

Commodity Report: Silk (2026)

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

- India (CL)
- Uzbekistan (FL)

Top ten countries that export silk worldwide:²

- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. China | 6. France |
| 2. Italy | 7. Slovenia |
| 3. India | 8. Japan |
| 4. Vietnam | 9. United Kingdom |
| 5. Romania | 10. Germany |

Where is silk reportedly produced with human trafficking and/or child labor?

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's *2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, silk is produced using child labor in India and forced labor in Uzbekistan.³ Silk fabric and silk thread are produced with child labor in India. Silk cocoons from silkworms are produced with forced labor in Uzbekistan. According to the U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*, there have been isolated reports that silk is produced with forced labor in Uzbekistan.⁴

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.

³ U.S. Department of Labor. [2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 5 Sept 2024.](#)

⁴ U.S. Department of State. [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

The U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* lists India and Uzbekistan as Tier 2 countries.⁵

What does human trafficking and/or child labor in silk 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.

In **India's** silk industry, children work in small, home-based industries such as silk production, reeling, and weaving. Silk thread and fabric, particularly for saris, may be produced using bonded child labor. Bonded child labor occurs when a child's labor is pledged to an employer in exchange for a payment or loan.⁶ Once these children are bonded to employers, they are obliged to remain working for an indefinite amount of time. Parents who exchange their child's labor as a commodity to an employer are often destitute, with no other options for obtaining credit, and may use their loan to pay for medical treatment, a wedding or funeral, to pay off another loan, or to feed their family.⁷ A CNN investigation in 2021 reported a case in which a mother and daughter worked for 11 hours a day for three years in order to pay off a loan of USD 1,370, which had since doubled.⁸ The pair worked on boiling silkworms and removing the threads of silk excreted in the process, which would later be used in textile production. Working with the steam reportedly burned workers.⁹ Despite bonded labor being criminalized in India, many victims have historically not reported to authorities as they sometimes feel beholden to their employers or fearful of retaliation.

While poverty in general contributes to bonded child labor in India, specific drivers include lack of access to credit, inaccessibility of schools, lack of employment options and living wages for adults, and marginalization by the caste system.¹⁰ Children's wages often go directly towards the repayment of loans, and workers commonly do not know the status of their debt. Often the debt cannot be repaid

⁵ [For the 2025 Trafficking in Person Report's tier ranking methodology, see "A Guide to the Tiers."](#)

⁶ Human Trafficking Search. ["Ending Child Labor, Forced Marriage and Labor Exploitation: A Success Story from Rural India." 19 March 2023.](#)

⁷ Human Trafficking Search. ["Ending Child Labor, Forced Marriage and Labor Exploitation: A Success Story from Rural India." 19 March 2023.](#)

⁸ Pokharel, Sugam. ["Silk slaves: India's bonded laborers are forced to work to pay off debts." 13 March 2021.](#)

⁹ Pokharel, Sugam. ["Silk slaves: India's bonded laborers are forced to work to pay off debts." 13 March 2021.](#)

¹⁰ Transparentem. ["Investigation Uncovers Abuse of Vulnerable Workers in Tamil Nadu." April 2021.](#)

during a worker's lifetime and is passed down to their children.¹¹ A 2021 report on spinning mills and textile manufacturers in Tamil Nadu noted that children worked 12- to 14-hour days and were exposed to hazardous conditions, including dipping their hands into boiling water in order to unravel silk cocoons, injuries from machine use, and extreme fatigue.¹² Exposure to harmful chemicals also results in difficulty breathing.¹³ Interviewed children recounted being trained to lie about their ages and hide when workplace auditors came to the production facilities. For some, their movement was also restricted both by identity document confiscation and physically being locked in the workplace.¹⁴

In **Uzbekistan**, the government controls the country's silk industry and local officials are commissioned to enforce production targets or quotas through pressure and coercion, including physical force.¹⁵ Although the sector is technically privatized, "de facto state quotas for cocoon production remain in place." "Sericulture clusters," new commercial enterprises often closely tied to families of government officials, facilitate the placement of cocoon production assignments among farmers.¹⁶ However, purchase prices for the cocoons are set by the state, and farmers reported that the costs of growing cocoons often exceeded the income received from selling them to the government.¹⁷

A 2022 survey conducted by the Uzbek Forum for Human Rights found that only 20 percent of farmers who grow silkworm cocoons claimed they had a choice in the matter; farmers who refused risked prosecution, fines, and land loss by government authorities.¹⁸ Furthermore, the strict government quotas imposed on farmers and neighborhood councils by regional- and district-level officials are reinforced with threats of fines, the loss of farmers' leased farmland, or physical violence. About 80 percent of surveyed farmers who cultivate silkworms believed that the prices set by the government are unfair, and 75 percent did not believe cocoon production is profitable. In May of 2025, one farmer was

¹¹Human Trafficking Search. "[Ending Child Labor, Forced Marriage and Labor Exploitation: A Success Story from Rural India.](#)" 19 March 2023.

