

POLISH WORKERS FREED FROM SLAVE CAMP IN ITALY

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Italian police have liberated 113 Polish workers from forced labour camps in southern Italy where they were reportedly raped and tortured if unwilling to work, with four cases of suicide being investigated. "We are talking about conditions similar to those of concentration camps where people were not only exploited for their work but also kept in a state of slavery," Italian prosecutor Piero Grasso said following the operation on Tuesday (18 July), according to Reuters.

The "labour camps" located in Puglia region were run by three Poles, two Ukrainians and one Algerian who even called each other "kapos," the term for guards in Nazi camps, Poland's national police chief Marek Bienkowski told reporters in Warsaw.

The joint Polish and Italian investigation dubbed as "Promised Land" has led to the arrest of 20 people for human trafficking and deprivation of freedom, while seven suspects are still at large.

Over 1,000 Poles may have fallen victim to the criminal ring managing the camps and their recruitment, the Polish news agency PAP reported.

The Polish workers were forced to work for up to 15 hours per day for a salary of less than one euro per hour.

They were kept in rooms without light or heating where they slept on the floor and were guarded by armed men to prevent them escaping home.

They received little more than bread and water and had to pay for it as well as for accommodation which led many of them into debt. They also had to pay a €20 fine if they fell sick.

Police said there were cases of forced prostitution, rapes and beatings, while a few workers committed suicide with investigators looking into details.