

BIGMUN 2025

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Research Report

Topic 1: Condemning and combating the exploitation of children in the agricultural sector



Yakamoz Pinar & Sienna Noon

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Definition of Key Terms.....	2
Background Information.....	3
Major Countries and Organisations Involved.....	4
Relevant UN Resolutions.....	6
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue.....	6
Possible Solutions.....	7
Bibliography.....	8

Introduction:

The exploitation of children in the agricultural sector still remains a widespread and urgent issue that threatens international development, human rights acts and affects some of the world's most vulnerable populations. As reported by the International Labour Organization (ILO), close to 112 million children globally are engaged in agricultural labor, which constitutes approximately 70% of all child labor. Despite significant advancements in schooling, legislation and economic standards, children continue to participate in the agricultural workforce, in fields and farms. The exploitation of children in agriculture is most common in developing countries where agriculture remains as the pillar of the economy, however structural poverty continues to remain.

There are many motivations and key drivers of child labour in the agricultural sector, ranging from extreme poverty and lack of education to cultural norms that put work over schooling. Countries such as Kenya, Brazil, Mexico, Pakistan, Indonesia and India continue to showcase the many reasons for child exploitation. These nations additionally suggest the challenges of implementing interventions despite the economic dependency on agriculture.

Global programmes led by the United Nations (UN) such as ILO, UNICEF and Alliance 8.7 have played key roles in addressing the issue. Their efforts have aimed to establish international conventions that set standards on work environments, improve access to quality education and most importantly create transparency in private sectors. Yet, these measures remain insufficient without global enforcement, community engagement and economic strategies.

Definition of Key Terms:

Child Labour: Child labour is the participation of children under the minimum age for admission to employment in work that is physically, mentally, socially or morally harmful to children. It also refers to work that interferes with their education by depriving them of the right to attend school or obligating them to leave school prematurely.¹

Bonded Labour (Debt Bondage): Bonded labour is a form of labour trafficking by manipulating civilians into debt, forcing victims into working to pay off the debt indefinitely. The never-ending cycle can trap children, contributing to modern slavery for generations. It is common in rural villages for families to accept small loans from businesses to pay for needs. By tricking them, traffickers distort the cultural practice to enslave the families. Debt bondage is most common in countries like India, located in South Asia.²

Conditional Cash Transfers for Education (CCTE): Conditional cash transfers for education relate to where families are paid a certain amount in return of their children's

¹ *Child Labour* | UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/Child%20Labour>

² "What Is Bonded Labor?" *IJM USA*, www.ijm.org/news/what-is-bonded-labor.

regular attendance to school. Since 2003, Türkiye has been contributing to CCTE, and has allowed for millions of families to reach education, as this decreases the number of child labourers.³

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7: The Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 stands for the elimination of modern slavery and the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour, recruitment of children into the military and child labour in all of its forms by the end of 2025.

Child Labour Monitoring (CLM): Child Labour Monitoring is based on national child labour legislation and the establishment of a sustainable procedure to combat all of child labour. CLM helps to identify the forms of child labour, provide better working conditions for children above the minimum working age, eliminate young children from working and improve the commitment of communities to fight against child labour.⁴

Background Information:

Child labour in the agricultural sector is one of the most persistent and challenging issues regarding human rights and labour markets. The agricultural sector is known to be one of the most child-employed sectors with over 112 million (as of 2021) children worldwide involved in physically exhausting and hazardous work that is damaging to the children's overall safety and well-being. The exploitation of children in agriculture is severely relative to socio-economic inequality, lack of education and inadequate regulatory enforcement.⁵

Although child labour was considered a part of household farming traditions in the pre-Industrial Revolution years, the industrialization of agriculture increased demand for labour, resulting the expansion of employment beyond family members. In former provinces such as Kenya, Mexico and Ethiopia, the exploitation of child labour established with the colonial rules of empowered kingdoms and empires, with children employed in crop production such as cocoa, cotton and sugarcane. The ILO's establishment in 1919 and following conventions⁶, focused on labour standards yet agricultural child labour continued unabated, particularly in developing countries as agricultural growth was demanded.

³ Ministry of Family and Social Policies - General Directorate for Social Assistance, et al. *POLICY PAPER on Improving Conditional Cash Transfers Programme in Turkey*. 2014, <https://www.aile.tr/uploads/sygm/uploads/pages/arastirma-raporlari/policy-paper-on-improving-conditional-cash-transfer-programme-in-turkey-collaboration-with-unicef.pdf>

⁴ "Child Labour Monitoring (CLM) | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 28 Jan. 2024, www.ilo.org/topics/child-labour/child-labour-monitoring-clm.

⁵ "World Day Against Child Labour 2020: preventing child labour in agriculture during COVID-19 and beyond - World." *ReliefWeb*, 12 June 2020, reliefweb.int/report/world/world-day-against-child-labour-2020-preventing-child-labour-agriculture-during-covid-19?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA9bq6BhAKAiEiwAH6bqoJe-hUYhZ_d5TphMx8B3C4rYbh1cJ-EhDD6oWojAS1Wc0LmNMxxMhoCC78OAvD_BwE.

