STRATEGY 2026 2030

TRANSPARENTEM

A defining moment

We are in a moment of unprecedented opportunity to address one of the most intractable human rights abuses of our time.

For the first time in modern history, the issue of forced labor has risen to the top of the global agenda. This is a rare opportunity in which often competing economic, national security, and ethical motivations are aligned in historically unparalleled ways.

We are witnessing a rapid rise in the number of countries adopting legislation that bans the import of goods made with forced labor. In turn, this puts pressure on all countries to ensure that forced labor is not used in the production of any goods intended for export and ultimately, with the right supporting policies and approaches, to eradicate forced labor entirely. At the same time, a growing number of countries are introducing mandatory human rights due diligence laws and we are seeing an increase in the number of trade agreements that explicitly require bans on forced labor.

Motives aside, we must not underestimate this opportunity. None of us can predict how this regulatory momentum will shift. That honest uncertainty should humble us. But we know that the progress we are seeing is unlikely to be rolled back, which is precisely why this moment is so compelling. It is incumbent on us to turn this moment into the best possible outcome for workers.

Today 28 million people live in forced labor. Nearly 40 percent are women and girls, and 12 percent are children. Migrant workers are three times more likely to be in forced labor than non-migrants. Strikingly, roughly two-thirds of forced labor exists in private sector supply chains that make our everyday goods.

Forced labor can take on many forms, including debt bondage, confiscation of identification, withheld wages, threats of violence, lack of ability to collectively organize, or living and working in conditions of extreme isolation and destitution.

For the past decade, Transparentem has been on the front lines of uncovering forced and child labor in corporate supply chains and ensuring they are addressed. We have catalyzed the return of over $12 million to workers, allowing them to escape forced labor conditions, repay debts, care for their families, and send their children back to school. At the same time, our work has been instrumental in driving more systemic change at both the industry and country levels where we have worked.

We have a model that works, and a window that won't stay open forever.

Now is the time to scale.

Beneath the surface of forced labor



THE PROBLEM	HOW OUR WORK REACHES IT
What workers experience Debt bondage, confiscated documents, withheld wages, threats, isolation, abusive working and living conditions	**Transparency and engagement** We expose abuse and press companies to provide remedy
What traps workers Recruitment fees, low wages, unstable immigration status, limited union access, gender-based violence, opaque supply chains, weak laws and enforcement	**Systems change** We push for corporate commitments and for stronger laws and enforcement
Root causes Poverty and inequality; gender, class, and racial discrimination; climate stress; authoritarianism and antidemocratic movements	**Partnership** We partner with unions, civil society, and others working on the deeper drivers of forced labor

Who we are

Transparentem partners with the world's most vulnerable workers to expose and eradicate hidden abuses in the making of our everyday products. We push for immediate and direct remedy to workers alongside change to the larger systems that perpetuate the abuse.

Our rigorous, worker-centered investigations uncover abuses—primarily forced and child labor—which have either escaped the public spotlight or been too quickly dismissed rather than permanently eradicated.

In an ecosystem of organizations working to eradicate corporate supply chain abuses, Transparentem's combination of rigorous investigation, direct company engagement, and public accountability sets us apart.

Our most valued asset is our ability to earn the trust of the workers who share their testimonies with us.

We have a roster of nearly 90 field investigators who gather firsthand worker testimony of workplace abuses, often at great personal risk.

Our investigators—a third of whom are women—are journalists, members of unions, civil society organizations, and academics, who understand the realities workers face and have the professionalism and humility to respectfully expose their abuse. They are based in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the United States. Most often, they are from workers' countries of origin or from the countries where we conduct investigations.

We conduct rigorous supply chain mapping to identify the consumer brands purchasing the products we investigate and bring the evidence we uncover directly to them. Voluntary action is the first step in our theory of change. In our first decade of work, we have connected more than 300 companies to violations, and 70 percent of them have taken action to address identified social and labor abuses. This direct corporate leverage is the most powerful and immediate way to make broad change.

