



► Forced Labour

This note provides an overview of the ILO's work to eradicate forced labour around the world. It highlights challenges at stake, key policy responses needed, as well as the ILO's tools and ongoing initiatives in this area.

The ILO's work and expertise can significantly contribute to achieving the priorities set within the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe, particularly the priority areas 1.6 (people) and 3.1 (prosperity), which focus on promoting decent job creation based on the ILO's fundamental labour standards.

► Key messages

- Our aim is a world in which no human being is ever subjected to forced labour in any of its forms. However, according to the latest [global estimates](#), **forced labour has grown in the past few years**. In 2021, 27.6 million people were still in situations of forced labour. **Progress must be faster and more comprehensive** if we are to meet our commitments by the ambitious target dates set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for ending forced labour among children by 2025, and universally by 2030.
- The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour is **one of the five fundamental principles and rights at work** recognized by the [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work \(FPRW\)](#). The ILO provides technical advice to its 187 Member States, guided by its Global Strategy on fundamental principles and rights at work.
- With a higher prevalence of forced labour in Europe and Central Asia compared to Africa or the Americas, it becomes evident that **forced labour is also a result of enduring social injustice and inadequate political will**.
- [The ILO Forced Labour Convention \(No. 29\)](#), the [Abolition of Forced Labour Convention \(No. 105\)](#), the [Forced Labour Protocol \(P. 29\)](#) and [Recommendation \(No. 203\)](#) collectively send an unambiguous message: forced labour is a serious crime, and it **cannot be eliminated through criminal law enforcement alone, but rather through a broad-based approach** focused on preventing and addressing root causes and ensuring protection and remedies for affected individuals.
- The **ILO is uniquely aligned with the [European Commission Communication on decent work worldwide](#)**, which reaffirms the EU's commitment to champion the elimination of forced labour both at home and around the world in the pursuit of decent work. The [EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence](#) and the [EU's proposal for a Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market](#) also demonstrate that combating forced labour is a priority of the EU's human rights agenda.

► Challenges

► **27.6M**

men, women and children are in situations of forced labour on any given day

► **↑ +2.7M**

forced labour has increased between 2016 and 2021

► **87%**

of adult forced labour occurs in 5 sectors: services, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and domestic work

► **3.9M**

people are in a situation of state-imposed forced labour

► **Migrant workers are 3 times more at risk of forced labour**

for instance, due to migrants lack of legal protection, inability to exercise their rights, unfair recruitment practices, or when migration is irregular or poorly governed.

► **People in forced labour exploitation are subjected to multiple forms of coercion**

the most common being the systematic and deliberate withholding of wages, followed by the abuse of vulnerability through the threat of dismissal.

► **No region is spared from forced labour**

The Asia-Pacific region has the highest number of people in forced labour, and the Arab States the highest prevalence.

► Levers of change

ILO supports its constituents to work on key policy priorities for addressing forced labour. This includes:

- 1. Strengthen the freedoms of workers to associate and to bargain collectively** to enable them to exert a collective voice, defend their shared interests, and bargain collectively for decent work. This helps create workplaces that are inimical to forced labour and workers who are resilient to its risks.
- 2. Extend social protection, including floors, to all workers and their families**, to mitigate the socio-economic vulnerabilities that often lead to forced labour and provide workers with the basic income security they need to reject abusive job offers.
- 3. Promote fair recruitment processes** to protect workers from abusive and fraudulent practices. This includes addressing issues such as the charging of recruitment fees and related costs by unscrupulous labour recruiters.
- 4. Ensure adequate enforcement mechanisms, including strengthening the reach and capacity of public labour inspectorates.** By doing so, labour violations can be detected and addressed before they escalate into forced labour cases. It is also important to raise awareness of employers, especially in the informal economy.
- 5. Ensure protection and access to remedies for individuals freed from forced labour**, so that they can successfully recover and avoid re-victimization.
- 6. Address the vulnerability of migrants to forced labour** and trafficking in persons.
- 7. Address the issue of children trapped in forced labour**, through investing in identification and protection measures for these children, including those involved in commercial sexual exploitation and those in forced labour linked to armed conflict.
- 8. Combat forced labour in business operations and supply chains**, by identifying, prioritizing, and acting on “hotspots” where the risk of forced labour and other human rights abuses is highest in terms of severity and scale.
- 9. End state-imposed forced labour**, by supporting the political commitment of the countries to reform laws and practices leading to forced labour.
- 10. Strengthen partnerships and international cooperation**, including through the [ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour](#) and the [Alliance 8.7](#) which are key in facilitating exchange of experiences against forced labour, as well as mobilize resources for targeted development cooperation support.

