Child Labour in Agriculture

European Commission contribution to the FAO consultation
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How can agricultural policies and strategies help to end child labour in agriculture?

The European Commission is firmly committed to fight child labour and contributing to the achievement of the SDG target 8.7.

The European Commission President Ms Ursula von der Leyen stressed this engagement in her political guidelines for “zero-tolerance policy on child labour” for every new trade agreement with the highest standards of climate, environmental and labour protection.

Regarding International Cooperation and Development, the new European Consensus on Development commits the EU and Member States to combat child labour in an integrated approach in line with the 2030 Agenda.

The EU’s Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy sets the objective to support partner countries to promote, protect and fulfil children’s rights and their best interests including the fight against child labour. The Plan has also a strong focus on business and human rights to promote social responsible behaviour in enterprises in line with the EU strategy on Corporate Social Responsibility. The EU also has dedicated Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child.

In fighting child labour the European Commission adopts an holistic and systemic approach. As primary objective to eradicate poverty, the EU external assistance contributes to reduce child labour through various instruments and programmes such as the Development Cooperation Instrument and the European Development Fund through thematic and geographic programmes, and bilateral cooperation.

The European Commission targets interventions to fill the gaps of decent work deficits and to bring systemic remedies to end and prevent child labour in particular in agriculture.

The EU specific support to tackle child labour includes strengthening the capacities of partner countries in improving the regulatory and legislative framework and policy implementation to meet the ILO Fundamental Conventions and comply with the Decent Work Agenda.

A systemic approach to combating child labour in agriculture is needed, paying particular attention to the needs of rural youth and adolescents, many of whom are migrants from neighbouring countries and vulnerable to child labour and forced labour. Strategic and comprehensive interventions in value chains for export commodities like cocoa and cotton can significantly contribute to reducing child labour. The EU support has shown good results in global value chains in key sectors with trade links to the EU in particular.

For example, the EU funded project Ship to Shore Rights, implemented by the ILO, has worked with the Thai Government, employers’ organizations, workers’ organizations, civil society and buyers towards the prevention and reduction of unacceptable forms of work in Thailand’s fishing and seafood industries. The project obtained impressive results in reforming labour laws, living and working conditions of workers in the Thai fishery and seafood sector affected by child labour and forced labour for national and migrant families. The respect for human rights, legal and regulatory fishing rules linked to trade agreements with the EU have contributed to the success of this project. The Endline research findings report highlights recommendations for the next phase.

Another example is the EU funded CLEAR Cotton - Eliminating child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains: an integrated approach in Burkina Faso, Mali, Pakistan and Peru. The project implemented by the ILO and FAO has the following two main objectives with articulated and interlinked activities:

1. Strengthening policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to combat child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment sector:

   • Review policy, legal and regulatory framework to identify gaps, provide concrete recommendations and undertake necessary revisions, in line with the International Labour Standards.

   • Map the cotton, textile and garment supply chain taking into consideration fundamental principles and rights at work.

   • Build the capacity of target countries to eliminate child and forced labour.

   • Strengthen the role of employers’ organizations in eliminating child and forced labour.
• Strengthen the capacity of workers’ organizations and cotton, textile and garment production workers to exercise their right to freedom of association and other fundamental worker rights.

2. Supporting local governments, public services providers, and other relevant stakeholders to take effective action to stop child labour and forced labour in target cotton growing districts and communities and garment/textiles factories

• Develop community-based multi-stakeholder compliance monitoring and remedial mechanisms to combat child labour and forced labour with additional focus on gender issues.

• Support due diligence initiatives and grievance mechanisms concerning child labour and forced labour along the value chain.

• Strengthen livelihoods of local and vulnerable families.

• Develop model youth and women employment and self-employment schemes and their supporting functions.

• Improve children’s access to education.

Regarding the access to education, a significant result achieved since the project started in 2018 is the reintegration of 1,000 children and adolescents into education and training in Burkina Faso and Mali. The project has used the SSA/P (Stratégie de Scolarisation Accélérée / Passerelle) in order to reintegrate children formerly in or at risk of child labour into the mainstream education system.

This strategy was initiated by the Fondation Stromme, a Norwegian NGO in the early 2000s and has since been improved and validated by the Ministry of Education of Burkina Faso and Mali. Today, this strategy is widely recognised and implemented by different education stakeholders.

