

Trade strategy

**Response to the Department of
Business and Trade**

January 2025

The TUC brings together more than 5.5 million working people who belong to our 48 member unions. We support trade unions to grow and thrive, and we stand up for everyone who works for a living. Every day, we campaign for more and better jobs, and a more equal, more prosperous country.

Introduction

The TUC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Business and Trade's consultation on its Trade Strategy.

We welcome a strategic approach being taken towards UK trade policy and trade negotiations.

Trade is crucial to support jobs but trade must be on the right terms to ensure workers in both the UK and globally benefit.

It is important for workers in the UK and globally that the Trade Strategy connects with the government's Make Work Pay Agenda so that trade policy promotes the highest standards of workers' rights and decent jobs. Trade policy must ensure governments retain the policy space to provide quality public services, protect workers' data and support a Just Transition.

The involvement of trade unions in trade policy and trade negotiations is essential to ensure these outcomes.

The TUC makes these calls in partnership with trade unions across the world who we work with through our membership of the International Trade Union Confederation and the European Trade Union Confederation.

The TUC stands ready to work with the government to pursue an agenda that has workers' rights and decent, clean jobs at its heart.

Consultation question 1

How can we build the right partnerships internationally through trade mechanisms to promote growth?

Building trading partnerships with countries that uphold high standards of workers' rights is crucial to promote growth as this will support good jobs, higher wages and stimulate domestic demand.

Involvement of unions in trade negotiations

The government's commitment to involve trade unions in the formulation of trade policy is welcome. This is vital to ensure that trade agreements and

policies support the needs of workers in different sectors, promote good jobs and protect workers' rights.

Unions should be able to comment on the text of trade negotiations as is common practice in other countries such as the US - where union involvement in trade negotiations has resulted in significant improvements in the enforcement of workers' rights in trade agreements such as in the US-Mexico-Canada agreement.¹

TUC Aid, the TUC's international solidarity charity, is currently running a project with trade unions in Cameroon and ITUC Africa to expand their capacity to influence the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).² We urge the government to support further capacity building for unions in Global South countries to influence trade negotiations and monitor their implementation.

Increased parliamentary scrutiny

The TUC believes there should be an increased role for parliament in the scrutiny of trade negotiations. Parliament should have a vote on new mandates for trade agreements and have a role in scrutinising the negotiations. Once a trade agreement is concluded we believe there should be an affirmative voting process in parliament for its adoption.

Importance of UK-EU reset

The TUC welcomes the government's commitment to negotiate a closer relationship with the EU based on respect for the highest standards of workers' rights.

The EU is the only trading bloc in the world where market access is conditional on respect for high standards of workers' rights and health and safety standards. The TUC believes the government should build on the Level Playing Field provisions in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) to ensure UK workers receive the same protections as workers have in the EU. The UK should implement all improvements in workers' rights that have been introduced in the EU since 2020, such as the AI Act, Platform Workers Directive and Pay Transparency Directive.

¹ For more information on the US-Mexico-Canada agreement provisions on workers' rights see Q66, International Trade Committee (2022), 'UK trade negotiations: Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council' online at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/10599/html/>

² TUC (2024) 'Increasing workers' influence over the African Continental Free Trade Agreement,' online at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/increasing-workers-influence-over-african-continental-free-trade>

In order to promote good jobs, it is important to reduce barriers to trade between the UK and EU.

Sectors such as automotive, chemicals and agrifood have been badly impacted by barriers erected since Brexit.³ HMRC data shows that the number of firms exporting to the EU fell to approximately 100,000 under the TCA compared to approximately 120,000 in 2019 and earlier years, implying a loss of around 20,000 exporters.⁴

The TUC believes it is important for the government to secure agreements on closer regulatory cooperation with the EU to remove barriers to trade such as requirements for customs checks and paperwork.

To ensure UK goods are not hit with costly tariffs from the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, the government should also secure linkage between the UK and EU's Emissions Trading Schemes.

