate the contract, including how much notice you need to give and if there are any financial penalties?
- Under what conditions can the contract be renewed?

Red Flags:

- Workers do not have written contracts.
- Workers do not have a signed copy of their contract.
- Contracts are not in a language the workers understand.
- Contracts were signed after the worker had travelled to the destination country or the work was already undertaken.
- Contracts were signed after work already undertaken or after worker embarked on vessel.
- Workers are provided with new contracts in the destination country with materially worse terms and conditions than in the original contract or offer/appointment letter.
- The contract given to the worker is different than the one on file with the employer.
- Workers report that the actual terms of employment are not consistent with their contract.
- Workers report signing blank contracts or other contract substitutions.
- Contracts do not contain all details required by law and company policy.

- Terms of contract violate company/supplier policy.
- Terms of contract violate applicable laws of origin and/or destination countries.

Document Retention

Confiscating, destroying, withholding, or otherwise denying access to personal documents can be a form of coercion that leaves migrant workers highly vulnerable to forced labor. When labor agents or company or supplier/subcontractor facilities take away workers' passports, residency or work permits, personal identity documents, or even ATM cards, this not only limits workers' freedom of movement and personal freedom, but it effectively binds them to that employer or labor agent, restricting their ability to terminate employment or leave the job without the threat of losing this valuable property. In many cases, it also means that workers are not able to take up a new job, access social benefits to which they may be entitled, and are vulnerable to deportation or detention by immigration authorities.

It is essential that the company ask questions like these in interviews with migrant workers:

- Did you submit any original copies of your government-issued identification, passports, or work permits to the employer or destination country labor agent?
 - If yes, what did you submit (for example, passport, residency permit, work authorization, identity documents, ATM or bank card, or other travel documents, such as the return portion of travel tickets)?
 - Do you know the reason for handing over these documents?
- Are your personal documents being withheld because it is a job requirement, or did you request that your employer or labor agent hold them for you?
- Can you access your documents at any time?
- What is the procedure for getting your documents back?
- If documents are not in your possession, were you given an exact copy of them?
- Does your employer or labor agent have someone responsible for giving you access to your documents upon demand?
- When were you told about these requirements and procedures?

- Are there any approvals needed or other requirements to access your passport or other personal documents, such as filling out a form or paying a deposit?
- Were you given advanced notice of these requirements and procedures?
- Do you have free access to locked, secure storage space for your personal documents and valuables that you can use 24 hours a day 7 days a week?
- Where is your locked storage located (accommodation, work location, both)?
- For vessel-based workers: Are your documents withheld from you when in port?

Red Flags

- Workers are not in possession of their personal documents.
- Workers cannot access their personal documents upon demand.
- Workers report that their freedom of movement has been limited by inability to access their documents.
- Workers report that they are reluctant to use the grievance mechanism for fear of being unable to access their personal documents.
- Workers report lack of locked secure storage for personal belongings.

Wages and Wage Deductions

Accurate payment of wages and accounting for deductions is critical to migrant workers who are vulnerable to debt bondage as a result of underpayment of wages, wage withholding, excessive deductions or fraudulent practices with regard to advances and loans provided by the employer or labor agent. Employers need to have a transparent wage system that accurately tracks and compensates workers for all the work they perform. The system needs to document how many hours were worked or quota units completed, how quota workers received at least the legal minimum wage, what overtime wage rates are applicable, the number of overtime hours worked, and how much money workers received after deductions at the end of the pay period. Workers should receive a pay slip, even if handwritten, that both the worker and the employer can confirm is accurate.

Under-payment, non-payment, and withholding of wages are common in the fishing sector, particularly for workers aboard fishing vessels. This risk is compounded by the fact that many workers do not understand how their pay is calculated and boat captains do not clearly communicate payment systems and structures, leaving workers further vulnerable to exploitation.

There are two primary types of payment systems in the fishing sector: wages and “shares.” Under a wage system, a fisher is considered an employee of the captain or the vessel owner and receives a set amount of cash wages based on hours worked. Under a share system, pay is based on an allotment of net proceeds from the catch after expenses for output (food, fuel, etc.) are deducted. Under the “share” system, workers are considered ‘partners’ in the fishing venture rather than employees. Boat owners may exploit share systems to avoid an employer-employee relationship and circumvent employment laws.

