

ILO

Study Guide

**Vulnerable Groups in the Global Workforce: Combatting
the Exploitation of Women, Children, and Forced Labor
Victims**

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USG: Yaprak Nisa AKAY



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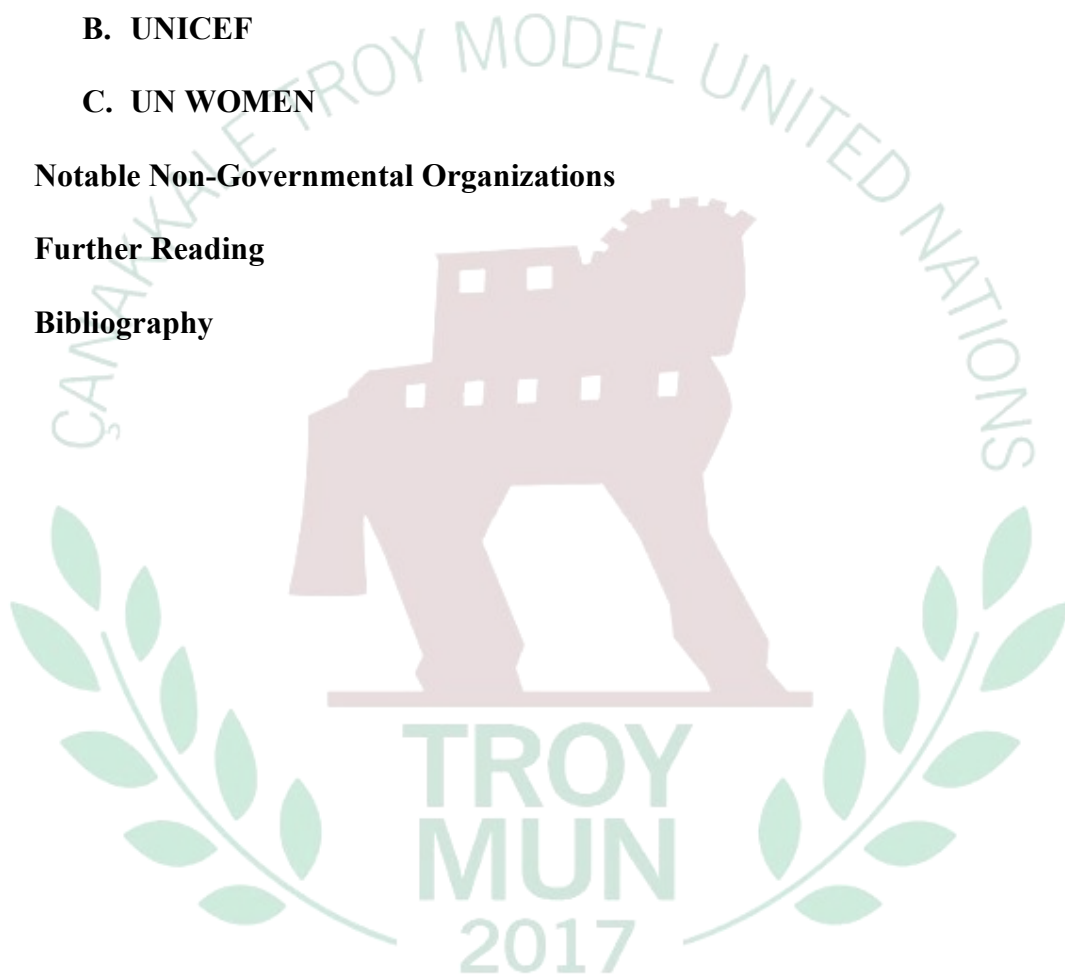
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I. Letter from the Secretary General

Highly Esteemed Delegates,

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your interest and enthusiasm regarding our conference. My name is Yaren Keçili, and I have the honor of serving as your secretary-general for the 8th edition of the Troy Model United Nations Conference this year. I embrace this role with immense appreciation. Similar to previous years, we have dedicated our efforts to creating a range of engaging and diverse committees for your benefit. We take great pride in the work we have prepared for you and sincerely hope that you will find it beneficial as well. Both the academic and operations teams have been working very hard to serve you to the best of their abilities and give you an unforgettable experience.

I wish to show my gratitude to the chair board and Yaprak Nisa Akay, who is going to serve as your Under-Secretary-General. All my teammates made great efforts in the process leading up to the conference. Hence, they need all the praise for their hard work.

I trust that all our delegates will engage in enlightening discussions throughout the three days they are with us, cultivate creative solutions to global challenges, be at the forefront of diplomacy and academia, and enjoy the experience in the process. Once again, I would like to welcome you all to both the conference and the committee. Buckle up and get ready because we have prepared an incredible ride for you.

