

# Mapping Modern Slavery in the Context of the 2030 Agenda: A Scoping Review Protocol

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## Abstract

**Background:** Modern slavery is one of the most serious violations of human rights and decent work, affecting around 50 million people worldwide. Despite international regulations and initiatives such as Agenda 2030, the phenomenon persists in multiple sectors, adapting to global economic dynamics. Understanding which approaches, concepts, and evidence have been produced on modern slavery in scientific literature, from the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), allows for the guidance of integrated policies, the strengthening of accountability mechanisms, and the identification of knowledge gaps.

**Method:** This protocol describes the methodological design for conducting a scoping review that aims to systematically map the extent, nature, and gaps in scientific production on modern slavery in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The review will follow internationally recognized methodological recommendations and will be reported in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. Searches will be conducted in multidisciplinary and specialized databases (Scopus, Web of Science, MEDLINE/PubMed, Academic Search Premier, and SocINDEX), supplemented by gray literature and institutional reports. Eligibility criteria will be defined using the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework. In addition, a bibliometric analysis will be performed to identify collaboration networks, research trends, and thematic clusters. **Discussion:** The expected result will provide insights and map academic production on modern slavery in the context of the SDGs, highlighting patterns, gaps, and regional disparities. Bibliometrics will enable the identification of research networks and key actors, providing input for public policies and future research agendas. Finally, the results will broaden the debate on sustainable development by showing how scientific literature has addressed the eradication of modern slavery, in particular target 8.7 and its connections with other goals. **Trial Registration:** OSF<sup>TM</sup> Registries, September 08, 2025: <https://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/gxbnq>.

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## Keywords

forced labor, labor exploitation, decent work, human rights, social justice, sustainable development goals, 2030 agenda, scoping review, bibliometric analysis

## Background

### Rationale

Modern slavery is one of the most serious forms of violation of human rights and dignity at work. It is estimated that around 50 million people worldwide live in this condition, which means that one in every 150 people is subjected to forced labor, human trafficking, or other forms of exploitation (Walk Free, 2023). Unlike ancient slavery, which was legally sanctioned and socially accepted, modern slavery is a clandestine phenomenon, “hidden in plain sight” (Bales, 2012; Brace & Davidson, 2018). It manifests itself in different economic sectors and countries, characterized by involuntariness, insufficient or non-existent remuneration, coercion, threats, abuse of power, and deception (Bales, 2012). This situation demands multidimensional responses that combine prevention, accountability, and redress.

Although often associated with the past, slavery persists and adapts to the dynamics of contemporary capitalism, reducing people to disposable commodities (Brace & Davidson, 2018; Rosenfield & Pauli, 2012). Emblematic cases, such as that of Indonesian fishermen who suffered exploitation and enslavement on foreign fishing vessels, and when one of them died, he was thrown into the sea without the knowledge or consent of his family (Kumala et al., 2023), highlight its insertion in global production and consumption chains, converting human suffering into concentrated profits and precarious lives (Miraglia, 2020). By eroding the foundations of the recognition of workers as co-creators of social wealth, modern slavery becomes an expression of an unequal and violent economic system, which reinforces the urgency of coordinated public and private responses.

In recent decades, regulatory frameworks have sought to address the problem. Laws such as the “Modern Slavery Act” in the United Kingdom (UK, 2015) and Australia (Australian, 2018) require companies to disclose measures to identify and combat slavery in their supply chains. The literature, however, has pointed to insufficient enforcement and limited results (Buck, 2019; Caspersz et al., 2022; Nolan & Pryde, 2024). Also noteworthy in this debate are the “French Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law” (Reinsberg & Steinert, 2025) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines (OECD, 2018), often cited as references for corporate accountability. The convergence of initiatives suggests an expanding regulatory field, albeit with uneven effectiveness.

Another explanatory factor concerns the institutional capacities of states. Evidence indicates that the quality of the institutional environment – involving democratic governance,

control of corruption, and strengthening of the rule of law – is associated with lower rates of modern slavery (Moussa et al., 2022). Institutional reforms, however, are necessary but insufficient if advances in sustainable human development do not accompany them. In short, the combination of corporate accountability, effective regulation, and robust institutions is a prerequisite for reducing the prevalence of the phenomenon.

Recent research highlights the expansion of the debate in different national contexts, including France (Reinsberg & Steinert, 2025), the United Kingdom (Nolan & Pryde, 2024), Spain (Agrawal et al., 2022), China (Kluck et al., 2025), Bangladesh (Jackson et al., 2020; Jackson & Sparks, 2020), Brazil (Jackson et al., 2020) and Sierra Leone (Balch et al., 2024). These studies highlight the need for interdisciplinary and multiscale approaches capable of coordinating local and global actions, with an emphasis on accountability in production chains, the generation of reliable data, and the development of more effective regulatory mechanisms. Thus, rather than simply criminalizing, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies aimed at providing complete and productive employment, safeguarding labor rights, and ensuring access to education and health care for vulnerable populations. In addition, it is essential to strengthen markets free from discrimination and exploitation and to implement environmental protection policies, promoting lasting cultural, environmental, and institutional transformations.

