

Symposium: The Path to 2025: Lessons from Efforts to Combat Child Labour

Nesrien Hamid, Research and Editorial Consultant - Delta 8.7

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Target 8.7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals calls for the end of all forms of child labour by 2025. Last year, the UN General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) declaring 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. Global commitment to eradicate child labour has thus remained unflinching, and multilateral institutions, specially the International Labour Organization (ILO), have developed [evidence-based guidelines](#) and programmes for tackling child labour around the world. While much progress has been attained—with a 94 million reduction in the number of children engaged in child labour since 2000—the issue remains gargantuan. The most recent [Global Estimates of Child Labour](#) indicate that 152 million children around the world are in child labour, and if the same rate of progress is maintained, 121 million children will still be in child labour by 2025.

In this Symposium, Delta 8.7 brings together contributors from a variety of organizations who are engaged in implementation and evaluation of programmes to combat child labour in different contexts. The contributors reflect on lessons learned from their experiences, highlighting what their work has shown to be most effective, and outline persistent challenges, including those that emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Symposium kicks-off with a piece by Dan Karlin from GoodWeave International, where he reflects on the organization's work to eliminate child labour from textile supply chains. Subsequently, World Vision discuss their USDOL-funded Campos de Esperanza project in Mexico. Following that, the ILO's Insaf Nizam highlights lessons learned and continuing challenges in Sri Lanka's standout efforts to eradicate child labour. The Symposium closes off with a piece by UNICEF, where they draw insights from their recent [report](#) on COVID-19's impacts on child labour and outline what measures need to be taken to mitigate its effects.

All the contributions to the symposium can be found below:

Uncovering and Eradicating Child Labour in Hidden Supply Chains

Dan Karlin, GoodWeave International

29 September 2020

A Multidisciplinary Model Toward Preventing and Eradicating Child Labour in the Agricultural Sector

World Vision

30 September 2020

A Policy Journey towards the Elimination of Child Labour in Sri Lanka

Fowzul Insaf Nizam, International Labour Organization

1 October 2020



Protecting Children from Exploitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Claudia Cappa, Aniruddha Kulkarni, Amanda Bissex, Eshani Ruwanpura and Ramya Subrahmanian, UNICEF

2 October 2020

All these contributions culminated in a virtual panel held on 10 November where each author elaborated on lessons learned from their experiences implementing and evaluating programmes and projects to combat child labour in different contexts. In addition, they offered valuable insights into what their work has shown to be most effective, and outlined persistent challenges, including those that emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The full recording of this event can be found [here](#).

Symposium: Uncovering and Eradicating Child Labour in Hidden Supply Chains

Dan Karlin, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer, GoodWeave International

29 September 2020

Hem Moktan is my colleague at [GoodWeave](#) in Nepal where he manages educational programming and care of former child labourers and children at-risk of exploitation. Hem rescued some of these same children from labour in his previous role as a supply chain inspection officer for GoodWeave. As a former child labourer himself, this work is deeply personal to him. He lost three years of his own education and freedom when a labour broker promised his father that Hem would have food, clothing and a salary, and then took him to work in a Kathmandu carpet factory. Hem worked on the looms from age 10-13, where he endured beatings, hunger and ridicule. In three years, he earned just 3,000 rupees—the equivalent of 45 US dollars.

Hem describes these as the years “when I was lost”. Despite starting kindergarten at age 13, Hem quickly progressed in his studies and graduated high school on time, with counseling and educational support from GoodWeave. He completed an undergraduate degree, then a Master’s degree, and is now pursuing his Ph.D. His escape from exploitation became possible when a US company decided to partner with GoodWeave to ensure its production was free from child labour. The choice this company made—to open up its full **supply chain** to GoodWeave’s unannounced, random inspections for child, forced and bonded labour—unveiled a hidden workforce where Hem had, until that moment, toiled in obscurity for three years. For every one of the 7,646 children like Hem that GoodWeave has rescued, there are nearly 20,000 more child labourers worldwide. But what can we do about it? Addressing this tragic situation begins with **understanding why it persists**.

