



Rise in Child Labour

This editorial is based on [Covid has led to major rise in child labour](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 11/06/2023. It talks about the issue of Child Labour and how the Covid pandemic has led to an increase in its prevalence.

Prelims: [WHO](#), [UNICEF](#), [ILO](#), [National Crime Records Bureau](#), [Child Labour \(Prohibition and Regulation\) Act, 1986](#), National Policy on Child Labour (1987), [Pencil Portal](#)

Mains: Child Labour – Causes, Laws, Socio-Economic impacts and Way Forward

The Covid-19 pandemic brought the world to its knees and exposed multiple fault-lines in the healthcare, education, economic, and job-related sectors. India has not been immune to this devastation. As per the official statistics around 5,31,843 deaths have been reported from India to the [WHO](#).

But it is among the marginalised sections of society, especially women and children, that the effect of the pandemic has been deep and long lasting. Households that were surviving in poor economic conditions were pushed to the brink of poverty. These conditions have exacerbated the social inequities and have exposed women and children to abuse, violence and lack of security.

A 2022 report by [UNICEF](#) and [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) said that as Covid has put children at risk of child labour globally, the number of child labour cases were expected to rise by 8.9 million by the end of 2022. As per the US Department of Labour, disruption in supply chains has thrust people into unemployment leading to an increase in poverty.

What does the Data say about Child Labour in India?

- According to the last available [Census 2011](#), there were 10.1 million child labourers in India.
- As per the [National Crime Records Bureau Report 2022](#), in 2021, around 982 cases were registered under the [Child Labour \(Prohibition and Regulation\) Act, 1986](#), with the highest number of cases registered in Telangana, followed by Assam.
- Aide et Action's study in India on the impact of COVID-19 on migrant children revealed a **two-fold increase** in the number of children who accompanied their working parents to the brick-making industry after the first wave COVID-19 pandemic.
- **According to a study by Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL)**, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of working children from 28.2% to 79.6% out of the 818 children who were surveyed, mainly because of the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools.
- According to a new **report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF**, the number of children in **child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide** with millions more at risk due to the impacts of COVID-19.
- India's biggest child labour employers are – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

What are the Prominent Causes of Child Labour in India?

- **Poverty:** Many families are unable to afford the basic needs of life and send their children to work instead of school. Poverty also forces some children to work as bonded labourers or migrate to other places in search of work.
- **Social norms:** Some communities and families have a tradition of making their children work in certain occupations, such as agriculture, carpet weaving, or domestic service. Some also believe that education is not important or suitable for girls.
- **Lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents:** Due to the high unemployment rate and low wages, many adults and young people are unable to find decent and dignified work. This leads them to engage in informal and hazardous work or push their children into labour.
- **Poor School Infrastructure:** Many schools in India lack adequate facilities, teachers, and quality education. Some schools also charge fees or other expenses that are unaffordable for poor families. These factors discourage parents from sending their children to school and make them drop out.
- **Emergencies:** Natural disasters, conflicts, and pandemics can disrupt the normal functioning of society and increase the vulnerability of children. Some children may lose their parents, homes, or access to basic services. They may be forced to work for survival or be exploited by traffickers and other perpetrators.

How has the Covid Pandemic aggravated the issue of Child Labour?

- **Fall in Living Standards:** The pandemic has caused economic insecurity, unemployment, poverty and hunger for many families, forcing children to work for survival.
- **Loss of Guardianship:** The pandemic claimed many lives, leaving numerous children without parents. As a consequence, some of these children were compelled to engage in child labor.
- **Deteriorating Employment Opportunities:** The disruption in supply chains, trade and foreign investment has reduced the demand for labour and income opportunities for adults, making children more vulnerable to exploitation.
- **Rise in Informality:** The pandemic has increased the share of informal workers who lack social protection, decent working conditions and access to health care. Children are often employed in informal sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, street vending, mining and construction.
- **Migration:** Economic hardships and disruptions caused by the pandemic may have resulted in increased migration, both internal and cross-border. Migrant children, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families, have been more susceptible to exploitation and forced labor.
- **Temporary School Closures:** The pandemic has disrupted the education of millions of children, especially those who lack access to online learning or face barriers such as lack of electricity, devices or internet. School closures increased the risk of dropouts, early marriages, teenage pregnancies and child labour.

What is the Socio-Economic Impact of Child Labour?

