



Child slaves in Bangladesh often work in hazardous conditions in factories.



MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

Tens of millions of people around the world, including children, are forced to work as slaves. What can be done to help them?

BY REBECCA ZISSOU

IN MANY WAYS, Mabel is a typical teen. She goes to school, hangs out with her friends, and daydreams about her future. But for years, Mabel's life was anything but ordinary.

When Mabel was just a young girl, her mother died. Mabel was sent to live with her grandparents in a poor village in the West African nation of Ghana. But they could not afford to take care of her. They sent her to work in the fishing industry on Lake Volta. That is one of the world's largest man-made lakes.

There, Mabel was held captive as a slave. She was forced to work up to 17 hours straight. She got little food and no pay. During the day, she would fold fishing nets on the lake. Strong winds

constantly threatened to flip over the wooden boats and drown everyone on board. At night, she had to make dinner for the other workers.

"I hardly slept at all," Mabel told reporters years later. "Every evening, I hoped that there would be a storm so I wouldn't have to go out on the lake."

Since then, Mabel's life has dramatically improved. When she was 15, aid workers raided the lake. They took her to safety. She was able to go to school for the first time. Mabel now dreams of becoming a nurse.

It may sound hard to believe, but Mabel's story is similar to those of millions of people worldwide. According to the Global Slavery Index, more than 40 million people are trapped in modern-day slavery.



Mabel was rescued from slavery when she was 15.



Thousands of kids in Uzbekistan are forced to pick cotton.



Many child slaves work in the fishing industry on Lake Volta in Ghana.

This includes 5.5 million children. Like Mabel, many of them are from poor communities in Africa or East Asia. The poverty, corruption, crime, and discrimination there make them vulnerable to **human traffickers**.

“People tend to think of slavery as a historical problem,” says Katharine Bryant. She works for an antislavery organization called the Walk Free Foundation. “But millions of people are still being exploited.”

Now new initiatives, such as one driven by kids, are calling attention to the crisis. The efforts include raising awareness about the issue and pressuring lawmakers around the world to enforce antislavery laws. They also include encouraging companies to ensure that forced laborers are not working in their **supply chains**.

“Modern slavery is a hidden crime,” says Bryant. “So it’s very important that we talk about it.”

History of Slavery

Slavery is as old as civilization itself. It existed in the earliest societies in Mesopotamia in 6800 B.C. Slaves helped build the world’s first cities. In the Roman

Empire, prisoners of war and people who could not pay their debts were sold into slavery. Some of them were forced to fight to the death as gladiators in the Colosseum. That started in the year 80.

Beginning in 1525, more than 12 million Africans and their descendants were forced into slavery in the Americas. Many had been kidnapped and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean. Then they were sold at public auctions to the highest bidder. Generations of slaves often worked on cotton plantations in the South, where many suffered regular beatings.

In December 1865, the 13th Amendment was passed. It made slavery illegal in the United States. At the time, about 4 million people were slaves. That was 13 percent of the country’s population.

A Global Problem

Today, slavery is illegal in almost every country. Yet it continues to exist all over the world, including in the U.S. According to some estimates, 58,000 people are enslaved throughout the nation. Many of them are domestic workers, including housekeepers.

The exact number of →

Made by Slaves

Many of the items you use every day are produced by slaves.

CLOTHES

Every year, the government of Uzbekistan forces kids as young as 10 to pick cotton, which is used to make clothes.

ELECTRONICS

Many of the materials in phones and other electronics are mined by slaves in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

About half of all packaged goods in U.S. supermarkets—including shampoo, soap, and bread—contain palm oil, which is processed by slaves in Malaysia, Indonesia, and other countries.

INTERNATIONAL

slaves in each country is unclear because human traffickers operate in the shadows. But the majority of the world's slaves, nearly 60 percent, are thought to be in just five countries: India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan. (See map, far right.)

In those nations, hundreds of millions of people live in poor communities. They lack economic opportunities and access to proper schooling. That makes them easy prey for human traffickers. The traffickers draw them into slavery with false promises of a good job and a better life.

Sometimes, parents are tricked into selling their own kids. Traffickers often promise that the children will get an education and earn money to send back home. But once the kids have left their villages, they are put to work in factories, mines, homes, fields, restaurants, and hotels. They are not allowed to go to school, see their families, or play outside.

Like child laborers, child slaves work in dangerous conditions for hours on end. But one difference, says Bryant, is that slaves are "owned" by their captors. They cannot return home.

For example, in Southeast Asia kids as young as 7 are forced to weave rugs in dark rooms with no fresh air. In West Africa, they get up at 6 in the morning to harvest cocoa beans in the extreme heat. In Latin America, they work on farms with toxic chemicals. They pick crops until their fingers bleed.

"We were confined in one room and made to work for a period of 12 hours," says Ravi. He was a child slave at a carpet factory in India. "I would think of running away. But the thought of running away would always be followed with the fear of getting caught."



Many packaged goods contain palm oil processed by slaves in Indonesia.

Wiping Out Child Slavery

Antislavery advocates say that ending forced labor will require a global effort. That is because modern-day slavery is driven in part by a worldwide demand for cheap labor. Cheap labor lets companies produce inexpensive goods such as clothes, sneakers, and electronics. Those products are then sold throughout the world, including in the U.S. (See sidebar, p. 15.)

But experts say that some progress has been made.

In recent years, governments, humanitarian groups, and other organizations have increased funding to help end slavery worldwide. Many countries have also strengthened antislavery laws and increased penalties for human traffickers.

In addition, several companies have promised to end the use of slave labor in the making of their products. Mars, Ferrero, and other chocolate manufacturers recently promised to do away with slavery on farms that supply their cocoa by 2020. And in recent years, more than 250 retailers have agreed not to buy cotton harvested by child slaves in Uzbekistan. Those retailers include Gap, H&M, and American Eagle.

