

WHAT IS CHILD LABOUR ?

- It refers to work that children are too young to perform or that – by its nature or circumstances – can be hazardous. Unlike activities that help children develop
- It causes harm to a child's health, safety or moral development.
- In its most insidious forms, child labour can amount to slavery or practices similar to slavery, including the sale and trafficking of children.
- In some places, children may be forcibly recruited into armed conflict, used in the production and trafficking of drugs, or offered into prostitution.
- Hazardous work refers to work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm children's health, safety or moral development.
- This includes anything that exposes children to physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- It's work that occurs underground, underwater, at treacherous heights or in confined spaces – often with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools.
- The latest global estimates indicate that some 138 million children were engaged in child labour in 2024. Over a third of them – about 54 million – are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health and safety.
- Child labour is most prevalent in low-income countries, yet more than half of all child labour occurs in middle-income countries.
- Globally, child labour is also more common in rural areas, with most child labour taking place in the agriculture sector.

DECLINE IN CHILD LABOUR

- In Asia and the Pacific, child labour has trended downward in percentage and absolute terms since 2020.
- Latin America and the Caribbean witnessed a drop in the number of children affected, while the prevalence of child labour has stagnated.
- Sub-Saharan Africa continues to carry the heaviest burden, accounting for nearly two thirds of all children in child labour around 87 million.
- Globally, involvement in child labour is more common for boys than girls at all age groups. Boys are more prone than girls to work in construction, mining and manufacturing, while girls in child labour tend to be in services, including domestic work.
- Among 5- to 17-year-olds, 9% of boys are in child labour, compared to 7% of girls. This gap is smallest among young children and widens with age.
- However, the definition of child labour does not include household chores in a child's own home,

where girls shoulder a disproportionate burden of this work

- When child labour is expanded to include household chores for 21 hours or more each week, the gender gap closes.
- Some 61% of the children engaged in child labour worldwide are working on farms or in other agricultural activities.
- Another 27% of child labour is categorized as services, including domestic work, small-scale commerce and other activities.
- Industry, which includes construction, manufacturing and mining, makes up the remaining 13%.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, child labour remains overwhelmingly agricultural.
- In Northern Africa and Western Asia, children are as likely to be found selling goods, cleaning homes or performing other activities in the service sector as they are working on farms.
- Services are also more predominant in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.
- In Central and Southern Asia, slightly more than 25% of children in child labour is in industry

INDIAN SCENARIO

- Child labour impedes children from gaining the skills and education they need to have opportunities of decent work as an adult.
- Inequality, lack of educational opportunities, slow demographic transition, traditions and cultural expectations all contribute to the persistence of child labour in India
- Age, sex, ethnicity, caste and deprivation affect the type and intensity of work that children perform.
- Agriculture and informal sector employment continue to be sectors where children end up working.
- As per Census 2011, the total child population in India in the age group (5-14) years is 259.6 million.
- Of these, 10.1 million (3.9% of total child population) are working, either as 'main worker' or as 'marginal worker'.
- In addition, more than 42.7 million children in India are out of school.
- The incidence of child labour has decreased in India by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011.
- However, the decline was more visible in rural areas, while the number of child workers has increased in urban areas, indicating the growing demand for child workers in menial jobs.

- Child labour is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Household poverty forces children into the labour market to earn money.
- Some perform child labour to supplement family income while many also are in it for survival.
- They miss out on an opportunity to gain an education, further perpetuating household poverty across generations, slowing the economic growth and social development.

Year	Percentage of working children (5-14)			Total number of working children (5-14) (in millions)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
2001	5.9	2.1	5.0	11.4	1.3	12.7
2011	4.3	2.9	3.9	8.1	2.0	10.1

*Source – Census 2001 and 2011

Distribution of working children by type of work in 2011

Area of work	Percentage	Numbers (in millions)
Cultivators	26.0	2.63
Agricultural labourers	32.9	3.33
Household industry workers	5.2	0.52
Other workers	35.8	3.62

*Source – Census 2011

Note: 'Other workers': Workers other than cultivators, agricultural labourers or workers in household industries

STATES WITH HIGH INCIDENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

Together, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh constitute nearly 55% of total working children in India.

States	Percentage	Numbers (In million)
Uttar Pradesh	21.5	2.18
Bihar	10.7	1.09
Rajasthan	8.4	0.85
Maharashtra	7.2	0.73
Madhya Pradesh	6.9	0.70

