



# Addressing Child Labour

*Lessons Learned from  
ChildFund Interventions*

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ChildFund<sup>®</sup>  
Alliance

## About ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations operating in 70 countries. We help nearly 23 million children and their families overcome poverty and the underlying conditions that prevent children from achieving their full potential. Members promote children's rights; work to end violence and exploitation against children; and provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children. We work in partnership with children, families and their communities to transform the lives of children and to create lasting change.

## Members of ChildFund Alliance

Barnfonden (Sweden)  
ChildFund Australia  
ChildFund Deutschland  
ChildFund International  
ChildFund Ireland  
ChildFund Japan

ChildFund Korea  
ChildFund New Zealand  
Children Believe (Canada)  
Educo (Spain)  
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## Addressing Child Labour

### Lessons Learned from ChildFund Interventions

2021 is designated as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, as unanimously adopted in a UN General Assembly resolution in 2019 and launched by the International Labour Organization and the Alliance 8.7<sup>1</sup>. Currently, there is strong momentum to accelerate global efforts in the fight against child labour; exchange ideas on good practices and learnings; and boost cooperation and multi-stakeholders' actions and commitment.

This paper presents a summary of exchanges among ChildFund Alliance members during a child labour webinar conducted in January 2021. Representatives from four program regions/countries—Africa, Bangladesh, Philippines and Paraguay—presented their work on child labour, including how they adapted their programming

as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This synopsis of lessons learned demonstrates the importance of a multi-layered, holistic approach when addressing this harmful work that deprives children of their childhood.

**What is Child Labour?** As defined by the ILO, child labour is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and psychological development.

**Worst forms of child labour include forced labour**, recruitment into armed groups, trafficking for exploitation, sexual exploitation, illicit work or hazardous work. Hazardous labour, its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health and safety or morals of children.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_766351/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_766351/lang--en/index.htm)



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While child labour has decreased over the past 15 years, a total of 152 million children—64 million girls and 88 million boys—are still engaged in child labour globally (see graph)<sup>2</sup>. Nearly half, or 73 million children are involved in hazardous work, and among them, an increasing number are younger children<sup>3</sup>.

The COVID-19 crisis is likely to drastically reverse progress toward reducing child labour. In fact, there is already evidence COVID-19 is causing an increase in child labour, especially the worst forms<sup>4</sup>, including in countries where ChildFund has a presence.



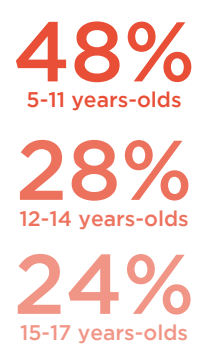
### METRICS

- 152 million were in child labour
- Of which, 73 million were in hazardous work

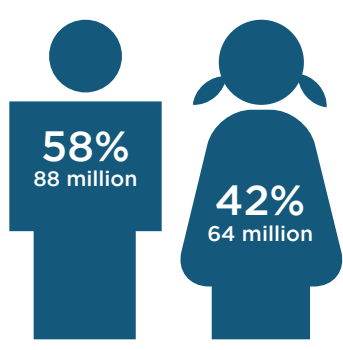
Statistics courtesy:  
**Global ILO estimates report, 2017<sup>2</sup>**

## OF THE 152 MILLION CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR

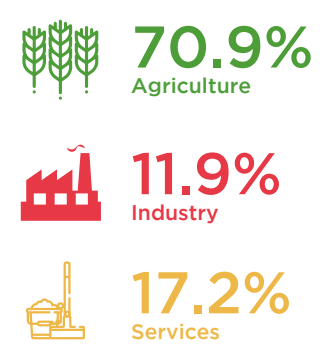
### AGE PROFILE



### GENDER



### ECONOMIC ACTIVITY



<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_575479/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=The%202017%20Global%20Estimates%20of,and%20state%2Dimposed%20forced%20labour.](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=The%202017%20Global%20Estimates%20of,and%20state%2Dimposed%20forced%20labour.)

