

General Questions on Slavery

How long has Anti-Slavery International been working?

Anti-Slavery International is the world's oldest international human rights organisation. Its roots stretch back to 1787 when the first abolitionist society was formed. A new organisation, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, was formed on 17 April 1839, declaring its commitment to abolishing slavery throughout the world. This organisation continues today under the name Anti-Slavery International.



today's fight for tomorrow's freedom

Anti-Slavery International
Thomas Clarkson House, The Stableyard
Broomgrove Road, London SW9 9TL

Tel: +44 (0)20 7501 8920 Fax: +44 (0)20 7738 4110

e-mail: antislavery@antislavery.org

website: <http://www.antislavery.org>

What does Anti-Slavery International do?

Anti-Slavery International is the only charity in the United Kingdom working exclusively against slavery and related abuses, and is the leading organisation in this field. With your help we work at local, national and international levels to eliminate the systems of slavery around the world. By working with local partners we investigate and report on slavery and promote action to eliminate this abuse.

Anti-Slavery International works around the world by:

- Urging governments of countries with slavery to develop and implement measures to end it
- Lobbying governments and intergovernmental agencies to make slavery a priority issue
- Supporting research to assess the scale of slavery in order to identify measures to end it
- Working with local organisations to raise public awareness of slavery
- Educating the public about the realities of slavery and campaigning for its end

What is contemporary slavery and how is it different to historical slavery?

An enslaved person in the world today has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Forced to work through mental or physical threat
- Controlled by an 'employer' under the threat of some form of punishment
- Dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'
- Physically constrained or has restrictions placed on their freedom of movement.

Slavery has taken different forms in all societies across the world across all ages. The most well-known form of historical slavery is the Transatlantic Slave Trade which lasted for over 500 years and saw millions of Africans, captured, transported and enslaved in the Caribbean or the Americas and forced to work on plantations growing cotton, tobacco, sugar and indigo. The enslaved Africans constantly fought for their freedom by destroying plantations and refusing to work.

Their actions and mass anti-slavery campaigning in Britain led to the passing of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1807, ending British participation in the slave trade and the subsequent 1833 act which abolished slavery in British colonies. Other countries followed suit with Brazil being the last country to abolish slavery in 1888.

A key difference between slavery today and in the past is that slavery is illegal in every country whereas it was previously sanctioned by governments. But it has not been eliminated because these laws are not enforced. Even in Europe and North America, where slavery appeared to have been consigned to history, it has returned in the form of human trafficking and forced labour, using violence, coercion or deception for the purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Modern slavery: summary results

Number and prevalence of persons in modern slavery, by region

	FORCED LABOUR ^(c)		FORCED MARRIAGE		MODERN SLAVERY ^(d)	
	No. ^(a)	% ^(b)	No.	%	No.	%
World	27,577	3.5	21,993	2.8	49,570	6.4
Africa	3,819	2.9	3,189	2.4	7,008	5.2
Americas	3,593	3.5	1,496	1.5	5,089	5
Arab States	886	5.3	814	4.8	1,700	10.1
Asia and the Pacific	15,142	3.5	14,207	3.3	29,349	6.8
Europe and Central Asia	4,137	4.4	2,287	2.5	6,424	6.9

Notes: (a) Number is expressed in thousands; (b) “%” denotes cases per 1,000 population; (c) “Total forced labour” comprises privately-imposed forced labour and State-imposed forced labour; and (d) “Total modern slavery” comprises all categories of forced labour and forced marriage.

What forms does slavery take today?

