



War and Workers: Navigating Labor Rights and Supply Chain Risks During Active Conflicts

Guidance for companies and suppliers

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Introduction

Current hostilities in the Gulf region are exacerbating regional instability and creating negative impacts for workers across the globe. In this document, the [Fair Labor Association](#) (FLA) provides guidance to assist companies and their suppliers sourcing from the conflict-affected Gulf region, as well as other areas where hostilities have heightened labor rights risks, to protect workers in their supply chains. This resource provides targeted insights for companies practicing [heightened human rights due diligence](#) in the textile, garment, food, and agriculture sectors.

On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent trade tensions, the global economy remains fragile. Beyond the immediate tragedy of lost lives, infrastructure destroyed, and severe environmental damage, the current conflict threatens to trigger a domino effect across global supply chains. Surging energy prices, disrupted trade corridors for raw materials and finished goods, and restricted mobility for migrant workers could further destabilize an already vulnerable economic system.

While the immediate danger to local and migrant workers in the region is paramount, the ripple effects are global. Beyond the conflict zone, this war undermines the safety and economic security of workers worldwide, threatening livelihoods through increased unemployment and an escalating global cost-of-living crisis.

FLA urges companies, including [FLA members and affiliates](#), to continue their due diligence activities through continuous communication with their suppliers and worker representatives, on-site visits, evaluation of existing working and living conditions, and, most importantly, through an active grievance mechanism where workers can report concerns securely and anonymously. Given the volatility on the ground, we urge companies to closely monitor location and industry-specific risks. This document will be updated as needed.

Contact and support

FLA encourages companies and suppliers to reach out with specific questions, comments, or requests for consultation regarding these guidelines. Please contact us at info@fairlabor.org.

Part I: Immediate safety and worker mobility

1.1 Safety and security in workplaces and worker housing

Companies should prioritize verifying that factories, agricultural facilities, dormitories, and agricultural worker accommodations in conflict-affected areas provide adequate protection for workers. Companies should review their suppliers' risk assessments and corresponding emergency response plans (ERPs) to ensure that they explicitly address conflict-specific scenarios. All risk assessment efforts should consider gender-specific vulnerabilities.

Suppliers should take measures to protect critical agricultural infrastructure, including irrigation systems, storage facilities, and livestock holdings, from conflict-related damage, as their destruction can have an immediate and prolonged impact on workers' food security and livelihoods. Suppliers should ensure that workers are not pressured into unsafe conditions to save harvests and should ensure that workers have access to clean water, sanitation, and medical assistance during conflict disruptions.

Additional safety considerations include:

- **Threat mitigation:** ERPs should address air raids, missile strikes, or drone attacks (including conventional, chemical, or other potential threats) on buildings and infrastructure. For agricultural settings, this includes threats to open fields, greenhouses, storage facilities, and irrigation infrastructure where workers may have limited access to physical shelter.
- **Resource self-sufficiency:** Suppliers should maintain emergency reserves of food, medical supplies, clean water, backup electricity, and communication tools that can be used in case of large-scale infrastructural damage. For agricultural operations dependent on livestock or seasonal crops, suppliers should implement contingency measures to protect these assets during periods of conflict. The loss of animals or harvests can constitute an irreversible livelihood shock for workers, particularly in contexts where in-kind compensation forms part of their remuneration.
- **Emergency response teams:** A trained emergency response team (ERT) should be responsible for implementing emergency response procedures; be supported by clear protocols; and have robust communication channels with local authorities, emergency services, and civil society organizations.
- **The containment of hazardous materials:** Suppliers should ensure the secure containment of chemicals and other hazardous materials to prevent environmental disasters in the event of structural damage.

1.2 Training and communication with workers and representatives

Suppliers should integrate conflict-specific emergency protocols into their annual training programs to ensure all workers and their representatives are fully informed of potential risks and planned mitigation strategies. Suppliers should regularly implement

drills for ERT members that include rehearsals and tabletop exercises. Suppliers should also ensure all emergency communication and training materials are provided in workers' native languages to facilitate rapid response during an emergency.

1.3 Evacuation preparedness

Suppliers should establish proactive protocols to address situations when the security situation rapidly declines. This includes having clear, pre-defined coordinated procedures with embassies, recruitment agencies, and local authorities for migrant workers. Suppliers should also prepare logistically by identifying specific assembly points, transport providers, and emergency communication means. For operations spanning multiple or remote sites, assembly points should be designated for each location.

1.4 Ensuring safe and affordable mobility

The presence of contested airspace has severely disrupted primary air travel corridors used by migrant workers traveling from Asia to the Gulf. Suppliers should proactively identify alternative transit routes to facilitate the safe movement of workers, such as multi-modal transit. If direct air travel is unavailable, land-and-air routes should be utilized to bypass logistical bottlenecks. These alternative arrangements should not result in additional costs or safety risks for the workers.

