The case for a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act

To protect labour rights domestically and internationally

This briefing, which includes cases of corporate abuse in UK and global supply chains, is part of a series of parliamentary briefings on a new Business, Human Rights and Environment Act. For more information, see our briefings on the general case, the environmental case, and the gender case for a new law. Our legal principles have been endorsed by over 40 organisations, including civil society organisations and trade unions.

Why we need a Business Human Rights and Environment Act to protect labour rights everywhere

"The crisis for workers' rights is no longer confined to the margins - it is now at the heart of democracies. Governments are failing to protect working people, and in many cases are actively undermining them"
- Luke Triangle, General Secretary, ITUC 2026

"Without assembly and association rights, workers have little leverage to change the conditions that entrench poverty, fuel inequality and limit democracy" - UN Special Rapporteur on rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (2016, para 11)

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) core labour rights are human rights. In particular, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and collective bargaining are enabling rights: they allow workers to defend and secure many other rights at work and in wider society. Labour rights are therefore essential not only to decent work and safe working conditions, but also to healthy democracies, strong local communities and inclusive economic development.

Trade unions, the core democratic mechanism for addressing power imbalances in the workplace are linked to higher productivity, lower inequality, reduced gender inequality, more resilient supply chains and a genuine just transition. Yet labour rights are under grave threat almost everywhere, and in many countries organising a union is increasingly treated as a criminal act. Without freedom of assembly and association, workers have no power to challenge the conditions that entrench poverty, fuel inequality and weaken democracy. When trade union rights are denied, other labour rights are undermined, including the rights to a living wage, paid leave, safe working conditions and protection from discrimination, unfair dismissal, and forced labour.

The UK has taken great steps to strengthen labour protections domestically through the Employment Rights Act (ERA). However, it is not designed to fix critical challenges such as enabling people to hold companies to account for all harmful business practices in the UK, including practices linked to the failures of essential privatised public services.

This matters not only overseas, but at home. When irresponsible businesses are allowed to undercut responsible ones, it becomes harder to uphold labour rights in the UK. The current overreliance on voluntary measures has failed to address this. Voluntary social auditing has repeatedly proved inadequate and often undermines the role of independent trade unions. This means where UK businesses are implicated in labour rights abuses, genuine remedy and accountability are extremely difficult to secure and sustain.

Sign the pledge to show your support for a new Business, Human Rights and Environment Act

The UK therefore urgently needs a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act. Such a law should apply across all sectors and to all businesses, including financial institutions and the public sector. In line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, it should mandate organisations to prevent, address and remedy harms to human rights, including labour rights, and to the environment throughout their operations, subsidiaries and global value chains. Crucially, it should also provide access to justice by allowing workers, trade unions and civil society to bring claims when businesses fail to prevent harm.

By genuinely remedying or preventing labour rights violations from occurring in the first place, a BHREA would support democratic accountability, strengthen workers' voices in decision-making, protect other human rights, and contribute to more resilient, secure and productive economies. It would also align the UK with legal developments internationally and help fulfil UK international obligations to protect human rights, UK commitments to take "ambitious action to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation" and to become "the world's first Net Zero-aligned Financial Centre".

A new mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence law is already being called for by civil society organisations and trade unions including the TUC and UNISON as well as businesses, investors, Parliamentarians, and more than 148,000 petition signers. You Gov polling shows four in five adults in the UK support new laws requiring UK companies to prevent human rights abuses and serious environmental damage in their operations or value chains.

Protecting labour rights globally is economically and politically rational. A Business, Human Rights and Environment Act would help support healthy democracies, boost productivity, strengthen supply chain resilience and security, and reduce instability at home and abroad. It is therefore also essential to advancing the UK's social and economic goals.

Labour rights: underpinning human rights and democratic governance

When respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining exists, other labour rights violations across operations and value chains can be addressed, democratic practice is strengthened and the space to address other related human rights and environmental violations opens.