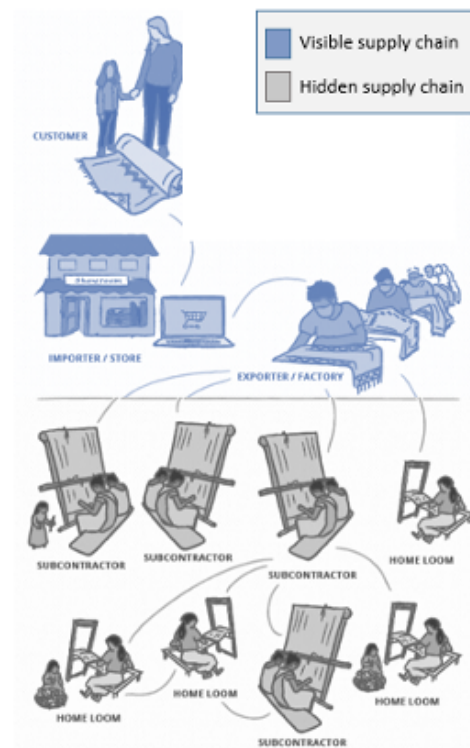
The GoodWeave Approach

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are 152 million child labourers in the world. However, to [find them and restore their childhoods](#), we need to know where to



look. Over the past 25 years, GoodWeave has found thousands of child labourers like Hem toiling in hidden, outsourced, informal supply chains, comprised of complex networks of production sites, often unmarked with no official address. This is particularly true in the production of textiles, such as carpets, which require significant hand-work—from the processing and preparation of raw material to the finishing and washing processes. Prior to its export, a handmade carpet may have travelled from a weaver's home to subcontractor sites to a finishing facility. One carpet exporter may have a supplier network of hundreds of subcontractor and home-based production sites that an overseas buyer will never see. These invisible networks often teem with child labourers.

When GoodWeave partners with new companies, we undertake an intensive onboarding process that involves thorough supply chain-mapping and deep due diligence. Our teams have uncovered up to 100 subcontractors per supplier, in the process finding child labour in hidden worksites that were previously unknown to the supplier. Then, we remediate all child labour cases identified (including counseling, family reunification and enrolment in education). Only after this process can a supplier application be approved. GoodWeave then continues to work with the company and their suppliers to ensure clean production and improved management of labour rights in the outsourced supply chain.



The hidden supply chain

GoodWeave builds visibility for our company partners and consumers. We stop the abuse and address root causes so they know who made their products, under what conditions, and that those products are child-labour-free. Quality data is instrumental in this process. GoodWeave's

Supply Chain Traceability Platform can show brands what their supply chains actually look like and where there are child labour risks that require attention and improvement. The Platform also tracks how GoodWeave remediates individual cases of child labour and builds producer capacity to prevent it from happening in the future. Longitudinal data in the Platform also enables us to understand how our preventative programming reduces child labour occurrences and changes industry practices in the long-term. The longitudinal data shows that, after the first year of partnership with GoodWeave, the supply chains of brand partners are cleaner and more insulated from child labour.

We use our data to track a rapid path to child labour-free production for individual companies. Whenever we identify a case of child labour, GoodWeave certification labels are withheld in connection with any goods in question, and repeat violators lose eligibility for certification. This creates a business incentive to stop using child labour. Our experience working with many companies over the years provides critical evidence that our holistic approach of bringing visibility, stopping abuse and addressing root causes is effective.

COVID-19 and Child Labour

Now in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, achieving these results is more challenging. Orders from overseas buyers for South Asian textile products have slowed significantly. For example, according to [research published](#) in August 2020 by the Clean Clothes Campaign, it is estimated that garment workers worldwide, excluding China, lost between USD 3.19 and 5.79 billion in wages from March 2020 through May 2020, while garment workers across South and Southeast Asia are estimated to have received 38 per cent less than their normal incomes. These disruptions lead to even more extreme poverty for the informal, marginalized workers toiling in subcontracted supply chains. Worker indebtedness is on the rise, schools have been closed and families are facing hunger and illness from the virus itself. Economic vulnerability enhances the risk of child labour, so children who were vulnerable before are even more so now because of increased economic hardship on their families. Hence, for the companies still sourcing carpets, home textiles and apparel products, ensuring their production contributes to well-being and not to exploitation is even more crucial. On top of our core work, this year GoodWeave has also focused on delivering urgent relief to informal worker communities in India, Nepal, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Since March 2020, our field-based colleagues, including Hem, have been on the front lines providing emergency food relief, hygiene aid, and COVID-19 health and safety information. Rapid research—to be published soon—that we conducted across the South Asia region on the impacts of the pandemic on carpet, home textile and apparel workers has identified troubling trends. One hundred per cent of apparel workers, and 6 in 10 workers overall, have either lost their jobs entirely or seen their income decrease since the COVID-19 crisis began. This places workers and their children, who have not attended school since March, in increasingly desperate situations, such as those described by a female carpet worker in Nepal, who



explained: “I alone [am] the bread earner of my family as my husband died five years ago. I have responsibilities of all three children and due to lockdown I have very little work.”

