Gender Analysis for Eradicating Child Labor in India - WNCB Final Report

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Introduction

India ranks 135th among 146 countries in the most recent Global Gender Gap report released by the World Economic Forum (2022). The index examines women's positions vis-a-vis men based on parameters including work participation and leadership, access to finance, civil and political freedom, family and care, education and skills, and health. India's performance reveals the imminent need for gender-responsive mechanisms to be integrated into interventions against harmful labour systems, power differentials in resource access, and exploitative social norms. Child labour is a pressing issue in the country. Factors such as economic deprivation, caste-based systems of labour, and differential access to infrastructural resources like education and healthcare foster children's participation in the workforce from a young age. Mapping gender gaps in anti child labour interventions is integral to creating more intersectional systems of child protection and children's welfare in India.

Child labour: global context

The most widely recognised international standards around child labour are set out by the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) set out a framework for children's rights, specifying that they are individuals in their own right and must be protected both within and outside the family. It highlighted that states must safeguard individuals below the age of 18 against discrimination, and provide them with access to care as well as opportunities for development. The Convention set out that states must protect children from performing work that is hazardous, interferes with their education, or impedes their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. It required states to (i) provide minimum age(s) for admissions to employment, (ii) establish appropriate regulation around the hours and conditions of employment, and (iii) create appropriate penalties or sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of these provisions. The ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138; 1973) set a precedent for these provisions, requiring countries to establish a minimum age for entry into employment and create national

policies against child labour. It specified that countries should not set the minimum age as lower than 15 years in general circumstances, and 14 years in circumstances where the economy and educational facilities in a country are insufficient. It was accompanied by Recommendation No. 146, which emphasised the role of policies around poverty alleviation, promotion of decent jobs for adults, free and compulsory education, and other systems of social security, and protection in the eradication of child labour. Upon determining that child labour remained a concern at the global level, the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182; 1999) sought to urgently eliminate the worst forms of child labour. It emphasised the need to remove children from any work that exposes them to physical, psychological, or sexual danger of any sort on a priority basis.

In the aftermath of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing concerns linked to child labour has become an even more pressing need. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and ILO (2021) found that progress towards eradicating child labour appears to be at a standstill for the first time since 2000. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 160 million children were estimated to be engaged in child labour across the globe. After showing a steady decline between 2000 and 2016, the global percentage of children involved in child labour remained stagnant between 2016 and 2020, while the absolute number increased by more than 8 million children. Similarly, while the percentage of children engaged in hazardous work did not grow significantly from 2016 to 2020, the absolute number grew by 6.5 million children. The report highlighted that the economic challenges induced by COVID-19 could contribute significantly to putting more children at risk— an anticipated 8.9 million additional children may have joined the workforce by the end of 2022. It also noted that gender, rural-urban dynamics, the nature of work, family systems, and schooling constitute important parameters to consider while analysing the risk factors linked to child labour.

The operational definitions of child labour at the international level highlight the broad contours within which global efforts towards child protection have been concentrated.

However, significant concerns emerge around the gender gaps when one examines the forms of labour that are included within these definitions. At the global scale, 11.2 per cent of all boys are involved in child labour, as compared to 7.8 per cent of all girls—boys outnumber girls by 34 million in absolute numbers (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). When the operational definition of child labour is expanded to take into account participation in household chores for 21 hours or more per week, the gap in these numbers is reduced almost by half. Participation in unpaid domestic work is expected of many young girls, in alignment with gender norms and roles that consider them biologically suited to labour within the domestic sphere. The overlaps between child labour and risks of gender violence faced by girls, including trafficking, sexual violence, and facing different kinds of social censure and stigma, highlight the importance of employing a gender lens while addressing child labour at the global scale.

Child Labour: Indian Context

As of 2011, India had 10.1 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 who were engaged in employment (Census of India, 2011). More than 42.7 million children were found to be out of school. While the number of working children in rural areas saw a decline between 2001 and 2011, the incidence of child labour in urban areas increased. Some of the major sectors employing child labour at a national level include cultivation, agricultural labour, and household industry work. 40.1 per cent children engaged in child labour in rural India worked as agricultural labourers, 31.5 per cent as cultivators, 4.6 per cent in household work, and 23.8 per cent in other forms of work (Census of India, 2011). On the other hand, 83.4 percent working children were employed in areas outside agricultural and household labour. In rural parts of the country, a significant proportion of children were found to be engaged in plantation, livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting, and allied activities, as well as in manufacturing in household industries, in addition to agricultural labour and cultivation (VV Giri National Labour Institute & UNICEF, 2016). On the other hand, child workers in urban areas were primarily found to be engaged in wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing in non-household as well as household industries. A significant proportion of children in India were found to be living on the

streets in urban areas, engaging in rag picking and organised begging, and suffering from homelessness (Srivastava, 2019).

A high proportion of working children in India were seen to be engaged in hazardous forms of child labour that fall under its worst forms, including garment production, stone quarrying, brick-making, and certain forms of agricultural work (United States Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020). Trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation and forced domestic labour was also a persistent problem, with Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, and Odisha being major sources for child trafficking. Children across sectors were discovered to be entering debt bondage while working, sometimes alongside their entire families, and at other times, while working for little to no pay. In addition to threats of violence, the worst forms of child labour pose extreme risks to children's health. Srivastava (2019) highlighted that children were being exposed to pesticides and expected to handle heavy and dangerous machineries in the agricultural sector. Small-scale urban industries created similar risks for children, linked to working in closed rooms with poor ventilation. Industry-specific hazards for children included tobacco ingestion, acid burns, and inhalation of fibres in the carpet and garment industries, and inhalation of dust in the brick-making and stone quarry industries. Burra (2011) examined girls' participation in household tasks including cooking, cleaning, and taking care of younger siblings to highlight that the gender dimensions of child labour in India were not being accounted for sufficiently. Even when girls were found to be attending school, they were expected to manage household work alongside. Parents were focused on preparing their daughters for marriage, and as a result, deprioritised their education and employment potential. Gender differentials were also found to be prominent in the worst forms of child labour. The links between trafficking and sexual exploitation were found to place girls at a significantly higher risk for this form of violence (Jani and Felke, 2017). These studies point towards some of the prominent gendered risks associated with child labour in the Indian context, and highlight the need for further inquiry along these lines.

Save The Children (2020) surveyed marginalised children and families in India to understand the extent of impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Learning loss constituted a significant concern, with 79% parents reporting that their children learned little to nothing over the pandemic. Close to one-third of children shared that they did not have access to learning materials and resources, and more than 70% children were unable to use the internet for online learning. Income loss, another risk factor for child labour, was found to be pervasive, with 15% of the survey respondents reporting an absolute loss of all income, and 56% reporting loss of more than half of their income. Access to healthcare and nutrition suffered as well— 33% respondents shared that they faced barriers while accessing healthcare services, medication, and menstrual products during the pandemic. Finally, children also faced a significant increase in violence in their households, as well as involvement in household work. The precarious socioeconomic contexts of vulnerable children in the aftermath of the onset of COVID-19 demonstrate that there is an urgent need to re-evaluate and strengthen interventions against child labour in an attempt to control its impact.

Child labour, gender norms, and gender-based violence
Historically, gender inequality in India has been marked by patriarchal mindsets about the role played by women and gender minorities in society. Some of its manifestations include son preference among families, early marriage of girls, social barriers against the participation of non-men in education and the workforce, and high incidence of violence and harassment faced by gender minorities. Gender roles based on distinctions between 'reproductive' work and 'productive' work are evident in the divisions of labour in India. Care work, which corresponds to the biologically essentialist 'reproductive' roles assigned to women and girls in society, entails responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, maintenance of the household, childcare, and caring for elderly family members. Across the globe, households are the spaces within which unpaid forms of such care work are most prominently found to be taking place (ILO, 2018). In the last four decades, despite an increase in education attainment and a decrease in childbearing rates among Indian women at a macroscopic level, women's labour force participation in the country has

remained conspicuously low (Fletcher et al, 2017). Evidence shows that gender norms that expect women to prioritise household labour, sometimes explicitly constraining them from working after marriage, have not changed significantly over this period. A large chunk of Indian women who expressed a willingness to work were found to be excluded from labour participation. Those who were already in the workforce encountered barriers in the form of having larger periods of unemployment between jobs, requiring vocational training to increase their probability of securing employment across all education levels, and facing wage gaps across sectors, especially in fields where there is higher representation of women than others.

Devaki Jain (2011) points out that the economic contributions of women from the poorest households in global South countries such as India are often erased entirely, due to the deprioritisation of work being carried out within households. The distinctions between 'formal' and 'informal' work fail to capture the unpaid household and care labour being done by these women every day. It also fails to account for the systemically exploitative nature of small-scale labour and production that economically marginalised women often carry out from within their homes, which is unrecognised under labour legislation. It is worth noting that the gendered distinctions between 'reproductive' and 'productive' labour render a significant proportion of women and girls' unpaid care work labour unrecognised and invisibilised. At the same time, they also contribute to creating expectations around boys' contributions to 'productive' work from a young age. Das and Mukherjee (2006) found that approximately 10 per cent of all boys engaged in work in urban parts of India were participating in child labour in order to acquire skills or utilise free time, as opposed to doing so out of economic need. Gender-responsive interventions against child labour need to account for how gender norms contribute to both girls' and boys' participation in labour, and in doing so, move away from biologically essentialist labour roles that leave no room for the experiences of gender non-conforming children.

Families as a unit of production lie at the heart of child labour. The family is the decision-making unit within which risk factors that push children into the workforce are most

prominently visible. Socioeconomic deprivation that created a need for additional household income was found to play a central role in children taking up work (Kaur & Byard, 2021). Other prominent push factors included parental literacy, parents' occupations, and caste and other social locations. Exceptional familial circumstances, such as children from abusive households seeking jobs while escaping mistreatment, were also found to be relevant. Notably, familial norms linked to gender have been found to play a significant role in shaping children's participation in labour in India. Good outcomes in terms of maternal education have been linked to a positive effect on child health and survival, as well as a higher probability of school enrolment and positive educational outcomes for children (Dreze & Murthi, 2001; Behrman et al 1999). Francavilla and Giannelli (2007) used household survey data from different parts of the country to highlight that while mothers' presence in the family and maternal literacy did play a role in improving children's welfare, mothers' labour participation appeared to have a perverse effect. Mothers' and children's participation in labour were found to be complimentary in high numbers, with a significant proportion of women participating in work where job quality and wage levels were extremely low. Land ownership and residing in urban areas were identified as factors that contribute somewhat to children's development being unimpeded by mothers' workforce participation. While the study does not explicitly link these findings to caste, the overlaps between caste dominance and these factors (explained in further detail in a subsequent section of the introduction) are worth taking into account. The barriers attached to women's workforce participation, exacerbated significantly in the case of women from socioeconomically underserved and marginalised groups, are therefore crucial to consider while examining the role of gender norms in systems of child labour.

Patriarchal norms are also linked to girls and women disproportionately facing structural, gendered forms of indirect and direct violence. In India, patrilineal norms which derive heavily from overlaps between caste and gender suggest that only men can continue a family's lineage, while women become a part of their husbands' families eventually (Vennam et al, 2016). This has led to a well-documented 'son preference' among families.

Parents are seen to allocate greater resources towards the education and development of sons, while focusing on 'preparing' their daughters for marriage through engaging their participation in household work from a young age. Child marriage and early marriage also constitute a prominent risk for girls. It is estimated that at least 1.5 million girls below the age of 18 get married in the country each year (UNICEF, n.d.). One perspective on child marriage holds that since children do not have the capacity to meaningfully consent to marriage before 18, any labour undertaken within such marriages constitutes child labour (UNICEF, 2021). However, even if one were to not take this definition into consideration, girls being married off at a young age bears significant links to an increase in the amount of unpaid care work that they are expected to carry out in their marital roles.

In areas where child marriage is pervasive, cases of marriage by abduction and trafficking are also frequent to arise (UNICEF, 2021). Trafficking, which is internationally considered one of the worst forms of child labour, is a rampant problem in India. The National Crime Records Bureau (2020) reported that 2,222 children below the age of 18 years were trafficked in the country at last estimate, including 1,377 boys and 845 girls. However, an earlier study on the elimination of sex trafficking highlighted that the actual magnitude of trafficking in India is difficult to estimate due to its clandestine nature, and limited information available through small data sets that are inconsistent across different stakeholders (Dasra, 2014). Trafficking for sexual servitude and commercial sexual exploitation is a form of violence disproportionate faced by girls, while boys are often targeted by traffickers for participation in other exploitative forms of labour (Rana, 2021). The need for addressing structural violence against girls and its overlaps with child labour is pressing and immediate, in light of the massive threats they pose to girls' bodies, dignities, lives, and livelihoods.

The WNCB India programme

Work: No Child's Business (WNCB) is an alliance run by Save the Children Netherlands, UNICEF Netherlands, and the Stop Child Labour Coalition. The alliance operates in six

countries that report high incidence of child labour— India, Cote d'Ivoire, Jordan, Mali, Uganda, and Vietnam. The aim of the alliance is to achieve freedom of children and youth from participation in labour, and to expand their access to quality education and decent employment in the future. WNCB's programme in India is focused on children who are involved in, or at-risk for participation in, child labour across rural and urban areas in Bihar, Rajasthan, and Delhi. This section highlights a brief profile of child labour in these three states, to develop a better understanding of the contexts in which the programme's interventions are situated.

Bihar

In 2001, Bihar reported 1,117,500 working children in the age group of 5-14 years (Census of India, 2001). This number dwindled significantly to 451,590 by 2011 (Census of India, 2011). However, the state continued to show one of the highest incidences of child labour in the country, accounting for 10.7 per cent of all child workers in this age bracket in India. Bihar is a regional source for high numbers of trafficked child labour to other regions and sectors in India (WNCB, 2022). The state faces high poverty rates, out-migration, and technological underdevelopment. Major sectors in which child workers are concentrated include agriculture and family farming, forestry and fishing, brick kilns, domestic work, trade, hotels, transport, and communication. Workplaces primarily include shops and factories. Domestic work is a sector where girls are disproportionately at risk, which could bear correlation with the high rates of early marriage that lead to girls dropping out from formal schooling at a young age.

Rajasthan

Rajasthan ranks high in terms of the prevalence of child labour in India. The state registered 252,338 children between 5 and 14 years engaged in labour in 2011, a sharp decline from 1,262,570 in 2001 (Census of India 2001, 2011). There is a prevalence of child labour in industries such as gem polishing, trade and commerce, transportation, mining and construction, hotels, and domestic work (WNCB, 2022). A large proportion of these child workers are migrants from other states, and are also seen to

disproportionately belong to SC and ST groups. Mining constitutes a significant employment sector in the state, and child labour is extremely common in the production of cobbles from waste sandstones.

Delhi

In Delhi, 26,473 children were reported to be working as of 2011, in contrast with 41,899 in 2001 (Census of India, 2001, 2011). Child labour in the state is overwhelmingly concentrated in the garment and textile industry (WNCB, 2022). It is worth noting that this industry has transitioned from being informal to a formal, factory-based industry. However, subcontracting labour in this industry to the unorganised sector, where it takes place within small factory settings and even households, is prevalent in Delhi as a cost-cutting measure. The hidden workforce thus created is a massive breeding ground for children's engagement in this industry while assisting their families with high volumes of work, for which they are also compensated far below minimum wage.

Rationale

Gender dynamics play a key role in structuring the environments in which children are socialised, including households, schools, and communities. Their relationship with child labour can be understood through an examination of how gender norms shape the expectations, motivations, and challenges surrounding children's lives. These norms constitute an important set of sociological factors through which labour relations are organised. They also uniquely account for the overlap between the marginalisation faced by young girls and gender nonconforming individuals, and the structural risks and harms they experience while participating in child labour. Adopting a gender-responsive approach to interventions against child labour addresses the complex ways in which gender norms dictate the participation of girls and boys in specific forms of labour. It prioritises their protection against the vulnerabilities created by these patterns of participation. This is especially significant in light of two considerations. First, the persistence of high rates of child labour in India, including in its worst and hazardous forms, conveys a need for the status of anti child labour interventions to be re-evaluated.

