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# United Nations Human Rights Council Study Guide



**UNHRC**

**Addressing Human Rights in  
Production Factories**



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## Chair Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to this year's United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) committee at OdeMUN!! We are beyond excited to be your chairs, look forward to meeting everyone, and are excited for all the fun debates.

As global supply chains continue to expand, it is imperative that we confront the pressing issue of human rights in production factories. While the demand for affordable goods has led to the growth of manufacturing in developing countries, this has often come at the expense of the dignity and safety of workers. Together, we must develop solutions that safeguard human rights, promote fair labor practices, and ensure ethical production standards across the global supply chain. This committee provides the perfect platform to delve into these critical issues.

## **A Bit About Your Chairs:**

My name is Danielle Kedem, and I am very excited to be your chair for this UNHRC committee in OdeMUN. I'm a 12th-grade student from Modi'in, I study physics and mechatronics. In my free time, I enjoy baking and reading.

I believe that MUN is one of the best ways to challenge yourself - by learning new topics, voicing your ideas, and getting to know new people.

I hope to make this conference interesting, fun, and meaningful for you.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at: [danielle.kdm@gmail.com](mailto:danielle.kdm@gmail.com)

I'm Liya Kozberg, and I am absolutely thrilled to be your chair in OdeMUN! I am 16 years old and live in Ashdod. In my free time, I like to dance ballet and read. This is my second year doing MUN and my third time chairing. My goal for this conference is to create a place where every delegate feels empowered to voice their ideas, challenge perspectives, have interesting debates, and, most importantly, have the most fun!! If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please don't hesitate to reach out at: [munliyak@gmail.com](mailto:munliyak@gmail.com)

Should you have any questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us; we are here to help with anything (Committee Email)

Sincerely,

Your Chairs,

Danielle Kedem & Liya Kozberg



## Committee Introduction

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was established in 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which faced criticism for inefficiency and the inclusion of member states with poor human rights records. Its mission is to promote and protect human rights globally, address situations of human rights violations, and enhance accountability through mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review, ensuring more effective protection and promotion of human rights worldwide. The Council has 47 members elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis.

Since its inception, the UNHRC has addressed major global issues, like human rights violations in conflict zones, racial discrimination, the rights of vulnerable groups, digital privacy, and regional conflicts that affect human rights. The Council promotes gender equality, freedom of expression, and access to education, healthcare, and housing. Despite political dynamics and criticisms, the UNHRC Council aims to uphold dignity, justice, and equality worldwide.

## Background To The Issue

### **Definitions:**

**Production factories:** Industrial facilities where goods are manufactured, assembled, or processed, often involving large-scale labor forces and machinery. Production factories are a focal point for concerns related to workers' rights.

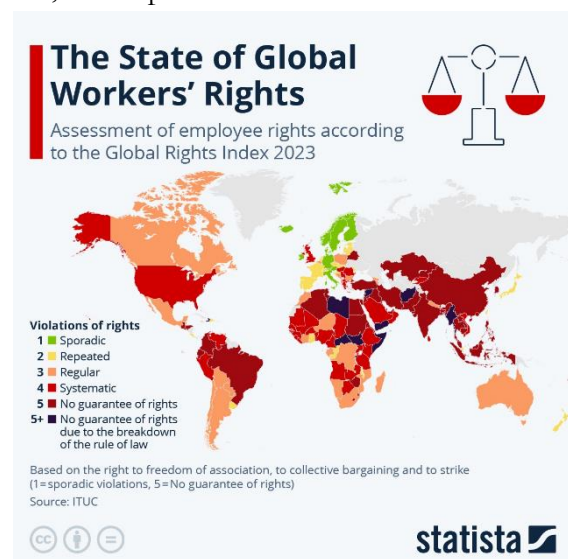
**Supply chain:** The network of organizations, individuals, activities, resources, and technologies involved in the production and distribution of goods. From the moment the raw material is collected or made until it reaches the end consumer of said product.

**Forced labor:** Forced labor, or unfree labor, occurs when individuals are compelled against their will to provide work or service through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. This includes situations where workers face threats of destitution, detention, violence, or extreme hardship to themselves or their families. Unfree labor encompasses all forms of slavery, penal labor, and related institutions such as debt slavery, serfdom, corvée, and labor camps.

