



**ALLIANCE**

# Regional brief for Asia and the Pacific

**2017 GLOBAL ESTIMATES OF  
MODERN SLAVERY AND CHILD LABOUR**

# Introduction

In 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 17 interrelated goals and 169 associated targets to guide global development. SDG Target 8.7 calls on governments to:

*Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.*

The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour<sup>1</sup> and the 2016 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery<sup>2</sup> chart how far we must still travel to honour these commitments. This brief summarizes key results from the global estimates for the Asia and Pacific region. It also addresses the main regional policy priorities on the road to the 2025 date for ending child labour and the 2030 date for eradicating modern slavery.

## Child labour: main facts and challenges

Table 1

### Key statistics: child labour

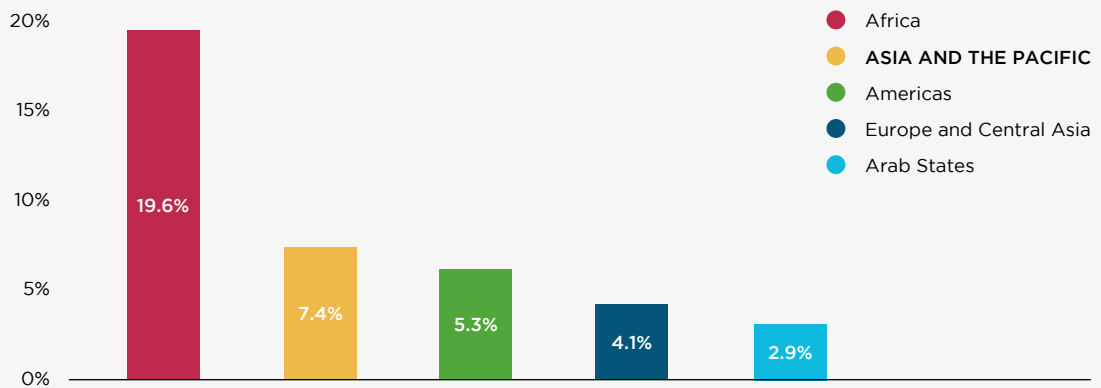
Number (000s) and percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, by age range, Asia and Pacific region, 2016

	Children in child labour		Children in hazardous work		
	Number (000s)	%	Number (000s)	%	
<b>World</b>	151 622	9.6	72 525	4.6	
<b>Asia and Pacific, total</b>	62 077	7.4	28 469	3.4	
<b>Asia and Pacific, age</b>	5-11	23 663	5.2	2 934	0.6
	12-14	17 917	9.3	5 038	2.6
	15-17	20 497	10.6	20 497	10.6

At a glance, the Asia and Pacific region no longer has pre-eminence in hosting the largest population of children in child labour; an unenviable position which it has lost to the Africa region. Nevertheless, the region still accounts for a fairly high proportion of the global estimate of child labour (41%); less than Africa but more than the Americas, Europe and Central Asia and the Arab States. The incidence of child labour is also relatively higher than in the three regions mentioned above (Fig. 1).