Land-based workers, those working in docks/ports, in processing plants or on aquaculture farms, may also not understand their payment structure and have unexplained deductions taken from their pay.

Many employers in the seafood supply chain may be relatively informal or small-scale, which can impact expectations for their management systems. Captains or skippers on smaller vessels, for example, will likely not have formal payroll documents. However, they may have handwritten records of when and how much workers were paid.

The ultimate goal is that employers have a transparent system that documents the amount of work a worker performs: the wage system, how many hours worked or quota units completed, what overtime wages are if applicable, and how much money workers received after deductions at the end of the pay period. Workers should be able to receive some sort of pay-slip, even if handwritten, that both the worker and the boat captain can confirm is accurate.

To address this complexity and establish a clear picture of migrant worker wage conditions, companies may wish to consider discussing the following with workers:

- Who pays your wages? Are you paid by the employer/work site or the labor agent?
- How are you paid (e.g., hourly, daily or piece rate, in cash, check, or direct deposit)? Do you know if you are paid at the same rate as local workers?
- Do you receive your pay on time? Have wage payments, or any portion of wages, ever been delayed or withheld? If yes, do you know why?
- Do you receive a pay slip or wage statement on payday?
 - If yes, is this pay slip in a language you understand, and
 - Does it clearly indicate wage calculations and any deductions that are made from your salary?
- Are there any deductions made from your wages?

- If yes, how much is deducted and for what (e.g., meals, transportation, lodging, utilities, uniform, tools)?
- Were you made aware of these deductions when you signed your contract, and did you approve of them?
- Were you requested to sign a document to authorize the deduction(s)?
- Do you ever receive wages in the form of non-cash or “in-kind” payments? If yes, what percentage of the wage has been paid in this way?
- Have you ever received an advance on your wages or a loan from the employer or labor agent?
 - If yes, what were the terms of this loan, including the interest rate and financing period?
 - Have the terms of the loan ever been changed without your consent?
- Do you participate in a savings program sponsored by the labor agent or employer?
 - If yes, is this program voluntary?
 - Did you sign a written consent form to authorize deductions for voluntary savings?
 - Where are your savings kept? If savings are kept in a bank, do you have free access to your bank account?
 - When do you get your savings back?
 - Have you had any difficulties in accessing your savings or getting them back?
- Is there anyone else, apart from yourself, who has access to your bank account (e.g., through an ATM card or power of attorney)?
 - Have you ever authorized another person to access your account to make a withdrawal? If yes, who else has such access?
- Does the employer or labor agent in any way limit your freedom to use your wages as you see fit?
- Are your wages based on a quota or piece rate?

- If so, can you typically make your quota in a regular shift? .
- If not, are you paid at least the legal minimum wage for those hours?

Red Flags:

- Workers do not receive pay slips.
- Pay slips are provided but are in a language the workers (particularly migrant workers) do not understand.
- Pay slips are inaccurate or do not contain adequate detail of how wages or earnings are calculated, or workers do not feel they have adequate visibility into earnings calculations.
- Workers do not understand how wages are calculated.
- Workers feel that the wage or pay system in practice was not adequately explained to them prior to beginning work.
- Workers are not able to meet quota or earn minimum wage under piece-rate systems unless they work overtime.
- Workers are not paid at least monthly.
- Workers are provided with cash advances which is deducted from their pay at high interest.
- Wage payments are delayed, or a portion of wages is withheld until completion of the employment contract term.
- Fishers (or their families) end fishing voyages with greater debt to the captain, skipper or boat owner than they began with.
- Workers' pay slips do not correspond to records provided by the employer.

Hours and Involuntary Overtime

Unless specified in the employment contract or collective bargaining agreement, compulsory overtime can create a forced labor risk for any worker. Migrant workers may be at greater risk of this abuse because of their heightened vulnerability. This heightened vulnerability may be exploited by employers or labor agents who take advantage of specific pressure points.

Vessel-based workers are often required to work around the clock with no “normal” working hours. The work required for harvesting catch is so intense that several days may go by with little opportunity for rest. Small vessels may go out every day to transport fish, while larger vessels remain at sea for months at a time.

