

## ► Vulnerabilities to child labour



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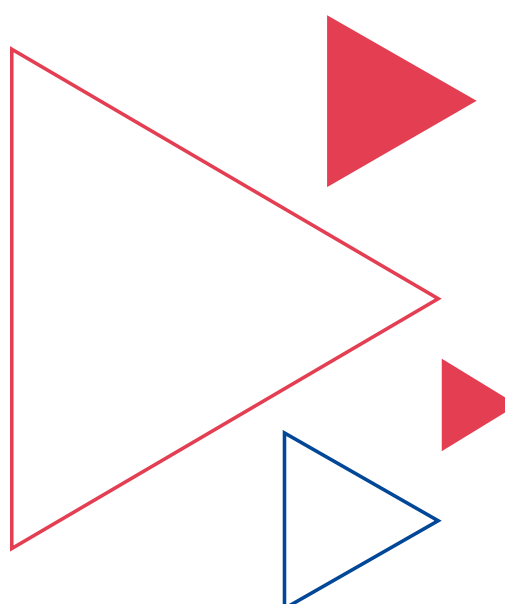
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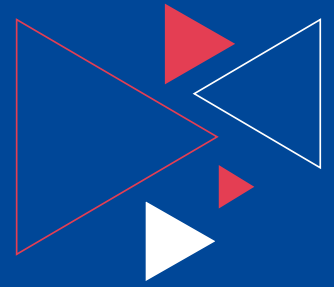
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# Introduction

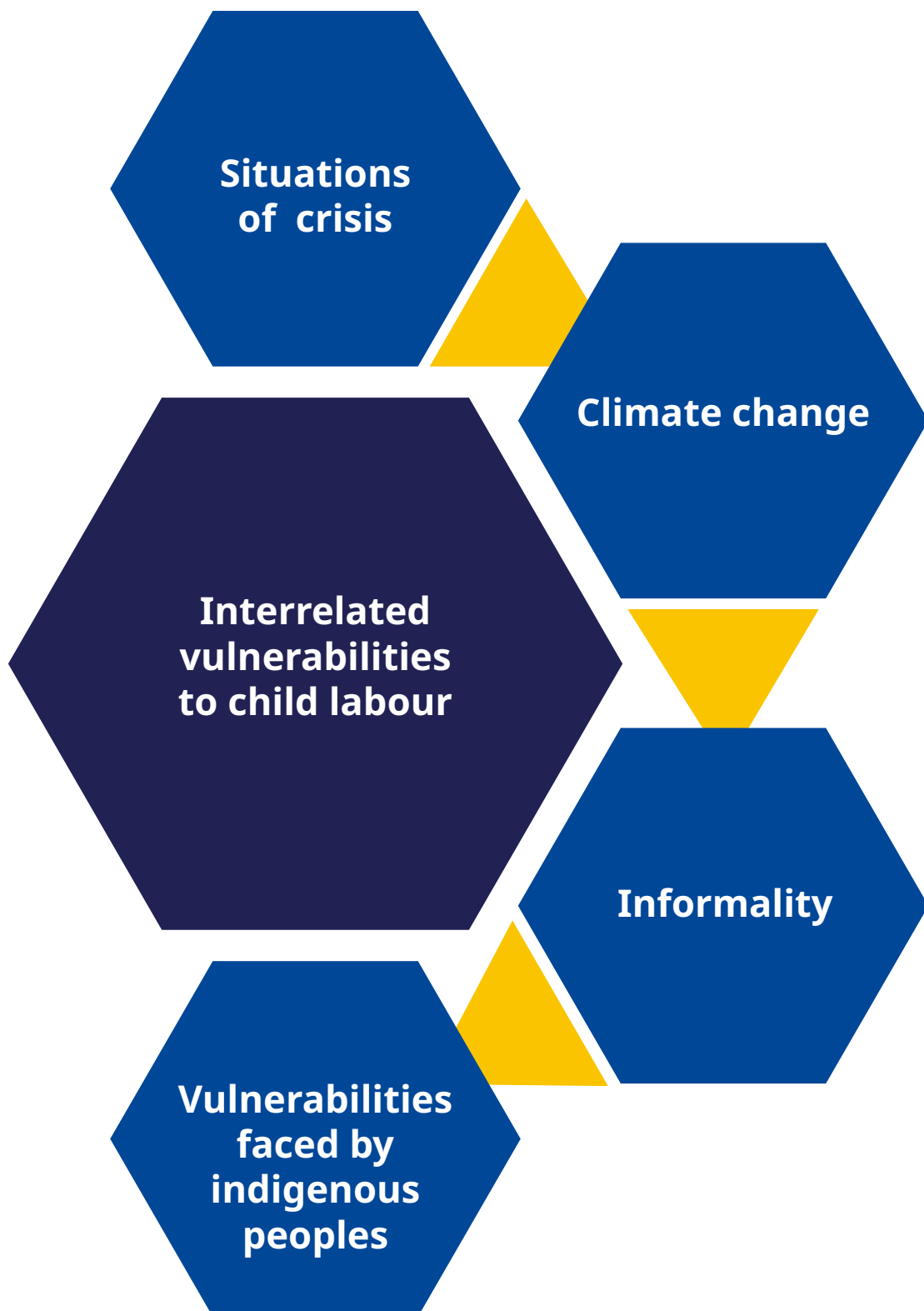
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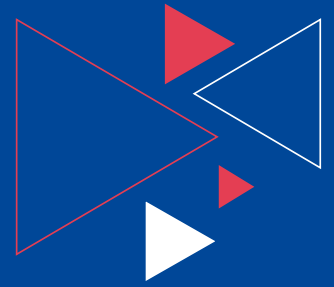
Identifying particularly vulnerable groups of children and their specific needs is essential for the elimination of child labour. Article 7 of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 – the first Convention to achieve universal ratification by all 187 member States – requires ratifying states to “identify and reach out to children at special risk”.

