



International
Labour
Organization

► COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour: The response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme



► Background and rationale

COVID-19 has plunged the world into a crisis of unprecedented scope and scale.

Undoubtedly, restoring global health remains the first priority, but the strict measures required are resulting in massive economic and social shocks. As lockdown, quarantine, physical distancing and other isolation measures to suppress transmission continue, the global economy has plunged into a recession.

The harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally. They are expected to be most damaging in the poorest countries and in the poorest neighbourhoods, and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, such as children in child labour and victims of forced labour and human trafficking, particularly women and girls. These vulnerable groups are more affected by income shocks due to the lack of access to social protection, including health insurance and unemployment benefits.

The ILO's Flagship International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour (IPEC+) has ongoing operations in 62 countries, all of which are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme has developed business continuity plans to mitigate the risks and to repurpose its strategy and is seeking to allocate additional funding to support efforts to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on child labour, forced labour and human trafficking, particularly in relation to school closures, business shut downs, unemployment, the loss of livelihoods in affected communities and a lack of social protection systems.

Experience from previous crisis situations, such as the 2014 Ebola epidemic, has shown that these factors play a particularly strong role in exacerbating the risk to child labour and forced labour.

In line with the ILO's policy framework to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, country policies responses and the ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, this briefing note provides an initial framework for the response of IPEC+ to the crisis. Service provided by IPEC+ will be part of a holistic ILO response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and to rebuild better after the crisis. The response of IPEC+ is situated under pillar 3 "Protecting workers in the workplace" of ILO's policy framework to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

The briefing note also builds on UN Secretary-General's Global Humanitarian Response Plan and UN Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 on Children.

Finally, 2021 will mark the UN International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, which will be an ideal opportunity to reinvigorate efforts to achieve SDG Target 8.7 to end all forms of child labour by 2025.

► IPEC+ is operating in 62 countries



► COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour

The root causes of child labour and forced labour – including poverty, limited access to decent work opportunities for those of legal working age, social marginalization, discrimination, the lack of universal quality education, the prevalence of the informal economy and weak social dialogue – are likely to be exacerbated.

- The economic and social crisis will hit children particularly hard. An estimated 42-66 million children could fall into extreme poverty as a result of the crisis this year, adding to the estimated 386 million children already in extreme poverty in 2019.¹
- The massive global disruption to education caused by confinement measures and the lack of distance-learning solutions in many countries could drive child labour numbers up.
- Households may resort to child labour in order to cope with job loss and health shocks associated with COVID-19, in particular if they are not in the education system.
- Children who are from marginalized minority groups, disabled, street-connected and homeless, or from single or child-headed households, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, or from conflict or disaster affected areas are more vulnerable to child labour and at particular risk in the current crisis.
- Children, in particular girls, in addition to the risk of child labour, might be burdened by increased domestic chores and caring responsibilities.
- Vulnerable individuals and families who have lost their jobs in the informal economy, in urgent need of funds for household survival but with few savings and limited access to social protection or other forms of State support, are likely to be at greater risk of falling prey to lenders providing credit on terms constituting debt bondage.
- Vulnerable workers are more likely to get tricked and trapped in forced labour. With more workers likely to contract debts to survive, the risk of increasing debt bondage is particularly important.
- Criminal networks may actively use this global crisis to exploit vulnerabilities to further restrict the freedom of victims and increase the financial profit that forced labour and human trafficking generates.
- Restrictions on movement may shift forms of exploitation, women and children for example may be commercially sexually exploited by their abusers online or within private homes.
- Stricter controls at borders may increase the risk of human trafficking. In fact, victims with documentation confiscated, might be at risk of abuse, detention and re-victimisation from security actors/police officers enforcing quarantines and managing checkpoints.²
- Victims who have had their personal documentation removed by the exploiters may experience additional barriers in accessing COVID-19 related healthcare and other services.



1 unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-children

2 www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC-Task-Team-on-Anti-Trafficking_COVID-guidance_final_SM.pdf

► IPEC+ and the human-centred approach to tackling the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable

1 Leveraging our field presence

The COVID-19 crisis and its impact is unfolding differently across regions and countries. With a presence in 62 countries worldwide, IPEC+ is conducting operations to prevent and eliminate child labour and forced labour among the most vulnerable populations on the planet, providing support to the children most at risk, adult workers, their families and communities.

In addition, within the framework of [Alliance 8.7](#), an SDG multi-stakeholder partnership to put an end to child labour and forced labour, [21 countries](#) recently became Pathfinder Countries and committed to leverage domestic resources to meet SDG target 8.7. Thanks to this unique mix of field presence and political support, the ILO is aiming to cover an additional 10 countries, thereby reaching at least 1 million additional vulnerable children, communities and families.