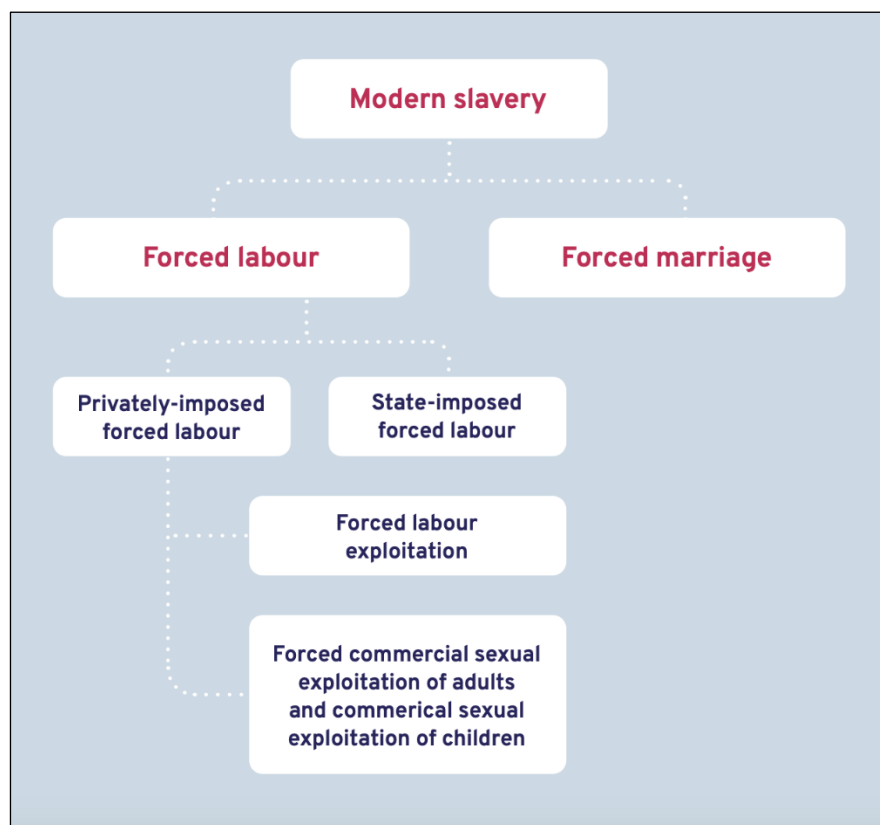
All forms of slavery involve forced labour which the International Labour Organization defines as ‘all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty for which the said person has not entered into of their own free will’. The different forms of slavery that exist today are:

- **Forced labour:** any work or service which people are made to do against their will under the threat of some form of punishment. This can occur in any industry including agriculture, construction, mining, catering, domestic service, health and social care and forced commercial sexual exploitation
- **Bonded labour:** occurs when labour is demanded as the means of repayment for a loan or an advance on a loan. Once in debt they lose all control over their conditions of work. Their debt becomes inflated through charges for food, accommodation, transport and exorbitant interest, which traps individuals and families into a cycle of debt with little chance of escape

- **The unconditional worst forms of child labour:** includes child slavery which affects children under 18 who are in forms of forced or bonded labour, forced recruitment for use in armed conflicts, prostitution, pornography and illicit activities (such as drug smuggling)
- **Descent based slavery:** occurs when people are forced to work or are treated as if they were owned by other people simply because of the ethnic group or caste in which they were born into
- **Trafficking:** involves the movement of an individual from one place to another

Why does slavery still exist today?

Slavery has existed across all societies during human history and has taken many forms. During the Greek and Roman empires for example, people were taken as slaves if they refused to accede into empire expansion, and a slave class existed. The Transatlantic Slave Trade underpinned capitalist expansion and Western industrial revolution. Contemporary slave trade is underpinned by global inequality, poverty and most largely discrimination as victims of slavery are mostly drawn from socially excluded and marginalised groups.



The scourge of modern slavery has by no means been relegated to history.

The 2021 Global Estimates indicate that 49.6 million people are in modern slavery on any given day.

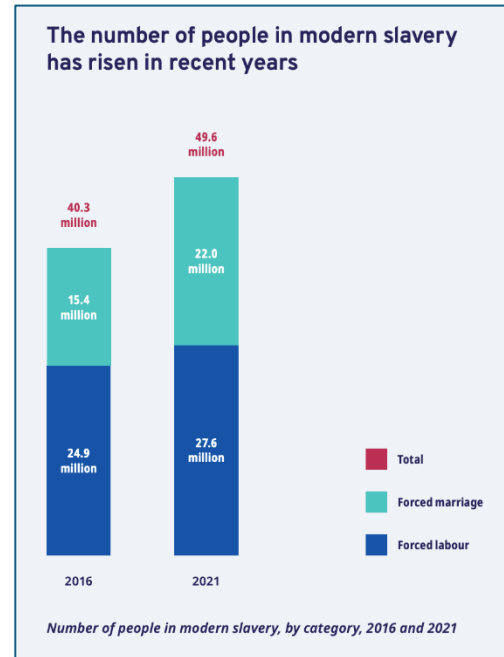
Forced labour accounts for 27.6 million.

Forced marriage for 22 million.

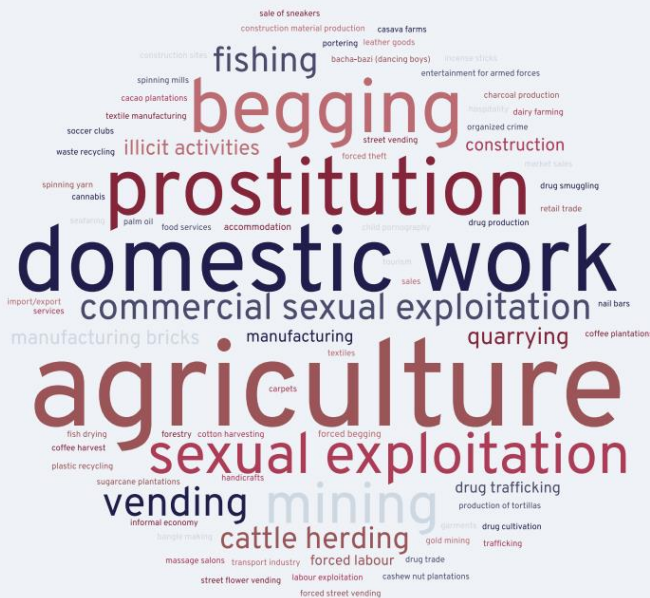
This number increased by nearly 20% between 2016 and 2021

More than 12 million of these are children.

