

Committee: GA3: Social, Humanitarian & Cultural

Agenda Item: Taking Measures to End Modern Slavery and Forced Labour in Global Supply Chains

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Introduction

The term modern slavery refers to *the condition of being forced by threats or violence to work for little or no pay, and of having no power to control what work you do or where you do it*, according to the Cambridge Dictionary. Modern slavery is an issue that spans across many industries such as but not limited to fashion, agriculture, mining, construction, electronics and textiles. The industries that entail modern slavery typically target vulnerable populations or minorities; particularly migrants, children or women. The main reasoning behind major companies engaging in such crimes is the cost of labor. Modern slavery is an extreme cost-cutting way that companies use to match the supply-to-demand ratios.

It is common that companies only monitor the first tier of their suppliers (the suppliers that companies buy from directly, not the main suppliers that actually create the product from raw materials), at the same time, the most severe violations happen several tiers down, in clandestine factories, labour brokers and recruitment networks that are run with little or no accountability. While the thirst for cheap goods on the global market increases, and the governments have a hard time enforcing labour standards, the world community is under increasing pressure to respond by tightening due diligence laws, increasing transparency, giving more power to workers, and attacking those economic structures which make it possible for forced labour to continue. It is a fundamental requirement for building ethical, sustainable, and genuinely fair global economies that will make economies grow.

Definition of Key Terms

Forced Labour: The work of any person that they are forcibly made to do under threat and against their free will.

Human Trafficking: Transporting or recruiting of people forcibly, deceitfully, or by using pressure for the purpose of exploitation.

Debt Bondage: The work you do is only to repay the debt although it is impossible to repay it in a lifetime of work.

Supply Chain: Every step a product takes from raw materials to the end consumer.

Subcontracting: When a company hires another company to do the work that is in their contract and this can conceal workers rights violations.

Worker-Driven Monitoring: The workers are given the power to check the work environment and report the problems themselves.

Recruitment Fees: Money paid to be provided with a job that may result in workers being indebted.

Exploitative Recruitment: Employer-favored recruitment choices that are neither fair nor lawful and may eventually lead to the involvement of forced labor.

International Labour Standards (ILS): A global model for granting fair work, wages, safety, and prohibition of forced or child labour.

Migrant Worker: A person who relocates to a foreign country in search of work and is typically exposed to exploitation risks.

Child Labour: Types of works that children do which endanger their health, safety, or education.

Ethical Sourcing: Making sure that the products are made in the manner which respects the workers and human rights.

Coercion: Compelling a person to do something by threats or pressure.

Exploitation: The act of gaining an unfair advantage over someone, usually with the purpose of increasing one's profit.

Corporate Accountability: The public holding the companies responsible when it comes to their labour and human rights abuses.

Operational Audits: The checks done to see whether the working conditions are up to standard.

High-Risk Industries: The sectors such as textiles, agriculture, mining, construction, and fisheries where forced labor is more likely to occur.

Xinjiang: Resource-rich region in northwest China that is known for the allegations regarding forced labour and modern slavery.

Major Actors Involved

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The International Labour Organization is an agency that provides guidance on issues relating to forced labor and worker's rights. ILO globally sets these standards through the conventions that are in line with the "Protect, Respect, Remedy" framework of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Through the conventions such as the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105), and the Protocol of 2014, the ILO provides the means to a facility for recording such accords.

Moreover, the ILO is in charge of the Alliance 8.7 network coordination, which consists of partners who are committed to the goal of eradicating forced labour in the world. The ILO is in some ways a representation of the international legal framework for the implementation of the enforcement of anti-slavery.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) mainly focuses on the criminal side of the modern slavery problem that leads to human trafficking-related activities, including the exploitation of the criminals and the cross-border criminal organizations. The UNODC assists the states by providing them with advisory services on the implementation of the Palermo Protocol.

The Palermo Protocol is better known as The Protocol to Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The protocol represents the main global anti-human trafficking plan that helps to facilitate national investigations and support law enforcement to improve their skills in identifying human trafficking in supply chains by granting them the authority to use the plan.

World Bank

The World Bank and other global financial institutions (IFIs) possess the power to bring about significant changes in the developing countries' economies. Usually, these countries where supply-chain exploitation happens are the ones that need the labour-rights conditions to be included in the loans and development projects.