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Gender overlaps significantly with some of the imminent threats faced by working children, such as participation of girls in unpaid care work, the vulnerability of girls to structural gender violence in the form of early marriage and trafficking, and stereotypes and gender roles that push both girls and boys into certain forms of work. It also plays a role in impeding children's access to education, agency, and other resources that are crucial to their holistic development. Second, families play a central role in enabling forms of children's work that have historically been exempt from legal scrutiny and action, at both the global and Indian levels. In India, the household is found to be the site of domestic work, agricultural labour, and small-scale manufacturing in informal settings. Gender norms are responsible for moulding how resource-access and decision-making power are organised within families, and are therefore important to target in order to alleviate risk factors linked to child labour. Identifying gender gaps in the regions where the WNCB India programme is operational, and developing strategic roadmaps that are focused on gender-responsiveness, holds promise when it comes to meeting these challenges.

Research objectives and scope of study

The scope of this study is situated in the WNCB focus areas and sectors in three states-Bihar, Rajasthan, and Delhi. Its objectives include:

- Evaluating gender gaps in the anti-child labour interventions taking place in the WNCB India programme's focus areas and sectors
- Devising recommendations on how to make these interventions against child labour more gender-responsive, in light of these gaps

These gender gaps have been evaluated in alignment with the four outcomes linked to WNCB's Theory of Change (ToC), which include:

| Outcome 1	Equitable access to quality education and retention

Outcome 2	Evidence-based recommendations to gender responsive legislation
Outcome 3	Discrimination and harmful practices in the private sector workplaces
Outcome 4	Gender outcomes that can improve to have a strong gender component in policies and laws

The study examines the following two questions:

1. What causes/drives child labour for boys and girls within the WNCB program target groups and sectors in India?
2. What can the WNCB program do better to address the risk factors of child labour and promote protective factors for boys and girls within the WNCB program target groups and sectors in India?

The study employs the socio-ecological model as well as the GAP (Gender and Power) analysis framework.

The socio-ecological model employs four levels of analysis vis-a-vis at-risk children and their families:
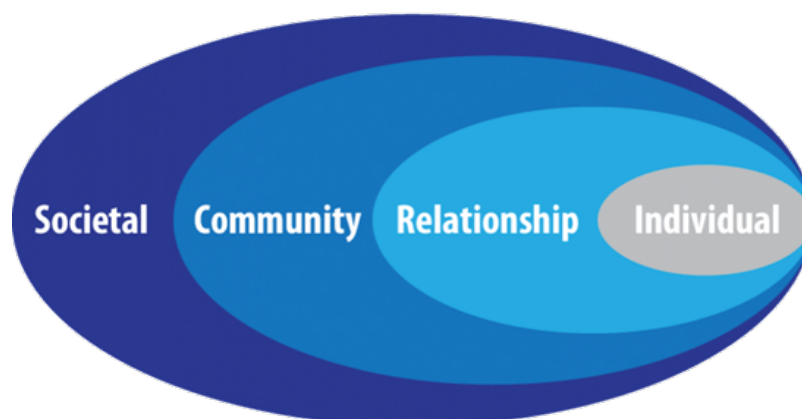
- Individual: The manner in which gender, age, and other power differentials shape children's self-conception, skills, and knowledge
- Interpersonal: The role of interactions with family, friends, and peers in reinforcing gender norms and social beliefs through formal as well as informal channels
- Community: The shaping influence of ecosystems such as schools, religious institutions, and community formations in shaping and reinforcing gender norms and social beliefs
- Society: The reinforcement of gender norms and inequalities through economic, political, legal, and cultural social systems

This framework recognises that children's lives, and the manner in which gender inequalities manifest within them, is moulded and reinforced by complex interactions of different kinds. The levels of socio-ecological analysis operate in dynamic interplay with one another, and aim to understand how unequal power hierarchies around gender are created through this interplay.

WNCB Outcomes	Level of analysis in the Socio-ecological model	Assessment Domains
Outcome 1: • Supportive Family & community • Access to quality education • Access to decent work	Individual, interpersonal, community	1. Patterns of decision making 2. Social norms, beliefs and practices 3. Access to & control over resources

Outcome 2: • Governments enforce Child-rights laws	Community, society	4. Laws, policies, regulations & institutional practices 5. Roles, responsibility & time use 6. Dignity, Safety & well-being
Outcome 3: • Private sector	Community, society including (international) market dimensions	
Outcome 4: • International action	Society	

The GAP analysis framework envisions an intersectional approach to understanding how gender structures social relationships. In order to capture barriers that limit gender equality and social justice, as well as map intersecting differentials of power based on other forms of social identity and privilege, the GAP analysis method employs the following six domains:

- **Patterns of decision-making**: This domain is concerned with individuals' capacity to exercise autonomy over decisions related to their lives and bodies, as well as contribute to decision-making within the family, community, and society. It encompasses individual decisions linked to one's own body, health, and activities (such as participation in education or work), as well as family or community-level decisions that are economic, educational, or political in nature.
- **Social norms, beliefs, and practices**: This domain focuses on informal social expectations and practices that structure how individuals interact with one another as well as with social structures around them. Unequal political, economic, legal,

and social systems rely on social norms and beliefs being shaped and reinforced such that power-holders' privilege is maintained.

- **Access to and control over resources**: This domain looks at individuals' access to, use of, and control over resources required to function and participate in society. It covers concerns around assets, education, income, social benefits, health, technology, and information. While examining if individuals can access resources, it is also important to consider that the usage of resources may vary among people in particular groups or contexts.

- **Roles, responsibilities, and time use**: This domain is concerned with the roles and responsibilities that people adopt and are allocated in different spheres of their lives, as well as how they utilise their time. Gender and other power differentials shape how individuals are situated within paid and unpaid work, leisure time, and social spaces inside and outside the household.

- **Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices**: This domain examines if there are any biases within how laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices operate. These play a role in creating, reinforcing, or challenging gender and social inequalities. The framing and exercise of rights is central to stakeholders' access to institutions such as inheritance, employment, legal status, and protections against violence.

- **Safety, dignity, and wellbeing:** Safety encompasses freedom from harm and violence, and includes both physical and psychological aspects. This domain focuses on how violations of rights, such as discrimination, inequality, exclusion, and violence affect individuals' ability to live with dignity within families, communities, and societies.

Constitutional and legislative provisions against child labour in India

In 2017, India ratified the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (no. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (no. 182), the ILO's two key conventions against child labour (ILO 2017). There are several constitutional provisions in India that directly or indirectly provide safeguards against child labour. Article 24 of the Constitution of India

specifies that children below 14 years of age shall not be employed in any hazardous factories, occupations, or industries (Indian Constitution, art. 24). Article 39(e) states that employers should not abuse the health and strength of workers across genders, including children (Indian Constitution, art. 39, § e). It further specifies that no citizens should be forced into any employment that is unsuited to their age, health, or strength due to economic necessity. Article 21A of the Constitution is concerned with the provision of free and compulsory education to every child between 6 and 14 years, and specifies that it must be provided in a manner determined by the law (IIndian Constitution, art. 21, § A). The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009; "RTE") enshrined the provision of free and compulsory education by the state to children under 14 as a Fundamental Right.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) banned the participation of children below the age of 14 in more than 20 occupations and labour processes. It regulates children's work hours in other forms of labour, and outlines conditions to ensure their safety and wellbeing at work. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act (2016) added to these provisions, making child labour an offence with a higher punitive threshold. It also prevented adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 from being employed in hazardous occupations. However, it provided exemptions from these provisions to home-based forms of production in which children are engaged alongside their families. Several other legislative provisions overlap significantly with the risk factors for children's participation in labour, and are key to understanding the legislative ecosystem around child protection in the country. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (1986) stated that anyone involved in activities such as recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving individuals for the purposes of sex work is liable to be punished. It outlined that the punishment by law for involving children in these activities is higher, and entails imprisonment for seven or more years. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) demarcated making a child go through marriage as a punishable offence, wherein girls upto 18 years of age and boys upto 21 years of age are considered children. It specified punishment by law for adults involved in

conducting or participating in such marriages, as well as for adult men who marry girls below the specified age. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) (2012) addressed sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children below the age of 18 years, focusing on child-friendly processes around reporting, evidence recording, and investigations, as well as mechanisms for speedy trials and protecting the anonymity of children. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (2015) set out the aim of protecting children found to be in conflict with the law, and children in need of care and protection. It sought to ensure care, protection, maintenance, welfare, education, development, and social reintegration for these children. Despite this robust ecosystem of legislation around children's welfare, conditions around their implementation require scrutiny in light of the persistence of child labour and other threats to children. The persistence of economic deprivation and the pervasive nature of norms around gender, caste, and other social indicators impedes individuals' access to legal recourse against grievances in many parts of the country.

Power differentials: gender, caste, class, and other social indicators

India is a highly heterogeneous country, with complex social systems whose on-ground realities show significant degrees of regional variation. Gender, caste, and class location constitute crucial markers that structure how labour operates in the country. Hierarchies and inequalities created around these factors are deeply entrenched in social norms and attitudes, and reflect in the socioeconomic status of groups that are marginalised on the basis of these markers. Other relevant forms of socioeconomic inequality include disability, religion and ethnicity, often marked by the dominance of non-disabled people and the dominance of particular religious ideologies, and geographical location, wherein urban-rural dynamics often demarcate vast inequalities of resource access.

Caste is a key social indicator that structures Indian society. The historical foundations of caste lie in Hinduism's demarcation of certain social groups, the 'higher' castes, as ethnically 'pure' when compared to the 'lower castes' (Ghurye, 1957). This was accompanied with hierarchies within the forms of labour that individuals from different

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castes were allowed to access or forced to practice. For instance, 'upper caste' Brahmins who were situated at the top of caste hierarchies were encouraged to take up priestly roles and teaching, while 'upper caste' Kshatriyas took up fighting and political power. 'Lower caste' individuals were marginalised into taking up forms of labour that were considered 'unskilled' and 'impure' under this system, such as cleaning. It is pertinent to note that while the justifications provided for the existence of the caste system have been rooted in delineating communities on the basis of their economic roles in society, caste is considered a function of heredity. Being born into a marginalised caste group even in post-decolonisation India has typically meant large-scale exclusion from social and economic mobility. The perpetuation of caste through endogamy (the custom of marrying only within one's own community) and heredity is associated with particular forms of exclusion such as 'untouchability', which asserts that 'lower' castes and those who do not find inclusion in the caste system altogether, should forcibly be spatially and physically separated from 'upper' castes, and excluded from the attainment of literacy and education. The modern face of caste in India is multifaceted, despite the existence of strong legal provisions against untouchability and other overt manifestations of caste-based marginalisation. Marginalised castes are denoted in the Indian legal system as Scheduled Castes (SCs), marginalised tribes as Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other communities that are caste-oppressed in varying degrees as Other Backward Castes (OBCs). An analysis of wealth inequalities in the country between 1961 and 2012 demonstrates that by and large, SC and ST groups across urban and rural settings have been able to secure economic mobility in significantly lower proportions than dominant castes (Bharti, 2019). While the vast education gaps between SCs, STs, and OBCs, and dominant castes, have declined significantly, the participation of marginalised caste groups in education is seen to be lower right from the schooling level (Desai and Kulkarni 2008). The interplay of caste and class is especially relevant to keep in mind while noting the vast economic inequality in the country— the top 10% of India's population on the basis of economic status holds 77% of the wealth, a curve that gets steeper as one travels lower down towards economically deprived groups (Oxfam International, n.d.).

As mentioned earlier, patterns of land ownership, economic mobility, and urban lives also shape gender norms within the family. In urban families where working mothers had access to these forms of mobility, child labour was found to be less prevalent than in the case of working mothers who are socioeconomically marginalised (Francavilla and Giannelli, 2007). The International Dalit Solidarity Network (2015) highlighted the forced participation of Dalit girls in forms of debt slavery and bonded labour linked to sex work, manual scavenging, and working in brick kilns and the textile industry. This massively compounded risk of being exposed to hazardous and worst forms of child labour is found to be a function of the intersectionality of gender marginalisation and caste marginalisation. These overlaps between gender norms, caste marginalisation, economic deprivation, and inequitable access to education make an intersectional evaluation of social factors a key consideration while examining child labour in the country.

Child labour and education

Historically, education has been situated at the heart of efforts to eradicate child labour. Children's induction into the workforce is often seen as a barrier to their participation in schooling. In India, the Right To Education (RTE) Act seeks to provide access to free and compulsory elementary education for all children below the age of 14. Lack of formal education restricts children's access to decent work opportunities and avenues for economic mobility later on in life. Participation in child labour makes it difficult for a significant proportion of children below 14 to attend school. As a result, it is directly responsible for denying them the time and opportunity to gain an education. School enrolment rates in 2015-16 showed that the number of children enrolled was the highest at the primary level (classes 1 to 5) at 129.1 million, and dropped to approximately half at the upper primary level (classes 6 to 8) at 67.6 million (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2016). At the secondary level (classes 9 and 10), this number halved further to 39.1 million. The significant decrease in the number of children enrolled in school at each level indicates that school dropout rates increase as students progress to higher classes, presumably due to participation in labour and adjacent social factors such as early marriage. Mitra et al (2022) used multivariate regression models to demonstrate

that the likelihood of girls being out of school in India is at least 16% higher than boys. They also highlighted that this likelihood is 35% higher for girls residing in rural areas, and significantly higher among SC, ST, OBC, and Muslim girls than dominant caste Hindu girls. The social matrix made up of gender, caste, economic deprivation, and other social factors that is a crucial determinant of labour relationships in the country is seen to have significant links with the status of children's education, and the gender gaps within educational outcomes.

A field study in rural West Bengal surveyed out of school children to identify several push factors for school dropouts in India (Mukherjee, 2010). First, school dropouts showed a positive correlation with problems linked to school infrastructure, including inadequate number of schools, the need to travel long distances, and lack of facilities such as clean toilets within the school. Second, low levels of income appeared to be a key factor responsible for dropouts— many parents who face extreme poverty are forced to take their children out of school, even when they are not able to find remunerative work as a replacement. Third, earning opportunities in sectors and industries that are operational in a particular region, as well as participation in household work, often led to children opting out of school. Fourth, systemic concerns such as acute shortage of teachers and ill-treatment of students by teachers dissuaded children from wanting to attend school. The quality of education available in government schools is important to

Among children who are engaged in labour across the globe, nearly 28 per cent between the ages of 5 and 11, and 35 per cent between the ages of 12 and 14, were found to be out of school (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). These percentages increased to 33 percent of 5 to 11 year olds and 40.2 percent of 12 to 14 year olds being excluded from schooling among children engaged in hazardous work. In India, 65.3 percent child workers between the ages of 5 to 14 years were found to be literate as of 2011, a marked improvement from 47.6 per cent in 2001 (Census of India, 2001, 2011). It is worth noting that according to these numbers, a sizable percentage of children engaged in labour were attending school alongside work, both globally and in India. However, school dropouts

continue to constitute a significant issue. This highlights the need to examine the relationship between child labour and learning loss vis-a-vis child workers who are out of school, as well as those who are still enrolled.