Yours Sincerely,

Yaren Keçili

Secretary-General of Troy Model United Nations 2025

II. Letter from the Under-Secretary General

Most distinguished participants,

First of all, I would like to welcome each of you to our annual conference TroyMun.

My name is Yaprak Nisa Akay and I will be serving as your Under-Secretary General for this committee which is SOCHUM.

With the assistance of my chairboard we have worked and prepared the most helpful and inclusive study guide that we could create. But it is important to remember that study guides alone are not enough for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. So please make sure to do further research before coming to the conference.

I hope that you will improve yourself, make new friends and have so much fun by the end of the conference.

If you have any prior questions do not hesitate to contact me via my email address below!

yaprakakay24@gmail.com

Best regards,

Yaprak Nisa Akay



III. Introduction to the Committee: International Labour Organization

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards. Founded in October 1919 under the League of Nations, it is one of the first and oldest specialized agencies of the UN. The ILO has 187 member states: 186 out of 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands. It was created on the principle that “labour is not a commodity” and that lasting peace can only be achieved if it is based on social justice.

One of the ILO’s most unique features is its tripartite structure, which brings together governments, employers, and workers as equal voices in decision-making. This structure ensures that policies and conventions are developed with input from all key stakeholders in the labour world. The ILO’s overarching goal is to promote decent work for all, meaning employment that is productive, provides fair income, ensures security in the workplace, and respects fundamental rights.

The ILO carries out its mandate through three main functions:

1. **Setting International Labour Standards:** The ILO drafts and adopts conventions and recommendations that establish global labour norms. These cover issues such as forced labour, child labour, workplace discrimination, freedom of association, and occupational safety.
2. **Supervising Compliance:** Member states that ratify ILO conventions are obligated to implement them domestically. The ILO monitors compliance through reporting systems and review mechanisms, ensuring accountability. This process encourages governments to align their laws with international standard

3. **Technical Assistance and Research:** The ILO provides practical support to governments, trade unions, and employers' organizations. This includes offering training, helping to draft labour laws, and conducting research on global trends such as the future of work, digitalization, and migration.

The ILO also plays a key role in the *United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, particularly SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Through initiatives like Alliance 8.7, the ILO coordinates global efforts to eliminate forced labour, human trafficking, and child labour.



IV. Introduction to the Agenda Item: Vulnerable Groups in the Global Workforce: Combatting the Exploitation of Women, Children, and Forced Labor Victims

The global workforce today is marked by striking inequalities that expose millions of individuals to severe exploitation. While international law recognizes the right to decent work as a fundamental human right, millions of workers remain excluded from these protections due to structural vulnerabilities. Among the most at risk are *women, children, and victims of forced labour*, who collectively make up a significant share of the exploited workforce worldwide. This agenda seeks to explore the systemic causes of their exploitation, the persistence of abusive practices despite international frameworks, and the role of the

International Labour Organization (ILO) in leading the global effort to protect vulnerable groups from such violations.

The exploitation of women in the workforce is one of the most enduring labour challenges. Women across industries face wage gaps, occupational segregation, workplace harassment, and barriers to equal opportunities. They are also disproportionately represented in informal and precarious forms of employment, often without access to social protections or labour rights. These vulnerabilities make them more susceptible to discrimination, unsafe working conditions, and exploitation within global supply chains. Addressing gender-based exploitation is not only a matter of justice but also a prerequisite for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Children constitute another group highly vulnerable to labour exploitation. Despite decades of progress, child labour persists at alarming rates, particularly in regions affected by poverty, conflict, or weak governance. According to the International Labour Organization and UNICEF, over 138 million children remain trapped in child labour globally, with tens of millions engaged in hazardous work that directly threatens their health, safety, and development. Child labour is both a cause and consequence of poverty: it deprives children of education, undermines future opportunities, and perpetuates cycles of inequality across generations. The persistence of child labour highlights the urgent need for stronger enforcement of international conventions, as well as investment in education and social safety nets for families.

Equally concerning is the persistence of forced labour and modern slavery, which continue to affect millions of workers worldwide. Victims of forced labour are often coerced through threats, debt bondage, confiscation of identity documents, or trafficking networks. Migrant workers are especially at risk, as their lack of legal protections in host countries leaves them

vulnerable to abuse in sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and manufacturing. Forced labour not only strips individuals of their freedom and dignity but also generates billions of dollars in illegal profits each year, creating a strong economic incentive for exploitative practices to persist.

