



Plan International UK

**ACHIEVING  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOAL 8.7 IN THE  
COMMONWEALTH:**

**A CASE FOR ACTION**

## Introduction

The momentum behind Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7 is growing. This target commits States to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. While this is a global target, more than half of all enslaved individuals are estimated to live in the Commonwealth. Taking bold action to eradicate these human rights violations is not only essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but also for promoting a secure, prosperous and fair Commonwealth.

### SDG 8.7

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.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), taking place in London and Windsor in April 2018, is an opportunity to further catalyse international action on SDG 8.7. This briefing paper makes the case for concerted action by the Commonwealth and its Member States on this issue.

### Defining modern slavery

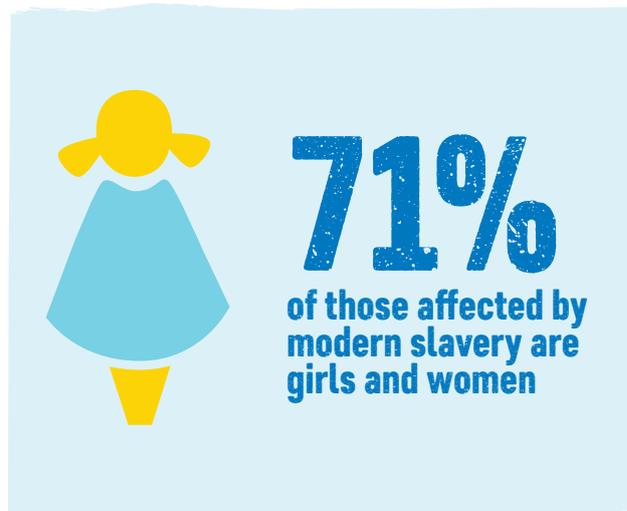
With the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and in particular SDG 8.7, states have committed to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking.

There is no internationally agreed definition of modern slavery. Modern slavery is an umbrella term, which encompasses many forms of severe exploitation, including, human trafficking, forced labour, the worst forms of child labour, slavery and slavery-like practices, including forced marriage and debt bondage. Common to each of these forms is exploitation that an individual is unable to refuse or leave. For the purposes of this paper, with its focus on women and girls, we are using the following definition:

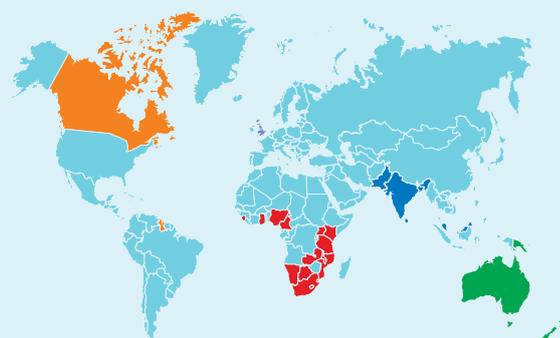
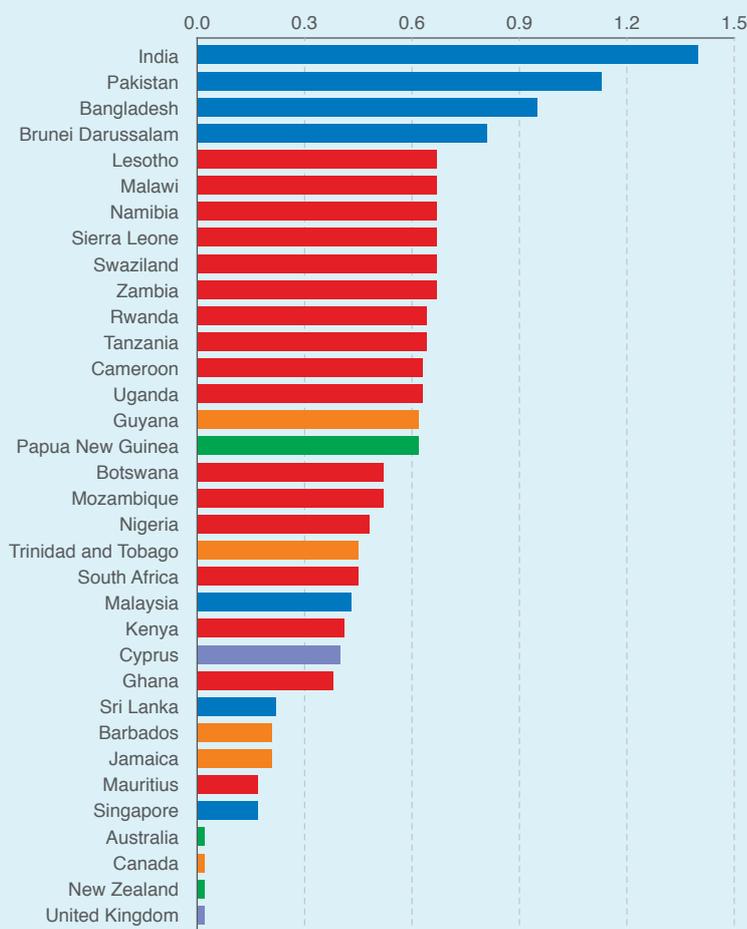
“Modern slavery is the condition in which one person is forcibly **exploited** by an individual or group who exercise **power** over them as a result of **possessing** or **owning** them. This is exercised through **control** or **coercion**, **restriction of movement**, and the **inability of the person to leave the situation.**”

