Child Labour and UNICEF in Action: Children at the Centre
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Introduction

Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school, exposes them to violence, and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Yet, this serious violation of human rights is not inevitable. Child labour is preventable through integrated approaches that simultaneously address poverty and inequity, improve access to and quality of education and mobilize public support for respecting children’s rights.

Worldwide, about 168 million children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in child labour, accounting for almost 11 per cent of all children.¹ The most recent figures, based on statistical evidence from UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, show a decline of about one third since 2000.

While that is positive news, progress is far too slow. The continued persistence of child labour poses a threat not only to the health and well being of children, but also to national economies and the achievement of global development goals.

Child labour is defined as work for which the child is too young – i.e., work done below the required minimum age. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes every child’s right, “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 that is likely to harm the child’s health or, “physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”² Other international instruments further define a child’s right to be protected from “the worst forms of child labour,” including recruitment in armed conflict, sexual exploitation and drug trafficking.³

Understanding the underlying causes of child labour and addressing their interconnectedness is the key premise behind the UNICEF prevention and response approach. Effective action against child labour must address the full range of vulnerabilities that children face, and must recognize that these wider concerns are not always adequately dealt with in existing response strategies. For example, the number of children begging or living on the streets cannot be addressed without also focusing on problems in the home or in schools that often force children onto the street. Likewise, a child who faces the risk of being trafficked for labour or sexual exploitation may also be in conflict with the law, experience violence in the home, be orphaned, or have a disability – creating additional vulnerabilities.

UNICEF and its partners work to strengthen legal and policy frameworks, enhance government and community-based structures and services, and engage with communities to promote positive social change.

Addressing child labour in the context of child protection: a systems approach

UNICEF and other child protection actors are increasingly moving away from small-scale, issue-specific projects in favour of a systems approach, with a strong focus on prevention.⁴ The goal of a "systems approach" is to create an environment where girls and boys are free from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from family, and where laws, services, behaviours and practices minimize vulnerability, address known risk factors, and strengthen the resilience of children.

The systems approach facilitates more systematic policy development and programming that considers the child, family and community as a whole. Better coordination of poverty reduction, social welfare, justice, labour, and education policies ensures cost-effectiveness and efficiency. A systems approach also addresses social drivers such as marginalization and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics.

The goal of a "systems approach” is to create an environment where girls and boys are free from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from family, and where laws, services, behaviours and practices minimize vulnerability, address known risk factors, and strengthen the resilience of children.

Teachers and others in the education system can be frontline supporters to protect children, alerting other actors (such as social workers) to situations where children display signs of distress or indicate that they work long hours. Other significant players include child welfare institutions, the health and justice sectors, religious leaders and faith-based communities.⁵

An effective child protection system includes:

- A robust legal and policy framework, including regulations and standards that comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as other international standards and good practices.
- Effective regulation and oversight to ensure standards are effectively implemented and to promote accountability.
- Services and service delivery mechanisms, comprising promotion, prevention and response mechanisms at institutional and structural levels.
- Collaboration and coordination, for example, between relevant government and non-governmental actors, between government ministries and departments, and between different sectors.
- Knowledge and data on child protection issues and good practices to inform evidence-based policy development.
- Human and financial resources, and management infrastructure (and capacities), including a skilled child protection workforce across all relevant sectors, able to respond and deliver services.

³ International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 defines the worst forms of child labour, to be prohibited to all persons under 18 years, as all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, by the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or pornographic performances; (d) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and (g) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.
⁴ The UNICEF 2008 Child Protection Strategy defines the aim of child protection as: “preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children,” which, “is essential to ensuring children’s rights to survival, development and well-being.”
⁵ The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, a multi-denominational initiative, is celebrated on Universal Children’s Day (20 November) by bringing together secular and faith-based organizations to work to end violence against children and address key child protection concerns. See dayofprayerandaction.org for more information.
As a child protection system reflects a society’s social norms, efforts aimed at strengthening such systems are heavily intertwined with those promoting social change to bring about an end to exploitation and violence against children. Evidence shows that a community’s beliefs, attitudes and practices shape the attitudes and practices of institutions, structures and services, and vice versa.

For example, new legislation to prevent child labour can contribute to positive changes in attitudes towards child labour and out-of-school children. Similarly, raising awareness on the harmful impacts of child labour can help challenge traditional assumptions. One example of a social norm that harms children is the commonly held belief that girls are better off working at home, which consequently denies them their right to an education simply because they are girls. Addressing this norm can positively influence girls’ education and help end their marginalization.

The UNICEF child labour programme in Nepal is part of the organization’s overall efforts to develop and strengthen a comprehensive child protection system in urban areas, laying the foundation for a comprehensive integrated response to children’s issues. Within the framework of Child Friendly Local Governance, district and municipality approaches to address child labour are co-funded by local government, development partners and the private sector in Nepal.

