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British public bought £14bn of goods made by slaves in 2017, claims report

Tuesday 31 July 2018, by [KELLY Annie](#) (Date first published: 19 July 2018).

Global slavery index identifies electronics and clothes among UK imports from countries where labour abuses may have occurred

Billions of pounds worth of laptops, mobile phones and clothing likely to have been made using slave labour are being bought by UK consumers every year, researchers have said.

The [global slavery index](#), which attempts to measure the scope and scale of slavery across the world, claims that [G20 countries annually import more than £272bn](#) of products from places with a high prevalence of modern slavery.

The UK imported £14bn of “at risk” goods last year including electronics, garments, fish, chocolate and sugar, said the study. The US was found to have imported similar goods worth \$144bn (£110bn), making it by far the biggest global importer of products potentially made by slaves.

The authors of the index said public demand for products at low prices was allowing slavery to thrive across the world.

“The prevalence of modern slavery is driven through conflict and oppression, but it’s also derived in more developed countries by consumer demand,” said Fiona David, executive director of research at Walk Free, the organisation that produces the global slavery index.

Despite a G20 pledge to [police human rights abuses in supply chains](#) last year, 12 of the G20 countries were found to have taken no action to stop businesses from sourcing goods made by slave labour.

“We must question why more is not being done to free the millions of people around the world that are trapped, abused and beaten down while being bought and sold to provide goods for businesses around the world,” said Kevin Hyland, the UK’s independent anti-slavery commissioner.

“The level of action G20 countries have taken to date to put an end to modern slavery is limited. These nations have a responsibility to pioneer an end to the demand for imported goods produced by criminals.”

The index, which is claimed to be the most comprehensive research project of its kind, was compiled after interviews with 71,000 people in 48 countries.

The authors of the study estimated that 136,000 people in the UK live as slaves, a number 12 times higher than the official government figure of 13,000.

North Korea has the highest number of people living in slavery, with estimates suggesting that one in 10 North Koreans are victims of state-sponsored forced labour. Eritrea, Burundi, Central African Republic and Afghanistan were also named among countries with the largest number of slaves per capita.

Last year, Walk Free along with the International Labour Organization and the UN's International Organization for Migration released a [new global estimate](#) of 40.3 million people thought to be in conditions of slavery. Women account for 71% of this total, with 15.4 million believed to be victims of forced marriage.

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The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jul/19/british-public-14bn-goods-slaves-global-slavery-index>