

Global Estimates of Modern Slavery **Forced Labour and Forced Marriage**



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Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage

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Executive summary

Modern slavery is the very antithesis of social justice and sustainable development. The 2021 Global Estimates indicate there are 50 million people in situations of modern slavery on any given day, either forced to work against their will or in a marriage that they were forced into. This number translates to nearly one of every 150 people in the world. The estimates also indicate that situations of modern slavery are by no means transient – entrapment in forced labour can last years, while in most cases forced marriage is a life sentence. And sadly, the situation is not improving. The 2021 Global Estimates show that millions more men, women, and children have been forced to work or marry in the period since the previous estimates were released in 2017.

Through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global community has committed to ending modern slavery among children by 2025, and universally by 2030 (Target 8.7). This report underscores the scale of the challenge facing the global community in the short period remaining to meet these ambitious targets.

Compounding crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, and climate change – in recent years have led to unprecedented disruption to employment and education, increases in extreme poverty and forced and unsafe migration, and an upsurge in reports of gender-based violence, together serving to heighten the risk of all forms of modern slavery. As is usually the case, it is those who are already in situations of greatest vulnerability – including the poor and socially excluded, workers in the informal economy, irregular or otherwise unprotected migrant workers, and people subject to discrimination – who are most affected.

It is urgent that the global community gathers the will and resources to overcome these obstacles and get progress towards ending modern slavery back on track. Promises and statements of good intent are not enough. While the principal responsibility for change lies with national governments, a whole of society approach is needed – the social partners, participants in the social and solidarity economy, businesses, investors, survivor groups, civil society, and an array of other actors have critical roles to play. Technical cooperation and assistance from UN agencies, other multilateral and bilateral organizations, international non-governmental organizations, and other groups will also be important to progress. Social dialogue provides an essential framework for building lasting, consensus-based solutions to the challenge of modern slavery.

The global and regional estimates presented in this report were developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The estimates are based on a jointly developed methodology summarised in the Annex and described in detail in the methodology report produced along with this 2021 Global Estimates report. As was the case for the 2016 global estimates, the 2021 calculations are derived from multiple data sources, as no single source was sufficiently reliable. The principal sources are data from nationally representative household surveys – 68 forced labour surveys and 75 forced marriage surveys – jointly conducted by ILO and Walk Free, as well as the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) anonymised case dataset on victims of trafficking collected by IOM and its partners in the process of providing protection and assistance services to trafficked persons.

Overview of key findings

Modern slavery, as defined for the purpose of the global estimates, 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, deception, abuse of power or other forms of coercion.

The scourge of modern slavery has by no means been relegated to history. The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that 49.6 million people are in modern slavery on any given day, either forced to work against their will or in a marriage that they were forced into. Forced labour accounts for 27.6 million of those in modern slavery and forced marriage for 22 million.

Forced labour

Forced labour, as set out in the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29),¹ 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.”

There are 27.6 million people in situations of forced labour on any given day. This absolute number translates to 3.5 people in forced labour for every thousand people in the world. Women and girls make up 11.8 million of the total in forced labour. More than 3.3 million of all those in forced labour are children.

Forced labour has grown in recent years. A simple comparison with the 2016 global estimates indicates an increase of 2.7 million in the number people in forced labour between 2016 and 2021, which translates to a rise in the *prevalence* of forced labour from 3.4 to 3.5 per thousand people in the world. The increase in the number of people in forced labour was driven entirely by forced labour in the private economy, both in forced commercial sexual exploitation and in forced labour in other sectors.

The initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic were accompanied by widespread reports of forced labour linked to the crisis. Disruptions to income because of the pandemic led to greater indebtedness among workers and with it reports of a rise in debt bondage among some workers lacking access to formal credit channels. The crisis also resulted in a deterioration of working conditions for many workers, in some cases leading to forced labour. Yet little is known about how forced labour risks have evolved since the initial months of the crisis, as strict economy-wide workplace shutdowns were phased out in most countries and the world economy began its fragile recovery. There are many reasons for concern in this regard. The World Bank indicates that extreme poverty – one important metric of forced labour risk – remains far higher than the pre-pandemic trajectory² and the ILO reports that the jobs recovery has stalled in much of the world.³

No region of the world is spared from forced labour. Asia and the Pacific is host to more than half of the global total (15.1 million), followed by Europe and Central Asia (4.1 million), Africa (3.8 million), the Americas (3.6 million), and the Arab States (0.9 million). But this regional ranking changes considerably when forced labour is expressed as a proportion of the population. By this measure, forced labour is highest in the Arab States (5.3 per thousand people), followed by Europe and Central Asia (4.4 per thousand), the Americas and Asia and the Pacific (both at 3.5 per thousand), and Africa (2.9 per thousand).

Forced labour is a concern regardless of a country's wealth. More than half of all forced labour occurs in either upper-middle income or high-income countries. When population is taken into account, forced labour is highest in low income countries (6.3 per thousand people) followed by high income countries (4.4 per thousand).

Most forced labour occurs in the private economy. Eighty-six per cent of forced labour cases are imposed by private actors – 63 per cent in the private economy in sectors other than commercial sexual exploitation and 23 per cent in forced commercial sexual exploitation. State-imposed forced labour accounts for the remaining 14 per cent of people in forced labour.

Forced labour touches virtually all parts of the private economy. The five sectors accounting for the majority of total adult forced labour (87 per cent) are services (excluding domestic work), manufacturing, construction, agriculture (excluding fishing), and domestic work. Other sectors form smaller shares but nonetheless still account for hundreds of thousands of people. These include adult workers who are forced to dig for minerals or perform other mining and quarrying work, fishers who are trapped in forced labour aboard fishing vessels, people forced to beg on the street, and people forced into illicit activities.

The composition of forced labour differs from that of the broader labour force in a number of ways. The share of migrants in the group of people in forced labour is much higher than the share of migrants in the overall labour force. There are also relatively more men among workers in forced labour compared to the labour force generally. People in forced labour are more likely to be in manufacturing, and much more likely to be in construction, than workers in the overall labour force. They are less likely to be in the services and agriculture sectors than workers in the overall labour force.

People in forced labour exploitation are subjected to multiple forms of coercion to compel them to work against their will. The systematic and deliberate withholding of wages, used by abusive employers to compel workers to stay in a job out of fear of losing accrued earnings, is the most common form of coercion, experienced by 36 per cent of those in forced labour. This is followed by abuse of vulnerability through threat of dismissal, which was experienced by one in five of those in forced labour. More severe forms of coercion, including forced confinement, physical and sexual violence, and the deprivation of basic needs, are less common but by no means negligible.

Forced labour in the private economy has an important gender dimension.

Women in forced labour are much more likely than their male counterparts to be in domestic work, while men in forced labour are much more likely to be in the construction sector. Women are more likely to be coerced through wage non-payment and abuse of vulnerability, and men through threats of violence and financial penalties. Women are also more likely than men to be subjected to physical and sexual violence and threats against family members.

Migrant workers face a higher risk of forced labour than other workers.

The forced labour prevalence of adult migrant workers is more than three times higher than that of adult non-migrant workers. This figure makes clear that when migrant workers are not protected by law or are unable to exercise their rights, migration is irregular or poorly governed, or where recruitment practices are unfair or unethical, migration can lead to situations of vulnerability to forced labour.

An estimated 6.3 million people are in situations of forced commercial sexual exploitation at any point in time.

Gender is a key determining factor: nearly four out of every five people trapped in these situations are girls or women.

The tragedy of children subjected to forced labour demands special urgency.

A total of 3.3 million children are in situations of forced labour, accounting for about 12 per cent of all those in forced labour. And because of data constraints, these numbers, already alarming, may well be just the tip of the iceberg. The forced labour of children constitutes one component of child labour,⁴ which the international community – through Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals – has committed to ending by 2025.

The forced labour of children occurs across wide array of economic sectors and industries.

Over half of all children in forced labour are in commercial sexual exploitation.⁵ Domestic work, agriculture, and manufacturing are among the many other sectors where children in forced labour are found. Qualitative reports indicate that children can be subjected to severe forms of coercion and abuse, including abduction, drugging, being held in captivity, deception, and manipulation of debt. Some of the worst abuses occur in situations of armed conflict.

The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that 3.9 million people are in state-imposed forced labour at any point in time.

Males make up more than three of every four of those in forced labour imposed by state authorities, while 8 per cent of those in state-imposed forced labour are children. Over half (55 per cent) of all cases involve some form of abuse of compulsory prison labour, 27 per cent involve the abuse of conscription and 17 per cent involve forced labour for economic development or for work beyond normal civic obligations.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage is a complex and highly gendered practice. Although men and boys are also forced to marry, it predominantly affects women and girls. Forced marriages occur in every region of the world and cut across ethnic, cultural, and religious lines. The many drivers of forced marriage are closely linked to longstanding patriarchal attitudes and practices and are highly context specific.

The number of men, women, and children living in forced marriages has risen globally. An estimated 22 million people were living in situations of forced marriage on any given day in 2021. This is a 6.6 million increase in the number of people living in a forced marriage between 2016 and 2021, which translates to a rise in *prevalence* from 2.1 to 2.8 per thousand people.

Forced marriages take place in every region in the world. Nearly two-thirds of all forced marriages, an estimated 14.2 million people, are in Asia and the Pacific. This is followed by 14.5 per cent in Africa (3.2 million) and 10.4 per cent in Europe and Central Asia (2.3 million). When we account for the population in each region, prevalence of forced marriage is highest in the Arab States (4.8 per thousand population), followed by Asia and the Pacific (3.3 per thousand population).

Over two-thirds of those forced to marry are female. This equates to an estimated 14.9 million women and girls. While women and girls account for the majority of people living in a forced marriage, men and boys are also subjected to forced marriage.

Three in every five people in a forced marriage are in lower-middle income countries; however, wealthier nations are not immune, with 26 per cent of forced marriages in high or upper-middle income countries.

Family members were responsible for the vast majority of forced marriages. Most persons who reported on the circumstances of forced marriage were forced to marry by their parents (73 per cent) or other relatives (16 per cent).

Half of those living in forced marriages were coerced using emotional threats or verbal abuse. This includes the use of emotional blackmail – for example, parents threatening self-harm or asserting that the family’s reputation will be ruined – and threats of estrangement from family members, among other things. Physical or sexual violence and threats of violence were the next most used form of coercion to force a marriage (19 per cent).

Once forced to marry, there is greater risk of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic servitude and other forms of forced labour both inside and outside the home. Females are more likely than males to report being forced to perform work by their spouse or the spouse’s family.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the underlying drivers of all forms of modern slavery, including forced marriage, which often is linked to economic hardship. Widespread socio-economic instability due to the pandemic led to increased global unemployment, increased indebtedness, and an increase in extreme global poverty for the first time in two decades. As the data only partially reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the estimates presented in this report are likely to understate the full magnitude of the pandemic’s impact.

Ending modern slavery: the path to 2030

Nothing can justify the persistence of modern slavery in today's world. We can and must do better. It is not a question of not knowing what to do. There is a substantial and growing body of policy and programming experience in addressing modern slavery, offering critical guidance for the future. The overall rise in modern slavery also masks numerous contexts that have registered significant reductions, offering additional key insights into the policy choices needed for progress. International legal instruments provide the normative framework for efforts against modern slavery.⁶

Some of the key policy priorities for addressing forced labour and forced marriage in the lead up to the 2030 target date for ending modern slavery are discussed below.

Forced labour

- **Respect for the freedoms of workers to associate and to bargain collectively** is indispensable to a world free from forced labour. These fundamental labour rights enable workers to exert a collective voice to defend their shared interests and to bargain collectively for secure and decent work, thus creating workplaces that are inimical to forced labour and workers who are resilient to its risks. These rights are essential prerequisites for social dialogue, which in turn is critical to building lasting, consensus-based solutions to the challenge of forced labour. Currently, workers in much of the world, and the vast majority of workers in the informal economy – migrants as well as nationals – lack a representative and collective voice.
- **Extend social protection, including floors, to all workers and their families**, to mitigate the socio-economic vulnerability that underpins much of forced labour, and to provide workers with the basic income security to be able to say no to jobs that are abusive and to quit jobs that have become so. Extending social protection coverage in the informal economy is a priority. It is important that social protection also provides inclusive, equitable and non-discriminatory coverage to migrants.
- **Promote fair and ethical recruitment**, to protect workers from abusive and fraudulent practices during the recruitment and placement process, including the charging of extortionate fees and related costs by unscrupulous recruitment agencies and labour intermediaries. The global estimates indicate that a large share of forced labour cases can be traced to abuses occurring during the recruitment phase of their employment.
- **Strengthen the reach and capacity of public labour inspectorates**, so they are able to detect and act on labour violations before they deteriorate into forced labour, able to raise awareness of forced labour risks and the compliance obligations of employers, and able to promptly detect and refer actual forced labour cases. Extending the reach of labour inspectorates into the informal economy is a priority.

- 7
- **Ensure protection for people freed from forced labour**, through immediate assistance, rehabilitation, and long-term sustainable solutions, so they can successfully recover and avoid re-victimization. Special consideration should be given to children, migrants, and those trafficked for forced labour. Despite progress, still only a small fraction of those subjected to forced labour and trafficking for forced labour are identified and referred to comprehensive protection services.
 - **Ensure access to remedy for people freed from forced labour**, to help recompense them for the consequences of their subjection to forced labour and to help in their recovery. Remedies include compensation for material damages (e.g., as medical costs, unpaid wages, legal fees, and loss of earnings and earning potential) or for moral damages (e.g., pain and emotional distress). Currently, only a very small share of those subjected to forced labour and human trafficking are provided with compensation or other forms of remedy.
 - **Ensure adequate enforcement**, to bring perpetrators to justice and deter would-be offenders from contemplating the crime of forced labour. Statistics indicate that the number of cases of forced labour and human trafficking reported for legal investigation remains low and, due to limited capacities for adequate investigation and prosecution of these crimes, the rate of conviction is minimal.
 - **Address migrants' vulnerability to forced labour and trafficking for forced labour**. Although most migration is voluntary and has a largely positive impact on individuals and societies, the global estimates indicate that when migrants are not protected by law or are unable to exercise their rights they can be at increased risk of forced labour and human trafficking. National policy and legal frameworks that promote respect for the rights of all migrants at all stages of the migration process, regardless of their migration status, are urgently needed.
 - **Address children trapped in forced labour**. Far more investment is needed in identification and protection measures for children in forced labour, including, but not limited to, those in commercial sexual exploitation and those in forced labour linked to armed conflict. Better information on the numbers of children involved, and on the nature and drivers of the forced labour they are trapped in, is urgently needed to inform responses.
 - **Mitigate the heightened risk of forced labour and trafficking for forced labour in situations of crisis**. Much of forced labour and human trafficking occurs in situations of crisis linked to armed conflicts, disasters, and disease. There is a need to mainstream prevention and protection measures across all phases of crisis responses, from pre-crisis preparedness to humanitarian action following crisis outbreak and on to post-crisis reconstruction and recovery. Measures to sustain livelihoods during crises are especially important in preventing workers from falling into forced labour and trafficking as they struggle to support themselves and their families.

- **Combat forced labour and trafficking for forced labour in business operations and supply chains.** Attention should focus on identifying, prioritizing, and acting on “hotspots” where the risk of forced labour and other human rights abuses is highest in terms of both severity and scale. Particularly important in this context are the informal micro- and small enterprises operating at the lower links of supply chains in high-risk sectors and locations.
- **End state-imposed forced labour, which accounts for one in seven of all forced labour cases.** The fact that state-imposed forced labour is the direct product of deliberate laws and practices on the part of states makes abundantly clear what is needed for change – namely, the political commitment and follow-up to reform these same laws and practices.
- **Partnership and international cooperation.** The challenge of forced labour is too big, and its myriad root causes too complex, for national governments or other stakeholders to address on their own. Alliance 8.7 plays an important role in facilitating cooperation and experience exchange on forced labour and human trafficking across the array of governmental and non-governmental organizations that make up its wide membership. International support to financing and resource mobilization is one of the key ingredients of broader cooperation and partnership against forced labour.

Forced marriage

- **As women and girls are disproportionately affected, legislative and policy responses should have a gendered lens,** including gender-sensitive laws, policies, programmes, and budgets, including gender-responsive social protection mechanisms. It is important that these initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and provide non-discriminatory access to migrants.
- **Ensure adequate civil and criminal protections in national legislation.** This should include raising the legal age of marriage to 18 without exceptions in order to protect children, criminalizing the act of marrying someone who does not consent, regardless of age, and civil protections that protect the individual from marriage without having to penalise the perpetrators, who are often family members. Legislative action should be part of a broader holistic response that tackles underlying drivers of forced marriage, and includes prevention and support measures such as safe accommodation, emergency funds, and psychosocial support.
- **Address underlying socio-cultural norms and structures that contribute to forced marriage.** Legislation is not in itself sufficient to end forced marriage and needs to be combined with wider preventative approaches addressing underlying discrimination and gender inequality, as well as related socio-cultural norms. Central to changing these attitudes is context-specific research on vulnerabilities and community-based education, training, and empowerment activities.

- **Invest in building the agency of women and girls.** Ensuring that women and girls have the opportunity and ability to complete school, earn a livelihood, and inherit assets plays a significant role in reducing vulnerability to forced marriage. To support this, institutions and employers should offer employment opportunities for women and girls while providing training for “soft-skills” beyond formal education, such as pre-employment and on-the-job skills building and training programmes.
- **Protect the rights of those vulnerable to forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage during times of crisis.** This requires coordination among humanitarian agencies to create pathways for people to safely leave conflict areas and to provide livelihood and education opportunities, ensure food security, establish free civil registration services (including births and marriages), and build the capacity of local service providers.
- **Address the vulnerability of migrants, particularly children.** This includes improving capacity to identify the most vulnerable, as well as ensuring equal access to safe, dignified return and sustainable reintegration such as social protection and services, justice, psychosocial assistance, education, vocational training, employment opportunities, and decent work, regardless of their migration status. Legal identity is a core enabler of sustainable development and safe and regular migration; access to legal identity registration procedures is particularly important for migrants at risk of forced marriage.

Reliable information and statistics on forced labour, forced marriage, and human trafficking are critical to promoting awareness and understanding of the problem, and to informing policy responses. It is hoped that the findings presented in the report will encourage further research and data collection efforts focused on the national and local dimensions of all forms of modern slavery.



Photo: Guillermo Arias/AFP via Getty Images

Introduction

Years of labour to repay a \$20 debt. When he was only 16, Ran, now in his eighties, took a \$20 loan from a landowner. To repay his debt, he ploughed the landowner's field for years until his government freed him. For years, the fruit of his labour belonged to someone else. He couldn't leave, he couldn't rest, he couldn't stop. He was in bonded labour.

When she was also just 16, Bianca was taken from the village where she grew up. From there, she was trafficked and sold five times before arriving in a nearby country, where she was kept behind bars and made to work as a prostitute. When she became pregnant, she managed to escape to a shelter, where her baby, Anne-Marie, was born.

Ida's story starts less dramatically but ends just as sadly. After signing a contract with a recruitment agency in her home country, she travelled abroad where she was promised a job as a domestic worker. When she got there, her employers confiscated her passport. She was made to work very long days, had to sleep on the floor and eat leftovers. For three years, she was kept a prisoner and only managed to escape by jumping out of a window. After weeks in hospital, she was finally sent home, limping, penniless, and scarred for life.

When she was just 12, Jasmine was married off to a man who offered to wed her in lieu of the debt her father owed him. Jasmine's husband was an alcoholic and forced her into commercial sexual exploitation to pay for his addiction. In addition to forced marriage and sexual exploitation, she endured physical violence and abuse at the hands of her husband.

Lyn met her boyfriend on a social media platform. They talked for many months before arranging to meet near her hometown. Once they met in person, he asked her to come meet his "uncle" in another town. When they arrived at their destination, her boyfriend and his "uncle" sold her into marriage to another man. Lyn never saw her boyfriend again.

Stories of modern slavery like those of Ran, Bianca, Jasmine, Ida, and Lyn are unfortunately not rare.

Today, 50 million people around the world are in some form of slavery – whether it is considered "contemporary" or is a centuries-old practice, and whether it occurs in the world of work, as in the case of forced labour, or outside, as in the case of forced marriage. And the challenge of modern slavery appears to be growing. Millions of *additional* people – women, men, girls and boys – have fallen victim to forced labour and forced marriage in recent years.

This report, the *2021 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, assesses the situation of modern slavery in the world today and the key policy priorities for ending it among children by 2025 and universally by 2030, in accordance with the target dates set by the international community in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the risk of modern slavery and made the road to the 2025 and 2030 target dates an even more difficult one. For Ran, Ida, Bianca, Jasmine, Lyn, and many millions of others, the decisions that national governments and the international community make as the world seeks to build forward better in the wake of the pandemic and regain momentum in the fight against modern slavery will be fundamental. For them, what is at stake is no less than their ability to live out their lives in freedom.

The global estimates presented in this report were developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The estimates are based on a jointly developed methodology summarised in the Annex and described in detail in a separate report on the methodology underpinning the 2021 Global Estimates.⁷ As was the case for the 2016 global estimates, the calculations are derived from multiple data sources as no single source was sufficiently comprehensive. The principal sources are data from nationally representative household surveys – 68 forced labour surveys and 75 forced marriage surveys – jointly conducted by ILO and Walk Free, as well as the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) anonymised data on victims of trafficking collected by IOM and its partners in the process of providing protection and assistance services to victims of trafficking.⁸

The methodology underlying the 2021 Global Estimates is the product of an ongoing process of refinement made possible by an improved understanding of forced labour and forced marriage and of how best to measure them.⁹ The methodological refinements in measurement, combined with a more balanced geographical coverage in data, mean that the 2021 Global Estimates are the most complete and comprehensive to date. While the refinements to the methodology do not affect the overall comparability of the 2016 and 2021 Global Estimates results, they do mean that caution should be exercised in comparing the disaggregated results yielded by the 2016 and 2021 Global Estimates exercises.¹⁰ The global estimates are based on cases of forced labour and forced marriage occurring during the five-year reference period from 2017 to 2021 (hereafter referred to as “2021”).¹¹

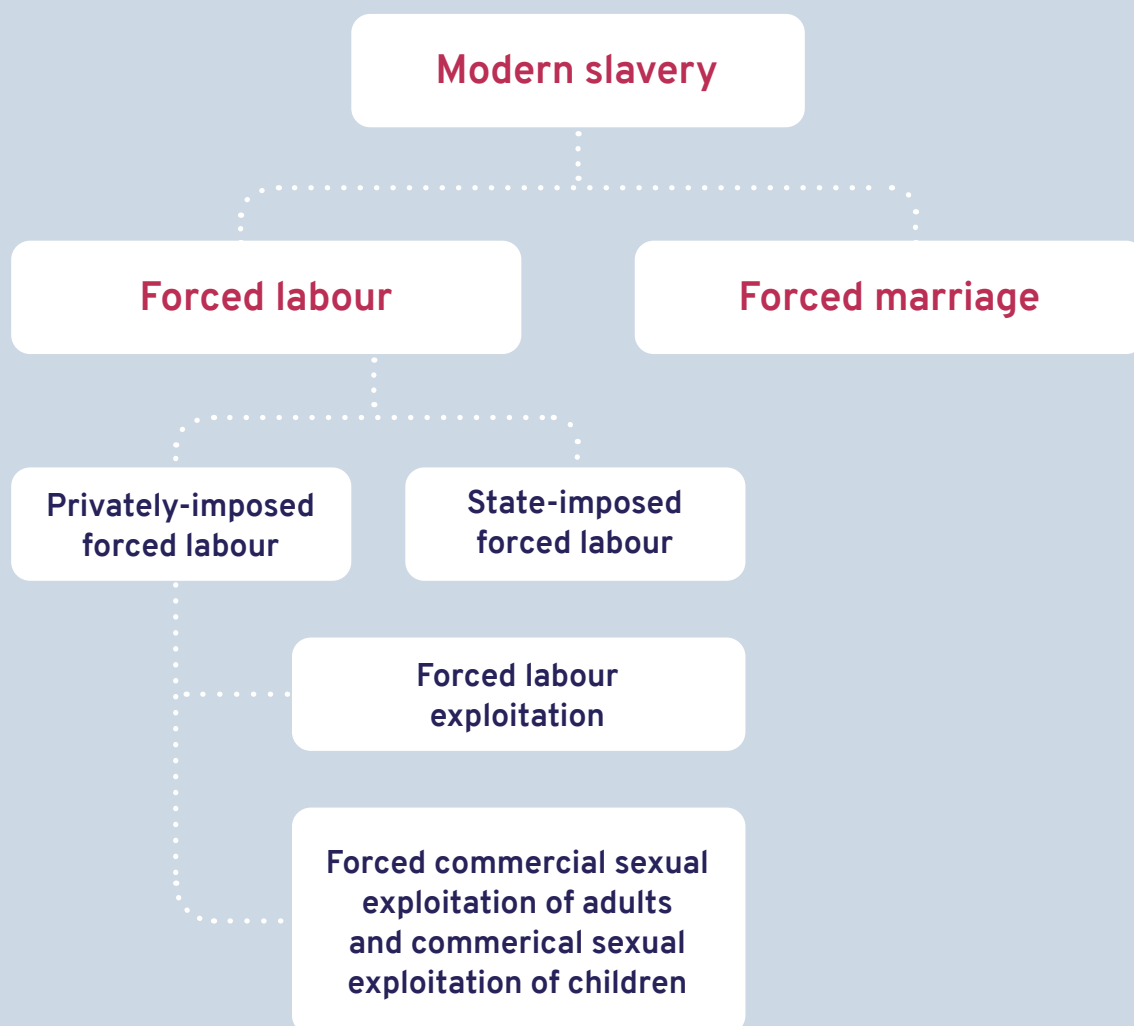
The report is structured in two parts. Part 1 provides the most complete possible profile of modern slavery in today's world. It presents the key results of the 2021 Global Estimates exercise for forced labour and forced marriage, including the defining features of each, and the number and characteristics of the people affected. Part 2 discusses key policy priorities for accelerated progress towards ending forced labour and forced marriage.

A note on terminology

Modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, concepts linked to forced labour (i.e., debt bondage, slavery and slavery like practices and human trafficking) and forced marriage. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term that focuses attention on commonalities across these legal concepts.

Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.

To make this set of complex legal concepts measurable, the global estimates focus on two key forms of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage.



Forced labour

Forced labour, as set out 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.” Forced labour does not depend on the type or sector of work, but only on whether the work was imposed on a person against their will through the use of coercion.

Forced labour is defined, for purposes of measurement, as work that is undertaken *both* under the threat of any penalty and is involuntary. The threat of any penalty refers to the means of coercion used to impose work on someone against that person’s will. Workers can be directly subjected to coercion, or subjected to verbal threats relating to specific elements of coercion, or can be witness to coercion imposed on other co-workers in relation to involuntary work. The coercion may take place during the worker’s recruitment process to force him or her to accept the job or, once the person is working, to force him or her to do tasks that were not part of what was agreed to at the time of recruitment or to prevent him or her from leaving the job. Involuntary work refers to any work taking place without the free and informed consent of the worker. There must be both a lack of free and informed consent and coercion for work to be statistically regarded as forced labour.¹²

Forced labour of children is defined, for purposes of measurement, as work performed by a child during a specified reference period falling under one of the following categories: (i) work performed for a third party, under threat or menace of any penalty applied by a third party (other than the child’s own parents) either on the child directly or the child’s parents; or (ii) work performed with or for the child’s parents, under threat or menace of any penalty applied by a third party (other than the child’s parents) either on the child directly or the child’s parents; or (iii) work performed with or for the child’s parents where one or both parents are themselves in a situation of forced labour; or (iv) work performed in any one of the following worst forms of child labour: (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, and serfdom, [as well as forced or compulsory labour], including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties.¹³

Typology of forced labour

The typology depicted above, which was developed for the global estimates of forced labour, is based on three main categories of forced labour defined as follows:

Privately-imposed forced labour refers to forced labour in the private economy imposed by private individuals, groups, or companies in any branch of economic activity. It may include activities such as begging for a third party that go beyond the scope of the production of goods and services covered in the general production boundary of the System of National Accounts. For the purpose of the global estimates, privately-imposed forced labour is divided into two sub-types:

- **Forced labour exploitation** refers to forced labour in the private economy imposed by private individuals, groups, or companies in any branch of economic activity *with the exception of commercial sexual exploitation*.
- **Forced commercial sexual exploitation** refers to forced labour imposed by private agents for commercial sexual exploitation and all forms of **commercial sexual exploitation of children**, including the use, procuring, or offering of children for the production of child sexual abuse materials.

State-imposed forced labour refers to forced labour imposed by State authorities, regardless of the branch of economic activity in which it takes place. It includes labour exacted by the State as a means of political coercion or education or as a punishment for expressing political views; as a punishment for participating in strikes; as a method of mobilizing labour for the purpose of economic development; as a means of labour discipline; and as a means of racial, social, national, or religious discrimination. While it is recognized that States have the power to impose compulsory work on citizens, the scope of these prerogatives is limited to specific circumstances, for example, compulsory military service for work of purely military character; normal civic obligations of citizens of a fully self-governing country and assimilated minor communal services; work or service under supervision and control of public authorities as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law; work or service in cases of emergency such as war, fire, flood, famine, earthquake, etc.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage refers to situations where a person has been forced to marry without giving their consent. A forced marriage might occur under physical, emotional, or financial duress as a result of deception by family members, the spouse, or others, or by the use of force or threats or severe pressure. These marriages are prohibited by several international conventions,¹⁴ including those that prohibit slavery and slavery-like practices, including servile marriage. Other forms of exploitation can also occur within the context of a forced marriage, such as human trafficking and forced labour.¹⁵

Importantly, the practice of arranged marriage is present in many cultures and is distinguished from forced marriage by the presence of consent of both parties to the marriage. However, where consent is present, coercion can still manifest in various forms, including exchange or trade-off marriages, servile marriages, and levirate¹⁶ marriages.

As set out in the joint general recommendation of the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), child marriage – where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age – is considered a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties cannot express full, free, and informed consent due to their age.¹⁷ However, in many countries 16 and 17-year-olds who wish to marry are legally able to do so following a judicial ruling or parental consent.

For the current estimates, the measurement of forced marriage is limited to marriages of both adults and children that respondents to the survey reported as having been forced and without consent. As a result, the estimates do not include every instance of child marriage, as child marriage is not currently measured adequately at the scale or specificity required for a global estimate.

Further, while an individual can experience forced labour and also be forced to marry, for the purpose of presenting a fuller picture of each of these human rights violations, forced labour and forced marriage are calculated and presented separately.

Other related concepts

The other main concepts of modern slavery are slavery, institutions and practices similar to slavery, and trafficking in persons (often referred to as human trafficking). These are not included explicitly in the global estimates but are closely linked to them.

Slavery was first defined in a Convention adopted by the League of Nations in 1926 as “the status or conditions of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.” It thus refers to control of one person or persons over others and is also considered a serious criminal offence.

The concept of slavery-like practices was first addressed in international law in 1956 by means of a United Nations instrument, supplementing the earlier Slavery Convention, covering a range of institutions and practices similar to slavery, including debt bondage, serfdom, and forced marriage.¹⁸ While the instrument places some emphasis on criminalisation, it is also accepted that the eradication of these slavery-like practices can be achieved only over time through the necessary legislative and other programmatic measures.

While the concept of trafficking in persons was addressed in a number of earlier instruments, the most recent and widely accepted definition is that contained in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), adopted in 2000. The definition specifies that the crime of trafficking is a process constituted by three distinct elements:

1. **An act** involving recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons;
2. **By means** of threat, deception, force, or other forms of coercion;
3. **For the purpose of exploitation.** Exploitation may take various forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, organ removal, and slavery and slavery-like practices.

