

Forum: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM)

Issue #1: Combating the rise of modern slavery and forced labor exploitation.

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"Trafficking & Slavery | International Justice Mission." IJM USA, www.ijm.org/our-work/trafficking-slavery.

Introduction

Modern slavery involves abusing people through force or threats, trapping them in conditions like forced labor, trafficking, or forced marriage. Both modern slavery and forced labor exploitation are escalating global crises, deeply rooted in economic, social, and political upheaval. Despite years of international prohibition, and efforts to kill off these abuses, the number of people living in modern slavery has risen by nearly 25% in the past five years, reaching an estimated 50 million individuals worldwide; meaning 1 in every 150 people is trapped in these conditions ("50 Million People Trapped in Modern Slavery"). Of these, 27.6 million are subjected to forced labor, crossing occupations such as manufacturing, construction, agriculture, domestic work,

and commercial sexual exploitation (webfronten). Women and girls are especially affected, making up 54% of those in modern slavery, while children are more than 12 million victims, including more than 3.3 million of those in forced labor alone (webfronten).

The causes of modern slavery are many and have worsened by today's global challenges. Ongoing economic instability, rising food, energy prices, and a record number of violent conflicts have forced over 95 million people to leave their homes, putting them at risk of exploitation and abuse ("Modern Slavery Risks Rise as Greatest Number of Global Conflicts since WWII"). In regions affected by conflict, the breakdown of law and order allows criminals to act without punishment, and people forced to leave their homes face a much higher risk of forced labor, trafficking, and other forms of modern slavery. These unstable environments, combined with weak legal protections, make it easier for traffickers to exploit vulnerable populations, contributing to the rise of modern slavery worldwide. Modern slavery is not limited to any one region or country; it is a hidden crime impacting every part of the world, from the poorest nations to the wealthiest economies. Many products that people use daily, including electronics, clothing, and food, are at risk of being made with forced labor. Despite the scale of the problem, government action to address modern slavery has not kept pace with the growing risk. Overall, progress has been limited, and most governments are still not taking enough action to protect victims and prevent further incidents.

What makes this issue controversial is that even though almost everyone agrees modern slavery is wrong, it still exists because some businesses and even whole economies make money from it. Forced labor gives companies cheap workers who are easy to control, which means they can spend less on making products and earn more profit. Some governments and industries ignore the abuse because it keeps costs low and trade going. This puts money ahead of human rights, even though ending modern slavery would help build fairer economies in the long run.

Definition of Key Terms

Modern Slavery: When people are controlled, abused, and forced to work or live in unfair conditions without being able to leave, often through threats and violence.

Forced Labor: When someone is made to work against their will, often under threats or punishments, and they don't choose to do the job freely.

Human Trafficking: The illegal movement or control of people, usually by force and threats, so they can be used for things like work or sex against their will.

Exploitation: Taking advantage of someone by using them unfairly for your own gain, often without their permission or benefit.

Debt Bondage: A situation where someone is forced to work to pay off a debt, but the debt is so large or unfair that they can't ever pay it off, keeping them trapped in that job (Walk Free "What Is Modern Slavery?").

State-Imposed Forced Labor: When a government forces its citizens to work under threats or punishments, such as detention camps or military zones (Anti-Slavery International).

Marginalized Communities: Groups of people who are treated unfairly or left out of important parts of society, like jobs, education, or healthcare, often because of their race or beliefs. (Qualls)

Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs): Specialized police teams focused on preventing and responding to trafficking cases (TheLaw.Institute).

Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA): A U.S. federal law that combats human trafficking and supports survivors (United States Department of Justice).

Corruption: Dishonest or illegal behavior, especially by those in power.

International Labor Organization (ILO): A United Nations organization that sets international labor standards and promotes rights. The ILO works to improve working conditions, create fair employment opportunities, and end modern slavery worldwide (International Labour Organization).

Trauma Bonding: A psychological response where victims develop emotional ties with their abusers (United States Department of State).