Methodology

Research Approach and Type

The gender analysis provides an overview of prevailing gender gaps in WNCB intervention areas regarding child labour. It focused on gaining insights on gender dynamics pertaining to gender-disaggregated engagement in child labour, social norms that normalized child labour practices, gendered access to and control over resources like education and financial assets, gender dynamics in everyday time-use pattern, gender roles and responsibilities, and functional laws and policies that regulated malpractices at community-level. The gender analysis followed a **qualitative approach** to gain an in-depth understanding on the 'why' of gaps in gender equality with respect to WNCB outcomes in the socio-cultural context. It further aided in triangulation of data to capture gender gaps and power relations from multiple sources. The captured gender and power dynamics were connected with extent of effectiveness of existing child labour laws and policies in India and how they unfolded in different states.

Methods of collecting data

The tools utilized in the study were created in accordance with the GAP framework. The data collection process involved gleaning both primary and secondary data to capture the grassroots realities. The primary data was further validated through existing secondary data which helped in providing gainful insights and adding value through the existing sources of data.

1. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Group Discussions were conducted with identified stakeholders with the aim of capturing the key risk and protective factors of child labour. FGD guides were prepared separately for each set of stakeholders focusing on the six assessment domains. Data collectors were given requisite training of sensitively approaching the participants,

seeking relevant data, and ensuring inclusiveness in the group setting. The setting in which FGDs were conducted ensured provision of a safe space to participants who were vulnerable— adolescent girls and boys, and mothers. Separate FGDs were conducted with male and female participants.

2. In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews involved interacting individually with identified stakeholders who influence the child labour practices at community and society level. This qualitative research technique included open-ended questions which gave an opportunity to identify different nuances of the situation on-field and understand the dynamics more deeply. It also ensured that respondents get a safe space to share their unfiltered views within ethical boundaries. It helped to uncover the child labour issues, practices and potential solutions through experiences and perspectives of relevant stakeholders.

3. Secondary data

A systematic review of existing data was conducted pertaining to child labour practices and nuances, gender gaps, and power relations in India, specifically Bihar, Rajasthan, and Delhi. The secondary data also gave insights on existing data on child labour, specifically in terms of disaggregation by sex, caste, religion, disability, and geographical location. The literature review focused on gender gaps and inequalities in child labour in relation to educational attainment and employment occupations of children. The secondary data analysis focused on:

- Sex-disaggregated demographic information
- Social and economic indicators of districts
- Gender issues pertaining to targeted sectors
- Barriers of access to education

Locale of study

The gender analysis was conducted in three states of India where WNCB is implementing anti-child labour intiatives:

1. **Bihar:** High incidence area of child labour and as a source area of migrant labour (including child labour) to other regions and sectors in India, including the other focus regions of the programme, Delhi and Rajasthan. Child labour exists in family agriculture, domestic work, brick kilns, and local economic activities.

Four districts from Bihar were selected using purposive sampling to represent one district of each partner organization:

Districts	Partner Organizations
North Bihar	
West Champaran	FSS
Muzaffarpur	Nav Jagriti

South Bihar	
Nalanda	Save the Children
Jamui	MV Foundation

2. **Delhi:** The garment and textile sector were key industries relevant to Delhi. There were largely hidden workforces and unorganized workplaces. The family-based work falls outside of legal protection.

One zone from Delhi has been selected using purposive sampling to represent the partner organization:

Zone	Partner Organization
South-east	Save the Children

3. **Rajasthan:** The state is the main source area for natural stone in India and experiences a high incidence of child labour. The mining areas are heavily operated

by business, because of high revenue. Furthermore, stringent gender norms regulate child labour practices adversely affecting early marriage, substance abuse, and educational attainment.

One district from Rajasthan has been selected using purposive sampling to represent the partner organization:

District	Partner Organization
Bundi	Manjari

Sampling

The team identified stakeholders and influential members who played a key role in the prevalence of child labour. Based on the different levels in the socio-ecological model, the respondents included:

1. **Individual level**

   • **Children:** Children were selected through purposive sampling to ensure equal representation from both sexes in the age group of 12 to 17 years. Community mapping was used to identify hard-to-reach groups or belonging to different socio-economic communities. Children were majorly identified through assistance of partner organizations. Separate focus groups were facilitated with adolescent girls and boys.

Inclusion Criteria: The main focus in identifying children was at-risk adolescents in any form of child labour and children who had dropped out of school for labour work or at risk of dropping out of school since outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic.

2. **Interpersonal level**

• **Parents/Caregivers:** Parents/caregivers were selected by using purposive sampling technique to ensure equal representation from both sexes. Separate group discussions were facilitated with mothers and fathers in each district.

Inclusion Criteria: Parents whose children were involved in any form of child labour or had dropped out of school for labour work.

• **Teachers:** Teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Their insights helped in understanding the role of classrooms and educational institutions in the lives of at-risk groups of children.

3. **Community Level**

• **Employers:** Employers were purposely selected from the private informal sector where children were engaged in labour work. The employers were majorly from hotels, factories, brick kilns, or working as middlemen/women.

• **Social Activists:** Social activists working extensively around child labour at the district level participated in the study. Their perspective was crucial as they were proactively engaged in the anti-child labour initiatives in the intervention areas.

4. **Societal Level**

• **Government Officials:** Government officials were purposely selected at the district level, from the officials who worked directly or indirectly on issues of child

labour. These majorly included Block Resource Person, Community Resource Centre Coordinator, and Beat Officer.

- **Sarpanch (village council head):** Purposive sampling was used to select sarpanchs at the district level. The sarpanch is an elected village-level government representative who offers perspectives on local political and cultural contexts. Sarpanch(s) played a crucial role by bridging needs and expectations of community members and government officials.

Sample Size

The sample size of respondents under each set of stakeholders included:

BIHAR	RAJASTHAN	DELHI
CHILDREN: 12-17 YEARS		
8 FGDs (across 4 districts) with 8-10 children each = 80 children	2 FGDs (across 1 district) with 8-10 children each = 20 children	2 FGDs (across 1 district) with 8-10 children each = 20 children
Total		100 children approx.
PARENTS/CAREGIVERS		

8 FGDs (across 4 districts) with 6-8 parents each = 48-64 parents	2 FGDs (across 1 district) with 6-8 parents each = 12-16 parents	2 FGDs (across 1 district) with 6-8 parents each = 12-16 parents
Total		<u>72 to 96 parents approx.</u>
TEACHERS		
One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district
SOCIAL ACTIVISTS		
One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district
EMPLOYERS		
One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district
SARPANCH		
One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS		

One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district	One IDI in each district
Total- 30 In-depth Interviews		

Data Collection Timeline

The data collection process involved recruitment of human resources at the capacities of: qualitative data collector, note taker, translator, and transcriber. The entire data collection process was completed by mid-June. Henceforth, data analysis and report writing commenced.

The methodological framework for gender analysis is summarized below:

S.No.	Respondents	Tools for data collection	GAP Domain(s)
1.	Children	Focus Group Discussions	• Social norms, beliefs, and practices • Access to and control over resources • Roles, responsibility, and time-use

2.	Parents	Focus Group Discussions	• Patterns of decision making • Social norms, beliefs, and practices
3.	Employers	In-depth Interviews	• Dignity, Safety & Well-being
4.	Social Activists	In-depth Interviews	• Social norms, beliefs, and practices • Laws, policies, regulations & institutional practices
5.	Government Officials	In-depth Interviews	• Laws, policies, regulations & institutional practices
6.	Teachers	In-depth Interviews	• Social norms, beliefs, and practices

			• Access to and control over resources
7.	Sarpanch	In-depth Interviews	• Social norms, beliefs, and practices • Laws, policies, regulations & institutional practices

Methods of Data Analysis

A three-pronged methodological approach was adopted to conduct qualitative data analysis:

1. **Thematic Analysis:** Conducting thematic analysis helped to extract patterns of meaning in the dataset. The themes were identified based on grouping them into similarities. It helped to find different themes around stakeholders' perspectives and experiences of child labour within their area.

2. **Grounded Theory:** The grounded theory method of analysis was utilized to identify emerging patterns from the grassroots. Through this method, the data spoke for itself about the two overarching research questions.

3. **Discourse Analysis:** Discourse analysis involved analyzing the language of respondents within the socio-cultural setting. For instance, implicit gender biases of school enrolment were extracted through this method during interaction with parents.

Using different analysis methods helped in triangulating the data. Though all three approaches used theme-generating techniques, their intent and approach was different.

Ethical Considerations

As the primary stakeholders in the study were minors, the consent of their parents for children's participation was imperative. The children were explained the purpose of the study and its contribution to the larger objective of the WNCB program.

- Given the participation of children as one of the primary stakeholders in the study, child centered and age-appropriate methodology was utilized:
    - It was ensured that caregivers were present but at a distance to avoid their influence in responses.
    - The age gaps between participating children were kept minimum to avoid mismanagement.
    - The facilitators sat at the same height as children to ensure more comfort.
    - The data was collected at the day/time/location convenient to the study participants. The social norms and gender differences were not compromised.
- Informed consent forms were created and each respondent was requested to sign if they gave their consent of participation in the study. For children below the age of 18 years, assent forms were developed which were consented and signed by their parents/guardians.
- All consent forms were drafted in Hindi and were presented to each respondent before collecting data. All respondents were ensured anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.
- Feminist Methodology considerations were kept in mind during the course of study:
    - All female-headed households were approached in a gender sensitive manner
    - The Child Protection Policy was adhered to while reaching out to children, especially female children.

- ○ Gender-separated FGDs were facilitated to help respondents feel more comfortable about sensitive topics.
- Considerations for gender and sexual minorities (like children with non-binary gender identities or persons with disabilities) were kept in mind:
  - ○ Data collectors were trained to use appropriate terminology while interacting with all respondents.
  - ○ Potential bias against gender and sexual minorities were mitigated through training around issues of homophobia, sexism, and transphobia.

Challenges

Several challenges came up during the data collection process:

• **Reaching out to respondents:** Data collectors in several districts were unable to reach out to government officials working directly with children or on issues related to children's welfare. As a result, IDIs were carried out with Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators (CRCCs), Block Officers, and Beat Officers. The lack of insights gained from individuals involved more directly in the implementation of government policies and schemes is visible in this data.

• **Hard-to-reach groups:** The identification of certain groups and individuals through community mapping was challenging to carry out during the data collection process. Children having non-binary identities, children having intellectual, multi-sensory, or psychosocial disabilities, and children belonging to underserved socioeconomic communities were found to be hard-to-reach. . Certain disadvantageous identity markers, including socioeconomic identities such as minority caste status and economic deprivation, were easier to map than others. As a result, the data does not provide adequate insights into the lives of non-binary or disabled children, and how these identities overlap with the risk of participating in child labour.

• **Structural issues:** <u>In districts where awareness campaigns, government programmes, and civil society interventions have been operational for several years, respondents were reluctant to speak about persisting inequalities linked to gender, caste, and other markers such as disability.</u> The lack of cognisance indicated psychosocial barriers that impede the WNCB programme outcomes in these areas, and prevent individuals facing such inequalities from having room to articulate their experiences freely in community spaces.

• **Logistical Issues:** Logistical issues, including the need for data collectors in some districts to travel to remote areas to speak to respondents and multiple data collectors experiencing illness during or after being on field, impeded data collection at multiple junctures. Challenges faced by data collectors while travelling to certain areas reflected the unevenness of developmental infrastructure, which disproportionately affects certain districts and regions. The impact of unbearable heat due to large-scale shifts in climatic conditions also reflects the everyday challenges that are being experienced by people living in these areas, and led to multiple data collectors falling ill while on field. These conditions are somewhat difficult to map in terms of their relationship with child labour, as well as challenging to overcome without large-scale systemic shifts.

Findings and Analysis

The gender analysis involved the integration of a gender perspective at all stages of the research process. This entailed taking gender issues and gender-based discrimination into account in a systematic manner. This section highlights the causes and factors that were revealed to drive child labour for girls and boys within the WNCB program target groups and sectors in India. It also lays down several recommendations for the WNCB program to better address the risk and protective factors for girls and boys within the specified target groups and sectors.

The analysis section presents the on-ground findings supported with relevant literature in accordance with the four specified program outcomes:

Outcome 1	Children are empowered and have improved access to (quality) education and youth employment within a supportive family and community environment
Outcome 2	Governments have enforced relevant child-rights based laws and have implemented policies on child labour, education, youth economic empowerment and social security.
Outcome 3	The private sector takes full responsibility for preventing and addressing child labour.
Outcome 4	The EU, Dutch government and international organisations act in support of the elimination of child labour and fulfil their obligation by setting and reinforcing due diligence policies and laws

The findings were further segregated with respect to the six assessment domains: (i) Social norms, beliefs, and practices; (ii) Patterns of decision-making, (iii) Roles, responsibilities, and time-use, (iv) Access to and control over resources, (v) Safety,

dignity, and well-being; and (vi) Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices. Each specified domain was assessed at four levels (based on the socio-ecological model) - individual, interpersonal, community, and society level.

Child labourers are a heterogenous group in India. A girl child labourer working in the household in rural Rajasthan cannot be compared with a boy child labourer working in a brick kiln in tribal Bihar. Although all children engaged in labour face exploitative situations in their daily lives, differentiations exist based on their caste, gender, religion, disability, culture, ethnicity, and living conditions. The outcomes, on the other hand, might be similar in terms of affecting their physical, socio-emotional, and psychological development by denying them basic rights to education, health, play-time, safety, and overall well-being.

Outcome 1: Children are empowered and have improved access to (quality) education and youth employment within a supportive family and community environment

Social norms, beliefs, and practices

Interpersonal level

Gender social norms are the most crucial non-economic determinant of children engaging in labour activities. Gendered social norms were found to interact directly with the way children perceived their roles and responsibilities and parents made everyday decisions for their children. These social decisions were embedded within their social context and thus primarily based on society's acceptance or rejection of a certain activity or behavior.

During data collection, fathers in Rajasthan were asked about their expectations from their daughters and sons. For daughters, fathers stated the following expectations- *"She should take care of her family's reputation, wear proper clothes, and learn all the household chores", "Women should be disciplined", "She should know how to hold a family together", "She should not go out at night and follow what her parents say."* For

boys, on the other hand, they stated the following expectations- *"They should support their parents when they become old", "They should be able to support their wife and kids", "They should study and secure their future."*

Community level

The findings highlighted different ways in which gender social norms influenced child labour practices. These social norms were found to be deeply-rooted to the extent that even social activists and teachers were influenced by these norms. For instance, the vocational training centers initiated by grassroots organizations or conducted in the schools reinforced stereotypes by offering tailoring, stitching and embroidery training to girls and mobile repairing and tourism courses to boys.

Restrictive gender norms: Violence and Moral policing

Interpersonal level

Boys and girls had differently defined social norms that dictated conformity to child labor practices. Young girls were gender-socialized to engage in household work and to be 'well-behaved'. They were expected to be obedient, especially towards fathers by wearing 'proper' clothes, learning household chores, and protecting the family's reputation.

Community level

While girls wanted to feel liberated with free mobility and spending time in learning, several norms were dictated to girls in terms of how they should dress, where they could go, what they could do etc. While parents denied that there was any inequality or differentiation between girls and boys, they accepted that norms dictated that girls should be more involved in household work from a young age, have fewer material demands (new clothes etc) from them, and be more obedient and polite. In Rajasthan, girls shared that they were not allowed to wear jeans and were forced to cover up with *dupatta* (a scarf worn by females to cover their neckline and breasts in India). Girls themselves feared being scrutinized by the community members when they stepped out of their

houses. Safety of girls was cited as a concern by the adults in the community of Bihar but the response to fear of harassment translated to moral policing of girls rather than addressing the structural issues that perpetuated gender-based violence. This led to restricted mobility of girls which in turn affected their access to quality education. As a result of fear of harassment, girls were not allowed to move out of the house to pursue better educational opportunities. Boys, on the other hand, were allowed to pursue such opportunities by parents.

