



KEY ASKS

2021 • SDG National Reviews

SDG TARGET 8.7: ELIMINATION OF THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR, INCLUDING RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Child labour deprives children of their childhood, and their future. Child labour is harmful to the physical, emotional, social or moral development of a child, and interferes with their schooling. Economic vulnerability associated with poverty, social inequality, armed conflict, and other risks and shocks, plays a key role in driving children to work. Child labour is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, reinforcing social inequality and discrimination. Worldwide, an estimated 152 million children are in child labour; almost half of which, 72 million, work in hazardous child labour.¹ In its worst forms, child labour can result in slavery, sexual as well as economic exploitation, permanent disability and death. Over the last two decades, the number of children engaged in child labour had declined by 94 million.² Now, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to slow or even reverse that progress and increases the risk of more children joining hazardous labour.³ As result, we might see an increase in child labour for the first time in 20 years.⁴

“Just as the combined effect of school closures and economic distress is likely to force some children to drop out of school, the same combination can be expected to compel children into child labour, to become child soldiers, and into child marriage in high-risk countries. Children without parental care are especially vulnerable to exploitation and other negative coping measures”.

--Policy Brief by the UN Secretary-General: [The Impact of COVID-19 on Children](#)

A “child associated with an armed force or armed group” refers to “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes.” It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities. The Secretary General’s report on children and armed conflict continues to confirm that children are being recruited in the thousands, by State and Non-State Actors and used as soldiers or for other exploitative purposes in armed conflicts around the world. During the first 15 years that the mechanism has been in place, more than 75,000 children were documented as subject to this worst form of child labour. Due to security constraints, and unwillingness of children and families to disclose child association, the total number of children associated with armed forces and groups is believed to be much higher. Nevertheless, it is hard to underestimate the levels of significant and sustained harm that children experience when associated. Between 2017 and 2019, UNICEF and partners assisted over 39,000 children by providing them with support of various kinds, including reintegrating with their families and communities. Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions have neither curtailed armed conflict nor the use of children.



KEY ASKS

- 1. Support enforcement of legal standards as fundamental to reduce child labour and child recruitment:** A 2017 study of 48 countries demonstrated strong correlation between ratification of international legal standards and reductions in child labour incidence.⁵
- 2. Promote an integrated approach to reducing child labour:** This involves strengthening parenting supports and addressing harmful social norms which perpetuate child labour, increasing access to quality education and supporting poverty reduction strategies, including social protection, which have been demonstrated to reduce child labour rates.
- 3. Engage and advocate with businesses and industry platforms** on approaches that tackle wider child rights deprivations as the root causes of child labour, help businesses understand how they can both assess the risk of child labour in their operations and supply chains and integrate results into company actions and strategy; and develop and implement promising solutions that can lead towards better working and living conditions for workers and their families in global supply chains.

4. **Strengthen the reach, calibre and funding of the social service workforce:** Prevent violence and abuse by strengthening parents and communities with support from frontline social service workers as crucial to preventing child labour and to supporting families to make different choices wherever possible. This includes provision of education and promotion of the importance of civil registration in establishing when children are too young to work.
5. **Treat children associated with armed forces and armed groups primarily as survivors of child rights violations** and clearly refer to them first as children in need of protection no matter the armed force or group with which they may have been associated, including by adopting legislation that criminalizes child recruitment and use. This requires Governments to address children's needs through child protection systems and for military and intelligence actors to transfer any child they may encounter to child protection actors.
6. **Eliminate child detention for children associated with armed conflict:** Thousands of children are deprived of their liberty every year for their alleged participation in hostilities. Detention can have a profound and negative impact on children's long-term physical, emotional and cognitive development. There are many alternatives to detention including tracing and reunification with families, fostering and other alternative care mechanisms. Consistent with their status as victims, children should be transferred to child protection actors to address their needs.
7. **Prioritize reunification:** Humanitarian law provides that parties to a conflict must facilitate the reunion of families dispersed due to armed conflict. Governments should support the Paris Principles and Commitments which promote reintegration programmes regardless of whether a formal process for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exists.
8. **Endorse the [Safe Schools Declaration](#)⁶ and implement the [Guidelines on Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#)⁷** Schools must be safe spaces. Catch-up education should be available to all.
9. **Prevent violations against children affected by conflict beginning with the prevention of recruitment, conflict, and other grave violations against children.**
 - Support programming to prevent and respond to child recruitment by armed actors according to the [Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups](#), the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) (Standard 11); and the [Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards](#) (module 5.20 on Children and DDR).
 - Engage with the UN in-country to promote UN monitoring, reporting and response to instances of child association, by state and non-state actors to sign Action Plans for the release and reintegration of children.



MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

- **Child labour data is available for most of the less industrialized countries, yet a number of middle-income countries have stopped collecting and publishing data, and high-income countries do not collect data on child labour.** Particularly in the context of the expanding COVID-19 pandemic, countries should continue to routinely collect quality data on the incidence of child labour. Additionally, further research needs to be undertaken on the implications for child labour in the context of broader global challenges, including COVID-19, climate change, migration, inequality, urbanization, and changes in the world of work.
- **Further, disaggregated data is needed to account for the children whose rights are violated by armed forces and armed groups that recruit children.** Strengthened data collection can help identify governments and non-state armed groups that recruit children, through engagement with the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. The data in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict and its annexes provides a basis for peace negotiations.
- Member States should **support and grant access to UNICEF for monitoring grave violations against children**, including the recruitment and use of children.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

The social service workforce is fundamental to address the lack of awareness within communities about the negative consequences of child labour and promote social norms that make child labour unacceptable in communities.

- Invest in the **strengthening and expansion of the social service workforce** to support access to prevention and response services, including support for families so that children can be in schools and learning.
- **Establish social protection systems**, including social protection floors to structurally prevent and respond to child labour, particularly in the absence of widely available decent work and/or in humanitarian contexts.

- **Establish and finance multi-year programmes to prevent child recruitment and support children who exit armed forces and armed groups** and provide long-term alternatives for children at risk for recruitment or re-recruitment.
- Support and develop **holistic reintegration programmes anchored to the national child protection system**, enabling the social service workforce to link with the education, health, justice, and law enforcement systems, such that children can reintegrate into and contribute to their communities.



ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

Evidence indicates that increased access to education has significantly reduced child labour, especially for girls. The importance of educated parents, particularly educated mothers, who have benefitted from educational expansion and access to better opportunities, demonstrates that children are much more likely to be kept in school when returns on investment are apparent.

- Invest in **inclusive and quality education for all to raise awareness of the harm which child labour generates** and to offer better life chances, particularly to girls.
- **Address the economic needs of the family and offer children and adolescents an alternative narrative**, just as strong and powerful. Research and evidence indicate that armed groups use powerful narrative that offers children and adolescents a strong sense of identity, as well as family income.⁸
- **Invest in prevention interventions engaging children and adolescents** that are inclusive and address the socio-economic needs of the entire family.



For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>

¹ International Labour Organization, [Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016](#), International Labour Office, Geneva, 2017. Quoted in: [COVID-19: Protect children from child labour, now more than ever!](#) World Day Against Child Labor – 12 June 2020.

² International Labour Organization, [Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016](#), International Labour Office, Geneva, 2017.

³ International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, [COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act](#), ILO and UNICEF, New York, 2020.

⁴ International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, [COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act](#), ILO and UNICEF, New York, 2020.

⁵ [Understanding Trends in Child Labour](#), Understanding Children's Work, 2017.

⁶ [The Safe Schools Declaration](#). Opened for endorsement at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools, 29 May 2015.

⁷ [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#). Finalized in a State-led process in December 2014.

⁸ [Cradled By Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict](#), United Nations University, 2017. See also: <https://unu.edu/children-and-extreme-violence>