## Chapter A: Breaking the Silence on Brutal Factory Conditions

Rana Plaza was a big building with eight floors in Savar, Bangladesh. Inside, several factories made clothes for well-known brands. The day before the building collapsed, workers noticed cracks in the walls, but the owner, Sohel Rana, ignored the warnings. He had added two extra floors without permission, using cheap materials and building on weak ground. Despite the dangers, factory managers told workers to keep working, threatening to fire them if they didn't. Tragically, the building collapsed, resulting in the death of over 1,100 people and leaving more than 2,500 others severely injured. After the tragedy, steps were taken to improve safety in factories, like creating a safety agreement called "The Accord on Fire and Building Safety". A fund was also set up to help the victims, and organizations are now working to make sure workers are treated fairly and safely. This horrible event showed the world that factory infrastructure safety needs to be taken seriously, and companies must be held responsible for keeping workers safe.

The tragic collapse of Rana Plaza highlights the devastating impact of poor working conditions. These conditions are characterized by unsafe, unhealthy, or unfair environments, including low wages, excessive working hours, dangerous workplaces, and exposure to harmful materials. Such environments seriously jeopardize workers' health, safety, and rights. Excessive working hours can lead to extreme exhaustion, increasing the risk of mistakes and workplace accidents. Unsafe workplaces lacking proper ventilation, fire exits, or safety equipment can result in severe injuries or death. Weak infrastructure, such as unstable buildings or faulty machinery, further exacerbates the danger. Additionally, low wages trap workers in poverty, and the lack of sufficient breaks prevents proper recovery, leading to long-term health issues.



Governments should support good working conditions because they protect people's basic rights, improve public health, and create a stronger economy. Enforcing safety measures, helps prevent workplace disasters. When workers are treated fairly and safely, they are more productive, which benefits businesses and society as a whole. By setting labor laws and holding companies accountable, governments can ensure that workplaces are safe, fair, and respectful of workers' rights.

## Chapter B: Child Labor and Forced Labor

In most areas of the developed world, most children don't take part in child labor. This hasn't always been the case, so it's important to recognize the process those developed countries have made. Still, in certain parts of the developed world, and in the developing and underdeveloped world, it is certainly a problem. Approximately 160 million children have been forced into child labor since 2020.

During the Industrial Revolution (18th-19th centuries), child labor was widespread. Factories, mines, and textile mills employed young children under harsh conditions, often working long hours with little pay. In Britain, children as young as five were employed in coal mines and textile mills. In the United States, child labor was common in agriculture and manufacturing. The Factory Acts in the UK (starting in 1833) and the Fair Labor Standards Act in the US (1938) were among the first legal measures to limit child labor.

Women entered industrial jobs en masse during the 19th century, often working in textiles, garment production, and domestic labor. They were paid significantly less than men and were subjected to poor working conditions. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in 1911 was one of the deadliest industrial disasters in U.S. history, killing 146 garment workers, most of them young immigrant women. Trapped in a factory with locked exits and no fire escapes, many either burned alive or jumped from the building to their deaths. The tragedy exposed the extreme dangers of sweatshop conditions and led to significant labor reforms, including improved fire safety standards, building codes, and workers' rights protections in the United States.

World Wars I and II dramatically altered the workforce. As men left to fight, women were recruited into industries such as manufacturing, munitions, and shipbuilding. The *Rosie the Riveter* campaign in the US symbolized the significant role women played during World War II. However, after the wars, many women were pushed out of these jobs in favor of returning soldiers. Despite this, their participation helped pave the way for future labor rights.

The post-war era saw increasing awareness of labor exploitation, but global enforcement of labor rights remained inconsistent. The International Labour Organization (ILO), established in 1919, played a key role in setting standards by establishing:

- The **Minimum Age Convention (1973)** aimed to eliminate child labor by setting 15 as the minimum working age (14 for developing nations).
- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)** sought to promote gender equality in employment but faced resistance from certain nations in implementation.
- The **Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999)** sought to eliminate hazardous labor for children under 18.

The exploitation of women and children in the workforce remains an issue despite historical progress. While international agreements have made significant strides, enforcement challenges persist. Continuous advocacy and stronger regulations are necessary to ensure fair labor conditions for all.

## Chapter C: Legal Responsibilities and Global Frameworks

Generally, governments and corporations have legal obligations to uphold workers' rights, no matter their citizen situation, gender, religion, or their field of work. Those rights are often outlined in national labor laws and international agreements.

