

The Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

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A. Introduction

1. The **Iranian Elite Research Center(IREC)** was established in 2000 with the aim of research in the field of sustainable development and in 2005, it succeeded in obtaining special consultative status with ECOSOC.
2. By Review of the human rights situation in the USA, IREC offers recommendations to improve the human rights situation in this country:
 - Take effective measures to prevent trafficking in persons mainly women and children

B. Modern Slavery in the United States: Key Findings and Analysis

I. Gaps in Legislative Response

3. The response to modern slavery in the United States reveals several critical gaps, notably the lack of legislation that criminalizes forced marriage and establishes a minimum marriage age of 18 without exceptions. While the prevalence of modern slavery in the U.S. is among the lowest in the Americas, the estimated number of individuals living in modern slavery is the highest of any country in the region. The vulnerability of certain populations is significantly influenced by factors such as discrimination against migrants and minority groups, irregular migration, organized crime along the U.S.-Mexico border, poverty, and the use of state-imposed forced labor within the prison system. These issues severely undermine the government's ability to effectively address modern slavery.

II. Prevalence of Modern Slavery in the United States

4. According to the **2023 Global Slavery Index (GSI)**, it is estimated that on any given day in 2021, approximately **1.1 million** people were living in conditions of modern slavery in the U.S. This equates to a prevalence rate of **3.3 individuals per thousand**. While this places the U.S. among countries with the lowest prevalence of modern slavery in the region (ranked **21st out of 25**) and globally (ranked **122nd out of 160**), it also indicates that the U.S. has the highest absolute number of individuals living in modern slavery in the Americas, accounting for over **20%** of the region's total cases. It is important to note that the lack of aggregated national data makes it difficult to determine the true extent of modern slavery cases. Nevertheless, the **National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH)** reported receiving **10,360** reports of suspected human trafficking cases in 2021.

III. State-Imposed Forced Labor

5. The government's efforts to combat modern slavery are significantly compromised by the presence of state-imposed forced labor within the prison system. Under the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which was ratified in 1865, individuals convicted of offenses can be sentenced to involuntary servitude. Prisoners are excluded from the protections of labor laws, including those that prohibit forced labor, as compulsory

labor in prisons is considered a legal punishment rather than an economic activity. Although international law allows for compulsory prison labor under specific conditions, it stipulates that such labor cannot benefit private parties without meeting additional requirements.

6. Reports indicate that detainees in U.S. private prisons—including pre-trial detainees and migrants in detention centers—have alleged coercion to work without compensation under threats of punishment. The United States has the highest recorded prison population rate globally, raising concerns about the risk of state-imposed forced labor. This burden is disproportionately shouldered by people of color, who are significantly overrepresented in U.S. prison demographics. The **International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR)** has urged the U.S. government to take steps to ensure that prison sentences involving compulsory labor are not disproportionately imposed due to racial bias in the criminal justice system. Notably, in December 2020, a joint resolution was introduced to amend the Constitution to prohibit involuntary servitude as a punishment for offenses, but as of this writing, it has not yet progressed into law.

IV. Exploitation Through Forced Labor

7. In 2021, the **NHTH** documented **1,066** reports of potential labor trafficking cases, with the majority occurring in sectors such as domestic work, agriculture, construction, retail, hospitality, and illicit activities. Additionally, there were **400** reports of trafficking for both labor and sexual exploitation, primarily in domestic work and illicit activities, including the illicit massage and spa business. The majority of identified victims of labor trafficking were adults (**81%**), and over half were foreign nationals (**55%**).
8. The risk of forced labor is particularly high in the domestic work sector. Domestic workers in the U.S. often face exploitation through practices such as passport withholding, physical and verbal abuse, and isolation. In 2021, the NHTH received reports of **185** potential labor trafficking cases, along with **59** cases of labor and sex trafficking within domestic work.
9. Risks of forced labor are also prevalent in agriculture. Reports to the NHTH in 2021 revealed that **117** cases (approximately **11%**) involved forced labor in agricultural settings, making agriculture the second most frequently reported sector for labor trafficking. Migrant workers from Mexico and Central America have reported experiencing severe exploitation in agricultural operations in South Georgia, including incidents of gun violence and the confiscation of passports and other identification documents.

V. Forced Marriage

10. While recent data on the prevalence of forced marriage among adults in the United States is scarce, child marriage—which is a form of forced marriage—is documented and remains legal in eight states. A 2021 study revealed that nearly 300,000 children were legally married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018. Approximately 96% of these marriages involved children aged 16 to 17, with some as young as 10 years old. Notably,

girls represented over 86% of child marriage victims, with many being forced to marry adult men. The issue of forced marriage extends to children born outside the United States as well; in 2022, the Tahirih Justice Center reported that between 2000 and 2017, more than 8,500 marriage-based visa petitions were approved that involved at least one individual under the age of 18.

VI. Imported Products at Risk of Modern Slavery

11. The issue of modern slavery in the United States extends beyond its borders, as the country is a significant player in the global economy and is thus exposed to risks stemming from imported products. Approximately two-thirds of all forced labor cases are connected to global supply chains, where workers are exploited across various sectors at every stage of production. Most forced labor is found in the lower tiers of supply chains, particularly during the extraction of raw materials and manufacturing processes. Given the influence of the G20 nations in the global economy, it is essential to scrutinize imports at risk of being produced under forced labor conditions. The U.S. imports US\$169.6 billion worth of products annually that may be associated with forced labor practices.

