



HUMANITY
UNITED



HUMANITY UNITED'S
**FORCED LABOR
& HUMAN TRAFFICKING
STRATEGY**

Rebalancing Power to Improve Lives

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FROM OUR TEAM

It's been an extraordinary journey since Humanity United officially organized its Forced Labor and Human Trafficking work into a portfolio in 2020. That initial strategy incorporated everything we and our partners had learned from the work we had already been doing, along with information gleaned from an exhaustive analysis of overlapping systems that enable, drive, and often demand forced labor, human trafficking, and worker exploitation.

Included in that strategy was a plan to revisit our approach and re-evaluate those systems in 2023. We developed our strategy prior to the threat of COVID-19 and unveiled it just a few months into the pandemic, unaware of the seismic shockwaves and radical changes that this global disaster – and the multiple world-shaking developments that would occur concurrently with it – would bring.

But as dramatic as these past few years have been, the truth is that the mechanisms that sit at the heart of systems that drive forced labor and human trafficking have been solidly in place for millennia.

Power imbalances lead to the exploitation of workers; the greater the imbalance, the greater the chance for exploitation.

The systems we aim to influence have changed significantly in recent years: in negative ways that we must now account for, and in positive ways that we can now leverage. In our revised strategy there are some shifts around the edges in the tactics we employ. And we, as Humanity United, have been called upon to utilize our own position and privilege to further the leadership and influence of workers and survivors of exploitation.

But our beliefs remain the same, our priorities remain the same, our commitment to accompanying our partners remains the same, as does our commitment to Humanity United's overall mission, vision, priorities, and organizational strategy. Despite all the upheaval the events of the last few years have caused, this process of revisiting our strategy has brought a strengthened commitment to our mission.

We believe that we and our partners are on the path to progress, and that together we can improve the lives of workers and their families around the world.

WHO WE ARE

AS AN ORGANIZATION

The Forced Labor & Human Trafficking portfolio is guided by Humanity United's overall mission and aligns with Humanity United's organizational strategy. Humanity United is dedicated to cultivating the conditions that transform human exploitation and violent conflict to enduring peace and freedom. Humanity United's work is anchored in five strategic pillars: building relationships and networks; practicing a philosophy of accompaniment; being learning-focused, systems-enabled and people-centered; being expansive in our efforts; and investing internally so we can grow together with our partners.



The Humanity United team at an All-Staff gathering in March 2023.

AS A PORTFOLIO

Humanity United's Forced Labor & Human Trafficking portfolio seeks to address power imbalances at the heart of worker exploitation, specifically those between employers and workers, between host and sending countries and migrant workers, and throughout each transaction within global supply chains. We seek to encourage and bolster the leadership of those within the system who can play a leading role in this challenge, including civil society, companies, investors, policymakers, and most importantly, workers themselves. We support workers' ability to organize and act collectively in order to decrease their vulnerability to exploitation.

OUR CORE BELIEFS

- **We believe taking a universal rights-based approach brings integrity to our work**, and that all vulnerable survivors of trafficking, migrant workers, and communities have the right to assemble and organize in the collective pursuit of equity and social justice.
- **We believe in and are committed to elevating the leadership and voices of survivors, workers, and human rights defenders**, with the understanding that centering their experiences is crucial to designing and implementing work to improve the lives of those most impacted by exploitation.
- **We believe in and are committed to elevating the leadership and voices of survivors, workers, and human rights defenders**. To that end, across the broader field we strive to play the roles of both leader and advocate, strategically catalyzing resources, person-power, and expertise to amplify the efforts of our partners and maximize our impact across multiple levers.
- **We believe that respect for universal and labor rights should never be contingent on corporate considerations of profits and losses or market dynamics**. We nevertheless believe in leveraging market dynamics and for-profit partners when they can improve the conditions of survivors, workers, and universal rights defenders.
- **We believe that to have the greatest impact we need to engage with the full spectrum of relevant sectors and stakeholders**, including survivors, workers, employers, corporations, suppliers, service industry leaders, investors, governments, civil society, and the public. We believe that we must speak truth to power and hold all parties accountable when necessary to advance our impact mission.
- **We believe in focusing our efforts and using our voice to address forced labor and human trafficking specifically**, while also striving to understand that the intersectionality at the root causes of vulnerability requires us to be connected with other movements for the shared purpose of securing dignity for all.
- **We believe both in funding evidence-based interventions and supporting creative, emerging approaches to problems in our field**, knowing that the best and most impactful innovations oftentimes spring from unexpected places.