Finally, it is important for the UK to secure a mobility agreement with the EU that includes the possibility for visas to be renewable subject to ongoing employment in the UK and EU, and a visa waiver for creative UK workers to tour in the EU.

Non-EU trading partners

The government's approach towards non-EU trading relationship should reinforce the welcome approach it has taken with the EU where it has stated it is seeking to build a closer relationship with the EU based on high employment standards.⁵ It is crucial that trading partners respect fundamental workers' rights to ensure good jobs in the UK are not undermined by trade deals providing more market access to goods whose price is artificially lower as they are produced in countries where workers' wages are held down by exploitative conditions.

Furthermore, by trade deals making it easier for companies to move production to countries with lower labour standards and wages, these agreements will pressure for the UK to lower standards and wages to compete, driving a race to the bottom.

³ Novy, D.; Sampson, T. and Thomas, C. (2024), *Brexit and UK Trade*, online at: <https://bit.ly/4j5S50Q>
Gasiorek, M. and Tamberi, N. (2023), 'The effects of leaving the EU on the geography of UK trade', online at: https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/journal_contribution/The_effects_of_leaving_the_EU_on_the_geography_of_UK_trade/24132501?file=42347916

⁴ HMRC (2023), 'UK Trade in Goods by Business Characteristics', <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-trade-in-goods-statistics-bybusiness-characteristics>.

⁵ Financial Times (2024), 'UK seeks "regular" EU meetings to rebuild post-Brexit relation', online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/3482c9de-bda4-412b-ab08-61191bc147da>

The TUC is concerned that the UK is currently negotiating trade agreements the Gulf Cooperation Council states, India, Israel, Korea and Türkiye where there is widespread labour and human rights abuses occurring. The government should halt these negotiations until these abuses are addressed.

There are also threats to workers' rights and the provision of quality public services from the implementation of the Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Partnership (CPTPP).

The TUC has additional concerns in relation to reaching a trade agreement with Israel given evidence of persistent violations of international law and human rights.

These concerns are detailed further below.

Gulf Cooperation Council states

Independent trade unions are banned in Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia while trade unions face severe repression in Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain.

Other violations of fundamental workers' rights taking place in Gulf Cooperation Council states include:

- the 'kafala' system which ties a migrant worker's visa to a specific employer. This has entrenched a system of modern slavery and fuelled the exploitation of millions of migrant workers.
- exploitation and violence against domestic workers
- hundreds of construction workers killed in the construction of World Cup 2022 stadiums in Qatar due to poor health and safety and lack of migrant workers' rights
- impunity for violence against women (which increased markedly during the pandemic) with 'honour killings' punishable only with fines in Kuwait
- abortion only permitted on health or therapeutic grounds, and in Saudi Arabia, requiring male permission

The TUC released a report *I have nothing: workers' rights and the Qatar 2022 World Cup*⁶ in November 2022 which documented employers and agents trapping workers in abusive employment by confiscating their passports or demanding they pay to end contracts early. It highlighted that weak enforcement of employment laws mean workers in sectors such as security,

⁶ TUC (2022), 'I have nothing: Workers' rights and the Qatar 2022 World Cup', online at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/i-have-nothing-qatar-2022-world-cup>

construction and domestic work often face abusive, unsafe conditions and extremely low pay.

India

The TUC has released a joint statement with the Indian unions INTUC, HMS, CFTUI and SEWA, collectively representing 52 million workers, calling for UK-India trade talks to be suspended due to concerns about labour rights abuses, repression of civil liberties and increased gender inequalities in India.⁷

The TUC stands in solidarity with workers and farmers of India who took part in the Joint Worker-Farmer Protest on 26 November.⁸ The protest was called as over the past decade, Prime Minister Modi's administration has driven up the costs of essential goods and suspended the fair and guaranteed procurement of agricultural produce. This has driven millions of farmers into poverty.

The protest was also called as Modi has also passed regressive labour law reforms which have ended rights to job security, a fair minimum wage and adequate social security for workers.