Addressing this issue should be central to all worker interviews; posing the following questions is even more important with migrant workers:

- How often do you have to work overtime, and for what reasons?
- Is overtime always voluntary? If no, what are the reasons for mandatory overtime?
- Are you free to refuse overtime without threat or fear of punishment or penalty? What could happen if you refuse to work overtime?
- Are you given advance notice by your employer or labor agent when overtime is required? If yes, how much advance notice do you receive?
- Are you allowed to take meal breaks and rest breaks during your shift? If yes, how many do you get in a day and how long are they?
- Do you receive at least one rest period of 24 consecutive hours each week?
- How are your hours worked recorded?
- Do you experience fatigue that prevents you from doing your job safely?
- Are you compensated for the time it takes you to commute or be transported to and from your work site from your employer or agent-provided housing?
- For vessel-based workers, how many consecutive rest hours do you have for sleep?

Red Flags:

- Overtime is mandatory.
- Workers are unable to refuse overtime without penalty or threat of penalty.
- Workers are not given enough notice about overtime work to make arrangements for childcare or other personal and family needs.
- Work hours routinely exceed legal or company limits, whichever is stricter.
- Workers report symptoms of fatigue related to excessive overtime work (e.g., exhaustion, inability to focus on tasks, cutting corners to finish more quickly, taking unusual risks, making unusual mistakes on routine tasks).
- Employer's records of work hours are inconsistent with hours reported by workers.
- Workers are unable to meet piece rate or production quotas without regularly working overtime.
- Workers are unable to earn minimum wage under piece-rate schemes without working overtime.
- Vessel-based workers report rest hours divided into small chunks (i.e. multiple two-hour rest periods that do not allow for restorative sleep).

Freedom of Movement and Personal Freedom

Restrictions on freedom of movement for workers can exist in the workplace or in the ability to freely come and go from the dormitories or housing where they live. Restrictions can be built into employer or labor agent policies and in rules and regulations governing worker housing. In some cases, there may be legal and regulatory restrictions to workers' ability to freely leave the employer or housing during non-work hours. While in others, the restrictions may result from the security environment; worker's migration status; cultural norms or considerations; active threats, intimidation, and harassment by a manager, labor agent, or security guard; and deceptive or hidden forms of coercion such as passport confiscation, which is addressed above.

Most forms of restrictions on freedom of movement are unreasonable and abusive. To make sense of this complex issue, here are some of the questions that can be included in interviews with workers concerning their freedom of movement and personal freedom:

- Are there any restrictions on your freedom of movement in the workplace during working hours? If yes, what are these restrictions?
- Do security personnel ever restrict your freedom of movement in the workplace for reasons other than workplace security?
- Are you ever restricted from or monitored when using the toilet facilities? Are you free to get a drink of water whenever you wish?
- Are you free to perform religious obligations without restriction?
- Are you free to leave the workplace immediately after your shift?
- Are you able to get permission to leave the employer during work hours under reasonable circumstances? What is the procedure for requesting this permission (for example, how many signatures are required to request a gate pass)?
- If you live in housing operated or arranged by your employer or labor agent, are you required to live there as a condition of employment? Are you free to leave the dormitory and reside elsewhere?
- Are you free to come and go as you please from your housing during non-working hours? If not, what are the restrictions on freedom of movement?
- Does the employer-provided housing have a curfew? Are there any housing rules and regulations that you believe unreasonably restrict your personal freedom?
- How often are vessel-based workers allowed access to shore/port? Are workers allowed to exit the vessel when docked?
- How long is the typical voyage?

Red Flags:

- Transshipment at sea is used (may greatly increase time vessel-based workers spend on vessels between access to port).
- Workers do not have regular access to shore/port.
- The typical voyage is longer than four months.
- Workers do not have access to potable drinking water or toilet facilities.

- Workers report that their freedom of movement is restricted by their employer.
- There are unreasonable restrictions on workers' ability to come and go from their housing during non-working hours.
- Workers report constant surveillance by employer or supervisor.
- Workers report intentional attempts by employer or supervisor to contribute to an environment of isolation.
- Workers report that employer or supervisor-imposed limitations on their freedom of movement have negative consequences on other areas of their lives (e.g., ability to see their family, pursue religious activities, socialize, organize freely, access healthcare, etc.).