In the education sector the EU also supported the programme TACKLE - Tackling child labour through education in 12 countries across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific group of states (ACP). Implemented by the ILO, the project contributed to the withdrawal of children engaged in child labour and to prevent further entry of children into employment by offering alternative education and training opportunities and thereby contributing towards poverty reduction. It provided guidance in formulating new or improved existing legal and policy frameworks on child labour and education in partner countries and to ensure their effective implementation and application. It promoted the development of institutional capacities of ministries and other relevant bodies for concrete action to fight child labour; promoted advocacy and awareness-raising concerning child labour issues; and increased dialogue and strengthen networks on child labour and education in coordination with stakeholders, social partners, and civil society.

Good practices are included in this publication.
Supporting employment and labour policies is instrumental to fight child labour as the improvement and the creation of decent jobs contribute to improve family livelihoods and prevent child labour with increased access to education and training.

The EU assistance in social protection is increasing in many partner countries as it is widely acknowledged that social benefits and services significantly improve living and working conditions and therefore effectively contribute to reduce child labour.

The EU funded programme SOCIEX+ supports employment, labour on social protection policies by providing short-term experts.

The EU supports countries in their efforts with the design and implementation of effective employment strategies and labour market policies including:

- employment policy, security and services, vocational education and training and skills
- labour policy and law, active labour market policies, information systems, decent work, workers, informal economy, working conditions, labour relations, labour standards and social dialogue.

SOCIEX+ assists partner countries to achieve more equitable, inclusive, efficient and sustainable social protection systems, including:

- social insurance: contributory pensions, health, accident, unemployment protection
- social assistance: cash transfer programmes, income guarantee schemes, old ages benefits, child and disability grants, public works, social services.

Another aspect of supporting social protection is the EU funded project Strengthening the synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management implemented by the ILO and UNICEF. The project, started in October 2019, aims to increase performance and domestic financing of social protection policies.

In might include extending small grants, including tools and equipment as start-up facilities for the adolescent graduates as part of enhancing their economic sustainability. It could also encompass efforts to transform the urban informal vocational skills training institutions, and ensure the recognition of the acquired skills in the labour market. Furthermore, it might engage with urban authority structures, public services of health, education and rehabilitation and CSOs to develop and implement community-based models for prevention, protection and rehabilitation of children and adolescents vulnerable to child labour. Concerning forcibly displaced people, social protection will help them to avoid negative coping strategies such as survival sex and child labour.

The lessons learned from CLEAR Cotton will feed into the possible social protection interventions in rural areas.

Other EU funded interventions to address the improvement of family livelihoods where children are victims or at risk of child labour, in addition of forced labour cases, in particular in agriculture and fishery sectors where children in vulnerable and informal situations are hardest to reach.

Strengthening community prevention mechanisms and social support structures, providing quality education and training, apprenticeships. Decent jobs and income generating activities with a particular attention to gender and youth.
In the agriculture sector and sub-sectors child labour and the worst forms of child labour ranging from 5 to 17 years old is highly prevalent. It is therefore crucial to distinguish the various age groups to design policies and strategies. Access to quality primary education could include groups until 10-12 years old, while specific integration into secondary education and vocational education and training should target adolescents and young boys and girls below the minimum age of employment or in the worst forms of child labour aged between 13 and 17.

**Vocational education and training** should be part of the curricula in secondary education or specific strategies implemented by countries institutions allowing a quick employability of youth in partnership with the private sector to offer apprenticeships and training adequate for their age group to develop skills responding to the labour market needs. In this area the agricultural sector offer potentials that should be exploited in various sectors for local and global value chains including services, transport, energy, digitalization in the respect of environmental and social standards.

**Youth** employability is crucial to end child labour and to empower today’s child labourers with the right tools to access to training and decent work opportunities.

The European Commission’s analysis in this sector has extensively addressed the youth dimension in the Volume 1 on concepts and foundations of “Promoting Employment and Decent Work in Development Cooperation” of Tools & Methods series.

This publication is available on our webpage on Employment and Decent Work.

