





*A mural created by slavery survivors. Courtesy of Joel Bergner and local partners. The Rights Lab is committed to ensuring that survivors have leadership roles and influence antislavery policies.*

# Research innovations towards the historic possibility of ending slavery in our lifetime

## Introduction to the Rights Lab

The modern antislavery effort is 20 years old and a commitment to end slavery by 2030 is part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (target 8.7). But to achieve this goal, we need long-term, evidence-based strategies for abolition. With the Rights Lab, we have built a large-scale research platform for ending slavery. We are the largest group of modern slavery scholars in the world, and home to the world's leading academic experts on modern slavery.

### **Our team is answering five big questions:**

- 1. How many slaves exist in the world and where are they?**
- 2. Why does slavery persist?**
- 3. What factors underpin resilience against slavery?**
- 4. How can we close the implementation gap?**
- 5. What difference does freedom make?**

Each question forms a Rights Lab programme, on Data and Measurement; Survivors and Cultures; Communities and Society; Law and Policy; and Business and Economies. Then, through our Modern Slavery Evidence Unit (MSEU) we bring together all of the Rights Lab's research

to ask a final big question: what works to end slavery? As our programmes unfold, we use their results to update what we call a Freedom Blueprint: a plan for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 – the end of slavery. We update this roadmap as we make discoveries, test intervention techniques, and complete our evaluation processes.

In this 2019 Innovation Update, we share a new flagship project from each programme plus our MSEU – inviting your input and collaboration. By scaling up these and other initiatives to become global research-led strategies, we hope to help end slavery. To achieve this goal, the world needs the antislavery community of survivors, policy-makers, civil society, researchers and business to work together. Ending slavery will only happen if everyone works together towards a shared vision, and we hope our Rights Lab research innovations can be a useful part of that joint vision and work towards ending slavery in our lifetime.

Ending slavery by 2030 is an ambitious goal. But this would be a watershed moment – when the world finally rejects the great lie of history, that some people are sub-human, and embraces the great antislavery truth: that labour must not be forced and that people are not for sale.

# An antislavery innovation: the Global Antislavery Observatory

## Our Data and Measurement Programme is asking: how many slaves are there in the world, and where are they?

In order to tackle modern slavery, we need to know how many people are enslaved and where they are. Robust measurement and analysis give the antislavery movement credibility, confidence and the foundations from which to build effective action: governments need to be able to measure slavery prevalence in order to design and resource appropriate policy responses; an accurate understanding of the location and prevalence of slavery can help NGOs plan more effective programmes on the ground; businesses benefit from understanding slavery prevalence linked to particular commodities.

In the Rights Lab's Data and Measurement Programme, geographers, political scientists, sociologists, mathematicians and business systems specialists have made globally recognised advances in measuring the risk and prevalence of modern slavery. As part of that work, our Slavery from Space initiative is the first use of geospatial observation to map and measure slavery. Using new machine-learning techniques and citizen

science, the team has uncovered sites and industries with high levels of slavery. We now estimate that more of a third of the world's slavery – 40 million people – is visible from space. This work with satellite imagery has also generated new data on the relationship between slavery and eco-systems. Demonstrating the slavery footprint on our environment, we have calculated for the first time the environmental costs of slavery and the environmental gains of ending it.

In 2019 we joined with the United Nations University's Delta 8.7 project and other partners to launch Code 8.7 at the UN headquarters. This global network is using computational science and AI to tackle modern slavery. As part of Code 8.7, we are now bringing together multiple partners to deliver a Global Antislavery Observatory: close-to-real time mapping of slavery sites via geospatial observation. Working with data providers, imagery analysts and AI experts, the Observatory can harness the value of satellite data for antislavery action. We can analyse satellite imagery and find and predict the locations of high-prevalence industries and hotspots.

**Find out more:**  
[nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab](https://nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab)

*An enslaved worker in a north Indian brick kiln; the Rights Lab has mapped slavery across the Brick Belt from space. Courtesy of Free the Slaves.*





Professor Kevin Bales interviewing a former child slave during fieldwork in Bangladesh.

## An antislavery innovation: the Voices Database

### Our Survivors and Cultures Programme is asking: why does slavery persist?

If we understand why slavery exists today, we will have a better chance of ending it. Key to understanding why slavery continues to thrive in multiple cultures of today's world are the ideas and perspectives of slavery survivors. By seeking input from former slaves on definitions, antislavery policies and programmes, we can ensure that policy and practice fit the actual experience of enslaved people and their recovery needs. We can understand what survivors of slavery themselves suggest would enable their communities to become slavery-free and slavery-proof.

