

**Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery**

**IDSN input on the Worst Forms of Child Labour – taking stock of progress and remaining challenges**

1. Prevalence of the worst forms of child labour and profiles of victims/survivors

*Which worst forms of child labour are prevalent in your country or region and how do they manifest?*

Several of the worst forms of child labour affecting Dalit children are prevalent in various sectors across India. In brick kilns, entire Dalit families, including children as young as five, are trapped in bonded labour, often due to generational debt from advance payments<sup>1</sup>. These children perform physically demanding tasks, including moulding bricks and carrying heavy loads for long hours with no pay<sup>2</sup>.

In agriculture, Dalit children, especially girls, are overrepresented in hazardous work on hybrid cottonseed farms in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh<sup>3</sup>. They are exposed to pesticides and harsh weather<sup>4</sup>. In the sugarcane sector, children migrate with their families for seasonal work, deprived of education<sup>5</sup>.

The textile and garment industries exploit Dalit girls under the "Sumangali" scheme in Tamil Nadu, where they enter three-year contracts with the promise of a lump-sum payment<sup>6</sup>. They endure forced labour, long hours, restricted movement and poor living conditions in spinning mills<sup>7</sup>.

Dalit girls are frequently employed as domestic workers in dominant-caste households, where they face long hours, low wages, physical abuse and sexual violence<sup>8</sup>. Many are trafficked into domestic servitude through deceptive recruitment practices<sup>9</sup>.

In illegal mining and quarrying operations, particularly in Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh, Dalit children are involved in hazardous tasks such as carrying stones, drilling and handling explosives, which put them at risk of serious injury, disease and disability<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [Slavery in India's Brick Kilns & the Payment System](#), Anti-Slavery International, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> [Recommendations for the 43rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council](#), IDSN, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> [Contribution to the EMRTD Questionnaire](#), IDSN, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> [Report to the HRC51](#), Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of Slavery, 2022.

Human trafficking and child prostitution are also significant issues. Dalit girls are at heightened risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation in urban areas and some are forced into the “Devadasi” system, a form of religiously-sanctioned sexual slavery<sup>11</sup>.

*What are the key drivers and causes of the worst forms of child labour in your country or region?*

Across South Asia, the worst forms of child labour are closely linked to caste-based discrimination, poverty and weak enforcement of laws. Dalits, who face systemic marginalisation, are often denied access to education, land and economic opportunities<sup>12</sup>. Employers exploit these caste hierarchies to justify bonded and forced labour, especially in manual labour industries<sup>13</sup>.

Many Dalit families are trapped in intergenerational debt due to discriminatory lending practices, with children frequently working in brick kilns, agriculture and domestic settings under advance payment schemes that result in long-term bondage<sup>14</sup>. Migration for seasonal work is common among landless Dalit families, often forcing children out of school and making them vulnerable to exploitation<sup>15</sup>.

Although laws such as the Child Labour Act and the Bonded Labour Abolition Act exist, they are poorly enforced for Dalits<sup>16</sup>. Authorities often ignore complaints due to caste biases. In education, Dalit children experience bullying, exclusion and corporal punishment, causing many to leave school<sup>17</sup>. Government benefits and schemes, such as midday meals and scholarships, are also frequently denied due to local prejudices<sup>18</sup>.

Dalit girls face caste and gender discrimination. They are more likely to be forced into early marriage, removing them from school and pushing them into domestic or bonded labour<sup>19</sup>. They are also at risk of sexual violence and trafficking, reinforcing their subjugation.

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<sup>11</sup> [UPR 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle review of India](#), Working group on the UPR, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> [Caste in Global Supply Chains](#), Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> [Recommendations for the 43rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council](#), IDSN, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> [Contribution to the EMRTD Questionnaire](#), IDSN, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> [Report to the HRC51](#), Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of Slavery, 2022.

*Which groups of children are most vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour in your country or region?*

Dalit children are among the most vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour due to deep-rooted caste-based discrimination in education, employment and wider society<sup>20</sup>. They are disproportionately employed in hazardous sectors, such as brick kilns, agriculture, textiles and domestic work<sup>21</sup>. Dalit children from migrant families face additional risks as seasonal migration disrupts their education and exposes them to exploitative labour conditions, particularly in the sugarcane, brick and garment industries<sup>22</sup>. Dalit girls face dual discrimination in this regard, due to their caste and gender, increasing their risk of being trafficked for domestic work, forced into early marriage or placed in dangerous jobs<sup>23</sup>. Children of manual scavengers are also subjected to manual scavenging, exposing them to serious health hazards and reinforcing their social exclusion<sup>24</sup>.