When an act is perpetrated by one of the means to get a victim into an exploitative situation, actual exploitation need not happen for a trafficking crime to have taken place (in other words, intent is sufficient). For children (below the age of 18 years), means are not needed at all for an event to qualify as trafficking in persons.



Photo: James Morgan.

Part 1.
**Scale and
manifestations
of modern slavery**

Table 1.

Modern slavery: summary results

Number and prevalence of persons in modern slavery, by category, sex, age, and income grouping

	Privately-imposed forced labour excluding FCSE		Forced commercial sexual exploitation (FCSE)		TOTAL PRIVATELY-IMPOSED FORCED LABOUR		State-imposed forced labour		TOTAL FORCED LABOUR ^(c)		FORCED MARRIAGE		TOTAL MODERN SLAVERY ^(d)		
	No. ^(a)	% ^(b)	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
World	17,325	2.2	6,332	0.8	23,657	3.0	3,920	0.5	27,577	3.5	21,993	2.8	49,570	6.4	
Sex	Male	11,303	2.9	1,403	0.4	12,706	3.2	3,072	0.8	15,779	4	7,060	1.8	22,839	5.8
	Female	6,022	1.6	4,929	1.3	10,951	2.8	848	0.2	11,798	3.1	14,933	3.9	26,731	6.9
Age	Adults	16,017	2.9	4,644	0.9	20,661	3.8	3,603	0.7	24,263	4.5	13,020	2.4	37,283	6.9
	Children	13,08	0.6	1,688	0.7	2,997	1.3	317	0.1	3,314	1.4	8,973	3.8	12,287	5.2
Income grouping^(e)	High income	4,065	3.3	1,208	1	5,274	4.3	110	0.1	5,384	4.4	1,865	1.5	7,249	5.9
	Upper-middle income	4,490	1.5	2,451	0.8	6,941	2.4	2,025	0.7	8,965	3.1	3,737	1.3	12,702	4.4
	Lower-middle income	6,467	2.2	2,122	0.7	8,590	2.9	326	0.1	8,916	3	1,4131	4.8	23,047	7.8
	Low income	2,301	3.4	551	0.8	2,852	4.2	1,459	2.1	4,311	6.3	2,261	3.3	6,572	9.6

Notes: (a) Number is expressed in thousands; (b) "%^(b)" denotes cases per 1,000 population; (c) "Total forced labour" comprises privately-imposed forced labour and State-imposed forced labour; (d) "Total modern slavery" comprises privately-imposed forced labour and State-imposed forced labour and forced marriage; and (e) "Income grouping" refers to the income grouping of the country where the forced labour occurs.

Table 2.

Modern slavery: summary results

Number and prevalence of persons in modern slavery, by region

	FORCED LABOUR ^(c)		FORCED MARRIAGE		MODERN SLAVERY ^(d)	
	No. ^(a)	% ^(b)	No.	%	No.	%
World	27,577	3.5	21,993	2.8	49,570	6.4
Africa	3,819	2.9	3,189	2.4	7,008	5.2
Americas	3,593	3.5	1,496	1.5	5,089	5
Arab States	886	5.3	814	4.8	1,700	10.1
Asia and the Pacific	15,142	3.5	14,207	3.3	29,349	6.8
Europe and Central Asia	4,137	4.4	2,287	2.5	6,424	6.9

Notes: (a) Number is expressed in thousands; (b) “%” denotes cases per 1,000 population; (c) “Total forced labour” comprises privately-imposed forced labour and State-imposed forced labour; and (d) “Total modern slavery” comprises all categories of forced labour and forced marriage.

1.1 Modern slavery

Modern slavery, as defined for the purpose of the global estimates, comprises two principal components – forced labour and forced marriage (Panel 1). Both refer to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or cannot leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power.

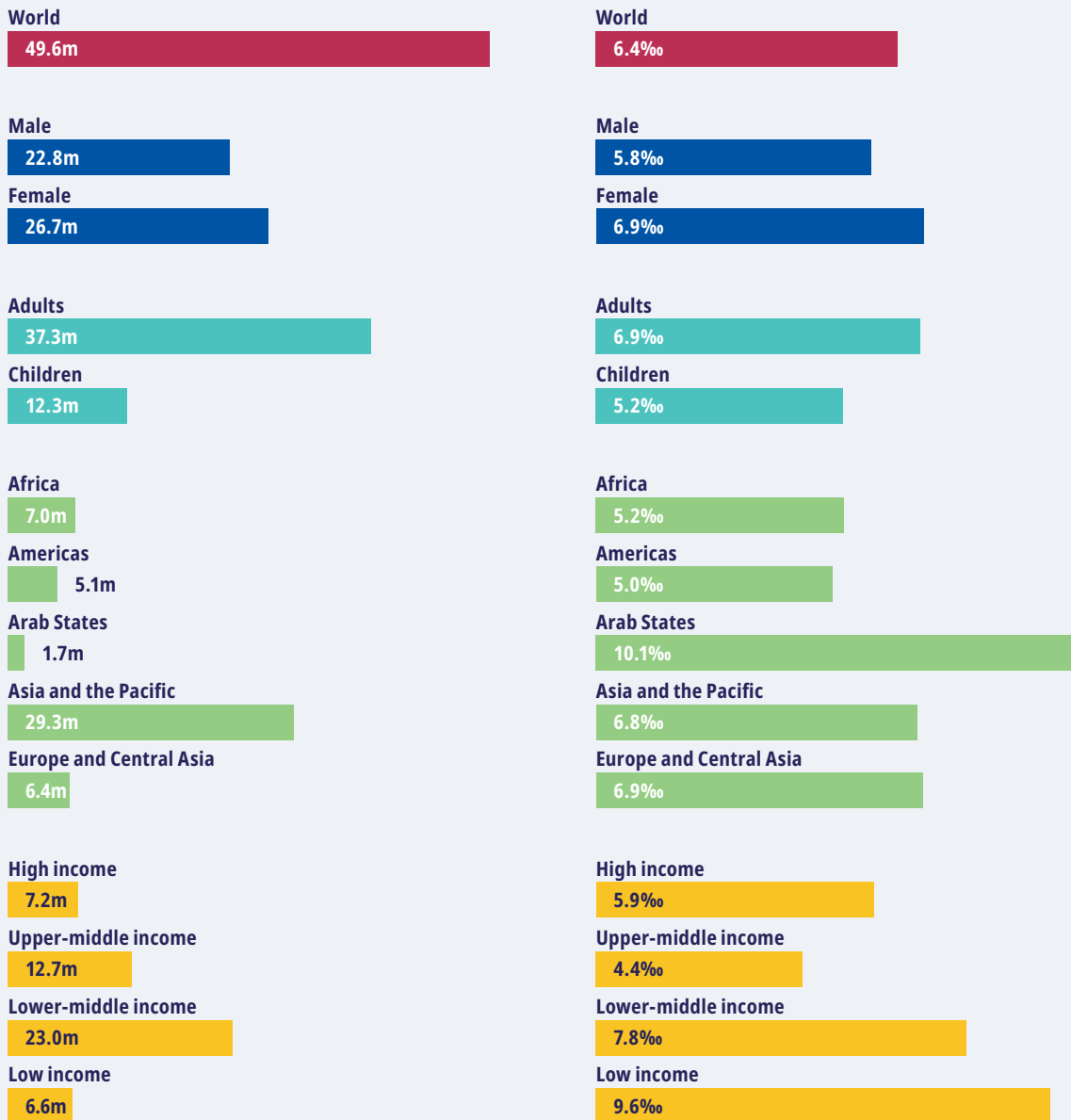
The scourge of modern slavery has by no means been relegated to history.

The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that there are 50 million people in modern slavery on any given day, either forced to work against their will or in a marriage that they are forced into. This translates into a prevalence of 6.4 people in modern slavery for every thousand people in the world. More than 12 million of the total in modern slavery are children. Women and girls comprise over half (54 per cent) of those in modern slavery. The Asia and the Pacific region has the highest number of people in modern slavery and the Arab States the highest prevalence. But no region, rich or poor, is spared.



Figure 1.

There are 49.6 million people in modern slavery on any given day



Number of people (millions) in modern slavery, by sex, age, region and income grouping, 2021

Prevalence (per thousand population) of modern slavery, by sex, age, region and income grouping, 2021

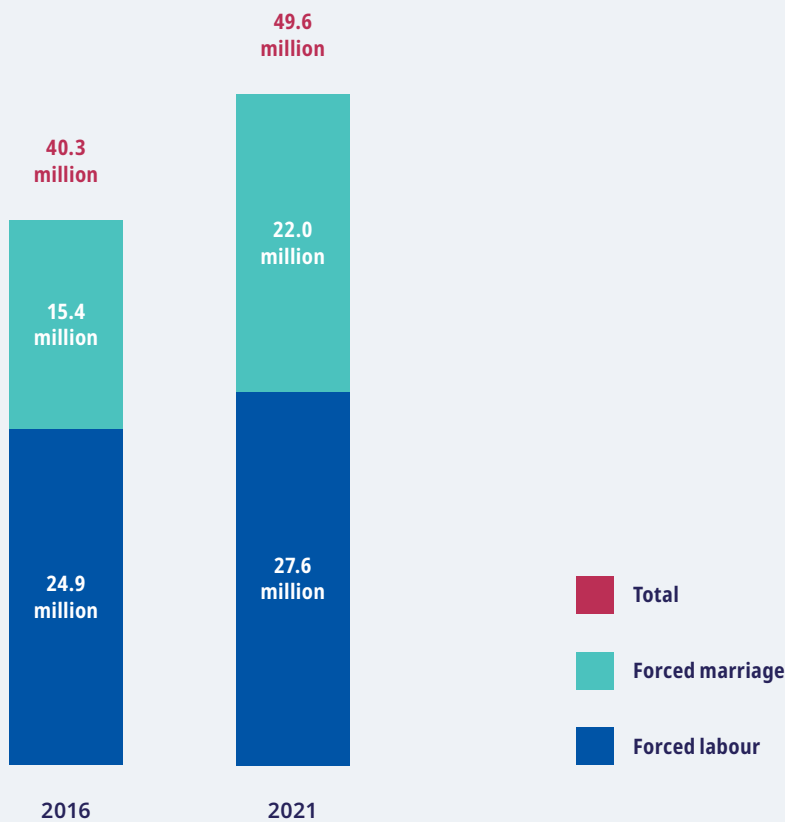
Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

The situation appears to be worsening, driven in part by the social and economic shock waves emanating from the ongoing worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. A simple comparison with the previous global estimates indicates a 9.3 million rise in the number of people in modern slavery in the period between 2016 and 2021. Both categories of modern slavery – forced labour and forced marriage – contributed to the overall rise in modern slavery over this period.

Much, of course, lies behind these aggregate figures. The estimates for forced labour and forced marriage are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections of the report.

Figure 2.

The number of people in modern slavery has risen in recent years



Number of people in modern slavery, by category, 2016 and 2021

1.2

Forced labour

Forced labour, as set out in the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29),¹⁹ 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.” Forced labour does *not* depend on the type or sector of work, but only on whether the work was imposed on a person against their will through the use of coercion. There must be both a lack of free and informed consent *and* coercion for a job to be considered forced labour.

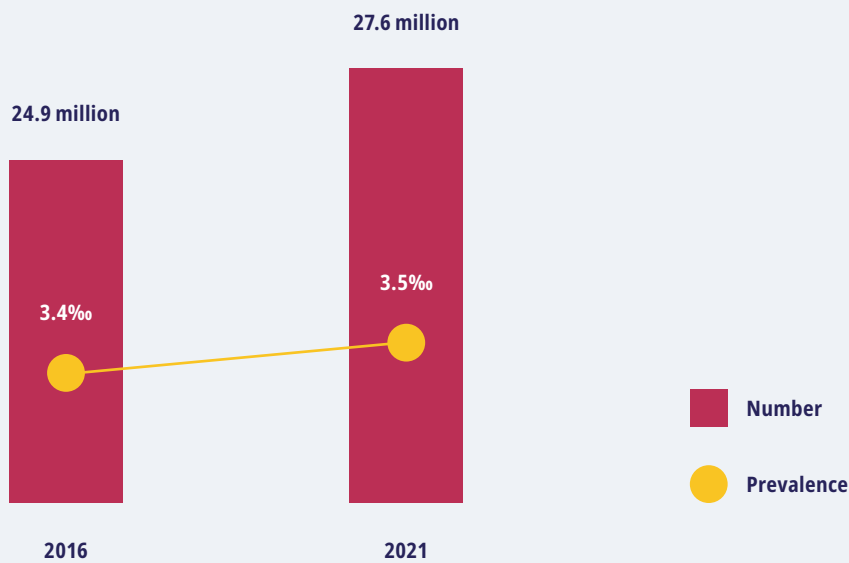
1.2.1 Overview and trends

According to the 2021 Global Estimates, there are 27.6 million people in situations of forced labour on any given day, 3.5 people for every thousand people in the world. Women and girls make up 11.8 million of this total. More than 3.3 million of all those in forced labour are children.

Forced labour has grown in recent years. There was a 2.7 million increase in the number people in forced labour between 2016 and 2021, which translates to a rise in the prevalence of forced labour from 3.4 to 3.5 per thousand people. It should be noted that part of the data collection for the 2021 estimates took place prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Annex), and therefore the results only partially reflect the effects of pandemic. The estimates therefore likely understate the full magnitude of the increase in forced labour.

Figure 3.

Forced labour increased since 2016 in both absolute and relative terms



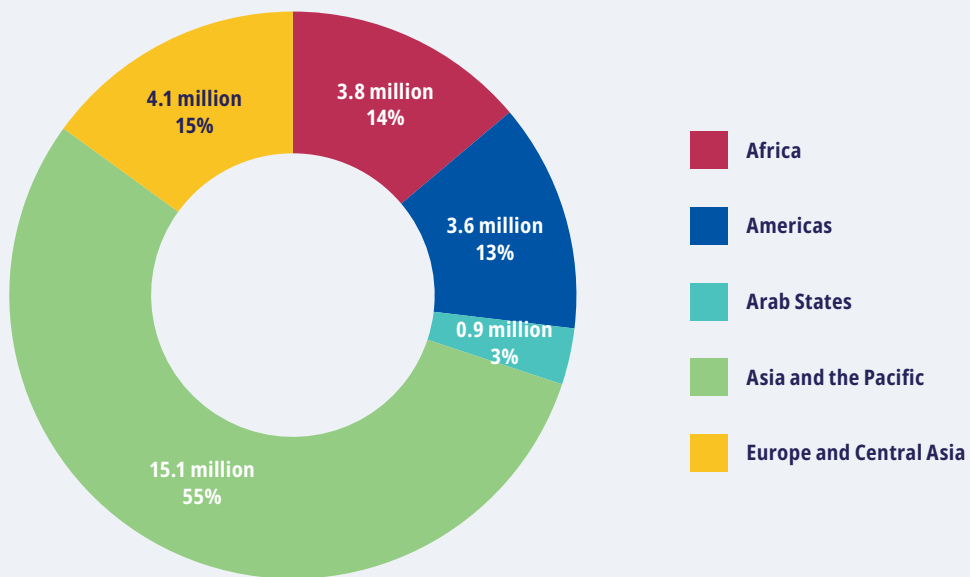
Number and prevalence of people in forced labour, 2016 and 2021

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

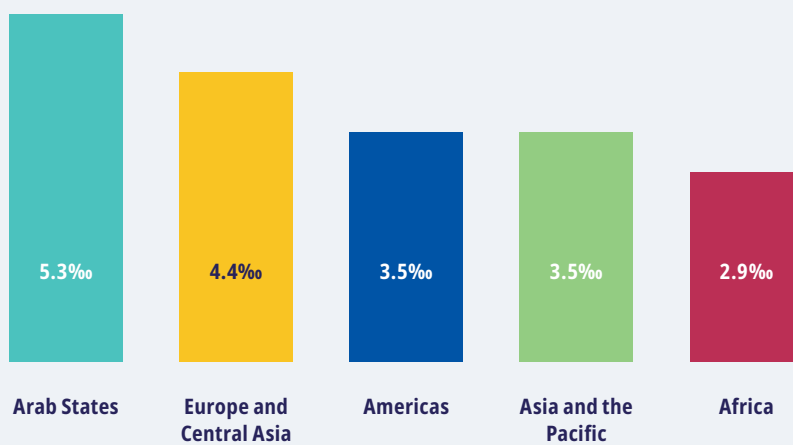
Forced labour affects all regions. The detailed breakdown of results by region makes clear that no part of the world is spared from the presence of forced labour. Asia and the Pacific is host to by far the largest number of people in forced labour, 15.1 million, which is more than half of the global total and more than three times that of the region with the next highest number, Europe and Central Asia. But these numbers are driven by the size of the population in each region, and the regional rankings change considerably when forced labour is expressed as a proportion of the population. By this measure, forced labour is highest in the Arab States, at 5.3 per thousand people, compared to 4.4 per thousand in Europe and Central Asia, 3.5 per thousand in both the Americas and Asia and the Pacific regions, and 2.9 per thousand in Africa.

Figure 4.

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



Forced labour by region: percentage distribution



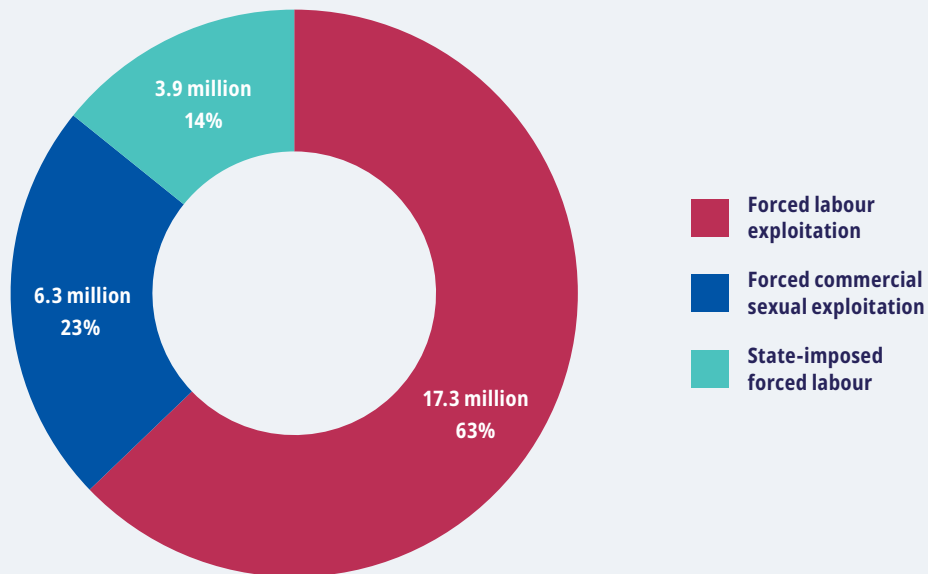
Forced labour by region: prevalence per thousand population

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

Most forced labour occurs in the private economy. The 2021 Global Estimates draw a distinction between forced labour imposed by private agents and state-imposed forced labour. Additionally, within privately-imposed forced labour, they distinguish between forced labour in sectors other than commercial sexual exploitation, referred to hereinafter as “forced labour exploitation,” and forced labour in commercial sexual exploitation. As reported in Figure 5, 86 per cent of all forced labour is imposed by private agents – 63 per cent in forced labour exploitation and 23 per cent in forced commercial sexual exploitation. State-imposed forced labour accounts for the remaining 14 per cent of people in forced labour.

Figure 5.

Eighty-six per cent of forced labour is imposed by private actors

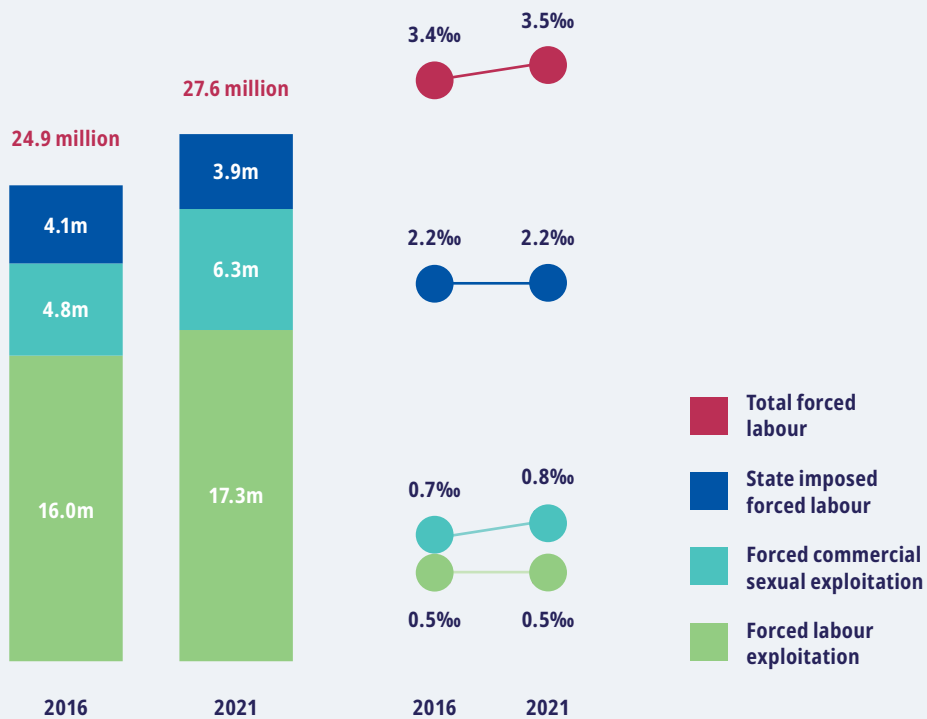


Number and percentage distribution of people in forced labour, by category

The overall rise in forced labour between 2016 and 2021 was the result of a rise in the number of people in privately-imposed forced labour. The number in forced labour exploitation went up by 1.3 million and the number in forced commercial sexual exploitation rose by an even larger number – 1.5 million – over the 2016 to 2021 period.

Figure 6.

The rise in forced labour between 2016 and 2021 was driven entirely by privately-imposed forced labour



Number and prevalence of people in forced labour, by sub-category, 2016 and 2021

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

Forced labour and the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic shockwaves, job destruction, and rise in poverty accompanying it, have left millions of workers worldwide in situations of heightened vulnerability and their fundamental principles and rights at work at greater risk.^{20, 21} Hardest hit have been those already belonging to the most vulnerable and least protected segments of society when the pandemic struck.

The initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic were accompanied by widespread reports of forced labour linked to the crisis. Disruptions to income due to the pandemic led to greater indebtedness among workers, and with it reports of a rise in debt bondage among some workers lacking access to formal credit channels.²² In worst cases, the effects extended to children, as desperate families resorted to negative coping mechanisms by providing their children's labour to obtain loans or to service existing ones from predatory lenders.²³

Yet it is likely that not all immediate effects were unidirectional, as the general collapse in labour demand in the initial weeks of the crisis may also have led to the release of workers who were in forced labour in some locations and sectors. The crisis also resulted in a deterioration of working conditions for many workers, in some cases leading to forced labour. There were reports in a number of sectors of workers being confined to their workplaces and forced to work excessive hours to compensate for labour shortfalls when the flow of migrant workers was interrupted,²⁴ and of workers forced to work unpaid overtime or forced to continue working despite the risk of contagion in order to meet production targets.^{25, 26} Sharp spikes in demand for personal protective equipment, in particular, were linked to reports of forced labour in numerous countries.²⁷

Healthcare staff and social workers in some countries were required to work without effective PPE, thereby endangering their health and their lives. Some governments, in classifying health workers as essential, criminalised those who went on strike to demand pay raises and adequate protective equipment to do their jobs. Additionally, around 400,000 seafarers were trapped aboard vessels that became what many called their "floating prisons." The restrictions adopted by many countries to contain the spread of COVID-19 meant that seafarers were unable to

leave their ships for shore leave when they arrived at ports.²⁸

Other reports indicate that the closing of migration pathways drove some prospective migrant workers to use irregular routes and, at times, to engage smugglers to circumvent restrictions and earn an income for their family abroad, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.²⁹ Other migrants, after losing their jobs, had to rely on irregular routes in order to return home, placing them at similar risk.

There were also reports of domestic workers, the majority female, forced to work extra hours without the compensation of overtime.³⁰ Human rights organizations reported increased incidents of physical and sexual violence against domestic workers, as well as of homelessness and legal limbo among some who lost their live-in jobs but are unable to return to their home countries. More broadly, COVID-19 created a "shadow pandemic" of violence against women,³¹ which some studies have linked to an increased risk of trafficking.³²

At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis constrained the ability of state and non-state actors to identify and follow up on forced labour cases, as resources and attention were diverted to the pandemic response and lockdowns and mobility restrictions impeded the ability of frontline actors to reach those in need. Referral pathways faced disruptions, leading to slowdowns in case identification, referral, and protection processes for cases of forced labour and human trafficking. Migrants in situations of vulnerability were among the groups particularly affected by protection gaps.

Most of the above discussion is based on information from the initial months of the crisis. Very little information – qualitative or quantitative – is available on the forced labour effects of the crisis as it has evolved since this time, as strict economy-wide workplace shutdowns were phased out in most countries and the world economy began its fragile recovery. The critical unanswered question is whether these forced labour effects were a temporary response to the severe shock at the outset of the pandemic, or whether they have persisted into the subsequent phases of the crisis.

There are many reasons for concern. Levels of extreme poverty – one important metric of forced labour risk – remain far higher than the pre-pandemic trajectory. The World Bank estimates an additional 75 million to 95 million people living in extreme poverty in 2022, compared to pre-pandemic projections, due to the combined effects of the pandemic, rising inflation, and the economic repercussions of the war in Ukraine.³³ At the same time, the ILO indicates that the jobs recovery has stalled in much of the world. Hours worked in the first quarter of 2022 were 3.6 per cent and 5.7 per cent lower than pre-pandemic levels in low-income and lower-middle income countries, respectively.³⁴ In both income groupings, the jobs situation has *worsened* since the last quarter of 2021.

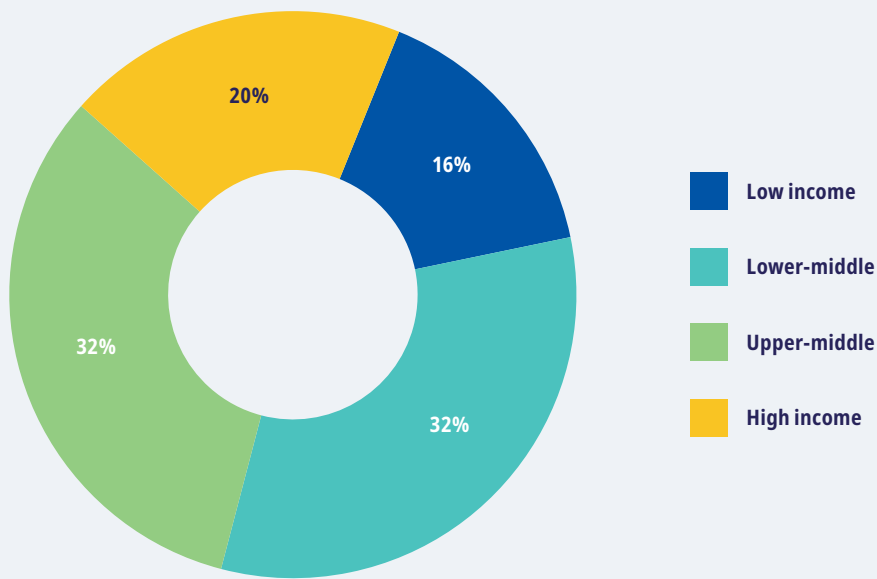
Yet the question of the long-term forced labour effects of the pandemic is not one whose answer is beyond the reach of governments or the international community, even in the face of the continuing difficult economic and labour market headwinds. As always, policy choices will be critical. The final section of this report reviews some of the key policy priorities for ensuring that increases in forced labour do not become a lasting legacy of the crisis.

Forced labour is a concern in countries of all income levels, including the richest. The breakdown of forced labour by national income grouping (of the country where the forced labour occurs) makes clear that forced labour is as much of a problem in rich countries as it is in poor ones. Indeed, more than half of all forced labour occurs in either upper-middle income or high-income countries.

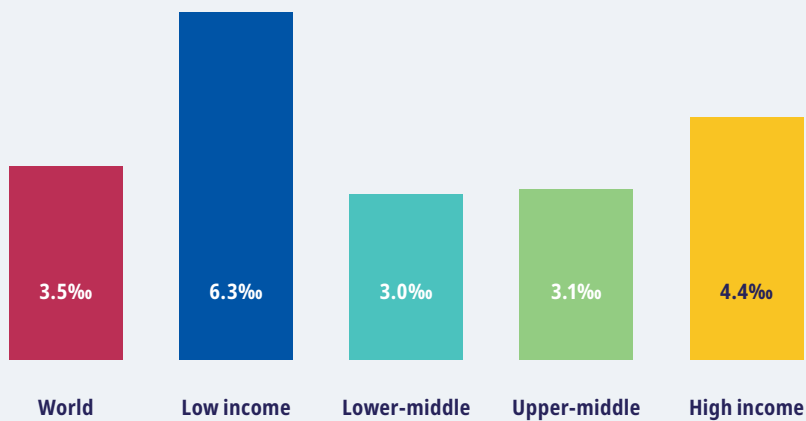
The results showing a significant presence of forced labour in higher-income countries are supported by a range of other reports documenting the presence of forced labour in these countries³⁵ in sectors including agriculture,³⁶ domestic work,³⁷ construction,³⁸ fishing,³⁹ and the commercial sexual exploitation industry,⁴⁰ with many cases involving migrants in situations of vulnerability.⁴¹ Additionally, richer countries can be connected to forced labour through global supply chains, even if the actual forced labour occurs elsewhere. Reports suggest that forced labour can occur in particular in raw materials production in the lower tiers of supply chains of consumer goods bound for markets in the Global North.⁴²

Figure 7.

More than half of all forced labour occurs in either upper-middle income or high-income countries



Forced labour, by national income grouping in country of abuse: percentage distribution



Forced labour, by national income grouping in country of abuse: prevalence per thousand population

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

1.2.2 Forced labour exploitation

This sub-section reports the global estimates results for privately-imposed forced labour in sectors other than commercial sexual exploitation, referred to for the purposes of the report as “forced labour exploitation.” The forced commercial sexual exploitation of adults and the commercial sexual exploitation of children are estimated separately using a different methodology and are discussed in Section 1.2.3.

The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that 17.3 million people are in forced labour exploitation on any given day, of which children make up 1.3 million. Among adults, those trapped in this category of forced labour remained there for an extended period of time – 15.4 months on average.

Economic sectors

Forced labour touches virtually all parts of the private economy. As illustrated in Figure 8, the global estimates identified significant numbers of adults in forced labour exploitation across a wide array of economic sectors. Among cases of *adult* forced labour exploitation where the type of work was known,⁴³ the five sectors accounting for the majority of total forced labour (87 per cent) are services (excluding domestic work),⁴⁴ manufacturing,⁴⁵ construction,⁴⁶ agriculture (excluding fishing),⁴⁷ and domestic work.⁴⁸

Services (excluding domestic work). The largest share of total adult forced labour exploitation – almost one-third of the total and 5.5 million people in absolute terms – is in the services sector. This figure excludes domestic work, which is looked at separately in the global estimates. The services sector comprises a wide range of economic activities, including trade, transport, hospitality, and non-market social and other services.

Manufacturing. The manufacturing sector accounts for nearly one-fifth of all forced labour exploitation of adults, about 3 million people. Manufacturing involves the transformation of raw materials from agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining or quarrying, as well as the transformation of other manufacturing products into new products. Most forced labour cases occur in production in the lower tiers of domestic or global supply chains.

I don't have legal working permit, so they can tell the police.

