

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

COMMITTEE Human Rights Council

ISSUE Combating Modern Slavery

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Introduction

The horrendous treatment of humans has always been a part of the history of mankind, in various forms in accordance with the time period. As of December 1948, the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document assessed by representatives of different backgrounds to lay a foundation for the protection of people. Given the inhumane treatment of slaves and their deprivation of freedom, Article 4 was introduced to abolish servitude, slavery and all of its forms. Despite the fact that slavery still exists in its traditional form as of today, it is less common than the modernised version, holding millions in unpleasant situations they cannot escape from. Although the United Nations has yet to introduce a legal definition, modern slavery is often claimed as an umbrella term for numerous practices, where one is exploited for personal or commercial gain, or is incapable of acquiring freedom due to violence, abuse of power or deception. Such situations include, but are not limited to debt bondage, forced marriage, forced labour or human trafficking. Reports show that 49.6 million people were trapped in modern slavery as of 2021 worldwide, with the numbers showing an increasing tendency.

Definition of Key Terms

Forced Marriage - It is often used to describe the marriage, in which the lack of consent from one of the partners is present and the partner uses physical violence or threats to obtain the agreement. It also refers to situations where one is incapable of putting an end to a marriage due to the aforementioned reasons.

Forced Labour - The term generally applies 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”, according to the ILO. It also entails debt bondage and bonded labour.

ILO - Abbreviation of the International Labour Organization founded in 1919, aiming to promote social justice and internationally recognised human and labour related rights and improving working and living conditions.

Debt bondage/Bonded labour - It is when one is tricked into working for another person for a very low or no salary, or the labour done in order to pay off a debt. One might never escape such bondage due to the extortionate fees they are charged with while earning the money for the exploiter. The debt can also be passed onto descendants in some societies, leading children to be born in slavery.

Human trafficking - It is a form of modern slavery when one is either deceived or coerced into moving into labour or commercial sex act. One may not even realise the agreement to trafficking first, since the victims are often carefully selected, and fail to seek help afterwards as a result of having to survive incomprehensible and tragic events. The aim of the recruitment, transportation and receipt of people is to exploit them for profit.

State-imposed forced labour - According to the Anti-Slavery International, it “takes place when national or local authorities force citizens to work, where people have not offered themselves voluntarily.” Hence the state does not only fail to protect its citizens’ fundamental human rights, but also abuses its power to exploit them.

Conscription - It means “the act or process of forcing people by law to join the armed services”. It also refers to any enlistment to state services. One of its forms, which is regarded as extremely inhumane, is when children under the age of 18 are forced into military service during hostile conflicts.

General Overview

HISTORY OF SLAVERY

Slavery has existed for millennia, but it is most often associated with the enslavement of the thousands of Africans, who were imported to the Americas from the 16th century. However, it is not a concept that was invented by Spaniards or Englishmen, it appeared simultaneously with the establishment of the first settled civilizations, with the agricultural revolution, which required workforce. It was a major part of Mesopotamia, the Ancient Egyptian Empire and many other societies, and it was not considered unusual. Even Aristotle, one of the greatest minds of

Ancient Greece, reckoned it to be natural. In the Ancient world, having an immense number of slaves meant dominance and power.

Therefore, it cannot be stated that white Europeans were the major cause for this form of freedom deprivation. In fact, in the Middle Ages, it was not a major characteristic of people from the continent of Europe, rather they were the ones held in captivity. Although religious scripts, the Bible, the Quran and others also acknowledge them as a separate class, they were treated differently in each culture. Some comprised the armies of empires, such as the Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire, others were employed to work on the fields or work as servants. In the Muslim world, for instance, one could even be released of servitude if paid enough to the owner.

The transatlantic slave trade refers to the transportation of approximately 12.5 million African slaves to the Americas, beginning in the 16th century and lasting until the 19th century. Africans were primarily enslaved by their own people and later sold to the Europeans colonising the New World. They were sold, traded with in the Americas, treated inhumanely and forced to do labour on the fields. In the early days, probably only a few hundred thousand were transported, however, the number gradually increased and reached its peak in the 18th century with nearly 60% of slaves of the transatlantic trade leaving their continent.

EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES, THE ABOLISHMENT OF SLAVERY

In 1777, the first sovereign nation to ban slavery became the State of Vermont. In the following decades, prominent countries such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, France and Spain gradually outlawed the import and trade of slaves but did not yet abolish it entirely.

