



# MUNESCO

**Forum:** Special Focus 1

**Issue:** Improving labour conditions in manufacturing and construction sectors, with emphasis on LEDCs.

**Student Officer:** Tan Elçin

**Position:** President Chair

## Introduction

Economies all around the world rely on the individuals' pattern of behaviour, their relations with one another and their input to the cycle. In this system, the work of the labourers is the principal catalyst for growth, production and the maintenance of economies. Thus, it is understandable that the conditions that the labourers are provided will reflect upon their work and consequently thoroughly influence the variables in economic systems. Although proper labour conditions should be prioritised for the sake of human rights, the well-being of labourers and also positive economic outcomes; many employers and corporations find it very favourable to not provide such conditions for lower costs and relatively higher profits. Especially, as we are standing in an increasingly competitive global economic environment, adequate labour conditions become subject to higher opposition by businesses and deteriorate substantially.

Developing countries and Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) tend to show the least immunity against improper and insufficient working conditions. As such countries are fervently trying to attract foreign businesses and initiatives; they put less leverage, regulation and supervision on businesses which directly damages working conditions and existent labour rights.

It is imperative to point out that the sectors of manufacturing and construction are among the areas of business which suffer the most from poor working conditions. Due to the nature of these sectors, areas of construction and business hold a great variety of potential risks to the workers. These hazards can influence the health of the labourers and even be fatal. The risks can extend from harassment to physical abuse and to many other issues; however, it is necessary to significantly alleviate the current labour rights concerns in these sectors with a global approach for the sake of sustainability and human rights.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Less Economically Developed Country (LEDC):** a developing country that relatively has lower welfare and civilisation standards.

**Ergonomics:** The discipline of applying the most suitable designs for the well-being and safety of labourer for the workplace.

**Health and Safety (H&S):** A fundamental necessity of working environment conditions and the field that works upon the protection of the health and safety of workers.

**Accident prevention:** The act of taking necessary measures to prevent occupational injuries/deaths.



# MUNESCO

**Abuse/Harassment:** Certain patterns of behaviour; physical, verbal, or in any form, that are regarded as harmful for the target individual's physical, sexual, mental, psychological and/or social well-being. Abuse and harassment are commonly accepted as crimes by the international community and by an overwhelming majority of nations. Especially in the workplace, gender-based harassment has been existent for decades. Abuse and harassment often do not get reported, thus these crimes are often sealed with the victim's silence, the legal procedure's complexity and inefficiency.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Any equipment, both in the construction and manufacturing sectors, that are important for the preservation of the H&S of employees during their work.

**Transnational Corporation (TNC):** A large network of corporations, an international conglomerate that has spread all around the world, which very often broadly influence and control the industries they represent in LEDCs.

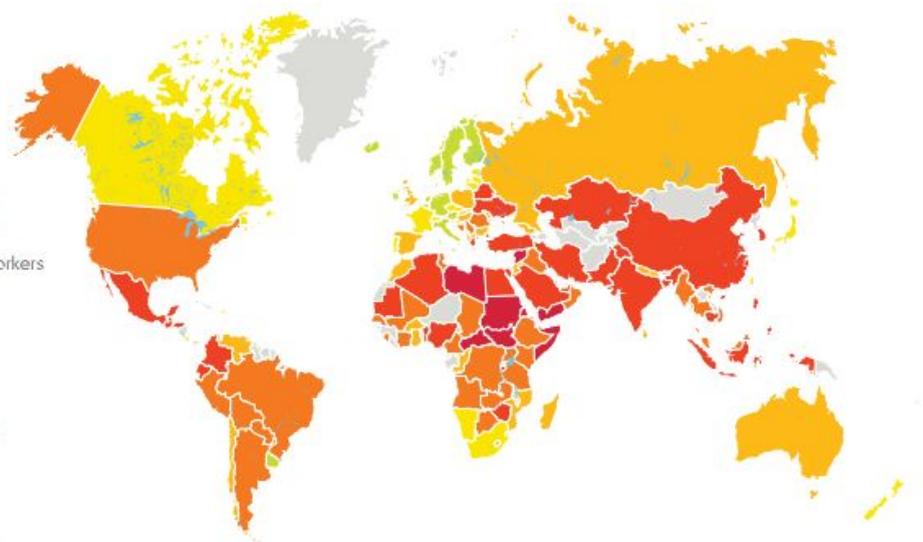
**Sweatshop:** A phrase used to describe working environments that are unsafe and inhumane.

