

ERADICATING FORCED LABOUR IN THE BETTER NORMAL

Summary of the ILO GBNFL webinar held on 29 May 2020.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Global Business Network on Forced Labour's webinar '*An inclusive approach to eradicating forced labour in the better normal*' was a lively and interactive event attended by just under 160 participants. Speakers represented small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), multinational enterprises, employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) and the ILO.

The ILO estimates that in 2016 there were 25 million victims of forced labour in the world. The COVID-19 crisis, by amplifying the root causes of forced labour, risks exacerbating the prevalence of this abuse. The contributions of the speakers, as well as those of the webinar participants, are the beginning of a conversation on addressing root causes of forced labour in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

SPEAKERS

Guy Ryder

Director-General, ILO

Emmanuel Faber

Chairman and CEO, Danone, and CEO Sponsor, Consumer Goods Forum Human Rights Coalition – Working to End Forced Labour

Heidi Koester Oliveira

Global Human Rights Lead, Mars, Incorporated

Matthias Thorns

Deputy Secretary-General, International Organisation of Employers (IOE)

Patricia Veringa-Gieskes

CEO and Founder, The Job Factory

Deborah France-Massin

Director, Bureau for Employers' Activities, ILO

TOWARDS A BETTER NORMAL

The webinar speakers touched on a few key ways that business and governments can build back better and work towards the eradication of forced labour:

Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate

Governments, EBMOs, workers' organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders all have a role to play. It is only by joining forces that we can tackle the systemic root causes of forced labour, identify it in workplaces, and eliminate it once and for all.

Adopt and enforce effective legal frameworks

Forced labour, over the centuries, has evolved. This is reflected by the ILO's international instruments, with its recent Forced Labour Protocol updating the original ILO Convention 29 adopted in 1930. Ratifying, and then effectively enforcing, these instruments is key in tackling forced labour.

Drawing from the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, business has a duty to respect human rights while governments have a duty to protect them. Governments bear the responsibility for adopting and enforcing legal frameworks on the eradication of forced labour.

Formalize the informal

Informality increases vulnerability to forced labour. An enabling business environment that provides incentives for businesses and workers to join the formal economy is important to transition from the informal to the formal economy.

SMEs have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis. Government support for SME business continuity is crucial to prevent a (further) slide into informality.

Include SMEs in the conversation

The views of SMEs must be included in any policy considerations and advocacy efforts to ensure government initiatives enable action on forced labour by the private sector as a whole. EBMOs have a unique role to play here as they are able to reach SMEs, work with governments to shape policies that work for SMEs, and then provide advice to SMEs on complying.

Focus on due diligence and overcome supply chain auditing challenges

Due diligence is key to identifying risks and preventing forced labour. The COVID-19 crisis has led to some challenges with traditional auditing given the restrictions on movement. Supply chain auditing can be improved and expanded by relevant stakeholders working together.

Communicate common priorities to create a common understanding

The Consumer Goods Forum's priority industry principles on forced labour have helped companies to communicate their expectations to suppliers and communities. The increasingly wide use of the principles also means that a common language around forced labour is now emerging, which is leading to a common understanding.

Renew our focus on fair recruitment

Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to forced labour. The COVID-19 crisis has largely stopped formal migration as borders have shut, at least temporarily. This increases the pressure on informal migration, which in turn risks leading to more smuggling and human trafficking. The adoption of the ILO's fair recruitment principles can curb abuses early on during recruitment.

Find innovative solutions that reach greater scale

We need to do more, faster, particularly in light of the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis. New solutions can be identified through business and other stakeholders sharing lessons learned from failed and successful actions and collaboratively identifying new solutions.

To watch the recording please click [here](#).

The ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour brings together businesses of all sizes and sectors, and their networks, from around the globe to eradicate forced labour.

CONTACT US

To join us, and for further information, please contact: fl-businessnetwork@ilo.org or visit flbusiness.network