In the Rights Lab's Survivors and Cultures Programme, political scientists, sociologists, health scientists, philosophers, and scholars of law and literature work with survivors to put their voices at the heart of the antislavery movement. Integral to this programme has been the perspective of the Survivor Alliance, a new NGO incubated in the Rights Lab and directed by survivor-leader Minh Dang, a current Rights Lab PhD student. The Survivor Alliance unites and empowers survivors of modern slavery around the world and brings the ideas of survivors into policy

and research. This work with survivors also has a focus on recovery, including mental health, to better meet the practical, health and wellbeing needs of survivors over the long term.

In 2019, we have launched the world's first largescale database of contemporary slave testimonies. When fused with our prevalence, geospatial and business data, these millions of words reveal why slavery persists in particular hotspots around the world. This new Voices database lets us analyse patterns in the data to understand trafficking routes, uncover reasons for slavery's emergence across different sectors, identify vulnerabilities and the challenges survivors face in liberation, and discover new antislavery solutions. Across thousands of narratives, we can highlight the possibilities for systematically designing new antislavery strategies based on the solutions of enslaved people. For example, we are mapping these life-stories onto the 169 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets to answer a key question from the point of view of enslaved people themselves: which SDG achievements, beyond 8.7 (ending slavery) are more likely to prevent or end enslavement?

**Find out more:**  
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# An antislavery innovation: the Slavery-Free Cities Index

## Our Communities and Society Programme is asking: what factors underpin resilience against slavery?

Efforts to prevent slavery, discover victims, and provide support for survivors draw upon a complex web of services at locality-level. Yet development of coherent antislavery policy at the sub-national and local level is frequently ignored or underfunded. Similar to other global challenges, such as climate change, modern slavery requires local action to underpin international and domestic legislation.

In the Rights Lab's Communities and Society Programme, sociologists, political scientists, and scholars of education, law, and business, are showing that community engagement remains – as across history – an essential facet of the antislavery movement. Our slavery-free communities project aims to establish how we might work locally, as well as nationally, to create sustainable and resilient localities where slavery cannot flourish. We are developing transferable, scalable and sustainable initiatives which can help communities to become slavery-free. This includes national comparative research on multi-agency antislavery partnerships, work alongside the Church of England and other faith

partners to understand the contribution of faith groups to antislavery action and grass-roots mobilisation, and evaluations of the impact of local press and media campaigns. We are also working alongside statutory and community partners towards creating a slavery-free Nottinghamshire, and this place-based approach to addressing slavery is receiving increasing attention from a number of other cities.

In 2019, we are starting work on a Slavery-Free Cities Index. This builds on our international collaborations with other cities to pilot place-based approaches to addressing slavery. We have theorised social determinants of slavery-free communities, setting them in context with a systemic view of the antislavery agenda, that stretches from prevention through discovery to respite, recovery and sustainable resilience. This framework will now underpin a new index of city resilience to slavery, one that will share the components required to develop slavery-free communities in diverse social and economic contexts. By understanding the factors contributing to slavery-free communities, we can measure and compare resilience across a wide range of local settings, and so challenge and inspire communities to further action.

**Find out more:**  
[nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab](https://nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab)

Local volunteers work with the Rights Lab to assess data and model slavery vulnerability in the city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.





Members of the Rights Lab team in conversation with parliamentarians from Malawi and Namibia about antislavery legislation.

## An antislavery innovation: the Antislavery Legislation Database

**Our Law and Policy Programme is asking: how can we close the implementation gap—the gap between principle and practice in antislavery governance?**

From the global to the domestic, States are increasingly engaging with the issue of modern slavery in their legal frameworks. Yet significant gaps remain in antislavery laws and national approaches often fail to satisfy international commitments. Disparities between States' legal frameworks create confusion, prevent effective cooperation, and result in incomplete coverage of the phenomenon—particularly in its transnational manifestations.

In the Rights Lab's Law and Policy Programme, legal scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and scholars of business and area studies are interrogating the law and policy frameworks that operate at the global, regional, and domestic level. They are working to determine the elements of effective antislavery governance and to map trends, successes, and failures in its realisation and implementation. This includes work defining the parameters of slavery and related forms of exploitation, investigating the full range of potential mechanisms for modern slavery governance, and engaging victim-centred approaches.