This brief brings together the key findings from four studies that each address a key area of vulnerability to child labour: (1) vulnerabilities associated with the impacts of climate change (2) vulnerabilities associated with situations of crisis; (3) vulnerabilities faced by indigenous peoples; and (4) vulnerabilities associated with informality. For each of the thematic areas, the brief presents evidence of the linkages with child labour and implications for policy.

These four areas were identified as among those where knowledge gaps are particularly pronounced. They are by no means an exhaustive listing of the vulnerabilities that can drive children’s involvement in child labour, but, either singly or in combination, affect a large proportion of the 160 million children who are still in child labour worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

It is critical that child labour considerations are mainstreamed into policy responses designed to mitigate these vulnerabilities. Achieving the 2025 deadline for ending child labour in all its forms under Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be possible without adequate consideration to the risks of child labour associated with climate change, situations of crisis and informality. Nor will it be possible without bespoke policies to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples.





# Child labour and climate change

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Climate change is widely recognized as one of the greatest challenges of modern times, with profound implications for all aspects of human society. Between the years 2000 and 2019, more than 11,000 extreme weather events have caused the death of over 475,000 people and produced estimated economic losses of US\$ 2.5 trillion around the globe.<sup>2</sup> Children have repeatedly been identified as one of the groups most at risk from effects of climate change.<sup>3</sup> A small but growing body of evidence underscores the importance of climate change as a threat multiplier for child labour, particularly in the agriculture sector, where 70 per cent of all child labour is located.

## Impact channels

Evidence indicates that the effects of climate change are affecting the risk of child labour and the circumstances under which it is undertaken through a number of channels, both direct and indirect.

► **Climate-related extreme weather shocks.** Climate-related natural disasters occur with increasing regularity and severity.<sup>4</sup> The frequency of droughts in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, nearly tripled between 2010 and 2019, more than quadrupled for storms, and increased tenfold for floods.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies have shown that climate-related shocks can increase child labour,<sup>6</sup> as families are forced to send their children to work as a survival strategy in the face of increased socio-economic vulnerability and food insecurity. In agricultural contexts in particular, evidence from contexts including Guatemala,<sup>7</sup> rural Haiti<sup>8</sup> and Madagascar,<sup>9</sup> indicate that extreme weather phenomena such as large tropical storms, hurricanes, cyclones, and the loss

of income due to crop damage and livestock deaths associated with these phenomena, increase the demand for children's labour on the farm, an effect that sometimes lasts even long after the occurrence of the extreme weather event itself.<sup>10</sup> Climate-induced natural catastrophes also increase the risk of children being separated from their families and becoming orphans,<sup>11</sup> which is an established high-risk condition for child labour.<sup>12</sup>

► **Climate-driven migratory movements and population displacements.** Climate migration is already occurring in many parts of the world, driven by scarcity of water, the constriction of fertile lands, and reduced livelihood opportunities, climate shocks and related factors. Around 500 million children, face the risk of displacement because they live in areas that are extremely vulnerable to floods arising from cyclones, hurricanes and storms, as well as rising sea levels.<sup>13</sup> In Bangladesh alone, one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, estimates indicate that between 50,000 and 200,000 people are displaced by river erosion every year.<sup>14</sup> Evidence suggests that children affected by climate-driven displacement are more prone to exploitation. In the Caribbean, for example, children uprooted to flee zones that have become increasingly hurricane-prone have become more vulnerable to child labour.<sup>15</sup> In India, migrant children fleeing from environmental stress in the state of Odhisa have been found to work increasingly in hazardous forms of child labour, and, as seasonal migration has extended in duration, their access to education has become even less consistent.<sup>16</sup> In Africa's Lake Chad Basin, the displacement of more than 4 million





people due to desertification forms the backdrop of a conflict involving children as combatants and other egregious violations of the human rights of children.<sup>17</sup>

- **Climate-related changes in agricultural productivity.** Overall, heat stress on plants and animals, modified rainfall patterns, as well as extreme climatic events like droughts, hurricanes or flooding are producing direct changes in crop phenology and yields.<sup>18</sup> Soil depletion and erosion, water shortages, changes in salinity, desertification, changes in pest and plant pathogens<sup>19</sup> and other climate-related effects are also directly impacting agricultural productivity.

The impacts of climate-related changes in productivity on child labour are complex. Where climate change is leading to declines in agricultural productivity, some contexts have seen fall in the demand for children's agricultural labour as it is rendered less valuable. Yet such circumstances rarely lead to a net decrease in child labour, but rather its displacement into other non-farm sectors such as mining and manufacturing activities. In Burkina Faso, for example, worsening economic conditions in the agricultural sector, coupled with a recent gold rush, have encouraged families to look for new income opportunities and resulted in children working in dangerous conditions in gold mines, an activity that itself can be highly destructive for the environment.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in Nepal and Peru, as agricultural productivity declines, families have sent their children to work in manufacturing activities such as brick kilns.<sup>21</sup>

In other contexts, falls in productivity have driven adults off the land in search of jobs elsewhere, leaving children behind to assume *greater* responsibilities in running the family farm. In still other contexts where changing rainfall patterns have *benefited* agricultural productivity, studies from countries including Viet Nam,<sup>22</sup> Tanzania<sup>23</sup> and India<sup>24</sup> have shown an increase in the demand for child labour and decrease in school attendance and educational attainment.<sup>25</sup> However, child labour seems to increase less if households have access to

labour markets where they can hire wage workers to absorb the increase in productivity.

