

Modern slavery in Indonesia

Global Slavery Index 2023 Country Study



KEY STATS

Population (2021) 273,524,000

GDP per capita, PPP (Current intl \$) \$12,072

6.7

PREVALENCE OF
MODERN SLAVERY
per 1,000 people

1,833,000

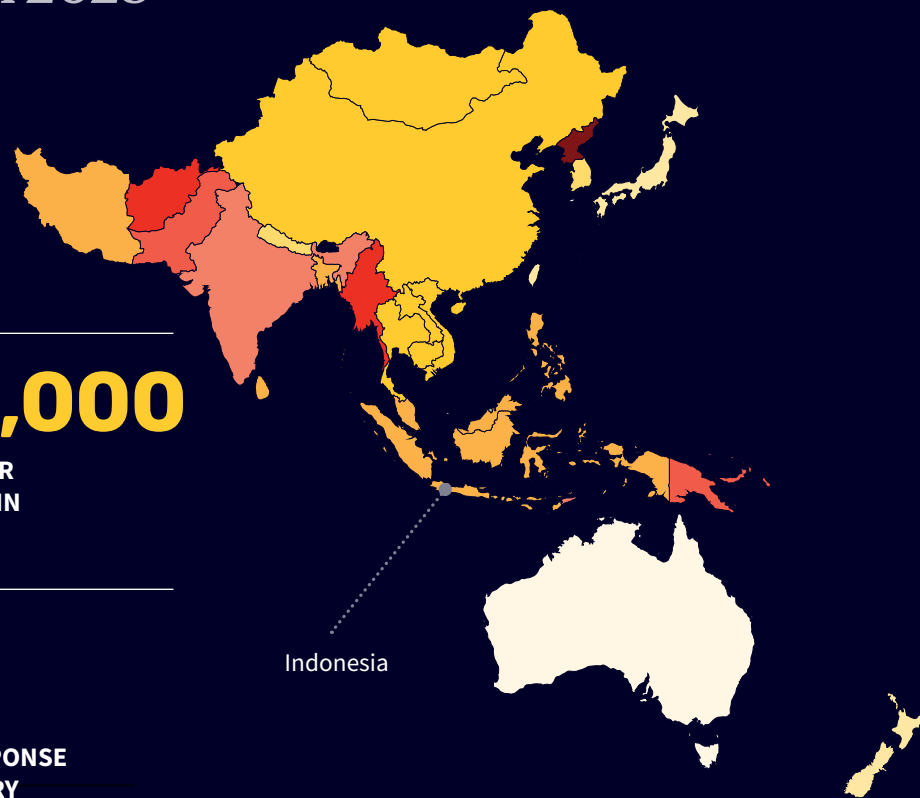
ESTIMATED NUMBER
OF PEOPLE LIVING IN
MODERN SLAVERY

49/100

VULNERABILITY TO
MODERN SLAVERY

50/100

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
TO MODERN SLAVERY



Estimated prevalence
of modern slavery across
Asia and the Pacific



Overview

Indonesia had among the strongest government responses to modern slavery within Asia and the Pacific, performing well relative to its wealth compared to higher-income neighbours.¹ The government improved its criminal justice response by outlawing forced marriage in April 2022,² and raising the minimum marriage age of girls in 2019 to align with the minimum age for boys.³ However gaps in legislation still allow child marriage to occur.⁴ Opportunities for the government to strengthen its response include fully funding the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Handling of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons 2020-2024 (NAP), improving efforts to identify and support survivors, and addressing modern slavery in supply chains. Indonesia has the 10th highest prevalence of modern slavery in the region, and vulnerability is driven by discrimination against minority groups and poverty.

Prevalence

The 2023 Global Slavery Index (GSI) estimates that over 1.8 million people were living in modern slavery in Indonesia on any given day in 2021, a prevalence of 6.7 people for every thousand people in the country. This places Indonesia within the top 10 out of 27 countries in the Asia Pacific region when ranked by prevalence of modern slavery, and 62nd out of 160 countries globally. The populous nation also ranks within the top 10 countries in the world in terms of the estimated total number of people living in modern slavery.

