



A Safe Future for Every Child: How Multisectoral Partnership Ends Child Labour

Executive summary

Problem: Child labour is a global crisis, violating the rights of over 138 million children, with 54 million in hazardous work like mining (driven by demand for minerals in green energy and electronics).[1] Child labour subjects children to violence and exploitation, and robs them of education and development. Evidence shows the social and economic costs of violence against children manifest at the time of the violence and throughout the life course, often into subsequent generations.[2] The root causes are multi-dimensional poverty, harmful social norms, and a lack of quality education.

Key Finding: Accelerating systemic change requires multi-stakeholder collaboration centred on the lived experiences of affected children to create survivor-centered systems. A multi-pronged approach to strengthen systems, increase accountability, and tackle root causes is needed.

Key Recommendations

- Ensure meaningful and inclusive participation of children as a non-negotiable step.
- Bridge silos and financially support local civil society organizations to reach vulnerable communities.
- Companies must strengthen due diligence and commit to paying living wages across supply chains to prevent poverty-driven child labour.
- Strengthen social protection and community initiatives through targeted research and public budgeting to address root causes.
- Implement policies to formalize artisanal and small-scale mining with clear regulations, child labour-free zones, and robust inspection mechanisms.

The questions we sought to answer

- ✓ What are the key challenges in addressing child labour as a form of exploitation?
- ✓ What roles can the government, the private sector and other key stakeholders play in addressing child labour at different levels of implementation?
- ✓ In what ways can children and youth actively engage with various stakeholders, such as government, CSOs and the private sector?



A public health approach to child protection

This policy brief presents strategies that strengthen the following public health pillars:

- Effective governance and multi-sectoral coordination
- Data driven and evidence-based solutions
- A continuum of child protection prevention and response services
- Child, survivor and community participation in solutions

The problem

Child labour remains a pervasive global crisis, affecting over 138 million children, with 54 million engaged in hazardous work, including one million in mining, an issue compounded by the increasing demand for minerals vital to the green energy transition and electronics.

This problem transcends economics, as it exposes children to extreme violence, neglect, and exploitation, **fundamentally violating their rights to education, play, and healthy development, resulting in the loss of their childhood.**[3][4]

While governments often hesitate over the high initial investment required for schools, social protection and child protection, they must also account for the long-term socioeconomic dividends generated by an educated and healthy workforce. The elimination of child labour and its replacement by universal education is estimated to yield enormous economic benefits. Children engaged in the worst forms of child labour often have zero school attendance. **Moving children into education provides an 11% increase in future annual earnings for every extra year of schooling they receive**, meanwhile the health benefits of removing them from hazardous environments remove significant burden from national health care systems.[5] Furthermore, freeing the 27.6 million+ people currently in forced labor (modern slavery) and integrating them into the formal economy could increase global GDP by \$611 billion.[6]

The dangerous conditions – involving unsafe tools, toxic chemicals, and extreme environments – lead to severe physical injuries, illnesses, and disabilities, alongside serious mental health challenges such as trauma and depression, with girls facing a heightened risk of sexual abuse.[7][8][9]

Although the [ILO Convention No. 182](#) has been universally ratified, implementation challenges persist, as global data indicates.[10] The current lack of cooperation among multiple actors at various governmental levels must be urgently addressed to foster an environment conducive to effective institutional action at the national and subnational levels to mitigate the implementation challenges.

Accelerating systemic change to end child labour requires multi-stakeholder collaboration – coordinating efforts, resources, and knowledge across government, non-governmental actors, and the private sector.

This approach must center on the lived experiences of affected children to create survivor-centred, responsive systems.

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Policy recommendations

1. Enhancing meaningful child and youth participation in policy making

All policy making bodies and processes must establish and utilize formal platforms for direct child and youth input, making their participation a non-negotiable step in the policy development cycle. Integrating children's perspectives ensures that policies are relevant, impactful, and grounded in their real-life experiences.