From the perspective of international governance, the ILO has been at the forefront of combatting exploitation through its conventions, recommendations, and monitoring mechanisms. Core instruments such as the Forced Labour Convention, the Minimum Age Convention, and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention establish clear international standards. However, despite widespread ratification, enforcement remains uneven. Challenges such as weak labour inspection systems, corruption, and the influence of powerful economic interests have limited the effectiveness of these instruments. This highlights the importance of not only strengthening international frameworks but also ensuring their meaningful implementation at the national and local levels.



A. Labour Exploitation Through Ages

1. Ancient Civilizations (3000 BCE – 500 CE)

In early societies such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, labour was often synonymous with slavery. Enslaved individuals were considered property and forced to work

in agriculture, mining, construction, and domestic service. Exploitation was institutionalized, and freedom was denied to millions of people whose labour underpinned the prosperity of empires. Violence, coercion, and the absence of legal protections characterized this period.

2. Medieval Period (500 – 1500 CE)

During the Middle Ages, outright slavery declined in Europe but was replaced by systems of serfdom and bonded labour. Serfs were bound to the land they worked on and owed service or dues to feudal lords, with little opportunity for mobility. In Asia, parallel systems emerged, such as debt bondage in India and corvée labour in China, where peasants were compelled to work on state projects. Exploitation in this era was tied to rigid hierarchies and obligations that restricted freedom and perpetuated inequality.

3. Colonial Era and Transatlantic Slave Trade (1500 – 1800 CE)

The expansion of European empires led to one of the darkest chapters of labour exploitation. The transatlantic slave trade forcibly transported millions of Africans to the Americas, where they endured brutal conditions on plantations and in mines. Colonial powers also imposed forced labour systems on Indigenous populations, such as the *encomienda* in Latin America, where local communities were compelled to work under Spanish colonizers. Indentured labour became common in Asia and Africa, as workers were bound by exploitative contracts that often amounted to little more than slavery in disguise.

4. Industrial Revolution (1700s – 1900s)

The shift to industrial economies transformed labour but did not eliminate exploitation. Factories demanded cheap and abundant labour, leading to the widespread use of child labour and the exploitation of women in unsafe, low-wage environments. Working days were long, conditions hazardous, and protections minimal. Urban poverty grew as industrialists

prioritized profit over workers' welfare. This period sparked the rise of labour movements, trade unions, and eventually the establishment of the ILO in 1919, as workers demanded rights and governments began to legislate minimum standards.

5. 20th Century (1900 – 2000)

The abolition of formal slavery in most countries did not end labour exploitation. Instead, new forms such as debt bondage, contract labour abuses, and state-imposed forced labour persisted, particularly in authoritarian regimes and conflict zones. Child labour remained widespread, particularly in agriculture and mining. At the same time, significant progress was made: the adoption of key ILO Conventions, the growth of international human rights law, and the expansion of social protections in many countries laid the foundation for modern labour rights.

6. The Rise of Modern Slavery (2000 – Present)

Despite progress, new forms of exploitation have emerged in the globalized era. Modern slavery encompasses forced labour, human trafficking, debt bondage, and forced marriage, and is estimated to affect over 27 million people worldwide.

- **Global Supply Chains:** Exploitation thrives in sectors like textiles, construction, agriculture, and electronics, often through subcontracting in the informal economy.
- **Migrant Workers:** Lacking legal protections, they face passport confiscation, withheld wages, and coercion.
- **Debt Bondage:** Recruitment fees and inflated debts trap workers in cycles of exploitation, especially in South Asia.

- **Women and Children:** Women are disproportionately affected in domestic work and garment factories, while children are exploited in hazardous industries and trafficking networks.

Modern slavery persists because of weak enforcement, corruption, economic incentives, and systemic inequalities. It is both a continuation of historical exploitation and a product of globalization, requiring coordinated international action, stronger legal frameworks, and accountability across governments, corporations, and civil society.



B. Evolution of Labour Rights for Women and Children

The recognition of labour rights for women and children has been a gradual process shaped by social change, activism, and international law. In the 19th century, during the Industrial Revolution, women and children made up a large portion of the workforce, often in factories, mines, and domestic service. They endured long hours, unsafe conditions, and wages far lower than those of men. The widespread exploitation of children, sometimes as young as five years old, sparked early reform movements in Europe and North America, leading to the first laws limiting child labour and regulating working hours.

The 20th century marked a turning point with the creation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919. Among its earliest priorities were the protection of women and children in the workplace. Conventions such as the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and

the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) established binding standards to prevent the economic exploitation of children. For women, the ILO advanced conventions on equal pay (No. 100) and non-discrimination (No. 111), reinforcing the principle of gender equality in the labour market.