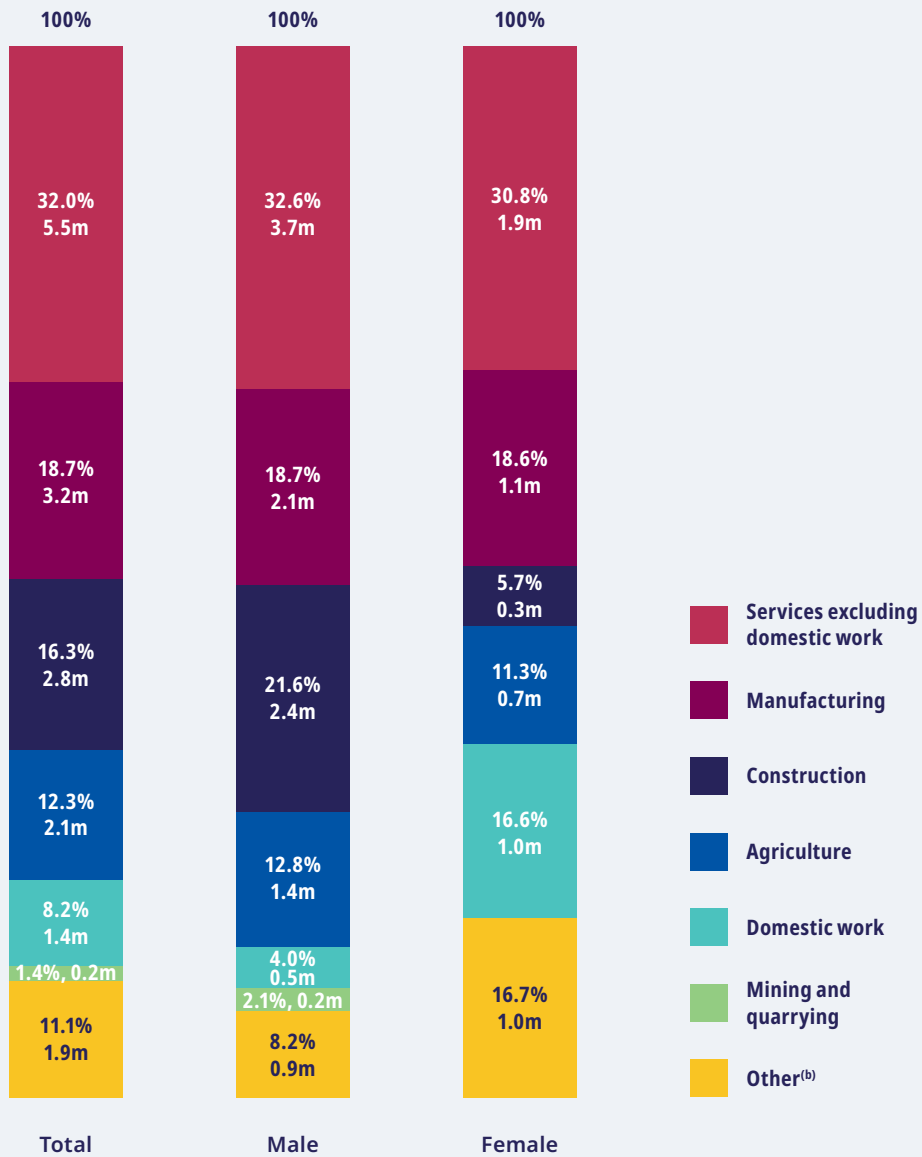
— 26-year-old woman working in accommodation and food services

I was forced to do excessive work due to debt, had to do overtime to clear the debt.

— 50-year-old man in the textile industry

Figure 8.

The services sector accounts for the largest share of forced labour exploitation



Number and percentage distribution of adults in forced labour exploitation, by branch of economic activity and sex^(a)

Notes: (a) 2.8 per cent of respondents did not indicate a type of forced labour. (b) "Other" includes begging and involvement in illicit activities.

Construction. Sixteen per cent of all adults in forced labour exploitation, 2.6 million people, are in the construction industry. Many cases involve migrant workers whose situations of forced labour stem from extortionate recruitment fees and other fraudulent recruitment practices of unscrupulous labour intermediaries.

Agriculture. Thirteen per cent of all adult forced labour exploitation, involving 2.1 million people, occurs in agriculture. Cases of agricultural forced labour vary widely. Many involve the farming of agricultural commodities that form the lowest links of agri-food supply chains, or other forms of commercial agriculture such as the harvesting of fruit and vegetables bound for sale in domestic or export markets. Particularly at risk are seasonal migrant workers recruited through informal labour intermediaries. Other cases of agricultural forced labour involve people who were born into a life of slavery in animal herding or field work because of their social class or inherited debt.

Domestic work. More than 1.4 million adults in forced labour exploitation, 8 per cent of the total, are in domestic work. Domestic workers, the majority of whom are female, are especially vulnerable to forced labour because of their isolation, deep power imbalances with their employers, and their limited access to complaints mechanisms and opportunities to organize. In many contexts they are not covered by labour and social security laws, heightening their vulnerability.⁴⁹ Restrictive visa arrangements that often tie migrant domestic workers to one employer can also increase their susceptibility to abuse, as can irregular immigration status, including lack of a visa.

Other sectors. Other sectors form smaller shares of total adult forced labour exploitation but nonetheless still account for hundreds of thousands of adults in forced labour. There are nearly a quarter-million adult workers who are forced to dig for minerals or perform other mining and quarrying work, and 128,000 fishers who are trapped in forced labour aboard fishing vessels, often at deep sea, a workplace characterised by extreme isolation, hazardousness, and gaps in regulatory oversight (see Panel 3). Other adults in forced labour include 208,000 who are forced to beg on the street and 32,000 forced into illicit activities.

We either work or [they] will prevent you from working anywhere else.

— 25-year-old male
construction worker

Forced to work on the farm until the work is finished so I can have a break. And forced to finish the work even after the time and without paying additional wages.

— 56-year-old male
agricultural worker

I worked without pay, I worked alone from 5am to 11pm from Monday to Friday.

— 20-year-old female
agricultural worker

Forced me to clean or else she will kill me.

— 25-year-old female migrant domestic worker

His boss told him if he quits the job, he will blow alarm that he is illegal immigrant.

— Male migrant domestic worker, age unknown

Forced labour and human trafficking in fishing

There is a strong and persistent minority of fishers for whom working conditions at sea continue to be far from decent work. Their working hours can be long, their pay very low, and their work hazardous and arduous. On board vessels in remote locations of the sea for months or even years at a time, they are extremely vulnerable to labour abuses. Poor connectivity at sea can make it all but impossible to raise complaints. Fishers themselves describe illness, physical injury, and psychological and sexual abuse as among the extreme violations they face. Not surprisingly, capture fisheries have one of the highest occupational fatality rates of any industry.⁵⁰

While there has been progress in some regions and countries, recent reports from a variety of sources confirm that forced labour and trafficking in persons persist in the fishing industry globally.⁵¹ Forced labour risks are especially pronounced in, but by no means limited to, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Migrant fishers in particular are vulnerable to being deceived and coerced by unscrupulous labour recruiters and forced to work on board vessels under the threat or by means of debt bondage. Many are charged high recruitment fees and related costs, such as for document preparation (including obtaining fraudulent training certificates) and for lodging and travel during visa and document processing in their countries of origin. Some migrant workers are also required to pay a “runaway guarantee” or a deposit before their employment, a sum which they forfeit if they attempt to terminate the employment early. In some cases, migrant fishers are told that they are required to pay a lump sum before they can terminate their contract, and the fishers are often not aware of the exact amount.⁵² On board, the retention of wages is one of the common means through which they are coerced into remaining in their jobs.

There are many underlying root causes of forced labour in the fishing industry. These include unequal power relations between crew and skipper, the remote nature of work at sea, the lack of oversight and accountability, and complicated legal jurisdictions for the enforcement of labour and human rights among flag States, port States, coastal states, and the states of origin of fishers.⁵³ The collapse of fish stocks is also a contributing factor. This has resulted in increased effort per unit of catch, rising input costs (such as fuel for longer periods at sea), and lower financial returns, cost pressures that are often passed on to fishers through exploitative work conditions and reduced earnings.⁵⁴

Jurisdictional issues stem in important part from the highly transnational nature of work in fishing. Migrant fishers are typically recruited from their

country of origin and taken to a port in a transit country to embark onto a fishing vessel, which may be registered to a wholly different country and owned by an entity located elsewhere. The fishing vessels, particularly those engaged in distant water fishing, operate in the waters of one or more other coastal countries or on high seas and land their catch at ports that are often far from the fisher’s country of origin. In addition, while flag States have primary jurisdiction over a fishing vessel while it is at high seas, the use of flags of a country other than the country of ship ownership means that some flag States are unwilling to enforce laws and regulations in their jurisdictions.

The 2021 Global Estimates indicate a total of 128,000 fishers in forced labour worldwide. However, because measuring forced labour aboard fishing vessels poses several unique challenges, this figure likely significantly understates the full extent of the problem. The isolation of the workplace makes it difficult to reach the fishers affected, while the extreme vulnerability that comes with work at sea, as well as the risk of repercussions, can lead to reluctance on the part of fishers to report and discuss abuses. At the same time, spouses and other relatives reached by survey enumerators may have only limited information about the situation of their family member at sea.

New, bespoke survey instruments are needed for generating reliable estimates of forced labour at sea. The ILO, IOM, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are collaborating in the Blue Fairness and Integrity Research Compact Project to develop survey tools that will be made available to the international community to estimate the prevalence of trafficking for forced labour in the fishing industry. The Blue Fairness Project forms part of the broader Blue Justice Initiative, a multi-partner effort supported by Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries to build global capacity to combat transnational organized crime in fisheries.

ILO is also working in collaboration with research partners to test the tools in various contexts. Under the umbrella of the 8.7 Accelerator Lab, an ILO initiative to accelerate progress towards the eradication of forced labour and child labour, the ILO plans to conduct prevalence surveys on forced labour in the fishing industry. The 8.7 Accelerator Lab is a multi-donor funded programme supported by the governments of Norway (Norwegian Development Agency), Germany (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), and Canada (Global Affairs department). These and other related research efforts will help in generating new, robust evidence on the prevalence and the characteristics of forced labour in the fishing industry and will inform the next round of the global estimates.

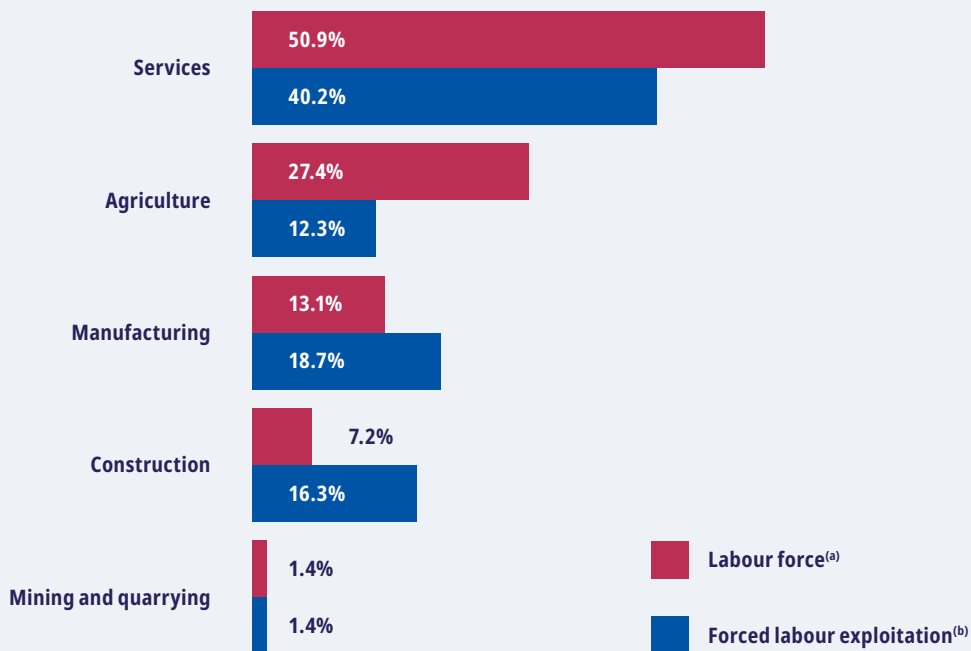
Women and men differ in terms of both the extent and nature of their involvement in forced labour exploitation. Overall, the number of men in forced labour exploitation (11.3 million) is nearly twice that of women (6.0 million). Men and women also differ somewhat in terms of the sectors where they are found. Domestic work makes up 17 per cent of the forced labour exploitation of women but only 4 per cent of the forced labour exploitation of men. At the same time, construction work accounts for 22 per cent of men's forced labour exploitation compared to 6 per cent of women's. Men in forced labour are also much more likely than women to be in mining and quarrying, although this sector accounts for a relatively small share of total forced labour for both sexes. The other sectors account for roughly similar shares of the total of women and men in forced labour. Not captured in these numbers, however, is the important gender segmentation that often occurs in the division of labour *within* sectors.⁵⁵

The composition of forced labour exploitation differs from that of the broader labour force in a number of ways. First, as discussed below, the share of migrants in the group of people in forced labour is much higher than the share of migrants in the overall labour force. There are also relatively more men among workers in forced labour compared to the labour force generally. There are additional differences in terms of how people in forced labour and the overall labour force are divided across sectors. People in forced labour are more likely to be in manufacturing, and much more likely to be in construction, than workers in the overall labour force. They are less likely to be in the services and agriculture sectors compared to workers in the overall labour force. The mining and quarrying sector accounts for equal shares of those in forced labour and of those making up the overall labour force.



Figure 9.

The composition of forced labour exploitation differs from that of the broader labour force in a number of ways



Percentage distribution of adults in the global labour force and adults in forced labour exploitation, by sector

Notes: (a) Labour force refers to employed persons of working age. Data for employed persons of working age from International Labour Organization, "Employment by sex and economic activity — ILO modelled estimates," ILOSTAT, Accessed 20-10-2021; (b) 11.1 per cent of adults in forced labour exploitation work in sectors other than those shown.

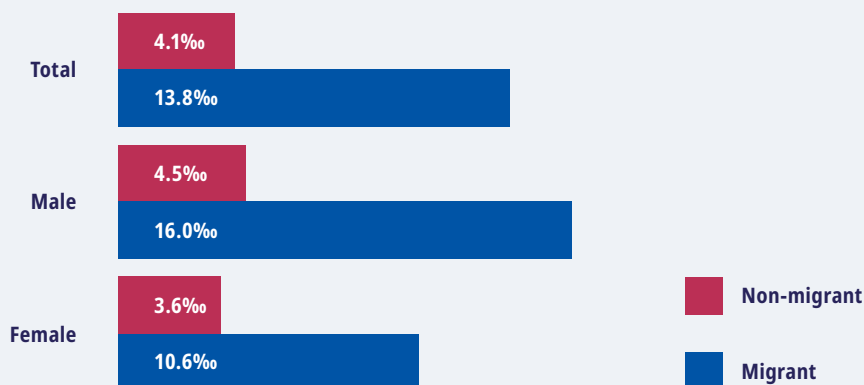
Forced labour and migration

Migrant workers who are not protected by law or are unable to exercise their rights face a higher risk of forced labour than other workers. The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that 15 per cent of all adults in forced labour exploitation are migrants (i.e., are subjected to forced labour in a country different from that of their birth). By comparison, in 2019 international migrant workers accounted for roughly 5 per cent of the total global labour force.⁵⁶ Migrants are therefore disproportionately represented in the group of workers in forced labour. Other localised studies suggest that migrants account for a much larger share of total people in forced labour in specific sectors and locations.⁵⁷

The prevalence of forced labour exploitation (expressed as a share of total workers) also makes clear that migrant workers are more likely to be in forced labour than non-migrant workers. Nearly 14 out of every thousand adult migrant workers are in forced labour in the private economy, a prevalence rate that is more than three times higher than that of non-migrant workers (4.1 out of every thousand).

Figure 10.

The prevalence of forced labour exploitation is much higher for migrant workers than for other workers



Prevalence (per thousand workers^(a)) of adults in forced labour exploitation, by migrant status and sex

Notes: (a) “‰” denotes cases per thousand workers. (b) As prevalence in this chart is expressed as a share of total workers rather than total population, it is not comparable with the prevalence figures reported elsewhere in this report.

While 2021 Global Estimates did not aim to estimate the prevalence of trafficking for forced labour, it is likely that for many migrants subjected to forced labour there was criminal involvement of traffickers at earlier stages of their journey – such as at the time of recruitment and facilitation of travel – with intent to exploit them once they reached their destination.

While migration has a largely positive impact at individual, household, community and societal levels, the global estimates make clear that under some circumstances – for example, when migration is irregular or poorly governed, or when recruitment practices are unfair or unethical, or when migrants are unprotected in law and practice – migration can create situations of vulnerability to forced labour, trafficking in persons, and other human rights abuses.

When the need to move is sufficiently acute, or regular migration channels are limited, individuals or families may resort to dangerous migration routes and means of travel, including irregular border crossings.⁵⁸ Many fall into the hands of smugglers who engage in abusive practices or unscrupulous recruitment intermediaries who exact from them recruitment fees and related costs, exacerbating the cycle of debt and risk of abuse.⁵⁹

Once they reach their destination, migrants may remain vulnerable to forced labour and human trafficking due to language and cultural barriers, lack of reliable information and support networks, challenges of economic and social integration, lack of access to basic services and social security, or restrictions on their ability to change employer or organize and bargain collectively.

In addition, migrant workers are often employed in sectors such as domestic work or agriculture, which may not be covered by the labour code and where there may be other restrictions, for example on the right to organize. High levels of informality in such sectors further limit their access to workplace protections or grievance mechanisms. Unscrupulous employers, landlords, and service providers may take advantage of their limited knowledge of local conditions and reduced bargaining power. This can be particularly challenging for women migrant workers, for whom regular migration channels might be restricted by law or practice.

Several countries have introduced reforms aimed at closing gaps in the legal protections of migrant workers. Qatar,⁶⁰ for example, has adopted a range of legislative reforms and other measures aimed at ensuring the rights and freedoms of migrant workers (see separate text box). In United Arab Emirates,⁶¹ a law has been passed to ensure the right of migrant domestic workers to, among other things, terminate their work contracts unilaterally.

Reform of the sponsorship system: the case of Qatar

Over two million migrants work in Qatar, and they make up 95 per cent of the workforce in the private sector. Since 2010, when Qatar was awarded the right to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, there have been widespread reports of severe labour rights violations against migrant workers, including forced labour.

In 2014, international workers' organizations lodged a formal complaint with the ILO Governing Body, where they alleged Qatar was not complying with core international labour standards. Central to the complaint was the fact that the *kafala*, or sponsorship system, was enabling an environment that could lead to exploitation and even forced labour. Moreover, concerns were raised about insufficient access to justice and complaint mechanisms for migrant workers, inadequate labour inspection system, and weak enforcement of labour legislation.

An ad-hoc Committee of the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) found the allegations to be credible, and the ILO Governing Body sent a high-level tripartite mission to Qatar in 2016 to assess the validity of these allegations. The outcome of the mission prompted the Governing Body and the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) to further urge the Government to address these issues.

After a period of negotiations and some legislative reforms, in 2017 the Governing Body decided to endorse a programme of work between the Government of Qatar and the ILO to enact major labour reforms, and to close the complaint procedure.

In April 2018, the ILO opened an office in Doha. Since then, there has been significant progress that has positively impacted the living and working conditions for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers

in Qatar. Notably, the most problematic elements of the sponsorship system have been dismantled. Workers can now leave the country and change jobs without their employer's consent. This has helped to redress the power imbalance between workers and employers. In addition, there have been significant legislative and policy developments in areas of minimum wage, occupational safety and health, and social dialogue at the enterprise level.

Despite the milestones reached, there are gaps in implementation. Among the top remaining priorities, there is the need to address the retaliation by some unscrupulous employers against workers who wish to change jobs. There continue to be many complaints related to non-payment of wages and benefits. And while new systems have been introduced to facilitate access to justice, the process can be time-consuming and unpredictable. Lastly, a large number of domestic workers are not yet fully benefiting from the labour reforms, particularly when it comes to their rights on working time and the right to a day off per week.

The ILO's cooperation with the Government of Qatar has demonstrated the effectiveness of the ILO's supervisory system, which helps to ensure that countries implement the international labour standards they ratify. It also showed that the combination of this unique system, the ILO's technical cooperation expertise, and a country's political commitment, can produce results quickly, and in full partnership with the Government, and workers' and employers' organizations.

There is a universal recognition that the work is not complete, and a commitment to continue the cooperation beyond the World Cup.

Source: [Monitoring compliance with international labour standards: The key role of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations](#), International Labour Office, Geneva, ILO, 2019, p. 51. [Progress report on the technical cooperation programme between the Government of Qatar and the ILO](#), International Labour Office, 2021.

Involuntariness and coercion

Forced labour involves work situations featuring two key, interrelated conditions. The first is a lack of free and informed consent (i.e., involuntariness) in taking the job or accepting the working conditions. The second is the application of some form of coercion, such as a penalty or threat of a penalty, to prevent an individual from leaving a situation or to otherwise compel work. The absence of free and informed consent and presence of coercion can occur at any stage of the employment process – at the time of recruitment to compel a person to take a job against their will, during employment to compel a worker to work and/or live under conditions to which they do not agree, or to compel a person to remain in the job when they wish to leave. As discussed above, international labour standards stipulate that both involuntariness and coercion must be present in a work situation for it to constitute forced labour.

The 2021 Global Estimates provide insights into the most common manifestations of involuntariness and coercion faced by people in forced labour.

Conditions leading to the absence of free and informed consent

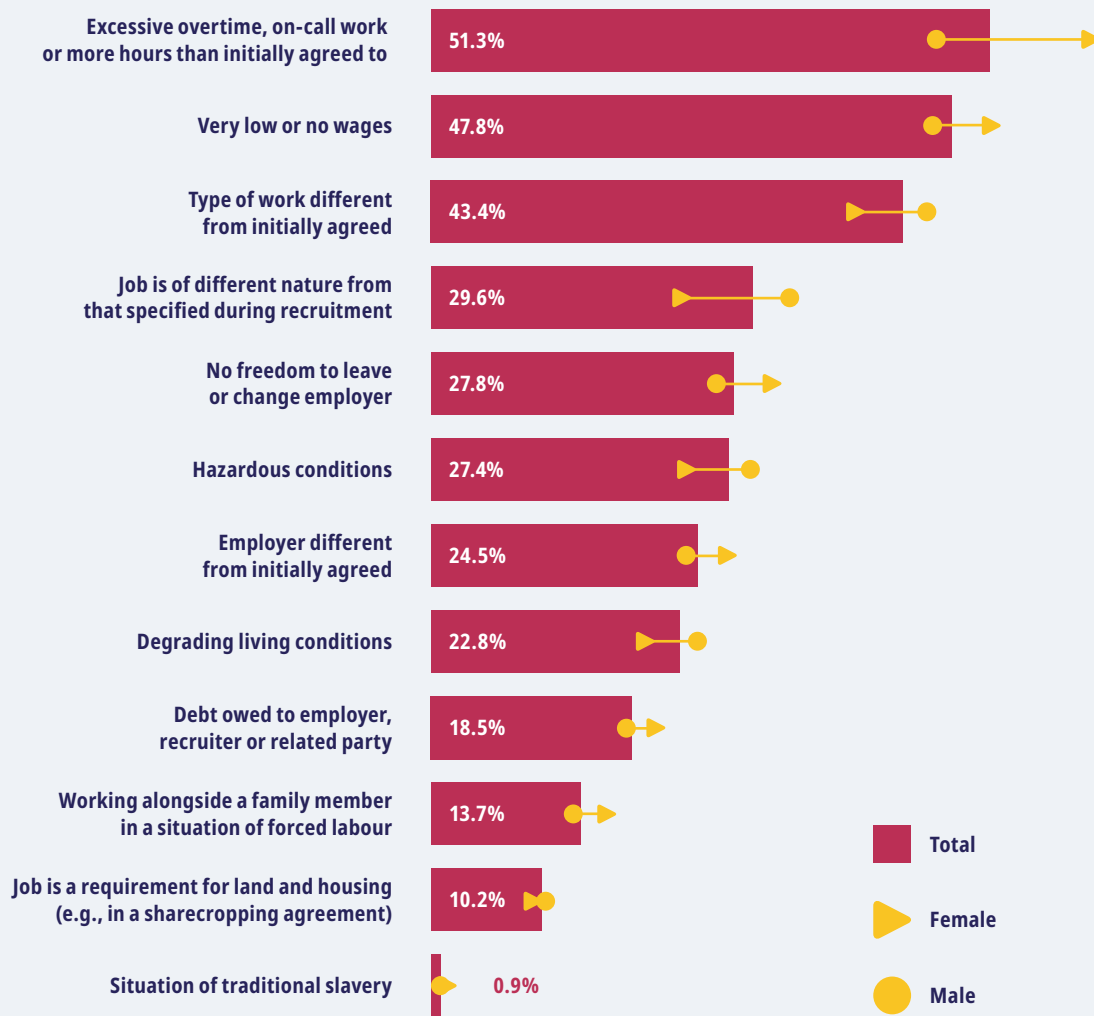
The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that the absence of free and informed consent can arise from a number of overlapping factors. It is most commonly linked to workers being confronted with work circumstances different from and inferior to those agreed at the outset of employment. In 51 per cent of cases of adult forced labour exploitation, workers are working involuntarily because of longer hours or more overtime than agreed, and in 43 per cent of cases because they must perform different job tasks from those specified during recruitment. In 30 per cent of cases, they are working involuntarily because the nature of their job is different from what they agreed to, and in 25 per cent of cases because they because they work for someone other than the agreed employer.

Other common factors giving rise to absence of free and informed consent relate to job conditions and living conditions associated with the job. Forty-seven per cent are working involuntarily because of very low or no wages, 27 per cent because of hazardous work conditions, and 23 per cent because of degrading living conditions at the work site imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third party.

Involuntary work also arises from restrictions in the ability to change employer (28 per cent) and because of debt owed to employers, recruiters, or related parties (19 per cent). In a smaller share of cases, lack free and informed of consent stems from having to work alongside a family member who is in forced labour (14 per cent) or because the job is a condition for land and housing (10 per cent). The latter relates in particular to sharecropping agreements that require, for example, a wife and/or children to perform domestic work in order for the family to have land and housing. Finally, in 1 per cent of cases, the absence of free and informed consent is linked to situations of traditional slavery.

Figure 11.

Involuntariness in work can arise from an array work conditions



Percentage of adults in forced labour exploitation experiencing conditions leading to involuntariness^(a) by sex

Note: (a) Percentages add to more than 100 because people can be subject to more than one condition leading to involuntariness.

Types of coercion

Coercion is what compels workers to work without free and informed consent. The global estimates indicate that coercion can take many forms. The systematic and deliberate withholding of wages is the most common, used by abusive employers to compel workers to stay in a job out of fear of losing accrued earnings. More than one-third (36 per cent) of adults in forced labour in the private economy are subjected to this form of coercion.

Coercion through the abuse of vulnerability affects about one in five adults in forced labour. This form of coercion involves employers exploiting workers' vulnerability – for example, their lack of alternative livelihood opportunities – to compel them under threat of dismissal to perform work they would otherwise refuse⁶² or to compel them to work excessive hours in order to secure a minimum wage.⁶³

A similar share of adults in forced labour, about one-fifth, are coerced through threats levelled against them directly. On rarer occasions, threats also extend to family members. Around one in ten of those in forced labour are coerced into remaining in their job through the imposition of a financial penalty for leaving prior to an agreed or imposed departure date.

Other forms of coercion affect smaller, but by no means negligible, numbers of adults in forced labour exploitation. About 5 per cent are coerced through the manipulation of debt – for example, by compelling people to perform work they would otherwise refuse under threat of increasing the debt they owe to the employer. A similar share is coerced through the use of isolation – for example, being kept in a remote location or being isolated from contact with families or sources of assistance by confiscating mobile phones and cutting off other means of communication.

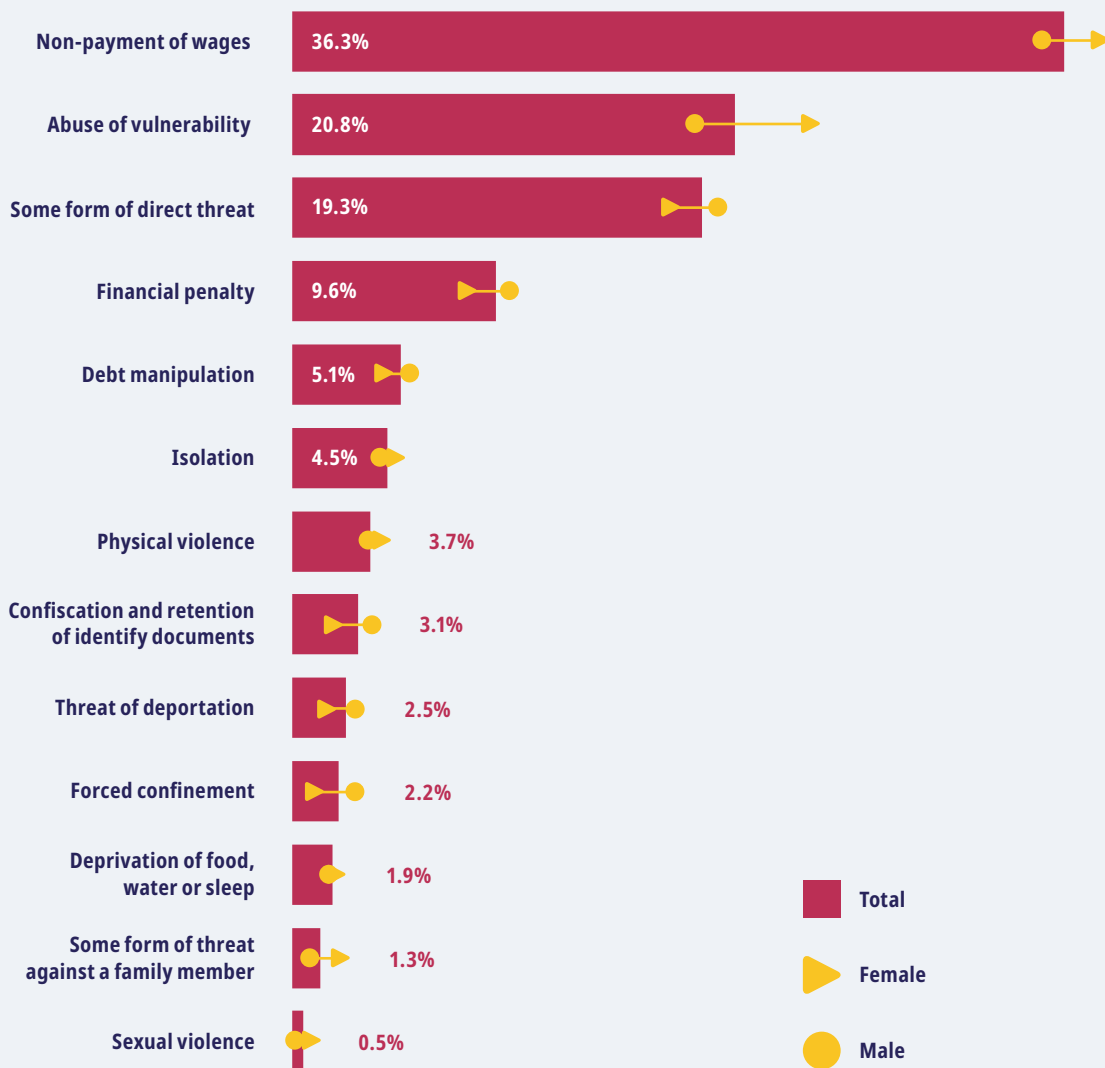
Migrant workers who are in irregular situations, unfairly recruited, or in contexts of poor migration governance can face coercion in the form of confiscation of their identity documents, which prevents them from leaving a job for fear of losing them. Migrants in irregular situations are also coerced through threats of being reported to authorities or deported. Other adults in forced labour are subjected to more extreme forms of coercion, including sexual and physical violence, forced confinement, and deprivation of food, drink, or sleep.

