

International Labour Organisation



BACKGROUND GUIDE

Promoting Workers rights with special reference to South East Asia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

LEGITIMATE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

ROLE OF THE ILO

FOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

UNDERSTANDING THE TOPIC

- LABOUR EXPLOITATION
- UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS
- WAGE RELATED ISSUES

ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

- INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
- GOVERNMENTS
- TRADE UNIONS
- EMPLOYERS

CONVENTIONS UNDER ILO

CASE STUDY-IMPROVING LABOR CONDITIONS IN CAMBODIA'S GARMENT INDUSTRY

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER & BIBLIOGRAPHY

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Greetings Delegates,

Though we shall do our utmost to provide you with a comprehensive guide, the responsibility of interpreting the finer details and connecting the dots lies with you. As moderators, we can only present the facts, but how you choose to pursue and interpret that information is entirely up to you. In this guide, we will offer a wide range of perspectives, from official statements to scholarly views, but it is up to you to determine what should be prioritized. When we speak of prioritizing information, we mean not according to personal preference, but according to what your country believes should take precedence.

Before attending the conference, it is crucial to break the larger agenda into smaller subtopics and ask critical questions regarding it. Preparing moderated caucus topics beforehand will give you an edge, especially in larger committees like the International Labour Organization (ILO). Additionally, sharpening your leadership skills and lobbying capacity is essential, as we will place great emphasis on overall participation.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on the criteria for judgment we will employ in the committee. It is rare for Executive Board Members to explicitly define their criteria for judgment, but in the interest of a fair and transparent simulation, we will outline the standards we intend to follow to ensure an equal footing for all delegates.

1. Research
2. Analysis
3. Guidance of debate
4. Adherence to foreign policy
5. Lobbying
6. Points and Yields
7. Documentation

We shall, to the best of our abilities, ensure that a fair simulation is conducted and there is ample scope for fruitful and meaningful discussion which paves the way for a nuanced learning experience.

With best regards,
Prateek G Aekbote
(Chairperson, International Labour Organisation)

LEGITIMATE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Evidence or proof is acceptable from sources:

1. News Sources:

- A. REUTERS – Any Reuters article which clearly makes mention of the factor is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate.
- B. State-operated News Agencies – These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any Country as such but in that situation, they can be denied by any other country.

2. Government Reports:

These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.

3. UN Reports:

All OFFICIAL UN Reports are considered credible information or evidence for the Executive Board.

- **Even Though Evidence or proof is acceptable from reliable sources only**
- **Delegates can still check other websites too in order to understand the agenda and get more knowledge only for research purposes.**

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

- The International Labour Organization is a United Nations agency that was created in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice. As the only tripartite agency within the U.N., the ILO unites governments, employers, and workers from 187 Member States to establish labour standards, shape policies, and create programs that promote decent work for all men and women.
- From tackling issues like global unemployment, informal economies, and precarious work, to addressing the ongoing challenges of forced labour, child labour, and workplace inequality, the ILO brings together 187 Member States and operates in over 40 field offices worldwide. The organisation works to address the most pressing labour issues of our time, aiming to improve working conditions, ensure social protection, and enhance employment opportunities globally.

ROLE OF THE ILO

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) is committed to promoting social justice and internationally recognized labour rights, believing that social justice is key to lasting peace. Through its Decent Work agenda, the ILO works to improve working conditions and foster economic stability for workers, employers, and governments.

FOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

- Set and promote standards and fundamental principles and rights at work.
- Create greater opportunities for women and men to decent employment and income.
- Enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all.
- Strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

To support its goals, the ILO leverages nearly 100 years of experience in addressing the global need for decent work, livelihoods, and dignity. It serves its tripartite constituents—governments, employers, and workers—and society at large through:

- **Formulating international policies and programs** that promote human rights, improve working and living conditions, and enhance employment opportunities.
- **Establishing international labour standards** supported by a unique supervisory system to ensure compliance.
- **Implementing extensive international technical cooperation** programs in partnership with constituents to effectively apply these policies in practice.
- **Providing training, education, and research** activities to advance its mission of promoting decent work for all.

UNDERSTANDING THE TOPIC

LABOUR EXPLOITATION

- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 28 million people were trapped in forced labour in 2021. Of these, 22 million were working in private economic sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and domestic work. Approximately 3.3 million of these victims were children, a stark reflection of the vulnerability of minors in the global workforce. Women and girls make up a significant proportion of forced labour victims, representing over 11.8 million people globally. Additionally, 6.3 million people are involved in forced commercial sexual exploitation, where 4.9 million of these victims are women and girls.
- Forced labour in non-sexual sectors includes a wide range of industries and accounts for the vast majority of cases. About 17.3 million people are exploited in industries outside of commercial sexual exploitation, with many victims suffering under poor working conditions, debt bondage, or coercion. The prevalence of forced labour across different sectors highlights the systemic nature of this issue, which affects men, women, and children globally, underscoring the urgent need for stronger laws, enforcement, and preventive measures to protect vulnerable populations from exploitation.

UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), nearly 3 million people die each year due to work-related accidents and diseases, making workplace health and safety a critical issue. This alarming figure includes both fatal injuries from accidents and deaths from occupational diseases, highlighting the dangerous conditions many workers face globally. In addition to fatalities, hundreds of millions more suffer from non-fatal work-related injuries that result in disability or long-term health issues.
- Workplace hazards extend beyond physical injuries, encompassing a wide range of harmful exposures such as chemicals, biological agents, and ergonomic risks. These hazards can cause chronic diseases, including respiratory conditions, cancers, and musculoskeletal disorders, which develop over time due to prolonged exposure. Ensuring that workers are protected from these risks requires comprehensive workplace health measures, including proper equipment, regulations, and education.

WAGE RELATED ISSUES

- Women in the Asia and Pacific regions, as well as in the Arab States, face several significant challenges in the labour market, primarily stemming from deep-rooted gender inequalities. One of the most pressing issues is the excessively low labour force participation rates for women, particularly in South Asia and the Arab States, where participation rates can be over 50 percentage points lower than those of men. Many women are engaged in informal work or unpaid family roles, which often lack labour protections and social security benefits, limiting their economic empowerment. This situation is exacerbated by the overrepresentation of women in low-skilled, low-productivity sectors, further hindering their access to decent work opportunities.
- Another critical problem is the prevalence of gender pay gaps, which are indicative of widespread wage discrimination against women. In the Asia-Pacific region, it is estimated that women held only 38% of all salaried jobs in 2015, and the gender pay gap has been persistent across various sectors. Women typically earn less than men for the same work, and despite some progress in closing these gaps, significant disparities remain. These wage inequalities not only deter women from entering or remaining in the labour force but also contribute to broader economic disparities. The ongoing gender pay gap reflects systemic discrimination and undervaluation of women's work, emphasizing the urgent need for policies aimed at achieving pay equity and fostering women's economic empowerment.

ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) play a significant role in advocating for worker's rights, providing technical assistance, and supporting the development of policies and programs.

The ILO works with its members in the region to deal with these and other issues. Institution building, policy support and local economic development play a critical role in social and economic progress. Respect for fundamental principles and rights at work helps to ensure that all sections of society benefit.

GOVERNMENTS

- **Develop National Action Plans to Eliminate Child Labor:** Governments should establish comprehensive national plans to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, focusing on vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and informal industries. These plans should include legal reforms, education initiatives, and coordination with international organizations.
- **Strengthen and Enforce Labor Laws:** Labor laws must clearly define minimum working ages, restrict the types of work children can perform, and limit working hours. Governments should also ensure robust enforcement mechanisms are in place to prevent child labor and unsafe working conditions.
- **Combat Human Trafficking and Forced Labor:** Governments should strengthen anti-trafficking laws, increase penalties for traffickers, and implement measures to protect victims of forced labor, particularly in industries such as fishing, agriculture, and construction.
- **Improve Labor Inspections:** Establish regular and thorough labor inspection programs targeting sectors prone to child labor and forced labor. These inspections should ensure that businesses comply with national labor laws and international labor standards.
- **Promote Access to Education:** Governments should enhance access to free, quality education for all children, particularly those in rural or impoverished areas. Ensuring education as a right helps prevent children from being drawn into labor at an early age.

- **Enhance Public Awareness:** Launch awareness campaigns to inform employers, workers, and the general public about the dangers and illegality of child labor and forced labor. Public understanding can drive social and corporate change.
- **Strengthen Social Protection Systems:** Establish or improve social safety nets that support vulnerable families, reducing the economic pressures that may push children into labor. Social programs could include financial assistance, healthcare, and educational support.
- **Collaborate with International Organizations:** Governments should partner with organizations like the ILO to leverage expertise, resources, and global standards to strengthen national efforts against child labor and forced labor.
- **Promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Encourage businesses to adopt ethical labor practices and ensure that child labor and forced labor are eliminated from supply chains. Governments can introduce policies that incentivize or mandate CSR reporting.
- **Protect Migrant Workers:** Implement legal protections for migrant workers, who are often vulnerable to exploitation. These protections should include fair recruitment practices, access to social services, and enforcement of labor rights.

