

Commodity Report: Shrimp (2026)

Shrimp are reportedly produced with forced labor (FL) and/or child labor (CL) in the following countries:¹

- Bangladesh (FL, CL)
- Burma (FL)
- Cambodia (CL)
- Ecuador (FL, CL)
- India (FL)
- Thailand (FL)

Top ten countries that export shrimp (fresh or chilled) worldwide:²

1. Thailand
2. China
3. Spain
4. Indonesia
5. France
6. India
7. United States
8. Malaysia
9. Saudi Arabia
10. Portugal

Where are shrimp reportedly produced with human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor?

This is one of two closely related Commodity Reports focusing on different subsectors of the seafood industry; the other is [Fish](#). There are some natural overlaps in the research and reporting, including workplaces where a variety of seafood is processed. In comparison to the broader scope of fishing vessels and fish processing, this report is limited to specific shrimping vessels, shrimp farms, and production of shrimp feed. Some findings presented in this report also appear in the [Fishing, Aquaculture, and Seafood Processing Sector Report](#), which provides a broader overview of the various

¹ This list is based solely on findings from the [U.S. Department of State's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and the [U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor and Forced Labor](#).

² [International Trade Center Trade Map](#). (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics).

Note: The country list is ordered by value exported.

forms that forced labor may take in the seafood sector, the structural causes, and the combination of factors that may bind workers to their jobs.

The U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* states that Bangladeshi families and Indian migrant workers are subjected to forced labor in shrimp and fish processing in Bangladesh. Forced labor and child labor are found in shrimp farming in Ecuador.³

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's *2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, child labor in shrimp production is found in Bangladesh and Cambodia, and forced labor is found in shrimp production in Burma, India, and Thailand.⁴

Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, and Thailand are listed as Tier 2 countries by the U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*. Cambodia and Burma are listed as Tier 3 countries.⁵

What does human trafficking and/or child labor in shrimp production look like?

This section includes countries with publicly available research and reporting on forced labor and child labor, in addition to the countries listed in the above-mentioned government reports.

Shrimp has been removed from the list of products made with child labor in **Thailand**, per the U.S. Department of Labor's *2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, as Thailand has made "significant advances in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor" in the shrimp and seafood processing industry.⁶ The U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Homeland Security have also stated that child labor in the Thai shrimp sector "appears to have been significantly reduced."⁷ Thailand had previously been on the U.S. Department of Labor's *List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labor* since 2009.⁸

³ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor. [2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

⁵ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor. [2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Thailand. 2024.](#)

⁷ [U.S. Department of Labor. "Notice of Initial Determination To Remove Shrimp From Thailand and Garments From Vietnam From the List of Products Requiring Federal Contractor Certification as to Forced or Indentured Child Labor Pursuant to Executive Order 13126." Federal Register. 10 May 2024.](#)

⁸ White, Cliff. ["US Department of Labor: Child labor no longer prevalent in Thailand's shrimp sector." SeafoodSource, 14 May 2024.](#)

However, the U.S. Department of Labor has also stated that more work is needed to eradicate other labor abuses in Thailand's seafood sector, including adult forced labor in the production and harvesting of shrimp and fish.⁹ Shrimp supply chains in Thailand have received significant international attention over the last decade following stories documenting forced labor in the harvest of "trash fish" that is used in shrimp feed,¹⁰ and in shrimp processing.

Thai Trash Fish

Thai fishing vessels include trawlers used to catch trash fish to make fishmeal for Thai shrimp farmers. Trash fish include species considered low value due to their unsuitability for direct human consumption, or commercially important fish that are damaged or caught before maturing to a size suitable for consumption. The fish are ground into fishmeal or used as fertilizers and bait. Shrimp aquaculture, or farms where shrimp are raised for consumption, has driven demand for high-quality fishmeal made from trash fish since the 1980s.¹¹ Trash fish make up the largest percentage of procured fish in Thailand, per 2023 government statistics, at 321,300 tons.¹²

In the latest sustainability assessment by Seafood Watch of Thai whiteleg shrimp in 2020, shrimp scored very low for its "unsustainable feed ingredients" due to findings of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and human rights abuses on the fishing trawlers in the shrimp feed supply chain.¹³ Thai trawlers use small-mesh nets and have no target species; over 300 species of fish are caught, and many are juveniles of commercially important species. Per the 2020 assessment, about 25 percent of shrimp feed is "believed to be almost entirely (>90%) sourced from Thai trawlers operating in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea."¹⁴ Major seafood producers in Thailand, including Charoen Pokphand Foods

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor. [2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

¹⁰ Hodal, Kate et al. ["Revealed: Asian Slave Labour Producing Prawns for Supermarkets in US, UK." The Guardian, 10 June 2014.](#)