## The scale of the issue globally, and in the Commonwealth

Globally, 40-45 million people are affected by forced labour and forced marriage; 71 per cent are women and girls and 25 per cent are children.<sup>i</sup> In 2016, an estimated four million adults and one million children were sexual exploited for commercial gain; of these, 99 per cent were identified as female.<sup>ii</sup> Sexual exploitation threatens the health, wellbeing and human rights of women and girls worldwide, depriving them of agency and undercutting their own sense of being a dignified human being.



**Figure 1: Prevalence of Modern Slavery in Commonwealth Countries**  
(as estimated percentage of population)



### Regions

- Africa
- The Americas and Caribbean
- Asia
- Europe
- Pacific

### 2016 Global Slavery Index.

18 Commonwealth countries (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Fiji, Grenada, Kiribati, Malta, Nauru, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and The Grenadines, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) were not included within the Global Slavery Index.

While commercial sexual exploitation is an important component of SDG 8.7, the global target encompasses a range of child rights violations that are prevalent on a global scale:

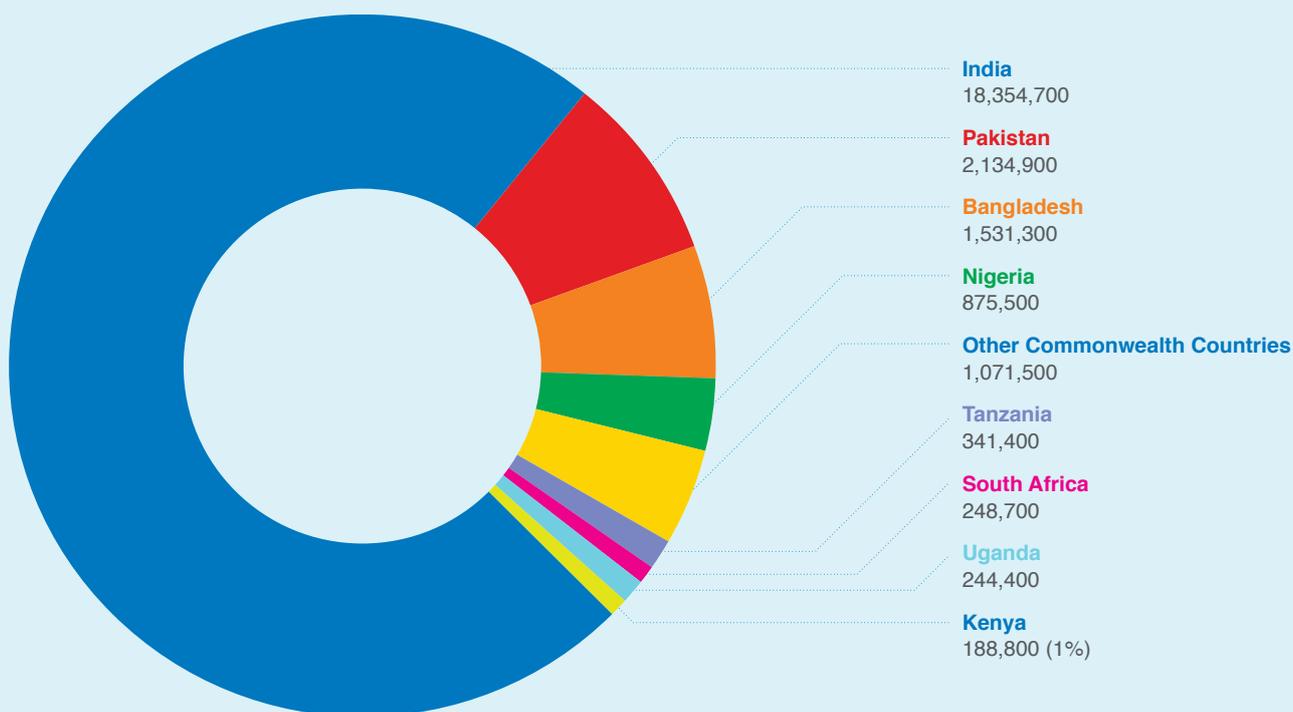
- More than half of the **215 million child labours** worldwide do hazardous work.<sup>iii</sup>
- Half of all trafficked persons are children, with **1.2 million children** trafficked each year.<sup>iv</sup>
- **3.7 million domestic workers** are in hazardous work (21.4 per cent of the total). 67.1 per cent of all domestic workers are girls.<sup>v</sup>
- It is estimated that children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAFAG) are numbered between **tens and hundreds of thousands**.<sup>vi</sup>

**3 OF THE 5**

**countries with the highest absolute numbers of people engaged in forced labour and forced marriage are Commonwealth Member States**

According to data collected by the Walk Free Foundation, more than half of all enslaved individuals are in Commonwealth member states. Three of the five countries with the highest absolute numbers of people engaged in forced labour and forced marriage are Commonwealth Member States.<sup>vii</sup>

**Figure 2: Estimated number of people in Modern Slavery in the Commonwealth**  
(by estimated number per country, 2016 Global Slavery Index)