The "enabling rights" of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are essential to resolving all other workplace disputes, securing decent work and safe conditions, and preventing future abuses for all workers — including migrant workers and homeworkers. These rights, including the right to strike as reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice, underpin other fundamental human rights and help create decent jobs, a stable workforce, and a vibrant, inclusive economy.

They are also crucial to addressing deep economic and political power imbalances across value chains and the closing of democratic space by governments by giving workers a strong collective voice in the face of global multinational corporations. Freedom of association enables workers to form or join independent, democratic unions, organise collectively, and bargain with employers. It allows workers to participate equally, practice democracy, speak for themselves, and negotiate collectively for better rights and pay at work.

Whether at home or abroad, collective bargaining can also advance gender parity, by reducing the gender pay gaps through wage and audit transparency; establishing protections against workplace harassment; promoting flexible arrangements for unpaid care work and creating pathways to leadership for women and marginalised groups, not only at work but also at home and in their communities.

When these fundamental rights are denied, workers cannot effectively challenge abusive employers or systemic violations, leading to escalating human, labour and environmental abuses. Freedom of association is therefore a foundation for lasting social and economic justice because it gives workers and communities the power, through democratic practices, to act collectively - to negotiate fair wages and safe conditions, to hold employers and institutions to account, and so participate in civic and democratic life. This collective voice helps rebalance unequal power, strengthens democratic systems, and builds more stable, inclusive economies.

A new mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence law would reinforce the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and enable free, independent and democratic trade unions to flourish. This would further protect other human rights, amplify workers' voices in policymaking, and support democratic accountability and sustainable development.

Labour rights are human rights

Labour rights are fundamental rights falling under the broad category of human rights. According to the UN International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), everyone shall have the right to freedom of association, including the right to form and join trade unions. Human rights also include the labour rights recognised in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and any locally applying labour laws. This includes the 11 fundamental ILO Conventions:

- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) (and its 2014 Protocol)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)

The importance of labour rights and the limitations of current UK regulation

There are significant gaps in UK regulations related to organisations (*) human and labour rights and environmental responsibilities. This, combined with a voluntary approach to human rights due diligence and a corporate governance framework that prioritises shareholders over other stakeholders, results in millions of workers in global value chains facing violations of their fundamental rights at work, every day. In this way, the UK is falling behind its trading partners when it comes to legal developments on responsible business conduct.

The Employment Rights Act (ERA) 2025 marks the most significant upgrade to UK workers' rights in a generation. The Act tackles one-sided flexibility by ending exploitative zero-hours practices, supporting family-friendly work, protecting against unfair dismissal and fire and re-hire practices, creating enforceable rights to reasonable notice of shifts, compensation, and guaranteed hours. These safeguards are also extended to agency workers. The Act also restores balance in industrial relations by repealing recent anti-union laws, enabling workplace access for unions and supporting negotiations. Overall, these reforms will lift the UK's employment rights to a more equal place among comparable OECD and EU states. As the TUC argues, the strengthening of labour laws promotes raised employment and the ERA's package is expected to lead to the same result, with an estimated modest boost to jobs.

(*) Organisations goes beyond commercial organisations and extends to public authorities or other organisations who have global value chains capable of giving rise to human rights impacts.

In contrast, no meaningful UK workers' rights regulations protect workers outside our borders who produce goods and services for UK businesses and the public sector. This gap enables market power to continue driving down labour rights, human rights and environmental standards across subsidiaries and value chains. This race to the bottom rewards bad business practices, and disadvantages businesses that want to do better.

Evidence of systemic abuses across UK and global value chains is extensive and well established. Evidence shows that many voluntary certification schemes and multi-stakeholder initiatives that fail to genuinely uphold freedom of association and collective bargaining can undermine union democracy. They often replace worker solidarity with worker–management committees, "fake" unions, and/or other alternative voice mechanisms, enabling companies to rebrand exploitative practices as ethical by selectively addressing issues such as forced labour or gender abuse.