The EU funded research project **Youth Inclusion**, implemented by the OECD Development Center, has analysed various sectors and countries and developed toolkit. This report, produced in cooperation with the FAO, has examined the potentials of youth in agriculture: **Unlocking the potential of youth entrepreneurship in developing countries**.

Like many youth, **children in migration** are vulnerable to child labour in particular in informal sectors where cheap workforce is required like agriculture.

It may be useful to point out that in November 2019, at the 35th ASEAN Summit, the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration was signed. This Declaration was a long time in negotiation and UNICEF considers it quite a success.

On child labour, it:

• recalled the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour

• called upon ASEAN Member States to further recognise that children in the context of migration are particularly vulnerable to inter alia forced and child labour and to cooperate and build partnerships with relevant stakeholders to address and prevent it.

The EU supports UNICEF in implementing a project on children in migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia. The focus is mainly on internal migration from rural areas to urban centres. It is expected that there will be some engagement with rural stakeholders on child labour issues. UNICEF Bangladesh is engaging with various ministries on the topic of
children in migration including the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives.

The EU is promoting the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, these principles are not limited to corporate responsibility to respect human rights and labour rights in global supply chains, but also in domestic supply chains.

The 2019 ILO/OECD/IOM/UNICEF survey “Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains” estimated for example for Eastern and South-Eastern Asia that 26% of child labour is linked to exports.

In promoting sustainable development the EU addresses its values and principles in the EU trade policies. High social standards are at the core of EU trade policy and it can also instrumental in combating child labour.

Recent free trade agreements (FTAs) negotiated by the EU systematically include provisions on sustainable development. The EU and its trade partners must follow international labour and environment standards and agreements; effectively enforce their environmental and labour laws; not to deviate from environmental or labour laws to encourage trade or investment; promote practices such as corporate social responsibility.

The prohibition of child labour is already pursued through different EU trade policy tools that include the obligation to effectively implement the two fundamental ILO Conventions on child labour C138 (Minimum Age) and C182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour). It is the case for both the EU’s Trade Sustainable Development (TSD) Chapters of Free Trade Agreements concluded since 2011 and the unilateral Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP).

The implementation of commitments is subject to monitoring and enforcement under the TSD Chapters of trade agreements and the GSP Regulation. Under the TSD Chapters, monitoring currently covers Peru, Columbia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, South Korea, Singapore, Japan and Canada, as well as Kazakhstan through the TSD Chapter in Economic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Once the new agreements enter into force, we will engage with Vietnam, Mexico and other countries.

The EU bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries do not have a fully-fledged TSD Chapters (with the exception of the EU-CARIFORUM EPA); however, to some extent the Cotonou Partnership Agreement with ACP countries covers the sustainable development objectives.

Under the GSP Regulation, we are continuously monitoring the countries benefiting from the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+) under which they have committed to ratify and effectively implement two ILO conventions on child labour, among others. These countries are Armenia, Bolivia, Cape Verde, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, we have intensified our engagement with three countries under the Everything But Arms (EBA) arrangement of GSP (Myanmar, Cambodia and Bangladesh) on relevant international conventions, including on child labour.
The EU funded project **Trade for Decent Work**, implemented by the ILO, aims at improving the application of the ILO fundamental Conventions and working conditions in EU trading partner countries. It will build capacity in selected trading partners to improve the effective implementation and awareness of the 8 fundamental ILO Conventions, including the two on child labour, listed under the GSP Regulation or included in Trade and Sustainable Development Chapters of Free Trade Agreements.

The 2020 phase of Trade for Decent Work project will address child labour in the cocoa sector in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana.

The project will support the constituents in addressing the committee of expert comments on the application of ILO conventions and in identifying the necessary measures to improve compliance in those areas such as the formulation of a roadmap on legislative review and operational measures. The support will include developing a concrete labour inspection strategy in the cocoa sector.

In addition, the European Commission is also conducting a **study** to examine the root causes of child labour in the cocoa sector in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana and to promote sustainable production in the cocoa sector while addressing deforestation. The report will be available end 2020.

The European Commission has conducted a **study** showing the need for EU-level legislation on **due diligence** throughout the supply chain on human rights and environmental impacts, including child labour. It examines options for regulating due diligence in companies’ own operations and through their supply chains for adverse human rights and environmental impacts.