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Forced labour

Forced labour exploitation

Forced labour exploitation is reported in several sectors including fishing and fish processing,⁵ palm oil production,⁶ logging,⁷ construction, mining, and manufacturing,⁸ with women and girls facing additional risks of forced labour in domestic services.⁹ Forced labour of children is also reported in domestic work, fishing, begging,¹⁰ and in the movement of illicit drugs.¹¹ In 2022, the Indonesian National Police (INP) reported investigating 89 cases of cross-border labour trafficking, a substantial increase from 16 cases in 2021.¹²

Modern slavery is deeply connected to environmental exploitation. For example, Indonesia produces the world's second largest proportion of global fish catch,¹³ yet illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing has led to declining fish stocks and consequently, labour exploitation as a means to reduce costs.¹⁴ In 2014, the Indonesian government banned foreign fishing vessels operating in its waters to prevent IUU fishing, and following the identification of over 1,300 foreign fisherman trafficked to Indonesia for exploitation aboard IUU fishing vessels in 2015,¹⁵ the government intensified its crackdown, seizing and sinking foreign vessels violating the ban.¹⁶ While this reduced the presence of vulnerable foreign fisherman, a 2019 study found that local fisherman (including internal migrants) continue to be exploited through debt bondage, salary deductions, and inhumane working conditions.¹⁷

Similar abuses have been documented alongside environmental exploitation in the production of palm oil,¹⁸ a common ingredient in soap, food products, and other everyday items.¹⁹ Indonesia is the world's largest exporter of palm oil,²⁰ and according to a 2020 investigation, international beauty brands and financial institutions have both been connected to severe abuses in the country's palm oil industry, including rape, threats, labour exploitation, and slavery.²¹ Workers are also vulnerable to modern slavery in illegal forest clearing for palm oil plantations, with a large number of plantations established without the required permits.²² Increased carbon emissions, pollution, and flooding driven by illegal logging can reduce plantation profitability which in turn can fuel further exploitation of workers to recoup costs.²³

Indonesian migrant workers are vulnerable to being trafficked overseas by unscrupulous local recruitment agencies, including for exploitation in fishing,²⁴ domestic work,²⁵ and online scam centres.²⁶ In April 2023, three individuals were convicted of human trafficking in Indonesia after recruiting workers for exploitation in online scam centres in Cambodia. The workers were promised jobs marketing cryptocurrency, but had their passports withheld and were forced to scam victims in Australia, Europe, and China under threats of physical abuse. One worker was told he would have to pay almost US\$2,000 to leave.²⁷

Forced commercial sexual exploitation of adults

In 2022, the INP investigated 22 cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation; however the government did not record all trafficking data centrally, therefore this figure may not capture all cases reported.²⁸ Women and girls are particularly at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation under false pretences of work in restaurants, factories, or households, particularly in Batam and Jakarta, or near mining sites in Maluku, Papua, and Jambi provinces, as well as sexual exploitation via online platforms.²⁹

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)

In 2022, the Commission for Child Protection reported identifying 150 cases of child economic exploitation, sexual exploitation, pornography, and cybercrimes.³⁰ In early 2020, six people were arrested by the Jakarta police for facilitating CSEC in a North Jakarta café, where at least 10 girls were abused and forced to consume pills to slow the onset of menstruation.³¹ CSEC has also been reported to take place in apartments,³² with recruitment of some victims occurring via social media.³³ This risk increased during the pandemic.³⁴