At the same time, the broader human rights framework ,especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), strengthened international commitments to protect these groups from exploitation. These instruments emphasized not only the prohibition of harmful labour practices but also the importance of education, social protection, and empowerment.

Today, while significant progress has been achieved, challenges remain. Women continue to face barriers such as wage gaps, harassment, and unequal access to opportunities, while child labour persists in agriculture, mining, and informal sectors. The evolution of rights for women and children reflects both remarkable progress in international labour standards and the unfinished struggle to achieve true equality and protection for the most vulnerable workers.

C. Vulnerable Groups in Focus

1. Women in the Workforce

Women play a critical role in the global workforce, contributing to economic growth, social development, and innovation across all sectors. Studies by the ILO and UN Women show that increasing women's participation in employment can significantly boost national GDP and strengthen resilience in times of crisis. Beyond economic benefits, women's involvement in the workforce fosters diversity, enhances decision-making, and promotes more equitable

societies. Ensuring equal opportunities for women is therefore not only a matter of justice but also a driver of sustainable development.

Women represent about 39% of the global workforce (ILO, 2023), yet they remain disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation.

The most persistent challenge is gender-based discrimination, reflected in the global gender pay gap of roughly 20% (ILO, 2022). Women are also overrepresented in

low-paid, insecure, and informal jobs, particularly in sectors like domestic work, agriculture, and garment production, where legal protections are often weak or absent. Migrant women face even higher risks, with many lacking access to labour rights or complaint mechanisms.

Another major concern is workplace harassment and violence. According to a joint ILO, UN Women, and WHO report (2022), one in five people worldwide has experienced violence and harassment at work, with women disproportionately affected. Harassment can range from verbal abuse to sexual violence, often going unreported due to fear of retaliation or job loss. The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) established the first global standard to address this issue, but fewer than 40 countries have ratified it so far.

Women's vulnerability is compounded by unpaid care responsibilities, which limit their bargaining power and force many into informal or part-time work. UN Women reports that women perform three times more unpaid care work than men globally, reducing their economic independence and increasing susceptibility to exploitative conditions.

Protecting women in the workforce requires enforcing equal pay laws, ratifying ILO Convention No. 190, improving access to reporting mechanisms, and promoting women's



participation in decision-making roles. Without tackling these systemic inequalities, women will continue to face higher risks of discrimination, harassment, and exploitation in the global workforce.

2. Child Labour

Child labour remains one of the most severe forms of exploitation in the global workforce.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF (2021), there are currently 160 million children engaged in child labour worldwide, with nearly half of them (79 million) working in hazardous conditions that threaten their health, safety, or development. After two decades of decline, child labour has risen again in recent years, largely due to economic instability, conflict, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The root causes of child labour are deeply linked to poverty, *lack of access to quality education, weak social protection systems, and cultural norms* that accept children as part of the workforce. In many households, children are seen as a necessary source of income, especially where adults face unemployment or underemployment. Humanitarian crises and displacement also drive children into informal or unsafe work, often leaving them outside of schooling entirely.

Child labour is concentrated in a few key sectors. The agricultural sector accounts for 70% of all child labour, involving activities such as farming, fishing, and livestock raising (ILO, 2021). Industry, including mining and manufacturing, represents about **20%**, while services such as domestic work or street vending account for the remaining **10%**. Girls are particularly overrepresented in domestic work, where they face heightened risks of abuse, exploitation, and exclusion from education. Boys are more often found in construction, mining, or other physically demanding and dangerous jobs.

The long-term impacts of child labour are severe. Children who work are less likely to complete school, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits their future opportunities. Physically, hazardous work exposes them to injuries, chronic illnesses, and psychological trauma. Socially, early exposure to exploitation



normalizes unsafe labour practices, making children more vulnerable to continued abuse as adults. The ILO estimates that children engaged in child labour are more likely to remain in low-income jobs throughout their lives, reinforcing intergenerational poverty.

3. Victims of Forced Labour

Forced labour is one of the most widespread forms of modern slavery, affecting an estimated 27.6 million people worldwide as of 2021 (ILO, Walk Free, and IOM Global Estimates). It involves work or services extracted from individuals under the threat of penalty and without their voluntary consent. Victims of forced labour often come from vulnerable groups, including migrants, women, children, and marginalized communities.

