

TECH SHAME

Amazon, Facebook and Samsung rack up hundreds of 'human rights abuse' allegations

A new report reveals a huge number of allegations against the world's top tech giants for using workers as "young as seven years old" and for forcing employees to work in gruelling conditions

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THE WORLD'S top technology companies have racked up 223 allegations of human rights violations between them – ranging from child labour to data breaches – according to a new report.

Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Samsung are among those listed in the [study](#) compiled by the Chartered Quality Institute (CQI) and RepRisk, which tracked media allegations of human rights abuses over the past 18 months.



Amazon, which recently became a trillion-dollar company, has been accused of exploiting its workers



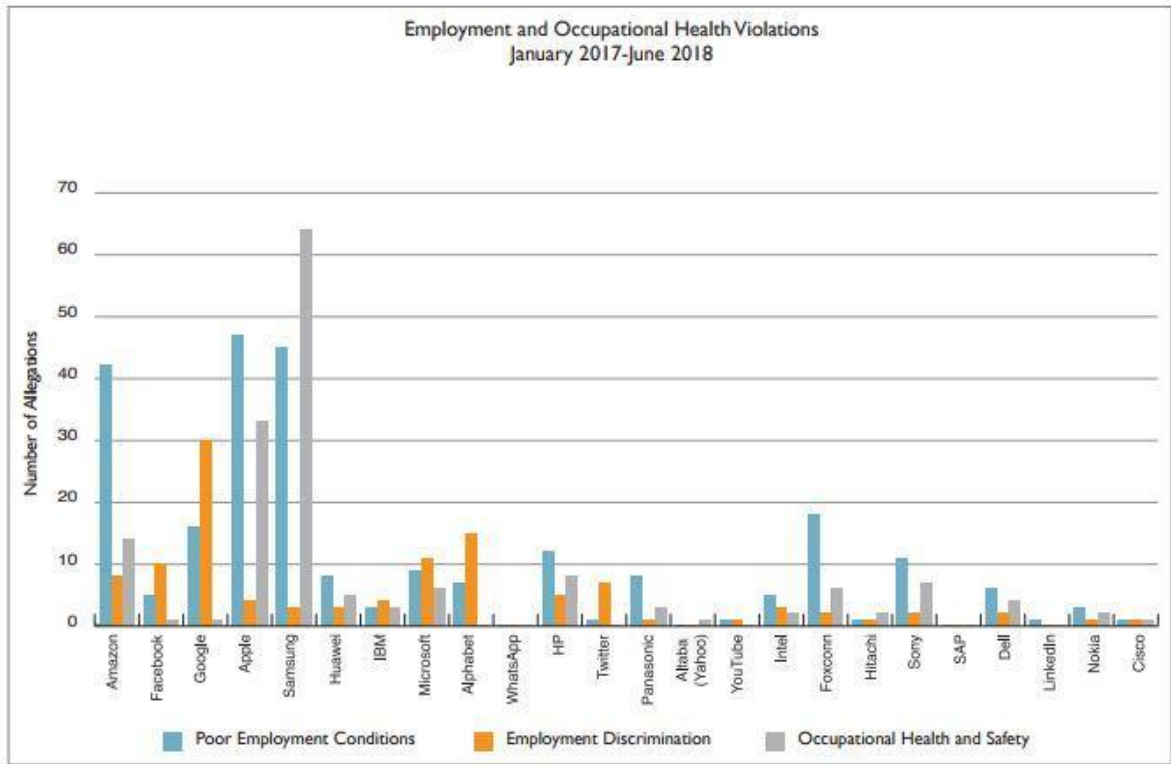
Apple has previously vowed to crack down on child labour in its supply chain

The greatest number of allegations around child labour violations over the past 18 months were pinned to Apple and Samsung – the world’s leading smartphone-makers – with 27 each in total, according to the report. However, the report didn’t detail each specific allegation included in the total, so take this with a pinch of salt. The Sun could not independently verify these claims.