*Source – Census 2011

NATIONAL LEGISLATION & ILO CONVENTIONS

- The enactment of the Child Labour Amendment (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2016 and The Right to Education Act 2009 have paved the way for ratification of ILO's two core conventions
 1. Convention No 138 stipulates that the minimum age at which children can start work should not be below the age of compulsory schooling and in any case not less than 15 years; with a possible exception for developing countries.
 2. Convention No. 182 prohibits hazardous work which is likely to jeopardize children's physical, mental or moral health. It aims at immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour for children below 18 years.
- Article 32 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "government(s) should protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or their education... Children's work should not jeopardize any of their other rights, including their right to education, or the right to relaxation and play."
- Child labour(prohibition & regulation)act 1986, employment of children act 1938, the factories act 1948, the mines act 1952, the merchant shipping act 1958, the plantation labour act 1961, Bidi & Cigar workers act 1966 - prohibited child labour system.
- Child labour (prohibition & regulation)amendment act 2016- prohibits "the engagement of children in all occupations & of adolescents in hazardous occupations & processes" adolescents refers to those under 18 years; children to those under 14- imposes a fine on anyone who employs or permits adolescents to work.
- 1996 - Supreme Court directed for establishment of child labour rehabilitation welfare fund - improvement of education, nutrition & health of children
- 2006 - banned employment of children as domestic servants (below 14 yrs)
- Commission for protection of child rights act 2005 : – national & state commission for protection of child rights & child's court against violation of child rights.
- Controversial provision : – that condones employment of children below 14 yrs under rubric of family enterprises & the declassification of several industries as hazardous occupations.
- According to Section 4 :- Ones listed as hazardous can be removed, not by Parliament but by government authorities at their own discretion.

- Section 3 in Clause 5 allows child labour in “family or family enterprises” or allows the child to be “an artist in an audio-visual entertainment industry”.
- Most of India’s child labour is caste-based work, with poor families trapped in intergenerational debt bondage, this refers to most of the country’s child labourers.
- Does not define the hours of work; it states that children may work after school hours or during vacations.
- The National Policy on Child Labour of 1987- development programmes to address root causes like caste & poverty- rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations
- Frequent budget cuts in education & women and children , leading to the the closure of 42,000 schools.
- Increased trafficking of tribal and minority girls from Odisha & Jharkhand.
- Amendments reverse gains of 1986 Act- contradicts Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection) of Children Act 2000 that makes it punishable for anyone to procure or employ a child in a hazardous occupation : – Also contravene International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) Minimum Age Convention & UNICEF’s Convention on Rights of Child, to which India is a signatory.
- Traditional skills to pass from parents on to their children should be done through reform & investment in education.
- Artisans should be hired as teachers for traditional knowledge
- Mid-day meals should re-instituted; & secure housing should be provided through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan boarding schools to homeless children
- Roughly 90% of the workforce continuing to remain outside the ambit of the organised sector, protecting vulnerable children from exploitation is difficult
- In domestic enterprises only for 3 hrs after school, & not between 7pm & 8am-- restrictions intended to ensure attendance at school.
- The new law linked age of employment for children to age of compulsory education under Rt. to Education Act (RTE), 2009.
- Girls - worst sufferers once dropout of school – face pressure from family to marry or to get a job.
- Child Labour Tracking System (CLTS)- Bihar (post rehab)
- Exempt from ban employment in family enterprises — suggested that poverty & socio-economic conditions in India justify children helping their families
- Family enterprises fall in unorganised sector
- Ratification of the 2 core ILO conventions, India ratified 6 out of 8 core ILO conventions.
- 4 other conventions → abolition of forced labour, equal remuneration & no discrimination between men & women in employment & occupation.
- GOI decided to ratify ILO convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour & convention 138 on Minimum Age of Employment
- Child labour perpetuates illiteracy & poverty – root cause of organised crimes such as human trafficking , terror & drug Mafia

REASONS

- The primary underlying cause is poverty.
- The low-income families struggle to make enough money to provide for shelter and food for their members.
- For these families, putting a child to work may be necessary for basic survival
- Social customs play a huge role – Traditional gender roles and the caste system have established strong barriers to socio-economic advancement in India
- In the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra—the Indian states with the highest rates of child labor.
- A lack of social services, overpopulation, and limited educational opportunities in many parts of the country are contributing factors.
- Adults without education are at an increased risk for low-paying jobs, job insecurity, unemployment, and employment in hazardous industries.
- Child laborers suffer from a variety of health and development issues due to exposure to dangerous substances
- *Debt bonds* occur when parents are loaned money and must sell their children into bonded labor in order to pay off the debt.
- Children in India are routinely kidnapped; in fact, an Indian child is abducted every eight minutes. About half of these children are never returned to their families.
- Child labor also negatively impacts the overall wage and unemployment rates for adults in a community.
- About 75 million adults are unable to secure profitable employment because many of these positions are filled by poorly paid children.
- Climate change has disrupted agriculture through irregular rainfall, droughts and floods, impacting crop cycles and reducing income for agrarian families. This often forces children to drop out of school to work on farms or migrate to cities for low-wage jobs, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.
- Child rights activist Kailash Satyarthi emphasised the gravity of this crisis, urging that the current drought-like conditions, impacting around 160 million children in India
- An analysis of the 2011 Census further corroborates that child labour is particularly severe in drought-prone regions of Maharashtra.

- Climate change has also led to water scarcity, which leads to an increase in the time spent collecting water, a task often assigned to children, especially girls in India and Africa.
 - Ocean acidification and marine heatwaves have led to a decline in fish stocks, which in turn reduces incomes and pushes children into fishing and related labour.
 - The financial support from developed nations, through the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), can play a crucial role in mitigating and adapting to the worst climate impacts
 - There is a need to have climate-resilient livelihoods.
- Expanding social safety nets and welfare programs can help buffer vulnerable families from the economic shocks of climate events. This includes cash transfers, food assistance, and other forms of social support to reduce the need for children to contribute to family income
 - Addressing child labour amid climate change requires urgent, integrated action. With policy reforms, community support, and climate-adaptive strategies, India can protect its most vulnerable — its children — from climate-driven economic hardships.
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