Workplace Discipline

Disciplinary measures and, in particular, the penalty of dismissal or denunciation to immigration authorities can be abused to threaten, take advantage of, and apply pressure on migrant workers. While some measures may be justified in reacting to misconduct, disciplinary measures should not result in compulsory labor or an obligation to work. The auditor should discuss disciplinary measures and determine that they are fair, objective, transparent, and communicated to workers in language they understand.

Here are some of the questions auditors may wish to ask:

- Can you describe your employer's disciplinary process for violating company rules?
- Have you been made aware of the rules and consequences for violating them?
- What kinds of disciplinary measures does your employer take (e.g., verbal warning, written warning, loss of privileges, physical punishment, termination)?
- What types of misconduct carry the penalty of dismissal and repatriation?
- Is there a clear process that includes investigation before workers are terminated and repatriated? If yes, can you describe it?
- Have you ever been disciplined at work? If not, do you know of others that have?
- Have you even been given a fine or wage deduction as a disciplinary measure? If yes, could you describe what happened?

- Do deductions for tardiness or time missed ever exceed the wage equivalent of the time missed (for example, you lose 1 hour of pay for being 15 minutes late)?
- Do disciplinary measures ever involve forced or compulsory work as punishment for a workplace infraction?
- Have you ever seen workers physically disciplined at work? If yes, can you describe what happened?
- Do you know if workers are ever forced to sign a letter of resignation?

Red Flags:

- Workers report verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse as punishment.
- Workers report financial penalties as punishment.
- Workers report threats of repatriation or denunciation to authorities as a disciplinary measure.
- Workers report difficult, degrading, or compulsory work as punishment.

Threats of Violence and Intimidation

Harassment, intimidation, and threats or use of violence can take many forms in the workplace or in employer- or labor agent-operated residences. They can be perpetrated by a supervisor, employer, manager, agent representative, dormitory manager, security guard, or even a fellow worker at almost any stage of the employment relationship, including recruitment and hiring. The aim may be to frighten workers or pressure them into accepting certain terms and conditions of employment or living conditions; or it may be to force them to work overtime or perform hazardous or life-threatening tasks. Women workers in the agricultural sector are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the field, where they may be relatively isolated should they need help. In some contexts, workplaces reproduce social hierarchies and notions of male domination, resulting in the exertion of power through sexual language as a tool that male supervisors use to control female workers.

Workers on fishing vessels are particularly vulnerable. Fishing crews are generally overseen by a captain or boss. The captain or boss has a high financial stake in a profitable voyage, incentivizing abusive management practices including actual or threatened physical abuse (hitting, violence with weapons, denial of rest), verbal abuse (yelling, threats), and other forms of intimidation or threats. In some cases, captains may force workers to use

amphetamines or other drugs as a way to combat fatigue.⁵ Crew members have reported witnessing murders of crew members at the hands of bosses.⁶

Whatever the case, there should be a strong policy in place to prevent such behavior, and workers are a key potential source of information when determining employer or agent compliance with that policy. Auditors should consider asking workers the following:

- Have you ever been subject to or witnessed verbal, physical or sexual harassment, or abuse (including threats)?
 - If yes, what happened, when and where did it happen, and who was involved?
 - Is this abuse on-going?
 - Was the incident(s) reported using the grievance mechanism or directly your employer or the labor agent?
 - What actions were taken to correct the abuse?
- Are you aware of employer policies and procedures for dealing with harassment and abuse complaints (e.g., reporting, investigation, follow-up, and sanctions)?
- *(For formal workplaces)* Does your employer conduct regular anti-harassment and abuse training for workers and supervisors? If yes, have you participated in the training?

Red Flags:

- Workers report any actual or threatened verbal, sexual, or physical abuse or harassment, of themselves or others. Any instance of abuse on vessels, where workers do not have an opportunity to leave, should be treated as a zero-tolerance issue.
- Workers state they have reported instances of abuse to the company or agent, but no action was taken.

⁵ Service, Shannon; Palmstrom, Becky. "Confined to A Thai Fishing Boat, For Three Years." *National Public Radio*. June 19, 2012.

