

# 50 million people trapped in modern slavery, a 10 million-person increase in last 5 years

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By Hans Gruber

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The International Labor Organisation (ILO) has issued a report which estimates that 50 million people, or one out of every 150 people alive, are either trapped in a forced marriage or doing unpaid labor. This represents an increase of 10 million from the numbers estimated 5 years ago.

The ILO lambasted the findings and said the fact that things are worsening is “shocking.”

“Nothing can justify the persistence of this fundamental abuse of human rights,” the ILO’s general, Guy Ryder said. “We know what needs to be done... an all-hands-on-deck approach is needed. Trade unions, employers’ organizations, civil society and ordinary people all have critical roles to play.”

The UN’s labor organization emphasized that slavery is not exclusive to poor countries and that more than half of all forced labor happens in richer countries in the upper-middle or high-income bracket.

Approximately 27.6 million people are in forced labor, including 3.3 million children. Of those children, over half are in commercial sexual exploitation. A further 22 million people are trapped in forced marriages, more than two-thirds of them women, and many victims are minors when the marriage takes place.

The ILO counts both forced marriages and forced labor as slavery because in both situations the person cannot leave due to “threats, violence, deception, abuse of power or other forms of coercion.”

“Entrapment in forced labor can last years, while in most cases forced marriage is a life sentence,” the report says.

The report states a mix of “compounding crises” coming together have made the situation worse by increasing poverty, which can therefore lead to a rise in slavery.

The pandemic restrictions caused major disruption to people’s income, leading to more debt – which led many into forced labor. The ILO says the pandemic has led to an increase in “extreme global poverty” for the first time in 20 years.

War and armed conflict also lead to hardships, or the recruitment of children to work or serve as child soldiers.

The report has issued a call-to-action for an international effort to gather resources and a genuine desire to fix this problem. “Promises and statements of good intent are not enough,” it warns.