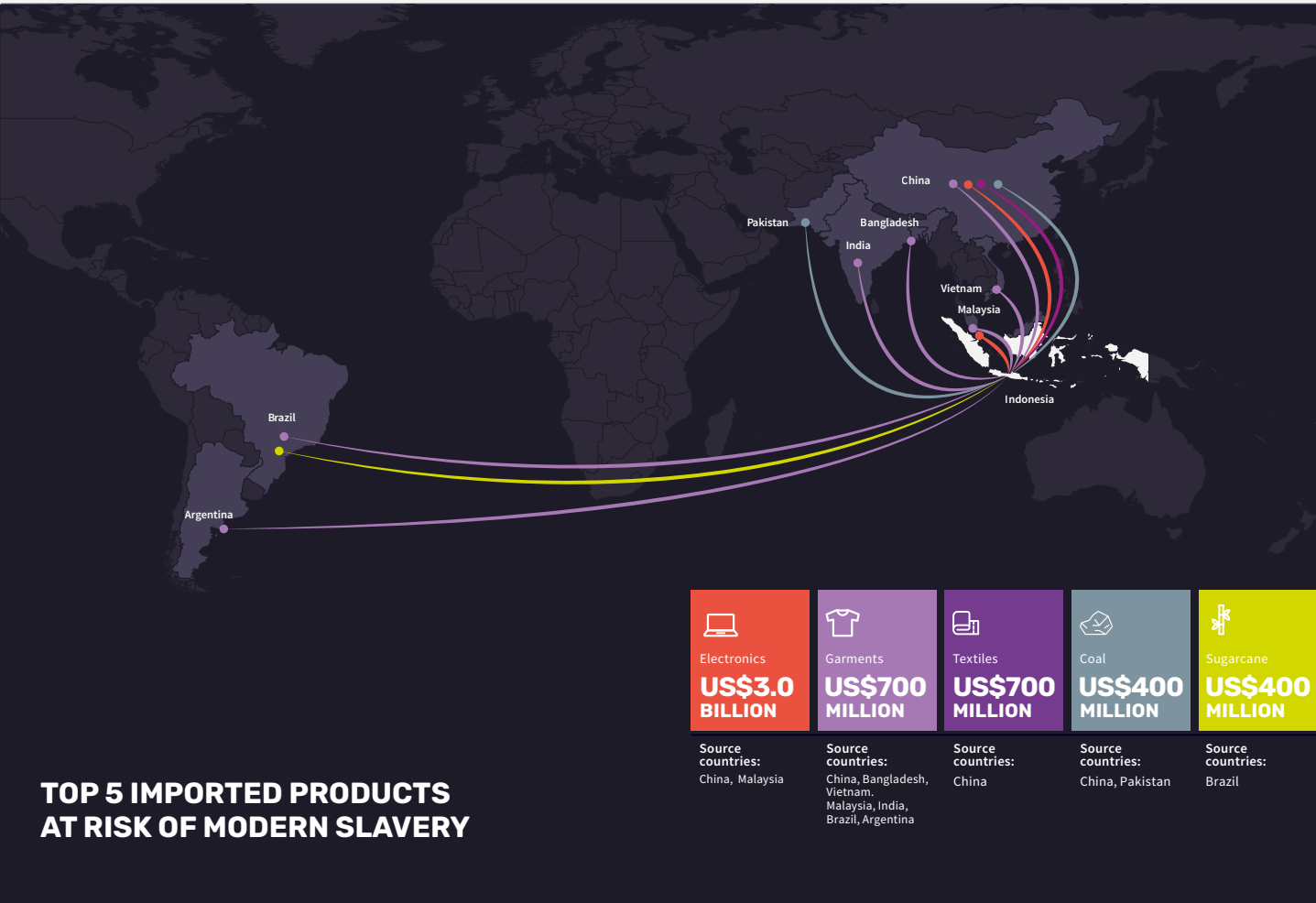
Forced marriage

In 2018, there were an estimated 1.2 million girls aged 20 to 24 who were married before their 18th birthday in Indonesia, one of the largest numbers in the world.³⁵ This amounted to 11.2 per cent of women in this age bracket; although still significant, this is a decrease from 14.7 per cent in 2008.³⁶ Child marriage is driven by economic necessity,³⁷ family honour codes,³⁸ and cultural beliefs, especially in rural areas such as Sulawesi where child marriage is particularly prevalent.³⁹ Bride kidnapping (merariq) is reported in Lombok where historical tradition is coopted to validate child marriage.⁴⁰ Women are also abducted for forced marriage on Sumba island as part of a cultural tradition known as kawin tangkap, or "catch-a-bride."⁴¹

