



# ILO 2012 Global estimate of forced labour

## Executive summary

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL JUNE 1, 2012, 8:30 a.m. GMT**

### RESULTS

Using a new and improved statistical methodology, the ILO estimates that 20.9 million people are victims of forced labour globally, trapped in jobs into which they were coerced or deceived and which they cannot leave. This figure, like the previous one in 2005, represents a conservative estimate, given the strict methodology employed to measure this largely hidden crime. Human trafficking can also be regarded as forced labour, and so this estimate captures the full realm of human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation or what some call “modern-day slavery”<sup>1</sup>. The figure means that around three out of every 1,000 persons worldwide are in forced labour at any given point in time.

Women and girls represent the greater share of the total – 11.4 million (55%), as compared to 9.5 million (45%) men and boys. Adults are more affected than children – 74% (15.4 million) of victims fall in the age group of 18 years and above, whereas children aged 17 years and below represent 26% of the total (or 5.5 million child victims).

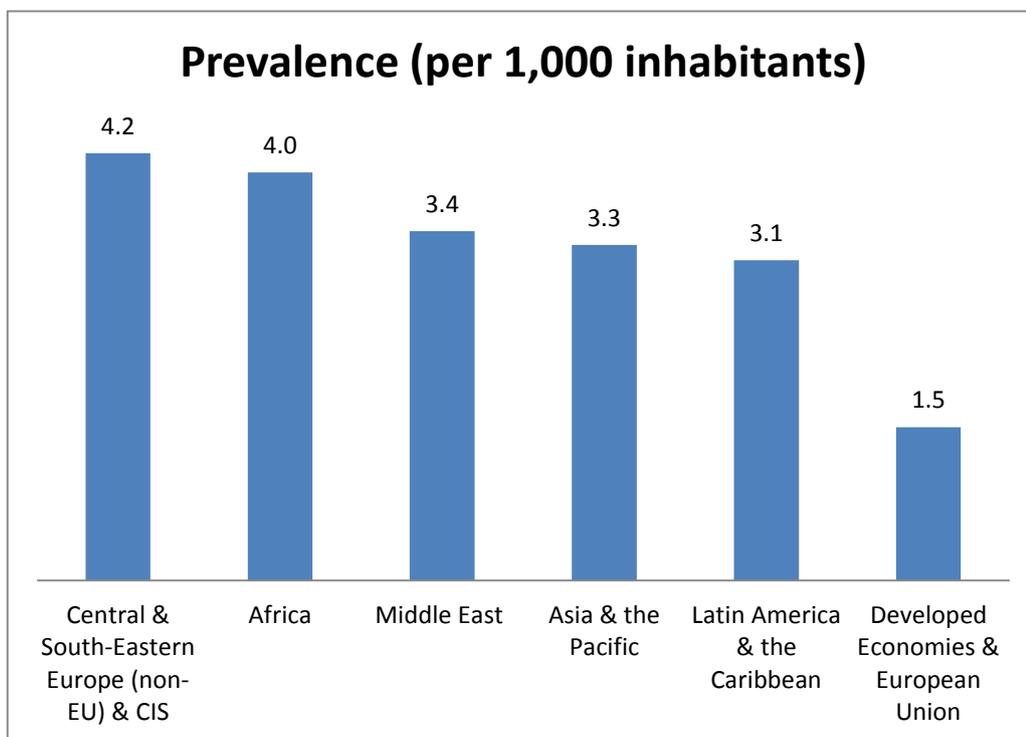
Of the total number of 20.9 million forced labourers, 18.7 million (90%) are exploited in the private economy, by individuals or enterprises. Out of these, 4.5 million (22%) are victims of forced sexual exploitation, and 14.2 million (68%) are victims of forced labour exploitation in economic activities, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work or manufacturing. The remaining 2.2 million (10%) are in state-imposed forms of forced labour, for example in prisons, or in work imposed by the state military or by rebel armed forces.

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1. The figures do not include trafficking for the removal of organs or for forced marriage/adoption unless the latter practices lead to a situation of forced labour or service.

