



Reimbursement of worker recruitment fees as remedy

Parallel session

28 November

13:30-14:45

Organized by the Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment (Business Initiative), the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) and Verité

Session focus: Low-waged migrant workers underpin much of the global economy and are among the most vulnerable to serious exploitation, including forced labour and trafficking. Unregulated and exploitative recruitment practices lead to migrant workers being saddled with excessive levels of debt incurred through recruitment fees charged to secure employment. These fees represent the predominant business model of the recruitment industry in the global South, including within the supply chains of leading brands. Leading global companies are working towards implementation of the Employer Pays model, whereby the costs of recruitment are borne not by the worker but by the employer. The [Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment](#) has set the ambitious goal of eradicating worker fees within a decade, and the question of reimbursement of fees as an important aspect of remedy must be addressed urgently, alongside improved regulatory environment for the recruitment industry itself.

This session focuses on the reimbursement to workers of recruitment fees, and what interventions can be made by companies, governments and civil society to prevent the charging of recruitment fees to workers in the first place. At the session, an important new research paper on reimbursement of fees will be presented and discussed with two companies from the apparel/electronics and construction sectors which have undertaken reimbursement of worker fees, and one representative of a migrant worker rights organization with experience in providing remedy to debt-bonded workers.

The session addresses one of the key challenges faced by companies which are seeking to tackle forced labour by eliminating worker recruitment fees in supply chains. The [Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment](#) spoke at last year's forum on working together to promote leadership and leverage in eliminating worker fees. This session builds on that debate by looking at the complicated area of reimbursing worker fees. The panel will launch the findings of an IHRB-commissioned report, 'Reimbursement and Remediation: companies tackling worker fees' (working title, tbc). The findings will provide an overview of the realities and challenges around reimbursement of fees, augmented by insights from two global companies with direct experience of reimbursement directly or through their suppliers. The emphasis will be on the operational challenges and effectiveness both as remedy and in combatting future debt bondage.

Speakers:¹

- **Frances House**, IHRB (co-moderator)
- **Shawn Macdonald**, Verité (co-moderator)
- **Mustafa Qadri**, CEO, Equidem
- **Alex Cech**, Human Rights and Supply Chain Social Responsibility Program Manager, Hewlett Packard Enterprise
- **Greg Priest**, Head of Sustainability Policy, IKEA
- **Ashley Orbach**, Head of Strategy, Partnership, and Human Rights for the Supplier Responsibility group, Apple

Format: The discussion will be oriented around the practical challenge of reimbursement of fees, as part of a commitment to the Employer Pays Principle from the perspective of a company as well as a worker. The companies will each give an insight into their own policies and implementation of worker fee reimbursement from Qatar and SE Asia, addressing questions around cost-sharing, contracts with suppliers, and communication with workers. The panel will be conversational in format, with at least 30 minutes reserved for audience interaction and discussion.

Objectives:

- Highlight the elimination of recruitment fee payments by migrant workers as a key method for business and governments in preventing labor abuse, including forced labour.
- Identify the practical and concrete measures different stakeholders should take to prohibit the payment of recruitment fees by migrant workers.
- Explore the operational realities and challenges of reimbursing worker fees as an important aspect of effective remedy from a corporate and a worker perspective.

Key discussion questions:

- What are the human and business costs of debt bondage?
- How effective is reimbursement of fees in providing remedy? Does it tackle the root cause of the problem of debt bondage?
- Who bears the cost of reimbursement?

¹ Further information on speakers provided in Annex

- How can business, government and civil society work collectively to achieve the Leadership Group's bold vision of no worker fees within 10 years? What is the call to action from the three perspectives?

Background:

The [Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment](#) is a collaboration between leading global companies – The Coca Cola Company, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, HP Inc., IKEA, M&S, Unilever, Walmart, Vinci, Mars, GE and Tesco – and expert organisations – the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), Verité, the International Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – to drive positive change in the way that migrant workers are recruited. Together, the Leadership Group's aim is bold – the total eradication of workers being charged fees to secure employment within 10 years. Members of the Leadership Group have committed to the [Employer Pays Principle](#): No worker should pay for a job – the costs of recruitment should be borne not by the worker but by the employer. The Leadership Group acts as a vehicle for advocacy and collaboration and serves as a knowledge hub for sharing best practices, tools and guidance in relation to responsible recruitment.

