

Action Against Child Labour:

Selected case studies
from UNICEF Programmes





Acknowledgement

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CASE STUDY MAP



Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF latest estimates indicate that 160 million children worldwide are engaged in child labour – that is, work that they are too young to perform or that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm children’s health, safety or morals. This underscores the urgent need for immediate action to eliminate child labour by 2025, a commitment enshrined within Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.¹ The persistence of child labour is a human rights violation that not only undermines the health and well-being of children but also poses a challenging threat to national economies and the realization of global development objectives.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child remains a vital safeguard for children everywhere. It explicitly 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.”² As a leading advocate for child rights, UNICEF promotes a comprehensive multisectoral approach that focuses on addressing the root causes of child labour.³

A multisectoral approach to eliminate child labour involves promoting the extension of social protection for children and families, improving access to quality education and strengthening child protection systems. This work is underpinned by support to improve legal, regulatory and policy frameworks to address child labour. Partnerships with various stakeholders and active engagement with communities to foster positive and enduring social change play an integral role in these efforts. This approach aims not only to protect children from the immediate dangers of labour but also to address the systemic issues that perpetuate child labour in the first place. Additionally, UNICEF emphasizes the crucial role of the responsible practices of businesses in safeguarding child rights, addressing the root causes of child labour and creating opportunities of decent work for adults and young workers.

Among the 51 UNICEF country offices that reported on supporting initiatives to prevent and eradicate child labour in their 2022 Country Office Annual Reports, specific examples of UNICEF impactful work are highlighted in this documentation.

Five case studies from different corners of the globe – Costa Rica, Jordan, Timor-Leste, Türkiye and Viet Nam – offer a glimpse into UNICEF continuous efforts to address child labour and tackle its underlying causes. They demonstrate UNICEF collaborative initiatives with national governments, the private sector, international donors and civil society.



COSTA RICA **P5**



JORDAN **P9**



TIMOR-LESTE **P14**



TÜRKIYE **P19**



VIET NAM **P26**

These case studies highlight the significant progress achieved at the country level in 2022 to tackle the alarming prevalence of child labour. Looking ahead, UNICEF remains committed to supporting multisectoral interventions in priority countries where child labour persists.

¹ ILO and UNICEF, Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward, 2021, www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_797515/lang-en/index.htm.

² United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989.

³ UNICEF, Ending Child Labour through a Multisectoral Approach, 2021, www.unicef.org/documents/ending-child-labour-through-multisectoral-approach.

Beyond the harvest: UNICEF efforts to protect children in Costa Rican coffee and sugar farms

UNICEF technical expertise and collaborative approach have been instrumental in the success of the 'Casas de la Alegría' initiative in Costa Rica. This transformative programme has significantly improved the quality of life for vulnerable children, primarily indigenous and migrant children, by creating safe and nurturing spaces while their parents engage in coffee-harvesting activities. The initiative has not only protected children from the hazards of child labour but also empowered families, strengthened communities and facilitated policy dialogues for the national replication of the model. UNICEF technical support encompasses diverse areas, including child protection strategies, intersectoral coordination and the development of culturally sensitive childcare models. Additionally, UNICEF advocacy to expand cash grants for children underscores its commitment to creating a sustainable and child-friendly environment. This case study highlights UNICEF pivotal role in promoting child-sensitive social protection, fostering intersectoral partnerships and advocating for innovative solutions.

Background and the current situation on child labour in Costa Rica

The Government of Costa Rica has made significant progress in its efforts to end child labour. UNICEF has been actively working alongside the National Steering Committee for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of Adolescent Workers to support the development of the National Strategic Plan to make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labour 2022–2025, through sectoral and intersectoral collaborations spearheaded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and supported by ILO.

This plan aims to make Costa Rica a country free of child labour by 2025.⁴

This comprehensive strategy outlines key action areas, each with specific goals. These goals include expanding and strengthening the identification and follow-up of child labour cases, enhancing intersectoral information by updating and refining the child labour index,⁵ implementing due diligence measures and preventing child labour within value chains.



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Child-friendly space at a Casas de la Alegría centre in Coto Brus Canton, providing care for children while parents (mostly indigenous) are harvesting coffee in the fields.

⁴ Alliance 8.7, Roadmap to Make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labour and its Worst Forms 2021–2025, 2022, www.mtss.go.cr/seguridad-social/trabajo-infantil/trabajo-infantil/hoja_ruta_2021_2025.pdf.

⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Statistics: Child labour and adolescent labour module in Costa Rica, www.mtss.go.cr/seguridad-social/trabajo-infantil/estadisticas.html.



The initiative

UNICEF, in partnership with the Costa Rican Coffee Institute, has been actively promoting the 'Casas de la Alegría' initiative since 2014. This programme is designed to safeguard and foster the development of children while their parents and relatives engage in coffee-harvesting activities. It serves as a protective measure against child labour risks within Costa Rican coffee plantations and provides essential public childcare and social protection services to these children. To date, more than 40 Casas de la Alegría have been established in 5 cantons across the country, primarily focusing on activities related to coffee and sugar plantations. Through this initiative, approximately 2,000 children, mostly from indigenous and migrant backgrounds, have received vital support.

These child-friendly spaces offer Ngäbe-Buglé children the opportunity to access public childcare and social protection services on coffee farms while their parents work. Children can play, rest, eat and learn in a secure environment, ensuring their well-being while their parents are occupied with coffee harvesting or other tasks. This initiative represents a collaborative effort involving farmers, national institutions and subnational government entities in developing protection and development programmes for children involved in coffee harvesting. In 2022, UNICEF supported the opening of five new Casas de la Alegría, thus expanding the reach of this initiative.

Furthermore, this initiative respects the cultural identity and traditions of the Ngäbe-Buglé population by creating culturally appropriate childcare models. It also promotes

the inclusion of Ngäbe-Buglé women in caregiving roles, reducing language and cultural barriers between local staff and the children. Collaboration among multiple stakeholders has proven essential when addressing the complex challenges faced by Ngäbe-Buglé migrants.

Effective collaboration with the private sector was crucial in delivering the programme, highlighting the cost-effectiveness and value of their involvement. Allocating land and constructing childcare centres have allowed coffee producers to retain their workforce while reducing potential incidences of accidental injury to children. These child-friendly spaces ensure that parents can focus on their work, knowing their children are well cared for. Incorporating the private sector from the outset is important, but clarity and advance planning regarding regulation and coordination among different government entities are equally essential.

Coffee farmers recognize the added value of endorsing the Casas de la Alegría initiative as a symbol of fair-trade practices within the coffee production industry. Such practices can elevate product prices, thereby improving overall business profitability. Additionally, the initiative places great importance on using local languages. While most centres have bilingual indigenous collaborators proficient in both Spanish and Ngäbere, Spanish-speaking caregivers have developed non-verbal communication strategies to interact with Ngäbere-speaking children. Learning resources such as drawings and signs facilitate better communication between Spanish-speaking collaborators and the Ngäbe-Buglé populations.