¹¹ [Just Seafood. From Trash Fish to Fishmeal Production in Thailand: History and Political Economy Analysis. 2025.](#)

¹² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

¹³ [Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch. Environmental sustainability assessment of farmed Whiteleg shrimp \(Litopenaeus vannamei\) from Thailand produced in ponds. 6 July 2020.](#)

¹⁴ [Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch. Environmental sustainability assessment of farmed Whiteleg shrimp \(Litopenaeus vannamei\) from Thailand produced in ponds. 6 July 2020.](#)

and Thai Union, have made efforts to reduce the amount of trash fish in the fishmeal used to feed shrimp by using fishmeal made from tuna and tilapia byproducts instead.¹⁵

Thai Seafood¹⁶

Research in the seafood sector has consistently noted that the systemic nature of abuse in Thailand is linked to the presence of vulnerable migrant workers from neighboring countries such as Burma and Cambodia.¹⁷ The U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* notes an increase of informal and illegal recruitment networks that recruit migrants onto fishing vessels coinciding with increased Burmese migration to Thailand due to ongoing armed conflict.¹⁸

According to the report, vessel owners, brokers, and senior vessel crew subject migrant workers from Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, as well as Thai workers, to forced labor on Thai and foreign-owned fishing boats. Migrant workers must often pay fees to labor agents, and face deception and debt-based coercion during the recruitment process. Fishing vessel owners also reportedly confiscate the identity documents of the fishermen.¹⁹ Combined with unpaid wages and debt, migrant workers are often blocked from quitting and returning home.

Workers on fishing vessels are paid as infrequently as once per year, work as many as 20 hours per day without a weekly rest day, and have limited access to adequate food, potable water, or medical supplies. Some boat captains also reportedly use physical violence against fishermen, and in some cases drug them, to make them work longer.²⁰

A 2024 report from the U.S. Department of Labor further describes debt-based coercion among fishers in Thailand, especially affecting migrant workers from Cambodia and Burma, including vessels that capture trash fish for fishmeal. Many fishers interviewed during the research obtained their jobs on Thai vessels through informal brokers or labor agents in their home countries who charged recruitment or

¹⁵ [Loomis, Llima. "Wrestling with a 'generational' problem, Thai shrimp industry rates higher." Global Seafood Alliance. 31 Aug 2020.](#)

¹⁶ Content in this section is also included in the Fish Commodity Report.

¹⁷ [Stringer, Christina, et al. "Modern slavery and the governance of labor exploitation in the Thai fishing industry." Journal of Cleaner Production, 371. 15 October 2022.](#)

¹⁸ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

¹⁹ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

²⁰ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

“service” fees that workers could rarely afford upfront.²¹ Many took out loans from the same brokers or from local lenders to cover these costs, entering Thailand already indebted. Once workers were placed on boats, their debts were often transferred to vessel owners or captains, who manipulated repayment terms and added deductions for food, equipment, or small advances. The result was a cycle of debt bondage in which workers’ earnings were too low to cover expenses, leaving them dependent on employers and unable to leave. Many fishers continued working for fear of losing wages or being deported before repaying debts. In one case documented in the study, a small personal loan of THB 1,000 grew seventy-fold over three years due to interest charged by a supervisor.²²

Following intense media and government scrutiny in 2014 and threats of a ban on Thai seafood imports by the European Union, the Thai government enacted regulations intended to formally register migrant workers, provide health care, require employment contracts, extend the minimum wage to fishers, and instate other worker protections including mandatory rest.²³ While some employment conditions have improved and reported worker-paid fees have reduced over the last decade, many fishers continue to face labor abuses, including deceptive recruitment practices, exploitative payment schemes, and cycles of debt as described above.

Reporting in 2019 found that fishers still were not receiving the minimum wage, and interviews with fishers indicated continued coercive practices resulting in forced labor as well as physical abuse against migrant workers.²⁴ Fishers surveyed continued to owe debts to employers for recruitment and migration costs and reported wage withholding, although the amount of fees paid had decreased since the 2017 survey. Just over half of the surveyed fishers recalled signing a work contract. The prevalence of forced labor indicators was most common among Cambodian fishers.²⁵

In small processing facilities that in some cases include trash fish processing, wage theft and exploitative piece-rate systems were reported. Employers violated minimum wage laws, did not pay all hours

²¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

²² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

²³ Clark, Timothy, et al. [“Global labor value chains, commodification, and the socioecological structure of severe exploitation. A case study of the Thai seafood sector” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49\(3\): 652–676. 2022.](#)

²⁴ Clark, Timothy, et al. [“Global labor value chains, commodification, and the socioecological structure of severe exploitation. A case study of the Thai seafood sector” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49\(3\): 652–676. 2022.](#)