The United Kingdom and Spain were pioneers in prohibiting the further enslavement and ownership of slaves via laws. In 1833, Britain passed the Abolition of Slavery Act, ordering the abolishment in all of their colonies. By virtue of the colonisers' massive control over the world and on account of the several anti-slavery organisations and campaigns, countries across the globe soon began to follow their predecessors and forbid slavery. In Denmark it occurred in 1846, in France in 1848, in Portuguese colonies in 1858 with a 20-year-long apprenticeship, and in Dutch Caribbean territories in 1861, to mention a few.

In 1865, the United States Congress passed the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, leading to the liberation of slaves in the country. This however was questionable, as it maintained an exception for "involuntary servitude" as punishment, therefore some scholars say it only

transformed slavery but did not end it. Not long after the second World War and the formation of the United Nations, the Declaration of Human Rights was introduced. In Article 4, it states that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”. This article clearly forbids the existence of slavery in the current world.

CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY

As aforementioned, slavery persists within the current world in its traditional form embedded into customs and beliefs, however, it has transformed into new, modernised versions as well. The former practices are due to long-standing discrimination against groups of society such as, but not limited to, tribal minorities, indigenous people and people of low caste. Although the term ‘modern slavery’ refers to situations where one is exploited via deception or violence, generally it either is used for describing forced marriage or forced labour. The main cause behind modern slavery is the increase in risk factors in certain areas, allowing people to be vulnerable to the contemporary forms of servitude. One can be in danger due to political instability, ongoing conflicts or forced displacement due to, for instance, natural disasters or pandemics. Hence immigrants or fleeing refugees are frequently targets to the perils of forced situations, both en route and in the country of destination. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of modern slavery cases occur in upper-middle or high-income countries and not only in developing countries.

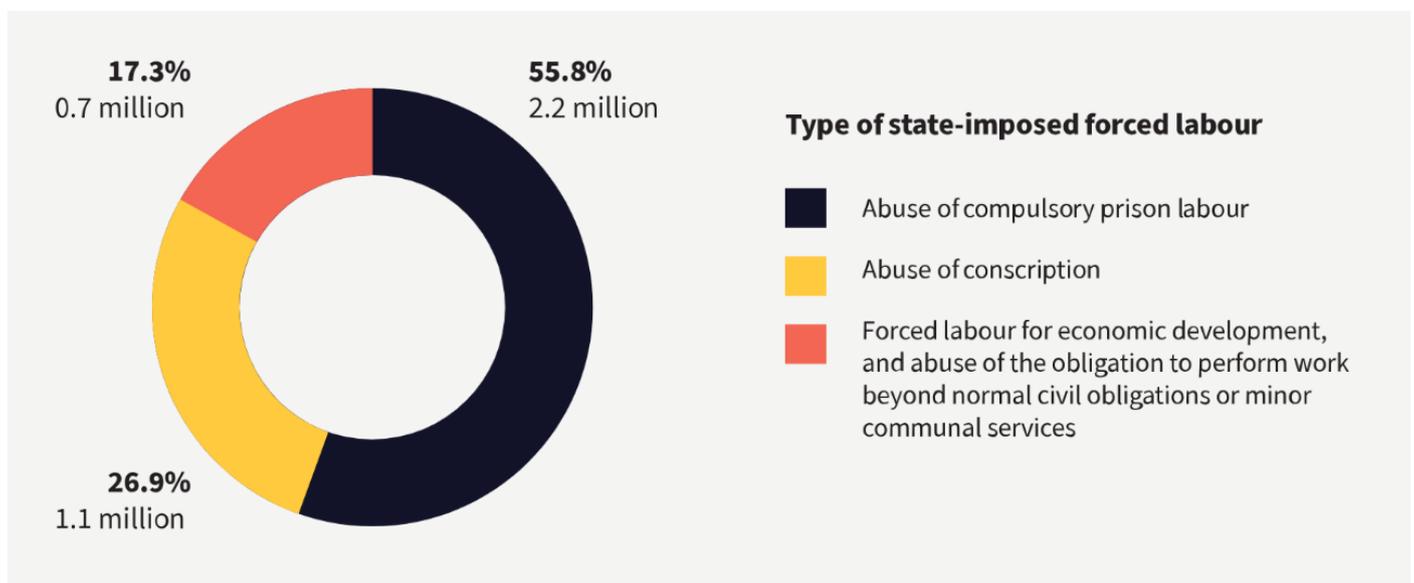
FORCED LABOUR

According to the International Labour Organization’s report, 49.7 million people were trapped in modern slavery as of 2021. This number can be distributed, an estimated 27.6 million people worldwide are doing forced labour, the remaining 22 million are part of a marriage to which they did not consent or cannot formally end.

