



## NEWS RELEASE

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THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL FOR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

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[www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk)

### New report reveals the down-side of flexible labour

Migrant workers fill many agency, seasonal and temporary jobs in the UK and Ireland. But, according to a new report published this week by the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR), they remain vulnerable to very low pay, over-long hours, poor health and safety conditions, workplace discrimination and other forms of injustice.

ECCR's report - ***Vulnerable Migrant Workers: The Responsibility of Business*** - reveals the vulnerability of migrant workers in areas of the domestic economy where low-skilled flexible labour is concentrated: care, cleaning, construction, hospitality and catering, and food production, manufacturing and retail.

The report compares the policies and practices of nine food production, manufacturing and supermarket companies towards migrant workers, particularly in their supply chains. Companies in the survey include Associated British Foods, Kerry Group, Morrisons, Northern Foods, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Unilever.

'Many companies' profits benefit from the use of flexible labour in the supply chain,' says ECCR's Researcher Sunniva Taylor. 'Companies and investors therefore have a moral responsibility to reduce the incidence of vulnerable work throughout their business and supply chain.'

Church group ECCR argues that accepting moral responsibility makes business sense in protecting companies against legal and reputational risk and improving workforce retention and security of supply.

The report finds that few food companies are explicit about the potential vulnerability of migrant workers or the additional support they may need. While most recognise some responsibility for workers in their supply chains, few appear to have mainstreamed considerations about labour conditions into their core business practice which may at times force suppliers to compromise labour conditions.

Weaknesses in the rights enforcement system mean that abuses may go undetected and unaddressed, the report also finds. Paul Whitehouse, Chair, Gangmasters Licensing Authority comments: 'This report highlights how vulnerable migrant workers are and recognises that better enforcement of existing laws is required.'

Praised by migrant worker support organisation SOS Polonia as 'an eye-opening and conscience-shaking document ... a must-read for all companies, investors, policy makers and consumers', ECCR's report highlights the need for companies to:

- recognise the potential vulnerability of migrant, temporary and agency workers;
- implement effective codes of conduct for suppliers;
- increase awareness of rights among all workers;
- and strengthen monitoring and audits.

ECCR, *Vulnerable Migrant Workers: The Responsibility of Business - an overview and comparative analysis of food production, manufacture and retail companies*, May 2009, 106 pp. Full report and executive summary available at [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk).

**more...**

## Notes for editors

### 1. **Media inquiries**

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2. **Vulnerable Migrant Workers: The Responsibility of Business** is available for download at [www.eccr.org.uk/module-htmlpages-display-pid-20.html](http://www.eccr.org.uk/module-htmlpages-display-pid-20.html).

3. **Printed copies** can be ordered (£12 non-members; £5 ECCR members and partners) at [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk) or from the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR), PO Box 500, Oxford OX1 1ZL, UK, tel. +44 (0)1865 245349, email [info@eccr.org.uk](mailto:info@eccr.org.uk).

4. The report's sponsor is **Rathbone Greenbank Investments** ([www.rathbonegreenbank.com](http://www.rathbonegreenbank.com)).  
Contact: Matt Crossman: +44 (0)117 930 3000, [matt.crossman@rathbones.com](mailto:matt.crossman@rathbones.com).

### 5. **Launch event**

Rathbone Greenbank Investments will host a launch of the report on **Thursday 28 May 2009**, from 5.00 to 6.30 pm, at Rathbone Brothers Plc, 159 New Bond Street, London W1S 2UD. Chair: Mark Mansley, Investment Director, Rathbone Greenbank. Speakers: Antonia Bance, Oxfam GB; Sunniva Taylor, ECCR; Paul Whitehouse, Gangmasters Licensing Authority. To reserve a place, please contact Helen Boothroyd: [helen.boothroyd@eccr.org.uk](mailto:helen.boothroyd@eccr.org.uk), tel. 01325 580028, or Miles Litvinoff: [miles.litvinoff@eccr.org.uk](mailto:miles.litvinoff@eccr.org.uk), tel. 020 8965 9682.

6. **Part One of the report** describes the distribution and role of migrant workers in the domestic economies of the UK and Ireland and the nature and causes of their vulnerability in sectors where many are concentrated: care, cleaning, construction, hospitality and catering, food production, food manufacturing and food retail.

7. **Part Two** analyses nine UK and Irish publicly listed food production, manufacture and retail (supermarket) companies in terms of their policies and practices towards migrant workers: Associated British Foods, Greencore Group, Kerry Group, Morrisons, Northern Foods, Premier Foods, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Unilever.

8. **Research** for the report was conducted mainly during the second half of 2008. All companies in the study were informed of the research and invited to contribute information, and a draft of the report was shared with each for comment. Five of the nine companies responded on each occasion.

9. The report provides a **framework for investors** to consider how companies perform with regard to vulnerable migrant workers and can also be used by company managements, workforces and trade unions seeking to improve policy and practice. The report's action guides for investors and for churches, downloadable at [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk), provide guidance for those wishing to engage with companies on the issues or to support migrant workers in the community.

10. **ECCR is a church-based investor coalition and membership organisation** working for economic justice, environmental stewardship, and corporate and investor responsibility. A Body in Association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, it undertakes research, advocacy and dialogue with companies and investors and seeks to influence company policy and practice and to raise awareness of corporate and investor responsibility issues among the British and Irish churches, the investor community and the general public.

11. **Other recent ECCR reports** include *Water Sustainability* (2008) – focused on the food processing and beverage industries - and company reports on Rio Tinto (2006), BHP Billiton (2005), GSK (2004), AstraZeneca (2003), Shell (2002) and BP (2002).

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