Our findings are ultimately always made public. Voluntary action in and of itself does not lead to remediation of all the abuses we uncover—there are always recalcitrant companies that do not act on their own. Making our work accessible to a broad audience also allows us to tackle forced labor at scale. We must ensure our investigations lead to systemic change in corporate policies and practices, strengthened laws and enforcement, and increased worker decision-making over their lives.

Beyond investigations, we research and publish information on what drives or impedes systemic change. To date, this has included social audit effectiveness, grievance mechanisms, and trade-labor linkages—but we'll continue evolving our focus as new issues emerge. This will remain central to our work.

From the field

Our investigators meet workers where they are: on factory floors and in fields, on the way to work, and in their homes and communities.







LEATHER TANNERY, BANGLADESH · GARMENT FACTORY, MYANMAR · HEADING TO WORK, INDIA

Our impact

In ten years of investigations, Transparentem has both transformed the lives of individual workers who have escaped forced labor conditions and driven positive change in the systems that allow that exploitation.

Systemic change has taken different forms in different places. Following public reporting on our investigation into child labor and other abuses in Bangladesh's leather tanneries, the government enforced a Supreme Court order shutting down wet tanning operations in Hazaribagh, the Dhaka neighborhood that was then the hub of the country's leather industry.

After our investigation found indicators of forced labor in garment factories and spinning mills in Tamil Nadu, India, 10 companies backed industry campaigns to raise the state's minimum wage, and 11 strengthened their audits, codes of conduct, or supplier oversight; nearly all extended oversight beyond their direct (tier-one) suppliers.

Our work in Taiwan shows how direct remedy and systemic change can build on each other.

260+
worksites investigated

1,400+
testimonies collected from workers and community members

300+
companies headquartered in 30+ countries connected to our findings

240+
connected companies responded to our outreach

$12M
returned to workers

DISCLOSED PROJECT COUNTRIES

Bangladesh
Brazil
India
Indonesia
Malaysia
Mauritius
Myanmar
Taiwan

INVESTIGATED SECTORS

Aerospace & Defense
Apparel & Accessories
Automotive
Food & Beverage
Industrial & Packaging
Metals & Mining
Retail
Technology & Electronics
Textile Manufacturing

“I came to work to pay my family’s debt but received another debt,”

one interviewed worker said.

BUYERS
Global brands and retailers

TIER 1
Product manufacturers

TIER 2
Parts and materials manufacturers

Since 2022, we have investigated the unethical recruitment of migrant workers into Taiwan’s factories.

Interviews with more than 120 migrants employed by 24 facilities in the textile, electronics, appliance, and automotive sectors revealed that workers from Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand paid recruitment fees of up to $6,400 to secure their jobs.

Many had to take out loans to pay those fees, putting them at risk of debt bondage, in which workers are trapped in jobs to pay off debts.

Many workers also paid monthly fees to Taiwanese labor brokers that added up to two to three months’ wages per three-year contract.

Workers also reported passport confiscation, restricted movement, excessive overtime, and deception and threats during recruitment.

The investigated manufacturers are in the supply chains of major global brands in apparel, technology, and electronics.

From worker testimony to national reform

DIRECT IMPACT

We used this evidence to engage manufacturers, brands, and investors. As a result, manufacturers took corrective action to address forced labor conditions and committed to reimbursing more than $8 million to migrant workers who had paid fees to obtain their jobs.

As of fall 2026, **more than $5.5 million has been repaid to workers**, with more expected by the end of the year. Following our engagement, at least seven manufacturers across our investigations adopted no-broker-fee policies.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Working with community organizations, local industry groups, and brands, **we secured signatures from more than 50 brands** on a petition calling on Taiwan's government to strengthen protections.

In a separate petition, 21 individuals and civil society organizations made the same call. The Taiwan Textile Federation began officially recommending that textile mills pay all recruitment costs of migrant workers to prevent debt bondage and forced labor. Following our first report, **Taiwan's top watchdog, the Control Yuan, conducted a formal probe into forced labor** in textiles that found serious problems and recommended reforms.