These forms of coercion are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, most of those in forced labour are subjected to multiple forms simultaneously.

The global estimates indicate some differences in types of coercion faced by women and men in forced labour exploitation. Looking at the four most common forms of coercion, women in forced labour are more likely to be coerced through wage non-payment and abuse of vulnerability through threat of dismissal, and men in forced labour through threats of violence and financial penalties. Among the other forms of coercion, women are more likely to be subjected to physical and sexual violence and threats against family members, and men to confiscation of identity documents, threat of deportation, and forced confinement.

Figure 12.

Non-payment of wages and threats of dismissal stand out as the most common forms of coercion faced by workers



Percentage of adults in forced labour exploitation, by forms of coercion^(a) and sex

Note: (a) Percentages add to more than 100 because people can be subject to more than one form coercion.

Debt bondage

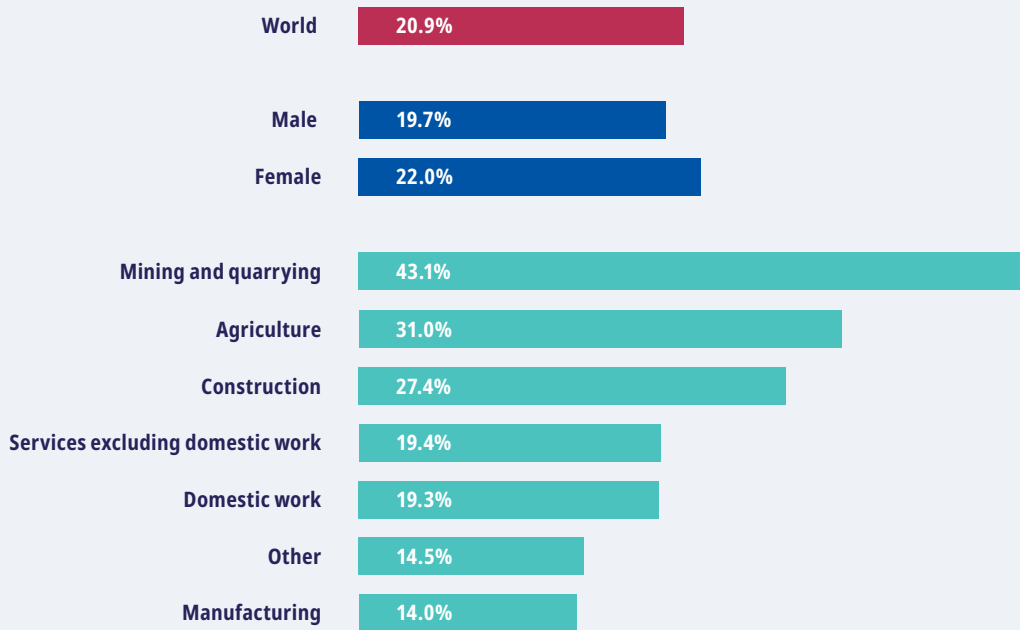
Debt bondage results when people are coerced to work against their will to repay a debt with an employer or recruiter, or when debt is manipulated to compel people to perform work tasks or accept work conditions that they would otherwise refuse. Such debts can last years or even generations.⁶⁴ They can be manipulated in ways that make their settlement impossible.

The factors leading to debt bondage vary. Sudden shocks, such as job loss, can oblige workers without savings or access to formal credit markets to turn to predatory lenders offering loans under conditions tantamount to debt bondage. Others, already indebted, can be forced to offer their labour or that of a family member to service their debts when they are unable to do so through other means. Still others fall into debt bondage through exorbitant fees, withheld wages, and other coercive practices of predatory recruiters or employers.⁶⁵ Migrants in particular are susceptible to having to take on large debts to pay exorbitant costs related to recruitment and migration to secure work in countries of destination. Rarer but persistent traditional forms of debt bondage include people born into debt bondage through debts purportedly accumulated by their forebears.

One-fifth of people in forced labour exploitation are in situations of debt bondage. While the global estimates point to the occurrence of debt bondage across all sectors, its relative importance varies considerably from one to another. Debt bondage is most prominent in mining, agriculture, and construction, where 43 per cent, 31 per cent, and 27 per cent, respectively, of all forced labour cases involve debt bondage. Debt bondage is present in about one in five cases of forced labour in services and domestic work and in 14 per cent of forced labour cases in manufacturing. Other studies point to bonded labour in specific industries including brickmaking, tobacco, fishing, illegal logging and timber extraction, carpet weaving, and textile and garment manufacturing, among others.⁶⁶ Marginalised communities, ethnic and religious minorities, and indigenous peoples are among the groups at particular risk.⁶⁷

Figure 13.

One-fifth of all people in forced labour exploitation is in situations of debt bondage



Percentage adults in forced labour exploitation who are in situations of debt bondage,^(a) by sex and sector

Notes: (a) Debt bondage for the purpose of the global estimates refers to two specific situations: (1) when a person is coerced work against their will to repay a debt with employer or recruiter (e.g., “you must take this job to repay the money you owe me, or else I will hurt your family”); or (2) when debt is manipulated to compel a person to perform work tasks or accept work conditions that he or she would otherwise refuse (e.g., “if you do not work all night to finish the order, I will double the amount of money that you owe me”).

1.2.3 Forced commercial sexual exploitation

This sub-section refers to persons in forced labour imposed by private actors for commercial sexual exploitation. This category of forced labour includes adults' forced involvement in commercial sexual exploitation, in production of sexual abuse materials, and in new forms of Internet-based commercial sexual exploitation. It also includes all forms of commercial sexual exploitation involving children.⁶⁸

The 2021 Global Estimates indicate a total of 6.3 million people are in situations of forced commercial sexual exploitation on any given day. This number includes 1.7 million children in commercial sexual exploitation, about a quarter of the total. Gender is a critical determining factor – nearly four out of every five of those trapped in forced commercial exploitation are girls or women.

Information from other sources underscores the close link between forced commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. According to UNODC, half of all identified trafficking cases reported to the organization in 2018 involved trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.⁶⁹ The CTDC also reports large shares of identified cases involving trafficking for sexual exploitation, with some geographic variation.⁷⁰

The trafficking mechanisms can be complex. UNODC, for example, reports multiple cases of collaboration between criminal groups specializing in recruitment and brokering women for commercial sexual exploitation in a source country and other criminal networks specializing in their “reselling” and abuse in destination countries.⁷¹ Traffickers commonly use false promises of other job opportunities abroad – for example, in domestic service – as a ploy to recruit women into situations of forced commercial sexual exploitation.⁷² Increasingly, social media and websites are used to recruit people via fake job advertisements.⁷³

According to CTDC, victims trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation report psychological abuse as the most frequent means by which traffickers control them, followed by restrictions on their freedom of movement and threats being made against them or their loved ones.⁷⁴

The numerous large-scale crises currently unfolding worldwide, and the population displacements and heightened vulnerability associated with them, are creating fertile ground for human traffickers. In Ukraine, for example, international organizations are raising the alarm about the risk of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation among the millions of women and children fleeing the conflict there.⁷⁵ Similar concerns have been raised in a number of other conflict-related crises, including in Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen.⁷⁶

1.2.4 Forced labour of children

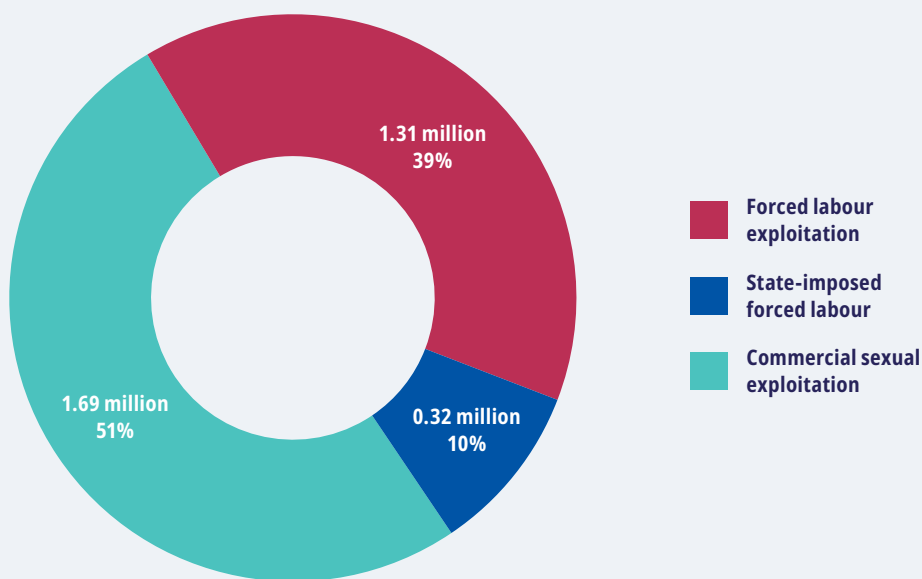
The 2021 estimates indicate that a total of 3.3 million children are in situations of forced labour on any given day, accounting for about 12 per cent of all those in forced labour. And owing to data constraints, these numbers, already alarming, may well be just the tip of the iceberg. The forced labour of children constitutes one component of child labour,⁷⁷ which the international community – through Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals – has committed to ending by 2025.

There are concerns that the risk of forced labour among children has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 10.4 million children, for example, have lost at least one parent to the pandemic, out of which 7 million have become orphans, leaving them vulnerable to abuse in contexts in which child support systems are inadequate.⁷⁸

A total of 1.7 million children are in commercial sexual exploitation, constituting over half of all children in forced labour. A further 1.3 million, accounting for 39 per cent of the total, are in forced labour exploitation. The remaining 0.32 million children in forced labour, 10 per cent of the total, are subjected to state-imposed forced labour.

Figure 14.

One half of all children in forced labour are in commercial sexual exploitation



Percentage distribution and number of children in forced labour, by category

Figure 15.

The forced labour of children occurs across a wide range of economic sectors and industries



Word cloud of commonly occurring words^(a)

Note: (a) This word cloud was generated using data collected by the ILO through a series of regional mappings of information on the forced labour of children in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The mappings relied on a variety of secondary sources and indicated (where available) the economic sector or activity in which children were engaged.

A review undertaken for this report of information from a wide range of supplementary sources⁷⁹ makes clear that the forced labour of children occurs across a wide array of economic sectors and industries (Figure 15). Some of the forms of forced labour of children are discussed briefly below.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children. There are tragic accounts from many parts of the world of children in situations of commercial sexual exploitation, including in travel and tourism and the production of child sexual abuse materials. Some of the severe forms of coercion and abuse these children are subjected to include abduction, drugging, being held in captivity, deception, manipulation of debt, and the confiscation of identity documents.

Many are trafficked into such situations, ending up far from their homes and families. The commercial sexual exploitation of children appears to be most prevalent against marginalised children struck by poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination, children on the move (particularly unaccompanied or separated children), children with disabilities, children living in residential care, and children left behind by their parents.⁸⁰ Situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis can leave children especially vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation.⁸¹

The online commercial sexual exploitation of children, involving the dissemination of acts of sexual abuse over the Internet, is also a growing concern worldwide.⁸² The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children has indicated that COVID-19 has greatly amplified the risk of online child commercial sexual exploitation.⁸³ The Internet is also creating new channels for the trafficking of children and for connecting trafficking victims with their abusers.⁸⁴

Forced labour of children in domestic work. The number of child domestic workers subjected to forced labour is difficult to estimate as this work occurs behind closed doors in private homes. What begins as a case of child labour may evolve into forced labour when children are required to work long hours, or are subjected to physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, with no means of escaping their employer.

In parts of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Asia, there are entrenched systems of domestic bondage involving children, such as the *criadazgo* in Paraguay,⁸⁵ *padrinazgo* in Peru,⁸⁶ *vidomegon* in Benin,⁸⁷ *confiage* in Togo,⁸⁸ and *kamlari* in Nepal.⁸⁹ Girls or members of minority ethnic groups are often particularly affected. There is an important two-way link between the forced domestic work of children and child trafficking. Forced domestic work can be the result of trafficking while, at the same time, children who escape this form of forced labour also become more vulnerable to trafficking.⁹⁰

Children in situations of debt bondage. Debt bondage of children persists in many parts of the world. It can be linked to traditional practices, such as the *wahaya* practice in Niger involving domestic work and sexual exploitation,⁹¹ and the *Haliya* and *Kamaiya* practices in Nepal involving agricultural bonded labour.⁹² In countries such as Mali and Mauritania,⁹³ despite some progress, hereditary slavery practices affecting entire families persist in some areas. These practices see children starting lives in slavery in activities such as cattle herding, field work and domestic work.

Children are also found in debt bondage in many contexts because their parents are in such situations. In South Asia, where endemic levels of debt bondage persist among brick kiln workers,⁹⁴ children work alongside their indentured parents.⁹⁵ Irregular migration also poses a risk of debt bondage for children. There are reports of child migrants in an irregular situation migrating from Asia or Africa to Europe and falling into debt bondage to repay their travel costs to smugglers.⁹⁶

Child trafficking for forced labour. UNODC statistics indicate that children account for one in every three detected victims of trafficking worldwide, rising to one in two in low-income countries. Most, but not all, of these children are trafficked for the purpose of forced labour.⁹⁷ Identified cases of child trafficking for forced labour reported by the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) indicate a lower but still very large share of one in five worldwide.⁹⁸

The CTDC data indicate that children are most commonly trafficked into domestic work (21 per cent), followed by begging (10 per cent), the hospitality sector (7 per cent), street and small scale informal retail (6 per cent), illicit activities (6 per cent), and agriculture (5 per cent).⁹⁹ Other reports point to child trafficking for forced labour in agriculture¹⁰⁰ and mining and quarrying,¹⁰¹ among others.

Children affected include girls in rural and remote parts of Africa who are trafficked to urban areas for forced labour in domestic work,¹⁰² scheduled caste and tribal children in South Asia who are trafficked to distant cities to work in manufacturing, and indigenous and migrant children in Latin America who are trafficked to work as domestic servants, to work for organized criminal groups, or to be used as soldiers in armed conflicts.¹⁰³

Studies in West Africa, Latin America, and South Asia highlight how the practice of families sending children outside the home for employment can increase the risk of child trafficking.¹⁰⁴ Crisis situations can also create opportunities for child traffickers. In Bangladesh, the IOM reports an organized network for trafficking Rohingya children out of refugee camps for domestic work.¹⁰⁵ There are growing concerns of child traffickers preying on children attempting to flee the conflict in Ukraine.¹⁰⁶

Forced begging and illicit activities. Nearly one in ten identified cases of child trafficking for forced labour reported by IOM's CTDC are trafficked for begging and one in 20 for illicit activities.¹⁰⁷ There are reports of children's involvement in forced begging and forced engagement in illicit activities in many regions of the world. In parts of the Sahel in Africa, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons reports the continuing practice of children being required to beg by religious teachers with whom they are sent to live, ostensibly for spiritual guidance.^{108, 109} Other reports indicate other forms of forced begging involving children in Eastern Europe,¹¹⁰ Southeast Asia,¹¹¹ and Latin America and the Caribbean.¹¹²

Other reported illicit activities involving children include the production and smuggling of narcotics in Southeast Asia,¹¹³ theft in Europe,¹¹⁴ and the sale and transport of stolen goods in North America.¹¹⁵ Children can be coerced into work in illicit activities through threats of violence,¹¹⁶ exploitation of economic vulnerability,¹¹⁷ and promises of status.¹¹⁸

Children in armed conflict. The recruitment and use of child soldiers, mostly by armed groups but also sometimes by government forces, is a persistent problem in approximately 20 countries and several conflict zones. The UN Security Council reported around 10,000 children recruited and abducted each year in the past five years,¹¹⁹ some as young as 8 or 9-years-old.¹²⁰ Affected countries include Afghanistan,¹²¹ Democratic Republic of the Congo,¹²² Mali,¹²³ Myanmar,¹²⁴ Nigeria,¹²⁵ Somalia,¹²⁶ South Sudan,¹²⁷ Sudan,¹²⁸ Syrian Arab Republic,¹²⁹ and Yemen.¹³⁰

In addition to taking direct part in fighting, children can also be forced into other roles in armed conflict situations that involve abhorrent abuses of their human rights. Reports from a variety of war contexts document children being used as human shields,¹³¹ in intelligence gathering,¹³² in mine clearance, as bodyguards, in planting improvised explosive devices, and as perpetrators of acts of terror.¹³³ Girls may be forced into sexual slavery or forced marriages. Many children are abducted.¹³⁴ In addition, they may be forced to perform extremely hazardous child labour in the production of conflict minerals.¹³⁵

Direct exposure to extreme violence is a common thread across all children associated with armed conflict, whether they are witnesses, forced combatants, or forced participants in some other role. The psychosocial and physical consequences can last a lifetime.¹³⁶

1.2.5 State-imposed forced labour

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State-imposed forced labour is used in the global estimates to describe various forms of forced labour that are imposed by state authorities, agents acting on behalf of state authorities, and organizations with authority similar to the state. It is prohibited by ILO Convention Nos. 29 and 105, subject to certain exceptions.

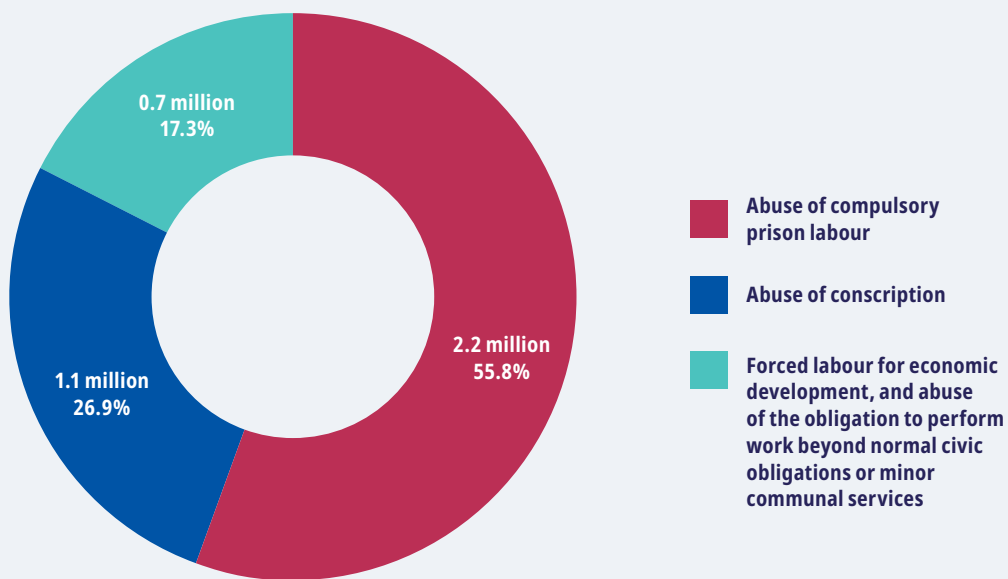
State-imposed forced labour has a number of overarching characteristics: 1) there is a mobilisation of labour using state apparatuses including the army, the police, the judiciary, and the prison system; 2) these state apparatuses act either in accordance with national law that is in non-conformity with ILO Conventions or remain unchallenged in imposing forced labour in contravention of national and international law; 3) there is no path to remediation because the forced labour is imposed by the state itself.

An estimated 3.9 million people were in state-imposed forced labour at any point in time in 2021. More than three of every four (78 per cent) of those in forced labour imposed by state authorities are male. Eight per cent of those in state-imposed forced labour are children.

Underlying these aggregate figures are a number of different categories of state-imposed forced labour. Over half (56 per cent of all cases) involve some form of abuse of compulsory prison labour: the abuse of compulsory prison labour for private interests, either in work performed by prisoners in privately-managed prisons or in work performed by prisoners inside or outside public prisons for private interests; forced labour imposed on people in pre-trial or administrative detention; or cases connected to the imposition of labour on persons imprisoned for non-violent political offences, for labour discipline, for non-violent participation in strikes, or as a means of discrimination.

Figure 16.

State-imposed forced labour takes a variety of different forms



Percentage distribution and number of people in state-imposed forced labour, by category

The abuse of conscription into military services accounts for 27 per cent of all cases. The remaining 17 per cent of cases involve either the obligation to work for the purpose of furthering national economic development, people being forced to work in excess of normal civic obligations, or people being forced to perform communal services exceeding the nature and scope of these activities as permitted by ILO standards.

The comments from the ILO's supervisory bodies' regular system of supervision make clear state-imposed forced labour persists in all of the world's regions.

Below, specific manifestations of the different categories of state-imposed forced labour are illustrated on the basis of information drawn from the ILO's supervisory bodies' regular system of supervision, including the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) and the International Labour Conference's Tripartite Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS), as well as from other UN human rights monitoring bodies.

Abuse of compulsory prison labour

Compulsory labour in prison can be imposed only on prisoners who meet certain conditions: they must be convicted of a crime in a court of law following due process¹³⁷ but must not have been convicted of a non-violent political offence,¹³⁸ for breaches of labour discipline,¹³⁹ for non-violent participation in strikes,¹⁴⁰ or as a means of racial, social, national, or religious discrimination.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the work itself must be supervised by public authorities and must not be for private individuals, companies, or associations unless a number of additional conditions are met (explained below).¹⁴²

Compulsory labour for people convicted of a non-violent political offence

One of the most common violations of the rules on prison labour is the imposition of compulsory work on people detained for non-violent political offences. The CEACR has been regularly requesting ratifying states to take measures to review their legislation or the manner in which the legislation is applied in practice with a view to ensuring that the legislation does not allow for or is not used to impose penalties involving compulsory labour (including compulsory prison labour, public, or correctional work) on persons who express political views or peacefully oppose the established political, economic, or social system.

Recent examples of such requests include Burundi,¹⁴³ Algeria,¹⁴⁴ Benin,¹⁴⁵ Kazakhstan,¹⁴⁶ the Russian Federation,¹⁴⁷ United Arab Emirates,¹⁴⁸ and United Republic of Tanzania.¹⁴⁹ The most recent individual case discussed by the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) concern Azerbaijan (2022),¹⁵⁰ Fiji (2022),¹⁵¹ and Zimbabwe (2021).¹⁵²

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has expressed grave concern about "credible accounts of forced labour under exceptionally harsh conditions within the ordinary prison system, which may amount to the crime against humanity of enslavement."¹⁵³ The forced labour included construction work, farming, logging, mining and similar forms of heavy manual labour. The exceptionally harsh work conditions included reports of "extremely long working hours, starvation rations, overall poor living conditions, denial of medical care and frequent beatings for minor infractions and failing to meet work quotas."¹⁵⁴

The CEACR and other UN human rights monitoring bodies have also expressed concern over the use of anti-terrorism laws or the guise of national security concerns as means of imposing prison sentences for the expression of political opinions or the exercise of independent civil society activity including trade unionists, business' leaders and other human rights defenders such as lawyers or journalists (e.g., Bangladesh,¹⁵⁵ Algeria,¹⁵⁶ the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Cameroon).¹⁵⁷

Imposition of forced labour as a means of racial or religious discrimination

With regard to China, delegates to the International Labour Conference of the ILO, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery have raised concerns about forced labour in some parts of China. In a context where employment schemes are used for poverty alleviation and where such schemes are linked with the prevention of religious extremism, the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

refers to allegations of practices of forced or compulsory labour with respect to Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim minorities, mainly with respect to placements in vocational education and training facilities and on leaving such facilities, and labour placements known as “surplus labour” and labour transfer” schemes. The report concluded that there were indications that such schemes were discriminatory in nature or effect and that they seemed to involve elements of coercion.

On 12 August 2022, China ratified the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No.105).¹⁵⁸ The latter requires ratifying Member states “ to suppress and not to make use of any form of forced or compulsory labour: (a) as a means of political coercion or education or as a punishment for holding or expressing political views or views ideologically opposed to the established political, social or economic system; (b) as a method of mobilising and using labour for purposes of economic development; (c) as a means of labour discipline; (d) as a punishment for having participated in strikes; or, (e) as a means of racial, social, national or religious discrimination”. This ratification creates renewed momentum for cooperation with the Government and social partners to pursue these issues, to combat forced labour and support human-centred development and decent work.

Pakistan is among the other countries where the CEACR has noted the imposition of compulsory labour as a means of racial or religious discrimination.¹⁵⁹ In the United States, the CEACR has strongly encouraged the government to strengthen its efforts to ensure that racial discrimination at the sentencing and other stages of the criminal justice process do not result in the imposition of racially disproportionate prison sentences involving compulsory labour.¹⁶⁰

Forced labour for breaches of labour discipline

Forced labour imposed as a consequence of a breach of labour discipline has been found to occur in countries including Botswana,¹⁶¹ where national legislation provides for sanctions of imprisonment involving compulsory prison labour for any wilful breach of a contract of employment by an employee who is acting either alone or in combination with others, if such breach affects the operation of overly broadly defined essential services. It has also been found in the Republic of Moldova,¹⁶² where criminal legislation provides that the non-performance or improper performance by an official in their duties as the result of a negligent attitude, causing substantial harm to legitimate rights and interests of persons or organizations, or to public interests, is punishable by imprisonment (which involves compulsory prison labour).

Several countries have laws imposing sentences of imprisonment on seafarers, or fines or forceful return to their ships, for breaches of labour discipline such as refusal to obey orders or absence without authorisation. These laws amount to a compulsion to work under threat of penalties. The ILO allows the imposition of proportional sanctions for actions that would endanger the ship or the life or health of persons on board. Otherwise, all sanctions involving compulsory labour should be abolished under ILO Convention Nos. 29 and 105 and the Maritime Labour Convention.

Cases involving seafarers dealt with by the CEACR include South Africa,¹⁶³ where national legislation provides for prison sanctions (involving compulsory prison labour) for breaches of discipline by seafarers, including: wilfully disobeying any

lawful command or neglecting duty; combining with any of the crew to disobey lawful commands, neglect duty, impede the navigation of the ship or retard the progress of the voyage; preventing, hindering, or retarding the loading, unloading, or departure of the ship; desertion; and absence without leave. Other examples include Grenada¹⁶⁴ and United Arab Emirates,¹⁶⁵ although both countries have committed to reforms aimed at bringing their laws into conformity with the forced labour conventions.

Imposition of forced labour for non-violent participation in strikes

Another frequent violation is the imposition of labour on prisoners incarcerated for non-violent participation in strikes (e.g., Côte d'Ivoire,¹⁶⁶ Kazakhstan,¹⁶⁷ Philippines¹⁶⁸) or otherwise promoting workers' rights. Strike action *may* be prohibited, and penal sanctions involving forced labour imposed, for workers in *essential services* in both the public and the private sector as well as in limited other circumstances (such as those involving minimum operational requirements and minimum safety and health requirements). However, some countries define "essential services" much more broadly than the supervisory bodies have considered acceptable, and breaches of a strike ban in services that cannot be considered "essential" should then not be subject to forced labour under C105 (e.g., Bangladesh¹⁶⁹ and Guatemala¹⁷⁰).

Abuse of prison labour for the benefit of private parties

Prison labour can be used for the benefit of private individuals, companies, or organizations only if several additional requirements are met. The prisoner must consent to the work and must not be threatened with a penalty (such as loss of privileges) for refusing. The conditions of work offered by the employer must be proximate to those that would be offered to other workers in the labour market. Prisoners must receive similar wages as other workers, daily working hours must conform with labour laws, health and safety measures must be in place in accordance with legislation, and any standard safeguards available to other workers must be present. Workers must additionally be supervised by the public authorities. Examples of countries where prison labour for private entities *meets* with the requirements of the Convention include Canada,¹⁷¹ Chile,¹⁷² and Colombia.¹⁷³

Violations typically involve the assignment of prisoners to work for private interests without asking for their consent and/or without remuneration. In several countries, prisoners freely consenting to work for private enterprises are either not paid a wage at all or paid only nominal wages. Cases examined by UN human rights monitoring bodies include Mongolia.¹⁷⁴ In other countries, cases dealt with by the CEACR involve prisoners assigned to work for private interests with remuneration but without consent (e.g., Australia,¹⁷⁵ Austria,¹⁷⁶ Germany,¹⁷⁷ the Russian Federation,¹⁷⁸ and United Kingdom¹⁷⁹).

Compulsory labour for persons in administrative detention

Compulsory labour cannot be imposed on people in administrative detention in any circumstances. A common violation is the imposition of compulsory labour on those detained by law enforcement authorities but never meant to be tried because they have committed "minor offences" – those that are not serious enough to be subject to criminal prosecution but errant enough to qualify for "re-education."

Other cases involve the imposition of compulsory labour on detainees in administrative detention centres established for drug users, beggars, sex workers, vagrants, street children, and other marginalised groups, again ostensibly for re-educational or rehabilitative purposes. In Belarus, for example, persons suffering from chronic alcoholism, drug addiction, or substance abuse may be sent to medical labour centres, where they have an obligation to work.¹⁸⁰ Other examples include Mozambique,¹⁸¹ where persons identified as “unproductive” or “anti-social” can be arrested and sent to re-education centres or assigned to productive sectors; and Democratic Republic of the Congo,¹⁸² where persons may be arrested and judged by a court for vagrancy or begging and forced to work.

In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, OHCHR reports of people being subjected to hard labour in labour “training camps” (*rodongdanryondae*) by an administrative process without trial.¹⁸³

Compulsory labour for persons in pre-trial detention

The imposition of labour on persons in pre-trial detention prior to their conviction also occurs in a number of countries (e.g., Democratic People’s Republic of Korea¹⁸⁴). Many countries do not specify in law whether compulsory labour may be imposed during the pre-trial period, leaving a legal grey area enabling prison administrations to subject pre-trial detainees to labour. Other countries provide explicitly in law that compulsory labour may be imposed even before an independent judge has confirmed the detention (e.g., Democratic Republic of the Congo¹⁸⁵). The effects of these legal shortcomings are compounded in contexts in which overburdened judicial systems result in prolonged periods of pre-trial detention.

Pre-trial detention laws in some countries are used to imprison activists and political dissidents indefinitely, mix them into the prison population at large, and subject them to compulsory labour as prisoners. Cases examined by the CEACR include Cambodia,¹⁸⁶ where compulsory prison labour may be imposed on NGO representatives, trade union members, and human rights defenders who are kept in pre-trial detention for long periods of time; Azerbaijan,¹⁸⁷ where compulsory prison labour may be imposed on journalists, social media activists, and opposition political activists who express dissent or criticism; and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,¹⁸⁸ where there is continued criminalization of social movements and imposition of compulsory prison labour on political opponents and dissidents.

Abuse of conscription

This form of state-imposed forced labour occurs where states force conscripts subject to compulsory military service laws to perform work not of a “purely military character.”¹⁸⁹ Abuse of conscription is often carried out under the pretext of contributing to social and economic well-being, reviving transport infrastructure, generating green energy, and other objectives requiring large-scale labour mobilisation. Abuse of conscription is therefore generally linked with the broader prohibition of the use of forced labour for the purposes of economic development (see below).¹⁹⁰

The ILO recommends that legislation should clearly reflect the principle that non-military tasks are to be restricted to emergencies or performed exclusively by volunteers.¹⁹¹ Comments from the CEACR indicate that some countries not only fail to specify the restriction but, on the contrary, provide explicitly in law that conscripts can be mobilised for civil and developmental purposes (e.g., Mongolia¹⁹² and Zambia¹⁹³).