<sup>3</sup> Towards the urgent elimination of hazardous child labour, ILO, 2018. [https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_IPEC\\_PUB\\_30315/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_30315/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/26/covid-19-pandemic-fueling-child-labor#>; UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/covid-19-and-child-labour-2020>; and ILO, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms\\_747421.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_747421.pdf)

# Addressing Child Labour

Child labour is a form of violence and exploitation which, depending on scale and context, significantly interferes with child rights: their right to protection, right to health, right to education and right to leisure<sup>5</sup>. It is different from some forms of economic employment which, if undertaken in proper conditions and without prejudice to other child rights, can support adolescents in gaining skills and confidence, and contribute to wider projects within the community and society.

Risks depend on the nature and conditions of the work, the number of hours worked, the developmental stage of children, and the level of interference with their ability to exercise other rights, such as the right to education. Different types of work have implications for children's safety, including isolation and lack of safe relationships with peers or trusted adults.

Beyond the physical, psychological and sexual violence that child labour can introduce to children's lives, children also can be exposed to work-injuries or impairments, illnesses, and even death. Worldwide, the ILO estimates some 22,000 children are killed at work every year, while the numbers of those injured or made ill because of their work are not known<sup>6</sup>. Because child labour

## CHILD LABOUR MAIN RISKS FACTORS

- Lack of knowledge or awareness in communities on child rights, risks of child labour;
- Presence of harmful practices and traditions, such as debt bondage;
- Lack of resources and limited access to decent work opportunities;
- Weak child protection and social protection systems, weak social dialogue;
- Weak adaptation of laws to international standards and insufficient implementation and enforcement;
- Absence of birth certificates;
- Lack of enabling and safe educational environment;
- Economic gain from the employers or traffickers, or any person benefiting from the work or exploitation.

is often undertaken in an informal way and in an informal sector, there often is a lack of visibility regarding the harms inflicted. This increases the vulnerability of children who work without access to minimum safety conditions, guaranteed working hours, or minimum wages.

## CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**Article 32:** States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

**Article 33:** States Parties shall take all appropriate measures [...] to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances [...] and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

**Article 34:** States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse [...].

**Article 35:** States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

**Article 36:** States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

<sup>5</sup> What is child labour? <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/WorstFormsofChildLabour/Hazardouschildlabour/lang--en/index.htm>

# Addressing Child Labour

Children and adolescents may not be in a position to claim their rights to decent conditions, or to claim their right to leisure, adequate education or vocational training which could enhance their skills and help them live the life they aspire to.

The consequence of child labour and exploitation on children's emotional and psychological status is also significant. For example, anxiety, mood disorders, low self-esteem and somatic complaints occur frequently as a result of violence suffered and the psychological pressure, which can be exacerbated when the children live with their employers.

Harm caused to children also has consequences on their families, and this has broader social and economic effects. Injuries or illnesses suffered in childhood may result in life-long consequences to children's physical and psychological status. They also can result in life-long healthcare costs, and hinder productivity of the future adult workforce.

Risk factors are very much affected by the COVID-19 crisis. This includes unprepared and unaccompanied migration, and in some instances, conflict. Children are more likely to be involved in child labour as a coping mechanism or to fall into the worst forms of child labour. Vulnerable families have lost income and their livelihoods during the pandemic, and the ILO anticipates the global health crisis will drive 66 million additional children into poverty<sup>7</sup>.

Other factors making children more vulnerable include possible separation from families due to illness or death, disruption of education, lack of access to protective services, and the increased use of the internet, often unsupervised, which places children at risk from online exploitation. COVID-19 is likely to reverse progress that has been made so far and to increase gender inequalities, stigma, and vulnerability among children involved in child labour.

## IMPORTANT PROVISIONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**ILO Convention 138 (1973) on the Minimum Age:** Ratified by 173 countries, it establishes 15 as the minimum age for work in general, and 18 for hazardous work.

**ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour:** In 2020 all 187 members of ILO ratified the convention to protect children from the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking.

