

BRITISH ACADEMY

Tackling
Slavery,
Human
Trafficking
and Child
Labour
in Modern
Business





‘Modern slavery’ is a relationship based on severe exploitation – often, though not always, economic exploitation. It is defined by a range of ‘slavery-like practices’, which can include forced or compulsory labour, servitude, forced or servile marriage, the sale or exploitation of children, human trafficking, and debt bondage. In all instances, this exploitative relationship is characterised by the control over a person through the prospect or reality of violence, and is enabled by a poor human rights framework.

The scale of the problem

Modern businesses rely on global supply chains which connect consumers to goods and labour. One alarming feature of modern business in both the developed and developing world is the prevalence of modern slavery. The scale and complexity of modern supply chains means they can be extremely difficult

to govern, and exploitative practices are often difficult to detect. Modern slavery has consequently become a hidden crime of global significance. In developing countries where regulation is weak, there is considerable potential for exploitation, especially low down in the supply chain.

It is estimated that worldwide...

45 million

people are enslaved*



25 million of these are in forced labour**

15 million people of these are in forced marriage**

72.5 million

children are employed in hazardous work***



* Global Slavery Index 2016

** 2017 Global Estimate of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Walk Free Foundation (WFF) in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

*** Global Estimate of Modern Slavery, 2017, Alliance 8.7



National and international action

To address these abuses, the United Nations (UN) has included within the Sustainable Development Agenda a specific target for states. National governments are called upon to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2030. This specific development goal, SDG 8.7, is closely connected to other ambitions including promoting decent work, gender equality and the right to education. In addition to the UN's Sustainable

Development Agenda, several states have introduced domestic legislation. One of the most notable examples is the UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act, which requires companies to confirm the steps taken to ensure that slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in the business (or in any supply chain) or declare that no steps to confirm the existence of slavery or trafficking have been taken. In so doing the Act gives law enforcement the tools to fight modern slavery, ensure perpetrators can receive suitably severe punishments for these crimes and enhances support and protection for victims.

Business risks

Businesses need efficient global supply chains, but face legal, reputational and economic risks from issues around slavery, human trafficking and child

labour. Productive global supply chains require well trained, healthy and educated people. Moreover, they create millions of new consumers. The failure

to tackle the human rights abuses in production and services has the potential to damage the finance and reputation of businesses, as investors and

consumers are increasingly sensitive to the ethical performance of the companies they engage with, as well as their record on human rights.

Business efforts to address the problem

One key challenge for businesses is how best to respond to (the risk of) human rights abuses within the production process across all sectors. Global businesses are often exceptionally complex and the challenge of governing across the supply chain is not to be understated. Companies are often reliant on tools, such as social auditing, to detect risks within their supply chains, which may not identify all existing and potential abuses and which are rarely open to public scrutiny.

Many human rights violations take place in the informal sector, which makes them even more difficult to detect. Hence, businesses cannot be fully sure that this approach is an effective way of tackling modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour, or whether their responses to these problems actually drive bad practice even further underground. Current understanding of what works in addressing modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour is very limited.

“The UK needs a ‘change in culture’ to end modern slavery.”

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland OBE, 20 December 2017

A new research programme

Recognising the existing evidence gap, the British Academy has initiated a new programme, 'Tackling Slavery, Human Trafficking and Child Labour in Modern Business', with support from the UK's Department for International Development. The programme aims to promote ground-breaking research and make evidence widely available

and accessible to those seeking to develop and support more effective policies, business models and interventions in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 8.7. This programme has funded eight innovative and interlinked research projects which seek to identify promising practices and share knowledge about what works at scale in different contexts.

The projects involved in the programme

The projects are led by multi-disciplinary research teams from universities in the UK and the USA, including Bath, Bristol, Brown, Coventry, Leeds, Liverpool, Nottingham, and

Sussex and are global in nature. Field research is taking place in Bangladesh, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Mexico, Peru and Vietnam.



The eight research projects will each seek to answer different key questions:

- How does the language of transparency enhance the wellbeing of workers and children in the developing world?
- How do legal reforms affect the supply chain and inform labour practices?
- Do corporate interventions work?
- How can businesses incentivise change at the bottom of the supply chain?
- Can workers' voices facilitate detection of labour risks and empower workers to strengthen remediation?
- How have attitudes towards child sex tourism changed over time?
- What is the relationship between trafficking and economic migration among female workers?
- How can workers be protected?

The projects compare production processes across different sectors including chocolate and textiles, beef production and timber, construction and domestic work, among others. In addition, there are detailed single case studies of the development of smartphone technology in East Asia, child sex trafficking in Jamaica, and debt bondage and seafood

production in Indonesia. Though it is not the sole topic of research, all eight projects address issues around gender (including childhood), and also aim to work with researchers and other stakeholders in developing countries to help build local capacity in tackling the challenges of modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour.

Events and broad engagement

Throughout 2018 and 2019 the British Academy will be organising various dissemination and networking events to raise awareness of the problem, generate dialogue around new ideas emerging from the research projects, and build

a base of stakeholders from within academic, policy and business communities in the UK and overseas interested in the development of more effective interventions aimed at addressing modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour.

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