Evidence from Nicaragua suggests that the growing unpredictability of harvest seasons, another product of climate change, is making it more difficult to align the harvest season with the school calendar, leading to more missed school because of agricultural work.<sup>26</sup>

- **Food price shocks.** Falls in agricultural productivity can also influence child labour indirectly through their impact on food prices. This impact channel can extend well beyond farm families and rural areas. Evidence from countries including Uganda<sup>27</sup> and Pakistan,<sup>28</sup> for example, indicated increases in food prices are linked to a rise in the probability and the intensity of child labour in non-agricultural families.
- **Heat stress linked to climate change.** Climate change is inducing a significant worsening of working conditions in some contexts, for example due to heat stress, especially in agricultural work and outdoor activities but also in other industrial activities.<sup>29</sup> Higher temperatures are exposing children in child labour to more harmful working conditions, as already observed in some agricultural contexts and in industries like brick kilns.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, beyond heat stress, extreme weather events, insect-borne diseases (such as malaria and dengue), dust exposure, and forestry risks like wildfires, are just a few of the occupational safety and health risks that are increasing with climate change, with direct implications for the hazardousness of the work performed by children.<sup>31</sup> These factors will also affect the productivity of adult workers in similar ways, pushing children towards child labour as climate-related health issues hinder the ability of their caregivers to support their families. When adults fall sick, child labour often increases.<sup>32</sup> Other coping strategies to respond to climate change, such as increasing the amounts of pesticides to sustain agricultural productivity and promote resistance to new pathogens, will also worsen working conditions for children.<sup>33</sup>

## Looking forward

The available evidence, though still limited, makes abundantly clear that climate change is already having profound impacts on child labour, and, following from this, on global progress toward ending all forms of child labour by the 2025 target date set by the Sustainable Development Goals. As the impacts of climate change grow and intensify, this will be even more true in the years up to and beyond the 2025 target date.

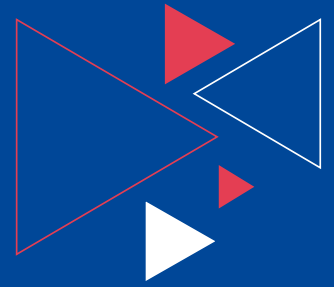
Coherence in policy responses to climate change, on one hand, and to child labour, on the other, will be critical. Coherence means, above all, that climate change responses *do not result* in unintended negative consequences for child labour, but rather are structured in a way that further child labour reduction goals. Both public and private responses to climate change are relevant in this context.

Concerning public responses, coherency has implications across a range of policy areas. Safeguards, for example, are needed so that public policies promoting the clean energy transition do not create labour market disruptions that leave low-skill workers and their families in a position of greater vulnerability. Government incentives programmes promoting “green” products such as electric cars and solar panels should include measures to address the risk of

child labour in mining activities (e.g., cobalt) or in other production activities in the supply chains of these products.<sup>34</sup> Relatedly, policies promoting the recycling of e-waste and other items (e.g., bottles), should ensure that these activities do not create new demand for hazardous child labour in out-sourced e-waste management and recycling.<sup>35</sup> Coupling disaster risk reduction strategies with child protection has proven to be effective in some contexts and may even render children in disaster-prone areas better off than in other poor regions.<sup>36</sup>

Coherency also has an important regulatory dimension – combining both environmental and human rights elements into laws and regulations governing the behaviour of firms, including in their supply chains, can help ensure complementarity between these two regulatory goals.

For business, coherency means ensuring that their environmental and human rights due diligence efforts are reasonably aligned and mutually reinforcing. It is critical that businesses do not fulfill their environmental regulatory requirements and obligations at the expense of labour standards and human rights, or vice versa. This is of particular relevance in raw materials production (e.g., in agriculture and mining) in the informal economy in the lower tiers of supply chains, where the risk of child labour is greatest.

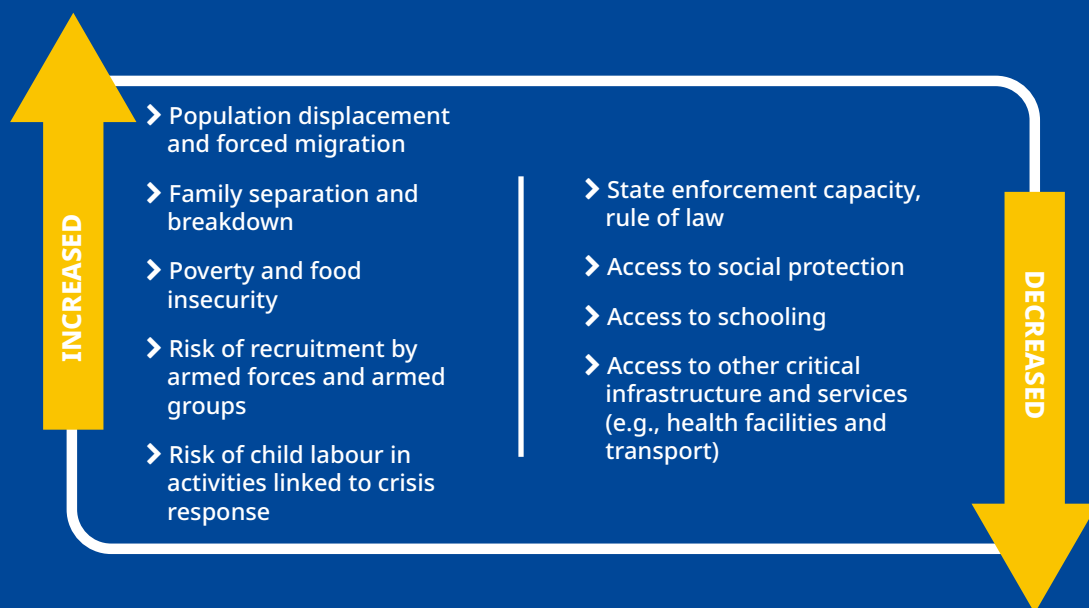


# Child labour and crisis

Crises, driven by political conflict, recurrent natural disaster, disease outbreak, economic collapse and other forces, are affecting growing numbers of children worldwide, increasing the risk of child labour and of other human rights violations. The number of people affected is huge. Close to 300 million people are estimated to need crisis assistance and protection in 2022, the highest figure in decades.<sup>37</sup> Out of the estimated 160 million children in child labour worldwide, 80 million live in countries with a coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan in 2022.<sup>38</sup> The unfolding COVID-19 pandemic is having substantial secondary impacts in crisis contexts, exacerbating the already high levels of vulnerability of children concerned.