Turning to the regional distribution, the Asia-Pacific region (AP) accounts for by far the largest number of forced labourers – 11.7 million or 56% of the global total. The second highest number is found in Africa (AFR) at 3.7 million (18%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (LA) with 1.8 million victims (9%). The Developed Economies and European Union (DE&EU) account for 1.5 million (7%) forced labourers, whilst countries of Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe (non EU) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CSEE) have 1.6 million (7%). There are an estimated 600,000 (3%) victims in the Middle East (ME)<sup>2</sup>.

The prevalence rate (number of victims per thousand inhabitants) is highest in the CSEE and Africa regions at 4.2 and 4.0 per 1,000 inhabitants respectively, and lowest in the DE&EU at 1.5 per 1,000 inhabitants. The relatively high prevalence in Central and South Eastern Europe and CIS can be explained by the fact that the population is much lower than for example in Asia, while reports of trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation and of state-imposed forced labour in the region are numerous.



The estimates also allow an assessment of how many people end up being trapped in forced labour following migration. There are 9.1 million victims (44% of the total) who have moved either internally or internationally, while the majority, 11.8 million (56%), are subjected to forced labour in their place of origin or residence. Cross-border movement is strongly associated with forced sexual exploitation. By contrast, a majority of forced labourers in economic activities, and almost all those in state-imposed forced labour, have not moved away from their home areas. These figures indicate that movement can be an important vulnerability factor for certain groups of workers, but not for others.

<sup>2</sup> Regional groupings are based on those used in ILO's Employment Trends Report, 2012. Percentages and numbers are rounded.

The 2012 estimates cannot be compared to those from 2005 for the purpose of detecting trends over time, i.e. whether forced labour has increased or decreased over the period concerned. What can be said is that we now have a more reliable estimate, based on a more sophisticated methodology and more and better data sources. This estimate, at 20.9 million victims globally, is considerably higher than ILO's first estimate in 2005. Another major difference from earlier ILO estimates is that state-imposed forced labour represents a lower proportion of the total, at around 10%. This could in part be due to the fact that far fewer data are available on state-imposed forced labour relative to the other forms, pointing to a need for further research in this area.



The age distribution of forced labourers has also changed from the earlier estimate of the ILO, with children at 26 %, representing a smaller proportion of the total. The new data confirm our previous conclusion that women and girls are more affected, and particularly by forced sexual exploitation. However, men and boys still account for an overall 45% of all victims. Finally, while regional comparisons cannot accurately be made because of changes in the country groupings, Asia and the Pacific retains its place as the region harbouring the greatest absolute number of forced labourers in the world, although its proportion of the total has decreased somewhat (to just over one-half of all victims). The share and number of victims in Africa has, by contrast, increased in the current estimate (18% or nearly one-fifth of the total), which we believe represents a more accurate reflection of reality, thanks to better reporting in the region.

The new estimates on movement, which were not calculated previously, illustrate the fact that cross-border movement is closely allied with forced sexual exploitation, whereas a greater proportion of victims of non-sexual forced labour are exploited in their home area. An interesting new piece of information to emerge from the estimates is that the average period of time that victims spend in forced labour, across all forms and regions, is approximately 18 months, with variation between the different forms of forced labour.

## **BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

Forced labour is the term used by the international community to denote situations in which the persons involved – women and men, girls and boys – are made to work against their free will, coerced by their recruiter or employer, for example through violence or threats of violence, or by more subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities. Such situations can also amount to human trafficking or slavery-like practices, which are similar though not identical terms in a legal sense. International law stipulates that exacting forced labour is a crime, and should be punishable through penalties which reflect the gravity of the offence. Most countries outlaw forced labour, human trafficking and slavery-like practices in their national legislation, but successful prosecutions of offenders sadly remain few and far between.