²⁵ International Labour Organization. [Endline research findings on fishers and seafood workers in Thailand. 2020.](#)

worked, or avoided providing benefits. While legal, piece-rate pay is reportedly set unfairly low, and workers struggle to earn a living wage.²⁶

Thai Shrimp Processing

Research by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union noted four types of workplaces in its research of recruitment and work conditions of migrant workers in lower tiers of seafood processing in Thailand:

- SME factories, small enterprises with less than 200 workers, which process fish and peel shrimp;
- Pier-based operations that commonly conduct work adjacent to fishing vessels in ports, including sorting and freezing the catch;
- Processing garages located near fishing piers where workers clean, boil, salt, skin, or dry seafood; and
- Homebased workplaces, where workers receive work from distributors, an SME factory, or a processing garage employer when there is excess seafood to process.²⁷

Surveyed workers were migrants from Cambodia and Burma. Across these workplaces, the majority of the workforce for land-based seafood processing were female. Work activities included the sorting, beheading, grading, gutting, unloading/loading, filleting, cleaning, and salting of fish; peeling and deveining shrimp; cleaning and drying squid; removing crab meat from the shell; and freezing or cooking all types of seafood.

Over half of the migrant workers surveyed by IOM went into debt to pay for migration costs, and half had used an informal labor intermediary to arrange transportation to Thailand.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

²⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand's seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

In SMEs, the majority of migrant workers did not have an employment contract and instead had a verbal agreement with the employer equating to “no work, no pay.” One out of five surveyed workers at processing garages or homebased workplaces had no written or verbal agreement.²⁸

Within seafood processing operations, workers in Thailand have increasingly faced forced overtime due to increasing demand for shelf-stable seafood, according to the U.S. Department of State’s *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*. Additionally, employers in seafood processing often deduct from workers’ wages for documentation fees, advances, and other charges. Employers also withhold workers’ bank cards, which denies their access to earnings.²⁹ Workers in both homebased workplaces and processing garages reported that their personal documents are withheld, and in some cases, employers told them they would not return the documents until debt is repaid.³⁰

Unsafe working conditions have also been found in processing facilities.³¹ Occupational hazards reported include severe injuries from slipping on wet floors, injuries from heavy lifting, and rashes from prolonged contact with ice used to keep seafood fresh. Workers are also reported to faint from the poor air quality. Half of workers surveyed by the IOM reported not receiving any safety training. Workers reported buying their own personal protective equipment (PPE) and other equipment at high costs, including gloves, knives, socks, boots, and overalls, some of which need to be replaced as frequently as three times per month.³²

The U.S. Department of State’s *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* states that migrant workers from Egypt, Ghana, and the Philippines are vulnerable to forced labor on fishing vessels in **Ireland**.³³ A 2023 study published by Bristol University found that fishers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Ghana, and Ethiopia were subject to the risk of forced labor in Ireland, especially when undocumented (illegal). Irish fishing vessels typically target species including the Atlantic mackerel, blue whiting, and shrimp.

²⁸ International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand’s seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

²⁹ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

³⁰ International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand’s seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

³¹ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

³² International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand’s seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

³³ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

Worker testimonies describe hours far beyond the 39-hour workweek stipulated in the migrant workers' contracts, unpaid wages, racial discrimination and mistreatment of migrant workers on fishing vessels, and abuse of migrant workers who relied on their employer for legal status.³⁴

One interviewed worker recounted “intolerable working conditions” while fishing, sorting, sizing, and blast-freezing shrimp in what is described as a “seafood factory at sea.”³⁵ Hours of work can reach up to 20 per day, but the worker reported being paid for only the 39-hour work week. Another worker reported working about 17 hours per day for minimum wage pay, and while he knew he was not being paid for the actual number of working hours, he was promised a bonus at the end of the fishing season that never came.³⁶

Previous studies in Ireland also confirm labor rights violations, including trafficking. A 2021 study by the National University of Ireland Maynooth described persisting labor issues including “very long working hours with insufficient breaks,” wages below minimum wage, deceptive contracts, lack of safety, a wide range of injuries, and racism and other forms of discrimination.³⁷ Workers reported injuries, or witnessing injuries, such as broken bones and loss of fingers.

According to the *2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, children in families from marginalized castes in **India** are vulnerable to labor trafficking in sectors including shrimp processing in Andhra Pradesh. Children work alongside family members in situations of debt bondage.³⁸

In 2024, the Indian shrimp industry came under fire after the Corporate Accountability Lab, Associated Press, and the Outlaw Ocean Project reported a number of human rights violations in Indian shrimp processing plants. The investigation by the Corporate Accountability Lab found the Indian shrimp industry to be “rife with discrimination, dangerous working conditions, hazardous child labor, sexual

³⁴ Marschke, Melissa, and Peter Vandergeest. (2023). “[Migrant workers in Irish fisheries: exploring the contradictions through the lens of racial capitalism.](#)” *Global Social Challenges Journal*, 2(2), 146-167.