**SDG 8, target 8.7:** Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.



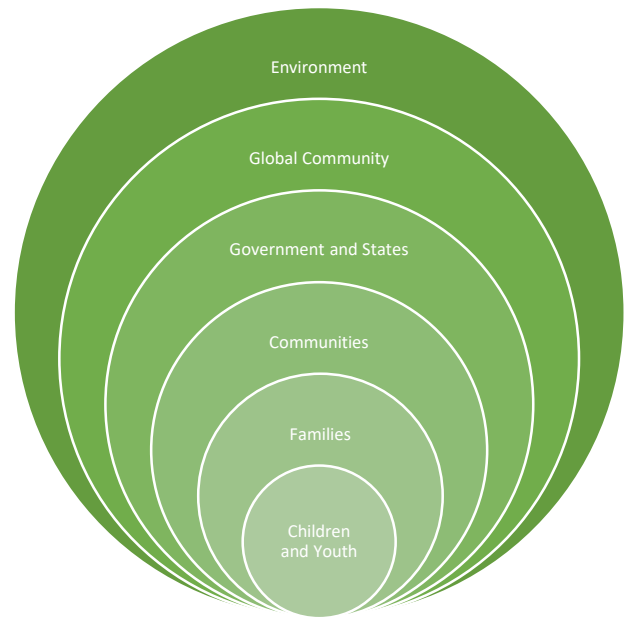
<sup>7</sup> COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_norm/@ipecc/documents/publication/wcms\\_745287.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_745287.pdf)

# Addressing Child Labour

The work examples provided by ChildFund members show an approach that targets the various layers of the socio-ecological system.

Addressing each of the first four layers in turn, this paper describes effective strategy examples used by ChildFund Alliance members in Asia, Africa and South America. The fifth layer, while not addressed in the learning webinar, includes influencing the Global Community. ChildFund's participation in networks such as Joining Forces, Alliance 8.7, and other partnerships is an important aspect of this layer.

The Global Partnership Alliance 8.7 is driving action towards reaching SDG Target 8.7, and 22 pathfinder countries and 230 partner organizations have committed to accelerate action, share knowledge and implement innovative solutions.



**Figure 1: ChildFund Alliance members' work on child labour demonstrates the importance of designing interventions that touch on multiple levels of the socio-ecological system, in line with the INSPIRE strategies.**





## Case Studies

### Children and Youth

**Children addressing the issue and providing peer support:** The African Movement of Working Children and Youth engages with a network of youth educators and activists present in 28 African countries.

Groups formed at the community level work with children and youth in schools, using school clubs as a key avenue to engage youth. They also work with children and youth in the community to advocate for the protection of children and youth. Fourteen-year-old Shazmina from Tanzania explains: “We are trying to improve the working conditions of children and youth, prevent [child labour] by developing grassroots groups, creating clubs at school and also in society – calling for meetings or [distributing] posters, telling people to do this. ... We try to empower [children involved in child labour] that although you are working, work is not everything you can do in life. We give them advice; we give them support and propose alternatives.”

Fifteen-year-old Mikiyas from Ethiopia described the particular risks to children involved in child labour during COVID-19. Without sanitation facilities and income, they cannot protect themselves from the virus. The Ethiopian arm of African Movement of Working Children and Youth (supported by ENDA Jeunesse-Action, one of Educo’s partners in the African region) ensured children were equipped with face masks, hand sanitizer and soap. Children involved

“ Most of the children now are working because they need to help their families, and as schools are opening children can’t go to school because they can’t afford to go to school or some of them have been abandoned. Parents can’t give children what they need because COVID-19 has affected their jobs, so the children themselves try to afford. COVID-19 has really brought an indecent advantage to the children. ”

**Shazmina, 14, Tanzania**

*Member of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth*

“ Previously I didn’t study. I work as a domestic worker. Washing dishes, cleaning furniture and others. [...] I had to work simultaneously in two different households. I faced different problems. [...] I like [ODHIKAR] school. I can study here. Teachers take good care of us. I can play ceram, chess and other games. We also have free medical support. [...] I told those who work in different households not to work in households and I also suggested them to go to school. ”

**Anita, Class 4, Bangladesh**

*ODHIKAR school*





## Case Studies

in child labour are also being supported with reintegration in the educational system or with technical and vocational training opportunities.

