

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

### **Methodologies developed for the Child Labour and Forced Labour Evidence Gap Maps (EGM)**

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#### **► Why do we need the EGMs?**

The latest Global Child Labour Estimates indicate that, despite important progress, there were still 160 million children in labour worldwide in 2020. The latest global estimates of modern slavery developed showed a total of 27.6 million persons are in situations of forced labour on any given day between 2017 and 2021. Given the hidden nature of human trafficking, there are no estimates on the prevalence of human trafficking that capture the full scope and scale of the issue.

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, adding to the challenge of addressing 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 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 necessary to achieve real progress in tackling child labour, forced labour and their root causes. However, significant information gaps still exist that hamper the design and targeting of policy responses.

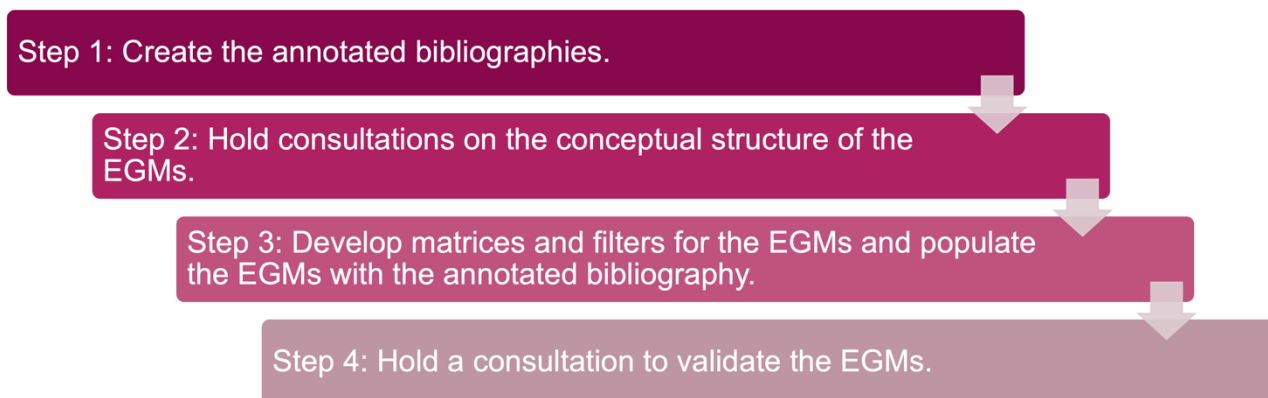
There is a need for a sound evidence base to support policy priorities and improve programming in the area of child labour and forced labour. The RTA project developed an annotated Bibliography and Evidence Gap Maps to make the relevant evidence available in an organized manner. The Bibliography and Evidence Gap Maps helped inform the broader process of identifying research gaps and articulating a Global Research Agenda.

Through multiple consultations, involving the academic community and experts from international organizations, policy actors, NGOs, country representatives and donors, the structure, and methodologies for developing the Child Labour and Forced Labour Evidence Gap Maps (EGMs) were developed.

## ► How do we develop the EGMs?

The EGMs draw on methodologies developed for systematic reviews. The process involves four steps; we i) create the annotated bibliographies, ii) hold a consultation on the conceptual structure of the EGMs, iii) develop matrices and filters with the identified research papers and reports (hereafter, records), and iv) hold a consultation to validate the EGMs. The annotated bibliography for child labour and forced labour was developed in 2019, while the one for human trafficking was developed in 2022.

Figure 1 The steps for developing the EGMs



### Step 1: Create the annotated bibliographies on child labour and forced labour

We reviewed the available evidence that can be used as the basis for policy choices to eliminate child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking. We conduct keyword searches in Google Scholar, ProQuest, ERIC, PubMed, and Web of Science – the five main citation ecosystems for academic research. Beyond the databases, we also searched keywords within a selected list of websites known to be research sources on child labour and forced labour. Please refer to Table 1 on the list of keywords and websites.

Table 1 List of keywords and websites for the annotated bibliography on child labour and forced labour