Individual level

This fear also dictated the way girls spent their free time. The gender discrepancy to occupy space burdened girls more with household work including participation in cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. As a result, girls did not get to play or engage in learning and entertainment activities. Boys on the other hand were found to be involved in outdoor chores including agricultural labour from the age of 10 years. Among all three states, there was consensus that girls work more than boys, do not get opportunities to rest during the day, and sometimes spend any spare time learning skills such as stitching and embroidery. These vocational skill learning activities in turn reinforced the gender stereotypes on girls. An even worse effect was noted in a community wherein mothers stated that girls were not considered safe even with their fathers and brothers which resulted in daughters being felt like a 'burden' as they were stated to be primarily responsible for the family's reputation. Parents were also reported to not respond to girls' and boys' grievances in the same manner- they are likelier to listen to boys. The code of morality was observed to affect girls in several ways: (i) restricting their mobility, (ii) limiting their educational opportunities, (iii) forcing them to get married early, (iv) limiting their access to resources like mobile phones and internet, and (v) confining their time and labour within the household.

The restrictive gender norms subjected children to different forms of fears and harassment with no strong system of enforcing child rights and regulating child protection mechanisms.

Safety, dignity, and well-being

Individual level: **Internal locus of control**

At an individual level, adolescent girls revealed to feel uncomfortable due to boys in the community staring and passing unnecessary comments when they stepped out of their houses. This took away their freedom of movement and affected their attendance in school. This fear of violence also affected their ability to negotiate for their decisions of accessing resources. Girls in Bihar reported fearing their brothers for stepping out of their house. The lack of ability to negotiate was also caused by the lack of agency. During FGD, girls mentioned feeling comfortable only with their teachers and peers to seek agency. The lack of agency and fear of harassment also perpetuated the idea of early marriage which was accepted as a norm by adolescent girls at their individual level too. The focus group discussions revealed that the majority of adolescents did value education. They considered education as their pathway to a bright future and a better life. Adolescents reported to prefer going to school over labour work. Although when compared to boys, girls themselves prioritized boys' education more than their own. At an individual level, boys exhibited more self-confidence in terms of self-development, learning, and opportunities. Though boys were not expected to be responsible for the household chores, they carried immense pressure of making financial contributions to the family. Boys in Rajasthan reported to feel compelled to spend their free time working and generating income in parallel to attending school.

Interpersonal level

Access to education

Education and child labour are intertwined, given that the time spent in working cannot be spent in attending school (Holger, 2008). Though the parents seemed keen to educate both girls and boys, the gender gaps in priorities and expectations were evident. The lack of motivation to educate girls was evident amongst parents. It was apparent that in situations of limited resource access, boys will be preferred over girls to be sent to a

private school or allowed to attend a school located far away. Educating girls was seen as an investing pathway towards their marriage while educating boys was seen as an investment towards their self-development and economic independence.

Based on various studies (Right to Education Forum, 2021; Sahoo, 2016; Sachdeva, 2015) the children drop out of school due to:

- Long distance to school
- Absence of basic infrastructure like separate toilets for boys and girls, drinking water, and child-friendly infrastructure
- Lack of female teachers
- Unsuitable school timings
- No added value in terms of employment opportunities

Parents believed that engaging children informally in family work would provide future job security to them as compared to formal school education. This relative importance of informal apprenticeship over school education also influenced child labour practices. Parents also believed that education is not for everyone; and children who are not interested in studying should be engaged in family labour work. For instance, the boys in Bihar reported irregular attendance during the season of harvesting due to engagement in agricultural labour alongside families. Sustaining and succeeding the family occupation was another reason stated for engaging children in family labour work. "*If we see that our child is not studying anything, won't we get bothered about their future? Won't we think it's better they drop out and learn some job skills to help them? No education will lead them to work as a labourer when they grow up. Better they learn some technical stuff.*" stated one of the fathers in Bihar.

Edmonds & Theoharides, 2020 found a strong negative correlation between test scores and child labour even in cases of light work. Beyond affecting the school attendance, labour work reduced children's time and energy to give attention to school and learning.

Girls were reportedly made to not attend school and, in some cases, even drop out if there were a lot of tasks in the household. On the other hand, boys were given preference to attend school despite similar socio-economic challenges. Interaction with parents in one of the districts in Bihar (Jamui) revealed that the nearest school was 90 minutes away which was another challenging factor that risked girls to not attend school. In another district of Bihar (Muzaffarpur), girls were expected to go to schools in the vicinity. They were not allowed to move away from home for better education. The boys, on the other hand, were given access to better education in terms of sending them to better schools, providing additional resources, and permitting them to move away from home for better education. Surprisingly, the attendance of girls was reported to be higher, given the access to targeted interventions in the area towards girls' education. However, in Rajasthan, even though girls were provided with bicycles to commute from home to school under the Rajasthan Free Bicycle Delivery Scheme, it was difficult to access school due to lack of well-constructed roads. The lack of infrastructure affected the regularity of girls more than boys in attending school.

Girls who participated in FGD in Bihar (Jamui) exhibited a desire to prioritize studies over engaging in household chores. They reported to not skip school for work and would rather invest their time in education activities. Within this group, 33 percent girls were not attending school due to engagement in labour work. A similar perspective was noted in Muzaffarpur wherein girls reportedly did not want to engage in income-generating prospects and wanted to invest their time in studies. Though in some cases, it was interesting to note that girls themselves prioritized boys' access to education over their own.

Covid-19 pandemic & gender digital divide

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, all the schools worldwide remained closed making remote learning a crucial part of a child's education. In India, a large section of the population had limited access to basic digital resources, given their low socio-economic status. This underlying inequality created a digital divide between different

sections of the population. This digital divide is also gendered which is often borne out of triple disadvantages for women and girls in India, (i) rural-urban digital divide, (ii) income-based digital divide, and (iii) intra-household discrimination (Observer Research Foundation, 2021). Girls were found to face several disadvantages in terms of access to technology, thereby widening the gender digital divide. The virtual learning space also negatively affected children from economically deprived families as they had no access to online classes for continuing their education. Being a multilingual country, the e-learning platforms could not be replicated in different dialects and contexts that are otherwise brought together in physical classrooms. Beyond stresses of accessibility and affordability, digital learning has not been able to accommodate one-to-one and peer learning. Not just students but even teachers have been reported to not be well-equipped with online teaching (World Economic Forum, 2020). In all districts, girls and women reported lesser access to mobile phones and internet as compared to the male family members. The lack of access to technology created impediment to online learning as well as leisure, specifically for adolescent girls. With no access to school education, more children were pushed into labour work due to (i) lowered motivation levels, (ii) pushing more children from poverty-struck families into labour work to make the ends meet, (iii) increased incidence of migration and reverse-migration due to loss of parents' jobs, (iv) increased bonded labour of children from marginalized castes, and (v) emotional disruption at family-level making children from single parent, step parent, and female-headed households more vulnerable to engage in child labour. Beyond the access to technology, school closure also meant not getting access to mid-day meals, sanitary napkins, and toilets.

Access to and control over resources

Individual level

Control over financial assets

Adolescent girls were vulnerable at multiple levels due to stringent social norms that affected their access to and control over resources. Though both boys and girls were reportedly engaged in child labour, girls were reported to earn lesser than boys. Moreover, boys held more control over spending their own wages while earnings made by girls were kept by parents. This gave girls no power to access money as a resource in terms of expenditure and savings.

In terms of physical assets, the children (both boys and girls) had access to infrastructure and land provided at household level. At the community level, these assets were confined to common spaces like playgrounds which were only accessible to boys due to restricted mobility of girls. The lack of freedom of movement also affected the access of social assets for girls like maintaining social ties and relationships with peers.

Roles, responsibility, and time-use

Individual and Interpersonal level

Time is a finite resource which is divided between school, labour, domestic work, leisure, and other productive activities for children. Societal expectations of set gender roles of girls and boys influenced the child labour practices and the nature of work that children were engaged in. Men and boys are often considered the primary bread-winners while women and girls are considered as caretakers. As a result, boys were commonly found to be involved in income-generating activities like working in the hospitality industry, brick kilns, and garment factories; while girls predominantly engaged in household labour work and hidden labour work. Most of the parents confirmed that girls engaged in household chores from a young age envisaging their role of housewives later in life. These cultural expectations defined the time-use patterns of girls and boys. The children assumed their roles as breadwinners and home-makers respectively. Since girls were assigned the responsibility of household chores in all the states, it misled their involvement in labour work. The parents emphasized the role of young boys in contributing towards family income and other familial responsibilities.

Gender norms dictated early marriage as the primary role for girls, taking away the importance of education and other learning opportunities. Girls were stated by parents to be responsible for getting married eventually, doing household tasks in in-laws' houses, and providing families with 'grandsons'. Boys, on the other hand, understood their primary role to contribute to family income. This made many boys engage in low paid sectors to fulfil their family's demands affecting their education and future career prospects. During interaction with all relevant stakeholders, household work was established as women's and girls' responsibility even if they were participating in income-generating activities.

In terms of economic activities, poverty engaged children in labour work alongside families from a young age. Children were majorly engaged in unpaid and low-skilled labour, which majorly involved assisting parents in their informal labour work. Children in Delhi worked alongside their mothers who were employed by garment industries, assisting them in tasks like stitching buttons and cutting threads. Boys' engagement was found to be distributed across agriculture, manufacturing, and hospitality.

Though both girls and boys were primarily engaged in agricultural labour in Bihar and Rajasthan, they undertook different roles based on existing gender dynamics. Girls played the role of putting seeds and carrying water, while boys were responsible for ploughing the fields, grazing cattle, and fishing in some areas. Both boys and girls reported irregular attendance during harvesting season. Many parents considered agriculture labour as a potential income-generating skill, thus persuading children to engage and learn the same from an early age. Boys in Rajasthan were involved in different kinds of agricultural labour alongside their families including harvesting, grazing cattle, and fishing. Some of this work was seasonal. In all areas, particular forms of 'outdoor' agricultural labour, such as fishing, were largely restricted to boys in participation. They were also found to be more at-risk of migrating to different regions to seek economic opportunities and participating in labour.

Time-use is an important indicator of how children's outputs are shaped by their roles and responsibilities throughout the day. Through focus groups conducted with adolescent girls, boys, and their fathers and mothers, it stood out that **girls do more work than boys**. This was a consequence of different gender roles that put 'triple burden' on girls. While boys were struggling to strike a balance between their school work and labour work; girls juggled between school, labour work, and inevitable household chores.

Community level

The interplay of Caste and Child labour
Caste as an institution played a significant role in pushing children in labour work based on socio-economic factors, household characteristics, institutional factors, and access and utilization of resources. In India, the caste system is one of the primary influencing factors in defining the roles and responsibilities undertaken by children (Boyden & Marrow, 2015). Caste system is a stratification wherein all individuals are ranked on the basis of their birth which further defines their social status, occupation, and marriage. The four varna system entails categories named Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The fifth category is called the untouchables. They are often given the status of impure due to their hereditary engagement in occupations like manual scavenging and disposing of dead animals. Due to their lower socio-cultural status, child labour pre-dominantly affected Dalit, tribal, and Muslim children. They ended up working due to extreme poverty and marginalized status. Low socio-economic status exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic due to amplified vulnerability. The dual factors of economic shock and school closures pushed more children into labour work.

Due to extreme discrimination and poverty, more children from SC and Musahar (Mahadalit) communities in Bihar were reported to work in brick kilns. Though the time of engagement during the day was not specified, some children did report skipping school for work. Girls from OBC community also reported to engage in brick and chimney factories in Bihar. The overlap between marginalized caste identities and resource poverty forced children from Dalit families to face joblessness and migrate to other cities for

economic opportunities. The lower socio-economic status also affected ownership of agricultural land which in turn acted as a risk factor for child labour.

In terms of education, access to education was tricky for some specified communities. Though India's education policy targets universalization of education by providing free and compulsory education to children till elementary level; it was not accessible to all communities. Children from Dalit and OBC communities were unable to access and benefit from targeted government schemes due to lack of documents such as passbooks and Aadhaar cards. Girls from Muslim community reported higher enrolment rates but only 10 percent girls from Scheduled Tribe were enrolled in Bihar (Jamui).

Cases of caste discrimination were reported within school premises, which affected attendance and retention of children from marginalized communities. For instance, a school in Bihar was reported to make separate queues for lower caste children during mid-day meal distribution. Data from Rajasthan also revealed the vulnerability of tribal communities- *Jadao* and *Bheel* in terms of discrimination within school.

Patterns of Decision-Making

The patterns of decision-making based on four levels of the socio-ecological model have been summarized below. The table also indicates major influencers and barriers identified at each level.

Socio-Ecological Levels	Influencers	Barriers
Individual level	● Parents ● Siblings ● Teachers ● Peers	● Poverty ● Gendered expectations ● Restricted mobility ● Lack of agency ● Caste-based barriers

Interpersonal level	- Parents - Siblings - Other familial forces - Spouse - In-laws	- Household chores - Lack of mobility - Early marriage
Community level	- Parents - Teachers - Peers - Community members - Cultural system	- Dependency in domestic work - Poor infrastructure - Physical distance - Water and sanitation facilities - Menstrual health
Society level	- Employers - Panchayat - Government departments	- Hidden work - Low-skilled unpaid labour - Triple work burden - Risk of trafficking - Lack of awareness about laws and policies - Lack of support from local government

Individual level

There is a marked difference between the way in which girls and boys exercise autonomy over their lives in Delhi, Bihar, and Rajasthan. Several factors, which have been explored in greater detail under other domains, impede girls' agency over their daily lives and future prospects. Irrespective of the amount of labour work girls engaged in, they were expected to conform to gender-based roles and responsibilities within the household. This resulted in a triple work burden- school, labour work, and domestic work. The decision to leave school is mostly taken by parents, rather than the children themselves. A study conducted by Dasra (2016) indicated that 53.6 percent adolescent girls in Bihar and 56 percent in Rajasthan did not participate in any decision-making pertaining to their own education, mobility, health, and well-being. Several studies affirmed that women and girls who are educated exercise larger decision-making roles within the household and community.

In most cases, the interest of children to engage in employment opportunities was driven by economic need. In a few others, seeing peers working influenced children to also work. This was more prominent amongst boys who were then able to purchase personal items like mobile phones. Boys were given more autonomy, mobility, and opportunities in comparison to the girls. Lack of agency amongst girls affected them in three ways: (i) their decision making was found to be limited in terms of their time-use, access and utilization of resources, and bound to gender norms; (ii) lack of self-confidence to conceptualize and achieve goals including educational opportunities, age of marriage, and employment prospects, and (iii) lack of power to influence caregivers with their own decisions.

Interpersonal level

The decision-making process was highly influenced by interpersonal relationships of adolescent boys and girls due to cultural beliefs that normalized child labour. At the household-level, fathers were stated as the primary decision-makers in terms of allocation of roles and work responsibilities to other family members. Occupations like farming, fishing, and domestic work were socially acceptable. They were even believed to be

teaching children important life skills that needed to be passed on to newer generations. The primary objective stated by parents was to secure a better future for their children.

The mothers in focus groups reported their husbands to undertake the primary role of budgeting in the household and making decisions about children's engagement in labour work. The girls held the least power amongst parents, male siblings, and other adult family members like grandparents and uncles/aunts. They stated during the interaction that they did not have room to express disagreements to their parents' decisions, especially fathers.

"I went to this place, while returning there was a small market in the way. I saw a small kid with an overbearing person. He hit the kid over some matter and the kid got hurt. We thought now that guy should be reprimanded. That area too is Naxalite prone. We took the kid for first aid. We asked that kid why he was working. He said because his parents left him there to work."