Throughout the last two centuries, the general population, especially in Western countries, has been steadily understanding the significance of labor rights. What now is seen as common sense, wasn't always perceived as such, even in the most developed countries. For instance, factory work started in the United Kingdom in the late 1720s, but more than a century later, there were still no regulations regarding working hours and safety hazards, even when the work was performed by small children. The acts that were passed in the UK during that time frame set a precedent for the improvement of workers' rights globally. Leading to similar acts being passed in other countries, like the United States of America.

Since then, international organizations have been working tirelessly to improve workers' conditions around the world. In many areas of the world, this work has proven itself. Health and safety continues to improve year on year, with fatality and injury numbers gradually decreasing. Some of the worker's conditions and rights that aren't upheld in certain countries include a hazard-free work environment and safety regulations (such as those outlined by the International Labor Organization), fair wages, freedom of association (the right of workers to create workers unions) and more. In some cases, workers aren't even fully aware of their rights, so they don't know what they can and can not do, and what they should demand from their employers.

In order to ensure human rights in factories requires adherence to international legal responsibilities and frameworks. Ones such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights that happened in 1948. It outlines fundamental human rights applicable to all individuals, and has influenced greatly on numerous treaties and national laws. Several articles in it are directly relevant to workers' rights in production factories; those include article 23 and 24, which describe the right to just and favorable working conditions, fair wages, rest, leisure, and reasonable working hours.

Another thing that has had a significant impact on the topic are The Core Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). They mention the right to freedom of association, equal pay and non-discrimination in employment, minimum age requirements for employees, and Prohibit forced and compulsory labor.

Those are only some of the global frameworks that were made regarding general human rights, and even more specifically human rights at work. Global frameworks are important, since even though they are not legally binding, they have shaped the way countries propose and pass laws, and the way the general population thinks and behaves.

## Current Situation

### **Chapter A: Legal Responsibilities**

In today's globalized economy, corporations often rely on complex supply chains that span multiple countries, making it difficult to enforce consistent labor standards. Many companies outsource manufacturing to regions with lower labor costs, mainly Africa and Asia. This has led to frequent human rights violations. Industries such as fast fashion, electronics, and agriculture are particularly notorious for labor exploitation. While many corporations claim to have ethical sourcing policies, loopholes in supply chain oversight allow exploitative practices to continue without disruption.

#### Forced labor:

Forced labor is a real and serious human rights issue, that companies ought to prevent. It is defined as all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself voluntarily. Including any types of work in any activity, in whichever industry. The term "offered voluntarily" is problematic, since it not only requires the worker to be paid fairly, and given reasonable working hours; It requires the free and informed consent of a worker to take a job and his or her freedom to leave at any time, with nothing restricting them.

Forced labor typically happens through threats or punishment, though also false promises made by the employer in order to make the person agree to the work, is considered forced labor.

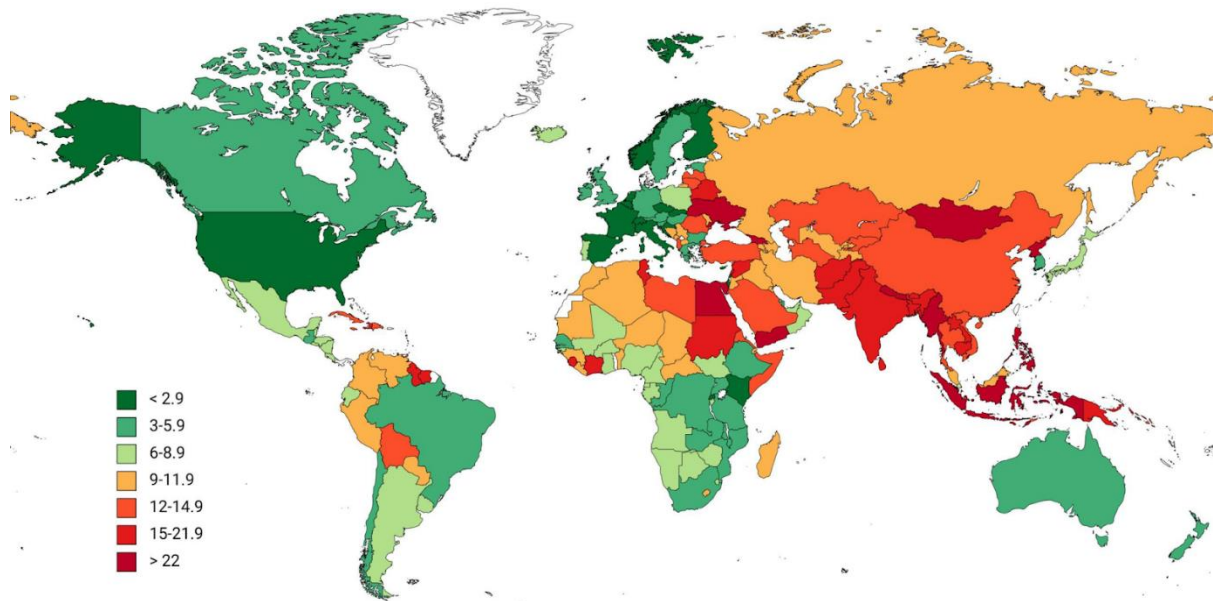
This can happen in many industries, such as farming, factories, and construction. Forced labor is most common in places like Asia and the Pacific, where female migrant workers are particularly at risk of mistreatment.

