

Labor and Human Rights Conditions of North Korean Workers Dispatched Overseas: A Look at the DPRK's Exploitative Practices in Russia, Poland, and Mongolia

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I. Total Number of North Korean Overseas Laborers	184
II. Amount of Foreign Currency Earned by North Korean Laborers	185
III. The Practice of Dispatching North Korean Laborers Overseas as a Form of Modern Slavery	186
A. Abuse of Vulnerability	186
B. Deception	187
C. Restriction of Movement	187
D. Isolation	188
E. Physical and Sexual Violence	188
F. Intimidation and Threats	189
G. Retention of Identity Documents	189
H. Withholding of Wages	190
I. Debt Bondage	190
J. Abusive Working and Living Conditions	190
K. Excessive Overtime	191
IV. The Case of Poland	191
A. The State of North Korean Laborers in Poland According to Occupational Groups	191
B. The Human Rights Situation of North Korean Overseas Laborers in Poland	193
1. <i>Payment of Remuneration</i>	193
2. <i>Working Conditions</i>	195

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3. <i>Living Conditions Including Residence and Meals</i>	198
4. <i>Surveillance and Control</i>	199
V. The Case of Russia	201
A. Human Rights Violations	203
VI. The Case of Mongolia	207
A. Human Rights Violations	214

The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) has so far dedicated over three years to a focused research on the human rights conditions of North Korean laborers overseas. In this amount of time NKDB researchers have only managed to uncover a small fraction of the abuses endured by the North Korean citizens dispatched overseas to earn revenue for the North Korean regime. There is a lot of work that still needs to be done, which should involve investigation of the working and living conditions of North Korean laborers residing in different countries, seeking accountability from the entities, government agencies and individuals profiting from the hard labor of North Korean laborers, and ultimately improving the state of the workers.

I. Total Number of North Korean Overseas Laborers

According to NKDB's estimates North Korea is dispatching 70,000 to 100,000 laborers to over thirty countries all over the world to earn foreign currency.¹ While the number of overseas laborers continues to increase, it is still difficult to know their exact number. Reports that have been released by the press² refer to approximately 20,000 workers in Russia; 19,000 in China; 4000 to 5000 in Kuwait; 2000 in UAE; 2000 in Mongolia; 1800 in Qatar; 1,000 in Angola; 400 to 500 in Poland³; 400 in Malaysia; 300 in Oman; 300 in Libya; 200 in Nigeria; 200 in Algeria; 200 in Equatorial Guinea; and one hundred in Ethiopia.⁴ After collecting testimonies from North Korean defectors and analyzing media sources and other investigative and statistical reports NKDB believes that the number of North Korean workers in Russia alone may be exceeding 50,000 (more than twice the initial estimates) and that the number of dispatched North Korean laborers in China is more than the suggested 19,000 people.⁵

1. See Yeo-sang Yoon & Seung-ju Lee, *Human Rights and North Korea's Overseas Labourers: Dilemmas and Policy Changes*. SEOUL: DATABASE CENTER FOR NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS 22(2015).

2. See *North Korea's Money Inflow Blocked . . . Government Maintained Through Forced Labour Overseas*, CHOSUN ILBO (Nov. 24, 2014); see also *North Korea putting thousands into forced labour abroad, UN says*, THE GUARDIAN (Oct. 29, 2015, 7:09 EDT), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/29/north-korea-workers-forced-labour-abroad-un-report> [https://perma.cc/9S3N-NHJL].

3. The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights estimates that there are around 800 laborers currently in Poland. See SEOUL: DATABASE CENTER FOR NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS, *supra* note 1, at 23.

4. See *id.*

5. See *id.*

II. Amount of Foreign Currency Earned by North Korean Laborers

The North Korean regime has not revealed the amount of foreign capital that they have earned through overseas laborers. According to existing reports, it is around \$120 million to \$230 million⁶ but the exact amount is unknown. As North Korea has increased its threat to international society by carrying out nuclear tests and firing missiles, interest in the foreign capital brought in by North Korean overseas laborers has increased due to the inference that they are financing these actions with this foreign capital.

According to a Chinese news source, North Korea's Mansudae Art Studio has earned \$160 million in foreign currency over the past ten years in African countries like Senegal where they installed the African Renaissance Monument.⁷ The news article reported that "[t]here are over 100,000 North Korean laborers dispatched to around forty countries and they bring in over \$300 million into Pyongyang every year."⁸

It was recently exposed that the Sri Lankan government confiscated \$168,000 held by North Koreans. The North Koreans who tried to smuggle the money through the country revealed that the source of this money was the wages of North Korea overseas laborers working in a construction site in Oman.⁹ The incident in Sri Lanka was the first case of a foreign government confiscating hard cash from North Koreans after UN Resolution 2270 against North Korea on March 2, 2016.¹⁰ While the majority of North Korea's overseas laborers' wages enter North Korea through people, banks have made it increasingly difficult to send dollars into North Korea, which has led to the North Korean regime resorting to smuggling cash illegally into the country.

It is difficult to estimate the total amount that North Korea receives through overseas laborers and how much is being sent back into North Korea. Furthermore, until the North Korean regime reveals it themselves, it is almost impossible to know how much is being used to develop nuclear weapons and missiles. The on-site investigation in Mongolia and Poland revealed that most of the laborers' wages were not given directly to them but instead received by the North Korean company and recruiting agency.¹¹ Consequently, the majority of the money sent back to North

6. United Nations, General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. A/70/362 (Sept. 8, 2015)

7. Jong-tae Won, *Where Is North Korea Getting Its Foreign Currency from after the Closing down of Kaesong Industrial Complex?*, MONEY TODAY (Feb. 13, 2016), <http://www.mt.co.kr/view/mtview.php?type=1>.

8. *Id.*

9. *Sri Lankan Gov't Confiscates Dollars Held by N. Koreans . . . "after 4th Nuclear Test,"* YONHAP NEWS AGENCY (Apr. 18, 2016), <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/04/18/0200000000AKR20160418172900077.HTML?input=1195m> [https://perma.cc/7AWT-4F8E].

10. S.C.Res. 2270 U.N. Doc. S/RES/2270 (Mar. 2, 2016) http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2270%282016%29 [https://perma.cc/EZ5T-EUW2].

11. This information was obtained by NKDB field investigation team.

Korea is not done by the individual North Korean laborers but rather parties working for the North Korean state.

III. The Practice of Dispatching North Korean Laborers Overseas as a Form of Modern Slavery¹²

Before we look into the cases of dispatch in Russia, Poland, and Mongolia, it is important to pay attention to the main issues associated with this exploitative practice of the DPRK government. The International Labour Organization uses a system of eleven indicators to identify situations of forced labor. These are: (1) abuse of vulnerability, (2) deception, (3) restriction of movement, (4) isolation, (5) physical and sexual violence, (6) intimidation and threats, (7) retention of identity documents, (8) withholding of wages, (9) debt bondage, (10) abusive working and living conditions, (11) excessive overtime.¹³ When the process of dispatch of North Korean workers overseas is analyzed there is a presence of several of these indicators in almost all of the locations to which workers are being sent by the regime.

A. Abuse of Vulnerability

The North Korean authorities abuse the laborers' vulnerabilities at all levels as the laborers are rarely able to act independently and without assistance from their managers. As the North Korean workers are not given essential orientation or training before dispatch to the country where they will live and work, they also lack the language skills needed to communicate both at their workplace and in the world outside their work.¹⁴ Unable to comprehend work tasks and workplace regulations and not capable to express their needs and the financial resources to secure items of basic need, in most cases the North Korean laborers depend entirely on their North Korean managers who know the local language and are responsible for the distribution of their salaries, food and other essential items.¹⁵ As the employees in the hosting companies do not speak Korean, the dis-

12. This information in this section is based on the content of multiple interviews conducted by NKDB with North Korean people who were dispatched to work overseas while they lived in North Korea. The information related to the specific conditions of work and life of the North Korean workers is not extracted from individual interviews but has continuously been reported by North Korean defectors who were dispatched to different countries and who worked in different industries. This serves to prove that the North Korean government has developed a system of dispatch and labor exploitation, which was utilized by multiple agencies, enterprises and other state authorities. The exploitation perpetrated by the DPRK is not limited to one particular geographic region, or to one particular group of workers. Testimonies by former North Korean overseas workers show a lot of overlap, pointing to the use of similar methods of abuse and exploitation.

13. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE, ILO INDICATORS OF FORCED LABOUR 3 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_norm/-declaration/documents/publication/wcms_203832.pdf [<https://perma.cc/7MY9-PFLM>].

14. Anonymous interviewee (Russia 2002).

15. *Id.*

patched laborers rely only on their managers in order to receive information, which makes them highly vulnerable to manipulation and deceit.

B. Deception

The majority of the laborers dispatched overseas are not given any information about the region or working conditions before being dispatched. It was revealed that they decided to work abroad after getting information from people with experience of working overseas.¹⁶ Witnesses have revealed that more information has been shared about countries such as Russia where a lot of laborers have been dispatched. Compared with other countries, laborers that have been dispatched to Mongolia and Poland did not have a choice in selecting their destination.¹⁷ Upon the decision made by the individual's affiliated department, the dispatch process begins and the workers are only told two months prior to departure where they will be sent. Their job function is usually known prior to this from their affiliated company. Other than that, no specifics are given to the workers before they leave North Korea. During NKDB's field investigation in Poland and Mongolia there was not a single laborer that was met who had signed an individual work contract or a document of this kind. Thus, the official working conditions of North Korean laborers (wages, work time, etc.) remain unknown. The workers are led to believe that they will be able to earn large amounts of money, with which they will be able to support their families, but in reality they receive only a small fraction of the promised amounts.¹⁸ Additionally the non-disclosing of details about the working conditions and multiple penalty fees subsequently imposed on the workers can be viewed as a form of deception used by the North Korean authorities to force compliance by the dispatched North Korean workers.