Our research also highlighted challenges that required solutions to protect workers and families. For example, many of the most marginalized and hardest hit workers were not able to access government relief subsidies, because they did not have active bank accounts to receive cash transfers. In response, we launched a programme within the communities that combines financial literacy training and assistance with securing bank accounts.

Back at our transit home for rescued child labourers in Kathmandu, Hem and other colleagues are ensuring the protection of many of the children we have rescued over the past several years. For Nepal’s National Children’s Day on 14 September 2020 these children celebrated their freedom and shared their dreams for their futures. Even in the face of this pandemic, together, with companies, consumers, governments, local colleagues and grassroots partner organizations, we can end child labour by 2025, in line with Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

GoodWeave partnered with [The Studio M](#) to tell Hem Moktan’s story, in honor of World Day Against Child Labour, 2020: [Watch Hem Moktan, He Made It](#):

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Symposium: A Multidisciplinary Model Toward Preventing and Eradicating Child Labour in the Agricultural Sector

World Vision
30 September 2020

This article examines the field experience of World Vision’s [Campos de Esperanza](#) project, a [U.S. Department of Labor](#) (USDOL)-funded programme that aims to promote labour rights and prevent child labour in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, Mexico. The piece provides an overview of the project interventions that have proven to show early signs of success in reducing child labour.

The Comprehensive Approach in Mexico

World Vision has partnered with the USDOL to address child labour around the world for over 17 years. With each project, best practices and lessons learned have been identified to help strengthen and refine World Vision’s comprehensive approach to eradicating child labour. The strategies for Campos de Esperanza take into account the repeated learnings from past DOL-



funded projects throughout the world and the project team's understanding of child labour issues in Mexico to form a multi-pronged approach to eradicating child labour.

Promoting school reinsertion and quality education

Campos de Esperanza is working to inform parents and caregivers about school availability, to improve the process for students to return to school and to change attitudes and practices of school administrators to accept migrant children into schools. The project is training teachers and school administrators, as well as supporting classroom and out-of-school learning for target children and youth, to increase quality teaching and learning. Together, these initiatives are intended to make education both accessible and interesting so that children and youth are less likely to drop out and engage in hazardous forms of child labour.

One of the project's out-of-school programmes is community libraries that provide children access to age-appropriate literature at least once a week. Children have expressed a desire to take books home and to share them with their families to discuss what they have learned. In the libraries, books and reading have become an everyday activity, which is not very common in rural communities in Mexico.

Establishing alternatives for adolescents of legal age to work

In Mexico, adolescents of legal working age (15 years and older) lack livelihood pathways beyond the agricultural sector. The Federal Labour Law classifies all agricultural activities as dangerous, prohibiting the participation of girls and boys under 18 years old. Therefore, the project is providing alternatives to hazardous labour for youth, such as life skills and technical training, entrepreneurship and linkages to social protection programmes. These alternatives are identified and determined by adolescents with programme support, depending on their interest, availability and context. The technical trainings are an opportunity to find alternatives for their own future, and in the words of one recipient youth, youth can "be something other than cane-cutters". Some youth have already started generating income from selling products or services they learned from the trainings, such as screen-printing balloons for community events and decorating party centrepieces for dining tables.

Promoting local level protection and social mobilization in the community

Rural communities often perceive children as an additional source of income, and do not recognize the risks of child labour. To shift the social norms and practices around child labour, the project is implementing robust social mobilization initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns. The project is establishing and/or strengthening civil society organizations that can appropriately identify and accompany cases of child labour and other violations in the community. Community leaders and volunteers of these organizations are trained by project staff on child labour, children's rights, labour rights, child protection and organizational



management and planning. These organizations refer cases to local child protection systems and provide basic guidance on labour issues.