As a result of structures, mechanisms and services established in urban municipalities, more than 9,000 Nepalese children who had been in child labour and without family care, have been reunited with their families and provided with appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration services, such as rescue and emergency support (shelter, food, clothes and medical assistance), psychosocial counselling, mediation with parents and employers, and legal support.

After family reunification, the children received education or vocational training, and their families were provided with income-generating support. Similarly, over 10,000 children at risk of child labour and their families have been offered counselling, and livelihood and education support.

Girls are just one of the target groups that might benefit from interventions developed within the framework of a child protection system. For example, a programme designed to tackle child labour through addressing household poverty or providing educational services may often also be advantageous to indigenous children, children with disabilities, child refugees and migrants, unaccompanied and separated children, or children associated with armed forces and armed groups. A thorough analysis of each group’s risks will determine which parts of the system need to respond, and in what way.

Children have the power to play a significant role in preventing and responding to child labour. They are key actors in a systems approach and can give valuable insights into how they perceive their involvement and what they expect from governments and other stakeholders.

UNICEF, with government and civil society partners, developed a project in Burkina Faso to provide children working in mines and quarries with a comprehensive package of protection, education and socio-economic support. The project supported 15,000 child workers with schooling, vocational and literacy training in their communities, and many of their mothers were given support for income-generating activities. The project secured strong community ownership to ensure monitoring. As a consequence, a social safety net against child labour has been built by strengthening the local child protection system.

In 2009, the Department of Social Welfare in Tanzania, in collaboration with UNICEF, undertook a mapping and assessment of the child protection system in seven districts. The assessment found that structures for preventing and responding to child labour, violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect were weak or missing at the national, district and/or community levels. Systems for managing data and information were also found to be lacking.

Based on the findings, the Government of Tanzania and UNICEF have been supporting selected districts to model a strengthened child protection system, in line with legislative reform at the national level. The objective is to establish a national and sub-national child protection system that can effectively prevent and respond to cases of child labour and other protection challenges faced by children in a holistic and sustainable manner.

A Child Protection Information Management System has been developed as a critical part of systems strengthening. The system provides frontline workers with data, including information on child labour, for advocacy, planning and case management.

UNICEF Brazil supports the National Forum for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour (FNPETI), a multi-stakeholder initiative created in 1994. The Forum encompasses representatives of the government and justice systems, workers, employers, civil society organizations and international organizations. FNPETI conducts advocacy in the national Parliament and with public authorities, aimed at eliminating all forms of child labour. Public hearings, led by children and adolescents, are one of the key strategies of FNPETI to strengthen commitment from local, state and central government to implement policies and meet targets to eliminate child labour.

6 Recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups is documented by the Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict. For more information, see the 2009 Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005).
7 Key areas for a child protection systems approach to child labour

Several areas are of particular importance in a child protection systems approach, including legal reform, education, social protection, and the collection of data and information.

Promoting legal reform

Providing clear legislative guidance on the types and conditions of activities that should be considered child labour is essential for effective action. Legal reform also provides government with a mandate to ensure other contributing issues (e.g. poverty, violence, migration) are properly addressed.

In line with international standards, national legislation must prohibit child labour in all its forms. However, those same international standards recognize that laws cannot be viewed in isolation. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for “legislative, administrative, social and educational measures” on child labour, recognizing the need for a multi-dimensional approach. For effective application, laws should be accompanied by policy interventions that provide alternatives in the form of education and vocational training, as well as social protection measures that benefit children and families.

Laws rejecting child labour are also important to promote social change. Clear messages in legislation denouncing child labour and other child rights violations can contribute to positive transformations in social norms and public attitudes. Laws rejecting child labour are also an important tool to encourage and support social change.

Policy requirements for effective legislation

International Labour Organization Minimum Age Recommendation No. 146 (supplementing the Minimum Age Convention No. 138) suggests that policy measures may include:

- Adequate facilities for education and vocational orientation and training;
- Promotion of employment-oriented development in rural and urban areas;
- Extension of economic and social measures to alleviate poverty, and to ensure living family standards and income that make it unnecessary for children to work;
- Social security and family welfare measures aimed at ensuring child maintenance;
- Facilities for the protection and welfare of children and young persons.

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182 also provides significant detail concerning the policy and operational aspects in ending child labour. The Convention requires ratifying States to design and implement programmes of action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour as a priority and establish or designate appropriate mechanisms for monitoring implementation of the Convention. It also calls for time-bound measures for prevention; support for the removal of children from the worst forms of child labour and their rehabilitation; access to free basic education or vocational training for all children removed from the worst forms of child labour; identifying children at special risk; and accounting for the special situation of girls.

Promoting education

Child labour and education are inextricably linked. Child labour acts as a major barrier to education, affecting both attendance and performance in school. Improving access to quality education has great potential to reduce child labour. In this sense, the education system is an important ally of the child protection system.