I've never seen my contract. It might exist between the state and the institution I belonged to but no individual contract. They simply said the work was hard during the training before the dispatch. No explanation on the working conditions or contract terms. I was also told the duration of work would be between three and five years. No specific contract, though. They said if I had done the given workload, I would be given the fixed amount.¹⁹

C. Restriction of Movement

In all locations around the world where workers are dispatched by the DPRK government, strict restrictions are imposed on the free movement of the North Korean workers. Accommodation is not freely chosen by the laborers, they are being assigned either to dormitories or separate housing managed by their North Korean managers, who accompany them everywhere. In more extreme cases the laborers are not allowed to leave their

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

workplace and are forced to live in a container or a cabin at the work site, and in some cases (mostly in construction) they would work, sleep, and eat at the construction site to which they were dispatched.²⁰ The North Korean workers are not allowed to leave their workplace or accommodation by themselves, and only going out in groups of minimum two or three people is approved. At all times the workers are under strict surveillance. Their every move and word is monitored by other workers, their North Korean managers, or even State Security Department officers who are at times dispatched under cover alongside the general laborers.²¹

There was no freedom of movement. I couldn't leave a designated area, I wouldn't be punished but would get told off . . . One person went out to do some business in December 1994 and disappeared. The North Koreans went and caught him then threw him in the company cellar for a week before sending him back to North Korea.²²

D. Isolation

In some places of dispatch, most notably Russia, North Korean laborers work in isolation from the rest of the world. Particularly the people dispatched to the logging fields in the Far East regions of the Russian Federation are far away from local settlements, which also means that they rarely have direct access to proper medical treatment facilities much needed in high risk work sites such as logging companies.²³ Moreover, exacerbating the feeling of isolation from the rest of the world, North Korean workers are prevented from watching TV or listening to the radio and they are not allowed to contact their relatives in North Korea (although on rare occasions they can write to relatives, but this is closely monitored by the DPRK authorities).²⁴ In some cases the workers are not allowed to have any non-work related conversations with their colleagues (either North Korean or from other nationalities).

E. Physical and Sexual Violence

Physical violence is not a wide spread phenomenon in the process of dispatch of North Korean workers but there have still been some reports of violence occurring either by senior workers towards less senior ones and by managers towards general workers.²⁵ Workers dispatched in Russia for example have shared information about the existence of detention facilities, where people who attempt to escape from their workplace or who do not follow the internal regulations are being held. During interrogation procedures in such facilities there are cases in which physical violence has been used alongside with verbal abuse and other similar methods of

20. *Id.*

21. *Id.*

22. Anonymous interviewee (Russia 1994).

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

punishment.²⁶

F. Intimidation and Threats

Threats of punishment permeate the whole period of dispatch of the North Korean workers. They are used as a tool of intimidation in the stage of pre-departure, when workers receive instructions what they are not supposed to do or say while working abroad and what the related punishments for each of the wrongdoings are.²⁷ One of the main criteria in the selection process of laborers to be sent overseas is the marital status of the candidates.²⁸ In some cases only men married with children can be sent to work overseas.²⁹ In the event that the workers do not follow regulations while working overseas, or escape from their workplace their family remaining in North Korea will be punished for their wrongdoing (family members may even be sent to a political prison camp). Living with the constant threat to the life of their families, the workers are forced to comply with all conditions posed by their managers. Workers are constantly threatened with punishment if they are to talk to people outside their workplace, watch foreign TV channels or listen to radio, leave their workplace/accommodation without explicit permission.³⁰

G. Retention of Identity Documents

All interviewees, who have shared their testimonies with NKDB during the years of investigation on the topic of North Korean overseas laborers, indicate that although they have been issued passports in order to travel to the country of their dispatch, these have been collected by their managers upon arrival at their destination. As a result the workers have no way of identifying themselves if they manage to walk outside their workplaces, and most importantly—leaving the country and travelling to another destination becomes virtually impossible.³¹ In some cases the laborers are issued temporary work permits (cards) but they are rarely allowed to keep possession of these, except when labor inspectorate officials or other local authorities are expected to make a monitoring visit to their place of work. Therefore the retention of the identity documents of the workers puts them in an especially vulnerable position when they have to identify themselves in front of local authorities in the rare occasions when they go out of their workplace or manage to escape. As a result there are many instances in which workers are arrested as illegal migrants and then returned to their North Korean managers, which later brings them more financial penalties or other forms of punishment.

We never saw our own passports. Right before we went through the customs at the Tumen River, they handed out our passports. When we were about to

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

enter Russia from Hasan, they called out our names and gave us the passports. But as soon as we entered Russia, those who were waiting for us there, collected the passports right away. Because we could escape using the passports.³²

H. Withholding of Wages

North Korean workers overseas receive only a small fraction of their original salaries. In the most severe cases they are allowed to keep only about ten percent of their salaries.³³ Additionally money is extorted from the workers under different pretexts—medical expenses, fees for food and lodging, etc. Workers injured as a result of work-related accidents are often forced to pay for their treatment or to cover through financial contribution the losses associated with their absence from work. As a result North Korean laborers sometimes don't receive any remuneration at all. The money is collected by their North Korean managers or officials from the local DPRK embassies. The salaries are distributed in cash and the workers are not allowed to have their own bank accounts to which their wages can be transferred directly.³⁴ In the same way the workers are not allowed to manage their money on their own meaning that remittances to their families in North Korea are impossible.

I. Debt Bondage

For many North Korean workers the issue of debt bondage stems directly from the previous indicator— withholding of wages. Not being able to receive their wages for several months in a row, or only receiving a small fraction of them, which is not enough to buy food, clothes or medicine, the laborers try to find side jobs where they can receive small amounts of cash in order to survive. They have to pay a bribe in order to be allowed to go outside their worksite and the only way for them to afford to do this is to take a debt load, thus accruing large debts that have to be repaid to their managers and causing the laborers to spend longer hours working without actually being paid.³⁵

J. Abusive Working and Living Conditions

Depending on the country of dispatch North Korean workers face different difficulties. Those sent to construction sites in Mongolia are forced to sleep without proper bedding at the construction site where they are working.³⁶ The ones sent to construction projects in the Middle East face a very hostile living environment, where they are put into small containers shared by eight or ten workers with no cooling equipment and no adequate personal hygiene facilities.³⁷ Many laborers who used to work in logging

32. Anonymous interviewee (Russia 2006).

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.*

35. *Id.*

36. *Id.*

37. *Id.*

companies in Russia report that safety gear was rarely provided, no proper work uniforms were distributed to the workers and there were no replacements of old or damaged work attire. Additionally running water, heating and medical aid were not available to the North Korean workers who had to endure hard labor in extremely difficult conditions.

If we were building a house in Kuwait, then we stayed around the site, sleeping and cooking. The residence was a container box, where twenty to thirty people slept together. There was only one shower. We did take a shower as we came back to the residence after work. There we had a shower and did the laundry. We made our beds ourselves, bunk beds. The bedding articles were a mattress and a blanket. The hygienic conditions were hopeless.³⁸

K. Excessive Overtime

North Korean workers very often work excessive hours for which they are not remunerated. Even if the overtime work hours are paid by the hosting companies, the money is collected by the North Korean on-site managers and the laborers never actually receive them. Some of the most extreme cases are sixteen or eighteen-hour shifts in the logging fields of Russia, where workers are forced to make the most of the winter season, which has the best conditions for logging.³⁹ Testimonies show that North Korean laborers are forced to work for extended periods of time with only insignificant amount of sleep between shifts, which is not only a human rights violation but also a serious threat to their health and safety.

It was about 14-16 hours a day, it would be up until 2:00 am if I worked late and then I would have to go out again at 5 or 6 in the morning . . . If I calculate what I got in a month in dollars, it would be about 10-50 dollars.⁴⁰

IV. The Case of Poland

A. The State of North Korean Laborers in Poland According to Occupational Groups

The following parts will examine the working and living conditions of North Korean overseas laborers in Poland according to occupational groups. North Korean overseas laborers in Poland mostly work in the field of construction but there are also other jobs that are occupied by North Korean laborers.

Two hundred fifty construction laborers, initially dispatched to Poland in 2008 by the Overseas Construction Guidance Bureau of the DPRK, are dispersed to five regions. In the capital city Warszawa, a total of sixty to seventy laborers in two groups are working on construction projects.⁴¹

38. Anonymous interviewee (Kuwait 2007).

39. *Id.*

40. Anonymous interviewee (Russia 2011).

41. This data was obtained with the help of an information provider whose identity is not revealed due to security concerns.

Currently, one group of thirty people are in Łódź, another group of twenty people are in Kraków, and the remaining one hundred people are living in Wrocław.⁴² The remuneration of North Korean overseas laborers in the field of construction varies according to the level of their technical skills, experience, and position.