The project has seen how awareness-raising activities—such as community murals, community dialogues and radio spots broadcasted in local stations—have begun to shape the conversation in communities. For example, community members have shared that they felt seen in the murals, because these include prominent elements of their culture, landscape and history along with the message, “Give them a better future. No to child labour”. This connection has led communities to accept the project and its message, and the project has seen an increase in the number of participants per activity.

Developing joint actions with the public and private sectors

Coordination with the public sector to address and respond to cases of child labour must be carried out at the federal, state and municipal levels to ensure child labour prevention policies are aligned. The project advocates for all sectoral plans, development plans, labour inspection procedures and CITI (*Comisión Intersecretarial para la Prevención y Erradicación del Trabajo Infantil y la Protección de Adolescentes trabajadores en Edad Permitida* or, in English, Inter-sectoral Commission for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour and the Protection of Adolescents of Working Age in Mexico, action plans that address child labour. These efforts have already resulted in the Federal CITI agreeing to establish CITIs at the state level and inviting the project to provide trainings to public officials on child labour and occupational safety and health in the agricultural sector. The project is jointly updating the guidelines, protocols and manuals for these technical trainings to government staff, ensuring the message of strong inter-institutional coordination is clear.

Similarly, the project’s engagement with the private sector promotes the establishment of due diligence and grievance mechanisms, to improve working conditions and **reduce the risks of child labour**, forced labour and other forms of labour exploitation. Guidelines and actions for responsible recruitment (for example, using written contracts, avoiding holding documents and payments and providing shelters with the necessary services and conditions), are being co-developed with each sector. Occupational safety and health programmes are also being implemented where critical areas are monitored and sufficient resources are allocated to identify, prevent and mitigate occupational risks. The sugarcane and coffee sectors are appreciative of the occupational risk assessments and the specific strategies created for each sector according to its needs. The positive results have led to other sectors requesting the project’s assistance to replicate the good practices in other parts of the country.

Strengthening the capacities of workers to claim their rights

Protecting workers and their rights to decent wages, access to social protections and optimal working conditions are critical to the economic growth and sustainable livelihoods for families, thus reducing the need for children to work. Workers trained by the project report that they



now know how to identify occupational risks in the workplace and are aware of their labour rights. For migrant agricultural day labourers specifically, the project supports the establishment of social programs, such as access to education, shelters, health and social protection services. For example, the project coordinated with the Mexican Social Security Institute to hold a vaccination campaign, reaching 1,919 day labourers with the message that providing preventative health services for workers impacts the household, reducing the likelihood of an adult being unable to work and a child needing to work.

Conclusion

The actions mentioned above all directly or indirectly play a role in eradicating child labour and its worst forms in Mexico. Given that the drivers of child labour are diverse and vary across social, economic, cultural and political spheres, multi-pronged and multi-stakeholder approaches are required. Campos de Esperanza has been actively utilizing this approach and as a result, has seen early signs of success. For example, national representatives and producer associations from the sugarcane sector have adopted responsible recruitment strategies in the field to reduce child labour. A sugar mill is now requesting that cutters who travel with their children enroll them in school prior to working. Community leaders are making household visits to ensure and support the enrolment of children into schools.

To measure project effectiveness, Campos de Esperanza has a Direct Beneficiary Monitoring System (DBMS) to track the provision of education and livelihood services and the status of children engaged in child labour every six months. At the end of the project, a comparative analysis of the DBMS data will be done to see the overall impact of project interventions. World Vision's experiences and early successes have shown that in order to make sustainable progress in reducing child labour, [equal engagement](#) of workers, families, communities, employers and government actors at all levels are critical ingredients for success.