In terms of schooling, the decisions regarding work and school were found to be interdependent. The decision of educating children was primarily taken at the household level which influenced the demand side variables. The demand of education varied on the basis of perceived returns on educating children vis-a-vis their engagement in labour work. The perception of quality of education or access to school and infrastructure also affected the decision made by households in terms of future returns on education and employment. The decision of sending children to school was also affected in households where financial resources were limited. In a few cases, the boys of such families were reportedly enrolled in private schools whereas girls were enrolled in government-run schools. The interaction of poverty, gender, and education was evident in terms of stakeholders' priorities.

Most parents affirmed their decision of engaging their female children in household chores in order to train them for their future role of being good wives. The social values like obedience, respect, hard work, and sustenance influenced the household decisions of

child labour. In terms of time-use, most children were not satisfied with their daily routine. When asked what change would adolescent girls make in their daily routine if they were given a choice, they stated that they would skip cleaning utensils and rather study. When a similar question was asked from the boys of the same community, they stated prioritizing education over their leisure time. Boys, in their personal capacity, had more space to exercise their decisions. But as a family unit, in all cases reported, children abided by the decisions made by their family, specifically in terms of expectations to contribute in labour work, age of marriage, migrating to other cities for economic opportunities, or finding a 'balance' between school and work; irrespective of their gender, age, caste, or ethnicity.

In terms of risk factors, gender discrepancy in decision-making at interpersonal level perpetuated due to stringent patriarchal norms. Lack of agency amongst adolescent girls also affected their decisions around attending school, managing household chores, and engaging in labour work.

Community level

In the discourse laid by socio-cultural norms, family, and community- the decision to work came from a place of duty rather than will. At the community level, teachers, peers, and community members were identified as influencers in the decision-making process. The norms perpetuated the culture of child labour which has now become deep-rooted at the community level. Defying the norms seemed more difficult than defying the law.

Gender norms played an important yet dynamic role in decisions around children working alongside school. In a few cases, mothers, fathers, and teachers shared flexible expectations in terms of children (both girls and boys) giving full attention to education. Contradictions regarding girls' engagement in domestic work were also apparent.

Society level

It was imperative to unpack how policies and programs influence the decision-making process of children engaging in labour work. Due to extreme poverty and low socio-economic status, many households relied on child labour as a coping mechanism. At the societal level, the decision making bodies like *panchayat* (village council), government departments, and other influencing institutions. According to a village council head, direct cash transfers were made into community members' accounts in light of adverse effects of covid-19 pandemic due to which most community members lost their jobs. Thus, the increased risk of child labour could be avoided if decision-making processes of different stakeholders were aligned. Irrespective of policies, provisions, and programs; parents were noted to be the primary decision-makers for children engaged in labour work. The government officials also reported engaging with parents in different motivation programs that aimed to influence their decision-making process.

"*Uma's (name changed) parents died. She used to live with her grandma. Due to the family's condition being very poor, she had to drop out after class 7th. Guardians were not willing to let her attend school but we somehow counselled them and got her back to school.*"

On the contrary, a few districts reported absence of any awareness programs for key stakeholders to learn about labour rights, physical safety, or psychological safety. Regulation at societal level was found to be helpful to help navigate families who felt helpless in their poor socio-economic conditions. For instance, linking parents to regular productive jobs influenced the decision-making process in Bihar. Stated by a father in Bihar, "*Our economic conditions do not permit us to educate our children that much*" clearly indicated that education and economic conditions were interrelated. "*Those who cannot educate their children send them for training.*" stated by another father indicated that accessibility and affordability of education was also directly linked with the engagement of children in labour in the name of securing their future. A village head in Bihar reported observing lesser cases of migration in case of more employment opportunities in the area. Another village head stated, "*Jobs should be created in our own space to stop migration. This will counter poverty.*"

Outcome 2: Governments have enforced relevant child-rights based laws and have implemented policies on child labour, education, youth economic empowerment and social security.

Outcome 4: The EU, Dutch government and international organisations act in support of the elimination of child labour and fulfil their obligation by setting and reinforcing due diligence policies and laws

Social norms, beliefs, and practices

Though Indian laws against child labour offer the flexibility to engage children in "light work", social norms held the potential to blur the lines between child labour and child work. The concept of child work was found to be complex in its nature as it was intertwined with both gender and caste. Children were being pushed by parents to work on family agricultural lands to indoctrinate their 'caste culture' onto the children, coupled with the intention of securing a better future for them.

Interpersonal and Community level

Early marriage

Since 1978, the legal age of marriage has been 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys in India. Recently in February 2022, a bill was introduced by the Government of India to increase the legal age of marriage for girls from 18 years to 21 years. Though the bill has not been passed in the parliament yet, the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) conducted between 2019-2021 reported that two-fifths of Indian women married before reaching the legal age of 18 years (Indian Express, 2022). The prevalence of child marriage varies across states in India. Over 40 percent of young women were married before the legal age of 18 years in Bihar (UN Women, 2019). The data collected in Jamui (Bihar) also reported girls to be at a higher risk of early marriage wherein girls were reportedly married off at the age of 15-16 years to 'protect the family's reputation'. In a similar way, girls in Champaran (Bihar) reported to get married as young as 12-13 years of age. Curbing and controlling the practice of child marriage was a stated priority of the

panchayat (village council). However, practices around marrying girls off early and arranging dowry were highly reported. Child marriage was found to be less common among boys as compared to girls.

Dowry was stated as one of the drivers of child marriage. Parents believed that younger the bride, lesser the dowry that they would have to pay. Though dowry is an illegal practice, its social acceptance translates the practice under the name of gifts offered by the bride's family to the groom's. Exchanges of gifts and money that happen the other way round, from groom's family to bride's family were termed 'bride price' in Bihar and Rajasthan. Like dowry, bride price was also reported to influence child marriage due to the belief that younger brides are more desirable and thus attract a higher bride price. This exchange of cash and kind was reported to happen at multiple stages. In Rajasthan, for example, the child marriage is a more socially acceptable norm to the level that defying the norm led parents face higher social stigma. The community in Rajasthan reported marrying the children at an age as young as 5 years in exchange of money, livestock, and material goods but the bride and groom were not permitted to reside together until the girl reached menarche. The process of a girl being sent off to the groom's family by puberty is termed as '*gauna*'.

Child marriage and education were found to be correlated. The practice of child and early marriage stimulated dropout cases of girls from school. Parents in focus group discussions in Rajasthan revealed to educate their daughters only till secondary level with the key objective to get them married, given increasing demand of secondary-level educated brides. A relatively implicit notion was also found among parents in Delhi who believed that girls should be married soon after completing their school education. They also dismissed the need for girls to be financially independent.

Laws, Policies, Regulations, and Institutional Practices

Individual and Interpersonal level

Legal status of children engaged in home-based labour

The findings of this study highlight that a large number of at-risk children across Delhi, Bihar, and Rajasthan are engaged in labour from within their households. This takes on several forms, including assisting parents (typically mothers, who are frequently stay-at-home parents) in income-generating activities such as cutting thread and working with cloth in Delhi, or participation in stone cutting and crafts in Rajasthan. In Bihar, children, especially boys, are expected to participate in agricultural labour alongside their family members during harvest season. These forms of work, which operate within the microcosm of the household, are obscured from the public eye as well as institutional spaces where interventions against them can be initiated. Employers from different districts, who were involved in unorganised forms of work in these industries, claimed that children's involvement is largely restricted to working from within homes. The exemptions granted by anti-child labour legislation in India to forms of employment that are 'solely family run' points to the legal loopholes that employers can use to avoid legal action against themselves in such cases. This absence of legal scrutiny extends to girls' participation in household work, which was found to be taking place at an overwhelmingly large scale in all districts. Examining the role of the household as a unit of production, and a site of child labour, is an urgent need in all three states.

Community and society level

Access to government benefits and public delivery systems

An in-depth analysis of our findings revealed significant exclusion from government benefits on the basis of gender, caste, and economic status. Marginalised groups in all three states were reported as being unable to access public services and welfare schemes for which they are eligible, and have a pressing need. The role of caste in creating pockets of extreme underdevelopment is crucial to note. A *Panchayat* (village committee) member in West Champaran, Bihar, highlighted that the key reason behind underdevelopment in his ward is that it is a Dalit area, ie. marginalised castes who fall

under the constitutional status of Scheduled Castes ("SCs") in India live here. While there are strong legal provisions against caste-based discrimination operational in the country, our findings show that implicit and even explicit forms of discrimination on the basis of caste are still pervasive in different regions. Research on caste-based spatial segregation in rural Bihar highlighted that neoliberal infrastructure-building, such as the setting up of public schools and community centres in areas that were already historically accessible to Dalit communities, has done little to alter the norms of segregation that have been pervasive for centuries (Prasad 2021). These communities continue to live in areas that are visibly away from non-Dalit settlements. They are systematically disallowed from accessing public services as well as critical state resources allocated to Dalit people, ranging from hand pumps to pension schemes. Caste overlaps significantly with economic deprivation, even as many markers of psychosocial discrimination on its basis are also prevalent. The ward member from Champaran described how residents of his village have been facing long-term economic deprivation and lack of economic opportunities. *"Only people like us can go in there and help",* he shared. Participants from the FGD held with fathers highlighted that schemes such as *Aangnwadis* (rural childcare centres) and the provision of midday meals in schools, both welfare benefits that the central government is meant to provide at no cost, are not operational in the area. They shared that there is a sense of opacity around government services in the area. Government workers stay away from this village, and no information and awareness campaigns are held by government bodies for its residents. Dalit and other caste minority children living in areas where underdevelopment is underpinned by spatial segregation and systemic exclusion are exposed to forms of structural and material violence that their non-Dalit counterparts do not have to face.

The role of structural factors in preventing relevant welfare schemes and policies from reaching intended beneficiaries is evident in data from other regions as well. A member of the All India Primary Teachers' Federation shared that access to schooling is heavily stratified on the basis of economic status. In Delhi, where he is a teacher, children from economically underserved families who do not have any official identity documents to

facilitate enrolment study in schools that fall under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, ie. local government-run schools. Children who have documents but whose families still lack the resources to send them to private schools are instead attending state-level Delhi government schools. Similarly, parents in Rajasthan shared that cash transfers under the central government's Direct Benefit Transfer schemes, intended to help economically deprived families cover the costs of school uniforms and textbooks for children, are inaccessible for them due to a lack of identity-verifying documents. Families that are facing extreme economic deprivation also reported that not having bank accounts means that these benefits cannot reach them at all. The exclusion of individuals who cannot furnish identity-related documents further disenfranchises groups that have already historically been excluded from public delivery systems in the country.

Access and quality of education: Government interventions

As of 2021, more than 70% children in rural India were estimated to be enrolled in government schools (ASER Centre, 2022). Alongside a fall in private school enrolment, a significant increase in government school enrolment was observed across age groups and grades, as well as among both girls and boys. This is indicative of a significant proportion of the country's child population, especially those who come from households experiencing financial distress, relying on the free schooling and facilities provided by government schools to participate in education. It also highlights the role that the COVID-19 pandemic has likely played in exacerbating this financial distress for many.

Data from our study showed that a majority of at-risk children across the six districts in Delhi, Bihar, and Rajasthan attend government schools. A lack of financial resources to opt for schools that are not free of cost was found to be the major factor behind this. Multiple concerns linked to the accessibility of these schools, and the availability of facilities within them, came up recurrently. Children and parents expressed doubts over the quality of education in these schools, with multiple instances of children being enrolled in government schools but not attending regularly. The data revealed that the reasons

behind this included irregular or infrequent classes, lack of teachers for every subject being taught, and disinterest in conducting classes and teaching on teachers' part. Parents cited a lack of basic infrastructure, such as clean and hygienic bathrooms, and no functional dispensers for drinking water, as the reason they do not want to send their children to government schools in Rajasthan. Girls shared that government schools for them are located in remote areas in Jamui, Bihar, with some having to travel for as long as 90 minutes on foot or by bicycle in order to reach them. Poor infrastructure, such as low quality roads, make them even more inaccessible. Multiple parents across districts expressed that if their financial circumstances allowed for it, they would prefer to send their children to private schools. Security was another key area of concern. In Delhi, parents reported that they worry about their children's safety while they attend the government school in their locality, as there are no security guards or security protocols in place.. Gendered risk factors linked to security are exacerbated in areas where girls are required to travel a significant distance to attend school. Girls reported security risks such as being subject to inappropriate comments and street harassment by men while travelling back and forth. In light of these concerns, it is important to consider whether or not government schooling in the country is adequate in ensuring that children have access to a safe and accessible learning environment. Parents' perceptions of government schooling also reflected worries about the quality of learning that is taking place. Across districts, parents expressed worries that their children's participation in government education seems futile, and is not translating to actual learning. This worry has increased due to school shutdowns in the COVID-19 pandemic— children studying in government schools experienced large-scale learning loss due to online classes being irregular, or sometimes not taking place at all. Despite belonging to families facing economic deprivation, a large number of parents and children shared that children attend private tuition and coaching classes alongside school, creating additional costs that are a financial burden for them. Government interventions intended to improve quality and increase student retention in these schools appear to be yielding mixed results. The RTE Act (2009) detailed the School Management Committee (SMC) model. It laid down that SMCs comprising parents, teachers, head teachers, students and local educationists, and

elected local government members were to be instituted in every school that receives government aid. These committees are meant to be responsible for measuring and planning for the functioning of the school. However, the effectiveness of SMCs showed significant variation across districts. While most districts reported that SMC meetings are held regularly, the involvement of local government functionaries seemed to be fairly limited, with one *Sarpanch* (village head) sharing that they do not attend these meetings because they have "never been invited". In Bundi, Rajasthan, stakeholders reported that SMC meetings are not being held at all.

Some of these barriers to government schooling have been widely recognised in the country, leading to policies and schemes that are aimed at incentivising enrollment and attendance for children from extremely marginalised families. The Midday Meal Scheme, intended to improve nutritional outcomes among government school students, is aimed at providing students with nutritious meals free of cost in the middle of the school day. Our data indicates that it is viewed as a strong incentive for families facing severe economic deprivation to send their children to school. However, the implementation of this scheme was also not found to be effective in several districts. Stakeholders reported that meals are not being provided by schools every day, and sometimes lack key nutritional components such as protein in the form of eggs. The Mukhyamantri Balika Bicycle Scheme (Chief Minister's bicycle scheme for girls) has been operational since 2006 in Bihar, and aims at increasing girls' enrolment in schooling. However, in at least one district out of four in Bihar, parents and children reported that they have still not received the bicycles that the scheme promises. Measures aimed at improving the state of government schools were seen to be riddled with implementational and infrastructural failures on-ground, similar to government schools themselves.

Child protection committees and rehabilitation schemes for child workers

Specific government provisions linked to children's protection and welfare, such as child protection committees, came up sparsely in our data. In Delhi, ward level child protection committees were reported to be operational and working alongside the District Child

Protection Unit and the District Legal Services Unit . However, government officials and *Panchayat* members in most districts did not provide significant information on such provisions, indicating a lack of implementation or possibly even adequate information about them on their part. Interviews with the *Sarpanch* (village head) and government officials across districts also revealed significant gaps in coordination over children's welfare between local and state/central governments. Members of either form of government came across as being unaware of the role played by the other in anti-child labour interventions. Particularly in the case of *Panchayats*, which are often considered uniquely predisposed towards understanding community-specific needs in their wards, there was a noticeable lack of awareness about anti child labour legislative provisions and government schemes The National Child Labour Project (NCLP; 1988) is a government scheme that targets districts in India where children are at high risk for participation in labour. It aims to rescue and rehabilitate children who are engaged in labour, and take measures to reintegrate them into the formal schooling system. Despite all five districts under the scope of this study, other than South-East Delhi, falling under the NCLP at present, government and *Panchayat* officials were found to have little information on it. In West Champaran, the *Panchayat* member shared that the NCLP was operational in the district, but was unable to furnish any more information about it. Stakeholders in all four of the other districts did not give any details on the operational status of the programme. This demonstrates that, when it comes to the implementation of anti child labour measures, there is a disconnect between government actors on the ground and those who are legislating policies and schemes. Across districts, a significant gap emerged while evaluating the status of interventions that directly targeted risk factors for children's participation in labour.

