



Global Slavery Index 2023

For Prelims: [Modern slavery](#), [G20 nations](#), [Terrorism](#), [Bonded Labour Abolition Act of 1976](#), [Article 23 of the Constitution](#).

For Mains: Major Takeaways of Global Slavery Index 2023, India's Stance Related to Modern Slavery.

Why in News?

A new report, 'The Global Slavery Index 2023', by the **Walk Free Foundation**, highlights the **increasing prevalence of modern slavery worldwide**, with the number of people living in such conditions reaching **50 million**—an alarming **25% rise in the past five years**.

- The report emphasises the significant role played by [G20 nations](#) in **exacerbating this crisis** through their trade operations and global supply chains.
- **India, China, Russia, Indonesia, Turkey, and the U.S.** are among the top G20 countries with the highest number of [forced labourers](#).

What is Modern Slavery?

- Modern slavery encompasses various forms of exploitation, including **forced labour, forced marriage, debt bondage, commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking**, slavery-like practices, and the sale and exploitation of children.
- Modern slavery has devastating consequences for **individuals, communities, and societies**.
 - It violates [human rights](#), **undermines human dignity and erodes social cohesion**.
 - It also **hampers economic development, perpetuates inequality, and fuels corruption**. It poses a threat to global security and stability by fuelling **conflict, terrorism, and organised crime**.

What are the Major Takeaways of Global Slavery Index 2023?

- **Key Highlights:**
 - According to the **Global Slavery Index 2023**, an estimated **50 million people were living in modern slavery on any given day in 2021**, an increase of 10 million people since 2016.
 - This means that one in every 160 people in the world is a victim of modern slavery.
 - It ranks **160 countries based on their estimated prevalence of modern slavery per 1,000 people**.
 - The countries with the highest prevalence are **North Korea (104.6), Eritrea (90.3), and Mauritania (32.0)**, where modern slavery is widespread and often state-sponsored.
 - The countries with the lowest prevalence are **Switzerland (0.5), Norway (0.5),**

and Germany (0.6), where strong governance and effective responses to modern slavery are evident.

- **Asia and the Pacific** has the largest number of people in modern slavery. **(29.3 million)**
 - **India has the prevalence of 8.** (Estimated proportion of population living in modern slavery per thousand people).

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Most prevalent

The countries estimated to have the highest prevalence of modern slavery tend to be conflict-affected, have state-imposed forced labour, and have weak governance.

	Rank	Prevalence Rate*	# of People
North Korea	1	104.6	2,696,000
Eritrea	2	90.3	320,000
Mauritania	3	32.0	149,000
Saudi Arabia	4	21.3	740,000
Türkiye	5	15.6	1,320,000
Tajikistan	6	14.0	133,000
United Arab Emirates	7	13.4	132,000
Russia	8	13.0	1,899,000
Afghanistan	9	13.0	505,000
Kuwait	10	13.0	55,000

*Estimated number of people in modern slavery per 1,000 population

Least prevalent

The countries with the lowest prevalence of modern slavery are those with strong governance and strong government responses to modern slavery.

	Rank	Prevalence Rate*	# of People
Switzerland	160	0.5	4,000
Norway	159	0.5	3,000
Germany	158	0.6	47,000
Netherlands	157	0.6	10,000
Sweden	156	0.6	6,000
Denmark	155	0.6	4,000
Belgium	154	1.0	11,000
Ireland	153	1.1	5,000
Japan	152	1.1	144,000
Finland	151	1.4	8,000

*Estimated number of people in modern slavery per 1,000 population

▪ Contributing Factors:

- The report identifies **climate change, armed conflict, weak governance, and health emergencies** like the **Covid-19 pandemic** as key factors that have contributed to the **rise in modern slavery**.
 - G20 nations account for **more than half of all people living in modern slavery**, primarily due to the importation of products worth **USD 468 billion from countries with weak worker protection**, thereby worsening forced labour conditions.

▪ Role of Global Supply Chains:

- Complex and opaque global supply chains, which involve the **sourcing of raw materials, manufacturing, packaging, and transportation**, are deeply entangled with forced labour.
- The report highlights the importation of high-risk products, such as **electronics, textiles, palm oil, and solar panels**, and their association with forced labor, human trafficking, and child labour.
 - It reveals that **G20 countries collectively import billions of dollars worth of textiles and apparel goods at risk of being produced by forced labour every year**.

▪ Assessment Methodology:

- Factors such as **political instability, inequality, lack of basic needs, criminal justice mechanisms, internal conflicts**, and displacement defined a **nation's vulnerability to modern slavery**.
- The index uses data released by the **International Labour Organisation (ILO), Walk Free, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** in 2022 to illustrate how **“modern slavery is hidden in plain sight”**

▪ Case Study: Textiles Industry:

- The **report highlights the textiles industry as a significant contributor to forced labour**. It describes conditions of forced and unpaid work, health and safety risks, poor wages, lack of benefits, and debt bondage.

- The **Sumangali scheme in Tamil Nadu** is cited as an example of exploitative conditions trapping women and girls in spinning mills.
- **International Efforts and Challenges:**
 - Despite the **adoption of a goal to end modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking by 2030**, the report highlights the significant increase in the number of people living in modern slavery and the lack of progress in government action.
 - The report attributes the **increase of 10 million people to compounding crises**, including armed conflicts, environmental degradation, assaults on democracy, global rollback of women's rights, and the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Recommendations:**
 - The Global Slavery Index recommends implementing stronger measures and legislations to **prevent governments and businesses from sourcing goods and services linked to modern slavery**.
 - The report also suggests **embedding anti-slavery measures in climate change sustainability plans, providing education to children, tightening regulations around [child marriage](#)**, and ensuring transparency in value chains.

What is India's Stance Related to Modern Slavery?

- **Legislative Framework:**
 - India has taken **legislative measures** to combat modern slavery, including the **[Bonded Labour Abolition Act of 1976](#)** (the Act was amended in 1985 to include contract and migrant workers) **and the Central scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour**.
 - The Supreme Court has also ruled that **non-payment of minimum wages amounts to “forced labour” under [Article 23 of the Constitution](#)**.
- **Challenges:**
 - Challenges remain in **implementation of the Acts, corruption, legal loopholes, and lack of politics** that hinders effective eradication of modern slavery in the country.
 - For instance, Growing evidence shows indigenous communities and those engaged in fishing and agriculture in **States like Odisha and West Bengal have become victims of debt bondage, human trafficking and mass displacement**.
- **Need of the Hour:**
 - **Multi Pronged Approach:**
 - Government needs to **enact and enforce laws that criminalise all forms of modern slavery and protect the rights of victims**.
 - **Businesses need to ensure that their operations and supply chains are free from forced labour** and human trafficking.
 - Civil society needs to raise **awareness, advocate for change, and provide support to survivors**.
 - Individuals need to **educate themselves about the issue**, demand transparency from companies they buy from or invest in, and report any suspected cases of modern slavery they encounter
 - **Survey on Bonded Labour:**
 - There is also a need to properly identify and enumerate people stuck in modern slavery conditions. **India’s last national survey of bonded labour was done in the mid-90s**.

Note: Walk Free is an international human rights group focussed on the eradication of modern slavery, in all its forms, in our lifetime.

Source: [TH](#)

