

REGIONAL FINDINGS

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King City, California, April 2020.

Socially-distanced migrant farm labourers rest in their dormitory. Restrictions on movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with rising unemployment rates, poverty, and inequality across the United States, exposed vulnerable workers to greater risks of exploitation. Photo credit: Brent Stirton via Getty Images

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

What is the extent and nature of modern slavery across the world’s regions?

Globally, nearly one in every 150 people are in modern slavery. Modern slavery affects every region in the world. More than half the men, women, and children living in modern slavery globally are in the Asia and the Pacific region (29.3 million). However, when the size of regional populations is considered, prevalence of modern slavery is highest in the Arab States (10.1 per thousand people) (Figure 11). This is followed by Europe and Central Asia (6.9 per thousand), Asia and the Pacific (6.8 per thousand), Africa (5.2 per thousand), and the Americas (5 per thousand).

Although comparisons between regions are impacted by data gaps, particularly in countries experiencing profound and current conflict (see Appendix 2: Part A for a fuller discussion of limitations), interesting differences emerge when forced labour and forced marriage are considered separately. For forced labour, Arab States has the highest prevalence (5.3 per thousand people),

followed by Europe and Central Asia (4.4 per thousand). The prevalence of forced labour is lowest in Africa (2.9 per thousand). For forced marriage, prevalence is again highest in the Arab States (4.8 per thousand), followed by Asia and the Pacific (3.3 per thousand), and lowest in the Americas (1.5 per thousand).

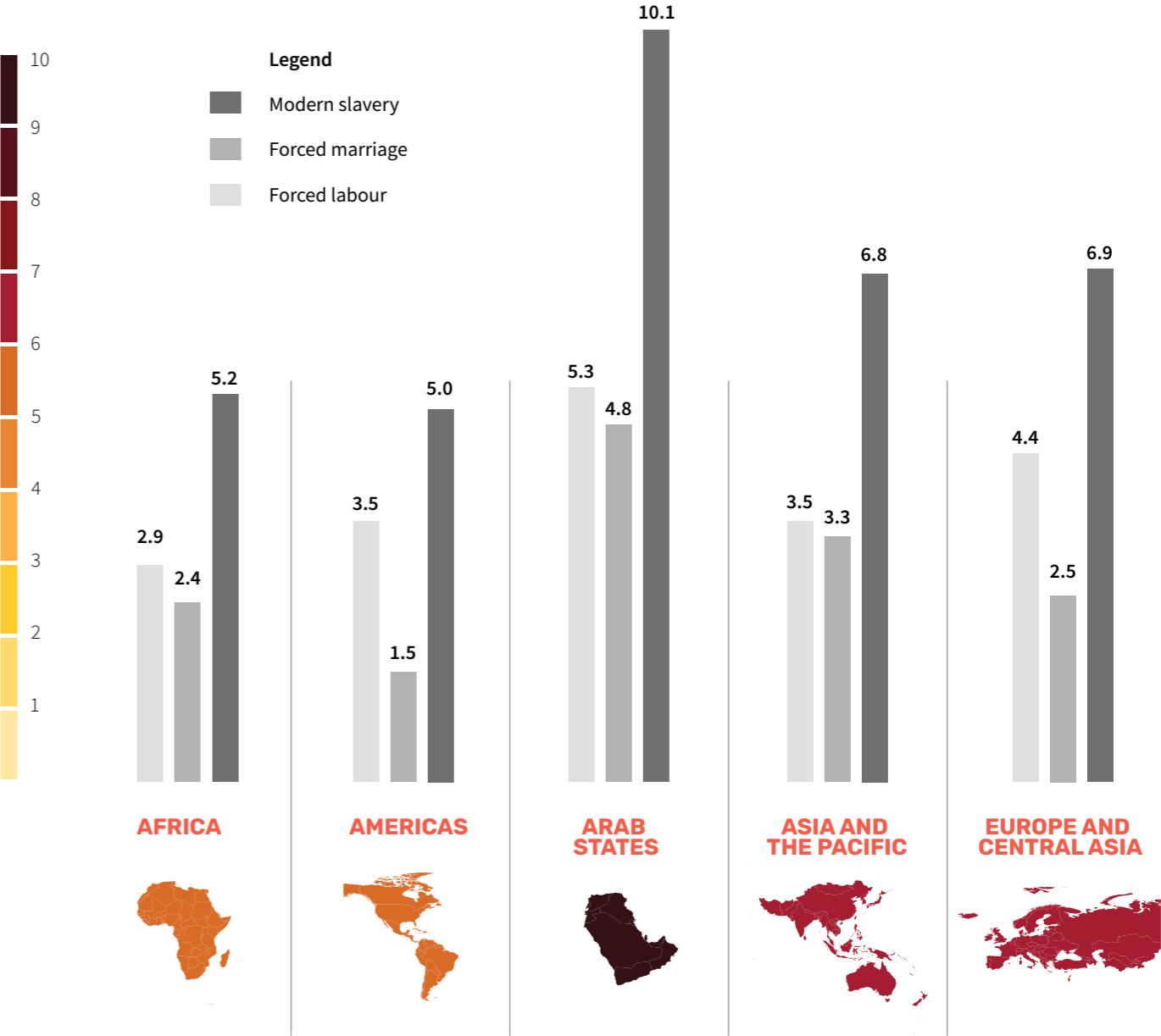
At the regional level, the impact of conflict and state-imposed forced labour on prevalence of modern slavery remains consistent with the global findings, with the highest prevalence occurring in countries with several reports of state-imposed forced labour or are otherwise impacted by protracted or recent conflict. The countries with highest prevalence across the regions include Eritrea, Mauritania, and South Sudan (Africa); Venezuela, Haiti and El Salvador (Americas); Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait (Arab States); North Korea, Afghanistan, and Myanmar (Asia and the Pacific); and Türkiye, Tajikistan, and Russia (Europe and Central Asia).

California, United States, October 2019.

An inmate firefighter crew works during the Palisades Fire which scorched at least 40 acres and threatened hillside homes. News media reports indicate that inmates work under exploitative conditions, receive little firefighter training, and are paid as little as US\$2.90 per day. Photo credit: Mario Tama via Getty Images.



Figure 10
Prevalence of modern slavery (per 1,000 people), by region and type



What drives vulnerability to modern slavery across the world’s regions?

Improving our understanding of which factors increase vulnerability to modern slavery is essential to developing and implementing successful interventions. Our assessment of country-level risk factors covers five dimensions — governance issues, lack of basic needs, inequality, disenfranchised groups, and effects of conflict — and is scored as a percentage where 100 represents extremely high vulnerability (see Appendix 2: Part B).

A regional analysis of our vulnerability measures suggests higher risk of modern slavery in Africa and the Americas than is evident in the prevalence data (Table 3). Africa has the highest vulnerability (64 per cent) of any region, despite having relatively low prevalence scores for both forced labour and forced marriage. The lowest levels of vulnerability are found in Europe and Central Asia (27 per cent). While regional risk differs across the dimensions, every region performs poorly on measures of acceptance of minority groups. In Europe and Central Asia, where there is relatively strong governance, access to basic needs, and low levels of inequality, there remain gaps in protection on the basis of migration status, sexual orientation, and racial and ethnic groups. Figure 11 shows how countries in the region scored in relation to the regional average on each dimension of vulnerability.

Regions	Governance issues (%)	Lack of basic needs (%)	Inequality (%)	Disenfranchised groups (%)	Effects of conflict (%)	Total (%)
Africa	61	53	52	70	37	64
Americas	44	35	55	52	25	44
Arab States	60	38	40	71	40	56
Asia and the Pacific	48	42	39	61	35	48
Europe and Central Asia	31	25	30	51	23	27

Idlib, Syria, December 2020.
A young boy crushes stones to sell as construction materials and help support his family living in a tent camp for internally displaced people. Thousands of civilians fled from attacks by the Assad regime to the camps and are struggling to survive in the harsh conditions as winter approaches. Photo credit: Muhammed Said/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images.



Figure 11
Level of vulnerability to modern slavery with regional averages



What are governments across the world’s region doing to address modern slavery?

Our assessment of government responses to modern slavery covers five milestones of a strong response — identification and support for survivors, effectiveness of criminal justice mechanisms, national and regional level coordination, efforts to address underlying risk, and government and business supply chains. This is scored as a percentage, where 100 represents the strongest possible response.

Europe and Central Asia has the strongest response to modern slavery, with an average score of 54 per cent. These governments, particularly those from the European subregion, generally had both high levels of political will to combat the issue and the required resources to enact comprehensive responses. Comparatively strong legal frameworks, including on monitoring business supply chains (for which scores were profoundly low across all regions), characterised the responses of these governments. However, there is not much difference in these scores in comparison to 2018; the actions

of many governments in this region had largely stagnated due to competing priorities in the intervening years.

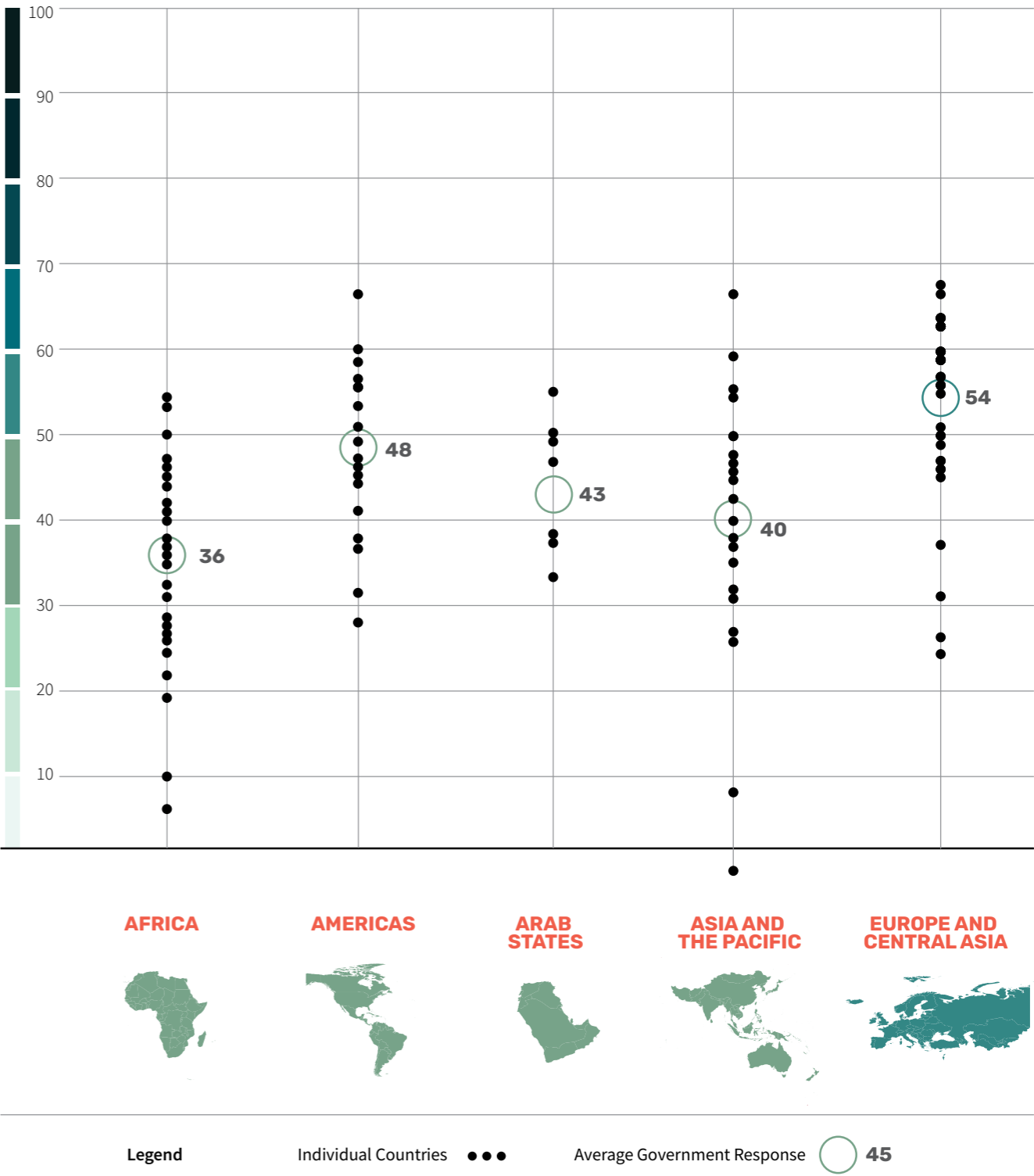
The Americas region has the second strongest response to modern slavery, reflecting continued improvements in both criminal justice frameworks and coordination of support services. The Arab States, while having the highest prevalence of modern slavery, has an average government response score of 43 per cent, driven by significant improvements in planning and coordination of responses against modern slavery, but also reflecting that few governments in the region are directly tackling the vulnerabilities associated with the *kafala* system.

While Africa has the lowest average government response score across the regions, it is outperforming Arab States on criminal justice mechanisms (Table 4). Average scores also hide great regional variability with some nations in Africa (Nigeria and South Africa) performing at a similar level to European nations. Implementing more comprehensive responses to combat modern slavery is still limited across all regions by resource constraints and the multiple and converging crises, such as ongoing conflicts, climate change, and the slow recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

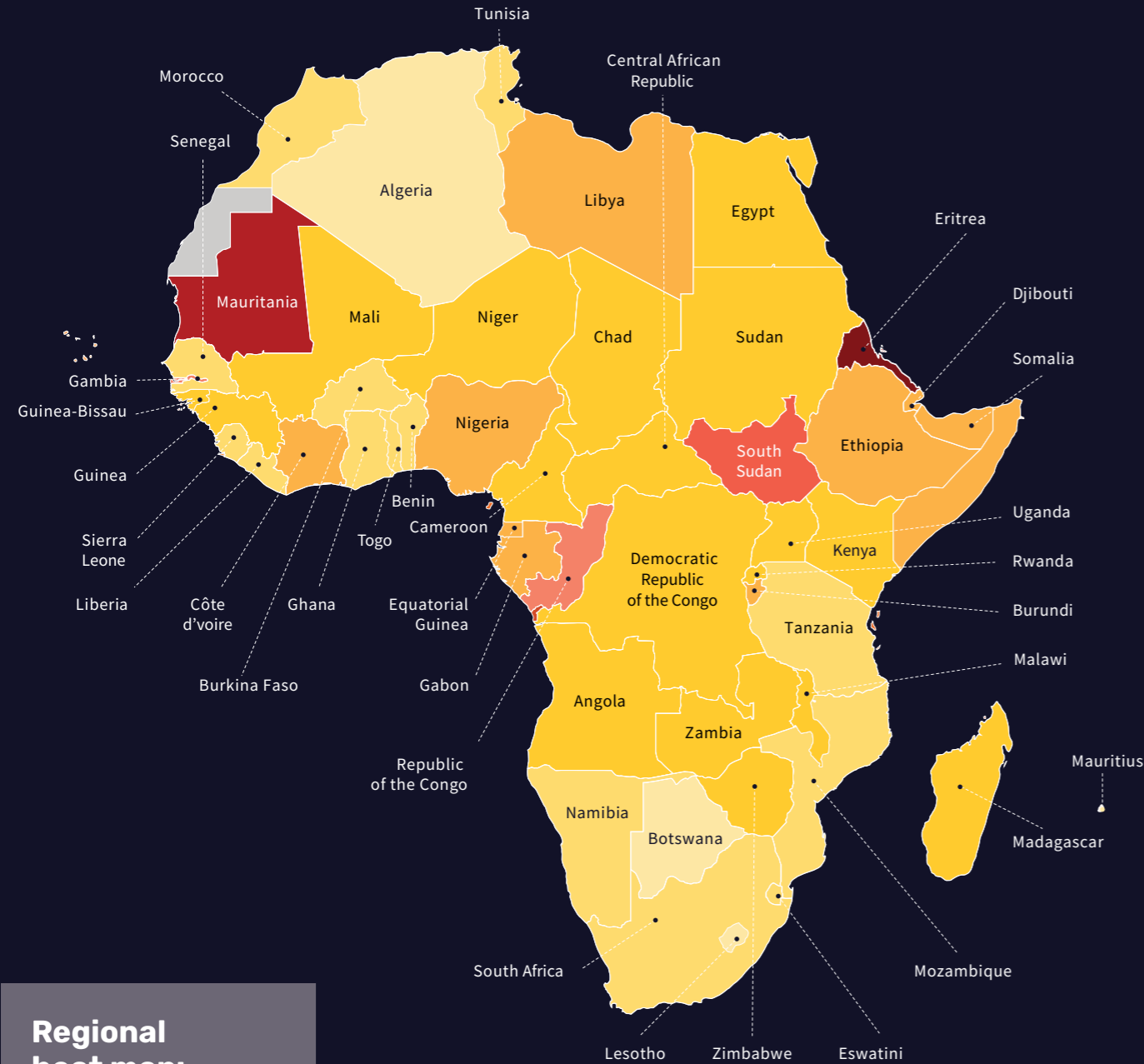
Table 4
Government response score, by region and milestone

Regions	Survivors identified and supported (%)	Criminal justice mechanisms (%)	National and regional level coordination (%)	Risk factors are addressed (%)	Government and business supply chains (%)	Total (%)
Africa	34	46	42	37	1	36
Americas	46	58	56	52	5	48
Arab States	51	45	56	48	0	43
Asia and the Pacific	38	48	51	45	4	40
Europe and Central Asia	54	62	64	58	17	54

Figure 12
Government response score with regional averages



AFRICA



Africa is a vast and diverse region that accounts for 17 per cent of the world’s population. Modern slavery in Africa is driven by ongoing political instability, poverty, displacement of people due to conflict and climate change, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Modern slavery manifests differently throughout Africa; it occurs in every country in the region, while those with higher prevalence typically experience compounding vulnerability factors. More than 3.1 million Africans are in forced marriage, the drivers of which depend on factors in their location, such as the presence of conflict, poverty, or persistence of certain traditional practices. There are more than 3.8 million people in forced labour across Africa. At particularly high risk are adults and children who travel from rural and remote areas to urban centres seeking work. Higher rates of descent-based slavery and forced begging continue to occur in parts of the Sahel.

Over the past four years, many African countries have taken actions to improve their response to modern slavery. Nigeria and South Africa have taken the most action, while Eritrea and Libya have taken the least. South Sudan was excluded from the assessment of government action on modern slavery due to ongoing conflict and extreme disruption to government function. Much more needs to be done to provide support for survivors, strengthen laws to protect people, and develop national strategies to combat modern slavery.

What is the extent and nature of modern slavery in the region?

On any given day in 2021, an estimated 7 million men, women, and children were living in modern slavery in Africa, a prevalence of 5.2 people in modern slavery for every thousand people. Africa had the fourth highest prevalence of modern slavery among the five regions of the world, following the Arab States (10.1 per thousand), Europe and Central Asia (6.9), and Asia and the Pacific (6.8). Forced labour was the most common form of modern slavery in the region, at a rate of 2.9 per thousand people, while forced marriage was at 2.4 per thousand.

When considering the total number of people in forced marriage worldwide, 13 per cent (3.2 million) were in Africa, second to Asia and the Pacific, which at 65 per cent has by far the highest share of the world’s forced marriages. Fourteen per cent of all people in forced labour were in Africa (3.8 million), the third highest behind Asia and the Pacific (55 per cent) and Europe and Central Asia (15 per cent).

The countries with the highest prevalence of modern slavery in Africa are Eritrea, Mauritania, and South Sudan. The countries with the lowest prevalence of modern slavery in Africa are Mauritius, Lesotho, and Botswana.

Nearly 4 million men, women, and children experience forced labour in Africa, particularly in the mining, agriculture, fishing, and domestic work sectors.¹ African job seekers misled by traffickers with false promises are subjected to forced labour abroad, such as in the Gulf states.² Children are also exploited in their pursuit of education. For example, under the *confiage* (trust) system in Togo, children from rural areas are sent to cities to complete their education and live with relatives, who may force them into domestic servitude.³ Nigerian girls seeking employment as domestic helpers to help pay for schooling are also subjected to domestic servitude.⁴ In Senegal, *talibe* (student, seeker) children in Quranic schools are forced to beg.⁵

In Africa, forced marriage particularly impacts women and girls. One in every 300 females in the region was in a forced marriage compared to one in every thousand males.⁶ In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of child marriages increased in Sudan, Egypt,⁷ and parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC),⁸ and they nearly doubled in communities across Senegal and Uganda.⁹ Women and girls living in conflict zones also experience forced and child marriage, including as a negative coping mechanism by families to protect them from further violence¹⁰ and by fighters who abduct, marry, and exploit women and girls as domestic and sexual slaves.¹¹ Forced commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls is used as a weapon of war by both state and non-state groups, reportedly in the Central African Republic, the DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan,¹² and by both parties to the civil war in Ethiopia’s Tigray region.¹³

“My father introduced me to husbands since I was twelve.”

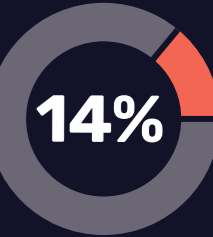
Sudanese female on her forced marriage at age 17

Although these figures are the most reliable to date, they are conservative estimates given the gaps and limitations of data collection in Africa. It is not possible to conduct nationally representative surveys in countries experiencing profound conflict, which leads to an underestimate of forms of modern slavery such as the recruitment of child soldiers. Despite gaps in data, reports indicate children have been recruited into armed groups in the DRC, Mali, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Nigeria, Libya, South Sudan, Sudan, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Somalia.¹⁴

Estimated number living in modern slavery:

7.0 MILLION
(5.2 per thousand)

Regional proportion of global estimate:



Forced labour

54%

Forced marriage

46%

Average vulnerability score:

64%

Average government response rating:

36%

Top 3 countries:
Nigeria 54%
South Africa 53%
Rwanda 50%

Bottom 3 countries:
Eritrea 5%
Libya 10%
Somalia 18%

Table 5
Estimated
prevalence and
number of people
in modern slavery,
by country

Regional rank	Country	Estimated prevalence of modern slavery (per 1,000 of population)	Estimated number of people in modern slavery	Population
1	Eritrea	90.3	320,000	3,546,000
2	Mauritania	32.0	149,000	4,650,000
3	South Sudan	10.3	115,000	11,194,000
4	Republic of the Congo	8.0	44,000	5,518,000
5	Nigeria	7.8	1,611,000	206,140,000
6	Equatorial Guinea	7.8	11,000	1,403,000
7	Gabon	7.6	17,000	2,226,000
8	Burundi	7.5	89,000	11,891,000
9	Côte d'Ivoire	7.3	193,000	26,378,000
10	Djibouti	7.1	7,000	988,000
11	Libya	6.8	47,000	6,871,000
12	Gambia	6.5	16,000	2,417,000
13	Ethiopia	6.3	727,000	114,964,000
14	Somalia	6.2	98,000	15,893,000
15	Chad	5.9	97,000	16,426,000
16	Cameroon	5.8	155,000	26,546,000
17	Central African Republic	5.2	25,000	4,830,000
18	Mali	5.2	106,000	20,251,000
19	Zambia	5.1	94,000	18,384,000
20	Kenya	5.0	269,000	53,771,000
21	Zimbabwe	5.0	74,000	14,863,000
22	Malawi	4.9	93,000	19,130,000
23	Niger	4.6	112,000	24,207,000
24	Madagascar	4.6	127,000	27,691,000
25	Democratic Republic of the Congo	4.5	407,000	89,561,000
26	Guinea-Bissau	4.5	9,000	1,968,000
27	Egypt	4.3	442,000	102,334,000
28	Rwanda	4.3	55,000	12,952,000
29	Uganda	4.2	190,000	45,741,000
30	Angola	4.1	136,000	32,866,000
31	Guinea	4.0	53,000	13,133,000
32	Sudan	4.0	174,000	43,849,000
33	Burkina Faso	3.7	77,000	20,903,000
34	Eswatini	3.6	4,000	1,160,000
35	Sierra Leone	3.4	27,000	7,977,000
36	Togo	3.3	28,000	8,279,000
37	Liberia	3.1	16,000	5,058,000
38	Benin	3.0	37,000	12,123,000
39	Mozambique	3.0	93,000	31,255,000
40	Senegal	2.9	49,000	16,744,000
41	Ghana	2.9	91,000	31,073,000
42	Tanzania	2.9	171,000	59,734,000
43	South Africa	2.7	158,000	59,309,000
44	Namibia	2.4	6,000	2,541,000
45	Tunisia	2.3	27,000	11,819,000
46	Morocco	2.3	85,000	36,911,000
47	Algeria	1.9	84,000	43,851,000
48	Botswana	1.8	4,000	2,352,000
49	Lesotho	1.6	4,000	2,142,000
50	Mauritius	1.5	2,000	1,272,000

What drives vulnerability to modern slavery in the region?

Africa has the highest vulnerability to modern slavery of all regions and is home to the four most vulnerable countries: South Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic, and the DRC (Table 6). Mauritius had the lowest vulnerability in the region. The largest driver of vulnerability was discrimination towards migrants and minority cultural and ethnic groups. Common to the most vulnerable countries are issues such as conflict, political instability, mass displacement, and poverty. The impacts of COVID-19 have compounded risk of modern slavery across the region.