Results

In 2022 and 2023, the Casas de la Alegría initiative has positively affected the lives of approximately 2,000 girls and boys, which potentially resulted in an improvement in their overall quality of life, including in their health, nutrition, safety, care and overall development. Furthermore, ongoing workshops on the Casas de la Alegría initiative and its benefits have increased the demand from farmers and improved trust in the indigenous population towards the services provided.

Additionally, parents have displayed a keen interest in staying informed on the care their children receive at the Casas de la Alegría. From a cultural perspective, this curiosity has encouraged parents to engage with various stakeholders, including caregivers, farm administrators, institutional actors and others. This parental engagement has broken down pre-existing barriers and fostered the exchange of valuable information.

Challenges

Addressing the associated challenges, which include a lack of training and support to implement the Ministry of Health decree, is crucial to standardize procedures and operations of the Casas de la Alegría at the regional level. This required several actions. First, more extensive advisory support to farmers was provided to facilitate awareness-raising processes for the implementation of the initiative on their farms. Additionally, efforts were made to offer training and support for the implementation at the regional level of the Ministry of Health's decree, aimed at standardizing procedures and the operation of the Casas de la Alegría. Encouraging the participation of other institutions, such as the Children's Nutrition and Comprehensive Care Centres (CINAI) and the Ministry of Education, was also crucial to enhance the quality of care services for children and adolescents.

Furthermore, advocacy at the national level aimed to increase child benefit, which currently stands at US\$200. This effort sought to extend the subsidy's reach to more producers through the Family's Social and Economic Situation File, prepared by the Social Assistance Institute.

Despite the challenges encountered at the project's inception, the collective commitment of various institutions led to expanded scopes of work for most of the entities involved. For instance, the Child Friendly Cantons (CAI) recognized that they had not previously worked with indigenous children, migrants or farm workers. The Casas de la Alegría initiative has provided an excellent opportunity to begin addressing the needs of these groups.

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Sustainability and moving forward

UNICEF not only provided ongoing technical support beyond the initial funding phase but played a vital role in developing mechanisms for financial investments from various stakeholders, including farmers and the government. These measures are aimed at making the project self-sustaining.

Moreover, UNICEF has actively engaged in policy dialogue and contributed to generating evidence that facilitated the government's decision to expand the successful Casas de la Alegría initiative to a national scale. As part of future plans, in 2024, a comprehensive diagnosis of the Casas de la Alegría and their surrounding areas is expected to be conducted. This assessment aims to investigate the demand and supply conditions of educational services within these spaces.

Conclusion

The initiative's success can be attributed to a multisectoral approach that encompasses culturally sensitive childcare models, local language integration and the active involvement of multiple stakeholders, including government ministries, the private sector and civil society organizations. Through strategic partnerships, UNICEF has not only provided technical support but also paved the way for financial investments from various stakeholders, thus ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project.

Additionally, the Casas de la Alegría initiative has removed cultural barriers, empowered parents and facilitated vital dialogue among diverse stakeholders. This collaborative effort has not only created safe and respectful spaces for children but also broken down pre-existing barriers, encouraged information exchange and empowered the migrant population.

In summary, UNICEF support for the Casas de la Alegría initiative is a demonstration to its unwavering commitment to promoting child welfare and preventing child labour. By fostering collaboration, empowering communities and creating culturally appropriate solutions, this programme serves as a valuable model for addressing complex challenges and improving the lives of vulnerable children in Costa Rica.

Strengthening partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and the National Council for Family Affairs to address child labour in Jordan

This case study looks at UNICEF partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) and the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) in Jordan to tackle child labour. Together, they revitalized the National Child Labour Task Group, supported professional capacities to respond to child labour cases, initiated a child labour bylaw for the family and child directorate of the MOSD and launched the National Child Labour Strategy 2022–2030.

The partnership focused on non-formal sectors, safeguarding children in high-risk settings. The Task Group coordinates both governmental and non-governmental entities and supports strengthening of integrated education, economic empowerment, social security and child protection responses. The revival of this key coordination mechanism ensures that there is active collaboration among stakeholders and that key statistical and qualitative data are accessible for sharing lessons learned and improving strategy implementation.

Background and current situation on child labour in Jordan

According to the 2016 National Child Labour Survey,⁶ over 75,000 children are engaged in economic activities, including nearly 45,000 children who are engaged in hazardous forms of labour. Poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities for the family are the main reasons why children work. Children with disabilities, unaccompanied or separated children, children without parental care, children from marginalized minority communities and children living and/or working on the streets face the greatest inequities. Refugee children and children from the poorest families also face significant child protection concerns.

UNICEF has been working closely with the Government of Jordan to strengthen the national child protection system to prevent and respond to child labour. Key counterparts of UNICEF include the MOSD and the NCFA, with their important mandates related to coordination, monitoring and implementation of interventions related to the protection of children, including child labour.



⁶ Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, National Child Labour Survey 2016 of Jordan, 2016, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-arabstates/-ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_510520.pdf.

The initiative

In 2022, UNICEF provided support to the NCFA to lead the coordination of the national work on child labour by re-establishing and re-activating the National Child Labour Task Group. The Task Group is considered a key multi-partner coordination mechanism, including for both governmental and non-governmental entities, to support strengthening of integrated education, economic empowerment, social security and child protection responses. The aim is to ensure improved collaboration and coordination between all concerned stakeholders providing prevention and response services to child labour cases and avoid any overlaps between different child labour interventions provided by relevant actors, such as ministries and government entities (the NCFA, the MOSD, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour), United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national NGOs. The Task Group enables exchange of information, identification of gaps, sharing of lessons learned and best practices and mapping of services.



Abdullah, a 12-year-old Syrian refugee, works at a mechanics in Sahab, Jordan.

UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the NCFA to conduct training of trainers for 24 governmental officials on the endorsed National Child Labour Framework and Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that they apply them in the field and respond accordingly to child labour cases.

The trained staff of the MOSD then conducted capacity-building interventions for staff of the Anti-Begging Unit (under the MOSD), staff from the implementing partner, the local NGO 'Rowad Al-Khair', and staff representatives of three community-based organizations. A total of 81 professionals (56 per cent of women) improved their knowledge and skills in dealing with child labour cases. Following the training, these professionals provided case management services to a total of 532 children (12 per cent of girls) in the targeted areas in Ruseifeh, Sahab and Zarqa, including services and referrals on education, youth employment and protection.

"Child labour is considered one of the economic and social problems at both local and international levels due to its close connection with the rights of the child guaranteed by local legislation and international conventions," said Ahmed Al-Zaben, the Director of the Juvenile and Community Security Directorate at the MOSD.

In addition, UNICEF supported the development of a bylaw on child labour. The bylaw has been finalized by the MOSD and is pending endorsement by the Constitutional Court to enter into effect, in alignment with the updated framework and the Juvenile Justice Law to ensure that a unified national legal framework is in place. This development is critical as it contributes to the institutionalization of providing children involved in child labour, or at risk thereof, with a protective environment, enabling their access to multisectoral services, such as education, health and social protection.

"I work to support my family, but when I see my younger siblings putting their school bags on, I am filled with regret. I wish I could return to school but we need the money. It was always my dream to finish my education and become a pilot", said Abdullah.

Results

With UNICEF support, the NCFA convened seven coordination meetings within the National Child Labour Task Group in 2022. The meetings contributed to (1) a mapping of child labour service providers in Jordan that led to strengthened communication (for example, regarding referrals and pending cases); (2) clear agreements on the targeted areas of child labour projects; (3) planning of a national advocacy campaign on the World Day Against Child Labour; and (4) the development of the National Child Labour Strategy (2022–2030) and its corresponding framework, which the NCFA oversees and coordinates with other members of the Task Group for effective implementation.

Together with high-ranking government officials, the National Child Labour Task Group identified roles and responsibilities related to the new child labour strategy. As a result of these advocacy activities, the Minister of Labour and the Secretary General of the NCFA agreed that the NCFA, as the lead of National Child Labour Task Group, will monitor the implementation of the strategy activities for the coming five years.

This increased the intention of the Government of Jordan to address child labour issues at the highest levels; for example, the King of Jordan delivered the country's address at the seventy-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023. His Majesty said, "Is the international community going to watch as refugee families find themselves forced to send their children to work instead of school?"

UNICEF also considered the important role of the NCFA in the 2023 activity plan and will continue to support the NCFA in monitoring the implementation of the strategy to ensure comprehensive support for vulnerable children in host communities.

Historically, national efforts to prevent child labour primarily concentrated on the formal sector. Through this programme, dedicated advocacy and technical support were directed at addressing child labour in the informal sector, specifically targeting areas such as the vegetable market and recycling industry. An unknown but significant number of children are involved in the informal sector in Jordan, where they are subjected to the most severe forms of child labour. Engaging in such work exposes them to numerous challenges, hazardous conditions and high prevalence of abuse, violence and exploitation, which adversely affects their overall health and well-being.

The National Child Labour Task Group launches nationwide activities on the World Day Against Child Labour 2022.



Challenges

Addressing child labour in Jordan, with its social and cultural dynamics, posed several challenges. Firstly, there were significant ambiguities in definitions. During the interpretation of the bylaw on child labour, there were extensive debates surrounding the exact definition of a working child. Diverse stakeholders brought forth varied perspectives, which threatened to introduce discrepancies into the bylaw. Expert advice from UNICEF and ILO were crucial in steering the debate towards the internationally recognized definitions. This ensured that the legislation aligned with global standards on child labour.

One of the more technical challenges was data collection and monitoring. The informal nature of many child labour engagements means that they often remain under the radar, making accurate and comprehensive data collection a persistent challenge. Without these data, it becomes increasingly difficult to design targeted interventions and assess the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives.

Syrian refugee children work on a farm on the outskirts of Amman, where they also live in an informal tented settlement.



Sustainability and moving forward

UNICEF, in collaboration with the NCFA and other relevant governmental and non-governmental entities, will continue to strengthen the national child protection system to address the issue of child labour as part of general child protection prevention and response interventions, both nationally and in the most marginalised areas of Jordan. UNICEF will continue supporting the entities concerned to develop child protection services that provide quality integrated case management services for working children. UNICEF is planning to expand the scope of the Family Violence Tracking System (FVTS) to include child labour cases. The FVTS, led by the NCFA and developed with full support from UNICEF, is a digitalized case management system that serves as a customized iteration of the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS). Currently, the system is undergoing testing in the East Amman area. The use of FVTS will ensure timely quality integrated services for child labour cases.

The last national child labour study for Jordan was in 2016. Support is needed to conduct a new national quantitative and qualitative study on child labour in Jordan to better understand the nature, extent and causes of child labour in the Jordanian society and to gauge the associated risk and protective factors.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, UNICEF will maintain its collaboration with the NCFA and other relevant institutions to enhance the capacity of national systems, including government officials and NGO staff, in the prevention and response to child labour in Jordan. Additionally, UNICEF aims to prioritize the support of the social responsibility aspect and enhance engagement with the private sector in order to eradicate child labour in Jordan.

Conclusion

The causes and consequences of child labour are multiple, demanding a multisectoral and coordinated response. Developing and strengthening partnerships and networks among stakeholders are two crucial elements of UNICEF work. This also involves the United Nations and international agencies operating in Jordan.

The collaboration between UNICEF and the NCFA represents a comprehensive approach to addressing child labour. Key milestones have been achieved, from revitalizing the National Child Labour Task Group to launching the pivotal National Child Labour Strategy. Nevertheless, to ensure lasting and sustainable change, several strategic directions must be secured. These include increasing access to education and potentially exploring the establishment of more technical and vocational training centres in more areas. Effective identification, monitoring and addressing child labour cases, linked with providing alternative income generation mechanisms for affected families, will strengthen the protective net around these children. Another persistent challenge is the need for systematic improvement in data collection regarding child labour in Jordan and emphasizing its inclusion in national surveys.

Qualitative research to inform child labour-targeted interventions in Timor-Leste

UNICEF-supported qualitative research shed light on the root causes of child labour in Timor-Leste, through an examination of perceptions, societal norms and economic drivers. Six regions ranging from urban to rural were surveyed to best represent the country's socioeconomic diversity, account for a broader cultural perspective and reach sectors with the most prevalent cases on child labour. Surveys included the identification of sectors where hazardous work occurs. Substantial aspects of the study also focused on understanding the relationship between child labour, poverty and access to essential resources.

Through comprehensive qualitative research across six municipalities, the study reveals a disparity between parental and child perspectives on child labour, emphasizing the deeply entrenched beliefs about gender roles and the economic circumstances that drive children into the workforce. The research underscores the pressing need for multisectoral interventions. Drawing from these understandings, the study concludes with UNICEF-recommended strategies centred on education, economic and shifting social and gender norms.



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Background and the current situation on child labour in Timor-Leste

The 2016 National Child Labour Survey in Timor-Leste highlighted the challenges and prevalence of child labour within the country. The data indicate that 67,688 children aged 5 to 17 years (16 per cent) were involved in economic activities. Even more concerning, 52,651 of these children were engaged in child labour. Among those children, 29,195 were found to be participating in hazardous work. This type of work is known to be especially harmful to a child's mental and physical well-being, as well as a barrier to their education. The definition of hazardous work, as indicated by the survey, includes roles such as field crop and vegetable growers, housekeeping, hospitality and retail.

Additionally, a smaller segment of children was engaged in particularly dangerous sectors such as fishing and extractive industries. Notably, the survey also pointed out that 42 per cent of children in hazardous work undertook their duties during nighttime shifts.

In Timor-Leste, regular collection of quantitative data on child labour is in place. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable gap in qualitative information. A comprehensive understanding of the situation is crucial for effectively implementing the National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which is currently pending adoption by the Government of Timor-Leste.⁷

⁷ General Directorate of Statistics - GDS/Timor-Leste. Ministry of Finance/Timor-Leste and ICF 2018. Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2016. Dili, Timor-Leste and Rockville, Maryland, USA: GDS and ICF.

The initiative

The comprehensive qualitative research on child labour was initiated with the support of UNICEF and ILO, the Secretary of State of Employment Policy and Vocational Training (SEFOPE), the General Directorate of Statistics of the Ministry of Finance, the National Commission against Child Labour (CNTI) and the Office of the General Labour Inspectorate.

The qualitative research was conducted to enhance understanding of the drivers of child labour in Timor-Leste. With this detailed insight, the research aimed to support the efforts of the government and collaborators in ending the worst forms of child labour. A significant portion of the study was dedicated to resolving the relationship between child labour and poverty, understanding poverty not just as financial deprivation but also as limited access to crucial services. Furthermore, the research explored the effectiveness of existing social support frameworks, notably the Bolsa da Mãe cash transfer initiative. Beyond these primary factors, the study also ventured into other dimensions, considering diverse elements beyond mere financial limitations and service access, which potentially influence the continuation of child labour in the region.

The research gathered existing information on child labour, current laws, policies in Timor-Leste and other relevant reports. Meetings with key officials from the General Directorate of Statistics of the Ministry of Finance and SEFOPE were vital in supporting the statistical data, primarily referencing the National Child Labour Survey of 2016. These efforts were supplemented by insights obtained from attending national workshops led by university experts on related subjects.

For primary data collection, six distinct locations were chosen, capturing the urban, semi-urban and rural settings. These choices, reflected upon by a steering committee comprising various stakeholders, ensured that the research reflected a diverse socioeconomic and cultural perspective. Furthermore, the areas were identified based on their prevailing child labour practices.

The Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD) led the way in participant selection, employing a sampling approach. They embraced the methodology of participatory action research (PAR), a technique the CEPAD has supported since 2007. This method seeks to immerse the locals in research, enabling them to pinpoint problems and create viable solutions.

Focused group discussions (FGDs) played a crucial role. Twelve FGDs were conducted with a diverse group of parents and caregivers, and a total of 157 individuals participated. The discussions were structured, yet they prioritized the genuine opinions and lived experiences of the participants, concentrating on their perceptions, their children's circumstances and the reasons underpinning their decisions. Valuable insights were then documented and further analysed.



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Photo taken during a qualitative research interview.

Results

The research investigated the perceptions around child labour among various community members in Timor-Leste, that is, parents, caregivers, children and the larger community. Discovered from the study was the widespread unfamiliarity with the term 'child labour'. Many parents did not have a clear conception of the term, often providing no response when they were questioned about it. This gap in understanding can be attributed to a combination of factors: a lack of access to pertinent information in their communities; the absence of a clear distinction between 'labour' and 'work' in Tetun language; and general unawareness about the negative implications of child labour.

Most participants across the studied municipalities perceived child labour positively. They believed that by working from an early age, children garner valuable life experiences and mature faster. This perception was especially pronounced in municipalities such as Ermera, Liquiça and the Special Administrative Region of Oé-Cusse Ambeno (RAEOA), where child labour was viewed as a 'duty' for children to learn life skills. Various comments from parents resonated with the sentiment that work inculcates a sense of responsibility in children, preparing them for future challenges.

Contrary to the parents' belief that work fosters maturity and skill-building, children primarily viewed their involvement in work as a 'family obligation'. Particularly for children from impoverished backgrounds or those with parents having disabilities, the compulsion to work seemed driven by necessity rather than choice. Narratives from children, such as the one from a 12-year-old child who had to work long hours to support a large family, underscored this notion. Notably, children did not express that work granted them greater independence or maturity. Their perspective contrasted with findings from the 2016 National Child Labour Survey, which had suggested that one of the primary reasons for child labour was skill acquisition.

In addition to these findings, decisions regarding a child's engagement in work were primarily taken by either the parents or the children themselves. Mothers played a pivotal role in distributing domestic chores among children. In situations where the mother faced adversities, such as being a widow or battling illness, the household was more inclined towards child labour. Most of the discussion participants being mothers underscored their centrality in shaping the household's stance on child labour.

Moreover, for households with child labourers, the child's education was often not prioritized. The immediate demands of the household often overshadowed the long-term benefits of education. This viewpoint was prevalent despite parents' recognition of the negative health impacts that work could have on their children.

Key stakeholders, including government officials, teachers and local authorities, exhibited an awareness of the commitment of the Government of Timor-Leste to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nevertheless, a gap existed in their understanding of child rights, especially concerning child labour. Teachers particularly expressed concern over students involved in work, noting its detrimental effect on their academic performance. While these stakeholders acknowledged the underlying systemic and societal issues leading to child labour, they emphasized the importance of educating families on the long-term benefits of prioritizing a child's education over immediate work benefits.

Quote from contributor

“This research goes beyond numbers and highlights people’s perceptions of child labour in Timor-Leste. It will help the government to better target its efforts and resources when addressing the worst forms of child labour.”

Elias dos Santos Ferreira,
President of the National Institute of Statistics of Timor-Leste.

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Challenges

The research faced several challenges. The term ‘child labour’ in the Tetun language does not carry the negative implications it does in English. To avoid misunderstanding during FGDs, the phrase ‘work that negatively affects the child’s education, health and well-being’ was used. The research’s intended gender balance was not achieved owing to many households being represented by women while men were at work. Although the questionnaires were designed without gender bias, discussions revealed gendered domestic roles as the emphasis was on the family unit.

The research unveiled distinct gender roles and expectations in the six municipalities studied. For instance, girls were predominantly tasked with domestic chores such as cleaning, washing and caring for younger siblings, often for extended periods. Moreover, some girls were also expected to work outside their homes, which included selling food in streets or washing clothes for others. This dual responsibility meant that many girls faced a twofold burden, with some even working late into the night. On the other hand, boys were usually employed in outdoor activities such as washing cars, selling firewood or farming tasks.

Nevertheless, in places such as Liquiça and Lautem, boys also took part in household chores, such as fetching water. These gender roles, especially for girls, align with findings from the 2016 National Child Labour Survey, which highlighted that a greater proportion of girls were engaged in both household chores and economic activities compared to boys.

This pattern of early labour has profound implications. Many female participants in FGDs admitted that their early work experiences influenced them as future mothers, leading them to introduce their children to work.

As one participant expressively put it “Child labour is a practice inherited in the family, and therefore it goes on from one generation to another”.

Another challenge was identifying households that had stopped deploying child labour. Although such households exist, the research’s timeframe and scope did not allow for their thorough investigation. Communication barriers were another challenge, especially in Lautem and RAEOA municipalities, where local languages were prevalent. Nevertheless, with the help of local focal points translating discussions, language did not significantly hinder the study.

Sustainability and moving forward

Moving forward, to provide a structured and coordinated response to child labour in Timor-Leste, the establishment of a National Action Plan against the worst forms of child labour was recommended by the qualitative research. This plan will offer clear guidance and strategies, especially as many stakeholders in the research expressed feelings of powerlessness when faced with the issue.

One evident link identified in the research is between child poverty and child labour. To break this cycle, it is essential to enhance and expand cash transfer schemes to all eligible children. By increasing the amounts and simplifying the application process, families can be directly supported, potentially reducing the prevalence of child labour.

Furthermore, the financial burdens associated with education, such as uniforms, school supplies and teacher honorariums, have emerged as barriers to children's school attendance. By making public schools entirely free and eliminating these costs, a rise in school enrolments and a corresponding drop in child labour instances are expected.

