

Forum:	General Assembly 2 (Economic and Financial)
Issue:	The question of working conditions and safety standards in factories
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Introduction

Factory working conditions and safety standards have remained a pressing issue for over a century. Although the rise of industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries has brought new opportunities for economic growth, workers are often exposed to unsafe working conditions. While ways such as legislation, labour unions, and international conventions have been used as attempts to alleviate these inhumane consequences, recent decades have shown that poor working conditions remain widespread, especially in developing nations that form the foundation of global supply chains.

It is proven that workers in factories experience long working hours, wage theft, child labour, and limited access to healthcare. The current rise of mass-consumerism with shops like Shein and H&M worsens conditions by creating intense pressure on suppliers for lower costs and long hours. Such harsh conditions affect millions of workers globally, particularly immigrant women and labourers who comprise a significant portion of the factory workforce.

Ultimately, the question of working conditions and safety standards in factories represents an immense challenge that requires international attention. It is an issue where the values of humanity and economic interests intersect. Hence, all perspectives of governments, corporations, and workers must be considered to address this pressing issue effectively.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Labour

Defined as the employment of children in an industry or business that deprives children of their childhood, dignity and harms their physical and mental development. The form of work usually interferes with their ability to attend regular school and is morally harmful.

Forced Labour

The international legal definition of forced labour is: all work or service which is extracted from any person under the threat of penalty and for which the person has not offered himself and herself voluntarily (*ILO Forced Labour Convention 1930*).

Supply Chain Transparency

It is the practice of a company to openly share detailed and accurate information about its products' origins, materials, and manufacturing processes.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

Policies and practices that are designed to prevent injuries, accidents, and diseases in the workplace by ensuring safe working conditions.

Living wage

A wage level that allows workers to meet basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and education. Essentially, the income earned is enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

Multinational Corporation (MNC)

It refers to a company operating in multiple countries that often manages supply chains across borders and influences labour conditions through outsourcing (obtaining goods from foreign suppliers).

Background Information

Historical context

The Industrial Revolution (18th-19th centuries) was the start of factories in Europe and the US that tolerated long hours, child labour and unsafe conditions. The early labour movement and the creation of trade unions were attempts to demand safety, fair wages and shorter working hours. The first international effort was the ILO (International Labour Organisation) established in 1919, which later became part of the United Nations.

The Current Global Situation

Over 3 million people worldwide who work in the factory workforce die annually from work-related accidents and diseases (estimated by the ILO). Several developing countries often rely on cheap labour to attract foreign investment. Although more developed countries have stronger regulations, they still create indirect responsibility due to outsourcing.

Major challenges

Ongoing challenges include weak enforcement, global competition and migrant labour vulnerabilities. For example, many countries already have legislation in place that sets the safety standards for factories, but these laws are frequently unenforceable. Developing countries may lack the resources to regulate the thousands of factories operating within their borders properly. Corruption also plays a huge role in this because some inspectors are bribed to overlook violations. Additionally, states competing for garment contracts may avoid enforcing worker protections. This is because they fear that companies will relocate to cheaper markets, undermining safety measures to reduce costs. Furthermore, millions of migrant workers, especially in Southeast Asia, are employed in factories under temporary contracts. These workers often face risks like language barriers, a lack of legal protections, etc. Migrant labourers are more vulnerable to exploitation since their legal status could be used against them. Additionally, the COVID-19 Pandemic caused widespread factory closures globally, so millions of garment and factory workers lost jobs or were forced to work in unsafe conditions.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the world's largest exporter of garments, employing over 4 million workers in the industry. The Rana Plaza disaster was an event that happened in 2013, which killed more than 1,100 workers, highlighting the country's weak enforcement of safety regulations. Since then, Bangladesh has been attempting to resolve the situation through global labour reform efforts. However, it is shown that enforcement remains inconsistent, and many of the country's factories still lack proper safety measures.

China

China is the world's largest manufacturing hub by far and has been constantly criticised for harsh working conditions and weak protections for workers in the electronics and textile industries. While China has attempted to resolve these issues by introducing new labour laws, local enforcement is still limited. This is mainly because protests are frequently suppressed, making it difficult to improve working conditions.

India

India is known for their garment, textile, and construction industries, employing millions of workers. However, child labour is a huge concern in rural factories. Despite the fact that labour protections exist in law, they are often undermined due to corruption and weak inspections. India is significant because the country plays a substantial role in global supply chains for clothing and textiles, as well as due to its large workforce size.

United States

The United States implemented an import ban on goods from China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) through the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act (UFLPA) in June 2022. It is known as home to many multinational corporations that obtain goods and services from foreign suppliers. The United States has also faced criticism for poor conditions in its meat-packing industries. However, many US companies are often pressed by activities and consumers to enforce stronger protection for workers in their supply chains.

Gulf States (e.g Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia)

95% of the workers in the domestic and construction industry are migrant workers. These workers are often employed under the Kafala system, meaning workers cannot change employers or leave the country without their sponsor's permission. However, Qatar is slowly abolishing this system through reforms like limiting No-Objection Certificates (NOCs). Workers in Gulf States face restrictions on mobility, long working hours, and limited protections, more specifically in construction and light manufacturing. These working conditions have drawn the public's attention internationally, especially during large infrastructure projects (FIFA World Cup in Qatar).

Viable Solutions

International Labour Standards Enforcement Fund

Establish a UN-managed fund to support governments in enforcing labour laws and the conduct of workplace inspections. The fund will finance inspector training sessions, resources, and monitoring programs in developing countries.

Migrant Worker Protection and Support Programs

Create international agreements that ensure the rights of migrant workers are protected and that employers provide safe housing, living wages, and health coverage. Calls for the government to implement legal safeguards, helplines and monitoring of migrant labourers in factories.

Awareness Campaigns

Launch campaigns to spread awareness about ethical purchasing and compliance with safety standards. Non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, and governments will educate consumers on unsafe factories and promote the brands that actually adhere to global standards. This can put pressure on corporations to comply with these standards.

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Appendix

1. [International Labour Organisation](#)
2. [United Nations Development Programme](#)
3. [Global Reports/Statistics](#)
4. [Clean Clothes Campaign \(CCC\)](#)