South Korea

The TUC has concerns about the serious repression of trade unionists in South Korea currently taking place. The former President Yoon Suk Yeol called for trade union leaders to be arrested as part of his attempt to declare martial law on the country.⁹

Meanwhile, South Korea's Trade Union and Labour Relation Adjustment Act (TULRAA) states in article 2 that the right of freedom of association and collective bargaining only applies to narrowly defined 'workers' and 'employers'. This allows employers to refuse to bargain collectively with subcontractors and other workers who do not fit the legal definition of 'worker'. TULRAA also represses the right to strike as article 3 allows an employer to sue workers to reclaim damages from strikes. Using these provisions, Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering was able to sue five low-wage subcontracted shipbuilding workers for 47 billion KRW (approximately £30 million) for 'damages' caused by the strike.¹⁰

⁷ TUC (2022), 'TUC joint statement with Indian unions calling for halt to UK-India trade talks', online at:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/tuc-joint-statement-indian-unions-calling-halt-uk-india-trade-talks>

⁸ People's Democracy (2024), 'No Corporate Exploitation, Protect People's Livelihood: Worker-Farmer Joint Protest', online at: https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2024/1201_pd/no-corporate-exploitation-protect-people%E2%80%99s-livelihood-worker-farmer-joint-protest

⁹ KCTU (2024) 'Yoon had ordered "Arrest the KCTU president and Round Them All Up"', Facebook post, online at:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/DgJ82zfzEvvkbkgn/?mibextid=WC7FNe>

¹⁰ Upstream (2022), 'DSME sues labour union leaders after recent yard strike', online at:

https://www.upstreamonline.com/finance/dsme-sues-labour-union-leaders-after-recent-yard-strike/2-1-1286371?zephro_sso_ott=SKp4cy

Türkiye

The TUC and our sister trade union confederations in Türkiye KESK and DISK issued a statement in January 2021 calling for the UK-Türkiye trade agreement signed in 2020 to be suspended due to abuses of labour and human rights in Türkiye.¹¹

In January 2024 the TUC, KESK and DISK issued a joint submission to the UK government stating that the UK-Türkiye trade agreement should not be updated as this would further endorse the government of Türkiye which is abusing workers' rights and severely repressing political opponents.

Abuses against fundamental rights taking place in Türkiye include:

- public sector workers not having the right to strike
- union leaders being held up in continuous court hearings on spurious terrorism charges. Some high profile KESK leaders, for example Gönül Erden - former president of KESK healthcare affiliate SES – remained imprisoned for over a year without sentencing before being released into house arrest with no verdict returned.
- deliberately lengthy legal process before authorisation for collective bargaining can be secured, which has led to union busting by employers and is a significant restriction on the right to strike
- the government having the power to ban any strike on grounds of either national security or public health, with no clear limits to what can be defined in terms of 'national security'
- repression of Kurdish rights organisations and the imprisonment of Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan who has been in prison since 1999. The Freedom for Öcalan campaign is a UK trade union-backed initiative to secure his release as a way to create conditions for peace negotiations
- high rates of femicide with 474 women murdered in 2019, double the number in 2011 when Türkiye signed the Istanbul Convention

Israel

The TUC has additional concerns about the UK's trade talks with Israel given evidence of Israel's persistent violations of international law and Palestinian human rights. The TUC is calling for the UK to cease negotiating a trade deal with Israel and to disapply the existing UK-Israel trade agreement until these violations are addressed.

¹¹ TUC (2024), 'TUC and unions in Turkey call for trade talks to be suspended', online at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/tuc-and-unions-turkey-call-trade-talks-be-suspended#_ftn2

The UN Special Committee report found that 'the policies and practices of Israel during the reporting period are consistent with the characteristics of genocide' and that 'civilians have been indiscriminately and disproportionately killed en masse in Gaza, while in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli colonial settlers, military and security personnel have continued to violate human rights and humanitarian law with impunity.'¹² The International Court of Justice (ICJ) case *South Africa vs Israel on the application of the genocide convention* stated in January 2024 that 'there is a real and imminent risk that irreparable prejudice will be caused to the rights found by the Court to be plausible'.¹³ Israel has not complied with the ICJ provisional measures in this case.