## **2. Promising practices and initiatives**

### *A) Legislative and policy developments*

India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan have ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182, committing to end hazardous child labour. However, enforcement remains weak, especially for Dalit children. In Bangladesh, the Labour Act (2018) prohibits child labour under 14 and hazardous work under 18, yet it overlooks caste-based vulnerabilities, leaving many Dalit children exposed to dangerous work, especially in tea plantations and manual scavenging. Pakistan's Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1992) outlaws bonded labour but fails to protect Dalits, who remain trapped in intergenerational debt bondage in agriculture, brick kilns and domestic work. Similarly, Nepal's Kamaiya Labour (Prohibition) Act (2002) abolished bonded labour, but Dalit children remain at risk due to a lack of economic alternatives.

In addition, the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) sets out obligations for companies to mitigate their negative impact on human rights, including child labour, slavery etc. After intensive lobbying, caste was mentioned in the final [recitals](#) of the CSDDD,<sup>25</sup> which help EU countries to transpose this directive into national law. The CSDDD creates a legal framework for Dalits to sue companies responsible for rights abuses in European courts. It also allows trade unions and NGOs to bring action on behalf of affected persons. However, the Directive risks becoming absorbed into the Omnibus Package, weakening the legislation.

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<sup>20</sup> [UPR 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle review of India](#), Working group on the UPR, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSIN, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> [Recommendations for the 43rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council](#), IDSIN, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1760](#), European Parliament, 2024. Section 33.

### *B) Prevention and protection measures*

Dalit-focused education initiatives across Bangladesh, Nepal and India aim to address systemic exclusion. In Bangladesh, Dalit children drop out due to exclusion, prompting Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) to advocate for education scholarships to increase school retention. Nepal has introduced legal reforms to improve Dalit access to education, though caste discrimination persists in schools. In India, seasonal hostels in Maharashtra and Karnataka support the education of children from migrant sugarcane worker families, but implementation remains weak.

Efforts to rescue and rehabilitate bonded labourers in Pakistan, India and Nepal are led by local NGOs. However, these organisations often lack sufficient government support.

Regional and international initiatives include the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC). Nonetheless, caste-specific child labour is not explicitly addressed. Some multinational companies are adopting voluntary, caste-sensitive corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks to combat caste-based child labour, but suppliers in India and Bangladesh often fail to comply.

Dalit-led advocacy groups such as the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) (India), BDERM (Bangladesh) and various Dalit NGOs in Nepal push for Dalit inclusion in child labour policy discussions, though they are often excluded from decision-making.

Innovative approaches include AI-based risk mapping by the Satyarthi Children's Foundation in India and Nepal, targeting high-risk Dalit-dominated industries. Child labour reporting applications, such as India's Childline 1098 and similar platforms in Bangladesh are used, but Dalit families frequently face police bias when reporting.

### **3. Stakeholder engagement and collaboration**

Government efforts in India, Bangladesh and Nepal include rehabilitation and schooling programmes under child labour-elimination projects. However, Dalit children remain excluded. In India and Pakistan, joint government and civil society district taskforces carry out child labour rescues, but police corruption and caste bias hinder protection for Dalit children.

Businesses have begun integrating caste-sensitive due diligence, especially in garment, agriculture and brick kiln industries, with support from organisations such as the Ethical Trading Initiative and the Fair Wear Foundation. However, local suppliers rarely comply.

Civil society and trade unions have collaborated. Dalit-focused NGOs work on child labour rescue and securing legal protections, but trade unions often overlook caste in their child labour campaigns.

Survivors and their families have given UN testimonies, though their voices are often marginalised in national policymaking. Community reporting mechanisms in India, Nepal and Bangladesh are strengthened through grassroots initiatives that train Dalits to document child labour, though fear of retaliation remains high.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives, such as Alliance 8.7, promote collaboration though they rarely address caste-specific concerns.

#### **4. Charting the Way Forward**

*The remaining challenges in effectively eliminating the worst forms of child labour?*

Despite progress in ratifying key ILO conventions, child labour persists in South Asia due to weak law enforcement, especially in informal and agricultural sectors<sup>26</sup>. National legal loopholes, like exemptions for family-run enterprises, undermine protections<sup>27</sup>, while anti-trafficking laws are poorly implemented. Caste-based discrimination further entrenches child labour, with Dalit and marginalised children facing systemic barriers to education and services, making them more vulnerable to forced and bonded labour<sup>28</sup>.

Dalit girls, in particular, experience a "triple burden" of caste, gender and economic oppression, forcing many into exploitative labour, including domestic servitude and sex trafficking<sup>29</sup>. Girls in agricultural labour are often burdened with both work and household responsibilities, leading to multiple and compounding forms of exploitation<sup>30</sup>. Child marriage is often used as a coping mechanism by poor families to generate income, pushing girls out of school<sup>31</sup>.