Vulnerability to modern slavery was driven by a higher risk of discrimination on the basis of migration status, race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation. Contemporary reports of slavery exist in Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, and Sudan, where people, often from minority ethnic groups, are born into slavery and bought, traded, and sold.¹⁵ In Mauritania, Niger, and Mali, widespread ethnic or caste-based discrimination manifests in descent-based slavery.¹⁶ In Mauritania, for example, slavery tends to follow racial lines, as black Haratine people are typically forced to work for the lighter-skinned “white Moor” community in agriculture and domestic work.¹⁷ Despite some legal reforms, the practice of *Wahaya* (put in the bedroom) continues in northern Nigeria and Niger, where girls born into slavery are sold as a “fifth wife” and subjected to domestic and sexual servitude.¹⁸

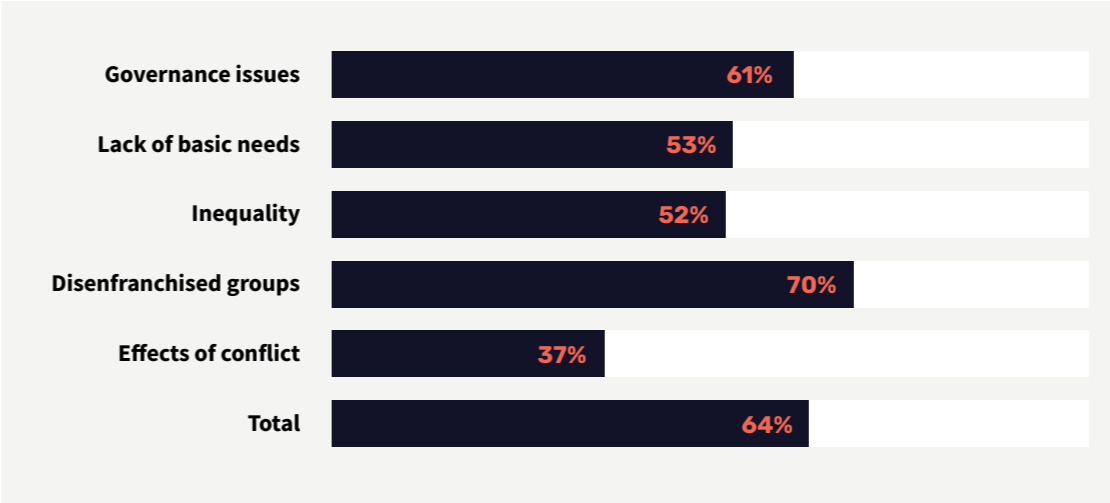


Figure 13
Level of
vulnerability to
modern slavery,
by dimension



Lome, Togo,
June 2021.
A young fisherman pulls the net with his catch from the water to the beach. Children reportedly as young as five years are trafficked from within the country as well as from neighbouring countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Niger, and are forced to work in sectors like fishing, agriculture, and domestic work, among others. Photo credit: Ute Grabowsky/Photothek via Getty Images.

Table 6
Level of
vulnerability to
modern slavery,
by country

Country	Total (%)
South Sudan	100
Somalia	98
Central African Republic	98
Democratic Republic of the Congo	94
Chad	84
Sudan	82
Libya	80
Guinea-Bissau	80
Republic of the Congo	77
Burundi	77
Niger	76
Nigeria	76
Zimbabwe	75
Mali	73
Cameroon	71
Equatorial Guinea	69
Ethiopia	67
Mozambique	67
Kenya	66
Mauritania	66
Eritrea	66
Guinea	66
Uganda	62
Angola	61
Madagascar	60
Lesotho	59
Eswatini	59
Gabon	59
Egypt	59
Côte d'Ivoire	59
Zambia	58
Gambia	58
Djibouti	57
Togo	57
Liberia	56
Burkina Faso	56
Sierra Leone	55
Malawi	55
Tanzania	53
Rwanda	53
Senegal	53
South Africa	52
Benin	48
Tunisia	48
Namibia	47
Ghana	45
Botswana	45
Morocco	44
Algeria	43
Mauritius	20

Some countries in the region continued to exhibit political instability, weak rule of law, and corruption, all of which increase the risk of modern slavery. Overall, governance issues were the second greatest driver of vulnerability in the region. South Sudan and Somalia have faced violent clashes and political instability.¹⁹ From 2020 to early 2022, there have been multiple military takeovers in the region: in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan,²⁰ in addition to failed military coups in Niger and Guinea-Bissau.²¹ This political unrest can cause displacement and disrupt national responses to modern slavery, putting people at higher risk.

Poverty and economic inequality drive vulnerability in the Africa region. Thirty-five per cent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa live in poverty.²² Poverty can drive desperate families to marry off daughters to reduce household costs and generate an income through obtaining a bride dowry.²³ Families living in extreme poverty may also require their children to enter the workforce. In 2020, there were more child labourers in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined.²⁴ Widespread child labour increases the risk of the worst forms of child labour.²⁵ Poverty and limited job opportunities in Africa also drive migration, which increases risk of exploitation by labour recruiters.²⁶ This migration is predominantly intra-regional and marked by the movement of low-skilled workers, particularly in sectors characterised by high demand such as agriculture, aquaculture, construction, resource extraction, and domestic work.²⁷

Compared to other regions, parts of Africa are heavily impacted by conflict. At the end of 2020 there were more than 24 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sub-Saharan Africa, most of whom were displaced due to conflict and violence.²⁸ In Nigeria, the DRC, and South Sudan, modern slavery and related abuses were not only prevalent among IDPs but were inextricably linked to conflict. Perpetrators of slavery-related abuses were largely members of the armed groups or armed forces who deliberately exploited displaced populations to further their conflict-related operations.²⁹ Risks also persist within IDP camps. For example, some camps in Eastern Sudan have decreased security, thereby becoming targets for traffickers.³⁰ The number of people displaced from their homes will only increase further with climate change. It is estimated that without any action on climate change there will be 86 million internal climate migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2050.³¹ Displaced populations are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

“When [armed group] kidnapped me, I was forced to marry one of their leaders.”

Nigerian female on her forced marriage at age 28



What are governments in the region doing to address modern slavery?

Walk Free assessed government responses to modern slavery in 51 countries in the region. Governments across the region scored an average of 36 per cent, the weakest average response of all regions. Overall, while governments improved identification measures and legal frameworks, gaps in services available to survivors remained and only limited action has been taken to address systemic risk factors to modern slavery. While three countries have identified and taken action with high-risk sectors to address modern slavery, no country has taken further action to combat modern slavery in government and business supply chains. South Sudan was excluded from the assessment of government action on modern slavery due to ongoing conflict and extreme disruption to government function.

GDP per capita PPP (current international \$) varies widely across the region. Of the four countries with the strongest responses (Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda, and Tunisia — see Table 7), it varies from US\$2,494 in Rwanda to a high of US\$14,420 in South Africa.³² Relative to their wealth, both Nigeria and Rwanda are outperforming their wealthiest neighbours in Africa, such as Seychelles, Libya, Mauritius, Equatorial Guinea, and Botswana.³³ Given Rwanda has the lowest GDP per capita of all four countries, but with relatively strong government responses to modern slavery, it is outperforming all countries in the region on action taken to address modern slavery relative to its wealth.

Nigeria (54 per cent), South Africa (53 per cent), and Rwanda (50 per cent) have the strongest responses to modern slavery in the region. Nigeria and South Africa both strongly address risk factors to modern slavery and provide adequate protection to citizens overseas.

Eritrea has the weakest government response to modern slavery in Africa and the second weakest response globally (5 per cent), followed by Libya (10 per cent). Eritrea’s and Libya’s responses are undermined by state-imposed forced labour. Eritrean citizens aged 18 to 40 years are forced into labour indefinitely in the government’s compulsory national service scheme.³⁴ They are threatened with torture, prison, or harm to their family members for refusing to comply.³⁵ In Libya, migrants continue to be trafficked and sold in “slave markets” where they are then tortured for ransom or exploited in forced labour.³⁶ In some instances, the only way out of detention centres for migrants is to be sold to employers.³⁷

Many countries in Africa have taken action to improve their response to modern slavery since our 2018 assessment. Angola introduced the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and allocated funding and support to the operation of shelters.³⁸ Namibia implemented a National Referral Mechanism and provided police and immigration officials with pocket manuals on procedures.³⁹ The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and Similar Practices in Guinea introduced standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral, however it is unclear if these procedures have been operationalised.⁴⁰

Manica Province, Mozambique, May 2022.

A woman sits outside of a dormitory at a refuge for women and children who have survived sexual violence, gender-based violence, and abandonment. Studies estimate that half of all Mozambican women are married before the age of 18, and more than one in five have experienced violence. Photo credit: Alfredo Zunigo/AFP via Getty Images.

Table 7
Government
response score,
by country and
milestone

Country	Survivors identified and supported (%)	Criminal justice mechanisms (%)	National and regional level coordination (%)	Risk factors are addressed (%)	Government and business supply chains (%)	Total (%)
Nigeria	68	58	50	57	0	54
South Africa	45	69	63	57	0	53
Rwanda	55	62	38	57	0	50
Tunisia	50	54	50	57	0	47
Kenya	55	50	50	50	0	46
Uganda	50	50	75	43	0	46
Ethiopia	41	54	50	57	0	45
Ghana	45	54	63	36	13	45
Mozambique	50	54	50	43	0	45
Zambia	50	46	50	57	0	45
Angola	59	46	63	29	0	44
Egypt	55	42	38	57	0	44
Namibia	55	46	25	57	0	44
Botswana	32	54	63	50	0	42
Madagascar	41	65	25	36	0	42
Tanzania	45	54	50	36	0	42
Cameroon	55	46	38	36	0	41
Liberia	50	42	50	43	0	41
Benin	32	54	50	43	0	40
Lesotho	36	50	50	43	0	40
Morocco	23	54	50	57	0	40
Senegal	36	50	63	36	0	40
Malawi	55	46	38	21	0	38
Côte d'Ivoire	18	50	63	43	13	37
Niger	23	54	50	43	0	37
Algeria	23	54	38	43	0	36
Burkina Faso	45	42	38	29	0	36
Democratic Republic of the Congo	32	42	50	36	13	36
Djibouti	41	46	38	29	0	36
Eswatini	27	38	50	57	0	36
Gambia	23	58	25	43	0	36
Guinea	36	50	38	29	0	36
Mauritius	32	50	25	43	0	36
Mauritania	27	54	38	29	0	35
Guinea-Bissau	32	35	25	57	0	33
Seychelles	23	46	38	43	0	33
Sierra Leone	27	46	38	36	0	33
Togo	27	42	38	43	0	33
Cabo Verde	23	35	50	43	0	31
Mali	23	50	50	14	0	31
Burundi	23	42	63	14	0	29
Republic of the Congo	41	27	38	21	0	28
Central African Republic	23	42	25	21	0	27
Zimbabwe	27	35	38	21	0	27
Sudan	9	46	38	21	0	26
Chad	14	38	13	36	0	24
Gabon	27	31	25	21	0	24
Equatorial Guinea	27	27	25	14	0	22
Somalia	9	27	25	21	0	18
Libya	-9	35	25	-7	0	10
Eritrea	-5	23	25	-21	0	5

“After I reported [my employer] to Labour, they bribed someone at Labour and I was told to return to work.”

29-year-old female domestic worker in Botswana

No country in Africa has fully criminalised all forms of modern slavery, yet legal frameworks have improved in Africa over the last four years. For example, during this period the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 has entered into force in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Côte d’Ivoire.⁴¹ Further, the Republic of the Congo criminalised human trafficking in domestic legislation in 2019.⁴² Encouragingly, 48 out of 51 governments we assessed have provided basic training on victim identification to general police. Only Mauritania, Libya, and Sudan have not.

“Governments should be providing training to government officials, public awareness campaigns, outreach education and advocacy campaigns, and prosecute human trafficking by providing training and technical assistance for law enforcement officials such as police.”

Survivor of modern slavery, Kenya, 2020

The coordination of modern slavery responses has shown some improvement across the region. While 12 countries in the region introduced or implemented National Action Plans (NAPs) to address modern slavery over the past four years, three countries failed to renew their previous plans, and 10 countries remained without formal strategies to combat any form of modern slavery. Only nine of the countries with NAPs have fully funded the activities within those plans (Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali). Just under half of the governments we assessed in Africa ensure services are provided to all survivors of modern slavery and 28 governments ensure child-friendly services are provided. In Kenya, five child protection centres provide child trafficking and child labour survivors with specialised services.⁴³

Risk factors such as attitudes, social systems, and institutions that enable modern slavery are weakly addressed in the region. There are only five countries in Africa where all children have access to birth registration systems and where over 95 per cent have a registered birth certificate (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Republic of the Congo, and Algeria). No government in the region ensures universal access to healthcare. Further, children

under the age of 18 can legally marry in all countries except Côte d’Ivoire, the DRC, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. A draft bill in Somalia was proposed in August 2020 that allowed minors to marry based on reproductive maturity, independent of age.⁴⁴ While the bill was ultimately not passed, it reveals a backwards step in terms of gender equality.

Systems are in place that allow asylum seekers to seek protection in 22 countries in the region. No country in Northern Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia) has appropriate systems in place for those seeking to flee humanitarian crises, despite the subregion being a regular migration route. The Libyan and Egyptian coastguards are supported by the European Union to intercept those fleeing and return them to Libya and Egypt where there is evidence of systemic discrimination, arrest, detention, and deportation. In Libya, migrants are additionally vulnerable to being bought and sold in slave markets.⁴⁵ Corruption and complicity also impede efforts to combat modern slavery in 36 out of the 51 countries. In Libya, officials working for coastguard, defence, immigration, and security authorities commit modern slavery crimes without fear of investigation or consequence.⁴⁶ In addition, state-imposed forced labour reportedly occurs in Libya,⁴⁷ Eritrea,⁴⁸ Egypt,⁴⁹ Mali,⁵⁰ Rwanda,⁵¹ and Zimbabwe.⁵²

“The government should be aware of the people migrating, know the reasons why they are migrating, ensure that the contracts and agreements made are valid, and ensure safety and work with the family to know that the migrant is safe.”

Survivor of modern slavery, Kenya, 2020

Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and more recently the DRC are the only countries in the region that have identified high-risk sectors and have taken action to eradicate modern slavery within supply chains. Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire are part of the Harkin-Engel Protocol to combat child labour in the cocoa sector,⁵³ while in 2019 the DRC created a regulatory authority to tackle child labour in cobalt and coltan mines.⁵⁴ However, governments in Africa have not taken broader action such as the introduction of legislation or human rights due diligence laws to ensure government and businesses stop sourcing goods and services produced by forced labour.

Freedom through faith

Faith leaders play an important role to identify, prevent, and remediate modern slavery in their communities. They occupy a unique position as they can see into the hearts of communities and are often a trusted source of information and advice.

“As faith leaders...you can see changes in people that would pass many others by. And you understand what poverty and desperation can do to men, women, and children. So you are uniquely placed to identify victims and help victims by putting them in touch with professionals who can help them and who can help deal with the perpetrators.”

Sheikh Armiyawo Shaibu, spokesperson for Ghana’s national chief Imam addressing fellow faith leaders at a Global Freedom Network event in Ghana, 2021

Faith leaders, together with faith-based organisations already working to protect vulnerable people, can empower their communities to act by providing them with the information and tools to understand modern slavery. Walk Free, through its faith-based arm the Global Freedom Network, works with religious leaders across the world to address modern slavery.

In 2014, faiths leaders from many Christian denominations, including Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox, and representatives of Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim faiths came together to sign the “Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery,” pledging to do everything in their power to eradicate modern slavery. Since then, more than 100 of the world’s most influential faith leaders from the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania have also pledged to help end modern slavery. The Global Freedom Network is developing a range of tools to support their efforts.

One tool, the Faith for Freedom smartphone app, was developed in consultation with a faith leaders advisory panel and gives faith leaders and their staff information on how to identify, respond to, and prevent modern slavery within their communities. The app has been launched in Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, and will expand to other countries. Further information on Walk Free’s work with faith leaders and religious organisations is available from the Walk Free website: <https://www.walkfree.org/projects/global-freedom-network/>.



Nouakchott, Mauritania, June 2018.
Mabrouka was a child when she was taken from her mother, also a survivor of forced labour, and was made to work as a domestic servant for a family in the Rosso area. When Mabrouka was 11 years old, she was badly burned while cooking for her abusers. Although freed in 2011, she was never able to go to school, and was married two years later when she was aged just 16. Now a mother, she is pictured with her own child. Photo credit: Seif Kousmate.

Promising Practices in Africa

Over 20 per cent of evaluated programs housed in the Promising Practices Database are delivered in Africa. These programs cover 42 countries in the region and target several types of modern slavery, including human trafficking, forced, servile or early marriage, the worst forms of child labour, and the use of child soldiers or exploitation of children by armed groups. Awareness-raising awareness campaigns and formal education were the most common interventions delivered in the evaluated programs. Overall, more than 80 per cent of programs delivered in Africa met some or all of their objectives, yet only 13 evaluated programs had a reliable evaluation methodology, scoring 3 or above on the Maryland Scale.⁵⁵

Spotlight on what works

An evaluation of the impact of two government-run unconditional cash transfers programs on early marriage and fertility rates in Malawi and Zambia raises interesting questions about the role of cash transfers in tackling modern slavery. The evaluation found that the impact on safe transition of youth aged 14 to 21 to adulthood (i.e., delayed pregnancy and marriage) was limited in both countries, with the exception of protective impact on marriage for male youth in Malawi.⁵⁶ This might point to the limited impact of cash transfers; however, the Promising Practices Database⁵⁷ and other systematic reviews have found that cash transfers are some of the most promising interventions, particularly when viewed as part of a multisectoral and holistic suite of interventions.

Recommendations for governments

- 1 Ensure support services are available for all survivors of modern slavery — women, men, and children — and that these support services are appropriately resourced.
- 2 The governments of Egypt, Eritrea, Libya, Mali, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe should immediately end state-imposed forced labour by repealing legislation and criminalising practices that allow it to occur.
- 3 Raise the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 without exception and support the economic empowerment of women and girls through increasing access to education and providing community empowerment programming.
- 4 Strengthen social protections, such as birth registration, access to education, unemployment insurance, universal healthcare, and sick leave to reduce vulnerability to forced marriage and to provide workers with basic income security. Extend social protection to workers in the informal sector in particular.
- 5 Identify sectors at high risk of forced labour and work with businesses and civil society to develop initiatives to eradicate forced labour and labour exploitation.

SHIVAN
PAVIN
ALUNGNAT

Musician, artist,
queer activist, feminist
and survivor leader.
Founder of Africa Nalia.

Frontline voices:

Modern slavery and the LGBTQI+ community

Experiencing marginalisation and discrimination is a key factor that can drive people into forms of modern slavery, intensify the lived experience of exploitation, and create barriers to accessing support. Despite some progress, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community still faces discrimination and marginalisation around the world today, which increases their vulnerability to modern slavery. Shivan Pavin Alungnat is a musician, artist, queer activist, feminist, and survivor leader based in Kenya. Shivan is the author of upcoming research on the intersection between queer communities and human trafficking. Here, Shivan shares their experience and expertise on how the modern slavery movement can best recognise and respond to the unique experiences of the LGBTQI+ community.

Being LGBTQI+ has been viewed as criminal as well as politically, religiously, and traditionally “un-African” across the African continent. The LGBTQI+ community faces systemic discrimination, violence, and exclusion, with society maintaining conservative views on gender identities and roles. Because these factors contribute to vulnerabilities to modern slavery, LGBTQI+ individuals are more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation.

In many African countries, members of the LGBTQI+ community are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and enslavement due to legislation that limits, and in some cases eliminates their rights. For example, some countries, such as Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and, more recently, Uganda, have laws that criminalise homosexuality and impose severe punishments, including imprisonment and even the death penalty. In many other countries, such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, there are laws that restrict the rights of LGBTQI+ people by prohibiting “promoting” homosexuality or denying them access

to health services. These laws have a devastating impact on the LGBTQI+ community, making it difficult for them to access basic services, such as healthcare and education, and putting them at risk of violence and persecution. Despite ongoing efforts by human rights organisations and LGBTQI+ activists, the rights of LGBTQI+ people remain under threat in many African countries. To compound this issue, LGBTQI+ people who flee their home countries to escape persecution may find themselves trapped in exploitative situations, including forced labour and sex trafficking, in countries of asylum.

As well as facing legal barriers to inclusion, research has revealed widespread social intolerance and discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community in Africa. According to one survey, the vast majority of respondents across 34 countries said they would not want to live next door to homosexuals.¹ Only 7 to 14 per cent of respondents in a similar study conducted in Kenya, Tunisia, and Nigeria agreed that homosexuality should be accepted by society.² Wage discrimination and underemployment related

to sexual orientation and gender expression persists across Africa, with one study estimating that such disparity costs South Africa alone US\$316.8 million each year.³

For many LGBTQI+ people, structural disadvantages and societal rejection begin in childhood. Cultural responses can force young members of the LGBTQI+ community into early and forced marriages to “convert” their identities, and access to education can be restricted.

The intersection between the LGBTQI+ community and modern slavery in Africa highlights the need for greater recognition of the unique challenges faced by LGBTQI+ individuals in the global fight against slavery. To date there has been limited knowledge sharing between both the modern slavery movement and the LGBTQI+ community. As a result, LGBTQI+ people are not always adequately informed about modern slavery risks to which they are likely more vulnerable and service providers in the space frequently lack the required knowledge and training to effectively respond to their needs. This creates multiple barriers to LGBTQI+ survivors accessing support and increases the risk of survivors returning to their situations of exploitation.

In order to address this intersection, it is crucial for governments, NGOs, and the LGBTQI+ community to work together to raise awareness and implement effective prevention and response strategies. This should include:

- Providing safe spaces for LGBTQI+ individuals who are at risk of exploitation, including shelters and support services for survivors of slavery.
- Developing anti-trafficking laws and policies that are inclusive of LGBTQI+ individuals and address their unique needs and experiences.
- Strengthening anti-trafficking efforts by working with LGBTQI+ organisations and advocates to increase awareness and advocacy on this issue.
- Providing training and education to law enforcement, immigration officials, and other relevant stakeholders on the specific challenges faced by LGBTQI+ individuals in the context of modern slavery.
- Implementing modern slavery programs and services that are specifically designed to meet the needs of LGBTQI+ individuals and ensure their access to justice and protection.



Kigali, Rwanda, May 2022.
Prince, a Rwandan model gets his make-up done before the Isano Fashion Show in Kigali to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. “Families are rejecting their family members because they’re gay, and we are in 2022, people need to get used to LGBTQI+ people”, says model Tonia. Around the world, many LGBTQI+ people face increased risks to modern slavery, included forced into ‘corrective’ marriages. Photo credit: Simon Wohlfahrt/ AFP via Getty Images.

THE AMERICAS



The Americas region is home to 13 per cent of the world's population, with varying levels of wealth, mobility, and security across and within countries in the region. Modern slavery in the region is driven by inequality,¹ increasing poverty,² discrimination against migrants and minority groups, political instability, and conflict. The situation has been exacerbated by economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it,³ as well as the impacts of climate-related displacement.

An estimated 3.5 per thousand people in the region are in forced labour and 1.5 per thousand in forced marriage. Mass migration fuels forced labour, particularly in the world's largest migration corridor from Mexico to the United States (US). Migrants flee countries such as Venezuela and others and congregate on the border between the US and Mexico.⁴ Forced marriage is linked to increased poverty and lower educational attainment,⁵ and is driven by longstanding patriarchal norms and fundamentalist religious beliefs within the region; for example, in North America forced marriage is reported in conservative religious sects.⁶

The US has taken the most action to tackle modern slavery in the Americas, followed by Canada, Argentina, and Uruguay. Cuba, Suriname, and Venezuela have taken the least action. Of the five G20 countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the US), Brazil, Canada and the US have taken action to tackle modern slavery in supply chains. Much more needs to be done to strengthen legislation to hold businesses to account and to tackle gender inequality that drives modern slavery of women and girls.

What is the extent and nature of modern slavery in the region?

An estimated 5.1 million men, women, and children were living in modern slavery on any given day in 2021. The Americas had the lowest prevalence of modern slavery among the five regions, with 5 in every thousand people living in modern slavery. The Americas had the third highest prevalence of forced labour (3.5 per thousand) and the lowest prevalence of forced marriage (1.5 per thousand) compared to other regions.⁷

Within the region, Venezuela, Haiti, and El Salvador had the highest prevalence of modern slavery. In Haiti⁸ and Venezuela⁹ modern slavery is intertwined with migration, political instability, and drug trafficking routes from South America to Central and North America,¹⁰ while in El Salvador it is associated with gang violence and gender-based violence.¹¹

The largest estimated numbers of people in modern slavery include some of the region's most populous countries — Brazil, the US, and Mexico. Three of every five people in modern slavery in the Americas are exploited in one of these countries. The countries with the lowest prevalence in the region are Canada, Uruguay, and Chile.

Children in the Americas are at particularly high risk of all forms of modern slavery. They have been recruited as soldiers in protracted civil conflicts in Colombia and Venezuela, resulting in long-lasting trauma.¹² Child recruitment by armed groups, gangs, and organised crime has increased in the region, impacting children in Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and El Salvador.¹³ Moreover, children are reportedly involved in hazardous labour in industries such as mining in gold and tin,¹⁴ drug trafficking,¹⁵ and agriculture, most notably in cotton, cattle, fishing, and tobacco.¹⁶ Commercial sexual exploitation of children occurs in the region. In the Caribbean, sex tourism,¹⁷ particularly involving children¹⁸ remains an issue, with sex tourists, primarily from the US, seeking to exploit children in countries such as Belize.¹⁹ UN estimates reveal that child marriage is prevalent in the region with 22 per cent of women between ages 20 and 24 having been married before the age of 18 years.²⁰ In the US, recent research estimated that 300,000 children were married between 2000 and 2018.²¹

Seasonal, temporary, and undocumented workers in the agricultural sector are vulnerable to forced labour, including workers in higher-income countries such as the US and Canada.²² This is particularly true in informal or rural labour contexts where there are limited regulations and few labour inspections.²³ Forced labour in US supply chains remains an issue in the Americas,²⁴ with agricultural workers in countries that supply products to the US market vulnerable to exploitation. Moreover, there are reports of compulsory prison labour in public and private prisons in Brazil²⁵ and the US.²⁶

Although these estimates are the most reliable to date, they are conservative given the gaps and limitations of data collection in the Americas. These figures do not capture all forms of modern slavery, such as recruitment of child soldiers, trafficking for the purposes of organ removal, and all child marriages.