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Imported products at risk of modern slavery

Indonesia is not only affected by modern slavery within its borders: as one of the world’s largest economies, Indonesia – like other G20 countries – is exposed to the risk of modern slavery through the products it imports. Nearly two-thirds of all forced labour cases are linked to global supply chains, with workers exploited across a wide range of sectors and at every stage of the supply chain. Most forced labour occurs in the lowest tiers; that is, in the extraction of raw materials and in production stages. Given the G20’s level of influence in the global economy, it is critical to examine their imports at risk of forced labour and efforts to address this risk. Indonesia imports US\$5.2 billion worth of products at-risk of being made using forced labour annually. Table 1 highlights the top five most valuable products (according to US\$ value per annum) imported by Indonesia that are at risk of being produced under conditions of modern slavery.



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Vulnerability to modern slavery in Indonesia is primarily driven by discrimination against minority groups. Indonesia is home to more than 2,300 indigenous groups,⁴² yet only around 1,300 are formally recognised by the government.⁴³ Without legal recognition, these communities are deprived of collective land rights.⁴⁴ For years, corrupt logging for palm oil and pulp plantations has displaced Indigenous communities from their traditional lands, stripping them of their livelihoods, resources, and cultural identity.⁴⁵ Dispossession places these communities at risk of exploitation as they search for new sources of income.⁴⁶

Despite the impact on local communities, there are few alternatives in remote areas to employment in the palm oil sector, where workers are vulnerable to forced labour.⁴⁷ Workers' access to housing, food, and other necessities hinges on non-involvement in union activities and the achievement of steep production targets, which often require them to enlist the help of their families.⁴⁸ Further, absence of routine labour inspections, limited enforcement of legal protections, and failure to prosecute violations has reportedly fostered a culture of impunity among employers.⁴⁹ Similar patterns are evident in the fish processing sector, where poor enforcement of legal protections has been cited as one key factor driving exploitation among the predominantly female workforce.⁵⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic compounded vulnerability, particularly among the 70 million informal workers who make up more than half of Indonesia's workforce.⁵¹ Drivers, farmers, porters, construction, and domestic workers were among those left without income or social protections, and women in particular struggled to find alternative sources of income while juggling additional caretaking responsibilities.⁵²

Overseas migration similarly is driven by a lack of local jobs and better income opportunities abroad.⁵³ Yet social pressures to migrate as a means of "poverty alleviation" — a narrative perpetuated by brokers — coupled with inaccurate information, increase the risk of trafficking among Indonesian migrants, especially women.⁵⁴ Vulnerability of female domestic workers is further exacerbated by a government ban on migration to 21 predominantly Middle Eastern countries,⁵⁵ which despite being intended to protect workers, has spurred increased irregular migration and risk of trafficking.⁵⁶