#### Supply chain:

Governments and international organizations have implemented laws and initiatives aimed at increasing corporate supply chain accountability. The EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive from 2022 requires companies to actively prevent human rights abuses and environmental harm within their supply chains. Similarly, Modern Slavery Acts mandate that large companies disclose their efforts to combat forced labor.

Beyond legal measures, consumer activism and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have pressured businesses to adopt ethical labor practices.

A crucial thing to remember is that while those laws and agreements are set in place, this does not mean that every company actually follows them, as many companies continue to prioritize profit over worker welfare. Nor does this mean that all of the countries are enforcing and actively checking whether or not companies follow them.



(In the image above you can see the number of deaths due to long working hours)

## Chapter B: Ethical Responsibilities

Fair wages, responsible labor practices, and community engagement are now essential, as conscious consumers demand transparency and fairness. Businesses that uphold these values not only strengthen their reputation but also gain a competitive edge, attracting both customers and top talent. After all, a product's true worth isn't just its price—it's the story behind its creation.

Employers have ethical duties to provide a safe workplace, fair compensation, and dignity to employees. Good managers lead by example, modeling ethical behavior and fairness. Transparency is also key—companies should clearly communicate expectations, provide training, and keep employees informed to foster trust and a better work environment.

Beyond individual harm, labor exploitation raises moral questions about corporate and governmental responsibility. Companies that knowingly profit from unfair labor practices are complicit in sustaining systemic inequality and suffering. When governments fail to enforce labor protections, they allow injustice to persist, placing economic gain over the rights of their citizens. Ethical governance requires that nations establish and uphold fair labor laws, ensuring that all workers are treated with respect and fairness, regardless of their economic or social status.

The ethical implications of labor exploitation also extend to consumers and the global economy. When people purchase goods produced under exploitative conditions, they unknowingly contribute to a system that prioritizes profit over human well-being. This raises the question of moral responsibility—should companies and consumers accept responsibility for ensuring that the products they sell and buy are ethically produced? Addressing labor exploitation is not just a legal or economic issue but a moral imperative, demanding accountability from businesses, governments, and consumers alike. A just society cannot thrive when its economic success is built on the suffering of others.

## Chapter C: National and regional mindset, and its influence on workers conditions

The conditions of workers in production factories are heavily influenced by both national policies and broader regional dynamics. Despite geographical proximity, some countries experience more frequent human rights violations in production factories than their neighbors. This contrast arises from differences in governance, economic priorities, labor laws, and enforcement mechanisms.

In countries with weak labor regulations, workers may be exposed to working conditions that violate human rights. Most workers in the industrial sector are low to medium-skilled. Low-skilled workers are often stuck in a poverty trap whereby their low pay forces them to work long hours and overtime to make a living wage. Additionally, workers often rely on the accommodation provided by the employer for long periods of time, with low hygiene and safety standards. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this dynamic, particularly amongst migrant workers, who may have been prevented from leaving due to border closures or quarantine rules.

Even within the same region, countries may have vastly different approaches to labor rights due to Government Priorities and Stability. Some governments prioritize economic growth over labor protections, leading to weak, if even, enforcement of workers' rights.

More than that, While one country may have comprehensive labor laws, another may have loopholes that allow exploitation, such as inadequate minimum wage laws, restrictions on unionization, or a lack of workplace safety regulations.