“The farm owner hired me...[and] he used to say to me to wait when the work was done then he would pay me, but at the end he did not pay.”

42-year-old Brazilian male agricultural worker

Estimated number living in modern slavery:

5.1 MILLION
(5 per thousand)

Regional proportion of global estimate:



Forced labour

71%

Forced marriage

29%

Average vulnerability score:

44%

Average government response rating:

48%

Top 3 countries:
United States 67%
Canada 60%
Argentina 58%

Bottom 3 countries:
Venezuela 27%
Cuba 31%
Suriname 31%

Table 8
Estimated
prevalence and
number of people
in modern slavery,
by country

Regional rank	Country	Estimated prevalence of modern slavery (per 1,000 of population)	Estimated number of people in modern slavery	Population
1	Venezuela	9.5	270,000	28,436,000
2	Haiti	8.2	94,000	11,403,000
3	El Salvador	8.1	52,000	6,486,000
4	Guatemala	7.8	140,000	17,916,000
5	Colombia	7.8	397,000	50,883,000
6	Ecuador	7.6	135,000	17,643,000
7	Nicaragua	7.3	49,000	6,625,000
8	Jamaica	7.3	22,000	2,961,000
9	Bolivia	7.2	83,000	11,673,000
10	Peru	7.1	234,000	32,972,000
11	Honduras	7.0	69,000	9,905,000
12	Dominican Republic	6.6	72,000	10,848,000
13	Mexico	6.6	850,000	128,933,000
14	Paraguay	6.4	46,000	7,133,000
15	Cuba	5.4	61,000	11,327,000
16	Brazil	5.0	1,053,000	212,559,000
17	Trinidad and Tobago	4.7	7,000	1,399,000
18	Panama	4.7	20,000	4,315,000
19	Guyana	4.2	3,000	787,000
20	Argentina	4.2	189,000	45,196,000
21	United States	3.3	1,091,000	331,003,000
22	Costa Rica	3.2	16,000	5,094,000
23	Chile	3.2	61,000	19,116,000
24	Uruguay	1.9	7,000	3,474,000
25	Canada	1.8	69,000	37,742,000

What drives vulnerability to modern slavery in the region?

Vulnerability to modern slavery in the Americas region is driven largely by inequality, political instability, and discrimination against migrants and minority groups (Figure 14). Conflict disproportionately impacted two countries in the region, Mexico and Colombia, while vulnerability was further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related disasters across the region. At the country level, vulnerability to modern slavery is highest in Haiti and lowest in Canada (Table 9).

Inequality represents the greatest driver of vulnerability in the Americas. Certain populations, including women, children, migrants, and Indigenous people, face heightened vulnerability as a result of systemic discrimination. In Haiti, children known as *restavecs* (stay withs), who are given away by their parents to a host household, are vulnerable to exploitation in domestic servitude, with girls particularly at risk.²⁷ *Restavec* children are trafficked and are at increased vulnerability to sexual abuse.²⁸ Across the region, Indigenous populations are particularly vulnerable to modern slavery. For example, although Indigenous women make up only 4 per cent of the population of Canada, they comprise at least 50 per cent of identified survivors of human trafficking.²⁹ Migrant workers are also at greater risk, with the absence of protections in several countries, such as the right to form a union or laws prohibiting recruitment fees.³⁰

Governance issues, such as political instability, lack of political rights, and poor regulatory quality, also drive vulnerability to modern slavery by causing displacement and hampering the national response. Violent protests in Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, the assassination of the President of Haiti in 2021 and increasing control of the country by street gangs and growing political polarisation in Brazil and the US³¹ drive vulnerability across the region. High rates of violent crime in several countries including Venezuela, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Jamaica,³² and weak confidence in judicial systems in Mexico, Haiti, and Venezuela, diminish accessibility to legal rights, representation, and prosecution.³³ In Venezuela, political instability and corruption among the prosecution and judiciary undermines law enforcement efforts,³⁴ while armed groups continue to commit acts of violence against civilians, thereby driving mass migration.³⁵

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by governance issues across the region, as patriarchal attitudes that suppress women’s agency persist at both the household and institutional levels.³⁶ Such attitudes contribute to the absence of laws protecting women and girls — for example, laws that set the minimum age of marriage at 18 without exception³⁷ — and a lack of enforcement of existing legal frameworks covering violence against women.³⁸

Recife, Brazil, October 2022.

A transgender woman, who works as a sex worker in Brazil, sits outside overlooking the water. While sex work is not criminalised in Brazil, many rights were rolled back under the conservative government of President Bolsonaro. Today, the industry remains heavily stigmatised and workers suffered significant hardship during the pandemic, exposing them to greater risks of labour exploitation. Photo credit: Natália Corrêa/ Freedom Fund.



Figure 14
Level of vulnerability to modern slavery, by dimension

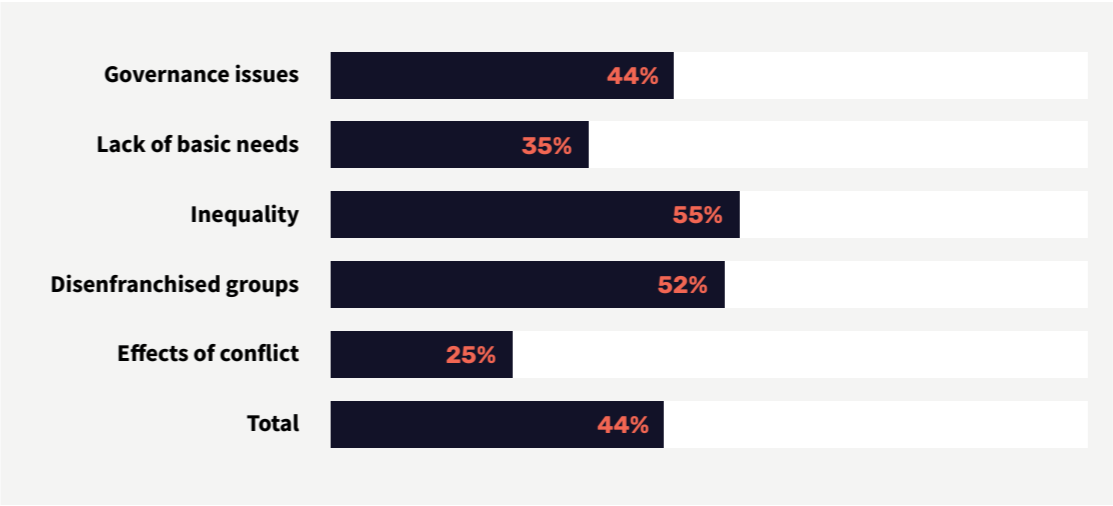


Table 9
Level of
vulnerability to
modern slavery,
by country

Country	Total (%)
Haiti	66
Venezuela	66
Honduras	62
Mexico	58
Guatemala	57
Nicaragua	54
El Salvador	53
Colombia	51
Ecuador	48
Paraguay	48
Peru	47
Brazil	47
Bolivia	47
Jamaica	45
Cuba	43
Guyana	41
Dominican Republic	41
Trinidad and Tobago	38
Argentina	36
Panama	33
Uruguay	27
United States	25
Costa Rica	24
Chile	22
Canada	11

Violence, poverty, political dysfunction, and environmental degradation across the region have led to a substantial increase in refugees, asylum-seekers, and other vulnerable and displaced populations.³⁹ The continual movement of migrants and refugees is a pressing issue in the Americas, which hosted 26 per cent of the world’s international migrants in 2020.⁴⁰ Venezuela’s political instability and socio-economic breakdown has pushed more than 6 million citizens to flee the country as of November 2021.⁴¹ The Mexico-US border is the world’s most popular migration corridor;⁴² over the five years from 2016 to 2021, some 4 million migrants were apprehended along the Mexico-US border, nearly half of whom came from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The remaining came predominately from Mexico and other nations.⁴³ In Mexico, migrants are held in crowded detention centres, while those who had sought assistance in shelters reported experiencing robbery, extortion, bodily harm, kidnapping, and abuse of authority while migrating, all factors which make these individuals vulnerable to modern slavery.⁴⁴ As many countries in the Americas have restrictive immigration policies, which force migrants to take increasingly precarious routes, thereby further exacerbating their vulnerability to trafficking and other forms of modern slavery.⁴⁵

What are governments in the region doing to address modern slavery?

Walk Free has assessed government responses to modern slavery in 32 countries in the Americas. Governments across the region scored an average of 48 per cent, second only to Europe and Central Asia. National responses in the Americas are mixed. Despite some strong responses in the region, there is evidence of weak criminal justice systems and inadequate protection for survivors, which are compounded by government crises, corruption, and large migration flows.

Wealth disparity impacts government responses to modern slavery within the region. Wealthier countries typically demonstrated stronger responses to modern slavery, with the US (67 per cent) and Canada (60 per cent) — the region’s wealthiest countries — ranking first and second respectively. The US also performed well at the global level, ranking within the top five. At the same time, some countries with comparatively lower wealth also demonstrated strong responses to modern slavery. Argentina’s response (58 per cent) ranked third in the region, only just below Canada, despite having less than half the GDP per capita PPP (current international \$) (US\$20,769 compared to US\$46,572).⁴⁶ Some of the countries that demonstrated the least action to respond to modern slavery had the lowest GDP per capita among countries assessed and had experienced political and economic disruption; for example, Venezuela (27 per cent) and Cuba (31 per cent).

The US, Canada, Argentina, and Uruguay demonstrated the strongest responses to modern slavery. Compared to others in the Americas, these countries are generally taking concrete actions to improve certain aspects of survivor support, strengthen criminal justice systems, and address risk factors. The Canadian government routinely releases annual reports describing actions to combat modern slavery and has an independent oversight mechanism in place for monitoring the functioning and effectiveness of its National Action Plan.⁴⁷ In 2019, Canada also ratified the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 with its ratification entering into force on 17 June 2020.⁴⁸ Venezuela demonstrated the weakest responses to modern slavery. Venezuela continues to be affected by protracted economic and political instability, which hampered the government’s ability to respond.⁴⁹

“My employer took away my passport, locked me in the house and disconnected the phone whenever she left home. I was made to sleep on the basement floor. I was so isolated from the outside world that I had no idea there was help available.”

Fainess Lipinga, United States ⁵⁰

Saint Lucia, Canada, and Uruguay have all taken further action to combat modern slavery since the previous assessment of government responses in 2018. In Saint Lucia, the government introduced a hotline that facilitates reporting to specialised human trafficking task forces, federal authorities, local law enforcement, and service providers.⁵¹ This was accompanied by a widespread awareness campaign to promote the hotline.⁵² Since the last report, Peru, Antigua and Barbuda, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, and Suriname have also ratified the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930,⁵³ while the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) entered into force in Mexico, Peru, and Antigua and Barbuda.⁵⁴

The strength of legislative frameworks to combat modern slavery in the Americas is varied. Across the region, 21 countries criminalise human trafficking, 12 countries criminalise forced labour, and only seven countries criminalise forced marriage

(Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Saint Lucia, Bahamas, Canada, and Belize). The US provided up to US\$10 million in funding for programs to prevent child marriage around the world from 2017 to 2020,⁵⁵ yet most of its states still allow children under the age of 18 to marry and eight have not set a minimum age.⁵⁶ In most countries assessed, governments provided training for the judiciary and prosecution, however only 11 countries provided this training regularly. When considering protections for children, 15 countries have criminalised child commercial sexual exploitation; however, only Colombia, Nicaragua, and Panama have criminalised the use of children in armed conflict. Only Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago are yet to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

While the majority of countries in the region had specialised law enforcement units to investigate modern slavery, 16 of them did not have the

Table 10
Government
response score,
by country and
milestone

Country	Survivors identified and supported (%)	Criminal justice mechanisms (%)	National and regional level coordination (%)	Risk factors are addressed (%)	Government and business supply chains (%)	Total (%)
United States	86	62	63	64	38	67
Canada	59	58	75	79	25	60
Argentina	50	73	75	64	0	58
Uruguay	55	73	50	64	0	56
Chile	55	69	50	64	0	55
Mexico	50	65	88	57	0	55
Peru	59	65	63	57	0	55
Bahamas	68	65	25	50	0	53
Brazil	45	50	75	57	38	51
Costa Rica	50	62	63	50	13	51
Ecuador	50	58	63	57	13	51
Guyana	50	65	63	50	0	51
Jamaica	41	62	88	57	0	51
Panama	41	65	50	71	0	51
Saint Lucia	45	69	50	57	0	51
Paraguay	41	69	63	43	0	49
Trinidad and Tobago	50	65	63	36	0	49
Bolivia	32	58	75	57	13	47
Guatemala	59	50	63	43	0	47
Honduras	45	54	50	64	0	47
Colombia	45	46	63	57	13	46
Dominican Republic	32	62	63	57	0	46
Belize	50	58	38	43	0	45
El Salvador	45	58	50	43	0	45
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	59	50	63	29	0	45
Antigua and Barbuda	36	54	63	50	0	44
Barbados	36	54	38	50	0	41
Haiti	41	38	38	50	0	37
Nicaragua	27	50	38	43	0	36
Cuba	27	38	50	29	0	31
Suriname	36	35	25	36	0	31
Venezuela	14	46	25	29	0	27

resources to operate effectively. In El Salvador, both the anti-trafficking police and prosecution units did not have enough resources to investigate and prosecute cases and were further impeded by the lack of an electronic case management system.⁵⁷ Additionally, there is evidence that survivors of modern slavery have been treated as criminals for conduct that occurred while under the control of criminals in the US, Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, and Honduras. In the US, survivors are criminalised and face challenges finding employment and housing because of charges laid against them while they were under the control of criminals.⁵⁸

All countries in the Americas are involved in a regional response to modern slavery. National coordination bodies exist in all but two countries (Cuba and Venezuela); however, only the US, Guyana, and Canada include survivors of modern slavery in this coordination. Almost all countries in the Americas have a National Action Plan to combat modern slavery; only Chile does not. Chile's draft National Action Plan has not been formally approved or made public, while after years of awaiting approval, Paraguay finally implemented a National Action Plan covering the period from 2020 to 2024.⁵⁹

While nearly all countries in the Americas have criminalised corruption, allegations of official complicity in modern slavery cases were reportedly not investigated in 17 countries. In Mexico, where an anonymous hotline to report corruption of officials received no tips despite reports of government officials facilitating modern slavery, some officials have been investigated but there have been no convictions.⁶⁰ Labour inspections specifically targeting modern slavery occur in 24 countries, although none have sufficient labour inspectors to cover the entire population or to allow labour inspectors to enter premises unannounced. Only in Honduras are labour inspectors able to enforce

finances. In 12 countries, not all children are able to access birth registration systems, which creates significant vulnerability due to related barriers to accessing education and employment.

There is evidence of awareness campaigns targeting known modern slavery risks in all but two countries in the region. In 2021, Canada launched a five-year awareness campaign based on a survey of public attitudes and awareness on human trafficking.⁶¹ There is also evidence that governments have facilitated research on modern slavery in 19 countries, including, for example, a 2021 study on the state of human trafficking in Honduras⁶² and a 2020 study to reduce vulnerability to human trafficking and crime in Saint Lucia.⁶³ That being said, state-imposed forced labour, such as abuse of compulsory prison labour, undermines any government efforts to tackle modern slavery in Brazil⁶⁴ and the US.⁶⁵

Although the Americas has the second strongest response in terms of addressing forced labour in global supply chains in comparison to other regions, the level of action remains low. Recently, Mexico and Canada joined the US in enacting legislation that prohibits companies from importing goods produced through forced labour. The US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement came into effect in July 2020 and prohibited the importation of goods produced with forced labour into each country's territory.⁶⁶ In the same month, Canada amended its Customs Tariff to incorporate the restriction on goods produced with forced labour,⁶⁷ and, more recently, passed its own "Modern Slavery Act" which imposes a mandatory reporting obligation on certain government institutions and private sector entities.⁶⁸ The US also passed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act in 2021, which entered into effect in June 2022, to prevent goods made with forced labour of Uyghurs from entering the US market.⁶⁹

Mexico City, Mexico,
August 2021.

A young boy searches through waste for fruit, vegetables and any food that is in good condition to take home. While many children are returning to the classroom after pandemic-related restrictions have lifted, he and his brother are not able to as their family's economic situation has been affected by lockdowns and they have had to work with their parents to be able to eat. Photo credit: Aidee Martinez / Eyepix Group/Future Publishing via Getty Images.



Promising Practices
in the Americas

In the Promising Practices Database, 53 of 262 evaluations cover 20 countries in the Americas. Most evaluated programs target human trafficking, child labour, and the worst forms of child labour. Only one evaluation focused on forced, servile, or early marriage, despite it being a significant issue within the region. While the majority of evaluated programs in the region met some or all their objectives, fewer than half of the evaluated programs had reliable methodologies that featured a control or comparison group. However, of these reliable evaluations, the majority had some success in providing insights into what works to address modern slavery in the Americas.

Spotlight on what works

The *Bono de Desarrollo Humano (BDH)* cash transfer program has provided unconditional cash transfers to families in Ecuador since 1998 and offers valuable lessons for reducing child labour through economic empowerment. The program randomly assigned money to low-income families, while others in the target area who did not receive a transfer were used as a control group. The transfers involved monthly payments of US\$15 to female heads of household, which accounted for 7 per cent of monthly expenditure. The evaluation included a sample of 1,488 randomly selected households and conducted baseline and follow-up surveys. The program led to a 78 per cent decline in child labour outside the home among all participants. Inside the home, child labour decreased by 32 per cent. Reducing child labour can lead to a reduction in children who are at risk of the worst forms of child labour, a form of modern slavery. The program demonstrates the importance of unconditional cash transfers in empowering and protecting vulnerable individuals.⁷⁰

Recommendations
for governments

- 1 Introduce legislation requiring governments and businesses to take steps to identify and address modern slavery in their supply chains, including mandatory human rights due diligence.
- 2 Enact or strengthen existing legislation to ensure that all forms of exploitation are criminalised and penalties for crimes associated with forced labour, forced marriage, and human trafficking are appropriate for the severity of the crime.
- 3 Improve support and identification efforts for all victims throughout the Americas by providing services to all survivors of modern slavery, including men, children, and migrants.
- 4 Establish bilateral agreements protecting labour migrants between countries of origin and destination.
- 5 Adopt and distribute national guidelines for identifying and screening victims and provide systematic and regular training for police and other first responders, as well as border guards, immigration officials, labour inspectors, teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, and tourism sector workers, with a particular emphasis on countries receiving large influxes of migrants fleeing crisis in the region.

ASHANTE
TAYLORCOX

Founder and Executive
Director of You Are More
Than Inc.

Frontline voices:

Black and Brown like me: Racial roots of modern slavery

Ashante Taylorcox is the Founder and Executive Director of You Are More Than Inc. – a US-based organisation that aims to transform the growth and potential of marginalised survivors of modern slavery. It does this through survivor-centred aftercare support that provides barrier-free access to mental health services, education, and financial stability. In this essay, she focuses on the unique experiences of survivors of colour and offers solutions for how the modern slavery movement can best respond and adapt to ensure true racial equity.

Historically, slavery has been deeply rooted in racial inequity. To justify the trafficking and exploitation of Black women and girls during and prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, we were often sexualized at a very early age and seen as “jezebels,” “promiscuous,” and “sexual deviants.” Today, Black women are disproportionately represented in trafficking statistics and the sexualisation of Black women and girls continues. Racial tropes deeply rooted in slavery still impact survivors’ access to services throughout the anti-trafficking movement.

When disclosing experiences of sexual violence to service providers, survivors of trafficking often face culturally specific barriers. This is due to systemic and individual biases and stereotypes throughout the anti-trafficking movement. These biases can look like the “Strong Black Women” trope, in which Black youth and women of colour are seen as less deserving of support because of stereotypes that sexual violence is normal for Black survivors.

It follows that we cannot feel harm from these experiences because it is “normalised” within Black communities. Black men and boys often face gendered racism and are more than likely to be seen as perpetrators and/or criminals rather than as potential victims. As young as five years old, Black

girls are adultified, seen as needing less nurturance, and more knowledgeable about adult experiences and topics, and because we develop more quickly than our white peers, we are often over-sexualised. Finally, many service providers struggle with understanding the deep-rooted correlation between exploitation and the racial trauma that many survivors face in their daily lives that can impact their sustainability out of the commercial sex industry. This, in turn, leads to minimising the impact that racial trauma has on survivors and they often face microaggressions and further racial discrimination when reaching out for support.

When marginalised survivors exit their trafficking situations, they often enter a world not built for them to succeed. Survivors need access to services and provisions that can support them in finding long-term employment, sustainable housing, and higher education. Additionally, it is vital to hold space for understanding and dismantling systems of oppression, power, and privilege and to address society’s often discriminatory view of Black and Brown survivors when accessing services. Placing marginalised survivors at the forefront of the movement and supporting them in building their own tables rather than forcing them to sit at ones



**New York, United States
June 2020.**

Protesters march on Juneteenth, which marks the end of slavery in the United States, with signs depicting George Floyd, an African American man who was killed by a white police officer Derek Chauvin during an arrest. Floyd’s arrest and subsequent death sparked a new wave of #BlackLivesMatter protests as people across the United States demanded an end to police brutality against people of colour and deep-seated racism. Photo credit: Ira L. Black/Corbis via Getty Images

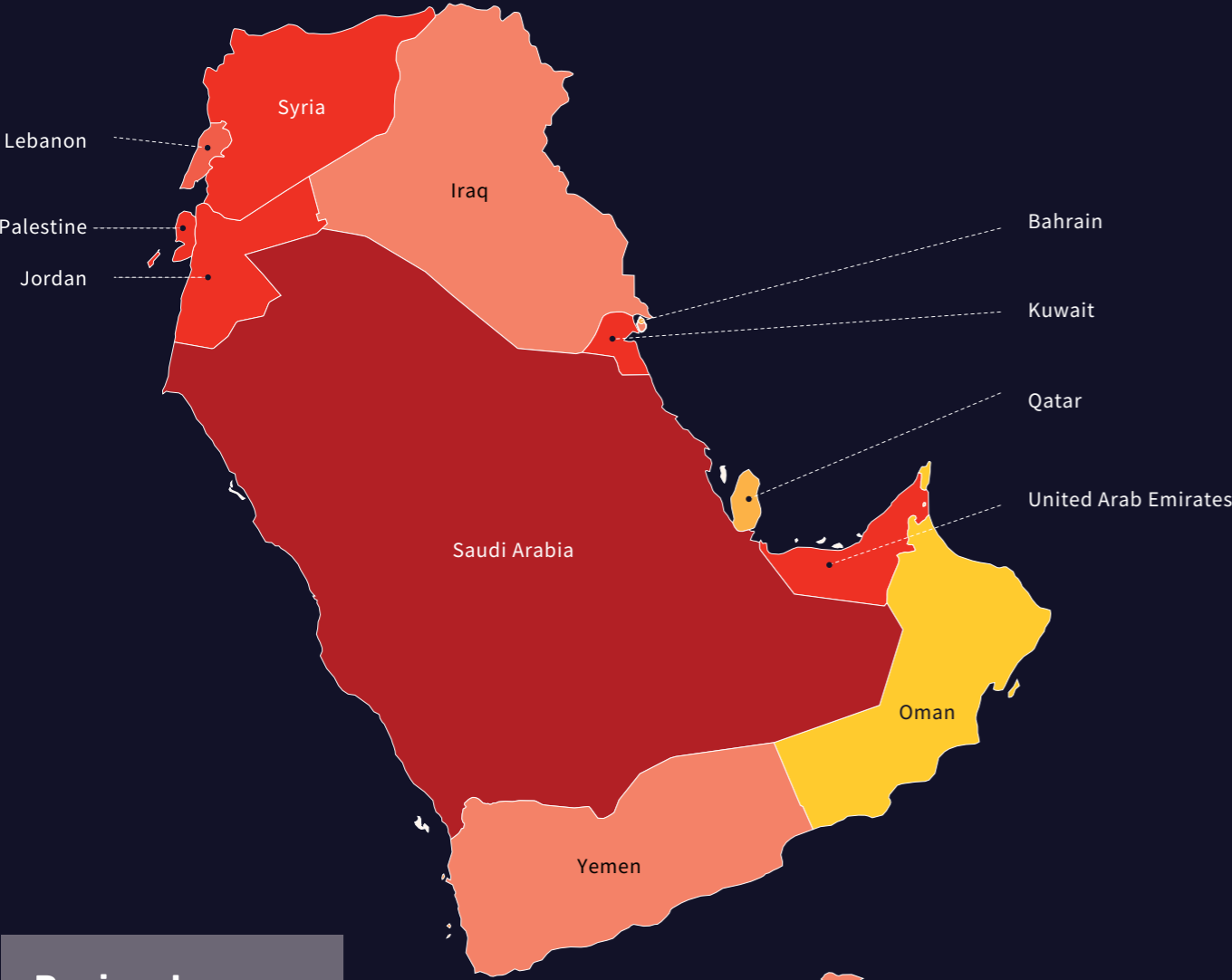
that weren’t made for them can cause a positive ripple effect within the modern slavery movement.

In order to address structural and embedded racism in this space, it is vital that we work to dismantle the “ideal victim” trope throughout the modern slavery movement. Persons of colour accessing victim and survivor services must be humanised as individuals worthy of responses that recognise their unique experiences. In line with this, culturally specific services for marginalised populations must be prioritised and appropriately funded throughout the United States and beyond, with a particular focus on those that are led by and for survivors of colour. Agencies that are primarily led by white providers should work towards expanding knowledge in

decolonising and deconstructing whiteness within the modern slavery movement through specific trainings that aim to increase understanding of diversity and inclusion. Additionally, it is vital for organisations to invest in economic opportunities for survivors of colour, particularly within leadership roles.

