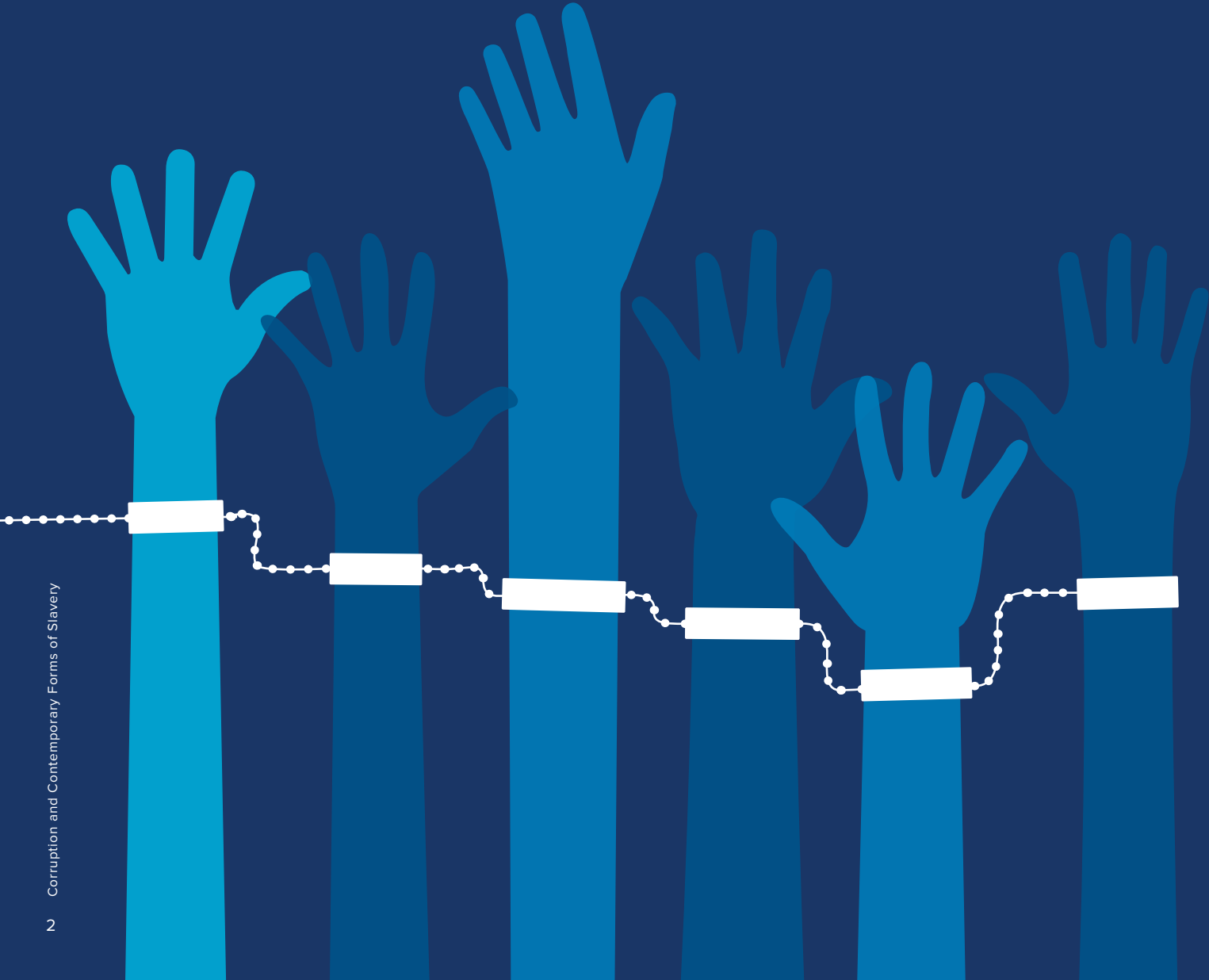


# Corruption and Contemporary Forms of Slavery

EXAMINING RELATIONSHIPS AND  
ADDRESSING POLICY GAPS





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## ACRONYMS

FCPA	Foreign Corrupt Practices Act
IAWJ	International Association of Women Judges
IBA	International Bar Association
ICAT	Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OCCRP	Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACO	Programme Against Corruption and Organised Crime in South Eastern Europe
PRA	Private Recruitment Agencies
TI	Transparency International
UN-ACT	United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons
UNCAC	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-GIFT	United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Trafficking
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UN Women	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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## FOREWORD