Keywords	Websites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child labor/labour</li> <li>• Child Work</li> <li>• Working Children</li> <li>• Child Employment</li> <li>• Economically Active Children</li> <li>• Forced labor/labour*</li> <li>• Debt-Bondage*</li> <li>• Forced Sexual Exploitation*</li> <li>• Human Trafficking*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BRAC</li> <li>• BREAD</li> <li>• CARE</li> <li>• Catholic Relief Services</li> <li>• Child Fund International</li> <li>• Concern Worldwide</li> <li>• Creative Associates International</li> <li>• Desarrollo y Autogestion</li> <li>• Devtech</li> <li>• DFID</li> <li>• Fair Labor Association</li> <li>• FAO</li> <li>• Free the Slaves</li> <li>• Goodweave</li> <li>• Grameen Foundation</li> <li>• Heartland Alliance International</li> <li>• ICF</li> <li>• ILO</li> <li>• Impaq International</li> <li>• International Cocoa Initiative</li> <li>• IPA</li> <li>• IRC</li> <li>• JBS International</li> <li>• JPAL</li> <li>• Management Systems International</li> <li>• Mathematica</li> <li>• MDRC</li> <li>• NBER</li> <li>• NORC</li> <li>• Oxfam</li> <li>• Partners for the Americas</li> <li>• Private Agencies Collaborating Together (PACT) Incorporated</li> <li>• Save the Children</li> <li>• Solidarity Center</li> <li>• Trickle Up</li> <li>• UCW</li> <li>• UN</li> <li>• UNHRC</li> <li>• UNICEF</li> <li>• USAID</li> <li>• USDOL</li> <li>• Verite</li> <li>• Winrock</li> <li>• World Bank</li> <li>• World Education</li> <li>• World Vision</li> </ul>

Notes: (\*) The following terms are used exclusively for the forced labour literature search: forced labor/labour, debt-bondage, forced sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. Due to the overlapping concepts between child labour and forced labour, some records appear in both EGMs.

The annotated bibliographies on child labour and forced labour include peer-reviewed papers and reports in the child labour and forced labour fields published from 2010 to 2019. The annotated bibliography on human trafficking includes peer-reviewed papers and reports published from 2010 to 2021 (see a report on the human trafficking bibliography for more information, forthcoming). Documents that are not original research are excluded. This means that literature reviews, bibliographies, and reports based on other studies are not included in the annotated bibliography. Documents that reference contexts predating 2000 are excluded. Documents that are theoretical in nature or whose primary contribution is related to theoretical modelling concerns are excluded.

Included documents were categorized by methodology, study design, and region. The methodologies are qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Qualitative research relies on numerical data. Qualitative research relies on personal accounts or interviews. Mixed methods research considers a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The study designs are descriptive, relational, or causal. Descriptive research describes the characteristics of a population. Relational research explores the relationship between two or more variables. Causal research identifies the nature and extent of cause-and-effect relationships. The 11 region options follow the ILO Subregion-Broad groups.

A total of 27,587 records were evaluated for inclusion in this literature review and a total of 614 records met the criteria for inclusion in the child labour and forced labour EGM (see Table 2). Finally, 19 records were removed (due to records being removed from the internet or duplication, e.g., when both the working paper and published paper were in the bibliography, we only included the published paper). This resulted in a total of 503 records in the Child Labour EGM and 92 records in the Forced Labour EGM.

Table 2 Sources of the records evaluated for the annotated bibliography

Source	Number of Records	Screened out by title	Excluded based on earlier search	Assessed for Eligibility	Excluded by abstract	Full text assessed	Excluded based on full text	Included
Google Scholar	8,550*	7,470	419	661	156	505	290	215
ProQuest	8,326	5,300	308	2,718	2,504	214	192	22
ERIC	846	126	120	600	496	104	101	3
PubMed	422	17	80	325	100	225	221	4
Web of Science	1,676	617	0	1,059	541	518	224	294
Website Searches	7,767	7,217	47	503	263	240	164	76

Notes: (\*) The original Google Scholar search returned more than 26,000 records. We limited the records to all those published in 2019 and all those published between 2010-2018 with at least 5 citations.

While the search and screening process is carefully designed with several quality checks, there are two main shortcomings. First, the search was conducted in English. Even though we include a few records in other languages that are cited in English works, we may have missed relevant records in other languages. We hope to perform searches in other UN languages in the future. Second, the Bibliography on child labour and forced labour is limited to publications from 2010 and 2019. As the Bibliography integrates with ILO Library's central discovery index, it allows users to explore records beyond 2019 and with other keywords when selecting 'Everything' or 'All Resources'. We hope to update the Bibliography soon.

## Step 2: Hold consultations on the conceptual structure of the EGMs

We consulted an International Advisory Board (IAB) to determine the factors and outcomes of policy interest influencing child labour and forced labour. The consultation workshops took place in April and May 2020. In

each workshop, participants were provided with the results of the annotated bibliography (from step 1) and a preliminary structure of the EGMs. The consultation workshop is the first step of a wider process to identify research gaps and priorities and ultimately develop the Global Research Agenda on child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking.

Participants were divided into breakout rooms. The main suggestions of these two workshops were:

- Revise the EGM factors and outcomes to ensure direct relevance with policy priorities.
- Consider the sustainability of the EGMs, including the possibility for users to update the EGMs when new research is available.
- Revise the filter from ‘Type of study’ to ‘Method of study’ as: descriptive, relational, and causal.