**Armed conflict and child labour.** Nearly 1 in 5 children, 426 million in all, live in a conflict zone.<sup>39</sup> There is a strong correlation between armed conflict and child labour – an analysis undertaken in 2017 indicated that incidence of child labour in countries affected by armed conflict was 77 per cent higher than the global average, and the incidence of hazardous work was 50 per cent higher.<sup>40</sup> Long-term disruption to education in conflict settings is also happening at scale across the globe, as schools are attacked and targeted by violence and explosive weapons, used as places to abduct and recruit children from, or act as places of shelter for communities during active conflict. These education disruptions leave children vulnerable to child labour in place of education and lacking the skills and knowledge they need for the future.

► Figure 1. Effects of humanitarian crisis on root causes of child labour





The most egregious violations of the human rights of children in armed conflict involve children recruited or associated with armed forces and armed groups. In the last 30 years, the number of children living in conflict zone at risk of being recruited and used in conflict has tripled from 99 million children in 1990 (under 5 per cent) to 337 million children in 2020 (more than 14 per cent).<sup>41</sup> And although vastly under reported, there have been around 81,500 incidents of child recruitment by state and non-state actors verified by the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children since 2006. In addition to taking direct part in fighting, children are used as human shields, in intelligence gathering, in planting improvised explosive devices, in staffing checkpoints, as body guards and as servants. Girls may be forced into sexual slavery or forced marriages. Many children are abducted by force.<sup>42</sup>

**Natural disasters and child labour.** As discussed above, there is a growing body of evidence linking natural disasters with a heightened risk of child labour, as the households affected are forced to turn to their children's labour as a negative coping strategy.

**Pandemics and child labour.** Throughout history large scale disease outbreaks have driven humanitarian need.<sup>43</sup> The latest example, the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, has brought an unprecedented crisis around the entire world, resulting in serious health, social and economic disruption, and will more than likely not be the last pandemic of our time.

The impact of COVID-19 on children has been profound, long-term, and unequal. In less than two years, an additional 100 million children have fallen into poverty, of which 40 million are from least developed countries. An additional 9 million children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022 because of the increase in poverty triggered by the pandemic. School children around the world have lost an estimated 1.8 trillion hours of in-person learning and at its peak more than 1.5 billion students were out of school due to COVID-related school closures and national shutdowns.<sup>44</sup> An interruption of education on this scale is unparalleled, and the implications for child labour could be profound. There is ample evidence that once children are

out of school it can be difficult to persuade them to return to the classroom.<sup>45</sup>

Lessons from the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa are stark. In Liberia, schools remained closed for one year and over 4,000 children were orphaned. The three counties with the largest proportion of children orphaned by Ebola were also the counties where the practice of child marriage was most prevalent, girls were at great risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, and boys of child labour including hazardous work.<sup>46</sup> In an assessment conducted with children, a direct correlation between school closure and increases of child labour and exploitation were reported, with children taking on new roles and responsibilities to supplement household income, becoming the main breadwinner, and carrying out more domestic chores. 43 per cent reported having to work to support their families due to the additional pressure on household income and school closures.<sup>47</sup> Diseases such as Ebola and measles are re-emerging in conflict zones, further complicating responses in places where access is restricted.

**Child labour and economic crises.** Standalone economic crises exacerbate poverty and inequality, which can be precursors to increased humanitarian needs and child labour. The 2008 global financial crisis had substantial negative effects on the economies of developing countries. High levels of job loss reduced incomes for millions, and children in many contexts were forced to work to support their families. An initial assessment of the impact of the crisis on child labour in 12 developing countries provided an indication that the crisis slowed or reversed progress against child labour in many countries. Child labour during this period rose significantly in countries including Colombia, while countries including Brazil and Ecuador saw progress to eliminate child labour slow down markedly.<sup>48</sup> A study of the harsh economic downturn that hit Venezuela during 2002 and 2003 also found that the proportion of children engaged in market work nearly doubled during the period of declining GDP and then fell back as the economy recovered.<sup>49</sup>

## Impact channels

The evidence makes clear that all four types of crises looked at (i.e., armed conflict, natural disaster, disease outbreak and economic crises) can significantly heighten the risk of child labour. The reasons for this are multiple and inter-related.

While every crisis situation is unique, most child labour impacts can be traced to three broad impact channels: population displacement and family separation; state breakdown; and economic and labour market disruption. Table 1 illustrates how these impact channels manifest in different crisis contexts.

**Table 1. Child labour and crisis: Impact channels**

		Armed conflict	Natural disaster	Disease outbreak
Displacement and family separation	Cross border displacement (forced migration, refugee movements)	✓ Sometimes involve the significant movement of people over international borders.	✓ Possible where people flee impact over borders. Not usually accompanied by refugee movements.	✗ Not typically. Borders often close. Existing displacement situations are exacerbated by onset of disease outbreak.
	Internal displacement, forced migration	✓ Sometimes involve long periods of displacement, dependency, limited autonomy, and income opportunities	✓ Displacement away from hazard. Extended displacement during reconstruction (rapid onset). Slow onset/recurring climate events drive displacement and migration.	✗ Not typically. Movement often restricted at onset. If protracted, or restrictions allow displacement can occur. Existing IDP situations are exacerbated by outbreaks.
	Family separation	✓ Accidental, deliberate and aid induced separation likely during conflict.	✓ Sometimes involves some accidental separation but significant aid induced and deliberate family separation.	✓ Hospitalisation, quarantine, isolation, migration for income, death, and illness, all lead to Accidental, deliberate and aid induced separation
Impact on State	Breakdown of authority (Rule of law, oversight, enforcement, governance)	✓ Violence, intimidation, criminality. Weakened capacity to respond, significant damage to institutions.	✓ Disruption to decision-making processes, and systems which enforce and oversee rule of law, policy, and legislation.	✓ Disease control measures impact efficacy and capacity. Rapidly developed decision-making, legislation, regulation.
	Physical damage	✓ Significant damage possible, especially where explosive weapons are used.	✓ Rapid and sometimes complete destruction of communities, infrastructure, and buildings.	✗ Not usually, although some physical spaces may be lost due to restrictions or repurposing.
	Breakdown of important child services and systems (Weakened, disrupted, destroyed, overburdened)	✓ Significant long-term disruption to education, use of schools in conflict (targeting, abduction, violence, recruitment, shelter etc.). Exacerbate pre-existing concerns and weaknesses, infrastructure, discrimination.	✓ Sometimes complete or temporary closure of services and schools. Often long-term disruption to education, difficulty learning upon return, use of schools for emergency shelters.	✓ Rapid adaptation and implementation with limited resources. Entirely new systems/services. (Long-term) closure of schools and services to control disease. Limited access to remote learning.
	Humanitarian access	✓ Significant challenges for access, security, accountability, cooperation.	✓ Context or location can make access challenging.	✓ Access to areas or populations may be restricted to control disease.