Further, social auditing has long been recognised as a failed tool: skewed by the financial interests of auditing firms and designed to reduce corporate risk rather than addressing structural exploitation. It therefore does not identify anti-union discrimination, forced labour or capture the gendered dimensions of abuse. Because social auditing fails to protect freedom of association it cannot deliver sustainable corrective action. Where worker interviews do take place, workers are selected by management and routinely 'discouraged' from telling the truth. The result is an opaque system that enables the continuation of violations of freedom of association and has left millions of workers and their families trapped in poverty and insecure, exploitative employment while the companies profiting from their labour including social auditors avoid accountability.

Any gains achieved through this kind of cherry-picking are ultimately unsustainable, as they do not empower workers to challenge the underlying power imbalances driving these violations.

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The Government must end its reliance on voluntary initiatives and prioritise mandatory legislation to deliver stable, sustainable and ethical value chains in line with its priorities and international obligations. Until now, attempts to regulate responsible business conduct for value chains have been fragmented, sector specific, and lacking enforcement. For example, despite huge amounts of money thrown at initiatives to end forced labour, the transparency requirements of the 2015 Modern Slavery Act have failed to prevent forced labour across value chains and do nothing to enable workers to redress extreme power imbalances within their workplaces. Further, Schedule 17 of the Environment Act (covering forest-risk commodities) is limited because it does not adequately address human and labour rights or include the financial sector. Other forced labour supply chain procurement initiatives in the NHS and Great British Energy Bill, for example, also fail to promote and protect Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining and rather than meaningfully engaging with workers, public sector supply chain procurement relies on company self-reporting and social auditing.

In contrast to the UK, other countries have adopted legislation to ensure businesses respect all human rights and the environment across operations, subsidiaries and value chains. Legislation making HREDD mandatory and holding businesses to account for abuses across their operations, subsidiaries and value chains has been adopted at pace internationally and in the EU, including in France, Germany and Norway. Such legislation is based on the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, unanimously adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2011, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct. It uses the concept of human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD), a process for businesses to identify, mitigate, prevent and account for their impacts in their operations and value chains. As they are intrinsically linked, human rights, labour rights and the environment are addressed together.

The UK needs to adopt mandatory legislation not only to keep pace with other countries, but also to align with its own plans to grow a strong, resilient UK economy. UK labour standards have been hard-won over hundreds of years. We urgently need a law that ensures powerful actors in lead companies support rather than suppress the trade union movement, including by ensuring poorer standards are not rewarded.

Strengthening labour rights in UK value chains supports an inclusive and thriving UK economy

Due to the inherent connection between labour rights and a healthy economy, strengthening labour rights across UK value chains via a BHREA would have lasting positive effects at home and abroad.

Trade unions are central to securing agile and robust economies, healthy democracies and a fairer society. They occupy a unique role in holding private actors and governments to account, as well as improving workplace conditions.

Productivity growth and decent work are mutually reinforcing. According to the Economic Policy Institute, improved worker rights increase productivity growth and reduce economic instability. Collective bargaining and union membership also contribute significantly to reducing income inequality, with broader bargaining coverage linked to more equal earnings. Workplaces with collective bargaining have higher pay and greater productivity. Better pay and other benefits allows workers to meet their families' basic needs, leading to higher productivity, fewer absences, and stronger cooperation and loyalty. It also supports the next generation of workers to develop into healthy and well-educated adults.

Additionally, when all workers receive a decent wage and dignified conditions, all households, including low-income households, can play a significant role in fostering local economic development and can prompt the multiplier effect of local job and income increases, and enhanced community resilience. With good industrial relations, unions also help employers modernise by offering practical solutions, supporting upskilling, and reducing resistance to change — boosting both efficiency and worker wellbeing. Partnership working - an approach affirmed in the UK Government's Make Work Pay plan - is also recognised to be beneficial with research showing that most employers agree that working in partnership with unions can benefit their organisation, while 72% of public sector employers agree. Overseas, the ILO has shown that employers, workers and trade unions working together can overcome exploitation in a range of studies and drive industrial stability and collaboration.