These IFIs together with the World Bank are taking steps to integrate social and labour safeguards into their loan agreements. Consequently, the people, who are the recipients of the funds will have to take care of the workers by modernizing the national labour inspection systems, putting into practice the national laws on forced labour and human trafficking, recruiting through transparent practices, and taking the necessary steps to prevent the sectors which are supported by the Bank-financed projects (e.g., construction, infrastructure, mining) from being exploited.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is a leader worldwide in the fight against modern slavery, which is best evidenced by their innovative Modern Slavery Act of 2015. Through this legislation, firms substantially sized are bound to yearly make public their transparency statements on the measures marching against forced labor they have taken. United Kingdom laws have amplified the companies' accountability and changed the trend for such regulations in Australia and Canada. Besides, the UK possesses the good-time enforcement agencies such as the GLAA, which manages the exploitation most occurring in the sectors of agriculture and construction. The National Referral Mechanism is very helpful in victim support and recovery. Although corporate reporting remains a challenge, the UK's well-built legal structure, execution, and global-standing influence are a model of how to eliminate slavery in the supply chain.

United States

Among the most rigorous systems of regulation for forced-labor-related accountability is that of the United States. The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) that is in place prohibits the vast majority of the imports from Xinjiang unless companies can demonstrate that their supply chains are free from forced labor—this is what makes the U.S. the most stringent enforcer of forced labor linked to the state. U.S. Customs and Border Protection are in charge of the confiscation of goods that are alleged to be in forced-labor supply chains, and the Tariff act is prohibiting all forced-labor-related goods. The Department of Labor issues comprehensive reports that function as a beacon for companies to comply with regulations and exert pressure on other countries. The U.S. is leading the way in showing how trade laws and transparency instruments can be utilized to resolve the problem of exploitative supply chains by its initiatives of border enforcement, active investigations, and heavy sanctions.

Germany

Germany has propelled the cause of global accountability essentially by enacting the Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (2023). According to the act, companies are required to identify and remove any usage of human rights violations, e.g., forced labor, in their supply chains at any level. Besides, the companies have to conduct risk assessments, put preventive measures into practice, provide complaint mechanisms, and issue their reports annually. Offenders will be fined and will lose the right to public procurements. The effect of Germany is not only confined within Europe as it is a major contributor to the EU's overall due diligence regulations. As the largest sectors of automotive, chemical, and industrial are in the country, the step of Germany to make due diligence compulsory is a very important move on the way to binding corporate responsibility. Germany is a leading example of regulated supply chain management with such a detailed and binding framework.

France

France's Duty of Vigilance Law (2017) is considered the most enforceable compulsory due-diligence framework around the globe. The law introduces the obligation of major businesses to prepare "vigilance plans" identifying and preventing human rights abuses, environmental degradation, and labor exploitation in the activities carried out worldwide. It is a significant point that companies can be sued in France for neglecting their actions, thus civil liability being the chief enforcement means. The system of accountability hereby offers the chance for NGOs and the victims to confront the corporations' indifference. Additionally, France's leading role is a source of motivation for the EU policy projects. Despite the fluctuations of compliance, this regulation still serves as a world benchmark for law-enforced corporate responsibility and real supply-chain supervision.

Australia

Australia's Modern Slavery Act (2018) is a legal regulation that focuses mainly on large corporations and government departments, which must annually publish statements that provide detailed information about risks, due diligence methods, and the measures taken to prevent forced labor. The statements are turned into a register accessible to the public, which promotes transparency and the reputation pressure that goes with it. Besides, Australia is cooperating with Pacific and Asian countries in the protection of migrant workers and also, it is spending a lot on anti-trafficking programs. The government is particularly watching those industries, which are at high risk of labor exploitation such as construction, hospitality, and agriculture. Although the Act lacks strong penalties, the government is progressing towards the introduction of fines and more rigorous enforcement. Australia's transparency-focused approach and regional partnership efforts make it a considerable positive example in the global supply-chain accountability arena.

China

China is ranked as one of the countries with the highest risk of modern slavery. This is mainly because of huge problems with transparency and accusations of forced labour imposed by the state, in particular, the use of Uyghur minorities in Xinjiang. The mentioned sectors include cotton, the textile industry, solar-panel materials, and electronics. These industries are very often the ones which are most deeply intertwined with forcible labor and limited movement. Unfortunately, there is little access to independent auditors, journalists, and NGOs which makes it very difficult to verify labor conditions. The exploitation of internal migrant workers, excessive overtime, and the retention of documents is still going on in factories that provide products for international brands. The Chinese government denies all accusations of forced labor and limits international monitoring, thus China being at the center of the global concern regarding supply chain-related modern slavery.