## The drivers of forced exploitation

The exploitation of children is a highly complex, context specific and multi-faceted phenomenon. Gender roles and age play a significant role in dictating the types, conditions, hours and visibility of labour and exploitation. Human trafficking and exploitation is also determined by the presence or absence of protection and respect for rights and equality, access to resources and services, and patterns of migration, displacement and conflict.

The most marginalised populations that face systematic inequality and low socio-economic status are more likely to be forcibly exploited. Family economic insecurity is a key driver of exploitation, which in turn exacerbates poverty, marginalisation, displacement and lack of access to justice.<sup>viii</sup> The table below highlights some of the drivers and risk factors of human trafficking and child exploitation:

### Risk factors and drivers of trafficking, modern slavery and forced marriage

Individual and community risk factors and drivers	Institutional and structure risk factors and drivers	Humanitarian contexts specific drivers and risk factors
Poverty and unemployment, economic shocks and loss of family income	Inadequate legislative frameworks	Forced displacement, and unaccompanied and separated children
Limited awareness of the risks of human trafficking and child exploitation	Weak / lack of child protection mechanisms	Disruption to the rule of law
Existing culture / acceptance of violence, abuse and exploitation, including hazardous child labour	Lack of access to formal labour markets, especially for refugees	Inadequate provision of humanitarian assistance targeting the most at-risk
Low level of (parental) education	Inadequate protection of workers' rights and monitoring the role of the private sector	Heightened marginalisation and exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities
Loss of home and safety, family separation, and children in street situations	Lack of political will and leadership to address human trafficking and child exploitation	Formal and informal child protection systems weakened and disrupted
Lack of access to quality, relevant and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services for children and youth		Changing family composition / roles of children in emergencies
Culture / tradition and harmful gender norms and practices in communities and families		Child recruitment into armed forces and armed groups can be supported by communities and families