Quote from contributor

“The research findings reiterate that child labour in Timor-Leste compromises children’s education and future opportunities and leads to vicious inter-generational cycles of poverty. Access to quality education, supported with inclusive social protection, will allow the children to continue education, even in economic hardship.”

Ainhoa Jaureguibeitia,
UNICEF Deputy Representative,
Programme, Timor-Leste Country Office.

While immediate health impacts of child labour, such as injuries and infections, were acknowledged by parents, there is a clear lack of understanding about its long-term repercussions. As such, awareness campaigns targeting parents and employers that can emphasize the enduring negative impacts on a child's holistic development, further discouraging child labour, were recommended.

Additionally, the research highlighted that the scarcity of adult employment opportunities indirectly fuels child labour. By introducing employment and credit schemes specifically in areas with high child labour rates, the issue can be addressed at its root. Such initiatives would not only uplift entire communities but also reduce the need to push children into the workforce.

Lastly, collaboration with NGOs and civil society can expedite the dissemination of information on the risks of child labour. As the research suggested, even minimal exposure to such information can significantly shift perceptions and practices related to child labour in communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from the research in Timor-Leste provided a comprehensive insight into the factors contributing to child labour, revealing the contradictions in perceptions between parents and children, the role of poverty and the societal implications of gender roles. The research underscores the urgent need for holistic, multisectoral interventions that address the root causes of child labour. Addressing economic challenges, enhancing educational accessibility and shifting deeply ingrained cultural beliefs require a combined effort from all stakeholders. Moving forward, the recommendations in the qualitative research provide a road map that, if followed with commitment and collaboration, can pave the way for a future where every child in Timor-Leste is afforded the right to a safe childhood, free from labour and filled with opportunities for learning and growth.

Promoting Children's Rights and Business Principles in vocational training and safe workplaces in Türkiye

This case study explores UNICEF collaboration with the Turkish Confederation of Tradesmen and Craftsmen (TESK) to prevent child labour, highlighting the strategies employed and the outcomes achieved.

To accomplish this, UNICEF partnered with the Government of Türkiye, private sector organizations, civil society and universities to implement a comprehensive initiative focused on vocational training and safe workplace learning.

Through a collaborative partnership, UNICEF implemented a multifaceted training programme encompassing the fundamental Children's Rights and Business Principles, strategies for preventing child labour and the development of inclusive and decent work-based training services within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Türkiye. The initiative sought to empower SME owners with knowledge and tools to uphold children's rights and create safe, inclusive and educational workplace environments.



Background and the current situation on child labour in Türkiye

Child labour remains a pressing issue in Türkiye. According to recent data, at least 720,000 children in Türkiye are working, which represents 4.4 per cent of the child population aged 5 to 17 years.⁹ Among these working children, 45.5 per cent work in the service sector, including those who work on the streets, 30.8 per cent work in agriculture, and 23.7 per cent work in industrial manufacturing, particularly in SMEs. Various studies report a high prevalence of child labour among refugees, who are not included in official statistics.¹⁰

Persistent poverty, a limited social protection and a large informal economy are the main factors leading to child labour in Türkiye. As nearly one-third of employment in Türkiye is in the informal sector,¹¹ it is difficult to implement laws and enforce business practices to ensure child rights are respected. Türkiye has well-developed institutions, public services and infrastructure, with a strong capacity to pursue developmental and humanitarian goals for its 84 million citizens and 5 million refugees. Nevertheless, socioeconomic inequalities of income and wealth as well as gaps in quality, adequacy and coverage of public services in social protection, education, employment, health and family services restrict a comprehensive and sustained fulfilment of children's rights and well-being. Child labour is one of the key areas where such challenges are evident.

Economic pressures are anticipated to increase child labour in Türkiye, forcing families and children to engage in income-generating activities to deal with poverty.

A recent UNICEF econometric study estimated the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 in Türkiye and showed that child poverty rates are expected to increase by 5 per cent in case of mild economic shock and by 9.3 per cent in case of severe shock.¹²

UNICEF efforts to address child labour in Türkiye are centred around the following areas: strengthening key governmental capacities; implementing child-sensitive social protection measures; promoting business practices that uphold child rights and well-being; supporting certified vocational training and inclusive workplace learning for skills development; and advocating for evidence-based policy development.¹³

The initiative

In partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the private sector, civil society and universities, UNICEF Türkiye contributes to the National Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (2017–2023)¹⁴ by supporting five strategic action areas focusing on (1) strengthening the key governmental capacities; (2) child-sensitive social protection; (3) business practices aligned with child rights and well-being; (4) certified vocational training and inclusive workplace learning for skills; and (5) evidence generation and advocacy. These actions essentially overlap with and complement each other.

⁹ Turkish Statistical Institute, Child Labour Force Survey 2019, www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=33807.

¹⁰ In Türkiye, there are 3,721,057 Syrians under temporary protection (<https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>) and 330,000 persons from various countries under international protection (<https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/unhcr-turkey-operational-update-may-2021-entr>).

¹¹ Social Security Institution, Informal Employment Rate, 2021, http://eski.sgk.gov.tr/wps/portal/sgk/tr/calisan/kayitdisi_istihdam/kayitdisi_istihdam_oranlari.

¹² UNICEF, Turkey Country Office Annual Report 2020, www.unicef.org/media/101206/file/Turkey-2020-COAR.pdf.

¹³ UNICEF Türkiye, Child Labour, www.unicef.org/turkiye/en/child-labour-0.

¹⁴ General Directorate of Labour, National Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2022, www.csgb.gov.tr/cgm/cimup.

Business practices aligned with child rights and well-being

UNICEF partnered with the TESK, which represents nearly 2 million SMEs in Türkiye. UNICEF provided the Children's Rights and Business Principles training to more than 1,650 SME members of the TESK and increased their connection to formal technical and vocational training services to improve the quality and inclusiveness of formal apprenticeship.

UNICEF provided training on: (1) the Children's Rights and Business Principles and their application to workplace settings in Türkiye;¹⁵ (2) strategies that can be adopted by the business for preventing child labour; and (3) strategies for safe, inclusive and decent work-based training services within SMEs. To promote practices aligned with the rights and needs of adolescents and young people, UNICEF aimed to support SME owners on child labour, enhance work-based learning opportunities, promote decent work, improve occupational health and safety and increase the number of certified master trainers for young individuals. The goal was to encourage SME owners to recognize their responsibilities and potential in training masters for their respective industries while prioritizing children's and young people's safety and education.

UNICEF supported more than 250 workplaces to improve their workplace learning conditions through the TESK. Internal inspection and guidance units of the TESK conducted 2,194 workplace visits with a vision to increase the capacity of employers to adopt the Children's Rights and Business Principles and prevent child labour. During these visits, workplace conditions and compliance with labour regulations were observed, prevalence of child labour was monitored, and opportunities to increase the quality workplace learning for vocational training were recognized.



Group photo from the Guidance and Inspection Strategies for Child Rights and Business Principles conference held by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and UNICEF on 23 November 2022.

¹⁵ UNICEF, Children's Rights and Business Principles, 2012, www.unicef.org/media/96136/file/Childrens-Rights-Business-Principles-2012.pdf.



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Muharrem, a 15-year-old adolescent, during an auto-electronic vocational training, learns how to fix an engine in Adana.

Certified vocational training and inclusive workplace learning for skills

In addition, UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of National Education and developed a series of materials for technical and vocational training professionals and SMEs providing formal workplace learning opportunities for apprenticeship students. UNICEF also updated occupational health and safety measures to improve student-friendly and safe (including COVID-19 measures) workplace training for adolescent apprentices in 300 SMEs and developed the Personal Protective Equipment Guidebook for SMEs with adolescent trainees to improve safety of and retention in workplace learning.

“I love working. I also love studying. Both my father and my brother work in the auto service industry. They fix cars. But they don’t know about auto electronics. I do! My master also received vocational training in auto service. I want to work for a well-known brand in auto industry once I receive my Master Certification or maybe open up a shop with my father and my brother. Who knows!”

Muharrem.

Results

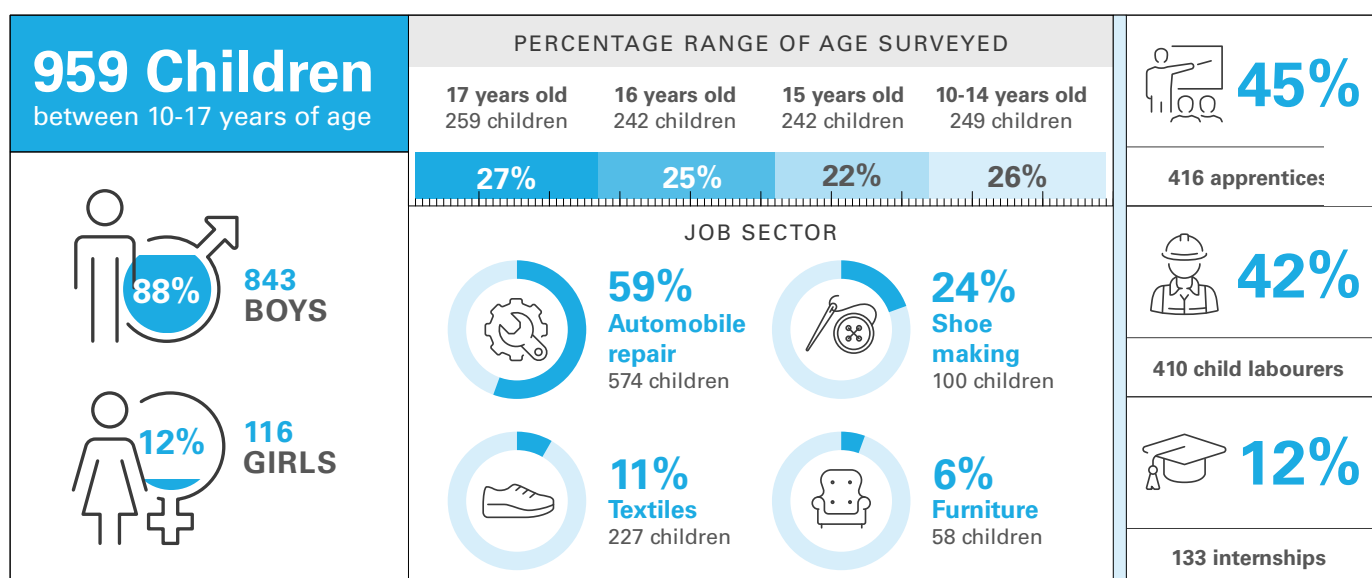
UNICEF and TESK’s workplace visits revealed that in SMEs, there are children engaged in economic activities that qualify them as child labourers. Visits also showed that some SMEs would offer work-based training for interested and eligible young people with some technical support on occupational health and safety measures, hiring master trainers and promoting the attainment of a master trainer certificate by masters working in the SMEs. SMEs are situated in urban areas and engage in the production of diverse goods and provision of a vast array of services. Several business owners have expressed their readiness to offer more work-based learning opportunities.

In 2022, UNICEF also continued its focus on public-private partnerships to achieve results for children. As a strategy, promoting business practices that respect children’s rights has been a key element to enhance investments for at-risk children. In this regard, UNICEF, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the TESK, carried out 4,638 workplace visits aimed at addressing child labour. During these visits, a total of 3,094 children at risk of child labour were identified and subsequently referred to various public services for protection and support (see Figure 1). These public services encompassed education, child protection, counselling, social protection and skills upgrading services. To ensure their continued education, the provincial branches of the Ministry of National Education were informed about all identified children. Additionally, UNICEF and the TESK met with local representatives from relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry

of Youth and Support and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to discuss potential actions to facilitate children’s enrolment in education, workplace training services and access to child protection, social protection and social services.

To further strengthen the Children’s Rights and Business Principles strategy with key public and private partners, UNICEF also led the preparation and dissemination of Tools to Prevent and Respond to Child Labour in Humanitarian Context of Türkiye. This toolkit consists of three tools and five booklets, available both in English and Turkish. UNICEF conducted four training of trainers on the Toolkit for Child Labour in the Humanitarian Context of Türkiye. Furthermore, UNICEF, in partnership with UNICEF Netherlands (Dutch National Committee) and the private sector, undertook an analysis on child labour and human rights due diligence practices including family-friendly policies in textile supply chains.¹⁶

Figure 1. Workplace visits in 2021–2022



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2022). Note: The nationalities of the 959 children are as follows: 773 Turkish citizens, 10 Afghans, 172 Syrians, 2 Russians and 2 Turkmen.

¹⁶ Kara, Pinar, Çi dem Cimrin and Ezgi Öner, Child Labour in Türkiye: An analysis on child labour and human rights due diligence practices, 2023, Minerva and UNICEF, www.minervabhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/06-CL-in-Garment-Sector-in-TR_An-Analysis-on-CL-and-HR-Due-Diligence_EN.pdf.

Challenges

In some cases, for sectors such as textile, the labour inspectors of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security witnessed poor working conditions not appropriate even for adults. During the workplace visits, it was discovered that certain workplaces were not in compliance with legal requirements regarding working hours, compensation, daily rest periods, annual leave and occupational health and safety standards.

Before the visits, employers were informed that these visits were for research and guidance only and that no penalties would be imposed for any findings. Nevertheless, some employers were still anxious about the possibility of facing penalties. This tension made workplace visits difficult, especially for SMEs with child labourers or young people who were registered for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) but not receiving adequate training and treated as regular workers. As a result, these employers attempted to conceal the presence of children and young people, making it challenging to understand the prevalence of child labour.

Lastly, in some instances, children pursuing job opportunities in provinces other than where they are registered may not be able to participate officially in TVET programmes and opportunities. As a result, they may choose to avoid such work-based monitoring activities and getting recorded in any research.

Sustainability and way forward

To support more provinces, UNICEF has planned to expand its technical expertise, advocacy efforts and capacity development activities in collaboration with the government and private sector. Following the devastating earthquakes that have adversely affected work-based training opportunities and safety measures for young individuals, UNICEF is committed to support the revitalization of SMEs and contribute towards inclusive and appropriate work-based training services in the affected area. By supporting these SMEs to rebuild their workplaces in accordance with the Children's Rights and Business Principles, SMEs can invest in sustainable businesses, safeguard children's rights and create a safe learning environment for children and young adults to gain employable vocational skills.