In early 2026, a US–Taiwan trade framework included commitments to end worker-paid recruitment fees and employers' retention of workers' passports and identity documents.

WHAT'S NEXT

Despite these advances, recruitment fees persist. We and civil society groups in Taiwan, including our partner Serve the People Association, are urging brands to establish a binding, worker-driven agreement with global unions to prevent and remedy abuse.

READ THE REPORTS

Following the Thread (2025)
The Price of Work (2025)
On the Mend (July 2026)
Debt Before Day One (October 2026)

What we have learned

Over the past decade, Transparentem has had outsized impact.

We are a small core team that has exposed abuses that otherwise would have stayed hidden, including child labor in Indian cotton fields, forced labor in the Taiwanese electronics industry and the Malaysian and Mauritian apparel industries, toxic waste in Bangladeshi tanneries, and environmental degradation in the mining of bauxite for aluminum in the Brazilian rainforest.

Along the way, we are always learning.

We have crystallized input from external stakeholders and our own staff into three key lessons that shape our new strategy:

LESSON 1

Pursue Work That Moves the Needle

LESSON 2

Change Is Built Together

LESSON 3

Sustain and Amplify Our Stories

LESSON 1

Pursue Work That Moves the Needle

Prioritize the most vulnerable workers

Our limited resources require us to be extremely disciplined in what we investigate. We must focus on egregious abuse faced by the most vulnerable workers. In some cases, that means we uncover abuses that have received no attention or only limited attention. In other cases, the attention may have been there, but the needle has not moved enough, and we can place renewed attention on it.

Ensure systemic change

Not every investigation moves systems. We must choose investigations where the right levers exist to drive both direct remedy and lasting change. Every investigation should have a tailored theory of change and include resources for the needed follow-through, by us or our partners, to ensure longer-term impact.

Be nimble in the "how"

Our model of engagement must be flexible enough to achieve maximum impact with the fewest resources needed. When change is possible with a more streamlined approach, we will use our newly developed lighter-touch model to move faster. This model focuses on one or two specific forced labor indicators, such as worker-paid recruitment fees. We go deep when we see the opportunity for outsized impact, be that legislative reform, weakening a repressive regime, or sustained country-level change with strong local partners who can carry the work forward.

LESSON 2

Change Is Built Together

Workers

Workers are our most essential partners. Their testimonies inform every investigation, and the credibility of our findings depends on the trust and agency of the people whose lived experiences we document. We must continually hone the way we engage with workers, ensuring that our work is never extractive in nature, that their voices are the strongest in designing remediation, and that we always close the loop, ensuring workers know the ultimate impact of sharing their stories and can encourage other workers facing similar conditions to do the same when they feel safe to do so. Publishing our findings in local-language media is essential.

Local partners

Working as partners with local organizations is key to long-term change and to strengthening civil society, which is the backbone of accountability and promotion of the rule of law. We must be even more rigorous in prioritizing alliances with organizations in the countries where we conduct investigations to strengthen their capacity, learn from them, and jointly amplify our collective messaging. It is equally crucial that we work with global, national, and industry-level unions whose mandate it is to represent and protect workers' right to organize and collectively bargain.

Coalitions

No organization can end forced labor alone. We must continually question how we can do what we do better by doing it together with others. There are existing coalitions that focus on forced labor and trade, and strong organizations across the political spectrum working to address forced labor. We must come together at this moment of unparalleled opportunity to make large-scale impact.

LESSON 3

Sustain and Amplify Our Stories

Our partners were clear with us that our evidence is unparalleled and company response rates are remarkable.

At the same time, they were united in urging us to ensure every investigation has a clear long-term plan for follow-up and that we make our information as accessible as possible to a wide range of audiences.

Sustain the pressure

Our work must lead to long-term, sustained change. This means ensuring every project has a long tail, even if the investigation itself can be done more quickly or with fewer resources. We must be explicit in how we—or our partners—will ensure that there is follow-through on the commitments made at the direct worker and systemic levels.