You Can Help!

DEMAND CHANGE

Conduct research online to find out whether the companies you support use slave labor at any point in their supply chains. If they do, contact them via social media and urge them to do their part to help end the crisis.

RAISE AWARENESS

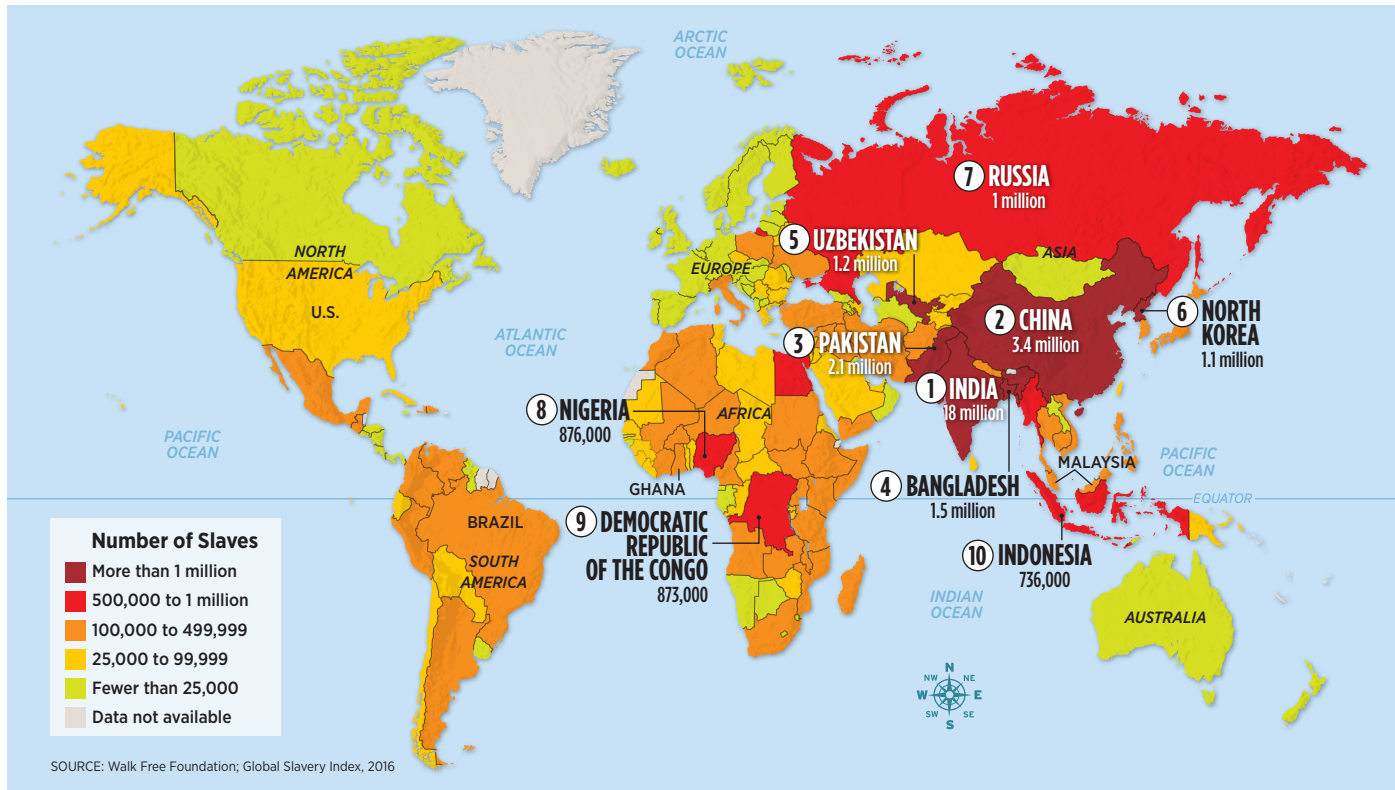
Let people know that millions of kids worldwide are trapped in modern-day slavery. Spread the word online with the hashtag #100million.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Donate to an aid organization that's working to combat child slavery, such as Freedom United, Amnesty International, or Free the Slaves.

Slavery Around the World

The 10 countries with the most slaves are numbered.



Map Skills

- How many people are enslaved in Indonesia?
- That country has coastline along which oceans?
- How many more people are enslaved in China than in Russia?
- Which African country has the most slaves?
- Which landlocked country has the most slaves?
- Most of the world's slaves are on which continent?
- Which labeled country borders China to the east and Russia to the south?
- How many people are enslaved there?
- The equator runs through which countries with more than 500,000 slaves?
- Which is greater: the number of slaves in India or the number of slaves in all the other top 10 countries combined?

Kids Working for Change

Millions of kids around the world have begun to do their part as well. The 100 Million campaign was recently launched in Washington, D.C. It is a global youth-driven effort to end abuses against children. It aims to mobilize 100 million young people worldwide to fight on behalf of the millions of exploited kids around the globe, including those trapped in slavery. The five-year push has kicked off in India, Bangladesh, and Brazil. It will soon begin in dozens of other countries too. (See sidebar, left, for how you can join the campaign.)

Kailash Satyarthi is a children's rights activist. His

organization is behind the 100 Million effort. He says it is important that young people educate themselves about the problems facing kids around the world. Then they should spread the word.

"Building global awareness around how children are exploited is the single most effective way to prevent them from being exploited in the first place," he says.

Bryant, too, says education is key. "As consumers, we have a responsibility to think about the products we're buying and how they were made." ♦

CORE QUESTION What are some of the keys to ending modern-day slavery? Explain.