Shipyard welders have been dispatched by the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and are currently working in Gdansk, Gdynia and Szczecin shipyards. The total number of welders dispatched to Poland amount to fifty to one hundred people, which is the second largest number of laborers following that of construction workers.⁴³

In particular, there are currently about fifteen welders remaining in a Gdansk shipyard because North Korean welders were dispersed to other regions due to a decline of their competitiveness to Ukrainian laborers. The remuneration for shipyard welders is about 150 dollars on average. The average remuneration for technicians is 1300 to 1500 zlotys,⁴⁴ which is higher than that of ordinary construction laborers.⁴⁵ Because of severe and dangerous working conditions, industrial accidents are reported to occur frequently.

According to a witness, there were about one hundred female North Korean workers in Karczew gardening business who were dispatched from the Central Service Bureau in 2007.⁴⁶ The women in the tomato farm were from Pyongyang who had been dispatched to Poland for a term of five years. It was identified that the female North Korean laborers who work in the horticultural business generally earn about seventy dollars per month on average.⁴⁷

There are about six to seven doctors dispersed to three regions in Poland. One doctor in Gdynia, another doctor in Kraków, and five doctors in Szczecin have been identified.⁴⁸ In a Gdynia hospital, one doctor in his sixties, who had arrived to Poland with his wife two weeks ago, was performing acupuncture and massage.⁴⁹ The hospital's director had visited North Korea for medical skills exchange fifteen years ago but has passed away.⁵⁰ The North Korean doctor could not speak Polish and worked during the official working hours of the hospital from 9:00 am. The hospital was attracting patients with a separate promotional material, specifying the

42. This information dates from NKDB's first field investigation in Poland in November 2015.

43. Data obtained via NKDB's field research in Poland.

44. As of May 2018, 100 zlotys is roughly equivalent to 26 USD. See *Convert Polish Zloty to United States Dollar (PLN to USD)*, [THEMONEYCONVERTER.COM](https://themoneyconverter.com/PLN/USD.aspx), [https://themoneyconverter.com/PLN/USD.aspx](https://perma.cc/MJ2L-EH6N) [https://perma.cc/MJ2L-EH6N].

45. Amounts were given by information providers familiar with this sector in Poland.

46. This data was obtained with the help of a witness who wished to remain anonymous.

47. Information collected by NKDB researchers during the field investigation in Poland.

48. *Id.*

49. *Id.*

50. *Id.*

cost of acupuncture and massage services given by the North Korean doctor.

It was reported that North Korean taekwondo instructors were running numerous clubs in Kraków region. Due to a limitation of time, however, the field research team was not able to identify their specific working conditions.

According to an article from local media, *Ceramika Harasiuki*, a company producing ceramic materials that is located in the southeastern region of a small city Harasiuki, dismissed Polish contract laborers and newly employed five North Korean laborers instead.⁵¹ Although it was identified that the North Korean laborers had been working in the aforementioned bus manufacturing company and furniture company in Słupsk, their current whereabouts remain unknown.

According to the president of ARAMEX, an employment agency, female North Korean employees were working in a restaurant in Warszawa, the capital city of Poland.⁵² Further information about the North Korean restaurant or the employees has not been obtained.

B. The Human Rights Situation of North Korean Overseas Laborers in Poland

1. Payment of Remuneration

The official remuneration to the North Korean laborers is sent to the authorities of the DPRK through a North Korean company. The actual remuneration for the laborers which consists only a partial amount of the official remuneration, is given separately. The head of the office summons one person at a time and gives the remuneration after a personal interview. Laborers who were assigned as informants to keep a watch and manage other laborers by the State Security Department office, or those who came into the favor of the head of the office receive a greater amount of remuneration. When the laborers receive their remuneration, they sign their names next to the amount of money written on the paycheck. This paycheck, however, is only a piece of paper that cannot be disclosed outside because it fails to guarantee the minimum amount of remuneration that is stipulated by the local law.⁵³

As for North Korean laborers in Poland, those who have worked less than a year receive less than half the remuneration, while those who arrived first receive twice the remuneration. This is in accordance to their

51. Jungmin Noh, *Return of Kim Pyung-il from Poland/Kim Jong-un's External Activities Expanded*, RADIO FREE ASIA (Sept.16, 2011), http://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly_program/radio-world/radioworld-09162011155414.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=%EA%B9%80%ED%8F%89%EC%9D%BC+%ED%8F%B4%EB%9E%80%EB%93%9C [<https://perma.cc/R8ZE-5VSM>].

52. Information obtained through an interview with representative of the agency.

53. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

local work experience.⁵⁴

Although Polish companies have transferred the remuneration on a regular basis, the payment of the North Korean construction laborers has always been in arrears for two months. Furthermore, it was also identified that there were no performance-based incentives or overtime payments. The payment of wages was delayed by the North Korean managers of the workers who make a pretext of having to pay fees to the DPRK government.⁵⁵

The major cause for the inadequate payment of remuneration is the route from which the remuneration is paid. The remuneration of North Korean laborers is first transferred from a Polish company to the head of a North Korean company, a fraction of which is then paid to the laborers by a North Korean head of the office.⁵⁶

A close examination into the management system of North Korean overseas laborers reveals that the North Korean overseas laborers generally do not have a labor contract and are affiliated with the North Korean companies at the time of their dispatch. Even after they had begun to work, no one testified that they had signed an employment contract. This indicated that they were not provided with any information on their conditions of labor (including contract period, work hours, base pay, allowance, insurance, workers' compensation, living condition, remittance to North Korea).

Hourly rates of laborers are stipulated on the paycheck that the Polish companies send with the monthly remuneration to the president of the North Korean company.⁵⁷ The North Korean laborers, however, cannot see these paychecks themselves, but are only allowed to see a separate paycheck made by North Korean companies. The North Korean laborers do not get access to this information and are thus paid only a fraction of their original salaries initially not even realizing the exploitation which they suffer. Although they should be earning a greater income than laborers of other countries since they work for longer hours, the North Korean laborers only receive one tenth of their original remuneration, because money is deducted by the DPRK authorities and embezzled by middle managers.

A comparison with other laborers reveals that an ordinary North Korean laborer receives six zlotys an hour, whereas laborers from Poland or other countries earn 120 zlotys for ten hours of work.⁵⁸ Six zlotys are less than 2.5 dollars.

54. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

55. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

56. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

57. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

58. These laborers work for 12 zlotys per hour.

In some cases, the North Korean companies paid the remunerations in zloty, even though the Polish companies initially had sent the actual remunerations in dollars. This suggests that the middle manager embezzled the money in consideration to the exchange rate differentials.

Even within the same industry, remunerations of North Korean laborers vary according to region. Although this may be in accordance to their contract details, the degree of the embezzlement may influence the actual remuneration that North Korean overseas laborers receive.

The DPRK authorities also take away the remuneration of North Korean laborers on various pretexts. According to a testimony collected by NKDB, authorities took away one hundred zlotys out of 400 zlotys under the pretext of building Kumsusan Palace of the Sun.⁵⁹

The overtime remuneration as well as the vacation bonuses provided by the Polish companies are not at all given to North Korean laborers.

When workers complain of such treatment, North Korean managers immediately send the person to another region. It is difficult to adjust to a new environment in a foreign country when you do not speak the same language. Besides, the new workplace that accommodates the displaced laborer does not welcome the person as he/she is labeled negatively due to their complaint. When the conflict aggravates, the laborers are immediately repatriated to the DPRK and are punished.⁶⁰

The North Korean laborers cannot return to the DPRK even if they are not satisfied with their conditions of labor and remuneration. This is because the North Korean laborers are dispatched basically with a debt to the North Korean company that paid for their travel expenses including the plane tickets to Poland. It is a difficult decision for the laborers, who have left their country to earn money for their families, to return indebted to the DPRK that is in a state of economic paralysis. It is well known among the dispatched laborers that many of those who still return, in spite of this situation, often encounter social and economic collapse of their families.

North Korean laborers are not permitted to use the banking system, and thus transfer their remuneration by someone who returns to the DPRK.

Witnesses who have been dispatched to other countries (not Poland) testify that laborers who normally return after about four years of work return with approximately 7000 to 8000 dollars.⁶¹

2. Working Conditions

In contrast to the North Korean laborers who work more than twelve hours a day for six days a week, the Polish laborers work eight hours a day from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm from Monday to Friday, which is a total of forty

59. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

60. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

61. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

hours a week. Because it usually becomes dark by 4:00 pm during November, workers in all types of businesses were leaving work by 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm at the time of NKDB's visit to Poland.

However, this is not applicable to North Korean laborers. It is usual for them to work for two hours overtime. They work eight hours on Saturdays and sometimes on Sundays as well.⁶² If they work overtime for about two hours, they are paid with an overtime rate of nine zlotys, slightly more than the basic hourly wage of six zlotys.⁶³ They may work until 8:30 pm during summer when they are behind their work schedule. Sometimes they were stopped from work at 10:00 pm because the Polish residents of the area complained about the noise from the work place.⁶⁴

The level of the North Korean laborers' skills is fairly high. When given the same amount of workload, the output of the Polish laborers is only a half of the North Korean's output.⁶⁵ Since they work in a contract work system, the manager attempts to impose longer working hours, and compel the North Korean laborers to work faster in the construction sites.

Given the circumstances, the rest periods are very short. Except for thirty minutes of lunch time out of the twelve hours of work, they work without rest.⁶⁶ They sometimes even have to work during national holidays. The North Korean laborers can attain equal rest periods as other workers only when Polish companies raise this issue.

