

GA Topic B Update Paper



The 2022 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery published by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and the International Organization for Migration estimated that around 50 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021, including 27.6 million in forced labor and 22 million in forced marriage.¹ Modern slavery continues to be concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, construction, mining, fishing, domestic work, and manufacturing supply chains.

A key global trend since 2016 is the growing recognition that supply chains in wealthy economies are linked to forced labor abroad. Governments and international organizations increasingly emphasize corporate responsibility and transparency requirements to prevent slave labor in global production networks.² Laws such as the United Kingdom’s Modern Slavery Act (2015) inspired similar measures elsewhere, including Australia’s Modern Slavery Act (2018), the European Union’s Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence initiatives, and import bans on goods produced with forced labor.³ These policies reflect a broader shift toward regulating supply chains rather than relying solely on criminal prosecutions. Countries including the United States, Canada, and members of the European Union now restrict imports of goods suspected of being produced through forced labor, particularly in sectors like cotton, seafood, and solar-panel supply chains.

At the international level, the most significant treaty development since 2016 is the entry into force of the International Labour Organization’s Forced Labour Protocol (P029) to the Forced Labour Convention in 2016. The protocol strengthens earlier conventions by requiring states to adopt stronger measures for prevention, victim protection, and compensation for survivors.⁴ In addition, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 8.7 has become a major framework guiding global anti-slavery policy; SDG 8.7 commits states to taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and eliminate child labor by 2030.⁵

In China’s Xinjiang region, international human rights organizations and several governments allege that large numbers of Uyghur Muslims have been subjected to forced labor through state-run “labor transfer” and re-education programs tied to detention camps.⁶ China denies these allegations, but reports suggest that Uyghur workers have been placed in factories and agricultural work—particularly cotton production—under conditions that many observers characterize as coercive.

In several Gulf countries, migrant labor systems tied to the kafala sponsorship structure have been widely criticized for enabling conditions resembling forced labor, particularly in construction and domestic work. Although some reforms have been introduced in recent years, human rights groups argue that migrant workers from South Asia and Africa remain vulnerable to passport confiscation, wage withholding, and restrictions on changing employers.⁷

¹ “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage.” *ILO*. <https://tinyurl.com/r8z6jnnj>.

² “Forced Labor in Global Supply Chains.” *RAND*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2534-1.html.

³ “UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 and Its Global Influence Today.” *I25BSI*. <https://tinyurl.com/5vj23zbh>.

⁴ “P029.” *ILO*. <https://tinyurl.com/ydj4566h>.

⁵ “Goal 8.” *The United Nations*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>.

⁶ “OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China.” *United Nations*. <https://tinyurl.com/38p6326b>.

⁷ “How are Gulf countries dealing with slavery?” *DW*. <https://tinyurl.com/2shk676h>.