The European Commission has developed the **Value Chain Analysis for Development** tool (**VCA4D**), a **common methodological framework**, aiming at appraising the sustainability of a value chain from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

The tool has developed a number of criteria to assess the working conditions: in the child labour analysis, the access to education and the protection against hazardous work are tackled.
The attached report highlights the following main findings of the analysis:

1. There is no major evidence of the worst forms of child labour for the majority of the VCA4D studies.

2. In most studies, child involvement in the value chain (VC) through lighter tasks occurs as family labour at small farms level, but this is not in conflict with the school enrolment. In some cases, it is stated that the earnings from the VC activities are reinvested in children’s education (i.e green beans VC in Kenya, beef VC in Zimbabwe, cocoa VC in Papua New Guinea).

3. In a minority of studies, school attendance may be affected because children are working on the harvest during school hours. This is mainly linked to the local context in the country rather than to the context of the VC.

4. In one study, children were reported to be less involved in the VC compared to other agricultural VCs in the country (banana VC in Dominican Republic).

5. In one study, children were reported to be exposed to harmful jobs specifically linked to the value chain (the banana VC in Burundi).

Combining a holistic approach and different types of analyses (functional, economic, social, environmental), help to contextualise child labour within a complexity of factors and highlight opportunities to improve the situation in the long run, for example raising the issues of the prices paid to farmers and general poverty conditions, that force families to involve children in agricultural activities.

Ending all child labour in agriculture will require to substantially scale-up our efforts and improve the effectiveness of interventions. It will involve getting to those harder to reach child labour situations in agriculture such as local and regional value chains and family based agriculture, most of them in informal settings.

On 12 June 2019, the World Day against Child Labour, the European Commission organized an event with ILO and FAO United to end Child Labour in Agriculture to exchange practices and facilitate the identification of major gaps and solutions. The event report and contributions are available on this page.

The workshop participants have formulated the following recommendations:

- Need to do better and more to tackle child labour, in particular in agriculture, a sector with additional 10 million labourer children since 2012. Among the 108 million children working in agriculture, 73 million are in the age range of 6-8 years.
- In addition to local and global value chains interventions, support to subsistence agriculture should target communities and family farmers to increase livelihoods in rural areas to create child labour free zones and not only focusing in a commodity sector, with support to decent wages, social protection, education and infrastructure.
- To invest in quality education as poor education will not convince parents to send their children to school, and children need opportunities after school.
- For rural youth empowerment, it is crucial to create and reform accessible Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems that match labour market needs in the areas where children and youth are victims and at risk of child labour.
- To empower small farmers and workers, in particular in the informal economy to get organised, skilled into new agriculture practices and price negotiations.
- To build awareness to families, employers, producers, policy and law makers on harmful effects of child labour in any sector and in particular the hazardous work in agriculture, the importance of birth registrations, investing in quality education, by using effective emotional communications tools such as personal stories, celebrities and child labour champions.
- To invest more in gender equality and mainstream child labour in women empowerment programmes.
- To include the participation of families, communities, teachers, trade unions to understand the root causes and find sound solutions, together with children and youth who must have the possibility to choose.
- The EU should support farmers and worker unions.
- Sharing knowledge and data, setting up networks, using new technologies; supporting disaggregated data collection for improved child labour statistics by sector/country in cooperation with national and international statistics offices.
- To promote an EU mandatory due diligence legislation and get inspired from the recently adopted laws in The Netherlands and France.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the connected social and economic shock will have a great impact on family households and worsen their livelihoods, already precarious and in vulnerable situations. Children are affected and the first to suffer from this crisis: the loss of jobs, incomes and lack of free meals because of school closure will be detrimental on children who are at risk to fall into child labour.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic requires urgent, decisive, and comprehensive actions to increase social protection and support people throughout the crisis. As many countries are planning to adapt and/or scale up existing programmes or introduce new measures, they are seeking technical guidance for the design, costing, financing and implementation of the COVID-19-response actions.

The EU support as a response to the Covid-19 related crisis consists of technical assistance to strengthen and expand social protection systems to most vulnerable countries. The short-term advisory services up of 12 months includes financing assessments, sector policy advice, awareness building, delivery systems design, addressing special target groups and advice on different Social Protection instruments.