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for committing the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare; and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts.¹⁴

The ICJ, in its advisory opinion to the UN General Assembly, stated that Israel's legislation and measures constitute a breach of Article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, which refers to two particularly severe forms of racial discrimination: racial segregation and apartheid.¹⁵ There is a body of evidence indicating that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid, as defined under international law.¹⁶ The government should act to challenge discrimination and to promote equality through its trading relationships.

The government should ban the UK's trade in settlement goods. In the view of the ICJ: 'Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is

¹² United Nations (2024) 'Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories', online at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/271/19/pdf/n2427119.pdf>

¹³ International Court of Justice (2024) 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip, South Africa v Israel', online at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>

¹⁴ International Criminal Court (2024) 'Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I rejects the State of Israel's challenges to jurisdiction and issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant', online at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges>

¹⁵ International Court of Justice (2024), 'Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem', online at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/advisory-opinion-icj-19jul24/>

¹⁶ Al Haq (2021), 'Al-Haq Highlights Israel's Apartheid Regime and Calls for Accountability at the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council', online at: <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/18174.html> B'Tselem (2021), 'A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid', online at https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid Amnesty International (2022) 'Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians', online at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/EndIsraelsApartheid>

unlawful' and Israel has violated its obligation to respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The Court cites member states' obligations 'to abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the Occupied Palestinian Territory or parts thereof which may entrench its unlawful presence in the territory'.

A trade agreement with Israel will give preferential market access to goods from the illegal Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) as Israel is in a customs union with the OPT and goods from the OPT are often labelled as originating in Israel. Furthermore, the TUC is calling for an end to all licences for arms traded with Israel, meeting international law.

CPTPP

The TUC is concerned that the government is currently implementing the Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Partnership (CPTPP) which involves countries where independent unions are banned such as Vietnam and Brunei and Malaysia where there is significant use of forced labour.

The TUC is also concerned that the CPTPP agreement contains the corporate investor-state dispute settlement court system (ISDS) that allows the government to be sued for actions that threaten multinational companies' profits. This court system has been used in the past to sue governments for increasing the minimum wage and bringing services back into public ownership.¹⁷ The existence of this court system also has a 'chilling' effect on policy making. New Zealand, for example, did not introduce plain packaging laws for cigarettes as Australia was sued for similar laws by Philip Morris using the investor-state dispute settlement court in the Hong Kong-Australia Bilateral Investment Treaty.¹⁸

Due to these experiences, Australia and New Zealand signed a side agreement to CPTPP exempting them from the ISDS provisions in the agreement. The government should agree a similar agreement with CPTPP countries to protect its right to legislate freely to improve workers' rights and run public services in the public interest.

The government of Colombia has also requested that the Bilateral Investment Treaty it has with the UK is renegotiated to remove ISDS as the mechanism has

¹⁷ TUC (2017) *Multilateral reform of the investment court system*, online at:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Multilateral%20reform%20of%20the%20investment%20court%20system%20consultation%20TUC%20final.pdf>

¹⁸ Poulsen, L.; Bonnitcha, J; Yackee, J; (2013) 'Costs and Benefits of an EU-US Investment Protection Treat', online at: <https://www.italaw.com/sites/default/files/archive/costs-and-benefits-of-an-eu-usa-investment-protection-treaty.pdf>

been used to challenge the government's implementing public welfare and Just Transition reforms.¹⁹

World Trade Organisation

It is important that the government uses the UK's independent seat at the World Trade Organisation to call for changes to global trade rules to promote labour rights internationally and address historic inequalities between the Global North and South.