General Overview

Mechanisms and Forms of Modern Slavery

Modern slavery takes many forms, all of which involve the systematic exploitation and domination of individuals through manipulation, threats, and fraud. The most common form is forced labor, where people are made to work against their will, often in harsh conditions, for wages below legal standards or sometimes no pay at all. These workers are often forced to endure long hours without rest, in overcrowded, unsanitary living environments, and threats of violence if they resist. An alarming form of forced labor is child labor, where children are forced to work in these same abusive conditions. Denied their rights to education, and are subjected to long hours of work as well (Walk Free). Because of their age and vulnerability, they are easier to exploit and control, making them prime targets for this practice. Globally, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, “the ILO estimates nearly 28 million people are trapped in forced labor, including over 3.3 million children”(U.S. Department of Labor). Human trafficking is another widespread form of modern slavery. Victims are manipulated or forced into leaving their homes, many times across international borders, and placed into a situation where they are controlled and exploited, most commonly for forced labor or sexual purposes.

Traffickers use deception, debt, or threats to maintain dominance, and victims often lack access to help or escape. Forced marriage, particularly common with women and girls, is another form of slavery. Individuals are made to marry without choosing freely, often because of pressure from their families or in exchange for money or favors. According to the United Nations, “worldwide, more than 650 million women alive today were married as children.” Additionally, they mention, “40 percent of girls are married

before age 18, and 12 percent of girls are married before age 15.”(United Nations). Their freedom is taken away, and they are trapped in relationships that lead to years of suffering. Additionally, debt bondage traps individuals in a cycle of unpaid labor in an attempt to pay off a debt that, in many cases, is nearly impossible to repay. This form of slavery exploits the vulnerable by keeping them bound to unjust work arrangements where their debts continue to grow, despite their efforts to settle them. Lastly, state-imposed forced labor occurs when governments force citizens to work under both threats and punishments. What makes this form especially harmful and worrying is that it's supported by legal and institutional systems that deny workers their basic rights and freedom (Walk Free).

Vulnerable Populations and Contributing Factors

Modern slavery affects people across the globe, but certain populations are at much higher risk than others. These include individuals living in poverty, women and girls, children, migrants, and those impacted by war or natural disasters. Migrants and displaced people are particularly vulnerable because they often leave everything behind and are desperate to find work or shelter in a new place. This desperation can lead them to accept unsafe and unfair labor practices, which traffickers take advantage of. The International Labour Organization states that migrant workers “are more than three times more likely to be in forced labor than non-migrant adult workers.”(International Labour Organization). Children are also frequent targets due to their innocence, easy manipulation, limited understanding of the world, and inability to advocate for themselves. Women and girls are often subjected to abuse, especially through forced marriage or sexual exploitation. In many cases, predators use psychological manipulation to maintain control over them, such as fostering loyalty, fear, or even inducing emotional bonds with their abusers. This can lead to conditions similar to Stockholm syndrome, where victims feel a connection to their captors. Other psychological mechanisms, like trauma bonding, may also occur, making it even harder for victims to escape. Family pressure is a major factor driving forced marriages, influencing more than 85% of these cases (International Labour Organization). These forms of control trap them in abusive situations, where they feel powerless to break free.

Psychological Manipulation and Control Tactics

Modern slavery doesn't only rely on physical force; it often traps victims through psychological control. Traffickers and exploiters use tactics such as manipulation, isolation, threats, and emotional dependency to dominate their victims. For example, they might threaten harm to the victim's family, confiscate identity documents, or impose exploitative debt bondage, creating a sense of obligation that the victim feels unable to escape. Specifically in forced marriage or sexual exploitation, abusers may foster emotional bonds with victims, a form of control known as trauma bonding, where victims develop loyalty or even affection toward their abuser despite ongoing abuse. This trick is specifically dangerous because it blurs the victim's sense of reality, making them question their judgment and self-worth. This manipulation often leads to psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and much more (Hippe). According to Evans et al., "studies indicated that an average of 41% of survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking had complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD). This was higher than 14% diagnosed with PTSD." (Evans et al.). These tactics create confusion and helplessness, making it harder for victims to recognize their exploitation or seek help. Many victims are led to believe they deserve the abuse or that escape is impossible. They are even told that no one will believe them or help them, reinforcing their silence. These invisible chains are often far stronger than physical restraints, keeping them trapped in modern slavery (Withers).