While North Korean laborers have to work without rest even amid the midsummer heat, the Polish companies can take action to ensure the rest period of the North Korean laborers. If the authority on the work site was solely granted to North Korean managers, rest periods would not have been provided. Laborers of other nationalities take sufficient rest. After arriving to work at 7:00 am, they have some time for snack at 10:00 am and are provided with bread. They eat lunch at 2:00 pm and leave work at 3:00 pm.⁶⁷

The North Korean laborers performing intense labor did not have insurance nor were their injuries covered by insurance as their contracts had stipulated by the Polish companies. Medical expenses are deducted from their remuneration and injuries make them fall under the displeasure of the North Korean managers and co-workers. Although earning money on the side is forbidden in principle, there have been cases in which North Korean laborers work as day laborers by using their personal connections.

While Polish laborers usually receive vacation bonuses during holidays, North Korean laborers cannot rest during these days and instead do

62. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

63. The hourly wage of Polish construction workers is 12 zlotys per hour.

64. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

65. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

66. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

67. Information obtained by NKDB via field investigation and interviews.

extra work for four hours. They even sometimes work for fifteen hours a day. While other laborers spend their holidays, this period is an opportunity for the North Korean laborers to earn more money. Public holidays are not enjoyed by North Korean laborers, because they cannot earn money during this period.

North Korean companies also send the laborers on vacation to their home country after three years and six months since they began their work, and they pay the expenses which cost about 1200 dollars.⁶⁸ However, the North Korean laborers rarely go on vacation if they did not receive any remuneration or if they did not gather a sufficient amount of money to send to their families. Thus, many laborers give up on their vacations since if they remain at their workplace they can earn 600 dollars instead.⁶⁹ Whether they have really received this money, however, is left unidentified.

The working clothes for the North Korean laborers are provided by the Polish companies, which are one pair of summer clothes, one pair of winter clothes as well as safety helmets and shoes. Buses for transportation and gasoline are also provided. Doctors receive white gowns for their work.

The Polish employment agencies and North Korean companies or North Korean organizations draw up a contract to receive and send North Korean laborers. The North Korean laborers in Poland, however, do not have individual labor contracts. They do not receive a contract after their dispatch is settled and arrive in Poland. They become aware of the contract details, after working for a certain period of time, from their surrounding conditions and from those who arrived earlier.⁷⁰

Even the North Korean companies have a certain standard for the amount of remuneration they pay the North Korean overseas laborers. A document exists within the North Korean companies and the remuneration according to the laborers' work period is stipulated on the paycheck that the managers keep.⁷¹

The Polish companies provide the remuneration of laborers either in dollars or the local currency, zlotys. If the remuneration is paid in zlotys, the North Korean managers exchange the currency to dollars from the bank before giving the money to the laborers. If the remuneration is paid in dollars, it is converted to zlotys for the laborers to buy basic necessities while living in Poland. Ninety percent of the remuneration that North Korean laborers originally earn is dedicated to the government.⁷² Even the remaining ten percent is sometimes deducted for an important event or other pretexts of the country. The North Korean laborers are left unaware

68. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

69. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

70. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

71. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

72. Information obtained by NKDB during its field investigation in Poland.

of the fact that the Polish companies provide incentives, vacation bonuses, and overtime payments.

3. *Living Conditions Including Residence and Meals*

The living conditions, especially the housing environment for North Korean laborers in Poland, greatly varies according to the region of dispatch and occupational group. The local environment and the contract company significantly affect the living conditions of North Korean laborers. They do not have the right to choose their residence, but instead have to follow the housing and meals that the North Korean companies provide.

As for the residence, the environment is relatively better than that of other countries due to the overall conditions in Europe. In order to facilitate the control of the managers, however, numerous laborers have to sleep in one room. The most inferior conditions are presented when more than ten laborers have to stay in a room that is 19.8 square meters.⁷³ They are not permitted to use the room alone. This is due to the mutual surveillance system that the overseas dispatch laborers are basically living under.

According to witnesses, although housing expenses were deducted from their remuneration, the North Korean laborers had to live in inferior conditions because they were provided with the residence by the DPRK authorities. In inferior conditions, the houses were only equipped with mattresses or beds made of wood, heating was not provided to save on gas bills, and warm water was only available during a certain time in the evening.

Although meal expenses were provided by the Polish companies, they were embezzled or partially offered to the DPRK government by the middle managers. Their meals were cooked with cheap, low quality rice, and the insufficient amount compelled them even to beg for food to their neighbors. Because the North Korean companies do not inform the laborers about the original amount of remuneration or how much is deducted from their remuneration for meal expenses, the North Korean laborers have no choice but to passively accept such treatments. Only after the North Korean laborers protested to their managers did the North Korean companies sometimes employ a cook to provide proper meals.⁷⁴

There also have been cases in which the Polish companies provided the meals. In such cases, the North Korean laborers were equally provided with nutritious meals as laborers of other nationalities. Moreover, because the North Korean managers could not arbitrarily deduct meal expenses from the remunerations, conditions were better for the North Korean laborers performing intense labor.⁷⁵ This is an important aspect for them

73. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

74. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

75. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

because the quality of food is not guaranteed by the North Korean companies.

Although North Korean laborers should basically have insurance, the medical expenses from the Polish government are not given to the laborers. Furthermore, in cases where the North Korean laborers are injured or temporarily ill, the North Korean companies deduct their remuneration, even though the Polish companies pay their remuneration on a regular basis.

In 2014, a North Korean laborer died from a gas explosion during welding work in Gdansk, Poland. Another North Korean laborer in an unknown region of Poland was heavily injured from a falling accident. Although he received surgery for the ruptured skull and was sent back to North Korea, he died after two to three months.⁷⁶ Despite the work conditions accompanying the risk of such accidents, the cost for surgery or medical treatment is forcefully deducted from the laborers' remuneration.

4. Surveillance and Control

The passports of North Korean laborers are collected by the North Korean head of the office right after their arrival to Poland. The head of the office personally manages their passports. They have a separate room for themselves which are under strict security. A certain period of time after their dispatch, the North Korean laborers are able to receive a temporary identification. There was an incident in which a North Korean laborer was caught by a local police while traveling by bus without any identification. The North Korean laborer was released only after the laborer brought the police officer to the residence and showed him the passport.⁷⁷

North Korean construction laborers in Poland have been staying in the country for seven to eight years since their initial dispatch in 2008.⁷⁸ Although their passport is valid for five years, there have been rarely any laborers who returned to the DPRK because all of them were forced to extend their contract periods.⁷⁹ This is in order to save the expenses of sending them back and bringing new labor force to Poland. They are not permitted to make phone calls with their families in the DPRK. Even when their parents pass away, they cannot immediately return home but are only permitted to accompany a superior on a business trip. Letters (which cannot be sealed) and money sent to their families are delivered by someone who returns to the DPRK.

Due to the language barrier, communication with Polish company managers is difficult for North Korean laborers. Therefore, they receive

76. SEBASTIAN WEIS, CASH FOR KIM: NORTH KOREAN FORCED LABORERS IN POLAND, (*Vice Germany*) (2016), https://www.vice.com/en_id/article/ypea8j/cash-for-kim-north-korean-forced-laborers-in-poland [<https://perma.cc/Q4L7-7P7H>].

77. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

78. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

79. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

information on their work from the North Korean managers who deliver messages from the Polish managers. Although some communication exists among the laborers, contact with others outside the work place is limited.

When NKDB's field research team attempted to talk to a North Korean laborer in a construction site of Warszawa, the team was immediately obstructed by a North Korean manager who had been watching.

North Korean managers exercise a greater authority according to their rank, in the order of president, party leader, and State Security Department officer. The State Security Department officers manage and supervise each construction site. They sequentially inspect each region in order to manage the laborers in the region. Because there are only a few of them to manage a large number of laborers, they plant a spy among the laborers. The head of the office of each city had one informant in each work unit that consisted of about ten people.⁸⁰

Although a large number of laborers were put into a single place, individual conversations or actions were restricted. In particular, there was a total ban on cell phones, TV, South Korean dramas or movies, and a violation of these rules resulted in the forced repatriation and punishment in the DPRK. Watching local media is also forbidden, and the authorities strived to prevent the laborers from having any outside contact, and communication which may lead to a breakaway from the site. Numerous laborers are put into a single place in order to restrict any possibility of having access to such media.

The laborers who cannot go out during weekdays console themselves with strong liquor. Because it is expensive, they sometimes drink industrial alcohol or bootleg liquor by buying the ingredients themselves.

As in the DPRK, the North Korean laborers have self-criticism sessions on their daily lives and their work output and ideological education on Sundays. Sunday is the only day in which they are allowed to go out. This is only possible after they finish cleaning up and complete their Ideological education and self-criticism sessions at 10:00 am.⁸¹ Although two people are to move together in principle, seniors are sometimes allowed to go out alone.⁸² They may occasionally go out at 10:00 am and return at 7:00 pm

The North Korean laborers usually spend this time on buying presents in second-hand shops or markets with the money they have gathered. Because the amount of money they gathered is little, North Koreans carrying a bundle of second-hand clothes have been frequently witnessed.

