

Outcome document

Insights from the Europe Regional Freedom from Slavery Forum 2025

The three-day Forum provided profound insights and crucial reflections structured around key themes: legal and regulatory frameworks, survivor leadership, multi-stakeholder coalitions, sector-specific challenges, resources, and the underlying importance of humanity in our actions.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Discussions on the EU Forced Labour Regulation and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) were illuminating, outlining substantial progress yet clearly highlighting significant challenges and myths still persisting. We clarified the practical scope, strengths, and limitations of these frameworks, recognizing the importance of debunking misconceptions and ensuring meaningful compliance. Critical insights emerged around enforcement complexities and the urgent need for practical implementation strategies.

A lot needs to be done on CSDDD in terms of risk assessment, costs, competition, control being difficult, the impacts on supply chains, and the possibility of endless litigations.

Survivor Leadership and Lived Experience

Engagement with lived experience is very minimum in Europe both in terms of policy development, program implementation and strategies for remedies.

The powerful guidance of survivors underscored an essential point: survivor voices must be genuinely centred, resourced, and empowered—not merely extracted and symbolically valued. The Forum reinforced our collective responsibility to truly see and listen to those often rendered invisible or silent. This deeply human reminder urged us toward meaningful inclusion, careful handling of trauma, and ethical interactions guided by a commitment to "do no harm."

Multi-Stakeholder Coalition: The "Coalition of the Willing"

The idea of a "coalition of the willing" emerged strongly, emphasizing the necessity of collaboration across all sectors—willing businesses, governments, civil society, academia, persons with lived experience and more. Participants repeatedly stressed that disbelief or denial in broader society that child labour and forced labour have yet to be eradicated. Moving forward requires a strategic proactive approach rather than patchwork reactive approach. This means cross-sectoral action for collective action and advocacy, tool building, clear communication beyond our inherent differences. And working out who convenes, who leads, who facilitates each of these efforts.

Sectoral Challenges: (Cocoa,) Agriculture, related products including cocoa and Textiles

Insights from discussions on industries such as cocoa, agriculture, and textiles revealed profound complexity, differences in supply chain challenges. It was clear that standards, patience and a nuanced approaches are essential, alongside an urgency for immediate action. Other sectors, notably mining, domestic work, also require our attention, even if in these days these were less visible or discussed.

Resource Mobilization and Challenges

Funding cuts from austerity measures across the world are affecting the sector in a disproportionate ways: forced labor, child labor and HT are deeply affected by the cuts from US and Europe. There are no tangible opportunities for funding and a call to other governments step up was made. In light of this, the call to businesses to step and invest in the issue was also made.

The Importance of Humanity: Trust, Emotions, and Complexity

Fundamentally, the Forum reminded us of the importance of trust, strategic connection, and humanity in all we do. Trust-building, empathy, as well as outrage and anger are essential sources of energy and insights pushing us beyond intellectual boundaries toward action.

Holding space for patience alongside urgency became an underlying theme—recognizing that complexity demands careful, collective navigation.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead, Anthropologist