³⁵ Marschke, Melissa, and Peter Vandergeest. (2023). “[Migrant workers in Irish fisheries: exploring the contradictions through the lens of racial capitalism.](#)” *Global Social Challenges Journal*, 2(2), 146-167.

³⁶ Marschke, Melissa, and Peter Vandergeest. (2023). “[Migrant workers in Irish fisheries: exploring the contradictions through the lens of racial capitalism.](#)” *Global Social Challenges Journal*, 2(2), 146-167.

³⁷ [Murphy, Clíodhna, David M. Doyle, and Stephanie Thompson. “Experiences of Non-EEA Migrant Workers in the Irish Fishing Industry: Working Conditions, Immigration Status and Enforcement.” October 2021.](#)

³⁸ [Child Labor in India: Findings from the U.S. Department of Labor. 2024.](#)

harassment, debt bondage, threats and intimidation, toxic sewage, false and misleading certification schemes, and a general lack of oversight.³⁹

Workers in shrimp peeling plants are paid less than USD 4 per day, which is USD 2 below India's minimum wage.⁴⁰ Of this, 25 cents per day goes to recruiters as fee to enter the processing shed. In addition, transportation and lunch fees are deducted from workers' salaries. While overtime pay is required in India by law, the AP reported that, according to interviews, neither overtime nor minimum wage was being paid. In the absence of a formal contract, many workers do not receive any support if injured on the job.⁴¹

In addition to illegal wages, workers in India's shrimp industry experience dangerous working conditions. According to the Corporate Accountability Lab, workers on shrimp farms are exposed to hazardous chemicals without proper precautionary measures. Workers in peeling facilities also develop frostbite and rashes from peeling frozen shrimp during 10-hour shifts without adequate gloves to protect their hands, which most workers cannot afford.⁴² These conditions do not meet Indian law nor U.S. legal food safety standards for seafood imports. According to the Associated Press, a dermatologist at a government hospital in Kakinada reported treating four to five shrimp peelers per day. These peelers suffer from nail fungus, infections, and frostbite; in some cases, amputation of fingers has been required. Furthermore, a labor organizer told Associated Press that miscarriages occur due to the intense work.⁴³ In addition to dangerous working conditions, workers in the shrimp industry in India work over 12 hours per day.⁴⁴

According to the Corporate Accountability Lab, American importers are not aware of the conditions at these peeling facilities because large Indian exporters only showcase "their own state-of-the-art

³⁹ Corporate Accountability Lab. [Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry. March 2024.](#)

⁴⁰ Mendoza, Martha et al. ["AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive.'" Associated Press, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁴¹ Mendoza, Martha et al. ["AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive.'" Associated Press, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁴² Corporate Accountability Lab. [Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry. March 2024.](#)

⁴³ Mendoza, Martha et al. ["AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive.'" Associated Press, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁴⁴ Corporate Accountability Lab. [Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry. March 2024.](#)

facilities,” and audits of peeling sheds are unlikely.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the housing conditions of these workers were described as “overcrowded and often unsanitary conditions under the careful surveillance of company guards.”⁴⁶ These workers were limited to leaving these facilities only once per month. Young girls also work in these processing plants to support their families.⁴⁷

In 2024, the Outlaw Ocean Project reported on forced labor risks identified at Choice Canning, a shrimp processing plant in India. The report is based on whistle blower reporting by a United States citizen who began working as a general manager at the plant in 2023.⁴⁸ The facility where he worked cultivates shrimp in ponds, then beheads, deveins, and treats the shrimp with chemicals to keep them moist for shipping abroad. Over 650 workers were typically at the plant each day in order to meet quotas, including workers who migrated internally from other regions of India and lived at the plant. Most are hired by third-party contractors.⁴⁹

The general manager reported the following: workers were not permitted to leave the facility, with concrete walls to prevent workers from escaping; and many did not have days off, including approximately 150 female workers who had not received a day off in a year. The manager was reportedly told by an executive that attendance records and timecards had to be altered in order to pass an audit. Workers were paid INR 350 per day as opposed to the minimum wage of INR 450 per day.⁵⁰

The manager further reported unsafe sleeping arrangements above the ammonia compressors used for refrigeration; an inadequate number of cots or mattresses such that many workers slept on the floor or shared cots without bedding;⁵¹ and only half the number of toilet and shower facilities needed for the population of residents.⁵²

⁴⁵ Mendoza, Martha et al. [“AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls ‘dangerous and abusive.’ Associated Press, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁴⁶ Mendoza, Martha et al. [“AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls ‘dangerous and abusive.’ Associated Press, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁴⁷ Corporate Accountability Lab. [Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India’s Shrimp Industry. March 2024.](#)

