

Trade Unions

The international trade union movement has a long history of defending human rights of workers in formal and in informal and unprotected work. Worldwide trade union action against child labour has shown what is possible, and what could be done to help eradicate forced labour.

ITUC

In November 2006 the International Trade Union Confederation was created as a unified worldwide structure to tackle the challenges of globalisation. Its Constitution gives a new impetus to the struggle against forced labour.

"It shall strive for the universal respect of fundamental rights at work, until child labour and forced labour in all their forms are abolished, discrimination at work eliminated and the trade union rights of all workers observed fully and everywhere."⁴

Trade unions are:

Essential partners in the implementation and the monitoring of ratified ILO Conventions, including the submission of evidence to the ILO supervisory mechanisms such as the Committee of Experts.

Uniquely positioned to speak with authority about abuse and exploitation wherever they occur.

Able to reach vulnerable groups of people such as undocumented migrants, indigenous people, and women at risk of exploitation.

Organised in different industries and can focus on high risk sectors for forced labour victims such as agriculture, food processing, construction, textile and garment, logging, mining and catering. Likewise, trade unions in the transport, travel, communication and entertainment industries have a responsibility in detecting trafficking.

Workers' involvement is key to the success of the ILO campaign to rid the world of forced labour and human trafficking by 2015. The ITUC urges you and your organisation to join the global Workers' Alliance against Forced Labour and Trafficking.

What can trade unions do?

Campaign and use established tripartite bodies and procedures to place ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions 29 and 105 at the top of the legislative and political agenda.

Help design clear legal definitions so that those responsible for exploitation and abuse can be brought to justice.

Develop a policy on forced labour and trafficking, appoint officials to deal with it and place forced labour on the agenda. Establish structures such as forced labour units, committees and study centres. Establish a plan of action targeting specific sectors and areas.

Raise awareness among staff and members. Call on them to campaign.

Pressure employers and employment agencies to respect fundamental labour standards.

Provide direct support to establish contact with victims, inform them of their rights and help rehabilitate them, through union organising and through trade union media and mass media, helplines, etc, in the relevant languages.

Bring cases to light and report them to the authorities without endangering the victims, and document the incidence of forced labour to support pressure on governments to take action.

Communicate information to relevant international trade union organisations and the ILO, network with other trade unions or friendly NGOs especially in countries of destination or origin.



The ITUC:
It shall strive for the universal respect of fundamental rights at work, until child labour and forced labour in all their forms are abolished, ...



1. Art. 2 of the ILO Convention on Forced Labour n° 29, adopted in 1930.
2. Art. 1 of the ILO Convention on Forced Labour n° 29, adopted in 1930.
3. Art. 3, paragraph (a) of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, adopted in 2000.
4 Extract from the Preamble of the ITUC Constitution.

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Former slave women in Niger.

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**A Workers'
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A Workers' Alliance against Forced Labour and Trafficking

The ILO estimates at least 12.3 million people are victims of forced labour worldwide. 9.8 million are exploited by private agents, including more than 2.4 million as a result of human trafficking. In industrialised countries, transition countries, the Middle East and the North Africa region, trafficking accounts for more than 75 per cent of all forced labour cases – it is the fastest growing form of forced labour.

The bicentenary of legislation in several European countries against slavery gave rise to numerous commemorations of the Atlantic slave trade, but millions of human beings are still working in slavery-like conditions today. Forced labour is a global phenomenon. Every region in the world is affected by this extreme form of exploitation.

Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as sub-Saharan Africa remain the three regions with the highest incidence of forced labour in relation to their population. Almost two-thirds of total forced labour in Asia and the Pacific involves economic exploitation, mostly debt bondage in agriculture. Forced commercial sexual exploitation represents 11 per cent of all cases. The vast majority of the 1,400,000 victims are girls or women.



Camel jockey in UAE.

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What is forced labour?

The ILO definition of Forced Labour

“The term forced or compulsory labour shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”¹

“Each ILO Member which ratifies Convention 29 undertakes to suppress the use of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms within the shortest possible time.”²

What is human trafficking?

The United Nations definition of Trafficking

“Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”³

Forced labour appears in many different forms, industries and regions

A few examples of forced labour:

Despite legal reform and a National Action Plan, **bonded and forced labour** remains widespread in various industries in **Pakistan** such as mining, agriculture and brick kilns. Some women also have to work in the landlord’s house, leaving them vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Children from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan and Yemen are trafficked into being **camel jockeys** in the **United Arab Emirates**. The work is extremely hazardous and they are sometimes beaten, abused and deprived of food.

In **Niger**, certain **people** are still held in **slavery** by their traditional masters, primarily as herders of livestock, agricultural labourers or domestic servants. They work without pay in exchange for minimal amounts of food. Usually, their master decides on their marriage and whether their children can go to school.

Indigenous peoples in the Chaco in Paraguay are working in **forced labour** conditions on **estates**; women are often employed as **domestic workers** on ranches. Most estates pay under minimum wage and women domestic workers receive less than half of this. Non-payment of salaries means they have to take loans from their employer, so they can buy essentials for the employer’s store, at inflated prices leading to a spiral of debt servitude.

Gangmasters in the UK are providing casual labour in agriculture and horticulture that can be linked to **trafficking**. People are being forced to work seven days a week and to repay travel costs, food and accommodation from their meagre income. They face isolation, beatings and threats to their families back home.

The **Burmese Government** is notorious for its widespread and systematic use of **forced labour** with total disregard of human dignity. Deaths from illness and work accidents are frequent in public building projects, army porters are sent ahead in suspected mine fields and those injured or ill are left behind in the jungle. Forced labourers do not receive any food, and face murder, beatings and sexual assault.

Porters in Burma



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