⁶ International Labour Organization. *Caught at Sea: Forced labour and trafficking in fisheries*. 2013.

- Workers report retaliation for reporting instances of abuse through the grievance mechanism.

Grievance Mechanisms

An effective grievance procedure and complaints mechanism is an important element in taking corrective action against abuse and exploitation in the workplace. It allows workers to confidentially raise issues about labor agent practices, worksite practices, and the conditions they face in the workplace or dormitory and is a key first step toward remediating existing problems and doing so at the level where problems exist.

However, in many cases, grievance procedures may not even exist; they may not be effective, trusted, or used by workers; or they may only be used to report grievances against an employer and not labor agents, where significant forms of abuse may occur. When addressing the topic of grievance mechanisms, auditors should fully assess the options workers have available to them to raise questions and complaints.

Grievance mechanisms are particularly important for workers who are at sea for long periods, as they likely lack any means of communicating with their family, law enforcement, or other support in the case of an exploitative situation.

- What means do you have to make a complaint or grievance about the recruitment agent you used or the recruitment process?
- How would you bring issues or complaints to the attention of your employer or labor agent?
- If a grievance process is in place, when were you first told about the grievance process and how was that done?
- Have you ever used the process? If you have, could you describe how your issue was resolved?
- Is someone available at all times to receive and process grievances and other complaints?
 - If yes, do you know the position of this representative (e.g., works for the company, an independent third party, etc.)?
 - Does this person speak your language and that of other migrant workers?
 - Are you and the other workers comfortable bringing your complaints to this person?
- Is there a mechanism in place for you to raise a grievance with someone other than your direct supervisor?

- Is there an anonymous way for you to report a grievance (without giving your name)? If not, what means are in place to protect your identity when reporting a grievance?
- Do you have access to any type of communication mechanism (e.g., phone, text, etc.) that is private/not under the surveillance of your employer?
- If a grievance/communication method is available, are there times when that method is unavailable? (i.e. only able to use phone hotline while in port, but not while in sea).
- Are the responses to grievances and the actions taken to address them communicated to workers? If so, what is the main method of communication?
- What can you do if you disagree with the way a grievance is resolved? Have you or anyone you know ever appealed a grievance finding? If so, what happened?
- Do you and other workers feel that the grievance process is effective? If not, why not?
- Do you and other workers trust the grievance process and feel comfortable using it? Why or why not?
- Are you aware of any workers that had a bad experience using the process or may have gotten into trouble if they did? Could you explain?

Red Flags:

- Workers worry that grievance mechanisms may not be confidential, express fear of retaliation, or express other forms of distrust.
- Workers do not know how to access the grievance mechanism.
- Workers do not understand how information from grievance reports is used to inform issue remediation.
- Workers feel that grievances are either not remediated or remediation has not served workers' best interests.
- No grievance mechanism is available at the point of recruitment.
- There is no way to file an anonymous complaint.

- Workers do not have continuous access to some form of grievance mechanism, including while they are at sea.

Termination of Employment and Repatriation

The ability of workers to terminate their employment at any time with reasonable notice and without penalty is central to ensuring that they work in a free employment relationship. Employers must bear the cost of migrant workers' return transportation upon contract completion or when reasonable notice of termination is provided, as well as due to illness or incapacity, violation of worker rights, and other scenarios.

In speaking with migrants, companies may wish to probe this issue and seek to identify whether any limitations exist that prevent workers from terminating their contracts before they are finished. Questions they may ask:

- Are you and other workers free to resign from your position without penalty prior to the end of your contract? For vessel-based workers, what would happen if you requested termination of employment while at sea? If no, what are the penalties you face? Who pays for your return travel if you quit before your contract is completed?
- Are you free to remove yourself from working situations that pose an imminent threat to your safety and/or health?
- What is the required notice period for terminating a contract early?
- Can you describe the procedure you would need to follow to terminate your contract early? How did you learn about the process?
- Do you know what would happen if there is an emergency back home and you couldn't give the required notice?
- If you participate in a voluntary savings program arranged by your employer or labor agent, do you have free access to all savings and monies owed at the time of contract termination?

