



When Recognition Matters



MODERN-DAY SLAVERY IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



The word “slavery” may sound ancient for many, but forms of contemporary slavery still exist. Even today, in many parts of the world, people are pushed to work against their free will. This phenomenon is mostly associated with developing countries. These countries make about 80 percent of the world's labor force.

The modern-day slavery covers violations of basic human rights. It includes practices of forced labor, child labor, the exploitation of migrant as well as domestic workers.

Although developed countries have already in place legislations and laws against slavery in the workplaces; yet, the greater part of the world's labor force – workers in developing countries – lack legal protection. A large number of multinational firms from the developed world use developing countries as their manufacturing base. Minimum wage levels in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, China and Indonesia are significantly lower than that of the United States and Europe. As, lower labor cost decrease the overall production cost, firms tend to invest in these countries. According to the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights, Bangladesh has the lowest labor costs in the world, with the minimum wage for workers in textile industry. However, several studies have shown that these foreign manufacturing firms in developing countries tend to pay higher wages to workers than local firms do.

These kinds of low-wage factories in poor countries are also being called sweatshops. These are workplaces where worker's rights are being repressed. Workers are pushed to work in a crowded environment, under dangerous conditions, longed working hours with low wages and have no job security.

Employees in sweatshops are often women and children. These are two vulnerable groups often exposed to the worst forms of forced labor which endanger their physical, mental or moral well-being.

ILO's statistics

- Nearly 21 million people are victims of forced labor – 55% of which are women and girls.
- Nearly 19 million victims are exploited by private individuals or enterprises and over 2 million by the state or rebel groups.
- Forced labor in the private economy generates \$150 billion in illegal profits annually.
- Domestic work, agriculture, construction, manufacturing and entertainment are among the most concerned sectors.
- Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to forced labor.

Still, some of the largest global brands of Western world outsource manufacturing activities to cheap labor markets, including companies from different sectors such as apparel, electronics, food and toys.

Except for manufacturing, another sector in which forced labor and other violations of workers' rights still occur is agriculture. International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that half of the total world's labor force is engaged in agricultural production worldwide. And almost 60 % of them are in developing countries.



The number of child labor exploitation in agriculture sector is quite high, particularly, cotton, coffee, and cocoa farms. In these communities, children are put into work at the early ages in order to help their families financially.

Although some regions are more exposed to and are affected by these slavery-like practices at work, these are global problems. Many national and international labor unions and organizations have taken, and are taking, actions and initiatives to eliminate contemporary forms of slavery in the workplace. Also, the number of businesses developing policies and programmes addressing potential human rights and labor abuses is gradually increasing. These voluntary actions are not always taken to meet some legal or regulatory requirements, but to simply behave ethically and adopt codes of ethics throughout their supply chain.

References: www.ilo.org
www.globallabourrights.org

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