**Reintegration into education:** In Bangladesh, the ODHIKAR project<sup>8</sup> works with children involved in child labour and supports their reintegration into education. There are several reasons why child labour is widespread in Bangladesh, beyond a lack of resources. Bangladesh society as a whole accepts child labour, which in turn proliferates its continued existence, despite the fact the Bangladesh government has adopted a number of child labour related policies and laws.

There are gaps, however, in these policies and laws and inconsistencies with international conventions. For instance, Bangladesh's Labour [Amendment] Act 2018 does not cover child labour in informal economies and therefore does not recognize the worst forms of child labour in informal economies. This means 95 percent of children involved in child labour fall outside the protection of these laws and policies.

With the ODHIKAR Project, ChildFund member Educo established three schools in the slum areas of Dhaka city, where a large number of children work in the domestic and transport sectors. These schools teach children basic

“ Before joining ODHIKAR school I was a Leguna (human hauler). [...] My employer used to scold me for silly mistakes. [...] I have seen the street drama organized by ODHIKAR project. I loved them. I learned which works are hazardous for children. [...] I would like to say to the parents “Send your children to school. Don't send your children to transport and domestic works. These jobs are very risky for children like us, so in this age we shouldn't do these jobs. ”

**Arif, Class 4, Bangladesh**

*ODHIKAR school*

education. Project staff has also been working with formal government and non-government schools to encourage them to reintegrate children and youth who have fallen out of the education system.

To date, 50 percent of the targeted working children have been fully withdrawn from workplaces and are enrolled in mainstream education. A few children participating in the project benefited from technical and vocational training and are preparing to establish their own jobs or businesses.

<sup>8</sup> This is an Educo project supported by ChildFund Korea, in association with the Eco Social Development Organization.



## Case Studies

### Families

In many countries and cultures, there is a general acceptance of child labour. Families rely upon income from children, and they do not recognize the value and importance of education for children, families, and communities.

**Parent education:** In the ODHIKAR project in Bangladesh, Educo established Community-based Child Labour Monitoring Committees. These Committees include local community leaders, religious leaders, teachers, employers and social workers. Through this structure, they are relying on people with influence within local communities to motivate parents, employers and children to withdraw—or not engage with—hazardous work. Monthly meetings are conducted to motivate parents to withdraw their children from work, to highlight the importance of education, and to emphasize how child labour can negatively impact children. Parents can share their opinions with other parents and with staff. Regular, direct communication between parents and the project team is an important part of this strategy.

**Advocacy and alliances:** The project also has a targeted advocacy campaign for improvement of laws and policies and to promote their proper

implementation—for instance, there is currently no law regarding domestic workers. Another important aspect of this strategy is forming linkages with like-minded alliances so advocacy efforts can be strengthened and be more impactful.



**Using social media:** The Building Capacity, Awareness, Advocacy and Programs Project (BuildCA2P), which works with CSOs in Mindanao, Philippines<sup>9</sup> is another good example of an approach that targets families and communities. BuildCA2P is a program of ChildFund International in the Philippines funded by the US Department of Labor (USDOL). As well as operating a website for the project, every Friday, live on Facebook, ChildFund Philippines releases an episode of Bata and Bida (Child's Best). These shows not only showcase children's talents and inspiring stories, but provide information on child labour, child protection, child health and parenting tips.

<sup>9</sup> BuildCA2P is in Bukidnon, Davao del Norte and North Cotabato of Mindanao province.



## Case Studies

### Communities

**Addressing child labour along the supply chain:** The BuildCA2P project in the Philippines supports three civil society organizations (CSOs) to target specific farming industries<sup>10</sup> by strengthening the capacity of these local CSOs to better understand and address child labour. In this way, they are able to locally influence the conditions of work in banana, coconut, corn and rice production. ChildFund Philippines partnered with Ateneo De Davao University (ADDU) to train the CSOs on research, particularly the mapping of child labourers in the supply chain of banana, corn, rice and coconut. The project team complemented ADDU by assisting the CSOs in developing a database to track child labourers and their situation. The database provides information on referral mechanisms to support government efforts aimed at ending child labour in these farming industries and along the entire supply chain.