**Table 1. Child labour and crisis: Impact channels**

		Armed conflict	Natural disaster	Disease outbreak
<b>Economic and labour market impact</b>	<b>Breakdown of household economy (Economic shock, loss, breakdown, restricted access to income, employment, assets, livelihoods)</b>	✓ Among earners and caregivers' loss of life, injury, disabilities, change in roles and disruption. Often persistent food crisis when conflict and access impact food security. Some economic opportunities (legal/illegal), frequently low income.	✓ Among earners and caregivers loss of life, injury, disabilities, change in roles, disruption. work absences, increased debt. Significant, abrupt, eroding (temporary or permanent) loss. Loss of food, and productive assets, (severe) food insecurity.	✓ Loss of life, illness, quarantine, fewer work opportunities, reduced working hours, closure of economic sectors, declining remittances. Increase in working hours/ production at home (domestic, economic, food security activities).
	<b>Breakdown in working conditions and labour market</b>	✓ Movement from formal to informal labour. Redistribution of labour opportunities. Influx, outflow of workers. Increased exposure to harm, hazardous work, criminality, illegal forms, military recruitment, weapons, sexual exploitation/violence, abusive labour relations including across borders.	✓ Increased exposure to low skilled, low wage, dangerous and harmful work. Slow and rapid changes compound pre-existing decent work issues such as informality, gender, violations of workers' rights, exploitation and forced labour.	✓ Movement of labour; decrease in formal employment, increase in informality. Longer hours, dangerous work, exposure to infection, inadequate OHS/PPE. Lack of availability of workers to assist in labour needs, livelihoods, agriculture, etc.; Reinforced gender and age-related roles at work and home.
	<b>Breakdown of economic production (Destruction, disruption of economic infrastructure, production of goods/services, etc.)</b>	✓ Economic instability and decline, hyperinflation, currency devaluation and significant post-conflict economic and labour market concerns.	✓ Damage gains from investment and development, economic stagnation. Influx of resources for response (positive and negative). Medium/long-term chances to develop decent work. Negative fiscal impact for government.	✓ Closure of entire economic sectors, declining remittances. Some economic opportunities (positive and negative) during response and implementation of disease control measures (some classified as hazardous).

► **Population displacement and family separation.** Forty-two per cent of the world's 82.4 million forcibly displaced people are children below 18 years of age.<sup>50</sup> Population displacement and forced migration within and across national borders can dramatically heighten the risk of child labour, as family support systems and livelihoods are interrupted, and families must find alternative survival strategies. Encampment policies and other restrictions in host countries which limit mobility or access to basic services and local labour markets, may also push households and children into unregulated and informal work.<sup>51</sup> Children crossing borders unaccompanied or separated from their families are at particular risk. Children can end up on the streets, or migrating in search of

family members or safety, leaving them at risk of trafficking and other severe rights abuses. In other crisis contexts, displacement can lead to family break-up or other changes in the family structure that can force children to take on additional work responsibilities.

► **State breakdown.** Crises can disrupt the ability of governments at all levels to deliver services and protect citizens, as the rule of law is disrupted by breakdowns in governance, and the institutions responsible for preventing child labour and for providing essential child services are impaired. The closure of schools and disruption to education are especially important in heightening the risk of child labour during crises. Other important physical spaces and services for

children can also be lost or disrupted, such as drop-in centres, school-feeding programmes, shelters, and community level activities. The enormous human and financial resources needed for immediate crisis responses can divert precious resources from facilities, services and programmes for children. The loss of these vital lifelines for children can also heighten their risk of child labour and other rights abuses.

- **Economic and labour market disruption.** Severe economic and labour market disruptions commonly accompany crises linked to conflict, natural disaster and disease outbreak, aggravating and prolonging the effects of the initial crisis. Disruptions such as job loss, the destruction of household assets, catastrophic health expenses, the incapacitation of household breadwinners and the loss of remittances from family members can have devastating consequences for household livelihoods and survival strategies. These impacts can be linked to or exacerbated by broader disruptions in the macro-economy, including the destruction of economic infrastructure, disruption of credit markets, production shutdowns, and interruptions in the flow of goods and services. All these economic and labour market impacts can push households already affected by crisis into situations of even greater vulnerability, thereby heightening the risk of child labour.

## Looking forward

The sheer scale of today's complex crises, the vast numbers of children caught up in them, and the strong evidence of the link between crisis and child labour, all serve to underscore the critical importance of addressing the risk of child labour in crisis settings.

Child labour concerns must inform all phases of humanitarian action: crisis preparation and

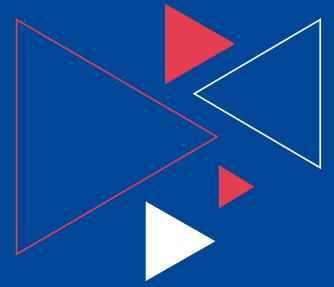
contingency plans, humanitarian responses and post-crisis reconstruction and recovery. Before a crisis hits, preparedness planning should draw on existing data on prevalent forms of child labour, the reach of social protection and essential services, and community-based supports. This evidence – combined with similar data on the economic impact of a crisis at the national, local, family and individual levels – can help in the formulation of appropriate responses during and after the most acute phases. Adequate preparation can also ensure that crisis responses and recovery efforts do not unwittingly create demand or entry points for child labour.

In all crisis situations, getting children back to school is essential to preventing a fall into child labour, including the worst forms. Particular attention should also be paid to the risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking and forced labour of children, including through abduction. In contexts of armed conflict, additional attention should go to the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups.