1.5 Termination, repatriation, and secure documentation

Suppliers should categorize conflict-driven departures as force majeure and should refrain from imposing penalties, withholding wages, or prolonging the termination process. This includes ensuring:

- **Secure documentation back-ups:** Suppliers should maintain secure digital backups of all worker contracts, payroll records, and identification documentation to prevent loss due to infrastructure disruption or damage.
- **Access to identification:** Suppliers should ensure workers have immediate access to their passports. If documents are with authorities for work permit renewals or other administrative processes, suppliers should take urgent steps to retrieve them.
- **Fair procedures for local workers:** Suppliers should ensure terminations are handled fairly; all earned wages and severance should be paid immediately.
- **Covered repatriation for migrant workers:** In alignment with the Employer Pays Principle, suppliers should fully cover all repatriation expenses.
- **Final settlement:** Payouts should be finalized prior to a worker's departure or contract closure, whichever occurs first.

1.6 Recruitment safeguards

Suppliers should exercise heightened caution when recruiting during periods of instability. Any fast-track recruitment processes should be closely monitored to

prevent workers being charged illegal recruitment or service fees. All recruitment should comply with the Employer Pays Principle, ensuring that workers do not bear any recruitment-related costs. Workers should not be deployed to the host country unless they have been clearly informed of the conflict-related risks and the current situation in the country, and safe travel arrangements from their home country have been secured.

1.7 Mitigating debt bondage and modern slavery risks

The sharp increase in regional travel costs and the shift to more expensive multi-modal transit routes significantly heighten the risk of labor exploitation. Suppliers should implement the following safeguards:

- **Prohibit cost-shifting:** Rising transportation costs should not be passed down to workers through payroll deductions, travel fees, or reduced wages. Any travel-related expenditure should be treated as a business expense.
- **Monitor third-party fees:** Proactive monitoring is required to ensure that third-party labor brokers or manpower agencies do not exploit the crisis by charging workers "priority" or "service" fees for evacuation or repatriation.
- **Ensure the integrity of final payouts:** Any deduction from a worker's final settlement for the purpose of travel is a violation of international labor standards and may constitute debt bondage.

1.8 Diplomatic engagement and worker wellbeing

Suppliers should maintain active, direct lines of communication with the diplomatic missions (embassies and consulates) of all nationalities represented in their workforce. In times of crisis, this coordination is essential for legal protection and safe passage. Suppliers should also consider:

- **Family connectivity:** Suppliers should ensure workers are provided with the necessary time, means, and technology (such as Wi-Fi access or international calling credit) to maintain regular contact with their families. This is essential to mitigate psychological distress caused by the conflict.
- **Psychological support:** Employers should proactively offer mental health resources or counseling services to workers in need.
- **Multilingual information:** All updates regarding safety, embassy instructions, or evacuation plans should be communicated in workers' native languages to ensure clarity and prevent the spread of misinformation.

Part II: Labor standards and employment terms

2.1 Worker engagement and social dialogue

Suppliers should respect workers' right to be heard during a crisis. Employers should proactively consult worker committees, unions, or worker representatives when

implementing emergency measures that affect wages, mobility, housing, or working conditions. Suppliers should also collaborate and engage with workers to ensure that emergency measures are practical and culturally appropriate, fostering trust and reducing the risk of industrial unrest.

2.2 Responsible purchasing practices

Supply chain disruptions and logistical bottlenecks often lead to production delays and missed delivery windows. To ensure these pressures do not translate into worker exploitation, companies should adopt responsible purchasing practices, such as:

- **Identifying clear harvest windows:** Engage with farmers and grower communities to understand the critical windows (such as harvesting, weeding, etc.) and assess conflict-related risks to harvesting activities.
- **Developing alternative labor or harvesting strategies:** Create an alternative plan in case mobility restrictions affect seasonal workers.
- **Granting delivery grace periods:** Proactively grant extensions on delivery deadlines to prevent suppliers from resorting to mandatory or excessive overtime to compensate for conflict-related delays.
- **Waiving penalties:** Refrain from imposing chargebacks, air-freight penalties, or other monetary sanctions on suppliers for delays caused by regional instability.
- **Implementing contractual flexibility:** Companies and suppliers should categorize these disruptions under force majeure contract clauses, ensuring that the financial burden of the conflict is not pushed down the supply chain, where it ultimately risks being recovered through worker wage cuts or increased production intensity.