Bangladesh

Due to a combination of factors such as poverty, lack of labor law enforcement, and production pressure by international brands, Bangladesh remains a country that is constantly at risk of forced labor. The garment sector, which is one of the largest in the world, is frequently blamed for the forced use of workers in overtime hours, the exposure of workers to unsafe conditions, and the exploitation of subcontracting practices without recourse to the workers. Women and rural migrants have been identified as the groups most vulnerable to coercion and withholding of wages. In addition, child labor is very common in high-risk areas and informal sectors such as brick kilns, tanneries, fishing, and domestic work. Although some labor reforms were made after the Rana Plaza tragedy, the execution of these reforms is still inadequate, and corruption is weakening the inspections. Bangladesh's dependence on cheap labor and lack of union protection have made this country still one of the main global forced labour hotspots.

India

India ranks among countries with the largest number of people subjected to forced labor. The main reasons for this situation are poverty, social inequality, and huge informal labor systems. Bonded labor, which is a situation where workers are trapped by debts that cannot be paid, is still very common in brick kilns, agriculture, domestic work, and construction. Child labor exists in the areas of textiles, fireworks, mining, and agriculture. There are laws to ban bonded labor, but the enforcement differs from one state to another and is generally weak due to corruption and a low number of inspections. Migrant workers are subject to exploitation during recruitment and in urban industries. The vast informal workforce and lack of proper oversight are deep-rooted issues in India which, over time, have made it a major global centre for forced-labour exploitation.

Thailand

Thailand's forced-labor situation has often been under the international spotlight, with the most severe abuses being pointed out in the fishing and seafood industries. There, the workers experience violence, debt bondage, document confiscation, they may even be held on board a vessel for several months without anyone knowing. Migrants from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia are very likely to be victims due to the illegal recruitment fee and weak security measures. The same problems are also in agriculture, domestic work, and manufacturing. Even though Thailand has brought on board the reforms and the anti-trafficking plans (partly in response to international pressure), the enforcement of the reforms is still very patchy and the corruption is still there. The cases of forced labor can still be found in Thailand, mostly in those suppliers that are at the lower levels of the chain. These systemic weaknesses have consigned Thailand to be a high-risk country in terms of global supply chains.

General Overview of the Issue

Modern slavery and forced labour in global supply chains are one of the most complicated and important problems we are facing in our world today. Even though slavery is illegal all around the world, millions of people, especially women and children, are still being exploited. This abuse can continue in our present day because it is deeply connected to most countries' economic and political structures.

1. The Structure of Global Supply Chains and Why Exploitation is so Common

Global supply chains have a very complex structure. Products pass through multiple countries before reaching their intended market. Large firms usually outsource their products to different suppliers, and those suppliers can also contract their work to smaller factories. This shows the many layers of a single supply chain.

Forced labour usually happens on the last link of the chain, which is usually the one with the least amount of government inspection and international monitoring. This is the main reason why forced labour can still happen without being detected.

2. The Effects of History and Economic Changes on Modern Slavery

a. Globalisation and demand for cheap products

When global production shifted over to countries with cheaper labour, this created competition in the supply market. Many factories now try to cut wages or force workers into overtime to cut final costs and produce faster. These conditions increase the demand for cheap labour, which results in forced labour, especially in the mining, electronics and clothing sectors.

b. Informal economies

In most developing countries, most of the workforce falls into the informal sector. These workers usually don't have contracts, which results in no legal rights and no access to social protection. This is why child labour and exploitation are so common, especially in developing countries, which also happen to be the last link of the global supply chain.

c. Migration

Many workers are forced to migrate to other countries in search of employment. Unfortunately, most of them are recruited by agents who take advantage of them by charging very high fees. Then, these workers are forced into debt just to pay off their fees. This creates a scenario where the workers are now trapped in this loop, which forces them to work for their employer just to be able to pay off their debts. This situation is usually referred to as debt bondage, which is currently the most common form of modern slavery.

3. Political and Governmental Factors

Many governments usually don't allocate enough inspectors, trained officials and resources to enforce labour laws. In some countries, this situation is further affected by political pressure and corruption. As a result, many firms can get away with breaking labour laws and exploiting workers without any consequences. Additionally, in most countries, workers cannot unionise freely without repercussions from their employer or government. Without unions or worker organisations, workers cannot complain about their current working conditions.

4. The Role of Companies

Companies also have a lot of influence on the issue. Big multinational companies rely on supply chains for the most optimal production efficiency. While some companies try to follow some ethical guidelines while doing primary business, as the chain goes down, the company has less influence on the ethical practices of the producers. Many large firms audit their factories to check on working conditions, but these audits usually fail to actually detect the ongoing forced labour. Workers may be forced to hide their problems, documents could be changed, and auditors usually don't investigate recruiters and brokers, which is where the chain begins. This is why companies may be a part of modern slavery without even knowing.

