



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Topic Guide

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Topic: Addressing Modern Slavery Practices within Global Supply Chains

Chair: Lina Z.

Co-Chairs: Aamna U. & Reemas G.

Introduction to the General Assembly

The [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#) is the main deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ of the United Nations ([UNGA](#)). Established in 1945, the UNGA comprises all 193 delegates to provide a unique forum for multilateral discussions on international events, peacekeeping, security, and development ([UNGA](#)). Every nation has the right to vote once and equally ([UNGA](#)).

Introduction to the topic

Nowadays, the global supply chain uses modern slavery practices as a means of economic benefit and to maintain production demand in a competitive global economy. An estimated number between 27-50 million individuals are victims of forced labor ([“Global Modern Slavery”](#)), primarily caused by companies utilising tactics like coercion, exploitation, threats, and deception against those individuals who are vulnerable ([Novotny](#)). On the global stage, modern slavery in supply chains affects millions who make the products that later fuel widespread consumption, and what many of us rely on, such as electronics, fashion and apparel, agriculture, and much more ([“Slavery Supply Chains”](#)). Furthermore, the complexities of the supply chain further catalyze the battle for raising the voices of the exploited. The system challenges accountability and corporate responsibility, driven and propelled by various global and national gaps ([Hoy](#)).

Definition of Key Terms

- **Modern Slavery:** Severe exploitation where people cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, or deception.
- **Forced Labor:** Work people are made to do against their will under threat or punishment.
- **Human Trafficking:** Recruiting or moving people through force, fraud, or coercion to exploit them.
- **Debt Bondage:** When a person must work to pay off a debt and cannot leave until it is repaid (often unfairly).
- **Child Labor:** Work done by children that harms their health, education, or development.
- **Global Supply Chain:** The worldwide network of people and companies involved in making and delivering a product.
- **Supply Chain Transparency:** Openness about where and how products are made.
- **Due Diligence:** Steps a company takes to identify and prevent harm or illegal practices in its operations.

- **Corporate Accountability:** When companies are responsible for the impact of their actions and can be held accountable.
- **Ethical Sourcing:** Getting materials and products in a way that respects workers, communities, and the environment.
- **Informal Economy:** Work that is not officially registered or regulated by the government.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** Groups at higher risk of harm or exploitation due to poverty, discrimination, or lack of protection.
- **Migrant Workers:** People who move to another place or country to find work.
- **International Labor Standards:** Global rules that protect workers' rights and working conditions.
- **Remediation:** Actions taken to fix harm or compensate people who were exploited.

Background and Context

It is imperative to note that the present-day modern slavery practices hold deep historical legacies of colonial labor and exploitation, propelled as an economic tool for industries that benefit from cheap labor. The word “Slavery” itself holds a notable historical weight of violence, dehumanisation, and deprivation of liberty (“[Impact of Slavery](#)”). Thus, it is of the essence to note that the topic at hand, concerning modern slavery, is deeply intertwined with events from the past, such as the transatlantic slave trade and colonial eras. For millions of laborers, this isn't a mere choice of fate, but a forced condition in which freedom is denied.

Tactics like low wages, abuse, deception, and withholding of workers' salaries for extended periods of time are just a few examples of the coercive environment that mistreats workers' livelihoods. The practice of modern slavery within global supply chains has become an enabler of systemic exploitation and rising inequality, where an increased amount of poverty leaves no choice but labor-intensive jobs for the most vulnerable. Within the global supply chain, weak legal systems and vulnerable populations are exposed to exploitation. Industries such as apparel, footwear, home textiles, and outdoor gear are often reliant on manufacturing in countries with lower-cost labor (“[Social Labor Assessments](#)”).