2.3 Termination and livelihood protection

Suppliers should ensure that all employment terminations are handled with transparency and legal integrity. Both local and migrant workers should be protected from unfair dismissal or forced repatriation without due process. Suppliers should ensure:

- **Comprehensive payouts:** Settle all legally or contractually earned wages and benefits in full, including severance, back pay, and earned leave.
- **Prohibition of forced return:** No worker should be coerced into repatriation against their will if safe alternatives exist. Conversely, workers wishing to leave due to safety concerns should be allowed to do so without the threat of penalties.
- **Due process:** Any termination should be documented clearly. Workers should have access to grievance mechanisms or worker representatives to ensure their dismissal is not a result of discrimination or an attempt by the supplier to avoid paying full benefits during the crisis.

2.4 Fair wage integrity and inflationary pressures

The cost-of-living crisis, fueled by surging energy prices and disrupted commodity supply lines, poses a significant risk to livelihoods of the workers. Companies should be vigilant in ensuring that wages remain sufficient to meet basic needs despite regional volatility. This includes ensuring:

- **Wage protection during work suspension:** In cases of temporary factory closures or reduced production due to conflict-related disruptions, workers should receive at least partial wage protection defined by local law to prevent sudden loss of income. Where workers receive part of their remuneration in the form of food, produce, or access to land, suppliers should ensure these arrangements are maintained or compensated in cash during conflict-related disruptions. Conflict-driven loss of crops or livestock should not result in a de facto wage reduction for workers.
- **Protecting purchasing power:** Companies and suppliers should conduct rapid assessments of local inflation. Where the cost of essential goods (food, water, and fuel) has spiked, companies should consider temporary cost-of-living adjustments or stipends to ensure workers' real take-home pay is not eroded.
- **Timely payments:** In conflict-affected areas, banking systems can become unstable. Suppliers should ensure that wages are paid on time and in a secure, accessible format, preventing workers from having to rely on predatory high-interest lenders for daily essentials. Companies should also avoid shifting commercial pressure onto farmers through price reductions or delayed payments.
- **A non-deduction policy:** Under no circumstances should suppliers introduce or increase deductions for accommodations, utilities, meals, or other in-kind provisions as a means of offsetting their own rising operational costs at workers' expense.

2.5 Monitoring contractual integrity

During periods of regional instability, suppliers may attempt to modify employment terms to manage fluctuating production. Companies should ensure that any temporary adjustments to employment duration or contract terms remain transparent, legal, and non-exploitative, including ensuring:

- **Informed consent:** Any modification to an existing contract should be explained to the workers in their native language, and changes should be mutually agreed upon without coercion or the threat of termination.
- **Preservation of seniority:** Temporary shifts to shortened or flexible contracts should not result in the loss of accrued seniority, pension contributions, or future severance entitlements for local or migrant workers.
- **Prohibition of contract substitution:** Suppliers should ensure that they are not using the conflict as a pretext to replace permanent contracts with temporary or short-term contracts that would strip workers of their legal protections.

- **Defined duration for contract changes:** Any emergency-related contractual change should have a clearly defined sunset clause or expiration date, ensuring terms revert to their original standard once the immediate crisis subsides.
- **Disruption monitoring of supply chain inputs:** Companies should monitor disruptions in supply chains inputs, including price increases in fertilizers or fuel, as well as impacts on farm profitability and labor demand.

Part III: Strategic company and supplier collaboration

3.1 Continuous communication and operational transparency

Companies should establish a safe disclosure environment where their suppliers can report disruptions without fear of commercial retaliation. Maintaining a real-time, transparent dialogue is essential for protecting both the business and the workforce. Actions should include:

- **Real-time risk mapping:** Companies should maintain an open channel to monitor immediate disruptions to logistics, raw material availability, yield availability, and factory idle times. This data should be used to adjust production expectations—not to penalize the supplier.
- **Proactive idle-time management:** In the event of factory closures or idle periods due to conflict, companies, suppliers, and workers should pre-negotiate how workers will be compensated. Transparency regarding idle time is critical to ensuring workers are not left without pay during operational pauses.
- **Integrated feedback loops:** Companies should establish a system where suppliers can report near-miss safety incidents or sudden security shifts in the region; companies should also provide immediate support or guidance on evacuation and worker protection.

3.2 Company harmonization and collective action

To ensure consistency and maximize impact, companies sourcing from the same facilities or geographic clusters should coordinate their response strategies. A unified approach prevents compliance confusion and ensures that labor protections are applied equally across the entire workforce. Companies should ensure:

- **Unified safety and payment standards:** Companies can align essential protocols with other companies and across locations, such as force majeure definitions, wage protection stipends, and evacuation procedures. This ensures that all workers in a facility are treated according to the same high standard, regardless of which company's product they are making.
- **Collective leverage:** By speaking with one voice, companies can more effectively support suppliers in negotiations with local authorities, logistics providers, or insurance companies to facilitate safe corridors and document retrieval.