⁴⁸ Urbina, Ian et al. [“The Whistleblower.” The Outlaw Ocean Project, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁴⁹ Urbina, Ian et al. [“The Whistleblower.” The Outlaw Ocean Project, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁵⁰ Urbina, Ian et al. [“The Whistleblower.” The Outlaw Ocean Project, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁵¹ Urbina, Ian et al. [“The Whistleblower.” The Outlaw Ocean Project, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁵² White, Cliff. [“Outlaw Ocean whistleblower Josh Farinella: ‘I want to see a change.’” SeafoodSource, 21 Mar 2024.](#)

In **Burma**, fishers on rafts who primarily catch shrimp reportedly work under conditions indicating forced labor. These conditions include months-long physical confinement on fishing rafts, excessive working hours (up to 16 hours a day, every day, for nine months), and violence from supervisors.⁵³ Raft workers interviewed in 2019 reported that debt, perpetuated by exorbitant interest loans from village money lenders, forced them into grueling and dangerous jobs like fishing; however, their earnings are enough to only maintain and not pay off loans, perpetuating a cycle of debt tied to low-paid fishing work.⁵⁴

In **Indonesia**, recent reporting described instances of debt bondage, withholding of wages, forms of deception in recruitment processes, and restriction of movement and isolation in Indonesia's export-oriented shrimp supply chain. A 2024 report by three NGOs in Indonesia detailed how employers withhold promised annual bonuses indefinitely, keeping workers' base salary well below minimum wage, and keeping them in the job for fear of lost income.⁵⁵

As previously reported by Oxfam, workers processing shrimp in factories reported unreasonable targets and degrading working and living conditions. One worker was directed to peel 600 shrimp per hour every day, and never met this target. Exposure to chlorine-based cleaner used on the conveyor belts in these factories caused burns and made breathing difficult; protective gloves for this type of work were not provided to employees. In dorms provided by the employer, bathroom facilities were often unsanitary, unusable, and lacked privacy.⁵⁶ Another worker at a factory supplying shrimp to supermarkets in the United Kingdom recounted being required to take multiple pregnancy tests, and eventually was forced to leave the job when the test was positive. She also reported signing short-term contracts that lasted only a few months, which could shorten to one month based on workers' attendance.⁵⁷

⁵³ Aidan McQuade and Yin Nyein. [“We Can’t Allow Myanmar’s Slavery-Tainted Shrimp to Land on Our Plates.” *The Guardian*, 19 Nov 2019.](#)

⁵⁴ Aidan McQuade and Yin Nyein. [“We Can’t Allow Myanmar’s Slavery-Tainted Shrimp to Land on Our Plates.” *The Guardian*, 19 Nov 2019.](#)

⁵⁵ Akatiga Center for Social Analysis. [“Net profits, human costs: How supermarkets shape exploitation in shrimp aquaculture.” 12 September 2024.](#)

⁵⁶ Hufstader, Chris. [“Workers Behind the Seafood in Our Markets.” *Oxfam America*, 21 June 2018.](#)

⁵⁷ Hufstader, Chris. [“Workers Behind the Seafood in Our Markets.” *Oxfam America*, 21 June 2018.](#)

In **Bangladesh**, where shrimp and prawn exports account for 70 percent of the country's agricultural exports, the risk of forced labor and hazardous child labor remains high despite national efforts to address these systemic problems.⁵⁸

Child labor persists because the Bangladesh Labor Act does not apply to the informal sector, including the shrimp industry. According to a risk profile by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Foundation, there is widespread social acceptance in Bangladesh that children help support their family's economic activities, which makes it difficult to monitor and eradicate child labor in informal sectors such as shrimp farming.⁵⁹ In the shrimp farming industry, child labor is most commonly found in wild fry catching, where children use nets to collect shrimp fry from shallow coastal waters. Wild fry catching has been illegal since 2006, but wild shrimp are in higher demand than hatchery fry.

Due to lack of oversight and protections in the sector, fry catchers are considered the most vulnerable workers in the Bangladesh shrimp industry. Fry catchers who depend on this income for their livelihood saw increased risks of extortion by local authorities and paramilitary groups. Workers also commonly lack permanent shelter or land and are often indebted to intermediaries for loans taken out during the low season to survive.⁶⁰

The **North Korean** government reportedly forces North Korean workers to work in factories in **China** and **Russia**. State-imposed forced labor is distinct in the seafood sector with coercion organized or enabled at the state level rather than emerging solely from private recruitment or vessel practices. These systems often involve formal labor-deployment programs, politically driven labor-export arrangements, or state-imposed constraints on workers' movement, communication, or earnings.