The drivers of forced labour are multifaceted. Poverty and lack of decent work opportunities make individuals more susceptible to exploitation. Irregular migration plays a major role, as many migrant workers rely on recruiters or intermediaries and may be coerced into exploitative arrangements once abroad. Debt bondage is another critical factor, where individuals pledge their labour in exchange for loans, often under unfair conditions that make repayment impossible. Human trafficking networks also exploit people through deception, coercion, and abuse of power, moving them across borders or within countries for purposes

of exploitation. Weak labour inspection, corruption, and lack of enforcement allow these practices to persist.

Forced labour affects a wide range of groups, but certain populations face heightened risks. The ILO reports that women and girls account for 11.8 million victims, disproportionately exploited in domestic work, garment production, and sexual exploitation. Men and boys, numbering about 15.8 million, are often forced into construction, agriculture, fishing, and mining. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, especially when their legal status is tied to employers or recruitment agencies. Children are also exploited in forced labour, particularly in agriculture, mining, and street work, where they are deprived of education and exposed to hazardous conditions.

Forced labour manifests in multiple forms. Debt bondage continues to trap millions, especially in South Asia, where families may be forced to work for generations to repay debts. Human trafficking for labour exploitation is another widespread form, with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reporting that over 40% of detected trafficking victims globally are trafficked for forced labour. Migrant domestic workers often endure confiscated passports, withheld wages, and threats of deportation. In conflict zones, forced recruitment into armed groups or compulsory labour for war economies also persists, further victimizing vulnerable populations.

The impacts of forced labour extend beyond the individual. Victims suffer loss of freedom, physical and psychological harm, and long-term economic marginalization. Families dependent on the income of trafficked or indebted workers face instability, and children born into these conditions often inherit the same vulnerabilities. At a broader level, forced labour undermines labour markets, perpetuates inequality, and obstructs the achievement of the *UN*

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Target 8.7), which calls for the eradication of forced labour and modern slavery by 2030.



D. Regional Analysis

1. Sub-Saharan Africa

Child labour and hazardous work are concentrated in rural agriculture and artisanal mining, with women and girls often carrying unpaid care work alongside risky income activities. Nearly one third of the world's child labour occurs in sub-Saharan Africa, with agriculture (including cocoa, cotton and coffee) the primary sector; community-level drivers include rural poverty, limited social protection, and school access gaps.

Country examples illustrate different facets of vulnerability. In Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, cocoa supply chains have long been associated with child labour. Programmes combining community monitoring, school access and women's economic empowerment show promise but progress remains uneven. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, artisanal and small-scale mining (cobalt, gold, coltan) exposes children to hazardous tasks and trafficked

labour; interventions often require coordination between ILO, UNICEF and national authorities to remove children and provide schooling or livelihood alternatives.

Women in the region face exploitation via informal, precarious employment (market trading, smallholder agriculture, domestic work) with limited labour rights or access to social protection. Forced labour and human trafficking also occur, often linked to migration and recruitment practices that trap adults and children in debt bondage or exploitative work.

2. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The MENA region's labour market is characterised by a heavy dependence on migrant workers. In the Gulf States, migrants make up more than 70% of the workforce in some countries, particularly in construction and domestic work. The kafala (sponsorship) system, still in practice in several states, ties workers' legal status to their employers, severely limiting mobility and leaving them exposed to exploitation. Common abuses include withholding passports, delayed or non-payment of wages, excessive working hours, and denial of rest days.

Women domestic workers from countries such as Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Nepal are particularly at risk. Reports by the ILO and Human Rights Watch document cases of forced confinement, physical abuse, and sexual exploitation. The lack of access to justice systems and linguistic or cultural barriers worsens their situation.

Children in conflict-affected states like Syria, Yemen, and Iraq face acute risks. Many are pushed into hazardous labour in agriculture, construction, or street vending due to family displacement and economic collapse. In Lebanon, Syrian refugee children are frequently employed in agriculture, often working long hours for very low pay, sometimes less than \$3 per day.

Forced labour also intersects with human trafficking in the region. Women and children are trafficked both internally and across borders for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. While reforms are under way -for example, Qatar has taken steps to modify the kafala system ahead of the FIFA World Cup - gaps remain in implementation and enforcement.

3. Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for over half of the world's child labourers and more than half of all forced labour victims globally. This makes it the epicentre of labour exploitation. Children are widely employed in agriculture (rice farming, tea, and rubber), manufacturing (garments, footwear, electronics), and services. In South Asia, brick kilns in India and Pakistan use bonded labour, often forcing entire families -including children- to work under debt arrangements that pass down generations.

A critical case is China's Xinjiang region, where the Chinese Communist Party has been accused by the UN and several governments of widespread abuses against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. Evidence indicates forced labour in cotton harvesting, textile production, and factories tied to global supply chains. Women face coercive sterilization and unsafe factory conditions, while children are separated from families and placed in state-run boarding schools. About 20% of the world's cotton is linked to Xinjiang, prompting international responses such as the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (2021), which bans imports tied to the region.