## Background Information

### 2018 ITUC GLOBAL RIGHTS INDEX

The World's Worst Countries for Workers

5+ No guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the law  
 5 No guarantee of rights  
 4 Systematic violations of rights  
 3 Regular violations of rights  
 2 Repeated violations of rights  
 1 Sporadic violations of rights  
 No data



Rating 5+	Rating 4	Rating 3	Rating 2	Rating 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bahrain</li> <li>Central African Republic</li> <li>China</li> <li>Uyghur</li> <li>Palestine</li> <li>Somalia</li> <li>South Sudan</li> <li>Sudan</li> <li>Syria</li> <li>Yemen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chile</li> <li>Colombia</li> <li>Ecuador</li> <li>Egypt</li> <li>Ghana</li> <li>Guatemala</li> <li>Honduras</li> <li>Hong-Kong (China)</li> <li>India</li> <li>Indonesia</li> <li>Iran</li> <li>Kazakhstan</li> <li>Korea (Democratic)</li> <li>Kuwait</li> <li>Laos</li> <li>Mauritania</li> <li>Mexico</li> <li>Nigeria</li> <li>Pakistan</li> <li>Philippines</li> <li>Saudi Arabia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turkey</li> <li>Ukraine</li> <li>United Arab Emirates</li> <li>Zimbabwe</li> <li>Angola</li> <li>Argentina</li> <li>Bolivia</li> <li>Bosnia and Herzegovina</li> <li>Botswana</li> <li>Brazil</li> <li>Cameroon</li> <li>Chad</li> <li>Congo (Democratic Republic)</li> <li>Cote d'Ivoire</li> <li>Djibouti</li> <li>El Salvador</li> <li>Ethiopia</li> <li>Fiji</li> <li>Haiti</li> <li>Iran</li> <li>Kenya</li> <li>Lebanon</li> <li>Malaysia</li> <li>Maldives</li> <li>Mauritius</li> <li>Myanmar</li> <li>Oman</li> <li>Paraguay</li> <li>Peru</li> <li>Romania</li> <li>Senegal</li> <li>Serbia</li> <li>Sierra Leone</li> <li>South Africa</li> <li>Tanzania</li> <li>Thailand</li> <li>Trinidad and Tobago</li> <li>Tunisia</li> <li>Uganda</li> <li>United States of America</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vietnam</li> <li>Zambia</li> <li>Albania</li> <li>Australia</li> <li>Bahamas</li> <li>Bulgaria</li> <li>Burkina Faso</li> <li>Chile</li> <li>Congo (Republic)</li> <li>Costa Rica</li> <li>Georgia</li> <li>Ghana</li> <li>Hungary</li> <li>Jordan</li> <li>Lebanon</li> <li>Liberia</li> <li>Macedonia</li> <li>Madagascar</li> <li>Maldives</li> <li>Morocco</li> <li>Mozambique</li> <li>Nepal</li> <li>Poland</li> <li>Russian Federation</li> <li>Spain</li> <li>Sri Lanka</li> <li>United Kingdom</li> <li>Venezuela</li> <li>Barbados</li> <li>Belgium</li> <li>Canada</li> <li>Costa Rica</li> <li>Croatia</li> <li>Czech Republic</li> <li>Dominican Republic</li> <li>Estonia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>France</li> <li>Israel</li> <li>Jamaica</li> <li>Japan</li> <li>Lithuania</li> <li>Lithuania</li> <li>Malawi</li> <li>Montenegro</li> <li>Namibia</li> <li>New Zealand</li> <li>Portugal</li> <li>Rwanda</li> <li>Singapore</li> <li>South Africa</li> <li>Switzerland</li> <li>Taiwan (China)</li> <li>Togo</li> <li>Austria</li> <li>Belgium</li> <li>Denmark</li> <li>Finland</li> <li>Germany</li> <li>Iceland</li> <li>Ireland</li> <li>Italy</li> <li>Netherlands</li> <li>Norway</li> <li>Slovakia</li> <li>Sweden</li> <li>Uruguay</li> </ul>

**Comparison with 2017 score:**  
 No change or new in 2018  
 Worse rating  
 Improved rating



# MUNESCO

**Source:**

<sup>(1)</sup><http://www.respect.international/ituc-global-rights-index-2018-the-worlds-worst-countries-for-workers-map/>

The chart above is International Trade Union Confederation's Index for the conditions of labour rights worldwide in the year 2018. The Index portrays that only a handful of countries possess the necessary environment for workers, while a great number of other nations lack in the framework for protecting the rights of labourers and satisfying proper worker conditions. The nations with poor labour rights are mainly located in Northern Africa and Southeast Asia according to the index, and some of the biggest economies including China and India are included in the list, alongside many G7 countries.