Forced labour has various forms, depending on the exploiter and the area they force one to work in. One may be a slave to another due to debt bondage or bonded labour. They may be charged extra fees for fabricated service, recruitment or accommodation, which can then lead to the inability to ever leave the work. Nonetheless, many fear to even attempt to escape as the employers tend to confiscate their IDs or passports and they might get criminalised afterwards. This form of labour has been present for centuries, as it existed in the 19th century as well, after the abolishment of the transatlantic slave trade, when the former slaves were bonded to labour on the plantations in Africa, the Caribbean and South-East Asia. Nowadays, it is most common in southern Asian nations, such as India and Pakistan, but it often occurs parallelly to other forms of modern slavery, like human trafficking. It is also extremely regular in areas where corruption flourishes, and where discrimination and poverty is common.

A pivotal event, which took place in 2020, led the number of people in forced labour to thrive. This was the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a lockdown and economic turmoil. Since factories and production were shut down in many regions, unemployment and impoverishment meant a great ordeal. According to an UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner statement, those facing discrimination prior to the lockdown were disproportionately affected, and were at greater disadvantage than others. The jobs they were able to acquire were more precarious, more likely to fail, they were more vulnerable to modern slavery. Therefore, the economic impact of coronavirus is bound to increase the chances of forced labour to many.

There are many more contemporary forms of involuntary work, such as labour in domestic servitude, in food and garment industry, in the agricultural section or forced prostitution, to mention a few. Also, child labour is a main component of the forced labour industry, one in 10 children is exploited for economic benefits, despite the opposition of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which firmly protects from such exploitation and from any hazardous work, job interfering with education or with the health of the child. Globally, 86% of all forced labour happens in the private economy, as a result of private actors, however, this means that 14% occurs within state-imposed forced labour. The latter comprises three main parts, which are the abuse of compulsory prison labour, conscription and labour for economic development. The state-imposed forced work is most common in the prison community, the following chart represents the distribution (in 2021):



Source:

<https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/spotlights/examining-state-imposed-forced-labour/>

Prison labour is often used as a legal punishment, it is acceptable under certain circumstances and up to a point, where one is not disproportionately treated nor does a third party benefit from the work done. There is greater risk in countries, such as the United States, China or Brazil, where imprisonment numbers are exceedingly high for state-imposed forced labour to occur. Conscription is most evident in Eritrea, Egypt, Mongolia and Mali, but is not limited to these countries. Those who choose to flee to avoid conscription are also vulnerable to modern slavery, as they become migrants or if they are caught, they might get injured, tortured or eventually, killed. Nonetheless, forced labour for economic development can, for instance, consist of annual harvesting, where one is required to work for the state or face a penalty. In Rwanda, for instance, a national community service takes place every month and is mandatory for people between the ages of 18-65. The law clearly establishes a threat of penalty for not participating in the community works.

Global supply chains constitute a great deal of modern slavery. Each section, from the miners to the manufacturers, from the transporters to the retailers, can be trapped in forced labour. Some giant tech companies, such as Apple, Microsoft and Amazon, also face suppliers who do not meet the required standards and many suppliers are known for coming from an area with a greater risk of exploitation. There have been initiatives designed to tackle the problem, including an annual report of the situations, but there still remains inadequacy, since, for one, regulations do not apply to many smaller businesses.

FORCED MARRIAGE

Forced marriage is the other form of modern slavery, accounting for almost 44.5% of all cases. Although it is certain and true that men and boys are also exposed to forced marriages, women and girls are in majority when it comes to this type of loss of freedom, to be more exact, 2/3 of the people are estimated to be female. Geographically, 66% of marriages are reported in Asia and the Pacific and 3 people out of 5 are from lower-middle income countries.

Reasons for a forced marriage depend on the circumstances, but they occur in every region of the world. One may need to agree to marriage to settle family disputes or to cancel debts, but there are cases where a female is impregnated and the rapist's only way to escape legal punishment is if he forces her into marriage. Nevertheless, some cultures put the blame on the woman if the baby is born out of wedlock, thus it is safer to marry someone, and parents may

push it. Therefore, to conclude, the reason behind this form of slavery is usually pregnancy, escaping poverty, preserving the reputation of the family or protection.