Figure 1

**Percentage of children in child labour, 5-17 years age group, by region, 2016**

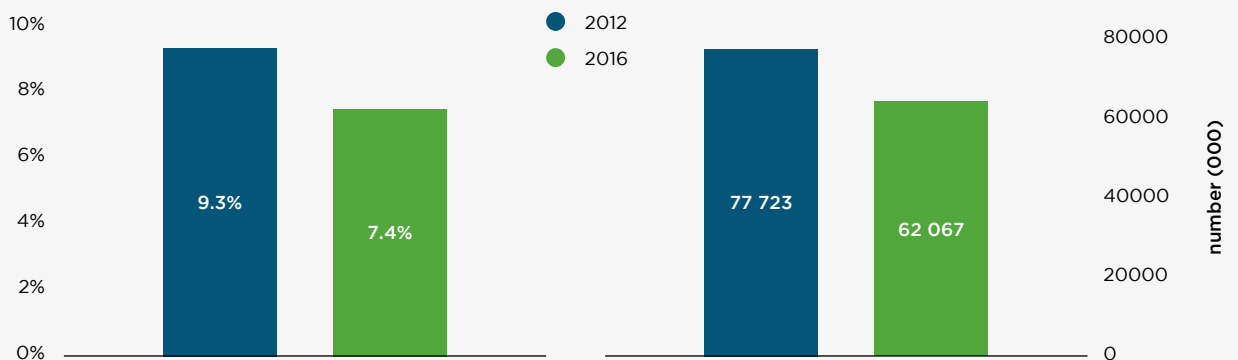


**The 2016 estimates also show:**

*Significant achievements in the fight against child labour in the Asia and Pacific region.* The child labour situation in the Asia and Pacific region has improved considerably in the 2012 and 2016 period. The global estimates for 2016 indicate that child labour in the region declined by one-fifth from what was estimated for 2012. A similar decline was noted for children in hazardous work, with their numbers dropping by almost 16%. The decline in all likelihood may have been buoyed by economic growth in the Southeast Asian countries, which fed job creation, and improved social protection for the populations at large. However, it is difficult to assess if these improvements are to be inferred across countries or are concentrated in few economies.

Figure 2

**Percentage and number of children in child labour, 5-17 years age group, Asia and Pacific, 2012 and 2016**



*The majority of child labour is to be found in agriculture.* Agriculture accounts for 52 per cent of all child labour and for 5.5 million children in absolute terms. Child labour in agriculture relates primarily to subsistence and commercial farming and livestock herding; most is unpaid and takes place within the family unit. Of the remaining children in

child labour, 3.8 million (35 per cent) are found in the services sector and 1.4 million (13 per cent) are found in industry.

Figure 3

**Percentage distribution and number (000s) of children in child labour, by branch of economic activity, Asia and Pacific, 2016**

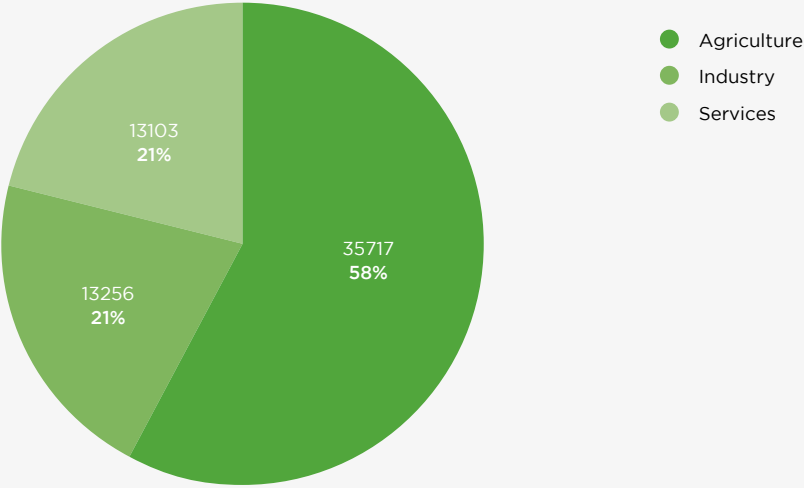
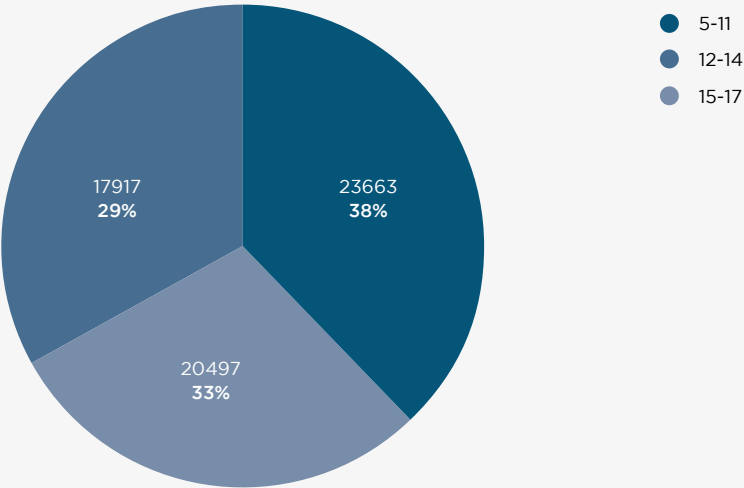