According to an Outlaw Ocean Project investigation, the North Korean workers are closely monitored, have limited freedom of movement, and are required to send 90 percent of their earnings into accounts controlled by the state.⁶¹

A 2024 New Yorker article described how thousands of primarily female North Koreans work in seafood processing plants in such Chinese cities as Dandong and Dalian, peeling shrimp and packaging fish

⁵⁸ Monterey Bay Aquarium. "[Warmwater Shrimp Social Risk Profile: Bangladesh, Aquaculture and Processing](#)." 2023.

⁵⁹ Monterey Bay Aquarium. "[Warmwater Shrimp Social Risk Profile: Bangladesh, Aquaculture and Processing](#)." 2023.

⁶⁰ Monterey Bay Aquarium. "[Warmwater Shrimp Social Risk Profile: Bangladesh, Aquaculture and Processing](#)." 2023.

⁶¹ Urbina, Ian. "[The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat](#)." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.

destined for export, under state-imposed forced labor.⁶² They live under constant surveillance by North Korean minders, are confined to locked dormitories, and work shifts of up to 16 hours in silence and reported exhaustion.⁶³ Nearly all of their wages are confiscated by handlers and funneled to the North Korean government, in direct violation of international sanctions. Workers who resist face beatings, sexual violence, and threats of execution. Seafood processed under these conditions was traced entering global supply chains.⁶⁴

In the **United States**, publicly available reporting has not confirmed whether the risk of forced labor and the exploitation of workers persist in the shrimp and seafood sectors. A previous media report documented cases of H2-B visa holders, as well as undocumented (illegal) immigrants, being subjected to harsh working and living conditions including verbal abuse, curfews, threats of exposure to authorities, illegal wages (as low as USD 2.00 an hour, reported in 2016), unpaid overtime, and deceptive recruitment.⁶⁵ The report documented workers in both Louisiana and Massachusetts living in company-provided housing in unsanitary conditions, with up to 20 individuals living in a single trailer. Female workers also reported being subject to sexual harassment and verbal abuse, both in the workplace and in company-provided housing.⁶⁶

Shrimp Production and Supply Chain:

Shrimp supply chains are long and opaque. Production takes place in one of two forms: aquaculture farming or trawling. The majority of shrimp globally are produced via aquaculture or on shrimp farms. According to the Shrimp Welfare Project, “shrimps are either caught in the wild or bred in hatcheries, then transported to the farm.”⁶⁷ In the hatcheries, shrimp with eggs are ‘de-egged’ and the eggs are placed in incubators to increase the survival rate before being transported to the farm. The scale of aquaculture varies from individual ponds of 0.2-1.6 hectares to farms of over 70 hectares.

⁶² Urbina, Ian. “Inside North Korea’s Forced-Labor Program in China.” *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2024.

⁶³ Urbina, Ian. “Inside North Korea’s Forced-Labor Program in China.” *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2024.

⁶⁴ Urbina, Ian. “Inside North Korea’s Forced-Labor Program in China.” *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2024.

⁶⁵ Sammon, Alexander. “American Seafood Has Its Own Forced Labor Problem.” *Mother Jones*, 15 June 2016.

⁶⁶ Sammon, Alexander. “American Seafood Has Its Own Forced Labor Problem.” *Mother Jones*, 16 June 2016.

⁶⁷ Shrimp Welfare Project. “[The Shrimp Supply Chain](#).”

In aquaculture farms, the shrimp grow under controlled environments either in tanks or ponds. This process requires the collection of shrimp fry, which are seeds produced in hatcheries and bought by shrimp farmers. Fry from wild collection or hatcheries are generally collected by middlemen and sold to aquaculture shrimp farms for maturation.⁶⁸ The specific commercial techniques in shrimp farming vary from region to region. Farms in Ecuador are semi-intensive, producing between one and five tons of shrimp per hectare a year; India has intensive systems producing five to 10 tons of shrimp per hectare a year; and farms in Thailand manage super-intensive systems, producing between 10 and 25 tons of shrimp per hectare per year.⁶⁹ While such hatcheries are more common in Thailand and India, shrimp and fry can also be caught in coastal waters on ponds, practices more common in Bangladesh.

Shrimp are harvested at approximately three to six months old and then transported to a factory, typically by truck. This process tends to include intermediaries. According to the Shrimp Welfare Project, “Many small-scale farmers (especially geographically isolated farmers) do not work directly with processing factories and instead work with intermediaries, agents and traders. They provide financial or other services (such as collecting, auctioning or transport) to farmers and assist factories with grading shrimps, pre-processing and transporting.”⁷⁰

At processing plants, the shrimp are washed, cleaned, and sorted. In some cases, processing companies subcontract work to “pre-processing” facilities known as “peeling sheds.” Workers at the largely unregulated peeling sheds remove the heads, veins, and hard shell of shrimp and prepare it for secondary or value-added processing.⁷¹ Depending on whether pre-processing facilities are used, processing factories may be required to remove the heads, veins, and shells before freezing, cooking, breading, packaging, or otherwise processing the fish product. Many workers at shrimp processing facilities in Asia are contracted workers.