Share our data

We have a tremendous amount of information that others can use. It is incumbent upon us to find ways to share that data—always prioritizing confidentiality—so that it can be leveraged by others to drive change. This will allow us to greatly amplify impact.

Lean into storytelling

It is essential that our findings reach as broad an audience as possible. This entails greater emphasis on telling personal stories, when appropriate and with the explicit consent of those whose testimony we are sharing, and use of shorter, graphic-friendly formats. We must build renewed partnerships with journalists, news outlets, campaign organizations, and influencers to expand our reach.

STRATEGY 2026-2030

A vision of 2030

As Transparentem plans for 2030, we are doubling down on our commitment to help drive the end of forced labor, including child labor. Over the past decade, we have proven that our model drives change. We have listened to our partners, evolved our approach where needed, and are now primed to accelerate our impact.

MISSION

Transparentem exposes and eradicates forced labor and the exploitation of workers in global supply chains.

VISION

A world where the workers who make our everyday products are treated with dignity and respect and can build a better future for themselves and their families.

Through 2030, we will sustain our current team and invest in four areas of strategic focus identified with our partners:

PRIORITY 1

Bring Hidden Abuse to Light

PRIORITY 2

Turn Evidence into Systemic Change

PRIORITY 3

Multiply Impact through Partnership

PRIORITY 4

Equip Our Team to Work at Scale

Bring Hidden Abuse to Light

Forced labor is our core investigative lens, with migrant labor and recruitment debt as our defining focus.

Much of the forced labor in global supply chains is the result of workers borrowing money to secure their jobs and ultimately getting trapped in debt bondage. This is an issue that can be directly addressed by brands, working in coordination with their supply chain partners, governments, and workers.

True to our model, we will prioritize investigations and supply chain tracing, which lay the groundwork for the engagement and advocacy described in Priority 2. At the same time, we will increasingly see our work as modular, not always necessitating that we conduct every aspect of the work, focused instead on the components most needed to spark wider attention and action.

Given the scale of the issue, we will focus on the countries and industries where our work can have the greatest ripple effect. Our expertise lies in the trust the field investigators on our roster develop with workers. That allows us not to limit ourselves to any industry. We will continue to focus on manufacturing, agriculture, and other sectors where abuse is rampant.

While our key entry point is forced labor, the drivers of forced labor must be addressed for it to be eradicated. Together with our partners, we will identify and call out those drivers, including the climate stress and environmental degradation that force people from their homes, discrimination that pushes workers into precarious situations, barriers to worker organizing, and other push factors.

A focus on women and girls

Nearly 40 percent of people in forced labor are women and girls, and they face abuses that too often go undetected. Over this strategy period, we will deepen our focus on gender, conducting investigations designed to uncover issues such as sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and discrimination. Drawing on the trust our field investigators build with workers, we will press for remedy and reforms that address the specific risks women and girls face.

Climate change and forced labor

Climate change is a growing driver of forced labor. When droughts, floods, and environmental degradation destroy livelihoods, people are pushed to migrate for work, often taking on debt to pay recruiters and becoming more vulnerable to exploitation. The same supply chains that rely on forced labor often harm the environment. We bring an integrated lens to labor and environmental abuses so that both receive coordinated attention.

“When they took us here, they snatched our passports.”

That is how one Bangladeshi migrant worker described arriving at a garment factory in Malaysia.

BUYERS
Global brands and retailers

TIER 1
Apparel factories

Beginning in 2016, we carried out three investigations into the country’s apparel manufacturing sector, interviewing more than 200 migrant workers across 11 worksites.

Investigators documented widespread indicators of forced labor: workers paid excessive recruitment fees to secure their jobs, leaving many in debt and at risk of debt bondage; recruiters deceived workers about their pay and conditions; and at several factories, employers withheld workers’ passports.

