

## FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION (RTA) PROJECT: Using Knowledge to Accelerate Progress in the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour

### Global Research Agenda: Building the evidence base for informed policy action against child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking

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#### Why do we need a Global Research Agenda?

The latest ILO global child labour estimates indicate that, despite important progress, there were still 160 million children in labour worldwide in 2020. The ILO global estimates of forced labour show that there was a total of 25 million persons in situations of forced labour in 2016.

The headline figures emerging from the global estimates make clear that a substantial acceleration of progress will be needed to meet commitments to achieve SDG Target 8.7. Moreover, the economic impacts of Covid-19 are placing unprecedented strain on Governments, families and societies, the results of which may stall country efforts to address child labour and forced labour.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, the international community committed to ending child labour in all its forms by 2025 and to eradicating forced labour by 2030 (SDG Target 8.7).

Policy choices will be critical to achieve SDG Target 8.7, and ready access to reliable evidence will be essential to informing these choices. A growing body of evidence, research and impact evaluation has generated a better understanding of the policy mix that should be implemented to achieve real progress in tackling child labour and its root causes. However, significant gaps still exist and hamper policy development.

Resources are limited, and knowledge gaps are wide: the identification of priority areas of research will be essential to support policy efforts to eliminate child labour and forced labour. It was in this light that in 2020 the RTA project launched a process towards the development of global and national research agendas. Through this participatory process, involving the academic community and experts from international organizations, policy actors, NGOs, country representatives and donors, the Global Research Agenda was established.

## How was the Global Research Agenda initiated?

The Global Research Agenda has been developed through a participatory process involving the academic community and experts from international organizations, policy actors, NGOs, country representatives and donors.

The process leading to the Global Research Agenda was composed of five interrelated phases:

- i) Mapping of existing research. An extensive mapping of child labour (CL), forced labour (FL), and human trafficking (HT) research was conducted: key research papers, studies and reports, including impact evaluations in the child labour and forced labour fields since 2010 were listed and categorized.
- ii) Convening of an International Advisory Board (IAB). This group, composed of the academic community and experts from international organizations, policy actors, NGOs, country representatives and donors, met to discuss and build the structure of an Evidence Gap Map (EGM) on child labour and one on forced labour.
- iii) Identification of knowledge gaps. The child labour and forced labour studies available were mapped against an Evidence Gap Map (EGM) based on categories agreed in the advisory board consultations. The EGM identifies gaps in knowledge and the availability of research.
- iv) Developing expert consensus on research priorities, with a focus on those critical for achieving SDG target 8.7. Building on the results of the first phase, the IAB identified an initial set of research priorities. In parallel, a stakeholder mapping was conducted to identify policy actors, funding partners and researchers for consultation on research priorities. Dialogue was then extended to selected policy actors and funding partners for additional consultations through key informant interviews to identify their needs and priorities.
- v) Establishing the Global Research Agenda. The priorities emerged through the analysis of the gaps and the wide consultation process were brought together by the IAB to:
  - Directly respond to evidence gaps;
  - Promote and guide policy development and policy reform;
  - Promote the development of new research methods and tools.

The Research Agenda has a limited lifespan (3 to 5 years) and should be revisited according to the progress and challenges experienced in achieving the SDG target 8.7.

## What is the Global Research Agenda?

Based on the discussion on research topics, methods and approaches and implications for policy actions summarized above, five broad themes to shape the Global Research Agenda on CL, FL, and HT have been identified. Above all, more and ethical data collection is needed, and consideration should be given to the use of existing administrative and other data to inform our understanding of these issues.

- Research on risk factors for vulnerability: social, economic, health, historical, political, or cultural dynamics and practices with influence on CL, FL, and HT on which there are still knowledge gaps.
- Assessment of what works and what does not work: research on whether and how policies, programmes and interventions are successful to prevent or eliminate CL, FL, and HT, under what circumstances and with which populations.
- Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI): make use of technology and AI in data collection, processing, and analysis.
- Monitoring and measurement: aspects related to address challenges related to sampling in the context of CL, FL, and HT (e.g., sampling of mobile, elusive or hidden populations), expanding research method, and clarifying related definitions and concepts (e.g., modern slavery, FL, HT).
- Research on economic, environmental, and social costs: research on CL, FL, and HT in specific economic sectors, including supply chains or complex global issues such as climate change and COVID 19.