Figure 4

**Percentage distribution and number (000s) of children in child labour, by age group, Asia and Pacific, 2016**



*The majority of child labour is to be found in agriculture. Slightly over half of the child labour in the region is to be found in agriculture and associated activities (57.5%). In absolute terms this accounts for almost 36 million child labourers. In agriculture, it is not just the commercial farms that exact child labour and in fact, they are an exception to the rule. The majority of child labour is to be found on family farms with a subsistence*

orientation and in family enterprises. The remainder in child labour are more or less evenly split between industry (21.4%) and services (21.1%) sectors.

*Even breakdown of child labour among the three age ranges.* Child labour in the region seems to be evenly divided among the three age ranges (i.e. 5-11 years, 12-14 years and 15-17 years), although children in the youngest age bracket still constitute the largest group. The Asia and Pacific region's share of children in hazardous work fell from 31% in 2008 to 22.5% in 2012. Boys were two times more likely to be found in hazardous work than girls. While there are no possible exceptions for hazardous work – all children must be protected from hazardous child labour – the group of very young Asia and Pacific children facing hazardous work conditions directly endangering their health, safety and moral development is of special concern.

# Modern slavery: main facts and challenges

Table 2

## Key statistics: modern slavery

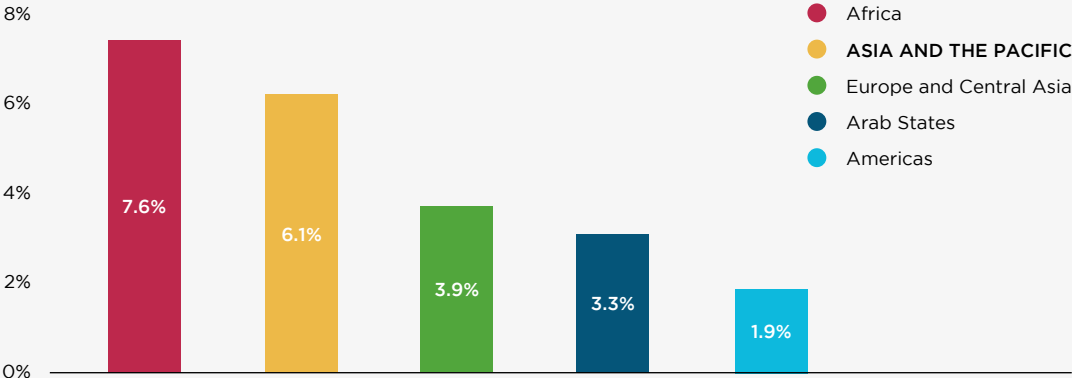
Number (000s) and prevalence (per 1,000) of persons in modern slavery, by age, sex and category, Asia and Pacific region, 2016

		(a) Forced labour	(b) Forced marriage	(a&b) MODERN SLAVERY
<b>World</b>	No. (000s)	24 851	15 442	40 293
	Prev. (‰)	3.4	2.1	5.4
<b>Asia and Pacific, total</b>	No. (000s)	16 550	8 440	24 990
	Prev. (‰)	4	2	6.1
<b>Asia and Pacific, age</b>	Children	No. (000s) 2 897	3 910	6 807
		Prev. (‰) 2.5	3.3	5.8
	Adults	No. (000s) 13 655	4 525	18 180
		Prev. (‰) 4.6	1.5	6.2
<b>Asia and Pacific, sex</b>	Male	No. (000s) 5 174	1 553	6 727
		Prev. (‰) 2.5	0.7	3.2
	Female	No. (000s) 11 398	6 882	18 280
		Prev. (‰) 5.7	3.4	9.1

According to the global estimates for 2016, the Asia and Pacific region predominates in the numbers of victims of modern slavery. The region accounted for almost two-thirds of all victims globally with 25 million victims of modern slavery<sup>3</sup> on any given day in 2016. The prevalence rate of 6.1 victims per 1,000 persons, is the second highest among regions (Fig. 5). Again, due to limitations of the methodology and data,<sup>4</sup> these figures are likely to be underestimates.

