

50 MILLION PEOPLE ARE TRAPPED IN MODERN SLAVERY

THE NEW GLOBAL ESTIMATES OF MODERN SLAVERY INCREASED BY NEARLY 10 MILLION IN 5 YEARS

Slavery is increasing around the world at an alarming rate. 49.6 million people are estimated to be trapped in modern slavery, according to the report just released by the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and the non-governmental organization Walk Free¹. This is an increase of nearly 10 million people, up from 40.3 million in 2016. Nearly one out of every 150 people is trapped in forced labor, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, or state-imposed forced labor such as in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Forced marriage alone accounts for 22 million victims. COVID-19 and armed conflict are contributing factors but cannot solely account for the magnitude of the increase. More than half of all forced labor occurs in either upper middle-income or high-income countries, and no nation is unaffected by modern slavery.

Global Impact to the World

This number is large, and it represents individuals. It represents a teenager sold by her “boyfriend” to other men for sex, and a young man forced to work for days underground in a toxic mineshaft to recover valuable minerals. It represents a 13-year-old girl sold by her parents into a “marriage” to a man more than twice her age, and an 8-year-old boy thrown from a fishing boat into the water to repair tangled nets. It represents a family trapped in debt bondage for generations, carrying heavy loads of bricks on their heads in a kiln’s sweltering heat. For many victims, this number signifies the end of childhood, formal education, and sometimes their life.

The number suggests a growing global sentiment that while goods and services have value, the people creating or providing them do not. Additionally, slavery supports commerce, and profits from human exploitation often fund organized criminal networks, terrorists, and adversarial nations.

Collaborative Efforts to Prioritize Policy

Human traffickers are organized, and the most effective efforts to combat them are organized as well. As the report notes, “Cooperation between governments and the social partners, grounded in social dialogue, is also vital to building lasting, consensus-based solutions to the challenge of forced labour.” Legislation is a key component of collaboration, yet nearly one-third of countries lack laws and policies that adequately criminalize and penalize human trafficking. It also demonstrates that nearly every country in the world has laws which criminalize modern slavery, yet modern slavery is prevalent in every country in the world. Capacity must also be increased at all stages in the prosecution process including enforcement strategies of these laws. Without justice for victims and accountability for traffickers, the cycle of slavery will continue.

Comprehensive survivor protection efforts are also a key component of collaboration, and this report reaffirms our position that to ensure survivors receive the highest-quality care, governments must invest in national and transnational referral mechanisms (NRMs/TRMs) and the adoption of universal standardized indicators of human trafficking across nations. Ultimately, these estimates confirm that modern slavery is the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time, and enhanced collaboration, information sharing and organization between law makers, government leaders, and survivors of human trafficking is more necessary now than ever.

**This statement was prepared by the [Task Force on Human Trafficking](#) for the Parliamentary Intelligence Security Forum.*

¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf