

Promises, Pledges and Declarations; what else is needed?

Call for urgent action to get children out of work and into school

The Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in May 2022 comes as the world grapples with the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for all people, everywhere. According to the [ILO-UNICEF global estimates \(2020\)](#), 160 million children across the world are engaged in child labour,¹ an increase of 8.4 million since 2016. For the first time in 20 years the number of children in child labour is increasing, and this number is being accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 ILO-UNICEF report estimates that by the end of 2022, **8.9 million more children - 50% of whom are just 5 to 11 years old - will be engaged in child labour if we do not act now.**

This is why UNICEF Netherlands, Save the Children Netherlands and the Stop Child Labour Coalition, together as the *Work: No Child's Business Alliance*, urge the international community and individual governments, employers' and workers' organisations and the private sector to recognise the problem, take responsibility, and protect children as per their obligations under the UN [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) and the ILO Conventions [138](#) and [182](#). They are urged to do this by:

1. **Investing in (inclusive) quality formal, full-time education** for all children up to the age of 15 across the world. In addition, all children from 15 to 18 years old should be supported to continue formal, full-time quality education;
2. **Supporting and promoting the norm that children should not work but be in school;**
3. **Enhancing company and government responsibilities to respect human rights**, including the creation, implementation and enforcement of mandatory due diligence legislation that holds all players in the international supply chains accountable for the violation of human rights in general and children's rights in particular.

The only way to turn the tables and realise tangible changes towards eliminating child labour in the coming years is to combine efforts in social service delivery (especially the provision of formal, full-time, and quality education for all children), law enforcement, and ensuring responsible business conduct by all actors. **Only through the active engagement of all stakeholders - government, the private sector and civil society - can we deliver on the promise of eliminating child labour.**

¹ "Child labour is considered work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development." - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ASK 1: Invest in (inclusive) quality, formal, full-time education

Providing access to formal quality education for all children is one of the most effective strategies for eradicating child labour and alleviating poverty.

Education is a fundamental human right. Almost all countries worldwide have ratified the UN and ILO Conventions on children's rights and child labour and have laws on compulsory schooling. As a result, governments are responsible for providing formal, full-time and quality education to all children up to the mandatory education age of 15 years, as per the ILO convention, article 138.2 In addition to that, youth aged from 15 to 18 must be protected from being engaged in the worst forms of child labour and should be supported to pursue further formal education or vocational training to prepare them to enter decent age-appropriate employment. Considering that COVID-19 and other crises have led to school dropout and learning gaps, children need more support to return to schools safely and catch up on missed education as soon as possible.

The quality of education and a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment are crucial to ensuring that girls and boys - without distinctions of caste, religion, disability, or any other forms of discrimination and exclusion - can participate and remain in schools. This requires qualified teachers with decent salaries and working conditions, quality tools and resources, and safe and supportive learning environments.

Call to action for (inclusive) qualitative, formal and safe education

- Governments across the world must live up to their responsibilities as signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO conventions 138 and 182, and ensure access to publicly funded, qualitative and safe education for all children. We need governments to declare education an emergency, investing at least 20% of the national budget or 6% of the GDP in quality public education and ensuring strong synergies between education and adequately resourced child protection and social protection systems.
 - The Netherlands government should ensure that at least 5% of the Official Development Assistance budget is spent on quality education in the South.²
- This money should be invested:
 - In quality training and decent working conditions for teachers, and in ensuring that teachers still receive their salaries in the event of school closure due to COVID-19 and/or other crises;
 - In the safe reopening of schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or other crises, for all children;
 - In bridge schooling and other forms of non-formal and remedial education. We emphasise that this is meant as a bridge for former child labourers and out-of-school children to (re)enter formal quality education (in age-appropriate classes), as well as for developing a system that supports a smooth transition from formal education to decent age-appropriate employment after reaching the minimum legal age for admission to employment or work;
 - In ensuring that governments take ownership of and accountability for education systems (both formal education and bridge schooling) to protect the quality of the curriculum and avoid for-profit organisations controlling the courses, and embedding education in broader social service delivery systems.
- Netherlands government to leverage its influence to increase these necessary investments in education by:
 - Calling upon international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to refrain from asking for budget cuts to critical public services - such as education and child protection - as this will decrease access to these services for vulnerable groups, including children;
 - Enable policies and practices that ensure corporate tax payments due in developing countries;
 - Addressing the chronic gaps in child protection funding and budgeting to ensure that children in need of social protection from child labour are reached. This includes the promotion of simultaneous interventions and collaboration between education, social and child protection actors.

ASK 2: Support and promote the norm that children should not work but be in school

The view that child labour is a systemic and inevitable problem that is difficult to change is deeply entrenched at many levels of society - rich and poor, elite and subalterns, parents and children - and at the level of (inter) national governments and companies.

Contrary to what many may think, poverty is often not the decisive factor in pushing children into work. Research shows that children's wages contribute only marginally to the family's income. Child labour also negatively affects adults' wages, thus creating even more poverty. *"Child labour is most prevalent where adults cannot access their rights to decent work"* (ILO 2018).² Key reasons why children work and don't attend school include social norms and traditions, social exclusion, discrimination, and their parents having a low income. The lack of decent work for adults, weak labour laws, poor enforcement by governments, and failing labour inspections also contribute to the persistence of child labour.

The abovementioned misconceptions require a change in behavioural and social norms, which in turn means that all actors, including entire communities, civil servants and employers, need to transcend their political, economic, cultural, class, caste and other differences in favour of children's rights.

Every child is entitled to education, so we believe in area-based approaches to realise child labour free zones. This means that all stakeholders in the area - teachers, local authorities, village leaders, employers, parents and children - work together to protect the rights of all children, including the right to education. No child can be left behind.

Call to action towards norms change

- Accept that child labour mainly occurs outside of international supply chains, i.e., in domestic agricultural supply chains, informal sector and domestic work. This means that governments need to look beyond regulating international supply chains and invest in broader solutions such as area-based approaches to realise child labour free zones.
- Netherlands government to actively promote the area-based approach and showcase successes with the EU, the ILO, the World Bank and in bilateral projects, in order to scale up and increase the impact that will decrease child labour to achieve goal SDG 8.7.
- The Netherlands government must acknowledge the importance of social norms towards child labour and subsequently invest and act in changing these norms to support the elimination of child labour.
- Netherlands government and financing partners must jointly invest in and support the strengthening of child protection and social protection systems that will form a backbone of support for communities to protect their children from child labour and provide for socio-economic development.
- The Netherlands government must promote decent working conditions for adults, including living wages, and have zero tolerance for child labour, as per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO conventions. This ensures that parents and caregivers can support their children to go to school and remain in school until completion.

² https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_653987.pdf

ASK 3: Private sector: business development and responsibilities

The private sector has an important role to play in the prevention and elimination of child labour and other human rights violations in their supply chains. We urge companies to display responsible business conduct by improving their due diligence processes and implementing [Children's Rights and Business Principles](#) (CRBP). This requires companies to focus on labour and human rights, based on international standards such as the ILO Conventions [138](#) and [182](#), [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) guidelines](#) and the Children's Rights and Business Principles.

Within the European Union (EU), several countries are working on or already have mandatory due diligence legislation for companies, based on the OECD guidelines. We urge countries that have not (yet) implemented such rules to formulate ambitious Due Diligence legislation that demands that companies across all sectors implement Human Rights Due Diligence systems, and ensure adequate monitoring systems are put in place.

Call to action for responsible business conduct

The Netherlands, as a member states of European Union and the EU should:

- Implement mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence legislation as soon as possible that obliges companies across all sectors to ensure they are aware of the risks within their entire supply chain and requires them to take mitigation measures where needed or else be considered liable;
- Extend the human rights due diligence law in all related investments and bidding contracts, whereby transparency, a code of conduct, and concrete action to prevent and eliminate child labour are essential prerequisites for funding;
- Ensure that third-party audits go beyond checking off the formalities at the facility level, and include field observations and wider stakeholder engagement to have achieve visibility on the way Human Rights Due Diligence systems are implemented and respected.

The private sector must join forces with trade unions and NGOs to take full responsibility for supporting and implementing mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence legislation. Meanwhile, their focus should remain on preventing and addressing child labour in their supply chains, including in the lower tiers, and extending their influence further up supply chains to hold each player in the chain accountable for the protection of human rights.

Promises, Pledges and Declarations

While recovering from the pandemic, we urge all stakeholders to pool their resources and support an integrated area-based approach that builds systemic change to create regions where children go to school and grow to achieve their potential. Places where socio-economic development goes hand in hand with sustainable supply chains that respect and protect human and children's rights.

There have been many promises, pledges and declarations made when it comes to protecting children and combatting child labour. Now - more than ever - we need to mobilise efforts and resources and **work together from the same conviction to fight all forms of child labour and promote free and compulsory education up to the completion of secondary school, along with promoting decent work**. Only then can we turn the tide and protect and promote children's rights.

About Work: No Child's Business

Work: No Child's Business aims to achieve that children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and (future) decent work. We work in six countries: Cote d'Ivoire, India, Jordan, Mali, Uganda and Vietnam. In these countries, we have identified five sectors with a high incidence of child labour: garment, textiles and footwear, gold/mining, natural stone, cocoa, and the informal sector, including domestic work. The Alliance works together with communities, schools, governments, civil society organisations, trade unions and private actors.

The *Work: No Child's Business* Alliance is run by Save the Children Netherlands, UNICEF Netherlands and the Stop Child Labour Coalition. Hivos is the lead organisation and hosts the programme management. The programme is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

www.wncb.org

Annex

To be completed - We will include case studies per country (either here in text or for example in a video). Also per country you can include here key data points that you want to bring across to support your narrative.