



► Child labour and forced labour in Pakistan

February 2023

Eliminating child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains: an integrated approach Results from the CLEAR Cotton project

Key points

- Project co-funded by the European Union and the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- Duration: 5 years (March 2018 – February 2023).
- Regions covered: Sindh and Punjab.
- Beneficiaries: Children and their families working at any level of the cotton, garment and textile production chains; victims of forced labour and workers at risk of forced labour; key ministries and other governmental agencies; public regional authorities; employers' and workers' organizations; farmers' organizations enterprises; media.
- Implementation: by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the local implementing partners.
- Partners: Federal Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development; Department of Labour, Sindh; Department of Labour Punjab; Ministry of National Food Security and Research; Punjab Provincial Agriculture and Extension Departments; Punjab Economic Research Institute; Pakistan Workers Federation (PWF); Pakistan National Textile, Leather Garments & General Workers Federation (PNTLGGWF); Employers Federation of Pakistan (EFP); Bunyad Literacy Community Council (BLCC); Sindh Agricultural Forestry Workers & Coordinating Organization (SAFWCO); Farmers Integrated Development Association (FIDA); National Rural Support Program (NRSP); Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA).

Child labour and forced labour situation in Pakistan

Child labour and forced labour in Pakistan are still major issues, despite the Government's will and action to combat them. Pakistan has ratified the relevant ILO Conventions (Convention No. 138 on minimum age; Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour; Convention No. 29 on forced labour; and Convention No. 105 on the abolition of forced labour) as well as other international instruments. Since the devolution, labour rights are the competence of provincial governments, which have

adopted several Acts to protect children and adults from child and forced labour, including in the agriculture, textile and garments sectors.

The agricultural sector is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, as it accounts for 19.5 per cent of the GDP. Cotton has a special importance: it provides a large share of employment for both men and women in its production and value chain. This crop and its products play a key role in Pakistan's economy as they account for around 60 per cent of the overall country exports. Pakistan is ranked eighth country in the world in terms of farm output and fourth in terms of cotton production.

However, child labour and forced labour are still an issue in the national cotton production. The national child labour survey of 1996 showed that agriculture was the sector with the highest incidence of child labour (74 per cent). This figure is almost at par with the latest ILO-UNICEF global estimates of child labour, which demonstrate that 70 per cent of all children in child labour are in agriculture. Pakistan's child labour survey indicated that most cogent reasons given by parents or guardians for letting their child work are to assist in family small business (69 per cent) and to supplement household income (28 per cent).

Among Pakistan's provinces, the child labour rate was the highest in Sindh up to 2012–13, before declining at a more rapid pace than in Punjab, the province with the highest incidence of child labour during the 2009–2018 period overall. While the child labour rate for boys fell during the last decade in Punjab, it rose for girls, leading to a higher incidence of child labour among girls in Punjab than boys between 2014 and 2018. Except for Punjab, the child labour rate for both girls and boys generally declined across all other provinces. The incidence of child labour was lowest in Islamabad Capital, where under 3 per cent of children aged 10 to 14 were economically active (2016, Pakistan Decent Work Country Programme).

In addition, Pakistan's rural communities are facing increased harsh climate episodes, such as the desert locust that destroyed crops in 2019 or, more recently, the flood of 2022 that devastated the south of the country. Such crisis pushes vulnerable households into poverty, making them more vulnerable to resort to child labour or fall into forced labour to make ends meet. Hence, recovery and rehabilitation efforts must include employment and livelihood schemes to reduce such vulnerabilities.



Young woman in a cotton field during a training © ILO, 2021.

The CLEAR Cotton project

The project aimed at contributing to the elimination of child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains in target producing countries. The project worked following an integrated approach, both by production area – covering all producing regions in the target countries – and by value chain – acting at all levels of the national cotton value chain. This approach allowed the project to address the basic needs of children and families at risk, working with local and national actors in the cotton sector. The specific objectives were:

- Enhanced compliance with legislative and regulatory frameworks and implementation of policies to eradicate child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains.
- Reduced recourse to child and forced labour by local communities with enhanced economic opportunities in selected cotton growing/processing districts.

The CLEAR Cotton project collaborated with the INDITEX-funded project [“Promoting Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in the Cotton Supply Chain”](#) in selected interventions.

Main results

Policy and research

- Realization of a **socio-economic assessment of cotton communities**, by WWF, to identify entry points to improve fundamentals principles and rights at work at community level.
- **FAO-PERI study to assess “Gender roles, related work burden and their effects on child labour in agriculture in Punjab”**, that led to recommendations on economic empowerment activities for women.
- Adoption of **Rules of Business** and notification (activation) of **29 District Vigilance Committees (DVCs)** in Sindh – public child and forced labour monitoring bodies created by the Sindh Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act 2015.

Capacity-building

- **120 inspecting staff of the Department of Labour (DOL) Sindh** were trained as custodian and implementing arms on child and forced labour laws.
- The capacity of **more than 600 small and medium sized enterprises**, members of the Employers

Federation of Pakistan (EFP), was built thanks to training materials developed on the basis of the rapid **assessment of the national ginning and spinning sector** conducted by EFP.

- Targeted **due diligence mechanisms** were developed with EFP support and **piloted in 12 companies** in the ginning and spinning sectors of Sindh and Punjab.
- The **Farmer Field Schools (FFS) Mini Module on Protecting children and communities' exposure from pesticides** was adopted by the Punjab Provincial Agricultural Extension Services thanks to FIDA and included in FFS training of trainers held and to develop **Children Ecological Club** and **Women Open School**.