Interpersonal and community level

Awareness and empowerment around legal protections for children

Girls and boys both identified parents as the stakeholder they would reach out to if faced with any distress or harm, with girls expressing more apprehensions about whether or

not their problems would be entertained. The practice of civil society actors such as social activists and NGOs serving as interlocutors for children's rights before the law also appeared to be fairly common. In situations linked to school dropouts, which are often accompanied with children participating in some form of work, teachers also reported having worked with parents as well as social activists to disengage these children from labour. The findings suggested that gender interfaced with this individual access to public services and legal avenues in two implicit ways. First, girls' perception of their own rights and safety was impeded by social norms that police their actions, and placed the onus of exposure to harm on them instead of perpetrators. This is linked to girls being policed by their families and communities when it comes to how they dress and behave. It also translates into an implicit access barrier wherein girls reported that they feared that their grievances will not be taken seriously. For instance, girls in a district in Bihar claimed that they did not think they could share concerns within their daily lives freely with their parents, because they would not be taken as seriously as boys. Second, parental restrictions on girls' mobility and access to technology were found to be recurrent across all six districts. This limited their access to information, and consequently, opportunities to learn more about their legal rights. A girl in Rajasthan shared that not being allowed to leave home prevented girls in the area from learning more about their own city and its people, impeding their personality development. Civil society interventions linked to rights awareness and sensitisation for children were operational in the concerned districts. However, these gendered restrictions on girls' access to public and social spaces remains a cause for concern when it comes to their ability to exercise agency over their legal rights.

Safety, Dignity, and Wellbeing

Individual and Interpersonal level

Safety and wellbeing of children working in hazardous conditions

In terms of safety and wellbeing of children, both boys and girls experienced particular risks that were linked to their participation in different forms of labour. Girls, who were overwhelmingly found to be involved in household work in their own homes for long hours, were likely facing risks to their safety in the form of long-term exposure to smoke in the kitchen, as well as bodily exhaustion from the high number of tasks they were expected to manage. In Bihar, girls were reported to be involved in the *beedi* (hand-rolled tobacco cigarette) making industry. While these health risks did not appear prominently in our findings, *beedi* making has been associated with risks such as coughing, breathlessness, asthma, and threats to reproductive, ocular, and dermatological health (Tom and Francis 2013). Boys also reported facing health risks specific to the forms of labour that they were involved in different districts. In Rajasthan, they shared that working with stone exposed them to diseases due to dust getting into their eyes and mouths, and their faces getting soiled. A recent news article reported that a 17-year old child labourer from Bihar passed away while working inside an illegal bangle factory who was tricked and trafficked to Rajasthan. His health reportedly deteriorated in the pitch-dark room where he worked round the clock in absence of any ventilation (Times of India, 2022). But hardly cases like these get reported unless faced with severe repercussions as in this case. Save the Children (2015) conducted a study in Delhi to understand the dynamics of the hidden workforce in the garment industry. Only 11 percent respondents said that they 'rarely' faced verbal or physical abuse. Some of them reported deteriorating health conditions like back pain, having to work long hours, and deteriorating eyesight. In Jamui, Bihar, boys' involvement in hazardous work was based out of jungles, where they encountered snakes and insects. It is pertinent to note that working in the jungles was reported to be a risk that disproportionately affected boys from SC and ST communities in the area. The informal nature of children's participation

in these types of work made these health risks difficult to map, and the reluctance of institutional stakeholders to engage with it could be a product of dismissing that these highly illegal threats of harm against children continue to persist. This reluctance is somewhat evident in the fact that data yielded from government officials, village council heads, employers, and even social activists scarcely highlighted these risks. As mentioned by one of the village council heads in Bihar, *"If they live at home, they have to obviously assist their parents in their work"* indicated the acceptance of children's participation in informal work.

Gender violence and girls' safety in public spaces

Gaps in perceptions of individual safety were discernibly gendered in how they were perceived among stakeholders across districts. Girls' safety was cited as a reason for why several behaviours were expected of them. Parental perceptions around 'protecting' girls were often found to be centred on disallowing them from stepping out of their homes, sometimes to the degree that they were not allowed to explore even their surroundings and hometowns on their own. The manner in which girls perceived their own safety, and the way they were expected to exercise responsibility over it is relevant to note here. Girls in a district in Bihar shared that although parents were likely to be one of the first people they turned to if faced with discomforts or grievances, they did not feel that they could share their concerns as freely as boys. They feared that they would not be taken as seriously, and not have room to express any disagreements they might have had with their parents' opinions. In Rajasthan, girls reported that they were blamed for harassment perpetrated against them by boys, placing the onus of their own safety entirely in their own hands from a young age. These attitudes reflected the double burden often placed on girls while navigating and negotiating their wellbeing. On the one hand, they were expected to concede agency by adhering to mobility restrictions in the name of safety, while on the other, they were also expected to take responsibility when faced with violence and threats of harm. Some girls reported that they reached out to individuals in their lives other than parents when confronted with unsafe situations, including teachers and other friends who were girls. In Muzaffarpur, Bihar, girls spoke fondly about reaching

out to and confiding in their friends as a primary response to such situations, and shared to find guidance, comfort, and support in this space. Keeping these findings in mind, it becomes important to note that while a variety of structural factors constrain what girls' safety and their exercise of agency over it looks like, there is a considerable degree of autonomy that they exercise in their day-to-day lives to secure that safety for themselves. Gender-responsive interventions linked to girls' safety would translate more effectively if it took this into consideration, and focused on creating avenues of empowerment that focus on tackling the norms that impede this individual-level exercise of autonomy.

Community level

While safety is often interpreted in alignment with other social codes around gender, girls also frequently reported that boys inflicted verbal harassment and other forms of inappropriate behaviour on them in public spaces. The site of these forms of harassment were often public spaces within their neighbourhoods. Girls reported that boys felt entitled to pass comments on their appearances, among other things, in such spaces. From a programmatic perspective, it remains unclear based on our findings whether or not sensitisation and awareness programmes, or other protective measures, are prioritising interventions against these forms of violence. It is worth noting that grievance redressal against these forms of violence were often done at the interpersonal level, within the neighbourhood. While parents across districts mentioned that they would escalate situations where children were getting harmed to concerned authorities such as the police, a combination of downplaying these issues at the interpersonal level and institutional apathy towards them made situations where formal grievances are registered and action is taken against perpetrators appear rare. In Jamui, Bihar, a girl shared that she experienced sexual harassment in the form of inappropriate touching at the hands of a boy in her neighbourhood. Upon reporting this to her parents, a fight broke out in the neighbourhood, but no institutional action appeared to be taken. In Rajasthan, where early marriage of girls appeared to be more prominent than in other areas, parents reported an incident wherein a boy came to a girl's house and tried to get her to forcibly marry him. The girl's family recounted that they were offered no support by local

authorities, and instead, some local officials were in fact present to support the boy. Girls' safety in their immediate interpersonal spaces seemed to be treated with an implicit attitude of not warranting institutional redressal. Despite the existence of legislative provisions such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act (2012), which lay down strong provisions against different forms of sexual harassment against children, there appeared to be a large degree of institutional failure when it comes to making their provisions accessible to children from at-risk communities living at the margins of society.

Structural unsafety and caste-based violence

The exposure to particular risks that are in turn embedded in certain forms of labour often aligns with caste, putting caste-marginalised children at the forefront of these dangers. Both a direct and an indirect causal relationship was observed, which linked to this in the findings. On an indirect level, caste being a precipitating factor for children's participation in labour from an early age is reported by different stakeholders across districts. Social activists, government officials, and village council heads in Delhi, Bihar, and Rajasthan shared that children from certain communities were much more likely to be involved in taking up work than others. Invariably, the communities mentioned by them were SC, ST, and OBC communities that fall on the lower levels of caste hierarchies in these respective regions. However, this is frequently accompanied with an insistence that the pervasiveness of caste-based discrimination has diminished significantly in the modern day, and an unwillingness to entertain the notion that caste-based discriminations are a significant area of concern. Mentions of caste-based discrimination in schools in Delhi appeared during the interaction with a teacher, despite the stark absence of considerations around caste in anti-child labour interventions in the region. The most blatant form of such structural violence against children in school came up in the interview with a teacher from Bihar. He recalled a teacher who had faced legal repercussions in recent times for beating up a child from a marginalised caste. Corporal punishment in schools did not appear to be commonplace from the findings, but was nevertheless found to be deeply embedded in casteist violence against children when it came up. A key

finding in Jamui, Bihar, provided a startling insight into how caste-based violence operated at a direct level. A social activist from the district shared, *"Generally people have targeted lower caste people to work in their fields. They force them and their kids to work. They don't want them to be educated. Similar to bonded labourers."* While this was not discussed by them in further detail during the IDI, it pointed towards how children's participation in the worst forms of labour was facilitated by the continued existence of caste hierarchies. In Muzaffarpur, OBCs and other marginalised caste communities that did not have ownership over agricultural land were identified at a higher risk for unemployment, and having to migrate from the area in order to seek jobs, which was identified as a push factor for children taking up labour. While the findings abundantly highlight the role of caste in being an immediate push factor for children getting involved in labour, there appeared to be a tacit acceptance of the hierarchies it creates, and a reluctance to address its on-ground implications.

Substance abuse

The data also showed normalisation of other forms of structural violence against children. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the substance abuse practices, particularly amongst adolescents in India (Bhatia et al., 2021). Prevalence of substance abuse was reported in all three states- Delhi, Bihar, and Rajasthan. Boys in Rajasthan were reported to be at risk of substance abuse from a young age. The practice of children hiding and working in the stone industry from within their homes, in order to earn enough money to consume alcohol and tobacco was found to be commonplace. Stakeholders in Delhi also reported that adolescent boys were at-risk of falling prey to intoxication and substance abuse through their peer networks. The relationship between caste and this risk for substance abuse was highlighted implicitly by multiple stakeholders. While boys shared that their peers who were abusing substances likely did so due to seeing their parents do the same, the social activist from the region reported that individuals from the marginalised *Bheel* tribal community were the most likely to be engaged in alcohol abuse. Historically, research has linked the risk of children engaging in substance abuse in India

to inhumane living and working conditions, prominently including homelessness and living on the street (Rathore, Joshi, & Pareek 2017). However, newer research identifies risk factors in their immediate psychosocial contexts, including a larger prevalence of most forms of substance abuse among boys than girls, and children from marginalised castes and communities being at higher risk (Iqbal 2020). The data findings did not offer a clear causal link between these factors and children facing substance abuse and addiction. At the same time, the rampancy of this problem among marginalized children and related stereotypes associated with particular caste, community, and gender groups revealed an implicit structural relationship at play in this case.

Society level

Trafficking, which constitutes one of the worst forms of child labour under the ILO convention, was highlighted as a concern in several districts. It appears to be fairly rampant in India. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) (2003) conducted a study on human trafficking in India, concluding that states such as Rajasthan, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu have high rates of intra-state trafficking of women and children, while states like Delhi and Goa have higher instances of inter-state trafficking. The vocabulary around trafficking differed from region to region in the findings. In West Champaran, Bihar, children were reported to be at risk of migrating to search for jobs, facilitated by 'labour suppliers'. The extent of coercive action involved in such instances was considered redundant in conversations around trafficking, as minors were not seen as empowered actors who had the capacity to consent to such actions. Similar implicit mentions of trafficking appeared in Rajasthan, where individuals who had migrated to the region were perceived to 'lure' girls into elopement, while the 'kidnapping' of boys was also highlighted as a risk. The gendered nature of trafficking was also apparent in data from Jamui, Bihar, where the trafficking of girls by 'agents' who sought to engage them in household work in other regions was viewed as a significant threat. Macroscopic data on child trafficking in India is difficult to track. Targeted governmental interventions against this particular form of violence are also fairly sparse. However, the scale at which

this problem operates was mapped using data on kidnapping from the country's National Crime Records Bureau several years ago to reveal that there had been a 571 per cent increase in children being kidnapped and abducted in the country in the previous decade (HAQ: Centre for Child Rights and Campaign Against Child Trafficking, 2016). The same data showed a 133.3% increase in cases listed under the 'buying of minor girls' between 2013 and 2014. The insidious forms taken on by child trafficking were apparent in the data, and pointed towards the need for a far deeper scrutiny around this issue.

At the societal level, the absence of mechanisms for children to report instances where their safety and wellbeing had been compromised was also a significant finding of the study. Not a single employer interviewed across districts reported the existence of grievance redressal mechanisms in their workplace. The responsibility over children's participation in, and by extension, safety at work was often attributed to parents. In West Champaran, an employer in the scraps industry reported that children worked on a 'freelance' basis, seeking income when they were able to find scraps. The employer emphasized that the onus of preventing children's participation in this work lay with parents. An employer in the garments industry in Delhi echoed similar sentiments, insisting that they did not employ children directly, and their participation in this work took place at home while assisting their parents. Children's involvement in informal, home-based work also impeded their access to any institutional mechanisms in case they faced health risks or had other grievances to raise. This was especially true of girls' participation in domestic labour outside their homes, which was a rampant practice. The inadequacy of grievance redressal was not restricted to workplaces. When asked about what institutional mechanisms existed for this in schools, teachers were also unable to highlight formal procedures and protocols around it. Instead, as mentioned earlier, there was a reliance on resolving grievances in interpersonal spaces, wherein teachers claimed that students could approach them directly if they were facing any discomfort. At a fundamental level, adult stakeholders help institutional power in the workplace as well as at school. They were the only resource available for children to reach out to. This denoted

a failure to implement systematic and holistic mechanisms that could ensure protection of children's rights in the course of their problems being addressed.

Outcome 3: The private sector takes full responsibility for preventing and addressing child labour.

Individual and interpersonal level

Gender gap in labour work

The hidden labour mainly encompassed domestic workers and migrant child workers. This posed a major challenge of reporting such cases wherein the repercussions were severe due to absence of any regulation or grievance redress. Due to extreme poverty, thousands of children have been reported to migrate from Bihar to the tourist magnet-Rajasthan to do forced labour in the handicraft industry including making bangles, embroider fabrics, and printing textiles (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2019). Delhi reported cases of around 50,000 children who were engaged in thread cutting work in the garment industry (Malhotra, 2015). These children neither worked in a factory nor went out to look for work. The work arrived at their doorstep, since thread cutting work fitted well within their little fingers. Without knowing the source, children (supervised by their mothers) engaged with this work through a woman in the colony who worked as a middle-person. This intricate supply chain network specialized in garment manufacturing and remained unrecognised towards children's contribution in the labour.

The table outlines an overview of children's gender-based engagement in different sectors and activities.