The specialized literature generally adopts a critical and descriptive perspective, emphasizing implementation failures and policy inconsistencies (Simic & Blitz, 2019; Van Dyke, 2019). Criticism of the predominance of the punitive approach over the humanitarian approach is recurrent, highlighting the ambivalences and limitations of the current model (Carvalho et al., 2025). In this scenario, recommendations for integrated, victim-centered, evidence-based policies with local partnerships and multidisciplinary approaches (Craig et al., 2019; Van Dyke, 2019), stand out, as well as the recognition of structural and historical factors that perpetuate modern slavery (Cunneen, 2005; Imran & Domicián, 2018; Simic & Blitz, 2019). These theoretical and empirical clues outline a field of research that requires systematic mapping and comprehensive syntheses.

### Previous Reviews

Searches of review records were conducted to identify previously registered protocols related to the topic of interest. To this end, a comprehensive search string (“modern slavery” AND “2030 agenda”) was applied to the following platforms: International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews

(PROSPERO™ – <https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/>), International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Protocols (INPLASY™ – <https://inplasy.com/>), Open Science Framework (OSF™ Registries – <https://osf.io/>), Cochrane Library® (<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/>), and Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI™ Registries – <https://jbi.global/systematic-review-register>). In addition, searches were conducted for previously published reviews on the topic, using the string (“modern slavery” AND “2030 agenda” AND “review”), considering titles, abstracts, and keywords in the MEDLINE/PubMed®, Scopus®, and Web of Science® Core Collection databases. No records were identified in the registry databases or comprehensive reference databases mentioned above. All searches were conducted on August 20, 2025.

### *Why it is Important to do The Review*

The persistence of modern slavery does not prevent economic growth. However, it compromises its long-term sustainability by deepening inequalities, weakening the workforce, reducing innovation and productivity, and affecting market integrity (Paz-Fuchs, 2016). Furthermore, this phenomenon threatens the reputation of countries and companies, exposing them to trade sanctions and international boycotts. Given this situation, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, proposes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and one hundred and sixty-nine targets to address social, economic, and environmental challenges (UN, 2015). Among them, SDG 8 stands out – decent work and economic growth – which promotes productive employment, protection of labor rights, and safe working environments, with a focus on migrants, women, and people in precarious occupations (Brazil, 2006; UN, 2015). Placing modern slavery within the scope of the 2030 Agenda is therefore highly relevant for guiding integrated policies and monitoring mechanisms.

Under SDG 8, target 8.7 establishes the commitment to “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and ensure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor” by 2025 (UN, 2015). This is a global challenge that is directly linked to other SDGs in the social dimension, such as poverty eradication (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). Thus, the eradication of modern slavery is inseparable from progress toward sustainable development and requires a systemic vision that integrates scientific evidence, governance, and social participation.

From a methodological standpoint, we opted to conduct a scoping review based on the intention to map the extent, nature, and gaps in scientific production on modern slavery in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Unlike a traditional systematic review, which presupposes the existence of robust and comparable evidence to be synthesized quantitatively or

qualitatively, the field of modern slavery associated with the 2030 Agenda still lacks theoretical and empirical consolidation. Thus, a scoping review is particularly appropriate for organizing the state of the art, providing an overview of the literature, and supporting future research agendas and public policy formulation.

In addition, the integration of bibliometric analysis enhances the scope of the review, providing evidence on patterns, scientific collaboration networks, leading researchers, countries, and institutions, as well as the evolution of interest in this research topic. This approach strengthens the mapping by identifying trends, thematic concentration, and possible gaps in the circulation of knowledge between geographic regions and academic disciplines. Therefore, the aim is to offer a comprehensive, critical, and practice-oriented synthesis that can support researchers, policymakers, and civil society organizations in addressing modern slavery within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

### *Objectives*

Considering the relevance and urgency of the topic, this scoping review has the primary objective of mapping the state of research on modern slavery in the context of the SDGs. Secondly, this study will also use a bibliometric approach (Xu et al., 2018) to support the influence of evidence in relation to the research topic. These two approaches (qualitative plus bibliometrics) aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How has the literature addressed the relationship between slave labor and SDGs?

RQ2: What are the gaps and potential areas for future research?

RQ3: What are the main articles on slave labor?

RQ4: What are the trends in publications on slave labor in terms of annual production, countries, periodicals, affiliated institutions, and authors?

