

HTMS Ambassador Programme

Purchasing Power

Human trafficking & modern slavery (HTMS) is the exploitation of people through the use of threats, fraud, coercion or deception. Labour exploitation is one of the most prevalent forms of exploitation in which individuals and companies profit financially from the exploitation of workers.

SUPPLY CHAINS

Companies have a responsibility to ensure their supply chains are slavery free, but even though it is illegal in many countries, it remains a serious issue affecting millions worldwide.

A supply chain is the network of organisations, individuals, resources and activities involved in the creation and sale of a product, from manufacture to consumer. Exploitative practices and slavery may exist at any stage of this process, whether it be in the harvesting of raw materials or the production process. This can occur in a number of industries, including fashion, technology and agriculture.

Exploitative practices and slavery in supply chains means workers are forced to work under extremely harsh conditions, are paid minimal wages or not at all, and are denied basic rights. Workers may live in poor conditions and suffer emotional or physical abuse by employers, unable to leave their job for a myriad of reasons.

PURCHASING POWER

Due to the demand for cheap labour, slavery in supply chains persists. As consumers, we have a responsibility to question these practices and by doing so, we can play an important part in combatting slavery in supply chains. [1]

With each purchase we make, we support the companies producing the goods we buy, encouraging them to continue with their exploitative practices for financial gain. By buying ethically and ensuring the products we purchase are not made by exploited workers, and questioning the practices and transparency of companies, we can reduce the demand for such products, and call upon all companies to ensure slavery free supply chains.

Although not all companies are transparent about their supply chains and practices, we can make ethical purchases by looking for certifications and labels which indicate ethical practices - such as the **Fair Trade** logo which signifies that the product meets standards regarding workers rights and environmental sustainability.

You can also check the **Modern Slavery Statement Register**, which was launched by the UK Government in 2021 which allows you to view and compare statements of businesses and their compliance with the UK Modern Slavery Act. Additionally, the **Transparency in Supply Chains Platform (TISC)**, which was launched to assist the UK to monitor compliance with the UK Modern Slavery Act, allows you to track supply chains both nationally and globally to view its compliance, supply chain and regulatory information.

REFERENCES:

[1] <https://theconversation.com/modern-slavery-how-consumers-can-make-a-difference-163603>

SLAVERY IN SUPPLY CHAINS

Fast Fashion

Fast fashion describes the high speed production of fashion at low cost. Some fashion brands are launching new collections every few weeks [2]. The demand for fast fashion has doubled the size of the fashion industry and whilst such expansion can be good for the economy, the increased production and consumption is linked to adverse effects [3]. The demand and quick turnaround required has companies offshoring manufacturing to places where labour is the cheapest and workers are most likely on low wages and denied basic rights[4].

A recent BBC exposé into **Shein** revealed the plight of Chinese factory workers in what is known as 'Shein village' (due to the large number of factories supplying Shein, the 'world's largest fast fashion retailer'). Workers were alleged to be working approximately 75 hours per week, between 10 to 12 hours per day, in violation of Chinese law and workers basic human rights. Shein is known as 'ultra-fast fashion' due to its output. Other such 'ultra-fast fashion' brands include **Boohoo**, a British brand which was named one of the least sustainable fashion brands in 2019, and was exposed in 2020 for worker exploitation, which exposed further exploitation in factories across Leicester, with workers being paid as little as £3.50 per hour[5].

There are many brands and businesses now considered as fast fashion, negatively impacting the environment and workers' rights. As consumers we can make ethical choices about our purchases and combat slavery in supply chains.

Cocoa farming & child labour

Due to extreme poverty, some families require their children to work and support the family leading to child labour in supply chains such as that of the cocoa industry - the farming and harvesting of cocoa beans are noted to be particularly vulnerable to forced labour, trafficking and child labour[6].

44% of the world's cocoa comes from Côte d'Ivoire, and whilst chocolate companies report profits in the billions, the average daily income of cocoa farmers in Côte d'Ivoire is only US\$1.23. Walk Free, an international human rights group working to eradicate modern slavery in all its forms, estimated that approximately 16,000 children across Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire were in forced labour, with others being trafficked from neighbouring countries for the purpose of labour exploitation in the cocoa sector[7].

As with fashion, an expanding chocolate industry means an increased risk of exploitation for workers, and an increase in child labour, particularly with existing structural inequalities in countries of cocoa origin.

As consumers, it is our responsibility to buy ethically and fight child exploitation and forced labour. BeSlaveryFree Australia, a coalition of civil society campaigning against HTMS and partner of Hope for Justice, has created a Chocolate Scorecard which provides information for consumers to make ethical choices: <https://www.chocolatescorecard.com/>.

These are just two examples of slavery in supply chains - it can exist in any industry and is exacerbated by societal inequity and consumer demand. Whilst businesses have a responsibility to ensure their supply chains are slavery free, we as consumers are also responsible for our purchases. As consumers we can use our purchasing power to hold businesses accountable and make ethical purchases.

REFERENCES:

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/may/08/fast-fashion-death-for-planet>

[3] <https://www.slavefreealliance.org/the-true-price-of-fashion-how-does-modern-slavery-exist-in-the-fashion-industry/>

[4] <https://www.unseenuk.org/modern-slavery-in-fashion/>

[5] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/boohoo-leicester-factories-modern-slavery-boohoo-leicester-factories-modern-slavery-investigation-coronavirus-coronavirus-fast-fashion-a9602086.html>

[6] <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/spotlights/chocolates-hidden-ingredient/#footnote:2>

[7] <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/spotlights/chocolates-hidden-ingredient/#footnote:2>