⁶ *Convention C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)*. normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312327:NO. *Convention C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)*.

The exploitation of children in agriculture carries many risks both healthwise and educationally, such as the exposure to pesticides and heavy machinery that harms children's physical and mental well-being. Additionally, child labour increases the lack of education as children are forced to miss significant portions of their studies.

The primary motivation of child exploitation in the agricultural sector is motivated by poverty and economic necessity. Families living below the poverty line often rely on child labour to reinforce household income. Typically, agricultural wages are considered low, resulting in the hiring of children as it is seen as a way to reduce cost. Statistics suggest that many child workers come from households lacking access to social protection which results in the aggravation of their vulnerability.⁷

Many rural areas lack quality schooling or do not provide an educational system, forcing children into the fields. In addition, female children experience gender-based inequalities that limit their access to education which perpetuates illiteracy and famine.⁸

The agricultural sector remains as one of the most unregulated subdivisions in labour. In many countries, labour laws exempt family farms of informal agricultural work from regulation. Despite the existence of legal frameworks, execution in remote areas tends to be poor due to resource constraints and political will. Weak enforcement of labour allowing for children to work in conditions exposed to hazards and risks that pose significant health concerns.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

International Labour Organization (ILO): The International Labor Organization was established 1919, a branch of the United Nations. It aims to set international labour standards across over 180 Member States, promoting decent work environments and standards for women and men. ILO has set many frameworks and conventions over the years to resolve the ongoing child labor crisis such as creating the establishment of a minimum age for entry into employment.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): UNICEF aims to emphasize the importance of education and social protection to address the main causes of child labour. The UN-led organization has established many projects and programmes contributing to the elimination of children in the workforce.

⁷ *The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour.* 2022, www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_845168.pdf.

⁸ "Gender and Decent Rural Employment and Child Labour." *Gender*, [www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-decent-rural-employment-and-child-labour/#:~:text=As%20of%202021%2C%20around%2070.areas%20\(FAO%2C%202021\)](http://www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-decent-rural-employment-and-child-labour/#:~:text=As%20of%202021%2C%20around%2070.areas%20(FAO%2C%202021).).

Alliance 8.7: The alliance aims to establish coordinated action to eliminate child labour by 2025 in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Alliance 8.7 has partnered with ILO and UNICEF to put an end to this issue.

Ethiopia: Ethiopia is estimated to have one of the highest rates of child labor in Africa with many children working in coffee production as Ethiopia is highly active in coffee bean production. According to UNICEF reports, in 2016, 8.7 million children have participated in hazardous child labour. Poverty is one of the key drivers in child labour as the 25% of all Ethiopian population lives below the poverty line. The limited access to education is also a contributing factor to the issue where children are unable to attend school. Children working in the agricultural sector are vulnerable and exposed to extreme working hours, heavy physical labour and pesticides used in agriculture which may later lead to health issues. Efforts such as the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy mission to increase education yet it remains inadequate.

Kenya: According to recent reports, 2 million children in Kenya are engaged in child labour and over 30% is employed in the agricultural sector particularly in tea, coffee and sugarcane farming due to rural poverty. The Kenyan Government has partnered with ILO to enforce the Kenya National Action Plan on Child Labour (2017-2022) with the mission to strengthen legal frameworks. Unfortunately, despite the work, enforcement still remains weak in rural regions of Kenya mainly due to extreme poverty and the lack of education. UNICEF has additionally set, community-based initiatives to increase school attendance, as it may decrease the numbers regarding child labour in the agricultural sector.

Brazil: Brazil has significantly decreased its numbers of child-workers in the agricultural sector by establishing the Bolsa Familia Programme which aims to eliminate rural poverty by conditional cash transfers in exchange for school enrollment. Despite the measures taken, child labour continues to persist in coffee and sugarcane farming. Additionally, Alliance 8.7 has identified Brazil's efforts to eliminate the forms of child labour and it is reported that UNICEF continues to focus on education based programs to prevent children from entering the work force.

Mexico: Child labour in coffee and sugarcane farming is a widespread issue in Mexico, especially among the children of migrant families. The government has partnered with ILO in support of the Roadmap to Eliminate Child Labour programme which ultimately missions to strengthen and enforce labour laws. Despite the attempts, family-run farms continue to hire children under the minimum age of work. Alliance 8.7 has advocated for better education implementation in select regions and UNICEF has set literacy campaigns to overcome this issue in Mexico.

Pakistan: Over 70% of child workers have been reported to be partaking in the agricultural sector in Pakistan, particularly in cotton and sugarcane production. Due to extreme poverty and cultural norms, Pakistan has been unsuccessful in overcoming this issue. Despite the Punjab Free and Compulsory Education act that has enforced education and school

attendance, child labour in the agricultural sector remains an urgent problem. Alliance 8.7 and ILO have partnered with Pakistan to establish stricter policies. In addition, UNICEF has committed to free education campaigns as a long-term solution regarding this issue.

Indonesia: Mainly due to extreme poverty and weak regulations, Indonesia remains a crucial contributor to this issue. The government's past partnerships with ILO and UNICEF have mainly focused on improving accessible education and awareness yet, the lack of regulations in Indonesia perpetuates the cycle of child workers.