Child Labour



The forced labour of children occurs across a wide range of economic sectors and industries



Word cloud of commonly occurring words^(a)

Note: (a) This word cloud was generated using data collected by the ILO through a series of regional mappings of information on the forced labour of children in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The mappings relied on a variety of secondary sources and indicated (where available) the economic sector or activity in which children were engaged.

The 2021 estimates indicate that a total of 3.3 million children are in situations of forced labour on any given day, accounting for about 12 per cent of all those in forced labour. And owing to data constraints, these numbers, already alarming, may well be just the tip of the iceberg. The forced labour of children constitutes one component of child labour, which the international community – through Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals – has committed to ending by 2025.

The forced labour of children occurs across a wide array of economic sectors and industries. Some of the forms of forced labour of children are listed below.

- Domestic work
- Commercial sexual exploitation
- Situations of debt bondage
- Trafficking for forced labour
- Forced begging and illicit activities
- Armed conflict / child soldiers

Are people working in sweatshops slaves?

There have been numerous reports of people in the developing world working in factories making products for well known brands being subjected to sweatshop conditions (a working environment with very difficult or dangerous conditions, usually where the workers have few rights or ways to address their situation). Whilst there is gross exploitation and sometimes abuse, there is a distinction between exploitative labour and slavery.

For example, an 18 year old woman who cannot find other employment and starts working for x factory making clothes for x UK owned company, working 15 hours a day with little or no breaks in between and takes home the equivalent of £1.50 at the end of the shift a slave?

Legally no, although subjected to illegal and exploitative labour conditions, she is not forced to work by anyone and can theoretically stop working at the factory if she chooses. A slavery situation would be if she was forced to work (through physical harm/threat to herself or any member of her family) and if she could not leave the factory without a penalty.

Which companies use forced labour to produce goods which I use?

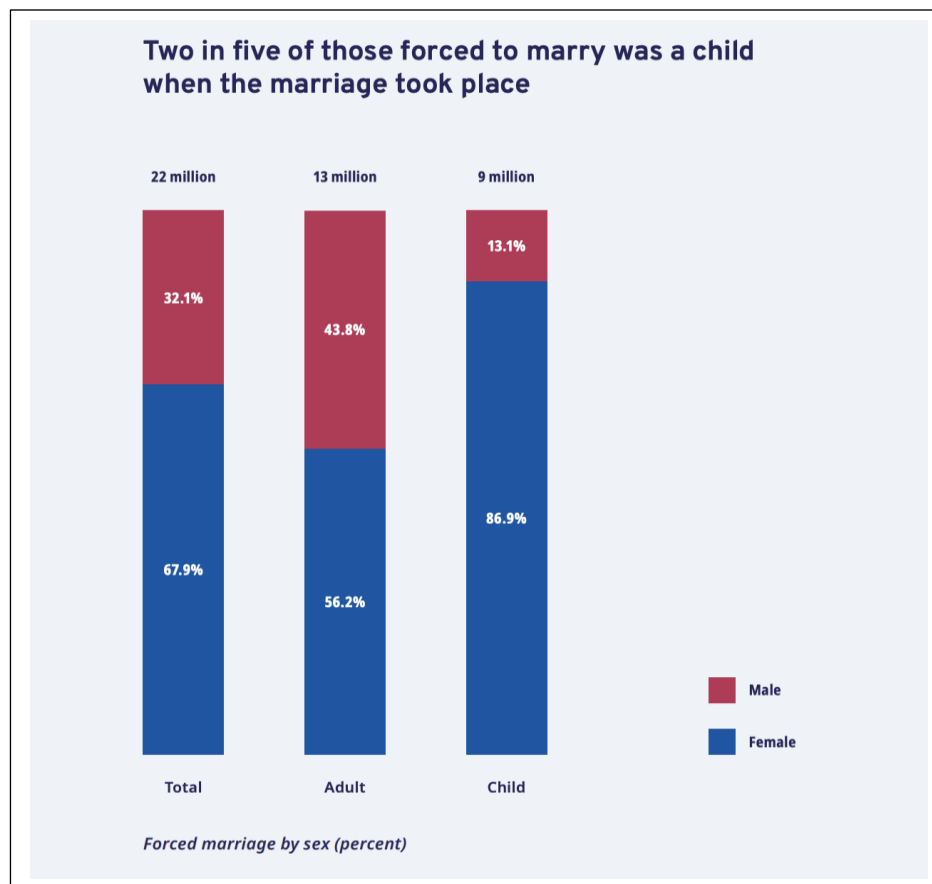
It is difficult to track each part of an end product because so many people and businesses are involved with the manufacturing, packing, distribution etc. We have all heard or read news stories of forced labour and sweatshop conditions in factories supplying well-known brands.