The use of labour exacted within the framework of compulsory military service to build infrastructure or produce certain resources for the state¹⁹⁴ has been noted by the ILO supervisory bodies in Egypt,¹⁹⁵ where national legislation provides that young persons who have completed their studies, and who are surplus to the requirements of the armed forces, may be directed to work in the development of rural and urban societies, in agricultural and consumers' cooperative associations, and in the production units of factories. It was also noted in Chad,¹⁹⁶ where within the framework of compulsory military service, conscripts who are fit for service are classified into two categories, one of which remains at the disposal of the military authorities for two years and may be called upon to perform work in the general interest by order of the government, and in Myanmar,¹⁹⁷ where conscripts are required to perform a variety of non-military tasks.

Other states exclude military personnel from the protection in constitutional or labour law from forced labour (e.g., Zimbabwe¹⁹⁸) or bundle civic service with military service to make the former also compulsory for conscripts (e.g., Mali¹⁹⁹).

Some countries require military officers to obtain the approval of a tribunal or panel before they are allowed to resign, without at the same time specifying in law the criteria to be used to decide whether a resignation request will be accepted (Egypt).²⁰⁰ In other countries, career military officers are not allowed to leave their service, even in peacetime (e.g., Albania,²⁰¹ Uganda,²⁰² Malaysia²⁰³). The right of military officers to resign was addressed by the General Survey of 2012 on the Fundamental Conventions, where it is recalled that under the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), career military personnel and other persons in the service of the State, who have voluntarily entered into an engagement, should have the right to leave the service in peacetime within a reasonable period, either at specified intervals, or with previous notice.²⁰⁴

Compulsory labour for the purpose of economic development, and abuse of the obligation to perform work as part of normal civic obligations or minor communal services

Compulsory labour for the purpose of economic development

This form of state-imposed forced labour occurs when a state uses compulsory labour to promote economic development, in contravention of ILO Convention No. 105.²⁰⁵ The prohibition applies even where recourse to forced or compulsory labour as a method of mobilizing and using labour for purposes of economic development is of a temporary or exceptional nature.

The CEACR and other UN human rights monitoring bodies have expressed deep concern about the forced participation in Turkmenistan²⁰⁶ of public servants, private sector workers, and students in cotton harvesting for the government, almost always for little or no compensation, under threat of substantial fines for refusal. Turkmenistan law also contains conditions under which a court may impose an administrative sanction in the form of community service, which includes cleaning the streets and pavements of the district or town and upkeep of public amenities, working in rural areas (crop, livestock, or poultry farming), and upkeep of grounds to mitigate damage from natural disasters (floods, landslides, earthquakes).²⁰⁷

Exaction of work beyond normal civic obligations or beyond minor communal services

States cannot impose work on people beyond normal civic obligations²⁰⁸ and minor communal services. An exception to this prohibition applies if the work is extracted in cases of emergency, such as a war or disaster.²⁰⁹ Outside of emergencies, only compulsory military service is excluded from the scope of ILO Convention No. 29 (subject to the condition that it is used “for work of a purely military character,” as discussed above).

States or local authorities can mandate minor communal services if these are performed in the direct interest of a community and by members of the benefiting community. The services must be “minor” – of small scale and short duration²¹⁰ – and members of the community or their direct representatives have the right to be consulted about the need for the services. Any mandatory work that is considered a minor communal service but violates any of these conditions is forbidden by Convention No. 29.²¹¹

Violations generally involve the assignment of work that is too long or onerous to be “minor,” or unilateral decisions on the work to be performed without proper consultation of the affected population. In Rwanda, where all adult citizens aged 18 to 65 years are required to perform unpaid community work including infrastructure construction on a monthly basis, the CEACR has requested the Government to take the necessary measures in order to ensure that this community work is limited to “minor services”, which constitute an exception to forced labour as provided for in the Convention.²¹² Another example involves mandatory periods of civil service for doctors specializing in public health or newly graduated professional specialists (Algeria²¹³).

Migrant domestic workers are another category of workers who in some countries can fall into situations tantamount to forced labour because of state laws restricting their rights and freedoms. Such situations have been noted in Oman,²¹⁴ where the existence of a sponsorship system enables a relationship in which migrant workers, including domestic workers, are dependent on their sponsors/employers, and links the work permit of this category of workers to their sponsors. The system prevents migrant workers from freely terminating their employment. In Saudi Arabia,²¹⁵ where migrant domestic workers do not enjoy the same rights as other workers in the country, they can be subjected to economic and physical abuse and exploitation, the confiscation of passports by employers, and the *de facto* persistence of a sponsorship system.

Legal reforms towards ending state-imposed forced labour

Important reforms in law related to state-imposed forced labour have been noted by the CEACR in a wide range of countries in recent years. Of course, reforms to legislation constitute only a first step – real progress towards ending state-imposed forced labour depends on translating these reforms into practice.

In Uzbekistan,²¹⁶ a number of measures have been taken towards ending the practice of state-imposed forced labour in the cotton harvest. The 2021 ILO Third-Party Monitoring Report of the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan found that Uzbekistan had eradicated systemic forced and child labour associated with the harvest.²¹⁷

In Viet Nam²¹⁸ and Türkiye,²¹⁹ new laws have eliminated provisions regarding the engagement persons in compulsory military service in tasks or roles of a non-military nature. In Morocco,²²⁰ amended laws on imprisonment for press speech, defamation, and “attacking religion or the monarchical regime” mean these actions are no longer punishable by imprisonment with forced labour.

In Benin,²²¹ legal reforms mean that the offences of defamation, insult, and contempt committed by the press, in printed matter, posters or any other modern means of mass communication are no longer sanctioned with prison sentences. In Guinea,²²² the penal code has been amended with the effect that persons who have not disturbed public order may no longer be punished by imprisonment involving the obligation to work. In Seychelles,²²³ legal reforms in 2020 repealed prison as a disciplinary measure for seafarers. Kiribati²²⁴ is an example of progress in amending laws dealing with strike action.

The CEACR has noted several cases of progress concerning the application of Article 1(a) of Convention No. 105, which prohibits the use of any form of forced or compulsory labour as a means of political coercion or education, or as a punishment for holding or expressing political views or views ideologically opposed to the established political, social, or economic system. For example, in Burkina Faso,²²⁵ the CEACR noted *with interest* that a new law on print media had removed prison penalties for the offences relating to attack on honour, insult, and defamation. In Sierra Leone,²²⁶ the CEACR noted *with interest* that persons who operate a media institution without a license were punished with fines only. In Serbia,²²⁷ the CEACR noted *with satisfaction* the adoption of Act No. 6 on public gatherings which only provided for fines in case of its violation but not penalties of imprisonment.

1.3

Forced marriage

This section of the report presents the main findings relating to forced marriage. Forced marriage is a human rights violation²²⁸ and a harmful practice that leads to the infliction of physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering. It has both short- and long-term consequences, and negatively impacts the capacity of individuals to realise their full rights.²²⁹

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all member states have committed to eliminate child, early, and forced marriages (Goal 5.3). Forced marriage refers to situations where a person has been forced to marry without their consent. As set out in the joint general recommendation of the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), child marriage is considered a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties cannot express full, free, and informed consent.²³⁰ However, in many countries 16 and 17-year-olds who wish to marry are legally able to do so following a judicial ruling or with parental consent.

For the purpose of the current estimates, the measurement of forced marriage is limited to marriages of both adults and children that respondents to the survey reported as having been forced and without consent. As a result, the estimates do not include every instance of child marriage, as child marriage is not currently measured adequately at the scale or specificity required for a global estimate.

1.3.1 Overview and trends

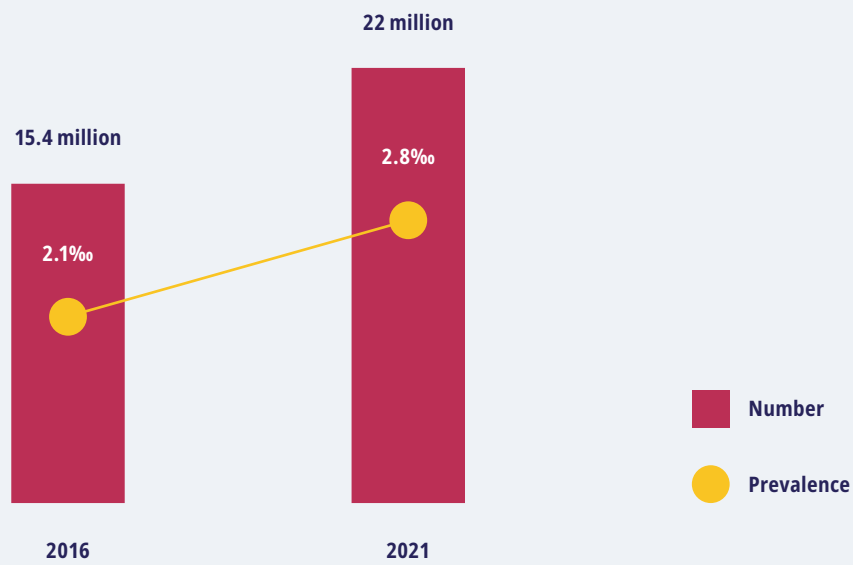
An estimated 22 million²³¹ people were living in forced marriage on any given day in 2021, nearly three in every thousand people in the world. These 22 million are people who were forced to marry at any time in their life, without their consent, and who are still alive and living with their partner. Women and girls make up 14.9 million of this total.

The number of men, women, and children living in forced marriages has risen globally. There was a 6.6 million increase in the number of people living in a forced marriage between 2016 and 2021. During this time, the prevalence of forced marriage rose from 2.1 to 2.8 per thousand people. As noted earlier in this report, part of the data collection for the 2021 Global Estimates took place prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, so the results only partially reflect the effects of the pandemic.

These estimates are considered conservative for several reasons, not least that forced marriage as presented here is based on a narrow definition and does not include all child marriages. UNICEF estimates about 650 million women and girls living today were married before the age of 18.²³²

Figure 17.

The number of men, women, and children living in forced marriages has risen globally



Prevalence (per thousand) and number of people in forced marriage, 2016 and 2021

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

The increase in forced marriage is partially explained by compounding crises including the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts,²³³ and climate change,²³⁴ which have increased the risk of forced and child marriage. These crises have led to unprecedented increases in extreme poverty,²³⁵ lower education rates,²³⁶ a rise in distress migration,²³⁷ and significant increases in reports of gender-based violence.²³⁸ All these factors are associated with increased vulnerability to forced marriage.

In some countries beset by armed conflict, women and girls are abducted and trafficked by armed groups and forced to marry fighters, enduring all manner of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Traffickers capitalise on the widespread human, material, social, and economic losses and consequent vulnerabilities caused by emergencies. In conflict and post-conflict settings, forced marriage is also used as survival mechanism. Families fleeing conflict who are faced with physical and economic insecurity may see marriage as a way of alleviating poverty and protecting female relatives from difficult living conditions.²³⁹ Similarly, they may fall prey to traffickers who claim to offer a safer place to live and job opportunities.²⁴⁰ Males in conflict settings may under-report experiences of forced marriage to avoid being accused of weakness or social deviance, including accusations of homosexuality in countries where it is illegal or widely disapproved of.²⁴¹

When I got married I was 13 years old. And I had a really big responsibility. I could not handle the cooking or the housework. It was a huge responsibility. I used to look at my friends and wish I could return to the days of childhood again.

— Female refugee and survivor of child marriage²⁴²

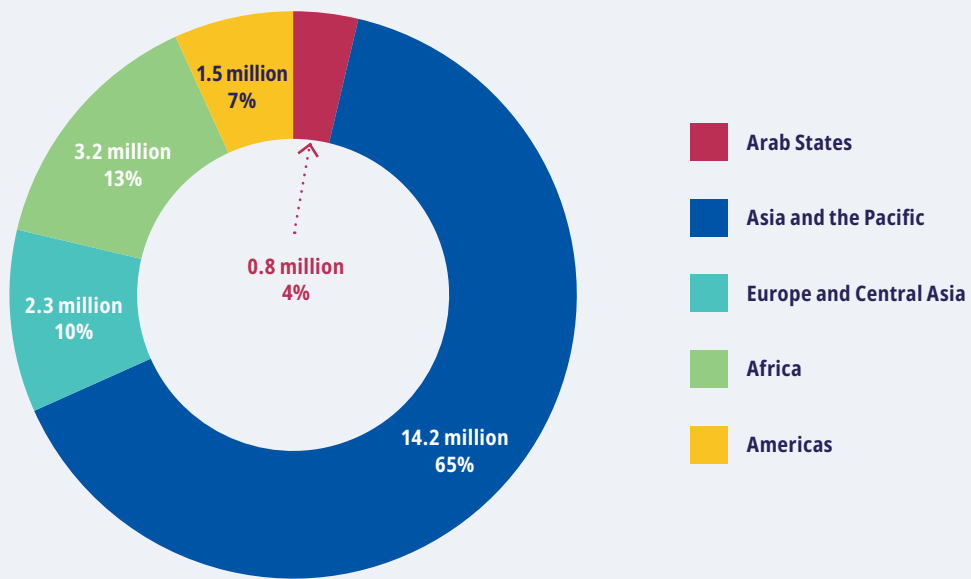
In March 2022, the Global Protection Cluster, a network of NGOs and international organizations engaged in crisis protection and response, reported a major increase of “child, early or forced marriage” in humanitarian crises compared to the situation six months prior. Fifty-two per cent of national cluster operations reported the situation as severe or extreme, compared to 42 per cent in September 2021.²⁴³

Forced marriages take place in every region in the world. Nearly two-thirds of all forced marriages, an estimated 14.2 million people, are in Asia and the Pacific. This is followed by 14.5 per cent in Africa (3.2 million) and 10.4 per cent Europe and Central Asia (2.3 million). When regional population is accounted for, the Arab States is the region with the highest prevalence at 4.8 per thousand people, followed by Asia and the Pacific at 3.3 per thousand. The Americas has the lowest prevalence of forced marriage at 1.5 per thousand people.

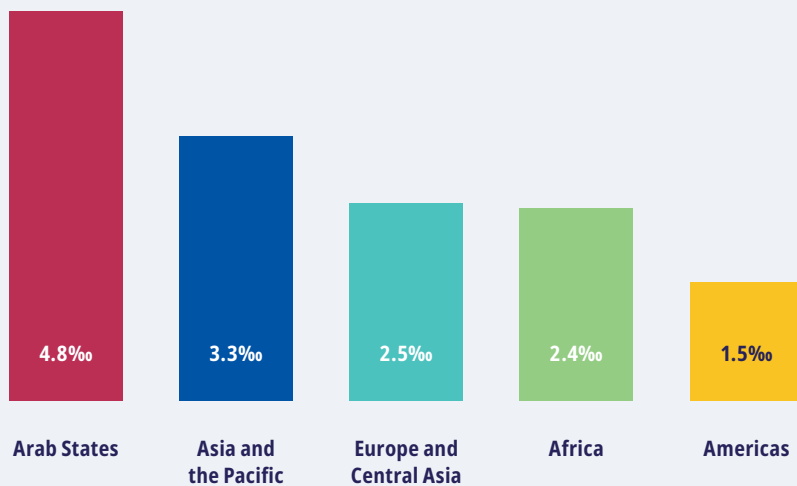
COVID-19 has led to increased risk of forced marriage in every region. The collection of official statistics, including civil registration systems, was interrupted during the pandemic due to mobility restrictions, safety and ethical considerations, delays in response services, or de-prioritisation.²⁴⁴ Where data is available, increases in child and forced marriages have been reported in Afghanistan,²⁴⁵ Bangladesh,²⁴⁶ India,²⁴⁷ Indonesia,²⁴⁸ Sudan,²⁴⁹ Egypt,²⁵⁰ Yemen,²⁵¹ Jordan,²⁵² Senegal²⁵³, Uganda,²⁵⁴ and Democratic Republic of the Congo.²⁵⁵

Figure 18.

The prevalence of forced marriage is highest in the Arab States



Forced marriage by region: Percentage distribution



Forced marriage by region: Prevalence per thousand population

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

Elsewhere in the world, calls to hotlines about forced marriages increased. In the UK in 2020, calls to a forced marriage NGO helpline increased in the early days of the pandemic before returning to pre-pandemic rates in 2021.²⁵⁶ The same is true of child specific hotlines, which saw a doubling of reports in parts of Malawi²⁵⁷ and Mozambique.²⁵⁸

Three in every five people in a forced marriage are in lower-middle income countries. However, wealthier nations are not immune with 25 per cent of forced marriages in high or upper-middle income countries. Prevalence of forced marriage was highest in low- to middle-income countries (4.8 per thousand people), followed by low-income countries (3.3 per thousand), and high-income countries (1.5 per thousand).

Vulnerability to forced marriage will be exacerbated by uneven recovery from the pandemic: low-income countries within the Arab States, Americas, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific regions are projected to have the slowest recovery,²⁵⁹ which may result in longer-lasting risks of forced and child marriage in those countries.

More than two-thirds of those forced to marry are female. This equates to an estimated 14.9 million women and girls. The prevalence of forced marriage is higher for females than males across all regions. While the global estimates show that the vast majority of those forced to marry are women and girls, it is worth emphasizing that men and boys comprise 32 per cent of the total. More research is needed to better understand how men and boys experience forced marriage.

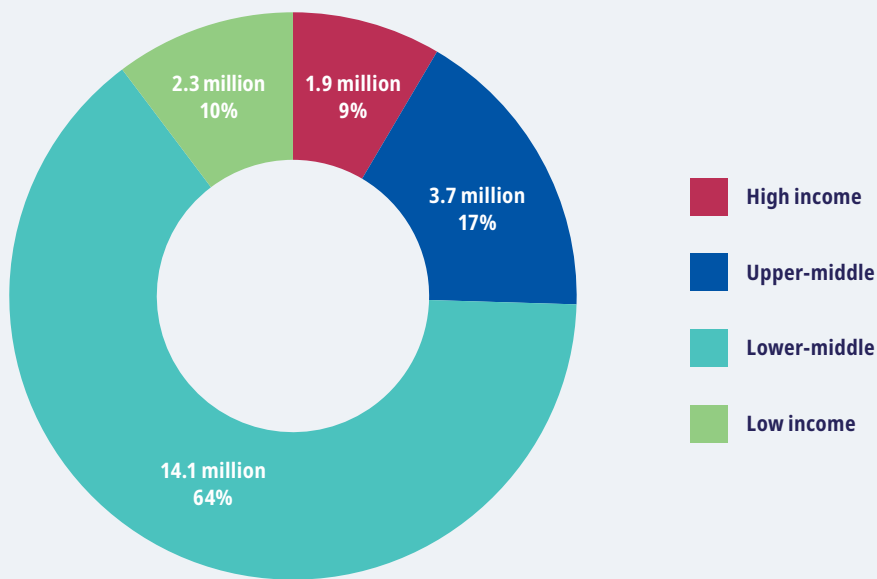
My mom forced me, she will help her to clean the house.

— 39 year-old man who was forced to marry at age 17

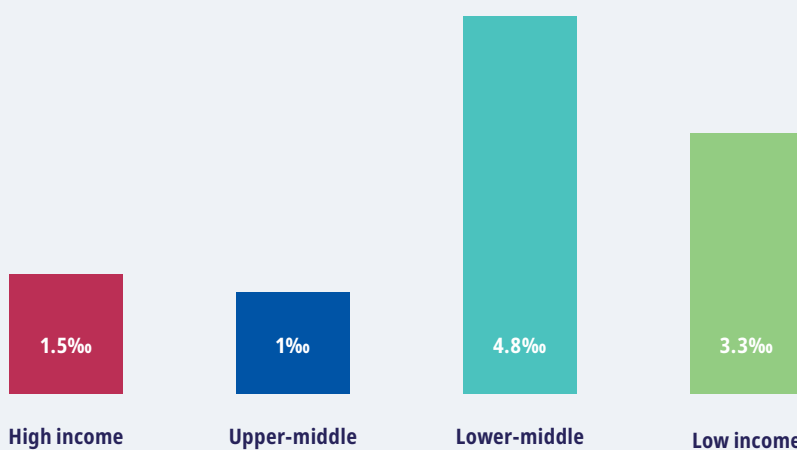
Forced marriage is a complex and highly-gendered practice. Although men and boys are also forced to marry, it predominately affects women and girls and is often underpinned by patriarchal norms²⁶⁰ that emerge in early adolescence but play a role in the forced marriage of females at every stage of life. In many parts of the world, a girl's value is seen to lie in her future role as a mother and wife and, as such, she is perceived to hold little economic value for her own family. This is reinforced by inheritance laws that often lead to men and boys inheriting family assets. For families with scarce resources, the future role of a son as head of the family and the perception of his greater earning potential leads to his education being prioritised over that of a daughter.

Figure 19.

Three in every five people in a forced marriage are in lower-middle income countries



Forced marriage by national income grouping: Percentage distribution

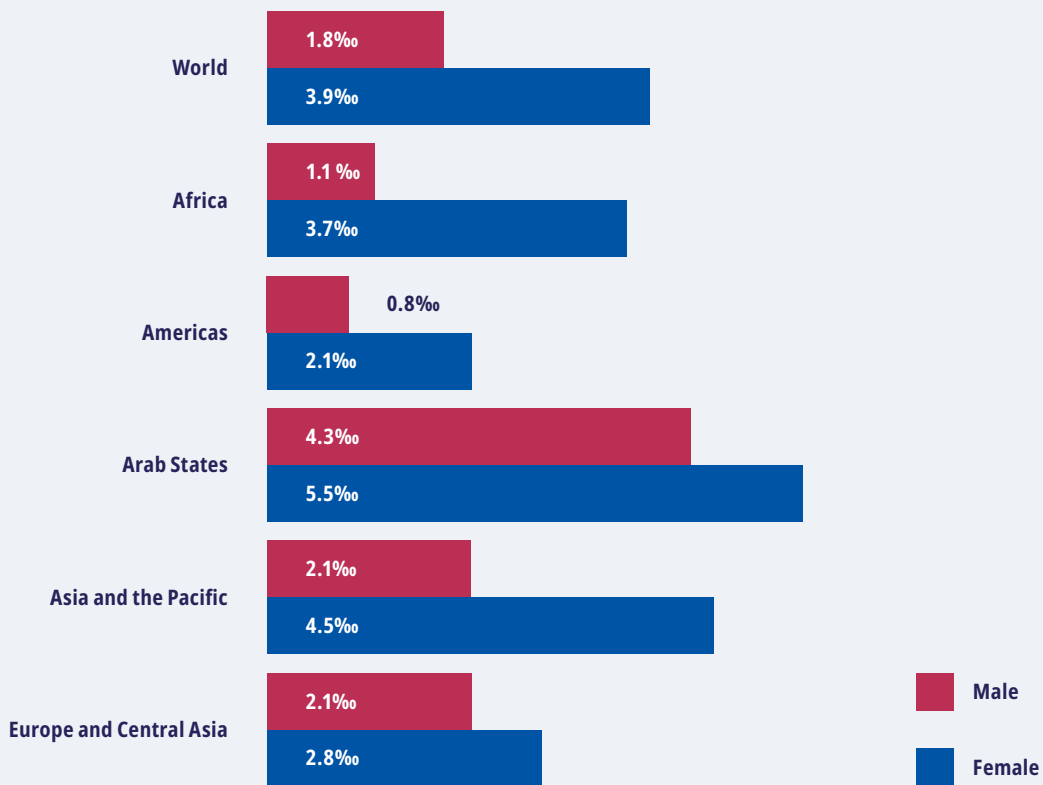


Forced marriage by national income grouping: Prevalence per thousand population

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

Figure 20.

The prevalence of forced marriage is higher for females than males across all regions



Forced marriage by sex and region (prevalence per thousand population)

Note: “‰” denotes cases per thousand population.

Two in five of those forced to marry were children when the marriage took place. Among these children, 41 per cent were forced to marry before the age of 16 years. Girls were more likely than boys to be forced to marry (87 per cent versus 13 per cent).

Although marriages under the age of 10 do occur, they are very rare. The lowest age at marriage reported in the sample was 9 years and the highest, 69 years. Girls were more likely than boys to be forced to marry (87 per cent versus 13 per cent).

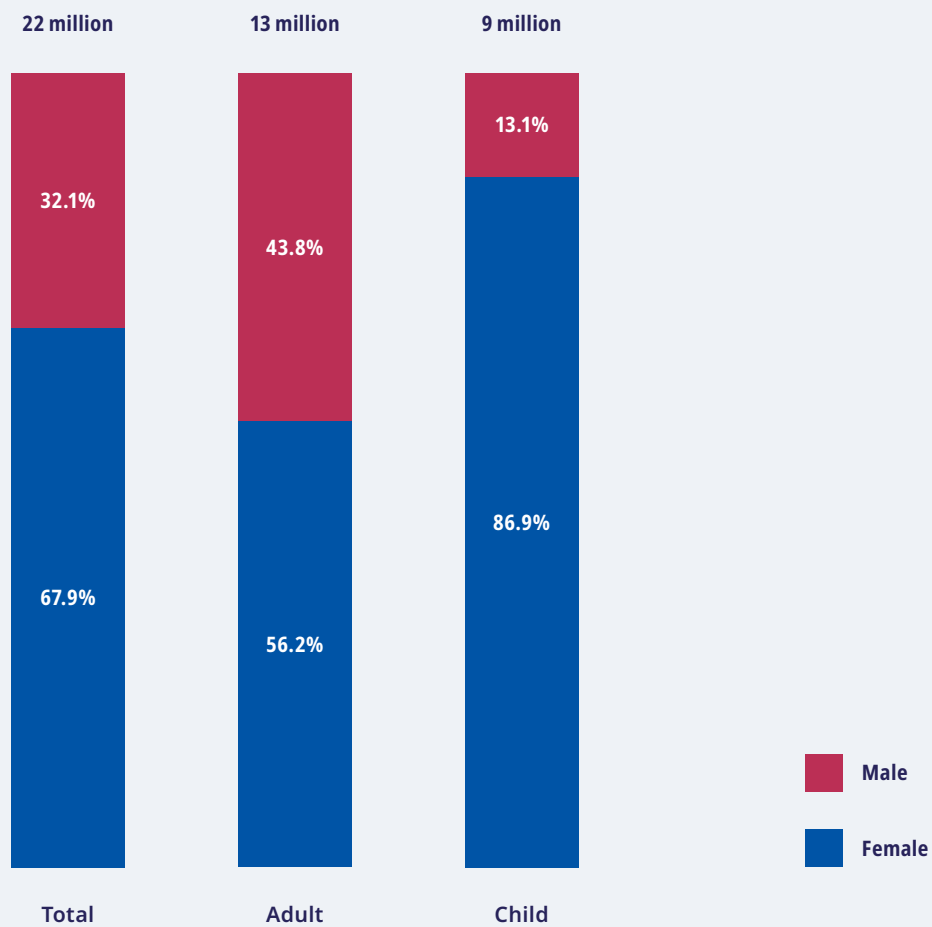
I was afraid of him. I didn't want to live or sleep with him in the same bed... [B]ut they told me that as a wife I was supposed to live with my husband. It was then that the reality dawned on me that I was married.

— Female who was forced to marry at age 11²⁶¹



Figure 21.

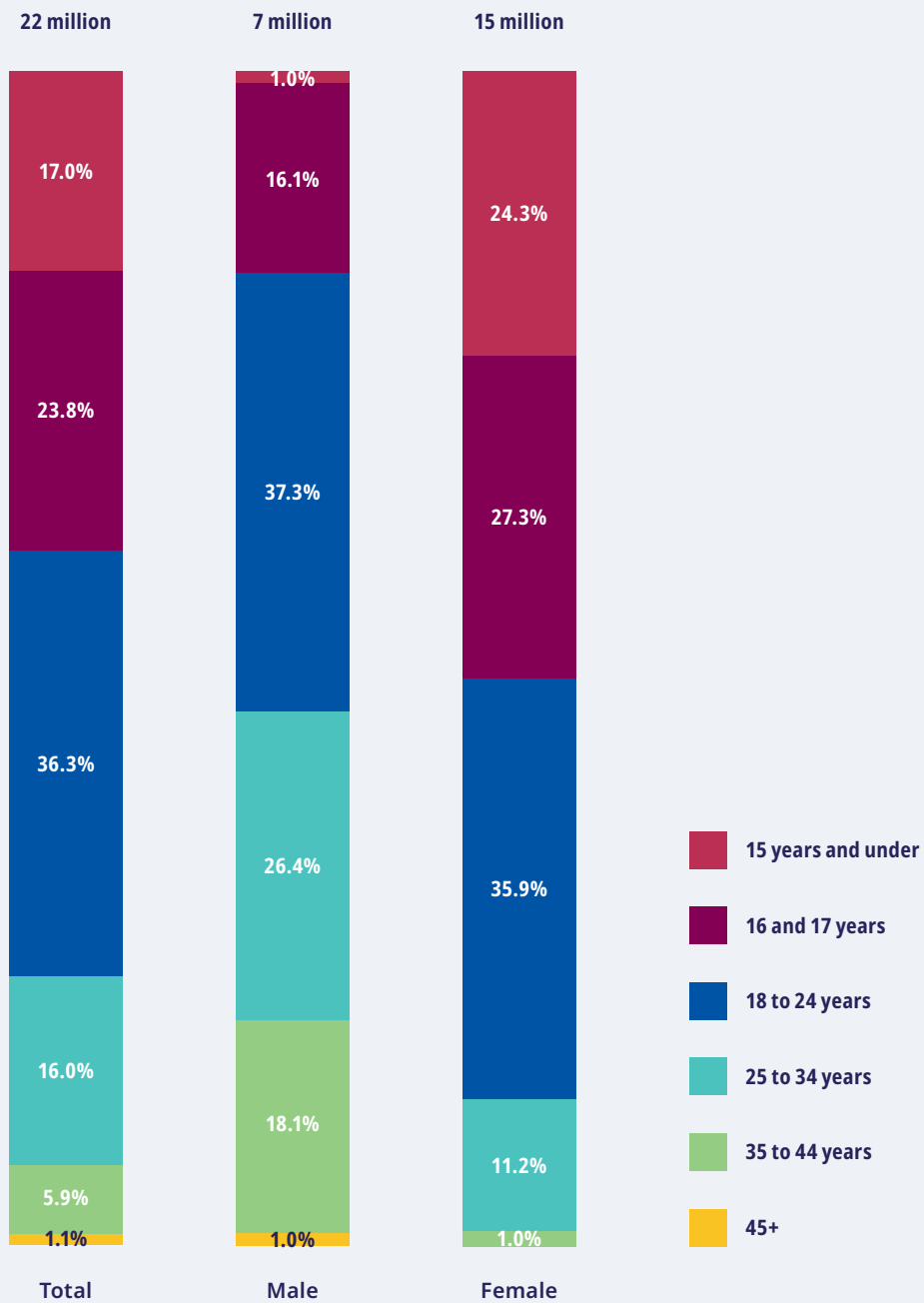
Two in five of those forced to marry was a child when the marriage took place



Forced marriage by sex (percent)

Figure 22.

Nearly one quarter of all females who were forced to marry, were married before 16 years of age



Age at time of forced marriage and sex (per cent)

1.3.2 Circumstances surrounding forced marriages

Forced marriages occur in every region of the world and cut across ethnic, cultural, and religious lines. The many drivers of forced marriage are closely linked to longstanding patriarchal attitudes and practices and are highly context-specific.²⁶² Girls and women are forced to marry in exchange for payment to their families, the cancellation of debt, or to settle family disputes.

Fundamentalist religious and social norms that stigmatise pre-marital sex and limit access to sexual and reproductive health rights also play a role in forced marriages. In North America, forced marriages have been reported among conservative religious sects²⁶³ and in some US states judges can issue marriage licenses for girls under the age of 15 if they are pregnant.²⁶⁴ In some societies, a rapist can escape criminal sanctions by marrying the victim, usually with the consent of her family.²⁶⁵

Forced marriage intersects with migration and human trafficking. While many people voluntarily migrate for marriage, migration may create situations of vulnerability that can be exploited to subject a person to forced marriage. People may be intentionally deceived and trafficked into forced marriage or, once having migrated or while still on the journey, end up in situations where they cannot escape and are coerced into forced marriage.^{266,267} Girls and young women who are forced into marriages (early or child marriage) may migrate to escape their husbands or parents. In high-income countries, women and girls are forced to marry foreign men for cultural reasons or to secure another person's entry into the country.