Until we can address the racial roots of slavery globally, survivors of colour will continue to remain marginalised, underserved, and underrepresented within the modern slavery movement and beyond.

ARAB STATES



Regional
heat map:
prevalence



The Arab States region is comprised of 12 countries, accounting for 2 per cent of the world’s population. While the Arab States is the world’s least populated region and smallest in terms of land mass, it comprises a rich diversity of culture, religion, industry, and geography. Yet, the region is impacted by the effects of conflict, political instability, economic shocks, and climate change — factors, among others, that drive modern slavery. More than 20 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) originate from the Arab States, and the region continues to host nearly 14.5 million of those who were forcibly displaced.¹ The effects of protracted conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen spur displacement, food insecurity, and economic instability.

The region is also home to nearly 37 million migrants, originating from within the region, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa.² Populations are vulnerable to sexual slavery and forced labour imposed by armed groups, forced labour as a result of displacement from their homes, and forced and child marriage to ease financial strain on households. In Jordan, Lebanon, and wealthier Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — migrant workers are vulnerable to modern slavery under the exploitative *kafala* (sponsorship) system. Forced labour is reported in sectors such as domestic work,³ construction,⁴ hospitality,⁵ and security.⁶ Within these contexts, gender inequality, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic work to amplify existing vulnerabilities.

Bahrain took the most action to address modern slavery in the Arab States, followed by the UAE, while Iraq and Lebanon took the least action. Syria and Yemen were excluded from the assessment of government action on modern slavery due to ongoing conflict and extreme disruption to government function. The need to reform gender discriminatory laws and grant all workers, including migrants, equal protection under national labour laws remains a pressing issue. At the same time, far greater action is needed to address modern slavery in the context of conflict, crisis, and displacement.

What is the extent and nature of modern slavery in the region?

An estimated 1.7 million men, women, and children were living in modern slavery in the Arab States region on any given day in 2021. Despite having the lowest number of people living in modern slavery across all regions, once population was considered, the Arab States had the highest prevalence of modern slavery. An estimated 10.1 people per thousand people were living in modern slavery in the region, which breaks down to 5.3 in forced labour and 4.8 in forced marriage. Forced labour

was the most common form of exploitation, accounting for just over half of people living in modern slavery (52 per cent). As in all other regions, the prevalence of forced marriage was higher among females (5.5 per thousand) compared to males (4.3 per thousand).

Within the region, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait were the countries with the highest prevalence of modern slavery. Saudi Arabia also had the highest estimated number of people in modern slavery, followed by Iraq, and together they accounted for half of all people in modern slavery in the region. Migrant workers face particular risk of labour exploitation in the region as a result of the *kafala* (sponsorship) system that operates in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.⁷ While not a form of modern slavery itself, the system embeds a steep power imbalance between workers and employers, with the result that employers control whether a migrant worker can enter, reside, work, change jobs, and, in some cases, exit the country.⁸ Female domestic workers residing the GCC and Jordan and Lebanon are particularly at risk of forced labour in private households⁹ and males vulnerable to debt bondage in construction.¹⁰

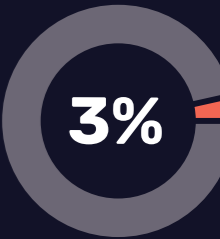
Conflict continues to shape experiences of modern slavery in the Arab States.¹¹ Families displaced by conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen rely on negative coping mechanisms such as forced and child marriage to relieve economic stress and protect daughters from the threat of sexual violence.¹² Syrian and Iraqi refugees have been trafficked from host communities in Jordan and Lebanon for forced marriage, forced commercial sexual exploitation, and forced labour, including forced begging.¹³ Almost 3,000 Yazidi men and women remain missing after being abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014.¹⁴ Anecdotal reports note that some missing Yazidi women and children are still enslaved in Iraq, Syria, and Türkiye,¹⁵ while others are reportedly held captive inside ISIS widow camps, such as the al-Hawl detention camp in north-eastern Syria.¹⁶

Although these figures are the most reliable to date, they are conservative estimates given the gaps and limitations of data collection in the Arab States. It is not possible to conduct nationally representative surveys in countries experiencing profound and current conflict which leads to an underestimate of some forms of modern slavery. Moreover, the estimates do not capture all forms of modern slavery, such as the recruitment of child soldiers, trafficking for the purposes of organ removal, and all child marriages. Despite gaps in data, sources indicate that children have been recruited into armed forces in Lebanon,¹⁷ Iraq,¹⁸ Syria,¹⁹ and Yemen,²⁰ while trafficking for organ removal has been reported in Jordan²¹ and Lebanon.²²

Estimated
number living in
modern slavery:

1.7
MILLION
(10.1 per thousand)

Regional
proportion of
global estimate:



Forced labour

52%

Forced marriage

48%

Average
vulnerability
score:

56%

Average
government
response rating:

43%

Top 3 countries:
Bahrain 55%
UAE 50%
Qatar 49%

Bottom 3 countries:
Lebanon 33%
Iraq 33%
Kuwait 37%

Table 11
Estimated prevalence and number of people in modern slavery, by country

Rank	Country	Estimated prevalence of modern slavery (per 1,000 of population)	Estimated number of people in modern slavery	Population
1	Saudi Arabia	21.3	740,000	34,814,000
2	United Arab Emirates	13.4	132,000	9,890,000
3	Kuwait	13.0	55,000	4,271,000
4	Jordan	10.0	102,000	10,203,000
5	Syria	8.7	153,000	17,501,000
6	Lebanon	7.6	52,000	6,825,000
7	Qatar	6.8	20,000	2,881,000
8	Bahrain	6.7	11,000	1,702,000
9	Oman	6.5	33,000	5,107,000
10	Yemen	6.0	180,000	29,826,000
11	Iraq	5.5	221,000	40,223,000

What drives vulnerability to modern slavery in the region?

The Arab States is the second most vulnerable region in the world to modern slavery. Conflict as a driver of vulnerability is more significant in the Arab States than any other region. Other drivers of vulnerability were discrimination towards minority groups, political instability, and lack of political rights. At the country level, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq were the most vulnerable countries; these countries also fall within the top 10 most vulnerable countries globally. Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE had the lowest levels of vulnerability within the region; yet compared with the least vulnerable countries around the world, vulnerability is still relatively high in these countries.

Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation is the greatest driver of vulnerability in the region. In Yemen minority groups such as the Al-Muhamasheen have long experienced marginalisation,²³ while in Jordan, Lebanon, and GCC countries, migrant workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation under the *kafala* system, which grants employers substantial control over their lives.²⁴ Risks have compounded in the wake of COVID-19,²⁵ with reports of increased wage theft,²⁶ detention,²⁷ confinement to the workplace,²⁸ and unemployment.²⁹ In GCC countries where migrants comprise 82 per cent of the workforce on average,³⁰ the pandemic has led to an escalation of workforce nationalisation policies; that is, efforts to increase the proportion of nationals employed.³¹ Such policies have spurred increased xenophobia and stereotyping of migrants as responsible

for the spread of coronavirus.³² Individuals belonging to the LGBTQI+ community also face widespread discrimination throughout the region, as homosexuality and gender non-conformity are criminalised in several countries in the region.³³

Governance issues linked to political instability, restricted political rights, and government inaction to combat modern slavery drive vulnerability across the Arab States. In Iraq and Yemen, corruption and conflict contribute to severe political instability and disrupt government functions, exacerbating vulnerability.³⁴ Throughout the region, gender inequality both drives, and is reinforced by, governance issues compounding vulnerability for women and girls. Despite some progress, all Arab States countries except the UAE were ranked in the bottom fifth of more than 150 countries assessed in the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Index, reflecting poorer gender equality in the region across economic, education, health, and political dimensions.³⁵ No countries in the region afford women equal rights in matters of divorce, inheritance, citizenship, and employment, while in most countries women lack equal access to justice and freedom of movement.³⁶ These domains are typically governed by personal status laws and male guardianship systems,³⁷ which severely restrict women's agency and increase their risk of exploitation.³⁸ Further, during the pandemic, women and girls across the region experienced a heavier domestic work burden³⁹ and heightened risk of gender-based violence.⁴⁰

“My mother was sick and wanted someone to help her with the housework.”

Qatari male on his forced marriage at age 24

Conflict drives vulnerability in the Arab States, yet the effects are not uniform throughout the region. While Oman and the UAE experience comparatively low levels of conflict, heightened risk of modern slavery in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen is spurred by conflict. The erosion of state protection has led to increased risk of conflict-related sexual violence and slavery in these countries.⁴¹ Meanwhile, conflict-related displacement has entrenched risks region-wide. At least 12.3 million people were internally displaced in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen in 2021,⁴² and a further 2.1 million refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and others of concern were recorded throughout the Arab States.⁴³ With resources in host countries increasingly strained,⁴⁴ most of these people face insecure conditions and complex humanitarian needs,⁴⁵ fuelling their vulnerability to modern slavery. For example, Syrian refugee girls in Jordan⁴⁶ and Lebanon⁴⁷ may be forced to marry as a means to access supplies and private shelters, and to protect against sexual violence and community perceptions of impurity. At the same time, research indicates that the influence of the host community may see families resist traditional expectations and delay child marriage.⁴⁸ Underreporting of sexual violence due to patriarchal norms, particularly when victims are men and boys,⁴⁹ as well as a lack of services for males, limits our understanding of their experiences of child and forced marriage in displacement settings.⁵⁰

The effects of climate change are felt across the region, from severe drought in Syria⁵¹ to desertification in Jordan,⁵² with extreme water stress affecting most Arab States countries.⁵³ In Yemen, natural disasters displaced more than

Country	Total (%)
Yemen	89
Syria	83
Iraq	82
Lebanon	60
Saudi Arabia	53
Jordan	49
Bahrain	40
Oman	40
United Arab Emirates	40
Kuwait	39
Qatar	38

220,000 people in 2020 alone,⁵⁴ while the war in Ukraine has caused disruptions to critical food imports in the Arab States region,⁵⁵ worsening the humanitarian crisis there. The impacts of climate change exacerbate the push factors that make people vulnerable to modern slavery, including poverty, loss of livelihoods, displacement, and distress migration,⁵⁶ with women and girls disproportionately impacted.⁵⁷ Where livelihoods are threatened, families may turn to negative coping mechanisms such as forced and child marriage,⁵⁸ or resort to irregular migration in search of alternative income, where risks of trafficking are heightened.⁵⁹ Climate-related resource scarcity can also trigger conflict, or spur recruitment into armed groups due to loss of livelihoods,⁶⁰ further compounding vulnerability to modern slavery.

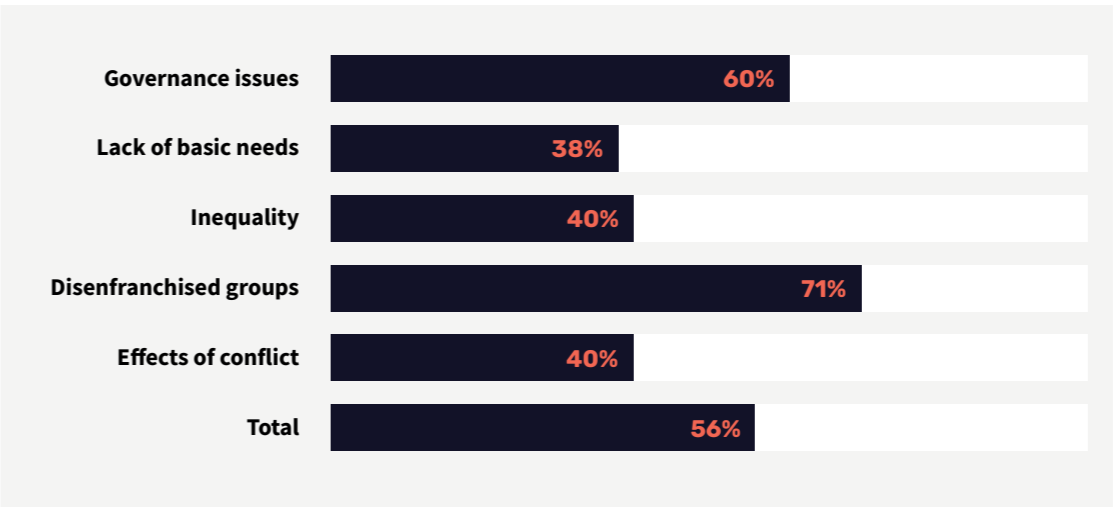


Figure 15
Level of vulnerability to modern slavery, by dimension

What are governments in the region doing to address modern slavery?

Walk Free assessed government responses to modern slavery in nine countries in the region.⁶¹ Due to ongoing disruptions to government and limited data, Palestine, Syria and Yemen were excluded. The Arab States region scored an average government response rating of 43 per cent, the third highest score of the five regions. Government responses featured efforts to improve survivor support and better coordinate the response to modern slavery at the national and regional level. Despite some efforts to strengthen criminal justice mechanisms, the criminal justice response remained the weakest of any region. As in the 2018 GSI, no countries in the Arab States region have taken action to combat modern slavery in supply chains.

GDP per capita PPP (current international \$) varied greatly at the country level,⁶² with wealthier GCC countries typically taking relatively stronger action to respond to modern slavery. For example, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Qatar are among the region’s wealthiest nations and demonstrated the strongest responses to modern slavery in the region. However, when compared to countries of similar wealth in other regions, GCC countries — particularly Kuwait — displayed a weak response relative to wealth,⁶³ with significant gaps in protections for migrant workers persisting across the subregion. Migrant workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation under the *kafala* system, Jordan, Lebanon, and the GCC countries.⁶⁴ During the reporting period, these countries continued to implement laws or policies that made it difficult for migrant workers to freely leave abusive employers. Across the region, only Kuwait and Iraq

covered all categories of workers under national labour laws.⁶⁵ In a positive step, Oman,⁶⁶ Qatar,⁶⁷ and Saudi Arabia⁶⁸ adopted reforms to the *kafala* system, yet these were insufficient to dismantle the system entirely.

GCC countries have significantly higher GDP per capita than Lebanon and Iraq, the two countries taking the least action to address modern slavery. Government response efforts in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq were constrained by limited resources as these countries continued to grapple with the flow-on effects of conflict in Syria and Yemen.⁶⁹ However, despite this, Jordan took some positive action to respond to modern slavery in 2021, amending its 2009 anti-trafficking law to enhance witness and victim protection and access to compensation.⁷⁰

Since 2018, most countries have taken further action to improve their response to modern slavery. For example, the government of Qatar established its first dedicated shelter for survivors of trafficking⁷¹ and Kuwait commenced meetings of its national anti-trafficking committee.⁷² Saudi Arabia launched an awareness campaign on how to identify and report modern slavery⁷³ and established a National Referral Mechanism,⁷⁴ with the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 also entering into force there in 2021.⁷⁵ No other countries made efforts to ratify international conventions since 2018 and, concerningly, the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)⁷⁶ has to date not been ratified by any country in the region. Further, no country has fully criminalised all forms of modern slavery, hampering access to justice for survivors. Oman,⁷⁷ the UAE,⁷⁸ and Qatar are the only countries to criminalise forced labour, while forced marriage is criminalised only in Iraq.⁷⁹ No countries have established a minimum marriage age of 18 without exception.

Table 13
Government response score, by country and milestone

Country*	Survivors identified and supported (%)	Criminal justice mechanisms (%)	National and regional level coordination (%)	Risk factors are addressed (%)	Government and business supply chains (%)	Total (%)
Bahrain	77	50	63	57	0	55
United Arab Emirates	59	42	75	64	0	50
Qatar	59	42	63	64	0	49
Saudi Arabia	59	54	63	43	0	49
Jordan	50	54	50	50	0	46
Oman	41	38	50	50	0	38
Kuwait	36	42	50	43	0	37
Iraq	41	38	38	29	0	33
Lebanon	32	42	50	29	0	33

* Palestine, Yemen and Syria excluded from analysis due to limited data



Chtoura, Lebanon, May 2021.

A young female Syrian refugee, who is just 19 years old, visits the office of a local NGO which provides assistance to young female survivors of child marriage. She was 17 years old when she married, and divorced a year later. Yet, young female divorcees living in Syrian refugee camps face significant stigma and hardship, and are particularly vulnerable to abuse including forced marriage and forced sexual exploitation. Photo credit: Marwan Naamani/ picture alliance via Getty Images.

Gaps in support services appeared across the region, with four countries neglecting to make services available for all survivors. Lebanon took the least action to identify and support survivors, while Saudi Arabia joined Bahrain as the only other country in the region to distribute national victim identification guidelines to all first responders.⁸⁰ Three countries provided training for police recruits and only Saudi Arabia and the UAE provided regular training for frontline responders. There is evidence that survivors were detained or deported for immigration violations in all countries except the UAE,⁸¹ where information suggests that inconsistent application of screening procedures may have meant survivors were wrongly criminalised.⁸²

Notably, all countries in the region have established a national body to coordinate the government’s response to modern slavery. All countries except Bahrain and Lebanon had a National Action Plan

(NAP) to combat slavery in place, yet there is no evidence the NAPs were fully funded or independently monitored. No governments in the region addressed modern slavery in government and business supply chains.

“I needed support from the police but the police didn’t help. I wanted them to contact my consulate but they only called the agent.”

24-year-old Sierra Leonean female survivor of domestic servitude in Lebanon

Understanding modern slavery in Palestine

Palestine has not been included in our assessments due to the complex and intertwining system of governance and occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which hampers reliable data collection. Administrative control over the West Bank was unevenly split between Israeli and Palestinian authorities under the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995, which resulted in the Israeli authorities having greater control over the area than Palestinian authorities.⁸³ A *de facto* Hamas government controls the Gaza Strip, however an Israeli land, air, and sea blockade has been in place since 2007 following their election.⁸⁴ Data on modern slavery in the Gaza Strip is severely limited; international and human rights organisations have been routinely denied entry by Israeli forces enforcing the blockade.⁸⁵ Several international organisations, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, have recently acknowledged that the Israeli government is perpetrating apartheid in Palestine.⁸⁶

Despite limited data, anecdotal evidence indicates that Palestinians experience various forms of modern slavery, including forced labour, worst forms of child labour, forced begging, and forced and child marriage.⁸⁷ Palestinian men and boys employed in the Israeli construction sector are vulnerable to debt bondage, as discriminatory employers charge them high fees and commissions and sub-contract them to other employers illegally.⁸⁸ Illegal workers without permits face greater risks of abuse and exploitation.⁸⁹ Gender biases further embed women and girls’ risk of modern slavery, particularly forced commercial sexual exploitation and forced and child marriage,⁹⁰ with risk heightened for Palestinian women and girls living in refugee camps.⁹¹ Palestinian government data estimates that more than 17,600 girls age 15 to 19 were married in the West Bank in 2018.⁹² In Gaza, an estimated 11 per cent of women were married before the age of 18.⁹³ There are also reports of women and girls being trafficked from the West Bank to the Al Naqab desert⁹⁴ where they are forced to marry older men.⁹⁵

Vulnerability to, and experiences of, modern slavery are also shaped by the systemic discrimination, dispossession, and displacement of Palestinians living under apartheid. In the

West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians are denied citizenship rights, and require Israeli-issued identity documents to live and work in the territories.⁹⁶ The work permit system creates greater risks of exploitation as it ties Palestinian workers to their employer. In addition, overnight workers have their identity documents withheld as a requirement of their permit.⁹⁷ Reforms to the permit system were introduced in 2020 to ease worker mobility in the construction sector, yet these have not been enforced.⁹⁸ Like the conditions created under the *kafala* system, the permit system entrenches power imbalances and restricts workers’ movements, increasing their vulnerability to labour exploitation in Israel.⁹⁹ The ongoing occupation also prevents some people from seeking help, for example, women and girls who have been trafficked within the 1948 borders for the purposes of forced marriage report not seeking assistance due to fears of being intercepted by Israeli authorities.¹⁰⁰

It is difficult to comprehensively assess Palestine’s efforts to combat modern slavery as a result of the complex and continuing history of occupation, which has resulted in several different legislative regimes having the force of law. However, some actions, albeit limited and often with exceptions, have been undertaken. A broad summary of the criminal justice framework is listed in Table 14. There are several gaps in removing risks in legislation, including gaps in labour laws that leave domestic workers without protection, prohibitions on sex work, and laws that entrench gender biases in areas such as guardianship, inheritance, and divorce.¹⁰¹ Field sources confirm that there are significant gaps in the government’s response, ranging from a lack of support for NGOs that provide direct services to survivors to a lack of awareness among government officials and frontline responders on how to identify victims and apply the relevant anti-trafficking laws.¹⁰² Within the West Bank, there is significant room for the government authorities to strengthen the legislative framework criminalising all forms of modern slavery, support survivors, and reduce risk of exploitation.



West Bank, Palestine, October 2020.

A Palestinian man harvests olives on his land that was split by Israel’s controversial separation wall. To be able to harvest his crops on the other side of the wall, a special Israeli army permit is required. The United Nations has noted that the separation wall violates international laws and severely limits Palestinian movement and access to livelihoods. Photo credit: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP via Getty Images.

Form of modern slavery	Level of protection	Source of law
Slavery	It is not clear that Jordanian prohibitions against slavery apply extraterritorially to Palestine.	Jordanian Abolition of Slavery Act of 1929. ¹⁰³
Forced labour	Forced labour is not separately criminalised in Palestine. Previously, Jordanian labour law had criminalised causing, procuring, or encouraging children under the age of 16 into forced begging.	Palestinian Labour Law No. 7 of 2000, which replaced the Jordanian Labour Law of 1960 in the West Bank. ¹⁰⁴
Forced marriage	Forced marriages are not criminalised within Palestine, however both brides and grooms must provide their full and free consent to the marriage. In practice, the importance of the bride’s consent may be limited, as women and girls of any age require the consent of a male guardian to enter into a marriage.	Jordanian Personal Status Law of 1976. ¹⁰⁵
Human trafficking	Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is criminalised. However, no other offences exist for other forms of human trafficking.	Jordanian Penal Code of 1960. ¹⁰⁶
Child marriage	Child marriage is not criminalised. However, a minimum age of marriage is set at 18 for both boys and girls, although exceptions exist if judges of religious and family courts consider it is in the interests of both parties to allow the marriage.	Decision by the Palestinian Authority passed in November 2019. ¹⁰⁷

Table 14
Legal protections against modern slavery in the West Bank



Promising Practices in the Arab States

Only 6 per cent of program evaluations in the Promising Practices Database were delivered in the Arab States region. Several evaluated programs targeted specific forms of modern slavery such as human trafficking, while others targeted related areas such as migration, refugees, and internal displacement. Evaluations of programs targeting forced marriage remain a significant gap: despite the highest regional prevalence of forced marriage being found in the Arab States, only three evaluated programs from the region targeted forced marriage. Overall, there is limited information on what works to reduce risk in specific sectors, with only two evaluations explicitly targeting high-risk sectors. One evaluated program targeted camel racing in the UAE and four countries outside the region, while another targeted the domestic work sector in nine Arab States countries. While most evaluated programs were found to have met some objectives, potential lessons learned are significantly limited as no evaluation methodology included a control or comparison group to reliably test these findings. Program designers, funders, and evaluators must systematically capture data and publicly share future evaluations to help fill the significant evidence gap on what works to address modern slavery in the Arab States.

Badra, Iraq, July 2022.

A man climbs a palm tree to harvest dates in a country once known as the home of “30 million palm trees.” Iraq’s date production has been blighted by decades of conflict and environmental challenges, including drought, desertification, and salinisation. This has resulted in greater rates of poverty, food insecurity, and vulnerability to modern slavery. Photo credit: Asaad Niazi/ AFP via Getty Images.

- ## Recommendations for governments
- 1** Dismantle kafala by expanding coverage of national labour laws to include all workers, including migrant, domestic, seasonal workers. Ensure that migrant workers can freely enter, reside and exit the country and leave or transfer jobs without employer consent.
 - 2** Abolish provisions in the law that criminalise absconding and enforce measures to discourage employers from filing false allegations against workers. Enforce laws that criminalise charging of recruitment fees and withholding of passports and identity documents.
 - 3** Equip humanitarian practitioners to respond to modern slavery risks in crisis settings by rolling out the Global Protection Cluster’s Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts.¹⁰⁸
 - 4** Introduce a suite of legal protections to tackle forced marriage, including by criminalising all forms of modern slavery in line with international law and raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 with no exceptions.
 - 5** Tackle underlying gender inequality by affording women equal rights in matters of divorce, inheritance, citizenship, and employment, and strengthen access to access to justice and freedom of movement for women and girls.

Disempowered, dehumanised, deported: Life under the *kafala* system

Beirut, Lebanon,
September 2020.

A former domestic worker from Sierra Leone uses her mobile phone while waiting to be repatriated later that evening. Lebanon's economic collapse, as well as COVID-19 and the August 4 blast at the Port of Beirut, have left a significant number of migrant workers in a humanitarian crisis. Many domestic workers, forced to live on the streets, are desperate to leave but cannot afford to buy a plane ticket home, and have received limited assistance from diplomatic representatives. Photo credit: Aline Deschamps via Getty Images.

The promise of decent wages and steady employment attracts many migrants from countries throughout Africa and Asia to the Arab States. However, the reality often differs substantially once in country and under the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, a restrictive work permit system that ties migrant workers to their employer.¹

By placing control over entry, exit, work, and residence in the hands of employers, the system leaves migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation and modern slavery,² particularly in domestic work,³ construction,⁴ hospitality,⁵ and sectors where seasonal work is common.⁶ Variations of the *kafala* system exist in Jordan, Lebanon, and the GCC countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar,⁷ Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Collectively, the Arab States region is home to more than 24 million migrant workers,⁸ comprising over 40 per cent of the labour force — the highest share of any region.⁹

What is the *kafala* system?