An estimated 57 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2011. Almost half of all children currently out of school may never enrol, and the other half may either enter late or drop out early. There is a high probability that children who are out of school will be exposed to violence and exploitation in workplaces. Some of the 600 million children who are in school also work in violent and exploitative workplaces, increasing their risk of dropping out.

Global out-of-school children initiative

The Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) was launched in 2010 by UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics to accelerate efforts towards universal primary education by 2015. The goal of OOSCI is to achieve a breakthrough in reducing the number of out-of-school children as well as to address disparities in access and attendance. More specifically, the objectives are to:

- improve data and analysis on the issue of out-of-school children and develop comprehensive profiles of these children that reflect the multiple deprivations and disparities they face in relation to education;
- identify bottlenecks related to enhanced school participation; and
- develop context-appropriate policies and strategies for accelerating and scaling up enrolment and sustaining attendance rates for excluded and marginalized children, including children formerly or currently engaged in child labour. This includes recognition that children who have been working from an early age often need special ‘transitional’ support to enable them to catch up with their peers who have attended school regularly.

Although children are increasingly entering school, there has been little progress in reducing drop-out rates. According to UNESCO, at least 34 million children are likely to drop out before completing the last grade of primary education, translating into an early school leaving rate of 25 per cent – the same level as in 2000. These children are vulnerable to child labour and other factors affecting their well-being.

Weak school environments can lead to child labour. Children are more likely to drop out of school early if they are subjected to discrimination or violence – including playground fighting, verbal abuse, intimidation, humiliation, corporal punishment, sexual abuse, gang violence, or other forms of cruel and humiliating treatment – by their peers, teachers and other school staff.

The need to consider the prevalence of child labour as a significant impediment to improving education systems has not been sufficiently recognized by education policymakers. In a 2009 survey of 44 national education plans, only eight plans identified child labourers as a marginalized group and of these, only four plans offered specific strategies to reach them. Education strategies must increasingly ensure the enrolment and retention of excluded and vulnerable groups of children.

- ⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 32.
- ⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
- ⁹ Given their frequent interaction with children, teachers can be considered frontline workers of child protection.
Pakistan: Child labour and being out of school

In Pakistan, statistical work by the Global initiative on Out-of-School Children shows the relationship between child labour and being out of school. Some 15.9 per cent of children aged 10–14 in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh provinces are classified as being involved in child labour. Boys and girls are equally likely to be involved in child labour, mainly as unpaid family workers. Children engaged in economic activity work an average of 32.2 hours per week and those involved in household chores work an average of 24.3 hours per week. Children engaged in child labour are more likely than non-working children to be out of school, with only 9.9 percent reporting attendance at school.


Furthermore, it is essential to improve the quality of education. Of the roughly 650 million children of primary school age in the world today, up to 250 million are not learning to read or write, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. Improving learning is a top priority to realize children’s right to education, and to realize the potential of education to break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Getting working children into school will require more flexible and responsive education systems, with improved learning environments. Primary education must be free and accessible to all, including those who were formerly labouring. Schools have to be safe and inclusive, and provide child-friendly, high-quality education.

Of course, education alone is not enough. Getting children out of work and into school also requires broader changes in public policy to empower families to choose education over exploitative labour. This entails addressing social and economic disparities through social protection, livelihoods assistance and access to social services, as well as tackling harmful social norms that uphold child labour through awareness raising and advocacy.

Social protection

Child labour is largely driven by vulnerabilities caused by poverty and deprivation. Progress to eliminate child labour is therefore closely linked to reducing these vulnerabilities, mitigating economic shocks, and providing families with social protection and an adequate level of regular income.

UNICEF defines social protection as: the set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation. This includes programmes such as social transfers, social health insurance, social support services, family leave policy and accessible child care. Well-functioning social protection systems can contribute to addressing some of the underlying causes of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children.14

One particularly effective solution is known as “social transfers”. These are regular, reliable and direct transfers in cash and/or in-kind to individuals or households. Social transfers aim to protect recipients from being affected by economic shocks and to support the accumulation of human, productive and financial assets. Social transfers can positively influence child labour in a number of ways, including through increased income, enhanced access to schooling and health services, and improved reallocation of household labour and time.

Evidence from a programme in Brazil shows that the average number of hours children worked decreased by 50 per cent in three states where a social transfer programme was implemented. Similarly, in indigenous areas in Panama, a conditional cash transfer programme called Red de Oportunidades, led to a nearly 16 per cent reduction in child labour among children aged 12–15 years and to a nearly 8 per cent increase in elementary school enrolment.15 In Pakistan, the Female School Stipend Programme resulted in a decline in girls’ labour force participation of 4 to 5 per cent.16

The impacts of social transfers on child labour differ by region and by gender – with boys more likely to benefit than girls from reductions in child labour. This may be explained by the fact that in many studies on the effectiveness of social transfers, household chores – which are predominantly done by girls – were not included in the definition of child labour.17

The design features of social transfers can also have important implications on child labour. For example, the amount of the transfer influences the impact, presumably because higher transfers are more effective at replacing lost income from child labour and covering potential education costs.18 Linking transfers with other types of social-protection programmes and child protection systems can maximize positive outcomes. For example, social transfer programmes linked to extra-curricular activities have shown greater impacts in reducing child labour.19

However, social transfers can also produce unintended consequences on child labour. For example, a cash transfer scheme may provoke an increase in productive investments by beneficiary households, in turn creating new opportunities for children’s work within the family.20 Consequently, child-sensitive programmes must be carefully designed to achieve positive impacts on child labour.