### *Methods*

For this study, we chose to conduct a scoping review to map the extent, nature, and gaps in scientific production on the research topic from multiple perspectives (Chaves et al., 2025) rather than evaluating the effectiveness of a specific intervention or answering a narrowly defined question (common in traditional systematic reviews), as recommended in consolidated guidelines (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2015, 2020). Thus, scoping reviews are more appropriate when seeking to explore fragmented, heterogeneous, or emerging fields of knowledge, allowing for the identification of key concepts, the delineation of areas of convergence, and the highlighting of research gaps. On the other hand, similar to

traditional systematic reviews, this scoping review will follow all the rigor in the extraction and screening of metadata, following a transparent strategy, ensuring its reproducibility through the systematic documentation of all stages.

Additionally, the development of this protocol was guided by the best practice recommendations of the JBI™ Scoping Review Methodology Group (Peters et al., 2024) and followed the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses for Protocols (PRISMA-P 2015) (Moher et al., 2015; Shamseer et al., 2015), as documented in Table S1. The scope review resulting from this protocol will, in turn, be reported following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses for Scoping Reviews extension (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018).

### Trial Registration

The study protocol was pre-registered in the Open Science Framework (OSF™ *Registries*, evaluated at: <https://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/gxbnq>) (Nunes et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2024; Pieper & Rombey, 2022), and published in this scientific journal prior to data extraction and the start of the review, in order to promote transparency (Muhl et al., 2023) and ensure the rigor of the study. Any changes made to the protocol during the conduct of the research will be updated in the trial registry and reported in the final manuscript presenting the results of the scope review (Chaves et al., 2025).

### Electronic Sources

All types of study designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) that meet the eligibility criteria will be analyzed (Muhl et al., 2023). Mainly, these sources were indexed in scientific databases and will be selected (Chaves et al., 2025). To ensure a comprehensive global perspective, databases with international coverage were chosen, both multidisciplinary and specific in scope (Costa et al., 2024). The primary search

will include the following databases: Scopus™, Web of Science™ Core Collection, MEDLINE/PubMed® via the interface of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), Academic Search™ Premier (ASP), and SocINDEX™ via the interface of the EBSCOhost. Searches in secondary sources and gray literature, including government reports and documents from organizations available online, will also be considered (Chaves et al., 2025). None of the sources, primary or secondary, will have any restrictions regarding language.

### Primary Search Strategy

The references of the included studies will be examined recursively to identify other potentially eligible studies (Muhl et al., 2023; Oliveira et al., 2025). The key concepts of the research question and the inclusion criteria established for the study were considered in defining the search strategy for this protocol (García-Varela et al., 2025). No quality restrictions will be applied to provide a comprehensive overview of the field (Chaves et al., 2025). The searches were conducted using titles, abstracts, and keywords found in the metadata of scientific databases (Costa et al., 2024; Terra et al., 2023). Some adjustments were made to the syntax of each database to optimize searches and enable greater accuracy through advanced search tools (Chaves et al., 2025).

The mnemonic 'PCC' (Population/Participants, Concept, and Context) will be used to predetermine eligibility criteria and guide the identification of relevant studies (Peters et al., 2024), since it covers the most significant elements of the research focus (von Elm et al., 2019). Details of the PCC framework are provided in Table 1.

In order to develop the search strategy, synonymous and similar terms, variations between British and American English, singular and plural forms, as well as other specific characteristics of the terms, were considered (Chaves et al., 2025). The Boolean operator 'OR' was used to group synonyms or similar terms for each concept (Oliveira et al., 2025).

**Table 1.** PCC Framework

Component	Definition
P (population/participants)	Workers and communities affected by modern slavery, with a special emphasis on vulnerable groups
C (concept)	The central phenomenon of this investigation is modern slavery, understood as a multidimensional reality that encompasses practices such as human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, domestic servitude, labor and sexual exploitation, and other forms analogous to slavery
C (context)	The context of the phenomenon will be analyzed based on the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which constitutes a global framework for sustainable development and includes the eradication of modern slavery among its goals and targets. In this sense, the review contributes to the international debate on human rights, sustainability, and global governance, examining how academic literature, institutional documents, and technical reports address modern slavery in the context of SDG monitoring and implementation strategies. The scope adopted is international, allowing for a comprehensive mapping of the available evidence and an understanding of how different regions, sectors, and actors have addressed this issue in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Note. PCC is a strategy to aid in scoping the review, which defines the key elements of the research, i.e., 'P' to delineate the Population/Participants, 'C' to specify the Concept, and another 'C' to detail the Context.

Next, the terms were organized into blocks and connected by the Boolean operator ‘AND’ to compose the complete search strategy (Costa et al., 2024; Pereira et al., 2023; Terra et al., 2023). The search will be performed using the terms specified in the strings shown in Table 2.