However, weak regulatory regimes abroad and insufficient enforcement in the UK have caused an increase in job insecurity and obscured serious decent-work deficits, while driving widespread informal work, insecure contracting and mass casualisation. This in turn has contributed to a rise in low wage growth, widening social and economic inequality and growing political instability.

When work is insecure, wages are poor, and union rights are undermined, workers are more likely to be pushed into more precarious or even illegal activities, including workplace corruption or involvement in criminal networks. **As well as destabilising society, this fuels unsustainable global value chains and strengthens organised crime groups that ultimately also threaten the UK's security.** Furthermore, insecure, informal work driven by irresponsible corporate behaviour reduces governments' tax revenues. This can lead to increased economic insecurity, weakened value chain resilience, and critically, reduced tax revenues, and a limitation on rises in living standards.

Mature industrial relations systems, underpinned by strong and representative trade unions, play a critical role in enabling a just transition to a low-carbon economy. By fostering structured dialogue between workers, employers, and governments, they ensure that environmental policies are not only ambitious but also socially fair, protecting jobs, wages, and working conditions as industries evolve. Trade unions can advocate for reskilling and upskilling programs, helping workers move from high-carbon sectors into sustainable industries, while also holding employers accountable for harmful environmental practices through collective bargaining and workplace oversight. This balance of economic security and environmental responsibility reduces resistance to climate policies, accelerates the adoption of cleaner technologies, and helps curb exploitative or polluting behaviours. Ultimately, strong industrial relations create the trust and cooperation needed to align social justice with climate action, making emissions reductions more achievable and durable over the long term.

Consequently, respecting labour rights and trade unions is essential to delivering sustainable economic growth built on a fair, productive labour market and resilient value chains, ultimately helping to reduce inequality and relative poverty.

How businesses drive the weakening of labour rights around the world

Businesses, including those based in the UK, drive the erosion of labour rights when they adopt poor purchasing practices, neglect labour standards, and contribute to the repression of trade unions and the weakening of labour regulations globally.

Corporate responsibility failures, coupled with weak or absent accountability measures, have resulted in a downward trend in global labour rights, decent work and a lack of access to justice and genuine remedy for those affected. Simultaneously, the rise of fragmented and complex value chains based on outsourcing and sub-contracting, coupled with insecure work arrangements such as zero-hours contracts and informal employment, has made it harder for unions to organise workers while unions themselves are proactively undermined by businesses across the value chain in the pursuit of profit.

Increasingly, as ITUC research highlights, governments that are weakening the regulatory and enforcement environments needed to uphold trade union and workers' rights are impeding workers' ability to organise by creating an anti-union hostile environment that irresponsible businesses take advantage of, including through the following key ways:

Union busting:
Actions taken by employers or states to break and remove trade union activity from a workplace, industry or country include restricting the right of workers to form or join unions, harassing and/or sacking union members and leaders, and bribing or threatening workers who want to form a union. It also includes establishing the concept of 'employer-employee committees' or employer-controlled unions, in order to secure a non-unionised workforce. Employers also often use complex value chains to sidestep their responsibility to uphold union and labour rights. It enables conditions for forced labour and other egregious harm - including to the environment - to thrive.

Restrictions on the right to organise:
Some UK companies choose to source from countries where labour rights are weak or poorly enforced, and/or where democratic trade unions are banned, in order to access cheaper labour. This can enable ongoing human rights and environmental abuses and reinforce repressive systems. By sourcing from these territories, companies encourage the production of cheap goods under exploitative conditions, poverty wages, and forced labour. This, in turn, undermines UK based manufacturing and UK workers chances of obtaining fair work

Intersectional discrimination:
Those who exist in or have multiple conditions of precarity and marginalisation, such as women and migrant workers, often end up taking temporary, short-term contracts and earning less than male or local counterparts. Indigenous women and women from marginalised castes and religions face exclusion from formal employment and therefore added complexity in obtaining justice.

"Trade union rights, freedom of association and the right to strike are crucial means of introducing, maintaining and defending just and favourable conditions of work.