Figure 5

Prevalence of modern slavery, by region, 2016

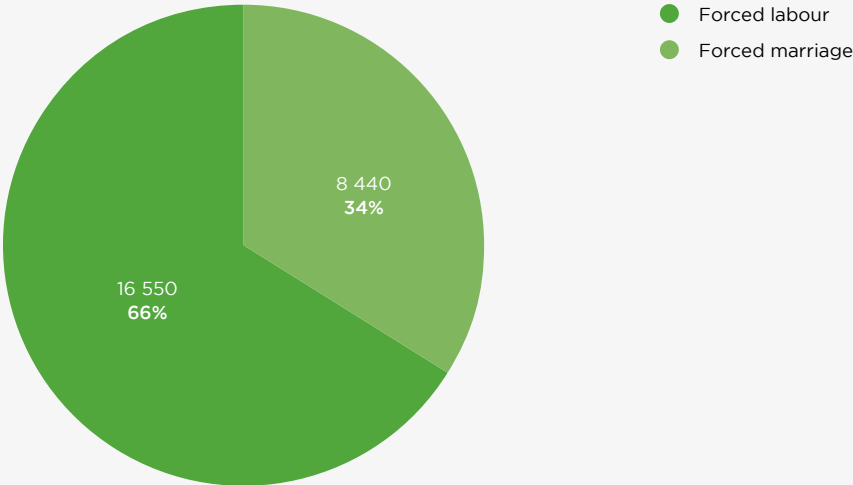


**The estimates also show:**

The largest share of those in modern slavery were victims of forced labour. As the case is for other regions, two-thirds (66 per cent) of the total were victims of forced labour<sup>5</sup>, which for the purposes of the estimates covered three areas: forced labour imposed by private actors; forced sexual exploitation; and State-imposed forced labour (Fig. 6). Women and young girls accounted for over two-thirds of those in forced labour. The prevalence of forced marriage was noted to be the second highest among global regional demarcations, after Africa. The region also had more than half (55%) of the victims of forced marriage worldwide.

Figure 6

Percentage share and number (000s) in forced labour and forced marriage, Asia and Pacific, 2016



Many forced labour victims were in situations of debt bondage. Debt bondage is defined for the estimates as being forced to work to repay a debt and not being able to leave, or being forced to work and not being able to leave because of a debt. Over half (55%) of all victims of forced labour imposed by private actors in the Asia and Pacific region were in debt bondage. The share was especially high among those forced to work in agriculture, domestic work, or manufacturing as well as among those migrating to the Arab Gulf States. It is likely that these figures reflect a mix of cases of both traditional forms of bonded labour and newer forms of debt bondage where recruitment fees and agency charges become the debt that binds.

The prevalence of modern slavery was much higher for females. There were 10.7 female victims per 1,000 compared to 4.4 male victims per 1,000. This overall gender gap masked an even larger gap between males and females in forced marriage (Fig. 8); female were more than six times more likely to be in a forced marriage. The prevalence of forced labour, by contrast, was slightly higher among males. There were also large gender-based differences in the means of coercion in forced labour; sexual violence, for example, was limited almost exclusively to female victims.