Shrimp are then inspected, certified, and exported. Shrimp are commonly held in cold storage for quality inspection in order to be issued a health certificate, as required by buyers and/or regulations. Shrimp are packed into containers and transported on cooler trucks to sea and land ports. Upon arrival at the

⁶⁸ Lan, Ngo Thi Phuong. [“Social and ecological challenges of market-oriented shrimp farming in Vietnam.” *Springerplus*, 2:675. 2013.](#)

⁶⁹ World Aquaculture Society. [“Shrimp farming advances, challenges, and opportunities.”](#) 11 October 2023.

⁷⁰ Shrimp Welfare Project. [“The Shrimp Supply Chain.”](#)

⁷¹ Environmental Justice Foundation. [“Impossibly Cheap: Abuse and Injustice in Bangladesh’s Shrimp Industry. Jan 2014.](#)

destination country, the certifications are checked and the shrimp may be further tested by local authorities. Distributors then transport the shrimp to food manufacturers, retailers, and food service providers.⁷²

In wild-capture trawling, vessels catch shrimp in the open water by dragging nets behind the vessel. Due to trawling's destructive environmental impacts, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) compares fish trawling to forest clear-cutting. The FAO also reported in 2021 that the discard rates hover around 27 percent.⁷³ Discards are the dead or alive portion of the catch that is thrown out at sea. Additionally, trash fish harvested via wild-capture trawling vessels in Thailand is processed into fish meal used in shrimp aquaculture, creating supply chain linkages between labor conditions on large trawling vessels and shrimp aquaculture.⁷⁴

How consumers are linked to human trafficking and/or child labor in shrimp production:

Top ten countries that import shrimp (fresh or chilled):⁷⁵

- | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1. China | 6. Vietnam |
| 2. Singapore | 7. Belgium |
| 3. Malaysia | 8. France |
| 4. Germany | 9. Honduras |
| 5. India | 10. United Arab Emirates |

The four largest importers of frozen shrimp are the United States, Japan, China, and the European Union.⁷⁶ Shrimp is by far the most consumed seafood in the United States, with over 760,000 metric

⁷² [The Shrimp Supply Chain — Shrimp Welfare Project](#).

⁷³ Stephen Eayrs and Carlos Fuentesvilla. [“Advances and best practices in bycatch reduction in tropical shrimp-trawl fisheries.”](#) 2021.

⁷⁴ United States Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [“Report: Supply Chain Study on Forced Labor in the Fishing Industry in Thailand.”](#) September 2024.

⁷⁵ International Trade Center. [Trade Map](#). (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics).

Note: The country list is ordered by value exported.

⁷⁶ International Trade Center. [Trade Map](#). (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics).

tons of shrimp imported in 2024.⁷⁷ Indian supplier Nekkanti Sea Foods has been the largest shrimp supplier to the U.S. since 2012.⁷⁸ The Associated Press reported in 2024 that the United States imports over USD two billion worth of shrimp from India.⁷⁹ Aldi, Costco, Hannaford, Kroger, Stop&Shop, Walmart, Whole Foods, Sysco, and U.S. Foods sell shrimp cultivated in India to American consumers.⁸⁰

Examples of what governments, corporations, and others are doing:

In 2019, Thailand ratified the International Labour Organization's Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) which officially came into force in 2020. The convention outlines binding requirements concerning fishing vessel-based work; requirements cover occupational safety and health, medical care and rest periods, and labor rights such as written work agreements and social security protection.⁸¹ An additional law introduced in 2019 added "forced labor or service" as an offence in Thailand's anti-human trafficking law, penalizing perpetrators with up to four years of prison and/or a fine of THB 400,000.⁸² Shortly after in 2021, a dozen Thai industry associations signed pacts as part of a government initiative pledging to eradicate forced labor and child labor from their supply chains by publicizing their human rights policies, putting complaint mechanisms into place, and undergoing audits.⁸³

In October 2025, the Thai parliament passed amendments to the 2015 Fisheries Acts, which, if approved by the Constitutional Court and submitted for royal endorsement, would significantly weaken penalties for IUU fishing and potentially reverse progress made to mitigate forced labor.⁸⁴

In light of 2024 reports on forced labor conditions in India, the American Shrimp Processors Association (ASPA) "filed an allegation with the U.S. government arguing that the government of India's failure to

⁷⁷ Spampinato, Erin. ["US shrimp imports declined marginally in 2024, but shipments from Vietnam, Thailand, Argentina grew to end the year."](#) *SeafoodSource*, 17 February 2025.