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

India

India has the highest number of people living in modern slavery worldwide, with an estimated 11 million individuals affected. (Walk Free) This includes various forms such as forced labor, human trafficking, and forced marriage. A significant portion of these victims come from marginalized communities, mainly including tribal groups like Dalits and Adivasis, who are more vulnerable due to poverty, lack of education, and social discrimination (Walk Free, "Modern Slavery in India"). Often, people are trapped in debt bondage, where they have to work to pay off loans. Natural disasters and conflict make things worse by pushing people from their homes and making them easier targets. The Indian government has taken steps to fight modern slavery, but persistent

challenges in enforcement and accountability have limited its effectiveness. For instance, it has established Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) in various districts to strengthen law enforcement and victim rescue operations ("ITEC Programme"). Although India has laws to fight modern slavery, putting them into action is still a major problem. Many anti-trafficking units don't have enough staff or resources, which limits their ability to help victims.

China

China has an estimated 5.8 million people living in modern slavery, according to the 2023 Global Slavery Index (Global Slavery Index). Many victims are from ethnic groups, like the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, where the government has been accused of forcing people to work in detention centers and factories. Investigators have also revealed that workers making clothes for factories like Shein often work up to 75 hours a week, far beyond legal limits, for very low pay. Despite its claim to improve workers' treatment and cut out child labor, reports show limited progress (Bicker). The Chinese government denies allegations; however, evidence has emerged from international investigations, and multiple abuses have come to light. China has not demonstrated a commitment or significance to address and eliminate these issues, suggesting a lack of interest in making serious changes.

Russia

Russia faces significant challenges with modern slavery, particularly in forced labor. An estimated 1.9 million people in Russia were living in conditions of modern slavery, making it one of the highest numbers globally. (Fleck) The ongoing war in Ukraine, which began in 2022, has highly impacted existing vulnerabilities and created new opportunities for exploitation. Reports have shown that individuals have been forced to work by Russian forces in occupied territories, like military facilities and other support roles. ("Rise in Migrant Workers Forced to Fight in Russia-Ukraine War"). Within Russia, the situation is further complicated by systematic corruption and weak enforcement of anti-trafficking laws. Despite the existing legal framework, Russia continues to struggle with widespread modern slavery.

United States

The United States has a long history of slavery, but it officially abolished it in 1865 with the 13th Amendment. (Walk Free, "United States") Today, while traditional slavery is illegal, modern slavery still exists in the country. According to the 2023 Global Slavery Index, about 1.1 million people were living in conditions of modern slavery in the U.S., including forced labor and human trafficking. The U.S. government has taken strong action against modern slavery, like passing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000, which criminalizes human trafficking and provides support for survivors (congress.gov). And the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act of 2021 that prevents imports of goods made with forced labor (U.S. Customs and Border Protection). Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Enforcement of existing laws can be inconsistent, and certain populations, such as migrant workers, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
1501-1866	Transatlantic Slave Trade: 12.5 million slaves were shipped from Africa all over the world. Portuguese and Brazilian traders transported the most, over 5.8 million, in boats with their flags. British traders came next, moving nearly 3.3 million; 2.5 million of them were sent during the 18th century, being the highway slaves transported by one nation in a century (O'Neill).
1807	The British abolished the trade in enslaved people through the Act of Parliament, but not slavery itself (Sheposh).
1820	The Missouri Compromise banned slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of Missouri's southern border (Keyser).
1866 -1872	The last known transatlantic slave voyage occurred, with recent research extending the timeline to 1872.
1850 - 1890	Peak Chinese immigration during the Gold Rush to the United States,

California. During this time, Chinese women were illegally trafficked into California and the American West by criminal groups known as Tongs (Office of the Historian).