HOW WE UNDERSTAND SYSTEMS

In human rights work, we often encounter the phrase “the system is broken.”

*On the contrary, we understand that the systems we work within – our global economies, societies, and political systems – **are working exactly as they are intended to.***

These systems enable, encourage, and in some cases even demand the exploitation of workers in order to maximize profit and meet the goals of the powerful.

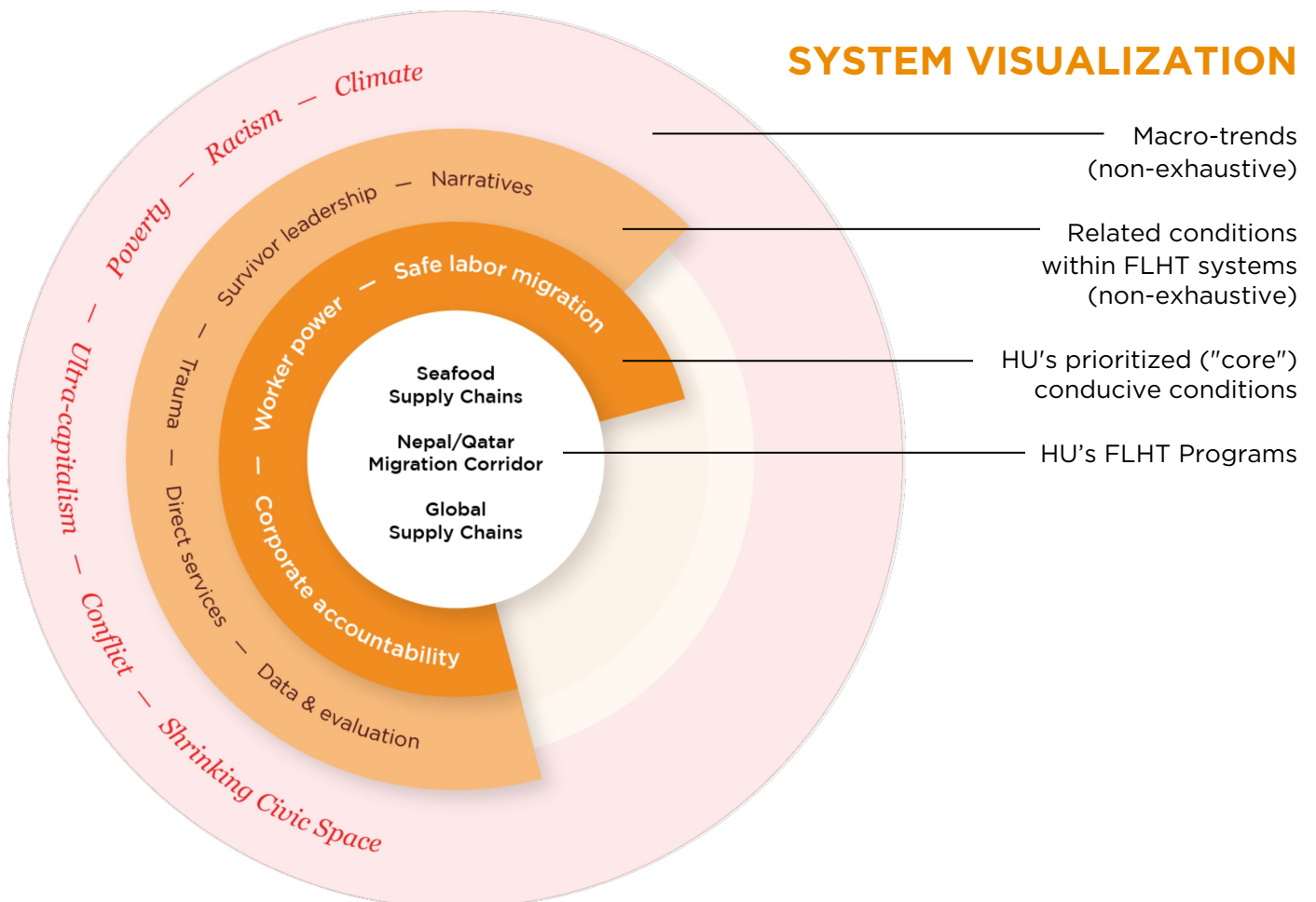


These systems are influenced by a host of powerful external factors that can exacerbate the risks to workers. Factors that we've seen have a direct impact on our work include the ongoing climate crisis, increased conflict, the expansion of ultra-capitalism and a widening wealth-gap leaving many more people living in poverty, a shrinking civic space, and the pervasive harms of racism.