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Symposium: A Policy Journey towards the Elimination of Child Labour in Sri Lanka

Fowzul Insaf Nizam, Specialist on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, International Labour Organization

1 October 2020

When a country reduces its incidence of child labour to less than one per cent, its total elimination becomes one of the most challenging tasks that requires extraordinary effort and out-of-the-box thinking. After its success in combating child labour in the country, this is the challenge that Sri Lanka faces. In a collaborative effort that spanned over two decades, the International Labour Organization (ILO)—with financial assistance from the [U.S. Department of](#)



[Labor](#) (USDOL)—has been the primary technical support provider to Sri Lanka, and is currently working to support the country in running the last mile towards achieving Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strong Social Welfare Measures – A Good Starting Point

The greater part of the credit for the significant reduction of child labour in Sri Lanka can be attributed to its strong welfare policies. The country which has provided free primary and secondary education for all its children also offers free health care to all citizens. Sri Lanka has enjoyed a relatively [high adult literacy rate](#) in the last two decades, and has reached a near universal primary enrolment rate. The number of out-of-school adolescents has decreased from [88,189 in 2010 to 18,401](#) in 2018. The emphasis given by the state and society on education has been a key contributor to keeping children in school.

Despite these contributing factors, Sri Lanka does have a child labour problem. The 2008 National Child Activity Survey (NCAS)—funded by the USDOL—conducted with the ILO’s support estimated that there were 107,259 children in child labour, amounting to 2.5 per cent of its child population between the ages 5 to 17. Of those in child labour, [63,916](#)—amounting to 1.5 per cent of the child population—were in hazardous forms of child labour. Although lower than many countries, this was not compatible with the strong welfare systems and social indicators of the country, which compelled stakeholders to increase their efforts to eliminate child labour.

5.1 Age, Gender and Sector composition

Table 5.1.2: Child population identified as Child labour and Hazardous forms of child labour by Age group in Sri Lanka - 2008/09

Age group	Total		Child Labour		Hazardous form of child labour	
	(Number)	(percentage)	(Number)	(percentage)	(Number)	(percentage)
Sri Lanka	4,338,709	100	107,259	2.5	63,916	1.5
Age Group						
5 - 11	2,292,887	100	30,111	1.3	1,344	0.1
12-14	1,007,832	100	21,702	2.2	7,126	0.7
15 - 17	1,037,990	100	55,446	5.3	55,446	5.3

Evidence-based policy responses

The 2008 NCAS thus triggered a range of policy and programmatic responses that were later proven to be quite effective. On the Government’s part, it further analysed the NCAS results and introduced a policy of convergence of efforts at the district level using a model to be later known as the [Ratnapura Model](#). The overall responsibility for addressing child labour in the



district was placed with the District Secretary, who managed over 20 district level officials representing various line ministries.

The ILO, in turn, successfully mobilized resources and continued its technical support, which led to the inclusion of Sri Lanka in the USDOL-funded CLEAR (Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labour) project in 2013. The Project focused on four Intermediate Outcomes:

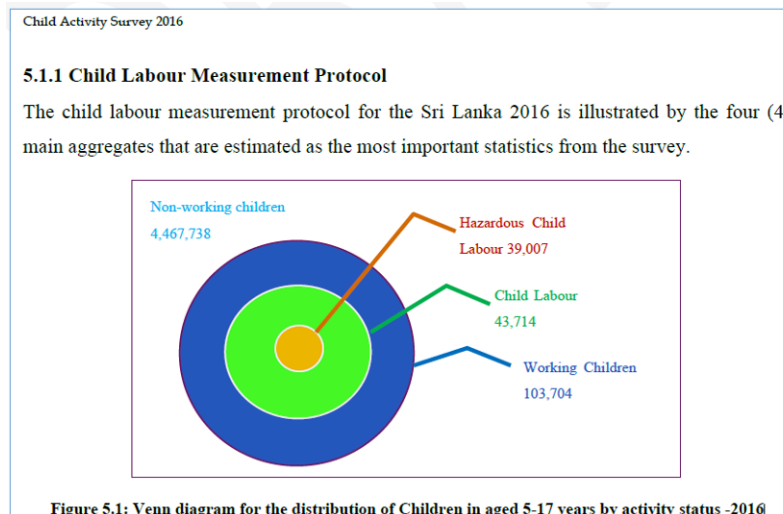
- Strengthening the legal and regulatory frameworks and aligning them with international standards;
- Improved enforcement of law and policies;
- Increased level of implementation of National Action Plans, and
- Improved implementation of national and local policies and social programmes aimed at reduction and prevention of child labour.

The project also included support to the government to conduct another NCAS in 2016.