**Empowering civil society organizations:** The CSOs are being trained to be advocates to influence policies and programs of the government and other sectors to address child labour. This includes training in advocacy planning, working with the media, developing information and communication materials and disseminating appropriate information to relevant audiences and other stakeholders. The technical partner of ChildFund, which trains the CSOs on advocacy, is Probe Media Foundation, Inc. Training on both research and advocacy has been delivered online since the COVID-19 outbreak. The project team



and Probe both coach the CSOs on how to effectively communicate messages to certain audiences and how to organise campaigns through social media about child labour and child work. This includes a call to action to end child labour.

The project team, together with the CSOs, participated in various events initiated by the government-led convergence in different provinces. This enabled the CSOs to introduce themselves to different stakeholders in the communities who might be potential partners to campaign with against child labour. Through the project team, the CSOs also trained in the implementation of small projects addressing the situation of child labourers and their families.

CSOs are expected to prepare proposals on how they will address child labour in their respective areas. The CSO projects may revolve around different interventions such as educational support, capacity building of the different mandated bodies in the locality to protect children, building livelihood security for the parents of child labourers, and promoting advocacy or informational campaigns to end child labour, among other activities.

<sup>10</sup> BuildCA2P is funded by the US Department of Labor with technical partners Ateneo de Davao University and Probe Media Foundation Inc. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/buildca2p-building-capacity-awareness-advocacy-and-programs-project>

# Case Studies

## Government and States

**Like-minded coalitions to hold governments accountable:** Children Believe, ChildFund's member operating in Paraguay, has been leading a coalition to coordinate 25 NGOs. The goal is to systematically advocate to the government to address, measure and be held accountable for ending child labour, among other critical issues that affect children in the country. The coalition, named the Front for Children and Adolescents<sup>11</sup> (the Front), includes the National Network of Children and Adolescents, which is integrated by child workers.

Every five years, during the presidential election processes, the Front advocates for the candidates to commit themselves to the so called "20 commitments in favour of childhood and adolescence" which the elected president ratifies in his first day of office during a public event. The fifteenth commitment on this list refers specifically to child labour. While the total package of commitments is supported by more than 250 indicators for measuring success, child labour is linked to eight of these indicators.

A diagnosis is made of what indicators the government has and what they need in order to make an objective monitoring of the compliance of the commitment. There were eight indicators identified, five of which follow:

- Social and monetary assistance to discourage child labour
- Technical and labour training for adolescents aged 15 to 17
- Children in unpaid domestic work
- Adolescents in the labour force, and
- Specific national strategy on the theme

The Front makes recommendations to the government to adopt and employ the indicators in order to be compliant. It also supports the preparation and implementation of a system for continuous reporting, so the next government can work with the same indicators and systems. These reports are provided in an annual



**President of Paraguay Mario Abdo Benítez (centre), Minister of Children and Adolescents Teresa Martínez (left) and Children Believe country director Jorge Méndez Rheineck (seated beside the President) sign the ratification of the 20 Commitments to Children and Adolescents.**

accountability event to children and civil society by the Ministry of Children and Adolescents. Public awareness of the reporting process is important in order to build an informed public who will expect such reports annually from government.

This approach has led to some concrete achievements, such as improved government accountability; increased institutionalization; enhanced awareness on public commitments, challenges and achievement; strengthened articulation work, and improved civil society and child participation in the public agenda.

### WAYS IN WHICH CHILDFUND PROGRAMS ADAPTED DURING COVID-19

- Consultation with local partners and CSOs to best adapt interventions.
- Special classes conducted online through mobile apps, or through home-based study groups regularly sitting in a suitable and safe place by maintaining social distance.
- Follow up of the children has been made on at least a weekly basis to check on progress and provide guidance.
- Provision of adapted education materials.
- Follow-up with the parents over the phone.
- Children involved in child labour were provided masks, hand sanitizers and soap.
- The most vulnerable families were provided with food.