- **Reduced Human Capital Accumulation:** Child labor diminishes children's ability to accumulate skills and knowledge, affecting their future productivity and income.
- **Perpetuation of Poverty and Child Labour:** Child labor lowers wages for unskilled work, contributing to the cycle of poverty and continued child labor.
- **Impaired Technological Progress and Economic Growth:** Child labor hampers technological advancements and innovation, slowing down long-term economic growth and development.
- **Deprivation of Rights and Opportunities:** Child labor deprives children of their rights to education, health, protection, and participation, limiting their future opportunities and social mobility.
- **Undermined Social Development and Cohesion:** Child labor weakens social development and cohesion within a country, impacting stability and democracy.
- **Negative Health Impacts:** Child labor exposes children to hazards, physical injuries, diseases, abuse, and exploitation, adversely affecting their physical and mental well-being, mortality rates, and life expectancy.

What Initiatives have been taken by the Government to Curb Child Labour?

- **Right to Education Act (2009):** It added [Article 21A](#) to the Constitution which recognizes education as a fundamental right of every child and provides for free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years.
- **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986):** Bans the employment of children below 14 years and adolescents below 18 years in hazardous occupations and processes..
- **The Factories Act (1948):** Prohibits the employment of children below 14 years of age in any hazardous environment and restricts the working hours and conditions of adolescents (14 to 18 years) who are allowed to work only in non-hazardous processes.
- **National Policy on Child Labour (1987):** Aims to eradicate child labour by prohibiting and regulating it, providing welfare and development programmes for children and their families, and ensuring the education and rehabilitation of working children.
 - **National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme:** It seeks to provide non-formal education, vocational training, mid-day meal, stipend and health care to the rescued children and then mainstream them into formal schooling system.
- **Pencil Portal:** The platform aims at engaging the Central Government, State Government, District, civil society and the public in eradicating child labour to achieve the target of a child labour free society. It was launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- **Ratifying conventions of the International Labour Organization:** India has also ratified two core conventions of the International Labour Organization on child labour in 2017.
 - **The Minimum Age Convention (1973) - No. 138:** This convention requires States party to set a minimum age under which no one shall be admitted to employment or work in any occupation. The minimum age should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, not less than 15 years. However, developing countries may initially specify a minimum age of 14 years.
 - **The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999) - No. 182:** This convention calls for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, forced labour and trafficking; the use of children in armed conflict; the use of a child for prostitution, pornography and in illicit activities (such as drug trafficking); and hazardous work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

What more should be done to Address the issue?

- **Strengthening the Legal Framework and its Enforcement:** The government should enact and amend laws that prohibit and regulate child labour, in line with the international standards and conventions.
 - It should also ensure that the laws are effectively implemented and enforced, by allocating adequate resources, capacity, coordination, data, accountability and political will.
 - The penalties for violating the child labour laws should be severe and consistent.
- **Providing Social Protection and Economic Support:** The government should provide comprehensive social protection and economic support to poor and vulnerable families, to prevent them from resorting to child labour as a coping mechanism.
 - This could include regular cash transfers, subsidies, pensions, health insurance, food security, etc.
 - The government should also facilitate access to credit, savings, microfinance and other livelihood opportunities for poor households.
- **Ensuring Universal and Quality Education:** The government should ensure that all children have access to free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years, as per the Right to Education Act 2009 and [Article 21A](#) of the Constitution.
 - It should also improve the quality, relevance, safety and inclusiveness of education, by providing adequate infrastructure, teachers, curriculum, materials, scholarships, etc.
 - It should also follow up with children who drop out or do not enrol in school, and provide them with bridge education, vocational training or alternative learning opportunities.
- **Raising Awareness and Mobilizing Action:** The government should collaborate with civil society organizations, media, corporations and citizens to raise awareness about the harmful

effects of child labour and the importance of child rights.

- It should also mobilize action and support for the initiatives against child labour, by creating platforms, campaigns, networks, coalitions, etc.
- The role of Panchayats can also be explored for raising awareness.
- **Responding to Emergencies and Crises:** The government should prepare for and respond to emergencies and crises that may increase the risk of child labour, such as conflicts, disasters, pandemics or economic shocks.
 - It should provide humanitarian assistance and protection to affected children and families, such as food, water, shelter, health care, psychosocial support, etc.
 - It should also ensure the continuity of education and social protection services during and after the crises.

Drishti IAS Mains:

Child labour is a global challenge that affects millions of children and hampers their economic, social and health development. Discuss the causes, consequences and solutions of child labour in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. International Labour Organization's Conventions 138 and 182 are related to: (2018)

- (a) Child Labour
- (b) Adaptation of agricultural practices to global climate change
- (c) Regulation of food prices and food security
- (d) Gender parity at the workplace

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. Examine the main provisions of the National Child Policy and throw light on the status of its implementation. (2016)