



International
Labour
Office

ILO 2012 Global Estimate of Forced Labour

20,900,000

A stylized icon of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and two children, rendered in blue and green colors.

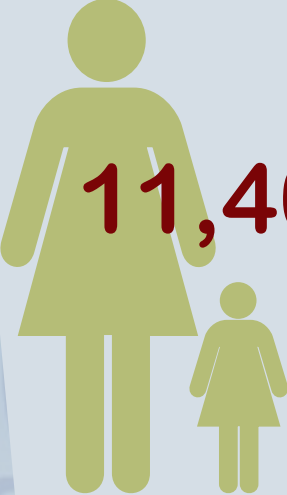
15,400,000

A stylized icon of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and two children, rendered in blue and green colors.

5,500,000

A stylized icon of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and two children, rendered in blue and green colors.

11,400,000

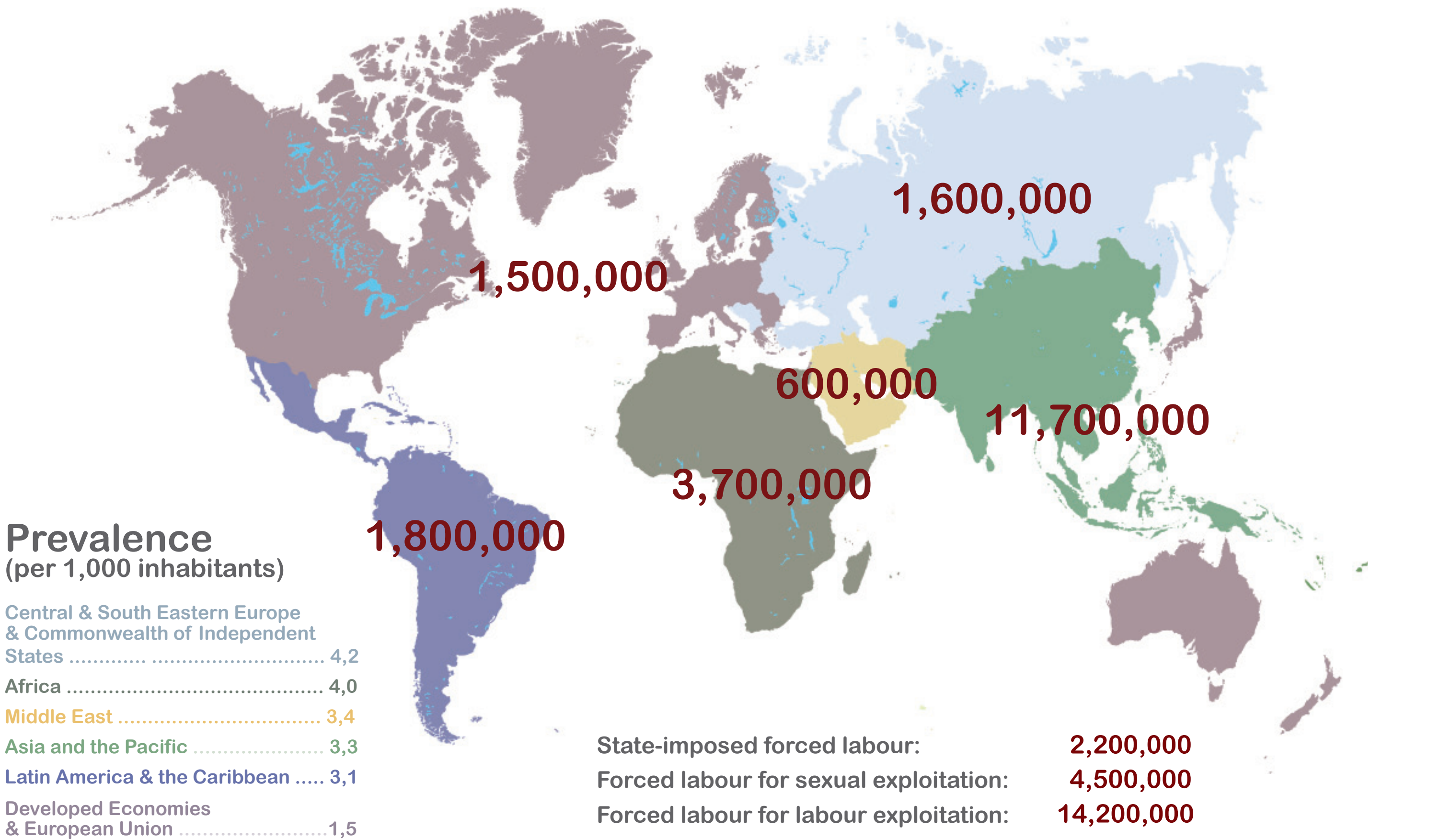
A stylized icon of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and two children, rendered in blue and green colors.

9,500,000

A stylized icon of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and two children, rendered in blue and green colors.

Regional figures

Persons in forced labour



Background

Forced labour is the term used by the international community to denote situations in which the persons involved – women and men, girls and boys – are made to work against their free will, coerced by their recruiter or employer, for example through violence or threats of violence, or by more subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities. Such situations can also amount to human trafficking or slavery-like practices, which are similar though not identical terms in a legal sense. International law stipulates that exacting forced labour is a crime, and should be punishable through penalties which reflect the gravity of the offence. Most countries outlaw forced labour, human trafficking and slavery-like practices in their national legislation, but successful prosecutions of offenders sadly remain few and far between.

Governments and their partners require information about the nature and extent of forced labour if they are to devise effective policy measures to combat it. But the practice is extremely difficult to research and quantify as it is most often hidden, out-of-sight of law enforcement and administrative personnel, and invisible to the public at large.

The 2012 estimates cannot be compared to earlier estimates of the ILO for the purpose of detecting trends over time, i.e. whether forced labour has increased or decreased over the period concerned. What can be said is that this new estimate is more robust, based on a more sophisticated methodology and far more and better data sources. The best way to generate really accurate statistics on forced labour would be to carry out many national surveys, on the basis of which global figures can be extrapolated. So far, only a handful of countries have undertaken special surveys on this topic. Results from these surveys have highlighted the gap between reported and non-reported incidents of forced labour. Member States who seek to improve their knowledge of forced labour and related practices, such as human trafficking, can turn to ILO for guidance and advice.

Resources

ILO: Hard to see, harder to count: survey guidelines to estimate forced labour of adults and children, Geneva, 2012

ILO global estimate of forced labour: results and methodology, Geneva, 2012

Visit our website: www.ilo.org/forcedlabour

Contact

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ILO Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL)

Programme for the Promotion of the Declaration
on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

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