▶ What the ILO can offer and how

In this table, you will find an overview of our offer, followed by examples of resources.

Public policies and governance

- ▶ Support ILO Member States in running **national campaigns to ratify international labour standards on forced labour**
 - ▶ The ILO has led campaigns to promote the ratification of forced labour instruments globally, regionally and nationally. These include the [“50 for Freedom” Campaign](#) and the [Centenary Ratification Campaign](#).
 - ▶ [ILO Standards on Forced Labour](#) (2016). This brochure is a reference for government officials, employers' and workers' representatives, partners within the UN system, NGOs and other stakeholders interested in the promotion of ILO instruments.
- ▶ Support ILO Member States in **reviewing their policies and laws** related to forced labour through social dialogue, addressing gaps with international labour standards
 - ▶ [Eliminating Forced Labour: Handbook for Parliamentarians](#) (2019). This handbook is specifically targeted at parliamentarians, decision and policy-makers, to sensitize them on forced labour and give them support to adopt efficient and actionable laws against this complex global issue.
 - ▶ [Forced Labour Observatory \(FLO\)](#) (2022). This public database on forced labour and trafficking in persons provides stakeholders with accurate data and statistics on forced labour in ILO's 187 Member States.
- ▶ Provide technical advice to ILO Member States on the **drafting and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs)** on forced labour, including the establishment of effective referral mechanisms
 - ▶ [Developing National Action Plans on Forced Labour Toolkit](#) (2020). NAPs are powerful policy tools that bring together relevant stakeholders and foster collective action around the eradication of forced labour. The Toolkit addresses the process of NAPs development, governance, implementation and evaluation, and strategies to end forced labour.
- ▶ Design and facilitate **trainings to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement officers**, and particularly **labour inspectorates** in their efforts to better detect forced labour
 - ▶ [ILO Detection Indicators of Forced Labour](#) (2012). This booklet are intended to help frontline criminal law enforcement officials, labour inspectors, trade union officers, civil society workers, business officers and others to detect persons who are possibly trapped in a forced labour situation, and who may require urgent assistance. The indicators can be used in trainings and represent the most common alert signal for a possible forced labour case.

Partnerships and advocacy

- ▶ **Support major multi-stakeholder initiatives** to accelerate the international debate and collective learning, and amplify advocacy efforts against forced labour
 - ▶ ILO acts as the Secretariat of the [Alliance 8.7](#) which provides a platform for partners to share information, promising practices, lessons learned, and to collaborate and demonstrate progress. Partners include governments, international and regional organizations, workers' organizations, employers' and business membership organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and other relevant stakeholders and networks.
 - ▶ The [ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour](#) unites the ILO with businesses of all sizes as well as their representative organizations to collectively work towards the eradication of forced labour. It aims to link business actors from across sectors and geographies to eradicate forced labour; support businesses to engage with other relevant stakeholders, including governments, to find sustainable solutions to the structural drivers of forced labour; and create opportunities to amplify these solutions. The Network currently has 22 members and is growing.
 - ▶ The [Fair Recruitment Initiative](#) has added renewed impetus to this important topic, including on the link between unfair recruitment practices and forced labour and how to prevent and address these practices. Through the implementation of its strategy, the role of ILO and its constituents has expanded, and the development of additional knowledge, tools and guidance has contributed to advancing the international debate. Check out the [Fair Recruitment Knowledge Hub](#).
 - ▶ The [ILO Toolkit for journalists on reporting on forced labour and fair recruitment](#) provides information and advice to media professionals on how to report accurately and effectively on these issues.