## The gendered nature of SDG 8.7

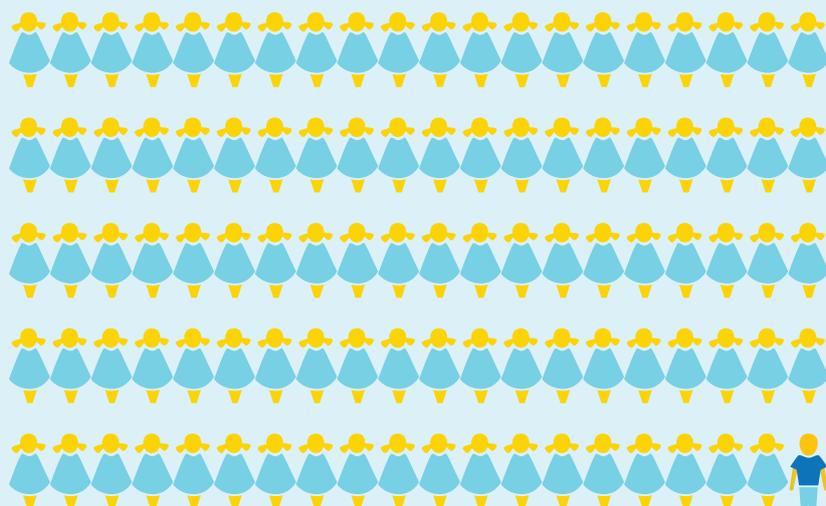
Women and girls are constantly limited, constrained and subjected to injustices that stunt their opportunities in life because of discrimination and gender inequality. In a study involving 7,000 adolescent girls and boys, for example, Plan International found that only 26 per cent of girls said they decide if they marry; over half of girls said they never or seldom decide to become pregnant; 5 per cent of girls in Asia claimed to evenly share housework. The findings reveal that violence against girls is frighteningly entrenched.

**Girls expect to experience violence, and the levels of violence that they experience are perceived as a normal part of everyday life.<sup>ix</sup>**

Adolescent girls experience violence in the form of sexual harassment, rape, sexual and economic exploitation and abuse,

forced marriage through blackmailing, and silencing girls through intimidation. Gender inequality and gender-based violence fuels the exploitation of women and girls, and the sectors where exploitation occurs are highly gendered. Men and boys more likely to be exploited in construction, manufacturing and agriculture, and women more likely to be exploited sexually and in domestic work.

Means of coercion are also dependent on whether the victim is male or female. Females are much more likely to be subjected to sexual violence, whereas males are subjected to other forms of physical violence, threats of violence, or use of threats against family. They are overrepresented in forced labour (59 per cent), forced marriage (84 per cent), and forced sexual exploitation. Of those in forced sexual exploitation, 99 per cent were female, with the risks presenting different threats at varying life-stages, especially during adolescence.



**99%**  
of people forced  
into sexual  
exploitation  
are female

## Heightened risks during times of crisis

Gender inequalities are often exacerbated during crises, and those girls and boys forcibly exploited during emergencies are often among those with pre-existing vulnerabilities. In the case of conflict, for many children and their families, it is often the conditions created by the emergency that put them at risk.

Protracted humanitarian crises can also impact social norms and values, reduce families' coping abilities and simultaneously reduce education, employment and support opportunities. The economic shock caused by emergencies, breakdown of community protection mechanisms, abuse within the family or community, and lack of access to education and employment are identified as increasing children's vulnerability to forced labour exploitation, for example.