To facilitate meaningful contributions from children and youth, provide simple, transparent information regarding the policy process, and ensure all background documents and materials are presented using age-appropriate language. For example, TdH and ILO prepared a child-friendly version of the ASEAN Roadmap for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, to enable children and youth to input into the 2025-2030 roadmap.[11]

Establish a safe environment. This could include utilizing mechanisms such as anonymous feedback boxes for anonymous inputs, designated trained safeguarding focal points, and employing a trauma-informed care approach throughout the process to remain attuned to children's feelings, potential sensitivities, and safeguarding needs. [12]

2. Bridging the silos: creating conditions for multi-stakeholders collaboration

Governments should formally recognize and financially support the indispensable, complementary role of local civil society organizations. This is crucial for reaching the most vulnerable, hard-to-reach, and informal contexts (for example, informal labour) and facilitating the participation of children and families in policy design and implementation.[13]

Create and empower effective collaboration platforms involving governments, employers, labour unions, and civil society organizations. These platforms should be tasked with jointly implementing policies to eliminate and prevent child labour, leveraging the civil society organizations' expertise on human rights and localized knowledge.[14] [15]

3. Strengthen private sector accountability through due diligence and living wages

Require companies to commit to rigorous, risk-based due diligence across their operations and supply chains. This requirement must be coupled with an explicit commitment to paying living wages, which is paramount for responsible business conduct and preventing the poverty-driven causes of child labour.[16]

Governments must leverage their regulatory and enforcement power to address adverse business impacts. This includes integrating responsible business conduct principles and child labour prevention standards into all public procurement processes to incentivize and normalize ethical supply chains. Implement a policy requiring companies to undergo mandatory, independent annual monitoring to track and publicly report their progress on eliminating child labour, fulfilling due diligence requirements, and advancing towards living wage commitments. Civil society organizations should be consulted on the best practices for effective due diligence assessment.



Policy recommendations

4. Strengthening the support system and improving public budgeting

The core policy recommendations center on a multi-pronged strategy to eradicate child labour, focusing on strengthening systems, generating evidence, and addressing root causes.[17] This involves establishing and funding national, county, and community-level child protection systems – including public budget allocation for social protection and community initiatives – while providing comprehensive support for children with lived experiences to access education and life skills. [18][19]

Furthermore, it is critical to allocate resources for targeted research and data collection, specifically focusing on geo-mapping informal mining sites and collecting disaggregated data in hard-to-reach areas, to accurately size the problem and inform tailored interventions.

Finally, prioritizing investments is essential to tackle the root causes, namely multi-dimensional poverty, harmful social norms, and lack of quality education, by strengthening local protection systems, ensuring access to free, high-quality education, and implementing economic programs that provide alternative, sustainable livelihoods for families.

5. Formalise and regulate the artisanal and small-scale mining sector

There is a pressing need for renewed global attention to child labour in mineral extraction, especially within artisanal and small-scale mining.

Policies to address hard-to-reach sectors and facilitate the formalization of artisanal and small-scale mining operations should be implemented. This should include establishing clear, enforceable mining and labour regulations specific to artisanal and small-scale mining, defining child labour-free zones, and providing technical and financial support for miners to transition to safer, legal practices. Crucially, this formalization must incorporate a robust inspection and monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with minimum age and labour standards.

Mandatory human rights due diligence legislation must be enacted and enforced for all companies sourcing minerals, requiring them to proactively identify, prevent, and mitigate child labour risks in their supply chains, especially those originating from artisanal and small-scale mining.

This must be complemented by the development of transparent and verifiable traceability systems for 'transition minerals' that provide consumers and regulators with assurance that the minerals they purchase are verifiably child labor-free.

Implementation considerations

The effectiveness of national child labour interventions hinges on the strong leadership and coordination provided by ministries such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

In countries with significant mineral resources, governments must ensure that tax revenues from mining are strategically reinvested into essential services, such as education, child protection, and psychosocial support for survivors, alongside sustainable local development in mining communities.

This national framework must be supported by adequately financed labour inspection systems, supplemented by community-based monitoring mechanisms, and the active involvement of local and regional governments for on-the-ground coordination.