VII. The Impact of Policy Changes on Victim Identification and Support

12. Recent directives from the U.S. government have mandated that law enforcement agencies, the State Department, and certain non-profit organizations engaged in combating sex trafficking eliminate all references to victims' identities, including their race and immigration status, from public communications and websites. Experts express serious concerns that this policy will jeopardize the safety and well-being of vulnerable minors by obscuring the unique challenges they face.
13. Interviews with prosecutors, government officials, and executives from anti-trafficking non-profits, along with correspondence reviewed by The Guardian, reveal alarming compliance with these orders. Organizations fear losing federal funding if they do not adhere to the new regulations, leading to a significant chilling effect on their ability to assist victims effectively. This creates an environment where essential information about the demographics of trafficking victims is suppressed, potentially hindering targeted outreach and support services.
14. Critics argue that the policy promotes a climate of fear, forcing organizations to prioritize funding over the needs of victims. Many non-profits have been explicitly instructed to avoid terms such as "marginalized," "vulnerable," and "immigrants" in communications related to grant applications and reports. By sidelining these critical descriptors, the policy not only undermines the specific vulnerabilities experienced by trafficked individuals but also dilutes the organizations' ability to advocate for necessary changes and resources.
15. This shift in communication can have dire consequences for identifying at-risk populations and developing effective interventions. For example, without acknowledging the pronounced vulnerabilities faced by immigrant children and marginalized communities, tailored support programs may not adequately address the unique factors that contribute to their exploitation. Moreover, failing to acknowledge

the role of systemic inequalities in trafficking can limit the effectiveness of prevention efforts.

VIII. **Recommendations**

16. Addressing the issue of modern slavery in the United States requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach that involves government entities, non-governmental organizations, community stakeholders, and the private sector. Here are several recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of efforts to combat modern slavery:
17. **Strengthen Legislation:**
 - a) **Criminalize Forced Marriage:** Enact laws that explicitly criminalize forced marriage and establish a minimum marriage age of 18 without exceptions. This would provide greater protection to vulnerable individuals, particularly young girls.
 - b) **Amend the Thirteenth Amendment:** Support efforts to amend the Thirteenth Amendment to eliminate the exception allowing involuntary servitude as a punishment for crime. This reform is essential for aligning U.S. practices with international human rights standards and for preventing state-imposed forced labor within the prison system.
18. **Enhance Law Enforcement Training:** Provide specialized training for law enforcement agencies to recognize the signs of modern slavery and human trafficking. This training should include cultural competency components to better understand the backgrounds of migrant and minority populations that may be disproportionately affected.
19. **Increase Funding for Anti-Trafficking Initiatives:** Allocate additional resources to federal, state, and local anti-trafficking programs to enhance the capacity of organizations working on prevention, victim support, and law enforcement measures. Increased funding can facilitate outreach programs to educate at-risk communities about the dangers of trafficking and exploitation.
20. **Support Victim Services:** Develop comprehensive support systems for victims of modern slavery, including shelters, mental health services, legal aid, and job training programs. Ensuring that victims receive the necessary care and resources can help them rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society.
21. **Encourage Corporate Responsibility:** Promote corporate accountability by encouraging businesses to adopt ethical labor practices and ensure transparency in supply chains. Encourage companies to conduct regular audits to identify and rectify any instances of labor exploitation within their operations and supply chains.
22. **Monitor and Evaluate Progress:** Establish clear metrics and indicators for assessing the effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives. Regular evaluation can identify successful strategies, areas for improvement, and help ensure accountability in policy

implementation.

By adopting these recommendations, the United States can take significant strides toward combating modern slavery and protecting the rights of vulnerable individuals. It is imperative to create a comprehensive approach that addresses the systemic issues contributing to exploitation, ensuring that all individuals are afforded the dignity and freedom they deserve.

IX. Conclusion

23. The issue of modern slavery in the United States is a complex and multifaceted challenge that affects a significant number of individuals across various sectors. While the U.S. shows a relatively low prevalence rate of modern slavery compared to other countries, the absolute number of individuals living in these conditions is alarmingly high, representing a pressing humanitarian concern. The factors contributing to this phenomenon, such as systemic discrimination against migrants and minority groups, poverty, and the application of state-imposed forced labor within the prison system, exacerbate the vulnerability of certain populations and complicate effective governmental responses.
24. The gaps in legislation, particularly the absence of laws criminalizing forced marriage and the failure to establish a minimum marriage age of 18 without exceptions, underscore the need for urgent policy reform. As reports from the **National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH)** highlight, labor trafficking in sectors such as domestic work and agriculture continues to thrive, reinforcing the necessity for comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of exploitation.
25. Moreover, the presence of state-imposed forced labor, especially within the prison population, poses ethical questions and legal challenges that cannot be ignored. The Thirteenth Amendment's loophole allowing involuntary servitude as a punishment for crime creates an environment where exploitation can flourish, particularly affecting individuals of color who are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Efforts to amend this are vital for aligning U.S. practices with international human rights standards.
26. To effectively combat modern slavery, a collaborative approach involving government, civil society, and private sector stakeholders is essential. Advocacy for stronger legislation, adequate resources for law enforcement agencies, and more robust support systems for victims are keys to creating sustainable change. Additionally, initiatives aimed at increasing public awareness and education about the signs of modern slavery can empower communities to recognize and report suspicious activities.
27. In conclusion, the fight against modern slavery in the United States requires a renewed commitment to the values of justice and human rights. By acknowledging the systemic issues that contribute to exploitation and taking decisive action to address these challenges, the U.S. can pave the way for more effective prevention, protection, and prosecution measures. It is only through a comprehensive and inclusive approach that we can hope to eradicate modern slavery and ensure that all individuals can live free from the threat of exploitation. The time for action is now; the responsibility lies with all of us to advocate for a society that promotes dignity and respect for every person.

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