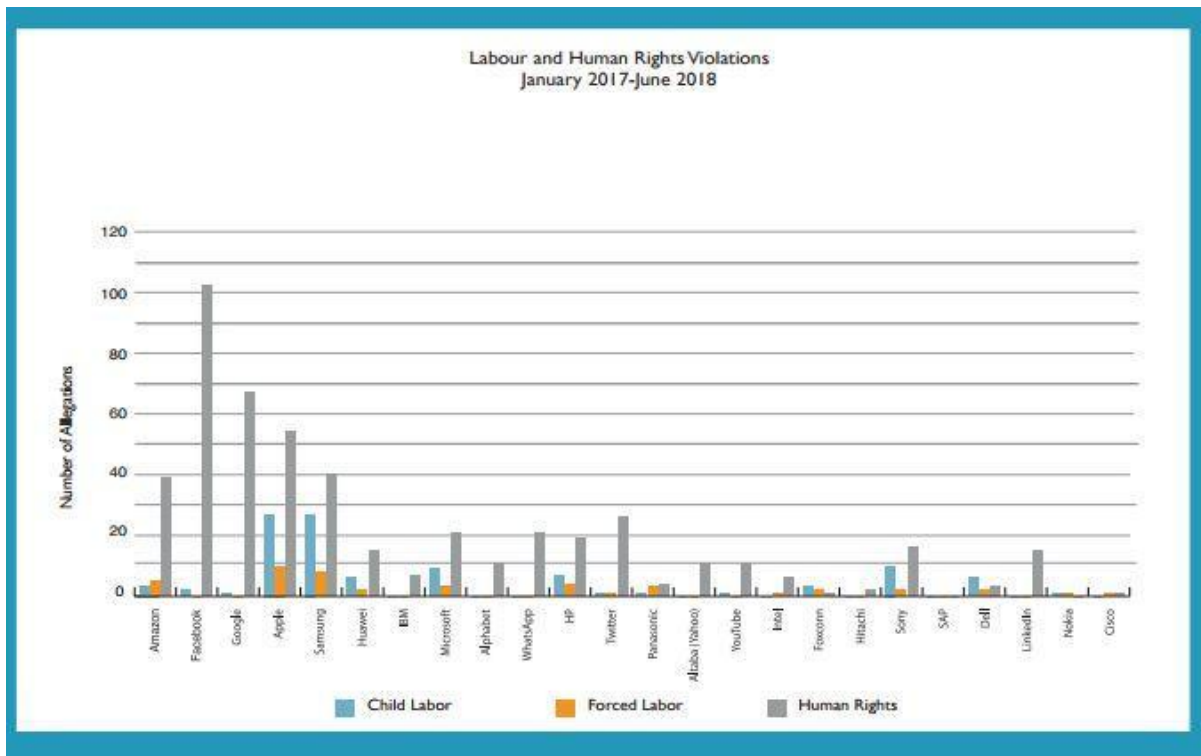
They also recorded the highest number of allegations of forced labour violations, according to the report.

Both Apple and Samsung have been dogged by child labour accusations in their supply chain (comprised of parts manufacturers in places like China and India) over the years.

But Amazon was by far the all-round worst offender named in the report, mainly due to the allegedly poor working conditions in its warehouses where employees reportedly fall asleep on their feet and are forced to pee into bottles as loos are too far away.



A table from the report shows the worst offenders for allegations of employment and occupational health hazards



Another table shows the number of allegations of labour and human rights violations caused by the world's top 14 tech firms

It's worth noting that the report only documents allegations – and doesn't differentiate between true or false claims.

That means some of the allegations tracked by the report may have been disproved, and may also be misleading.

Importantly, it means that the companies included in the report didn't necessarily commit hundreds of human rights violations – but were simply accused of such.

Here are details of some of the allegations levelled at five of the biggest tech companies on the list, including trillion-dollar titans Apple and Amazon.

Amazon

Amazon, the report claims, has been linked to three allegations of child labour use in the last 18 months. In June, a report on Amazon's US supply chain partners found cases of underage workers and violence being used against children as young as nine to force them to work in manufacturing facilities.

Earlier in the year, the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health included Amazon's warehouses in their list of the most dangerous workplaces in the US, citing workers being denied pay and compensation for workplace injuries.

Another Amazon partner factory, this time in China, was allegedly forcing employees to work 100 hours of underpaid overtime (64 hours over the 36-hour monthly limit), in order to fulfil Amazon order quotas.

Overall, the firm was linked to allegations of 39 human rights violations since January 2017, according to the study.

Responding to the CQI report, an Amazon spokesperson said: "We disagree with the report, which contains a number of old and unfounded allegations. All Amazon suppliers have to follow our Code of Conduct and we take any violations extremely seriously. And we are proud of the working environment in our fulfilment centres, which are open to anyone who wants to visit – we encourage everyone to come see for themselves."