Furthermore, a commitment to enhanced data collection is essential, focusing systematically on areas like artisanal mining and forced child labour, and crucially including children's own perspectives to design truly evidence-based and effective policies that meet their needs.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration for a child labour-free mica supply chain in India

The mica mining belt in eastern India is among the country's most disadvantaged regions. Although child labour in mica mining and in the collection of mica scraps (known as dhibra) is prohibited by law, enforcement remains difficult despite government efforts. Research conducted by Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH NL), Global Mica Mining and the Impact on Children's Rights, confirmed the continued presence of child labour in the sector. This evidence prompted closer collaboration between subnational government authorities, local civil society organisations, education and social protection institutions, and the private sector, including through the Responsible Mica Initiative.

This multi-stakeholder approach has enabled systemic interventions that have reached approximately 25,000 children through preventive measures. As a result, 4,700 children have exited mica mining and are now attending school. The collaboration has also improved access to social protection schemes and livelihood programmes for caregivers of children at risk, addressing some of the underlying economic drivers of child labour.

Children's participation has been a core element of the initiative. Children have been supported to voice their perspectives and engage directly with policymakers, ensuring that their experiences and needs inform decision-making processes.

Through sustained policy dialogue, the Jharkha and state government announced the Dhibra Policy in January 2023, which decriminalized the collection of dhibra in the state. Since then, TdH NL and its local partners have supported government-led, multisectoral coordination and engagement with actors across the mica supply chain in Jharkhand.

The next critical step is the formalization of mica pickers to address the root causes of child labour more sustainably. Within the government's technical advisory group, a proposal for a multi-functional cooperative model has been developed. Currently, stakeholders are working together to streamline access to a living income for mica workers through the designated nodal government agency.



Conclusion

To accelerate implementation, national and subnational governments should focus on three key policy priorities:

Prioritize meaningful and inclusive child participation.

Establish inclusive and survivor-centred spaces for child participation during the policy-making cycle. Outcome documents and calls to action must reflect children's views and also their lived experiences.

Enhance access to social protection schemes as a structural prevention measure.

Eliminating barriers to access to social protection schemes for hard-to-reach communities will help to ensure that caregivers can sustain their families without relying on their children's work.

Create and strengthen multi-stakeholder spaces for policy and action.

The creation of multi-stakeholder platforms can support the sharing of information between the different stakeholders and help produce policies that incentivize companies to undergo due diligence processes.

Encouraging responsible business practices in global and regional supply chains is also critical. Companies, especially those in renewable energy and electronics, should conduct meaningful human rights and child rights due diligence in their mineral supply chains and commit to integrating living wages as part of their social licence to operate.

Children and youth shaping the post-2025 ASEAN Roadmap on Child Labour

Terre des Hommes Netherlands led a regional collaboration with children and youth, and the ILO across Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and the Philippines to meaningfully involve children in shaping the Post-2025 ASEAN Roadmap on the Prevention of Child Labour and the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Through country-level consultations led by local child rights organizations, children and young people shared their experiences and perspectives on child labour. Ten representatives then participated in a regional workshop in Thailand, where they developed ten key recommendations using child-friendly, creative methods. These were compiled into a Call to Action and submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat in July 2025, becoming part of the official materials for ASEAN delegates.

When the new ASEAN Roadmap was launched in November 2025, child and youth representatives from TdH NL and the ASEAN Youth Forum presented the Call to Action and led a session on child participation, reinforcing children's direct role in regional policy-making.



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About the authors of this policy brief

This policy brief was developed by Terre des Hommes Netherlands.

Priti Mahara, Ines del Real and **Anna Di Ruscio** provided the policy inputs, drawing upon their technical knowledge and extensive experience working with children, communities, policymakers, the private sector, and other key stakeholders.

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The [ISPCAN Rise Up Policy Forum](#) is a global initiative to catalyse progress in child protection through a public health and system strengthening approach. It brings together governments, researchers and practitioners in a community of practice and learning, to build on and translate into action the pledges made during the 2024 Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children.



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