

# THE LONG RUN CLUB

ESTD. 2023

MODERN SLAVERY IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY



**RIDE FOR  
FREEDOM**  
END MODERN SLAVERY



# MODERN SLAVERY IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Modern slavery in the fashion industry involves forced labour, debt bondage, and human trafficking. These practices occur across the supply chain, from cotton fields to garment factories, primarily in developing countries. This information pack provides an overview of modern slavery in the fashion industry, including key statistics, causes, impacts, and efforts to combat the issue.

## KEY STATISTICS

### 1. Prevalence:

An estimated 50 million people were living in modern slavery on any given day in 2021, an increase of 10 million people since 2016. Of these people, 28 million were in forced labour, and 22 million were trapped in forced marriage. Unfortunately, the number of people in modern slavery has risen significantly in the last five years.

From raw materials to manufacturing and through to packaging and delivery, modern slavery is embedded in the supply chains of the global garment industry. The clothing industry has doubled in size in the last 15 years alone, partly driven by demand for fast fashion. (A lot of information on page 97 of the Global Slavery Index report)

### 2. Geographical Distribution:

India, China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam are among the top countries where garment workers are most vulnerable to modern slavery.

In Bangladesh, over 80% of the workforce in the garment sector are women, many of whom face exploitation and forced labour.

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### 3. Economic Impact:

The global fashion industry is worth approximately \$1.7 trillion, yet garment workers are some of the lowest-paid workers in the world.

An Oxfam report also found that 0% of Bangladeshi garment workers and 1% of Vietnamese garment workers earned a living wage. This prevents workers from saving money and having a safety net while looking for alternative employment. Often, women start their daughters working in the factory as young as age ten to help feed their family because one wage is inadequate. Being trapped in this cycle makes women increasingly more susceptible to sexual abuse because they can't risk the loss of income by reporting misconduct, with 1 in 4 Bangladeshi garment workers disclosing some form of abuse to Oxfam.

#### Largest Apparel and Footwear Markets Worldwide (2021)

The United States and China account for the majority of the global apparel demand. The five markets with the highest market size in 2021 in USD million below.

China	\$427,153.9
USA	\$364,136.6
United Kingdom	\$70,734.8
Germany	\$69,957.3
Japan	\$65,764.0

\$147.9 billion worth of garments and \$12.7 billion worth of textiles are at risk of being produced by forced labour are imported annually by G20 countries.



# CAUSES OF MODERN SLAVERY IN FASHION

## 1. Complex Supply Chains:

Fashion supply chains are intricate, often involving multiple tiers of suppliers, subcontractors, and home-based workers, making it difficult to monitor labour conditions.

## 2. Cost Pressure:

Fast fashion brands prioritise low-cost production and rapid turnover, pressuring suppliers to cut costs, often at the expense of workers' rights and safety.

## 3. Lack of Regulation:

Weak labour laws and inadequate enforcement in producing countries allow exploitative practices to thrive.

## 4. Poverty and Vulnerability:

Poverty and lack of alternative employment opportunities make workers, particularly women and migrants, vulnerable to exploitation and modern slavery.

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# IMPACTS ON WORKERS

## 1. Human Rights Violations:

Workers face physical and psychological abuse, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and withholding of wages or identity documents.

## 2. Health and Safety:

Poor working conditions in factories lead to health problems, including respiratory issues, musculoskeletal disorders, and mental health challenges.

## 3. Economic Injustice:

Workers are trapped in a cycle of poverty due to extremely low wages and exploitative practices, hindering their ability to achieve economic stability.

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# EFFORTS TO COMBAT MODERN SLAVERY IN FASHION

## 1. Legislation and Policy:

Section 54 of the UK Modern Slavery Act states that all UK businesses with a global annual turnover of £36 million must report on the steps they are taking to ensure their goods and services are slave free.

While this was a huge step forward in the development of corporate social responsibility, there are still gaps that need amending, including:

There are no standards for what constitutes sufficient due diligence.

The Act does not require UK companies to report on the supply chains of wholly owned subsidiaries abroad.

The lack of effective enforcement provides little incentive for qualifying businesses to engage with the Act.

The California legislature passed the Supply Chains Act (2010) with the goal of informing consumers and businesses about companies' efforts to address slavery and human trafficking in the supply chain so that customers can consider this information when making their purchasing decisions.

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The European Union Parliament has given its final approval to a new regulation enabling the EU to prohibit the sale, import, and export of goods made using forced labour.

## 2. Industry Initiatives:

Initiatives like the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and Fair Wear Foundation work with brands to improve labour standards and ensure ethical sourcing.

The Fashion Revolution movement advocates for greater transparency and ethical practices within the industry.

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### 3. Consumer Awareness:

Increased awareness among consumers about the origins of their clothing and the conditions under which they are made has led to a demand for more ethically produced fashion.

### 4. Corporate Responsibility:

Many brands are adopting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies to ensure fair labour practices and improve working conditions throughout their supply chains.

Modern slavery in the fashion industry is a complex and pervasive issue that requires concerted efforts from governments, brands, and consumers to address. By increasing transparency, enforcing stronger labour laws, and promoting ethical consumption, progress can be made toward eradicating exploitation and ensuring fair treatment for all workers in the fashion supply chain.

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