The findings presented in this section offer further insights into the circumstances surrounding forced marriages reported by respondents.

Family members are primarily responsible for forced marriages. Most persons were forced to marry by their parents (73 per cent) or other relatives (16 per cent). Four per cent of females in the sample were forced to marry by a marriage broker.

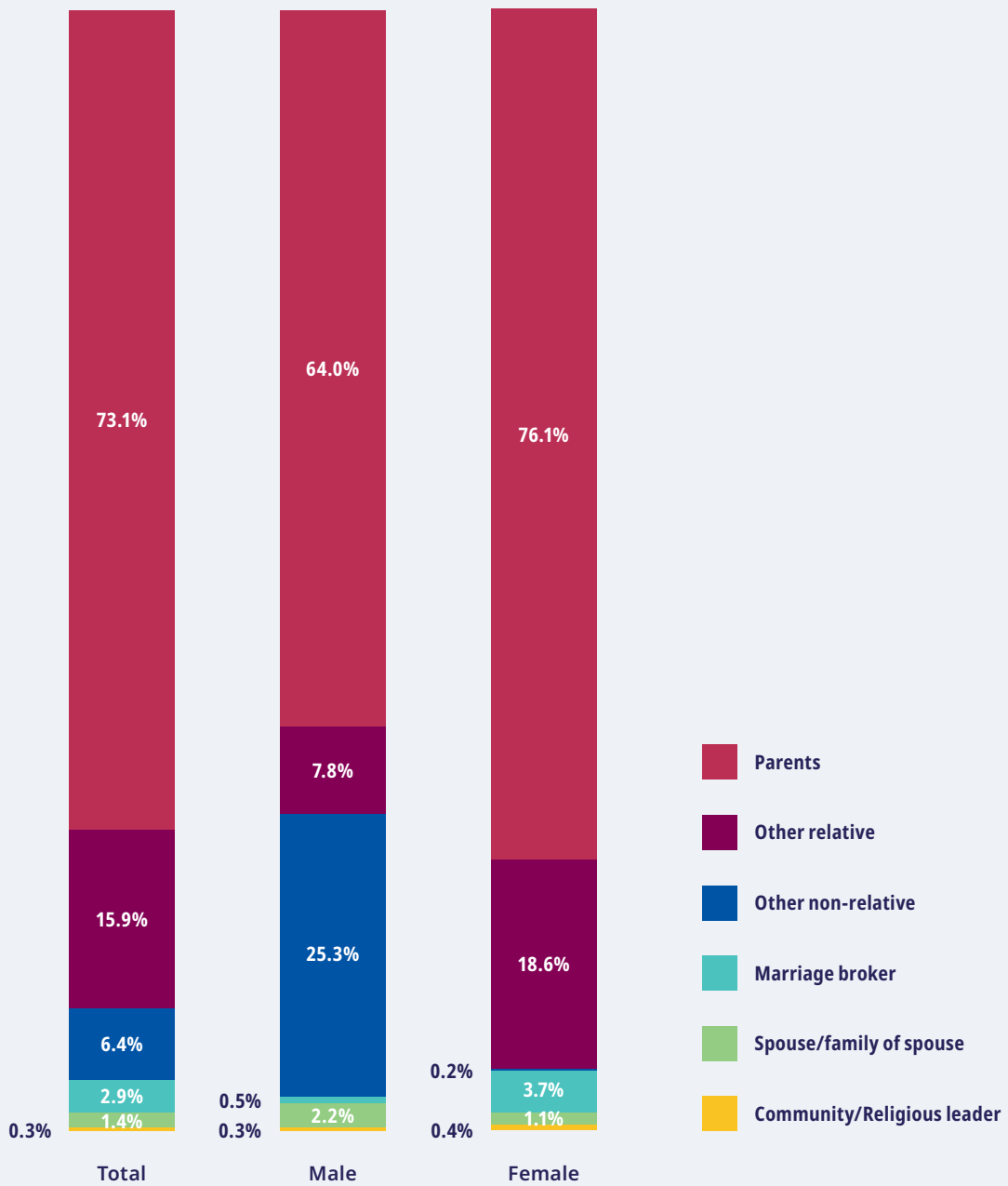
My father introduced me to husbands since I was twelve.

— 40 year-old female who was forced to marry at age 17

The ways in which a person is coerced to marry range from overt actions, such as physical or sexual violence or being physically restrained, to emotional pressure. Half of those living in forced marriages were coerced using emotional threats or verbal abuse. This includes the use of emotional blackmail, for example, parents threatening self-harm or asserting that the family's reputation will be ruined, and threats of estrangement from family members, among other things. This was the most common form of coercion used to force both males (75 per cent) and females (46 per cent) to marry. Physical or sexual violence and threats of violence were the next most used form of coercion to force a marriage (20 per cent). Among females, a further 11 per cent reported being kidnapped or forced to travel abroad for the purpose of marriage.

Figure 23.

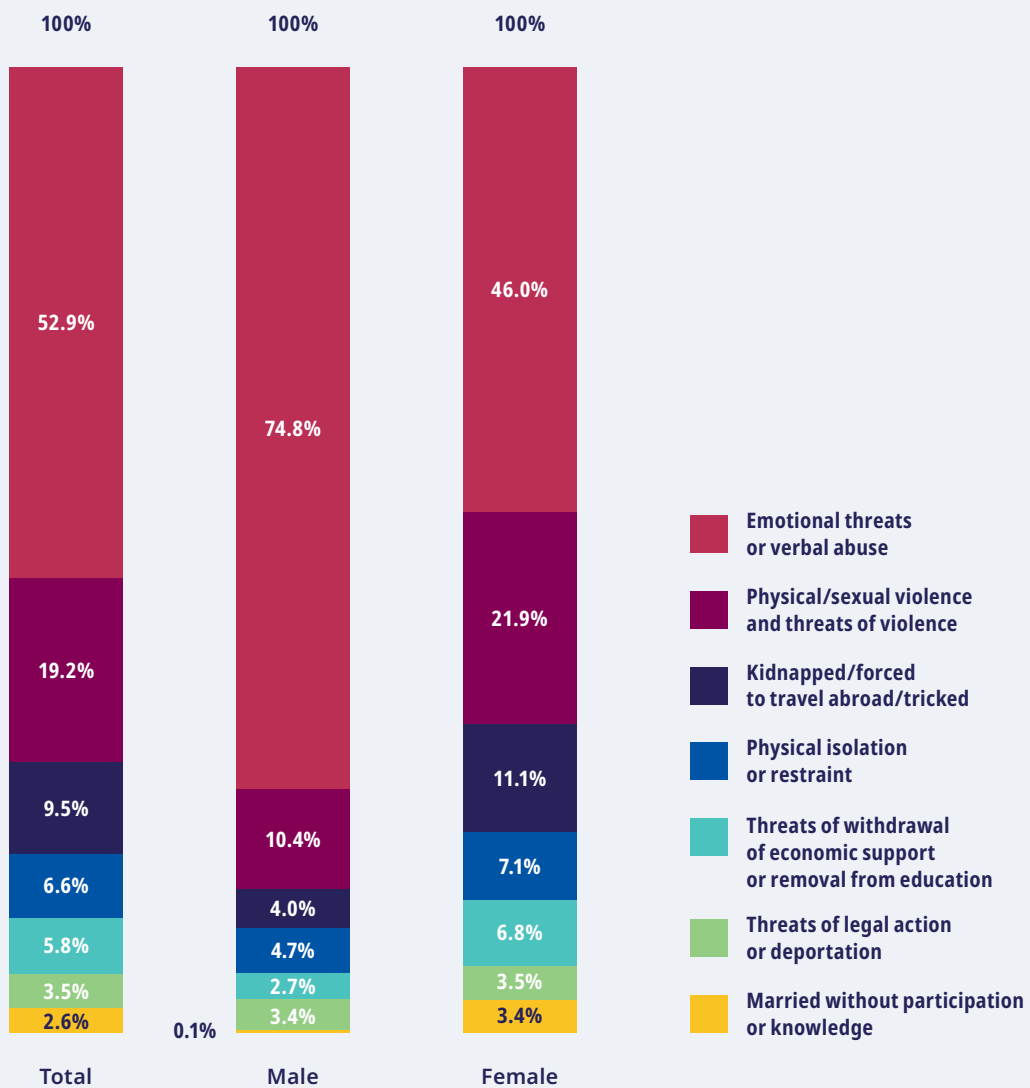
Family members are primarily responsible for forced marriages



Forced marriage by the person most responsible for forcing the marriage (per cent)^a

Figure 24.

The ways in which a person is coerced to marry range from overt actions, such as physical or sexual violence or being physically restrained, to emotional pressure



Forced marriage by forms of pressure or coercion (per cent)

Note: (a) Percentages may exceed 100 as multiple options were allowed.

Females were more likely than males to report being forced to perform work by their spouse or the spouse's family. Thirty-two per cent of respondents identified that they were forced to perform domestic labour, 25 per cent in their own home and 6.5 per cent in the homes of other family or community members. A further 8 per cent of females reported being forced to work in a business owned by their spouse or spouse's family. Over half (57 per cent) of people living in forced marriage reported that they were not forced to perform work or tasks. This is likely to be an overestimate, as those who are in a forced marriage may be unlikely to view control or coercion to conduct certain activities within the marriage as being "forced."

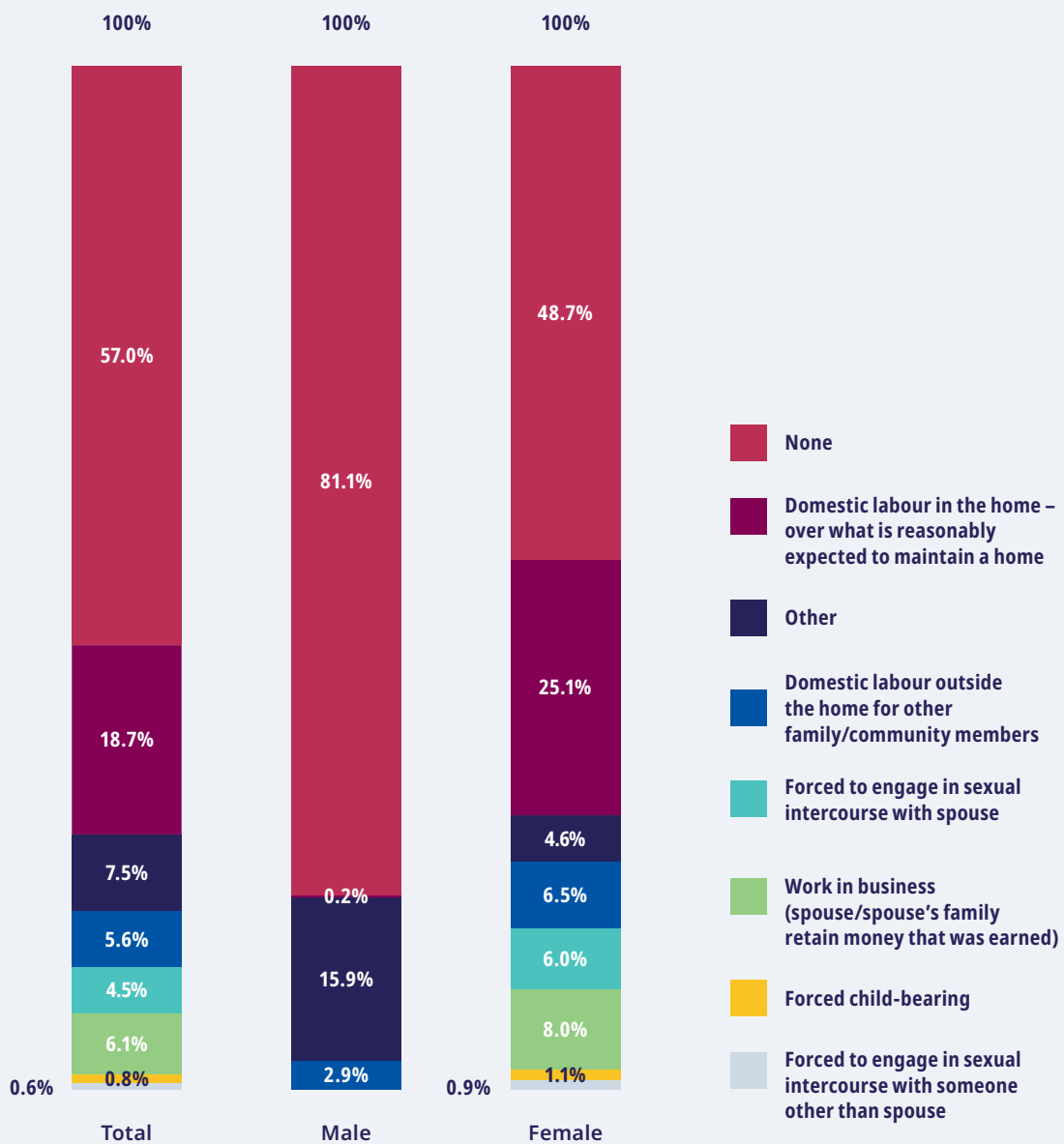
I had to leave the situation or be killed. I know I can never return home because I am considered a dead person for breaking the culture and bringing shame to the families. According to my father, I am dead.

— Female survivor of three forced marriages²⁶⁸



Figure 25.

Once forced to marry, there is greater risk of further exploitation, including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and violence, and other forms of forced labour both inside and outside the home



Forced marriage by sex and types of work/tasks made to perform during the marriage (per cent)

Forced marriage and the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 has exacerbated the underlying drivers of all forms of modern slavery, including forced marriage. Widespread socio-economic instability due to the pandemic led to increased global unemployment, job loss,²⁶⁹ increased indebtedness,²⁷⁰ and an increase in extreme global poverty for the first time in 20 years.²⁷¹ COVID-19 interrupted education and service delivery, increased rates of pregnancy, and led to the death of parents or guardians.²⁷² Despite prior progress in reducing the rate of child marriage, post-pandemic estimates from UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) warn that an additional 10 to 13 million girls will be married because of pandemic-related restrictions, economic downturn, gender-based violence, and increasing socio-economic insecurity.²⁷³

As with all forms of modern slavery, it is those who are already vulnerable who are most exposed to these economic shocks. Many low-income families, already less financially resilient and more vulnerable to job and wage loss,²⁷⁴ sought to reduce expenditures on education or to decrease their household size.²⁷⁵ Often in these scenarios, daughters are viewed as financial burdens rather than potential wage earners, forcing their families to see little alternative than to marry them off.²⁷⁶ Regular interruptions to children's education, caused by school closures to stymie the spread of COVID-19, led parents to question the value of education against the alternative of early marriage. Food insecurity caused by economic hardship also drives forced marriage.²⁷⁷ For example, in West and Central Africa, COVID-19 caused supply chain issues that exacerbated food shortages already impacted by economic insecurity, recurring droughts, and conflict. This led to harmful coping mechanisms, including forced marriage, to obtain food and other goods.²⁷⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated gender-based violence. According to UNFPA, every three months of lockdown produced an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence globally.²⁷⁹ Women and girls were exposed to sexual, physical, and psychological abuse from family members and intimate partners because of stay-at-home orders and quarantine restrictions.²⁸⁰ Forced marriage risk can also increase where women and girls experience other forms of gender-based violence, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).²⁸¹

Pandemic-related restrictions reduced access to support services and identification mechanisms for those at risk of forced marriage. A study in the UK identified a reduction in calls to national helplines and in the number of Forced Marriage Protection Orders that were issued,²⁸² suggesting that people

were less able to access these protection measures or that people who tended to report concerns found it harder to identify people at risk.²⁸³ Redirection of health workers to work on the pandemic, coupled with closures of sexual and reproductive health services and stay-at-home orders,²⁸⁴ increased vulnerability to exploitation.²⁸⁵ This, in turn, increased the risk of adolescent pregnancies, which heightened pressure among unmarried females to marry.²⁸⁶ Moreover, public health, safety, and financial considerations impacted the work of grassroots and service delivery civil society organisations, where services had to be closed and budgets reduced, thereby decreasing support to those at risk and survivors.²⁸⁷ In Niger and Kenya, for example, safe houses were closed, creating a gap in the protection of girls at risk of gender-based violence.²⁸⁸

The intersection between COVID-19, conflict, political instability, and climate change has further exacerbated risks of forced marriage among communities already struggling with survival. Approximately 452 million children were living in conflict zones in 2020,²⁸⁹ with an increasing number of children requiring humanitarian assistance in these areas because of the pandemic.²⁹⁰ In Afghanistan, for example, the pandemic, an ongoing food crisis, and political insecurity of the Taliban government have worsened the economic situation for families, resulting in an increase in child marriage, with reports of families offering daughters as young as 20 days old for future marriage in return for a dowry.²⁹¹ COVID-19 also intersects with climate change. Frontline organizations in Kenya report that the pandemic has undermined their work to prevent child marriages, which had already increased due to the impacts of climate change.²⁹²

Despite the increase in risk of forced marriage, there have been some reports that COVID-19 restrictions and the subsequent economic downturn may have delayed some child marriages. For example, in Jordan, girls reported delayed child marriages because wedding venues were closed, gatherings restricted, and wedding expenses were too prohibitive. However, many girls reported that some in their communities still got engaged or married during the various lockdowns.²⁹³ On the other hand, COVID-19 limitations prohibiting large gatherings in India²⁹⁴ and Sudan²⁹⁵ unintentionally provided another incentive for child and forced marriages: the reduced cost of a smaller wedding. While in many ways we are still learning about the full extent of the impact of COVID-19 on forced marriage, vulnerability will be exacerbated in many regions of the world.



16 PAZ, JUSTICIA
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17 ПАРТНЕРСТВО В
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УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ

1 无贫穷

2 HUNGER

9 INDUSTRY,
INNOVATION ET
INFRASTRUCTURE

10 УМЕНЬШЕНИЕ
НЕРАВЕНСТВА

11 CIUDADES Y
COMUNIDADES
SOSTENIBLES

12 الاستهلاك
والإنتاج
المسؤولان

13 气候行动

2 零饥饿

3 ХОРОШЕЕ ЗДОРОВЬЕ
И БЛАГОПОЛУЧИЕ

4 EDUCACIÓN
DE CALIDAD

5 المساواة بين
الجنسين

6 清洁饮水和
卫生设施

13 CLIMATE
ACTION

14 海洋生态
系统

15 СОХРАНЕНИЕ
ЭКОСИСТЕМ СУШИ

16 PAZ, JUSTICIA
E INSTITUCIONES
SÓLIDAS

17 通过伙伴关系
实现目标

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION

7 ÉNERGIE PROPRE

8 体面且
可持续的
经济增长

9 产业、
创新和
基础设施

10 减少
不平等



Part 2.

Ending modern slavery: the path to 2030

Modern slavery is the very antithesis of social justice and sustainable development. The 2021 Global Estimates indicate there are 50 million people in situations of modern slavery on any given day, either forced to work against their will or in a marriage that they were forced into. This number translates to nearly one of every 150 people in the world. The estimates also indicate that situations of modern slavery are by no means transient – entrapment in forced labour can last years, while in most cases forced marriage is a life sentence. And sadly, the situation is not improving. The 2021 Global Estimates show that millions more men, women, and children have been forced to work or marry in the period since the previous estimates were released in 2017.

Nothing can justify the persistence of these human rights abuses in today's world. We can and must do better.

Through the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global community has committed to ending modern slavery among children by 2025, and universally by 2030 (Target 8.7), and, relatedly, by 2030 to eliminating of all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation (Target 5.2), and ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children (Target 16.2).

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As the 2025 and 2030 dates for achieving these ambitious SDG targets draw nearer, it is urgent that the global community gathers the will and resources to get progress towards ending modern slavery back on track. Promises and statements of good intent are not enough. While the principal responsibility for change lies with national governments, a whole of society approach is needed – the social partners, participants in the social and solidarity economy, civil society, survivor organisations, the business community, investors, and an array of other groups have critical roles to play.

It is not a question of not knowing what to do. There is a substantial and growing body of policy and programming experience in addressing modern slavery, offering critical guidance for the future. The overall rise in modern slavery also masks numerous contexts that have registered significant reductions, offering additional key insights into the policy choices needed for progress. International legal instruments provide the normative framework for efforts against modern slavery.²⁹⁶

The two elements of modern slavery – forced labour and forced marriage – both reflect a denial of people's freedom and their economic and social agency. Both refer to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, and deception. Both involve underlying imbalances and abuses of power. Both are embedded in patterns of discrimination, deprivation, and poverty. Gaps in governance, in law and practice, create the space for both these abuses to occur.

Yet in many ways these two human rights abuses are also unique. Forced labour occurs in the world of work and is interwoven with denial of the right to bargain collectively and the right to freedom of association. Broader economic and labour market forces can play an important determining role. Forced marriage occurs outside the world of work but those living in a forced marriage may be subject to forced labour and domestic servitude. Forced marriage is driven by entrenched patriarchal norms, discriminatory legislation, and policies and systems that place lower value on women and girls and control their sexuality. Policy responses must necessarily reflect these important differences.

This section looks separately at key policy priorities for addressing forced labour²⁹⁷ and forced marriage in the lead up to the 2025 and 2030 target dates.



2.1

Forced labour

Expanding workers' voices

The freedoms of workers to associate and to bargain collectively are indispensable to a world free from forced labour. These fundamental labour rights enable workers to exert a collective voice to defend their shared interests: to bargain collectively for secure and decent work, including fair incomes, and to press public authorities to ensure that legal protections in the world of work are enforced, thus creating workplaces that are inimical to forced labour and workers who are resilient to its risks.

Ensuring respect for workers' fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining is a critical precondition for social dialogue, which is in turn vital to building lasting, consensus-based solutions to the challenge of forced labour. Without the respect of freedom of association and collective bargaining in all parts of the economy, there can be no negotiation for "a fair share of wealth they have helped to generate,"²⁹⁸ and without that there can be no decent work.

Yet much more needs to be done to ensure these rights are realised, both in law and in practice, not least in the informal economy. More than 40 per cent of the world's population lives in countries that have not ratified either the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) or the ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), and restrictions on the universal rights to establish or join a trade union and to bargain collectively persist in law or in practice in most countries.

The COVID-19 crisis is adding to the challenge of ensuring necessary legal protections and guarantees. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Standards has noted that "in some countries exceptional measures have led to temporary restrictions including the setting aside of collective bargaining mechanisms and the resulting agreements."^{299,300} Both the European Trade Union Confederation³⁰¹ and the International Trade Union Confederation³⁰² have raised similar concerns.

Redressing the lack of effective access to representation in the informal economy, where forced labour abuses are overwhelmingly concentrated, is especially important to progress against forced labour. It is also a central element in broader efforts towards the formalisation of informal workplaces.

Reaching informal economy workers so they can organize in collective representative structures is difficult but far from impossible. Groups of informal workers, including domestic workers, home-workers, brick-kiln workers, tenant farmers, and artisanal fishers, are developing innovative forms of organization to represent and defend their interests, often with the support of established trade unions, demonstrating what can be done.³⁰³

Some of these organizing efforts involve the establishment of bespoke trade unions, while others involve bringing informal economy workers from a variety of sectors under the umbrella of an existing national trade union. Still others rely on alternative organizing frameworks, such as small producers' cooperatives or hybrid structures containing elements from each. Some are cross-national in scope, involving cooperation between trade unions in source and destination countries, to help ensure the trade union representation of migrant workers. These experiences make clear that there is no one-size-fits-all solution – a wide array of approaches is relevant and necessary.

Migrant workers are among the groups particularly affected by restrictions on their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, in some contexts because law forbids them to join unions and in others because they are concentrated in sectors in which the freedoms to associate and bargain collectively are not protected under law. This is particularly so for migrants with irregular status. However, most international commitments, as well as the 2030 Agenda's promise of leaving no one behind, means that it is critical that such barriers are removed, including in relevant policy and legislative frameworks.

Extending social protection, including social protection floors, to all

Social protection is also central to broader progress against forced labour. Put simply, social protection is a primary means of mitigating the socio-economic vulnerability that underpins much of forced labour. When set at an adequate level, it has a critical “emancipatory value” providing workers with the basic income security to be able to say no to jobs that are abusive and to quit jobs that have become so. More generally, social protection can obviate the need for poor and credit-constrained people to resort to unscrupulous moneylenders to survive shocks such as sudden job loss or family illness, in turn limiting their risk of falling into situations of debt bondage. There is also evidence that social protection can facilitate savings, and thereby enable workers to take greater productive risks and engage in income generation activities. This, too, can promote income security and reduce the power and pull of informal moneylenders.

With the huge increase in poverty and disruptions in the world of work in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by a cost-of-living crisis and acute food insecurity, at no other time have these arguments for social protection as a strategy against forced labour been more relevant.

There is an urgent overarching need to extend at least basic social security guarantees to all workers and their families, without discrimination. Such guarantees are an important part of a nationally-defined social protection floor, which forms the “ground floor” of a universal social protection system.³⁰⁴ A particular priority in this regard are those struggling to eke out an existence in the informal economy, where most forced labour is found and where the COVID-19 crisis has hit especially hard. Despite important progress, the most recent ILO estimates indicate that 4 billion people are still without social protection,³⁰⁵ a large share of whom are found in the informal economy. There is a growing body of experience offering critical guidance in extending social protection to those in the informal economy as part of facilitating their transition to formality.³⁰⁶

Extending *legal* coverage by bringing previously excluded categories of informal workers under social security legislation is a critical first step to extend protection to commonly excluded categories, such as workers in agriculture, domestic workers and workers in casual employment, and, cutting across these categories, migrant workers.

In terms of broad approaches for extending *effective* coverage, both contributory social insurance schemes and non-contributory, tax-financed programmes have a role. However, in view of the limited contributory capacities of workers in situations of extreme vulnerability who are most at risk of forced labour, tax-financed programmes or subsidised social insurance mechanisms are particularly relevant. Cash transfer programmes are one tried and proven non-contributory instrument for addressing the contingencies faced by workers vulnerable to forced labour, and by their families, including during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰⁷ Cash transfers are also being used to help those freed from forced labour to get back on their feet and prevent their re-victimization.³⁰⁸

Yet there is no single answer to extending social security to workers in the informal economy, in view of the scale of the challenge, the diversity of the informal economy, and the wide variety of work arrangements within it. Other relevant programmes include child benefits, disability benefits, support for those without jobs, and old-age pensions, as well as effective access to health care. All have a role to play in the social protection response to forced labour, guided by international labour standards.³⁰⁹ Provisions for the portability of social security related benefits can also be important. There are numerous examples of approaches using all of these mechanisms to extend at least basic social security guarantees to hitherto uncovered groups susceptible to forced labour, including domestic workers,³¹⁰ agricultural workers,³¹¹ workers in micro- and small enterprises,³¹² and self-employed workers.³¹³ Concerted efforts are also needed to ensure that vulnerable workers are aware of and able to access social security.³¹⁴

Migrants and, above all, migrants in irregular situations,³¹⁵ unaccompanied and separated migrant children, asylum seekers, the forcibly displaced (both internally and across international borders), and refugees – are especially vulnerable to forced labour and trafficking for forced labour. Addressing the array of obstacles, legal and practical, to social protection for these groups therefore constitutes a particular priority. They should have equitable and non-discriminatory access to main social protection schemes, as partial provision of social protection through limited parallel schemes is not enough. Again, country experiences in this area offer valuable guidance.³¹⁶

The challenge of strengthening and extending social protection systems, including floors, clearly cannot be met in the absence of adequate financing. This is by no means an impossible task. The estimated US\$77.9 billion per year required to ensure a social protection floor in low-income countries pales in comparison to the approximately US\$19 trillion mobilised in the global fiscal stimulus response to the pandemic.³¹⁷ Countries need to reinforce existing sources of financing and also develop new and innovative ones.³¹⁸ International experience points to a range of options available to countries.³¹⁹

Promoting fair and ethical recruitment

Unscrupulous recruitment practices directly contribute to forced labour and other human rights abuses in the world of work. The global estimates, for example, indicate that 20 per cent of all forced labour cases involve debt bondage. While some relate to feudal forms of debt bondage, many are linked to extortionate fees and related costs paid by workers – particularly migrant workers – during recruitment by unscrupulous recruitment agencies and labour intermediaries. Several other common forms of coercion associated with forced labour, including deception about the nature and conditions of work and the identity of the employer, contract substitution, retention of passports, withheld wages, and illegal wage deductions, can also be traced to abusive and fraudulent recruitment practices. The COVID-19 crisis has served to exacerbate the risk of recruitment abuses facing workers in many contexts.³²⁰

These facts underscore the critical importance of fair and ethical recruitment to broader efforts against forced labour and trafficking for forced labour. The adoption of laws and regulations to help ensure that workers and jobseekers, including migrants, are not subjected to various recruitment-related abuses, such as deception, document retention, or high recruitment or related costs – in line with international labour standards³²¹ and guidelines³²² – is a necessary starting point.

An ILO review of national regulations and measures in the labour recruitment sphere indicates that legislation in many countries is still not aligned with international guidelines and standards. Examples of shortcomings include recruitment fees and related costs not clearly defined or explicitly prohibited, legislation that does not cover both national and cross-border recruitment, and legislation that lacks explicit provisions for sanctions for recruitment violations.³²³ Other studies indicate that recruitment regulations commonly only cover recruiters operating at the upper end of the labour supply chain, leaving the various labour intermediaries and subcontractors acting on behalf of the recruiters outside the government's regulatory authority.³²⁴

Stepped up efforts are also needed to ensure compliance with existing recruitment laws and regulations. There is a growing compendium of good practices to help guide these efforts.³²⁵ Public labour inspectorates, discussed further below, and other relevant authorities at national and sub-national level have a critical role to play through monitoring of private recruitment and placement agencies, the detection of abusive recruitment practices, the processing of complaints and application of sanctions.³²⁶ In some countries, for example, bespoke inspection bodies with the authority to issue dissuasive sanctions have been set up to monitor the recruitment industry.³²⁷

Yet the proliferation of actors along the labour supply chain and jurisdictional limitations can challenge the inspection and enforcement capacity of many national regulatory bodies. Joint liability laws are one emerging strategy for lightening the enforcement burden of regulatory authorities. By also obliging employers to report on the recruitment due diligence steps they take and making them legally liable and subject to sanction for fraudulent or abusive recruitment or labour practices in their own operations and supply chains, and related recruitment corridors, these laws create incentives for employers to use their market power to influence better recruitment practices.³²⁸

In contexts of international recruitment, bilateral agreements between origin and destination countries can serve to formalize their shared responsibility in dealing with labour recruitment issues, so that recruitment abuses along a labour supply chain are not simply displaced from origin country to destination country, or vice versa. While there are a growing number of bilateral agreements dealing with labour migration generally, too few specifically address labour recruitment issues.³²⁹ Another related concern is the phenomenon of some countries of destination avoiding their fair recruitment responsibilities by shifting their migrant recruitment focus to less-regulated countries of origin.³³⁰

Expanded collective efforts to engage with workers at the early stages of recruitment and empower them with information about the risks of recruitment abuses is also critical to broader forced labour prevention efforts. Pre-departure preparedness programmes have had a proven effect in reducing the risk of recruitment debt and other recruitment abuses along some migration corridors.³³¹ Post-arrival orientation programmes are also undertaken in some contexts to reach migrants with information about their rights and obligations, including in the recruitment process.³³² Yet such pre-departure and post-arrival programmes still reach only a very small share of total cross-border migrants.³³³

Much more can also be done to leverage the promise of information and communication technologies (ICT) in promoting among workers awareness and information exchange relating to recruitment issues.³³⁴ Recruitment Advisor,³³⁵ a web platform launched by the International Trade Union Confederation with support from the ILO and other groups, is one promising ICT tool for providing workers with information on recruitment agencies and a peer-to-peer forum for exchanging experience. A recent review identifies a wide range of other ICT tools, including mobile phone apps, social media platforms, and peer-to-peer networks, for providing recruitment information to migrants, enabling communication between migrant workers and frontline responders, and providing online recruitment platforms for direct hiring.³³⁶ In addition, relatively simple interventions, such as making sure workers have free access to the Internet, contribute to workers' awareness and well-being and prevention of exploitation and abuse.