For the PubMed® database, Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) were used to broaden the scope of the search and ensure the inclusion of relevant studies indexed with controlled terminology (Terra et al., 2023). In each database, in order to maintain alignment with the search strategy, the available filters will be applied to exclude studies unrelated to the research objective (Chaves et al., 2025). This process will be adequately documented, in accordance with the recommendations of the PRISMA-Search checklist (PRISMA-S) (Rethlefsen et al., 2021) (see Table S2). PRISMA-S covers various aspects of the literature search process for systematic reviews, including specific details of the database, the search strategy (record of limits, restrictions, and filters used, among others), and the process of documenting the records retrieved and deduplicated (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). Finally, the search strategy was validated using the evidence-based checklist from the Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies guideline (PRESS, 2015) (McGowan et al., 2016).

### Citation Tracking of Included Studies

For an even more comprehensive search for evidence, the studies included and the reviews identified in the first phase of the review will serve as ‘seeds’ for the second phase (García-Varela et al., 2025). This process is defined as citation tracking and will be used to identify additional relevant literature (Albæk et al., 2022) through citation mapping, after

completion of the first phase of the review (Batista et al., 2025). The strategy adopted at this stage will make use of the Litmaps® platform (<https://www.litmaps.com/>), which integrates Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to locate similar studies related to an article provided as a reference; for each article included, a query will be performed in Litmaps® using the digital object identifier (DOI) (Batista et al., 2025).

### Searching for Other Resources

Finally, exhaustive searches of secondary data sources may occur at different times; as these are not part of a systematic process, detailed documentation may not be feasible (Chaves et al., 2025). Thus, for this third phase, gray literature will be considered, including government reports and documents from organizations available online, such as official reports and public policies (Table 3) (Oliveira et al., 2025). Other sources of information not listed in the table may also be incorporated into the review as they are identified in the studies (Table 3).

The search will include specific sources, such as Google Scholar™, in order to maximize results (Chaves et al., 2025). The selected documents will be examined to identify evidence on key policies and their analytical impacts in the area, including qualitative and quantitative data and related legislation, which may contribute to the consolidation of robust evidence for this review. On the other hand, dissertations, theses, and undergraduate monographs will be excluded (Chaves et al., 2025).

### Metadata Extraction

Based on the systematic search string, data extraction will be performed in a single day, using metadata files generated

**Table 2.** Keywords Used in the Systematic Search Strategy Were Organized Into Blocks

Blocks (PCC)	Keywords used
#1 (population/participant)	(“Slavery victim” OR “trafficked person” OR “trafficked people” OR “trafficking victim” OR “exploited person” OR “exploited people” OR “exploited worker” OR “exploited group” OR “exploited population” OR “migrant worker” OR “child laborer” OR “child labourer” OR “child exploitation” OR “sexually exploited” OR “vulnerable group” OR “vulnerable people” OR “vulnerable person” OR “vulnerable population” OR “sweatshop worker” OR “domestic worker”)
#2 (concept)	(“Modern slavery” OR “contemporary slavery” OR “slavery-like practice” OR “work analogous to slavery” OR “slave labor” OR “slave labour” OR “slavery labor” OR “slavery labour” OR “forced labor” OR “forced labour” OR “child labor” OR “child labour” OR “convict labor” OR “convict labour” OR “bonded labor” OR “bonded labour” OR “debt bondage” OR servitude OR “labor exploitation” OR “labour exploitation” OR “sexual exploitation” OR “sexual slavery” OR “exploitative practice” OR “human trafficking” OR sweatshop OR “domestic slavery” OR “forced domestic work”)
#3 (context)	(“sustainable development goals” OR “millennium development goals” OR SDG OR SDGs OR MDG OR MDGs OR “United Nations agenda” OR “UN agenda” OR “U.N. agenda” OR “2030 agenda” OR “agenda 2030” OR “development agenda” OR “sustainability agenda” OR “global development” OR “global goals” OR “global sustainability goals” OR “voluntary national review” OR VNR OR “high-level political forum” OR HLPF OR “international development framework” OR “sustainable development framework”)
Search string	(#1) OR (#2) AND (#3)

Note. PCC is a strategy to aid in scoping the review, which defines the key elements of the research, i.e., ‘P’ to delineate the Population/Participants, ‘C’ to specify the Concept, and another ‘C’ to detail the Context.