Brazil: Cash transfer programme in action

The Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil (PETI) was introduced in Brazil in 1996 as a cash transfer programme aimed at reducing hazardous child labour. It was integrated into the social welfare programme known as Bolsa Família in 2003. The programme includes attendance at an after-school programme called Jornada Ampliada. Evidence showed that PETI reduced the number of hours children worked by around 50 per cent. The programme was more successful in reducing hazardous child labour among children working part-time, rather than among full-time child workers. PETI also reduced the probability of children being involved in hazardous or risky work.21

20 This example and similar ones are discussed in International Labour Organization, World report on child labour: Economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour, ILO, Geneva, April 2013.
Despite the promise of social transfers, they are insufficient by themselves to eliminate child labour altogether. Other responses in the field of social protection are required.22

For children, as well as for adults, access to services is crucial. While social transfers can be instrumental in reducing key barriers, there is another core set of social protection programmes that support service access at the community, household or individual level. For example, birth registration contributes to removing the barriers that prevent access to essential services, and protects social and economic rights. Social health services, social schemes or access to essential health services can protect families from health shocks and reduce reliance on child labour. Other examples include social protection for persons with disabilities, providing income security in old age, and unemployment benefits.

Another area where social protection measures can contribute to preventing and eliminating child labour is the provision of social support and care services to vulnerable families. This includes a range of measures that help to identify and respond to vulnerability and deprivation, particularly at the child and household level. Examples include family-based care, family support services and home-based care. These services help reduce social vulnerability and exclusion, strengthen resilience and capacity to cope with and overcome shocks and strains, and link children, women and families to existing programmes and services. Social support is often overlooked, but it is critical in addressing the interaction between social and economic vulnerability.

Data needs and challenges

Efforts to collect statistics on child labour have long been undermined by the absence of an internationally accepted operational definition of child labour. While legal standards have been developed and used to define the problem and the underlying concepts, the translation of these legal frameworks into operational definitions for measurement has been the subject of considerable debate and disagreement. This has often led to the use of different indicators and measurement tools, and the publication of inconsistent and incomparable estimates. As leading organizations for the collection of data on child labour, UNICEF and ILO collaborate on harmonizing survey modules for use in the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and the surveys carried out by the ILO Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC).

MICS surveys collect data on a wide range of topics. The questionnaires are modular tools that can be adapted to each country’s particular needs.23 Data on child labour have been collected in MICS since 2000 in more than 50 surveys through a standard module questionnaire. A standard definition of child labour was also used to calculate the prevalence of child labour across countries. In 2010, following consultations with ILO, the standard MICS questionnaire was carefully revised to make it consistent with currently available international standards.24 SIMPOC questionnaires were developed for use in a variety of data collection methods, including in stand-alone household-based child labour surveys and as separate modules in other household-based surveys. The model child labour questionnaire is based on ILO Conventions 138 and 182 and covers 5- to 17-year-olds. However, SIMPOC surveys calculate estimates on the basis of definitions existing in the national legislation of each country, which may vary across countries and result in diverging estimates.

UNICEF and ILO continue to work together to improve the comparability of estimates produced by countries implementing MICS and SIMPOC surveys. For example, with support from the joint project ‘Understanding Children’s Work’,25 UNICEF and ILO have been working recently to overcome some of the challenges that still affect the production of statistics on child labour by harmonizing tools and methods to collect data and produce estimates.

In 2008, the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) adopted the Resolution concerning statistics of child labour.26 The Resolution sets standards for the collection and analysis of data on child labour and calls upon all countries to develop a system to collect child labour statistics. The Resolution also confirms the point of view promoted by UNICEF that, in addition to economic activities, any type of work undertaken by children should be considered in the measurement of child labour, including unpaid household chores. This revised view of the different productive activities by children reflects the Resolution concerning the measurement of working time, which was also adopted at the 18th ICLS.27

Analysis of available data shows that child labour estimates can indeed be very sensitive to the inclusion of Unpaid Household Services (UHS), particularly for girls, whose activities may otherwise not be captured in child labour measurements. Accordingly, there is a need to develop a global standard to capture the exploitation of children in household chores and an operational definition for UHS. While the Resolution sets the threshold for economic activities at 14 or more hours during the week for children aged 12 to 14 years, it does not specify precise thresholds for UHS due to a lack of evidence that would support such a threshold. Recently, UNICEF and ILO have conducted data analyses to support the establishment of a threshold for the inclusion of UHS in the measurement of child labour.28

Many knowledge gaps continue to affect the field of child labour. For example, little is known about the conditions under which children work, including their exposure to risks in the workplace. Little is also known about the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking and forced labour of children or children’s involvement in illegal activities. The lack of reliable information on the magnitude of such phenomena continues to affect programmatic and advocacy efforts, and will remain a priority for UNICEF and its partners.