Refugees and migrants in large movements are at greater risk of being trafficked and of being subjected to forced labour,<sup>xi</sup> and child, early and forced marriage, sexual exploitation and the worst forms of child labour are exacerbated in times of crisis.<sup>xii</sup>

**Adolescent girls on the move<sup>xiii</sup> – especially those in fragile or humanitarian contexts – are at particular risk.**



## Exploitation in supply chains and the role of the private sector

An estimated 16 million people were in forced labour in the private economy in 2016. More women than men are affected with 9.2 million (57.6 per cent) females and 6.8 million males (42.4 per cent). Half of these men and women are in debt bondage, where personal debt is used to forcibly obtain labour. This proportion rises above 70 per cent for adults who were forced to work in agriculture, domestic work or manufacturing.<sup>xiv</sup> Many of the goods and services enslaved individuals produce end up in global supply chains.

The private sector can be a critical partner in the fight against forced labour and the worst forms of child labour. It is often well-placed to work with high risk suppliers to improve recruitment practices and working conditions, and can respond directly to forced labour and the exploitation of children in supply chains. Putting in place responsible business practices makes good business sense, and the private sector should be held to account for preventing and responding to forced labour, child labour and trafficking throughout value chains.<sup>xv, xvi, xvii, xviii</sup>

## The importance of achieving SDG 8.7 in the Commonwealth

The exploitation of girls and boys – a significant human rights challenge – is a cause and consequence of poverty, inequality, discrimination, social exclusion and lack of access to education. It represents a threat to the health, education, livelihood, wellbeing and human rights of women and girls, and curtails their freedom and autonomy.

Violence, abuse and exploitation of children neutralises development gains. The cost of physical, sexual and psychological violence against children, measured indirectly as losses in future productivity, could be between 2-5 per cent of global gross domestic product.<sup>xix</sup>

### Policy and programme responses

The Commonwealth is uniquely placed to drive forward both collective and individual action to address sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forced marriage.

#### **We know it can be done.**

Over the last decade the Commonwealth commitment to promote gender equality and address child, early and forced marriage has been expressed at the highest political level, from the Commonwealth Charter through to the Heads of Government, Women's Ministers and Law Ministers Meetings. Progress on meeting these commitments has been supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat and we have seen remarkable progress in many Commonwealth countries.

**More importantly, we know that when we support girls and boys to realise their rights, to challenge the barriers they experience and to achieve their dreams, they go on to do incredible things.**

There is, therefore, a pressing need to address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forced marriage. Eliminating the forced exploitation of children must become a priority of the Commonwealth – both collectively and as individual Member States - if the Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved by leaving no-one behind.

Building on this precedent, now is the time for governments to take similar action on human trafficking and child exploitation, taking immediate action to develop and publish national strategies to prevent and respond to human trafficking and child exploitation, in line with SDG targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2.

Policy and programme responses need to reflect and prioritise the higher risk profile faced by women and girls by promoting their rights and adopting comprehensive, gender-sensitive and victim-centred approaches. Governments, civil society and other partners should focus on tackling the wide spectrum and the root causes of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forced marriage, and the harmful gender and social norms that give rise to these forms of gender-based violence and its acceptability.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1

### THE COMMONWEALTH AND MEMBER STATES

**Commit, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, to leading the fight against the exploitation of women and girls**, prioritising this as a critical human rights and gender equality issue to be addressed in line with efforts to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Play a leading role in improving research on SDG 8.7** to plug the gap around accurate and representative data and promising policy and programmatic responses.

**Take immediate action to develop and publish national strategies and legislation to prevent and respond to child exploitation**, in line with SDGs 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2. Effective national strategies should have a focus on preventative approaches that are rights-based and gender-and-age sensitive, developed working closely with civil society – including women’s and child rights organisations.

**Intensify efforts to address gender inequality prevent and address gender-based violence**, with a view to eliminating the demand that fosters forced labour, forced marriage, trafficking and all forms of exploitation, especially of women and girls. This should take a holistic whole-community approach, working with both women and girls and men and boys together to tackle discriminatory gender norms and promote gender equality.

**Improve sex and age disaggregated data collection.** Better analysis and information management could vastly improve the evidence base for programming to address issues related to SDG 8.7.

**Prioritise the right to education**, including evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education, **and invest in strengthening child protection systems** as critical components in addressing human trafficking and child exploitation.