Although the police sometimes come and check their passports and the Ministry of Labour in Poland inspect their residence or work place, there have not been any follow-up actions. On the other hand, there has been a visit from a Polish human rights organization protesting the human

80. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

81. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

82. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

rights conditions of the laborers.⁸³

On this matter, the superior authorities of the DPRK gave an order to avoid any conversation in case of outside visits. They instructed that they should take good care to ensure a future workplace for their junior colleagues as well, since North Korean laborers have been repatriated due to these people.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong-un's policy on the management of North Korean overseas laborers in Poland orders, "[s]trict military life should also be applied to overseas work," and thereby controls their working and living environment just as in the military.⁸⁴ Personal insults and despotism to the newly arrived laborers occur severely from the head of the office, unit leader, as well as the seniors.

Several cases on the insults and violence of seniors to their junior colleagues have been reported.⁸⁵ On December 31, 2014, a junior colleague was beaten by a group in Gdansk twice because he had defied his seniors.⁸⁶ Consequently, the leader was summoned to the DPRK, while the head of the office was demoted to an ordinary laborer. In July 2015, a newly arrived laborer was beaten by his senior colleagues in Warszawa, for the reason that he had sat down for a rest.⁸⁷

On the other hand, there have been separate punishments for those who violated the local law in Poland. In March, 2015, a North Korean welder residing in Gdansk was caught while shoplifting a video player from a store and was detained for a day.⁸⁸ For the reason of bringing disgrace to the country, the laborer was not given any remuneration for six months and was moved to another city.

V. The Case of Russia

While there are testimonies about North Korean female laborers working in restaurants or clothing factories, the general dispatch of laborers in Russia is concentrated in forestry and construction. The ministry responsible for a certain project is in charge of the dispatch of laborers and both the Party and the military have independent control over the process. Especially due to the economic hardships of the 1990s, organs within the Party, the cabinet and the military began to dispatch laborers autonomously in order to earn capital.⁸⁹

83. Information provided by Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland.

84. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

85. Jungwoo Park, *North Korean Labourers in Poland Suffering Double Whammy of Mockery and Physical Assault*, RADIO FREE ASIA (Nov. 11, 2015), http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/food_international_org/nklabor-11102015153948.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=%EB%B9%84%EC%95%84%EB%83%A5 [https://perma.cc/NBY3-BZY2].

86. *Id.*

87. *Id.*

88. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

89. Information obtained by NKDB via a series of in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors who were dispatched to work in Russia.

According to testimonies, North Korean overseas laborers are managed by the Overseas Construction Bureau of the Committee of Overseas Economy under the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea.⁹⁰ In the case of the construction sector, there are Overseas Construction Office affiliated to the Ministry of Trade and the West Public Building Construction Office affiliated with the Capital Construction Management Bureau under the Capital Construction Committee. Apart from these two agencies there is also the Overseas Construction Management Bureau, under the direct control of the cabinet, which has state-owned enterprises such as "39 Construction" in Moscow).⁹¹ Each ministry of the cabinet including the Railway Ministry and the Ministry of Physical Education is directly dispatching laborers through its overseas construction training school. Additionally, the "Bureau 8" Construction Office under the Financial Management Department affiliated with the Party, "Bureau 7000" and "Bureau 8000" under the army's guard, "Department 25" of the People's Armed Forces and the First brigade of the Engineering Bureau were all found out to be involved in dispatch of laborers. The dispatch of construction laborers overseas seems to be carried out under the planning and control by the Overseas Construction Supervision Bureau.⁹² As an organ affiliated with the Korean Workers' Party, Office 39 is assumed to manage the overall foreign funds coming from the forestry and overseas construction sectors. However, its subordinate bodies were not identified. The institutions in charge of the dispatch of laborers seem to have autonomous business systems. The Overseas Construction Office had subordinate bodies such as "Munsu," "Reungra," "Okryu," "5.16" and "7.27," while "Bureau 7000" and "Bureau 8000" are in charge of enterprises such as "Namgang Overseas Construction."⁹³ Thus, it was confirmed that the Party, the Cabinet and the military in the DPRK are operating their own networks in order to implement the policy of dispatching North Korean workers to Russia. In the case of the forestry sector, it is less preferred by laborers than construction, due to the high intensity of the labor and low level of remuneration. The North Korean laborers who are dispatched to the forestry sector in Russia are affiliated with agencies and companies under the Forestry Management Bureau in each province in the DPRK and central to the dispatch is the Ministry of Forestry.⁹⁴

According to official data released by the Russian Ministry of Labor, there is an existing job quota for 47,364 North Korean laborers for 2015.⁹⁵ However this is not the number of actual issued visas to North Korean laborers in the country. NKDB's investigation estimates the number of North Korean laborers working in Russia to be somewhere close to around

90. Anonymous interviewees 29, 30 (Russia 2011).

91. Anonymous interviewee 16 (Russia 2006).

92. Anonymous interviewee 10 (Russia 2008).

93. Anonymous interviewee 33 (Russia 2014).

94. Anonymous interviewee 26 (Russia 2006).

95. *Around 40,000 North Korean overseas laborers built all of the buildings in Primorsky*, DONGA DAILY (Dec. 22, 2015).

50,000 people.⁹⁶

The number of North Korean overseas laborers dispatched to Russia in the forestry sector shows a high concentration in Khabarovsk and Amur Oblast. The Russian Far Eastern Forestry Representative of North Korea located in Russia, which is responsible for overseeing the work of the North Korean enterprises in Russia, maintains a semi-diplomatic relationship with Russia. Union Enterprise 1 and Union Enterprise 2, that are the main entities employing North Korean workers in the country, have entered Russia as an autonomous business organization. It is estimated that the number of North Korean loggers has decreased to 2000 or less after the year 2010.

Regarding the construction sector, The Korean Workers' Party, individual ministries and military organs are autonomously dispatching construction workers to Russia. They install administrative offices for construction or bureaus, and manage factories and agencies such as Munsu, Reungra, Okryu, Sakhalin 1 Construction, Moscow 39 Construction, Namgang Overseas Construction, Geumreung, Susandseong, and Hwangyeongsan. These factories and agencies appear to be operating in the form of local corporations in regions of Russia that show a demand for construction. As income in the form of foreign currency from logging decreased considerably in the 1990s "Arduous March" and the 2000s, the DPRK authorities have been actively involved in the dispatch of construction workers for procurement of foreign currency.

North Korean overseas workers are dispersed in cities in all regions of Russia. Their number is concentrated in the western parts of Russia in federal cities such as Saint Petersburg and Moscow, in Tartastan Republic, in Makhachkala—the capital city of Dagestan Republic, and cities in the Russian Far East and Siberia region including those in Omsk Oblast, Novosibirsk Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai, and Primorsky Krai.

A. Human Rights Violations

North Korean workers in both the forestry sector and the construction sector are suffering from the abuse of their North Korean managers and employers, as well as the systematic exploitation of the DPRK state authorities as a whole. The following paragraphs provide information on some of the human and labor rights violations that are occurring most often.⁹⁷

When it comes to the workers residence in Russia, North Koreans are not able to choose their own accommodation and received instructions from their managers as to where they will live once they arrive at their workplace. The living conditions very often do not meet even the bare minimum for safe and healthy living, especially in the case of loggers, who

96. NKDB's estimates based on field investigations and research.

97. The information is based on a series of fifty interviews taken with North Korean defectors who had experience working in Russia during the time they lived in North Korea. Wherever excerpts of their testimonies are included in this section the corresponding codes of the interviews have been included the way they have been categorized in NKDB's database.

sleep in a wooden house or wooden container box (bbangtong)⁹⁸. Running water and electricity are rarely available, and as a result water is drained from nearby rivers or obtained from snow and electricity is produced via a local generator. North Korean construction workers are sometimes instructed to live in uncompleted housing (still under construction), which is technically illegal and means that those residencies do not have any facilities to turn them into a livable space. Additionally, according to Russian law workers are not allowed to sleep at the construction site, but this is a frequent practice for North Korean workers. Overall North Korean workers reside in makeshift structures or other facilities not suitable for safe living, in which water use, cooling and heating are often problematic or non-existent. Such conditions become the source of very poor hygiene and linked to it is the worsened state of health of the North Korean workers.

Food costs are deducted from the workers' wages and in many cases the workers are responsible for cooking their own food. Witnesses report a lot of corrupted practices associated with the embezzlement of funds initially allocated by the Russian companies for the supply of food to the workers. The North Korean laborers are provided with work clothes only once and when these get worn out they are responsible for repairing them on their own.

Our dormitory was dreadful. We didn't have water so we had to wash our faces with snow. Three to four people shared a room in the logging fields, and they deducted money from our wages. They deducted expenses for winter clothes and blankets . . .⁹⁹

We lived in log cabins. We moved them around every time we changed our logging fields. We had to cook rice with melted snow . . . Our beds were just wooden boards nailed high onto the wall. A fire was placed in the center. We did our laundry and cooked our own meals. Anyone who has cooked before at home becomes the cook. No meat is given. Salted dry sea mustard gathered during fall, soybean paste and oil, that's all. But it's still better than in North Korea.¹⁰⁰

Medical help is essential for the North Korean laborers who work in especially dangerous conditions which make them prone to accidents and work-related injuries. This is especially true for the forestry sector, where the logging work can be very dangerous, more so when the workers lack the necessary safety gear and proper tools to complete their tasks. Additionally the severe weather conditions in the Russian Far East in winter make the work of North Korean loggers especially dangerous and they suffer from hypothermia and frostbite, which in extreme cases can lead to disabilities and death. Each North Korean union enterprise and its corresponding offices have a hospital where injured or sick workers are treated.

98. This is often called "train bbangtong." The internal structure of a bbangtong has a heater in the center, two barrels in front of the door, and a space to sleep on both sides.

