



## ► How businesses can help end forced labour of children

May 2022

**The fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour must lead to more, better, and faster action on one of the worst forms of child labour: Forced labour of children. With the right regulatory framework and enforcement in place, businesses can fully play their part.**

### What is forced labour of children?

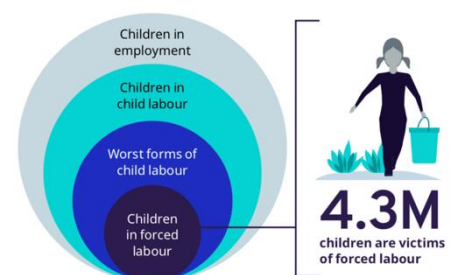
Where forced labour and child labour overlap, children are in forced labour. Child labour and forced labour have similar root causes. These include poverty, weak governance structures, lack of access to quality education, discrimination, labour market informality, and lack of company awareness and/or capacity to tackle these abuses.

ILO's Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) defines forced labour of any person, regardless of their age, as 'All work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.'

Generally, forced labour of children takes two forms. In the first form, parents are in a situation of forced labour with their children working alongside them or for the same employer. Children who work because their parents are in forced labour are also considered as victims. Children may also be trafficked or deceptively recruited or coerced into working for an employer without their parents. Examples of this could include children who migrate alone or who are trafficked into forced labour, particularly for domestic work.

### How many children are victims?

An estimated 4.3 million children were in forced labour in 2016, of which three million were trapped in forced labour in the private economy and more than one million were trapped in commercial sexual exploitation. Since then, figures are thought to have increased as the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated root causes.



## Where are children in forced labour?

Information on both child labour and forced labour paints a useful picture.

- A significant share of child labour and human trafficking in supply chains occurs in the lower tiers, in activities such as raw material extraction and agriculture. Forced labour also tends to take place in domestic markets.
- High risk sectors include agriculture, small-scale mining, apparel, brick production, domestic work, and the entertainment industry.
- Regionally, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of child labour, with 23.9 per cent of children estimated to be trapped. In Africa as a whole, 2.8 out every 1,000 people are victims of forced labour.
- The highest prevalence of forced labour regionally is in Asia and the Pacific where four in every 1,000 people are victims. According to the latest estimates, 5.5% of children in Central and Southern Asia and 6.2% of children in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia are victims of child labour.

### Recommended actions for businesses

- **Make a commitment and act on it.** This is paramount and will take different forms according to the nature of the business. Small- and medium-sized companies (SMEs), especially those operating at a national or local level and with no or more limited supply chains, can demonstrate their commitment through positive impact on their local and/or sourcing communities.
- **Target action.** Understand the nature of forced labour of children and address it where it is most prevalent, including in domestic economies and lower tiers of supply chains.
- **Identify risks.** Gather information on risk factors and act accordingly. Apply the ILO's 11 indicators of forced labour while bearing in mind that children are generally more vulnerable than adults to coercion and deception.
 

► ILO's 11 indicators of forced labour

The ILO's 11 indicators of forced labour			
Isolation	Physical & sexual violence	Intimidation & threats	Retention of identity documents
Withholding of wages	Debt bondage	Deception	Excessive overtime
Abuse of vulnerability	Abusive working & living conditions		Restriction of movement
- **Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate.** Working with employer and business membership organizations, worker representative organizations, experts, civil society, as well as local stakeholders, means businesses can access the right information and support.
- **Work with relevant authorities and/or experts to remove children from forced labour.** Where forced labour of children is identified, coordinate with (local) experts and the police/labour inspectors to remove the child(ren) from the situation as soon as safely feasible. This should be done in a manner that preserves the long-term interests of the child.
- **Recognize the role of national governments and advocate for action.** Businesses can play an important role in eradicating forced labour of children, but they cannot do it alone. National governments must create and enforce the right regulatory framework. Where governments are not (sufficiently) doing this, businesses and their representative organizations should advocate for positive change, collaborating where possible. High-level advocacy points businesses can use in their discussions with governments can be found below.

For further information, please see our brief ['An introduction to forced labour of children for businesses'](#).

## Recommended actions for governments

- ▶ **Make a commitment and act on it.** Publicly recognize the need to eradicate forced labour of children at the highest level of government. Have the political will to drive a comprehensive and ambitious reform agenda if required.
- ▶ **Tackle the root causes of forced labour of children.** Tackling root causes such as poverty, discrimination, and labour market informality, will protect children from forced labour, as well as protecting them and their families from other forms of exploitation and abuse.
- ▶ **Put in place the right regulatory framework and enforce it.** Businesses can play an important role in eradicating forced labour of children, but they cannot do it alone. National governments must create and enforce the right regulatory framework. This includes, but is not restricted to, the creation of a business environment conducive to forced labour and child labour eradication. This means eliminating all corruption. It also includes ensuring that unscrupulous recruiters cannot undercut ethical businesses, and using public procurement to drive responsible business conduct by only giving contracts to businesses with an ethical track record.
- ▶ **Sufficiently fund relevant public services and enforcement agencies.** These include child protection services, education, the police, and the labour inspectorate.
- ▶ **Build a trusted and credible inspection system.** This can be done via joint labour inspections between government, employer and business membership organizations, and workers' organizations.
- ▶ **Ensure victims have access to justice and grievance mechanisms.** Cases of forced labour of children must be investigated, prosecuted, and result in convictions and compensation for the victims. This means, among other things, that there must be a clear definition of forced labour of children in national laws as well as associated penalties, the authorities must record and investigate, and the judiciary need to have the capacity to make the right judgements.
- ▶ **Increase public and government awareness of forced labour of children and how to tackle it.** This should include all levels of government, the labour inspectorate, journalists, and populations facing vulnerability.
- ▶ **Invest in data collection.** Governments need to collect more timely and accurate data to better understand the nature of forced labour of children, allowing for more effective action.

For an overview of government actions on forced labour and child labour, please see [Ending forced labour, child labour, and human trafficking in global supply chains](#).

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further information

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