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EU set to ban products made with forced labor

EU fishing group calls for quick implementation of the system to effectively ban the trade of fish products derived from forced labor.

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By [Dominic Welling](#) 

The European Council and Parliament this week reached a provisional deal to ban products made with forced labor -- including seafood -- from entering the single market.

The agreement seeks to prohibit any such product from being available on the EU market or for export from the EU market.

"This hideous crime must be eradicated and the first step to achieve this consists in breaking the business model of companies that exploit workers," said Pierre-Yves Dermagne, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Economy and Employment.

"With this regulation we want to make sure that there is no place for their products on our single market, whether they are manufactured in Europe or abroad."

The bans would be enforced on goods made outside the EU by forced labor and on products manufactured in the EU with parts made abroad by forced labor.

How it will work

The new regulation would create a framework for enforcing this ban, including through investigations, new IT solutions and cooperation with other authorities and countries.

The European Commission will establish a database containing "verifiable and regularly updated information" about forced labor risks, including reports from international organizations, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Suspected use of forced labor would be investigated and, if proven, products withdrawn from the market. Products could be allowed back on the market if forced labor is eliminated from supply chain.

Firms that do not comply can be fined.

The Commission will draw up a list of economic sectors in specific geographical areas where state-imposed forced labor exists. This will then become a criterion to assess the need to open an investigation.

The Commission can also identify products or product groups for which importers and exporters will have to submit extra details to EU customs, such as information on the manufacturer and suppliers of these products.

A new Forced Labor Single Portal will also be set up to help enforce the new rules. It includes guidelines, information on bans, database of risk areas and sectors, as well as publicly available evidence and a whistleblower portal.

The European Parliament and Council will now both have to give their final green light to the provisional agreement. The regulation will then be published in the Official Journal and enter into force the following day.

EU countries will thereafter have three years to start applying the new rules.

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Fishing sector calls for speedy implementation

EU fishing trade group Europeche welcomed the EU deal but called for a quick implementation of the system to effectively ban the trade of fish products deriving from forced labor.

"The EU's battle against forced labor is evolving into a decisive new phase, characterized by a comprehensive array of legal measures to eradicate exploitative labor practices," said Daniel Voces, managing director of Europeche.

Together with the EU's policy on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, Voces said the new law "will undoubtedly help sustain dignified employment and upholding fundamental rights within the fisheries sector worldwide."

Additionally, the new law "will offer European consumers even greater confidence in purchasing products that are ethically and sustainably sourced," he said.

The deal comes amid a [series of investigations from the Outlaw Ocean Project](#) on the use of forced labor in seafood supply chains entering the United States and Europe, specifically the exploitation of Uyghur and North Korean workers in Chinese processing facilities. (Copyright)

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