

New slavery act will aid victims claiming compensation

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Credit: Arlette (Flickr)

Victims of servitude, forced labour and forced marriage will be able to obtain financial compensation more easily due to the passing of an amendment to federal crimes legislation in the senate on Wednesday, according to the director of Anti-Slavery Australia, Associate Professor Jennifer Burn.

The passage of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Act 2012 coincides with the tenth anniversary of Anti-Slavery Australia, a specialist law and research centre based at UTS working to abolish slavery and trafficking in Australasia.

"Australia has a legacy of slavery and slave-like conditions and these amendments recognise the breadth of exploitation through the new slaveries of forced labour and forced marriage" said Professor Burn.

"We commend the Australian Parliament for the passage of this Bill."

The new offence of forced labour will protect those in situations of extreme labour exploitation, poor conditions and underpayment or non-payment of wages, where the person has been coerced to work and isn't free to stop working or leave the place where they are working.

Forced marriage will be made illegal under the new law and a [jail sentence](#) of four to seven years may be imposed for those found guilty of the offence. Forced marriage is defined under the legislation as a situation where a person does not give 'full and free' consent to the marriage, because of the use of coercion, threat or deception over them.

"The new laws recognise that [traffickers](#) use subtle forms of [coercion](#), deception and threats to both a victim and their family in order to gain compliance, as well as more severe forms of psychological and [physical abuse](#)," said Professor Burn.

The laws will protect Australian citizens, residents and international visitors to Australia, regardless of visa status. If a person is identified as a victim of these crimes they will be eligible for assistance through the [Australian Government's](#) victim support program.

Professor Burn said the slavery bill reflects the hard work and advocacy of many organisations including Anti-Slavery Australia, ACRATH, Good Shepherd Australia & New Zealand, the Law Council of Australia, Not for Sale, Project Respect, Salvation Army, Stop the Traffik, Women Lawyers Association and World Vision.

"I thank the Attorney-General's Department for initiating early and detailed consultation with organisations and the community."

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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