Figure 7

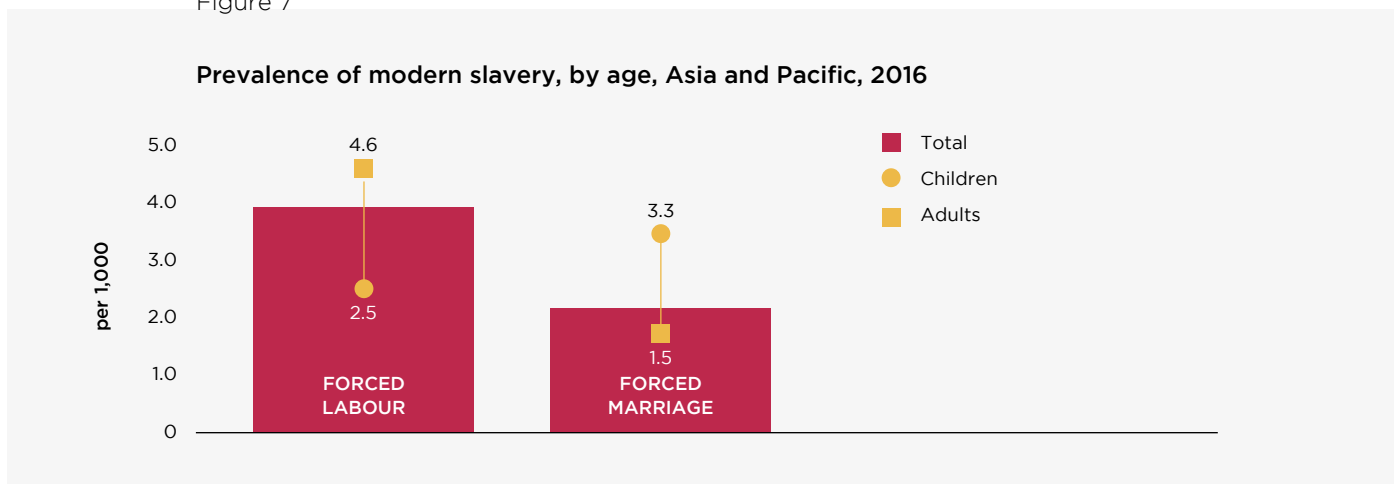


Figure 8



Sexual exploitation was rife in the region. More than 7 in 10 victims of forced sexual exploitation worldwide were to be found in the Asia and Pacific region. Although males are also victims of sexual exploitation, they are overwhelmingly outstripped by females,

who accounted for 99% of the victims worldwide. Given the high preponderance of the phenomenon in the region, it could be surmised that the majority of such victims were to be found in the region.

# Policy priorities on the road to 2025 and 2030

Ending child labour and modern slavery requires a coming together of efforts, which address a wide spectrum of issues – economic, social, cultural and legal – that contribute to vulnerability and enable abuses. Given that qualitatively different situations require purposely targeted policies, there can be no one-size-fits-all solutions; responses need to be adapted to the very diverse environments in which child labour and modern slavery still occur. It is nonetheless possible to identify some overarching regional policy priorities emerging from the global estimates and a growing body of research and practical experience.

*Expanding access to free, quality public education.* Education helps break intergenerational cycles of poverty and provides a worthwhile alternative to child labour. Evidence also suggests that, alongside the development and enforcement of criminal laws, the promotion of the right to education helps to prevent forced marriage. But, despite significant progress, many obstacles remain in Asia and Pacific to ensuring that all children are able to attend school at least until they reach the minimum age for work (which should be consistent with the end of compulsory education). There is an ongoing need for investment in what we know works in getting children out of work and into the classroom – and keeping them there. The quality concerns that affect many schools in the region must also be addressed to keep children in school and ensure successful educational outcomes.

*Extending social protection systems, including floors.* Vulnerabilities associated with poverty, sudden job loss, natural disasters, economic crisis and other shocks can force households to resort to child labour as a coping mechanism. These shocks can also play a central role in pushing people into modern slavery.<sup>6</sup> Social protection is critical to mitigating these vulnerabilities. Yet, the ILO estimates that only about 10 per cent of the economically active population in Asia and Pacific is covered by statutory social security schemes. This points to the continued need to build social protection systems, including floors, to help prevent vulnerable households from resorting to child labour and vulnerable people from being caught up in modern slavery. Cash transfer schemes, public employment programmes, health protection, maternity protection, disability benefits, unemployment protection and income security in old age are all relevant in this regard, within a well-designed social security system. These schemes can also play an important role in facilitating the recovery of victims of modern slavery and preventing their re-victimization.

*Ensuring fair and effective migration governance.* The global estimates show that a high percentage of Asia and Pacific victims of modern slavery are exploited outside their country of residence underscoring the link between migration and modern slavery in the region. The unique vulnerabilities faced by migrants should be addressed



through broader reforms to migration governance designed to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks and social costs of migration. Ensuring security *en route* is critical as this a time of maximum vulnerability, especially for children. The compliance of host governments with international conventions governing the rights of migrants generally, and child migrants in particular, is necessary for protecting migrants at their destination.

