EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Depriving someone of their freedom is a terrible violation. Modern slavery is a destructive, personal crime and an abuse of human rights. It is a widespread and profitable criminal industry but despite this it is largely invisible, in part because it disproportionately affects the most marginalised. This is why measuring this problem is so crucial in exposing and ultimately resolving it. The information contained within the Global Slavery Index is critical in these efforts.

The 2018 Global Slavery Index measures the extent of modern slavery country by country, and the steps governments are taking to respond to this issue, to objectively measure progress toward ending modern slavery. The Index draws together findings from across estimates of prevalence, measurement of vulnerability, and assessment of government responses, alongside an analysis of trade flows and data on specific products. When considered as a set, the data provide a complex and insightful picture of the ways modern slavery is impacting countries around the world. This enables us to refine our thinking on how to better respond to modern slavery, and also how to predict and prevent modern slavery in future.

As reported in the recent Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, published by the International Labour Organization and the Walk Free Foundation, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, an estimated 40.3 million people were living in modern slavery in 2016. In other words, on any given day in 2016, there were more than 40 million people – about 70 percent of whom are women and girls – who were being forced to work against their will under threat or who were living in a forced marriage. In the past five years, 89 million people experienced some form of modern slavery for periods of time ranging from a few days to the whole five years. These estimates are conservative, given the gaps in existing data in key regions such as the Arab States and also exclusions of critical forms of modern slavery such as recruitment of children by armed groups and organ trafficking due to lack of data. From this starting point, the 2018 Global Slavery Index uses predictive modelling, based on data from nationally representative surveys and the Walk Free Foundation Vulnerability Model, to estimate the prevalence of modern slavery country by country.

The contributing factors

Findings from the 2018 Global Slavery Index highlight the connection between modern slavery and two major external drivers - highly repressive regimes, in which people are put to work to prop up the government, and conflict situations which result in the breakdown of rule of law, social structures, and systems of protection.

The country with the highest estimated prevalence is North Korea. In North Korea, one in 10 people are in modern slavery with the clear majority forced to work by the state. As a UN Commission of Inquiry has observed, violations of human rights in North Korea are not mere excesses of the state, they are an essential component of the political system. This is reflected in the research on North Korea undertaken through interviews with defectors for this Global Slavery Index. North Korea is followed closely
by Eritrea, a repressive regime that abuses its conscription system to hold its citizens in forced labour for decades. These countries have some of the weakest responses to modern slavery and the highest risk.

The 10 countries with highest prevalence of modern slavery globally, along with North Korea and Eritrea, are Burundi, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Mauritania, South Sudan, Pakistan, Cambodia, and Iran. Most of these countries are marked by conflict, with breakdowns in rule of law, displacement and a lack of physical security (Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Pakistan). Three of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence stand out as having state-imposed forced labour (North Korea, Eritrea and Burundi). Indeed, North Korea, Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Iran are the subject of various UN Security Council resolutions reflecting the severity and extremity of the situations there.

Nicoleta, 34, Romanian survivor of forced labour and forced sexual exploitation in Sicily

“I came to Sicily with my husband. We needed to send money back to support our children in Romania. But the greenhouse farmer where we found work said I had to sleep with him, and if I refused, he wouldn’t pay us. My husband said it was the only way we could keep our work. My employer threatened me with a gun, and when he finished, he just walked away. This went on for months. I left both the farm and my husband, but found out it is the same wherever you try to find work here in Sicily.”

Photo credit: Francesca Commissari for The Guardian

A global issue

One of the most important findings of the 2018 Global Slavery Index is that the prevalence of modern slavery in high-GDP countries is higher than previously understood, underscoring the responsibilities of these countries. Through collaboration, the number of data sources which inform the Index has increased. This has allowed the Index to more consistently measure prevalence in countries where exploitation has taken place. More surveys in sending countries has resulted in more data about receiving countries, most of which are highly developed. Following these changes, an interesting pattern emerges: the prevalence estimates for the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and several other European nations are higher than previously understood. Given these are also the countries taking the most action to respond to modern slavery, this does not mean these initiatives are in vain. It does, however, underscore that even in countries with seemingly strong laws and systems, there are critical gaps in protections for groups such as irregular migrants, the homeless, workers in the shadow or gig economy, and certain minorities. These gaps, which are being actively exploited by criminals, need urgent attention from governments.

The realities of global trade and commerce make it inevitable the products and proceeds of modern slavery will cross borders. Accordingly, for the first time we examine the issue of modern slavery not only from the perspective of where the crime is perpetrated but also where the products of the crime are sold and consumed, with a specific focus on the G20 countries. The resulting analysis presents a stark contrast of risk and responsibility, with G20 countries importing risk on a scale not matched by their responses.

Citizens of most G20 countries enjoy relatively low levels of vulnerability to the crime of modern slavery within their borders, and many aspects of their governments’ responses to it are comparatively strong. Nonetheless, businesses and governments in G20 countries are importing products that are at risk of modern slavery on a significant scale. Looking only at the “top five” at-risk products in each country identified by our analysis, G20 countries are collectively importing US$354 billion worth of at-risk products annually.
Of greatest concern is the continuing trade in coal from North Korea, alongside other products that are subject to UN Security Council sanctions. However, most of the at-risk products examined for this report are not subject to existing sanctions. Rather, information about risk of modern slavery can be found in research and media reports, and occasionally court cases. G20 countries are only just beginning to respond to this risk, through a growing focus on modern slavery in the supply chains of business and government, but existing efforts are not nearly enough. The Government Response Index reveals that more than half of the G20 countries are yet to formally enact laws, policies or practices aimed at stopping business and government sourcing goods and services produced by forced labour (Argentina, Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Turkey). The exceptions are China, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, UK, and the United States, each of which has begun to take some steps in this regard. Australia has announced it will introduce supply chain transparency laws in the second half of 2018.

