

**INCORPORATING  
WORKING  
CHILDREN'S  
VIEWS  
IN POLICY  
INTERVENTIONS**

Policy Briefing Paper by



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**Policies, legal frameworks and programmes are far more likely to secure positive change for children if they engage with the realities of boys' and girls' lives.**

**How can policy interventions addressing children's work better reflect children's views and lived realities?**

**We aim to improve legal and policy frameworks by integrating recent evidence gathered from working children themselves.**

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## LISTENING TO CHILDREN WHO WORK: TIME TO TALK! AND YOUNG LIVES

*Time to Talk! – Children’s Views on Children’s Work*<sup>1</sup> is a global project of Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes International Federation (TDHIF), in collaboration with over 50 NGO partners, that consulted 1,822 working children in 36 countries, using group discussions, creative activities, and individual interviews. The objective was to better understand the benefits, challenges, and risks of children’s work, and to listen to children’s suggestions to improve their lives (see *It’s Time to Talk! – Children’s Views on Children’s Work (2018) Duisburg: Kindernothilfe*).

Young Lives is a longitudinal study of childhood poverty<sup>2</sup> that has been studying 12,000 children from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam since 2002. Five rounds of survey data and four waves of in-depth qualitative research were gathered on how children spend their time (see Morrow, V. & Boyden, J. (2018) *Responding to children’s work: evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru & Vietnam. Summative report*. Oxford: Young Lives).

## WHAT IS CHILDREN’S WORK OR LABOUR?

The term “child labour” is commonly used to describe children’s economic activities. It tends to be applied differently by different institutions and individuals, either to encompass all types of children’s work, or to denote work that is dangerous, exploitative and generally harmful to children. This variation in usage creates confusion and can potentially have detrimental consequences, particularly when policies or approaches are proposed to “end child labour in all its forms” without distinguishing between work that is hazardous to children and work that is harmless or beneficial.

We use the term ‘children’s work’. Children’s work includes activities that have economic significance, such as unpaid labour on family land, or domestic work and childcare that children undertake so that adults can work. Children are recognised as being part of their households and communities and contributing actively to family livelihoods, whether via waged work, unpaid work, or domestic work within their homes. Children’s work needs to be appreciated in the context of other aspects of their lives, interconnected with intergenerational relationships.

Time to Talk and Young Lives captured a variety of work children are involved in. This included: unpaid household and agricultural work, domestic work for employers, small scale vending, paid agricultural work, mine work, brick or stone making, waste collection, construction work, working in a shop, looking after children, factory work, looking after animals, cleaning cars or buses, begging, work in massage or dance parlours, and commercial sexual exploitation. Children’s time-use varies, as children work full or part-time, some combine work and school while others do not attend school at all. Working hours and conditions vary across sectors and activities. The types of work children undertake are specific to local economies and cultural and gender norms.

<sup>1</sup> [www.time-to-talk.info](http://www.time-to-talk.info), <sup>2</sup> [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICIES AND MEASURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL WORK

### 1

#### UNDERSTAND WHY CHILDREN WORK:

In order for policies to effectively protect children and fulfil their rights it is crucial to understand the reasons why boys and girls work, what contribution they and their families perceive work makes, and how work fits in with other aspects of their lives.

- Ensure that policy and practice is locally relevant, flexible and responsive to the needs, rights, and aspirations of boys and girls of different ages and take full account of the economic and social circumstances of their families.
- Policies and programmes to protect children from harmful work need to consider working conditions and relationships, as well as the type of work or the sector that is considered to be harmful.
- It is important to identify and reduce children's engagement in and exposure to harmful work. Protective factors that contribute to beneficial work should be identified and strengthened through collaborative initiatives with the children concerned.
- Policies should not criminalise, penalise or stigmatise children of any age when they engage in work. Instead they should promote children's protection and resilience, and address the drivers of exploitation, violence and other hazards.

### 2

**CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION** in decision-making in all settings (families, work places, communities and wider governance processes), their access to information and the fulfilment of their right to association can all enhance their protection and development. Children's participation is also a way of increasing programme effectiveness since boys and girls who work can contribute to understanding what constitutes harmful work and which conditions facilitate safe and appropriate work, even if they cannot know all the risks.

- Policy makers need to better understand from girls and boys the positive and negative aspects of their work, in order to design and implement policies to reduce harm and protect working children from exploitative conditions.
- Governments should increase efforts to ensure realisation of children's civil rights to information, expression, participation, and association. This requires removal of barriers to children's expression and participation in decision-making at different levels and in different settings, as well as creating an enabling environment for child-led initiatives (children's clubs, organisations, parliaments etc.). All children should be included and empowered to participate in decisions affecting their lives, including girls and boys of different ages, children with disabilities, children from minority ethnic, religious or language groups, migrant and stateless children.
- Children's advocacy initiatives (collective and individual) should be actively supported, and safe and accountable reporting mechanisms that are tailored to the diverse needs of children of various ages and social groups should be established in different settings.
- Policy makers and practitioners at local, national and global levels need to create spaces for dialogue with and feedback from working children, their parents, caregivers and employers.