Bangladesh, a country with around 175 million people (“[Bangladesh Population](#)”) and over 4 million workers, who are a part of the garment industry (informal economy), are often underpaid, overworked, and facing violence (“[Bangladesh Garment Sector](#)”). Despite the brutally disastrous Rana Plaza incident, where a garment factory collapsed and killed thousands of workers in 2013, the country remains far from achieving proper regulations and standards that must be enforced by both the government and the businesses themselves. It is

also essential to note that countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, D.R Congo, Vietnam, and many more remain common destinations for industries to manufacture their goods. It is due to the presence of such large vulnerable populations and cheap labor that businesses often disregard due diligence to fulfill their supply chain demands.

Furthermore, supply chains remain a complex network of businesses that collaborate, such as suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers that fulfill the production of goods through different stages (“[Labor Supply Chains](#)”). Transforming the raw material to a consumable product requires a global and interconnected economy, which can span multiple

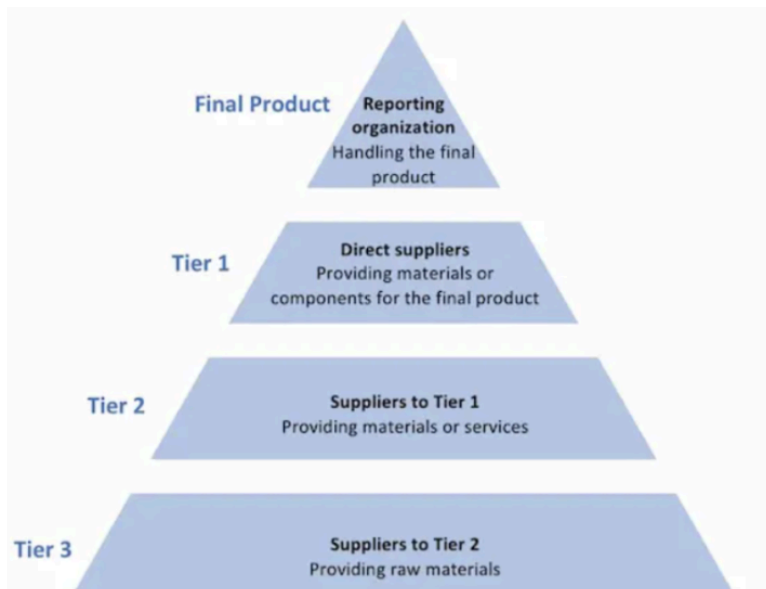


Figure 2. Supply Chain Explained - Tiers of Supply Chain (Sild).

Tier 2 suppliers. The Tier 2 suppliers provide materials or components to Tier 1 suppliers. As a result, the Tier 1 Suppliers are companies that directly supply parts, components, or services to companies and are the primary contractors that have an impact on the product's quality and cost (“[Labor Supply Chains](#)”). It is vital to note that within the production of the goods, workers can be exploited at any stage. Forced labour often thrives as a result of multi-tier

industries and regions. The start of global supply chains typically begins with the supply of raw materials, through harvesting and extraction in industries, known as Tier 4 of the supply chain. Moving on, the already extracted raw materials are sent further upstream through Tier 3, where raw materials are sent to

supply chains, by creating blind spots and increasing the difficulty in monitoring working conditions due to the depth of the supply chain.

Current Situation

Staggering estimate of 50 million people worldwide living in situations of forced labour and human trafficking, often deeply hidden within the operations that underpin everyday activity (Martin). Vulnerable populations are often susceptible to manipulative tactics due to poverty, lack of opportunities, and imbalance of power. Modern slavery remains a concern due to increasing amounts of debt bondage, child labor, and practices that exploit workers, leaving them often helpless ([Abolition of Slavery](#)). It is imperative to note that modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world and cuts across ethnic, cultural, and religious lines ([Abolition of Slavery](#)).

No industry or geographic region is free from the risk of unsafe working conditions and unethical labor practices (“[Social Labor Assessments](#)”). Especially in the context of businesses in the supply chain, the ever-growing demand for consumer goods is a constant driving force for modern slavery. Many responsible brands and retailers are now conducting social and labor assessments to evaluate working conditions (“[Social Labor Assessments](#)”) and apply steps towards supply chain transparency, simultaneously increasing their corporate social responsibility obligations.