The extent of repression:
The International Trade Union Confederation in its 2025 annual survey of workers' rights in law in 149 countries, revealed "a stark and worsening global crisis for workers and unions" and a "sharp escalation in violations of fundamental rights, including access to justice, the right to free speech and assembly, and the right to collective bargaining".

- Workers in three out of every four countries were denied the right to freedom of association and to organise.
- Workers had no or reduced access to justice in 72% of countries, a sharp increase from 65% in 2024.
- Attacks on the rights to free speech and assembly were reported in 45% of countries – a record high for the Index.
- The right to strike, the only tool workers have to even up power imbalances, was violated in 87% of countries.
- The right to the legal registration of unions was impeded in 74% of countries, unchanged from 2024 and the worst level since the Index began.
- The right to collective bargaining was restricted in 80% of countries (121)
- Authorities in 71 countries (47%) arrested and/or imprisoned workers, almost twice the rate recorded in 2014.

Corporate abuse of labour rights in UK-based value chains

Across industries, UK businesses are linked to systemic labour rights violations through their operations, subsidiaries, and value chains in the UK and abroad.

Human rights, labour rights abuses and environmental harm are systemic in the operations, subsidiaries and value chains of UK businesses across industries both internationally and on UK soil. In addition to documented cases of abuse in garment manufacture - for example Boohoo's operations in Leicester - and allegations of anti-union tactics in e-commerce - multiple sectors were identified in 2025 as high priority and at risk of exploitation by the Director of Labour Market Enforcement. The following are selected examples only.

Social Care

Exploitation of workers in adult social care and the particular vulnerabilities of its migrant workers is an issue frequently raised by unions. It remains a sector at high risk of exploitation, given its labour supply issues, low margins and employer linked visas and/or housing, which can lead to dependency on employers and consequent difficulties in challenging poor treatment. Debt bondage and hiring fees in the contracting value chain remain a pervasive issue in this sector.

Agriculture

Agriculture and the local and global value chains of large food retailers present multiple risk factors for exploitation, with low margins, physically demanding conditions, and reliance on sponsored workers whose visas are tied to employers. Research in 2023 shows significant and likely underreported abuse in UK supermarket value chains, especially in agriculture and livestock farming, involving issues like racism, wage theft, and threats of unfair dismissal while a 2024 BBC report alleges trafficking and modern slavery in the UK fishing industry.. Whilst nearly impossible to get full data, the often-fragmented public sector purchasing of food means these value chains are also likely to end up in our schools and hospital canteens. Debt bondage, isolation and employer linked housing create multiple conditions of precarity and exploitation for workers.

Seasonal agricultural workers are particularly vulnerable due to long standing issues for organising and unionising this demographic. Recent research in the UK has found that the number of foreign workers seeking help over claims of exploitation, bullying, underpayment, and poor living conditions on UK farms in 2024 had increased significantly since 2023. In 2024, the Worker Support Centre (WSC) reported over 700 complaints from seasonal agricultural migrant workers compared to just over 400 in 2023.

Construction

In the construction sector, exploitation in the UK remains high with low levels of collective worker representation and unions. The increasingly complex value chain in construction has seen a rise in sub-contracting with unscrupulous sub-contractors taking advantage of low levels of scrutiny. Issues such as workers being misclassified as independent contractors and losing employment rights; housing tied to employment; and the often transient nature of the workforce continue to grow.

These problems are compounded by critical worker shortages and changing immigration rules which increase worker vulnerability and exposure to exploitation. Given the expected significantly increased demand for construction workers to meet the Government's housebuilding agenda, international recruitment could compound the risk of exploitation growth of this sector .

Corporate abuse of labour rights in UK public procurement

UK public procurement has repeatedly been linked to labour rights abuses in the UK and abroad.

The UK is also at risk of human and labour rights abuses in its public procurement value chains. In 2024/25, £434 billion of public money was spent on private sector procurement. However, the lack of effective legislation and insufficient upskilling or resourcing of the public sector procurement profession means there are insufficient safeguards or standards to ensure UK tax payers' money supports decent work or protected workers in global value chains.