**Table 3.** Preliminary Secondary Sources for Document Searches (Secondary)

Organization	Website	Description
ILO	<a href="https://www.ilo.org/">https://www.ilo.org/</a>	Agency specialized in monitoring indicators related to target SDG 8.7, which addresses forced labor and child labor. It also acts as a coordinator for 8.7 Alliance, a global partnership aimed at accelerating the achievement of this target
UNSD	<a href="https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/">https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/</a>	The UN statistics division is responsible for providing official SDG metadata. This division provides methodological documentation for indicators – such as 8.7.1 (child labor) and 16.2.2 (detected victims of trafficking per 100,000 inhabitants) – intending to standardize definitions and ensure international comparability
Alliance 8.7	<a href="https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/alliance-87/">https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/alliance-87/</a>	It is a global partnership supported by the UN, ILO, states, and partners, acting as a platform for international cooperation. The initiative brings together ‘Pathfinder’ countries, promotes research, and maintains a repository of evidence on effective practices to accelerate the achievement of target SDG 8.7
UNODC	<a href="https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/sustainable-development-goals.html">https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/sustainable-development-goals.html</a>	UN office responsible for providing thematic pages and technical materials on SDG measurement, contributing to the monitoring and analysis of indicators
	<a href="https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html">https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html</a>	UN office responsible for producing and publishing the GR-TiP, a biennial report based on official data provided by countries. The publication, whose most recent edition is from 2024, presents global and regional trends on human trafficking
	<a href="https://dataunodc.un.org/">https://dataunodc.un.org/</a>	UN office responsible for maintaining the data portal, a platform that provides statistical series and indicators on crime, allowing access to comparable data between countries and over time
SHERLOC	<a href="https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/st/home.html">https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/st/home.html</a>	The UN-maintained platform brings together legislation and case law from different countries, allowing for comparative mapping of legal frameworks related to organized crime and human trafficking
ICAT	<a href="https://icat.un.org/">https://icat.un.org/</a>	It is an interagency UN mechanism that produces summary notes, sets priorities, and prepares joint reports, offering normative and strategic benchmarks for combating human trafficking
IOM	<a href="https://www.iom.int/counter-trafficking/">https://www.iom.int/counter-trafficking/</a>	International organization responsible for providing resources to combat human trafficking, including the CTDC, a global database that collects data on victim profiles and human trafficking routes
OHCHR	<a href="https://www.ohchr.org/en/trafficking-in-persons/what-we-do-end-human-trafficking/">https://www.ohchr.org/en/trafficking-in-persons/what-we-do-end-human-trafficking/</a>	UN office that provides materials on preventing human trafficking with a focus on human rights, in addition to supporting the preparation of ICAT briefs and special procedure reports
OECD	<a href="https://www.oecd.org/en/publications.html">https://www.oecd.org/en/publications.html</a>	An organization that establishes guidelines for multinational companies, standards of business conduct that include explicit references to the prevention of human trafficking and forced labor. These parameters serve as a basis for analyzing public policies and due diligence regulations
EMN	<a href="https://emnbelgium.be/all-publications/">https://emnbelgium.be/all-publications/</a>	Revised directive on combating human trafficking and on the EU strategy, offering comparative inputs for regulatory and regional policy analysis
UE	<a href="https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/">https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/</a>	EU anti-trafficking coordination is responsible for producing progress reports for regulatory instruments and regional administrative indicators
GRETA	<a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/">https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/</a>	Council of Europe Convention on Action against trafficking in human beings, with a monitoring mechanism that conducts country evaluations and thematic studies

Note. ILO – International Labor Organization; UN – United Nations; UNSD – United Nations Statistics Division; UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; SDG – Sustainable Development Goals; GR-TiP – Global Report on Trafficking in Persons; SHERLOC – Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime; ICAT – Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons; IOM – International Organization for Migration; CTDC – Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative; OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; EMN – European Migration Network; EU – European Union; GRETA – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

directly by the database platforms (Chaves et al., 2025; Oliveira et al., 2025), covering all databases on the same day, which will facilitate future updates of the systematic review. The extraction was preliminarily scheduled to take place in

November 2025, provided that this protocol has been accepted for publication. If the editorial decision has not yet been issued, the schedule will be revised. All details of the extraction will be duly documented and reported, and the raw metadata

will be made available in an open-access scientific repository, with a link associated with the manuscript containing the results of the review, ensuring total transparency and allowing for the reproducibility of the study.

### Management of References and Document Retrieval

The main steps in evaluating and reviewing the metadata of eligible studies will be carried out and managed with the support of Rayyan<sup>®</sup> software (Rayyan Systems Inc., Cambridge, USA). This software, widely used by researchers, allows for greater efficiency in selecting studies for reviews (Reis et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2024) (available at <https://www.rayyan.ai/>). In addition, the tool allows researchers to decide whether to include or exclude studies based on eligibility criteria, create labels to detail decisions, and extract relevant words, among other visual and filtering features that streamline the entire process (Ouzzani et al., 2016). Recently, AI features have been incorporated into the tool, allowing for less laborious review, with greater speed and accuracy in reading the full texts of studies. However, AI will only be used when strictly necessary.