Measures to prevent and respond to child labour during a crisis should make links among the humanitarian, development and peace dimensions. They should help build social cohesion, resilience and peace, and strengthen existing government, economic and social structures.

Supporting meaningful economic and livelihood opportunities for adult members of families in crisis situations is essential. The ILO Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205) calls for inclusive measures to promote decent work and income generation, including through employment-intensive investment strategies such as public employment programmes. Universal child benefits make practical sense in fragile places with limited capacities and very high shares of vulnerable children. They can help lay the foundations for elaborating a social protection system later on.<sup>52</sup>





# Child labour and informality

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The ILO international labour standard, Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), has placed a renewed focus on informality as a barrier to decent work for all. Workers in the informal economy<sup>53</sup> — which is comprised of numerous sectors, urban and rural — are among the most vulnerable and least protected groups. The informal economy exposes working people to the risk of denial of rights at work, including the right to organize and bargain collectively (and thus to a lack of social dialogue); absence of sufficient opportunities for quality employment and assurance of occupational safety and health; and inadequate social protection. All of these run contrary to the concept of decent work and increase the likelihood that working households must rely on children's labour.

While child labour is most widespread in informal work in agriculture, there are number of other sectors in the informality economy in which child labour has an important presence. Among these are artisanal mining, including of gold, cobalt, mica and coal; brick kilns; manufacturing; street work; and the very large number, especially of girls, still engaged in child labour in domestic work.

## Impact channels

Informality can influence child labour through a number of channels. First and most importantly, families forced to eke out an existence in the informal economy are invariably in situations of heightened socio-economic vulnerability and lacking in alternatives to child labour to

make ends meet. Informality can also create or contribute to demand for child labour, as the low-skill production and lack of regulation that characterises the informal economy is more conducive to the use of children in production. Informality additionally undermines the economic base for taxation systems required to finance social protection systems, education and health provision, which are in turn vital to efforts against child labour.

Evidence from national household surveys with data on both informality and child labour undertaken in 22 Sub Saharan Africa countries sheds additional light on child labour and informality in the specific context of Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>54</sup>

Virtually all working children in Sub Saharan Africa (99%) aged 10-14 years work in the informal sector, mostly in agriculture. Older, 15 to 17 year-old, working children, who are legally entitled to work in *non-hazardous* jobs, are as likely as their younger peers to be in informal employment. Only about 1 per cent of children in this age range are in formal employment. By contrast, more than 9 per cent of 18 to 50 year-olds are in formal employment, meaning that the transition to the formal employment only begins after entry into adulthood at the age of 18. The predominance of informal employment for working children does not seem to vary substantially by area of residence (i.e., urban or rural) or by sex.

The evidence from the 22 Sub-Saharan Africa countries also underscores the important role of informality in driving the socio-economic vulnerability that can lead to household reliance on child labour. The evidence shows that children



belonging to households with adult family members working in the informal economy are more likely to work than children from households with adults engaged in the formal economy.

The predominance of family work also emerges clearly from the evidence from the 22 countries. About 84 per cent of working children aged 10 to 14 years, and 76 per cent of working children aged 15 to 17 years, work alongside an adult household member in the same type of job.

The remaining group, children not working with a household member, appear to be particularly disadvantaged. They are less likely to attend school and more likely to work long hours as compared to their peers working with a household member in a similar type of job. This pattern is especially pronounced for the minority of children with formal employment. These results point to the need for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between informality and child labour, and of the array of other factors impacting on this relationship.

## Looking forward

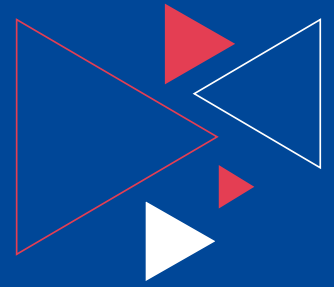
The preceding discussion underscores the critical importance of labour market policies promoting the transition from the informal to the formal economy – and, ultimately, to decent work – to broader efforts against child labour. The dynamics and drivers of informality are manifold and often context-specific, meaning that a multidimensional policy approach to addressing informality is

required that can be adapted to specific national and local contexts.<sup>55</sup>

Yet it is possible to identify some overarching priorities along the road to formality. Legal reforms and related measures to extend the reach of labour law and state enforcement machinery to workers in the informal economy and their workplaces are a critical starting point. In virtually all circumstances, widening the collective, representative voice of women and men who earn their living in the informal economy is a key precondition to the transition to formality, as it enables them to influence their working conditions, productivity, and incomes. A growing body of experience offers guidance in building collective representation structures for different categories of informal economy workers.<sup>56</sup>

Extending the reach of social protection to informal economy workers and their families is another key element. Non-contributory schemes financed by taxes or other state revenues are especially important in this context, as the earnings of those in the informal economy are often too low and too irregular to make regular contributions, and they may in any case be ineligible for contributory schemes linked to formal employment. Again, a wealth of experience in extending social protection to hitherto unreached groups offers key guidance going forward.<sup>57</sup> Agriculture is the sector where the intersection between child labour and informality is most pronounced, and therefore the formalisation of the agricultural production constitutes a key overarching priority.<sup>58</sup>