Many workers also lived in overcrowded hostels. “*In one room, 24 of us stayed together on the floor,*” one worker said. “*We stayed on the floor for one and a half years.*”

Three investigations, one industry pledge

DIRECT IMPACT

We traced the evidence to 46 companies and privately pressed each of them to remediate.

Our engagement **secured $3.19 million in recruitment-fee reimbursements** for workers, paid or committed by suppliers and some buyers. Suppliers also returned 1,600 confiscated passports.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Coverage in *the New York Times* and *the Guardian* brought our methods and findings to a wider audience and added public pressure on companies to act.

Our first Malaysia investigation, whose findings were shared with buyers beginning in spring 2018, helped spur the creation of the Apparel & Footwear Industry Commitment to Responsible Recruitment, an industry pledge launched by the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA).

As of 2026, **101 major multinational apparel companies** have signed on. Signatories commit to working with their suppliers so that no worker pays for their job; workers receive a timely refund of any recruitment fees and costs they have paid; workers keep control of their passports and other travel documents and have full freedom of movement; and workers learn the terms of their employment, in a language they understand, before they leave their home country.

Signatories must also write these commitments into their codes of conduct within one year of signing and report regularly on their progress. In March 2023, AAFA and FLA relaunched and strengthened the pledge, adding the refund requirement, the one-year deadline, and the reporting obligation.

READ THE REPORT

Paying to Work (October 2024)

PRIORITY 2

Turn Evidence into Systemic Change

Every investigation we conduct must have clear levers to drive systemic change.

We define systemic change as improvements to corporate policy or practice at individual companies, new industry standards or commitments, or strengthened laws and enforcement. We will achieve this change through direct engagement with stakeholders, including:

Employers: Outreach to workers' direct employers following an investigation is the quickest way for workers to be liberated from forced labor. We will continue to take our findings directly to them and push for direct remediation and changes to their policies and practices.

Workers and their representatives: We must ensure our findings are shared directly with workers and their representatives so they can use them to press for remediation and shape its design. Collective worker voice is the only viable long-term check on abuse, which is why we also invest in the partnerships with workers and organized labor described in Priority 3.

Brands: We take the evidence we gather to the brands that purchase the goods we investigate. Over our first decade, we have developed trusted relationships with brands and their industry associations. We must trace more companies tied to the products we investigate, speed our engagement with them, and ensure their responsiveness is timely and sufficient. We will also build on past successes in spurring collective industry action, such as the still-active coalition addressing child labor in Indian cotton.

Government bodies that have acted on our findings

UNITED STATES

US Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection

US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs

US Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

US Embassy Mauritius

BANGLADESH

Bangladeshi Ministry of Industries

INDIA

District-level governments in Khargone and Barwani

MAURITIUS

Mauritian Ministry of Labour

TAIWAN

Control Yuan (Taiwan's highest supervisory and audit branch of government)

Taiwanese Ministry of Economic Affairs

Taiwanese Ministry of Labor

Taiwanese National Human Rights Commission

Governments: Ultimate responsibility for eliminating forced labor sits with governments.

We will actively engage with governments to share the results of our investigations and to push for stronger laws and enforcement.

In the new trade environment, it is incumbent upon governments to prove they are taking action to eliminate forced labor.

We have proven through our past work—such as the blocking by US Customs and Border Protection of apparel from a Mauritian factory that refused to remediate forced labor following our reports—that our evidence drives regulatory action. With further investments, we can put more of our work into the hands of governments and partner with them to drive change.



Women going to work in Myanmar

Investors: Transparentem has built a strong relationship with a broad group of investors, including pension funds, public and private equity, banks, family offices, and international financial institutions, helping them to navigate risk in their portfolios and identify opportunities for positive impact through their investments.

Over this strategy period, we will build on our suite of publicly available investor tools and actively engage with investors to increase pressure on recalcitrant companies with forced labor in their supply chains.

The potential supply chain disruptions their investees face from ignoring forced labor are greater now than ever before.

General public: Investigations that reach the public create reputational pressure that companies, investors, and governments cannot ignore. In this strategy period, we will deepen partnerships with global and local journalists and news outlets, center worker voices in how our findings are told, and reach more audiences across traditional and emerging media channels, supported by expanded communications capacity.