<sup>11</sup> Front for Children and Adolescents: <https://childrenbelieve.ca/working-alongside-children-to-make-lasting-change/>



## Recommendations

### Recommendations at the NGO / CSO level:

1. Ensure children have a vital role to play. Empower them to raise awareness of issues concerning child labour and to provide peer support.
2. Sensitize parents and guardians to the risks around child labour and encourage them to realize the value of children's protection and education.
3. Engage in regular communication with parents to provide them an opportunity to bring issues forward so problems can be discussed and solutions can be identified.
4. Use social media safely and effectively to raise mass awareness and engage people.
5. Engage community leaders to promote children's protection and their education and to fight against child labour and exploitation. Establish or strengthen Community-based Child Labour Monitoring Committees (including working children) to monitor child labour situations at the local level, as well as to raise awareness and mobilize the community against child labour.
6. Work with employers—businesses, agriculture sector, and those employing domestic workers—to ensure they respect child rights, understand the issues, and provide safe work opportunities.
7. Offer children who are involved in child labour a chance for safe and inclusive education instead of, or around, their work. Do not expect that all child labourers can immediately re-enter school.
8. Consider introducing vocational training for adolescents in the fight against child labour. Adolescents are often more interested in enrolling in technical and vocational training to gain work skills. Going to school with younger children may not be the appropriate solution for them, for a variety of reasons. In addition, their parents often are more interested to see them involved in vocational training instead of schooling.
9. Advocate with other organizations, including children's groups, and issue clear policy requests to governments.

10. Leverage government measurement systems supported by data management tools that can be passed from one political cycle to the next to provide opportunities for learning and improvement of children's life and work conditions. These can be used to show child labour trends and to track progress towards government commitments, which should be reported to children, in a child-friendly manner.
11. Support the enhancement of global-level advocacy, which is enhanced when NGOs that are active in the space of ending child labour come together as a strong, unified, coherent voice. Together, propose clear policy asks of global leaders to eliminate harmful practices.

### Recommendations at the Government level:

1. Governments should strengthen social protection mechanisms to enhance the family's capacity to provide financial support and care to children.
2. Governments should create strategies to eliminate exploitative work assigned to vulnerable children.
3. Governments should ratify and domesticate ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and invest in raising awareness about laws protecting children from child labour.
4. Governments should create and enforce laws related to the protection of workers and define exploitative informal types of work.
5. Governments should adopt legislation combatting human rights abuses in global supply chains, including the use of child labour.
6. Governments should adopt legislation to criminalize trafficking in persons, in line with the definition used by the UN Protocol to Prevent and Punish the Trafficking in Persons;
7. Governments should sign or ratify relevant conventions and their Optional Protocols. The failure to ratify and implement the provisions of these international standards into domestic laws can lead to violations of the rights of children as enshrined in the UNCRC.



## Conclusions

In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, risk factors of child labour and forced labour are likely to be exacerbated. These risk factors include a lack of resources, limited access to decent work opportunities for people of legal working age, social marginalization and discrimination, lack of universal quality education, the prevalence of the informal economy, and weak social dialogue. This situation motivates us to continue working harder, and in collaboration with others, through a comprehensive approach. Our approach includes a strong emphasis on addressing the root causes and prevention, care and support of children involved in child labour—especially its worst forms—and children at risk.

Civil society plays a crucial role in addressing and eliminating child labour and harmful work. Children thrive when communities and civil society commit to protecting workers' rights; when strong child protection systems are in place; when education is accessible, valued and safe; and when age-inappropriate work is prevented.

ChildFund Alliance members are firmly engaged in fighting against and reducing child labour as

a form of violence and exploitation of children and adolescents. Across our various intervention countries, we are mobilizing and supporting children, communities, employers, civil society organizations, educational centers, and authorities to contribute to societies free from child labour where children can fully and happily develop.

Only through an open and efficient collaboration between various actors and sectors, and with an inclusive approach aimed at addressing various forms of discrimination including gender discrimination, will we be able to bring concrete changes to children and families' lives. Children and youth voices are crucial during the process: their voices need to be heard and their views considered.

Working at the various layers of the socio-ecological model leads to greater impact and increases the success and sustainability of the work we do, together with children and families. Our goal is that ChildFund initiatives and projects provide impetus to energize global efforts, to make children visible, and to build their potential while working collaboratively to end child labour, in all its forms.



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**Every child deserves to live a life free from violence.**

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