Violence against children in places of work – a special area of concern

In addition to addressing child labour through policy interventions, the question of violence against children in places of work deserves special consideration. Violence affects many millions of children who are working, both legally and illegally. Violence against children and child labour are closely related as violence acts as both an aggravating circumstance for children in child labour, and as a ‘push’ factor towards child labour. Violence in the home, at school or in institutions, for example, can drive children to run away and become vulnerable to child labour. Work becomes a way to survive, even in extremely exploitative forms such as sexual exploitation, recruitment by gangs, armed groups and armed forces, forced labour, and trafficking.

While the worst forms of child labour are violent acts themselves, violence permeates other forms of child labour and even legitimate forms of labour for children of working age. In these instances, violence is frequently used to coerce children to work, to keep them in servitude, and to control them within the workplace. Children also often face violence from co-workers.²⁹

The 2006 Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children (A/61/299) noted that, “of all the settings where children are exposed to violence, the workplace is among the most difficult to address.” The many challenges concerning data collection on violence include the hidden nature of the phenomenon, the formulation of appropriate and understandable questions, the type of respondents, and the fear of reprisals for giving information.

Evidence on violence against children in child labour

A 2008 working paper³⁰ by a joint UNICEF/ILO/World Bank project called ‘Understanding Children’s Work’ provides a comparative analysis based on preliminary evidence from Colombia, El Salvador, Cambodia and Ecuador.

The paper shows that older child workers are more likely to be mistreated than younger workers. Although in absolute numbers, abuse is found to be more prevalent in urban areas, most mistreated child workers work in agriculture. Child workers are more likely to encounter violence when working outside of the family. Even self-employed child workers are subject to violence, indicating that abuse is widespread.

Furthermore, the paper revealed a heightened risk of mistreatment for children performing household chores, in the form of corporal or verbal punishment in domestic settings. The study also found that a large proportion of children experience abuse both in the workplace and at school.

Prevention and response to violence against children in domestic work

Children working in domestic settings are highly vulnerable to violence and abuse. Indeed, the hidden nature of child domestic labour makes monitoring and enforcement very difficult. Girls in domestic work far outnumber boys, although boys also represent significant numbers and face similar risks and vulnerabilities. The ILO estimates there are some 15.5 million children in domestic work; 11.3 million of them are girls.³¹

Research shows that many guardians and employers frequently physically punish child domestic workers, or shout at them for not doing their work quickly enough, for breaking crockery or pottery, or for failing to account for the revenues from sales. Punishment can also take the form of deprivations, including barring the child from watching television or withholding food.³²

While the issue of sexual abuse of child domestic workers has received some attention recently, it remains an under-explored subject because of its sensitivity, and because of moral discourses and stigma surrounding girls’ sexuality and sexual abuse, including while working on household chores.

Some countries still exclude domestic work from legislation, based on the flawed notion that domestic workers are simply ‘helpers’ who do not need protection. Other countries have prohibited all domestic work by children under 18 as a hazardous form of labour. Though the latter approach may respond to violence and other risks many child domestic workers face, it may not be realistic in all settings and may further drive the practice into obscurity.

Effective programming requires the involvement of child domestic workers themselves, not only in consultations, but also as advocates who speak from their own experience, and as peer educators in the context of training. Importantly, in addition to involving children themselves, rigorous registration and monitoring programmes are needed to prevent and reduce abusive situations.

Efforts to protect children in domestic work from violence and other forms of abuse have been strengthened by recent improvements in the international legal framework. Adopted in 2011, ILO Convention No. 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers entered into force in September 2013. The Convention requires that States shall set a minimum age for domestic workers consistent with the provisions of ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182, and not lower than the minimum age established by national laws and regulations for workers in general.

The Convention also requires States parties to take measures to ensure that work performed by domestic workers who are under 18 and above the minimum age of employment does not deprive them of compulsory education, or interfere with further education or vocational training opportunities. Recommendation No. 201, which accompanies and reinforces the Convention, calls for the identification, prohibition and elimination of hazardous domestic work by children, and for the implementation of mechanisms to monitor children in domestic work.

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²⁹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Toward a World Free from Violence: Global Survey on Violence against Children, SRSG on Violence Against Children, October 2013.
Engaging the business sector in supporting child protection

Companies and children interact on a daily basis. In some cases, children can be workers in factories and fields. In other cases, the interactions are more indirect – for example, children might be family members of employees, or community members in neighbourhoods where businesses operate.