The *kafala* system is a set of laws and policies that delegate responsibility for migrant workers to employers, including control over their ability to enter, reside, work, and, in some cases, exit the host country.¹⁰ Workers typically cannot leave or change jobs prior to completion of their contract, before a certain time period, or without permission from their employer. Those who do leave may run the risk of arrest and deportation for the crime of absconding.¹¹ The system also limits the ability of exploited workers to access justice. In practice, a worker who leaves their job not only risks losing their means of earning an income, but also risks becoming an illegal migrant. This threatens their ability to pursue legal action against their employer and recover any income they are owed. If deported, workers may also face bans on returning to the country to work.¹² Legal redress is made even more difficult by prolonged, expensive court processes, limited legal assistance, and the absence of interpreters.¹³ Some employers reportedly create additional barriers to justice; for example, by levelling false allegations of theft against migrant workers in retaliation for leaving¹⁴ or filing false absconding reports with law enforcement to avoid paying wages owed.¹⁵ Migrant workers can be deported even where no evidence exists to support the accusations, while employers enjoy impunity.¹⁶

What are the origins of the *kafala* system?

The differences between past and present understandings of the *kafala* system are vast. In classical Arabic, the term *kafala* referred to relationships between an authority figure or person with power (the *kafeel*) and a vulnerable or relatively weaker person (the *makfūl*), whereby the *kafeel* would take legal responsibility for the *makfūl* without benefitting from the relationship. Specifically, *kafala* meant “to guarantee” (as one would a business loan) and “to take care of” (for example, become the legal guardian of orphaned children).¹⁷ The traditional interpretation of *kafala* as a form of alternative care is recognised in international law,¹⁸ and may still be practiced in modern settings; for example, in the care of orphaned children and unaccompanied refugee minors.¹⁹ However, the understanding of the system as a means of protection, trust, and social solidarity has largely been eclipsed by the widespread oppression of migrant workers under its present-day application as a sponsorship process.²⁰ This divergence between past and present applications highlights the lingering impact of colonialism.

The first example of present *kafala* was reportedly in the pearl diving industry in the British Colonial Protectorate of Bahrain in the 1920s, and subsequently spread throughout other colonies in the Gulf states.²¹ In Bahrain, colonial administrators used the *kafala* system to facilitate the entry of migrant workers to fill perceived labour shortages on British-owned pearl diving ships while exerting their control over a foreign labour force by ensuring an acceptable *kafeel* took legal responsibility for the workers.²² Most pearl divers were bound to their ship by debt and subject to abusive labour practices while onboard.²³ The repression of migrant workers is now entrenched in law and social norms. While present *kafala* is upheld by sponsorship requirements rather than debt,²⁴ both national and foreign employers today benefit from the disproportionate control the *kafala* system provides over workers.²⁵ Infantilising attitudes that position migrant workers as in need of protection justify restrictions on their mobility and other freedoms under the *kafala* system.²⁶

Modern slavery experiences
in Lebanon and Kuwait

Female migrant domestic workers face specific challenges under the *kafala* system. Globally, patriarchal norms that devalue domestic labour as “women’s work” confine women within the household and make them less visible to authorities.²⁷ In high-income countries, domestic work is typically performed by low-paid female migrants who fill gaps in care driven by the curtailing of social welfare. These workers are subject to constant surveillance and face higher risks of gender-based violence, discrimination, and exploitation within their employer’s households. With their movements heavily restricted, it is even more difficult for victims to leave situations of abuse.

In 2020, Walk Free interviewed 30 female survivors of domestic servitude who were exploited in Lebanon and Kuwait. Respondents came from six countries, including Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone, and were employed in Kuwait and Lebanon, where strict versions of the *kafala* system operate. While migrants do not require an exit permit to depart Lebanon or Kuwait, all other elements of the *kafala* system are present. In Lebanon, migrants cannot leave their job without their employer’s permission²⁸ and in Kuwait, domestic workers must receive approval from the Ministry of Interior and Labour Court to transfer jobs without consent from their employer.²⁹ Getting this

approval requires workers to leave their employer’s household, which can lead to accusations of absconding and result in deportation:³⁰ seeking help is not without significant risks for migrant domestic workers. The interviews highlighted the difficulties women faced when seeking to leave their situation. Three-quarters of respondents had limited or no access to a phone in at least one household where they worked, and more than half reported having their movements restricted, including by being locked inside places of employment or monitored on camera. Half of all respondents physically escaped their household, and five women were subsequently arrested by police despite having experienced abuse and mistreatment by their employers. At least nine respondents were deported or repatriated after leaving their workplace, however this number is likely higher given not all respondents reported how they returned home.

“After I escaped, [my employers] told me that I had been reported to police for having stolen money from the home. Shortly afterwards, the police showed up and arrested me...When the day of my flight arrived, I wasn’t even allowed to collect my possessions. I was still owed four months’ salary and returned empty-handed.”

23-year-old Ghanaian female survivor
of domestic servitude

Perceived or actual lack of protection prevented victims leaving situations of exploitation. Respondents reported that a lack of assistance from embassies, consulates, employment agencies, police, and beliefs that they could not turn to authorities were barriers to seeking help. While it is unclear how some respondents returned home, several were assisted by civil society organisations or family members, while few others had the cost of their tickets home paid for by their employers and agents. In one instance, a worker in Kuwait was required to pay her employer to be allowed to leave. For some workers, returning was further complicated by unpaid wages and confiscation of passports. When specifically asked if their documents were seized, all respondents in Cameroon reported that their passports were seized in Lebanon, where the practice is not outlawed,³¹ and in Kuwait, where passport withholding is illegal.³²

“I didn’t go to police because they always support their citizens and will always treat my escape as a breach of contract. That was what my employer told me. I got to a church owned by a Ghanaian and they also told me they can’t be of help since I’ve breached a contract...I was arrested by police on the street, the Kuwait government paid for my flight.”

31-year-old Cameroonian female survivor of domestic
servitude

Almost two-thirds of respondents paid fees to brokers in their country of origin or transit, including in Ethiopia and Guinea, where domestic laws prohibit workers being charged recruitment fees.³³ Payment of fees increases risk of debt bondage in the Gulf states, where workers are forced to work for little or no pay in order to repay recruitment and related fees.³⁴ While Kuwait³⁵ and Jordan³⁶ prohibit charging recruitment fees to migrant domestic workers, and the remaining *kafala* countries prohibit charging recruitment fees to all migrant workers,³⁷ exorbitant fees are still passed on in practice.³⁸ To cover these costs, some respondents borrowed money from family or arranged to pay the money when they began their job, which typically carried the false promise of a good salary and ultimately led to situations of debt bondage. Many respondents were also deceived about the nature and conditions of the work, with more than a third of them being promised an entirely different form of employment than domestic work. Among respondents in Cameroon, just under half did not sign a contract and some respondents signed contracts in a language they did not understand. Meanwhile, two Ethiopian migrant workers reported being encouraged to travel despite a temporary ban on labour migration to Gulf states being in effect at the time.

“I think Lebanese law needs to change so that we may have our rights protected. I wouldn’t have had to escape.”

33-year-old Ethiopian female survivor
of domestic servitude

Most migrant workers reported having very little to no knowledge about the destination country prior to travelling. Respondents in Cameroon were asked further questions on what would have been helpful for them in preparing for work. The most common response was knowing the true nature and conditions of the work. When the remaining respondents (those in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone) were asked what support they needed but did not receive, the most common responses focused on greater support from embassies, employment agencies, or police.

Impact of COVID-19

The situation worsened for many migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, with reports of wage theft in the construction,³⁹ hospitality, and manufacturing sectors in Gulf countries,⁴⁰ largely driven by order cancellations, weakened labour protections (allowing employers to reduce wages), and dismissal or repatriation of workers without pay.⁴¹ Migrants from countries in Asia and Africa are often recruited to work in these sectors by a complex network of local brokers, recruitment agents, friends, and relatives.⁴² They may receive limited or inaccurate information about the nature of the work and be required to pay substantial recruitment fees to migrate through informal and formal channels, thereby increasing their risk of debt-bondage and exploitation in the destination.⁴³ During the pandemic, some migrants reportedly defaulted on loan repayments due to wage theft and were subsequently arrested in the UAE,⁴⁴ while several migrant workers in Qatar were deported before receiving their wages.⁴⁵ Construction workers were physically abused after requesting their unpaid salaries in Saudi Arabia,⁴⁶ where the government also allowed a temporary 40 per cent pay reduction in the private sector.⁴⁷ Lockdowns intensified social isolation and vulnerability among domestic workers in private households⁴⁸ and compounded difficulties in sending remittances home.⁴⁹ Some domestic workers in Lebanon were abandoned outside their consulates by employers who said they can no longer afford to pay them.⁵⁰

Manila, Philippines,
February 2023.

Relatives of Jullebee Ranara, a migrant domestic worker who was killed in Kuwait, call for justice at her funeral. Police later arrested the 17 year-old son of Jullebee’s employers in relation to her killing. Migrant domestic workers in Kuwait often face sexism and racism, as well as risks of exploitation by employers due to the extreme power imbalance created by the *kafala* system. Photo credit: Jam Sta Rosa/AFP via Getty Images.



Forms of tied visa programs operate in several other countries globally, and these systems similarly increase migrant workers’ vulnerability to exploitation.⁵¹ However, the various iterations of the *kafala* system involve some of the most restrictive conditions and are present in countries which have among the highest concentrations of migrant workers in the world.⁵² Over the past decade, countries that uphold *kafala* have faced significant criticism due to the pervasive abuse of migrant workers under the system, with major international events such as the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup and Dubai World Expo 2020 drawing global attention to the issue.⁵³ Several countries have instituted reforms, some in response to mounting international pressure, yet no country has abolished *kafala* entirely, with vestiges of the system undermining reform efforts.

Qatar represents one example in which preparations for the FIFA World Cup since 2010 have drawn attention to grave migrant worker abuses in the construction, hotel, and security sectors.⁵⁴ Amid mounting criticism in 2017,⁵⁵ Qatar agreed to undertake a technical cooperation program with the ILO,⁵⁶ seeking to align laws and practices with international labour standards.⁵⁷ Promisingly, in 2020 Qatar ceased requiring exit permits for workers excluded from the scope of the labour law, including migrant domestic workers, expanding upon a similar 2018 amendment.⁵⁸ Qatar also removed No-Objection Certificate (NOC) requirements, allowing workers to change jobs without permission from their employer under certain conditions.⁵⁹ However, these positive reforms have been undermined by gaps in implementation and protections. In practice, the system is not only difficult for migrant workers to navigate, but many are unaware of their right to leave,⁶⁰ and even if they are they still face the threat of retaliation from their employers who may file false allegations of theft or absconding.⁶¹ As reports of abuse persisted in the lead-up to the World Cup, human rights organisations continued to call for the government to enforce reforms and for FIFA and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (the body responsible for delivering the event) to strengthen due diligence and monitoring,⁶² as well as establish a scheme to remediate harms caused.⁶³ While global attention was brought to the issue following the games, it has not been followed by any meaningful commitment or action by FIFA and the Qatari government, with impacted migrant workers still struggling to access compensation.⁶⁴

Several other countries have implemented limited reforms to increase job mobility in recent years. In 2021, the government of Oman removed its NOC requirement, allowing workers to transfer jobs without their employer’s permission upon

completion of their contract.⁶⁵ Saudi Arabia’s 2021 Labour Reform Initiative similarly allows workers to change jobs or leave the country without employer consent;⁶⁶ however, workers must complete one year of their contract and migrant domestic workers, among others, are excluded from this protection.⁶⁷ Under 2016 reforms allowing workers to transfer jobs in the UAE, workers must complete their contract or provide advance notice to avoid an employment ban, and may be required to compensate their employer.⁶⁸ As in Qatar, absconding is punishable in each of these countries and places migrant workers at risk of arrest or deportation for leaving abusive workplaces.

Even in Bahrain, which previously had the most sweeping reforms to the *kafala* system, gaps in protections persisted.⁶⁹ In 2017, the government introduced the Flexi-Permit, allowing migrant workers to freely change jobs and leave the country without facing possible charges of absconding.⁷⁰ This granted greater freedom than had ever been seen under the *kafala* system, yet the steep price of the permit deterred those eligible from self-sponsoring⁷¹ and permit-holders lacked defined labour protections under the law.⁷² Rather than address these shortcomings in line with civil society recommendations,⁷³ Bahrain abandoned the system entirely in October 2022,⁷⁴ replacing it with a program that allows workers to self-sponsor within designated professions.⁷⁵ Under the new system,⁷⁶ workers must obtain a vocational work permit through a certified registration centre, effectively privatising the process.⁷⁷ While the reforms purport to strengthen protections for migrants, those with irregular status from October 2022 are not eligible for the permit (unlike the Flexi-Permit system).⁷⁸ Further, workers must still bear the cost of the permit and can no longer obtain commercial registration.⁷⁹ The reforms were passed amid pressure from the business community, which was driven by fears that freelance migrant workers posed a threat to local businesses, and due to a government push to nationalise their workforce in a bid to move away from reliance on migrant workers.⁸⁰

The state of reform

The five elements of the *kafala* system present across countries in the Arab States are set out in Table 15.⁸¹

Table 15
Status of key elements of the *Kafala* system, by country

Rating scale: ● = in force ◐ = partially in force ○ = not in force

Country	Employer must sponsor entry into country	Employer controls residency / work permit	Employer must grant permission for workers to change / leave job	Employer can report worker for absconding	Employer must grant permission for worker to exit country
Bahrain ⁸²	● Under reforms introduced in December 2022, visit visas can no longer be converted into a work permits, meaning migrants cannot obtain a work permit without exiting Bahrain. ⁸³	◐ The vocational work permit allows workers to self-sponsor in designated professions. It is unclear if domestic workers are eligible. ⁸⁴	◐ Vocational work permit holders can transfer labour registration centres after a minimum of 30 days from initial registration. ⁸⁵ Excluding domestic workers, ⁸⁶ other migrants can transfer after one year with three months’ notice. ⁸⁷	● Before the Flexi-Permit was cancelled in October 2022, permit holders could not have absconding cases filed against them. ⁸⁸ It is unclear whether the new permit allows absconding charges to be filed. Other migrant workers can be punished for absconding. ⁸⁹	○
Oman ⁹⁰	◐ Visit visas may be converted into a work visa without the worker having to exit Oman, however granting of the work visa depends on the employer. ⁹¹	●	◐ Migrant workers can transfer jobs without permission after completion of their contract. ⁹²	●	○
United Arab Emirates ⁹³	◐ Free zone workers are sponsored by the free zone authority rather than an employer. ⁹⁴ Visit visas may also be converted without the worker having to exit the UAE. ⁹⁵	●	◐ Requirement for permission is waived in certain circumstances, such as contract expiry or non-payment of wages. ⁹⁶ Domestic workers may end their contract without consent if their employer violates legal obligations. They can transfer employers upon expiry of the contract. ⁹⁷	●	○
Kuwait ⁹⁸	●	●	◐ Migrants can change jobs after three years and 90 days’ notice without permission. ⁹⁹ Excludes domestic workers, who require approval from the Ministry of Interior and Labour Court to transfer jobs without consent from their employer.	●	○
Lebanon ¹⁰⁰	●	●	●	●	○
Qatar ¹⁰¹	●	●	◐ Migrant workers can transfer jobs under certain conditions and with at least one or two month’s notice. ¹⁰²	●	◐ Almost all migrant workers can depart without permission; however, employers can apply to have up to 5 per cent of certain employees to require prior approval. ¹⁰³ Domestic workers must give 72 hours’ notice. ¹⁰⁴
Saudi Arabia ¹⁰⁵	●	●	◐ Migrants can transfer employers upon completion of their contract, or after one year under certain conditions. ¹⁰⁶ Domestic workers can transfer in some cases such as abuse. ¹⁰⁷	●	◐ Migrant workers can apply to exit the country without their employer’s permission. ¹⁰⁸ This does not apply to domestic workers. ¹⁰⁹
Jordan ¹¹⁰	●	●	◐ Migrants can terminate unlimited term contracts with one month’s notice; however, they may be required to compensate the employer. Limited term contracts can be terminated under certain conditions without permission or upon expiry. Excludes certain categories such as agricultural workers. ¹¹¹	●	●

*Doha, Qatar,
December 2022.*

Construction workers, mainly from India, Bangladesh and Nepal, watch the Argentina-Australia match in the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Civil society activists criticised the labour conditions faced by the thousands of migrant workers involved in preparing the global tournament, and many migrant workers lost their lives during the construction. At the time of writing, a campaign is being run by civil society activists calling for FIFA to create a fund and financially compensate families of deceased workers. Photo credit: Christian Charisius/picture alliance via Getty Images.



Several countries in the region still grapple with strong opposition to comprehensive reforms due to perceived economic benefits of the *kafala* system and entrenched discriminatory attitudes towards foreign workers.¹¹² In 2020, prior to the installation of a new government in Lebanon, a new standard unified contract was proposed to allow migrant workers to change employers after one month’s notice, among other protections.¹¹³ However, the contract was swiftly struck down by the Shura Council, Lebanon’s highest administrative court, after the Syndicate of Owners of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon claimed that the contract violated the labour law and would adversely affect domestic worker recruitment, a lucrative trade in Lebanon.¹¹⁴

The government of Jordan has taken the least action to reform the *kafala* system. Jordan currently maintains all elements of the *kafala* system, whereby migrant workers typically cannot enter or exit the country or transfer jobs without written employer consent.¹¹⁵ While the government has made some attempts to curb illegal practices of unscrupulous recruitment agents and improve protections,¹¹⁶ there is a lack of capacity and will to enforce the regulations.¹¹⁷

“I wish I knew that going to work there, I didn’t have to pay any money to process any documents because my employer was to do everything. And if I fully knew that I was supposed to work as a housemaid, be locked up and denied free movement or be a prisoner, I shouldn’t have gone there. I knew nobody working in Lebanon. I signed a contract when I got to Lebanon but did not understand the terms of the contract. I didn’t know who the employer was.”

34-year-old Cameroonian female survivor of domestic servitude

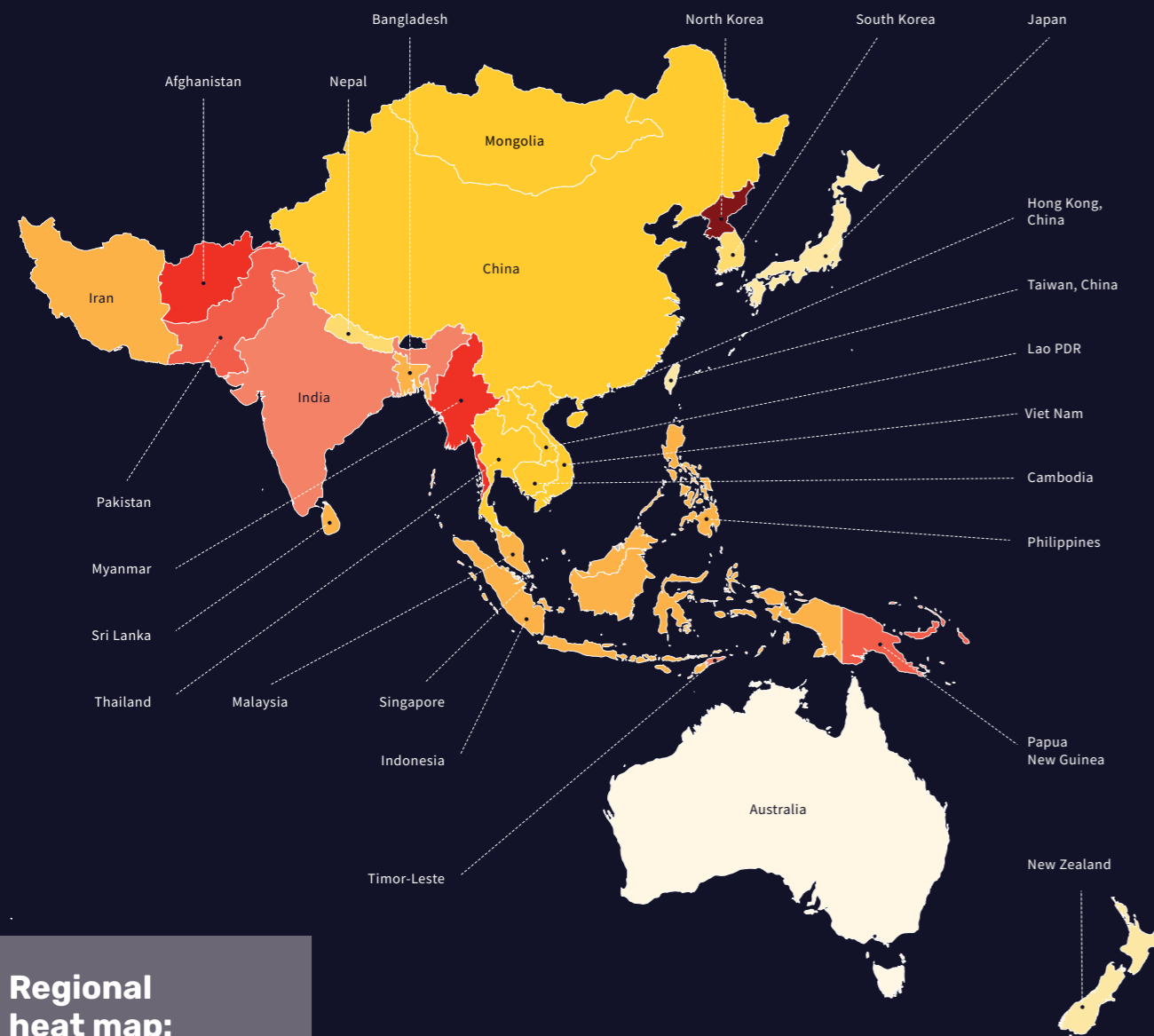
Recommendations host governments

- 1 Dismantle *kafala* by expanding coverage of national labour laws to include all workers and ensuring migrant workers can freely enter, reside, and exit the country, and leave or transfer jobs without employer consent.
- 2 Strengthen monitoring and regulation of recruitment agencies and high-risk sectors by increasing resources and capacity of labour inspectorates and conducting unannounced labour inspections. In addition, operate reporting mechanisms with whistle-blower protections to allow workers to freely report grievances.
- 3 Strengthen criminal justice responses, including the provision of free legal and interpretation services, and provide systematic, regular training on victim identification for police and first responders to ensure no victims are detained and deported. Provide training for prosecutors and the judiciary on related legislation to support access to justice, including timely compensation for survivors.
- 4 Address underlying discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes towards migrant workers that increase their vulnerability to modern slavery across all sectors.
- 5 Ratify international conventions including the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930.

Recommendations sending governments

- 1 Introduce and enforce laws to prohibit charging of recruitment fees to employees and register and monitor local recruitment agencies for deceptive practices, ensuring contracts are made available in a language migrants can understand.
- 2 Pursue and strengthen bilateral labour agreements to protect migrant workers (rather than implementing labour migration bans) and cooperate with other sending countries to advocate for common standards for the protection of workers, in consultation with migrant workers, survivors, and civil society.
- 3 Strengthen the capacity of embassies in receiving countries to support survivors, including through deployment of trained labour attachés, and make survivor funds accessible to all migrant workers, regardless of their status.
- 4 Launch targeted information campaigns and formal training to ensure prospective migrants are informed of the risks, their rights, and support services available in the destination country, and support and engage with returned migrant workers to inform policies and decision-making.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Asia and the Pacific is home to 56 per cent of the world's population, including the two most populous countries, India and China, and experienced the greatest increase in international migrants from 2000 to 2020.¹ The region hosts the largest number of people in modern slavery, with an estimated 15 million people in forced labour. This includes debt bondage among migrants exploited within the region, hereditary forms of bonded labour in South Asia, and state-imposed forced labour in China, North Korea, and other countries. The prevalence of forced marriage in Asia and the Pacific is second highest in the world, after the Arab States, impacting an estimated 4.5 females and 2.1 males per every thousand people.

Although the region is highly diverse in terms of geography, ethnicity, culture, religion, and wealth, modern slavery occurs in every country. Discrimination on the basis of gender, race, caste, and ethnicity drives vulnerability to modern slavery. This vulnerability is compounded by conflict, as seen with the mass displacement of the Rohingya population in Myanmar, political instability, as shown by the seizure of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and economic insecurity, as illustrated by the economic crisis and humanitarian emergency in Sri Lanka. To varying extents, the effects of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated vulnerability across the region — driving increased unemployment, poverty, and gender inequality.

Australia took the most action to combat modern slavery in the region, followed by the Philippines and Thailand, while North Korea and Iran took the least. Across most countries, governments should address significant gaps including raising the age of marriage to 18 for girls and boys with no exemptions and ensuring that labour rights are extended to all workers, including migrants.

What is the extent and nature of modern slavery in the region?

On any given day in 2021, an estimated 29.3 million people were living in modern slavery in Asia and the Pacific. This accounts for 59 per cent of the global total. When population size is taken into account, Asia and the Pacific had the third highest prevalence of modern slavery in the world with 6.8 per thousand people in the region forced to work or marry. Among the five regions, Asia and the Pacific had the second highest prevalence of forced marriage (3.3 per thousand) and the third highest prevalence of forced labour (3.5 per thousand).²

The country with by far the highest prevalence in Asia and the Pacific, and, indeed, the world, is North Korea, where the population is forced to work by the state or risk being penalised with hard labour in prison camps.³ In North Korea, an estimated one in every 10 people are in situations of modern slavery.

