

Forced Labor Indicators Project

Sector-Specific Resource on Cocoa



Introduction

Cocoa is the key ingredient of chocolate. It is also an important element of many cosmetics and soaps, pharmaceutical products, and baked goods which feature cocoa butter. However, cocoa production and cocoa supply chains have been linked to a range of exploitative working conditions, including excessive working hours, occupational safety and health hazards, and in some instances, forced labor and human trafficking.

Over 70 percent of cocoa is grown in West Africa, after which it is processed and consumed primarily in the United States and Europe.ⁱ Cocoa farmers often face low earnings and poverty;ⁱⁱ in addition to other negative outcomes, Verité has found that this can lead to a reliance on vulnerable workers such as children and migrants who may not demand higher earnings. Indeed, in some countries, cocoa farming relies heavily on both domestic and transnational migrant workers, who may be vulnerable to different types of exploitation. Cocoa production may involve numerous types of workers including farmers, caretakers, day laborers, and contract workers in a variety of sharecropping, lease holding, or caretaking systems—all of which have their own compensation arrangements and terms of agreement.

Cocoa trees produce cocoa pods, reaching peak production levels when they are around five years old. Farmers harvest cocoa pods, often using machetes. While cocoa pods may ripen throughout the growing season, there are often two peak production harvests each year. After the pods are split open, the beans are removed, fermented, dried, and stored to be picked up by collectors or transporters. After processing, the beans are exported to the global market, where they are purchased by manufacturers to be processed into various cocoa products for commercial consumption.ⁱⁱⁱ

What does forced labor (or forced labor vulnerability) look like in cocoa production?

The International Labor Organization defines forced labor as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which said person has not offered himself voluntarily”.^{iv} This means that a person is in a forced labor situation if they have entered into a job against their will, or without informed consent, and cannot leave that job without penalty or a threat of penalty of any kind.



The ILO and the International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) have developed specific indicators of forced labor related to a worker’s experience that help to identify the presence of involuntary work and/or a threat or menace of penalty.^v To learn more about the indicators, access [FLIP’s free online learning resource on The ILO Forced Labor Indicators](#).

Common labor abuses documented in cocoa production include hazardous child labor, induced indebtedness, and non-payment and underpayment of wages.^{vi} The remote location of some cocoa farms and illicit nature of some cocoa farming can also contribute to forced labor risk.^{vii} In some cases, these common labor abuses and vulnerabilities constitute indicators of forced labor.

The tables below present examples of indicators of involuntariness and threats or menace of penalty that have been documented in cocoa production:

Indicator of Involuntary Work	Documented Example in Cocoa Production
Situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person’s consent	In some country contexts, there are reports that suggest deceptive recruitment of child or young adult migrant workers. Children may be transported to other countries for forced labor in cocoa production. ^{viii}
Degrading living conditions imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third-party	Poor living and working conditions have been reported on cocoa farms in some countries. Young migrant workers in isolated cocoa-growing regions are reportedly required to fend for themselves in terms of medical care and food. ^{ix}
Work for a longer period of time than agreed	Research conducted by Verité showed that migrant workers with recruitment-related debt in the cocoa industry may have deductions taken from their already low wages to cover items like food and medical care. In order to pay off this debt, some workers may have to continue working beyond the time frame originally agreed upon in order to access their earnings. ^x
Work with very low or no wages	A report from The Global Business of Forced Labor Project found that cocoa workers in some countries performed work activities for which they were not paid and that 60 percent of cocoa workers interviewed had gone into debt during their time working in cocoa production. ^{xi}

Indicator of a Threat or Menace of Penalty	Documented Example in Cocoa Production
Debt bondage or manipulation of debt	According to an investigation by Verité, migrant cocoa workers may incur debt related to their recruitment and transportation. Compounding recruitment-related debt, migrant workers may have deductions taken from their already low wages to cover items like food and medical care. This can further prevent them from leaving their jobs, or require them to continue working beyond the time

	frame originally agreed upon in order to access their earnings. ^{xii}
Threats or violence against workers, workers' families and relatives, or close associates	Physical violence, sexual violence, and threats of violence and dismissal have been reported on cocoa farms in some countries. ^{xiii}

Monitoring for forced labor risk in cocoa production:

Numerous contextual factors can contribute to forced labor vulnerability. Some factors reflect characteristics of the type of work involved, some reflect circumstances in a particular geographic region, and some reflect the risk tied to the demographics of the workers involved.

