

Child labour in the context of COVID-19 in Livelihoods and Food Security sector

Potential impact and actions

Child labour means employing children into dangerous or exploitative work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. Already, there are an estimated 152 million children in child labour, 72 million of which are in hazardous work.¹ The economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19 will hit children particularly hard. An estimated 42-66 million children could fall into extreme poverty as a result of the crisis this year, adding to the estimated 386 million children already in extreme poverty in 2019.²

COVID-19 is placing a lot of economic and social pressures on families around the world. As poverty increases, so does the risk of children being used for dangerous and exploitative labour. It is estimated that a 1 percentage point rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7 percentage point increase in child labour.³ In the context of families, when heads of household cannot find work and run out of options for sustenance at home, children may be sent away, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation.⁴ The health, psychosocial, and educational impacts on children in labour can negatively impact their development and wellbeing for years or decades. Measures such as the closure of schools, restrictions on population movements and social gatherings disrupt the social support for children and can put them at risk.

While the risks of child labour are not always immediately visible, experience shows that crises with high economic impact worsen risk factors of child labour and are likely to increase its prevalence. Some of the child labour risks below have already emerged in the current COVID-19 pandemic, while others are potential child labour risks that have been prevalent in previous humanitarian crises including infectious disease outbreaks.

¹ ILO. (2020, June 12). COVID-19: Protect Children from Child Labour, now more than ever! ilo.org: <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Campaignandadvocacy/wdacl/2020/lang--en/index.htm>

² ILO. (2020, May). COVID-19 Impact on Child Labour and Forced Labour: The Response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme. ilo.org: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipec/documents/publication/wcms_745287.pdf

³ UNICEF and ILO. (2020). COVID-19 and Child Labour: A Time of Crisis, A Time to Act. [COVID-19-and-Child-labour-2020.pdf \(unicef.org\)](https://www.unicef.org/childlabour/index.html)

⁴ ILO. (2020, May). COVID-19 Impact on Child Labour and Forced Labour: The Response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme. ilo.org: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipec/documents/publication/wcms_745287.pdf

Potential impacts of COVID-19 on child labour

- Households may resort to child labour in order to cope with reduction on income due to death, illness, quarantine, job loss, remittances reduction, debts increase and health shocks associated with COVID-19, in particular if they are not in the education system, including commercial sexual exploitation to meet basic needs of their families, also to the extent of Trafficking in persons.
- More hazardous working conditions for children (i.e., longer hours, more dangerous tasks or more harmful work circumstances if parents or other relatives are not present, and exposure to Covid), particularly in agriculture, recycling industry and mines
- The massive global disruption to education caused by confinement measures and the lack of distance-learning solutions or other alternatives for educational continuity, alongside barriers to access existing ones (e.g., lack of infrastructure and equipment, poor digital literacy, lack of or poor support/accompaniment of homeschooling by relatives or teachers) in many countries could drive child labour numbers up.
- Increase of informal work demand (easier to access for children).
- Reinforcement of traditional gender roles at home: increased role of girls in cleaning, cooking, and caregiving; increased pressure on boys to help their family with income generating activities.
- Child marriage for girls as a coping mechanism (families might see it as “one mouth less to feed”, a way to generate income through dowry or other similar mechanisms, or have the intention to keep girls safe from sexual attack)
- Children in isolation do not see their peers and friends and are disconnected from other support networks.
- Greater risk to children who are from marginalized minority groups, disabled, street-connected and homeless, or from single or child-headed households, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, or from conflict or disaster affected areas are more vulnerable to child labour and at particular risk in the current crisis because COVID-19 compounds their existing vulnerabilities.⁵
- Increased psychosocial distress.
- Increased risks of family separation and migration as parents and children search for work can further isolate children and/or expose them to new risks.
- Increased risk for unaccompanied children who migrate seeking work.
- Weakened protection and support systems to help children who are working and less access for social workers and civil society organizations that help protect them.
- Restrictions on movement may shift forms of exploitation, women and children for example may be commercially sexually exploited by their abusers online or within private homes. More children pushed into dangerous and exploitative work including sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- Increased risk of being recruited into armed groups.