UNICEF will continue to support the private sector in addressing child labour in their supply chain and promote the Children's Rights and Business Principles including family-friendly workplace policy and practices. In 2023, UNICEF remains committed to partner with the private sector to support the endorsement of supply chain policies to eliminate child labour in all production processes and promote business principles upholding child rights.

Additionally, UNICEF continues to engage with employers, managers and employees across various tiers and sectors through informative sessions aimed at enhancing their capacity to adopt business practices that prioritize child rights.

As part of its wider programme, UNICEF will continue to improve the national and subnational capacities for policy implementation and generate good practices to be adopted nationally while further expanding its engagement with the private sector in delivering results for children. To that aim, UNICEF will work with its public partners to improve child labour monitoring structures at the policy and workplace levels and strengthen school-based and community-based child labour monitoring structures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the focus lies on empowering businesses, especially SMEs, to become strategic partners in preventing child labour before it occurs. This approach entails supporting vocational training opportunities for young people and encouraging businesses to invest responsibly, fostering a society that respects child rights and corporate human rights due diligence regulations.

Recognizing the changing economic landscape and aiming to increase accountability by promoting child rights due diligence and corporate sustainability human rights due diligence, the goal is to mobilize employers as allies in the fight against child labour, urging them to invest in training qualified employees and cultivating conscious consumers who make ethical purchasing decisions.

To achieve these objectives, a critical inspection process is employed that guides businesses towards compliance with regulations, ensuring decent working conditions and safe training environments for young people. By connecting all essential partners involved in the supply and demand sides of child labour, UNICEF promotes sustainable growth while adhering to legislation and due diligence practices.

Moreover, there is a strong commitment to increasing funding options to prevent child labour, advocating for the Children’s Rights and Business Principles and family-friendly workplace policies that ensure decent working conditions and social rights for women, thereby enhancing their participation in the labour market and improving the overall economy.

The partnership with the TESK, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of National Education and businesses from various sectors, exemplifies Türkiye cross-sectoral approach. By connecting businesses with public institutions, civil society organizations and the ultimate beneficiaries, UNICEF has achieved significant accomplishments in its mission to prevent child labour and promote the Children’s Rights and Business Principles.



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Ms. Süreya and her daughter Hatice live in a village of Kahramanmaraş and benefit from UNICEF’s Cash Transfer Program.

Collective action: UNICEF multifaceted approach to tackle child labour and strengthen legal framework in Viet Nam

UNICEF is a co-implementing partner in a multi-partner project in Viet Nam supported by the Government of the Netherlands, Save the Children and Stop Child Labour Coalition. Known as the ‘Work: No Child’s Business – Joining forces to scale up action against child labour’ (WNCB) project, this initiative aims to tackle child labour by addressing its multiple causes through partnerships with various stakeholders.¹⁷ It focuses, through case management, on improving access to education and retention in schools, training in employability skills to facilitate youth access to employment and protection for vulnerable children and child labourers affected by economic and internal migration.

The project seeks to strengthen the child protection system through three main pathways: empowering children and families to prevent child labour; improving child labour-related laws and policies and capacity of key government partners; and fostering partnerships with the private sector to eliminate child labour.

UNICEF has played a pivotal role by providing extensive technical support in improving the legal and policy framework, including the amendment of the 2019 Labour Code; the development of the National Programme on Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour 2021–2025; the development of the National Programme on Social Work Development 2021–2030 with the accompanying social work decree; the development and amendment of several government circulars in the education sector on social work and psychosocial support services in schools; a legal review based on international practices and standards; and the engagement in policy dialogue on the roles of social workers and the state of social work development in Viet Nam. WNCB engagement also includes facilitating technical meetings and workshops to encourage discussions among government agencies and stakeholders at the national and subnational levels, as highlighted by the high-level delegation participation at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in South Africa in 2022 and its follow-up actions.



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¹⁷ An alliance of three parties (UNICEF, Stop Child Labour Coalition and Save the Children) joins forces to implement the project WNCB in six countries (India, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Mali, Uganda and Viet Nam) in 2020–2024. In Viet Nam, UNICEF and Save the Children are the key implementing partners, with some technical assistance from the Centre for Child Rights and Business (formerly CCR-CSR).

¹⁸ General Statistics Office and United Nations Population Fund, The 2015 National Internal Migration Survey, 2016, https://vietnam.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/PD_Migration%20Booklet_ENG_printed%20in%202016.pdf?ref=next.blue.

Background and the current situation on child labour in Viet Nam

In Viet Nam, according to the second National Child Labour Survey in 2018, over 1 million children aged 5 to 17 years, representing 5.4 per cent of this age group, were found to be engaged in child labour. This rate of child labour in Viet Nam stands almost 2 percentage points below the Asia Pacific average and more than 4 percentage points lower than the global average. Recent reports indicate a notable increase in internal migration, resulting in a growing number of displaced and unregistered families and children residing in urban areas.¹⁸ This surge in migration has exposed many children to the risks of labour and sexual abuse and exploitation.

Furthermore, children and young individuals are increasingly involved in informal labour arrangements, which often lack supervision and regulation. In these challenging situations, children have limited chance for retention in education, impeding their personal development. Among those most vulnerable are migrants, ethnic minorities and young girls, who require targeted attention and support.

The prevalence of child labour in Viet Nam, while showing a lower rate compared to the regional and global averages, remains a significant concern. The recent trends of internal migration and the concentration of displaced and unregistered families in urban areas have exacerbated the issue, particularly for marginalized groups such as migrants, ethnic minorities and young girls.

Le Nguyen, a 14-year-old girl, lives in Dong Thap Province where she attends school and, during the summer, catches snails in the river and peels cashews to supplement her family's income.



The initiative

The WNCB project addresses the business-driven root causes and facilitators of child labour through multi-stakeholder partnerships, which aim to improve access and retention to quality education, skills training, protection and support for girls and boys affected by economic and internal migration. These children may either be left-behind children or live in poor migrant urban households.

The primary goal of the project is to strengthen the child protection system to effectively prevent child labour. It comprises three broad outputs or pathways: initiatives focused on empowering children and families to prevent child labour; efforts aimed at improving laws and policies related to child labour; and initiatives designed to foster partnerships with the private sector to prevent and eliminate child labour.

UNICEF played a pivotal role in advocating for the strengthening of the national legal framework to tackle child labour and child protection, the implementation of a national programme addressing child labour, the adoption of a multisectoral approach and the promotion of social work. This includes the development of a comprehensive law on social work in Viet Nam, recognizing the importance of a robust legal framework to ensure the effective functioning of the roles and responsibilities of social workers and recognition of social work as a profession. Nevertheless, following consultations with high-level government officials and stakeholders, a strategic decision was made to initiate the process with the creation of a decree as the initial step towards strengthening the regulatory landscape for social work in the country.

In line with this strategic direction, UNICEF provided extensive technical support throughout this process. This support encompasses a multifaceted approach, including conducting a thorough legal review that draws upon international experiences with social work legislation while also conducting a detailed legal analysis of the specific situation in Viet Nam. Furthermore, UNICEF helped to prepare policy briefs that critically assess the roles of social workers and the current state of social work development within the Vietnamese context. These briefs not only evaluate the existing landscape but also offer practical recommendations aimed at enhancing the regulatory framework governing the social work profession.