99. Anonymous interviewee 4 (Russia 1995).

100. Anonymous interviewee 3 (Russia 2006).

However, the quality and level of medical care is quite unsatisfactory and very often only the most basic treatment is provided to patients. In the case of construction workers, if a medical facility exists in the vicinity of the construction site, it is usually a small medical office rather than a properly functioning clinic or a hospital.

The meal that the office gave us was not enough. So illegal practices were inevitable Daily necessities were given once to those who came for the first time. We did our best not to spend any money that came into our pockets . . . There was one doctor. All he could do was apply some disinfectant to the wound. Urgent patients were given emergency treatments from hospitals outside and were then sent back home, because hospitalization costs money. There were many people who returned because they were injured. Because they couldn't work with the injury, the officials told them to stop freeloading and to go home. Sometimes fellow workers do collect some money and give them. But the Supervision Department never spends a penny on these things.¹⁰¹

Excessive overtime work is very common for the North Korean laborers dispatched in Russia. Working hours are usually the longest (twelve to twenty hours) in the summer for construction workers and in the winter (twelve to eighteen hours) for the ones in the logging fields of the Far East. North Korean defectors report working longer hours of intensive labor and receiving almost no free days. North Korean workers can rest on North Korean public holidays and the rest of the time they would also work on Sundays. NKDB collected many testimonies of North Korean workers who revealed that overworking led to lack of concentration, which subsequently turned to be the cause of many work-related injuries.

According to most testimonies provided by North Koreans who were dispatched to work in Russia, they received about \$100 per month and they were not compensated for their overtime work. A person who used to be a Party Secretary at Office 21 until 2008 reported that eighty percent of the money, which was received by the enterprise as workers' salaries, was transferred to the North Korean regime, thus leaving only twenty percent for the workers. In reality the North Korean laborers received just about seven or eight percent of the original amount as the remaining part is deducted by their North Korean managers for food, accommodation, party loyalty fees and other costs. The so called "loyalty fund," a financial contribution that must be made by each worker to the regime, varies from minimum \$500 to maximum \$1000. Since in many cases the original salary of the workers is not big enough to cover this amount, the workers are indebted to the regime and sometimes go back to North Korea without having been able to repay the entire amount.

I would drive a car that carried wood for 12 hours a day and the two of us would take it in turns. We didn't get a day off. I didn't know how much the wages were. Even when I was there they would not give the money directly but transfer it to North Korea.¹⁰²

101. Anonymous interviewee 24 (Russia 1989).

102. Anonymous interviewee 4 (Russia 1995).

Construction is better, but in regards to time it's like working 16 or 15 hours a day. I worked in an apartment, so even if I had to work a long time at least it was safe I work from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm thinking that I should work hard to make money. I worked like crazy until it got dark, and the money I got was about 100 dollars that's about 100 thousand won (in South Korean won). There were times when I would get this much, but also times when I don't, and so there was a high rate of runaways. You couldn't even earn 1,000 dollars in three years, but if you ran away and worked you could earn about 1,000 dollars.¹⁰³

About 80% was taken off each worker to pay a portion (to the North Korean authorities), from the 20% after taking off an amount for delivery goods and food, then the rest (about 7-8%) would be given to the workers. There were times I would receive 150 or 200 dollars, but usually the average would be 80-90 dollars. The amount paid to the party secretary was always 265 dollars a month . . .¹⁰⁴

Surveillance and strict control are exercised over the North Korean workers dispatched overseas. In general they are not allowed to leave the premises of their work sites without explicit approval from their North Korean managers. Facing poor working conditions, scarce payments and debt, North Korean workers in Russia seek other sources of income outside their designated workplace. There are many cases in which North Koreans pay bribes to go outside their workplace, or even run away, in order to do some construction work, potato harvesting, home repairs, collection of scrap metal and other jobs, which can bring them additional income. As the work permit issued by the Russian authorities is only valid for their original companies, any side jobs taken up by the North Korean workers are illegal. Some of the people interviewed by NKDB for its research pointed out that sometimes the Russian employers will take advantage of the vulnerability of the North Korean workers and knowing that they are not in a position to complain, they would not pay them for their work.

It isn't a human life. The clothes were also really tattered and covered in oil, I had to work 12 months throughout the year. It was inhumane. They gave me one pair of shoes. I escaped in 2008. Two years before the escape, I said I was sick and just rested. It isn't an issue if you rest because you are sick. You would get medical treatment, and you could work here and there and earn a little bit by working part time. I earned a little bit of money helping out at a house near the company. I got by doing some things in my past time. They didn't send me back to North Korea. If you kept giving things to the officers they don't send you back. I would give \$200, and in one month I could earn up to \$800, and I did some construction work. I did some extra work outside the workplace.¹⁰⁵

Duplicating the daily life of average North Korean people inside the DPRK, workers dispatched overseas are forced to continue receiving ideological education and to participate in self-criticism sessions even abroad. In some cases regarding North Korean enterprises in Russia, ideology ses-

103. Anonymous interviewee 5 (Russia 2006).

104. Anonymous interviewee 13 (Russia 2005).

105. Anonymous interviewee 5 (Russia 2006).

sion were only a formality, while in reality the laborers were sent to work in order to earn more money for their companies.

North Korean laborers in Russia are not allowed to have telephone conversations with their families remaining in the DPRK and can only communicate with them via letters, which is done through their colleagues who go back to North Korea or a delivery serviceman affiliated with the Ministry of State Security. The workers are also not allowed to watch local TV or listen to Russian radio while living in Russia. Contacts with people outside the workplace are often restricted and as a result are very limited. One of the most serious offences is considered escaping from one's workplace. Laborers who run away and are then caught by the North Korean authorities become victims of extrajudicial punishment. According to witness testimonies of North Korean defectors who used to work in the forestry sector in Russia, some of the union enterprise offices maintained detention facilities, where laborers will be punished and sometimes detained for indefinite periods of time.

I couldn't contact my family in North Korea for a year. The Russians tell the North Korean authorities to allow families to be dispatched with the laborers so that they can lead a stable and humane life, but the North Koreans say that it isn't possible that way . . . As we didn't get paid our wages, many just ran away. At around the year 2000, they began to carry out investigations in cooperation with the Russian police against people who ran away. If you got caught then you would be sent back to North Korea right away.¹⁰⁶

They say that party life is not taken so seriously and it is done differently from North Korea. They really crackdown on radios and TVs. When you go out to do part time jobs you hear a lot of foreign news so you buy a recorder. Generally you can get Chinese or South Korean signal easily. In the residences you do not know who is a spy so you can't listen there.¹⁰⁷

At first I went out (to do side jobs) to earn money. As I went out without any identification I wasn't able to drive. So do you think there was anything else for me to do but construction work . . . (After I escaped the office) The People's Security Department started meddling again. There isn't a place that they can't reach in Russia. They came to catch me again. I gave money there on the spot, and pretending they didn't want it, they said I had to promise to be back in the winter and let me go. I was planning to go back to the office, but there was a rumor that they would take everybody back home so I couldn't go back to the office. I survived for 17 years. They would imprison you and repatriate you. There was a detention facility within the union enterprise. There was a wooden house that was boarded up, and it was a detention facility. There was one for the union, enterprise and a separate one for the People's Security Department . . .¹⁰⁸

VI. The Case of Mongolia

From the early 2000s until 2008 a relatively small number of North Korean workers were deployed in Mongolia. Around 200 to 500 workers

106. Anonymous interviewee 1 (Russia 1995).

107. Anonymous interviewee 3 (Russia 2006).

108. Anonymous interviewee 8 (Russia 1995).

were involved in industries such as textiles, handicraft, construction and roadwork.¹⁰⁹ In 2008 there was a sharp increase in the number of North Korean workers in Mongolia, mainly in the construction sector, as a result of the signing of a Mongolia-North Korea exchange agreement. The agreement permitted the hiring of maximum 4000 North Korean workers.¹¹⁰ It also stipulated that the North Korean workers will enjoy fair labor rights and conditions such as an eight-hour working day and a five-day working week.¹¹¹ The workers were also supposed to have the opportunity to experience life in Mongolia on their own.

NKDB's field investigations in Mongolia have shown that the reality is quite different. The North Korean laborers dispatched to Mongolia are facing very difficult conditions, while working numerous hours of overtime, which is not properly paid to them. Additionally their living environment is equally harmful, exposing them to many human rights violations.

The visas of the North Korean laborers are issued by the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to witnesses there is a company that manages the dispatch of North Korean workers to Mongolia. The company is known as Genco and it is located in Ulaanbaatar.¹¹²

According to reports received through NKDB's investigation there are several North Korean companies that send workers overseas to Genco, Geumneung, Taeryeong. They usually enter contracts with other companies in Mongolia. However, Namgang Construction company, which is affiliated with the DPRK Overseas Construction Guidance Bureau, would only have dealings with the Mongolian government.

The workers are usually sent on one to three year-working visa, which is standard compared with other regions where North Korean workers are dispatched overseas.

The Center for Employment Service under the Mongolia Ministry of Labor plays an important role in the import and output of foreign laborers in Mongolia. Unfortunately this government-run agency did not provide NKDB with any details regarding our inquiry about the North Korean workers hired in the country.