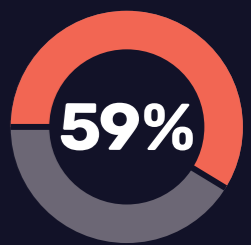
Following North Korea, Afghanistan, and Myanmar had the second and third highest prevalence of modern slavery in the region. India, China, and North Korea had the highest number — and together accounting for two-thirds of all people in modern slavery in the region. Instability continues to shape experiences of modern slavery across high prevalence countries in Asia and the Pacific. For example, the worsening humanitarian situation caused by the political and economic turmoil drives modern slavery practices in Afghanistan and Myanmar.⁴ In these contexts, families may resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as marrying their young daughters, to deal with economic stress.⁵ In other countries with a high prevalence of modern slavery, such as Pakistan and India, economic insecurity drives workers to take on risky jobs or loans from unscrupulous employers. Employers then exploit these workers by forcing them into labour-intensive jobs to repay their debts.⁶

Although these regional figures of modern slavery are the most reliable to date, they are conservative estimates given the gaps and limitations of data in key regions and subregions. For example, difficulties in conducting surveys in countries that are experiencing conflict means that our estimates for these countries likely understate the problem, despite our efforts to address data gaps. These estimates also do not include the recruitment of child soldiers or organ trafficking, which other sources note occur in parts of the region.⁷ The true number of people living in situations of modern slavery in Asia and the Pacific is likely much higher.

Estimated number living in modern slavery:

**29
MILLION**
(6.8 per thousand)

Regional proportion of global estimate:



Forced labour

52%

Forced marriage

48%

Average vulnerability score:

48%

Average government response rating:

40%

Top 3 countries:

Australia	67%
Philippines	59%
Thailand	55%

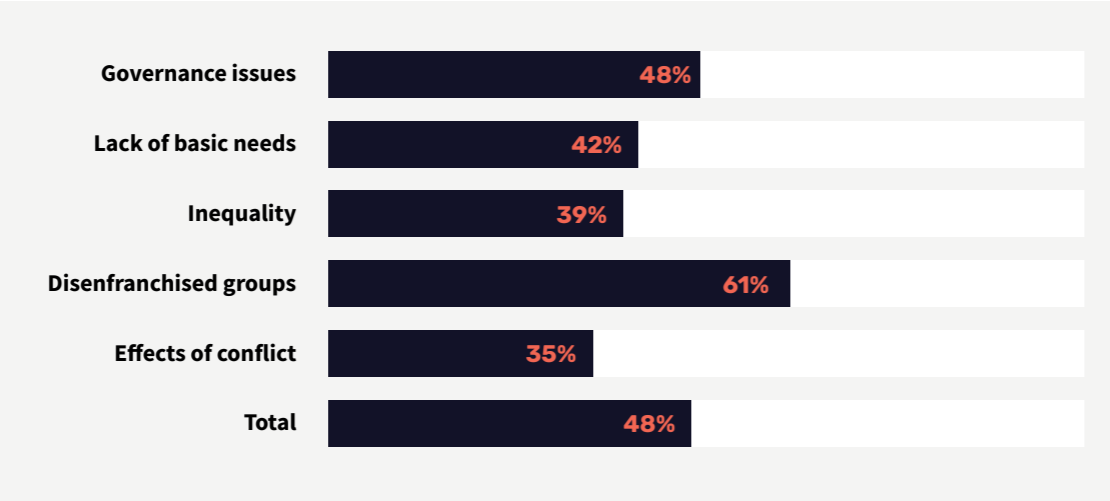
Bottom 3 countries:

North Korea	-3%
Iran	8%
Vanuatu	26%

Table 16
Estimated
prevalence and
number of people
in modern slavery,
by country

Regional rank	Country	Estimated prevalence of modern slavery (per 1,000 of population)	Estimated number of people in modern slavery	Population
1	North Korea	104.6	2,696,000	25,779,000
2	Afghanistan	13.0	505,000	38,928,000
3	Myanmar	12.1	657,000	54,410,000
4	Pakistan	10.6	2,349,000	220,892,000
5	Papua New Guinea	10.3	93,000	8,947,000
6	India	8.0	11,050,000	1,380,004,000
7	Philippines	7.8	859,000	109,581,000
8	Iran	7.1	597,000	83,993,000
9	Bangladesh	7.1	1,162,000	164,689,000
10	Indonesia	6.7	1,833,000	273,524,000
11	Sri Lanka	6.5	139,000	21,413,000
12	Malaysia	6.3	202,000	32,366,000
13	Timor-Leste	6.1	8,000	1,318,000
14	Thailand	5.7	401,000	69,800,000
15	Lao PDR	5.2	38,000	7,276,000
16	Cambodia	5.0	83,000	16,719,000
17	Viet Nam	4.1	396,000	97,339,000
18	Mongolia	4.0	13,000	3,278,000
19	China	4.0	5,771,000	1,439,324,000
20	South Korea	3.5	180,000	51,269,000
21	Nepal	3.3	97,000	29,137,000
22	Hong Kong	2.8	21,000	7,497,000
23	Singapore	2.1	12,000	5,850,000
24	Taiwan	1.7	40,000	23,817,000
25	New Zealand	1.6	8,000	4,822,000
26	Australia	1.6	41,000	25,500,000
27	Japan	1.1	144,000	126,476,000

Figure 16
Level of
vulnerability to
modern slavery,
by dimension



What drives vulnerability to modern slavery in the region?

Asia and the Pacific is the third most vulnerable region in the world to modern slavery. The drivers most influencing this risk include widespread discriminatory social norms, political inequality and instability, and economic insecurity. While conflict-induced displacement and disruption widened gaps in wealth and social capital in some countries, vulnerability was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related disasters. Overall, Afghanistan had the highest levels of vulnerability (86 per cent) and Australia the lowest (7 per cent).

Discriminatory social norms that devalue marginalised groups on the basis of their migration status, race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation are the greatest driver of vulnerability in the region. In Myanmar, the Rohingya minority continue to face mass displacement, abductions, sexual violence, and murder,⁸ driving many to seek protection in Bangladesh. Once in Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees face increased risks of modern slavery as offenders prey on their extreme vulnerability,⁹ while families living in camps struggle to cope with food and economic insecurity,¹⁰ which, coupled with gender discrimination, has led to increased rates of child marriage.¹¹ The persecution of religious and ethnic minorities occurs in China, including the use of state-imposed forced labour to control the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim majority groups in the Uyghur region.¹² The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of Uyghur and other predominately Muslim groups has been called a crime against humanity by the UN Human Rights Commissioner.¹³

Political inequality and instability pervade many countries in the region, driving vulnerability to

modern slavery. Notably, Afghanistan is considered the least peaceful country in the world.¹⁴ In August 2021, after four decades of war, the Taliban seized control, triggering political, economic, and social shocks and worsening the humanitarian situation.¹⁵ The crisis has caused many civilians to turn to smugglers to flee the country, often to countries with measures in place to actively deter Afghan refugees,¹⁶ which compounds their vulnerability to exploitation. Afghan women and girls have reportedly been forced into marriages by their families to escape the country.¹⁷ In Iran, physical and sexual violence is perpetrated by security forces as a means to repress women’s rights and stifle political dissent, which has attracted coordinated sanctions from 30 countries in March 2023.¹⁸ Hundreds of activists have been unfairly imprisoned and subject to torture and sexual assault or killed since protests erupted in September 2022, following the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini — who was arrested for wearing her hijab incorrectly.¹⁹ Personal status laws that deny women equal rights in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and children further entrench gender inequality and vulnerability to exploitation.²⁰

Economic instability and increasing poverty limit access to essential needs for survival such as shelter, food, and water, and increase vulnerability to all forms of modern slavery in Asia and the Pacific. This is underpinned by widening wealth gaps: in 2021, an additional 80 million people were forced into poverty due to pandemic-related disruptions in economic activity.²¹ This risk is compounded for disenfranchised groups who were already living in precarious conditions. In India, for example, a sudden lockdown in early 2020 left many migrant workers, who were largely employed as day labourers, stranded and without support from the government or their employers.²² Many had no alternative but to make the journey home on foot,



Kabul, Afghanistan,
August 2021.
Men walk past an all-girl school in Afghanistan. The Zarghuna High School previously educated 8,000 girls, until it was locked and shuttered per orders from the Taliban-controlled Education Ministry. Photo credit: Marcus Yam/ Los Angeles Times via Getty Images.

Table 17
Level of
vulnerability to
modern slavery,
by country

Country	Total (%)
Afghanistan	86
Pakistan	80
Papua New Guinea	79
Iran	68
Myanmar	67
North Korea	67
Philippines	66
Bangladesh	58
Cambodia	58
India	56
Sri Lanka	56
Lao PDR	52
Timor-Leste	51
Mongolia	50
Indonesia	49
Thailand	46
Nepal	46
China	46
Viet Nam	44
Malaysia	37
South Korea	29
Hong Kong	28
Singapore	24
Taiwan	21
Japan	11
New Zealand	8
Australia	7

often walking hundreds of kilometres,²³ while others took out loans to meet their basic needs.²⁴ After a devastating second wave of COVID-19 buckled the Indian health system in 2021²⁵ and caused many deaths from the disease,²⁶ thousands of newly orphaned children were exposed to higher risks of abuse and trafficking.²⁷

Climate change and climate-related disasters exacerbate risks to modern slavery by reducing access to essential needs and increasing existing disparities in wealth and social capital levels. These burdens were not evenly shared across the region. Many people in low-lying countries in the Pacific Islands expect to be displaced from their homes due to the effects of climate change,²⁸ if they have not been already.²⁹ Intensifying weather events and rising sea levels contribute to food and water insecurity through crop loss, loss of arable land, overcrowding, poor health and sanitation, and increased competition for limited jobs.³⁰ These conditions create opportunities for traffickers to exploit vulnerable individuals,³¹ particularly where avenues for regular migration are not readily available.³² Risk of modern slavery also increases through reliance on negative coping mechanisms. For instance, in Bangladesh, one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change,³³ extreme weather has been linked to child marriage to both minimise household expenses and protect daughters from the heightened risk of sexual violence.³⁴

What are governments in the region doing to address modern slavery?

Walk Free assessed government responses to modern slavery across 32 countries in the region. Asia and the Pacific scored an average 40 per cent rating on government response, the second lowest score of the five regions. Overall, governments did not have sufficient measures to support survivors or the criminal justice process, coordinate the response, address underlying risk factors, or eradicate modern slavery from supply chains — though responses vary significantly across the region.

Within Asia and the Pacific, there are stark differences in GDP per capita PPP (current international \$),³⁵ meaning certain economies have far more resources available to dedicate to responding to modern slavery than others. However, on overall government response scores, countries with a higher level of wealth, particularly Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan are taking relatively little action to respond to modern slavery. In comparison, Bangladesh, Fiji, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Thailand are all taking positive steps to respond to this issue relative to their level of wealth.

Australia took the most action to combat modern slavery in the Asia and the Pacific region, followed by the Philippines, Thailand, and New Zealand. For the first time, Australia allocated a budget to support implementation of its National Action Plan.³⁶ In December 2021, the President of the Philippines signed Republic Act (R.A.) No. 11596 into law, which effectively criminalises child marriage, setting the minimum age of marriage at 18.³⁷ The Philippines is only the eighth country in our assessment of the region to do so. However, the Philippines has not yet criminalised forced marriage, which remains a critical gap across the region, with only 10 countries having done so.³⁸ Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, and Malaysia recently joined Sri Lanka as the only countries in the region to have brought the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 into force.³⁹

North Korea and Iran still demonstrate the weakest response to modern slavery, reflecting a lack of political will to address modern slavery and, in the case of North Korea, the active use of state-imposed forced labour. For many Pacific Island countries, the challenge of operating in resource constrained environments largely accounts for existing gaps in the response to modern slavery.⁴⁰

Many countries in the region took further action to combat modern slavery since the last edition of the Global Slavery Index in 2018. For example, since then, Palau, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Nepal, and Pakistan⁴¹ acceded to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.⁴² Brunei Darussalam finalised a National Action Plan on

human trafficking⁴³ and established a National Committee on Trafficking in Persons.⁴⁴ Palau, which was not included in the previous edition of the GSI, has also made significant strides in improving the modern slavery response over the last four years, during which it set up a coordinating body and adopted a National Action Plan,⁴⁵ ratified the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182),⁴⁶ and established a trafficking hotline.⁴⁷

“Once they are rescued and back in their communities, the victims needed to be connected with services within their community. They need services so that there is no re-trafficking.”

Female survivor of modern slavery, India, 2019

There are significant gaps in legislative frameworks to combat modern slavery across the region. Nine countries in Asia and the Pacific have stated in legislation that survivors are not to be treated as criminals for conduct that occurred while under the control of criminals. However, even where this protection exists, it is not always implemented in practice. A total of 19 countries in the region treated survivors of modern slavery as criminals. For example, in 2020, 81 returned migrant workers who had been exploited in Viet Nam were jailed in Bangladesh.⁴⁸

This is not the only gap between policy and practice. While almost all countries have criminalised corruption, there were reports that official complicity in modern slavery cases were not investigated in 19 countries. In India, officials allegedly received bribes from traffickers in exchange for protection against prosecution, while in the state of Tamil Nadu, local politicians allegedly benefitted from the commercial sexual exploitation of children and forced begging rings.⁴⁹ Further, despite National Action Plans in 28 countries, only 11 governments routinely reviewed their modern slavery response and just two countries monitored the government response to modern slavery through an independent entity, such as the Office of the Special Rapporteur

on Trafficking in Persons in Nepal, which is tasked with monitoring human trafficking in the country and making recommendations to government.⁵⁰ More recently, Australia announced funding to establish an Anti-Slavery Commissioner.⁵¹ Of 26 countries that have a legal framework that supports compensation or restitution for modern slavery crimes, only 15 awarded compensation or restitution to survivors in practice.

Labour laws in 18 countries prevented certain groups, such as migrant workers or domestic workers, from exercising their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and only the Philippines has ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).⁵² Despite significant levels of regular and irregular migration — largely intra-regional but also to destinations such as North America, Europe, and the Middle East⁵³ — only six countries had ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 1990⁵⁴ and fewer than half have ratified the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.⁵⁵ Further, recruitment agencies were registered and monitored by governments in only 13 countries, and even fewer countries in the region had laws or policies stating that recruitment fees — a known driver of risk among migrants — are to be paid by employers.

Only six countries took any steps to eradicate modern slavery from supply chains. This includes Australia’s 2018 Modern Slavery Act, which requires businesses with an annual consolidated revenue of at least AU\$100 million (approximately US\$67 million) to report on their efforts to address modern slavery within their operations and supply chains.⁵⁶ In 2022, New Zealand also proposed legislation to prevent modern slavery within business supply chains.⁵⁷

“Holding company owners directly liable for what happens in their business or supply chains.”

Female survivor of modern slavery, India, 2019

Regional cooperation through the Bali Process Government and Business Forum



The Bali Process Government and Business Forum provides a unique platform for government and business leaders from 45 countries across the Asia-Pacific to collaborate on initiatives with the joint goal of eradicating modern slavery. Its “Acknowledge. Act. Advance.” Framework was the first major policy document agreed upon by the private and public sectors to tackle issues of human trafficking and forced labour in the region. It focuses on the pillars of supply chain transparency, ethical recruitment, and worker protection and redress.

At the high-level meeting in February 2023, many business leaders called on their own governments to introduce robust legislation addressing modern slavery offences, noting that such legislation can create a level playing field for those businesses complying with their human rights obligations. Future plans include a series of regional events to raise awareness of modern slavery risks and promote closer collaboration between business and government. For example, the Indonesian co-chair will hold a forum aimed at young entrepreneurs, while the Nepalese business leader will host a Responsible Business Summit in Kathmandu.

Table 18
Government
response score,
by country and
milestone

Country	Survivors identified and supported (%)	Criminal justice mechanisms (%)	National and regional level coordination (%)	Risk factors are addressed (%)	Government and business supply chains (%)	Total (%)
Australia	64	69	75	79	38	67
Philippines	59	73	75	50	13	59
Thailand	50	65	75	64	0	55
New Zealand	45	65	50	64	25	54
Indonesia	45	65	50	57	0	50
Bangladesh	41	69	50	50	0	49
Sri Lanka	45	65	50	50	0	49
Singapore	55	54	38	57	0	47
Taiwan	45	36	63	79	13	47
Viet Nam	64	46	75	36	0	47
Fiji	50	50	38	64	0	46
India	36	58	75	50	0	46
Lao PDR	59	50	50	43	0	46
Malaysia	41	58	50	50	0	45
Nepal	36	58	63	50	0	45
Japan	45	42	63	57	0	44
Cambodia	41	46	75	43	0	42
Myanmar	50	42	75	36	0	42
China	41	46	50	36	13	40
Mongolia	36	54	25	43	13	40
South Korea	41	46	50	36	0	38
Maldives	41	38	38	50	0	37
Pakistan	36	42	50	43	0	37
Brunei Darussalam	27	42	25	57	0	35
Timor-Leste	32	42	50	36	0	35
Hong Kong	27	35	38	50	0	32
Papua New Guinea	23	42	50	29	0	31
Solomon Islands	14	42	50	43	0	31
Palau	27	31	25	36	0	27
Vanuatu	9	38	50	29	0	26
Iran	-5	19	25	0	0	8
North Korea	-9	8	13	-21	0	-3

Aceh province,
Indonesia,
August 2019.

Fishermen collect their catch. Fishing is a high-risk industry for forced labour. Migrant workers are particularly at risk of experiencing exploitation in the Indonesian fishing industry. Photo by Chaideer Mahyuddin/AFP via Getty Images.



Promising Practices in Asia
and the Pacific

Within the Promising Practices Database, 46 per cent of evaluated programs are delivered in Asia and the Pacific, covering 22 countries in the region. While most programs tackle known forms of modern slavery in the region such as forced marriage, there are significant gaps in relation to debt bondage and forced labour despite the high prevalence of these issues in the region. Over three quarters of evaluated programs delivered in Asia and the Pacific had met some or all their objectives; yet as only 19 of these evaluations featured reliable methodologies with a control or comparison group, the ability to determine lessons learned or identify promising practices in the region was limited.

Spotlight on what works

Using a community-based program to empower adolescent girls with life skills, the Bangladeshi Association for Life skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) aimed to reduce child marriage across three high-prevalence districts. The program offered nearly 10,000 adolescent girls 44 hours of life skills lessons in addition to 100 hours of training focused on education support, gender rights awareness, or livelihoods training. The program also engaged local young women as mentors and engaged with communities to build awareness around adolescent skills development. The evaluation of the BALIKA program found that all three interventions significantly reduced child marriages, demonstrating the importance of a community-based approach and investment in education, skills development, and livelihoods training for adolescent girls.⁵⁸

Recommendations
for governments

- 1 Ensure survivor support services, including shelters, crisis support centres, and community-based protection, cover all populations — including males, adults, and migrants — and make specialised support available for children.
- 2 Strengthen legislation to protect survivors of exploitation by ensuring they are not treated as criminals for conduct that occurred while under the control of traffickers. Ensure legislation supports compensation and restitution for survivors of modern slavery and that this occurs in practice, including by setting up a compensation fund for survivors.
- 3 Raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls and boys with no exemptions.
- 4 Extend labour laws to ensure that all groups are covered without exception and ensure that labour inspections are regularly conducted across all sectors, including the informal sector. Introduce and enforce laws to prohibit charging of recruitment fees to employees and register and monitor local recruitment agencies for deceptive practices, ensuring contracts are made available in a language migrants can understand.
- 5 Introduce mandatory human rights due diligence to stop governments and businesses sourcing goods or services linked to modern slavery.

Frontline voices:

“I have no way out”: Forced into marriage, Afghan girls fear for their future

Afghanistan has experienced decades of political instability and insecurity amid successive wars and violent conflicts. The most recent Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, in August 2021 following the withdrawal of US troops, saw the militant group seize control of the country’s capital city, Kabul, after a rapid advance across the country. The Taliban’s return to power has seen mass degradation of human rights in the country as well as mass violence and terrorism. The emerging restrictions on women and girls’ mobility and participation in government and education are further contributing to the rapid rise of modern slavery risks across the country.

With Afghan women increasingly confined to their homes, reports on their welfare are difficult to obtain. For this piece The Fuller Project, a global newsroom that reports on issues that impact women, and Zan Times, a women-led investigative newsroom that covers human rights in Afghanistan spoke to women facing the worst impacts of Taliban rule. What their interviews reveal is a nation grappling to resist ongoing violence and exploitation.

Afghan teenager Rukhsar once dreamed of becoming a doctor and finding a well-educated husband who would support her work. That was before the Taliban banned secondary education for girls and the 15-year-old’s father forced her to get engaged to an older man.

“Sometimes I think to myself, it is better to ... run away from home,” said Rukhsar, whose name has been changed for her protection, in the western city of Herat.

Yet Rukhsar said she feared that fleeing home would lead to her being caught by the Taliban — putting her in an even worse situation.

Her situation is far from unique. Reports of early and forced marriages have soared since the Taliban seized power in August 2021 and excluded girls from middle and high schools, according to Afghan experts and international organisations working in the country.

Rukhsar’s father arranged her engagement to the son of his business partner — a 22-year-old car salesman, in December. Without an education, Rukhsar said her father saw marriage as the only option for her. Her desperate appeals to him have been answered with violence.

“Every time I object to this marriage, my father beats me very hard,” she said in an interview.

“My mother can’t help me either because she herself got married at the age of 14,” added Rukhsar, whose wedding is set for June. “I don’t really know anything about marriage, I still play with my dolls. I have no way out of this situation.”

Even before the Taliban’s takeover, child marriage was prevalent in Afghanistan. According to the latest national data¹ from 2017, about 28 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before turning 18, and 4 per cent before reaching 15. The former Afghan government set the minimum age for marriage at 16 for girls, but even this was rarely enforced. But the Taliban’s crackdown on women’s and girls’ freedoms, such as the right to work and attend school, as well as the worsening economic and humanitarian outlook, are fuelling an increase in early and forced marriage rates across the country.

“The Taliban’s draconian policies on women and girls are only increasing in number and severity, and this means that prospects are extremely dim for any improvements in terms of child, early and forced marriage in Afghanistan,” Nicolette Waldman, senior crisis advisor for Amnesty, said in an interview.

UNICEF Afghanistan spokesman Salam Al-Janabi said there is a growing number of reports of “destitute parents being forced into heart-breaking measures to keep their families alive” — from exchanging daughters for a dowry to selling infants to strangers.

Shaharзад Akbar, the former chairperson of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission, said the laws and structures meant to protect women and children “no longer exist.”

“The economic conditions of poor families and tolerance of child marriage have led to increase of forced and child marriage for girls in Afghanistan,” said Akbar, who is now executive director of Rawadari, an organisation that monitors and reports on human rights violations in the country.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid dismissed reports of an increase in early marriage and said people were not forcing their children to wed.

“We don’t have a number for it, but propaganda about this is not true,” he said in a phone interview.

“The level of awareness about [child marriage and forced marriage] is high among people and they don’t give their children into marriage ... forced marriage is not possible at all.”

The Taliban issued a decree on women’s rights which said, “no one can force women to marry by coercion or pressure.”² However, last May a spokesman for the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice told Voice of America that girls “can be given to marriage” upon reaching puberty.³

It is not just the Taliban’s policies but its members themselves who are also fuelling forced marriage, according to rights groups and some of the girls interviewed for this story. Cases of Taliban members forcing women and girls to wed them has even led some families to marry off their daughters urgently as a preventative measure.

Fatima, 14, lives in a village in Kang district in southwestern Nimroz province where gossip spread last year that the Taliban would force girls under the age of 18 into marriage. “My father engaged me because of these rumours,” she said in an interview.

She was married off in February 2022 and moved to Zaranj city, the capital of Nimroz, to live with her husband and his family. There, she faced abuse and violence. “I was very young. I did not understand anything about being a housewife and doing chores,” she said. “My mother-in-law used to torture me because I couldn’t do housework.”

The situation grew even worse, with Fatima recalling how her husband would beat her repeatedly, even when she was seven months pregnant. Although her husband moved to Iran several months ago to make money as a labourer, Fatima said she is still trapped with his family as she raises her baby.

“I would wish no one else to experience the pain and suffering that I am going through,” she said.

Girls who are forced into marriage face a greater risk of domestic servitude and other forms of forced labour both inside and outside the home. They experience domestic abuse and violence, marital rape, complications during pregnancy and childbirth, and disproportionately suffer from mental health conditions.

“The consequences will be devastating not only for the physical and mental health of these girls, but for generations to come.” said Akbar of Rawadari.

An Afghan doctor in a mental health ward in Herat province, who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals from the Taliban, said more women and girls were arriving with extreme mental health conditions, in many cases as a result of being forced into marriage.

“This unfortunate situation has increased the number of our visitors,” he said in a phone interview, referring to a rise in forced and early marriages.

“The Taliban’s restrictions have left women in a vulnerable position ... (they) are paying the price,” he said.

Having been married off by her uncle last November to avoid a Taliban wedding, 17-year-old Arzu said she is treated like “a slave” and is now suffering from severe depression. “I am married to someone with whom I cannot live and I have no escape from it,” she said in an interview from northern Samangan province.

“I hate him more everyday. My life will be ruined by this man.”

Arzu said she endures constant beatings, rape and death threats, and that her husband’s family refuse to take her to a doctor despite her poor mental health.

“From the day I got married, my body melts like a candle.”

“My memory is weakening. I have become forgetful. I don’t remember anything. I don’t talk to anyone — it’s no use.”

Recognition of the intersection between conflict and modern slavery risks in Afghanistan is vital. In the face of an uncertain future, Afghanistan needs continued and sustained advocacy and action from the international community, towards the goal of establishing stability and rule of law. In the immediate term, there is an urgent need to reopen secondary schools and universities for women and girls, and for a humanitarian response to ensure support to all at-risk persons and to enhance monitoring and reporting mechanisms throughout the country.

See page 58 “Modern slavery: A weapon and consequence of war” for a wider discussion on this intersection, including recommendations for government action.

Orphanages: Modern slavery hubs



Despite overwhelming evidence cataloguing the harms of institutional care for children, an estimated 5.4 million children worldwide live in orphanages and other institutions.¹ While many assume that orphanages are home to children who have no living parents, research consistently demonstrates that this is not the case for over 80 per cent of children living in orphanages globally.²

In many countries, only a small proportion of children's institutions are registered with the government, which leaves many children invisible to necessary oversight and protections, and hinders data collection efforts.³ The institutionalised population, including children in orphanages, are underrepresented in the prevalence estimates within this Global Slavery Index for this reason.

