

Modern slavery

50 million people worldwide in modern slavery

Latest estimates show that forced labour and forced marriage have increased significantly in the last five years, according to the International Labour Organization, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration.

Press release | 12 September 2022

One in every 150 people are trapped in modern slavery



GENEVA (ILO News) – Fifty million people were living in modern slavery in 2021, according to the latest [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#). Of these people, 28 million were in forced labour and 22 million were trapped in forced marriage.

The number of people in modern slavery has risen significantly in the last five years. 10 million more people were in modern slavery in 2021 compared to 2016 global estimates. Women and children remain disproportionately vulnerable.

Modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world, and cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious lines. More than half (52 per cent) of all forced labour and a quarter of all forced marriages can be found in upper-middle income or high-income countries.

Forced labour

Most cases of forced labour (86 per cent) are found in the private sector. Forced labour in sectors other than commercial sexual exploitation accounts for 63 per cent of all forced labour, while forced commercial sexual exploitation represents 23 per cent of all forced labour. Almost four out of five of those in forced commercial sexual exploitation are women or girls.

State-imposed forced labour accounts for 14 per cent of people in forced labour.

Almost one in eight of all those in forced labour are children (3.3 million). More than half of these are in commercial sexual exploitation.

Forced marriage

An estimated 22 million people were living in forced marriage on any given day in 2021. This indicates an increase of 6.6 million since the 2016 global estimates.

The true incidence of forced marriage, particularly involving children aged 16 and younger, is likely far greater than current estimates can capture; these are based on a narrow definition and do not include all child marriages. Child marriages are considered to be forced because a child cannot legally give consent to marry.

Forced marriage is closely linked to long-established patriarchal attitudes and practices and is highly context specific. The overwhelming majority of forced marriages (more than 85 per cent) was driven by family pressure. Although two-thirds (65 per cent) of forced marriages are found in Asia and the Pacific, when regional population size is considered, the prevalence is highest in the Arab States, with 4.8 people out of every 1,000 in the region in forced marriage.



© Trafficking in Persons Office USA

Migrants particularly vulnerable to forced labour

Migrant workers are more than three times more likely to be in forced labour than non-migrant adult workers. While labour migration has a largely positive effect on individuals, households, communities and societies, this finding demonstrates how migrants are particularly vulnerable to forced labour and trafficking, whether because of irregular or poorly governed migration, or unfair and unethical recruitment practices.

"It is shocking that the situation of modern slavery is not improving. Nothing can justify the persistence of this fundamental abuse of human rights," said ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder. "We know what needs to be done, and we know it can be done. Effective national policies and regulation are fundamental. But governments cannot do this alone. International standards provide a sound basis, and an all-hands-on-deck approach is needed. Trade unions, employers' organizations, civil society and ordinary people all have critical roles to play."

António Vitorino, IOM Director-General, said: "This report underscores the urgency of ensuring that all migration is safe, orderly, and regular. Reducing the vulnerability of migrants to forced labour and trafficking in persons depends first and foremost on national policy and legal frameworks that respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants – and potential migrants – at all stages of the migration process, regardless of their migration status. The whole of society must work together to reverse these shocking trends, including through

implementation of the Global Compact on Migration."

Grace Forrest, Founding Director of Walk Free, said: "Modern slavery is the antithesis of sustainable development. Yet, in 2022, it continues to underpin our global economy. It is a man-made problem, connected to both historical slavery and persisting structural inequality. In a time of compounding crises, genuine political will is the key to ending these human rights abuses."

Ending modern slavery

The report proposes a number of recommended actions which, taken together and swiftly, would mark significant progress towards ending modern slavery. They include: improving and enforcing laws and labour inspections; ending state-imposed forced labour; stronger measures to combat forced labour and trafficking in business and supply chains; extending social protection, and strengthening legal protections, including raising the legal age of marriage to 18 without exception. Other measures include addressing the increased risk of trafficking and forced labour for migrant workers, promoting fair and ethical recruitment, and greater support for women, girls and vulnerable individuals.

Notes to editors

Modern slavery, as defined for the report, is comprised of two principal components – forced labour and forced marriage. Both refer to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or cannot leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power. Forced labour, as defined in the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29) >, refers to "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". The 'private economy' includes all forms of forced labour other than state-imposed forced labour.

Contacts:

For further information and to arrange media interviews, please reach out to the following contacts:

International Labour Organization

ILO Department of Communication

Email: newsroom@ilo.org >

Tel: +41 22 799 7912

Walk Free

Martina Ucnikova

Email: mucnikova@walkfree.org >

Tel: +61 458 029 760

International Organization for Migration

Kennedy Okoth

Email: Kokoth@iom.int >

Tel: +41 22 717 9702

Tags: bonded labour, child labour, forced labour, trafficking in persons, child workers, migrant workers, women workers, debt, human rights, workers rights, vulnerable groups



Global Estimates of Modern Slavery

Forced Labour and Forced Marriage



Report

[Global Estimates of Modern Slavery:
Forced Labour and Forced Marriage >](#)

Key resources

[Modern slavery global estimates \[Executive Summary\] > \[pdf 511KB\] >](#)

See also

Web page

[ILO topic portal on Forced Labour >](#)

Media contact

newsroom@ilo.org >

© 1996-2022 International Labour Organization (ILO) | [Copyright and permissions](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Fraud alert](#) | [Disclaimer](#)

We use cookies to give you the best experience. By using our website, you consent to the use of cookies. Find out more in our [privacy policy](#). [OK, I understand](#)