TRADE UNIONS

Trade unions and advocacy programs

Trade unions across Southeast Asia organize workshops, training, and awareness programs to educate workers about their labour rights, workplace safety, and the risks of exploitation. These programs empower workers to recognize labour violations, such as child labour and forced labour, and report them

- **Advocating for Workers' Rights:** Trade unions work to influence governments and businesses to improve labor laws, ensuring better protection for vulnerable workers in sectors where exploitation is prevalent.
- **Providing Reporting Channels:** Unions often serve as safe spaces for workers to report instances of forced labor or exploitation, offering legal support and assistance in addressing these issues.
- **Collaborating Internationally:** Unions work with other national and international labor groups to coordinate efforts to eliminate forced labor and improve working conditions across borders.
- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** By collaborating with unions in different countries, particularly between sending and receiving nations of migrant workers, trade unions help ensure protection from forced labor and trafficking.
- **Organizing Workers in the Informal Sector:** In sectors like street vending, domestic work, and agriculture, where exploitation is common, unions organize informal workers to provide them with legal protections and a collective voice.
- **Advocating for Migrant Workers:** Unions actively campaign for the rights of migrant workers, helping them secure better legal protections and access to reporting systems when they face exploitation or unsafe conditions.
- **Ensuring Labor Law Enforcement:** Unions work alongside governments and labor agencies to monitor labor practices and ensure that laws are enforced to reduce instances of forced labor and child exploitation.
- **Promoting Social Protections:** Unions advocate for systems such as health insurance and pensions for all workers, particularly in informal sectors, reducing their vulnerability to exploitation and child labor.

EMPLOYERS

- **Commitment to Ethical Supply Chains:**

Many large companies in Southeast Asia have developed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs to ensure that their supply chains are free from child labor and forced labor. These programs focus on ethical sourcing, auditing suppliers, and implementing strict labor standards.

- **Labor Standards Certification:** Companies in the region often seek certification from organizations like **Fair Trade** and the **Rainforest Alliance**, which ensure that products are made without child labor or forced labor. This also helps employers build a reputation for ethical practices in global markets.

- **Internal Audits of Labor Practices:**

Many multinational and local companies operating in Southeast Asia conduct **regular audits of their supply chains** to monitor for child labor, forced labor, and unsafe working conditions. These audits often involve independent third parties to ensure impartiality.

- **No Fees Recruitment Policy:**

Some companies, particularly in industries like manufacturing and agriculture, have adopted **no recruitment fee policies** for migrant workers to reduce the risk of forced labor. This practice helps prevent debt bondage, where workers are trapped in exploitative conditions due to high recruitment costs.

- **Use of Technology for Transparency:**

Some companies are investing in **blockchain technology** and other digital tools to trace the origins of products and monitor labor conditions throughout their supply chains. This is especially important in industries like electronics, agriculture, and textiles where exploitation is common.

- **Ensure Equal Wages Pay:** The difference in wages across men and women, across different ethnicity should be reduced and the companies should ensure a equal pay to all its employees.

CONVENTIONS UNDER ILO

FORCED LABOUR CONVENTION, 1930 (NO. 29)

- **Reason for Implementation:** This convention was introduced to combat forced or compulsory labor, which was prevalent in the early 20th century. Many workers were subjected to exploitative conditions, particularly in colonies and regions under authoritarian regimes.
- **Amendments:** The ILO introduced the Protocol of 2014 to complement the convention, addressing modern forms of forced labor such as human trafficking, ensuring stronger protections and remedies for victims.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE CONVENTION, 1948 (NO. 87)

- **Reason for Implementation:** After World War II, this convention was established to protect the right of workers to form and join organizations of their choosing without fear of retaliation, which was seen as a fundamental pillar of democracy.
- **Amendments:** The convention remains largely unchanged, though its principles have been reinforced through regional charters and national legislation supporting freedom of association.

RIGHT TO ORGANISE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING CONVENTION, 1949 (NO. 98)

- **Reason for Implementation:** This convention was created to protect workers against anti-union discrimination and to ensure that workers have the right to collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions.
- **Amendments:** While the convention has not been amended directly, various countries have introduced national frameworks to support collective bargaining processes as stipulated by the convention.

EQUAL REMUNERATION CONVENTION, 1951 (NO. 100)

- **Reason for Implementation:** Gender pay gaps were a significant issue post-WWII, and this convention sought to promote "equal pay for equal work" for men and women to address wage discrimination based on sex.
- **Amendments:** No formal amendments have been made, but this convention laid the foundation for subsequent laws and regulations promoting gender equality in workplaces globally.

ABOLITION OF FORCED LABOUR CONVENTION, 1957 (NO. 105)

- **Reason for Implementation:** This convention was introduced to reinforce and extend the prohibition on forced labor, targeting systems such as forced labor imposed by state authorities as punishment for political dissent or labor exploitation in post-colonial contexts.
- **Amendments:** None. However, subsequent international laws, including the 2014 Protocol to Convention No. 29, have enhanced its application.