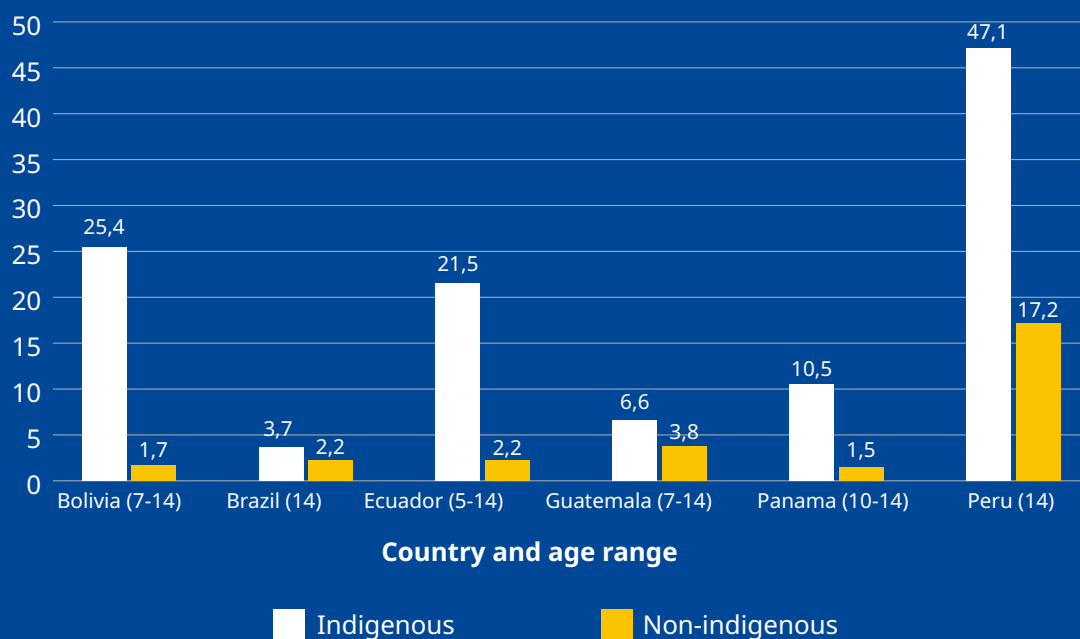
# Vulnerabilities faced by indigenous peoples

Levels of child labour and educational exclusion among indigenous children remain high relative to other children worldwide. An array of studies and consultations with indigenous organizations in the Latin America and Caribbean region and elsewhere make clear that these patterns are driven in important part by broader violations of the rights of indigenous people enshrined in ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Indigenous peoples are consistently among the most disadvantaged and marginalized segments of society; they are disproportionately represented among the poor, have educational indicators well below national averages and lack access to basic and health services.

## Child labour among indigenous children

Where statistical information is available, it shows that indigenous children face a higher risk of child labour than other children, and often a dramatically higher risk (figure 2). This situation appears to be common to indigenous children across regions, although the bulk of the representative data on child labour among indigenous children relates to the Latin America and Caribbean region. The majority of indigenous children engaged in child labour are found in agricultural work, but child labour among indigenous children also extends to work in sectors such as construction, commerce, manufacturing, and domestic work.

► Figure 2. Prevalence of child labour, by country and indigenous status





Evidence also suggests that in many contexts, indigenous children are significantly over-represented among the group of children in hazardous work and in worst forms of child labour other than hazardous.<sup>59</sup> Indigenous children with disabilities are particularly at risk of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation.<sup>60</sup> Trafficking takes advantage, among other factors, of the widespread lack of birth registration and identity documents of indigenous children and their frequent 'invisibility' within the broader society.<sup>61</sup> There are also reports of the involvement of indigenous children in bonded labour,<sup>62</sup> of their recruitment into armed conflict<sup>63</sup> and other abuses of their human rights.

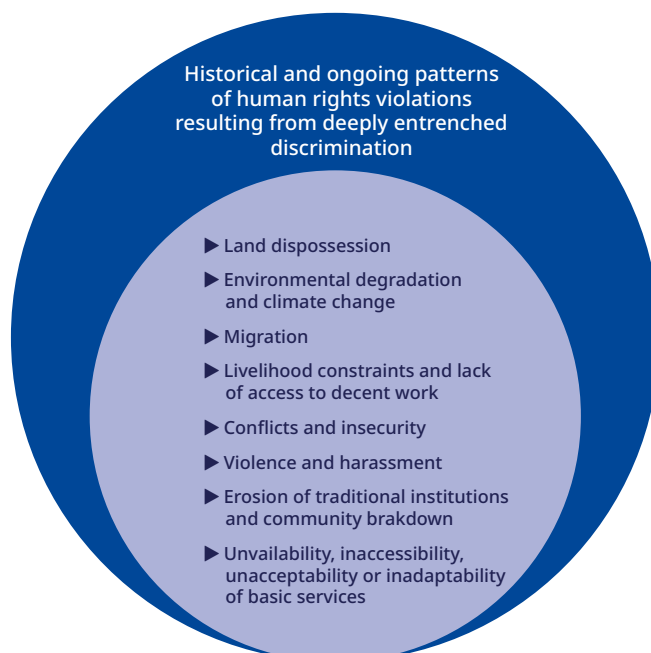
Indigenous children are also disadvantaged in terms of their access to education, contributing to their vulnerability to child labour and compromising their ability to acquire the skills and knowledge needed for work and life. This creates a vicious circle as, due to the lack of access to education and training, many indigenous men and women end up performing work in the informal economy, where they are subjected to poor working conditions, low pay, discrimination and limited access to social protection,<sup>64</sup> thus increasing the need for children to work to support the household. In most countries where data is available, the school attendance of indigenous children in the age range of compulsory schooling is lower than for other children; the attendance gap is particularly pronounced for indigenous girls. Indigenous children face multiple educational barriers, including the non-recognition of indigenous knowledge and education systems and the use of formal education as a means of assimilation that jeopardizes their cultural survival.<sup>65</sup>

## Impact channels

The current situation of indigenous children in the areas of child labour and education must be understood against the backdrop of broader violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples, communities and families, resulting from deeply entrenched, century-old, discrimination and continuing patterns of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, and exclusion. The causes of child labour for indigenous children are closely inter-related and mutually reinforcing,

and are manifestations and consequences of the broader rights violations that indigenous peoples and their children face.