In the garment sector, millions of women in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam work under exploitative conditions. Long hours, unsafe factories, and suppression of trade unions are common. The 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh, which killed more than 1,100 workers, most of them women, drew international attention to forced labour indicators in supply chains.

Fishing industries in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines have also been exposed for trapping migrant workers on vessels. Victims report document confiscation, violence, and months or even years at sea without pay. Children are also exploited in fisheries, diving for seafood in dangerous conditions.

Migrant workers, both internal (from rural to urban areas) and international (to the Middle East or wealthier Asian countries), face risks of recruitment fees that create debt bondage. A 2021 ILO study found that more than half of surveyed migrant workers in Asia paid recruitment costs exceeding legal limits, trapping them in cycles of repayment and coercion.

4. Europe

In Europe, labour exploitation is often linked to human trafficking and irregular migration. According to Eurostat, 10,793 victims of human trafficking were registered in 2023, and 60% were women and girls, many forced into labour or sexual exploitation. Migrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia are especially vulnerable.

Agriculture in southern Europe relies heavily on seasonal migrant workers. In Italy and Spain, irregular migrants have reported working 12–14 hour days under unsafe conditions, with little pay and poor housing. Women seasonal workers are exposed to both economic exploitation and gender-based violence, with documented cases of harassment in Spanish strawberry fields.

In Eastern Europe, trafficking networks exploit both local populations and migrants. In Romania and Bulgaria, women and children have been trafficked for domestic servitude and agricultural work. In wealthier countries like Germany and the UK, forced labour has been detected in construction, hospitality, and care work.

European Union policy has increasingly addressed these issues through the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and by developing corporate due diligence laws to hold companies accountable for exploitation within their supply chains. However, gaps remain in victim identification and access to remedies.

5. Oceania and the Pacific

Though smaller in absolute numbers, Oceania faces unique patterns of exploitation. Seasonal worker programmes in Australia and New Zealand recruit labour from Pacific Island nations. While these programmes provide income opportunities, reports have highlighted cases of wage theft, unsafe housing, and excessive working hours, creating forced labour indicators.

The fisheries industry in the Pacific is another hotspot. Distant-water fishing fleets recruit migrant workers from Southeast Asia, who may remain at sea for months or years, subjected to abuse, debt bondage, and withheld wages. Inspections at Pacific ports have uncovered multiple instances of human trafficking in maritime labour.

Women and children in the Pacific face distinct vulnerabilities. Trafficking for sexual exploitation has been reported in countries such as Fiji and Papua New Guinea, often linked to poverty and weak social protection systems. Children are also found in hazardous forms of work, such as logging and small-scale agriculture.

Regional cooperation is growing, with the ILO and Pacific Island governments working on stronger maritime labour standards and seasonal worker protections. However, gaps in monitoring and enforcement remain significant.

6. North America

In North America, labour exploitation is often tied to migration and undocumented workers. In the United States, the Department of Labor reported in 2023 that child labour violations had increased by 69 percent since 2018, with children found working illegally in meatpacking plants, agriculture, and food processing. Migrant children from Central America are particularly vulnerable, often working night shifts in dangerous environments to support families. Women, especially undocumented immigrants, face exploitation in domestic work, agriculture, and the hospitality industry, where they are frequently underpaid and denied access to labour protections due to their immigration status. Forced labour has also been uncovered in supply chains: in 2022, U.S. Customs and Border Protection blocked more than 3,600 shipments suspected of being produced with forced labour, including goods from China's Xinjiang region. In Canada, reports have highlighted exploitation of temporary foreign workers in agriculture, where poor housing, withheld wages, and unsafe conditions have been documented. Both countries face the challenge of balancing strong labour protections with loopholes that leave migrants, women, and children vulnerable to systemic abuse.

7. South America

South America has long struggled with forced and exploitative labour linked to inequality, rural poverty, and informal economies. According to the ILO, Brazil alone has identified more than 55,000 workers in conditions of modern slavery since 1995, particularly in agriculture, logging, and construction. The government's "dirty list" program has

documented companies and employers engaged in forced labour practices, but enforcement gaps remain. Child labour continues to be a pressing issue, with about 8.2 million children across Latin America engaged in work, especially in agriculture and street vending. In Bolivia and Peru, children are widely employed in mining, often exposed to toxic substances and hazardous conditions. Women are disproportionately exploited in domestic work, which remains undervalued and poorly regulated; in Argentina, nearly 16 percent of women in the labour force are employed as domestic workers, with many lacking formal contracts or legal protections. Indigenous populations across the Amazon and Andean regions are particularly vulnerable to forced labour, often targeted by illegal logging and mining operations. Efforts to combat these issues vary widely across countries, but entrenched inequality and corruption often weaken protections for vulnerable groups.