1900 - 1910	After traditional slavery ended in most countries, "white slavery" took place. It was a term used for sexual slavery where European women, often immigrants, were held captive in forced prostitution (Smolak).
1910	The Mann Act, also known as the White-Slave Traffic Act, made it illegal to transport women across state lines for prostitution (Cornell Law School).
1919	The International Labor Organization (ILO) was founded to improve labor rights and address forced labor (ILO).
1926	The Slavery Convention was signed, becoming the first international treaty to legally define slavery and commit countries to abolish all forms of slavery (United Nations, "Slavery Convention").
1949	The UN approved the Convention for Combating Human Trafficking and Exploitation of Others through prostitution (OHCHR).
2000	The UN adopted the Trafficking Protocol, the first global treaty to define and combat human trafficking and modern slavery, promoting prevention, action, and victim protection worldwide (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights).
2007	The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) started the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), showing a commitment to taking action against human trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime).
2013	The Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh killed over 1,100 garment workers, exposing dangerous labor conditions and raising

global awareness about forced labor and exploitation in the clothing industry (Clean Clothes Campaign).

2017 Migrants were found being sold in slave markets in Libya (BBC).

2020 The COVID-19 pandemic worsened modern slavery by trapping workers in abusive jobs during lockdowns and increasing vulnerability due to job losses and poverty (Cockayne and Smith).

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

The UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1991, the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery provides direct humanitarian, legal, psychological, medical, educational, and social support to survivors of modern slavery through contributions given to civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide. Managed by the UN Human Rights Office and supervised by a Board of Trustees, the Fund gives out grants each year, usually between \$15,000 to \$35,000. Since its development, the Fund has donated more than \$8 million to more than 400 organizations around 100 countries. In 2025, it granted nearly \$1.36 million to 45 projects across 35 countries, assisting over 10,000 survivors. The Fund also supports projects that deliver critical services and promote survivors' reintegration and empowerment through education programs and income-generating activities, to help break cycles of exploitation (United Nations Human Rights Office).

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, also known as the Palermo Protocol, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 15, 2000, is an international treaty that supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It requires countries to criminalize human trafficking, protect and assist victims with legal, medical, psychological, and social support, and ensure their privacy and safety. The Protocol

also encourages allowing victims to remain temporarily or permanently in the country where they are found, and supports their safe and voluntary return home. To address root causes, it promotes public awareness and social and economic initiatives to reduce vulnerability. The Protocol has been widely ratified and serves as the main international legal framework to combat human trafficking, especially of women and children ("Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish"). While the Palermo Protocol focuses mainly on trafficking, this framework plays a key role in addressing the broader issue of modern slavery by targeting the various dimensions.

Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)

Adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1930, the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) is one of the earliest international treaties to address forced labor. It requires countries that ratify it to work towards ending all forms of forced labor as quickly as possible. It also specifies exceptions, such as compulsory military service, normal civic duties, work as a result of a court conviction, emergencies, and minor communal services. The Convention sets standards to protect workers, including fair wages, safe conditions, and reasonable working hours. Overall, the Convention serves as an international tool to protect workers' rights and ensure voluntary, fair working conditions ("Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)").

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The 1926 International Slavery Convention

The 1926 International Slavery Convention was one of the first important international agreements to clearly define and fight against slavery. The Convention asked all countries that signed it to take steps to stop the slave trade and work toward ending slavery in every form. It also addressed forced labor, warning that it could become like slavery if not controlled, and called for laws to punish those involved in slavery and slave trading. Countries were expected to work together to enforce these rules. Even though the Convention set strong legal and moral standards, it had some problems. There were not many ways to make sure countries followed the rules, and some governments did not fully commit to stopping slavery. Because of this, some forced

labor and slavery continued even after the Convention was created. Still, the 1926 Convention was crucial because it was the first time many countries agreed on a clear definition of slavery and promised to fight it. It laid the groundwork for later agreements and showed that stronger laws and better cooperation between countries were needed to truly end slavery worldwide. In summary, the 1926 International Slavery Convention was a key early step in the fight against slavery, but its limited power to enforce the rules meant more work was needed to stop slavery completely ("League of Nations Adopts International Slavery Convention | EBSCO").

