



The global seafood industry provides cheap seafood at scale by openly disregarding both human rights and environmental concerns, cutting corners and exploiting workers in order to keep prices as low as possible.

This business model, which focuses on procuring the cheapest possible seafood to meet consumer demand, means that seafood suppliers around the world are continuously squeezed further and further to reduce costs. Labour costs are among the easiest to exploit, with migrant workers often deceived into taking on debt, forced to work very long hours in dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs, for very low (or no) wages. Workers often have little practical ability to leave their jobs, due to outstanding debts accrued and the common practice of employers retaining workers' key documents. Exploitation provides a de facto subsidy that allows the industry to remain profitable.

## What we have done to date

Humanity United started working to address forced labour and human trafficking in the shrimp supply chain in 2010. In 2014, HU broadened its approach to work across various seafood supply chains within one narrow geography - Thailand. At the time, Thailand, one of the world's largest exporters of seafood, had an acute problem with forced labour in the industry, both on land and at sea. In 2015, Humanity United and the Freedom Fund partnered together to implement a comprehensive Thailand program. Specifically, our goals were to catalyze market-based leverage, empower workers and survivors, and incentivize regulatory action to counter a climate where companies could act with impunity. This program included work with Thai grassroots partners through the Freedom Fund's hotspot model, whilst simultaneously working across the wider supply chain with retailers, suppliers, international NGOs and governments to effect change.

The Thailand program has seen significant positive impact since its inception. Working together with our partners, we have seen the following reforms and improvements take place:

- Significant changes to the legal and regulatory framework governing the sector, including ratification of key ILO conventions and enactment of domestic legislation;
- A comprehensive monitoring, control and surveillance system for vessels with technical assistance to implement and improve; establishment of Port-In and Port-Out centres to monitor vessel and labour conditions;
- Changes in the practice of some Thai-owned vessels, aquaculture farms and seafood processing businesses, including improved transparency and the beginning of a shift towards ethical recruitment;
- Stronger coordination and collaborative action by grassroots civil society bodies, monitoring conditions and leading evidence-based advocacy; and
- Building of worker networks and leaders to defend rights and to monitor their own conditions.

**However, while progress has been significant, there is still a need to continue to work to ensure adequate resourcing and strong enforcement of reforms, to ensure real change for workers on the ground.**

## A regional Asia-Pacific approach

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At the same time, the limits of a single-country approach have become clear. Problems are displaced as fishing capacity and activity shifts in response to tighter regulation and enforcement. Moreover, the overall business model has not changed: buyers are still making sourcing decisions based on cheapest price and still do not factor environmental or social considerations into their transactions. This means that if seafood is more expensive in one country due to increased costs of sustainable production, buyers are likely to buy from another country where lax labour and environmental regulation allows for cheaper production of seafood at scale. In many cases, this country is also in the Asia-Pacific region, where the vast majority of global seafood production occurs.

Additionally, the Asia-Pacific seafood and labour supply chains are highly interdependent. This region has spent decades building fleets, developing aquaculture and investing in costly processing infrastructure. As a result, this area now produces the majority of the world's seafood, heavily relying on migrant workers from across the region. Our intention is to ensure that we're taking a truly systemic, "whole-of-supply chain" approach. By focusing on the *entire* interconnected circuit that makes up the seafood supply chain, we aim to ensure that practices aren't just being reformed in one place, whilst leaving abuses to continue unabated elsewhere in that same supply chain.

Our next-phase approach takes account of the above trends and learnings and aims to create an encircling effect across the region, levelling the playing field and building to a tipping point that culminates in basic minimum standards for the protection of workers. With highly interdependent and closed supply chains, our hope is that exposure of abuses across Asia will disincentivize buyers from simply shifting their sourcing when risk or scrutiny rises in one area.

## Geographic scope

We will not work in *every* country in the Asia-Pacific; rather we are focusing on the largest producing/exporting nations: India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. We will also be working to improve the practice of retailers at the global level, who are ultimately responsible for setting the price, and work towards improved standards at the regional level. While this sounds like a large amount of work, we will take a bespoke, surgical approach to funding interventions in each country by identifying discrete areas of need and opportunity to have an outsized impact on the system. Our two "anchor" countries, Thailand and Indonesia, will include deep engagement with local grassroots civil society on the ground, in the Freedom Fund hotspot model approach.

## Areas of focus

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Our new strategy has four thematic leverage areas:

1. **Safer Migration** - focusing on migrant workers, through direct assistance, ethical recruitment models and accreditation, and government advocacy and policy reform.
2. **Worker Power** - building worker agency by supporting worker leaders, worker organising and worker-led monitoring.
3. **Business Models** - investigations and initiatives to shift the business model from one based solely on short-term profit considerations, to one that properly accounts for labour and environmental costs and focuses on longer-term business gains.
4. **Government Regulation** - evidence-based advocacy to shift national, regional, and market-state (U.S., UK, EU) laws and trade levers.