The government should use its seat to support:

- trade unions to be consulted in the negotiation of WTO rules
- WTO rules that promote respect for ILO conventions and the Decent Work Agenda
- policy space for Global South countries to protect domestic industries , including through special and differential treatment; this is particularly crucial to enable countries to develop carbon-neutral industries
- unilateral duty-free quota-free access for all products from Least Developed Countries, conditional on respect for labour rights
- Global South governments to be able to use stockholding programmes for food security purposes
- an expansion of the suspended intellectual property protection rules on vaccines against COVID-19. The exceptions should cover treatment and diagnostics, not only vaccines, and be extended to cover all life-threatening diseases and illnesses, not only COVID-19
- Aid for Trade to fully cover adjustment costs and skills development for workers who lose their jobs due to trade liberalisation

Economic Partnership Agreements and trade preferences

Trade unions across Africa²⁰, supported by the ETUC, ITUC²¹ and TUC²² have raised concerns that Economic Partnership Agreements, including those that the UK has with a number of African regions, restrict the policy space of

¹⁹ Financial Times (2024), 'Colombia seeks renegotiation of investment treaty with the UK', online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/6aba7afd-2e7b-4751-ae7a-19bf4f8ea3f2>

²⁰ ITUC Africa (2016), 'ITUC Africa statement on EPAs', <http://www.ituc-africa.org/ITUC-Africa-Statement-on-EPAs.html>

²¹ ETUC and ITUC (2016), 'Letter calling MEPs to vote against SADC EPA', http://www.actsa.org/Pictures/UplImages/ituc-af-ituc-etuc_letter_to_meps%20docx.pdf

²² TUC (2016), 'Letter calling on MEPs to reject SADC EPA', <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/tuc-calls-meps-reject-economic-partnership-agreement-between-eu-and>

governments to implement development and industrial policies. Economic Partnership Agreements also cause a significant loss of revenue from tariffs and undermine workers' rights by displacing workers from the formal economy into informal employment where exploitative conditions are commonplace.

The TUC believes Global South countries should receive unilateral access to the UK markets (trade preferences), conditional on respect for fundamental labour rights, without having to make reciprocal commitments to open markets through trade agreements.

Trade preferences should be based on commitments to uphold fundamental labour standards. If a country receiving trade preferences abuses labour rights, the government should support trade unions in the country in their work to ensure these abuses are addressed. We are concerned that some countries receiving trade preferences to the UK market are not respecting fundamental labour rights, including the Philippines which was rated by the ITUC as one of the ten worst countries for workers' rights in 2024.²³

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

It is important that the government implements its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism in a timely manner to protect domestic clean industries from being undermined by goods made through carbon intensive processes. The longer the lag time of the UK CBAM behind the EU's, the more risk this presents to UK industries.

To avoid UK goods being hit with EU carbon border tariffs, it is important that the UK secures an agreement to align its Emissions Trading Scheme with that of the EU.

To support Just Transition in Global South countries – which is vital to ensure a Just Transition for all countries – it is important that the UK's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism contains flexibilities for appropriate Global South countries. The government must also provide Global South countries with adequate climate financing which is not attached to any conditionalities.

²³ ITUC (2024), ITUC Global Rights Index, online at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2024_ituc_global_rights_index_en.pdf?31226/ce28bb2139c2fe0d4e5f0a36d726ac7334d1c2d9be8b29dd88b4d2b9d89f5654

CONSULTATION QUESTION 2

How should the UK operate in the international context to support and protect businesses?

Upholding high standards of rights

In order to protect good businesses that are upholding high standards of workers' rights, it is important that the government prioritises securing a closer trading relationship with the EU as a trading partner that respect high standards of workers' rights.

As described above, the TUC is concerned that the government's trade negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council States, India, Israel, South Korea and Türkiye threaten to undermine good employers in the UK by allowing more market access to goods whose prices are held down due to repression of workers' rights.

Protecting the steel industry

It is imperative that the government provides adequate trade remedies for the UK steel industry from dumping from China, India and other countries. The trade remedies system should adopt the criteria around adherence to core ILO conventions²⁴ similar to those proposed in the EU antidumping methodology.²⁵ Failure to ensure respect for ILO core conventions is a form of trade distortion, as it allows countries to gain an unfair trading advantage by holding down prices by denying workers' the right to claim decent wages through trade unions.