Because of these constant interactions, the private sector has enormous power to protect children from harm and to improve their lives. This can be done at many different levels, including the way in which companies operate facilities, develop and market products, provide services, or exert influence on economic and social development. Yet at the same time, businesses also have the power to disregard or even endanger the interests of children, leaving them vulnerable, invisible and voiceless.

As companies increasingly assert strong and public positions on corporate social responsibility, children’s rights must be at the centre of the conversation and be seen as a relevant business mandate. The private sector has an active role to play in any child protection system that takes a holistic approach to child well-being.

The children’s rights and business principles

Developed by UNICEF, the United Nations Global Compact and Save the Children in 2012, the Children’s Rights and Business Principles explore how businesses can respect and support children’s rights in the workplace, marketplace and community. The Principles provide a child rights lens to the global standard on the independent responsibility of all businesses to respect human rights, as established by the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Each Principle defines actions that businesses can take to fulfill their corporate responsibility to respect children’s rights. The Principles also describe how businesses can take the extra step and make a corporate commitment to more broadly support children’s rights.

The Principles are founded on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and are intended to highlight the specific contexts in which companies can create positive or negative impacts on children. The Principles are informed by ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 and elaborate on existing standards for business, such as the United Nations Global Compact’s ‘Ten Principles’. UNICEF has developed a set of tools to provide guidance to business for the implementation of the Principles and to support companies in integrating children’s rights considerations into their policies and processes. For example, Hennes & Mauritz, the global fashion retailer better known as H&M, in its corporate statement on human rights, states that ‘H&M’s approach to its business operations is informed by the ILO International Labour Organisation’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Children’s Rights and Business Principles, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the United Nations Global Compact, to which we are signatories ... To make sure that communication, marketing and product design do not have a negative effect on children’s rights, H&M has special guidelines for the advertising of children’s concepts and pays particular attention to child safety throughout all stages of production.’

 IKEA: Integrated approach to child labour

IKEA, the world’s largest furniture retailer, has declared its dedication to supporting the rights of children in an integrated manner. The ‘IKEA way on preventing child labour’ – the company’s code of conduct – is based on the explicit premise that ‘all actions shall be in the best interests of the child’. It includes an emphasis on preventive measures (especially training of co-workers, suppliers, and sub-contractors), unannounced third party inspections of suppliers and subcontractors, and clear procedures when child labour is discovered (putting the supplier on probation, halting orders and training staff).

Through its foundation, IKEA funds holistic, long term programmes addressing children’s fundamental needs across South East Asia and Africa, with the aim of creating substantial and lasting change and enabling them to take charge of their own future.

In partnership with UNICEF and Save the Children, the IKEA Foundation supports education and child protection projects aimed at addressing the root causes of child labour and promoting quality education for children aged 6 to 14, benefiting over 10 million children in India and Pakistan. Activities include raising awareness and mobilizing rural communities to protect the rights of all children and support their education, as well as ensuring access to quality education by supporting child-friendly teaching methods to facilitate better learning levels and retain children in schools.

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Despite concerted efforts, child labour remains a challenge for many businesses that rely on complex global supply chains and source from areas with significant informal economies. Increasingly, companies are starting to use their influence to go beyond prohibiting the use of child labour by their own suppliers, realizing that eliminating child labour requires addressing root causes, including high levels of unemployment, limited access to free education and inadequate law enforcement.

Businesses can commit to addressing the root causes of child labour by, for example, advocating for decent work and minimum school-leaving age legislation, supporting education and women’s empowerment projects, and promoting child poverty eradication initiatives.

The role of UNICEF

To prevent child labour, the UNICEF child protection strategy calls for concerted and sustained efforts by multiple stakeholders:

- **With international partners –** UNICEF, United Nations organizations and other child protection actors will promote and address child labour in the context of child protection strategies that consider the full range of vulnerabilities and protection concerns of the child.

- **With national governments –** UNICEF will work to strengthen the effective application of national legal frameworks and promote regulation of working conditions for children old enough to work. At the policy level, UNICEF will assist governments to identify types and conditions of work to be prohibited for persons under 18; promote social norms and public attitudes that reject child labour; provide support to child workers and their families and promote decent youth employment and decent work conditions for adult family members; include child labour concerns in national education plans to ensure that children at risk of falling victim to child labour or trapped in it have access to meaningful schooling opportunities; and make social protection systems ‘child-sensitive’, so that the impact of social protection instruments on child labour is carefully considered and monitored.

- **With international donors –** Resource partners can support this work by increasing investments in child protection and channeling funding to programmes that support the child protection systems approach. Other areas of support include: developing social security systems that are child-sensitive, and mainstreaming child labour concerns in the operations of global initiatives on education, with a particular focus on out-of-school children.

- **With the private sector –** UNICEF will bolster its partnership with businesses to promote actions that fulfill their corporate responsibility to respect children’s rights and support young workers in the workplace, in line with the Children’s Rights and Business Principles. UNICEF will also encourage the prohibition of the use of underage workers in supply chains, support programmes that contribute to the elimination of child labour and promote education and sustainable solutions to address the root causes of child labour.