Governments and their partners require information about the nature and extent of forced labour if they are to devise effective policy measures to combat it. But the practice is extremely difficult to research and quantify as, being a criminal activity, it is most often hidden, out-of-sight of law enforcement and administrative personnel, and invisible to the public at large. The ILO is working with governments to assist them to measure forced labour in their country, but so far only a handful of countries have been able to undertake special surveys on the topic.

In the absence of solid national data, the ILO has produced a new estimate of forced labour at the global and regional levels using mostly secondary sources of information, supplemented by the results of four national surveys conducted by the ILO in collaboration with local partners. During the development of the estimation methodology, ILO benefited from the expertise of four independent and respected peer reviewers, who examined the proposed methodology in detail, and provided valuable feedback and suggestions for its improvement.

The method used to generate the estimates is essentially a refinement of that applied by the ILO in 2005, when it made its first global estimate of forced labour, of a minimum of 12.3 million victims. The method relies on the collection of “reported cases” of forced labour, over the 10 year period 2002-2011, from all countries in the world. “Reported cases” are those which refer to specific instances of forced labour, indicating where and when the activity took place and how many people were involved. Cases can be found in various secondary sources of information, ranging from official statistics and NGO reports to newspaper articles.

Two teams of researchers, based in the ILO in Geneva, had the task of collecting cases over a 13 week period in September - December 2011, following an intensive training exercise and working strictly independently of each other. This research method is known as “capture-recapture”: A sample of forced labour cases is “captured” by the first team from all those cases potentially available; a separate sample is “recaptured” by the second team.

By comparing the two samples, and identifying those cases “captured” by both teams, it is possible to make a statistical estimation of the total number of reported cases of forced labour over the 10 year period<sup>3</sup>. Details of those cases identified as being forced labour, by filtering them using a set of forced labour “indicators”, were entered into a database, which was then scrutinized by ILO experts to ensure that the cases that were retained indeed amounted to forced labour. When available, information was also entered on the duration of the forced labour episodes, economic sectors and judicial responses.

Finally, “aggregate” data were entered, meaning reports from credible institutional sources, which contained data on, for example, trafficking victims identified by the police in a given region or country over a 6-month period, or those sheltered by an NGO (for which detailed case-based information was not available). No estimate or “guesstimate” data were retained for use in the estimation procedure.

Using these raw data entries, and following a rigorous data validation and “matching” process to detect the common cases of forced labour recorded in the database, ILO statisticians estimated first, the total number of reported cases of forced labour and second, the total number of victims in these cases. In the final, crucial step, an extrapolation from estimated “reported” to “total” number of forced labour victims, at any given point in time during the ten year period, was made – further drawing upon the estimated duration of “completed episodes” of forced labour in the private economy (had the victims not been identified and released). The methodology allows for estimates to be presented on the basis of the “type” of forced labour (whether exacted by the state, or imposed in the private economy for either labour or sexual exploitation), by the sex of the victim, by the victim’s age group (adult or child) and by region.

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3. This method was originally developed for the purpose of estimating populations of fish and elusive wildlife, and is now widely used in social science research.

The 2012 estimates are more robust than those made in 2005. The margin of error for the global estimate of 20.9 million is 7% (1.4 million) - meaning that the actual number lies between 19.5 million and 22.3 million, with a 68% level of confidence. As compared to 2005, the margin of error has decreased significantly, from 20% to 7%.

Given the rigorous process of data validation, discarding all cases which did not meet the specified criteria, the global estimate is also considered to be conservative. Nonetheless, we must sound several strong notes of caution over how the estimates should be used and interpreted. First, given differences in the methodology employed and the availability of data between 2005 and 2012, the respective estimates are not comparable and cannot be used to claim that there has been an increase in the incidence of forced labour over this seven-year period. The regional breakdowns are similarly not comparable, being based on different country groupings in some instances.

Despite the fact that ILO believes this methodology to be the best possible given the current availability of data on forced labour, it equally acknowledges its limitations. As more and better information becomes available, especially through primary surveys conducted at national level, it will become possible to progressively generate more accurate estimates in the future. This will further strengthen the basis for more effective policy responses and interventions to end the crime of modern forced labour.



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