



**Forum:** SOCHUM (GA3)

**Issue:** Labour Rights in Developing Countries

**Student Officer:** Lishi Zhong

## Overview

Globalisation refers to the unprecedented growth of complex global supply chains, mass labour migration and large informal economies. As it is currently playing a major role in driving today's society, a growing number of developing countries undergo rapid industrialisation to ensure sustainable economic growth, thus eradicate poverty. Increasing attention from governments, corporations, and the popular media has been paid to working conditions and the rights of workers, particularly focusing on the developing countries where millions of workers are excluded from legal frameworks; therefore, they have no collective bargaining cover or union protection over inadequate working conditions. A new report released in 2018 by the International Labour Organisation stated that more than 2 billion people work informally globally with 93% of them in developing countries. All employees around the world should have decent working conditions. However, due to the complexity of employment relationships, a diverse variety of issues such as forced labour, pay equity, wrongful termination, workplace safety still persists today in developing regions.

Hazardous labour conditions continue to exist and substandard working conditions are often tied with poverty, inequality and discrimination. In many contexts, certain groups such as workers with disabilities, women workers and migrant workers face extra obstacles in accessing decent work and are especially vulnerable to abuses. In developing countries, women continued to be channeled into low-wage, low status jobs in the least protected segments of the economy. The gender wage gap is 77%, women do the bulk of unpaid care work, along with the high risk of facing verbal, physical or abuse and sexual harassment or rape at work. The rate of fatal accidents in industry is several times higher in developing countries compared to developed countries. Additionally, almost half of child workers are in Africa according to statistics released by ILO. There is still a significant number of workers outside the scope of labour law and in need of protection.



## Key Terms

### Minimum Wage

The federal minimum wage is the lowest remuneration that employers can legally pay their workers. It also refers to the price floor which workers may not sell their labor for wages below the federal minimum wage. Currently, approximately 90% of all countries have statutory minimum wages. However, the informal sector covers a large portion of developing countries compared to formal sector. This means that federal minimum wages may have limited effect on wages in the former.

### Overtime Pay

In certain cases, employers may require or permit workers to work overtime. Overtime pay refer to the additional financial compensation for any hours worked by non-exempt staff in the excess of 40hours per week.

### Globalization

Globalization can be defined as the growing integration and interdependence of the world's economies. It has caused national economies to integrate towards a single global economy, leading to the increased interconnectedness of national economies. With globalization, economic and political decisions taken in one region of the world will affect those in other parts of the world too.

### Global supply chains

A global supply chain refers to the dynamic network created among different worldwide companies producing, handling and distributing specific goods or services to customers. Efficient global supply chain management allows business to source materials and service customers in other countries.

### Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining is a process of negotiation between management (on behalf of the company) and trade unions (on behalf of employees). The parties will establish agreements with respect to working salaries, working conditions, benefits and other aspects of workers' compensation and labour rights.

### Collective bargaining agreement (CBA)



A collective bargaining agreement is the ultimate goal of the collective bargaining process. It is the contract that embodies the results of the negotiations between the employer and the union.

### **Labour's rights**

Labor rights, also known as worker's rights encompass a large array of human rights relating to labor relations between workers and employers. Such rights involve decent work and freedom of association to equal opportunity and protection against discrimination of any kind, obtained under the national and international labour and employment law.

### **Informal economy**

The informal economy, also known as the grey economy, is the part of an economy that is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. The concept applies to self-employment in small unregistered enterprises as well as wage employment in unprotected jobs. The informal sector makes up a significant portion of the economies in developing countries, thus is often stigmatized as troublesome and unmanageable.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is the scarcity or state in which a community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. Absolute poverty is the complete lack of the means necessary to satisfy basic personal needs, such as food, clothing and shelter. Poverty is closely associated with poor health, low levels of education, unemployment or government corruption.

### **Labour unions**

Labour unions are organisations that represent workers in various industries. Their activities centre upon collective bargaining over wages, benefits and working conditions for their members, thus supporting one another in disputes with management over violations of contract provisions.

### **Labour relations**

Labour relations is the relationship between the management of an organisation and its workforce. It refers to "to or with whom one work and under what rules". These rules determine the type of work, working conditions as well as the degree of freedom and autonomy with the work.



## Important Events/Timelines

Date	Event
1919	Founding of the International Labor Organization (ILO), devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights.
1930	Establishment of the Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (Forced Labour Convention) is one of the eight fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation, with the purpose of suppressing the use of forced labour in all forms.
1946	Founding of The United Nations General Assembly Third Committee, SOCHUM, with its primary focus on the examination of human rights and humanitarian issues.
Dec 1946	The ILO became the first United Nations specialised agency.
1949	Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention was established for workers to enjoy adequate protection against acts of anti-union discrimination
1958	Establishment of the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, aims to enable legislation which prohibits all discrimination and exclusion of any kind, thus promoting equal opportunities for every individual.
1973	Minimum Wage Convention (ILO) requires rectifying states to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour, as well as to raise the minimum age for admission to employment.
2011	Domestic Workers Convention (ILO) involves setting labour standard for domestic workers. It entered into force on 5 <sup>th</sup> September 2013.
14 September 2016	United Nations A/71/385 General Assembly released a report, primarily focusing on the promotion and protection of human rights, including alternative approaches for improving labour rights and fundamental freedoms in workplaces.



## Major Nations/Organizations involved

### **The United Nations General Assembly Third Committee (SOCHUM)**

The United Nations General Assembly Third Committee, also known as the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee, is one of the six main committees at the General Assembly of the United Nations. Founded in 1946, SOCHUM mainly deals with the examination of human rights, humanitarian affairs, and social matters that affect the rights of many. It focuses on the promotion of fundamental freedom through the elimination of racial discrimination and the right to self-determination.