Tricking one into a forced marriage can happen in several ways, the most general of which is coercion by emotional threats or verbal abuse. This includes blackmailing one, threatening one's relatives and loved ones or suggesting the destruction of their reputation. What is more, physical abuse is present in forcing someone to wed another, and its forms can vary infinitely. Family members usually play a role when one is given to marry, especially the parents of the person. They give their children away in hope of a better tomorrow or for the aforementioned reasons of forced marriage, not taking into consideration the fundamental human rights of the daughter or son. It is a criminal act and is crucial to be solved, as a marriage is basically a life sentence. Forced marriages also are likely to coexist with forced labour, work done not only inside but outside the house.

STATISTICS

Although it has been mentioned that modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world, regardless of economic status, there are a few countries where it is most prevalent. Such can be said about North Korea with approximately 104.6 people out of 1000 being modern slaves, Eritrea with 90.3 out of 1000, Mauritania with 32 out of 1000 or Saudi Arabia with 21.3 out of 1000 people. The list does not stop here, there are other factors to consider as well, when looking at statistics, such as the vulnerability, which is the greatest in South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, government response to the issues at hand can also be addressed, United Kingdom with the greatest score, next to Australia, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United States, and North Korea with the lowest of all, together with Eritrea and Iran.

Major Parties Involved

The United States of America: The United States has been a contributor to resolve the issue of modern slavery and slavery in general. As it has been previously mentioned, in 1865, the Congress passed the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery and freeing hundreds of thousands. Today, it receives the fifth greatest government response score worldwide, although there are cases to respond to as well. Imprisonment rate is high in the states, enabling vulnerability to the abuse of prison labour to many, given that compulsory labour is a legal form of punishment. The United States also has

a Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS), which seeks to find approaches to combat human trafficking by thorough research and examination of the causes.

Australia: By being part of the former British Empire, slave trade was banned in 1807 and slavery was illegalised in 1833, however, it has never been characterised as a slave state. Former prime minister, Scott Morrison stated in an interview in 2020 that “ there was no slavery in Australia “. The people of the country are among the least vulnerable to forced labour and marriage in the Pacific region, yet statistics show the existence of victims. Estimates report around 40,000 cases of forced labour and marriage, although the prevalence is low given the size of the country and hence its population. Government response is among the best in the world, however. The Australian government introduced a Modern Slavery Act in 2018, which targeted businesses to abide by the newly created rules and give annual reports on the risks of modern slavery.

The United Kingdom: The history of the United Kingdom has connections to slavery, both to its exploitation and to its abolishment. In 1833 they were among pioneers to ban the traditional form of involuntary servitude, on their colonies as well. Nowadays, the country responds to the issues with attentive ears, its score is the highest in the world, and the prevalence of modern slavery is among the lowest. Many international organisations exist in the United Kingdom, which aim to prevent or tackle modern slavery. Modern Slavery Act 2015 passed in the country, setting out the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, which has the role of encouraging good practice in the prevention, investigation, prosecution and ending of modern slavery cases.

China: According to several UN reports, there is widespread state-imposed practice of modern slavery in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), mostly affecting minorities, such as the Tibetans and the Uyghur people. These people are thought to be imprisoned, tortured and furthermore, forced to do labour. The Chinese government denied all allegations initially, later admitted to the existence of such training centres, saying that they were to “counter extremism and separatist activity”. The main issue the workers in the country are subject to is related to the multinational companies since their suppliers are often based in China.

North Korea: There have been numerous reports stating the inhumane conditions one needs to suffer in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Although the government in Pyongyang denies all alleged accusations, people who were able to flee the country have made statements about the situation. The Global Slavery Index shows that they are the

leading state in the prevalence of modern slavery, with the lowest government response as well. Apparently, widespread use of forced labour is present, including the work done in political prison camps and labour done by children. Migrants are not treated well either, they are also subject to modern slavery and its forms.

International Labour Organization: Since the ILO participates in most of current day labour affairs, it is no surprise they take part in combating modern slavery. They have launched various programs seeking to end child labour, forced labour and human trafficking, such as the Multi Partner Fund or the Measurement, Awareness Raising, and Policy Engagement Project (MAP16). The organisation has member states, who are required to comply with standards set in conventions or other documents.