The [Institute for Human Rights and Business](#) (IHRB) is dedicated to being a global centre of excellence and expertise on the relationship between business and internationally proclaimed human rights standards. We provide a trusted, impartial space for dialogue and independent analysis to deepen understanding of human rights challenges and issues and the appropriate role of business. IHRB works to raise corporate standards and strengthen public policy to ensure that the activities of companies do not contribute to human rights abuses, and in fact lead to positive outcomes. One of our key programmes focuses on Migrant Workers, built on the foundational [Dhaka Principles for Migration with Dignity](#).

[Verité](#): Verité is a global, independent, non-profit organization that conducts research, advocacy, consulting, trainings, and assessments with a vision that people worldwide work under safe, fair, and legal conditions. Since its inception in 1995, Verité has partnered with hundreds of multinational brands, suppliers, and international institutions in more than 70 countries across multiple sectors to improve working conditions and social performance within global supply chains, taking aim at serious problems: child labor, forced labor, human trafficking, and gender discrimination.

ANNEX. SPEAKERS SHORT BIOS.

Frances House

Deputy Chief Executive, IHRB

Frances has twenty years' experience in the field of business and human rights both from at a strategic and an operational level. She is responsible for the overall operational management of IHRB as well as having a particular focus on delivery of IHRB's Migrant Worker programme and its leadership activities with global brands around combating modern slavery.

@ihrb

Shawn Macdonald

Executive Director, Verité

Dr. Shawn MacDonald is CEO of Verité, a civil society organization that promotes workers' rights in global supply chains through research, consulting, training, assessments, and policy advocacy. Before joining Verité, he was Director of Accreditation at the Fair Labor Association, Vice President of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, Senior Advisor at Meridian Group International, and co-founder of the Development and Employment Policy Project and worked for a variety of civil society organizations in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

@smacdonal18

Greg Priest

Head of Sustainability Policy, IKEA

Greg's team leads and supports the development of the policies and approaches needed to achieve the ambitious goals in the area of sustainability at IKEA with a focus on human rights. Greg is also responsible for stakeholder engagement and partnership development. He is a key figure in the development of the IKEA sustainability strategy, "People & Planet Positive". Greg has 17 years of sustainability experience, both on consumer topics and supply chain issues.

Alexandra Cech

Human Rights and Supply Chain Social Responsibility Program Manager, Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE)

As the Human Rights and Supply Chain Social Responsibility Program Manager, Alexandra leads policy development and manages the implementation of programs that address human rights and ethical sourcing, specifically focusing on worker well-being in the supply chain. Alexandra has over nine years of work experience in Latin America, South Asia, East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, including roles with the non-profit sector, private sector and multilateral organizations. Alexandra has a Bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and a Master's degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

Ashley Orbach

Head of Strategy, Partnership, and Human Rights for the Supplier Responsibility group, Apple

Ashley Orbach is Apple's Head of Strategy, Partnership, and Human Rights for the Supplier Responsibility group. Ashley joined Apple in 2017 following a career with the U.S. State Department where she worked since 2003. Ashley held various assignments including: Senior Advisor on conflict and natural resources; U.S. representative to the Kimberley Process; National Security Council's Multilateral and Human Rights Director; U.S. Mission to the UN's Security Council Team; the Consulate General in Jerusalem; the USAID West Bank/Gaza Mission; and the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan.

Mustafa Qadri

Executive Director, Equidem

Mustafa Qadri is the Founder and Executive Director of Equidem Research and Consulting, a specialist human rights and labour rights investigations consultancy. He is a human rights research and advocacy expert with over 15 years of interdisciplinary experience in government and public international law, journalism and the non-governmental sector.

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