Construction is among the most hazardous sectors in professional working fields that rely on manpower. For example, according to a report of the Construction Industry Development Board, even in developed states, the construction sector satiates approximately ten per cent of total employment, whereas the sector's percentage involvement to work-related deaths is two to four times higher than that figure.<sup>(2)</sup> Since the workers in the construction field are also exposed to a multitude of health risks coming from the existence of dust, asbestos, chemical materials, harmful biological agents and different pathogens; there is a high prevalence over the occurrence of respiratory diseases and skin-related illnesses.<sup>(3)</sup> Due to the existence of excessive noise, hearing loss is very common. And because workers are frequently expected to accomplish physical labour, some that are detrimental to the physiological well-being of the individual; musculoskeletal issues also arise. These concerns among others can be easily solved through fundamental accident prevention measures that include the usage of personal protective equipment (e.g. helmets, goggles, gloves, masks), application of safer and improved technological systems, staff education, thorough supervision and third-party/government inspection in the workplace.

The manufacturing sector also possesses a vast number of dangers to the prosperity and health of the workers if there is not a working environment compatible with workers' rights. Manufacturing, is an area in which the abuse of labourers is commonly seen by the means of very low wages, overtime work obligations, gender discrimination and many others. In LEDCs, transnational corporations and big global brands have very wide representation, and they often benefit from very little tax responsibilities, insufficient labour laws, cheap and abundant labour force and almost no tariff measures. Some of the biggest garment manufacturer TNCs are often accused of running sweatshops, in LEDCs and especially in the rural regions of those countries.<sup>(4,5,6)</sup>

There are also a number of issues resulted specifically by the employer parties' policies in their businesses. Harassment and abuse, which can be physical, psychological, verbal and sexual, is strictly forbidden both by International Labour Organisation's Conventions and by national legislations, yet in the workplace, this issue is still existent. For example, in the garment manufacturing industries that are run by transnational corporations in LEDCs, in which women are predominantly employed, women are often sexually harassed.<sup>(6)</sup> It is also seen that in the sectors of both construction and manufacturing, there are a great amount of labourers who work with no contracts, which results in the exploitation of their labour and exempts them from fundamental worker rights. Similarly, labourers that face such treatment and suffer low working conditions, are usually not involved with union activity, which may be because of intimidation and systematic mobbing by employer parties, lack of existence of labour organisations, or unawareness.



# MUNESCO

Child labour is also a critical matter when it comes to the industries of construction and manufacturing. Especially in LEDCs, where there is often not a proper framework for the detection and prevention of such cases and strict child labour laws; children undertake heavy labour that can be unhealthy for their growth in order to contribute to the household income.

## Timeline of Major Events

Date	Description
1919	International Labour Organisation is founded.
1930	Forced Labour Convention is adopted.
1949	Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention is adopted.
1958	Discrimination/Employment and Occupation Convention is adopted.
1973	Minimum Age Convention is adopted.
1999	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention is adopted.
2015	Sustainable Development Goals are adopted in the General Assembly. SDG 8.8 is set as “Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment”.



# MUNESCO

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### China

People's Republic of China is currently the world's second largest economy by Gross Domestic Product and is the biggest manufacturer in the globe. However, it is among the countries that have the worst record on workers' rights and preserving correct and sufficient conditions for labourers. Though there is a collective bargaining system, workers are banned to strike. Still, Beijing has recently been successful in mitigating the problem within its borders by strengthening corporate inspections and substantially reducing the occupation-related deaths and injuries from the hundred thousands to thirty eight thousand in the year of 2017.

### India

India, a global economic power, suffers greatly when it comes to the protection of labour rights and adequate working conditions. The country is especially notorious for having a large number of child labourers, over ten million according to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. There have also been allegations in the country against the assets of transnational corporations within the country over poor working conditions verbal abuse of labourers by the employers. <sup>(7)</sup>

### Bangladesh

According to the news from the press and reports of international NGOs, Bangladesh is a country with a high prevalence of sweatshops, which are mostly run by the garment industry. While the products manufactured in Bangladesh are exported all around the world under different brands, the employee wage is extremely low and there are a multitude of grave problems in the working conditions.

### International Labour Organisation

The principal body in the international community, International Labour Organisation sets the framework and basis for internationally accepted working condition and labour rights guidelines. ILO further cooperates with governments, corporations and Non-Governmental Organisations and conducts campaigns to hinder child labour, gender discrimination and many other problems in the workplace.