Accurate and informative media coverage of fair recruitment can be critical to raising awareness of recruitment abuses and, more broadly, to promoting a more informed and less politically-charged public debate on recruitment issues.³³⁷ In this context, the ILO and its partners are supporting the creation and strengthening of networks of specialized journalists and have released a toolkit for journalists on reporting on forced labour and fair recruitment.³³⁸

Strengthening the reach and capacity of public labour inspectorates

Public labour inspectorates have a central role to play in the prevention, identification, and follow-up of forced labour. Labour inspectorates are uniquely equipped to detect and act on labour violations – for example, withholding of wages, unfair deductions, fraudulent contracts, or abusive recruitment practices – *before* they deteriorate into forced labour. Their privileged access to the workplace by virtue of their mandate means they are also uniquely positioned to identify cases of forced labour when they occur, and to refer perpetrators to criminal law authorities for prosecution and the workers concerned to protection actors for assistance and follow-up. Labour inspectorates can also have the important function of raising awareness of forced labour risks and the compliance obligations of employers in this regard.³³⁹

Public labour inspectorates require the necessary resources, capacity, and mandates to effectively fulfil these important functions. Many, already chronically underfunded and understaffed, have come under further pressure as budgetary space for labour administrations has shrunk in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Effectively extending the reach of labour inspection into the informal economy constitutes a particular challenge in view of its expansiveness and the fact that much of it falls outside the typical pattern of labour relations – characterised by clearly-defined employers, employees, contracts, and workplaces – upon which labour inspection is traditionally based.³⁴⁰

Yet the informal economy is where forced labour is overwhelmingly concentrated, and expanding the reach of inspectors into the informal economy is therefore critical. Evidence also suggests that extending labour inspection to informal entities can also incentivise their formalisation.³⁴¹

New inspection approaches are needed that are adapted to the informal economy. A participatory approach based on the principle of stakeholder engagement offers one a straightforward and cost-effective way forward in this regard.³⁴² This approach, initially developed in West Africa, involves the engagement of an array of informal economy stakeholders (e.g., representatives of trade associations, employers' and workers' organizations, cooperative associations, and local community representatives) and institutional partners (e.g., municipal authorities, social security agencies, and public occupational and health services) in the planning and implementation of inspection activities. These actors do not replace public labour inspectors but rather complement and support them, providing critical "eyes and ears on the ground," thereby helping to extend inspectors' reach and effectiveness.

The development and expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is an important, but hitherto underexploited, complementary strategy for extending the reach of labour inspectorates into the informal economy, and for preventing, detecting, and publicising human rights abuses occurring there.³⁴³ Such technology can be put to use to automate some routine inspection tasks, thus providing inspectors more time to cover a greater number of workplaces. Equally important, ICT solutions have a critical role to play in bringing together and analysing disparate administration data sources – e.g., social security, taxes, labour and criminal law, and occupational safety and health – to identify high-risk sectors and locations in the informal economy where inspectorates can strategically and proactively concentrate their efforts.

Assessments of one such application, Apprise, a multilingual tool being implemented in a number of Southeast Asian nations, points to the broader relevance of these mobile digital applications in helping inspectors overcome challenges of communication, privacy, trust, language, and training during workplace inspections.³⁴⁴ In probing sensitive topics such as forced labour, these advantages can be especially relevant.

Ensuring protection for those freed from situations of forced labour and trafficking for forced labour³⁴⁵

There are 27.6 million people in situations of forced labour and untold millions who more have escaped or been rescued from modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking, but continue to suffer from its cruel consequences – financial ruin, legal jeopardy, and physical and psychosocial trauma, among other things. The rights of these people to protection and remedies as set forth in international standards³⁴⁶, should be upheld.

An essential first step in ensuring that those subject to forced labour receive the protection and assistance they need is through their effective identification. Despite progress, still only a small fraction of those subjected to forced labour are identified and referred to comprehensive protection services or provided with compensation or other forms of remedy.³⁴⁷ Effective identification requires adequate legal and protection frameworks based on international commitments,³⁴⁸ sufficiently trained and resourced labour inspectors, law enforcement and social protection entities, as well as non-state actors, to identify those in situations of forced labour or human trafficking. Experience also points to the potential of complaints mechanisms or hotlines, often leveraging ICT applications, in enabling people subjected to forced labour or human trafficking to self-identify and contact an agency or organization that can assist them.³⁴⁹

Beyond this, for their comprehensive protection needs to be met and rights to be realized, referral mechanisms setting out roles and responsibilities for competent protection actors and service providers, state and non-state, both within and across borders, are necessary.³⁵⁰ National and transnational referral mechanisms (NRM/ TRM) can play a critical role in coordinating the efforts of both state and non-state actors in identification and follow-up protection efforts. Developed first in Europe, NRM models are now being introduced in other regions. Transnational referral mechanisms are also needed to ensure the comprehensive cross-border assistance and/or transfer of identified or potential trafficked persons and the continuum of care across various locations.³⁵¹

The obligation to protect revolves around measures for immediate assistance, rehabilitation and access to long-term sustainable solutions, so they can successfully recover and avoid re-victimization. Special consideration should be given to children, migrants, and those trafficked for forced labour. Much also remains to be done in these areas. Most countries provide basic assistance, such as temporary shelter and health care and psychological counselling, but fewer provide services such as vocational and financial assistance designed to ensure the long-term and sustainable reintegration of people exposed to forced labour and to prevent their re-victimization. Countries offering a comprehensive package of interventions encompassing both the immediate and longer-term needs of those who were in forced labour are even rarer.³⁵²

Special protection measures called for in international standards³⁵³ for migrants freed from forced labour and human trafficking – including residence permits, work permits, and reflection and recovery periods, as well as safe and voluntary return assistance – are lacking in many countries and substantial obstacles (legal, administrative, linguistic, and informational) can impede access to such services even when ostensibly available.³⁵⁴ Similarly for children freed from forced labour, there remain important gaps in law and practice in terms of ensuring their best interests and in providing protection services adapted to their special needs and circumstances. Providing appropriate protection measures for *migrant* children, and particularly for those who are unaccompanied and/or have irregular migration status, constitutes a particular priority. So, too, does ensuring the care and rehabilitation of demobilized child soldiers.³⁵⁵

International standards³⁵⁶ make clear that protection should not be conditional on cooperation with the authorities in legal proceedings. Again, important gaps in law and practice persist in this area. A review undertaken in 2018 indicated that nearly half of the countries with laws mandating protection services link it to cooperation in criminal proceedings.³⁵⁷

International standards also make clear that persons in forced labour or human trafficking should not be prosecuted or punished for offences committed as a direct consequence of their situation. While most countries have provisions ensuring freedom from prosecution and penalties, actual state practice in this area remains far from consistent. One of the biggest problems in terms of effective application is the common failure to identify persons in forced labour as such. Many continue to be prosecuted because of the absence of indicators and mechanisms for confirming that they are in situations of forced labour or human trafficking. Such instances are often used by traffickers as a means to control their victims, through threat of reporting to law enforcement.

Ensuring access to remedy for those freed from forced labour³⁵⁸

Extending access to effective remedies for those freed from the crimes of forced labour and human trafficking is another key challenge. Evidence indicates, for instance, that only a very small fraction are reached with the remedy of compensation from the perpetrator or the state, whether for material damages (such as medical costs, unpaid wages, legal fees, and loss of earnings and earning potential) or for moral damages (such as pain and emotional distress). Remedies can in turn provide critical support to recovery and help prevent their re-victimization.³⁵⁹ Obliging perpetrators to pay compensation to those they have harmed can also serve a punitive function and act as a deterrent for would-be offenders.

A growing number of countries are adopting legislation specifically relating to the rights to remedies of people freed from forced labour, but major challenges remain in translating law into practice. Indeed, in most contexts in which judicial or other mechanisms for remedies are technically in place, practical and procedural obstacles mean that people subjected to forced labour are not compensated for the violations committed against them. A lack of awareness on the part of the aggrieved – both of their rights and of how they can be exercised – is one important obstacle in this regard. Migrants, who are living in an unfamiliar environment and may face additional language and cultural challenges, are typically among the groups who are least aware of their rights.

Experience points to the value of local assessments of factors impeding access as a starting point. The effective mobilisation of the actors who are normally the first point of contact for people freed from forced labour, including labour lawyers, trade unions, NGOs and humanitarian actors, can be critical in raising their awareness of the legal channels for remedy that are available to them. Promoting paralegal support is another important strategy for bridging the gap between people freed from forced labour and the system for remedies, and enabling them to overcome the cost barriers associated with pursuing remedy. In a number of countries, migrant resources centres provide vital paralegal assistance to migrants and their families and help them seek redress for employment abuses. Operational guidelines produced by IOM and other groups provide more detailed guidance in providing remedy.³⁶⁰

Ensuring adequate enforcement³⁶¹

Statistics indicate that the number of cases of forced labour and human trafficking reported for legal investigation remains low and, due to limited capacities for adequate investigation and prosecution of these crimes, the rate of conviction is minimal.

Strengthening the legal architecture around forced labour and human trafficking remains a critical priority in many countries as a starting point for effective enforcement. As many as one-third of countries lack laws that define, criminalize, and assign adequate penalties for either forced labour, human trafficking, or both. Outdated laws present another common challenge. The laws in many countries have not kept pace with recent mutations of forced labour linked to trafficking, recruitment debts, and other developments. Another common weakness in national legislation is a lack of precision and clarity in terms of how

forced labour is defined. A number of countries have undertaken “gap analyses” of existing legislation as a first step in bringing laws and regulations into line with international labour standards.

Laws alone are insufficient if not accompanied by adequate capacity for enforcement. National studies and comments from the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations point to a range of capacity needs at all stages of the prosecution process. In some instances, capacity needs are conceptual in nature, relating to the understanding and awareness of forced labour and trafficking in persons, as well as their constituent elements and concrete manifestations. In others they are more technical, as with the evidentiary requirements needed to adjudicate claims or to secure convictions. In still others, the challenge relates more to overcoming cultural obstacles to enforcement.

Training in countries where new laws on forced labour and/or human trafficking have come into force is a particular priority in order that legal reforms do not outpace the institutional capacity needed to implement them.

Addressing migrants’ vulnerability to forced labour and trafficking for forced labour

The global estimates indicate that the prevalence of forced labour among adults in the private economy is three times higher for migrants than for non-migrants. Although most migration is voluntary and has a largely positive impact on individuals and societies, this figure makes clear that migrants not protected in law and in practice can be at increased risk of forced labour and trafficking in persons.

Reducing the vulnerability of migrants to forced labour and human trafficking depends first and foremost on national policy and legal frameworks that are consistent with this goal - that protect their human and labour rights and do *not* instead contain gaps that leave them more exposed to violations of these rights. Laws and policies should protect the rights of all migrants at all stages of the migration process, regardless of their migration status, consistent with the relevant international labour standards governing the rights of migrants in the world of work.³⁶² There are only a few examples of countries of destination extending equality of treatment to migrant workers with respect to all aspects of employment.

“Gap analyses” that compare extant laws, regulations, and policies with international human rights and labour standards can be a useful first step in identifying and taking action towards closing protection gaps concerning migrant workers. Policies and practices should be reviewed to ensure that they apply a human rights-based approach. It is also critical that the voices of migrants are heard in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and practices. The ILO checklist of policy considerations for ensuring the human rights of migrants at work offers a valuable framework for this type of analysis.³⁶³

Policies that create and widen pathways for regular migration help reduce irregular migration flows, and the risks of trafficking in persons and forced labour associated with them. This implies migration management policy coherence across different areas of government to facilitate labour mobility and decent work in a manner which reflects demographic, gender, and labour market realities, and responds to the needs of migrants who are compelled to leave their country of origin by crisis or other precarious situations. It also means promoting effective labour migration governance systems, including through bilateral labour agreements, mechanisms for facilitating family reunification, and regularizing migrants who are in irregular situations, in line with national laws. Critical also are policies expanding resettlement and ensuring safe passage for refugees and proper implementation of the relevant international protection frameworks.

While protection and remedy for migrants who have fallen victim to forced labour and human trafficking are essential, they are not sufficient. Protection systems should also have sufficient capacity and resources to provide the necessary services to migrants in situations of vulnerability and at heightened risk of forced labour and human trafficking – including those who are stranded or destitute – with the support and participation of a range of local and international partners. Specific policies and measures addressing the special vulnerabilities of women migrant workers throughout the migration cycle are also critical.

Ancillary support measures for migrant workers can play a central role in reducing their vulnerability to human rights abuses. Measures to ensure adequate preparedness are especially important in this regard. In countries of departure, bespoke skills training programmes can expand the labour market opportunities of would-be migrants and help facilitate job matches with decent work conditions upon migration. Predeparture and post-arrival orientation and information sessions, discussed above, are also critical to ensuring migrant workers understand their contracts and are able to identify support services and access justice in case of abuse.

Migrant resources centres in countries of origin and destination, often run by trade unions, civil society organizations, government employment services, and other groups, can be another critical vehicle for providing migrant workers and prospective migrants with information and support, and for offering them the protection of trade union membership.

The issue of forced labour and human trafficking among migrants cannot be separated from the broader political discourse around migration and asylum. Political rhetoric that reinforces discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants and those seeking asylum only adds to the climate of risk they face both inside and outside the workplace. Discourse that deliberately conflates human trafficking for criminal gain with migration driven by the legitimate desire of people in search of decent work or safe refuge from crisis is damaging to the understanding of forced labour, migration, and the rights of refugees, and to the development of appropriate, rights-based policy approaches to them.

Addressing children trapped in forced labour

The tragedy of children trapped in forced labour demands special urgency. These are children suffering some of the worst abuses imaginable in the world of work. They include children trafficked by criminal networks for forced begging, drug dealing, or commercial sexual exploitation. In war zones, they include children recruited as combatants, used as human shields and slaves, and forced to commit acts of extreme violence. Elsewhere, they include children born into a life of slavery toiling in the fields because of debts ostensibly incurred by their forebears or because they must work alongside their indentured parents. Through Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the international community has committed to ending the forced labour of children, alongside all other forms of child labour, by 2025, just three years from now.

The global estimates indicate a total of 3.3 million children in forced labour. But this is an imputed estimate based on adult forced labour and it may well be just the tip of the iceberg. Better information on the numbers of children involved, the types of forced labour they are trapped in, the locations and economic sectors where they are found, and on the criminal actors involved is urgently needed to inform responses. Information already available also needs to be put to better use. Administrative data sources, such as health system records, social welfare and support services information, community-level child labour monitoring systems, and public labour inspectorate reporting systems can potentially provide valuable real-time data on the forced labour of children and related risk factors of relevance for policy makers and frontline actors – yet they are rarely exploited for this purpose.

Far more investment is needed in identification and protection measures for children who have fallen victim to forced labour. These should include measures for both immediate assistance and long-term recovery and rehabilitation. Access to education and family reunification or, when in the best interest of the child, alternative family-based care, are especially important. Special efforts are needed to ensure that migrant children who have been subjected to, or are at risk of, forced labour, including those who are unaccompanied and/or have irregular migration status, do not fall through the cracks and are identified at an early stage and reached with protection measures. National referral mechanisms, discussed above, need to prioritise the special protection needs of child victims to ensure they are reached with needed services and care.

Children account for more than one in four of all persons subjected to forced commercial sexual exploitation, and this is a specific area requiring urgent action. While many countries have taken steps to criminalise and act on child commercial sexual exploitation, there are still significant gaps to be addressed. In a 60-country benchmarking index of legislation dealing with child sexual abuse and exploitation produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit, for example, the average score was 60 for legislative framework³⁶⁴ and only 40 for government commitment and capacity,³⁶⁵ both out of a maximum possible score of 100.³⁶⁶ Priorities include greater investment in integrated care models that support and promote the recovery of children who are dealing with the severe psychosocial effects of having been through commercial sexual exploitation. Expanded awareness-raising on the risks of commercial sexual exploitation, including its growing online mutations, is also needed for children and their caregivers.

The forced labour of children poses a particular risk in situations of armed conflict. Several countries have special programmes for the care and rehabilitation of demobilized child soldiers, but this is another area where much more needs to be done. Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery has called for measures to restore the rights of children of people freed from slavery, including birth registrations that include their national identity, reuniting children with their families, and ensuring access to schooling.³⁶⁷

Mitigating the heightened risk of forced labour and trafficking for forced labour in situations of crisis

Situations of crisis linked to armed conflicts, disasters, disease, and other precipitating events are affecting growing numbers of people around the world. These crises, and the conditions characterising them – including the collapse of the rule of law, loss of livelihoods, population displacement within and across national boundaries, failure of basic services, disruption of social protection programmes, and breakdown in extended family support systems – create situations of extreme vulnerability *and* fertile ground for criminal elements seeking to exploit this vulnerability. Indeed, worrying reports of severe human rights violations, including human trafficking, forced commercial sexual exploitation, and forced labour, accompany many of the major crises unfolding in the world today.

This discussion points to the critical importance of mainstreaming forced labour and trafficking in persons prevention and protection measures across all phases of crisis response, from pre-crisis preparedness to humanitarian action following crisis outbreak and finally to post-crisis reconstruction and recovery. While no two crises are the same, it is nonetheless possible to identify some key overarching priorities for dealing with the threat of forced labour, human trafficking and other human rights abuses in crisis situations.³⁶⁸

Crisis preparedness starts with building societal resilience to crises.³⁶⁹ Crises provide ample opportunities for hiring abuses to occur, and a consolidated regime of fair recruitment laws and practices can help crisis-affected workers avoid the reach of unscrupulous recruiters. A consolidated set of basic social security guarantees helps protect groups in situations of vulnerability from falling victim to forced labour when crises strike. Established collaboration between employers' and workers' organizations has been shown in recent crises to help mitigate some of the worst consequences, and speed up recovery.³⁷⁰

Consolidated national referral mechanisms, bringing together governmental authorities, civil society organizations, and international organizations, can help ensure the effective identification and follow-up of those in forced labour and trafficking in crises.³⁷¹ Pre-established mechanisms of collaboration between anti-trafficking experts and humanitarian practitioners working in crisis zones can also play an important role in ensuring forced labour risks are addressed during crises.³⁷²

Early warning systems are also critical as part of broader preparedness efforts. Many such systems are in place, especially relating to the risk of crises stemming from political violence and armed conflict,³⁷³ but few of these contain early warning indicators of forced labour and human trafficking and of the circumstances that could lead to these abuses. The risks and types of forced labour differ considerably between women and men, and between adults and children, and indicators should be responsive to these gender- and age-based differences. Existing early warning indicators of related phenomena, including conflict-related sexual violence,³⁷⁴ offer a starting point for these efforts.

During the acute phase of a crisis, rapid assessment tools and risk monitoring systems help to quickly identify forced labour cases and guide follow-up action. Measures to sustain livelihoods during crises are especially important in protecting workers from forced labour and trafficking as they struggle to support themselves and their families. Emergency cash transfer programmes can be a rapid means of getting money into the hands of affected populations, reducing their susceptibility to human traffickers, unscrupulous moneylenders, and other criminal elements seeking to exploit their situations of extreme vulnerability. Awareness-raising and sensitisation sessions can also play a role in helping affected populations recognise and avoid forced labour traps. For children, (re) opening classrooms and other safe spaces is especially important to preventing them from falling into forced labour or other forms of child labour.³⁷⁵ Special procedures are needed to ensure the safety of the growing numbers of unaccompanied children seeking to escape crisis situations and obtain asylum.

The immigration and refugee policies of countries outside the immediate crisis zone can also have important implications for the risks of forced labour, human trafficking, and other rights abuses during crises. Closed-border policies, all too common in today's world, limit the options of crisis-affected people, making it more difficult for them to escape crisis zones or pushing them onto high-risk informal routes in order to do so.³⁷⁶

Similarly, policies in destination countries that deny displaced people access to assistance and protection, for reasons relating to their legal status or other grounds, can force them into survival strategies that raise their risk of forced labour. Conversely, measures such as the adoption of temporary residency and employment permits that allow displaced persons to seek out job opportunities legally and transparently can play an important role in reducing the socio-economic vulnerability that underpins forced labour.

Post-crisis reconstruction and recovery efforts must ensure that forced labour is not a lasting crisis legacy. Inclusive measures to promote decent work and income generation, including through employment-intensive investment strategies such as public employment programmes, are essential to re-establishing livelihoods and reducing socio-economic vulnerability. Restarting tripartite dialogue, and the government institutions and employers' and workers' organizations that underlie it, is of particular importance to ensuring workers' rights are not eroded during the post-crisis rebuilding and recovery phase.³⁷⁷ In the context of forced labour and, more broadly, linking humanitarian efforts with longer-term development considerations in crisis responses from the outset can help promote and speed up post-crisis reconstruction and recovery.

Combating forced labour and trafficking for forced labour in business operations and supply chains

A total of 17.3 million adults and children are in forced labour imposed by private actors in sectors other than commercial sexual exploitation, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all people in forced labour. Some from this group are found in subsistence production linked to situations of hereditary slavery and traditional forms of debt bondage, others are in domestic work and in forced begging and illicit activities. These forms of privately-imposed forced labour, and the people entrapped in them, clearly cannot be forgotten or ignored. Yet the largest share of privately-imposed forced occurs in business enterprises of all sizes linked to the broader market economy, in sectors including services, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and mining and quarrying. This basic fact underscores the need for attention to business operations and supply chains – domestic and transnational – in broader efforts against forced labour and trafficking for forced labour in the corners of the market economy where these abuses occur.³⁷⁸

The principal responsibility for addressing the causes of forced labour and trafficking for forced labour – in business operations and supply chains and more broadly – lies with governments, and the principal means of addressing them lies in a strong legal framework, accompanying enforcement mechanisms and in sound public policies, as discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter.

Laws governing business respect for human rights throughout business operations and supply chains are a critical element of the broader legal framework on forced labour and trafficking for forced labour. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in this context calls on states to “set out clearly the expectation that all business enterprises domiciled in their territory and/or jurisdiction respect human rights throughout their operations.”³⁷⁹ States are also expected to take steps to prevent abuse abroad by business enterprises operating within or from their jurisdiction; this is especially important as businesses operate increasingly across countries with different regulatory environments.³⁸⁰

A number of states have adopted voluntary provisions on human rights due diligence in businesses operations and supply chains. More recently, countries, principally but not exclusively those in the Global North, have begun introducing laws mandating enterprises to carry out human rights due diligence. While the debate on the optimal design features of these laws remains open, among the lessons from first wave of mandatory due diligence legislation are the importance of clarity in terms of the specific obligations and expectations placed on business, coherency across national jurisdictions to ensure a level playing field, and active government outreach to business to explain the laws and provide compliance guidance.³⁸¹ The coverage of human rights due diligence laws is also critical. Most have hitherto been limited to suppliers operating at the upper links of supply chains, meaning the laws have had limited impact on advancing due diligence among enterprises further down the supply chain in the informal economy where risks are typically greater.³⁸² Too few such laws have been passed by countries in the Global South.

States also need to make greater use of other dimensions of their regulatory authority and economic power to ensure businesses respect human rights in their operations and supply chains. This includes the integration of human rights due diligence as a part of eligibility criteria for businesses applying for officially-supported export credits and direct lending,^{383,384} as well as the inclusion of human rights conditionality in the loan agreements with business of development finance institutions.³⁸⁵ Labour provisions in trade policies and trade arrangements are another important means of leveraging responsible business practices. While more and more trade agreements contain such provisions, only about a third of the trade agreements entering into force over the last ten years contained provisions relating specifically to freedom from forced labour and the other fundamental rights at work.³⁸⁶ Governments themselves can do more to set a good example and promote broader change by ensuring robust due diligence against human rights abuses by business enterprises that are owned or controlled by the state. They can also leverage the economic importance of public procurement to encourage due diligence practices on the part of government suppliers.³⁸⁷

Progress also requires that businesses – transnational and domestic – step up efforts to prevent, identify, mitigate, and remediate forced labour, trafficking for forced labour, and other human rights abuses in their operations and supply chains, in accordance with the due diligence obligations of business spelled out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,³⁸⁸ the ILO MNE Declaration,³⁸⁹ and other government-backed due diligence guidance.³⁹⁰

While much of the attention has focused on large public-facing transnational firms based in the Global North, business responsibility to respect human rights of course extends well beyond this group, encompassing, among others, micro-enterprises, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and other large firms – public-facing and business-to-business, domestic and transnational, based in both the Global North and in the Global South. Progress demands that *all* of these groups act to address human rights impacts in their business operations and supply chains.

At its core, human rights due diligence involves assessing actual and potential risks of human rights abuses within a company's operations and supply chain, integrating and acting upon the findings, tracking progress, and communicating on these efforts. Throughout, effective due diligence requires the meaningful engagement of stakeholders, including workers, their representative organizations, and community members, as they are best positioned to identify local risks and help formulate the most appropriate mitigation strategies.

Human rights due diligence is risk-driven, meaning that attention should focus on identifying, prioritizing, and acting on “hotspots” where the risk of human rights abuses is highest in terms of both severity and scale. Particularly important in this context are the informal micro- and small enterprises operating at the lower links of supply chains, often in raw materials extraction and production, where forced labour and other human rights abuses are often most pronounced.³⁹¹ Too often, due diligence efforts concentrate on the higher links of supply chains, where leverage and visibility are greatest, rather than on these higher-risk informal actors operating at the lower links.³⁹² This needs to change.

Human rights due diligence requires that firms critically assess their own operations and business models, and how these can influence the incentive structures, business decisions, and labour practices of suppliers along supply chains. A recent self-assessment tool developed by the ILO, together with the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), offers valuable guidance.³⁹³ There is no one-size-fits-all means of addressing business-related or “demand-side” contributing factors to human rights abuses in business operations and supply chains, but well-established, responsible business, purchasing, and fair recruitment practices can go a long way towards this goal. The prices paid to suppliers for the inputs they provide are also critical to ensuring living incomes and a fair value distribution along supply chains.

Businesses can also contribute to addressing some of the more structural root causes of forced labour in high-risk locations linked to their business operations and supply chains. While their leverage on root causes may be limited, businesses can play a critical role in advocating for government action, in contributing to the design and implementation of efforts and in fostering synergies between public and private sector initiatives. Again, business action should be dictated by assessments of risk and of opportunities for constructive partnership and community engagement. Experience has shown that go-it-alone approaches are rarely successful in achieving lasting change.

Tools such as a recent interactive mapping of organisations partnering with the private sector to combat human rights abuses³⁹⁴ can help businesses in identifying entry points for collaboration. A growing body of experience³⁹⁵ and guidance³⁹⁶ can also help business in identifying intervention options and approaches. Examples of ongoing business efforts targeting root causes include measures to advance the fair recruitment of migrant workers, and measures to help tackle poverty of workers in their supply chains through the adoption of living income programmes.³⁹⁷

Ending state-imposed forced labour

State-imposed forced labour refers to a wide range of abuses with one common thread – they are exacted by states on their own citizens, the very people whose rights it is their prime responsibility to protect and promote. The global estimates indicate that state-imposed forced labour accounts for one in seven of all cases of forced labour.

The fact that these abuses are the direct product of deliberate laws and practices on the part of states lends them an added layer of unacceptability. Yet it also makes abundantly clear what is needed for change – namely, the political commitment and follow-up to reform these same laws and practices. The experience of Uzbekistan – where state-imposed forced labour in the cotton harvest was all but eliminated just a few years after an announced change in state policy – illustrates how rapidly change can happen when this vital ingredient of political commitment is in place.

The ILO Conventions and related deliberations of the ILO supervisory bodies clearly outline the reforms in law and practice that are necessary in the countries where state-imposed forced labour persists.

International cooperation and partnership

International cooperation and partnership are indispensable to an effective response to forced labour, modern slavery, and trafficking in persons. The challenge is too big, and the myriad root causes too complex, for national governments or other actors to meet on their own.

Much has been done in terms of raising the profile of forced labour and building cooperative and partnership mechanisms for addressing it. Alliance 8.7 is playing a particularly important role in this context. Founded in 2016, this global partnership facilitates cooperation on stopping forced labour, human trafficking, and child labour. It groups more than 240 partners from governments, multilateral organizations, workers' and employers' organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and think tanks to define effective ways of accelerating progress towards SDG target 8.7 on ending child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking. The Alliance focuses on increasing collaborative action, promoting innovation, and scaling up effective solutions.

The cross-border nature of forced labour and trafficking in persons underscores the particular need for close cooperation and policy coherence across countries in policy areas with a bearing on these abuses. These areas include the rights-based governance of migration, fair recruitment, and criminal law enforcement. A number of mechanisms are in place with an aim to facilitate cross-country collaboration on these and related issues.³⁹⁸ 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. Ensuring respect for workers' fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, discussed above, is a critical precondition for social dialogue.

While other actors cannot replace the roles of employers' and workers' organizations in conducting labour relations, nor the obligations of states with regard to enforcement of the rule of law, national and international civil society organizations, including survivors' groups, can also contribute their strong local experience in addressing drivers of forced labour and building the resilience of groups vulnerable to it. Multi-stakeholder initiatives involving cooperation among government, the social partners, members of the social and solidarity economy, civil society, businesses, and other groups are an increasingly common model for addressing the root causes of forced labour and child labour at the local level in places where the risk of these abuses is high.

International support to financing and resource mobilisation is another key ingredient of broader cooperation and partnership. Policies and plans against forced labour mean little in the absence of the resource commitments needed for their implementation. While governments can and should adopt resource mobilization strategies to expand their fiscal space,³⁹⁹ the international community has a key role to play in helping to fill national financing gaps for combating forced labour where they persist. This role is all the more important in view of the budgetary pressures and increased debt that many governments are facing in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Meeting the broader longstanding commitments made by industrialised countries to official development assistance and to financing sustainable development is critical.⁴⁰⁰ Concessional international financial assistance through debt relief and very low interest-rate loans to countries are two of the other areas in which international support can help fill the financing gap.⁴⁰¹

The ILO Forced Labour Recommendation R203 also stresses the importance of mobilising resources for international technical cooperation and assistance in national efforts against forced labour. UN agencies, other multilateral and bilateral organizations, international non-governmental organizations, private foundations, and a variety of other groups involved can play an important role in this context.

Accelerated progress against forced labour requires building on the foundation of extant experience rather than “reinventing the wheel.” Partnerships aimed at sharing experiences and lessons learned can help highlight and advance a growing body of instructive practices in addressing forced labour at all levels. Alliance 8.7 is one key platform for sharing experience across the wide array of governmental and non-governmental organizations that make up its membership. The Pathfinder Country Initiative, one component of Alliance 8.7, includes more than 20 member countries from the Global North and Global South that have committed to accelerating progress towards achieving Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals and to documenting and sharing lessons learned for the benefit of other countries.

Business platforms, including the Global Business Network for Forced Labour⁴⁰² and the Child Labour Platform,⁴⁰³ are important forums for experience exchange and guidance in business efforts towards ending forced labour, human trafficking, and child labour. The International Organisation of Employers (IOE), within its broader role as the permanent liaison body for the exchange of information, views, and experience among employers throughout the world, is also critical in facilitating peer-to-peer exchange of experience and guidance for businesses on combating forced labour. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) plays a similar role as a platform for sharing experience and guidance for trade unions in efforts to combat forced labour.

Research and data collection

Reliable information and statistics on forced labour and human trafficking is critical to promoting awareness and understanding of the problem, and to informing policy responses.