¹² Transparentem. "[Investigation Uncovers Abuse of Vulnerable Workers in Tamil Nadu.](#)" April 2021.

¹³ Garg, Muhita. "['Threads of cruelty': Caught between heritage, livelihoods and animal welfare - India's silk dilemma.](#)" 12 June 2026.

¹⁴ Transparentem. "[Investigation Uncovers Abuse of Vulnerable Workers in Tamil Nadu.](#)" April 2021.

¹⁵ Yusupov, Yuliy. "[Sericulture in Uzbekistan: Ineffective bureaucratic management practices persist.](#)" 24 March 2023.

¹⁶ Uzbek Forum for Human Rights. "[An Economist vs. Uzbekistan's Silk Industry: Whose Facts Matter?](#)" 5 October 2023.

¹⁷ Yusupov, Yuliy. "[Sericulture in Uzbekistan: Ineffective bureaucratic management practices persist.](#)" 24 March 2023.

¹⁸ Yusupov, Yuliy. "[Sericulture in Uzbekistan: Ineffective bureaucratic management practices persist.](#)" 24 March 2023.

reportedly beaten by local law enforcement for not fulfilling a cocoon quota and forcibly taken to the police station, despite not holding a contract for silk production.¹⁹

Farmers must sell silk cocoons back to the government, often leading to payments that are too low to offset the cost of cultivating them, and farmers may receive delayed payments or no payment at all.²⁰ Historically, when the government had shortages of cash to make payments for cocoons, goods such as flour or vegetable oil were accepted by farmers instead.²¹ Human Rights Watch reported an instance in 2024 in which a blogger from the Kashkadarya region was detained and beaten for attempting to film a meeting between farmers and local officials regarding silk production.²² The blogger claims the police arrested him in order to prevent the spread of footage of authorities pressuring farmers on silk cocoon quotas.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, child labor is also found in the cultivation of silkworms in Uzbekistan.²³ As sericulture typically takes place inside farmers' homes, children contribute to the labor-intensive process. This work requires supervision of silkworms 24 hours a day, picking mulberry leaves, and caring for the silkworms. Silkworms that fall off mulberry branches must be put back in their place otherwise they risk being attacked by ants, thus requiring constant supervision.²⁴ Children are also often tasked with harvesting mulberry leaves, which is done twice a day. One household sericulture farm reported that children harvested leaves from 4 to 8 a.m., and from 4 to 7 p.m.²⁵

Silk Production and Supply Chain:

Cultivating silkworms is a long process which takes place during the entire month of May. The silkworms must be painstakingly cared for and fed every few hours or they may starve. This process requires constant hands-on work; fresh mulberry leaves must be hand-harvested, and the silkworms require

¹⁹ Uzbek Forum for Human Rights. ["Farmer Beaten by Police for Refusing to Fulfill Silkworm Cocoon Quota." 7 July 2025.](#)

²⁰ Yusupov, Yuliy. ["Sericulture in Uzbekistan: Ineffective bureaucratic management practices persist." 24 March 2023.](#)

²¹ Labor Rights Monitoring Mission. ["Uzbekistan: The Hard Labor Behind Soft Silk." 20 May 2026.](#)

²² Human Rights Watch. ["'Farmers Have No Freedom': Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan." 16 Feb 2026.](#)

²³ US Department of Labor. ["2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Uzbekistan." 2024.](#)

²⁴ Yusupov, Yuliy. ["Sericulture in Uzbekistan: Ineffective bureaucratic management practices persist." 24 March 2023.](#)

²⁵ Yusupov, Yuliy. ["Sericulture in Uzbekistan: Ineffective bureaucratic management practices persist." 24 March 2023.](#)

constant supervision. The area in which silkworms are held must also be kept at a certain temperature. After the silkworms have eaten mulberry leaves for about 25 days, they enclose themselves in cocoons for two to three hours.²⁶ After they are harvested, silkworms are placed in boiling water and the silkworm pupae dies, producing between 600 to 1,500 yards of raw silk filament per cocoon.²⁷ Silk filaments are soaked in hot water in order to soften the sericin, or silk gum, that binds the filaments together. The silk cocoons are brushed, unwound, and reeled into thread, which are then twisted and cleaned to produce silk yarn usable for weaving.²⁸ Once woven into fabric, silk may be dyed and finished to achieve the desired appearance and texture.²⁹

As of 2023, China produced 90 percent of the world's mulberry silk, followed by India and Uzbekistan.³⁰ Italy, as the world's second biggest exporter of silk, produces luxury finished silk products, while China, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan focus mainly on raw silk products. India holds a strong position in global silk production as an exporter of all commercially useful varieties of silk, including raw silk, silk yarn, fabrics, readymade garments, and silk waste.³¹

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

Top ten countries that import silk:³²

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| 1. Italy | 5. Vietnam |
| 2. India | 6. France |
| 3. United Arab Emirates | 7. China |
| 4. Romania | 8. Japan |

²⁶ Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. [“The Hard Labor Behind Luxury: Uzbek Silkworm Growing Is A Family Tradition.” 14 June 2024.](#)

²⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica. [“How is Silk Made?” 29 Jan 2026.](#)

²⁸ ScienceInsights. [“How Is Silk Made? From Silkworm to Fabric.” 10 Nov 2025.](#)

²⁹ Szoneier. [“How is Silk Produced? Step-by-Step Guide from Cocoon to Fabric.” 13 June 2025.](#)

³⁰ International Sericultural Commission. [Statistics. Global Silk Industry. 2024.](#)

³¹ India Brand Equity Foundation. [“Silk Industry and Export in India.” December 2025.](#)

³² [International Trade Center. Trade Map.](#) (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics). **Note:** The country list is ordered by value imported.