### International Trade Union Confederation

International Trade Union Confederation is the biggest labour union federation in the globe. ITUC campaigns all around the world to improve working conditions for the labourers and works to tackle many work-related issues. The Confederation has been successful in its collaboration with unions among member states to push a worker's rights agenda.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The main institution that have led the effort to protect the rights of the workers was the International Labour Organisation. Until that time; wars, the Industrial Revolution, and global competition halted and eroded the human rights of labourers and their working conditions. After the Second World War, the United Nations was established and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the institution which prioritised the well-founded rights of workers and embedded it within fundamental human rights. Following these events, ILO became more active in the global arena as it produced key workers' rights protocols and conventions. Meanwhile, countries



# MUNESCO

around the world started to apply themselves with these newly formed guidelines. Many nations adopted the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery of 1926, which was introduced by the League of Nations. Today, although the 1998 Declaration called member states to move ILO conventions in effect within their nations; there are problems over the ratification and the full application of these conventions.

- International Labour Organisation (ILO) Forced Labour Convention, 1930
- ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947
- ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948
- ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949
- ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951
- ILO Social Security Convention, 1952
- ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957
- ILO Discrimination Convention, 1958
- ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973
- Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998.
- ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999
- Better Work Global Programme, 2007
- ILO Code on Safety of Workplaces

## **Possible Solutions**

All effective and long-lasting solutions to the problems of labourers that include manufacturing and construction workers need to abide by the principles of human rights, democracy and dialogue.

First of all, the ratification of ILO conventions is crucial in the way of reforming existent workers' rights issues. The core principles of these conventions must be included and protected by national legislations, criminal codes and constitutions. To oversee the proper application of these standards, governments are to direct their relevant offices and ministries in monitoring workplaces and apply procedures that may include inspections, hotlines etc. However, a firm stand on worker-related issues by executive and legislative organs will have a great influence over the situation of workers' rights.

It is significant to consider giving stronger representation possibilities to labourers with governmental offices in order to address the concerns of workers alongside the concerns of employers. Thus, empowering the tradition of labour unions will increase the coordination of branches of the government and workers.

Apart from these solutions, policy proposals that can be efficient in handling matters of labour rights may include;

- Periodic corporate inspections,
- Comprehensive workers' rights laws and regulations,
- Corporate transparency laws,
- Regulation and banning of child labour, mechanisms to monitor child labour,



# MUNESCO

- Adopting the qualities of lean manufacturing in the workplace,
- Improvement of safety and efficiency of technologies and equipment,
- Transition to Industry 4.0 system.

## Useful Links For Further Research

1. <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/how-improve-working-conditions-developing-world>
2. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/198551/ewp-497.pdf>
3. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLM/214578-1103128720951/21692675/EPPNoteNo9\\_Eng.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLM/214578-1103128720951/21692675/EPPNoteNo9_Eng.pdf)

## Bibliography

- (1) “Resource Centre.” *RESPECT*, [www.respect.international/ituc-global-rights-index-2018-the-worlds-worst-countries-for-workers-map/](http://www.respect.international/ituc-global-rights-index-2018-the-worlds-worst-countries-for-workers-map/).
- (2) “Annual Reports // .” *Mandate*, [www.cidb.org.za/publications/Pages/Annual-Reports.aspx](http://www.cidb.org.za/publications/Pages/Annual-Reports.aspx).
- (3) “Chart Book (6th Edition): Occupational Diseases - Respiratory Diseases in the Construction Industry.” *Chart Book (6th Edition): Fatal and Nonfatal Injuries - Leading Causes of Fatal and Nonfatal Injuries in Construction | CPWR*, [www.cpw.com/chart-book-6th-edition-occupational-diseases-respiratory-diseases-construction-industry](http://www.cpw.com/chart-book-6th-edition-occupational-diseases-respiratory-diseases-construction-industry).
- (4) McDougall, Dan. “Child Sweatshop Shame Threatens Gap's Ethical Image.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 28 Oct. 2007, [www.theguardian.com/business/2007/oct/28/ethicalbusiness.india](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2007/oct/28/ethicalbusiness.india).
- (5) Lazare, Sarah. “Gap, Old Navy, and the Living Hell of a Bangladeshi Sweatshop.” *Common Dreams*, Common Dreams, 4 Oct. 2013, [www.commondreams.org/news/2013/10/04/gap-old-navy-and-living-hell-bangladeshi-sweatshop](http://www.commondreams.org/news/2013/10/04/gap-old-navy-and-living-hell-bangladeshi-sweatshop).
- (6) Hodal, Kate. “Abuse Is Daily Reality for Female Garment Workers for Gap and H&M, Says Report.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 June 2018, [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jun/05/female-garment-workers-gap-hm-south-asia](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jun/05/female-garment-workers-gap-hm-south-asia).
- (7) Chamberlain, Gethin. “India's Clothing Workers: 'They Slap Us and Call Us Dogs and Donkeys'.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 25 Nov. 2012, [www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/25/india-clothing-workers-slave-wages](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/25/india-clothing-workers-slave-wages).