### Step 3: Develop matrices and filters for the EGMs and populate the EGMs with the annotated bibliography

The consultation workshops helped finalise the codebook used to develop the EGM matrices and filters. A total of 595 records (503 records in the child labour EGM and 92 records in the forced labour EGM) were coded in Excel. We reviewed and mapped each record to the factors and outcomes following the definitions outlined for [child labour](#) and [forced labour](#).

The complete matrix in Excel provides detailed information and analysis of all domains and how they intersect, highlighting where research does and does not exist. The matrix provides a visual and exhaustive scan of the literature from 2010 to 2019. We hope to update the annotated bibliography as more research is available. Please refer to Figure 2 for the matrices and filters in Excel.

Figure 2 An early version of the matrices and filters for the child labour (left) and forced labour (right) EGMs in Excel

Factors affecting CL, including determinants and policies		Outcomes				
		Prevalence/ incidence	Child Labour	Hazardous work	Child Work	Forms of work Children in own use production of goods
Demographics	Gender					
	Ethnicity	69	275	57	116	20
	Household structure	8	33	6	18	3
Identification and withdrawal	Identification/Referral system	44	146	34	71	14
	Withdrawal	1	12	6	4	1
		2	11	6	5	1

	Prevalence/ Incidence	Forced Labour		
		Forced Labour	Forced Labour Exploitation	Bonded labour
Gender	9	39	9	2
Ethnicity	1	11	6	2
Household structure	0	3	0	0
Identification/Referral system	1	2	1	0
Release	0	0	0	0
Legal framework	2	20	7	0
Law enforcement and monitoring	3	16	6	0

Notes: Factors affecting child labour or forced labour read from top to bottom. Outcomes are the results of child labour or forced labour discussed in each record. The outcomes read from left to right. The interaction indicates the number of records available on the effect of a factor on an outcome.

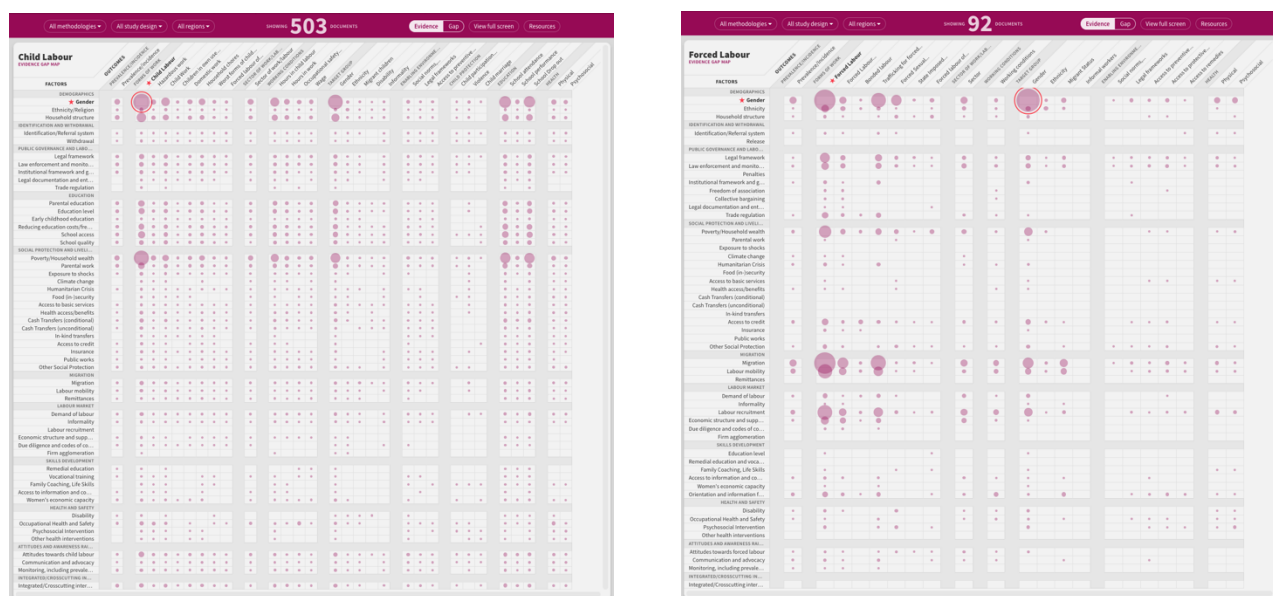
### Step 4: Hold a consultation to validate the EGMs

We consulted the IAB in January 2022 to validate the EGMs on child labour and forced labour and determine the Global Research Agenda. We shared the Excel matrices and a background document outlining the key knowledge and policy gaps (informed by the EGMs) with the IAB. These documents provided insights into the Global Research Agenda consultation process.