India: India remains as the country with the most number of child workers globally, with agriculture making up for 62%. The government has enforced the Child and Adolescent Labour Act yet, the lack of regulations continues to bolster this issue. ILO and UNICEF have collaborated with India on the establishment of education campaigns and vocational training for vulnerable children.

Relevant UN Resolutions:

ILO: The International Labour Organization is a specialized branch of the UN, and has adopted the ILO Convention No. 138 which aims to set an international policy on the minimum age for admission to employment. Additionally the ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour has set the legal framework for prohibiting all forms of child labour. Many nations have implemented these conventions into their domestic policies.⁹

FAO Framework On Ending Child Labour In Agriculture: The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has led many frameworks to eliminate child labour in agriculture. The specific report, first released in 2020, gives a clear instruction of how member states should regulate and improve their frameworks for the elimination of child labourers in the agricultural sector. The framework essentializes that eradicating child labour by 2025 in various sectors is a main contributor to SDG 8.7.¹⁰

Previous Attempts To Solve the Issue:

Education Programmes: Initiatives like Education for All, set by UNESCO and encouraged by UNICEF, have focused on implementing quality education and the access to quality education which is a key factor to prevent child labour. Many countries including Brazil have implemented such programmes with success, using conditional cash transfers to send children to school instead of work.

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC): In cooperation with ILO, IPEC has worked with over 90 countries and set out programmes which offered

⁹Convention C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).

normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138.

¹⁰ [FAO FRAMEWORK ON ENDING CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE. 2020, openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/89ac247c-5dcd-4eeb-a208-3b481d5b1f94/content](https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/89ac247c-5dcd-4eeb-a208-3b481d5b1f94/content).

technical support for the drafting of policies and promoting awareness which directly intervenes with illegal child employers.

Private Sector Initiatives: Companies most significantly in the cocoa and coffee industries have joined programmes like the Fairtrade Certification System to report child labour issues in their supply chains. The certification standard prohibits companies from importing from child employed supply chains and contributes to addressing the issue.

Possible Solutions:

Strengthening Education Access: Education is a necessary component in working against child labour in the agricultural sector. Governments and organizations should prioritize implementing accessible, quality education especially in rural regions. Investments in infrastructure, teacher training programmes and financial campaigns for families to reduce the economic burden of schooling should be heavily considered in solutions.

Enforcing Laws and Monitoring Supply Chains: Member States must implement the pre-existing child labour laws most significantly in agriculture. Private sectors should implement traceable systems to ensure that supply chains are in alignment with labour standards, refraining from child employment. Partnerships and organizations should encourage transparency and accountability in trading.

Addressing Poverty: Poverty, mainly in rural areas is one of the driving factor of child labour especially in the agricultural sector. Comprehensive rural development programmes, aiming for increase in income and access to credit with the addition of agricultural modernization should be considered by delegates to help reduce dependency on child labour for families in rural regions.

Bibliography:

“World Day Against Child Labour 2020: preventing child labour in agriculture during COVID-19 and beyond - World.” *ReliefWeb*, 12 June 2020, reliefweb.int/report/world/world-day-against-child-labour-2020-preventing-child-labour-agriculture-during-covid-19?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA9bq6BhAKEiwAH6bqoJe-hUYhZ_d5TphMx8B3C4rYbh1lcJ-EhDD6oWojAS1Wc0LmNMxxMhoCC78QAvD_BwE.

“Child Labour Monitoring (CLM) | International Labour Organization.” *Www.ilo.org*, 28 Jan. 2024, www.ilo.org/topics/child-labour/child-labour-monitoring-clm.

“What Is Bonded Labor?” *IJM USA*, www.ijm.org/news/what-is-bonded-labor.

Edmonds, Eric V., et al. “Child Labor and Economic Development.” *Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics*, July 2020, www.amherst.edu/system/files/Edmonds_Theoharides_HBK_final_post.pdf.

“FAO Child labour in Agriculture | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.” *ChildLabour*, www.fao.org/childlabouragriculture/en.

Convention C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).

https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138

Convention C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312327:NO.

Ministry of Family and Social Policies - General Directorate for Social Assistance, et al. *POLICY PAPER on Improving Conditional Cash Transfers Programme in Turkey*. 2014, <https://www.aile.tr/uploads/sygm/uploads/pages/arastirma-raporlari/policy-paper-on-improving-conditional-cash-transfer-programme-in-turkey-collaboration-with-unicef.pdf>

The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour. 2022,

www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipeec/documents/publication/wcms_845168.pdf.

“Gender and Decent Rural Employment and Child Labour.” *Gender*,

[www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-decent-rural-employment-and-child-labour/#:~:text=As%20of%202021%2C%20around%2070,areas%20\(FAO%2C%202021\)](https://www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-decent-rural-employment-and-child-labour/#:~:text=As%20of%202021%2C%20around%2070,areas%20(FAO%2C%202021)).

FAO FRAMEWORK ON ENDING CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE. 2020,

openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/89ac247c-5dcd-4eeb-a208-3b481d5b1f94/content.