Knowledge and data

- Support ILO Member States in **collecting key data on the prevalence, causes and consequences** of forced labour to inform their policies and actions. This includes:

Developing and conducting innovative global research

- [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#) (2022). This ground-breaking report has been instrumental in placing the issue of forced labour on the global development agenda and now serves as a reference point for global discussion and policy debate on this intricate matter. Besides assessing the global situation of modern slavery and the key policy priorities for ending it, the report has supported country-level data collection efforts on forced labour.
- [Hard to see, harder to count](#) (2012). These survey guidelines to estimate forced labour of adults and children laid the groundwork for the Guidelines concerning forced labour measurement, adopted by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2018.
- [Evidence Gap Map on Forced Labour and Human Trafficking](#) is an interactive tool which fosters research-driven action to bridge knowledge gaps and combat forced labour and human trafficking. It offers critical guidance on where research resources should be allocated.
- [Global research agenda and national research agendas](#) in 5 selected countries – Chile, Paraguay, Malawi, Nepal, and Uganda. These agendas identify priority areas to advance global and national efforts against forced labour, human trafficking, and modern slavery.

Undertaking prevalence surveys and other national research

- Recent nationally representative household surveys, such as the [Nepal Labour Force Survey](#) (2019), and similar surveys in [Uganda](#) (2021) and [Nigeria](#) (forthcoming) have been key in prompting revisions of laws and regulations related to forced labour and initiating national dialogues on the issue.

Develop initiatives to enhance knowledge dissemination and assess promising approaches to eradicate forced labour

- [8.7 Accelerator Lab](#). An ILO initiative to accelerate progress towards the eradication of forced labour and child labour by optimizing the effectiveness of development cooperation interventions. The Lab is creating both a **global map of all ILO development cooperation work** on forced labour to increase knowledge sharing, and a toolkit to ensure that interventions are evaluated and scaled up.

Empowerment, protection and due diligence

- **Support trade unions to empower vulnerable workers**, especially in the informal economy and sectors with low unionization rates
 - [Example of ILO's targeted capacity building support](#) to trade unions to reinforce workers' voices in sectors at high risks of forced labour.
- **Support employers' organizations and the private sector to address forced labour**, including by developing due diligence tools on forced labour and implementing sectoral pilots to demonstrate good practice that can be replicated
 - [Combating forced labour: A handbook for employers and business](#) (2015). This handbook helps business and employers' organizations, and enterprises operating in global supply chains, understand and tackle the various dimensions and issues of forced labour.
 - [Due diligence toolkit for fair recruitment](#) (2023). This toolkit offers step-by-step guidance aimed at helping companies, particularly SMEs, set out a due diligence process when recruiting and hiring workers from abroad.
- Enhance the protection of workers and their rehabilitation, including through implementing **skills development and economic reintegration programmes**
 - [Global guidelines on the prevention of forced labour through lifelong learning and skills development approaches](#) (2020). These guidelines are designed to assist governments, employers' and workers' organizations, NGOs and development practitioners in supporting the prevention and the economic reintegration of victims of forced labour through formal and non-formal skills development services, skills recognition services and post-training support.

► Examples of ILO interventions to eradicate forced labour

The ILO currently has 30 ongoing development cooperation projects which are implemented in 35 countries with governments, social partners, and other key actors to accelerate the eradication of forced labour.