The Congress of Vienna

The Congress of Vienna, held in 1814-1815, was one of the earlier international meetings that aimed to address the issue of the slave trade. However, its focus was mainly on stopping the trade of enslaved people rather than ending slavery itself. The countries involved agreed to work together to reduce the buying and selling of slaves, but they did not take strong actions to abolish slavery in the places where it already existed. This limited approach was influenced by the interests of colonial powers, who often benefited economically from slavery and were unwilling to give it up. Additionally, the enforcement of any agreements made at the Congress was weak, meaning that illegal slave trading continued despite the promises. While the Congress of Vienna was an important step in raising awareness about the slave trade, its limited goals and poor enforcement showed that more powerful and focused efforts would be needed in the future to truly end slavery worldwide (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

Modern Approaches

In more recent years, organizations like End Slavery Now have taken a different approach, focusing on public education, community involvement, support for survivors, and advocacy against modern slavery. These newer efforts have helped raise more awareness and bring change at the community level. However, they still struggle with problems like a lack of funding, limited coordination, and the deep social and economic issues that keep slavery alive today (End Slavery Now). Overall, these past attempts have led to some progress, but limited resources have prevented them from making it fully successful.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Accountability in Labor Practices

By holding companies accountable for their labor practices, businesses, especially those in high-risk industries such as manufacturing, can be encouraged to adhere to labor laws and ethical standards, which helps reduce worker exploitation. This accountability can be improved in several ways, such as through surprise workplace visits, anonymous worker surveys, and laws that require companies to publicly report on their labor conditions and supply chains. These methods could help uncover unfair treatment, unsafe environments, and violations like underpayment or excessive working hours. They also encourage companies to offer fair wages, respect workers' rights, and create safe, respectful workplaces. When companies know they're being monitored and could face harsher consequences, they are more likely to improve their practices and protect the well-being of their employees (FLA).

Reward for Fair Businesses

Giving rewards, like tax breaks, to businesses that treat their workers fairly is a good way to encourage better working conditions. For example, companies that ensure their workers are safe, pay fair wages, and follow labor law could receive tax reduction or other financial benefits. These rewards give businesses a reason to take good care of their employees and follow fair rules. Many companies engage in unfair or illegal labor practices because it saves them money. By offering financial incentives to those who meet fair labor standards, governments can motivate businesses to act responsibly and reduce exploitation. Over time, this could help create a more equal and responsible labor system, especially in industries where abuse and exploitation are common.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Modern slavery directly interlinks with the principles of decent work and economic growth promoted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, SDG 8 aims to ensure safe, fair, and productive employment for all, but modern slavery, through forced labor, human trafficking, and exploitative child labor,

violates these fundamental rights. Target 8.7 of this goal calls on countries to take urgent and effective action to eliminate all forms of forced labor and modern slavery. Achieving this requires stronger laws, better enforcement, and enhanced protections for vulnerable workers. Furthermore, international corporations play a crucial role in preventing exploitation by adopting ethical labor practices and supporting fair treatment of workers worldwide. Addressing modern slavery is essential to restoring the decent work standards that the SDGs seek to establish and to promoting sustainable economic growth for everyone (United Nations).

Appendix

This section includes the most relevant sources to support your research and help you succeed.

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/50-million-people-worldwide-modern-slavery-0>

Source A: This report provides up-to-date global estimates on modern slavery. It offers key data on regional trends, vulnerable populations, and contributing factors like economic pressures, conflict, and weak legal protections. It's a useful resource for understanding the global scale of modern slavery, especially forced labor and forced marriage.

<https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/>

Source B: This source offers country-level data and analysis on the prevention of modern slavery and how governments are responding. It helps identify risk factors, measures progress, and compares efforts across different regions. It is a valuable resource for understanding how modern slavery looks in specific countries and what actions are being taken in each.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitariansettings>

Source C: This source provides information on human rights concerns related to child labor and forced marriage, especially in humanitarian settings. It also highlights legal responses and protections, making it a useful resource for understanding how these

practices violate rights and what measures are being taken to address them.

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