Everyone has the right to a life free from slavery, but today, over 40 million people are estimated to be trapped in contemporary forms of slavery such as forced labour, debt bondage, serfdom, children working in slavery or slavery-like conditions, domestic servitude, sexual slavery, and servile forms of marriage. According to global estimates, one in four victims of contemporary forms of slavery are children and 71 per cent of victims are women and girls.<sup>1</sup>

The risks of exploitation are magnified as the world experiences the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society, the economy and governance institutions. As warned by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, millions of people could be pushed into contemporary forms of slavery and other forms of exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Those who are already marginalized, discriminated against, or impoverished are at the greatest risk.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions a world free of forced labour, contemporary forms of slavery, human trafficking, and child labour in all its forms. In particular, Target 7 of SDG 8 urges to “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”

While a complex range of factors result in a demand for modern slaves, corruption can play a determining and enabling role. Indeed, many contemporary forms of slavery rely on corruption to operate, as corruption often facilitates exploitation and abuse. Most importantly,



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**“Corruption and contemporary forms of slavery both thrive in social, political and economic environments that allow perpetrators to act with impunity.”**

corruption and contemporary forms of slavery both thrive in social, political and economic environments that allow perpetrators to act with impunity.

**Corruption and Contemporary Forms of Slavery: Examining Relationships and Addressing Policy Gaps** offers an in-depth examination of the linkages between corruption and contemporary forms of slavery and offers policy recommendations for governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and the international community to inform policy and programmatic work on anti-corruption and human rights efforts.

Given the multi-dimensional nature of the problem, a comprehensive approach is needed to tackle the linkages between corruption and slavery. This includes the effective enforcement of international conventions and national laws, but also preventive measures such as strengthening social protection, promoting inclusion, and ensuring economic and social justice for those vulnerable to slavery. A multi-stakeholder approach is also vital to eliminate risks of contemporary forms of slavery across sectors and global supply chains, including slavery-related money laundering and financing risks.

We hope that this publication will contribute to the global discourse on both corruption and contemporary forms of slavery.



**Martin Frick**

Director  
Office for Foreign Affairs  
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<sup>1</sup> Estimates from International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation, 2017, “Global estimates of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage”.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “COVID-19 could push millions into exploitation or slavery, UN expert warns”. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26246&LangID=E>

# Executive Summary

**“Corruption is essential to creating the conditions for a low-cost, low-risk, high-profit illicit trade in vulnerable individuals.”**

The world officially declared an end to slavery in 1981, when Mauritania was the last country to ban the legal recognition of the ownership of individuals. But today, 40 years later, “contemporary forms of slavery” still exist in virtually all countries, and are the second most profitable illicit trade after the drug trade (Niethammer, 2020; US Department of Justice, 2020). Profits from contemporary forms of slavery reach US\$150 billion per year, two thirds of which come from forced sexual exploitation, primarily of women and girls (ILO, 2014). Estimates suggest that 40 million people—71% of whom are women and girls—are trapped in contemporary forms of slavery, with 24.9 million in forced labour and 15.4 million in forced marriages (ILO and Walk Free Foundation, 2017a).

Research into the root causes of contemporary forms of slavery first focused on poverty, unemployment, inequality and weak rule of law, which indeed all increase the vulnerability of children and adults to human trafficking, forced marriage and servitude. But corruption is also an underlying cause of and facilitating tool for practices arising from contemporary forms of slavery as seen in more recent research (IBA, 2016; Transpar-

of 2015, have specific definitions for offences that would be considered “modern slavery”.

In this study, the term “contemporary forms of slavery” will be used for a broad range of practices consistent with, but not limited to, those explicitly listed in the definition of “trafficking in persons” provided by Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime from 15 November 2000 (one of the three Palermo Protocols<sup>3</sup>):

**“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having**

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