*Protecting vulnerable populations in situations of conflict and disaster.* Though the incidence of conflict and disaster has ebbed in the Asia and Pacific region, the countries need to be well-prepared in handling political, economic and natural shocks. Early warning systems could mitigate the impact of shocks in fragile situations. These fragile situations – characterized by income shocks, a breakdown in formal and family social support networks, displacement and disruptions in basic services provision – create an elevated risk of child labour and modern slavery if any lessons are to be discerned from the global estimates, which indicate that child labour significantly higher in countries affected by armed conflict than global averages. This discussion underscores the urgent need to enhance responses to child labour and modern slavery among emergency-affected populations. Prevention and protection measures addressing child labour and modern slavery should be systematically included during all phases of humanitarian action. Tools are needed to rapidly assess risks of child labour and modern slavery in order to guide responses.

*Addressing debt bondage.* The global estimates reveal a very high prevalence of debt bondage as a means of coercion in Asia and Pacific region – more than half the victims of forced labour were in some form of debt bondage. These statistics also capture cases of child forced labour in which involve children working with or for their parents who are themselves in forced labour. A common example is child labour in the context of family-bonded agricultural work. This finding makes clear that prevention and protection policies must also tackle the roots of debt bondage and bonded labour systems. However, other forms of debt bondage, often related to shortcomings in migration governance, are also gaining in importance. These include cases of debt bondage arising from excessive fees charged by unregulated manpower, recruitment and brokers and agencies. These more recent forms of debt bondage need to be addressed as part of broader reforms aimed at ensuring fair and effective migration governance, as discussed above.

*Strengthening legislation and enforcement.* The establishment of a legal architecture consistent with international legal standards relating to modern slavery and child labour remains a key priority in a number of Asia and Pacific countries. This includes legislation dealing with forced labour imposed by the state, which the global estimates show still occurs in the region. It is also essential that relevant legislation, including labour laws, apply to all workers, including those in the informal economy, where most forced labour and child labour occurs and where 60-80 per cent of the Asia and Pacific workforce is found. But laws alone are insufficient if not accompanied by adequate enforcement. Despite the enactment of criminal laws, statistics indicate the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions is very small relative to the scale of the overall problem. This means that criminal law enforcement needs to be intensified, particularly in response to cases of very severe abuse. It is equally important to strengthen the administration of labour justice, to apply both sanctions for the offenders and remedies for the victims of modern slavery. Systems of inspection also need to be strengthened, to enable effective victim identification in the sectors of the economy where modern slavery and child labour occur.

*Building the evidence base.* While the regional estimates for Asia and Pacific are a major step forward, our information on modern slavery in the region is far from complete. Modern slavery affecting children, including forced recruitment by armed groups, commercial sexual exploitation and child marriage, is an especially important region-wide

knowledge gap. There is also a need to more effectively capture specific sub-populations such as adult victims of forced sexual exploitation and victims in conflict contexts. The regional-level information provided by the global estimates needs to be augmented by further research and data collection efforts on all dimensions of modern slavery at the *country level* to generate the country-specific evidence necessary for informed national policy responses. In the areas of both child labour modern slavery, there is also an ongoing need for information about the impact of policies and interventions in order to guide policy choices.

# End notes

1. *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016*. International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva, 2017.
  2. *Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*. International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation, Geneva, 2017.
  3. In the context of this report, modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery like practices, and human trafficking. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used an umbrella term that focuses attention on commonalities across these legal concepts. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power. In order to make this set of complex legal concepts measurable, the Global Estimates focus on two key forms of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage.
  4. For a detailed discussion of this point, see *Methodology of the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*, International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation, Geneva, 2017.
  5. Forced labour is defined by ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) as “all work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.” The global estimates of forced labour is based on three main categories of forced labour defined as follows: forced labour imposed by private agents for labour exploitation, including bonded labour, forced domestic work, and work imposed in the context of slavery or vestiges of slavery; forced sexual exploitation of adults, imposed by private agents for commercial sexual exploitation, and all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children; and State-imposed forced labour, including work exacted by the public authorities, military or paramilitary, compulsory participation in public works, and forced prison labour.
  6. The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) provides a key framework for ensuring social protection for all.
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