



**EU Forced Labour regulation  
implementation guidelines**  
Feedback by W=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

March 2026

# WO=MEN feedback in response to the EC Call for Evidence for the Forced Labour Regulation implementation guidelines

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## About WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

WO=MEN is the Dutch platform working for global gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Our platform consists of over 58 member organisations and more than 100 individuals, including women's rights, human rights and LHBTI-rights organisations, migrant and refugee women-led organisations, trade unions, social entrepreneurs, knowledge institutions, and other civil society organisations. Together, we monitor and influence political and policy developments, share knowledge and good practices, and mobilize diverse stakeholders to advance gender justice globally. See [www.wo-men.nl](http://www.wo-men.nl) for more information on our platform.

## Introduction and background

WO=MEN welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the European Commission on the Guidelines on the Implementation of the [EU 2024/3015 Forced Labour Regulation \(FLR\)](#). Freedom from forced labour is a human right and essential to reach gender equality. Yet an estimated 27.6 million people are in forced labour globally ([ILO](#)). Women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labour due to gendered discrimination, wage gaps, gender-segregated labour markets, and heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Women's over-representation in precarious, informal or irregular employment, combined with restricted mobility, migration status, and care burdens, creates layered vulnerabilities that require explicit attention in FLR implementation.

WO=MEN applauds the EU Forced Labour Regulation as an important piece of legislation to prevent and eliminate forced labour from supply chains. It is product-based, and prohibits placing, making available or exporting products made with forced labour at any stage of production with a risk-based approach. We particularly stress the importance of recital 7 of the FLR: ***“Forced labour has a distinct impact on vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as children, women, migrants, refugees or indigenous peoples, and therefore an intersectional and gender-sensitive approach is essential to combat forced labour effectively.”***

The FLR's explicit focus on products however, unfortunately means that forced labour in services fall outside of the scope of the Regulation. As a result, exclusion of specific types of exploitation where women are significantly overrepresented, including for instance domestic servitude, coercion and abuse in the hospitality sector, sexual exploitation and/or trafficking.<sup>1</sup> It is, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Definition by the United Nations 'Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children': "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." On the other hand, sex work is a commercial transaction between consenting adults. Understanding the difference between sex work and



very positive that the FLR applies to all products, across all sectors, and to any EU or non-EU economic operator.

To be most effective, the FLR implementation guidelines must prioritise women’s rights and gender equality, and embed gender-responsive due diligence throughout all three guideline categories and all stages of evidence collection, investigation, enforcement, and remedy. Without a gender-responsive approach, the FLR risks missing hidden, informal, and coercive forms of forced labour disproportionately affecting women and girls and will be unable to provide effective remedy for them. We also call for gender to be a risk-intensifying factor in prioritisation and for women dominated sectors with known high risks to get heightened scrutiny. WO=MEN welcomes continued engagement with the Commission and stands ready to support the development of gender-responsive tools, indicators, and training content.

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trafficking is essential for an effective anti-forced labour and anti-trafficking approach that both addresses exploitation and respects sex workers’ rights.

## 1. Guidelines for competent authorities on practical implementation

### 1.1 Main types of evidence to be considered during investigations

To ensure investigations accurately reflect gender-differentiated risks, competent authorities should incorporate the following types of gender-specific evidence types:

#### A. Workforce and labour-market evidence

- Verified gender-disaggregated workforce data across all tiers of production, including analysis of gender (im)balance in management versus workers.
- Documentation reflecting recruitment pathways for women, including use of subcontractors, intermediaries or debt-bonding risks or absence of written employment contracts.
- Direct worker and trade-union survey data relevant to women's working conditions.

#### B. Evidence of gender-based violence and coercion

- Documentation and/or indications of SGBV, sexual harassment, threats of sexual abuse, or quid-pro-quo arrangements. It is important that victims, survivors or their representatives can also share suspicions of sexual violence or exploitation.
- Testimony indicating coercive working conditions linked to pregnancy, maternity, or reproductive health, included, but not limited to forced pregnancy testing, dismissal of pregnant workers, forced sterilization.
- Reports from (local) women's rights organisations, shelters, and/or trade unions on violence against women workers.

#### C. Evidence on gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities

- Country factors, including women's legal and political rights.
- Data on migrant and/or undocumented women workers, ethnic or religious minority women, LGBTQ+ workers, or women in conflict-affected areas.
- Evidence showing barriers women face in reporting, including fear of retaliation, language barriers, residence permits tied to employment, on-site accommodation.