While the case for global care reform is not new, more recent evidence from governments and civil society organisations highlights the multifaceted relationship between children's institutions and human trafficking — revealing a complex web of factors that position orphanages as both a driver and an outcome of exploitation.⁴ In 2019, the links between institutions and child trafficking were recognised by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). For the first time, member states collectively expressed their concern over the harm that institutions can cause to children and called for them to be progressively phased out. In its historic Resolution on the Rights of the Child, the UNGA set out the political and human rights case for transforming care systems and made some ground-breaking recommendations. Governments and civil society now have an opportunity to implement these recommendations.

A residential care institution is any residential setting where children are isolated from the wider community and are compelled to live with other children to whom they are not related. These children, and their families, do not have control over their lives or involvement in the decisions that affect them. Crucially, an institutional culture prevails, meaning that the requirements of the organisation tend to take precedence over the children's individual needs.⁵ This Spotlight uses the terms “institution” and “orphanage” interchangeably.

Trafficking into orphanages

Child trafficking into institutions, also referred to as orphanage trafficking, is described as “the recruitment of children into residential care institutions for the purpose of profit and exploitation.”⁶ This practice is linked to the funding of orphanages through private donations, volunteer tourism, mission trips, and other forms of fundraising.⁷ It is estimated that US Christian organisations alone donate approximately US\$3.3 billion to residential care each year.⁸ The popular practice of orphanage volunteering — people from high-income countries traveling abroad to help children living in orphanages — also serves to provide a continual income for the orphanage, as well as reduced labour costs for the care of the children.⁹ However, there is a grim downside to all of this.

Although often well-intentioned, these sources of financial and in-kind support undermine national efforts to support broader child protection and social welfare systems by creating a parallel system without official oversight and accountability. They also create a marketplace that can incentivise the expansion of existing orphanages and the establishment of new ones, with the *supply* of funding and resources into orphanages increasing the *demand* for children to be in them.¹⁰ There is evidence of children being deliberately recruited from vulnerable families to fill spaces in orphanages, under the guise of better care and access to education.¹¹ Once trafficked into orphanages, children are vulnerable to neglect, abuse, and exploitation. Orphanages that are run for profit have been found to operate under extremely poor conditions to drive down care costs, with evidence also pointing to children being kept deliberately malnourished to encourage further donations,¹² forced to interact with and perform for visitors, or forced to beg for financial donations.¹³

The popularity of orphanage “volunteering” has seen a rise in orphanages built in tourist hotspots to fulfil demand and capitalise on the financial potential.¹⁴ In Cambodia, for example, there was a 75 per cent increase in the number of residential care institutions in a five-year period, despite no correlating increase in the number of children losing both parents.¹⁵ In Uganda, the number of children in institutions increased from just over one thousand in the late 1990s to 55,000 in 2018, despite large

Deoria, India, August 2018.

A bungalow which served as an old age facility and orphanage for girls living with mental disabilities was investigated for allegations of forced sexual exploitation of residents by shelter staff. Police raided the shelter after a 10-year old girl escaped and reported that many young girls, who were usually locked inside rooms, were taken away for short periods of time by strangers in cars parked outside. Photo credit: Deepak Gupta/Hindustan via Getty Images.

decreases in the number of orphans.¹⁶ The presence of volunteers also places children at increased risk of sexual abuse. There have been numerous documented cases of perpetrators posing as well-intentioned orphanage volunteers to gain access to vulnerable children, taking advantage of often unregulated, unvetted, and unsupervised access.¹⁷

Australian Modern Slavery Act addressing orphanage trafficking

The Australian Modern Slavery Act (2018) defines and recognises orphanage trafficking as a form of modern slavery under the Act’s definition.¹⁸ As such, reporting entities with orphanages in their structures, supply chains, funding models, or operations must assess for and report on risks of modern slavery in these contexts. Additionally, the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act Guidance Material¹⁹ includes information on orphanage trafficking and the exploitation of children in orphanages, identifying orphanage volunteering and tourism as a related risk factor. Guidance has been developed by civil society organisations to assist entities reporting under the Australian legislation to understand its implications.²⁰

Trafficking out of orphanages

Traffickers and organised criminal groups are known to target institutions where they can exploit weak or absent child protection mechanisms.²¹ Evidence shows children in orphanages are groomed, coerced, and deceived into leaving facilities and are trafficked into sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced criminality, and other forms of modern slavery.²² In some cases, orphanages have been complicit or directly involved in the trafficking and exploitation of children within their care.²³

Demand for adoption among childless families — often from high-income countries — also drives trafficking and kidnapping of children into and out of orphanages.²⁴ This is particularly evident in countries where private and international adoptions are common, for example in China, where it is estimated that more than 200,000 children are sold for the purposes of international adoptions per year.²⁵ In Nigeria, some orphanages have been linked to “baby factories,” where traffickers hold women against their will, rape them, and force them to carry and deliver a child for the purpose of selling.²⁶

Hopeland creates programs and campaigns that improve the lives of children by strengthening families. Learn more at www.ourhopeland.org.

Child survivors of modern slavery and unaccompanied migrant children being placed in orphanages

Children who have been trafficked are often placed in institutions, either as a mechanism intended to provide them with protection and support or as a law enforcement response because the child is not being treated as a victim of crime. Government responses fall short of providing child-centric safeguards; for example, only 55 per cent of governments assessed in the Global Slavery Index were found to have special support for child victims of modern slavery. In some cases, children identified as victims are returned to the same institutions from which they were trafficked and are re-exposed to the risks that led to their initial exploitation.²⁷

Without the protection provided by parents and guardians, unaccompanied migrant and refugee children are at greater risk of trafficking and exploitation, both in transit and on arrival in their destination country.²⁸ Often, these children are either placed in reception facilities akin to orphanages or they enter the institutional care system.²⁹ The institutionalisation of trafficked children and unaccompanied migrant and refugee children increases their vulnerability to exploitation on account of entering a high-risk and insecure system.³⁰

Modern slavery risks experienced by care leavers

Children who have grown up in institutional settings are more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation once they have aged out of the system or if they have run away from the facilities.³¹ This is linked to the impact of having had fewer opportunities to develop the social skills and networks needed to live successfully and independently in the community.³²

This vulnerability is increased where there are limited services and support available for reintegration into society.³³ Further, care leavers are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Girls in Moldova who grew up in institutions, for example, were found to be 10 times more likely to be trafficked for sexual exploitation than their peers raised in families.³⁴ International analysis highlights similar disadvantages among care leaver populations globally, including higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, isolation, poverty, and mental health issues compared to peers raised in families.³⁵

Globally, orphanages and other institutional settings for children are hubs where child exploitation and modern slavery can thrive, as they are often hidden from official oversight, operate with weak child protection systems, attract a continuous flow of large and unmonitored donations, and are home to children who are already vulnerable. Addressing this requires a multi-faceted response.

Times of crisis and children in care

More than 5 million children have lost a parent or caregiver as a result of COVID-19³⁶ and the number of children being separated from their parents and at risk of subsequent exploitation is expected to increase.³⁷ In some parts of the world, COVID-19 has reportedly led to family reunification. For example, authorities in Nepal, India and Kenya instructed orphanages to reintegrate children with their family during the national lockdown³⁸ In Nepal, this resulted in nearly 10 per cent of the country’s institutionalised children returning to their communities in the early stages of the pandemic.³⁹ While this shows that not all children in orphanages lack family-based alternatives, there are concerns that children may have been sent home without the necessary assessment, preparation, and support.⁴⁰ Additionally, experts warn that inadequate records of where children have been placed, as well as of those who remain institutionalised, could lead to more children falling through the gaps and becoming unaccounted for.⁴¹ For many orphanages around the world, lockdown and social distancing measures mean that the child-to-caregiver ratio has decreased due to reductions in staff and access to facilities, raising concerns over declines in quality of care.⁴²

Social distancing restrictions have hampered orphanage inspections in some countries.⁴³ Encouragingly, one study on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s institutions globally found that the vast majority of founders, funders, and directors of orphanages participating in the research (91 per cent) stated that to some degree the pandemic had catalysed reflection and created an opportunity to consider or implement changes or adaptations to the orphanage model of care. This included a greater focus on sustainability and a renewed belief in the ability for institutionalised children to be reunited with their families and communities.⁴⁴

Much can be learned from the impact of previous international crises on children in institutional care. In the wake of disaster, support for orphanages is a popular response for overseas audiences wanting to contribute to relief efforts.⁴⁵ Following the devastating 2015 earthquake in Nepal, an increase in child trafficking and of children being placed in institutions led to immediate child safeguarding concerns.⁴⁶ Officials recorded cases of traffickers posing as either aid workers or religious representatives, coercing poor and vulnerable families to give up their children for placement into orphanages for the purposes of financial exploitation.⁴⁷ Similar conclusions have been drawn from post-disaster analysis in Haiti⁴⁸ and Indonesia.⁴⁹ It is vital that there be close monitoring of COVID-19’s impact of on children in institutions and on those from families and communities whose vulnerabilities have increased due to the pandemic.

In addition, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has had a devastating impact on children in institutions. Ukraine already had the largest population of institutionalised children in Europe, and the displacement brought on by the conflict has caused those numbers to rise.⁵⁰ Concerns continue to grow regarding living conditions in orphanages and the risk of child exploitation and abuse, with instances of traffickers targeting Ukrainian orphanages.⁵¹ Additionally, the UN has expressed concern about the risk of forced adoption of Ukrainian children, warning that children in institutions cannot be assumed to be orphans.⁵² In March 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and children’s commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova on war crimes for the mass abduction of Ukrainian children. The children are allegedly being taken to Russia and adopted by Russian families, under the guise of a humanitarian mission to save the children from the war.⁵³

Recommendations for governments

- 1

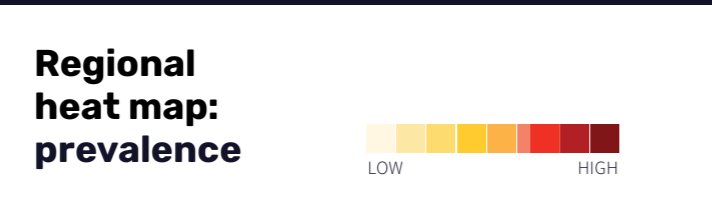
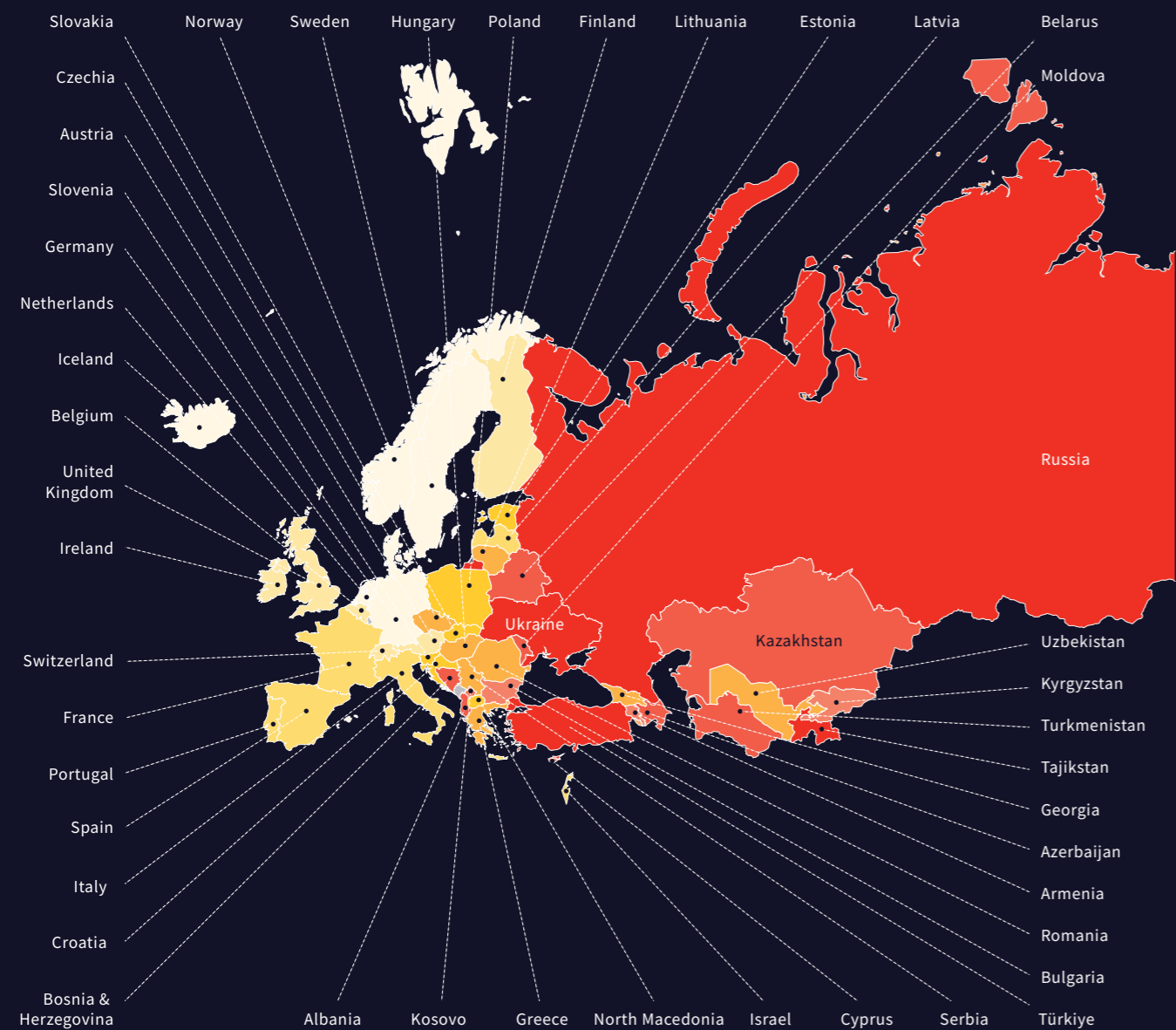
Recognise the link between children in orphanages and modern slavery. Orphanage trafficking must be criminalised and children in these settings recognised and responded to as being highly vulnerable to exploitation.
- 2

Curb the proliferation of orphanages by prioritising family and community-based care in all policies relating to the care and protection of children. This includes ensuring adequate funding for family and community services and prioritising long-term, sustainable solutions that enable families and communities to thrive together.
- 3

Focus international aid on family and community strengthening initiatives, as opposed to being directed towards institutional care for children.
- 4

Monitor international donations and raise awareness among philanthropic communities of potential risks of funding orphanages.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



Europe and Central Asia is home to 12 per cent of the world’s population. Although the region is highly diverse in terms of geography, ethnicity, culture, religion, and wealth, modern slavery occurs in every country. Europe and Central Asia has the second highest prevalence of modern slavery of the five global regions. Various factors contribute to the prevalence of forced labour and forced marriage, including poverty, discrimination, migration, and a lack of economic opportunities.

Conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change further compound these vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and created new ones, with increased economic insecurity across the region and unequal access to vaccines and healthcare. To varying extents, countries across the region are impacted by climate change, with effects on agriculture and other primary industries driving poverty and food insecurity. Climate-related displacement continues to drive the risk of exploitation, particularly in forced labour, across the region. Although not reflected in our estimates, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has increased the risk of modern slavery, with mass displacement and forced migration both in-country and across the region.

The United Kingdom (UK) took the most action to combat modern slavery, followed by the Netherlands and Portugal, while Turkmenistan and Russia took the least. Europe has taken the most action of any region to tackle forced labour that ends up in global supply chains. Across all countries, governments should address significant gaps, including expanding the provision of safe and regular migration pathways for the most vulnerable, and tackling underlying discrimination of migrants and other marginalised groups.

What is the extent and nature of modern slavery in the region?

An estimated 6.4 million people were living in modern slavery in Europe and Central Asia on any given day in 2021. The region had the second highest prevalence in the world, with 6.9 per thousand people living in modern slavery. Europe and Central Asia had the second highest prevalence of forced labour at an estimated 4.4 per thousand people and the third highest prevalence of forced marriage (2.5 per thousand).¹

Türkiye, Tajikistan, and Russia had the highest prevalence of modern slavery in the region. Russia, Türkiye, and Ukraine had the highest number of people living in modern slavery, accounting for nearly three in every five people in modern slavery in the region. The countries with the lowest prevalence are Switzerland, Norway, and Germany.

There are 4.1 million people trapped in forced labour in Europe and Central Asia. Forced labour takes many forms across the region for both adults and children, including domestic servitude, agricultural labour, and construction work and forced commercial sexual exploitation. There is a high population of migrant workers, both from within and outside the region, who are more vulnerable to being trapped in situations of debt bondage and exploitation.² Displacement fuelled by conflict, climate change, and political and economic instability also contributes to forced labour prevalence in the region, as well as rising discrimination against certain groups, such as the Roma community.³

Ten per cent of all forced marriages in the world, involving an estimated 2.3 million people, are in Europe and Central Asia. Forced marriages occurring across the region represent a rigidity of gender beliefs that uphold traditional roles for girls and restrict their prospects. Patriarchal attitudes towards girls, including the preservation of “family honour,” are often associated with forced and child marriage, as well as poverty rates. Growing crises may also be driving forced marriages in the region. For example, data from the UK highlights that the increased risks of forced marriage created by COVID-19 and pandemic-related restrictions were experienced significantly by children, while their access to identification and support services were limited.⁴ In some countries in Central Asia, the practice of bride kidnapping, or *Ala-Kachuu*, occurs — where men abduct a girl or woman and force them to get married. Despite existing domestic laws and international obligations, the practice is widespread in Kyrgyzstan, with an estimated 12,000 cases taking place a year.⁵

Although these estimates are the most reliable to date, they are conservative given the gaps and limitations of data collection in the region. These estimates do not capture all forms of modern slavery, such as, the recruitment of child soldiers, trafficking for the purposes of organ removal, and all child marriages. Notably, these figures do not capture any impact of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.⁶

Estimated number living in modern slavery:

6.4 MILLION
(6.9 per thousand)

Regional proportion of global estimate:



Forced labour

64%

Forced marriage

36%

Average vulnerability score:

27%

Average government response rating:

54%

Top 3 countries:
United Kingdom 68%
Netherlands 67%
Portugal 67%

Bottom 3 countries:
Russia 24%
Turkmenistan 26%
Liechtenstein 31%

Table 19
Estimated
prevalence and
number of people
in modern slavery,
by country

Regional rank	Country	Estimated prevalence of modern slavery (per 1,000 of population)	Estimated number of people in modern slavery	Population
1	Türkiye	15.6	1,320,000	84,339,000
2	Tajikistan	14.0	133,000	9,538,000
3	Russia	13.0	1,899,000	145,934,000
4	Ukraine	12.8	559,000	43,734,000
5	North Macedonia	12.6	26,000	2,083,000
6	Turkmenistan	11.9	72,000	6,031,000
7	Albania	11.8	34,000	2,878,000
8	Belarus	11.3	107,000	9,449,000
9	Kazakhstan	11.1	208,000	18,777,000
10	Azerbaijan	10.6	107,000	10,139,000
11	Bosnia and Herzegovina	10.1	33,000	3,281,000
12	Moldova	9.5	38,000	4,034,000
13	Armenia	8.9	26,000	2,963,000
14	Kyrgyzstan	8.7	57,000	6,524,000
15	Bulgaria	8.5	59,000	6,948,000
16	Cyprus	8.0	10,000	1,207,000
17	Kosovo	8.0	14,000	1,806,000
18	Georgia	7.8	31,000	3,989,000
19	Slovakia	7.7	42,000	5,460,000
20	Romania	7.5	145,000	19,238,000
21	Uzbekistan	7.4	249,000	33,469,000
22	Serbia	7.0	61,000	8,737,000
23	Hungary	6.6	63,000	9,660,000
24	Greece	6.4	66,000	10,423,000
25	Lithuania	6.1	17,000	2,722,000
26	Poland	5.5	209,000	37,847,000
27	Croatia	5.2	22,000	4,105,000
28	Slovenia	4.4	9,000	2,079,000
29	Czechia	4.2	45,000	10,709,000
30	Estonia	4.1	5,000	1,327,000
31	Portugal	3.8	39,000	10,197,000
32	Israel	3.8	33,000	8,656,000
33	Latvia	3.4	6,000	1,886,000
34	Italy	3.3	197,000	60,462,000
35	Spain	2.3	108,000	46,755,000
36	France	2.1	135,000	65,274,000
37	Austria	1.9	17,000	9,006,000
38	United Kingdom	1.8	122,000	67,886,000
39	Finland	1.4	8,000	5,541,000
40	Ireland	1.1	5,000	4,938,000
41	Belgium	1.0	11,000	11,590,000
42	Denmark	0.6	4,000	5,792,000
43	Sweden	0.6	6,000	10,099,000
44	Netherlands	0.6	10,000	17,135,000
45	Germany	0.6	47,000	83,784,000
46	Norway	0.5	3,000	5,421,000
47	Switzerland	0.5	4,000	8,655,000

The realities of risk and resistance:
How one survivor of domestic violence and
sex trafficking fought her way home

Katya* is a 25-year-old woman from Belarus. Following her father’s death when she was a child, her mother remarried and had another child, after which her mother’s attitude towards her changed. Over time, her mother became psychologically abusive, emotionally distant, and would constantly seek to humiliate Katya. This abuse led Katya to spend as little time at home as possible.

After finishing school, Katya took up a job in sales, but her family criticised her for not earning enough money. Feeling unsupported and lost, Katya accepted the offer of a friend who told her about a job in Moscow. She agreed to work in a market, but upon arrival quickly found that the promised job was not real. Instead, after arriving in Russia, Katya was forced into sexual exploitation. Unable to leave, she was subjected to daily physical, sexual, and psychological violence.

After months of living in modern slavery, Katya found an opportunity to escape when a client fell asleep while she was with him. Not willing to let an opportunity for freedom pass her by, Katya jumped out of a second-story window, injuring both her legs in the fall. Luckily, she was assisted in seeking medical attention and, with the help of friends, Katya finally returned to Belarus. Having made a daring escape to fight her way back to her homeland, Katya sought help from a non-governmental organisation and began rebuilding her life.

*Not her real name



Pitesti, Romania,
January 2017.
Adolescent girls who had
been exploited by Romanian
traffickers operating in Italy,
Spain, Germany, and France,
greet the psychologist at
the shelter. Photo credit:
Daniel Mihailescu/AFP via
Getty Images.

What drives vulnerability to modern slavery in the region?

Europe and Central Asia is the least vulnerable region in the world to modern slavery. While the region performed relatively well across all dimensions, disenfranchised groups remain particularly vulnerable to modern slavery. Inequality and conflict disproportionately impacted some countries, while vulnerability was further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and climate-related displacement.

Conflict exacerbates vulnerability to modern slavery⁷ and although it was found to be the lowest driver of vulnerability in the region, it is important to note that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine fell outside our data collection period, therefore its impact is not reflected in these findings. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reports more than 8 million refugees and 5 million internally displaced people in what has become the largest movement of refugees since World War II.⁸ Ukrainian citizens fleeing the conflict are at increased risk of trafficking for various purposes, including sexual and labour exploitation.⁹ Media reports and crisis-response work have highlighted instances of exploitation of women and girls crossing the Russian border and of those in refugee camps.¹⁰ This vulnerability predates and is exacerbated by the war.

“Hundred of thousands of Ukrainian women have been victims of human trafficking. This was the case before the war and the war has only made it worse.”

Robert Biedron, EU lawmaker and chair of the Women’s Rights Committee.¹¹

Discrimination against disenfranchised groups on the basis of migration status, race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation represents the greatest driver of vulnerability in the Europe and Central Asia region. The region is a source, transit, and destination for significant migrant and refugee populations.

In 2020, more than 71.1 million migrants¹² and 6.7 million refugees¹³ lived in the region. These people often encounter a lack of legal protection and insufficient information about their rights, which increases vulnerability to exploitation and abuse from recruiters, employers, and authorities.¹⁴ Discrimination fuelled by bigotry and xenophobia has also grown alongside mass migration, with black, Muslim, Roma, and Jewish communities in the region often experiencing social exclusion, verbal harassment, and physical attacks.¹⁵ For example, recent reports in Germany,¹⁶ Austria,¹⁷ France,¹⁸ the UK,¹⁹ and elsewhere in Europe²⁰ highlight steep spikes in antisemitism and other hate crimes against Jewish people. In some instances, discrimination against certain groups has been grounded in policy and justified under national security measures, such as increased surveillance of Muslim communities in France, Germany, and Austria.²¹

Governance issues such as corruption drive vulnerability to modern slavery in the region and particularly in Central Asia. Corruption is increasingly prevalent in fragile democratic states throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia,²² with the subregion performing second lowest in the most recent Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).²³ Populist governments in Eastern Europe have cracked down severely on the freedoms of expression and assembly needed to call out corruption.²⁴ Additionally, for several years, international bodies and NGOs have condemned state-imposed forced labour in Belarus,²⁵ Poland,²⁶ Russia,²⁷ and Turkmenistan.²⁸ Despite Western Europe and the European Union performing better on governance issues and scoring consistently well on the CPI, progress has stagnated. The neglect or curtailment of accountability and transparency measures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have remained unrestored across the subregion, and public trust has fallen in the wake of scandals associated with procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in response to the pandemic.²⁹ These have included allegations of corruption, overpricing, substandard quality of PPE, and unequal distribution.³⁰

Despite impressive economic growth that has helped halve the number of people living in poverty in the region over the 20 years prior to the COVID-19

pandemic,³¹ economic inequality still leaves many at a stark disadvantage,³² increasing their vulnerability to modern slavery. The impacts of income inequality in some communities include higher rates of health and social problems, such as poor health outcomes, increased poverty and homelessness, and lower levels of economic growth.³³ Inequality will likely increase as the region faces a cost-of-living crisis fuelled by COVID-19, climate change, and most recently the war in Ukraine.³⁴ As food and energy prices surge, already vulnerable populations across Europe and Central Asia will be further impacted. When individuals and families struggle to access basic necessities, they become more vulnerable to exploitation and forced labour. Additionally, the increased demand for food and energy can create opportunities for traffickers and exploiters to take advantage of the situation by profiting from the higher prices. This can lead to the exploitation of vulnerable populations, including forced labour in the agriculture, fishing, and energy sectors.