Ensure **person-centred assistance and support for young people**, including the provision of information and education on how to avoid, recognise and report instances of exploitation, violence and abuse.

**Harness the critical role of women and girls** and youth in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and meaningfully engage them as active and equal partners in achieving SDG 8.7.

# 2

## DONORS AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

### Promote a full spectrum approach.

The exploitation of women and girls, men and boys, is not unique to humanitarian settings. However, the economic impact of emergencies, particularly in protracted crises, vastly increases vulnerability to exploitation. Efforts to develop effective systems that prevent and respond to gender-based violence and exploitation before, during and after emergency settings are required, drawing on resources such as the *Inter-Agency Toolkit: Supporting the Protection Needs of Child Labourers in Emergencies*.<sup>xx</sup>

### Develop, pilot and adopt strategic approaches to meeting the specific needs of adolescent girls in emergencies.

A comprehensive, multi-sectoral, gender-transformative approach is needed, working with local actors to design targeted interventions to protect women and girls from violence, abuse and exploitation.<sup>xxi</sup>

# 3

## THE PRIVATE SECTOR

### Ensure business practices are guided by, and compliant with, the Children's Rights and Business Principles<sup>xxii</sup> and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights<sup>xxiii</sup>:

These principles provide useful guidance for the private sector on how to prevent and address any adverse impact on children's human rights, including in relation to the exploitation of children in value chains.

### Work with partners, including communities and girls and boys, to address risks of trafficking, child labour and forced labour in supply chains:

Resolving complex issues such as modern slavery requires companies working in partnership with communities, community-based organisations and child rights NGOs. The private sector should commit to listening to children and community members, and work with them to develop strategies to prevent modern slavery, trafficking or forced labour in value chains.

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- ii** Ibid.
- iii** International Labour Organization, 2015, *World report on child labour 2015: Paving the way to decent work for young people*. Geneva.
- iv** International Labour Organization, 2012. *Every child counts: new global estimates of child labour*.
- v** The most common hazards are: long working hours; lack of public scrutiny, which can provide opportunities for sexual exploitation; and isolation. Domestic service often involves carrying heavy loads (laundry, water, children), being exposed to fires and hot stoves, handling household chemicals and using sharp knives, as well as deprivation of education.
- vi** Further research is required to understand the prevalence and impacts of CAFAG. Data from; <https://www.child-soldiers.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/faq5>
- vii** Walk Free Foundation, 2016, *Global Slavery Index*
- viii** Bales, K., 2004, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*
- ix** Plan International, 2014, *Hear Our Voices: Do Adolescent Girls' Issues Really Matter?*
- x** Girls tend to enter puberty during the period of early adolescence (age 10-14), which means they may physically mature before their brains have caught up, they are also subject to being less able to resist peer-pressure, and as a result their identities are often sexualised by society according to wider ingrained gender norms. During the period of middle-adolescence (15-17), conceptual development and puberty are often complete leading to a sense of more independent behaviour and movements away from family structures. In later adolescence (18-19) girls are more able to resist peer-pressured behaviour, but find social networks of increased importance. See, for example: Girl Effect and John Hopkins School of Public Health, 2017, *Understanding the golden threads that connect the adolescent girl experience worldwide*.
- xi** New York Declaration of Refugees and Migrants, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/57e39d987>
- xii** [http://www.childlabour2017.org/sites/default/files/declaracion\\_bs\\_as-eng.pdf](http://www.childlabour2017.org/sites/default/files/declaracion_bs_as-eng.pdf)
- xiii** Adolescent girls on the move are defined by Plan International UK as “girls aged between 10 and 19 years who have left their place of habitual residence and are either in transit – moving across international borders or within countries – or have already reached a place of safety. The term can therefore be applied to IDPs, asylum-seekers and refugees, stateless persons, migrants, trafficked persons or child soldiers, for example. They may be travelling voluntarily or are forcibly displaced; they may be accompanied by parents, peers/others, or travelling alone.”
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- xxiii** Report of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, March 2011, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework*, [www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/business/A.HRC.17.31.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/business/A.HRC.17.31.pdf)



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