

# FORCED AND CHILD LABOUR IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Global demand for cheap goods and services and big profits means many people around the globe are exploited for their labour, paid little or no wage and often work in dangerous conditions. Even children are victims of labour exploitation.

**Australian businesses may encounter forced or child labour in many aspects of their business,** such as when suppliers or sub-contractors use forced or child labour to make products that the business then uses or sells on to consumers. Businesses may also encounter forced or child labour if staff are overseen by a third party, such as labour brokers, and they cannot fully assess whether the conditions of employment meet minimum labour standards.

**Our daily contact with businesses – the products and services we buy, the businesses we work for, the companies we support – means we may be indirectly supporting the use of forced or child labour.**



DON'T TRADE LIVES FACTSHEET



# WHEN YOU TALK, BUSINESSES LISTEN

Forced or child labour<sup>1</sup> is forcing a person (man, woman or child) into an exploitative working situation they cannot escape from. They are not free and are exploited for profit over and over again.

**Although the crime of forced and child labour can seem too big and complicated to fight, we can all do our bit to make sure Australian businesses and companies are not involved in exploitative labour practices.**

**As a consumer** your voice and purchasing power can put a lot of pressure on companies to improve their business practices.

- Before you make a purchase, educate yourself about a business' policies and practices in this area so you are satisfied that it is not involved in forced or child labour, either through its own activities or its supply chain.
- When you don't have clear information about what the company is doing to avoid involvement in forced or child labour, ask the company about their policies and processes.

## All businesses and companies can help combat forced and child labour by:

- Carefully choosing who to work with to make sure that a business partner is not using or linked to forced or child labour.
- Adopting a corporate culture that promotes responsible business conduct at all levels of the company. Set up policies and practices – endorsed at the highest levels – that will enable the company to effectively avoid any connection to forced or child labour.

- If companies do not respond to your enquiries or make statements that you reasonably believe are misleading or deceptive, tell regulators like the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission or your state consumer law regulator. They may decide to investigate whether these companies have engaged in misleading and deceptive conduct in relation to your enquiries about their actions to prevent and/or address forced or child labour.
- Raise awareness among other consumers about these issues.

**As an investor** you can ask questions of the businesses you have shares with about what they are doing to avoid involvement in labour exploitation.

- What do you know about their policies and practices to prevent and address their potential or actual involvement in forced or child labour?
- What can they tell you about their policies, processes and performance on preventing and addressing their potential or actual involvement in forced or child labour?
- Encourage other shareholders to get involved at annual general meetings (AGMs) and other forums.
- When you don't have enough information, write letters to key people in the business or use shareholder resolutions or other opportunities at AGMs to ask for more detail on their due diligence processes with regards to labour exploitation across all aspects of their operations.

**As an employee** you can think about whether your own role may have implications for your company's involvement in labour exploitation. You may also have access to colleagues and business partners, like suppliers and customers, who may not be aware of the strong business case for avoiding involvement in labour exploitation. Ask about and better understand your employer's policies, processes and performance on these issues, including how they decide who they do business with.

- Consider establishing a working group in your company to identify and learn how to better deal with challenges relating to labour exploitation facing your company and the broader industry, as well as opportunities to make a positive change in this area.
- Highlight best practice to managers and direct reports and conduct training and other awareness-raising activities where appropriate.
- Make use of internal complaints mechanisms when you have a concern about your company's involvement in forced or child labour.

## Labour exploitation in the fishing industry

Fishing is just one of many industries where labour exploitation exists. In the Thai fishing industry for example, boys and young men, especially from Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, leave their villages looking for work in Thailand but are instead tricked or coerced onto fishing boats. Once onboard these offshore boats, the boys and men are trapped and forced to work.

Bounmy\* from Laos was tricked onto a fishing boat and forced to work for nine years without pay. "We worked 24-hour shifts and slept three to four hours per day. If we could not complete the work during work hours, the chief worker would beat us," says Bounmy.

Australia is a large importer of seafood from Asia, so the seafood we eat here may have been caught using exploitative labour. Companies that brand and package seafood sold in Australia may source their goods from numerous contractors and have a responsibility to know and address the conditions workers endure.

\*Name has been changed

## As a constituent and voter

you have the right to ask questions of your Federal MP and the Australian Government about what they are doing to address forced or child labour. You could:

- Write to your MP to tell them your concerns about the potential/likelihood of Australian businesses' involvement in labour exploitation overseas.
- Encourage them to raise the issues with companies within their constituency and for the government to ensure that Australian businesses are acting responsibly at home and abroad.
- Ask them to review the government's own purchasing practices and update their Procurement Guidelines so these meet the minimum labour standards set by the International Labour Organisation.

Bounmy started a small farm after he received training and assistance from World Vision. He now has hope for the future.

Photo: Thongxay Phavixay/World Vision





## Tainted technology

There have been reports of labour exploitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo where vast quantities of coltan, tungsten and tin are mined. These minerals are commonly found in the computers, mobile phones and other technological equipment we use daily at work and at home. Miners may be forced to work without pay by armed forces or rebel groups that control the mines. Children are sometimes forced to work deep below ground breathing dusty air and using no protective equipment.

After these minerals are extracted they are sold to trading houses. From here they are sold on to exporters that transport them to refining companies around the world. They then turn the ore into metal and electronic components. These will then be bought by manufacturers who produce the items we use and sell them under some of the world's most well-known brands.

At all points of this supply chain it is important for companies to transparently document the source of the items they purchase and conduct independent audits to determine whether they are taking appropriate steps to make sure their business is not profiting from forced or child labour.



# GET INVOLVED

World Vision Australia, through its Don't Trade Lives campaign, is uniting Australians against forced and child labour. As part of this campaign it is asking Australian businesses to ensure they have transparent, traceable and independently verifiable supply chains free of labour exploitation. It is also asking businesses to proactively engage with networks and coalitions on this issue to ensure they follow relevant international norms, treaties and mandates.

Visit [donttradelives.com.au](http://donttradelives.com.au)

1. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) states that "the term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that: is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of "work" can be called "child labour" depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries". (International Labour Organisation, 2011. Available from: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>).