In addition to these crucial contributions, UNICEF has been instrumental in providing concrete technical advice and inputs for the development of the decree's outline and its subsequent draft versions. This technical guidance is based on insights from the legal review and policy briefs, ensuring the regulatory framework is both comprehensive and in line with international best practices. Moreover, UNICEF commitment extends to facilitating technical meetings and workshops in close collaboration with key government agencies and stakeholders at both the national and subnational levels. These forums serve as platforms for meaningful discussions on the draft decree, fostering dialogue and consensus-building among all relevant parties.

Results

UNICEF in Viet Nam has made significant progress in enhancing the national legal framework to prevent child labour and in implementing a national policy framework that embraces an inter-sectoral approach to addressing child labour. This progress was achieved by strategically leveraging the ongoing amendment of the Labour Code as a pivotal opportunity. Working through existing relationships and with continuous engagement with relevant ministries and officials, UNICEF, ILO and the WNCB Alliance successfully advocated for a dedicated chapter on child labour in the amendment and its supplementary government circular on prevention of child labour and protection of minor workers, supplementing the 2019 amended Labour Code. It also introduced crucial provisions to protect children's rights, including an extension of legal protection to employees without written contracts, covering all forms of work, including the informal economy.

UNICEF played a direct role in these achievements by organizing technical workshops with representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the National Assembly. Additionally, UNICEF developed policy briefs that presented international standards, shared best practices from other countries and provided expert advice and concrete recommendations for strengthening the legal framework. The amended Labour Code, in effect since 2020, brings the labour legislation in Viet Nam more in line with international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Minimum Age Convention (C138) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182). This alignment supports a business environment that promotes the prevention and response to child labour, even for SMEs in the supply chain.

The advocacy efforts made by UNICEF contributed to enhanced government commitments and capacity to address child labour. In close cooperation with ILO, the Alliance supported the organization of technical meetings and a high-level advocacy workshop on the development of the second National Programme on Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour 2021–2025 with a vision to 2030. This national programme now distinctively promotes an inter-sectoral approach to addressing child labour, in line with WNCB ambitions, by assigning roles and responsibilities to various concerned ministries and organizations. A monitoring and evaluation framework was developed to monitor the implementation of this national programme. With support from UNICEF, a national guideline on case management on child labour was developed and used for training 350 local officers nationwide.

In addition, UNICEF joined hands with ILO in supporting and advocating the Government of Viet Nam via the celebration of the World Day Against Child Labour and the development of the road map as a Pathfinder Country of the Alliance 8.7. UNICEF also facilitated a high-level inter-sectoral delegation to the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in 2022 in Durban, South Africa, reflecting the political commitment of the Government of Viet Nam. In commemoration of the World Day Against Child Labour 2022, under the theme 'Universal Social Protection to End Child Labour' and as a follow up of the Durban Call to Action, an advocacy workshop was organized to call for greater efforts, including social protection strengthening.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Training in developing a circular to establish school-based counselling positions to provide psychosocial support for students. With support from UNICEF, three guidelines on school-based social work practice, counselling and child labour prevention were endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Training and disseminated to 7,000 teachers nationwide, coupled with a national workshop on school-based violence against children and child labour prevention to advocate for increased education sector awareness and actions.

Challenges

In the past two years, the WNCB project in Viet Nam witnessed significant transformations owing to revisions in the government's official development assistance (ODA) management framework and practices. These modifications created a more intricate environment for the evaluation, approval and execution of projects, affecting not only WNCB but all United Nations initiatives and development partners operating within the country.

One notable consequence of these alterations was the extension of project approval timelines. The processes for project appraisal and approval became notably lengthier, resulting in disruptions to project schedules and timelines. Furthermore, the revised practices introduced higher standards and increased stringency in evaluating project proposals, necessitating organizations such as UNICEF to meet more rigorous criteria to secure approval for their initiatives.

Upon receiving approval, projects encountered more intricate implementation procedures. These complexities encompassed additional reporting requirements, compliance measures and heightened oversight mechanisms. Consequently, the entire process of project approval and execution became more challenging and time-consuming.

In light of these changes and the ongoing challenges related to child labour underreporting owing to the lack of a legal definition and limited identification and monitoring capacities, the Alliance actively supports and advocates for the government to establish a list of indicators for identification. This initiative is complemented by capacity-building efforts to strengthen the government's ability to monitor and address child labour cases effectively.



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Le Thi Nhu Y, a 15 year old girl is living with her grandmother following the divorce of her parents. Her family is also a poor commune household, and her grandmother is weak and unable to help. Nhu Y and her grandmother are supported by grassroot government, and a small amount of money sent by her parents on occasion. During the summer, she worked as a gas station staff opposite her grandmother's house. She was also assisting a neighbor who owned a beef noodle Pho shop. She obtained the spirit and scholarship to continue her studies by assisting of a social worker in her area. Her ambition is to become a police officer because, as she stated, the tuition is covered.

Sustainability and moving forward

Collaborating with government partners is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of UNICEF efforts. UNICEF has engaged with the Ministry of Education and Training, reaching an agreement to pilot school-based child labour prevention initiatives. These initiatives not only inform policymaking but also advocate for the replication of successful models and best practices within the school system.

UNICEF work with the education sector has focused on the development of social work service in schools and preventing school dropouts, a major driver of child labour. Activities at the subnational level contribute to the development of models, evidence and lessons that inform scaling-up efforts and national policy development.

UNICEF dual approach, combining high-level policy advocacy with practical fieldwork, positions WNCB uniquely to promote, advocate and inform the scaling-up of tested models and evidence-based policies for eliminating child labour. Government partners have begun mobilizing additional resources to expand various activities, with technical support from the project, such as the roll-out of group coaching sessions by the Women's Union and child-led communication initiative.

Conclusion

UNICEF takes a multisectoral¹⁹ and proactive approach in addressing child labour, with a strong focus on prevention. This approach involves strengthening the legal framework capacity-building, promoting the social service workforce, enhancing coordination among stakeholders, improving case management, establishing effective inter-agency referral mechanisms and providing timely support to child labourers and at-risk children. These multifaceted initiatives aim to create a lasting and positive impact.

Globally, strengthening local child protection systems has proven to be an effective strategy for addressing child labour. This involves various aspects, including legal reforms, raising public awareness, social protection measures, data collection and engaging the private sector in efforts related to child labour. The approach also entails enhancing the capacity and functionality of community-based child protection committees to address a wide range of issues affecting children, including child labour.

In summary, UNICEF intervention in Viet Nam adopts a multifaceted and strategic approach to prevent child labour and strengthen the social service workforce. Through partnerships with diverse stakeholders, UNICEF remains committed to tackling the root causes of child labour and enhancing the well-being of vulnerable children affected by economic and internal migration.

¹⁹ UNICEF, Ending Child Labour through a Multisectoral Approach, 2021, www.unicef.org/documents/ending-child-labour-through-multisectoral-approach.

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