# 3

**POVERTY IS A CAUSE AND A RESULT OF HARMFUL CHILDREN'S WORK.** In most contexts poorer children are the ones most likely to be working longer hours and under dangerous or exploitative conditions. Lessening the vulnerability of communities, families and children to exploitation is a priority and, poverty reduction policies and social protection systems need to be designed in such a way as to ensure working children benefit.

- Multi-sectoral responses are needed to reduce drivers of vulnerability to and within families, especially poverty, and to increase families' resilience against economic shocks.
- Increase investments in poverty reduction; decent work and livelihood schemes for parents/caregivers and young people; social protection schemes, including conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and work schemes need to be evaluated for the effects on children's work; and improved infrastructure for education, health and social services especially in remote rural and urban settings, including camps.

# 4

**EDUCATION IS KEY TO ENDING EXPLOITATION AND TO SUPPORTING WORKING CHILDREN.** From children's viewpoints, school and work are intertwined, as girls and boys try to manage demands on their time and (family) resources.

- Access to free, quality education ensuring non-discriminatory, non-violent learning environments for all children (including girls, refugee, stateless, and migrant children, children with disabilities, and minorities) is critical to increase enrolment rates and ensures children's regular attendance in school.
- Greater understanding of children's realities, their responsibilities and the many demands on their time is needed by teachers, especially in rural areas and in contexts affected by conflict, flight or migration.
- Legislation that outlaws corporal punishment in schools needs to be enforced and teachers need pedagogical support to encourage positive discipline.
- Mechanisms for children's and parent's views to be heard in school management can enhance opportunities to develop and monitor the quality of education that is relevant to local needs, e.g. flexible school timetables and curricula to ensure inclusion of children from families who undertake seasonal work.
- Increase policy and programme focus on transitions from education to training and decent work for adolescents and adopt policies to promote future employment of young people.
- Incorporate transferable life skills within school curricula to support children to build resilience and capacities to transition out of harmful work and into decent work.
- Increase investments in gender and disability sensitive education and vocational skill training and on-the-job mentoring schemes for adolescents.

## 5

**ARMED CONFLICT AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS** have multiple negative impacts on children and their families, and increase children's engagement in harmful work. Situations of crisis contribute to changes in the allocation of work responsibilities within and outside households, often increasing the burden on younger children or those of either one gender or the other.

- Strategic efforts are required to overcome legal barriers, discriminatory practices and criminalization of migrants/refugees and internally displaced persons that prevent parents, caregivers, and youth from earning a living and accessing decent work in host communities/countries.
- Ensure timely and adequate cash and material assistance for children and families affected by crisis, so that families have sufficient resources to meet their basic needs.
- In order to respond to children's involvement in harmful/exploitative work in or after situations of crisis, agencies need to adopt a multi-sectorial approach that can mitigate the different drivers of harmful work, including lack of access to livelihood opportunities and basic services.
- Access to education and child protection systems enhance children's protection from exploitation during and following environmental crisis.
- Targeted programmes for older children, including age-appropriate learning, vocational training and opportunities for decent work within the legal framework should be prioritized.
- Increased government investments in disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and violence prevention would help lessen vulnerability and strengthen resilience to adversity.

## 6

**POLICIES TOWARDS CHILDREN'S WORK NEED TO BE AGE AND GENDER SENSITIVE.** Children's work is differentiated by gender, and these differences increase as children grow older.

- Ensure that gender analysis is conducted to understand both barriers and enablers for the realization of boys' and girls' rights. Data on children's work and its outcomes must be gender-disaggregated.
- Ensure co-ordinated, child-focused, gender sensitive, policy and practice developments that are locally relevant, flexible and responsive to the needs, rights, and aspirations of girls, boys and families.
- Strengthen child protection systems (local to international) to prevent and protect children from violence, including different forms of gender-based violence in families, work places, schools, streets, communities, and wider society.
- Ensure that monitoring and strategies to protect children from harmful work include paid and unpaid domestic and caring work.
- Improve access to childcare programmes in order to decrease care work, often undertaken by girls.

## **7 THE LINKS BETWEEN HARMFUL WORK AND VIOLENCE-AFFECTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO BE ADDRESSED.** *Many children face various forms of violence when working.*

- In prevention and protection of children from harmful work, a range of state and non-state actors need to support multi-sectoral efforts to prevent violence and to protect girls and boys from all forms of violence, be it in workplaces, families, schools, communities
- Working collaboratively with communities to build upon their strengths, and engaging with children as agents of change to prevent and respond to violence sensitively, must be integral to such efforts.
- Governments should invest in increased training of police, social workers / social welfare officers, and labour inspectors on children's rights; and ensure that those who violate children's rights (employers, traffickers, police or other officials) are held accountable.

## **8 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN** *and caregivers should inform the design, monitoring and evaluation of child labour laws, policies and programmes.*

- More research is needed to better understand the effectiveness and different consequences of interventions targeting working children, as well as the role of work in children's lives, including through longitudinal research to identify long-term effects of work on children's outcomes.
- Ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation of child labour laws, policies and programmes, using a range of methods and participatory techniques, would increase knowledge on what does and does not work, and why. These could be used to inform and scale-up examples of good practice.

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