We believe that by focusing our attention on rebalancing power dynamics, we can accelerate the transformation of labor systems that are fair and just for the workers who are most often targeted for exploitation.

At the heart of all of Humanity United’s work is the idea of “cultivating the conditions” that transform human exploitation and violent conflict to enduring peace and freedom. As a team, our work is focused on cultivating three conditions within the systems that enable forced labor which can greatly improve the lives of workers, and which we feel Humanity United is particularly well-positioned to affect. We call these our “core” conditions: worker power, corporate accountability, and safe labor migration. We will go into greater detail on these conditions in the next section.

We also recognize many other conditions within the system that are conducive to improvements in the lives of workers, and which our own work touches on in some way, often indirectly. Efforts to end worker exploitation must be driven and designed by those who are closest to the issue; survivor leadership is essential. Data can be collected and utilized for the purposes of shedding light on the lower levels of supply chains and telling the stories of workers. Those stories can help shape a changing narrative, in which the voices and efforts of workers - including those we (all-too-briefly) recognized as “essential” - are sought out and valued. And exploited workers continue to need access to direct services that are provided in a way that recognizes the traumatic effects of their experiences.



OUR CORE CONDITIONS

At the launch of our portfolio we considered the needs that were identified within the field, the gaps (or presence) of other funders, our own experience, and HU's values, and selected three core conditions within these systems, which we seek to directly cultivate through our work:

Worker power

Corporate accountability

Safe labor migration

These remain the core conditions we focus on cultivating. Change in each of these conditions mutually reinforces advancements in the others.

These are the conditions that we aim to directly cultivate through our programs, which are focused specifically on worker exploitation in **the world's seafood industry**; the migration corridor between **Nepal and Qatar**; and finding and leveraging pressure points to improve corporate practice across **global supply chains**.

The vast majority of our partners directly support at least two of these core conditions and often work across all three.

WORKER POWER

We believe that if we support workers' ability to organize and act collectively, then we can shift existing power dynamics toward greater leadership of workers, which will in turn counteract the marginalization that can lead to exploitation.

Our work to expand worker power begins with the recognition of the inherent dignity of workers, regardless of whatever factors may leave them marginalized in other contexts. We know that inequities continue to increase, and that workers are experiencing exacerbated risks related to challenging the status quo.

The supply chain shocks beginning in 2020 have led to a stronger awareness of the fragility of global supply chains, but while there is indication that some policymakers, business leaders, investors, and consumers are open to change, significant and sustained impact is not yet occurring.

We believe that there are strong models for worker-centered organizing, both formally and informally, showing resilience in the face of government crackdowns and corporate resistance. Movements and solidarity are necessary to achieve change. We also reflect on the fact that the goals of organizing are becoming more expansive and incorporating workers' needs beyond wages and basic safety.

Our efforts are aimed at supporting the leadership of workers within the broader labor movement. We seek to elevate the strategies, influence, and decision-making power of workers, both in their workplaces as well as in the context of organizing and advocacy. We emphasize the diversity and inclusion of workers and worker organizing as part of the larger labor movement, including migrants, women, Dalit communities and temporary / transient communities. We also seek to galvanize powerful stakeholders to bring workers to the table as partners.

In a system where workers' voices are more clearly heard and respected, workers will be better able to hold accountable the corporations that benefit from their work and will bring to the forefront the recognition that the very process of migration can create conditions that increase risks of forced labor.

SAFE LABOR MIGRATION

Our work to expand safe labor migration begins with the recognition that migrant workers are more than the conditions they often face and the pathways that led them there. If we are to make the migration experience of migrant workers safer, then our work

must start with a holistic and comprehensive view of their journey and a greater understanding of their needs prior to departure, on the job, and upon their return.

We have learned from workers and our partners that the pathways themselves are only a portion of the migration cycle and formal pathways may not be the safest option, the cheapest option, or even an available choice. Part of our responsibility is to contribute towards pathways that meet the full range of workers' needs, of which safety is just one.

Although public policy around the world continues to trend toward increased policing of migration and the targeting of non-citizens, we do see positive signs. Among our partners, migrant worker groups say they more often report meaningful participation and influence in public policy, bilateral agreements, and memoranda of understanding related to migration policy. Our partners also say that in some cases returning migrant workers have reported encountering less stigma and discrimination in their home countries and new narratives are emerging around their contribution to economic development through remittances.



CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Our work in this area begins with the knowledge that the business practices that dominate our global economy prioritize short-term profits above all other concerns. As companies seek the lowest costs of production, including labor costs, many workers will be put in situations of exploitation — including forced labor and human trafficking, but also through means such as artificially low wages, delayed wage payment, debt bondage, or limits on organizing or their freedom of movement.

We seek systems in which corporations treat their workers in a fair and dignified way, which includes ensuring that those corporations are held accountable to uphold basic labor rights. Not just by workers and their advocates, but also by leading corporations that have good practices and seek a level playing field.

Over the last few years we've seen an increased level of awareness of how supply chains operate (and their fragility) and the integral roles that workers play in keeping the global economy afloat even in times of crisis. We've also seen greater concern for the exploitation of workers within the service and construction industries, particularly with regards to migrant workers.

We also recognize the key role that data plays, knowing that technology can influence decisions regarding purchasing, contracting, wages, marketing, and other corporate practices. We know that the programming code that will drive tomorrow's AI decision making — and the guardrails it will be told to follow — are being developed today.



COLLABORATION

Our work is highly collaborative, as the topic of forced labor and human trafficking and the strategies and tactics we use to cultivate our core conditions have countless intersections with those of the other teams within our own organization, other advocates for workers' rights, our peer funders, and even other human rights and justice movements.

WITHIN HUMANITY UNITED

As we seek to cultivate our core conditions, we work closely with our **Public Engagement** portfolio to help spur narrative and policy changes. On the narrative side, we've seen the power that **Independent Journalism & Media** can have in lifting the voices of the marginalized, and telling stories that would otherwise go untold. Our **Strategic Communications** team collaborates with our programs to create a "rising tide" effect, influencing the broader narratives around the issues. Our Communications team also often works directly with our partners to increase the reach of their messages. On the policy side, we work closely with our **Policy and Government Relations** team to help ensure that U.S. law is strong on the issue, that it works to hold both corporations and countries accountable for their efforts to address worker exploitation, and that existing law is meaningfully enforced. We also leverage access to our lobbying sister organization, **Humanity United Action**.

Our goal of lifting up the voices and investing in the leadership of those who are closest to the issue and have firsthand experience is shared by our **Peacebuilding** colleagues, as is our focus on power dynamics. Many of the circumstances that lead to the marginalization of exploited workers are shared by those in areas of conflict, or directly caused by the conflict itself. Migrants are continuously being displaced by violence, and increasingly displaced by the effects of the climate crisis, which disproportionately affect the already-disadvantaged.

These marginalized communities are dealing with individual and collective trauma, and we recognize that trauma healing can play a crucial role in survivors taking leadership roles. At the same time, both we and our **Peacebuilding** colleagues have seen the power of networks and social movements to create space for deep transformation and change.

We also collaborate closely with HU's **Racial Justice and Equity** team, as well as The Omidyar Group's **Rights and Dignity Assembly** (which is housed within HU) as racism is one of the key drivers of marginalization, and marginalized workers are those most often targeted for exploitation.

Our work is designed to fit within **HU's overarching organizational strategy**, which mandates taking an approach of accompaniment with our partners, accomplishing much of our work through networks and relationships, maintaining a learning environment, investing internally in our team's capabilities, and being expansive in our efforts to support partners and the broader field, looking beyond just our own financial contributions.



ACROSS THE FIELD AND BEYOND

Our commitment to truly embracing a philosophy of “expansive efforts” includes the policy, communications, and technical support we provide to partners as mentioned above but is by no means limited to it. We create connections between our partners, peers, and other stakeholders, so that they may develop and deepen their own relationships. We utilize our ability to convene key individuals and organizations.

During the process of refreshing our strategy our partners told us loud and clear that we have the responsibility to use our privilege and position within the field of funders working on this issue. We must encourage others to invest in the work that centers the experience and leadership of those with lived experience, and we will increase our efforts to seek opportunities to align funding with our peers and engage at the intersection of our movement and those fields that directly interact with forced labor and human trafficking, including climate change, gender justice, peace, and others.

We also heard that we have the responsibility to use our own voice. As important as it is to uplift the experiences and leadership of our partners and survivors, we cannot ignore the fact that we have a valuable perspective on the issue as well. We are consistently surveying the systems that enable and encourage forced labor and human trafficking, observing changes, and maintaining a constant conversation with our partners and advisors, giving us a unique vantage point.