2 Mobilising our global and regional networks

As the Secretariat of Alliance 8.7, the ILO plays a key role in mobilising a coordinated response through a network of more than 250 organizations to address the emerging challenges of COVID-19 in affected communities and therefore to mitigate the risks of a resurgence of child labour and forced labour. The Alliance 8.7 is preparing a statement with policy principles and guidelines for countries to address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable groups and leave no one behind. Close coordination will be maintained with other UN agencies and relevant inter-agency working groups. The capacities of social partners and civil society groups will be reinforced to design effective advocacy strategies. As an example, the Alliance 8.7 is collaborating with Global March Against Child Labour to monitor the child labour situation through their partner networks in COVID-19 affected communities. The ILO will also work closely with regional initiatives and organizations such as the Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean free of Child Labour, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

3 Producing knowledge and data

New research has been launched to shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on child labour and on forced labour, drawing on research from past crises to provide constituents and partners with the means to take informed decisions to respond to the crisis. The ILO is developing an issue paper to discuss the possible implications of the crisis on fundamental principles and rights at work, and a separate joint issue paper with UNICEF exploring the likely effect of the crisis on child labour. UNICEF and ILO are also collaborating on a research project, the results of which will be published in 2021, that uses a simulation model to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on the global prevalence of child labour. Finally, ILO is supporting a series of research activities at the national level aimed at understanding the situation, and among specific vulnerable groups.

4 Investing in gender-responsive monitoring and compliance solutions

Unlike its impact on health, the impact of COVID-19 on socio-economic status of vulnerable communities and on the rise of child labour and forced labour is not immediately visible. However, it is already evident that in economies largely dominated by the informal economy, COVID-19 is exacerbating existing challenges related to the lack of social protection, the limited access to education, inequality or loss of employment, income and livelihood opportunities. Without urgent prevention and response, this situation will have devastating effects on child labour and forced labour. It is therefore paramount that ILO maintains and strengthens its current support to governments in establishing sustainable monitoring systems and enforcement measures. Labour inspectorates and social partners must continue playing their role even under the prevailing and challenging circumstances. The ILO will also focus on strengthening the capacities of community-based structures by providing training on occupational safety and health to those who continue assessing the impact on vulnerable communities once the strict lockdown measures are lifted without putting their lives at risk. Furthermore, the active participation of more than 30 companies and business networks with hundreds of members in two Alliance 8.7 business networks, namely the Child Labour Platform and the ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour, guarantees the vital contribution of business to monitoring efforts. Finally, the drastic changes in society due to confinement, physical distancing, and travelling restriction measures will be used as an opportunity to test new technologies such as crowd-work based supply chain traceability map and monitoring systems.

5 Building resilience through social dialogue

Social partners have always played an active role in the fight against child labour and forced labour, especially through advocacy and effective monitoring; but ILO's unique tripartite constituency is also an asset to respond to the impact of COVID-19. In fact, in times of crisis, social dialogue, based on freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, generates a strong foundation for building resilience and to ensure the commitment of employers and workers to necessary policy measures. The [Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 \(No. 205\)](#) calls for member States to ensure consultation and encourage active participation of employers' and workers' organizations in planning, implementing and monitoring measures for recovery and resilience. Building on this existing commitment and collaboration, the ILO will continue working with its constituents to strengthen their capacities to leverage collective advocacy efforts. It will also place particular focus on the role of workers in monitoring the risk of child labour and forced labour, especially in the informal economy. Electronic and remote platforms will be tested when traditional dynamics of social dialogue are challenged by isolation measures. ILO's work will also be guided by the recently published report named [Managing Conflicts and Disasters: Exploring collaboration between Employers' and Workers' Organizations](#).



© Bolanos, G & Vindas, F.

Repurposing and innovating our operations

An unprecedented crisis like COVID-19 lends a renewed urgency and importance to the core IPEC+ agenda at the country level. Leveraging technology and conducting research to address child labour and forced labour, while building on good practices and evidence-based solutions, will be a priority. While the current situation is unmatched in recent history in terms of scale and scope of impact, IPEC+ has built up significant experience working in numerous crisis situations, including responding to the 2008 global economic crash and the 2014 Ebola epidemic. By building on this knowledge and experience, IPEC+ will look at short, medium and long-term responses to the impact of COVID-19 on child labour and forced labour from the initial phase of lockdown until the progressive return to work.

Short-term targeted responses will focus on reducing vulnerabilities, awareness raising, increasing coordination and information exchange among partners and countries to act quickly with innovative solutions; in the medium-term, once the crisis stabilizes, protective measures will be applied; and the long-term approach will focus on structural issues in line with international labour standards for a long-lasting and sustainable response to the crisis.