### Eligibility Criteria

This systematic review will include studies without language restrictions, published from 2015 (the year of implementation of Agenda, 2030) until the date of metadata extraction, provided that they simultaneously meet all inclusion criteria and do not fall under any of the pre-established exclusion criteria. In addition, considering the wide variation in the propagation of retractions, which may lead to retracted articles being cited and incorporated into the evidence base of this review, care will be taken to avoid this situation. Thus, the retraction of each included study will be verified (Kühberger et al., 2022) and, if retraction is confirmed, the study will be excluded.

### Inclusion Criteria

- (i1) Peer-reviewed journal articles published as original studies (Pereira et al., 2023; Terra et al., 2023). Review-type studies addressing the topic will not be included in the review; however, they will be separated for use in the secondary citation mapping stage (Oliveira et al., 2025).
- (i2) Studies presenting data on modern slavery in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

### Exclusion Criteria

- (e1) Duplicates obtained from different databases will be removed using Rayyan's<sup>®</sup> "Systematic Auto Resolver" feature, considering 95% similarity. If any duplicates remain, they will be eliminated using the Bramer method. Methods (Bramer et al., 2016).
- (e2) Dissertations, theses, reviews, or undergraduate monographs.

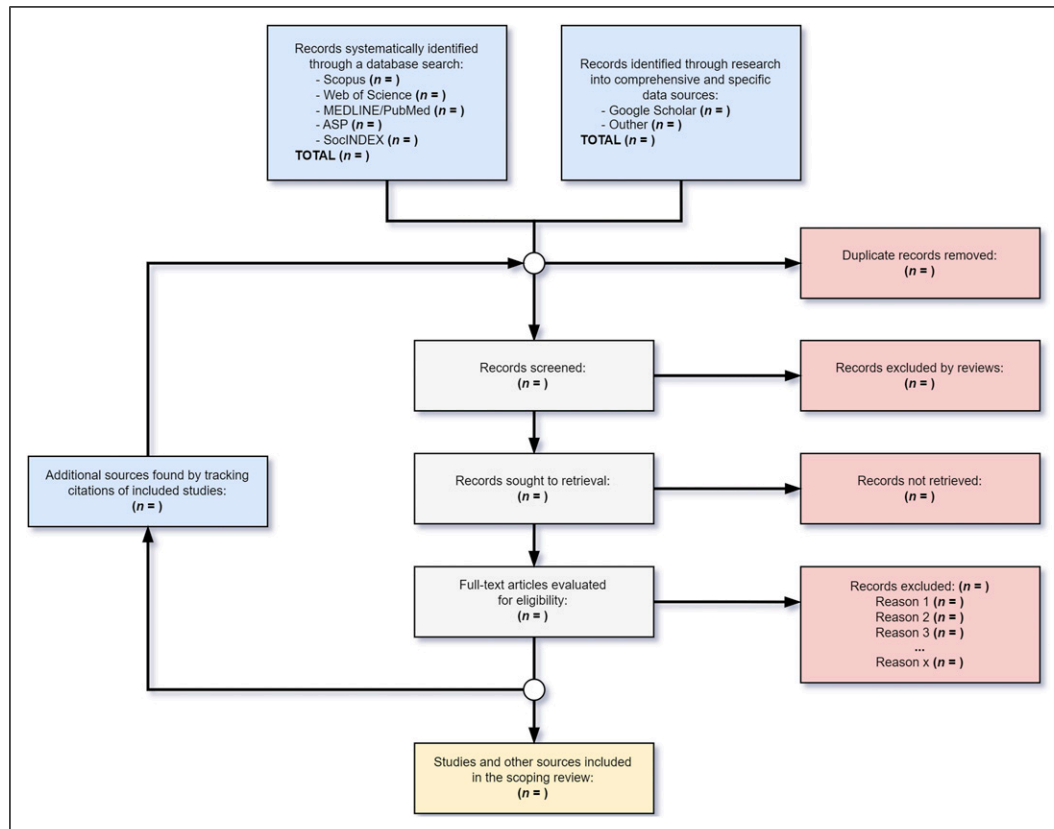
- (e3) Studies that are not fully available in the databases consulted and that cannot be accessed even after attempts to contact the authors (Barker et al., 2025; Pereira et al., 2023; Terra et al., 2023).
- (e4) Articles written in restricted languages that cannot be translated adequately (Pérez-Neri et al., 2022). This criterion will only be applied after all translation possibilities have been exhausted, including: (i) seeking support from our international collaboration network; (ii) using artificial intelligence tools; and (iii) hiring specialized companies for the necessary translations. This information will be indicated in the results of the systematic review (Costa et al., 2024).
- (e5) Studies with evidence of formal retraction (Pérez-Neri et al., 2022).