Area	Project intervention background	Results
Laws and policies	<p>► ILO-Qatar technical cooperation programme to support labour reforms</p> <p>Over the last decade, reports of labour exploitation of migrants in Qatar have been widespread. In 2014, international trade unions submitted a complaint to the ILO against the State of Qatar, alleging that the country was not addressing violations of labour rights. After a period of negotiations, the State of Qatar and the ILO agreed on a programme to support major labour reforms.</p> <p>As part of the Kafala system, the legal framework defining the relationship between migrant workers and their employers, workers in Qatar previously required permission from their employers to change jobs. One pillar of the programme focused on supporting the Qatar government to reform its legal framework to ensure that workers can exit the country and change jobs freely.</p>	<p>Following the changes to the Kafala system and the introduction of the new legislation in 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Workers can now change jobs freely, after a notice period of up to two months. ► Migrant workers, including domestic workers, also no longer require an employer-approved exit permit to leave the country, with some exceptions for a limited number of workers. ► Over 350,000 applications to change jobs have been approved in the two years following the introduction of the new legislation.
National Action Plans	<p>► From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labour (Bridge Project)</p> <p>To assist countries to enact National Action Plans (NAPs), the Bridge Project developed a Toolkit on Developing National Action Plans on Forced Labour (2020). The toolkit supports stakeholders in developing, implementing and monitoring NAPs. So far, the toolkit was used by Malaysia, Nepal, Niger to develop NAPs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► In Malaysia, the project worked closely with key national stakeholders to create buy-in and ownership to develop and implement the NAP provisions. ► In Peru, the ILO in close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, used the toolkit to conduct an evaluation of the previous NAP that proved instrumental for the new NAP. The evaluation process involved members of the National Committee for the Fight against Forced Labour.
Labour inspection systems	<p>► 8.7 Accelerator Lab - South Africa</p> <p>Under the framework of the ILO's Multi Partner Fund, the 8.7 Accelerator Lab carried out a series of capacity building sessions with the South African Maritime Safety Authority, the Department of Labour, the Department of Fisheries and social partners in order to improve labour inspection on board national and foreign flagged fishing vessels, especially on the detection of forced labour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Following the training in South Africa, inspectors detained a foreign flagged vessel for breaches of ILO Convention No. 188 and indicators of forced labour. Several fishers were repatriated to Indonesia and the Philippines, one of whom would have died from his injuries had not been able to leave the vessel and seek medical assistance.
Partnerships and advocacy	<p>In 2023, the ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour organized a major capacity building workshop together with the Confederation of Industrial Chambers of the United Mexican States (CONCAMIN) on preventing forced labour and unfair recruitment. The workshop involved dialogue with the government, including updates to the legislative framework. Companies received training to identify and prevent forced labour and unfair recruitment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► CONCAMIN joined the ILO GBNFL, committing to providing further information and training to their members on preventing forced labour. This provides significant reach, as CONCAMIN represents companies that account for more than 30% of the Gross Domestic Product in Mexico. ► Approximately 60 people have been trained as trainers and now have a better understanding of new and upcoming relevant legislation, as well as the ability to identify and take actions to prevent forced labour.
Research and monitoring	<p>► Third Party Monitoring (TPM) programme on Child and Forced Labour - Uzbekistan</p> <p>Through the TPM programme, launched in 2013 to monitoring child labour and extended to forced labour as part of an agreement with the World Bank in 2015, ILO produced Uzbekistan indicators and conducted surveys of forced labour in the cotton harvest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► The ILO has conducted comprehensive surveys and assessments to gather data on labour practices, including forced labour, during the annual cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. These surveys involved interviews with employers, workers, and other relevant stakeholders. ► The surveys served as a starting point for critical changes in law and for the verified elimination of child labour and forced labour in the annual cotton harvest in Uzbekistan.