For example, the NHS procured surgical gloves produced in Malaysia despite numerous allegations of forced labour against the supplier – promoting one academic to state that "Local employers, global brands, and shareholders, as well as organisations such as NHS Supply Chain, have benefited from such systemic abuses for years". A 2024 Freedom of Information request found that UK government departments sourced uniforms, protective equipment and other essential items from Chinese suppliers despite widespread human rights abuses, the repression of freedom of association and environmental harm within China's textile and garment industry.

NHS trusts spent £14m procuring gloves from Ansell between 2019-2022, despite extremely strong allegations of union busting in its Sri Lanka operations. Whilst the case was finally settled after 10 years, for the original dismissed union leaders as well as the workers, it is claimed that Ansell still refuses to act in good faith with the union. On-going alleged cases of forced labour in Ansell's supply chain such as the MediCeram Malaysia case which supplies to the NHS persist, despite NHS Supply Chains current assurances of improved practices on forced labour.

Rather than engaging with and learning from less expensive Worker Driven Monitoring and Remedy models, NHS systems such as the Modern Slavery Assessment Tool and Evergreen Sustainable Supplier Assessment rely on company self-reporting. When complaints are made, rather than engaging with the human and labour rights defenders, they commission social audits. This leads to a "tick-box" approach, data verification blind spots, and a failure to track deep, multi-tier supply chain realities.

The endemic nature of labour rights abuses, including union busting in the ICT sector everywhere has also been recognised by some UK public bodies (and many in Europe and Australia) affiliated to Electronics Watch, including universities.

Finally, Banana Link and UNISON have found UK purchasing of bananas - a sector famous for its exploitation and reflecting the UKs most popular fruit, to be extremely fragmented, making it exceedingly difficult to set and maintain labour standards. For example, Costa Rica is the biggest supplier of pineapples and the second biggest supplier of bananas to the United Kingdom, representing 90% and 20%+ of imports respectively. However, working conditions are deteriorating, harmful pesticide use is growing and restrictions on trade unions are tightening. UK trade unions, such as UNISON have highlighted the prevalence of these exploitative practices in fruit supplied to UK hospitals and schools and are calling for support in ending the endemic labour abuses in this chain.

UNISON, the biggest public service trade union, representing members in public sector procurement and responsible procurement jobs, are clear that more needs to be done to halt the abuses of rights in the UK public procurement system. UNISON is calling urgently for "a law that will force businesses and the public sector to take preventative action against abuse to workers and the environment or face serious consequences." Trade unionists and civil society continue to highlight that the government has failed to take meaningful action against companies found to have caused or contributed to human rights abuses and instead allows the use of these companies in public procurement deals.

Corporate abuse of labour rights in global value chains

UK companies spanning all sectors are linked to serious and well-documented labour rights abuses in their global value chains. The potential for violations of labour rights to occur - and exist in impunity - are increased through the complexity of value chain structure, outsourcing, offshoring, sub-contracting and the diffuse corporate architecture through subsidiaries and indirect shareholders.

The fashion industry's global value chains are noted by Amnesty International for their "endemic and structural exploitation". UK businesses are implicated in this exploitation, with issues encompassing the failure to protect workers from heat stress, and failure to investigate cotton imports from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region — an area associated with forced labour and denial of basic rights. Allegations in a case in British courts by Burmese migrant workers in Thailand producing jeans for Tesco include working up to 99 hours per week, receiving only one day off per month, widespread payment below the legal minimum wage, and failure to pay overtime, which have left many workers trapped in cycles of debt.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, unilateral contract cancellations by British fashion companies left millions of workers denied the full wages legally owed to them, and one major UK fashion retailer, NEXT plc., now stands accused of union busting after closing its only unionised plant in Sri Lanka. This is the same union that has been busted by Ansell in the above PPE public sector procurement case. UK businesses are also linked to historic and catastrophic health and safety failures in the garment sector, such as the fatal collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013, which killed over 1000 people and left many more injured.