Short-term measures may include:

- ▶ Raising awareness to prevent child labour and forced labour, with particular attention given to domestic work and the worst forms of child labour.
- ▶ Referring adolescents in working age to youth employment programmes compatible with prevailing physical distance measures.
- ▶ Setting-up cash transfer programmes to ensure business continuity and as income support for vulnerable populations, including workers in the informal economy, in collaboration with Ministries in charge of Social Protection.
- ▶ Conducting rapid assessments to understand vulnerabilities and impact of COVID-19, especially on women and girls.
- ▶ Rescuing workers who have been confined in the workplace and subjected to forced labour.
- ▶ Providing vulnerable households with viable livelihoods and alternative income generating opportunities, including cash transfers, to mitigate the risk of resurgence of child labour and forced labour.
- ▶ Strengthening labour inspectorates to monitor child labour and forced labour via video-based monitoring, OSH training and similar.
- ▶ Including remedial modules on child labour and forced labour in government sponsored distant learning programmes.
- ▶ Supporting and promoting electronic and remote platforms that can facilitate social dialogue.

Medium-term measures may include:

- ▶ Conducting research to detect new and emerging patterns of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking.
- ▶ Supporting countries to review the list of Hazardous Occupation in line with COVID-19 impact.
- ▶ Providing education and training on safe and healthy work practices, free provision of personal protective equipment and access to public health services.
- ▶ Strengthening employers' capacities to raise awareness about OSH and investing in safe devices and equipment.
- ▶ Supporting countries in implementing OSH systems capable of identifying dangerous work and removing adolescents from peril.
- ▶ Supporting countries to adapt existing national policies on child labour and forced labour to COVID-19 impact.
- ▶ Monitoring the use of public emergency programmes and possible risks of forced labour.
- ▶ Working closely with boards of education and ministries, to boost re-enrolment as and when schools re-open, in order to minimise the number of children falling out of educational systems and into child labour.

Long-term measures may include:

- ▶ Advocating for the prolongation of socio-economic measures adopted by countries during the crisis, such as strengthening national budgets for public health, for education and for the extension of social protection coverage, and economic incentive measures for vulnerable populations. Such measures will have a positive impact on the fight against child labour and forced labour.
- ▶ Promoting innovative technologies experimented with during the crisis, especially for distance learning, training and monitoring, to make them systemic.
- ▶ Ensuring that short- and medium-term responses are strengthened in the context of the prolonged effects of the crisis, towards the attainment of the SDGs and in compliance with international labour standards. This includes support to institutionalised and coordinated social protection measures.

Cash transfers to tackle child labour



Cash transfers aim to relieve the economic vulnerability of households by providing income support. Particularly when coupled with interventions to reduce the costs of school and health care and improve their quality. They have proven to be an important policy tool for the elimination of child labour. Programmes such as Mexico's *Prospera*, and Cambodia's CESSP scholarship programme have measurably reduced child labour. ILO analysis has found that such cash transfer programmes have been one of the key drivers of the nearly 40 per cent decline in child labour from 2000-2016.



► Funding requirements

In coordination with its development partners, the ILO has reprogrammed US\$ 21 million of its existing development cooperation funding to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an ongoing process.

In order to respond to the needs outlined above, ILO is aiming to increase its support to **5 Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Countries and to cover 5 additional particularly vulnerable countries**, thereby reaching around **1 million additional vulnerable children, communities and families**. The communities and groups we serve are facing particular hardships at this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including greater exposure to exploitation and a loss of livelihoods.

ILO's aim, in conjunction with UN response, is to leave no-one behind. IPEC+ will support these 10 countries through development cooperation programmes that will form part of the UN response to COVID-19 at country level.

ILO will strengthen and repurpose its ongoing collaboration with UN agencies such as FAO, IOM, UNICEF and UNDP, as well as with the World Bank, to respond to the COVID-19 impact.

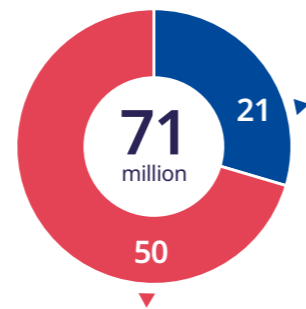
The total budget required to immediately implement the short-, medium- and long-term measures in 10 countries described above is US\$71 million. Since IPEC+ has already allocated US\$ 21 million to implement these measures, **ILO is appealing for US\$ 50 million to cover the funding gap.**

Current funding requirements and country outreach are estimated to increase, especially in the Least Developed Countries.

Budget required

US\$ **71** million

Period: June 2020-June 2022



Budget appealed

US\$ **50** million

Period: June 2020-June 2022

Budget already allocated

US\$ **21** million

Period: April-December 2020

10 countries

5 Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Countries and 5 additional countries particularly vulnerable



1 million

vulnerable children, communities and families





© Lisa Kristine

Fundamental Principles and Rights
at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS)

Governance and Tripartism Department

International Labour Office
Route des Morillons, 4
1211 Geneva 22 - Switzerland

ilo.org/ipec-plus

Copyright © International Labour Organization 2020
Published in May 2020