Modern slavery continues to be closely tied to global supply chains, where the demand for low cost production often outweighs the protection of basic human rights. In China, reports have highlighted state imposed forced labor involving Uyghurs and other

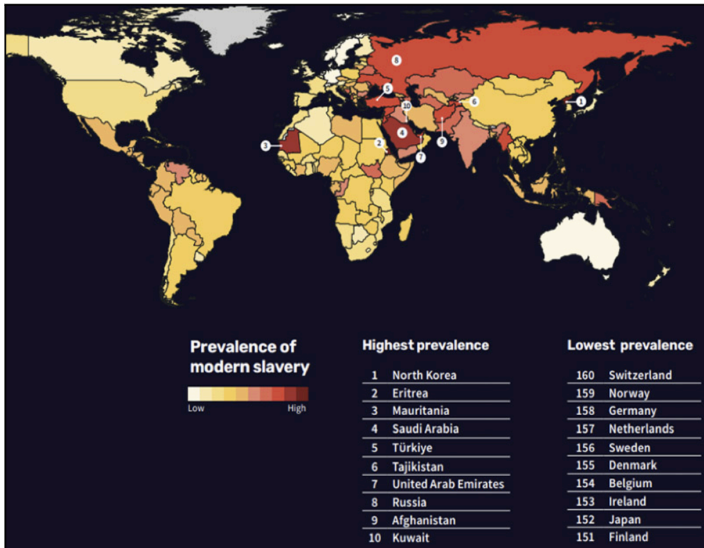


Figure 1. Prevalence of Modern Slavery 2023 (Global Slavery Index).

Muslim minorities, particularly in the cotton, textile, garment, and electronics sectors (Martin). Because these industries export products worldwide, concerns about forced labor extend directly into international fashion and technology markets ([Abolition of Slavery](#)). Similarly, in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cobalt mining has been linked to child labor and hazardous working conditions, connecting exploitation to the global demand for batteries used in smartphones and electric vehicles (Martin). In Pakistan, bonded labor remains widespread, especially in brick kilns where families are trapped in cycles of debt, while the textile sector has also faced scrutiny for labor rights violations ([Abolition of Slavery](#)).

Across the Gulf region, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, the kafala sponsorship system has increased the vulnerability of migrant workers in construction and hospitality, with reports of passport confiscation, wage theft, and restricted movement (“[Social Labor Assessments](#)”). In Malaysia, migrant workers in the electronics manufacturing industry have experienced cases of forced labor and debt bondage (Martin). In Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia, the fishing and seafood

industries have documented instances of human trafficking and exploitation ([Abolition of Slavery](#)). Meanwhile, North Korea and Eritrea show some of the highest levels of state imposed forced labor, where citizens are compelled to work under government systems (Martin). In Côte d'Ivoire, child labor continues to be a major concern in the cocoa supply chain ([Abolition of Slavery](#)). These cases demonstrate that modern slavery is embedded in global supply chains and requires coordinated international responses from governments, corporations, and civil society (“[Social Labor Assessments](#)”).

Key Challenges and Issues

One of the biggest challenges that modern slavery in global supply chains presents is the risk it poses to businesses. This risk is both legal and financial. As supply chains become more complex and globalized, businesses tend to outsource and use informal networks of labor, making it difficult to monitor and detect instances of modern slavery. This puts businesses at risk of serious legal repercussions under both domestic and international laws, such as mandatory reporting regulations and due diligence obligations. In addition to these risks, the discovery of modern slavery in supply chains can cause serious reputational damage to businesses, leading to a loss of consumer trust and subsequent withdrawal of investments, causing long-term financial losses (International Labour Organization, 2017). Businesses often lack the financial or political capital to monitor their suppliers effectively across different countries, making it a structural problem in globalized supply chains.