- **Shared resource allocation:** Coordination allows companies to pool resources for psychological support services, emergency transport, or independent monitoring, reducing the administrative burden on the supplier and ensuring more robust worker protections. Companies are encouraged to collaborate with local NGOs to ensure children remain in school where possible.
- **Consolidated reporting:** Harmonizing data requests regarding factory idle times and raw material delays reduces audit fatigue for the supplier, allowing factory management to focus on immediate worker safety.

3.3 Business continuity and insurance resilience

Companies should work collaboratively with suppliers to assess financial vulnerabilities and ensure that risk-mitigation tools are properly activated. Protecting the supplier's financial health is a prerequisite for protecting the workers' livelihoods. Companies should implement:

- **Insurance policy audits:** Companies should support suppliers in a thorough review of insurance coverage—specifically business interruption, employer's liability, and material damage. Special attention should be paid to war risk, civil commotion, or political violence clauses, which are often required for claims in contested airspaces or conflict zones.
- **Support for claims processing:** In crisis environments, administrative hurdles can delay payouts. Companies should offer legal or technical guidance to help suppliers document disruptions correctly to ensure insurance claims are processed efficiently.
- **Contingency funding:** Beyond insurance, companies should discuss temporary credit extensions, advance payments, or no- or low-interest bridge financing to help suppliers cover immediate overhead—like worker salaries—while waiting for insurance settlements or for logistics to stabilize.
- **Resilience planning:** Suppliers should have a re-start protocol. Business continuity isn't just about surviving the pause; it's about having a plan to resume operations safely without cutting corners on labor standards when the situation stabilizes.
- **Cross-sector collaboration and ground-level verification:** In volatile environments, official reporting channels may become unreliable. Companies should engage with a broad ecosystem of stakeholders to ensure a high-fidelity understanding of the human rights landscape and to facilitate essential aid.
- **Independent verification:** Partner with local civil society organizations, NGOs, and independent labor groups to verify on-the-ground conditions. These organizations provide an essential early warning system for issues like forced labor, safety violations, or restricted worker mobility that may not be captured in standard management reports.
- **Coordinated humanitarian support:** Where the crisis exceeds the capacity of the supplier, companies should collaborate with international humanitarian agencies (e.g., Red Cross/Red Crescent, IOM) to ensure workers have access to emergency food, medical care, and safe shelter.

- **Safe reporting channels:** Leverage existing NGO-managed hotlines to provide workers with a safe, external way to report grievances or request emergency assistance without fear of employer retaliation.
- **Multi-stakeholder advocacy:** Join forces with other industry bodies and human rights defenders to advocate for humanitarian corridors that allow for the safe passage of goods and, more importantly, the safe movement of the workforce.

Part IV: Global macro-economic impacts

4.1 Global economic contraction and demand shifts

Companies should prepare for a domino effect as regional instability leads to global demand shifts and potential economic contraction. If these pressures necessitate downsizing or factory closures, companies should adhere to [FLA's responsible exit guidance](#), which includes:

- **Phased reductions:** Avoid "cliff-edge" cancellations. Any reduction in volume should be phased to allow suppliers to manage their workforce transitions without resorting to mass, uncompensated retrenchments.
- **Prioritization of payments:** In the event of a factory exit, companies should ensure that all outstanding worker wages, severance, and legal benefits are ring-fenced and paid in full before final contract closure.
- **Livelihood support:** Collaboratively explore redeployment opportunities or vocational support for workers displaced by conflict-related economic shifts.

4.2 Supply chain resilience and metric integrity

The disruption of raw material pipelines and finished-good transit requires a move toward non-punitive performance management. Companies should implement:

- **KPI adjustments:** Companies should adjust suppliers' performance metrics to account for "acts of God" or conflict-driven delays. Penalizing a supplier for logistics failures outside their control creates financial pressure that is often passed down to workers through wage theft or unpaid overtime.
- **Flexible sourcing timelines:** Extend lead times for raw materials to reduce the panic-buying or panic-shipping cycles that strain factory resources and worker safety.
- **Cost sharing:** Recognize that increased costs for shipping and materials are a shared supply chain risk. Companies should avoid forcing suppliers to absorb 100% of these inflationary shocks, as this directly threatens the factory's ability to maintain fair wage levels.

Additional resources

The UNDP's Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence: Training Facilitation Guide

<https://www.undp.org/publications/heightened-human-rights-due-diligence-training-facilitation-guide>

The Sphere Humanitarian Standards and Handbook

<https://spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/>

Additional guidance for FLA members and affiliates

In 2025, FLA published a guidance document, Due Diligence Recommendations on Operating, Sourcing, and Exiting from Conflict Areas. FLA members and affiliates can access this document on [MyFLA](#).