Through vigorous implementation, leadership and commitment of the Government, and ownership and partnership of social partners (Employers' Organizations and Workers' Organizations) and stakeholders, the project was able to record a number of key achievements, including: the approval of a National Child Labour Policy; the rolling out of Child Labour Free Zones—known as the *Ratnapura Model*; and training of officials in all 25 districts of the country. The project also produced recommendations leading to the inclusion of child labour-related issues in Sri Lanka's policies related to domestic work, updated the Hazardous Work List and conducted the National Child Activity Survey of 2016. Furthermore, Sri Lanka became one of the first countries to join the [Alliance 8.7](#) when it was established in 2016, and volunteered [to become a Pathfinder Country](#) in 2017.

The results of the [2016 NCAS](#) were encouraging but not surprising. They revealed that the prevalence of child labour decreased by more than half since the NCAS of 2008—i.e. reduced to just one per cent—with 43,714 children in child labour, of which 39,007 children, or 0.9 per cent of the child population, were in hazardous labour.





A prevalence rate of less than one per cent poses its own set of challenges. For instance, drilling into the statistics becomes difficult the further one goes into it, the numbers become less significant for analysis due to the low prevalence rate. Identification of those children is also a challenge as they are highly dispersed in different geographical locations. It is also difficult to identify a limited number of drivers that can be addressed through macro policy initiatives as the number of children affected by one single factor becomes numerically insignificant to attract a policy change. Measurement also becomes a challenge as the low prevalence rate makes an expensive national survey unviable. The COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded these challenges by shifting national priorities and constraining social protection systems.

With these limitations in mind, ILO is taking a number of targeted initiatives to identify and further narrow gaps in the system with a view to not only reduce the existing caseload but also ensure that new children are not pushed into the labour market. ILO, with the support of USDOL, initiated yet another project in 2019 which commenced implementation early this year. The project attempts to undertake very specific interventions that can address the unique challenges posed by the situation, and includes strengthening stakeholder coordination through the activation of Alliance 8.7 mechanisms, introducing a school-to-work transition module to minimize the possibility that children leaving school fall into child labour, as well as a targeted awareness programme. It also includes strengthening the country's child labour monitoring system.

Innovative Use of Child Labour Monitoring (CLM)

With last mile efforts being taken to eliminate child labour, there is a need for objective criteria to measure their effectiveness and ensure that the goal of elimination is achieved. When large-scale national surveys become less viable, the innovative use of a robust CLM mechanism can be explored as a proxy. This is not automatic though. Firstly, the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the system is necessary as merely counting those cases reported to the

Department of Labour will not be sufficient to give an idea of child labour prevalence in the country. Secondly, it requires that society see child labour as something completely unacceptable, as social tolerance towards child labour can affect reporting by the public. Thirdly, a high degree of public awareness is crucial. Without such awareness, cases of child labour can go unreported, or lead to false reports of child labour that can clutter the system and drain out time, energy and resources of institutions and officials responsible for the issue. And finally the mechanism, including the institutions and officials that form part of it, must win the trust of the public.

Conclusion

There is no single magic solution to eliminate child labour in a country. Success comes with the presence of a number of factors including a solid social policy regime, political will, the right social norms and attitudes and, importantly, consistent and continuous support of the international community—all of which has converged in the case of in Sri Lanka. Even with such effort, eradicating the last one per cent of child labour is one of the most complicated parts of the journey. It is only through constant analysis, reflection and innovation that the total elimination of child labour can be achieved.

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Symposium: Protecting Children from Exploitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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2 October 2020





Photo credit: © UNICEF/UNI335716/

The mask 12-year-old Miajul wears offers scant protection from the toxic plastic hazardous waste he sorts through in the Shyamal Palli area of Dhaka. It's no job for a child, but Miajul had little choice given the economic crisis precipitated by COVID-19 and containment measures taken by the Government of Bangladesh.

As similar scenarios are repeated in countries throughout South Asia and the world, millions of children globally are undertaking work as a matter of survival for themselves or their families. Over the last two decades, the number of children engaged in child labour has [declined by 94 million](#). Now, the [pandemic threatens](#) to slow or even reverse that progress.

Pathways to exploitation

The COVID-19 crisis exacerbates child exploitation through various pathways. With the loss or reduction of household income, families increasingly need, and often expect, children to contribute financially or through time spent in family enterprises, including household chores. Parental care may be diminished—or lost altogether—due to death, illness or separation, raising the risk that children are exposed to exploitative or hazardous conditions. The economic crisis often means reduced caregiving, with detrimental effects in the long term. These factors may be aggravated by dislocations brought on by the pandemic, including family separation and migration.