To support evidence-based action in antislavery governance, in 2019 we will launch and analyse the world's first comprehensive database of the domestic legislation and international obligations of all 193 UN Member States with regard to slavery and related forms of exploitation. From this Antislavery Legislation Database, we can construct blueprints for antislavery law and policy enactment, reform, and implementation around the world, working with government, legislators, and practitioners to lay the legal foundations for a future free from slavery. Building and honouring consensus through a greater harmonisation of approaches is critical for delivering on the global commitment to antislavery action. The database allows States to learn from global practice and comparative analyses in order to develop robust governance frameworks that respond to the changing dynamics of slavery. As the database expands, it will include new areas of law, national policies, international and regional frameworks, and information on implementation. Placing a world of law and policy evidence at stakeholders' fingertips, the database allows us to access, understand, interrogate, and ultimately achieve prohibition in practice, as well as on paper.

**Find out more:**  
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# An antislavery innovation: the Commodities Risk Index

## Our Business and Economies Programme is asking: what difference does freedom make—what is the Freedom Dividend when slavery ends?

We know that slavery exerts a disproportionate drag, inhibiting social and economic development for free people as well as the enslaved. The UK Government's own 2018 analysis calculates the economic cost of modern slavery at between £3.3 and £4.3 billion. We argue that ending slavery would mean a better world for everyone – what we call the Freedom Dividend.

In the Rights Lab's Business and Economies Programme, business scholars, economists, sociologists, political scientists, and computer scientists are measuring demand and supply for slave labour, demonstrating slavery's impact on a country's economy and economic benefits of ending slavery. Our analyses are revealing the economic value of slavery-free production and making the business, as well as the ethical, case for slavery-free supply chains. As we research slavery in supply chains, we work with partners to change supply chain design in response. We are also showing the global benefits of slavery-free economies: dividends to social and gender

equality, educational enhancement, peace, health, and the environment.

Building on our sector-specific work into global supply chains, we will pilot in 2019 a Commodities Risk Index. This aims to help eradicate slavery in commodity production through the development of an index score. The pilot will identify and catalogue the factors that impact the occurrence of modern slavery in the production of key agricultural commodities, including cotton. It will structure these factors into influencer categories, measure them, and develop an index from their measurement. By incorporating the modern slavery risk in commodity production into the decision-making of global supply chains, we can enable stakeholders – including producers, commodity traders, procurement and supply chain managers, and government bodies – to measure their exposure to slavery, measure progress, and build a commercial case for modern slavery prevention. The index score will help us understand at which point in the supply chain modern slavery is likely to occur, and so enable businesses to understand the impact of their decisions and allocate resources towards improvement.

**Find out more:**  
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*Enslaved person harvesting cotton, a high slavery prevalence commodity. Courtesy of Trafficking in Persons Office, U.S. Department of State.*



Members of the Rights Lab team and partners at the United Nations University event, Code 8.7 about slavery and computational science at the UN Headquarters in New York.



## An antislavery innovation: the Modern Slavery Evidence Unit

**Our Rights Lab Modern Slavery Evidence Unit (MSEU) brings together all of our programmes' research to ask: what works to end slavery?**

Our aim of helping to end slavery by 2030 can only be delivered if the work of key stakeholders in policy-making, business and civil society is informed by a clear roadmap – what the Rights Lab calls The Freedom Blueprint. Without this blueprint, antislavery cannot draw upon successful practices at all levels of activity – from slavery-free supply chains and global prevalence estimates, to survivor care and multi-agency partnership working.

Domain specialists from each of the Rights Lab's five programmes work in the MSEU and focus on translating research into accessible briefings. Specialist MSEU Fellows bring extended capacity in systematic review, policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and translation and impact. Drawing on evidence from the Rights Lab's five programmes, along with evidence from the wider global antislavery scholarship community, MSEU delivers consultancy and briefings, and tackles key evidence gaps identified by policy-makers and other partners. We also anticipate potential shifts in the landscape of modern slavery, for example

with a new report on the likely impact of Brexit on antislavery work. Our team shares this expertise with government departments, NGOs and other policy partners, through our MA in Slavery and Liberation and our free Massive Open Online Course on Ending Slavery, which has been taken by participants in more than 150 countries.

In 2019, MSEU launched an antislavery monitoring and evaluation (M&E) service, demonstrating effective processes of antislavery intervention and helping our partners to further develop evidence-based approaches. Our current evaluations include an assessment of the Freedom Dividend of a survivor employment programme in Cambodian garment factories, to better understand the impact on factory employees, their families and wider communities over time. Using a subset of social progress indicators, we will determine the difference that freedom makes at individual and societal levels. We are also evaluating the efficacy of a national faith-based programme in the UK, assessing a wellbeing intervention delivered by an NGO in Malaysia, and analysing survivors' reintegration journeys and experiences via a new framework for sustained liberation with NGOs in Ethiopia and India.

**Find out more:**  
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