UK companies are also implicated in human rights risks linked to the high growth critical mineral sector. For example, it is alleged that workers at Zambia's Konkola Copper Mine—part-owned by UK-registered Vedanta Resources - have been beaten and arrested by police while protesting poor working conditions. Supermarket value chains are again revealed to enable endemic abuse with the seafood industry being renowned for alleged beatings, excessive hours and inadequate food in supplying fisheries.

Lack of access to remedy and worker-driven solutions

Remedy is the least understood and practiced pillar of the UNGPs. Engagement with workers and affected communities must be central to new legislative efforts to ensure the prioritisation of the needs, expectations, and perspectives of those affected, and both the remedy process and outcomes should be worker-driven.

Worker-driven social responsibility directly addresses the pitfalls of the social auditing industry and engages those who are best placed - workers, worker representatives, and unions - to determine the reality of conditions on the ground and how to improve them, including through collective bargaining agreements. For example, acknowledging the critical importance of addressing labour rights abuses among shipping, freight, and warehouse workers. TFG Brands London signed an agreement with the International Workers' Federation (ITF) to commit to human rights due diligence and work with the ITF to prevent, mitigate and address human rights risks for transport workers in its value chains. Some UK public sector affiliates of Electronics Watch are using worker driven monitoring and remediation methods to improve impact for workers in their value chains, including stopping union busting. Similar efforts In Pakistan have shown how union involvement can effectively cut health and safety problems at work in mining.

Recommendations and call to action

To ensure that the Employment Rights Act (2025) strengthens workers' rights in both UK and international value chains, it must be complemented by a Business Human Rights and Environment Act (BHREA) requiring UK businesses and public bodies to protect all human and labour rights - including the fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining - across global value chains.

A BHREA would mandate UK businesses and the public sector to take all reasonable steps to prevent human rights and environmental harm in their operations, subsidiaries, and value chains including through ensuring that human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD) is carried out.

The introduction of a BHREA would help the UK to keep pace with similar legal developments among our allies and trading partners and remain competitive as a centre for excellence in regulation and corporate governance, which is key to its attractiveness as an investment destination. A BHREA would level the playing field to support responsible UK companies, while providing regulatory clarity for businesses and certainty for UK consumers.

Recommendations:

- **The Government should introduce a BHREA, modelled on the world-leading 'failure to prevent' model** of the 2010 Bribery Act, a model also recommended by Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights. This model, successfully used in multiple pieces of subsequent legislation, reverses the burden of proof, meaning that once it is shown that harm has occurred in connection with a business, the burden is on the business to demonstrate that it took all reasonable steps to prevent the harm.
- **A BHREA must protect and promote fundamental labour rights**, as set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and UN Conventions. It is crucial that labour rights, and in particular the enabling rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, are highlighted as a key part of value chain resilience and a worker-driven just transition, in order to empower trade unions, reduce exploitation, poverty, and inequality, and strengthen the UK economy.
- **A BHREA must encompass all internationally recognised human rights** protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; all international human rights treaties that the UK has ratified as well as rights which form part of customary international law or international humanitarian law. These conventions include rights ranging from the rights to life, health, privacy, work, freedom from slavery, and an adequate standard of living.
- Recognising the interrelated nature of human rights and environmental rights violations, **legislation must also cover environmental protections** set out in relevant international environmental agreements and principles; agreements and treaties on climate change, and any locally applicable environmental laws.
- **The legislation must centre engagement with workers and affected communities** and the remedy processes should be worker-driven, engaging those who are best placed - workers, worker representatives, and unions - to determine the reality of conditions on the ground and how to improve them, including through collective bargaining agreements.
- **The Government must ensure respect for, and the promotion of labour rights are a key linchpin of a just transition towards net zero** which would ensure a sustainable, secure and clean industrial strategy that protects workers and the environment, future-proofs jobs, improves economic stability, supports productivity and boosts employment rates.