

# RESEARCH REPORT

## COMMITTEE: HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### Topic 2:

The question of addressing the persistence of child labour and modern forms of slavery within global supply chains.

## INTRODUCTION

The persistence of child labour and modern slavery within global supply chains represents a critical barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly regarding the right to education and decent work. Despite increased international scrutiny from civil society and governments, the complexity of modern production continues to facilitate systemic human rights violations that require coordinated multilateral intervention and corporate accountability. Addressing these risks necessitates that businesses move beyond awareness to implement practical frameworks for identifying and managing exploitation within their deeper operations.

## KEY TERMS

### Child Labour:

- Refers to work that is hazardous or performed by children who are too young for the specific task
- It is often linked to global production networks and hinders a child's education and development

### Modern Slavery:

- An umbrella term covering legal concepts such as forced labour, debt bondage, and slavery-like practices
- Unlike forced labour, it generally also includes forced marriage

### Forced Labour:

- Pervasive exploitation in today's labour markets where work is performed involuntarily under threat of penalty

### Human Trafficking:

- The recruitment and movement of people through force or deception for the purpose of exploitation

**Debt Bondage:**

- A specific form of modern slavery where a person is forced to work to pay off a debt while losing control over their employment conditions

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANTS**

- **1973:** ILO Convention No. 138 sets minimum working age
- **1989:** UN Convention on the Rights of the Child protects children from economic exploitation
- **1999:** ILO Convention No. 182 bans the worst forms of child labour
- **1990s-2000s:** Global supply chains expand, increasing risk of hidden child labour and forced labour
- **2011:** UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights introduce corporate due diligence
- **2015:** SDG 8.7 commits states to eliminate child labour and forced labour by 2025
- **2016:** Launch of Alliance 8.7, global partnership to coordinate action against child labour and modern slavery
- **2018:** UK Modern Slavery Act requires companies to report on slavery risks in supply chains
- **2021:** UN declares International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour
- **2024:** ~138 million children still in child labour

**CURRENT SITUATION**

- 138 million children are still engaged in child labour worldwide (2024), with around 54 million in hazardous conditions, particularly in agriculture, mining, and informal work, putting their health, safety, and education at risk.
- Progress in reducing child labour has been made since 2020, but it is uneven across regions; economic shocks, poverty, and crises threaten to reverse these gains, and the SG 8.7 target for 2025 will not be met.
- Modern slavery and forced labour persist across global supply chains; exploitation is driven by poverty, lack of access to education, weak governance, and complex multi-tiered supply networks that make monitoring and enforcement difficult.

## KEY COUNTRY POSITIONS

### India:

- Child labour in agriculture, textiles, informal sectors
- Focus on poverty reduction, education, social protection, gradual reforms

### Bangladesh:

- Child labour in garment and textile production
- Emphasis on international cooperation, corporate engagement, balancing economic growth and labour standards

### Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):

- Child labour in hazardous mining (cobalt, minerals)
- Focus on international support, governance improvements, supply chain accountability

### China:

- Labour exploitation in manufacturing and electronics
- Focus on economic development, job creation, national regulations over strict international oversight

### USA:

- Major importer linked to global supply chains with child labour
- Emphasis on corporate responsibility, transparency, due diligence, laws against forced labour imports

## CONCLUSION

Addressing child labor and modern slavery within global supply chains remains a critical human rights challenge. Despite international agreements, current figures indicate that approximately 138 million children were affected by child labor in 2024, suggesting that the 2030 agenda goal (SDG 8.7) will not be met without significant changes. The complexity of modern supply chains allows exploitation to remain hidden, particularly in sectors like agriculture and mining.