- **With civil society –** UNICEF will continue its efforts to support a holistic child protection approach to child labour, contribute to the evidence base on child labour through research and data collection and advocate with all stakeholders to end child labour.

Brazil: private sector partnerships to raise awareness and promote social change

UNICEF Brazil works in partnership with the private sector on efforts to end child labour, including a campaign promoted by Fundação Telefônica, UNICEF and ILO.

Started in 2012, the campaign aims to give visibility to the issue of child labour and safe work for young people, working through three pillars: Acknowledge, Ask and Participate. Celebrities such as Lazaro Ramos, an actor and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, participate in the campaign, helping to mobilize Brazilians to support the fight against child labour. In the first phase of the campaign, 1 million people were reached through different activities and an additional 25 million through online social networks.

The impacts of child labour

Child labour can lead to lifelong health and educational hardships, severely restricting children’s abilities to develop fully. Children who work instead of attending school are often vulnerable to violence and exploitation, and face a higher risk of becoming victims of trafficking and traditional crimes. Child labour can also limit children’s ability to enjoy their rights and participate in society.


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Afghanistan, 2011

© UNICEF/NYHQ2013-0704/Giovanni Diffidenti

Syrian Arab Republic, 2013
Looking ahead

Certain global development initiatives, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All and the Global Partnership for Education have made a significant impact on programmes aimed at preventing and eliminating child labour. Since the MDGs were adopted, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty globally has been halved, and between 2000 and 2011 the number of children out of school has declined by almost half – from 102 million to 57 million. As leaders discuss the global development goals that will follow the MDGs, there is widespread anticipation that this momentum will be sustained. At the same time, there is a strong call for leaders to take on issues that were left out of the MDGs – notably issues of human security and child protection.

Thanks to concrete national development goals and political commitment to implement policies in order to meet the MDGs, a climate has been created whereby investments in education, social protection and human development are no longer considered far-fetched or unachievable. Targets set by other major international actors that support the elimination of child labour further aid the positive climate. For example, the World Bank is galvanizing international and national support around two goals: virtually ending extreme poverty in a generation, and pushing for greater equity. A new ‘Shared Prosperity Indicator’ will be used to measure income growth at the bottom 40 per cent in each country and promote national measures to ensure that economic growth translates into progress for the poorest. The International Labour Organization promotes a strategy for the extension of social security aimed at establishing and maintaining basic social protection floors as a fundamental element of national social security systems.

While progress to date has been slow, UNICEF believes that these converging global development targets provide fertile ground for accelerating progress to eliminate child labour. Looking ahead, UNICEF will pursue comprehensive child protection interventions in countries where child labour is prevalent in order to accelerate the elimination of child labour, and provide sustainable solutions to ensure its effective prevention.

Child labour is everyone’s responsibility. Neither poverty nor inequitably distributed benefits of economic growth justify inaction, or worse, apathy, in addressing this violation of children’s rights. UNICEF and others are committed to placing children themselves at the centre of all efforts to prevent child labour and to assist victims of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. This approach, backed by an effective legal framework, supports interventions that benefit families and communities, and works to improve the quality of schools.

Children must be empowered as agents of change, according to their evolving capacities. At the same time, state actors need to prioritize children’s protection from hazards and harms. Effective action against child labour means that families, governments, faith-based organizations, community leaders and change-makers, industry and children themselves engage – with urgency – to make the protection of children a priority.

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Annex: the Convention on the Rights of the Child
The international legal basis for holistic child protection

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by 193 Member States, is the most widely and rapidly ratified human rights treaty in history. The CRC is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – for children everywhere and without discrimination. It spells out a child’s right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

The CRC comprises 54 articles that set minimum and legally binding standards for all children and apply equally to all children, from the most privileged to the most excluded and impoverished, including stateless children and those denied birth registration and access to citizenship.

To further protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse, two Optional Protocols to the CRC were adopted in 2000: on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The obligations in the Optional Protocols may be more demanding than those in the CRC and are not automatically binding on States that have ratified the original treaty. Nonetheless, they are increasingly accepted as an international normative standard and enhance the protective environment for children.

More recently, in 2011, a third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure was adopted, entering into force on 14 April 2014 following the 10th ratification.

To fulfil their obligations as States parties to the Convention, national governments are required to take “all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention” (article 4). Measures for implementation therefore encompass establishing legislation, adopting public policy, and allocating adequate financial resources.

While government has the primary responsibility for protecting and fulfilling children’s rights, other actors with a role in children’s lives – including parents, teachers, institutions and businesses – are also accountable to children for protecting their rights.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2011-1451/Noah Friedman-Rudovsky - Bolivia, 2011. German Tumpanillo, 13, and his 7-year-old sister, Rosaleni, carry sugar cane stalks for planting, in a field near the village of San Juan del Carmen.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2011-0217/Sebastian Rich - Argentina, 2011. Five-year-old Kiara makes a sale in a commuter train car in Buenos Aires, the capital. She has been working in the Subte, the city’s mass transit system, selling hairpins and other cheap goods, since she was three years old. A year ago, she broke her arm when it was caught in a train door. She has also fallen onto the train tracks while playing.