Via the collection of testimonies and reports, and from filed observations NKDB has estimated that the number of North Korean laborers in Mongolia is about 2000 people.¹¹³ In the beginning of the 2000s with the boom in the construction sector there were even more workers dispatched there but many have returned as a result of the unstable economy, which

109. Information provided to NKDB by interviewees whose identity cannot be revealed due to security concerns.

110. Young Kwan Kim, *High Level Mongolian Government Official States "2,000 North Korean Labourers in Mongolia Guaranteed Labour Rights,"* VOA (Dec. 4, 2014), <http://www.voakorea.com/a/2544792.html> [<https://perma.cc/2GKA-9P5V>].

111. *Id.*

112. *Company Overview of Genco Holdings Pte Ltd*, BLOOMBERG, <https://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=44488591> [<https://perma.cc/L9M6-838U>].

113. NKDB's estimates based on in-depth interviews and field investigations in Mongolia.

has heavily affected the construction business. The majority of the workers are men, employed on construction sites (about 1800), around 220 female laborers are engaged in textiles and handicrafts, around fifty men are employed as miners and another 50 (mostly women) are working in restaurant and services.¹¹⁴ There is a very small number of highly skilled workers—about ten North Korean doctors.

North Korean workers are dispatched to Mongolia to work in a variety of fields—construction, mining, services and hospitality, the textile industry and even medical field.¹¹⁵ In the following paragraphs is more detailed information about different occupations held by North Korean workers in Mongolia.

Construction workers dispatched to Mongolia can largely be categorized into two groups. Soldiers employed by Namgang Construction and civilian workers employed by North Korean companies. North Korean construction workers usually come from Pyongyang, with some occasionally coming from rural areas such as Yangyang province. As North Korean laborers have to go through a thorough ideological examination, laborers who are dispatched are usually residents of Pyongyang coming from a high social class and social status that have shown loyalty to the party. Yet as those employed by Namgang are active duty soldiers, a high percentage will come from rural areas. As Pyongyang residents are usually not able to do their military service in Pyongyang, they will be sent to rural areas; and vice versa, those from rural areas go to Pyongyang to do their military service.

North Korean laborers dispatched to Mongolia generally speak very poor Mongolian but work-site managers are likely to speak Mongolian while work will be assigned and instructed through interpretation provided from the Mongolian company.

It is of the general opinion that North Korean laborers are highly skilled in each of their respective fields; North Korean construction workers dispatched to Mongolia are very skilled at tiling and plastering, with years of experience. There are occasions in which laborers will be dispatched even if they are not particularly skilled. However, due to the fact that work is done in groups, such laborers will be prone to critique and eventually return to North Korea. If they are able to withstand this, they will stay in Mongolia by helping their fellow laborers through preparing food or other necessities.

An interesting fact is that the majority of construction workers in Mongolia are people with skills who have already been dispatched to different countries before coming to Mongolia. This is because the laborers with

114. Information collected via NKDB's field investigations in Mongolia.

115. See Alistair Gale, *North Korea's Lucrative Labor Exports Come Under Pressure*, WALL ST. J. (July 7, 2016, 4:51p.m. ET), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/north-koreas-lucrative-labor-exports-come-under-pressure-1467916815> [<https://perma.cc/Q9RR-X66U>]; see also *U.S. joins diplomatic squeeze on North Korean labor exports*, FREE KOREA (July 11, 2016), <https://freekorea.us/2016/07/11/state-dept-joins-squeeze-on-n-korean-labor-exports/> [<https://perma.cc/UST2-8GE4>].

a low chance of escaping and that have had their ideology investigated, will be dispatched to Mongolia.

In the case of Namgang Construction, there are approximately 450 soldiers working in Mongolia.¹¹⁶ There are three groups consisting of 150 soldiers on separate construction sites, but with few jobs available a large number of them are on standby.¹¹⁷

North Korea has opened a lot of North Korean restaurants around the world as a way of bringing in foreign currency. Findings show that there are five restaurants managed by the North Korean state in Mongolia, with three being in Ulaanbaatar. The names of the restaurants are Pyongyang Art Restaurant, Korea Minjok Restaurant and the largest one Pyongyang Baekhwa Restaurant. It appears that there are approximately twenty female restaurant workers working in the three restaurants in Ulaanbaatar. There are two more restaurants operated by North Korea in Darkhan, where there are about five people working at the restaurant including a supervisor and female workers.¹¹⁸

The majority of North Korean restaurant workers are in their twenties and come to Mongolia for three years, with most female workers usually working in one place for two to three years.¹¹⁹ Some will register to be students at Mongolian language academies in order to get a visa.

There are ten workers working at the “Pyongyang Art Restaurant” in Ulaanbaatar, seven employees and the restaurateur’s three family members.¹²⁰ They are mostly from Pyongyang and have one to three years of work experience. Naturally many South Koreans, but also North Korean, Chinese, and Mongolian people will visit the restaurant, with a high number of Chinese and a relatively low number of Mongolian visitors. The restaurant workers did not seem to be particularly distant towards South Korean guests, will simply treat them like any other guests and engage in conversation. However, upon request to take a photo with the employees, guests are told that photographs are limited to performance times.¹²¹ It appeared that employees had been educated on how to act towards guests. This is the same with other restaurants.

Pyongyang Baekhwa Restaurant in Ulaanbaatar is the largest North Korean restaurant with a total of ten North Korean female workers.¹²² Opened in 2014, the restaurant opened a branch (a skewers restaurant) in the vicinity.¹²³ The female employees are responsible for cooking, waitressing and performances. There are only a few party members and the majority has graduated either from the four-year Pyongyang Arts School or can play an instrument upon graduating from the six-year Kim Won Bong

116. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia).

117. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia).

118. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia).

119. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

120. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

121. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

122. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

123. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

University of Music.¹²⁴ The female restaurateur runs the restaurant with her husband, with one person being in charge of the accounts. The restaurant also has a shop that sells souvenirs such as paintings drawn by North Korean artists, art pieces, medicine, badges, photographs and flowers.¹²⁵

Lastly, Korea Minjok Restaurant is comparatively smaller with two employees, a restaurateur and a chef.¹²⁶ South Korean food catered for South Korean guests stand out from the menu, and South Korean diners are greeted very naturally. Nonetheless, according to a Mongolian source, the employees will always go around in pairs when buying ingredients at the market. There are two bedrooms in the residence, one bedroom is for the couple in charge and the rest is a room for ten people so that they can all keep an eye on each other. While restaurant employees have a lot of contact with outsiders in order to increase income, it appears that in reality surveillance is more severe than other jobs.

NKDB's on-site investigation team visited a cashmere factory employing North Korean laborers in Mongolia. Established in 1989, it is the representative cashmere factory in Mongolia and has continuously employed North Korean laborers over the past ten years.¹²⁷ There are a total of 400 factory workers and currently eighty North Korean workers.¹²⁸ It was revealed that the female workers currently dispatched there had their three year visa extended to five years. As the contract was for five years, it was possible to extend the visa. A condition for employment in the agreement made between Mongolia and North Korea is that the workers should be between thirty to forty years of age, but in reality most look like they are in their teens or early twenties and work on the machinery without rest.¹²⁹

According to a source affiliated with the factory, the North Korean employees will work from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, the same as other workers. They will usually work two hours overtime to increase their income.¹³⁰

North Korean workers will receive 800,000 Mongolian tugrik a month, which is comparatively higher than local laborers.¹³¹ When working overtime, they can earn more than one million Mongolian tugrik. All workers sleep and eat in the factories, an environment that is favorable for North Korean laborers.

The Mongolian supervisors were aware that a large portion of the laborers' wages are given to the North Korean authorities. They revealed that this factory was different to others in that it gave the wages directly to the North Korean laborers. While it was not possible to check if the wages were directly given to the North Korean laborers by asking a North Korean laborer, a source affiliated with the factory firmly stated that it was so. The

124. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

125. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

126. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

127. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

128. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

129. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia.

130. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

131. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

source revealed that while it is difficult to know how much of the wages is given to North Korean authorities, Mongolian supervisors will not interfere with this matter. The basic work of the factory workers is managed by the Mongolian supervisors.¹³²

The working conditions of the factory were comparatively good as laborers from different countries are all given the same conditions by the Mongolian supervisor. They will live in the accommodation provided by the Mongolian company and live in groups at the same residence with workers from other countries. Meals are also provided by the Mongolian company and thus laborers are given the same food.

It was not verified if restrictions were placed on the workers on going outside, but it appears that they do not have a lot of contact with colleagues from other countries. There are at least two North Korean workers in each section, and it can be inferred that this has been done so that they can supervise one another.

North Korean oriental doctors are also dispatched overseas as North Korean laborers. North Korean doctors will either work in local Mongolian hospitals or independently run a hospital. The majority of them are from Pyongyang Medical University, and have about twenty years of medical experience after graduation, making them between forty to sixty years old.¹³³ Even the doctors themselves are not aware of the period they will be working in Mongolia, with some having had experience working in Europe and other countries. While it is not possible to know exactly how long a doctor will be dispatched for, it appears that the majority will work for three to five years, with staff members rotating on a two to three year basis.

NKDB's on-site investigation team visited one hospital with two North Korean oriental doctors. The doctor that the team met was fifty-three years old and had been in Mongolia for one year.¹³⁴ He was living in Mongolia with his wife while his son was in Pyongyang, studying medicine.

