Economic Growth at the Price of Human Rights Violations?
The Protection of Human/Labour Rights in Export Processing Zones

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While export processing zones (EPZs) are generally regarded to promote investment and employment, they are also criticised for their poor protection of human and labour rights. Problems such as deficient enforcement of health and safety standards, weak or missing implementation of labour laws, and breaches of trade union rights are reported in EPZs. This article examines means and strategies to address the abridgment of human and labour rights in these zones. It provides an overview of the most problematic violations of human and labour rights in EPZs, and outlines the applicable international human rights and labour standards. More importantly, it examines various strategies to foster the implementation and enforcement of human rights and labour rights in EPZs, including state reporting and individual complaints procedures under general human rights treaties, International Labour Organisation’s supervisory mechanisms, and other ‘softer’ tools. The article concludes with a more general perspective of what can be done to improve compliance with human rights and labour standards in EPZs, discussing the accountability/responsibility of transnational corporations as well as relevant corporate social responsibility initiatives.

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