

I.1: Introducing the course

Hi, my name is Joel Quirk. I'm a researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa and my main goal here is to welcome and introduce you to our course on forced and precarious labour in the global economy. I want to do two things. Firstly, I want to introduce you to the main objectives of this course and then following on from that I want to briefly walk you through the main themes and issues we're going to be grappling with over the next two months.

So when it comes to objectives, the main thing I would like to emphasise is that we are primarily interested in the terms upon which labour is structured and organised, and how workers and migrant workers contribute to global patterns of production and consumption, and, as a matter of design rather than by accident, are left in marginal precarious and vulnerable conditions.

So in this context there are three main things the course wants to do.

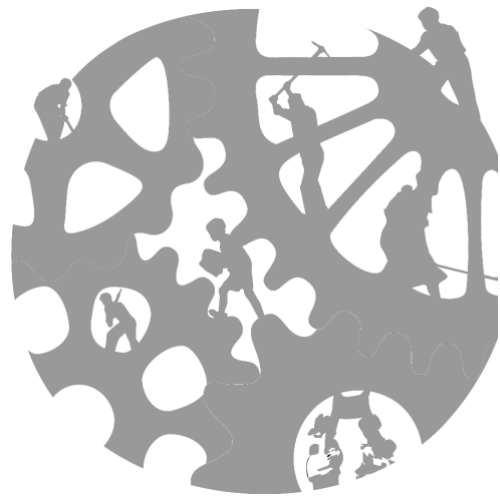
Firstly, we want to give you a better understanding of how and why patterns of exploitation take place. So it's really about the nuts and bolts of how labour systems are constructed and with what types of effects.

Secondly, we want to think through and reflect upon existing policies and strategies that have been developed in order to at least hopefully address various problems of exploitation vulnerability and the like. The general sense of this course is that a lot of existing interventions aren't particularly effective when it comes to addressing underlying forms of exploitation and vulnerability.

It's here we have our third main objective. We really want to get people taking this course to think about alternative ways of organising, alternative sets of solutions, and alternative campaigns that really delve a bit deeper in terms of better understanding why and how people are exploited, and then using that understanding to develop strategies that are more likely to challenge the underlying systems that leave people exploited and marginal.

So in pursuit of those goals we've organised a course that primarily focuses upon three main case studies.

The first of these is about labour exploitation and global supply chains, and about how large corporations structure their production processes in ways that leave workers exploited and vulnerable. Then we want to look at migration and migrant workers. We're specifically interested here in how governments have structured immigration systems and work visas in ways that leave migrants vulnerable to employment abuses, unable to articulate and defend their rights, and unable to effectively organise as workers due to the ways in which migrant labour systems have been constructed. A key



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theme of this course is what happens to workers and what happens to migrant workers is that they are exploited by design rather than by accident. It's not criminals, it's not individual employers, its systems and governments and corporations. Our third case study focuses primarily on the status of sex work. We think through the argument of sex work as work and about how additional rights and protections might be afforded to commercial sex workers in a context where it's the system that leaves them vulnerable rather than individual employers or individual clients.

Each case study takes place over two weeks. In the first case, in the first week we're going to focus on how and why abuses occur, and in the second week we're going to focus upon a range of different solutions, what's been tried, what might be tried, and what type of alternatives might work better when it comes to addressing the root causes of vulnerability and marginality.

That's our course. Both myself and the other instructors you'll encounter on this course are from a collective which goes under the name of Beyond Trafficking and Slavery. The Beyond Trafficking and Slavery project, which is a partnership with openDemocracy, has been around for about three years now, and its primary goal is to better understand the underlying reasons why people are exploited and vulnerable and from that understanding to come up with more creative solutions which really get to the heart of how systems are constructed and from that to better address forms of exploitation and abuse. So I hope that feels like an introduction to a course that you are interested in taking and I look forward to engaging with all of you over the course of the next two months so thanks and welcome.

This transcript was prepared for the online course [Forced and Precarious Labour in the Global Economy](#) by Beyond Trafficking and Slavery (openDemocracy). It has been lightly edited for clarity. This course was originally released on the edX.org platform in 2018, where it has now been archived. As of 2021 it is available on [opendemocracy.net](#).