E. Impact of Conflict, Climate Change, Economic Inequality

Conflict

Conflict remains one of the strongest drivers of vulnerability to exploitation in the global workforce. Armed violence and political instability displace populations, weaken state

institutions, and destroy livelihood opportunities, leaving millions without access to safe employment. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2023), there are now more than 110 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, including refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. These individuals often lack legal protections or access to formal labour markets, making them prime targets for traffickers and exploitative employers.

Women and children are disproportionately affected. In conflict zones such as Syria, Yemen, and South Sudan, children are recruited by armed groups or forced into hazardous agricultural and construction work. The *UN Secretary-General's 2022 report on Children and Armed Conflict* documented thousands of verified cases of children recruited or used in conflict, many in forced labour roles. Women, particularly displaced or migrant women, are often coerced into domestic work or sexual exploitation. In many refugee-hosting states, restrictive labour policies further push displaced people into informal markets where exploitation is rife. Thus, conflict not only strips people of security but also directly increases the risk of trafficking, forced labour, and long-term cycles of exploitation.

Climate Change

Climate change is increasingly recognized by the ILO and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as a “threat multiplier” for labour exploitation. Extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and environmental degradation destroy livelihoods, especially in agriculture, fishing, and herding communities. When families lose income sources, they may resort to child labour, debt bondage, or unsafe migration to survive.

The ILO (2022) estimates that by 2030, more than 80 million jobs could be lost due to climate-related impacts, particularly in agriculture and forestry. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, droughts and floods have already displaced millions, driving rural families into exploitative urban jobs or unsafe migration routes. In Bangladesh, for example,

climate-driven flooding and cyclones have destroyed farming land, pushing many children into hazardous brick kilns and garment factories. Similarly, in parts of the Sahel region, desertification has intensified conflict over land and resources, compounding both displacement and child labour rates.

Climate-related migration further heightens risks. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has warned that environmental displacement often occurs without legal protections, leaving migrants vulnerable to traffickers and exploitative recruiters. Women and girls are especially exposed in such contexts, as they may be forced into domestic servitude or sexual exploitation in exchange for shelter, employment, or safety during migration.

Economic Inequality

Economic inequality both within and between countries is a central factor fueling labour exploitation. Despite global progress, the World Bank (2023) estimates that nearly 700 million people still live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 per day. Such conditions force families to rely on unsafe or informal employment, often involving child labour or exploitative contracts. Inequality also drives migration, with workers from lower-income countries moving to wealthier states in search of better opportunities, only to face wage theft, debt bondage, or forced labour.

Gender disparities further deepen inequality in the workforce. According to UN Women (2023), women globally earn about 20% less than men and are overrepresented in the informal economy, where legal protections are limited. Women are also more likely to work in domestic or care roles, which are undervalued and often hidden from labour inspections, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and harassment. Children from poor households are significantly more likely to enter the workforce prematurely, particularly in agriculture, construction, and street work, where their rights are unprotected.

At the international level, inequality between developed and developing states exacerbates vulnerabilities. Migrant workers in the Gulf states, for example, often face exploitative conditions under the kafala system, where their legal residency is tied to employers. Similar patterns exist in parts of Asia and Europe, where migrants from poorer regions are forced into dangerous or low-paying jobs with little recourse to justice. Such structural inequalities ensure that women, children, and marginalized groups remain at the bottom of labour markets, exposed to exploitation and unable to escape cycles of poverty.

V. Previous International Actions

A. International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO has been the leading body addressing forced labour, child labour, and workplace exploitation since its creation in 1919. Its landmark conventions form the legal foundation for global action. The *Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930)* and its *Protocol of 2014* remain binding frameworks against modern slavery, while the *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182, 1999)* became the first convention in ILO history to achieve universal ratification in 2020. Additionally, the *Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100, 1951)* and the *Discrimination Convention (No. 111, 1958)* have been instrumental in protecting women from exploitation in the workforce.

The ILO also coordinates *Alliance 8.7*, a global multi-stakeholder partnership launched in 2016 to accelerate progress toward *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7*, which calls for the eradication of forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labour. Through Alliance 8.7, more than 20 countries have become “Pathfinder Countries,” committing to intensified national action. These initiatives demonstrate the ILO’s central role in setting international labour standards and mobilizing coordinated action.