#### D. Evidence gathered through safe, confidential and gender-sensitive methods

- Confidential interviews with women workers carried out by trained women investigators in safe places.
- Testimonies collected by women-led organisations or independent trade unions.
- Documentation showing whether grievance mechanisms are accessible to women.

#### Recommended documentation includes:

- Gender-disaggregated workforce data on all tiers of the supply chain.
- Company policies on non-discrimination, SGBV prevention, maternity protection, and equal pay, in line with OECD standards.
- Risk assessments with gender-specific indicators.



- Audit reports that include interviews with women workers conducted by trained gender-sensitive investigators.
- Grievance mechanisms designed to be accessible, confidential, and safe for women with protection against retaliation.
- Supplier codes of conduct aligned with EU guidelines on responsible business conduct.

### **1.2 Risk-Based Prioritisation**

Gender should function as a risk-intensifying factor in case selection and prioritisation. Authorities should apply heightened scrutiny where:

- Sectors are women-dominated (e.g., apparel, agriculture, electronics assembly, food processing, cut flowers).
- There is evidence of SGBV and gendered coercion.
- Supply chains rely on migrant/undocumented women or informal subcontracting.
- Women's legal protections are weak or poorly enforced.

### **1.3 The EU Single Information System on Forced Labour (SISFL)**

**We recommend that SISFL:**

- Prioritise gender-disaggregated data capture and tagging (sector, product, geography, women's share of workforce).
- Flag gender-specific alerts (e.g., SGBV-linked coercion, pregnancy-related abuses).
- Include sector risk profiles showing female-concentrated roles and known indicators of gendered exploitation and coercion.
- Enable information-sharing with national equality bodies and labour inspectorates with gender expertise.

### **1.4 Training and Capacity-Building for Competent Authorities**

Effective enforcement of the FLR will require specific gender expertise and competencies at the competent authorities. Investigative bodies need to be trained to identify gendered indicators of forced labour. These trainings should be co-developed with women's rights organisations, women-led organisations, unions and women human rights and labour rights defenders. Training is not only essential for competent authorities, but also for economic operators and for civil

society including trade unions, who also need the capacity to recognize forced labour (see also 2.5).

*Competent authorities should receive mandatory training and build their capacity on:*

- Identifying gendered indicators of forced labour and SGBV.
- Conducting gender-sensitive interviews that minimise retraumatisation.
- Understanding how coercion and dependency, including financial dependence, family dependence and dependence during migration, disproportionately affect women.
- Assessing risks in sectors with heavy women labour participation, including agriculture, garments, electronics.
- Supporting women's equal and meaningful participation in consultations and negotiations, and collaboration with women's rights organisations, women migrant-worker groups, SGBV service providers, trade unions and women human rights defenders.
- Protection of whistleblowers and (women) human rights defenders.
- Identifying limitations of traditional social-auditing practices and the need for triangulated evidence.

Adequate gender capacity and expertise of competent authorities should be part of monitoring and reporting and responsibility needs to be at management level.

## 2. Guidelines for economic operators on due diligence in relation to forced labour

### 2.1 Guidelines on gender-responsive due diligence

Gender-responsive due diligence must be embedded across all six stages of forced labour related due diligence. This is in line with international frameworks, including the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises:

1. **Policy commitments and management systems:** Include a zero-tolerance policy on forced labour that explicitly prohibits SGBV, discrimination, coercive practices related to pregnancy/maternity, and gender-based barriers to remedy.
2. **Risk identification and assessment:** Map supply chains using gender-disaggregated data, identify gendered risks, and analyse overlapping vulnerabilities.
3. **Prevention and mitigation:** Develop gender-sensitive warning systems and protection of whistle blowers, train suppliers on gender equality and SGBV prevention, and improve access to safe grievance mechanisms.
4. **Tracking implementation and results:** Require suppliers to report gender-disaggregated indicators, including retention, promotion, grievances filed, and SGBV cases.
5. **Communication:** Transparently report on gender impacts and corrective actions taken.
6. **Remediation:** Ensure remedies account for the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls.

See [www.genderduediligence.org](http://www.genderduediligence.org) for more information.

We strongly recommend integrated due diligence guidelines that guide economic operators to establish a robust and gender responsive due diligence system in line with the requirements of not only the forced labour regulation, but also the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive to ensure an effective and robust approach to not only forced labour but also other rights violations in supply chains.

### 2.2 Risk Scoping Across Sectors and Product Groups

Economic operators must consider contexts where women face heightened risks:

- Contexts with severe gender discrimination or restrictive gender norms.
- Fragile, conflict, or post-conflict settings.
- Sectors and global supply chains with high concentrations of women: apparel, footwear, electronics, agriculture, flowers and food processing.
- Countries that have not ratified or are not implementing ILO fundamental conventions.
- The informal sector, including informalised subcontracting, and sectors reliant on migrant women workers.