Modern slavery is also a serious human rights abuse that causes severe physical, psychological, and social suffering to the victims of modern slavery. The victims of modern slavery are denied their freedom of movement, fair working conditions, and a safe working environment, while being subjected to violence, intimidation, and dehumanizing treatment. These abuses are also disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including migrants, women, and children, who may lack legal protections or access to justice in host countries. The normalization of such exploitation within supply chains perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization, stripping individuals of dignity and agency while enabling the continued demand for cheap labor (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). As a result, modern slavery is not merely an economic issue but a humanitarian crisis embedded within everyday consumer goods.

At the community level, modern slavery within supply chains undermines social cohesion and sustainable development, creating long-term instability in affected regions. Communities reliant on exploitative industries often experience suppressed wages, unsafe working conditions, and weakened labor standards, which hinder economic mobility and reinforce inequality. The presence of forced labor can also distort local economies by undercutting ethical businesses, discouraging formal employment, and entrenching corruption among local authorities and intermediaries. Over time, this erodes trust in institutions and limits a community's capacity to achieve inclusive growth and social resilience (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). Consequently, the persistence of modern slavery in supply chains poses systemic risks not only to individual victims but also to the broader social and economic fabric of communities worldwide.

Previous UN Actions and Resolutions

Through international legal frameworks, conventions, and concerted agency efforts, the UN has been actively fighting modern slavery. One of the most important documents is the **1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which establishes a fundamental standard in international law by expressly forbidding slavery and servitude under **Article 4**. The UN has built on this by supporting legally binding agreements like the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (2000), also referred to as the **Palermo Protocol**, which requires states to criminalize human trafficking, protect victims, and foster international cooperation (United Nations, 2000). These frameworks have been crucial in influencing national laws and increasing awareness of supply chain forced labor around the world.

To combat modern slavery in labor contexts, specialized UN agencies have also been extremely important. **The Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) and its 2014 Protocol** are two important conventions that the International Labour Organization has adopted. These conventions strengthen state obligations to prevent forced labor, guarantee victim protection, and provide access to remedies. Furthermore, the ILO's global estimates on forced labor have urged states to incorporate labor inspections and due diligence procedures into supply chain governance, influencing evidence-based policymaking (ILO, 2017). The aforementioned endeavors underscore the obligation of both public and private entities to eradicate exploitative labor practices.

The UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) have passed several resolutions at the policy level calling on member states to improve corporate accountability, transparency, and cross-border collaboration in the fight against modern slavery. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, which calls for the abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and child labor in all forms, has more recently addressed modern slavery. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of UN action remains constrained by enforcement gaps and uneven implementation across regions, underscoring the need for more robust monitoring systems and coordinated global responses.

Possible Solutions and Policy Options

- **Strengthening Supply Chain Due Diligence**
 - Encourage Member States to adopt and enforce mandatory human rights due diligence laws requiring companies to identify, prevent, and address risks of forced labor throughout their supply chains, including subcontractors and informal labor networks.

- **Enhancing International Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing**
 - Promote cross-border collaboration between states, international organizations, and law enforcement agencies to dismantle transnational trafficking networks and share data on high-risk sectors and regions.

- **Corporate Accountability and Transparency Measures**
 - Support policies that require public reporting on labor practices, supplier audits, and remediation efforts, while imposing penalties on companies that knowingly benefit from forced labor.

- **Victim Protection and Rehabilitation Programs**
 - Expand access to legal aid, medical care, education, and reintegration programs for survivors of modern slavery, ensuring protection regardless of migration status.

- **Capacity Building in High-Risk Regions**

- Provide technical assistance and funding to strengthen labor inspections, judicial systems, and regulatory enforcement in developing and conflict-affected states where exploitation is most prevalent.

- **Responsible Procurement and Trade Policies**
 - Encourage governments and international organizations to adopt ethical procurement standards and restrict imports of goods produced using forced or exploitative labor.

- **Public Awareness and Consumer Education**
 - Launch global campaigns to raise awareness about modern slavery in supply chains and empower consumers to make informed purchasing decisions.

- **Engagement with the Private Sector and Civil Society**
 - Foster partnerships with businesses, trade unions, and NGOs to develop industry-specific codes of conduct and monitoring mechanisms.

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