By investing in our network of nearly 90 field investigators, half of whom are journalists, we extend our investigative reach and strengthen local media in producing countries.

CASE STUDY – MAURITIUS

When voluntary remedy fails

BUYERS
Global brands and retailers

TIER 1
Apparel factories

Mauritius's garment industry relies heavily on migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, China, and Madagascar.

In December 2023, we published an investigation into the country's apparel factories. We found that workers had paid high recruitment fees, been deceived by recruitment agents in their home countries, and faced abusive conditions and intimidation from factory staff.

DIRECT IMPACT

We engaged 18 buyers sourcing from these factories. Where companies acted, workers received remedy.

In February 2025, the brands PVH, Barbour, and Second Clothing **reimbursed nearly $390,000 in recruitment fees** to workers at the apparel manufacturer R.E.A.L Garments, establishing an important precedent that buyers—not only suppliers—have a material responsibility to ensure ethical recruitment. IndustriALL Global Union, a global federation of trade unions, verified the payments on the ground.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Firemount Group, another manufacturer in the investigation, did not provide meaningful remedy to workers. For more than two years, we tried to engage Firemount and eight of its buyers without receiving information that workers had been reimbursed for the fees they paid to secure their jobs.

In November 2025, following our reports, **US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued a Withhold Release Order blocking Firemount's goods from entering the US market** on suspicion that they were made with forced labor. CBP cited four forced labor indicators: debt bondage, deception, intimidation and threats, and abuse of vulnerability. We believe import bans should be a last resort, used only after voluntary efforts have failed. The Firemount case shows that when companies ignore clear evidence, the consequences are real.

READ THE REPORTS

"I Came Here with So Many Dreams": Labor Rights Abuses & the Need for Change in Mauritius' Apparel Factories (December 2023)

Migrant Garment Workers Still Waiting for Change (October 2024)

PRIORITY 3

Multiply Impact through Partnership

The scale of forced labor and the magnitude of opportunity to eradicate it require that we work in broad coalition with organizations at the local, national, and global levels. This requires a commitment to leverage our respective capabilities to ensure the broadest change. Partners may be co-grantees, sub-grantees, formal or informal collaborators, or allies in larger coalitions.

At the local level, we will engage workers, unions, and civil society organizations that advocate for workers from the point of scoping an investigation, through a project, and in follow-up to our investigations. This has taken and will take distinct forms depending on the breadth and depth of a given project.

More than 60 civil society organizations are taking concrete action in response to our findings and engagement, including:

- The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MV Foundation), an organization dedicated to combating child labor and ensuring full-time schooling for all children, teaming up with the Fair Labor Association and 27 companies on the multi-year development initiative Harvesting the Future – Cotton in India;

- Serve the People Association in Taiwan, which aims to improve the rights and working conditions of migrant workers, pushing the Taiwan Textile Federation to ban worker-paid recruitment fees;

- Voices, which helps minorities and Indigenous communities fight for their rights, and the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, which tracks human rights policies, performance, and legal accountability of thousands of companies, using our work in Brazil to advance their own campaigns and tool development.

Defending the rule of law and democracy

Forced labor thrives under authoritarian regimes and wherever workers cannot organize, the press is silenced, and laws go unenforced.

Our work strengthens the foundations of democracy: our evidence fuels enforcement and stronger laws, our partnerships with unions and civil society support workers' right to organize and collectively bargain, and our field investigators, half of them journalists, strengthen the independent press.

When we expose abuse and hold powerful companies accountable, we push back against the systems that sustain authoritarian power.

Our goal will be to strengthen local civil society capacity where we have technical expertise, amplify local partners' messaging, and learn from local partners in how we approach our collective work.

Our network of field investigators is itself a powerful form of partnership. Half are journalists, and many are part of local media, academic institutions, and civil society organizations.