This threat will be increased if the new US administration introduces high tariffs on goods from China as it will become more likely that China will divert exports of steel and other manufacturing products to the UK and other markets. Trade unions must have a role as 'interested parties' to be able to trigger reviews into suspected unfair trade activity.

There is a need for urgent implementation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, taking action on the UK's uncompetitive energy prices, and a wider

²⁴ The nine fundamental Conventions are: Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87); Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98), Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105), Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) and the Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155)

²⁵ European Parliament (2017), 'Proposals amending Regulation (EU) 2016/1036 and Regulation (EU) 2016/1037' online at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2F%2FEP%2F%2FTEXT%2BREPORT%2BA8-2017-0236%2B0%2BDOC%2BXML%2BV0%2F%2FEN&language=EN>

comprehensive steel strategy that supports a thriving primary steel sector into the future.

There should be exemptions for appropriate Global South countries from the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism to promote Just Transition. Exemptions, however, should not be provided to steel imports from India, China and other countries engaged in dumping on the UK market.

Regulation of global value chains

The TUC welcomes the government's commitment to build resilient supply chains in the growth-driving sectors identified. Inevitably, the UK will also have to expand its global value chains to meet its objectives for these sectors. Ensuring that human and labour rights are respected and protected and environmental harms are prevented in global value chains must be at the heart of the government's strategic approach. This will require policy coherence across government departments and new regulations.

The clean energy transition, digital transformation and scaling up of advanced manufacturing, for example, will increase the UK's demand for critical minerals. Global South countries hold the bulk of the world's critical mineral reserves.

At present, evidence indicates a concerning trend in human rights violations and environmental harms linked to critical minerals and clean energy technology. The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre Critical Minerals Tracker for 2024 shows a marked increase in labour rights violations and worker deaths, compared to previous years, alongside widespread violations of land and Indigenous Peoples' rights, and environmental standards.²⁶ As much as 97 per cent of solar panels could contain materials made by persecuted Uyghur workers who are trapped in forced labour schemes.²⁷ The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) holds 60 per cent of the world's cobalt supply, but many mines are unregulated - with the use of child labour and many miners working without basic health and safety equipment.²⁸ The US Department of State has also expressed concern about the role that the illicit trade and exploitation of certain

²⁶ Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (2024) Critical Minerals Tracker, available at: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/transition-minerals-tracker/>

²⁷ Unison (2022) 'Dirty energy: sourcing solar panels without Uyghur forced labour', available at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2022/08/Clean-dirty-energy-1.pdf>

²⁸ The Guardian (2021) 'Child labour, toxic leaks: the price we could pay for a greener future', available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/03/child-labour-toxic-leaks-the-price-we-could-pay-for-a-greener-future>

minerals from the African Great Lakes Region continues to play in financing the conflict in eastern DRC.²⁹

Strong regulations must underpin the UK's partnerships with governments and business – with increased corporate accountability. The UK is falling behind the international trend to regulate global value chains, with related legislation passed in, for example, the EU, France, Germany and Norway. Therefore, the TUC is calling on the government to introduce new UK mandatory human and labour rights and environmental due diligence legislation. This will help ensure that in delivering its Industrial Strategy and Trade Strategy, human and labour rights are respected, growth does not come at the expense of harms down the global value chain, including harms to workers involved in the transportation of goods that are imported and exported to and from the UK via maritime routes, and where harms occur, that victims, including workers and their trade unions, have access to justice.

Furthermore, any partnership the UK enters into with Global South countries on critical minerals must support value addition in the country of origin and ensure respect for fundamental labour rights.

²⁹ US Department of State (2024) 'Statement of Concern Related to Certain Minerals Supply Chains from Rwanda and Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo Contributing to the Ongoing Conflict', available at: <https://www.state.gov/statement-of-concern-related-to-certain-minerals-supply-chains-from-rwanda-and-eastern-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-contributing-to-the-ongoing-conflict/>