9. United States

10. Slovenia

Raw silk is made into silk thread, which is then used to make silk fabric. Silk fabric is used in a variety of products, including clothing, accessories, upholstery, rugs, bedding, wall hangings, and many other decorative products.³³ Growing demand for biodegradable and luxury textile products indicates that silk's market share in the textile industry will likely grow, with projections of a global industry annual growth rate of 9.2 percent between 2026 and 2034.³⁴ Over 80 percent of all silk produced globally is consumed by the luxury apparel industry.³⁵

However, silk has a relatively high cost of production due to its specialized environmental requirements and labor demands, constraining its ability to expand past synthetic materials.³⁶

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

Resham Sutra: A New Silk Production Business Model

Founded in 2015, Resham Sutra is a social enterprise based in India that challenges mainstream approaches to silk production to support rural artisan communities towards self-sufficiency.³⁷ The company uses solar-powered reeling and spinning machines, which increase productivity by 200 to 400 percent, and a digital platform connecting all stakeholders in their value chain, thereby increasing traceability. Resham Sutra has made a concerted effort to employ rural women and pay living wages, 67 percent higher than the average income in the Indian silk industry. They aim to scale their model to employ 37,000 additional artisans and establish 200 acres of new silk plantations, creating 100,000 rural artisan jobs.³⁸

³³ Sewport. [“What is Silk Fabric: Properties, How it’s Made and Where.” 17 June 2026.](#)

³⁴ Fortune Business Insights. [“Silk Market Size, Share, and Industry Analysis By Type, By Price Range, By Application, and Regional Forecast \(2026-2034\).” 1 June 2026.](#)

³⁵ Technavio. [“Silk Market Analysis, Size, and Forecast 2026-2030.” May 2026](#)

³⁶ Fortune Business Insights. [“Silk Market Size, Share, and Industry Analysis By Type, By Price Range, By Application, and Regional Forecast \(2026-2034\).” 1 June 2026.](#)

³⁷ Resham Sutra. [“About Us.”](#)

³⁸ Forum for the Future. [“Resham Sutra weaves livelihoods for rural women through sustainable silk production.” 17 May 2025.](#)

The ILO's Strategic Compliance Planning Methodology

The State Labor Inspectorate of Uzbekistan worked with the ILO to adopt Strategic Compliance Planning (SCP) into the sericulture sector in 2022. The Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, the Confederation of Employers of Uzbekistan, the Uzbekistan Textile and Garment Industry Association, and the Association of the Uzbek Silk Industry (SLI) signed a commitment to conduct “compliance monitoring visits,” overcoming bottlenecks that occurred when the SLI was made to wait for the approval of the Business Ombudsman of Uzbekistan for labor inspection visits. The tripartite partners enabled the SLI to develop a questionnaire specific to the sericulture sector, and the SLI went on to detect non-compliance in 62 percent of its visits.³⁹ Strategies for remedying these non-compliances are reportedly forthcoming.

The Uzbek Forum for Human Rights

The Uzbek Forum for Human Rights is an NGO based in Berlin, Germany, dedicated to improving human and labor rights in Uzbekistan. Their work has brought attention to forced labor conditions in the production of silk, cotton, and wheat. As a result of their advocacy work, the World Bank Group and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have pursued investigations into forced labor in Uzbekistan.⁴⁰ Their work stands as valuable pressure on the Uzbekistan government as they fund the legal representation of political dissidents and publish fieldwork data used by intergovernmental organizations monitoring human rights, such as UN Special Rapporteurs.⁴¹

Where can I learn more?

- [Read an article by an Uzbekistani economist on the state of the silk industry.](#)
- [Watch a documentary about indentured labor in India's silk industry.](#)
- [Read about a farmer's experience with local officials in Uzbekistan.](#)
- [Watch a video on Uzbekistan's sericulture process.](#)

³⁹ International Labor Organization. [“Strategic Compliance Planning in action, Stories of Change.”](#) 3 May 2023.

⁴⁰ Uzbek Forum for Human Rights. [“Our Impact.”](#)

⁴¹ Front Line Defenders. [“Sharifa Madrakhimova WHRD, Journalist.”](#)

United Nations. [“A/HRC/58/50/Add.1 Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Balakrishnan Rajagopal.”](#) 4 March 2025.