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USTR Initiates Section 301 Investigations Relating to Forced Labor

On March 12, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) [announced](#) new investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 relating to *Acts, Policies, and Practices of Various Economies Related to the Failure to Impose and Effectively Enforce a Prohibition on the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor*. This announcement follows USTR's March 11 [announcement](#) initiating Section 301 investigations relating to acts, policies, and practices of 16 economies relating to structural excess capacity and overproduction in manufacturing sectors.

USTR focuses on 60 economies for forced labor prohibitions and enforcement

The newly initiated Section 301 investigations focus on 60 economies to “determine whether acts, policies, and practices . . . related to the failure to impose and effectively enforce a ban on the importation of goods produced with forced labor are unreasonable or discriminatory and burden or restrict U.S. commerce.” These include Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, The Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, European Union, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Vietnam.

In the [Federal Register Notice](#) announcing the investigations, USTR states that “U.S. law has prohibited the importation of goods mined, produced, or manufactured in whole or in part with forced labor” for more than 100 years. In addition to the humanitarian concerns, USTR notes that worker exploitation abroad “threatens domestic producers who must compete with foreign goods produced with an artificial cost advantage and may harm U.S. workers and citizens through distorting competition and the purchase of goods produced under exploitative conditions.” USTR also notes [efforts](#) by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to effectively enforce the U.S. forced labor ban.

The Federal Register Notice also says that despite consistent engagement with U.S. trading partners - which has, in some instances, resulted in trading partners such as Mexico, Canada, and the European Union adopting measures to prohibit forced labor - USTR cites lax enforcement as one reason for these investigations. USTR says that “[i]n the absence of a forced labor import prohibition that is effectively enforced, firms can continue to source, use, and profit from imported products produced with forced labor,

even if the use of forced labor is prohibited domestically.” USTR also cites the Department of Labor’s report, [2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#), which “includes 134 products produced with forced labor in particular countries.”

USTR invites public comments and participation in a public hearing

USTR has opened a public comment period for written comments, which must be submitted in the [USTR portal](#) by April 15, 2026. USTR specifically invites comments on the following:

- Whether any economy subject to these investigations maintains or is in the process of establishing a forced labor import prohibition, and whether any such import prohibition is being effectively enforced.
- The extent to which the failure of any economy to establish and effectively enforce a forced labor import prohibition is unreasonable, discriminates against U.S. goods, or constitutes a persistent pattern of conduct that permits any form of forced or compulsory labor.
- The extent to which the failure of any economy to establish and effectively enforce a forced labor import prohibition has negatively affected U.S. commerce, such as through lost U.S. exports or economic output, lower prices for U.S. goods, or lower wages for U.S. workers.
- What action, if any, should be taken to address these issues, including:
 - The level and scope, if any, of duties on products of any economy subject to these investigations.
 - The level and scope, if any, of import restrictions on products of any economy subject to these investigations.
- The appropriate aggregate level of trade to be covered by any additional duties on products of any economy subject to these investigations.

USTR will hold a public hearing on April 28, 2026. Requests to testify at the public hearing, as well as a summary of the testimony, must be submitted to [USTR](#) by April 15, 2026. Post-hearing rebuttal comments will then be due 7 days after the hearing concludes.

Potential timeline for Sec. 301 investigations

Under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, USTR generally has 12 months to complete an investigation. That said, USTR has indicated that it would move expeditiously in conducting new Section 301 investigations, suggesting that findings and associated reports could come as early as this summer. USTR may also try to conclude these investigations before the 10% tariffs imposed under Section 122 expire on July 24, 2026.

See the Federal Register Notice [here](#).

See the USTR press release [here](#).

If you have questions, please contact Blake Harden (blake.harden@ey.com) or Evan Gieseemann (evan.gieseemann@ey.com).

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