⁵ COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour: The response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_745287.pdf)

National Societies Actions: Preventing and Responding to Child Labour during COVID-19 in Livelihoods and Food Security Sector

National societies have an important role in protecting children from child labour. To mitigate risks and address child labour during COVID-19, they must prioritize the following actions⁶:

- Take into consideration the **needs of children** during the selection criteria for FSL programmes, emphasising the needs of disabled children, unaccompanied and separated children, orphans, children living with elderly or disabled caregivers, etc. who may be part of the HHs (special needs may include nutrition needs or access to livelihood options). Make sure to analyse experiences, impacts, needs, access and opportunities from a gender dimension.
- **Include child protection**, including protection of children at risk of child labour, violence, abuse and exploitation, into **assessments**. Assess risk for children within each of the four food security pillars – availability, access, utilization and stability – liaise with the Protection Cluster if it exists or its equivalent to be trained / to participate in The Child Protection Needs and Identification Framework (CP NIAF)⁷.
- When the food security intervention is well planned and carried out **integrating child protection** within each of the four **food security pillars** it notably contributes to preventing and responding to the risks of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence faced by children affected by emergencies and crises.
- When working with children at risk of child labour, ensure application of **gender and diversity analysis** to meet the specific needs of girls, boys and other gender status. Also include an analysis of children who are at risk because of factors like being street-connected, being from racialized or traditionally marginalized communities, and living in poverty.
- **Promote food security and livelihoods interventions** as direct ways to prevent children from child labour and other negative coping strategies.
- **Include families of children at risk of, or already in child labour; child headed households, unaccompanied and separated children** in the **targeting criteria** of food assistance and livelihood programmes and consider the economic impact of the pandemic on households that (used to) rely on child labour.
- Link families at risk of child labour to **food assistance and livelihoods programmes**, with careful consideration to gendered roles and responsibilities within the family and between caretakers.
- Promote and support the **development of income-generating activities** (with start-up capital if needed) for parents and family members, of legal working age, so that children don't need to work. When necessary promote access to **microfinance and business management skills trainings**. Ideally, set up these mechanisms in such a way that the support provided to parents or family members is conditioned to their children's access to education and continued learning (i.e., enrolment in or return to school and regular attendance of classes and/or other available quality learning opportunities).

⁶ *Tips and recommendations Child protection and FSL – an example from Syria Crisis*
https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/fsl_and_child_protection_integration_-_tips_and_recommendations.pdf

⁷ *The Needs Identification Assessment Framework (NIAF) is an investigative approach to identify and assess the needs of vulnerable children and changes in child protection risks caused for example by COVID-19. The approach produces an evidence based analysis to better inform humanitarian and child protection actors in their operational planning of child protection response:* <https://www.cpaor.net/node/669>

- Ensure **cash-for-work** activities/employment opportunities prevent child labour and only involve adolescents (older children) who have reached the legal age for work and who have completed compulsory education.
- Promote **decent work for adolescents**, who are above the minimum working age, through **training, life skills and entrepreneurship**, as well as **savings and credit services**. This can include Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) adapted to the job market/opportunities and adolescents' own preferences.
- **Strengthening social safeties/protection**: consider ways to collaborate with existing government social protection systems who may be adapting or expanding cash programming, in response to COVID 19, supporting those families in risk of sending their children to work.
- For children who are working, provide personal protective equipment, hygiene kits including for menstrual hygiene, and food vouchers.
- Support **access to education and encourage school attendance** through:
 - ✓ Supporting the **costs of schooling** (school fees and related expenses – e.g., for equipment, supplies, transportation, etc.).
 - ✓ Providing **midday meals** at school.
 - ✓ Ensure access to appropriate menstrual hygiene management and dignified and private sanitation facilities at school.
 - ✓ Paying **conditional wages** while children attend school. The quickest way to reduce the number of full-time child workers is to continue to pay them while they attend school. Consider adjusting amounts according to gender and school levels (more to girls to avoid dropping school).
 - ✓ Providing **transitional schools** (“catch-up classes”) for children who have fallen behind their peer group or who are dropped out and offering quality complementary learning opportunities (e.g., socio-emotional and action-oriented learning, life skills and digital literacy programmes).
 - ✓ Providing **individualised support** and accompaniment to children’s education (e.g., homework/schooling assistance, learning aid for children with specific needs, psychosocial support, etc.).
 - ✓ Supporting adolescents who do not have a **basic education** by combining training in the workplace with **life and literacy/numeracy skills and informal basic education**.