At the moment of the field investigation conducted by NKDB there were ten North Korean oriental doctors posted in Mongolia, with some in areas other than Ulaanbaatar.¹³⁵ The doctors will work according to the hospital's working hours, starting at 9:00 am and finishing at 5:00 pm, and spend their evenings doing activities they enjoy. While they will occasionally go to have a drink, it does not appear that they have a lot of freedom. The doctor was reluctant to reveal when he will return to North Korea and what he does after work.

North Korean doctors will usually know enough Mongolian to work and to give treatment. When North Korean doctors first come to Mongolia they will study Mongolian with a Mongolian dictionary and create amicable relationships with the hospital's Mongolian staff members. It appears

132. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

133. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

134. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia

135. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia

that they were all sent to Mongolia in 2014 and had received Mongolian language lessons for two to three months before being dispatched.

North Korean doctors live in the same apartment, separated for couples.¹³⁶ The decision to return to North Korea is made by the state and thus the doctors are in a position to be ready to be sent back whenever a decision is made.

While North Korean doctors are limited in their contact with outsiders to a certain extent, it appears that they are relatively free in choosing how to spend their time after work. They replied that they have already visited South Korean restaurants, but it was not possible to check whether they had any contact with outsiders, other than patients treated during working hours.

North Korean doctors must always work in twos to allow mutual surveillance; however, the level of surveillance in the hospital did not seem to be particularly high. Using Mongolian mobile phones and I-pads, they appeared to be very up to date with South Korean news, even mentioning the president.¹³⁷ As an inter-Korean talk was being held at the time, they had been checking the news on the internet and asked the investigation team for their opinions.

Mongolia is rich in underground resources, making it one of the top countries that earn foreign currency through exportation of minerals. While Mongolia has plenty of mines, many of them are currently not being run due to Mongolia's worsening economy which has led to a decrease in the number of coal miners. It has been revealed that fifty male North Korean laborers work in mines.¹³⁸ A gold mining company stated that each person earns 200 dollars a month.¹³⁹ As the North Korean workers are soldiers, they will mine using equipment brought over from North Korea.

As many of the mining equipment can also be used for farming, the miners will also partake in farming. In this manner, they are seeking to increase extra income. However, it has been revealed that North Korean miners were sent back to North Korea four to five years ago for an unknown reason, and is uncertain whether they have returned.¹⁴⁰

Other than the aforementioned fields, there are other North Korean laborers earning foreign currency for North Korea in Mongolia. There is a taekwondo professor at Mongolian National University who has been working for ten years.¹⁴¹ While the income from a university in Mongolia

136. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

137. Information collected by NKDB during field investigation in Mongolia

138. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

139. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

140. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

141. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

is relatively low, the North Korean professor speaks Mongolian very well and is permitted to participate in international events such as competing in a competition in Bulgaria. The taekwondo professor appears to have come to Mongolia with his daughter.

A. Human Rights Violations

One of the most serious problems faced by the North Korean laborers dispatched in Mongolia is unpaid salaries. NKDB obtained many reports by involved individuals that there are many Mongolian construction companies which are withholding the laborers' salaries because they are experiencing financial difficulties. One such company is ENIGMA, which is responsible for the construction of the Mongolian National University. In certain cases the wages of the workers are delayed several months.¹⁴² When the workers are finally paid, they do not receive the full amount of their remuneration. On average Mongolian workers are paid about 50,000 Mongolian tugrik (approximately \$25), while North Korean workers who perform general labor receive about 5000 tugrik or about \$2.50.¹⁴³

North Korean labourers working on the Mongolian National University construction site didn't receive any money; they're behind with 180 million MNT, just in salaries. So all of the labourers that were waiting just left and now there are about 15 people left.¹⁴⁴

I wasn't given three million MNT. That's 1,500 US dollars. It's a lot of money. It's a huge amount of money in North Korea.¹⁴⁵

There are a lot of North Korean construction workers out here in Mongolia. There are many construction sites that have been put on hold due to the bad economic situation. They've built too many apartments here compared to the demand.¹⁴⁶

As in the case of any other country of dispatch, North Korean laborers suffer financial exploitation imposed by the DPRK authorities. Large portions of the original salaries of the workers are directly sent back to North Korea for the use of the regime. The workers are required to dedicate a certain amount of their wages as "loyalty fees." Since those amounts often exceed the money that the workers have, many of the North Korean laborers end up having large debts upon arrival in North Korea.

We have to give some money to the embassy every month. We have to give the money even if we don't have any work. We have to give the money even if it means starving ourselves. We would be able to give the money if we worked every day, but with Mongolia's bad economy there aren't any jobs available, so we can't put aside that much money. It's difficult to provide

142. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

143. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

144. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

145. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

146. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

that much, even when you're earning.¹⁴⁷

You are paid as much as you earn, if you work one day they give you about this much. If there is money left over after giving the contribution [fee] of 600 dollars, I can keep it. But if I don't have enough, then you have to pay next time¹⁴⁸

Many Mongolian employers would prefer to hire North Koreans as they are cheaper than other employees and would work harder and faster in order to earn more money. North Korean laborers are paid according to the amount of work they complete within a certain period of time. As a result they would often be forced by their North Korean managers to work overtime in order to earn more money, which leads to excessive amounts of work hours that are not even paid to the workers. North Korean laborers usually work in units of two to four people and each unit has its own leader. While the working hours of the Mongolian construction staff are from 8:00 am to around 6:00 pm, North Korean laborers usually finish their work day around 11:00 pm or even midnight.¹⁴⁹

They [North Korean workers] arrive at 7:30 am and start working at 8:00 am. Local Mongolian labourers work until 6:00 pm but they [North Koreans] work until 11 or 12:00 at night. [What about inspection of the workplace?] The [Mongolian] authorities inspect a variety of things. Whether it's safe, whether it's been built properly . . . People live in warehouse type places, and they know it. Mongolians know. We've been working here for five years, everybody working in this field knows. The representatives know too; even the Mongolian representatives.¹⁵⁰

Despite engaging in intensive work for long periods of time during the day, a lot of the North Korean workers do not receive enough food or food that is sufficiently nutritional to sustain them during the long work hours.

We don't have breakfast and just eat dinner after finishing work in the evening. When there is work to do, you have to finish the work quickly, plastering away; it's physically exhausting. Though you have to eat well when plastering¹⁵¹

They make the food together and eat it on the site. They work and sleep on the site. That's perhaps the worst of it. There isn't even one banchan. The biggest problem is getting tuberculosis from not eating enough. It's from malnutrition Anybody can have the tuberculosis germ but you get (tuberculosis) from having a low level of immunity, and seeing that they are malnourished (they get tuberculosis).¹⁵²

Another serious violation of the rights of the workers are the inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live while working in Mongolia.

147. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

148. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

149. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

150. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

151. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

152. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

Especially in the case of construction workers living conditions are especially severe as they have to sleep and eat at the construction site where they work or in groups in containers nearby the work site. Moreover the North Korean laborers are not provided even with items of basic necessity—beddings, heating, proper work uniform, etc. In extreme cases interviewees report that they had to sleep on a piece of Styrofoam without heating and blankets in the middle of winter.

Residence is always on a construction site. If they have separate accommodation then transport costs and rent needs to be paid so they rather stay on the site.¹⁵³

The North Koreans aren't able to return home. They have to earn enough money so that next time they could be sent to another country. Fifty North Korean labourers slept together on one mat. When we told them to sleep on our site, they just brought one mat to sleep on. They had no bedding whatsoever, they just slept. They didn't even get 100 dollars. They had to survive one month with just 100 dollars.¹⁵⁴

The North Korean supervisors and other state officials accompanying the workers in Mongolia try to maintain the same conditions as inside North Korea. Whenever the laborers are not expected to work, in rare occasions of having some free time, they are expected to attend ideological education and self-criticism sessions. Loyalty to the Party is emphasized at every instruction given by the government officials.

We have the ideological education and self-criticism sessions. We do it when we finish working after 10pm. The education for the day is written on an A4 piece and must be read out once at the beginning.¹⁵⁵

The workers are under surveillance and their movement and actions are under the control of the North Korean managers. The laborers are strictly forbidden to have contact with outsiders, and especially with South Korean nationals as this would be severely punished. An exemption is made for North Korean restaurant workers, but even they are prevented from further engaging in conversations with South Korean guests.

Even if you are just going out for very briefly, you have to report everything. This is how people are managed.¹⁵⁶

I just went to chop some wood, but I was caught and fired. I was called out for having worked with a South Korean. After talking about sending me back or what not . . . I was sent back.¹⁵⁷

The workers cannot freely use holidays and days of rest. Additionally in the cases of construction workers, who are actually soldiers dispatched

153. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

154. Anonymous interviewee residing in Mongolia.

155. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

156. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

157. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

from the North Korean military, freedom of movement and voluntary activity is entirely forbidden.

When it's hot like it is now (in August), we say it's 'farming season.' They won't send you back during 'farming season.' When there isn't a lot of work to do, they let you go when you say you want to.¹⁵⁸

As for Namgang,¹⁵⁹ you can't leave or return even if you wanted to, as the contracts were made between the two countries. You have to stay no matter what, until the end.¹⁶⁰

158. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

159. Namgang is a North Korean company whose workers are soldiers dispatched from the DPRK. See Albert Hong, *North Korean Workers in Kuwait Face Tight Information Controls as Bulk of their Pay Goes to Kim Regime*, RADIO FREE ASIA, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/nkinvestigation/kuwait1.html> [<https://perma.cc/AX4W-Z6P4>].

160. Anonymous interviewee (Mongolia year of dispatch undisclosed for security reasons).