Awareness-raising

- A **resource toolkit** was developed with trade unions (PWF and PNTLGGWF) and used to **sensitize 5,000+ workers** from cotton producing communities of South Punjab on child labour, forced labour and occupational safety and health.
- Creation of a pool of **30 masters trainers on the SCREAM methodology**, with a focus on agriculture, to raise awareness about children's rights.
- **Sensitization of 2,403 students, teachers and community members** through 40 sessions of SCREAM trainings in 10 schools in Sindh organized by SAFWCO.
- **71 teachers and 79 PWF members were trained on the SCREAM approach**, 16 community and district-levels meetings organized, 9 murals created on public walls of Multan, and more than 8,700 artworks produced through several competition and exhibition thanks to PWF.
- The **Urdu and Sindhi versions of the ILO-FAO visual facilitator Guide on "Protect Children from Pesticides"** were developed and widely disseminated.
- Awareness-raising of thousands of cotton producers, partners and general public, through many different tools and events, including:
 - World Cotton Day (7 October 2019) on "Promoting Rational Use of Pesticides" attended by 60 participants, chaired by the Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research.
 - 2021 Music Against Child Labour competition held at national level. Winner: [Ahmed Faraz, with his song "Faryad"](#), launched during the World Day Against Child Labour celebration.
- Partnership with PODA to enhance awareness of child labour in rural communities in Punjab.

Direct support to affected communities

- **42 Decent Work Cotton Resources Centres (DWCRCs) were established** by BLCC close to the cotton communities to serve as education and information centres.
- **1,600+ children** were withdrawn or prevented from entering child labour through **accelerated schooling programmes** in DWCRCs to eventually reintegrate mainstream schools.
- **200+ youth and women benefitted from vocational training** to access decent work opportunities in the cotton, textile and garment value chain.
- **42 community-based multi-stakeholder monitoring and remedial mechanisms** to combat child and forced at village levels were set up.
- **500 women started their own business or new income generating activities** after training provided by FAO and NRSP.
- Beneficiaries affected by the flood were supported through **livelihood, employment generation, capacity building and rehabilitation programmes** in collaboration with EFP and BLCC.

► The collaboration between the ILO and FAO

Child labour has been at the heart of the ILO's mandate since its creation in 1919. As the originator or member of multiple programmes and initiatives (IPEC+; the Alliance 8.7), the ILO works to address the needs of the 160 million children still in child labour worldwide. In the framework of the CLEAR Cotton project, the ILO relied on the FAO's expertise in rural development and poverty alleviation, and its tools, such as Dimitra Clubs, Farmer Field Schools (FFS) or Village Savings and Credit Associations. The two organizations therefore acted together through complementary interventions, targeting the same villages or communities.

Good practices

- Using OSH as an entry point to sensitize on child labour: by informing on the dangers of pesticide use and how it affects adult and children differently, beneficiaries were able to better understand the issues of hazardous child labour and child labour in general.
- The inclusive approach has enabled a strong involvement of the project beneficiaries and the information and expectations provided by the beneficiaries themselves have been integrated into project's interventions.

- The complementarity between the schooling and IGA offers, in particular the skills development and business models targeting women and conditioned on the schooling of children, is a factor in the sustainability of the project's results.
- The capacity building of local actors will contribute to the sustainability of the actions on the ground. Some of them have already planned awareness-raising actions.

► **Success story**

Mumtaz, Sayeeda and Sharifan lives in an urban settlement in Multan, Punjab. Widowed or married to a disabled man, these three women are the sole bread winners of their families. They make ends meet through daily labour, including cotton picking in rural areas, that they have to reach by paying transport and other fees themselves.

They were sensitized by PNTLGGWF on the dangers of child labour, the importance of education and how it can lead to decent work. It took them some time to adapt to the idea. But in a few weeks' time, they were seeking admission for their children into government schools in the area. They overcame administrative challenges to finally enroll their children, including the five that had already dropped out of school.

"We have realized the importance of education. Elder children are not educated but we will educate the young ones. We do have our limitations but will educate the children."

Lessons learned

- Eliminating and preventing child labour in agriculture requires an integrated approach, including through close collaboration between labour, agriculture, education and social protection actors, social partners and civil society organisations.

- In cotton production, child labour is linked to the social understanding of the role of the child, not just to poverty. It is important to complement livelihoods support with broader awareness raising actions.
- Involving producers, smallholders, small and medium sized enterprises and their umbrella organisations in the direct implementation makes it possible to mobilise actors at the grassroots level so that they take ownership of and adhere to the fight against child and forced labour.

Next steps and challenges

- Continue the support provided by the project to DOL Punjab in implementing their program "Disengaging children from labour and referring to schools" based on their annual development program 2023-24.
- Expand the due diligence mechanisms developed with EFP to other companies, provinces and sectors.
- Apply the integrated approach and lessons learned from the project to address the growing problem of child and forced labour in other sectors, with a specific focus on people vulnerable to climate episodes.
- Provide adequate social protection to farming families, to mitigate their vulnerabilities to shocks, based on data collected from the national child labour survey.

► **Resources**

- [Project results in Pakistan](#)
- [Results of the FAO component](#)
- [Testimonies from project beneficiaries](#)
- [Protecting children from pesticides \(FAO\)](#)
- [Music Against Child Labour competition 2021](#)

► www.ilo.org/clearcotton

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**Contact details**

**Fundamentals Principles and Rights at
Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS)
International Labour Organization**
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

T: +41 22 799 7239
E: fundamentals@ilo.org

www.ilo.org/fundamentals
Twitter: @ILO_ChildLabour