Containment measures adopted by many countries to prevent and halt the spread of the coronavirus have disrupted children's everyday lives, environs, routines and relationships. In many cases, girls are expected to take over a larger share of household duties, which can increase gender imbalances within the family. Moreover, some measures have interrupted reporting and referrals by child protection services, leaving many children adrift and even more



vulnerable to violence and abuse. However, a combination of policies and targeted interventions point towards a way forward in a time of difficult choices for children, families and governments.

Creating a web of support

Not surprisingly, the pandemic is disproportionately hurting vulnerable population groups, such as migrant workers and those employed in the informal economy, including children. For instance, when **Nepal** went into lockdown, 2,384 children from 66 brick kilns began their journeys home, sometimes travelling 300 kilometres to reach their families. Due to travel restrictions, some were stranded at their worksite without access to adequate food or water. Reintegration into their communities was delayed due to mandatory quarantine requirements in government-managed quarantine centres. In response, UNICEF is supporting community-based networks that ease the reintegration of these children back into their families and communities.

In **Bihar, India** about 20 per cent of returning migrants, some 600,000 individuals, were children, many travelling alone. Working in partnership with the state government, UNICEF is supporting the development of a database to register these children, identify their needs and connect them with appropriate services. Relief packages, including cash transfers, food, ration cards and basic hygiene supplies are being distributed. Child migrants are also enrolled in protection schemes, including access to support centres and counselling services.

In **India's** northern state of Uttar Pradesh, UNICEF's advocacy with the government has led to a temporary cash transfer to help offset COVID-19-related losses among daily wage earners and families of working children. It is expected to benefit nearly 2,000 children over the next six months. As an immediate response to the pandemic, **expanding social protection measures** that reach the most vulnerable must be a priority.

Building back better

This is a critical moment for the entire world, a time in which we must, as United Nations officials have repeatedly urged, "[build back better](#)".

Measures that strengthen livelihoods, improve nutrition and offer access to primary and secondary health care need to reach the most vulnerable children and their families. Governments also need to reactivate social protection networks and expand economic stimulus measures. Previous global economic crises taught [the importance of implementing](#) such measures in child-sensitive and gender-responsive ways in order to achieve sustainable impacts on well-being. Earlier crises also point to the risk of austerity policies following short-term expansionary fiscal policies. Targeting near-poor or newly poor informal workers and at-risk families and children in the social protection response is crucial to prevent their falling into poverty traps.



Rapid investments are needed to keep children learning and preparing to return to schools when they re-open, so they are not sidelined into work. Millions of children, especially those who lack computers and Internet connectivity, now lag behind their better-equipped peers as a result of pandemic-related school closures. As schools slowly re-open, every child should have the opportunity to get an education. To keep children in school and out of the labour market, catch-up measures should be instituted for those left behind by the digital divide or the pandemic. ‘Second chance’ programmes, remedial learning and ‘teaching at the right level’ initiatives for children who have been released from work they started during pandemic-related closures can help prevent them from dropping out and re-engaging in child labour. Mauritania, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Singapore have been proactive in [preparing remedial courses](#).

Upholding fundamental principles and rights

During the lockdowns, labour monitoring and inspections were drastically reduced. As economic activity gradually restarts, governments need to reinstitute oversight measures to be sure that the reopening of businesses—both formal and informal—does not compromise the health, rights and access to justice for the [88 million employed](#) adolescents of legal working age (15 to 17 years old). Many businesses in the formal sector have devised return-to-work policies. The informal sector should do so as well, with governments providing guidelines in sync with international labour standards.

Communities are well-positioned to assist governments by monitoring local businesses for compliance. Local groups can also take the lead in supporting initiatives to support education and to change harmful social norms that perpetuate child labour. Trained social workers have vital roles to play in mitigating the impact of the crisis, from identifying vulnerable children and families to linking them with available health, education and child and social protection services.

As governments seek to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, upholding children’s rights and following fundamental workplace principles have never been more urgent. These are levers that can transform this crisis into an opportunity for children as they transition to adulthood. Such measures will also help build stronger, more resilient families, communities, societies and economies and prevent the coronavirus from entrenching intergenerational poverty.

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