After the consultation workshop, we worked with ILO-ITC, the International Training Centre of the ILO, to develop a web-based relational database to connect the factors and outcomes in each EGM. The online EGMs allow users to interact with the data and to gain knowledge of evidence gaps and trends.

We also collaborated with the ILO Library to import the annotated bibliography as a reading list on a cloud-based library services platform (Alma). The annotated bibliography in Alma and the web-based relational databases are fully integrated. The primary keys between the two systems are linked, providing users with a seamless and timely experience to cross-reference between platforms. Please refer to Figure 3 for the online EGMs.

Figure 3 The latest online EGMs on child labour (left) and forced labour (right)



Notes: Similar to the Excel version, the factors read from top to bottom; the outcomes read from left to right. The interaction indicates the number of records available on the effect of a factor on an outcome. The filters are available at the top menu. When one clicks to a bubble at the intersection, a pop-up menu displays the related records.

Please refer to this [guide](#) on how to use the EGMs.

Please refer to this [page](#) to learn more about the Global Research Agenda.

## ► What are the main findings of the Child Labour EGM?

1. **There is little research on the prevalence of the phenomenon.** There is research on the prevalence of child labour, but there is a lack of research on the factors driving the child labour prevalence by economic sector or in different contexts (e.g., informal economy, rural areas, administrative regions).
2. **There is little to no research on child protection in situations of fragility and crisis.** This calls for ethical data collection and safe sharing of data.
3. **Impact evaluation, randomised control trial (RCT), and causal analysis should be prioritised.** While we record some research on education interventions, social protection measures, poverty reduction programmes, impact evaluation, RCTs, and causal analysis can inform the effectiveness and impact

of these programmes, alongside some less frequently studied areas e.g., community monitoring programmes and local enforcement practices.

4. **Multidisciplinary research is needed.** Child labour is a complex phenomenon. Approaches from different disciplines and a mix of qualitative and quantitative data can inform policy decisions.
5. **More collaboration and communication between the research and policy communities are needed.** The value added of research is limited without clear policy actions. Policy actors should be involved in the early stage of research. This can strengthen the policy-relevance of the study and ensure broader dissemination of research findings.

## ► What are the main findings of the Forced Labour EGM?

1. **There is a lack of data and research on forced labour.** When comparing the amount of research on child labour and forced labour, we find fewer data and research available on forced labour than child labour. There is some research on the labour recruitment and migration dimensions of forced labour, but much less research on areas such as protection and remedies, law and enforcement, or on how forced labour is linked to the broader challenge of informality.
2. **Prevalence studies and causal analysis should be prioritised.** There are no causal studies on forced labour. These types of studies can inform policy actions.
3. **There is a need to develop and share best practices on ethical data collection and data triangulation.** Consideration should be given to the use of existing administrative and survey data to inform our understanding of issues related to forced labour.
4. **Channels to disseminate research findings should be improved.** A centralised repository on data and research findings that is accessible to researchers, policy actors, and funding partners can greatly improve the use of research to inform policies.

## ► Call to Action

The Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7 calls on all to “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”. Policy progress towards meeting these goals depends on reliable evidence on the extent of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking as well as causal research on what can influence the prevalence of these circumstances.

The Child Labour EGM, Forced Labour EGM, and the Bibliography offer opportunities to all stakeholders to initiate and support research addressing the identified priority areas.

In this way, all stakeholders will contribute to filling the knowledge gaps deepening the understanding of the root causes of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking and informing the policies needed to get back on the path toward achieving SDG target 8.7.

We encourage researchers, including junior researchers, to address the evidence gaps. Combining with the research agendas developed under this project, we encourage practitioners and researchers from different fields of specialization to undertake studies with direct policy relevance.

The authors and contributors of the EGMs invite and encourage new collaborations and innovative approaches to strengthen the evidence base on child labour and forced labour. We also count on further financial and technical commitments to translating research into policy action and solutions for sustainable development.

## ▶ The Research to Action project (RTA) project

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

The Research to Action project centers on bridging the divide between policy research and policy action to tackle issues of child labour, forced 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).

## ▶ Acknowledgments

The RTA project thanks the International Advisory Board (IAB) for their valuable guidance through multiple consultation workshops. The IAB consists of technical experts from the ILO, international organizations, workers' and employers' organizations, USDOL, Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder countries, national statistical offices, INGOs and the research community.

## ▶ Methodologies developed for the Child Labour and Forced Labour Evidence Gap Maps (EGM)

[www.rtaproject.org](http://www.rtaproject.org)

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This product was produced under the framework of the ILO's project "From Research to Action" (RTA) (GLO/18/20/USA). Funding is provided by the United States Department of Labor under cooperative agreement number IL-32462-18-75-K. One hundred per cent of the total costs of the project is financed with Federal funds, for a total of USD 3,360,000. This material does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.