### 2.3 Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement

Economic operators should:

- Conduct meaningful, safe, and accessible consultations with women workers.
- Use women-only focus groups to facilitate disclosure of SGBV and coercion.
- Engage with independent trade unions (not employer-dominated committees) or independent and democratically elected workers councils, and make use of worker-led survey data.
- Support women's equal and meaningful participation in consultations and negotiations and partner with women's rights organisations, women-led CSOs, migrant-worker organisations, LGBTQ+ groups and women community leaders.
- Avoid relying solely on social audits, which routinely miss gendered and hidden forms of forced labour ([HRC](#)).

### 2.4 Effective Gender-Responsive Remedy

Remedy and grievance mechanisms must include:

- Access to medical, psychological, maternity, sexual-health and reproductive-health services.
- Gender-sensitive emergency protection for survivors of GBV and female whistleblowers.
- Restitution for withheld wages, recruitment fees, and financial exploitation.
- Measures preventing retaliation or deportation of (undocumented) migrant women.
- Support for women's collective bargaining and union participation.
- Long-term reintegration and economic-empowerment pathways.

## 2.5 Recommended training content

- How to identify gendered risk indicators of forced labour.
- How to conduct gender-sensitive audits and interviews.
- How to collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data.
- How to engage safely and effectively with women workers, unions, and feminist organisations.
- How to design gender-responsive grievance and remediation mechanisms.
- Awareness of FLR enforcement expectations, including robust due-diligence processes before investigations, as highlighted by FLR compliance guidance

## 2.6 Guidelines on inclusive stakeholder management and meaningful consultation processes

Companies should directly engage with other local stakeholders, including worker representatives, independent trade unions, communities, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and civil society groups, to facilitate and enrich the identification of existing or potential forced labour risks that cannot be identified through traditional auditing or certification processes (see for instance [HRW](#) or [Clean Clothes Campaign](#)). Women-only focus groups and confidential interviews to allow disclosure of coercion and harassment.

See for more information the [STITCH MSE Framework](#) or the [meaningful stakeholder dialogue tools and training](#) from the Dutch Social Economic Committee.



### 3. Guidelines for civil society organisations, victims and other stakeholders on how to submit information concerning potential violations

CSOs, unions, whistleblowers, and worker groups should be encouraged and supported to submit evidence by:

- Ensuring the Single Information Point accepts anonymous submissions, protected identities, and evidence from civil society organisations.
- Allowing submission of gender-specific documentation, including SGBV reports and suspicions, worker testimonies, shadow-monitoring reports and trade union surveys.
- Providing templates and guidance explaining what constitutes actionable, high-quality evidence.
- Ensuring CSOs can provide contextual information on sectors, migration patterns, gender norms, or documented abuse.

*The Commission should also ensure:*

- Adequate funding for women's rights organisations, women-led organisations and trade unions to effectively and independently conduct research and monitor forced labour.

## Relevant sources

- [Q&A: European Union Forced Labor Regulation | Human Rights Watch](#)
- [Gender-Responsive Due Diligence - Gender-Responsive Due Diligence](#)
- [Guidance on due diligence for EU businesses to address the risk of forced labour in their operations and supply chains](#)
- [EU Forced Labour Regulation: Preparation & Compliance Guide](#)
- [Forced labour in the United Kingdom](#)
- [Women and girls at growing risk of modern slavery, data reveals - Unseen](#)
- [Modern slavery and women's economic empowerment: discussion document](#)
- ["Obsessed with Audit Tools, Missing the Goal": Why Social Audits Can't Fix Labor Rights Abuses in Global Supply Chains | HRW](#)
- [Combating Gender-Based Violence in Lesotho - Worker Rights Consortium](#)
- [Severe exploitation of women. The rights to become protagonists.](#)
- [IRL Global Labor Institute. EU Forced Labour Regulation to the Rescue? Samira Rafaela.](#)
- [ActionAid. Ensuring a gender-responsive and effective Corporate Due Diligence Legislation in 10 steps.](#)

**For more information on gender and the Forced Labour Regulation, or on gender-responsive due diligence, please contact our program manager for Gender and Sustainable Economy, Marjolein Quist, via [m.quist@wo-men.nl](mailto:m.quist@wo-men.nl).**

*Note: all photos used in this document are royalty free and depict women working in various trades and sectors in global supply chains, but not necessarily in the context of forced labour.*