- **Processes of land dispossession and lack of control over their territories** jeopardize the capacity of indigenous communities and families to meet their most basic needs, impair their food security and threaten their ways of life and well-being.<sup>66</sup> In this context, child labour may become a necessary element of the survival strategies of indigenous families, and indigenous children themselves may feel a strong responsibility to engage into work to supplement the income of their families and support their siblings. There is some evidence of increases in bonded labour among communities that have been forcibly displaced from their lands.<sup>67</sup>
- The child labour of indigenous children is often linked to **migration**, encompassing both migration within rural areas to work as seasonal or temporary workers on, for example, plantations and livestock farms, and migration to urban areas. Both scenarios sometimes involve international migration. The migration of indigenous children for work is linked to loss of family lands, or possession of land of insufficient size and quality to sustain their livelihood and ensure food security of the family, and to the broader lack of decent work opportunities available to indigenous adults.<sup>68</sup>
- **Inadequate livelihood and decent work opportunities for indigenous adults** can drive child labour through several channels. The ILO estimates that 86 per cent of the global indigenous population has an informal job compared to 66 per cent of non-indigenous. Indigenous women have particularly high informality rates; they are nearly 26 percentage points more likely to work in the informal economy than their non-indigenous counterparts.<sup>69</sup> As discussed above, families struggling to eke out an existence in the informal economy are more likely to have to resort to child labour as a survival strategy. Earlier studies in Latin America reported that an increase in child labour among indigenous children is due to the difficulties faced by indigenous peoples

► **Figure 3. Main causes of child labour among indigenous children**

to sustain their livelihoods within their communities and their consequent migration in search for other opportunities which fail to offer them decent work options and are predominantly in the informal economy.<sup>70</sup> Perceived poor returns to education in the labour market and pessimism for the future can also lead indigenous parents to question the value of investing in their children's education and to opt instead to send them to work, for example, on plantations, even when education facilities are available.<sup>71</sup>

- The **inaccessibility or inadequacy of basic services** including health services is associated with child labour in indigenous communities.<sup>72</sup> Lack of access to health care can translate into family indebtedness arising from catastrophic health expenses, in turn pushing children into work. Poor access to electricity and water networks can also create greater need for children's labour in tasks such as hauling water and fuelwood collection.

- It is in the contexts of **conflict, insecurity and violence** that some of the worst forms of child labour affecting indigenous children are found, including trafficking and sexual exploitation and recruitment by armed groups and criminal organizations. Conflicts affecting indigenous children take many forms, including disputes with non-indigenous parties over the control of indigenous territories and tensions stemming from the actions of criminal organizations.<sup>73</sup> Some parents may encourage their children to work in order to protect them from the risk of getting involved with local gangs, in the absence of education opportunities.<sup>74</sup> Violence and harassment faced by indigenous children at school is also a factor in pushing them out of the classroom and into situations of child labour.<sup>75</sup> In addition, in some cases indigenous children migrate away from their communities to escape situations of domestic violence and engage in child labour to sustain themselves.<sup>76</sup>



- The **erosion of traditional institutions and the disruption of communities**, and associated collapse of informal safety nets and support structures among community members, can also increase the vulnerability of indigenous children to child labour.<sup>77</sup> Disruptions may be caused by the non-recognition of traditional institutions, the pressures and divisions created by third-parties to gain control over indigenous territories, as well as cultural pressures and the long-term impacts of assimilationist policies and forced displacements, among others. It has been reported, for example, that traffickers of indigenous girls take advantage of “the disintegration of society and the loss of family, community and traditional indigenous values”.<sup>78</sup>

## Looking forward

The underlying discrimination against indigenous peoples and the persisting lack of respect for their distinct identities and cultures, ways of life, and world views are at the root of the challenges faced by indigenous children. Consequently, efforts to combat child labour among indigenous children

and improve their access to education must form part of broader efforts to ensure and protect the individual and collective rights of all indigenous peoples, as enshrined in the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This includes:

- Recognizing indigenous peoples’ right to land, territories, and resources, and supporting their livelihoods and access to decent work
- Addressing the security situation affecting certain indigenous communities, including conflicts and violence
- Establishing appropriate and effective mechanisms for the consultation and participation of indigenous peoples regarding matters that concern them
- Providing for special measures for indigenous children within national and local policies and programmes aimed at tackling child labour
- Increasing efforts to collect statistical data on the living and working conditions of indigenous children, and on the situation of indigenous peoples in general.

# Conclusions

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Meeting Target 8.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require rapid action to address vulnerabilities and tackle the root causes of child labour, in tandem with other human and labour rights violations. With only three years to go before the 2025 deadline for the elimination of child labour in all its forms, and in the face of the devastating impact of the COVID-19

pandemic, there is no time to lose. Effectively mitigating the four areas of vulnerability examined in this issue brief requires coherent and coordinated responses, which position measures to combat child labour within efforts to protect broader human and labour rights and are guided by relevant international human rights and labour standards.



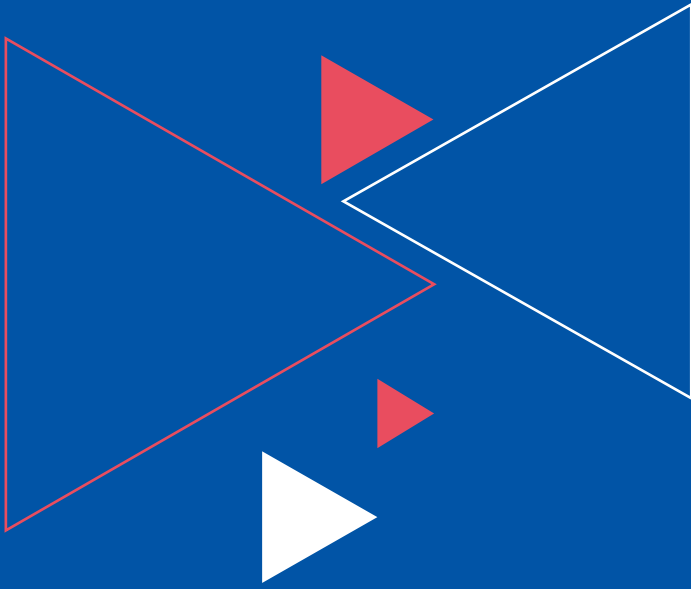
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**Fundamental Principles and Rights at  
Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS)  
Governance and Tripartism Department  
(GOVERNANCE)**

**International Labour Office**

4 route des Morillons

CH-1211 Geneva 22 – Switzerland

T: +41 (0) 22 799 61 11

E: [childlabour@ilo.org](mailto:childlabour@ilo.org)

[ilo.org/childlabour](http://ilo.org/childlabour)

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