5. Human and Social Consequences

Workers who were forced into labour usually suffer from physical and mental trauma and are kept away from their friends and family for extended periods of time. Young workers are often taken away from their education and become stuck in a cycle of poverty which they can't free themselves from. For communities, forced labour actually weakens economic stability and decreases trust in the government. All of these are the result of people, especially younger people, being forced into labour.

6. Global Stability

More economically developed countries (MEDC), especially in Europe, North America and some parts of Asia, actually shape the labour conditions through their laws and purchasing choices. New regulations coming from the European Union (EU), the United States of America and Australia require larger companies to examine their supply chains and report unlawful actions. Some laws even ban certain imports that are linked to high amounts of forced labour, which forces companies to be more transparent in their supply chains. International cooperation between big organisations like the UN and certain NGO's has become more common, which helps investigate and reduce forced labour cases.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, modern slavery in global supply chains is very complicated and requires multi-layered solutions. The issue stems from economic competition, weak or corrupt governments, hidden networks and vulnerability of young and immigrant workers, which makes it easier for large companies to take advantage of workers and force them into hard labour. While international laws and other movements are trying to solve the issue, it requires a larger initiative with help from governments.

Timeline of Important Events

Date:	Event:
1990s	Forced labour in factories grows with globalization in Latin America & Asia
1998	ILO Declaration leading to forced labour recognized as a fundamental violation
2000	UN Palermo Protocol goes into practice, emphasizing global definition of trafficking & forced labour

2013	Rana Plaza Collapse (Bangladesh) leads to global outrage, supply-chain reforms begin
2015	UK Modern Slavery Act causes companies must report on forced labour
2017	France Duty of Vigilance Law goes into action, introducing the enforceable corporate liability
2018	Australia Modern Slavery Act happens, contributing to the public registry for corporate reporting
2019	Uyghur Forced Labour expose leads to China global supply-chain scrutiny spikes
2021	Germany Supply Chain Due Diligence Act causes mandatory corporate risk assessment (companies become legally required to check entire supply chains)

2022	UFLPA (Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act) in the US leads to Xinjiang imports being banned unless proven clean
2025 - 2025	EU CSDDD (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive) helping achieve due diligence across Europe

Related Documents

ILO Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930)

ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105, 1957)

ILO Protocol of 2014 to Convention No. 29

UN Palermo Protocol (2000)

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011)

Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (2013)

UK Modern Slavery Act (2015)

Past Solution Attempts

Palermo Protocol (2000)

One of the first major international legal instruments to define human trafficking and forced labor as one of the most serious crimes is the Palermo Protocol. It is a binding document that commits countries to criminalize trafficking, provide the victims with aid and support, and cooperate at the international level. In effect, what the protocol accomplished was not only to define a single set of standards to be followed everywhere, thus enabling a new worldwide legal framework to be used by governments and NGOs in their efforts to combat the latest and cross-border forms of human trafficking but it also upgraded the laws targeting traffickers while simultaneously motivating the victim support approach to be followed, hence, becoming a landmark in the spread of the later domestic anti-slavery laws and corporate due diligence standards globally.

UK Slavery Act (2014)

The UK Modern Slavery Act is a pioneer global legislation that mandated businesses to disclose the measures undertaken to identify and address the dangers of forced labor in their supply chains. The regulation enhanced corporate transparency and accountability by obliging companies to carry out risk assessments, policy implementation, and the release of annual public statements regarding their anti-slavery initiatives. The Act also defined the crimes as the situations of slavery, servitude, and forced labour, and provided for victim protection measures. Although there are some limitations in terms of enforcement, it established a worldwide reference point for legislations that link corporate responsibility to the fight against modern slavery and have been followed by similar laws in other countries, such as Australia and the EU.

US Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (2022)

The UFLPA specifically deals with the issue of forced labor in Xinjiang, China, and is based on the assumption that all commodities from the area are made under forced labor unless it is proved otherwise. What this means is that companies now have to show that their supply chains are compliant; otherwise, their products are effectively banned from being imported. The Act, therefore, has a ripple effect around the world, as multinational corporations have to perform rigorous due diligence, trace the origins of their raw materials, and end their relationships with suppliers who are involved in human rights abuses. It is, thus, a significant enforcement instrument at the state level, which, by intertwining legal, economic, and human rights components, aims at stopping the occurrence of exploitation in regions with a high risk and at increasing corporate accountability globally.