For each of these themes, the table below presents the topics or research dimensions, possible research questions and the value for policy and programme response.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that some key topics can be grouped under multiple themes.

Theme	Key topics	CL	FL	Related research questions	Related policy / programme response
Risk factors for vulnerability	Migration	x	x	What are the vulnerability factors for FL and CL migrants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decent work conditions / related programmes (including targeting of specific services)</li> <li>Social protection policies</li> </ul>
	Informality	x		How does informality act as a driver for FL?	
	Demographics	x	x	How to improve prevalence studies on FL?	
	Child marriage	x		What is the relationship between child marriage and CL?	
	Ethnicity	x	x	What role does race, ethnicity or other minority status play in vulnerability to CL/FL?	
	Gender-focused policies	x	x	How can CL policies better address the gender-related vulnerabilities to CL and FL?	
	Physical and Mental Health	x		What are the long term impacts of children working in (specific) potentially hazardous types of work?	
Assessment of what works and what not	Skill development (early childhood)	x	x	What is the effect of early childhood development programmes on CL and schooling?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal commitment</li> <li>Labour recruitment practices</li> <li>Education policies</li> <li>Social protection and livelihood programmes</li> </ul>
	Awareness raising and information campaigns	x	x	What is the effect of awareness raising campaigns on policy action?	
	Vocational training	x		What is the role of technical and vocational education and training in small and medium enterprises in reducing CL?	
	Monitoring and law enforcement	x	x	How effective are labour inspectorate and other law enforcement services in reducing CL/FL?	
	Survivors of FL and TIP		x	What strategies are effective at mitigating trauma from these experiences?	
	Social protection and livelihood programmes	x	x	What kind of programmes are (the most) sustainable and effective at preventing child and families from CL and FL? What aspects of social protection and livelihood programmes (e.g., cash transfers, credit, parental work) affect CL/FL and how?	
Technology and AI	Ethical data collection	x	x	What is the impact of technology and AI in data collection in a given context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification and referral mechanisms</li> <li>Community monitoring systems</li> </ul>
Monitoring and measurement	Sampling		x	How can be the range of sampling methods be improved in FL research?	
	Methods	x	x	How can different research methods address the interlinkages between CL and FL? How can research better involve and benefit local communities?	
	Definitions and concepts (e.g., modern slavery, FL, HT)		x	How to compare findings and data collection procedures given different definitions and concepts?	
Economic, environmental, and social costs	Climate change	x	x	How does climate change influence the risk of child labour and forced labour? How does climate change modify the vulnerability factors of CL and FL?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labour recruitment</li> <li>Due diligence</li> <li>Freedom of association and collective bargaining</li> </ul>
	Supply chains	x	x	What is the role of global supply chains on CL and/or FL (taking into account broader economic structures and especially third party goods/suppliers)?	
	Specific economic sectors	x	x	What is the influence of governance mechanisms on specific sectors?	
	COVID-19	x	x	How has COVID 19 impacted the determinants of CL and FL? How has COVID 19 impacted the push/pull factors leading to CL and FL?	

## Call to Action

The Global Research Agenda offers opportunities to all stakeholders to initiate and support research addressing the identified priority areas.

To this end, all stakeholders will contribute to deepening the understanding of the root causes of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking and inform the policies needed to get back on the path toward achieving SDG target 8.7.

Within each thematic area, the authors have deliberately posed only a few core research questions with the objective of encouraging researchers, including junior researchers, to build on to address evidence gaps. The openness also allows flexibility for practitioners and researchers to fine tune research questions to meet specific priorities and needs in their fields of specialization.

The authors and contributors of this agenda invite and encourage new collaborations and innovative approaches to implement the Global Research Agenda. We also count on further financial and technical commitments to translating research into policy action and solutions to sustainable development.

## The Research to Action (RTA) project

### Using Knowledge to Accelerate Progress in the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour

The “From Research to Action: Using Knowledge to Accelerate Progress in the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour” (RTA) project centres on bridging the divide between policy research and policy action to tackle issues of forced labour, child labour and human trafficking. The primary objectives of the project are to increase access to evidence, facilitate understanding of available research and gaps, enhance capacity to provide evidence and fill gaps and promote new interest and engagement in the subject area. The RTA project is funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL).

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