While some countries such as Norway, Switzerland, and Ireland have made significant progress on gender and income inequality, women in neighbouring countries still face widespread discrimination.³⁵ However, even among countries with strong performances on gender rights measures, domestic and intimate partner violence remains a significant problem, as in the region more broadly.³⁶ Evidence also suggests that this issue has been exacerbated by recent crises across the region, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.³⁷ In addition to being paid on average 30 per cent less than their male peers,³⁸ women living in Europe and Central Asia are more likely to work in the informal sector, be irregular migrants, and face greater risks of trafficking and abuse.³⁹

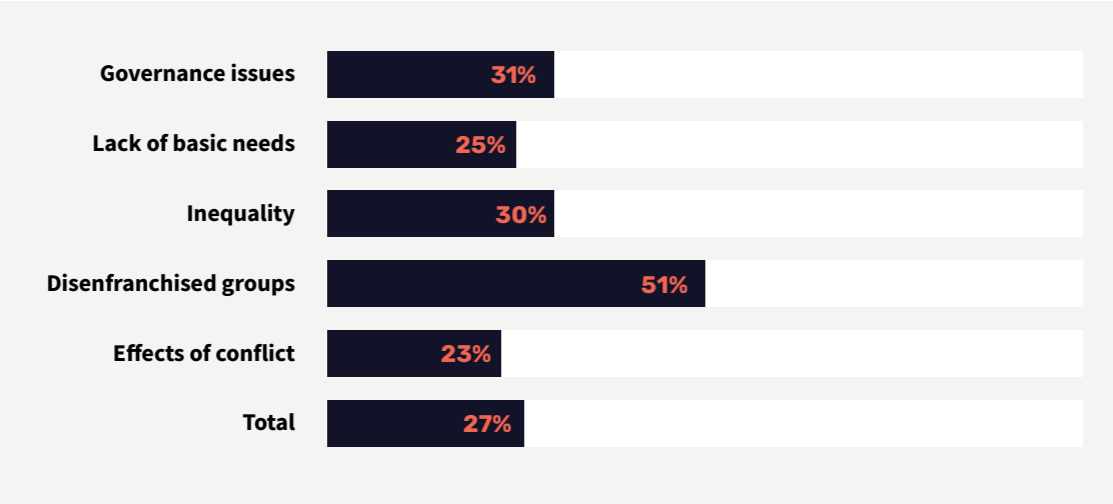
Limited access to basic needs also drives vulnerability to modern slavery. Across the region, the COVID-19 pandemic has had major health, social, and economic impacts on people and communities, as around the world,⁴⁰ which in turn have compounded challenges for already vulnerable populations. For Tajikistan, one of the least economically developed countries in the region, the impact on access to basic needs was felt across the population. Four out of 10 Tajik households reported they were forced to reduce their consumption of food, while one in five families have said they were unable to obtain medical care.⁴¹ An analysis of impacts of the pandemic across the EU revealed educational gaps across low-income families and significant rises in households in arrears.⁴²

Vulnerability to modern slavery in Europe and Central Asia is also exacerbated by the adverse impacts of climate change and climate-related disasters, which in turn are not evenly shared across the region. For example, severe drought has affected many parts of Europe and is expected to expand and worsen,⁴³ which ultimately increases the risk of exploitation and modern slavery through decreased livelihood opportunities and increased migrant flows to and from the region.⁴⁴

Country	Total (%)
Tajikistan	67
Russia	60
Azerbaijan	57
Uzbekistan	56
Kyrgyzstan	55
Türkiye	51
Armenia	48
Ukraine	48
Turkmenistan	47
Kazakhstan	42
Belarus	41
Kosovo	40
Albania	40
North Macedonia	38
Georgia	38
Bosnia and Herzegovina	36
Moldova	36
Israel	35
Serbia	34
Croatia	30
Bulgaria	26
Romania	26
Italy	22
Cyprus	21
Lithuania	21
Greece	21
Poland	19
Hungary	19
Latvia	17
Slovakia	16
Estonia	15
United Kingdom	14
Switzerland	14
France	13
Czechia	13
Belgium	11
Germany	11
Spain	10
Ireland	9
Slovenia	9
Austria	8
Sweden	7
Portugal	6
Netherlands	6
Denmark	6
Finland	5
Norway	1

Table 20
Level of vulnerability to modern slavery, by country

Figure 17
Level of vulnerability to modern slavery, by dimension



Finding cooperation in crisis:
Tackling modern slavery in Ukraine
after the Russian invasion

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, resulting in a displacement and protection crisis on a scale not witnessed in Europe since World War II. Today, 8.1 million refugees⁴⁵ and 5.4 million internally displaced people⁴⁶ require protection and assistance.

Unlike many other global conflicts, where modern slavery is often a neglected protection risk, the response to prevent exploitation was swift and coordinated. For the first time in a humanitarian response, an anti-trafficking response was embedded from the outset in the work of the humanitarian Protection Cluster. By May 2022, the Cluster’s Anti- Trafficking Task Force, consisting of over 30 local and international organisations,⁴⁷ was disseminating modern slavery risk information, ensuring that modern slavery was put on the agenda of humanitarian responders, mapping available services, operating hotlines, and establishing referral pathways.⁴⁸

One year on, despite the scale of the crisis, and credible evidence of conflict and displacement exacerbating modern slavery risks and giving rise to new ones, an increase in the number of victims identified in Ukraine and host countries has not been observed.⁴⁹

The Ukraine crisis: an anomaly in the equation that crises = modern slavery?

Crisis responders, including governments, NGOs, international organisations, and UN agencies, have expressed surprise that the projected spike in cases of modern slavery has not occurred. There may be several reasons for this, both positive and negative.

Firstly, the proactive and prolific early warning system about the risks of trafficking, gender-based violence, and exploitation disseminated to conflict-affected people and those on the move may have helped to raise awareness and mitigate the risks of these forms of abuse. Unlike in many conflicts, where government breakdown or collapse creates ideal conditions for traffickers to operate without risk of punishment, in Ukraine, government institutions remain functioning, alongside civil society actors and NGOs, reducing opportunities for offending, and ensuring vulnerable people can access support.

Regionally, for the first time in the European Union’s history, the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was activated to provide refugees with legal access to entry and stay, freedom of movement, and access to vital protection and assistance. This has enabled refugees from Ukraine to receive emergency health care, education, and employment.⁵⁰ Members of the host communities have volunteered their time

and resources, opened their homes to host refugee families, and donated food, clothing, and other essential items.⁵¹

These internal and regional factors have served preventative and protective functions against compounding risks for conflict-affected and displaced people. They have played an important role in mitigating exploitation risks and have helped to build resilience and strengthen crisis responses.

However, there are several reasons that risks of modern slavery could be higher than currently detected, and that the reduction in the reporting and detection of trafficking cases should still be cause for concern.

Within Ukraine, despite sustained efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the millions in need, support is stretched. Some populations remain highly vulnerable to exploitation, including women and girls in active fighting zones who are inaccessible to humanitarian responders, and unaccompanied and separated children and child-headed households, who are not receiving sufficient practical assistance.⁵² For Ukrainian men, previously vulnerable to forced labour, the decision to bar them from leaving the country — while potentially stemming the flow of labour exploitation abroad — may be forcing some into irregular and dangerous routes and could reduce their likelihood of coming forward to be identified and receive assistance.⁵³

Regionally, four million refugees have not formally registered for the support and protection under the TDP. Some refugees, particularly those from minority groups, are sometimes refused registration due to lack of documentation. Many Ukrainian children, particularly unaccompanied and separated children, and children previously in institutions, also remain unregistered and unmonitored.⁵⁴ The lack of oversight over these two hugely vulnerable groups may be impacting our understanding of what exploitation is occurring.

It is possible that victims and survivors may not be ready to come forward, or that ongoing challenges associated with the conflict will go on to impact levels of modern slavery in Ukraine and the region. These challenges include the depletion of resources, dwindling access to goods, reduced access to affordable accommodation, loss of documentation, and family separation. In many hosting countries, the gap between social benefit payments and potentially lucrative work offered by unscrupulous employers or traffickers may become too good to refuse.⁵⁵ In addition, the potential for donor, host state, and community compassion fatigue could also make it difficult to sustain effective responses to this ongoing crisis.

Recommendations for governments

Approximately two billion people, equating to over a quarter of the world’s population, currently live in conflict-affected countries.⁵⁶ There is much to be learnt from the swift, coordinated, and compassionate response to the Ukrainian people and the impact this has had to date on reducing anticipated cases of modern slavery. It is vital these lessons be applied to some of the most neglected conflicts across the globe, where thousands of victims of modern slavery, and people at risk of exploitation, remain trapped, displaced, and unassisted.

Governments must:

- 1

Extend social assistance and benefits to refugees without conditions, especially to those who are unable to secure employment, to help minimise risks of modern slavery. Such assistance may include facilitating accreditation of licenses for refugees, expanding employment opportunities, and providing free or subsidised childcare and free language classes to increase employability, foster integration, and reduce risks.
- 2

Strengthen screening at borders and at all stages of the asylum or registration process with the support of UN agencies and specialised NGOs to ensure that vulnerabilities and risks are identified and addressed.
- 3

Address the issue of discrimination against non-Ukrainian nationals and Roma people fleeing Ukraine and improve their access to rights and services, including access to registration and safe and suitable accommodation.
- 4

Individual safety should be prioritised over immigration. Investigation and prosecution should be decoupled from accessing protection and services for survivors of modern slavery or for those identified as at risk of exploitation, ensuring timely referral and access to asylum procedures, with provision of free counseling on rights to international protection or asylum.
- 5

Strengthen government oversight over care and accommodation of unaccompanied or separated children (UASC), particularly children coming from institutions, and strengthen best interest assessments where return is being considered. Strengthen support to guardians and carers of UASC to ensure adequate care and support is provided.

Walk Free is proud to support the work of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), a network of nongovernmental organisations, international organisations and United Nations agencies, engaged in protection work in humanitarian crises, including armed conflict and disasters. The GPC is led by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. Walk Free have supported the GPC to improve anti-trafficking action in crisis contexts since 2020.

What are governments in the region doing to address modern slavery?

Walk Free assessed government responses to modern slavery across 52 countries in Europe and Central Asia. Overall, the Europe and Central Asia region continues to have the strongest response to modern slavery, scoring an average 54 per cent rating among countries. Responses to modern slavery vary significantly within the region and there remains a relatively higher level of political will to address modern slavery in Europe, in part driven by regional and multilateral coordination bodies which hold governments to account and monitor their responses.

GDP per capita PPP (current international \$) varied greatly across the region,⁵⁷ meaning certain economies have far more resources available to dedicate to responding to modern slavery than others. Overall, the countries with the strongest government response to modern slavery are those with a higher level of wealth, such as the top-ranking countries in the region and globally — the UK and the Netherlands. However, notable outliers are present. For example, Liechtenstein and Iceland, despite having some of the highest GDP per capita in the region and as such having relatively more resources to combat modern slavery, were among the nine governments taking the least action in the region. Both countries scored poorly on indicators relating to national, regional, and cross-border coordination and tackling forced labour in government and business supply chains. Conversely, while Albania and Georgia are among the region’s

countries with lower levels of GDP per capita, they have shown relatively stronger government responses to modern slavery, with both countries scoring highly on addressing risk factors.

Strong government responses in the region are typically characterised by robust criminal justice mechanisms and effective identification and support to survivors of modern slavery. The countries with the strongest government response scored high on indicators related to criminal justice mechanisms, highlighting their function to effectively prevent modern slavery. Conversely, it is concerning that more than half of the countries in the region did not have laws in place that recognise that survivors should not be treated as criminals for conduct that occurred while under control of criminals. Treating survivors as criminals not only fails to acknowledge the exploitation they have faced, but it also creates additional barriers to accessing support and justice. This approach also undermines the EU Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which states that the “rights and dignity” of trafficking survivors must be respected and that they should not be penalised for their involvement in criminal activities that are a direct result of their trafficking situation.

“Police need more training on the signs for victims. Many don’t know what the signs are — they take the word of the trafficker over the victim.”

Male survivor of modern slavery, United Kingdom, 2018

Restricting routes, reducing protections: Impact of recent changes to UK immigration policy

Recent changes to the UK’s immigration policy, particularly post-Brexit, have been criticised for putting vulnerable people at greater risk of exploitation and modern slavery. The shift towards a more hostile and discriminatory environment has made it increasingly difficult for vulnerable people to access essential support and services.⁵⁸ The criminalisation of immigration offences and the tightening of immigration laws⁵⁹ has led to individuals not coming forward and reporting instances of modern slavery out of fear of being arrested and deported. This allows traffickers to operate with impunity, putting people at even greater risk of abuse and exploitation. In March 2023, the UK government proposed the Illegal Immigration Bill,⁶⁰ which aims to detain and swiftly remove anyone entering the country “illegally.” In its current form, the bill contravenes the UN Refugee Convention,⁶¹ which the UK government has ratified, and could prevent modern slavery victims from reaching safety and accessing support.⁶² The increasing curtailment of clear and accessible pathways to safe and legal migration leaves people vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers and other criminal networks.⁶³ As such, the recent changes to UK immigration policy pose a serious threat to the safety and well-being of people who are vulnerable to modern slavery.

Throughout Europe and Central Asia, Turkmenistan and Russia have the weakest responses to modern slavery. This is characterised by limited action to address underlying risk and drivers of modern slavery. In general, this reflects a combination of limited political will and a lack of resources, which means these governments do not prioritise the response to modern slavery. Our assessment of government responses also reflects evidence of state-imposed forced labour in both countries, as well as in Belarus and Poland. In Turkmenistan, reports highlight forced labour being used as a method of mobilising labour for the purpose of economic development; and as a means of labour discipline, tens of thousands of adults are forced to pick cotton, and farmers forced to fulfil state-established quotas, under the threat of penalty.⁶⁴ In Poland, abuse of prison labour for private interests has been reported.⁶⁵ In Russia, an initiative has been approved by the prison service and several government bodies for prisoners to exchange confinement for labour on major construction projects.⁶⁶ More than a third of the country’s total prison population are eligible, while it is unclear how voluntary this labour is and if it will be paid.⁶⁷ Further, there have been reports of North Koreans in forced labour within the construction and agriculture industries in Russia, with migrant workers sending the majority of their earnings back to North Korea to help prop up the regime.⁶⁸ Abuse of prison labour occurs in Belarus⁶⁹ while so-called medical labour centres⁷⁰ see citizens struggling with drug addiction forced to work as part of their recovery.

Encouragingly, for the first time in 11 consecutive years of monitoring forced child and adult labour in Uzbekistan’s cotton fields, the latest reports found that state-imposed forced labour during the country’s cotton harvest no longer occurs.⁷¹ This is due to central government policy, international pressure, and national awareness raising of the illegality of forced labour.⁷² In other countries across the region, modern slavery responses have been undermined by state authorities. While most countries have criminalised corruption, reports of official complicity in modern slavery cases failed to be investigated 14 countries. This includes reported instances in Bulgaria, where police officers have not been investigated for allegedly taking payments to turn a blind eye towards women exploited in commercial sex.⁷³

Albania, Portugal, and Ireland have all taken further action to combat modern slavery since the previous assessment of government responses in 2018.⁷⁴ Recent developments have occurred in Albania, with the government operating one specialised shelter and allocating US\$175,390 to NGO-run shelters in 2020 to support staff salaries.⁷⁵ Additionally, in Portugal, guidelines were published to outline that frontline responders, including police and NGOs, could identify and refer presumed victims to services.⁷⁶



Berlin, Germany, August 2017. Two of four accused cover their faces during a trial against them where they are accused of trafficking people from Hungary and Austria into Germany. Photo: Gregor Fischer/dpa via Getty Images.

Significant gaps remain in legal frameworks to combat modern slavery across Europe and Central Asia. Thirty-four countries have failed to criminalise forced labour and 29 countries have failed to criminalise forced marriage. Both Cyprus and Malta were the latest countries to criminalise forced marriage since the last Global Slavery Index in 2018. Although 14 countries in the region have ratified the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 since 2018, overall ratification remains disappointing, with 23 countries in the region failing to do so. Other critical gaps across the region include uptake of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 1990.

Where countries have enacted legislation or put in place relevant policies, implementation is not always consistent. Gaps in services appeared across the region, with 15 countries failing to provide services to all survivors. For example, in Serbia,⁷⁷ Germany,⁷⁸ and Hungary,⁷⁹ among others, services for men and children were inconsistent. Further, despite National Action Plans existing in 41 countries, only 11 governments fully funded activities within these plans and just 10 countries monitored their implementation through an independent entity. Most recently, in October 2020, the Irish government appointed the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission as the independent national rapporteur responsible for monitoring human trafficking policy and data collection.⁸⁰

“There needs to be some sort of global standard of aftercare to avoid re-trafficking.”

Female survivor of modern slavery, United Kingdom, 2018

Given the significant migrant flows across the region, cross-border collaboration on issues specifically related to modern slavery is integral. Encouragingly, most governments in the region did cooperate bilaterally in some way, either through repatriation efforts or labour migration agreements, and often this is facilitated through EU agreements. These agreements can help to prevent exploitation and modern slavery, as they can provide a legal framework for movement and workers’ rights. However, 35 countries did not have systems in place to allow asylum seekers to seek protection or there was evidence of systematic discrimination, detention, and/or deportation of these groups. This includes countries in the region with some of the largest asylum seeker populations, including Germany, the UK, Greece, Armenia, and Spain. For example, in April 2022, the UK announced plans to deport to Rwanda asylum seekers from that country who enter the UK using “irregular routes,” such as on small boats or in the backs of trucks.⁸¹ Although the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) stepped in to issue injunctions that halted deportation flights,⁸² a judicial review published in December 2022 found the policy to be lawful.⁸³ The scheme has been justified by the UK government as a way to deter people making dangerous journeys; however, the numbers crossing have not fallen since the policy was announced. More than 45,000 people used irregular routes like this to come to the UK in 2022, the highest figure since records began.⁸⁴

Kherson, Ukraine, November 2022.

Since the start of the invasion, staff at a children’s hospital in Kherson have protected a group of 10 orphans between the ages of two months and three years old, after hearing that occupying authorities were forcibly removing children to Crimea and Russia. There are allegedly thousands of such abductions, including 46 from the local orphanage where these children lived prior to the invasion. The whereabouts of these missing children remains unknown. Photo credit: Chris McGrath via Getty Images.



Country	Survivors identified and supported (%)	Criminal justice mechanisms (%)	National and regional level coordination (%)	Risk factors are addressed (%)	Government and business supply chains (%)	Total (%)
United Kingdom	59	81	75	71	38	68
Netherlands	77	62	88	64	38	67
Portugal	73	73	75	64	25	67
Ireland	59	69	88	64	25	63
Norway	55	73	75	64	38	63
Spain	55	73	75	71	25	63
Sweden	59	69	63	79	25	63
Albania	55	69	75	79	13	62
Austria	59	65	75	71	25	62
Denmark	64	65	75	64	25	62
France	41	81	88	57	38	62
Georgia	68	65	75	71	0	62
Germany	50	81	63	57	38	62
Greece	68	62	75	64	25	62
Finland	55	62	88	71	25	60
Montenegro	68	73	63	57	0	60
Azerbaijan	64	69	63	64	0	59
Belgium	45	65	75	71	38	59
Croatia	59	65	75	64	13	59
Czechia	59	62	88	57	25	59
Italy	50	65	63	79	25	59
Latvia	64	65	63	57	25	59
Bosnia and Herzegovina	68	65	63	57	0	58
Cyprus	64	62	63	57	25	58
Lithuania	59	65	50	64	25	58
North Macedonia	68	65	75	50	0	58
Romania	59	65	75	50	25	58
Slovakia	50	62	63	79	25	58
Estonia	59	46	75	79	25	56
Serbia	64	69	63	50	0	56
Slovenia	50	65	63	64	25	56
Bulgaria	50	65	63	57	25	55
Hungary	50	58	63	71	25	55
Poland	50	65	75	50	25	55
Armenia	64	58	75	50	0	54
Luxembourg	50	62	50	50	25	51
Ukraine	64	54	63	50	0	51
Switzerland	50	50	50	64	25	50
Malta	64	58	38	29	25	49
Türkiye	64	54	63	36	0	49
Belarus	64	50	38	50	0	47
Iceland	55	50	38	50	25	47
Kyrgyzstan	41	65	63	43	0	47
Moldova	45	50	63	57	13	47
Kazakhstan	45	50	50	64	0	46
Uzbekistan	45	54	50	57	0	46
Israel	41	50	63	57	0	45
Kosovo	59	50	50	36	0	45
Tajikistan	23	54	50	36	0	36
Liechtenstein	27	42	25	29	13	31
Turkmenistan	14	46	25	21	0	26
Russia	5	46	38	21	0	24

Table 21
Government response score, by country and milestone

**Dunkirk, France,
October 2022.**

A migrant man carrying a child runs to board a smuggler's boat and attempt to cross the English Channel, while smugglers stand behind him. Many people, forced by circumstance, take dangerous journeys to find a better life in the UK. However, hostile attitudes towards migrants and refugees are increasing their vulnerability to exploitation. Photo credit: Sameer Al-Doumya/AFP via Getty Images.



European migration policies in response to the crises in Libya have also been criticised for their hostility and focus on border enforcement and control.⁸⁵ From 2020 to 2021, there was a 90 per cent increase in those attempting the crossing from Libya to EU countries.⁸⁶ The safe and legal options for those seeking to flee humanitarian crises across Africa via Libya are limited and have been further impeded by the European Union's support of the Libyan coastguard and its intercepting of those fleeing and returning them to Libya, where they are vulnerable to being bought and sold in slave markets.⁸⁷ Such policies appear to be addressing the sentiments of European audiences at the expense of Libyan stakeholders and local vulnerable groups. Similar border management measures have been implemented by the EU and its member states with other African countries in recent years in an attempt to limit irregular migration from the region, such as an €80 million (approximately US\$87 million) deal signed with Egypt in October 2022. Egypt is likely to see intensified flows of migrants in the medium to long term as a result of regional instability, climate change, demographic shifts, and a lack of economic opportunities.⁸⁸ By limiting safe legal pathways for migrants, modern slavery, and exploitation risks will rise considerably.

Other examples of rights curtailments across the Europe and Central Asia region include labour laws in 12 countries preventing certain groups from

exercising their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. For example, in Israel, prison staff do not have the right to form and join unions, nor do self-employed workers.⁸⁹ In Denmark, certain groups of non-resident foreign workers do not have the right to collective bargaining.⁹⁰

The Europe and Central Asia region scored poorly on indicators relating to government and business supply chains, although countries in the Europe subregion have among the strongest legislative responses globally in this area. France,⁹¹ Germany,⁹² and Norway⁹³ have active mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence (mHRDD) legislation while the same type of legislation has been proposed Switzerland⁹⁴ and the Netherlands.⁹⁵ What this means in practice in Norway, for example, is that all Norwegian-domiciled “larger enterprises” (as determined by size and income thresholds) are required to carry out due diligence in identifying, preventing, and mitigating possible adverse impacts on human rights and labour rights. Failure to do so results in fines and/or injunctions. Encouragingly, progress in this area is likely to grow in the region. An EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDD), including environmental concerns, was proposed in 2022 but has not yet been adopted.⁹⁶ It would require in-scope companies to conduct due diligence on the human rights and environmental impacts of their operations and supply chains, and to take steps to address adverse impacts.

**Promising Practices in
Europe and Central Asia**

Within the Promising Practices Database, just over 20 per cent of evaluated programs were delivered within Europe and Central Asia, covering 36 countries in the region. The majority of programs focus on industries where there are known modern slavery risks, such as sex work, agriculture, and domestic work. Seventy per cent of evaluated programs in the region targeted human trafficking, followed by the worst forms of child labour. The most common activities delivered within the evaluated programs included awareness-raising campaigns, policy advocacy, and technical support for the government. Almost 75 per cent of evaluated programs in the region met some or all of their objectives.

Notably, none of the evaluated programs in Europe and Central Asia that had some success featured a reliable evaluation methodology that included a control or comparison group to test the veracity of these positive outcomes. This severely limits the insights able to be drawn on what works to end modern slavery in Europe and Central Asia.

**Recommendations
for governments**

- 1** Strengthen efforts to protect vulnerable populations in situations of conflict and disaster from modern slavery risks, including repealing hostile migration policies that place securitisation above human rights and expanding the provision of safe and regular migration pathways and screening asylum seekers and migrants for modern slavery indicators. This should include ending political, financial, and material support to the system of forcible returns from international waters in the Central Mediterranean Sea to Libya.
- 2** Ensure that the right of survivors to not be treated as criminals for conduct that occurred while under the control of traffickers is enshrined in legislation.
- 3** Enhance efforts to prevent discrimination against certain populations — such as Muslim, Roma, and Jewish people — and ensure that state policies serve to further integrate rather than target these communities.
- 4** Ensure that legal loopholes that facilitate state-imposed forced labour are closed and that the practice is abolished in Belarus, Poland, Russia, and Turkmenistan.
- 5** Expand enactment of mHRDD laws across the region to place more robust requirements on companies to report on identifying and mitigating modern slavery in their supply chains.