⁷⁸ Corporate Accountability Lab. ["The Indian Shrimp Sector Fact Sheet. Mar 2024."](#)

⁷⁹ Mendoza, Martha. ["AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive'."](#) *Associated Press*, 20 Mar 2024.

⁸⁰ Corporate Accountability Lab. ["The Indian Shrimp Sector Fact Sheet. Mar 2024."](#)

⁸¹ [International Labour Association. Thailand ratifies Work in Fishing Convention. 30 Jan 2019.](#)

⁸² Chandran, Rina. ["Thailand ramps up fight against forced labor with stricter law."](#) *Reuters*, 8 April 2019. [U.S. Department of State. 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Thailand. 2025.](#)

⁸³ Wongsamuth, Nanchanok. ["Thailand enlists industry groups in slavery blacklist effort."](#) *Reuters*, 29 Mar 2021.

⁸⁴ [Dao, Toan. "Thai Parliament passes controversial amendments to Fisheries Law." Seafood Source, 16 October 2025.](#)

[Board, Jack. "'A new era of slaves': Thailand's plan to loosen fisheries laws renews fears of illegal fishing, forced labour." CNA News, 15 April 2024.](#)

enforce its most basic labor laws provides a subsidy to Indian shrimp producers.” ASPA requested that the U.S. Department of Commerce provide a subsidy towards ASPA’s preexisting unfairly traded shrimp imports investigation. Additionally, ASPA “filed a request with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to ban imports of shrimp from India made with forced labor, as required under section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930.”⁸⁵

The Seafood Task Force, a non-profit U.S. trade association launched in 2014, works to improve and expand seafood supply chain oversight, improve worker recruitment practices in the seafood supply chain, and assist governments with combatting IUU fishing, among other focuses.⁸⁶ As of 2026, there are 68 members of the task force, including Costco, Starkist, Intertek, MARS Petcare, the Global Seafood Alliance, and Nestle PURINA.⁸⁷ Recent engagements include baseline assessments across India’s shrimp supply chain to establish “a foundation for targeted improvements that will directly benefit the lives of fishing crew and workers throughout the sector” to be implemented in 2026, including wage and benefit increases and ensuring workers are provided employment contracts they understand.⁸⁸

On March 25, 2024, the United States’ Southern Shrimp Alliance submitted a request to the Bureau of International Labor Affairs of the U.S. Department of Labor to add Indian shrimp to the *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* and the *List of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor*. Again, this request occurred in light of the reporting by the Associated Press, Outlaw Ocean Project, and the Corporate Accountability Lab on forced labor in the Indian shrimp sector.⁸⁹ As noted in this report, forced labor in shrimp production in India is listed in the U.S. Department of Labor’s 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*.⁹⁰

The Southern Shrimp Alliance also authored a letter to the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in 2024, urging the addition of eight seafood processing plants in China to the list of companies blocked from importing to the United States due to evidence of forced

⁸⁵ Beaumont Business Journal. [ASPA fights back against Indian shrimp imports made with forced labor. 16 Apr 2024.](#)

⁸⁶ [Seafood Task Force. “Progress.”](#)

⁸⁷ [Seafood Task Force. “What?”](#)

⁸⁸ [Seafood Task Force. Seafood Task Force Achieves Initial Impact Across India's Shrimp Supply Chain. Feb 2026.](#)

⁸⁹ Southern Shrimp Alliance. [SSA Asks Labor Department to Add Indian Shrimp to Forced/Child Labor Lists. 25 Mar 2024.](#)

⁹⁰ [U.S. Department of Labor. 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor and Forced Labor.](#) 2024.

labor-related practices in their production facilities.⁹¹ The evidence was sourced through the same Outlaw Ocean Project report⁹² finding that “members of the Uyghur minority were forcibly moved to Shandong and coerced to work in seafood processing facilities, including shrimp.”⁹³ Of the eight Chinese seafood processing plants, one (Shandong Meijia Group) was added to the UFLPA Entity List in 2024.⁹⁴

⁹¹ [Southern Shrimp Alliance. Letter to the Department of Homeland Security. 29 Jan 2024.](#)

⁹² Urbina, Ian et al. [“The Whistleblower.” *The Outlaw Ocean Project*, 20 Mar 2024.](#)

⁹³ National Fisherman. [Shrimp alliance calls for U.S. ban on forced-labor imports.](#) 30 January 2024.

⁹⁴ [U.S. Department of Homeland Security. UFLPA Entity List.](#)

How can I learn more?

[Read the U.S. Department of Labor's supply chain study on forced labor in Thailand's fishing industry.](#)

[Read the forced labor profile on shrimp aquaculture and processing in Bangladesh.](#)

[Read the Associated Press's report on forced labor in India.](#)

[Read Outlaw Ocean's report on forced labor in India.](#)