The Fairtrade scheme and others like it provide the best available guarantee of a slavery-free supply chain, but isn't 100%.

Forced Marriage

An estimated 22 million people were living in forced marriage on any given day in 2021, nearly three in every thousand people in the world. These 22 million are people who were forced to marry at any time in their life, without their consent, and who are still alive and living with their partner. Women and girls make up 14.9 million of this total. The number of men, women, and children living in forced marriages has risen globally. There was a 6.6 million increase in the number of people living in a forced marriage between 2016 and 2021.

These estimates are considered conservative for several reasons, not least that forced marriage as presented here is based on a narrow definition and does not include all child marriages. UNICEF estimates about 650 million women and girls living today were married before the age of 18.



Two in five of those forced to marry were children when the marriage took place. Among these children, 41 per cent were forced to marry before the age of 16 years. Girls were more likely than boys to be forced to marry (87 per cent versus 13 per cent). Although marriages under the age of 10 do occur, they are very rare. The lowest age at marriage reported in the sample was 9 years and the highest, 69 years. Girls were more likely than boys to be forced to marry (87 per cent versus 13 per cent).

The two elements of modern slavery – forced labour and forced marriage – both reflect a denial of people’s freedom and their economic and social agency. Both refer to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, and deception. Both involve underlying imbalances and abuses of power. Both are embedded in patterns of discrimination, deprivation, and poverty. Gaps in governance, in law and practice, create the space for both these abuses to occur.

What can students do to help fight against contemporary slavery?

Students and young people have a vital role to play in the fight to eradicate slavery from the world today. The first step is awareness of the issue, once you are aware, you can make a lot of other people aware and they in turn can make more people aware. When a lot of people are armed with facts then they can start to lobby decision makers, both governments at home and internationally as well as international organisations. Sufficient lobbying can make a massive difference to decision makers, who will either be counting on your votes now or in a few years time.

Activities that students can carry out to help raise awareness and fight for the eradication of slavery include:

- Visiting the Anti-Slavery International website and learning about the different forms of slavery
- Joining the Campaigns Network and taking regular actions on campaigns
- Writing a letter to your local MP and asking for action on a particular campaign
- Becoming a member of Anti-Slavery International
- Holding an awareness raising day at school/college/university/place of worship/youth club/community centre
- Organising a writing group and asking each one in the group to write a letter to your favourite shops asking what measures they are taking to identify, prevent and end the use of slavery in their supply chain
- Organising a fund-raising activity to raise funds to help support Anti-Slavery International’s partners in their release and rehabilitation of enslaved people
- Supporting the Niger Schools Development project which provides education for children descended from slavery

How do you free slaves?

While some people think that enslaved people should be freed by buying their freedom for them, this can actually perpetuate the cycle of slavery. Enslavers can use the money to buy more people into slavery and released enslaved people can find themselves destitute without the necessary help to prevent them from being re-enslaved. Slavery functions as an institution which thrives on poor and marginalised people. Anti-Slavery International works with governments and partner organisations as well as the ordinary public to campaign for the implementation of laws which protect people against slavery and tackles the discriminatory practices and poverty that are the causes and consequences of slavery

Will slavery ever come to an end in my lifetime?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of people in slavery, the fact that it happens in so many countries across the world and that it is underpinned by issues of global poverty, discrimination and social exclusion.

However great strides have been made. The United Nations in 2008, decided to create a new Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery who will report directly to the UN Human Rights Council on measures needed to fight slavery across the world.

One historical example to take inspiration from is the Transatlantic Slave Trade which was abolished after 500 years of being legally sanctioned by governments. The actions of the enslaved Africans in fighting for their freedom inspired 12 people in 1787 who went on to raise awareness and changed the attitudes of millions of British people from viewing the slave trade as a normal and credible way of life to realising it was a great human injustice. Between 1787 and 1807, British participation in the slave trade came to an end buoyed by the general public signing petitions and boycotting sugar produced by slave labour.

This example shows what possibility the future holds. By making a small start such as signing up to the Anti-Slavery International campaign at http://www.antislavery.org.uk/english/campaigns/sign_up_for_updates.aspx and you can harness the spirit of the abolitionists of the past and work towards seeing the eradication of slavery in your lifetime.

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