DISCRIMINATION (EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATION) CONVENTION, 1958 (NO. 111)

- **Reason for Implementation:** The goal was to eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin, reflecting growing awareness of civil rights issues.
- **Amendments:** This convention has influenced numerous anti-discrimination laws worldwide and has been supplemented by the ILO's ongoing work on gender equality and minority rights in employment.

MINIMUM AGE CONVENTION, 1973 (NO. 138)

- **Reason for Implementation:** The convention was aimed at combating child labor by establishing a global minimum age for employment, with the objective of preventing child exploitation and promoting the right to education.
- **Amendments:** The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) of 1999 expanded the protections for children, specifically targeting hazardous child labor.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH CONVENTION, 1981 (NO. 155)

- **Reason for Implementation:** Industrial growth in the latter half of the 20th century raised concerns about worker safety and health. This convention aimed to establish basic principles for safe and healthy working conditions in all sectors.
- **Amendments:** The convention has influenced numerous national regulations on workplace safety, and its principles continue to evolve through various ILO initiatives on occupational health.

WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR CONVENTION, 1999 (NO. 182)

- **Reason for Implementation:** The convention was designed to eliminate the most dangerous and exploitative forms of child labor, such as slavery, trafficking, and forced recruitment in armed conflict, marking a crucial step in child protection.
- **Amendments:** None, but it remains one of the most ratified ILO conventions, showing widespread commitment to eradicating child exploitation.

CASE STUDY

IMPROVING LABOR CONDITIONS IN CAMBODIA'S GARMENT
INDUSTRY

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

- **Forced Overtime:** Workers from 48 factories reported that overtime, while legally supposed to be voluntary, was often mandatory, with refusals leading to dismissals, wage deductions, or punitive transfers .
- **Pregnancy-Based Discrimination:** Many pregnant workers faced discrimination, including contract non-renewal to avoid providing maternity benefits. They were often denied basic accommodations like restroom breaks or lighter work .
- **Sexual Harassment:** Around 20% of women surveyed reported sexual harassment in the workplace, with inappropriate comments and physical contact being common .
- **Anti-Union Practices:** Factories discouraged union activities by harassing or dismissing newly elected union leaders and placing workers on short-term contracts to weaken their job security and deter union participation .
- **Child Labor and Subcontracting:** Child labor was documented in 11 factories, especially in smaller subcontractor factories, which are often not monitored effectively. These subcontractors tend to have the worst labor conditions .

OUTCOMES OF THE BETTER FACTORIES CAMBODIA (BFC) PROGRAM

- **Growth and Worker Welfare:** The program contributed to sustained growth in the garment industry and improved the lives of over half a million workers, ensuring correct wages and social protections.
- **Reduction of Child Labour:** It virtually eliminated child labor within the participating factories.
- **Improved Workplace Safety:** The program has made garment factories safer overall.
- **Standardization Across Sector:** The BFC helped create a "level playing field" for labor conditions across Cambodia's garment sector.
- **Influence on Business Practices:** It influenced brands' risk management strategies and used data to highlight areas needing improvement in factories.
- **Transparent Reporting:** Cambodia played a pioneering role in transparent reporting, particularly for occupational health and safety, and influenced other Better Work programs globally.
- **Accountability and Enforcement:** The PAC emphasized the responsibility of the Cambodian government, employers (GMAC), and unions in enforcing labor laws and holding parties accountable for violations.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
BIBLIOGRAPHY

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are the issues related to topic faced by my country?
- What are the reasons for the prevalence of the these issues?
- What are the existing legal frameworks in my country to combat these issues?
- Why are the existing frameworks failing?
- What are the roles of international community and how can my country contribute?
- Can the existing organizations collaborate with other organizations to tackle the issues more efficiently?
- Which are the new laws that can be implemented to uphold the existing laws?
- How will the solutions affect the vulnerable people?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- <https://www.who.int/srilanka/news/detail/27-10-2023-south-east-asia-regional-workshop-on-strengthening-occupational-health>
- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/11/cambodia-labor-laws-fail-protect-garment-workers>
- https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/PAC-statement-2018_Eng-1.pdf
- <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/nearly-3-million-people-die-work-related-accidents-and-diseases>
- [https://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/data-and-research-forced-labour#:~:text=Main%20Figures%20on%20Forced%20Labour&text=of%20them%20are%20women%20and,million%20in%20other%20economic%20sectors\).&text=of%20them%20are%20children%20\(3.3,are%20in%20commercial%20sexual%20exploitation.](https://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/data-and-research-forced-labour#:~:text=Main%20Figures%20on%20Forced%20Labour&text=of%20them%20are%20women%20and,million%20in%20other%20economic%20sectors).&text=of%20them%20are%20children%20(3.3,are%20in%20commercial%20sexual%20exploitation.)
- [Convention C029 - Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\) \(ilo.org\)](#)
- <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards>
- <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:1:0>
- <https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipec/about-international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipec/ipec-worldwide>