- Certain **types of work**, like seasonal, informal, or dangerous work, can increase vulnerability; cocoa work can be hazardous and take place beyond the reach of law enforcement.
- **Key geographic risk factors** that can contribute to vulnerability among cocoa workers include the geographical isolation of cocoa-producing areas and severe deforestation.
- Finally, **demographic characteristics** can create risk factors that increase vulnerability. Some populations commonly employed in cocoa production—for example, migrant workers, workers living in poverty, young workers, and workers recruited by labor brokers—may be more vulnerable to forced labor risk.

These factors can intersect to heighten vulnerability. For example, a young and impoverished migrant may be more vulnerable than an older migrant from a wealthy and well-established family.

Forced labor vulnerability is context-specific. It is important to tailor the identification process to different sectors, types of work, locations, and population by knowing what kinds of questions to ask and what indicators and red flags to look for. To learn more about understanding risk, key contextual factors, and key questions to ask that can help identify the presence of indicators in different contexts, access [Module III: Understanding Risk](#) from FLIP's online learning course on The ILO Forced Labor Indicators.

ⁱ "About Cocoa." *World Cocoa Foundation*, <http://www.worldcocoafoundation.org/learn-about-cocoa/tree-to-table/how-chocolate-is-made.asp>. ; "Our Approach." *World Cocoa Foundation*, <http://worldcocoafoundation.org/our-work/our-approach/>.

ⁱⁱ Fountain, Antonie and Friedel Huetz-Adams. *Cocoa Barometer 2020*. The Cocoa Barometer Consortium, 2020, <https://www.voicenetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2020-Cocoa-Barometer-EN.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Trafficking Risk in Sub-Saharan African Supply Chains – Cocoa*. Verité, n.d. <https://verite.org/africa/explore-by-commodity/cocoa>.

^{iv} ILO Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C029.

^v "Hard to See, Harder to Count: Survey Guidelines to Estimate Forced Labor of Adults and Children." *International Labor Office (ILO)*, 2012. p. 53. www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_182096.pdf. ; International Labor Office, Department of Statistics. "Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labor." Geneva, October 2018. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648619.pdf.

^{vi} *Assessment of Forced Labor Risk in the Cocoa Sector of Cote d'Ivoire*. Verité, Feb. 2019, www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Verite-Report-Forced-Labor-in-Cocoa-in-CDI.pdf.

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- ^{vii} *Assessment of Forced Labor Risk in the Cocoa Sector of Cote d'Ivoire*. Verité, Feb. 2019, www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Verite-Report-Forced-Labor-in-Cocoa-in-CDI.pdf.
- ^{viii} *Trafficking in Persons Report*. U.S. Department of State, 2020, www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf.
- ^{ix} Robson, Paul. *Ending Child Trafficking in West Africa Lessons from the Ivorian cocoa sector*. Anti-Slavery International, 2011, http://www.antislavery.org/includes/documents/cm_docs/2011/c/cocoa_report_for_website.pdf.
- ^x *Assessment of Forced Labor Risk in the Cocoa Sector of Cote d'Ivoire*. Verité, Feb. 2019, www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Verite-Report-Forced-Labor-in-Cocoa-in-CDI.pdf.
- ^{xi} Genevieve LeBaron. *The Global Business of Forced Labor: Report of Findings*. SPERI & University of Sheffield, 2018, globalbusinessofforcedlabor.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Report-of-Findings-Global-Business-of-Forced-Labor.pdf.
- ^{xii} *Assessment of Forced Labor Risk in the Cocoa Sector of Cote d'Ivoire*. Verité, Feb. 2019, www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Verite-Report-Forced-Labor-in-Cocoa-in-CDI.pdf.
- ^{xiii} Genevieve LeBaron. *The Global Business of Forced Labor: Report of Findings*. SPERI & University of Sheffield, 2018, globalbusinessofforcedlabor.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Report-of-Findings-Global-Business-of-Forced-Labor.pdf.