The skills and support we provide them strengthen those institutions, including the independent local press. This is a two-way learning process: we gain as much from their knowledge and networks as they gain from ours.

As the number of countries adopting forced labor import bans grows, we are committed to supporting local civil society with the tools to gather and submit evidence effectively to their own and foreign governments and thereby multiply our collective impact.

The standard we must hold ourselves to is that when Transparentem's direct engagement in a region ends, the organizations and relationships that exist on the ground should be stronger and have greater technical capacity to fight forced labor than they were when our work began.

Our partnerships directly with workers and their representatives are core to structural reform and upholding freedom of association. An investment in deepening partnerships with organized labor will counter the systematic weakening of democracy through attacks on workers and their structural safeguards.

At the national and global levels, we must tackle forced labor together. We will double down on our active commitment to the pre-existing coalitions focused on trade and forced labor and help to build new connections when needed.

Our aim is a shared agenda, a clear division of labor, and coordinated use of enforcement, investor pressure, and corporate engagement to translate this moment into lasting change for workers.



Community group meeting with Transparentem in Brazil

Addressing abuses in the cotton fields

BUYERS
Global brands and retailers

TIER 1
Factories

TIER 2
Spinning mills

TIER 3
Ginning mills

TIER 4
Cotton farms

Between 2022 and 2023, we investigated labor conditions on 90 cotton farms in the Khargone and Barwani districts of Madhya Pradesh.

Through interviews with 151 workers and 66 farm owners, investigators found wages below both the legal minimum and a living wage, debt bondage tied to employer advances and loans, and children as young as six working in the fields, some of whom were not attending school at all.

Ravi (a pseudonym), an adult cotton farm worker, said of his 13-year-old niece, "*She goes to school rarely.*" He added, "*For the sake of our daily bread, we have to work. If we just let the child go to study, then how will we overcome our hunger?*" Adults and children alike were handling or exposed to toxic pesticides. We traced cotton from these farms through three major Indian suppliers to more than 60 global apparel brands, most of which had never traced their supply chains to the farm level.

DIRECT IMPACT

All three suppliers and more than half of the 60 brands we engaged joined working groups to understand their supply chains and support remediation. Through the resulting program (see systemic impact below), to date **more than 275 children** have been re-enrolled in school.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

That engagement led to Harvesting the Future – Cotton in India, an initiative led by the Fair Labor Association and backed by 27 companies. **It covers 32 villages and more than 7,500 farms**.

One and a half years into the three-year program, partner MV Foundation is establishing child-labor-free zones.

Key district-level government agencies have also joined a compact to connect workers with the entitlements and protections that address the root causes of child labor.

READ THE REPORT

From Field to Fabric: Enhancing Due Diligence in Cotton Supply Chains (January 2025)

PRIORITY 4

Equip Our Team to Work at Scale

The heart of Transparentem is the small core staff and our network of field investigators. They have made our outsized impact possible over the last decade.

We must continue to develop our own internal skills to keep pace with rapid change in our external environment. This includes finding new ways to identify the most egregious instances of forced labor, increasing the efficiency of our processes, expanding our expertise in partnership development and engagement, and expanding the suite of tools we can use to ensure follow-up to our investigations.

It is essential that we invest in our team's ability to thrive in and embrace this time of rapid change and ambiguity.

We will also invest in our field investigators, growing their abilities to use AI effectively and responsibly, understand the shifting trade and regulatory environment and the opportunities that it provides, build their legal expertise, and expand their ability to use new forms of communications and social media.

Internally, it is crucial that we identify ways AI and other new technologies can scale our work.

We see potential for AI to help us identify and research hot spots faster, conduct investigations more efficiently, map brands connected to abusive supply chains more comprehensively, and ultimately reach an exponentially higher number of workers.

In all this work, we will continually debate the most responsible way to implement AI and hold ourselves to the highest levels of integrity. Most importantly, we will not compromise our rigor or our trust-based human engagement and approaches.