Government responses

While much more needs to be done to prevent and respond to modern slavery, the Government Response Index suggests that national legal, policy, and programmatic responses to modern slavery are improving, with an upward trend overall in ratings for government responses. Globally, governments are taking more action to strengthen legislation and establish coordination and accountability mechanisms. Protection measures are being strengthened, with improvements in access to justice for adults and children in some countries. Nonetheless, in every country, there are enormous gaps between the estimated size of modern slavery and the small number of victims that are identified. This suggests efforts that exist on paper are not being implemented effectively. Furthermore, in many countries, critical gaps in services remain, with 50 percent of countries excluding either migrants, men, or children from accessing services. Not only are certain groups of victims not being identified, even when they are detected they are not able to access support and other services.

Moreover, high-GDP countries such as Qatar, Singapore, Kuwait, Brunei and Hong Kong are doing very little to respond despite their wealth and resources, while low-GDP countries such as Georgia, Moldova, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Mozambique are responding relatively strongly. Government engagement with business on modern slavery has increased dramatically since the 2016 Global Slavery Index. In 2018, 36 countries are taking steps to address forced labour in business or public supply chains, compared to only four countries in 2016. However, these steps are often to establish the bare minimum of reporting requirements; individual governments can do much more than they are doing to proactively engage with business to prevent forced labour in supply chains and in public procurement.

Progress, but challenges remain

The 2018 edition of the Global Slavery Index introduces new ways to look at an existing problem, drawing on a growing data set and increasingly sophisticated analysis. This deepens our understanding of the different contexts where modern slavery is likely to flourish and helps us predict the next flashpoint. For example, it is clear that if the international community does nothing to address the enormous risks resulting from the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people to temporary camps in Bangladesh, this will be the next population of deeply exploited and abused people – further compounding and reinforcing what is already a deeply entrenched conflict. It is equally clear that businesses and governments continuing to trade with highly repressive regimes such as North Korea and Eritrea are contributing to the maintenance of forced labour.

The research also highlights the responsibilities held by both low-GDP and high-GDP countries. All governments have committed to work together to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 on eradicating modern slavery. In this regard, high-GDP countries cannot simply rely on doing more of the same – there is an urgent need to prioritise prevention, through a focus on discrimination and safe migration. Equally, high-GDP countries have an obligation to take serious and urgent steps to address the risks they are importing. They owe this obligation both to consumers in their own countries and to victims along the supply chain, where products are being harvested, packed and shipped.

This edition of the Global Slavery Index introduces important improvements to the ways prevalence of modern slavery is measured. Building on the collaborative work undertaken with the ILO and IOM on the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, the Global Slavery Index results reflect changes to scope, methodology, and expanded data sources. The estimates are presented as a stock (or point in time) calculation rather than a flow (total over a period of time), include state imposed forced labour, and better estimates of sexual exploitation, and children in modern slavery. Further, we were able to count exploitation where it occurred more consistently due to a considerably larger number of national surveys.

As a result of these advancements, the national prevalence estimates are not comparable with previous editions of the Global Slavery Index. Nonetheless, the strengthened methodology reflects stronger data, increased levels of data, and more systematic coverage of different forms of modern slavery. As such, while comparability from previous years is lost, the changes are justified by the need to continually improve our knowledge base.
Recommendations

1 / Governments and businesses prioritise human rights in decision making when engaging with repressive regimes.
   » Deliver on financial and trade restrictions imposed by the UN Security Council, such as those in place against North Korea.
   » Conduct due diligence and transparency of business operations, to ensure that any trade, business or investment is not contributing to or benefiting from modern slavery (or other human rights abuses).
   » Establish active efforts to drive positive social change through economic and business relationships.

2 / Governments proactively anticipate and respond to modern slavery in conflict situations.
   » Create protective systems to identify and assist victims, and at-risk populations both during conflict and in post-conflict settings (including in neighbouring countries).
   » Collect and preserve evidence to ensure perpetrators can be punished.
   » Prioritise international cooperation to investigate and prosecute perpetrators.

3 / Governments improve modern slavery responses at home.
   » Improve prevention, including through prioritising safe migration and steps to combat deep discrimination, whether against ethnic minorities, women and girls or migrants.
   » Close the gap between the estimated size of modern slavery and the small numbers of victims that are detected and assisted, through implementing laws to identify victims. If laws are not working, the question should be asked why, so barriers can be found and overcome.
   » Ensure labour laws protect all workers, including migrant workers, temporary and casual workers, and all people working in the informal economy.
   » Ensure all victims can access services, support and justice, whether they are male, female, children, foreigners or nationals and regardless of migration status.

4 / G20 governments and businesses address modern slavery in supply chains.
   » Conduct due diligence and transparency in public procurement to guarantee public funds are not inadvertently supporting modern slavery.
   » Conduct due diligence and transparency in private supply chains, using legislation that is harmonised across countries.
   » Ensure the ethical recruitment of migrant workers, including through prohibiting charging workers fees to secure work and withholding identification documents.

5 / Governments prioritise responses to violations against women and girls.
   » Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.
   » Eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
   » End abuse and exploitation of children.
   » Facilitate safe, orderly and responsible migration.

Country level recommendations can be found on the country pages on the website. Regional level recommendations can be found in the forthcoming region reports.