Sector	Activity	Social group
Agriculture	● Ploughing fields ● Peripheral work ● Harvesting	● Rural children engaged in agricultural labour ● Both boys and girls were involved in

	● Grazing cattle ● Fishing	agricultural labour. More boys were reported to work in fields due to restricted mobility of girls ● Children worked in the fields from the age of 10 years ● Children from poor households more vulnerable to engage in bonded labour on other families' lands
Industry	● Stone industry ● Manufacturing garments ● Weaving fabrics ● Weaving carpets ● Polishing gems ● Rolling cigarettes ● Producing bricks	● Boys from SC and Dalit communities were more prone to work in brick kilns ● Girls assisted their mothers in household workspaces for weaving fabrics and manufacturing garments by cutting threads and fabric pieces ● Both boys and girls were involved in stone industry ● Girls engaged more in tobacco farming and rolling cigarettes in home-based workspaces
Services	● Household chores ● Hotels ● Local shops ● Tourism	● Girls outnumbered boys in engaging in household chores and other domestic work ● More boys at-risk of migrating from rural to urban areas to work in hotels and local shops

Worst forms of labour	• Trafficking • Bonded labour • Forced labour • Hazardous labour	• Girls were trafficked by agents to engage in household work • Boys were trafficked by labour suppliers to work in factories • Increased incidence of trafficking during Covid-19 pandemic • Boys at higher risk of getting trafficked • Both boys and girls engaged in bonded labour on agricultural lands • Boys from Dalit community more involved in hazardous work in jungle • Hazardous work conditions reported in stone industry due to exposure to diseases due to dust

"Hidden" labour work

Child labour is a complex and multi-dimensional issue. It has been argued that child labour reported under data constitutes a small percentage of the actual number of child labourers across the world, especially in the developing nations (Edmonds, 2008; Ali et. al, 2017). The more prevalent type of child labour included child labour in the households, family agricultural lands, and family businesses, and work collectively done by a family. This nature of engagement still remains undefined by international agencies since most of them are considered family work wherein children contribute to support the family income. Within the unpaid care economy, women and girls' participation in household tasks including cleaning, cooking, and child labour is not accorded economic value (OECD 2014). Unpaid care economy has a tremendous economic value but it largely remains unrecognized. As of 2015, the unpaid care economy was estimated to be worth USD 10

trillion, representing nearly 13 percent of total world's GDP (Gates Foundation, 2017). This constitutes a significant gender gap in many spaces where the labour participation of gender minorities is being evaluated. This bears deep links with the concept of the sexual division of labour. The WNCB SenseMaker Assessment (2021) highlighted the role of household work within their own families in making girls in Bihar, Delhi, and Rajasthan more vulnerable to the harmful effects of child labour.

Girls reported to work significantly more than boys in unpaid care economy whereas boys worked significantly more in paid economic work. Gendered spaces created due to rigid patriarchal norms around division of labour within homes, the tasks performed by girls and boys were found to be gender-differentiated. The overwhelming majority of child labourers in domestic work were found to be girls. Boys were reported to spend much less time in household chores, only boys in Rajasthan reported to spend a few minutes in cleaning the household, primarily because they were obligated to contribute as most of them were the only child in the household. The participation of girls in household chores increased manifold during the COVID-19 pandemic. During interaction with multiple stakeholders, household labour work undertaken by girls was not recognized as productive work or as obstructing their education. It was considered to be a duty that most girls had to perform based on the virtue of being born a girl.

The disproportionate engagement of women and girls in unpaid care work affected them in several ways:

1. **Education:** Girls dropped out of school or could not optimally perform in school due to domestic work responsibilities. This was also highlighted by a 16-country study by ILO. one teacher also stated, "*Girls skip school more frequently because of their dependency on household work.*" This dependency affected the motivation of parents to send their daughters to school due to more opportunity cost of educating their daughters. Opportunity cost consists of the lost chore time and their lost girl's-mother's earnings (Ghosh & Sengupta, 2012).

2. **Access to formal and informal work:** <u>Since girls were fully engaged in household chores, they were not presented with outdoor economic opportunities. The lack of access to formal and informal work for girls reinforced social norms around roles and responsibilities of girls and boys</u>.

3. **Lack of decision making:** Given the lower contribution to household income, girls did not have agency in decision making. This limited their access and control over resources like bank accounts, mobile phones, and household assets. According to Gates Foundation (2017), it also limits their control over family formation and several studies have proven that women with more children do more unpaid care work (OECD, 2016).

4. **Time Poverty:** The countless hours invested by girls in household work not only remained unrecognized but also posed a triple burden of managing school, household chores, and family labour. This left girls with no discretionary time which is known as time poverty. Time poverty is a manifestation of systemic oppression of women and girls via restrictive gender norms which dictate normative expectations of what it means to be a boy and a girl in the society and what tasks and privileges are allocated to an individual based on these norms (Hyde et al., 2020). Time poverty resulted in negligible time spent on leisure by adolescent girls. During a FGD in Rajasthan, girls stated, *"We get more angry because we have to work more than boys. Only we do the household work, which makes us frustrated. Boys can roam around but we cannot. Hence, we remain awkward and frustrated and are unable to develop our personality."* Girls in Rajasthan also reported to get late for school or occasionally miss school due to their family's dependency on them to engage in household chores.

Household chores are time-consuming in India due to the absence of resources and machinery/ technology like refrigerators, regular electricity, and clean tap water. Since girls were involved significantly more than boys in household chores, they did not get enough leisure time to play or roam around as well as engage in learning activities. The pressure of engaging in labour increased for children residing with single parents due to

increased vulnerability towards economic hardships, life stress, poor mental health, and loss of parental support (Gupta & Kashyap, 2020). In the absence of a father, the boys reportedly were expected to spend more time in economic work while in case of absence of the mother, the girls faced more pressure of spending more time in household chores. Boys in Rajasthan shared being more vulnerable to engage in paid labour especially in cases of female-headed households. Wikle (2014) established a clear link between household work patterns and family characteristics. The author found that 68 percent of girls participated in domestic work in single-headed households, which was four times higher than their male counterparts.

Engagement in domestic work was noted to be hazardous because of the tasks undertaken as well as the working conditions. The regular tasks reportedly undertaken by girls included kitchen duties (girls in Rajasthan were reported to be exposed to hazardous kitchen pollutants), laundry (involving occasional use of toxic chemicals), and undertaking agricultural tasks along with the family (entailed carrying heavy loads and walking long distances under extreme temperatures, making children vulnerable to potential slow-acting and cumulative hazards of malnutrition and diseases). In districts of Bihar, girls were involved in fetching wood for cooking while boys were working in the jungle.

Interpersonal and community level

Home-based manufacturing and production

Children were recognized as important workers in household-based manufacturing and production. Household-based manufacturing activities in the informal sector are prominent in India. They refer to settings wherein production of manufactured goods are subcontracted to home-based workers. This form of child labour fails to attract penal provisions in the country (Mehrotra & Biggeri, 2001). Both girls and boys were reported to engage in manufacturing of different products including garments, carpets, and hand-rolled cigarettes. Girls were reported to be particularly engaged in small scale

manufacturing of *beedi* (thin cigarettes with tobacco flakes) to assist their mothers at home in Delhi as well as Bihar. These manufacturing units were set up within the household where the female members in particular took part in the production line. Beedi unions provided workers who make beedis with benefits such as medical insurance. However, girls' participation in beedi-making was primarily home-based and informal and undertaken as a task to 'help' their mothers out, resulting in the exemption from such benefits and their contribution largely remained unrecognized. Informal work from within/adjacent to households restricted formal grievance redressal mechanisms. This form of engagement encouraged girls to skip school and assist their mothers, either by contributing in manufacturing work or taking over the household chores so that their mothers could engage in production work.

The girls who engaged in tobacco farming in Bihar reportedly skipped school during particular seasons. In the same community, boys were involved in hazardous labour work in forest areas, which made them prone to snake bites and other injurious insect bites. In another district of Bihar, boys were reported to migrate to work in factories in urban areas where they faced issues of low wages and scolding by employers. The boys engaged at multiple other workplaces like working in agricultural fields alongside families as well as working jobs in chimney factories, brick kilns, hotel industry, or mat weaving factories. Boys from Scheduled Caste communities were most vulnerable due to extreme economic deprivation. 'Musahar' community within the Scheduled Caste was reported to involve the boys to work in poor conditions in brick kilns affecting their attendance in school.

In Rajasthan, girls were found to be exposed to hazardous work conditions like hot stoves. The boys were also working in hazardous conditions in stone factories by getting exposed to diseases from dust. The boys also assisted their parents in the mining industry. Boys reported to feel compelled to spend their free time working and generating income alongside attending school. Rajasthan accounts for nearly 10 percent of total child labour in India (Godha, 2021).

In such work settings, child labour could be difficult to detect and the hidden nature enhanced the difficulty to understand its effects. Thus, if the problem of hidden hazardous labour is to be resolved, we need to move beyond a top-down approach and adopt a people-centric approach which would provide better insights.

Disaggregated findings: Risk and Protective factors identified for each outcome

This section highlights the results of data analysis based on risk and protective factors that can support WNCB program in addressing anti-child labour interventions in India:

Outcome	Domains	Risk factors	Protective factors
Children are empowered and have improved access to (quality) education and youth employment within a supportive family and community environment	Social norms, beliefs and practices	- Strong links between economic deprivation and children's labour participation - Vulnerability to early marriage, especially in the case of girls from marginalised castes - Low socioeconomic status among marginalised caste groups (predominantly Dalit, tribal and Muslim children), trapping children in labour - Restrictions on girls' mobility and access to public spaces - Gendered expectations for girls, such as protecting families' reputation - Gender stereotypes and moral policing - Girls disproportionately face street harassment and other forms of sexual violence -	- Awareness and sensitisation campaigns by schools, teachers, and local government bodies
	Access to and control over	- Lack of educational opportunities for girls, children from marginalised castes and	- Involvement of student groups/assemblies,

	resources	social groups, and children from economically deprived households - Enrollment of children in schools alongside participation in labour, leading to irregular attendance and impeded learning outcomes - Lack of access to technology, mobile phones, and online learning (especially after the onset of COVID-19) among girls and socioeconomically marginalised children - Boys who are working had discretion over how to spend earnings, while girls did not - Girls at higher risk of dropping out of school at secondary and senior secondary levels	teachers, School Management Committees (SMCs), community ward members, village head, parents, NGOs in school retention programs/awareness drives - Bridge/remedial courses as post-COVID strategy - Non-Residential Special Training for teachers to give remedial classes to children who have dropped out/fallen behind in school - Extra attention given by teachers to girls' education, govt schemes targeting their enrolment - Pension, reservation in education for disabled children
	Roles, responsibilities, and time-use	- Children primarily engaged in low-skilled labour, assisting parents informally, participating in agriculture and home-based production alongside their families - Girls disproportionately involved in cooking, cleaning, and household work in their own homes - Girls take up 'indoor jobs' such as fetching water while assisting parents, while boys take up 'outdoor jobs' such as fetching things from the market and assisting with	- Door to door campaigns and tracking kids who are not attending school by social activists and teachers

		agricultural harvest - Girls found to experience triple burden of household work, schooling, and income-generation in extremely deprived households - Boys commonly found to be involved in income-generation in brick kilns, hospitality industry, and garment factories - Marriage seen as primary role and socioeconomic activity for girls and women - Impediments on girls' leisure time and time for studies after school due to household chores	
	Patterns of decision-making	- Migration of children and families from chronically underdeveloped areas (such as Bihar) to urban areas in search of employment - Children's participation in labour and schooling shaped by community-level norms - Lack of agency among girls in decision-making around employment, marriage, education - Gender discrepancy in interpersonal decision-making due to stringent patriarchal norms imposed on girls' behaviour - Social norms created barriers to girls' participation in family, community and society-level decisions - Absence of awareness programmes for key decision-makers in children's lives (including children themselves,	- SMC meetings for collaboration between teachers/school staff, parents, and other stakeholders - Social work/civil society interventions against child labour in the form of awareness campaigns, training sessions at schools, community mobilisation, and bridging gaps between service providers and stakeholders

		parents, teachers etc)	
	Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices	- Exclusion of most marginalised groups, including caste minorities and economically deprived groups from welfare schemes and benefits - Lack of awareness and empowerment around children's legal rights, schemes against child labour, and welfare schemes across stakeholders	- Awareness programs for children about their legal rights- 42 clauses in the CPC article
	Safety, dignity, and wellbeing	- Participation in hazardous and worst forms of child labour prominent among girls, as well as Dalit, Muslim, and tribal children - Girls' safety used as a reason to restrict their mobility and interactions outside the household	- Girls feel comfortable reaching out to teachers in case of grievances in school - Girls feel comfortable seeking assistance from their friends as well as their parents when facing harassment from boys in the community
Governments have enforced relevant child-rights based laws and have implemented policies on child labour, education, youth economic empowerment and social security.	Social norms, beliefs and practices	- Gaps between governmental perceptions of the risk factors linked to child labour and on-ground realities - In families facing significant lack of economic resources, parents preferred to send sons to private schools and daughters to government schools	
	Access to and control over resources	- Low confidence in government school education due to inadequacy of teachers, unavailability of basic facilities and quality infrastructure, and poor learning outcomes	- Schemes for incentivising participation of girls in education- bicycle scheme, economic support to families

and The EU, Dutch government and international organisations act in support of the elimination of child labour and fulfil their obligation by setting and reinforcing due diligence policies and laws.		- Lack of water and sanitation facilities in government schools, posing particular barriers for menstruating girls - Unequal development and lack of access to basic public infrastructure, especially in areas populated by SC, ST, OBC and Muslim groups - Unclear demarcation of child protection responsibilities between central, state, and local governments	- Nutritional and health check-ups for older girls - For children who do not have personal documents, government schools are willing to enrol them on the basis of an affidavit
	Roles, responsibilities, and time-use	- Disproportionate focus on education and literacy as the key protective factor against child labour	
	Patterns of decision-making	- Poor coordination between state and central government bodies and *Panchayats* (village councils) over policies linked to child protection and welfare - Lack of political mandate, decision-making power, and political will among *Panchayat*s over anti child labour initiatives	
	Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices	- Inefficient public delivery systems, leading to the exclusion of most deprived groups from receiving welfare benefits (on the basis of factors like lack of documents) - Children's access to legal recourses subject to parental decision-making, typically taken up by men in the family and community	- NCPCR- identification of children engaged in labour, linking with schooling
	Safety, dignity, and	- Girls disproportionately vulnerable to sexual	- NGOs, social activists establish child

	wellbeing	harassment and violence in neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces - Girls' ability to travel to school impeded by safety concerns while in public spaces, exacerbated by schools being located in remote areas - Continued existence of caste hierarchies and caste-based discrimination, linked to high unemployment among parents and higher risk of children being pushed into labour - Involvement of children from marginalised castes in bonded agricultural labour in Bihar - Boys from marginalised castes at risk of intoxication and substance abuse in Rajasthan, leading to seeking small-scale income generating opportunities - Trafficking of children under different hidden forms such as 'recruitment' by 'agents', especially among girls and children facing extreme economic deprivation	protection forums, help families write applications to government officials involved in child welfare - Child rehabilitation centres, CWC and DCPU- infrastructure for anti-child labour govt programs is present in the area - Ward level child protection committees are active in the area. Involvement of district legal services unit (DLSA), and district child protection unit (DCPU) in children's welfare - Social workers work on identifying at-risk children, conducting 3-monthly pre and post assessments, enrolling these children in schools, providing remedial classes. Children and youth groups with training on CPC, JJ, POCSO rules
The private sector takes full responsibility for preventing and	Social norms, beliefs and practices	- Employers blamed parents for children's participation in labour, and accorded them with the responsibility to protect their children's welfare - Norm of children assisting their parents in agricultural work and home-based production alongside	- Monthly meetings for children, teens, and women to sensitize them about the risks of child labour and other issues- organised by NGOs

addressing child labour.		- education from an early age - Girls were expected to participate in household work such as cleaning and cooking in their own homes from a young age	
	Access to and control over resources	- Sectors facing fewer regulations, such as agriculture and domestic labour, were found to have a high incidence of child labour - Significant proportion of child labour found to be taking place within homes, including home-based production of garments and stones	- Focus on livelihood generation by NGOs/civil society actors
	Roles, responsibilities, and time-use	- Girls' participation in unpaid care work was not recognised as additional labour by most stakeholders across districts - Girls faced more time-poverty, lack of time to play, and barriers to their studies than boys, due to restrictive gender norms and being expected to take on household responsibilities	
	Patterns of decision-making	- Children from women-headed households, single parent households, and abusive families were found to be more vulnerable to participation in labour	
	Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices	- Household work, small-scale household production, and agricultural work alongside families are exempt from legal definitions of child labour in India, impeding interventions against them	

	Safety, dignity, and wellbeing	- Absence of grievance redressal mechanisms and mechanisms to ensure gender safety in informal workspaces	- Youth clubs and self help groups- equipped to identify and intervene in situations such as labour trafficking of children - Employers in stone industry informally check to prevent the participation of children in this labour from within their homes

Conclusion

Spaces where child labour is taking place extend far beyond the scope of formal, organised employment. While anti-child labour interventions focus on workspaces such as factories, a significant amount of children's participation in income-generating and other forms of labour is centred around the household. They assist their parents with small-time work, and specifically in the case of girls, participate in domestic work for their own families from a young age. These spaces fall outside the scope of conditions around child labour that are convenient to map and have clear legislative provisions against them, making children engaged in such forms of work more vulnerable to risks and potential harm in the form of exposure to smoke in kitchens, and bodily exhaustion while managing schooling alongside this labour.