The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (2013–2021)

The Bangladesh Accord is usually seen as one of the most successful attempts to improve labour conditions in global supply chains. Created after the Rana Plaza factory collapse, which killed over 1,100 garment workers, the Accord was a legally binding agreement between global brands, trade unions, and NGOs. Unlike previous voluntary initiatives, it required brands to ensure the safety of factories in their supply chains and allowed unions to participate in inspections and enforce compliance. In 8 years, the Accord led to thousands of factory inspections, major safety renovations, and the creation of confidential worker complaint systems. Although its primary focus was on factory safety, the Accord showed that binding international agreements, transparent inspections, and worker involvement can significantly reduce exploitation and create a way for stronger protections against forced labour.

The ILO Forced Labour Convention and the 2014 Protocol

The ILO's Forced Labour Convention No. 29 and its current 2014 Protocol have established the global foundation for addressing forced labour. Countries that agree to the Protocol commit to updating their laws, strengthening labour inspections, regulating recruitment agencies, and supporting victims. The ILO also helps governments in developing National Action Plans, training inspectors, and building systems for identifying forced labour in supply chains. This framework has shaped labour laws in dozens of countries and is the key international standard that guides both national policies and corporate supply chain practices. It is currently the most detailed global tool for addressing forced labour, and its influence extends to every region and sector involved in global production.

Possible Solutions

Modern slavery can be avoided if governments empower labour inspections, overhaul ethical recruitment and develop corporate responsibility better. Increasing the number of inspectors and digital access could enhance governmental oversight, in addition to partnerships with the ILO and IOM for recruitment, and regulatory agencies to stop the need for workers to pay their own recruitment fees, which are a leading cause for debt bondage.

Supply Chain Transparency

The fight against modern slavery of today begins with an understanding of the supply chain operations. Corporations are in a position to install online tracking mechanisms and blockchain technology in order to trace the use of the materials and the labor practices right from the source. Frequent inspections, supplier surveillance, and disclosure to the public are the means by which an organization makes itself accountable and lessens the chances of a violation occurring. Openness in the supply chain compels suppliers to keep up their decent moral norms while gaining confidence from consumers, regulators, and investors, thus making it extremely difficult for slavery and exploitation to be concealed.

Proactive Risk Assessment

Firms have the ability to fight modern slavery through the recognition of risks at their initial stage. The process of mapping supply chains, evaluating labor conditions and analyzing environmental repercussions, expose weak points. Instructing suppliers, providing them with advice and facilitating the adoption of ethical practices help in the prevention of the occurrence of abuses. A company equipped with a committed team or a partnership with an NGO will be in a better position to solve the problem of complex risks. By such a move, companies turn areas with a high risk of violation of human rights into compliance exemplars and thus ensure that such violations are detected and rectified without delay.

Incentives and Accountability for Suppliers

One of the main ways of eradication of modern slavery is the use of contract strategies. Enterprises are able to insert explicit anti-slavery provisions in vendor agreements, among which there are deterrents in case of infringements and benefits in case of ethical accomplishment. Relationships of duration make it possible for a supplier to be willing to set up a secure factory environment and implement good labor practices. Yes, this lowers the risk of law and reputation that the company faces, but most importantly it promotes accountability all over the supply chain network. Through the matching of incentives with ethical conduct, modern slavery will be forever eliminated.

Corporate Culture and Governance

The elimination of modern slavery is greatly facilitated by a well-developed internal culture. The appointment of compliance officers, the provision of staff training, and the integration of human rights into corporate policies are ways in which due diligence is exercised every day. Employees are made responsible through internal reporting channels and performance metrics. If sustainability and morality are at the core of the decision-making process, then compliance is not only a legal obligation but also a characteristic of the company's identity. Such an internal pledge virtually eliminates the possibility of modern slavery continuing.

Useful Links

ILO Global Estimates on Forced Labour

https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_854733

Walk Free – Global Slavery Index

<https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/>

UNODC – Human Trafficking & Smuggling Reports

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html>

IOM – International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS)

<https://iris.iom.int/>

UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights (UNGPs)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/guiding-principles-business-and-human-rights>

OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains

<https://www.oecd.org/corporate/mne/responsible-business-conduct-and-due-diligence.htm>

Better Work Programme (ILO & IFC)

<https://betterwork.org/>

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre – Forced Labour Hub

<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/issues/forced-labour/>

Anti-Slavery International

<https://www.antislavery.org/>

Human Rights Watch – Workers' Rights Reports

<https://www.hrw.org/topic/labor>

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