



MODERN FORMS OF SLAVERY: LEGAL ASPECTS, INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS, AND CHALLENGES OF COMBATING

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ABSTRACT

The article examines modern forms of slavery as one of the key issues in human rights violations. An analysis is provided of various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, human trafficking, debt bondage, forced child labor, and forced marriages, as well as their prevalence worldwide. Special attention is paid to international legal mechanisms and their effectiveness, including UN Conventions, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and regional agreements. The main causes and consequences of modern exploitation are described, supported by statistical data and opinions from leading researchers. In conclusion, the article suggests measures to improve national legislation, strengthen international cooperation, raise public awareness, provide victim support, and implement new technologies.

Modern forms of slavery remain one of the most serious threats to human rights. Despite historical progress in eradicating slavery, its transformed forms persist across all regions of the world, often concealed under various social, economic, and political factors. In the 21st century, phenomena such as forced labor, human trafficking, child labor, and debt bondage have acquired new dimensions, necessitating a reassessment of legal and human rights mechanisms. This article examines modern forms of slavery from the perspective of international law, providing a statistical overview and considering the opinions of leading scholars as well as the effectiveness of international treaties and conventions.

Modern slavery refers to situations where individuals are subjected to coercion, threats, or manipulation, depriving them of the ability to refuse exploitation. As noted by Professor Kevin Bales, "slavery is the control of a person for the purpose of economic exploitation." According to the Global Slavery Index published by the Walk Free Foundation, over 50 million people were living in conditions of modern slavery in 2023¹.

Modern slavery encompasses a wide range of practices aimed at exploiting people for economic, social, or cultural purposes. In 2023-2024, the most widespread forms of modern slavery included:

¹ Walk Free Foundation, Global Slavery Index 2023. // <https://www.walkfree.org/>



- Forced Labor: This form of exploitation involves compelling individuals to work under the threat of punishment. Forced labor is commonly found in agriculture, construction, mining, and domestic service. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 17 million people worldwide are subjected to forced labor, with 86% of such cases occurring in the private sector².

- Human Trafficking: Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of individuals through force, deception, or coercion for exploitation purposes.

- Debt Bondage: In debt bondage, individuals are forced to work to repay debts that are often inflated by unfair conditions. This is one of the oldest forms of slavery and remains prevalent in South Asia.

- Forced Child Labor: The exploitation of children in hazardous or harmful labor deprives them of their right to education, health, and development. For example, the ILO reports that 160 million children globally are subjected to exploitation, with nearly 50% engaged in hazardous forms of labor³.

- Forced Marriages: Victims, predominantly women and girls, are coerced into marriage, leading to the restriction of their freedom and exploitation. According to the Global Slavery Index, over 22 million people were in forced marriages in 2021.

Modern slavery is a global challenge requiring a comprehensive international approach. Through the development of conventions, protocols, and agreements, as well as the establishment of global and regional monitoring mechanisms, efforts to combat modern slavery have become more systematic.

Slavery Convention (1926): This was the first international document to define slavery as "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised." The convention obligates states to take measures to prevent human trafficking and eradicate traditional forms of slavery.

Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery (1956): Expanding upon the 1926 Convention, it broadened the definition of slavery to include practices such as debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriages, and the exploitation of children in labor without appropriate remuneration.

ILO Conventions No. 29 and No. 105 on Forced Labor: These conventions aim to eradicate all forms of forced labor. Convention No. 105 (adopted in 1957) specifically prohibits the use of forced labor as a means of political coercion, economic discrimination, or disciplinary punishment.

Palermo Protocol (2000): As part of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, this protocol focuses on the prevention of human trafficking, protection of victims, and prosecution of perpetrators⁴.

² "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage (2022)." // https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang--en/index.htm

³ "Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward." // https://www.ilo.org/pec/Informationresources/WCMS_797515/lang--en/index.htm

⁴ Протокол о предотвращении, пресечении и наказании за торговлю людьми.// <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/protocol.html>



Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989): This article emphasizes the necessity of protecting children from economic exploitation and hazardous labor.

UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7: This goal targets the elimination of forced labor, the end of human trafficking, and the eradication of child labor by 2030⁵.

Within the framework of the United Nations, several structures have been established to address modern slavery directly:

International Labour Organization (ILO): Plays a pivotal role in creating standards for combating forced labor and monitoring their implementation globally.

UN Structures: Dedicated bodies such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery contribute to addressing this issue comprehensively.

UN Programs and Regional Mechanisms to Combat Human Trafficking

- **UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime):** Implements projects focused on training law enforcement agencies to combat human trafficking effectively.
- **Blue Heart Campaign:** A global program aimed at raising awareness about human trafficking and mobilizing support to fight the issue.
- **European Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005):** Establishes a regional monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with anti-trafficking obligations.

Modern slavery is widespread, with its characteristics varying across regions and industries. According to the Global Slavery Index (2023) published by the Walk Free Foundation:

50 million people live in conditions of modern slavery worldwide.

Of these, 28 million are subjected to forced labor, and 22 million are in forced marriages.

Gender-Based Distribution of Victims

- Women and girls account for approximately 76% of victims, often subjected to forced marriages and sexual exploitation.
- Men are more frequently forced into labor in heavy industries such as construction and mining.

Asia and the Pacific: This region accounts for nearly 30 million victims, with the majority subjected to debt bondage and forced labor in industries such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing.

Africa: More than 9 million victims are identified, with a significant focus on child labor and traditional forms of slavery, particularly in rural and impoverished areas.

Europe and North America: Around 5 million victims, with the majority subjected to sexual exploitation, often involving transnational trafficking networks.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** estimates that modern slavery generates an annual income of **\$150 billion** globally. Of this, approximately **\$99 billion** is attributed to **sexual exploitation**, making it one of the most profitable forms of exploitation.⁶

⁵ Цели устойчивого развития ООН (ЦУР) // <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

⁶ "Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour (2014)." // https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_243391/lang--en/index.htm



Researchers are actively examining the causes, mechanisms, and potential solutions to eliminate modern slavery.

Kevin Bales highlights that modern slavery is primarily an **economic issue**, driven by the demand for cheap labor and the vulnerability of specific groups. He emphasizes that slavery today is cheaper than ever in history, with the cost of acquiring a "slave" as low as **\$90⁷**.

To effectively eradicate modern slavery, it is essential to take action at multiple levels:

1. **Strengthening National Legislation:** Governments must adopt and enforce laws that require **mandatory reporting from companies** regarding their supply chains and ensure corporate accountability for the use of forced labor.
2. **Enhancing International Cooperation:** Promoting **information sharing** among nations and developing collaborative operations to tackle transnational criminal networks involved in human trafficking and forced labor.
3. **Improving Education and Awareness:** Educating the public about the realities of modern slavery and establishing **training programs** for law enforcement and judicial systems to identify and respond effectively to cases of exploitation.
4. **Strengthening Victim Support Mechanisms:** Setting up **rehabilitation centers** to provide victims with access to medical care, psychological support, and legal assistance, helping them reintegrate into society.

Harnessing New Technologies: Implementing **artificial intelligence (AI)** for the detection and monitoring of exploitation cases.

Using **blockchain technology** to ensure transparency and traceability in supply chains.

Developing **mobile applications** to assist victims and enable the reporting of violations.

5. **Increasing Funding for Anti-Slavery Programs:** Expanding financial resources to support international organizations and programs dedicated to combating modern slavery, ensuring their sustainability and impact.

Modern slavery is a challenge that requires a comprehensive approach, uniting the efforts of states, international organizations, NGOs, and society. Despite significant achievements, such as the development of international conventions and increased awareness, the problem remains relevant due to economic inequality, weak enforcement mechanisms, and new forms of exploitation. It is important for the international community to continue working on improving legal instruments, increasing funding for anti-slavery programs, and holding accountable those who continue to violate fundamental human rights.

⁷ Bales K. Disposable people: New slavery in the global economy, updated with a new preface. – Univ of California Press, 2012.