### **The International Labour Organization's (ILO)**

The International Labour Organization's (ILO), founded in 1919 is a specialised United Nations agency that sets international labour standards, thus internationally recognises human and labour rights. The premier objective of the organisation is to promote social protection and work opportunities throughout the world. The preamble declares that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.”

### **Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)**

Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) is a London based charity working to end human trafficking for labour exploitation. Through conducting research, advocacy and awareness raising, FLEX prevent and address the exploitation of people working in the mainstream economy, including the construction, agriculture, manufacturing sectors. The organisation strives to prevent labour abuses, thus protect the rights of trafficked people.

### **International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF)**

International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF), founded in 1986, is a nonprofit advocacy organisation that advances dignity and justice for workers in the global economy. ILRF strives to develop practical and effective tools, and works with trade unions, faith-based organisations and community groups to support workers, thus secure a safe and dignified life for themselves and their families.

### **China Labour Bulletin (CLB)**

China Labour Bulletin is a non-governmental organisation that was founded in Hong Kong in 1994. Its main objective is to promote and defend workers' rights in the People's Republic of China. CLB strives to demand change by establishing labour rights litigation programmes, as



well as reinforcing international standards and conventions of labour rights, thus advocating the right to collective bargaining.

## Important Documents/Passed Solutions

1. One of the latest reports released by the United Nations A/71/385 General Assembly. It examines the rights of freedom of association in the workplace, primarily focusing on the most marginalized portions of the world's labour force, including global supply chain workers, informal workers, migrant workers and many more.  
Source: [http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A.71.385\\_E.pdf](http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A.71.385_E.pdf)
2. Working conditions, work outcomes, and policy in Asian developing countries. Released by the Asian Development Bank in September 2016. It provides greater insights to the persistence of poor labour practices as well as possible policies to address such issues.  
Source: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/198551/ewp-497.pdf>
3. Protecting workers in the third world. Released by the Overseas Development Institute. It reviews the problem of the lack of labour rights in developing countries, thus explores a selection of the previous ILO international labour conventions. Source:  
<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6702.pdf>

## Possible Solutions

Though attempts have been made to protect worker's rights and secure decent working conditions in the developing world. However, more actions are essential to enforce labour rights in order to achieve more fulfilling results.

As workers have the "rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association" regardless of their status within a country, governments may enact further progressive laws to reinforce such rights, thus improve conditions in the developing world. The construction of obligations under international human rights law could ensure that everyone within their jurisdiction is able to maintain and exercise their rights. This will enhance the scope and application of labour regulation, focusing particularly on the developing world. Authorising appropriate measures to



ensure that workers in vulnerable situations have the opportunity to exercise their rights effectively is vital. This is because the coercive conditions of work visas potentially lead to the inordinate control on the lives of workers. On top of that, the freedom of movement and access to justice should be encouraged by the government with any workers' rights violations being investigated and action taken upon on employers for disobeying labours' rights, fostering an effective environment for workers to establish independence.

Further reinforcing the importance of labour rights in developing countries through raising awareness among the society is another possible solution. This means to make use of the social media platform to express the severe consequences of the existence of issues. Further demanding the importance of having a decent workplace and effective labour rights could secure safe and dignified lives for several workers. This would not only spread awareness among the society, but encourages the formation of pressure groups comprised of determined individuals to make better approaches to the issue of labour rights in developing countries.

## Bibliography

Dupont, Mari-Lou. "Labour: UN Global Compact." *Labour | UN Global Compact*, 2019, [www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social/labour](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social/labour).

Kabeer, Naila, et al. "Informal Economy." *WIEGO*, 2019, [www.wiego.org/informal-economy](http://www.wiego.org/informal-economy).

"Labour Rights Are Human Rights: UN Report." *IndustriALL*, 21 Oct. 2016, [www.industriall-union.org/labour-rights-are-human-rights-un-report](http://www.industriall-union.org/labour-rights-are-human-rights-un-report).

"More than 60 per Cent of the World's Employed Population Are in the Informal Economy." *Informal Economy: More than 60 per Cent of the World's Employed Population Are in the Informal Economy*, 30 Apr. 2018, [www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_627189/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_627189/lang--en/index.htm).

"Poor Working Conditions Are Main Global Employment Challenge." *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2019: Poor Working Conditions Are Main Global Employment Challenge*, 13 Feb. 2019, [www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_670171/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_670171/lang--en/index.htm).

Project, Borgen. "The Labor Market in Developing Countries – A Case Study." *The Borgen Project*, Borgen Project <https://Borgenproject.org/Wp->



Content/Uploads/The\_Borgen\_Project\_Logo\_small.Jpg, 14 Aug. 2015,  
[borgenproject.org/labor-developing-countries/](http://borgenproject.org/labor-developing-countries/).





“Quick Facts About Child Labor.” *And Statistics about Child Labor Around The World - Compassion International*, 2016, [www.compassion.com/poverty/child-labor-quick-facts.htm](http://www.compassion.com/poverty/child-labor-quick-facts.htm).

Ronconi, Lucas. “Enforcement of Labor Regulations in Developing Countries.” *IZA World of Labor*, 19 Mar. 2019, [wol.iza.org/articles/enforcement-of-labor-regulations-in-developing-countries/long](http://wol.iza.org/articles/enforcement-of-labor-regulations-in-developing-countries/long).

“Workers' Rights.” *National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights*, 2019, [globalnaps.org/issue/workers-rights/](http://globalnaps.org/issue/workers-rights/).