Responding to the allegations of Amazon workers having to urinate in bottles, an Amazon spokesperson said: "Amazon ensures all of its associates have easy access to toilet facilities which are just a short walk from where they are working. Associates are allowed to use the toilet whenever needed. We do not monitor toilet breaks."

Responding to the NCOSH allegations, an Amazon spokesperson said: "Congress created OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) to assure safe working conditions across the country, and enforce standards by providing training, outreach, education and assistance. Unlike OSHA, COSH is not a government agency – COSH is financially supported and run by committees which are private, coalitions of labor unions, and other interested parties. Amazon regularly engages with OSHA and multiple state OSHA programs. Our goal is to innovate, continually raise the bar, and excel in workplace safety standards."



Samsung had the most allegations of fraud and corruption against it

Apple

Apple faced 50 human rights violation allegations in the same 18-month period, according to the report.

One Apple supplier was accused of hiring 3,000 secondary-school teenagers as interns to build the £999 iPhone X last November and it has also been accused of failing to ensure that minerals used in its products are not mined by children. Six of these said they were working overtime, and Foxconn confirmed it had taken immediate action to ensure no interns carried out any overtime work in future.

A 2014/15 investigation into cobalt mining in the Congo found that kids as young as seven were working in dangerous conditions to unearth the component for tech companies. Apple, among others, was listed as one of the customers of Congo Dongfang Mining International, one of the companies at the centre of this trade.

Apple appears to have since cleaned up its act when it comes to the supply chain.

In the Enough Project Conflict Minerals 2017 rankings, Apple was named as the world's top company for the responsible sourcing of conflict minerals.

In November 2017, Amnesty spoke regarding Apple's cobalt sourcing: "Earlier this year, Apple became the first company to publish the names of its cobalt suppliers, and Amnesty's research shows it is currently the industry leader when it comes to responsible cobalt sourcing."

Google

Google was the third-worst performing tech company in the report, with reports of poor working conditions and discrimination.

The study highlights a 2013 incident where 1,000 employees at Google's Mountain View headquarters in California were reportedly exposed to excessive levels of the hazardous solvent, trichloroethylene (TCE) following the disabling of a core component of the site's ventilation system.

This allegedly stopped fresh air from entering the building, allowing toxic vapours to collect. TCE is known to cause varying types of cancer and to produce birth-defects in the children of expectant mothers.

Google reportedly confirmed the exposure but has not stated how many workers were exposed.



Facebook's recent data breach and illegal data-sharing practices with WhastApp landed it on the [list](#)

Facebook

Facebook was named joint worst tech firm for allegations – along with Amazon – in the report, largely because of its maligned privacy record.

Of course, the Cambridge Analytica data breach was at the forefront but the report also cited two illegal data sharing incidents against WhatsApp, including one that saw it fined 3million Euros for passing on user info to Facebook without consent.

The Federation of German Consumer Organisations has also filed a lawsuit against WhatsApp in Berlin's Regional Court, accusing the company of illegally collecting user data for its parent. "In this case, one billion WhatsApp users were likely affected," claims the study.

Samsung

Like Apple, Samsung has had charges of child labour levelled against it (27 in total over the past 18 months) in the media. One of these also included the same accusations of child labour in Congo's cobalt mines as directed at its smartphone rival.

Samsung was also sued over its alleged use of underage workers in its Chinese factories at the start of this year.

In addition, the company had by far the most allegations of corruption and fraud against it (a whopping 137 in total).



Google was slammed for a horrific incident that saw a “hazardous solvent” released into the workplace

We reached out to the five companies in question and will update this article with their respective responses.

“For the first time the failings of the tech sector is laid bare. Previously, individual companies have hit the headlines for the wrong reasons, but it is now clear that this is a sector-wide and systemic problem,” said Estelle Clark, director of policy at the CQI.

She continued: “We have found a sector mired in governance violations, more akin to the first industrial revolution, than companies at the vanguard of technological advancement in the 21st Century. We should be expecting the tech sector to set new, higher, standards for governance rather than lagging way behind.

This report is a warning shot. It isn't good enough for the boards of these companies to say 'we didn't know'. Those who sit on the board have a responsibility, to know what is going on in their businesses, their divisions, and their supply-chains.

"The biggest companies must act as the standard bearers for corporate governance. Their boards must question their role in the communities they operate in and their impact on society."