Another main thing that may cause differences are the country's economic models. Countries that rely on low-cost manufacturing to attract foreign investors may deliberately weaken labor protections to keep wages low.

We can see such a difference when looking at Mexico and the USA. Factories in Mexico near the U.S. border often exploit workers, with low wages, long hours, and unsafe conditions. Weak labor law enforcement allows corporations to take advantage of cheap labor. While The United States generally enforces stricter labor laws, mandates higher wages, and has stronger worker protections than Mexico.

Regional factors such as trade agreements, infrastructure, and economic interdependence significantly impact supply chains, which in turn influence labor conditions like labor wage and working hours.

Regional trade agreements, such as the European Union (EU) or ASEAN, often impose labor standards that member states must follow. This creates pressure for countries to improve working conditions to maintain access to trade benefits. However, in regions without strong trade regulations, the opposite is true.

In globalized industries, multinational corporations seek the lowest production costs, leading them to source goods from far countries, with weaker labor protections. However, in regions where governments regulate supply chains and enforce corporate accountability, workers may enjoy stronger protections.

In regions with high migration rates, workers from poorer countries may move to wealthier neighbors in search of jobs. If labor protections are weak, these migrant workers may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation, facing lower wages, unsafe conditions, and restrictions on unionizing.

## **Chapter D: Exploitation of women and children in the modern world**

Despite international agreements, weak enforcement in many countries allows labor exploitation to persist, particularly in production factories. An estimated 27.6 million people worldwide are trapped in forced labor, with 39.4% being women and girls. Among them, 6 million endure abusive conditions across various industries, including manufacturing, textiles, and electronics. And conditions are no better for children. Shockingly, one in three child laborers is deprived of access to education, limiting their opportunities for a better future.

Efforts to combat child labor have seen progress, but the issue remains severe, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than one in four children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in labor. Poor working conditions, excessive hours, and lack of fair wages remain widespread, especially in low-cost production hubs. In some regions, factory workers face hazardous environments with inadequate safety measures, while many are denied fundamental labor rights. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms and corporate accountability is essential to ensuring ethical production practices and protecting workers from exploitation.

## **Chapter E: What can/should we do now+conclusion**

Labor exploitation in factories remains a critical global issue, driven by weak regulations, inadequate enforcement, and economic pressures. Vulnerable populations, such as women and children, are disproportionately affected, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Despite previous efforts, many factory owners exploit workers as long as there are no consequences. Immediate and concrete action is required to end these abuses.

Governments must enforce stricter labor laws, conduct regular workplace inspections, and penalize companies that violate workers' rights. For example, Germany's Supply Chain Due Diligence Act has proven effective in promoting transparency and holding businesses accountable. Similarly, countries like Australia have implemented the Modern Slavery Act, requiring companies to report on efforts to eliminate forced labor.

Transparency in global supply chains is paramount. Nations must mandate businesses to disclose their sourcing practices and labor conditions. Incentives like tax benefits or trade advantages can encourage ethical labor practices. Meanwhile, workers' rights must be strengthened through unionization support, whistleblower protections, and legal aid. Expanding education and vocational training programs will empower workers and open paths to better opportunities.

International cooperation is critical to tackling labor exploitation on a global scale. Collaborative mechanisms, such as trade restrictions on goods produced through forced labor and cross-border enforcement of labor laws, can amplify efforts. For example, regional forums under the International Labour Organization (ILO) have successfully facilitated coordinated action against exploitative practices.

By implementing these measures, nations can create a world where economic growth is not built on exploitation but on sustainable and ethical practices that uphold human dignity.



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## Questions to consider

- What has your country done in order to protect human rights in production factories?
- What is the most pressing issue regarding human rights in production factories in your country?
- What role does your country play in promoting fair trade and sustainable production practices?
- How is your country different in regard to the issue from other countries near it?
- Is your country a part of any regional trade agreement?
- What impact does your country have on the global supply chain?

## Further Reading

### **Videos:**

[Inside the Fast Fashion Industry | Workers Rights and Conditions - Sustainable Earth](#)  
[China: Carmakers Implicated in Uyghur Forced Labor - Human Rights Watch](#)

### **Podcast episodes:**

[Manufacturing Consent - Philosophize This!](#)

### **Articles:**

[The Five Biggest Issues Related to Business and Human Rights in Asia - Friedrich Haumann Foundation](#)

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