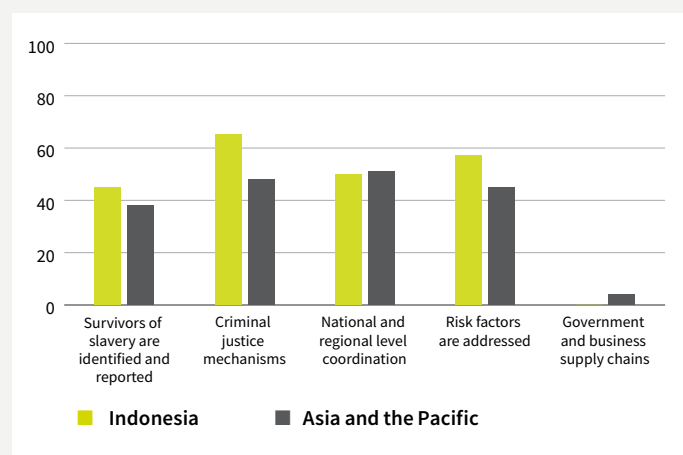
Conflict and displacement also drive vulnerability, particularly in West Papua where Indigenous Papuans are subject to human rights abuses by Indonesian security forces. Torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings (including of children) have been reported in the region in addition to mass internal displacement.⁵⁷ Since the end of 2018, an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 Papuans have been displaced and now live in temporary shelters or in the forests without basic necessities, and where humanitarian actors lack access.⁵⁸ Further, an estimated 68,000 people were displaced due to disasters in 2022, with negative impacts on income, education, and health.⁵⁹ Such disruptions increase vulnerability to modern slavery, including child marriage as a means to alleviate household expenses.⁶⁰

A 2018 study found that education, wealth, and media exposure had a "protective" effect against child marriage in Indonesia, while living rurally increased risk. Structural factors such as religious and ethnic diversity, which varied by province, were also found to be important predictors of child marriage.⁶¹ The minimum age of marriage under cultural law (adat) varies by province,⁶² and religious institutions are granted authority to validate marriages under 18.⁶³ A 2019 study of applications for marriage dispensations to religious courts in Tuban, Bogor, and Mamuju districts from 2013 to 2015 found that of 377 requests, 97.3 per cent were granted.⁶⁴ The findings suggest dispensations were used to prevent behaviour deemed to be socially and religiously unacceptable, such as having an intimate relationship outside marriage.⁶⁵

Government response

Figure 2.

Government of Indonesia's responses to modern slavery by milestone, compared with the regional average



The Indonesian government's response to modern slavery received a score of 50 per cent, placing it among the higher scoring responses assessed in the region. The government achieved its highest score for its criminal justice response to modern slavery, however efforts to identify and support survivors and address forced labour in supply chains were limited.

Since the 2018 GSI, the government has improved its criminal justice response. In April 2022, the government passed legislation outlawing forced marriage,⁶⁶ and in 2019, it raised the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 19 with parental permission and to 21 without permission, reflecting the minimum age for boys.⁶⁷ While a promising step, parents can circumvent these laws by filing for dispensation.⁶⁸ Other gaps in the legal framework include the absence of legislation criminalising forced labour and CSEC. While human trafficking is criminalised under the 2007 anti-trafficking law, the definition of child trafficking requires the use of "means" such as force, deception, coercion, or abuse of power or vulnerability, in contradiction with international law.⁶⁹ Indonesia

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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.

is also yet to ratify several relevant international conventions, including the ILO 2011 Domestic Workers Convention and 2014 Forced Labour Protocol.

Despite improvements, gaps in enforcing protections remain. Anonymised court decisions related to human trafficking and other cases are made publicly available via the Supreme Court Directory of Decisions, setting a positive example of transparency for the region.⁷⁰ An analysis of 435 human trafficking-related court decisions from 2019 to 2021 found that multiple cases were classed as trafficking cases without related trafficking charges, limited orders for restitution or confiscation of assets were made, and few decisions referenced use of victim-sensitive approaches in courts.⁷¹ However, there is evidence of victim protection measures being used outside courts, with the Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK) reportedly providing protection for 314 victims and witnesses of human trafficking crimes in 2020.⁷²

The government has taken some action to identify and support survivors, for example LPSK runs a hotline for all victims to report modern slavery, and the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (MOWECP) runs a hotline for women, while citizens abroad can access hotlines run by the National Agency for the Protection and Placement of International Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).⁷³ Yet some gaps in the response continue: for example, national

guidelines⁷⁴ for first responders on how to identify and screen victims are insufficiently implemented,⁷⁵ and there is no national referral mechanism to ensure victims receive support services. While some services are available, including integrated service centres for women and children (P2TP2A) in all 34 provinces, men reportedly experience difficulties accessing services, and there is concerning evidence that survivors' movements are restricted within shelters.⁷⁶