B. UNICEF

UNICEF has carried out many programmes and campaigns to fight child labour and labour exploitation. It worked in Bangladesh's garment industry with the *Mothers@Work* programme to give female workers paid maternity leave, breastfeeding support, and childcare so children would not be forced into labour. In Rwanda's tea sector, UNICEF improved early childhood development services so parents could work while children were cared for safely. In Indonesia, it partnered with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil to add child-rights protections into certification, helping prevent children from working on plantations. In Madagascar, UNICEF supported schooling, community protection, and family support in mica mining areas where child labour was common. In Türkiye, it ran workplace monitoring, vocational training, and social protection projects, identifying thousands of children at risk and helping businesses follow child-friendly standards. With the ILO, UNICEF set up a Child Labour Monitoring System in Iraq, launched a joint programme in Malaysia's Sabah region to remove children from oil-palm plantations, and called for stronger laws and safety nets in Timor-Leste. At the global level, UNICEF and ILO publish regular *Global Estimates on Child Labour* reports and show how social protection, like cash transfers for families, reduces child labour.



C. UN WOMEN

UN Women has worked to combat the exploitation of women in the workforce by creating programmes that promote safe migration, fair working conditions, and protection from violence and trafficking. Together with the EU and ILO, it leads the *Safe and Fair*

programme under the Spotlight Initiative in ASEAN countries, which ensures that women migrant workers can migrate safely, access justice, and work without abuse or discrimination. It also co-implements the *PROTECT project* with UNICEF, ILO, and UNODC in Southeast Asia, which targets forced labour, trafficking, and exploitation of women and children in migration corridors by strengthening laws, improving services, and supporting survivors. UN Women has also been active in the garment industry, partnering with companies and governments to improve working conditions for women, ensure maternity rights, and address workplace harassment and gender-based violence.

VI. Notable Non-Governmental Organizations

Here are a few non-governmental organizations that work to protect and support vulnerable groups in the workforce, including children, women and victims of forced labour.

Save the Children

Save the Children works globally to prevent child labour and protect children from exploitation. Its programmes focus on keeping children in school, providing vocational training for adolescents, supporting families with income-generation schemes, and running community awareness campaigns to reduce hazardous child work in agriculture, mining, and domestic sectors. They operate in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, often in partnership with local governments and UN agencies.

Anti-Slavery International

Anti-Slavery International campaigns against all forms of modern slavery, including forced labour and human trafficking. It lobbies governments for stronger laws, monitors corporate supply chains, supports survivors with rehabilitation and reintegration, and raises global

awareness about labour exploitation. It works in multiple sectors, such as domestic work, agriculture, and manufacturing, ensuring victims have access to justice and social protection.

World Vision

World Vision focuses on protecting children and vulnerable communities from exploitation. Its programmes include safe spaces for children, access to education, and family livelihood support to reduce reliance on child labour. In mining and agricultural communities, World Vision provides alternative income opportunities for parents and vocational training for youth, often partnering with local NGOs and government initiatives.

Walk Free Foundation

Walk Free Foundation addresses modern slavery and forced labour globally. It produces the Global Slavery Index, supports grassroots projects to rescue and rehabilitate women and children victims, and advocates for stronger laws and corporate accountability. Its programs include safe shelters, skills training, and reintegration support for survivors of forced labour.

VII. Points a Resolution Should Cover

- How can states reduce gender-based discrimination in workplaces, especially in recruitment, pay, and promotions?
- How can childcare, parental leave, and social protection policies help reduce the burden on women workers?
- How should member states cooperate to ensure better implementation of the Palermo Protocol and Alliance 8.7 commitments?
- How can the UN system improve coordination among ILO, UNICEF, UN Women, and NGOs to address overlapping vulnerabilities?

- How should states regulate industries like agriculture, mining, and manufacturing where child labour is most prevalent?
- How can access to free, quality education be expanded as an alternative to child labour?
- How can the international community strengthen protections for migrants and refugees who are vulnerable to trafficking and forced labour?
- How can victims of forced labour gain better access to legal aid, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs?

VIII. Further Reading

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): Human Trafficking and Refugee Protection

<https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protecting-refugees/human-trafficking>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>

World Bank: Gender and Development – Women's Economic Empowerment

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender>

Human Rights Watch: Workers' Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/topic/labor/workers-rights>

Global Slavery Index (Walk Free Foundation)

<https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/>

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<https://www.ilo.org/resource/statement/world-day-against-child-labour-ilo-and-unicef-call-joint-work-among-all>

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<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women/safe-and-fair>

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