Building the tools necessary for collecting data on forced labour and human trafficking is an important first step. Towards this end, the ILO is working in partnership with national statistical offices and other UN agencies in developing a standardised household survey instrument for forced labour data collection. The ILO, IOM, and UNODC are also partnering in the development of a bespoke survey instrument for the measurement of trafficking for forced labour, starting in the fishing sector. IOM and UNODC are also developing the first International Classification Standard for Administrative Data on Trafficking in Persons⁴⁰⁴ as well as accompanying guidance for the production and safe management and use of such data.

National data collection on forced labour remains in its infancy, and these tools will be critical helping countries in generating robust statistics on forced labour and human trafficking, and in monitoring progress in addressing these human rights abuses. The first-ever international guidelines on forced labour measurement, endorsed in October 2018 at the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, provide countries with a standardised framework of data collection efforts.

Yet the need for evidence extends well beyond data and statistics. Informed policy responses also require more detailed information on the drivers – socio-cultural, economic, legal, and political – of the different typologies of forced labour. Relatedly, much more information is needed about the concrete impact of policy initiatives and legal measures enacted against forced labour and human trafficking, to permit the identification of good practices with greatest potential for broad scale replication. Cooperation among research institutions, universities and other members of the broader research community will be critical to filling these key evidence gaps.

Data and knowledge sharing is an important related challenge. For information to be acted upon, it must first reach those in a position to act. With this goal in mind, ILO and IOM are partnering in the development of a comprehensive annotated bibliography and an interactive map of evidence and evidence gaps relating to forced labour to facilitate access to and sharing of forced labour research. In another effort, the IOM and other partners have created a global open data portal on human trafficking – the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) – for researchers, lawmakers, advocates, funding partners, and other groups.⁴⁰⁵



2.2

Forced marriage

Responses to forced marriage should necessarily be highly contextualised and geographically specific. Fundamental to the drivers of forced marriage are patriarchal norms and social structures that drive control over girls' sexuality.⁴⁰⁶ These include perceptions that a girl's sexuality and sexual activity reflects negatively on her and her family and therefore her parents are responsible for protecting her; it follows that the girl should comply with their directives on whom to marry. Underpinning this is the assumption that all girls *want* to marry, and that marriage and motherhood are a girl's only life choices.⁴⁰⁷ Interventions must tackle these contextualised norms and social structures if they are to be successful in ending forced marriage. The following global recommendations should therefore be considered as a broad starting point and should be tailored to specific populations, countries, and regions.

Put those vulnerable to forced marriage, especially women and girls, at the centre

Any response to modern slavery should have survivors, and those vulnerable to exploitation, at its centre. Tackling forced marriage is no different. **As women and girls are disproportionately affected, legislative and policy responses should have a gendered lens**, including gender-sensitive laws, policies, programmes, and budgets, including gender-responsive social protection mechanisms.⁴⁰⁸ It is important that migrants also have fair and equitable access to these mechanisms, and that their voices are represented.^{409, 410} Women and girls should be involved in the design of these interventions, and governments should provide meaningful avenues for their participation and active consultation, including the creation of safe spaces (including online), forums, and support networks.⁴¹¹ For example, involving girls in legislative changes and empowering them as transformative agents to challenge harmful laws has brought positive outcomes in Kenya, Jordan, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.⁴¹² The same principles hold during time of crisis, while any intervention should always prioritise the enhancing of girls' voice and agency.⁴¹³

Ensure adequate protection in national legislation

Any legislation to tackle forced marriage should be part of a suite of protective and preventative measures that put women and girls and those vulnerable to forced marriage at the centre.

Forced marriage violates several international human rights conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948,⁴¹⁴ the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery 1956,⁴¹⁵ the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1981,⁴¹⁶ the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC),⁴¹⁷ and the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime Supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol).⁴¹⁸ These instruments oblige states to prevent forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage, and to protect citizens, including by prohibiting or criminalising certain acts associated with it. Ending child, early, and forced marriage is also included under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 5.3. Despite these frameworks, there is no internationally agreed definition of forced marriage and what constitutes it; this would be critical to the ending the practice.

Despite nearly universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which prohibits child marriage, many countries permit children to marry with parental or judicial consent. In fact, only 35 countries follow the recommendation of the joint Committees of CEDAW and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to establish 18 years as the minimum age of marriage.^{419, 420} Raising the legal age of marriage to 18 without exceptions would protect vulnerable children who may otherwise be coerced into a marriage at age 16 or 17. Doing so would provide an objective standard of maturity that prevents discrimination and safeguards a child from marriage before they are ready.⁴²¹ Marriage before 18 has also been shown to have negative economic impact.⁴²² Child marriage and early child-bearing is estimated to cost the global economy hundreds of billions of dollars, while raising the age of marriage to 18 could support global gains of US\$98 billion related to under-five child mortality and stunting costs, as well as saving US\$17 billion per year related to universal secondary education.⁴²³

Making it a criminal offence to force someone to marry can be part of the response, but not the sole solution. It has a symbolic effect in communicating that the practice will not be tolerated,⁴²⁴ can deter perpetrators, and empower victims to come forward and report incidents. This can include criminalising the act of marrying a child or someone who does not consent to marriage, as well as adults who facilitate the marriage, including the person conducting the ceremony. For example, in Australia, forced marriage legislation applies to registered marriages and unregistered ceremonial events that take place in Australia or where a person is taken overseas to marry.⁴²⁵ However, criminalisation can lead to driving these practices underground and can distract from wider responses that prevent forced marriage and protect those vulnerable. Respondents to consultations with experts in the UK ahead of the introduction of forced marriage provisions under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act of 2014 expressed concern that criminalisation could make victims more fearful to come forward, especially if it could lead to their family members being imprisoned.⁴²⁶ This is real concern, given that family members are primarily responsible for forced marriages. Unlike civil proceedings, there is concern that a victim may lose control over the criminal case, as prosecution services could continue to

pursue it, potentially against their wishes.⁴²⁷ While in many ways it is too early to understand its full impact due to the limited amount of case law, criminalising forced marriage should be part of a broader holistic response to forced marriage, including other prevention and support measures⁴²⁸ such as safe accommodation, emergency funds, and psychosocial support for those in formally registered marriages and informal unions.⁴²⁹

Gender-responsive and child-sensitive national referral mechanisms for the protection of trafficked persons should be strengthened to improve screening measures and individual assessments among those forced to marry and trafficked for forced marriage. This includes developing and applying standardised operating procedures and raising awareness and developing capacity among actors dealing with survivors to support identification and safe referral, as well as providing specialised protection services and culturally-sensitive counselling. Access to legal counselling and legal representation must also be ensured, including for migrants who may be in an irregular situation and/or are without legal identity documents.

Legislative measures aimed at forced marriage should include civil protection orders that are independent of other legal proceedings.⁴³⁰ In Australia, the Federal Court can issue orders that prevent a passport being issued for a child, require a person to deliver a child's or accompanying adult's passport to the court, and restrain the removal of a child from Australia.⁴³¹ In the UK, Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPO) create legally binding conditions that change the behaviour of a person trying to force someone into marriage, with the ultimate aim of protecting the person at risk.⁴³² This can include a restraining order or a ban on taking the individual out of the country. Violating an FMPO is a criminal offence and can be dealt with at family court or criminal court.⁴³³ Central to providing criminal or civil remedies to protect victims and those at-risk is a trauma-informed, victim-centred approach that empowers survivors to make informed choices as to the best solution for their individual situation. Not everyone wants to prosecute, particularly where family members are perpetrators; therefore, a suite of remedies should be made available, including alternatives to criminal prosecution.

Beyond punitive approaches, laws should tackle the underlying drivers of forced marriage, including gender inequality and provide protective measures for girls who are vulnerable to forced marriage. For example, legislation should strengthen health systems and access to them,⁴³⁴ including health information systems, as well as mandate comprehensive sexuality education that includes recognition of capacity to consent to sexual activity before marriage. Laws should also provide for equality of access to education.⁴³⁵ Forced genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and other harmful traditional practices should be criminalised, along with all sexual and gender-based violence.⁴³⁶ This includes any provisions that enable, justify, or lead to a forced marriage, such as those which allow perpetrators of rape or sexual abuse to escape prosecution by marrying their victims.⁴³⁷ Marital rape should also be recognised as a crime, while provisions should allow child marriages to be voided, annulled, or dissolved without undue burden placed on the survivor.⁴³⁸ Laws that increase vulnerability to forced marriage should be dismantled, including those that prevent women's full, equal, and meaningful political participation, those that render women or their children stateless, and those that do not allow women to inherit land and property.⁴³⁹ Laws should provide for equal access to social protections and safety nets, including birth and marriage registration, equality in employment rights, and the prevention of discrimination on grounds of marriage or maternity, such as dismissal on grounds of pregnancy. All states should introduce and protect paid parental leave.⁴⁴⁰

Strong legislative frameworks require access to justice and accountability mechanisms.⁴⁴¹ This includes strengthening available legal frameworks such as laws on counter-trafficking, child protection, witness protection, and free legal services, and providing training for justice officials such as police, prosecutors, defence attorneys, and the judiciary.⁴⁴² National coordinators or national human rights institutions can play a role in monitoring the legislative response and holding governments to account.⁴⁴³

Address underlying socio-cultural norms and structures that perpetuate forced marriage

Legislation is not in itself sufficient to end forced marriage and should be combined with wider preventative approaches addressing underlying discrimination and gender inequality, as well as related socio-cultural norms.⁴⁴⁴ These preventative approaches must be grounded in the relevant context, determined through research on the specific vulnerabilities to forced marriage that includes collecting and publishing relevant anonymised data to inform targeted approaches.⁴⁴⁵

Central to changing these attitudes are community-based education, training, and empowerment activities that have been shown to encourage an increase in the age of marriage. For example, the Tostan programme focuses on empowering communities to abandon FGM/C by increasing awareness of gender equality and encouraging economic empowerment. Although not directly targeting forced or child marriage, one of the outcomes of the programme has been changes in community attitudes on not only FGM/C but on forced marriage, as well. The programme has been replicated in Somalia, Senegal, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Mauritania.⁴⁴⁶ Critical to all community empowerment programmes is tailoring them to the recipient community and culture and being inclusive of all in the community, including men.⁴⁴⁷

Patriarchal norms also affect access to sexual and reproductive health services, which are critical to prevent adolescent pregnancy and the subsequent risk of child marriage. This goes beyond removing legal barriers to accessing services and should involve working with health providers to remove “extra-legal barriers” such as requiring excess information from girls who seek support or leaving them with the perception that providers will breach their confidentiality.⁴⁴⁸ It is critical that healthcare providers receive education and training to critically engage with the underlying paternalistic norms that drive these additional barriers.

Religion can have a profound effect on tackling the attitudes and social norms that drive forced marriage. In many countries, faith-based organizations provide services to those affected by forced marriage, including identifying cases and supporting individuals to rebuild their lives.⁴⁴⁹ Faith leaders are also hugely influential and can play a specific role in ending forced marriage. This includes raising awareness of how to identify potential cases, refusing to perform any marriage they suspect may be forced, and tackling social norms by collaborating with development actors, making public commitments, and participating in campaigns and training to develop their own role in ending the practice, including through the delivery of sermons.⁴⁵⁰

Invest in building economic agency of those at risk of, and living in, a forced marriage

Providing economic alternatives to forced marriage acts as a preventative measure as well as a pathway out. Primary and secondary education for all, especially girls, plays a significant role in diverting children away from child labour in the household and towards the classroom and has delivered pivotal results in the reduction of both prevalence and vulnerability of child marriage.⁴⁵¹ Accordingly, the focus needs to extend beyond the provision of educational systems and include measures such as increasing access for children to attend school, such as by reducing school fees and costs associated with the purchase of textbooks and uniforms.⁴⁵² The quality of education should also be considered as it also influences the retention of at-risk children.⁴⁵³ Familial and community barriers to providing education for girls, where they are seen to hold less value than their brothers, increase the risk that girls will not complete their education. Important to increasing retention of girls where secondary schools are not locally available is to create community-based education programmes for them,⁴⁵⁴ as well as campaigns to raise awareness of child marriage and the importance of sexual and reproductive health.

Economic incentives for families, such as conditional and unconditional cash or in-kind transfers, when implemented as part of a broader programme tackling harmful patriarchal attitudes and behaviours, have been shown to encourage an increase in the age of marriage.⁴⁵⁵ For example, the Berhane Hewan programme in rural Ethiopia included activities such as forming support groups for girls aged 10 to 19, offering vocational and livelihood skills training, providing goats upon graduation to unmarried girls who participated in the programme, and facilitating community conversations on child marriage and reproductive health for girls.⁴⁵⁶ An evaluation of the programme found that not one child who went through the Berhane Hewan had married by project end.⁴⁵⁷

Women and girls vulnerable to forced marriage must have equal access to economic opportunities, including full productive employment and decent work.⁴⁵⁸ Forced marriage has substantial impacts on women's potential earnings and productivity, with some estimates that countries forego on average 1 per cent of their national earnings base due to child marriage.⁴⁵⁹ Ending the practice also means providing avenues for women and girls who may have otherwise been vulnerable to contribute to the economy. To support this, institutions and employers should offer employment opportunities for women and girls while providing training for "soft-skills" beyond formal education, such as pre-employment and on-the-job skills building and training programmes that promote self-awareness, self-esteem, and life planning.⁴⁶⁰

Protect the rights of those vulnerable to forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage during times of crisis

Those living in conflict settings, or those forced to migrate because of conflict or in the contexts of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change, are at higher risk of forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage. Some forms of forced marriage occur as a direct result of crisis; for example, where women and girls are abducted or trafficked by armed groups and forced to marry fighters.⁴⁶¹ The risk also increases as an indirect result, as when those fleeing conflict areas may also be preyed upon while they are on the move or residing in refugee camps.⁴⁶² Any humanitarian response must therefore include a response to forced marriage, including prioritising adequate funding and human resources.⁴⁶³ This should be tailored to an understanding of the specific vulnerability of the affected population as well as the specific risk factors at play. It requires holistic, integrated, and coordinated action between all stakeholders from the outset of the crisis through to transition and recovery.⁴⁶⁴ Coordination is critical; essential to this is developing standard operating procedures that would help strengthen protection pathways for the identification of those vulnerable to forced marriage and assistance to them, as well as ensuring that all actors involved are adequately trained.⁴⁶⁵

The Global Protection Cluster guidelines on anti-trafficking action in internal displaced contexts recommend that humanitarian actors “create pathways for people to safely leave conflict areas, provide livelihood and education opportunities for at risk persons, ensure food security, establish free of charge civil registration services (including births and marriages), enable the community to identify and use local resilience mechanisms, and build the capacity of local service providers.”⁴⁶⁶ They further recommend raising awareness of the signs of trafficking, including for forced marriage, as well as providing protection and assistance for those affected.⁴⁶⁷ One example of a promising initiative focused on raising awareness in the Levant. An awareness tool aimed at raising the voice of the affected population⁴⁶⁸ was developed and a campaign launched across the subregion engaging different members of the family as actors of change to prevent trafficking in persons including for forced marriage. The crisis-affected population themselves facilitated community dialogue sessions to prevent trafficking, including for forced marriage. Such initiatives will need to be complemented with access to basic needs and livelihood opportunities for those identified as at-risk of trafficking for forced marriage.

Providing assistance to those in conflict settings includes developing protective systems such as hotlines, safe houses and shelters, and legal support – together with awareness-raising efforts on how to claim their rights⁴⁶⁹ – in order to identify and assist at-risk populations during conflict and in protracted and post-conflict settings, including in neighbouring countries and areas of return.⁴⁷⁰ Early warning and monitoring frameworks for potential or imminent risk of forced marriage or trafficking for forced marriage, especially in managed camps, should be established. Regular assessments of the protection risks faced by different groups of crisis-affected people should also be conducted by humanitarian actors who manage camps. Such assessments should include forced marriage and the collection of data on risks and vulnerabilities to forced marriage, including through proxy indicators.⁴⁷¹

While embedding efforts to address forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage into humanitarian responses is necessary during an emergency, part of any crisis response should include strengthening existing institutions and structures to better respond to future crises. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities and social injustices inherent throughout the world. It led to more families and communities facing extreme poverty and, as with many crisis situations, it was lower-income families, and women and girls,⁴⁷² who were particularly vulnerable to these shocks. It is essential that “build back better” after COVID translates into a more sustainable and resilient recovery that reduces the likelihood of future shocks and increases society’s resilience to them when they do occur.⁴⁷³ This includes continuously investing in social services and welfare,⁴⁷⁴ including sexual and reproductive health services,⁴⁷⁵ so that they are resilient in the face of the next crisis, strengthening legislation that provides for gender equality, and tackling patriarchal norms so women and girls are not disproportionately affected.

More specifically, COVID-19 has set back education outcomes for children, especially girls, in many countries.⁴⁷⁶ There is a risk that school closures led some students to “go off the grid,” especially girls and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This may prevent them from re-engaging in education, thus putting these individuals at higher risk of falling further behind and curbing their education aspirations.⁴⁷⁷ This, in turn, increases the risk of child and forced marriage. It is essential that countries provide catch-up education opportunities and schooling through teacher training and tutoring.⁴⁷⁸ Children affected need additional educational opportunities to graduate from school with full diplomas and become ready to access the job market rather than being forced into early marriage as the only viable alternative.

Address the vulnerability of migrants, particularly children

Migration may create situations of vulnerability that can be exploited to subject a person to forced marriage. While many people voluntarily migrate for marriage, some are intentionally deceived and trafficked into forced marriage or, once having migrated or while still on the journey, end up in situations where they cannot escape and are coerced into forced marriage. Some individuals – both children and adults – find themselves being pressured or instructed by their family to undertake migration for marriage. While in some cases the family may not have criminal intent, they may be resorting to negative coping strategies by deciding that the marriage is the best way to support their family and not fully considering the individual’s best interests or respecting their agency. In other cases, migrants who have ended up in vulnerable situations – such as unaccompanied or separated children or stranded or destitute migrants – may be more easily preyed upon and forced into marriages.

Establishing comprehensive policies and developing partnerships that provide migrants in situations of vulnerability, regardless of their migration status – with necessary support at all stages of migration – is therefore an important means of addressing and reducing the risk of forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage. This includes improving capacity to identify those most vulnerable to forced marriage and trafficking for forced marriage and to protect and help them exercise their human rights. Migrants who have experienced forced

marriage and trafficking for forced marriage must be provided with the tools to determine their next steps, including providing them with a safe, dignified return with equal access to social protection and services, justice, psychosocial assistance, education, vocational training, employment opportunities, and decent work. All migrants should be provided with information about the requirements and benefits of getting access to legal identity. Consular capacities should be strengthened in identifying, protecting, and assisting their nationals abroad who have experienced forced marriage, including by training consular officers on human rights-based, gender-responsive, and child-sensitive actions.

Those returning home who have experienced forced marriage may struggle to readapt and rebuild their lives because they still face many of the same economic, social, and psychosocial factors that prompted them to migrate in the first place. Therefore, an integrated and sustainable approach to reintegration should take into consideration economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions as well as the needs of individual returnees and the communities to which they return. Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees who have experienced forced marriage have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are then able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice rather than necessity.⁴⁷⁹

States should enter into bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation frameworks and agreements, ensuring that return and readmission of survivors of forced marriage to their own country is safe, dignified, and in full compliance with international human rights law, including the rights of the child, and by ensuring that they also include provisions that facilitate sustainable reintegration.⁴⁸⁰

Child migrants require special focus. Unaccompanied and separated children must be protected at all stages of migration⁴⁸¹ through the establishment of specialised procedures for their identification, referral, care, and family reunification. This includes providing access to healthcare, mental health, education, and legal assistance, as well as the right to be heard in administrative and judicial proceedings. Swiftly appointing a competent and impartial legal guardian is an essential means to address the child's vulnerabilities, to protect them from all forms of violence, and to provide access to sustainable solutions that are in their best interests.

Legal identity is a core enabler of sustainable development and of safe and regular migration,⁴⁸² in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Access to legal identity registration procedures is important to protecting children from forced marriage, to protecting those who were forced to marry while abroad, and particularly to preventing traffickers from posing as their guardians. A legal identity facilitates the establishment of a nationality for children, thereby contributing to preventing statelessness and enabling children to seek protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse such as forced marriage. This includes removing barriers to birth registration for migrants in irregular situations, whether by law or in practice, to reduce their exposure to forced marriage. Progress in this area also requires strengthening identification procedures and documentation systems through digitalization efforts, as well as consular capacities and cooperation, including through technical assistance and bilateral or regional agreements.⁴⁸³



Photo Grace Forrest.



Annex.
Methodology

The Global Estimates of modern slavery cover two principal components, forced labour and forced marriage. This annex summarises the methods used to calculate the estimates of modern slavery in the present edition. A more comprehensive technical description of the methodology is also available in a separate publication.⁴⁸⁴

Stock and flow

In principle, all forms of modern slavery may be measured as both a *stock* and a *flow*. A stock measurement refers to the average number of persons in modern slavery at a given *point in time* during the 2017-2021 reference period. A flow measurement refers to the total number of persons who were subjected to modern slavery during any period of time between 2017 and 2021. The estimates calculate both the stock and total flow of the different components of modern slavery. The flow measurement does not take into account the length of time that the individual was subjected to modern slavery in the reference period, while the stock measurement does.

The duration of forced labour (meaning the amount of time in which people were trapped in forced labour) is the key factor in determining the average stock by reference to the total flow. The stock estimate is calculated by multiplying the total flow by the average duration of a spell of forced labour, expressed in fraction of the overall time period.

The estimate of forced marriage is presented as a stock figure, representing all people living in a forced marriage in the reference period.

Forced labour

The estimate of forced labour comprises forced labour exploitation (forms of forced labour imposed by private individuals, groups, or companies, in all sectors except the commercial sex industry), forced commercial sexual exploitation of adults, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and state-imposed forced labour. These estimates have been derived from various sources, as no one source is considered sufficiently suitable. Overall, the methodology used in the present edition of the Global Estimates is essentially the same as that of the previous edition from 2017, with some improvements on the scope and the statistical treatment of the underlying data. The changes particularly affected the estimation of forced labour at regional level and in the male-female distribution of global forced labour. Therefore, the comparison of the present estimates with the results of the previous edition should be avoided at disaggregated level. However, comparison of estimations in the two editions at global level is possible. Another feature that makes comparison extremely difficult is the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected not only the situation of workers worldwide but also the modalities of data collection in the surveys.

Forced labour in the private economy

The same methodology was employed for estimating forced labour in the private economy and forced marriage.

The estimates of forced labour in the private economy are derived from nationally representative household surveys in 68 countries conducted during the 2017-2021 period, using a common set of questions on forced labour (see Table 5). Only cases of modern slavery that occurred between 2017 and 2021 are included in these estimates.

The target sample for the national surveys was the entire civilian, non-institutional population, aged 15 years and older. Except for areas that were scarcely populated or presented a threat to the safety of interviewers, samples were probability-based and nationally representative. Typically, 1,000 to 1,200 interviews were conducted in each survey country, except for Bangladesh (n=2,072), Cambodia (n=2,600), Indonesia (n=2,192), Myanmar (n=1,600), Nepal (n=2,095), the Russian Federation (n=2,168), and Thailand (n=2,000). Two of the surveys were conducted in 2017, 43 in 2019, and 24 in 2020. In one case (Cambodia), part of the survey was conducted in 2017 (n=1,000) and the other part in 2019 (n=1,600). Surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019 used face-to-face interviewing, but those conducted in 2020, after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, were carried out by telephone interviewing.

A total of 77,914 respondents were interviewed across the 68 survey countries. The survey respondents were asked questions about their own experiences of forced labour and those of their immediate family network. The family network included the respondent's living immediate family (spouse or partner and biological parents, children, and siblings). The combined size of the family network of the 77,914 sample respondents included 628,598 persons altogether, corresponding to an average family network size of 8.07. The family network included children below 15 years of age as well as individuals 15 years old and over.

As the estimate of forced labour exploitation of adults is based on household surveys, respondents were interviewed in their country of residence. Nevertheless, all situations of forced labour were counted in the country where the exploitation took place, regardless of the worker's citizenship, country of birth, or country of current residence. For example, if a woman interviewed in Indonesia reported that she was forced into domestic work in Oman during the reference period, that case would be attributed to Oman.

Table 3.

Outline of questionnaire on forced labour in the ILO-Walk Free Surveys conducted as part of Gallup World Poll surveys, 2017-2021

Questions	Description
P1-P4, wp1223	Identification of immediate family network
P6-P7	Inquiry on involuntary work experience by anyone among immediate family (e.g., work against will in particular circumstances; overtime, hazardous conditions; work against will to repay debt, work to help other family member who was made to work against will by employer, work against will for employer so another person receives job, land, money or other resources)
P8-P10	Who in the immediate family, sex and age
P11	When last happened
P11i	Total duration during last 5 years
P12	Country in which last spell happened
P13	Type of activity (e.g., agriculture and forestry; fishing; mining and quarrying; manufacturing; construction; domestic work ...)
P14	Coercion (Physical violence; threats of violence; threats of deportation or legal action; withheld valuable documents (e.g., passport, residence permit, ...); non-payment of wages or other promised benefits; isolated and dependent on employer to leave work or living place; ...)
WP5	Country of current residence
WP4657, WP9048	Native or foreign born; country of birth

In the 2020 surveys, the following six additional questions were included in the survey questionnaire for collecting data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Questions	Description
covidp14_1	Currently being forced to work by employer or recruiter
covidp14_2	Forced work was stopped before or after coronavirus restrictions started
covidp14_3	Situation that kept you/family member from quitting work stayed the same
covidp14_4	Main reason situation that kept you/family member from quitting work improved
covidp14_5	Main reason situation that kept you/family member from quitting work got worse
covidp14_6	Main reason situation involving force work was stopped

Forced marriage

The estimates of forced marriage are derived from nationally representative household surveys in 75 countries conducted during the 2017-2021 period, using a common set of questions on forced marriage (see Table 6).

A total of 109,798 respondents were interviewed across the 75 survey countries. The survey respondents were asked questions about their own experiences of forced marriage and those of their immediate family network. The combined size of the family network of the 109,798 sample respondents included 931,394 persons altogether, corresponding to an average family network size of 8.48. The family network included children below 15 years of age as well as individuals 15 years old and over.

The global estimates of forced marriage are based on those who reported having been forced to marry in the last five years, without their consent, and those who were forced to marry before that time but remain in the marriage. Respondents were asked if they had ever been forced to marry, and later in the survey they were also asked if they consented to the marriage in order to limit overcounting.

Table 4.

Outline of questionnaire on forced marriage in the household surveys

Questions	Description
P1-P4,	Identification of immediate family network
WP5	Country of current residence
WP4657, WP9048	Native or foreign born; country of birth
WP1223	Marital status
WP1220	Current age
P15	Inquiry on forced marriage experience by anyone among immediate family
P17-P20	Who in the immediate family, sex and age at time of forced marriage
P21	Whether consented to the marriage

From national survey estimates to global estimates

The expansion to national estimates is carried out by applying extrapolation weights to the survey data, which take account of the probabilistic nature of the national sample and the extent of non-response of the sample units. The extrapolation weights are then calibrated to ensure consistency of the survey population estimates with known population totals from reliable external sources. The resulting weights are finally adjusted to take account of the response bias that occurs due to the tendency for people reporting on their own experiences to be more accurate than when talking about experiences of family members, by giving more importance to self-responses relative to proxy responses for family members.

Estimates for countries in which national surveys were not conducted were obtained through an imputation model. This is a change from the methodology used in the previous edition of the global estimates, where the sample countries were considered to mimic a random sample of the universe of countries in the world. In the present edition, the sample of countries are treated as a non-probability sample, which they are, and appropriate techniques for inference from non-probability samples are applied.⁴⁸⁵ It essentially consists in using a model with covariates to impute values for the missing countries. After some experimentation with alternative models and a range of covariates, a weighted linear model on the prevalence rate of forced labour was adopted with the covariates consisting of geographic variables and an additional variable on the number of international migrant workers in the country. For forced marriage, the weighted linear model consisted of geographic variables only. Because no national surveys were available for the North America region, that region was assimilated with the Northern, Southern and Western Europe region.

Figure 26.

Sample scheme for the 2021 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage



Aggregating national survey estimates to regional estimates

The country-level estimates obtained from the national surveys and the imputation model described above refer to the number of adults subjected to forced labour exploitation in the country of residence at the time of the survey. At the global level, there is, of course, no difference between place of residence and place of exploitation. The difference comes at the regional level. Accordingly, to obtain regional estimates of adult forced labour exploitation at country of exploitation, a matrix was constructed relating the country of residence and the country of exploitation using the information provided by the national surveys. The resulting matrix estimates the proportion of adults subjected to forced labour in a country of region X who were exploited in a country of region Y. The matrix is then used to derive the regional estimates at country of exploitation from the data on the country of residence.

Forced commercial sexual exploitation

Estimation of forced commercial sexual exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation of children required a different methodological approach, as too few cases were reported across the 68 countries surveyed. The estimates, covering both children and adults, were calculated using two datasets. The first is the national survey data on forced labour of adults. The second is the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) dataset.⁴⁸⁶ The CTDC dataset consists of case data collected by IOM and its partners in the process of providing protection and assistance services to victims of human trafficking.⁴⁸⁷ It comprises cases of trafficking for both sexual and forced labour exploitation and includes information on the profile of the victims of human trafficking (e.g. age, gender, citizenship, country of birth) and on the trafficking situation (e.g., country of exploitation, type of exploitation, industry of exploitation, means of control). The estimates were calculated in two steps. First, statistical models were used to estimate the odds ratios of forced commercial sexual exploitation relative to forced labour exploitation separately for adults and children by gender using the CTDC database.

A range of alternative logistic regression commercial models⁴⁸⁸ were tested, examining the odds of being subjected to forced commercial sexual exploitation relative to being subjected to forced labour exploitation. The most appropriate model in line with the model of the previous edition of the global estimates was used to derive the estimates for this edition. Second, these odds ratios were applied to the corresponding global estimates of forced labour exploitation of adults and children derived from the national surveys to derive the estimate of cases of forced commercial sexual exploitation of adults and commercial sexual exploitation of children. For example, the estimate of the number of adult females subjected to forced commercial sexual exploitation in a given region is obtained by multiplying the odds ratio derived from CTDC data with the estimate of the number of female adults subjected to forced labour exploitation in this same region derived from the national surveys.

Forced labour imposed by the state

For the estimate, state-imposed forced labour has been classified into three main categories:

1. **Abuse of compulsory prison labour**

- Compulsory prison labour of prisoners in remand or in administrative detention.
- Compulsory prison labour exacted for the benefit of private individuals, companies, or associations outside the exceptions allowed by the ILO supervisory bodies.
- Compulsory prison labour exacted from persons under certain circumstances, such as punishment for expressing political views, labour discipline, or punishment for peaceful participation in strikes.

2. **Abuse of conscription, when conscripts are forced to work for tasks which are not of purely military character.**

3. **Compulsory labour for the purpose of economic development, and abuse of the obligation to perform work as part of normal civic obligations or minor communal services**

- Obligation to perform work beyond normal civic obligations.
- Abuse of the obligation to participate in minor communal services, when these services are not in the direct interest of the community and have not benefited from prior consultation of the members of the said community.
- Compulsory labour for the purpose of economic development.

To build estimates for each of these three main categories of state-imposed forced labour, cases of forced labour were identified through a systematic review of the comments of the ILO supervisory bodies followed by a review of secondary sources.

The forced recruitment of children by armed groups and armed forces was excluded from the estimate due to a lack of reliable estimates.



Photo Grace Forrest.



Endnotes

- 1 ILO, [Forced Labour Convention](#), 1930 (No. 29).
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September 2022

Global Estimates of Modern Slavery

Forced Labour and Forced Marriage



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