Red Flags:

- Workers do not feel free or able to leave their employer.
- Workers would suffer financial penalty caused by terminating their employment.
- Vessel-based workers have no means to terminate their employment and physically leave the vessel.

Housing and Living Conditions

In many cases, migrant workers are housed by their employers or labor agent, who sometimes make excessive deductions from workers' wages for these services. Employer-provided housing can in many cases be sub-standard, and workers generally have no other options available if they wish to continue working for the employer. This also creates multiple levels of dependency on their employers, an indicator of forced labor and trafficking.

Vessel-based workers often live in cramped, unsanitary, and unsafe quarters on fishing vessels. They are not provided privacy or personal space, contributing to mental stress, poor sleep and fatigue. Most vessels do not have any beds or mattresses, and in some cases, workers take turns using the very limited available sleeping facilities. Even while docked, many workers have no other option other than to sleep on the boat, or on the port grounds. There is often a lack of potable drinking water and hygienic (or any) sanitary facilities. Many vessels also have minimal space for workers to prepare and eat food. While at sea, workers have very limited access to communication.

Land-based workers may also experience degrading living conditions provided by their employer. This is particularly problematic for workers on isolated aquaculture farms who may have no alternate housing options.

The following questions can be asked to assess risk:

- Are you provided housing/sleeping quarters?
- For vessel-based workers, where do you sleep while in port?
- Are you charged for your housing? If so, how much do you pay?
- Are you charged for transportation to the worksite, if provided by your employer, labor agent, or labor contractor?
- How long does it take to travel from your housing to the worksite. Are you paid for travel time?
- Describe where you sleep. Do you get good rest? Are there shower and toilet facilities in your housing? If not, describe where you shower and use the toilet.
- Is there a separation between your living quarters and your employer's operation (manufacturing, construction, farm, etc.)?
- Are there food preparation and dining facilities in your housing? Describe where you prepare food and eat.

- Does your housing always provide you potable drinking water?
- Have you or other workers experienced any injuries or illnesses that you believe are related to the conditions of your living accommodations?
- Do you feel that you have adequate personal space and privacy in your housing?
- Do you share a bed with workers on other work shifts? If yes, please describe the situation.
- Do you feel safe and secure in your living accommodations? If no, why not?
- Did you understand what your living conditions would be like before you accepted this job? Are they as were described to you?
- What would happen if you complained about your living conditions?

Red Flags:

- Workers report feeling unsafe or unsecure.
- Workers report that the amount they are charged for their housing is excessive (that is, it exceeds rental rates in the local area).
- Workers report unsanitary or dangerous conditions.
- Workers cannot effectively lodge complaints about living conditions or feel they will be retaliated against if they do.
- Accommodations are visibly decrepit, poorly constructed, poorly maintained, dangerous, or unsanitary.
- Workers cannot get enough rest to safely perform their jobs due to poor conditions or long travel times to the worksite.
- Workers are suffering illness or injury due to poor conditions.
- The employer does not keep maintenance or inspection records, or records do not correspond with condition of accommodations (i.e., records show inspection of fire extinguishers that are not working or not present).

When workers are able to participate in safe and secure forms of workplace dialogue — both as individuals and collectively — they are better positioned to protect themselves against coercion, deception, discrimination, or other forms of exploitation. Workers can be asked the following questions to determine whether they can adequately practice the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining as defined in ILO Conventions 87 and 98:

- Have you been informed or trained about your right to join or form a trade union? If yes, how were you told and when?
- Are you free to join or form a trade union?
- Has your employer or agent done anything, including interference, threats or penalties, to prevent you or others from joining or forming a union?
- Are you aware of other ways for workers to organize such as worker committees or worker centers?
- Do you feel existing worker organizations are responsive to and represent your concerns?
- How are worker representatives chosen? Are they elected by the workers or appointed by your employer?
- Is any group of workers excluded from the trade union or worker organization for any reason?

Red Flags:

- Workers have experienced or fear retaliation for efforts to organize.
- Workers perceive that employers have influence over worker organizations.
- Employers do not have a policy of neutrality towards worker advocacy organizations.
- Worker representatives are chosen by the employer or labor agent.
- Except where prohibited by law, migrants are not specifically excluded from workers organizations including unions. Worker representatives are chosen by the employer or labor agent.