Norms around **gender** and **caste** are central to how labour outcomes are shaped in the concerned districts across Delhi, Bihar, and Rajasthan. Children's participation in the workforce heavily derives from the labour roles ascribed to them by these norms. For instance, boys tend to be involved in hazardous forms of work outside their homes more than girls. However, girls participate significantly more in domestic labour work. Children

belonging to Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) are more at-risk for participation in hazardous forms of work such as working in brick kilns, or agricultural labour surrounded by bonded labour-like conditions.

The role played by gender and caste in facilitating children's participation in hazardous work and sometimes even the worst forms of child labour is easily discernible. However, teachers, social activists, and government stakeholders tend to report that gender and caste hierarchies have diminished significantly, and 'equality' has been achieved in terms of access to education and other resources. Anti child labour initiatives are not taking these sociological conditions into account through an intersectional lens, and the risk factors for children's participation in labour are often homogenized to economic necessity and deprivation.

Interventions against child labour heavily prioritise children's participation in schooling. This does not account for the significant proportion of children who are participating in labour alongside being enrolled in or even regularly attending school. The prominent gender gap created here by girls' participation in household work further augments the idea that examining children's participation in schooling is an inadequate measure of risks linked to child labour.

In the same way, the importance of educating girls is emphasised by most stakeholders across the three states. However, there is little emphasis on future employment prospects for girls. Instead, preparing for marriage and the 'duties' associated with being good wives and mothers plays a significant role in the socialisation that pushes them to undertake work within their own homes from a young age.

Children often engage with work by assisting their parents in their jobs, both within and outside the household. This is a potential breeding ground for the perpetuation of economic hierarchies linked to caste, wherein the primary forms of skill development that children are able to access are typically restricted to ones that their parents have. Children's disengagement from other forms of skill acquisition, coupled with economic

necessity and familial contexts, pushes them into these forms of work in a manner that perpetuates a cycle of poverty and prevents them from accessing economic and social mobility.

The lives of at-risk children are subject to key risk factors that are region-specific in nature. In Rajasthan, alcoholism and substance addiction are prevalent among adolescent boys from a young age, and the creation of a cycle of poverty can be observed due to children's participation in small-time jobs, sometimes concealing their work from their parents, to spend on these substances. In West Champaran (Bihar), children and families from marginalised castes experience disenfranchisement from public services, industry, and governmental interventions, creating massive amounts of economic deprivation among them. There is a complex interplay between caste, class, and other dynamics of structural power that perpetuates these risk factors.

When it comes to schooling, anti child labour interventions are emphasising on children's enrolment and attendance rates. Concerns about quality of education and infrastructure in government schools, risks associated with children working alongside attending school, and the identification and mapping of children who are completely disenfranchised from formal education systems are not receiving the same amount of attention.

While some stakeholders see low parental literacy as a precipitating factor for children dropping out of school, parents in multiple districts express doubts about the quality of education and the accessibility of government schools, and are therefore concerned that their children will not be able to access decent employment after finishing schooling. This is often a push factor for children attending private tuition classes despite coming from families experiencing economic deprivation, or parents seeking to equip children with alternate labour skill sets through participation in training programmes or familial forms of labour.

Children attending government schools have experienced large-scale learning loss during COVID-19 induced lockdowns. Some districts report the complete absence of online

classes, while children and parents in others describe that online classes have been inefficient and difficult to keep up with in terms of access to technological resources. A gender digital divide is evident in most families, where an overwhelming majority of girls lack access to personal mobile phones that they can use to participate in online learning. This period of learning loss and other pandemic-induced economic crises have pushed a significant number of children into labour participation during this period.

On-ground implementation of laws against child labour and welfare delivery systems that target some of its root causes lack adequacy in their functioning. Families across districts report that they are not receiving benefits for which they are eligible, and awareness around legislative provisions to safeguard children's wellbeing appears to be extremely low. Child protection and anti-child labour programmes that exist on paper are not being implemented at grassroots level in most districts.

There is a lack of coordination between *panchayats* and governments. While *panchayat* members lack awareness about legal provisions and schemes against child labour that are active in their wards, government officials accord responsibility for interventions linked to community norms solely to *panchayat* members. The lack of interface and collaboration between these governmental bodies creates barriers to the creation of well-integrated, efficient, and impactful systems for child protection at the district level.

Interventions against child labour focus on rescuing and rehabilitating children who are already in labour. This post-hoc resolution of instances where children are found to be working creates an inadequate focus on the precipitating factors that drive children into labour participation in the first place. In multiple districts, accounts of children who were rescued and rehabilitated drifted back into labour participation. This demonstrates that the root causes that drive these risks are crucial to address.

Recommendations

Outcome 1: Family & community, education, decent work

Individual

- Strategies aimed at mitigating child labour primarily focus on awareness programmes that use tools such as poster-making and essay competitions. There is a need for more **deep-rooted sensitisation strategies** that are aimed at creating long-term cognisance around the different risk factors for children's participation in labour, and introducing strategic roadmaps for their mitigation.

- The WNCB programme should foster a **greater focus on gender mainstreaming**. The scope of this needs to be expanded beyond a focus on girls' participation in education, and map and intervene against the specific forms of labour for which girls are disproportionately at risk. Girls are expected to participate in household chores in their own homes from a young age. We strongly recommend the implementation of sensitisation programmes that highlight how this exposes them to risks of exhaustion, learning loss, loss of time to play and engage in recreation, and sometimes even exposure to hazardous conditions, in a manner that is similar to other forms of labour.

Interpersonal

- The findings demonstrated that children faced significant security risks while in school. Security needs to be strengthened in order to ensure that outsiders do not have access to schools, and that girls do not encounter street harassment perpetrated by men while commuting or right outside schools. Appointing security guards to protect schools and **setting up formal, accessible, and gender-responsive grievance redressal mechanisms** are two measures that could be implemented with urgency to respond to incidents causing children discomfort in school.

- A thorough review should be conducted to examine if **partner organisations working on children's welfare are gender and caste representative**, in light of how many risk factors for child labour are linked to norms around these two social systems. This is especially significant when it comes to interventions against sensitive issues such as sexual harassment, familial violence, and violence by dominant castes, which the findings demonstrated are not usually discussed beyond interpersonal spaces. Organisations with heterogeneous representation are likely to be more comfortable spaces for children to address such grievances.

Community

- Organisations should conduct a thorough mapping of how norms and stereotypes around gender, caste, economic status, and other structural identities differ across regions and communities. The shape that children's participation in labour takes is heavily determined by these identities, which, in turn, show significant regional variations. For instance, while the likelihood of children from SC, ST, and OBC communities being engaged in labour from an early age is significantly higher than those from dominant castes across districts, the specific forms of hazardous work that they are likelier to be exposed to depends on which forms of labour are considered 'lower' and more marginal in nature according to region-specific caste norms. Interventions should be made more community-responsive by identifying these regional variations and focusing on them through programming.

Society

- School Management Committees (SMCs) are functional in most schools in the concerned districts, but our findings do not reflect their ability to act as a forum that is contributing significantly to improving the quality of learning outcomes or children's wellbeing in school. Two major interventions can be made to improve their functioning. First, although *panchayat* members and government officials involved in child protection in the region are intended to be participants in SMCs

according to the guidelines for their formation, our findings suggest that the government officials attending meetings are often ones who do not work directly on children's welfare, while *panchayat* members are typically not present at all. Integrating these officials more closely into SMCs is a key step towards connecting school-level and policy-level interventions. Second, SMCs could be utilised as a space to sensitively raise and discuss pressing issues, such as how caste and gender are impeding learning outcomes for children and creating barriers for them to access schooling.

- Skill training programmes should be expanded to ensure that children are learning in a manner that improves their employability upon finishing school. Within these programmes, it is important to create opportunities for girls which do not reinforce gender stereotypes, and move beyond training them for jobs in sectors such as salons and cosmetics, while certain jobs are seen as appropriate only for boys. Children, especially girls, expressed a desire to learn skills such as computer usage and programming. Advocacy measures and collaborations with government schools should be undertaken to include these skill programmes within curricula.

Outcome 2: National policies

Individual

- Children who are facing particular barriers that fall within or are adjacent to the worst forms of child labour, including children who are being trafficked, engaged in bonded labour, or forced into early marriage, are difficult to identify under current frameworks. The needs of other groups who are disproportionately excluded from formal schooling, including disabled children and children from families facing extreme economic and social deprivation, are similarly important to consider. Interventions need to identify and work on the rights and wellbeing of these children, in addition to the current focus on identifying at-risk children who are already enrolled in schools.

- The relationship between child labour and child trafficking is an important aspect of mitigation measures that is not being prioritised in a manner that is proportionate to the threats to safety that it poses at present. The first step towards addressing this problem entails mapping its scale, which appears to be significant anecdotally, but is not highlighted clearly by government data at the state and central levels. Creating inter-state networks between organisations such that the forced movement of children and their subsequent engagement in labour can be tracked could act as another step towards preventing this form of forced labour and the violence it exposes children to.

Interpersonal

- Sensitisation and awareness at the level of the family appears to be focused on enrolment and participation in schooling. However, many children were found to be engaging in labour alongside going to school, indicating that there is a need for more direct conversations on the specific harms of children participating in labour at all. This needs to be supplemented with opportunities for skill development and training, as well as an improvement in the quality of education in government schools, to ensure that parents understand that preventing their children from taking up labour work is crucial to helping them develop holistically and secure access to better employment opportunities once they are adults.

1. Key stakeholders in the child protection ecosystem, including teachers, social activists, and government officials, should be made cognisant of and sensitive towards caste. Across districts, our findings suggest that exclusion and violence towards marginalised castes is not only a pervasive problem, but also one that bears deep links to children's participation in labour, and overlaps significantly with extreme economic deprivation. However, individuals at the forefront of interventions against child labour tend to dismiss caste as a system that is no longer prevalent. Therefore, carrying out caste sensitisation training for these individuals is an essential first step to making these interventions caste-responsive.

Community

- *Panchayats* (local governments) are key government actors who have the capacity to understand and work closely around gender, caste, community, and other social dynamics in a region. However, our findings suggest that they have little to no involvement with anti child labour initiatives in the concerned districts at the moment. Involving *panchayats* as active stakeholders in these interventions holds the capacity to bridge the gaps between communities, schools, and state and central governments.

- Conditional cash transfer programmes should be strengthened in order to create systems through which access to education can be expanded alongside poverty mitigation, keeping in mind the fact that children's engagement in labour is often a product of economic deprivation and necessity. In order for these programmes to work on-ground, there is a need to map and address the conditions of families and individuals that are excluded from them on the basis of a lack of documents, bank accounts, and other basic resources. This is also integral to making programmes more caste-responsive, in light of the significant overlap between caste marginalisation and on-ground exclusion from welfare delivery systems.

Society

- Anti child labour legislation is found to fall short at multiple levels at the implementational level. There is a need to strengthen the monitoring, regulation, and enforcement of these legislative provisions, while fostering more participation from local and district-level government officials. There is also a need to examine the barriers to their implementation in informal sectors, with a focus on children's participation in income-generating labour as well as household chores from within their own homes.

- A lack of coordination between different government departments and units, especially between *panchayats* (local governments) and state as well as central governments, and subsequent implementational issues with policies, is apparent

in our findings. Anti-child labour interventions that involve and engage both these forms of government in a region should be prioritised by organisations.

Outcome 3: Private sector

Individual

- While the aim of interventions against child labour is its complete elimination from regions where they are operational, programmes should also aim to sensitise children about their legal rights in the workplace. Our findings show an absence of formal mechanisms to account for children's safety and wellbeing in formal and semi-formal workplaces. This points towards the need to make children who are working out of economic necessity empowered actors who can assert their rights and access bodies working on child protection directly to report workplace grievances if the need arises.

Interpersonal

- Our findings show that a significant proportion of children participate in labour alongside their parents, whether in workplaces or from within their homes. This is especially the case with agricultural labour and other primary sector activities such as collecting resources from jungles. It is relevant to note that such a generational 'passing down' of labour skills is often associated with the caste system in India, and is practiced more commonly by marginalised caste communities that have been systematically excluded from upward economic mobility. These findings blur the lines between what constitutes the 'private sector', ie. the domain within which employers of child labour operate, and entire social structures ranging from the family to the community. Reaching out to communities where this generational continuity of economic deprivation is taking place as a result of caste, and identifying and addressing the risks and challenges faced by them, is essential.

Community

- Employers in informal sectors in remote communities might be difficult to map and reach out to. However, reaching out to employers engaging children who have migrated or been trafficked to urban areas to take up work in sectors such as domestic labour, hospitality, and factory-based labour could be a more feasible first step to take towards employer sensitisation and awareness.

Society

- While formal workplaces are subject to legislative provisions such as providing adolescent children with safe work environments and creating grievance redressal mechanisms for employees, informal sectors are exempt from these. Programmes should be initiated to engage with informal actors who engage children in work, with the focus of sensitising them towards the need to protect children from the risks of hazardous and taxing labour, and making them aware of legislative measures for child protection that are still applicable to their actions. The grievances of children working in such spaces should also be mapped, in order to create more responsive systems for their needs.

Outcome 4: International policies

Individual

- There is a pressing need for a strong emphasis on significant participation domestic work within one's own household constituting child labour within international frameworks. There is growing international cognisance around the gender gap created in accounts of child labour when this form of work is not taken into consideration. However, in countries such as India, disproportionate engagement in household work shares a strong relationship with other risk factors such as girls dropping out of school, or being socialised into the role of ideal wives and mothers as opposed to being allowed to work when they are older. Targeting and highlighting the risks that are created due to girls' excessive and disproportionate participation in this labour through international conventions and codes would act as a push factor for country-level legislation to be instituted against it.

Interpersonal

- International interventions against child labour should take into account the vast resource disparities that cause the persistence of children's engagement in work, particularly in developing countries. Programmatic agenda for coalitions such as WNCB should aim to include measures targeting large-scale poverty alleviation, and focus on risk factors that affect the family as a unit. This is especially significant keeping in mind that our findings suggest that the family is the primary decision-making unit that determines children's participation in labour in most cases.

Community

- While engaging with child labour in the Indian context, international advocacy should aim to be caste-responsive in addition to being gender-responsive. This study finds that while caste remains deeply embedded in how labour is practiced in different parts of the country, it is vastly underrepresented in institutional frameworks and often disregarded even by government functionaries. Increasing the international focus on caste as a systemic form of violence that persists in India could nudge institutions towards acknowledging and addressing how caste marginalisation operates in modern-day rural and urban contexts.

Society

- Monitoring and evaluation is found to be a weak link while legislating and implementing interventions against child labour in India. Strategic collaborations between international bodies working on such interventions in the country and governmental and civil society bodies to create robust normative frameworks and guidelines to evaluate the scale of problems such as child labour in informal sectors, trafficking, and child marriage would be beneficial towards addressing this deficit.