Studies show time and time again that providing free and good quality education to all children around the world helps to reduce the incidence of child labor⁸.

Monitoring

- Monitor the positive and negative impact of livelihoods support and cash for work on child labour.
- Monitor rapidly changing markets and labour market situation and adapt FSL programmes to the new conditions and to continue to ensure children are protected from child labour through new initiatives.
- Assess and monitor the existing and potential negative and reverse effects of the assistance.

⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/education>

Child Safeguarding & Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA):

- Ensure a **Child Safeguarding and PSEA Policy**, and systems are in place within **the National Society**, and its suppliers, so that personnel interacting with children and their families know what acceptable behaviour is, how to protect children, and how to support children who need help.
- Ensure a safe and inclusive national society organizational structure and systems are in place among programmes and the staff and volunteers' compositions. Trainings, practical tools and standardized procedure, as well as policies shall all include Protection, gender and Inclusion considerations and efforts across the organizational infrastructure.

Child participation:

- Provide meaningful opportunities for children to participate in all the decisions that affect them.
- Include the protection of child workers into community awareness programming and messages.
- Ensure risk communication and community engagement messages are developed with children and adapted into child-friendly formats.
- Ensure the participation of boys and girls in all stages of the programme cycle, from needs assessment/baseline survey, programme design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation to programme closure.

Safe referrals:

- Train staff and volunteers in identifying/recognizing when a child is at risk
- Identify children at risk or involved as child workers, or in an exploitative situation and provide child-friendly information on how they can access local mental health and psychosocial support, protection services, and health care.
- Ensure **National Society personnel know how to handle concerns of child labour, exploitation, trafficking in persons and SGBV towards children**. National Societies can ask support from protection specialists and/or connect with the local interagency child protection cluster or working group, if available.

Advocacy

- Encouraging support for National Child Labor laws and their enforcement
- Promoting social accountability for communities, governments, and businesses to combat child labour
- Advocating for and/or supporting authorities with strengthening national social support programmes/welfare systems to address this systemic dimension of the problem
- Raising awareness on child labour and the Principle of Non-Discrimination with special attention to gender and diversity.
- Equipping communities - faith leaders, parents, and community groups (e.g., teachers and education personnel) - to monitor children at risk of labour to keep them out of hazardous work, help their families survive without their child's income, and report/refer child protection concerns to relevant authorities/ service providers.
- Promoting ethical consumerism, where no child labour is involved.

This document provides some guidance related to potential impacts of COVID-19 on child labour in Livelihoods and Food Security sector and suggested actions from the NS. For further support do not hesitate to contact the COVID-19 LIVELIHOODS HELPDESK (covid19-livelihoods@cruzroja.es).

Livelihoods Centre site: www.livelihoodscentre.org/

Resources

- The Alliance for child protection in Humanitarian Action: [Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic | The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(alliancecpha.org\)](https://alliancecpha.org/2020/04/protection-of-children-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/) and [covid-19 and child labour annex final.pdf \(alliancecpha.org\)](https://alliancecpha.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/covid-19_and_child_labour_annex_final.pdf)
- MOOC on Case management for Children during COVID-19. Project is led by IFRC with International Social Services, UNHCR, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, and several other partners [MOOC | COVID-19 and Adapting Child Protection Case Management | The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(alliancecpha.org\)](https://alliancecpha.org/2020/04/mooc-on-case-management-for-children-during-covid-19/)
- Children as Partners in Child Protection in COVID-19 Guide, September 2020 (<https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/children-partners-child-protection-covid-19-guide/>)
- Child protection and Covid-19 Overview (https://www.preparecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/IFRC_COVID19_Child_Protection_Overview.pdf)
- [IFRC tool on “Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Emergencies”](https://www.ifrc.org/2020/07/ifrc-tool-on-minimum-standards-for-protection-gender-and-inclusion-in-emergencies/)
- IFRC technical guidance note to support RCRC education response to Covid-19: <https://volunteeringredcross.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IFRC-Technical-guidance-note-to-support-RCRC-education-response-to-Covid-19.pdf>