Bonded labour remains widespread, especially in India and Pakistan, where children are trapped in hazardous industries and tied to families' debts<sup>32</sup>. Informal and agricultural sectors dominate child labour, especially in sugarcane and seed production, with poor working conditions and weak supply-chain accountability<sup>33</sup>.

Limited access to quality education, driven by poverty, caste and seasonal migration, pushes children out of school and into labour<sup>34,35</sup>. Migrant children lack legal protection and access to services, while unregulated labour recruitment fosters abuse. Institutional responses remain inadequate due to corruption, poor coordination and weak enforcement<sup>36</sup>.

Eliminating the worst forms of child labour in South Asia requires stronger legal enforcement, expanded social protections and greater corporate accountability.

*Measures needed to effectively address these challenges at the local, national, regional and global levels?*

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<sup>26</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> [Caste in Global Supply Chains](#), Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> [Slavery in India's Brick Kilns & the Payment System](#), Anti-Slavery International, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

To combat child labour, a comprehensive strategy is essential.

**Legally**, child labour laws must be strictly enforced by closing loopholes like family-based exemptions<sup>37</sup>, ratifying ILO Conventions 182 and 138<sup>38</sup>, criminalising caste-based discrimination and strengthening laws against bonded labour<sup>39</sup>. Corporations must be held accountable through transparency requirements and due diligence laws to prevent child exploitation in supply chains<sup>40</sup>.

**Administratively**, enforcement should be enhanced by increasing independent labour inspections, especially in the informal sector<sup>41</sup>, and establishing child protection units in vulnerable areas<sup>42</sup>. Reliable, disaggregated data by caste, gender and region is vital for targeted interventions<sup>43</sup>. Cross-border cooperation should be improved to prevent trafficking and protect migrant children<sup>45</sup>.

**Economically**, support for vulnerable families is key, through expanded social protection<sup>46</sup>, rural development<sup>47</sup> and proper enforcement of minimum wage laws<sup>48</sup>. Ethical business practices must mandate CSR initiatives to eliminate child labour<sup>49</sup> and penalise caste-based discrimination<sup>50</sup>.

**Socially**, addressing caste and gender discrimination is crucial. This includes anti-discrimination training for authorities<sup>51</sup> and promoting livelihoods and education<sup>52</sup>. Combatting child marriage<sup>53</sup> and providing vocational training for girls is essential<sup>54</sup>.

**Educationally**, access to free, quality education must be expanded, especially in rural and migrant areas<sup>55</sup>, with incentives to keep marginalised children in school<sup>56</sup>. Schools must be inclusive<sup>57</sup> and flexible learning options should be developed for working or rescued

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<sup>37</sup> [UPR India 4<sup>th</sup> cycle](#), Joint Submission, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> [Report to the HRC51](#), Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of Slavery, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> [Recommendations for the 43rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council](#), IDSN, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> [Caste in Global Supply Chains](#), Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> [Slavery in India's Brick Kilns & the Payment System](#), Anti-Slavery International, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> [Examining the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child through the Lens of Caste- and Descent-Based Discrimination](#), Philip E. Veerman, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> [Recommendations for the 43rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council](#), IDSN, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> [Contribution to the EMRTD Questionnaire](#), IDSN, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> [UPR India 4<sup>th</sup> cycle](#), Joint Submission, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> [Caste in Global Supply Chains](#), Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> [Caste in Global Supply Chains](#), Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> [Paradox of the Sweetest Crop](#), Global March Against Child Labour, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> [Dalit Children in Bangladesh](#) input into the Committee on the Rights of the Child, IDSN, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> [Recommendations for the 43rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council](#), IDSN, 2020.

children<sup>58</sup>. Early childhood programmes should be strengthened in under-served communities<sup>59</sup>.

*Please explain which actions/measures Governments, businesses, National Human Rights Institutions, intergovernmental organisations, community leaders and other stakeholders should take/focus on as a matter of priority.*

## 6. Role of stakeholders

Governments should strengthen legal frameworks and enforce anti-child labour laws, while increasing funding for education and social protection programmes targeting vulnerable children. Businesses must implement transparent supply chain practices, invest in ethical recruitment and ensure adults' living wages to reduce child labour dependence. National Human Rights Institutions should monitor legal compliance, report violations and offer legal aid to those affected. Organisations such as the ILO, UN and SAARC can provide national technical and financial support and promote regional cooperation to combat cross-border child trafficking. Community leaders and NGOs play a vital role, raising awareness, advocating for children's rights and establishing local support systems for at-risk children.

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<sup>58</sup> [UPR India 4<sup>th</sup> cycle](#), Joint Submission, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> [Sowing Hope](#), ARISA, 2020.