### Review Process

The review process will only begin after all metadata from the systematic search has been imported into Rayyan<sup>®</sup>, following these steps: (i) removal of duplicates; (ii) screening by reading titles and abstracts; (iii) calculation of agreement between reviewers; and (iv) complete reading of the texts for the final decision on the inclusion of studies. Step (ii) will be performed by two independent reviewers with Rayyan<sup>®</sup> blinded, while the other steps will be conducted only by the lead reviewer, based on the titles and abstracts of each study (Amri et al., 2023; Harris et al., 2023). Filters will be applied in Rayyan<sup>®</sup> to exclude studies that do not meet the predefined inclusion criteria, performed during screening, with reviewers appropriately labeling records (Costa et al., 2025).

A senior researcher with expertise in the research topic will resolve any discrepancies between the decisions of the two reviewers (Chua et al., 2024; Liberati et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). The co-authors of this study will serve as reviewers, and if necessary, new reviewers may be added to ensure that the review remains manageable and feasible (Amri et al., 2024). If a study is not available, a reviewer will contact the corresponding author to request the full text (Nunes et al., 2022) and, if necessary, the related data set. At the end, each study will be evaluated based on predefined criteria and labeled as 'included' or 'excluded' (Costa et al., 2025).

All stages of the review process are illustrated in the flowchart proposed for this type of study (Figure 1), which will guide reviewers from the selection of information sources through all intermediate stages – including the recursive citation tracking stage mentioned above – to the inclusion of studies and relevant information in the scoping review (García-Varela et al., 2025). Studies will initially be rigorously selected based on eligibility criteria. All decisions made for each study will be duly recorded, ensuring accurate, transparent, and complete documentation of the entire process, including inclusion and exclusion criteria in the first and second stages of the review (Chaves et al., 2025).



**Figure 1.** Scope review flowchart, adapted from [Chaves et al. \(2025\)](#)

Three primary sources of data will be considered ([Oliveira et al., 2025](#)): the first involves the systematic extraction of metadata from scientific databases; the second, the tracking of citations from the studies included and the reviews identified; and the third, the search for other sources of information, such as official reports from organizations and public policy documents. The information obtained from these additional sources will complement the review, allowing for more robust and comprehensive analysis, incorporating studies, data, and official guidelines to accurately assess the state of research on the topic under investigation. The review process will follow the PRISMA extension guidelines for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) ([Tricco et al., 2018](#)).

### Reviewer Training

A pilot assessment will be conducted to train the reviewers participating in this study, under the guidance of an experienced researcher, to standardize screening decisions according to predefined eligibility criteria for the review ([Oliveira et al., 2025](#)). In addition, the training will provide instruction on using Rayyan<sup>®</sup> software, allowing reviewers to familiarize themselves with its tools and features ([Chaves et al., 2025](#)). This training will promote a standardized review process, help reviewers correctly classify studies at each stage of the review,

and contribute to reducing the percentage of disagreement among them.

### Measuring Review Quality

The review process, conducted by independent reviewers working in parallel and blind, aims to minimize bias in the analysis process ([Andrić et al., 2023](#)). To ensure transparency and quality of the review, the reliability among reviewers regarding the classification of different components will be assessed by calculating the percentage of agreement between them ([Costa et al., 2024](#)). This calculation will be performed automatically by Rayyan<sup>®</sup> for both the primary and secondary flows, and the results will be presented in the systematic review.

### Extracted Data Summary

A detailed spreadsheet ([Table S3](#)) will be used to collect the data for this study, allowing us to summarize and characterize the included studies, as well as record the primary data of interest ([Erickson & Biedenweg, 2022](#)). Information will be extracted from each study, including publication details (such as title, year, and DOI), research context (e.g., country, institution, period, scope, and study population), methodological design (such as analysis type and sample size), and results ([Costa et al., 2024](#)).

## **Methodological Quality and Risk of Bias Assessment**

This scoping review will not assess the methodological quality of the included studies or the risk of bias associated with them. Such analyses are not mandatory in scoping reviews, since the main objective is not to generate clinical recommendations or causal inferences, but to describe the extent, diversity, and characteristics of the literature on a given topic (Peters et al., 2020; Tricco et al., 2018). Thus, the inclusion of studies will be determined exclusively by the previously defined eligibility criteria, regardless of the individual quality of each study.

## **Bibliometric Analysis**

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach that allows for the systematic examination of research trends, performance, collaboration patterns, and the intellectual structure of a given field (Donthu et al., 2022; Verma & Gustafsson, 2020). In reviews, this analysis is especially useful for mapping accumulated scientific knowledge and understanding the evolving nuances of established fields. Rigorously handling large volumes of unstructured data enables objective and subjective assessments of research scenarios (Donthu et al., 2021). The results of the bibliometric analysis will complement the systematic review, providing a structured, data-driven perspective on literature and guiding subsequent phases of the qualitative synthesis (Oliveira et al., 2025).