Timeline of Events

4th millennium BC - Appearance of the first civilizations and thus of the first slaves

Ancient age - Societies with a vast number of slaves

1492 - Christopher Columbus's discovery of the Americas

1619 - Turning point in the transatlantic slave trade

1833 - United Kingdom introduces the Abolition of Slavery act, prohibiting slavery in all of its colonies

December 18, 1865 - The 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution passes, the abolishment of slavery in the United States of America

1919 - The establishment of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which would later become the only tripartite UN agency

1930 - Forced labour convention of the ILO

1945 - Establishment of the United Nations after years of planning

December 10, 1948 - The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration of Human Rights, a document containing the fundamental rights to which every person is entitled

December 1993 - The UN General Assembly established The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

2014 - Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 of the International Labour Organization

2020 - Covid pandemic lockdown increases vulnerability to forced marriage and labour

2021 – Reports show cases of 49.7 million people trapped in modern slavery, many comparing it to a prior estimation recorded in 2016

December 02, 2023 – International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, to amass attention to the currently still existing issue

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Dealing with the issue of modern slavery has been a goal of the world for decades now, and there have been multiple initiatives. Acts and conventions focusing on different aspects of the problem have been introduced, not only by the United Nations, but Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and some countries themselves have also taken action inside their borders.

The ILO has introduced several conventions on forced labour oppression, such as, but not limited to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, which provides a clear definition of the aforementioned situation, or the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957, requiring signatories to suppress and not abuse compulsory labour. The former was reviewed recently under Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 with the purpose of creating “measures to prevent and eliminate its use, to provide victims with protection and access to appropriate and effective remedies, such as compensation, and to sanction the perpetrators of forced or compulsory labour”.

The United Kingdom’s Modern Slavery Act was adopted in 2015, which sets out a range of measures within the country to combat the issue. It mainly requires larger businesses to ensure transparency by annual reports on the matter, furthermore, it established an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner for thorough research and prosecution of the issue. Similar act has been

enacted in Australia in 2018, mandating an annual report from businesses over AU\$100 million revenue. Ever since it has been revised and expanded, one of the major changes being the lowering of the threshold to AU\$50 million. What is more, the United States' attempt to put an end to the ongoing affairs of modern slavery is worth mentioning, under the Program to Eliminate Modern Slavery (PEMS).

Since the majority of females who are trapped in a forced marriage are girls, there have been campaigns to end their entrapment, such being the "Too Young to Wed" campaign of the United Nations, for instance, which followed the Swiss Anti-Human Trafficking Week. Not only this, but countries have also implemented measures to protect the youth from forced marriages via laws, for example in the Netherlands, the Harmful Practices action plan set out measures to combat such form of modern slavery, and the Forced Marriage (Prevention) Act to legally forbid marriage under 18 beside other regulations.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

To tackle the problem, one may need a multifaceted approach. One aspect could include the funding of investigation of the eradication of the problem at its roots, by examining the factors which lead to entrapment into modern slavery. Such include the existence of corruption, poverty and labour conditions. Although currently, many individual organisations are on the same path, the problem still exists and needs further research, and one should ensure the neutrality and unbiasedness of the investigators.

Exploring the shift to a human rights economy can also lead to success, as it has been proposed by special rapporteurs in a joint statement in early December 2023. The suggestion calls for a policy of "leaving no one behind", instead of an urge to restore and maintain the economy.

Nonetheless, to prevent state-imposed forced labour, governments could be urged to acknowledge the existence of such, and to illegalise practices that can lead to this form of modern slavery. Ensuring that minorities are treated appropriately is crucial, and a proper investigation of the migrant workers' exploitation may be proposed. The removal of laws that prevent or make it difficult for workers to leave an exploitative job without the risk of losing one's visa and deportation could also contribute to the decrease of forced labour.

Recommendations for businesses include the immediate cessation of contracts with suppliers, where modern slavery is proven to exist or is at extremely high risk. Countries should agree on rules as regards to obligatory annual reports of multinational and other larger businesses.

The prevention of forced marriages could be contributed to by introducing international laws as some countries have already done it. Raising the legality of marriages to 18 years old is one solution, although some cultures may not comply with it. It is crucial, however, to recognise if one is a victim, and seek to assist them as much as possible.

Since transparency is key, one could further fund programs, campaigns and individual organisations seeking to give reports on slavery in certain areas. Also, each country could be requested to provide a detailed report on how workers, including children, are treated, as well as how evident forced marriages are in the state, nevertheless the primary reasons that lead to the existence of modern slaves within its borders.

Modern slavery still continues to exist, with an increasingly high number of people trapped in it. All member states should take immediate steps to find temporary and permanent solutions, given the inhumane nature of the activity, and how much it does not comply with basic human rights.

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To find further statistics, you may visit the following website, which displays each country on Earth and their global slavery index scores in different areas:

<https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/map/>