

"Let our voices be heard!"



This 2022 document shares advocacy priorities and messages from working Children's Advisory Committees (CAC) that are organised across 15 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, as part of the Dialogue Works campaign¹.

Proposals of working children around the globe²:

Address poverty, provide decent jobs for our parents, and ensure that our basic needs are met

Working children want their right to have their basic needs met, to be respected. Poverty as one key driver of child labour, must be addressed so that families have enough resources to meet children's basic needs for food, clothes, health care, education etc. Parents and caregivers should have opportunities for decent work and vocational skill training in rural, remote, and urban settings so that they can earn fair wages. Families also need decent housing, land rights, clean drinking water and sanitation. Poverty, migration, health pandemics, conflict, and environmental damage, has made it even harder for families to meet children's basic needs. During pandemics and other emergencies, there must be fair distribution of aid, including provision of basic food, cash or other social protection schemes, and all families should have free access to quality health services and vaccinations.

Key messages from working children's committees:

"If poverty is addressed and our parents can get income from work, child labour exploitation is decreased and our basic needs fulfil easily." (CAC, Ethiopia)

"If decent jobs were provided all our basic needs will be meet such as education, quality health and improved nutrition diets." (CAC, Zambia)

"It is the responsibility of the government to help its citizens during the time of pandemics and disaster" (CAC, Nepal)

¹ The document builds upon the first "Let our voices be heard" (2019) from CACs in "It's Time to Talk!". Members of the current CACs reviewed, validated and added to earlier messages to create this document.

² Most frequently mentioned issues are listed first.

Take our education seriously and provide quality education and skill training

Working children want their right to education to be respected, including during pandemics and other emergencies. Children want free, friendly, flexible, accessible, non-violent and non-discriminatory quality education and skill training, including digital education. Children want to complete their education, to be more knowledgeable and confident to get good jobs. Children do not want to miss school or drop out because of their work. However, many children also shared that their earnings are used to pay school costs to continue their education, plus some gain skills through their work. Children want schools that are flexible to their needs, and more efforts to re-enrol out of school children. Education and skill training should be inclusive of all, including working children with disabilities. It is also important to stop tuition fees, discrimination and violence within schools, as each leads to irregular attendance and school dropout, which in turn increase risks of labour exploitation.

Key messages from working children's committees:

"Support continuing education of working children, including placement in vocational skill training centres and opportunity to enrol back in formal schools." (CAC, Kenya)

"Work and education should be linked, work should be part of education and education should let children work and learn from work." (CAC, Peru-Ifejant)

"If we get quality education, we can have better employment opportunities" (CAC, India)

Protect us from labour exploitation, harsh conditions and risks, and allow children to do suitable dignified work

Working children want their right to protection from exploitation to be respected. They do not want to do work that is too heavy, underpaid, harmful, in harsh or risky conditions. Boys face increased risks of heavy work, and girls face increased risks of doing unpaid household work for long hours. However, many working children do not want to stop all forms of child work. They want to do work that is suitable to their age and capacity in order to contribute to their families, to learn skills, to earn money, to meet their basic needs and to respect their traditional culture. Many children are proud to help their families and want their work to be valued. Children, including those with disabilities want improved working conditions, fair pay, safety, respect, and sufficient time to study, rest, and play.

Key messages from working children's committees:

"Protect children from labour exploitation" (CACs, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nepal & Peru-CESIP)

"Fight for dignified work, the work I do is not a crime." (CAC, Bolivia)

"Work dignifies and forms us as persons and also helps us to support the family. Work is our culture and joy, not just a response to poverty." (CAC, Peru-Ifejant)

Listen to us, understand us, and implement laws that respect our rights

Working children want their right to participation to be respected by seriously listening to and acting upon their views, feelings and suggestions. Children want their views to be valued by parents, caregivers, teachers, employers, police, practitioners, and policy makers – including government authorities, and other national and international agencies. Children want to be informed about their rights, and about policies and laws affecting them. Children's associations and networks should be supported, and working children want to play a role in shaping and monitoring laws,

policies and programmes to increase proper implementation to better realise their rights.

Key messages from working children's committees:

"When our rights are heard, this will make children feel part of the decision, it boosts children self-esteem." (CAC, Zambia)

"Understand the reality of working children and support our rights" (CAC, Guatemala)

"A person must be heard, whether they are children or adults, every voice is important and must be listened to, understood and something must be done about it." (CAC, Peru)

Prevent and protect working children from violence and discrimination

Working children want their right to protection from all forms of violence and discrimination, to be respected. Girls and boys experience different forms of violence (physical, emotional and sexual) and bullying in their homes, schools, on the street, and in the workplace. This includes violence and discrimination from police and other adults who are supposed to protect them. Working children with disabilities felt they experienced greater risks of sexual and physical harassment; and across many regions, girls face heightened risks of sexual harassment. During the covid-19 pandemic, parents experienced higher levels of stress that increased risks of domestic violence in the home. Thus, governments should also support psychosocial support services for children and caregivers.

Key messages from working children's committees:

"All children need to be protected, and if children face discrimination, they will feel sad and hurt." (CAC, Indonesia)

"Prevent & respond to violence against children" (CACs, Rwanda & Tanzania)

"Protect children from violence, and stop bullying of working children." (CACs, Lebanon & the Philippines)

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