To enhance our reach, we must also invest in increased communications capabilities. Using storytelling, advocacy approaches, and a wider array of communications tools and platforms will allow us to pull new levers and reach a greater breadth of audiences in both producing and purchasing countries.

This expanded communications capacity is essential to drive greater corporate action and regulatory attention.

Theory of change

28 MILLION IN FORCED LABOR

Nearly 40% women and girls
Two-thirds in the supply chains behind everyday goods

A WINDOW TO ACT

New laws banning forced labor
Economic, security, and ethical motives aligned

ALONGSIDE WORKERS, LOCAL PARTNERS, AND COALITIONS

TRANSPARENCY: bringing hidden abuse to light

INVESTIGATE
Labor abuses in global supply chains, chosen for impact

→

TRACE SUPPLY CHAINS
We link abuse to the brands that buy the goods

LEVERAGE: turning evidence into action

ENGAGE COMPANIES
Employers, then brands, privately at first

→

PUBLISH FINDINGS
Made public so others can act

→

PRESSURE BUILDS
Investors push brands; media spotlights abuse; regulators act

TRANSFORMATION: making change last

DIRECT REMEDY

Workers freed from forced labor and other abusive conditions

Especially women and girls

SYSTEMS CHANGE

Corporate policies and industry commitments

Stronger laws and enforcement

Stronger unions and civil society

POWERED BY

Core staff

90 field investigators

Technological innovation

A world where the workers who make our everyday products are treated with dignity and respect and can build a better future for themselves and their families.

Where workers can organize, the press is free, and laws are enforced

Measure what matters

We measure impact at three levels: direct, systemic, and organizational.

DIRECT OUTCOMES

We measure the immediate results of each investigation by whether workers are better off and whether companies have changed how they operate:

- Number of workers freed from forced labor conditions
- Number of workers benefiting from corporate remediation and improvements
- Amount of recruitment fees repaid to workers
- Number of children removed from child labor
- Number of civil society organizations taking action to address identified abuses
- Number of companies that have taken action to address identified abuses

SYSTEMIC OUTCOMES

We measure whether our findings move beyond individual worksites to the systems level:

- Number of government actions, including new laws, regulations, or enforcement measures, that cite or build on our findings
- Number of investors engaged
- Number of coordinated investor actions taken
- Number of industry-wide initiatives launched, strengthened, or expanded
- Number of media stories published or communication channels that cite our findings to drive public accountability
- Number of peer organizations using our evidence to advance their own advocacy
- Number of civil society organizations that retain investigative capacity, stakeholder relationships, or advocacy tools after our direct engagement ends
- Number of civil society organizations with increased capacity to investigate forced labor and hold corporations accountable
- Number of companies that have adapted their corporate policies or practices as a result of our investigations

ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

We measure the increased capacity of our organization and staff:

- Growth of our reach and impact as a result of investments in new technologies and processes
- Professional growth of our team measured by technical expertise and impact
- Repetitive processes that have been streamlined, bottlenecks addressed, and resources saved as a result of investments in new technologies
- Growth in the investigative and communication capabilities and relationships of our investigator roster
- Increase in the number and diversity of funders, with a focus on unrestricted funding across our four strategic priorities
- Exploration of new ways of proactively raising revenue

Building lasting change

We stand at an inflection point.

For the first time in modern history, the world's economic, security, and moral interests have converged around the eradication of forced labor. This moment has created unprecedented openings for systemic change—in policy, in corporate practice, in investor behavior. We are seizing it not for short-term gains but to build durable change that will outlast any single political cycle or market trend.

AI offers enormous potential to identify abuses faster, conduct investigations more efficiently, map supply chains more comprehensively, and reach exponentially more workers. But technology is only a multiplier, and we must be cautious in our approach to it. The trust we've built with workers, our rigorous investigations, and our human engagement are the most important elements of who we are as an organization.

The scale of forced labor is immense.

The opportunity before us is unparalleled.

With disciplined focus, broad coalitions, and a strong growth mindset, we can drive the change that transforms supply chains and liberates millions of workers from exploitation.





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