© UNICEF/FAO2009-0980/Shahzad Noorani - Afghanistan, 2009. Zahra, 11, wearing rubber gloves, makes mounds of cakes from cattle dung and straw inside her home in Zargaran Village in Bamyan Valley in the central Bamyan Province, Afghanistan. Zahra, an ethnic Hazara, spends most of her day caring for her younger siblings, weaving carpets and doing other household chores. She is in Grade 6 at a UNICEF-supported school located about a kilometer from her home. “I want to be a teacher when I grow up. Afghanistan needs literacy,” she says.

© UNICEF/BANA2011-01527/NASER SIDDIQUE - Bangladesh, 2011. Anik, 14, works in a metal workshop, where he cuts metal pipes for a living at Hawker Market, Kothai Khana, Barsat. It is hazardous work for children of his age. The owner of the workshop gives him a chance to go to the Basic Education Centre supported by UNICEF, in between his work.


© UNICEF/FAO2010-08382/Chandri Asther - Bangladesh, 2010. “Education is not a privilege, it is our right. But Prithi, 11, works at a tobacco (bidis) factory and is deprived of that right. If we can ensure that girls like Prithi get an education, our country will have a better future.” Photo and quote by Chandri Asther, 14, Barsat, Bangladesh, 2010. This photograph is a sample from the exhibition and book “Living in the Urban Jungle” produced by 20 working children from urban Bangladesh as part of a UNICEF photography training project in partnership with DKIK gallery and the ‘Tilerk’ Group.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2011-0768/Oliver Asselin - Sierra Leone, 2011. Children break stones at a quarry near the town of Makeni, in Bombali District, Sierra Leone.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2012-1665/Marco Dominio - Peru, 2012. Children attend a math class at the UNICEF-supported Francisco Bolognesi School in Ventanilla District. The district includes a town built on sand dunes that is inhabited by poor families.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2011-2402/Giacomo Pirozzi - Philippines, 2011. Jenny Rose, 9, sells candles to people in a passing car, near the historic Pardo Parish Church, a major tourist attraction in Cebu City. By selling candles to tourists and other visitors to the church, she earns about 60 pesos ($3.81) a day to help her mother support the family; her father is in prison.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2012-0561/D Oliver Asselin - Liberia, 2012. Jenn John- son smiles after receiving a monthly cash disbursement under the UNICEF-supported Social Cash Transfer Programme, in Julijah Village in Bomi County. The pilot programme provides regular cash payments for vulnerable households, including those that are child-headed, or have peo- ple with disabilities or who are chronically ill or too old to work.


© UNICEF/NYHQ2010-0501/Giacomo Pirozzi - Niger, 2010. Close up of students holding hands in the school yard of a UNICEF supported primary school, in a suburb of Niamey, capital of Niger. The photo(s) in this image were participating in a advocacy publication, as part of a UNICEF supported campaign to reduce violence and abuse in schools.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2012-2563/Roger LeMoine - Haiti, 2012. Jacqueline Paul, 7, holds a cooking pot in Acra, a displacement camp for quake vic- tims in the Juvenat neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, the capital. Jacqueline is a ‘restavek’, a child given by impoverished parents to relatives or un- known families in the hope that she will have a better life. Many restaveks become domestic servants, are subjected to violence or abuse, and are kept out of school.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2012-1203/D Olivier Asselin - Côte d’Ivoire, 2012. Firmin Kouassi, 13, uses a machete to chop palm nuts off a branch, on his uncle’s cacao plantation, near the town of Moussadougou, in Bas-Sassandra Re- gion. He no longer attends school.


© UNICEF/NYHQ2013-0704/Giovanni Diffidenti - Syrian Arab Republic, 2013. Mohammed, 13, stands near petroleum barrels at the site where he works, which manufactures fuel, in the village of Khan Assabol, Idlib Governorate. In early September 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic’s con- flict, now well into its third year, had internally displaced some 4.25 million people. Over 2 million more – half of them children – have fled the country, seeking refuge in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

© UNICEF/BANA2012-0003/Aziy Thame – Myanmar, 2012. Aung Phyo Min works up to 16 hours in a tea shop with a low income and without holidays.

© UNICEF/NYHQ2013-0704/Giovanni Diffidenti - Syrian Arab Republic, 2013. Mohammed, 13, stands near petroleum barrels at the site where he works, which manufactures fuel, in the village of Khan Assabol, Idlib Governorate. In early September 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic’s con- flict, now well into its third year, had internally displaced some 4.25 million people. Over 2 million more – half of them children – have fled the country, seeking refuge in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

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