Therefore, in this review, bibliometric analysis will be applied to the literature related to modern slavery in the context of the 2030 Agenda. This approach will provide a comprehensive overview of the historical development of research in this area, highlighting the main thematic and methodological advances. To this end, the bibliometric analysis will address several key dimensions (Donthu et al., 2021), including the geographical distribution of studies, historical production trends, research relationships, publications per year, scientific mapping, citation and co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-word analysis, co-authorship, as well as network metrics and clusters. In addition, the analysis will be performed based on the metadata of the articles included in the systematic search and citation tracking. The Bibliometrix<sup>®</sup> package will be used for the R environment (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and the VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

## **Reviews Found Report**

The study screening process will be described using narrative, tabular, and visual formats to demonstrate how the results relate to the review's objectives and research questions (Muhl et al., 2023). The elements of the PCC inclusion criteria will be considered to guide the choice of the most appropriate format for presenting the results to the public (Peters et al., 2020). The data obtained will be organized in a spreadsheet and included as [Supplemental material](#). When necessary, the findings may

be categorized and subcategorized objectively and concisely (Costa et al., 2024), and quantitative data can be transformed into themes or categories (Hong et al., 2017). The evidence collected may also be presented through figures, diagrams, or other visual aids, better illustrating the grouping of factors, as well as emerging patterns and trends (Melo et al., 2023; Stern et al., 2020). The detailed and appropriate presentation of results will enable reviewers to identify gaps in the literature and clearly map the available evidence (Peters et al., 2020).

## **Expected Results**

### **Primary Results**

Given the relevance and urgency of the topic, this scoping review is expected to provide a comprehensive mapping of scientific production on modern slavery in the context of the 2030 Agenda. It also aims to highlight existing knowledge gaps, guide future research agendas, and highlight prevailing thematic approaches. In addition, the results are expected to generate robust inputs for public policy strategies aimed at eradicating modern slavery, providing evidence for policy-makers, civil society organizations, and researchers, especially concerning promising practices and interventions identified in the studies and aligned with the SDGs.

### **Secondary Results**

Complementarily, through bibliometric analysis, this review will seek to map scientific collaboration networks, including co-authorship, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling, while also identifying under-explored areas and thematic and methodological gaps in the literature. Thus, we hope to identify temporal trends in publication, geographical distribution of studies, as well as the most influential journals, institutions, and authors on the topic.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study has several strengths that are worth highlighting. First, integrating bibliometric analysis enhances the robustness of the findings and enables the identification of patterns in scientific collaboration, publication trends, and thematic gaps within the existing literature. Second, the use of additional techniques for mapping citations from the included studies, reviews found in the extracted metadata set, and secondary searches will enable a broader and more detailed coverage of scientific production. Third, the validation of the search strategy, often neglected in systematic reviews, was performed in accordance with recommended practices (Costa et al., 2024). Fourth, there were no restrictions on language, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Costa et al., 2024; Pereira et al., 2023). In addition, the analysis will follow a rigorous method of data extraction and

evidence assessment, conducted independently by two trained reviewers (Amri et al., 2023, 2024; Harris et al., 2023).

As with any other type of research, scoping review studies may have specific limitations. In this study, the following limitations are noteworthy: (a) possible limitations related to the selected databases; (b) language barriers; (c) the period covered by the research (studies from 2015 onwards); (d) the risk of underrepresentation of studies from peripheral contexts or published in journals with lower circulation; and (e) the possibility that the data used are indexed only in specific databases, which may leave out relevant unindexed literature. Although these limitations may influence the scope of the results, they do not compromise the usefulness of the review in providing reliable evidence that contributes to achieving the proposed objective.

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Conceptualization: APCN, MMS, and JTS; Data curation: not applicable; Formal analysis: not applicable; Funding acquisition: no external funding; Investigation: APCN, WPC, and MMS; Methodology: APCN, JTS, and WPC; Project administration: APCN; Software: not applicable; Resources: MMS, JTS, and MMT; Supervision: JTS; Validation: MMS, JTS, WPC, and MMT; Visualization: APCN, MMS, JTS, WPC, and MMT; Writing – original draft: APCN, MMS, JTS, WPC, and MMT; Writing – review & editing: APCN, MMS, JTS, WPC, and MMT. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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### Data Availability Statement

All files containing metadata extracted from databases (i.e., the original raw data prior to the deduplication process) will be publicly available as supplementary material in RIS format in the scientific repository Open Science Framework (OSF™ Platform, available at <https://osf.io/>) (Pieper & Rombey, 2022). The data will only be publicly available after acceptance of the manuscript containing the results of the systematic review. With any necessary updates to the systematic review, the new complementary data sets extracted will also be made available in this same repository.

### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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