Area	Project intervention background	Results
<p>Skills and livelihoods</p>	<p>► The Bridge Project: Combatting bonded labour - Nepal</p> <p>The Bridge Project provided vocational training to 1,115 adult former bonded labourers in Nepal and 400 female descendants of slavery in Niger.</p> <p>Participants also took the Start and Improve Your Own Business course, which included trainings on soft skills and starting your own business plan. Participants were provided with post-training start-up tools relevant to their trade and put in contact with potential employers for employment opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► 44% of livelihood participants in Nepal and 50% in Niger have increased their income after the training. ► 80% of livelihood participants in Nepal and 78% in Niger report having their own business as a source of income. ► 71% of livelihood participants in Niger reported positive changes due to the training, including improved income, education for children, living conditions, social relations and increased self-confidence.
<p>Root causes such as lack of freedom of association and collective bargaining</p>	<p>► 8.7 Accelerator Lab - Ghana</p> <p>The 8.7 Accelerator Lab supported social dialogue through the establishment of a Tripartite Committee on working conditions and the elimination of forced labour in the fishing sector. It also conducted capacity building sessions with employers, workers, and government counterparts and formulated a Trade Union Policy on SDG Target 8.7.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► In 2022-2023, the Ghana Maritime Authority issued a series of shipping notices that mandated compliance with certain provisions of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188). As a result, 80% of Ghanaian flagged industrial trawler fishing vessels were detained for refurbishments and contract verification. ► Fishers saw increased wages, new water and bathing systems installed, the construction of sleeping quarters with ventilation and mattresses and individual work agreements.
<p>Services for migrant workers</p>	<p>► Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia</p> <p>The project provides assistance to migrant workers through 18 Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) in key destination and origin countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, and MRC-like services in Indonesia and Philippines in partnership with the governments, civil society organizations, and trade union partners. The MRCs aim to prevent forced labour by providing information and support services to migrant workers throughout the migration cycle, particularly those in the fishing and seafood processing sectors, including pre-departure information, paralegal assistance, and support to access grievance mechanisms.</p> <p>The project also supported a large-scale public information campaign targeting Myanmar migrant workers through the Yay Kyi Yar Facebook page.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► 60,207 migrant workers and their family members (42% women) have been provided with individualized and responsive services to support safe migration for decent work in South East Asia and beyond. ► 7,079 potential migrant workers in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Indonesia were provided with the pre-departure information and orientation, covering subjects such as included document preparations, laws and relevant regulations, workers' rights and responsibilities, culture and traditions, and support services at the destination countries. ► The Yay Kyi Yar Facebook Myanmar-language campaign hosted 201 original videos and infographics, and reached more than 68 million people, with 1.5 million followers (42% women) across 10 countries.
<p>Private sector engagement</p>	<p>► Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia</p> <p>The programme supports the implementation of the Seafood Good Labour Practices (SGLP) among Thai seafood processing factories in collaboration with the Thai Tuna Industry Association (TTIA) and Thai Frozen Foods Association (TFFA).</p> <p>ILO supported the development and implementation of the SGLP Guidelines to increase compliance with international labour standards including on the eradication of forced labour.</p> <p>In 2022: publication of an assessment of its initial implementation and provision of a series of recommendation to strengthen the ongoing partnership.</p> <p>In 2023: ILO entered into agreement with TTIA and TFFA to continue the implementation of the SGLP as an "continuous improver" programme for private sector through more robust capacity building, monitoring of compliance, and increased public accountability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Regular compliance audit of 55 seafood processing enterprises employing more than 60,000 workers. ► Civil society organizations representing workers are now invited to observe association visits to member factory to increase accountability to workers. ► Increased representation of migrant and women workers in worker voice mechanisms at enterprise level. ► The industry associations committed to the recommendation of the "employer pays" principle for all recruitment fees and related costs, and to implement fair recruitment practices. The associations also committed to banning pregnancy screening during employment and implement gender-responsive measures. ► TTIA also shared their experiences in implementing the SGLP with their counterpart Indonesian industry associations to support the adaptation and implementation of the SGLP in Indonesia.

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