

12 Employment practices in events: Precarious working conditions and risks of severe exploitation

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Introduction

Events are often depicted for their social and cultural benefits, including enhancing the status of the host destinations, generating positive impacts, and long-term consequences of under-represented cities or countries (Draper et al., 2018). The events industry plays a significant role in the global visitor economy, generating revenue and employment opportunities and influencing travel trends, thus helping promote and aid the growth of tourism (Duignan, 2021; Baum, 2015). At a global level, the Events Industry Council (2022) estimates the direct spending associated with business events alone at a \$1.2 trillion and suggests that the full-time equivalent of 10.9 million jobs globally is generated by the events sector. Visit Britain (2023) the official Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in the UK estimates the event sector sustains between 530,000 and 570,000 full-time equivalent jobs (Business Visits and Events Partnership, 2022), with 15,500 working in business events such as conferences, events, and exhibitions. Substantially higher figures are achieved once the indirect and induced spend are included as wider economic impacts; this includes incurred costs of transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, and the spend by those accompanying attendees at business events (Events Industry Council, 2022). Beneath the socio-economic benefits generated by events lies a concerning reality for employment conditions in the sector. Employment conditions and decent work have been the focus of emerging studies in events that explore negative social impacts (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2016), precarious working conditions (Janta et al., 2011), and risks of more severe exploitative practices (including human trafficking and modern slavery) for individuals working in the event sector and its supply chains (Macaveiu, 2022; Matheson and Finkel, 2013).

Recent studies investigating modern slavery and human trafficking report that mega-events like Formula One Grand Prix, the FIFA World Cup held in Brazil, South Africa, and Russia, the US Superbowl (Kim et al., 2015; Wickey-Byrd et al., 2023), and several Olympic games including Beijing 2008, London 2012, and