The government's response to modern slavery is coordinated by the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, convened by MOWECP.⁷⁷ In 2022, the Task Force finalised the 2020-2024 NAP after some years of delay.⁷⁸ Although a positive step to improve national level coordination of the response, several gaps remain: for example, the government does not routinely review its response to modern slavery, and it did not publish the Task Force's budget. The Task Force oversees 32 provincial and 242 municipal and district-level anti-trafficking task forces, however reduced funding during the reporting period reportedly hampered their prevention activities,⁷⁹ and not all task forces remained operational.⁸⁰

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Meanwhile, as co-chair of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, Indonesia is a leader in regional cooperation to address human trafficking.⁸¹ The government is involved in regional efforts to address trafficking through ASEAN,⁸² and to improve labour migration safety through the Colombo Process⁸³ and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue.⁸⁴ Further, Indonesia has established agreements with Australia,⁸⁵ the United Arab Emirates (UAE),⁸⁶ and Taiwan⁸⁷ to collaborate on modern slavery issues.

Indonesia is one of the largest source countries of migrant workers in Southeast Asia, and has negotiated bilateral labour agreements with South Korea,⁸⁸ the Philippines,⁸⁹ Saudi Arabia,⁹⁰ and the UAE,⁹¹ which include provisions to protect labour migrants. Migrant worker guidebooks detailing rights and redress mechanisms are also distributed by local authorities prior to migration.⁹² However, incomplete implementation of the 2019 Law on Protection of Migrant Workers – which prohibits recruiters passing placement fees onto Indonesian migrant workers⁹³ – has meant many workers continue to bear costs, increasing their risk of debt bondage.⁹⁴

Within in Indonesia, several risk factors remain unaddressed, including insufficient labour inspections, particularly in rural areas, and ongoing reports of uninvestigated official corruption in modern slavery crimes.⁹⁵ During the reporting period, reports of forced labour on a palm oil plantation emerged in which local police and politicians were complicit.⁹⁶ The Indonesian government has not taken steps to eliminate forced labour from public and private supply chains.



THE GLOBAL SLAVERY INDEX 2023



For more information on modern slavery, visit the Global Slavery Index 2023 website.



Recommendations

1

Survivors identified and supported

- Ensure survivor support services, including shelters, crisis support centres, and community-based protection, cover all populations – including males and migrants – and ensure no victims are detained in shelters against their will.
- Deliver systematic training at regular intervals on how to identify and screen potential victims and the implementation of the national guidelines for all first responders.
- Establish a national referral mechanism to ensure victims are referred to services.

2

Criminal justice mechanisms

- Ratify all international conventions relating to the elimination of modern slavery, including the Domestic Workers Convention ILO No. 189, 2011, the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, P029, 1930, and the Work in Fishing Convention ILO No. 188, 2007.
- Criminalise modern slavery in all of its forms, including forced labour and child commercial sexual exploitation, and close all legal loopholes that enable marriage under the age of 18 to occur.

3

National and regional level coordination

- Ensure activities in the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Handling of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons 2020-2024 are fully funded.
- Pursue and strengthen bilateral labour agreements to improve the protection of migrant workers (rather than implementing labour migrant bans) through clearly stated rights and mechanisms to jointly monitor recruitment.

4

Risk factors are addressed

- Ensure all reports of official complicity in modern slavery cases are thoroughly investigated.
- Introduce and enforce laws to prohibit charging of recruitment fees to all employees, and conduct regular labour inspections to address exploitative practices.
- Strengthen enforcement of legislation to protect workers' rights in high-risk sectors, such as palm oil, domestic work, and fishing, and among informal workers, migrants, Indigenous communities, and other vulnerable groups.

5

Government and business supply chains

- Introduce mandatory human rights due diligence legislation to prevent government and businesses from sourcing goods or services linked to modern slavery.

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