INFUSING DEIJ

Humanity United's commitment to the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) were already a core part of how we designed the earlier version of our strategy. It was also a strong guiding force in how we revisited our strategy and continues to guide the way we implement it. We recognize that nearly all workers who find themselves facing extreme power imbalances are themselves severely marginalized, often in intersecting ways. These workers face some combination of racism, classism and caste discrimination, sexism and ableism, as well as discrimination based on cultural differences, religious differences, language barriers, migration status, and other life experiences.

We also recognize that the field of Forced Labor and Human Trafficking, particularly on the funding side, has not historically reflected the communities it aims to serve, nor has it done an adequate job of inviting their leadership.

Our commitment to these values is present in the way we seek to accompany our partners. We want to meet them where they are, employing a trust-based and trauma-informed approach while being aware that each partner has a different set of experiences and needs. In this refreshed strategy, we seek to be more specific in the communities we seek to serve, including migrant workers, women, and people from discriminated castes. Based on feedback from migrant workers themselves, we reframed our work from "worker agency" to worker power" to be clearer about our intentions in ways that were better understood by our primary partners. We are also increasing our ability to engage with partners in their preferred language.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

ADVISORY GROUP

Our commitment to our DEIJ principles and to maintaining a culture of learning has led us to utilize the guidance of an advisory group, which represents a variety of lived experiences, geographies, types of organizations and proximity to the issue of forced labor and human trafficking. We particularly seek their friendly challenges to our thinking and help in expanding our understanding of the change we seek to see. We design our engagements with advisors, unfamiliar voices and communities in ways that do not only benefit HU but where partners can learn from one another and benefit from HU's thinking. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of their time and expertise.

STRATEGY LEARNING QUESTIONS

Our learning questions for this iteration of our strategy are aimed at trying to understand how the changes we're seeking will interact with each other and seeing the parts of the picture that we're missing. These questions include:

- Are companies measuring whether reforms in their business practices generate positive change for workers? If so, how, and are workers involved in that analysis? Is there more we can do to increase worker involvement?
- Are we living up to our own commitment to accompaniment? Is HU adequately showing up in solidarity with worker movements? Are we supporting (rather than directing or controlling) worker power and worker movements?
- In what ways has philanthropy, like HU, helped and hindered efforts to make the migration journey system healthier? What have we learned about ways to engage in areas like trauma and post-job support?

We also face a more philosophical question. How can we use our collective imagination, build on the wisdom of our partners and those impacted by the issue, and paint an image of a world in which our core conditions are fully actualized, *beyond* just the end of forced labor and human trafficking?

CONCLUSION

When we created our initial portfolio strategy in 2020, we recognized that it was crucial that in 2023, when we looked back on our three years of learning, we do so with open hearts, open ears, and an open mind, and invite our partners to guide us.

Our strategy also sits underneath the umbrella of Humanity United's core values and organizational strategy, which means we approached this process with humility and commitment, and in the spirit of accompaniment and trust. In addition to our continuous learning with partners, for this most recent strategy effort we listened to the expertise of those leading the efforts against worker exploitation, we engaged with unfamiliar voices to challenge our thinking and bring new perspectives into our reflections, and we strived to create the safest possible spaces for migrant workers and survivors to fully express their views. They told us where we could step up and lean in, and where we should zoom out and see the bigger picture, but their overall message was that together, they believe we are on the right path.

As dramatically as the world has changed in the last three years, the systems that enable forced labor and human trafficking are still aimed at supporting those power imbalances, and the core conditions required to end worker exploitation remain in need of more attention and resources.

We are proud to be stepping into the next phase of our work alongside our partners, and we are committed to using our own influence to elevate the voices and leadership of those most impacted by worker exploitation to bring an end to these practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express deep appreciation and gratitude to those who make our work possible, particularly our partners, whose efforts are improving the lives of countless workers despite constant challenges and global upheaval, and whose wisdom and leadership constantly inspire and guide us. We would also like to thank our advisory group, whose candor and thoughtfulness help keep us on the right track, and our friends and peers throughout the field who assisted in the development of this strategy.

Sincere thanks to the entire FLHT team and our adjunct teammates from other parts of the organization for their work on this strategy, and all of our Humanity United colleagues for their deep commitment to HU's mission and values. We are particularly grateful for the leadership and strategic vision of Srik Gopal, our Managing Partner, and our Board of Trustees.

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