International Labour Organization

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From research to action

▶ **Nepal: National Research Agenda**

Building the evidence base for informed policy action against child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking

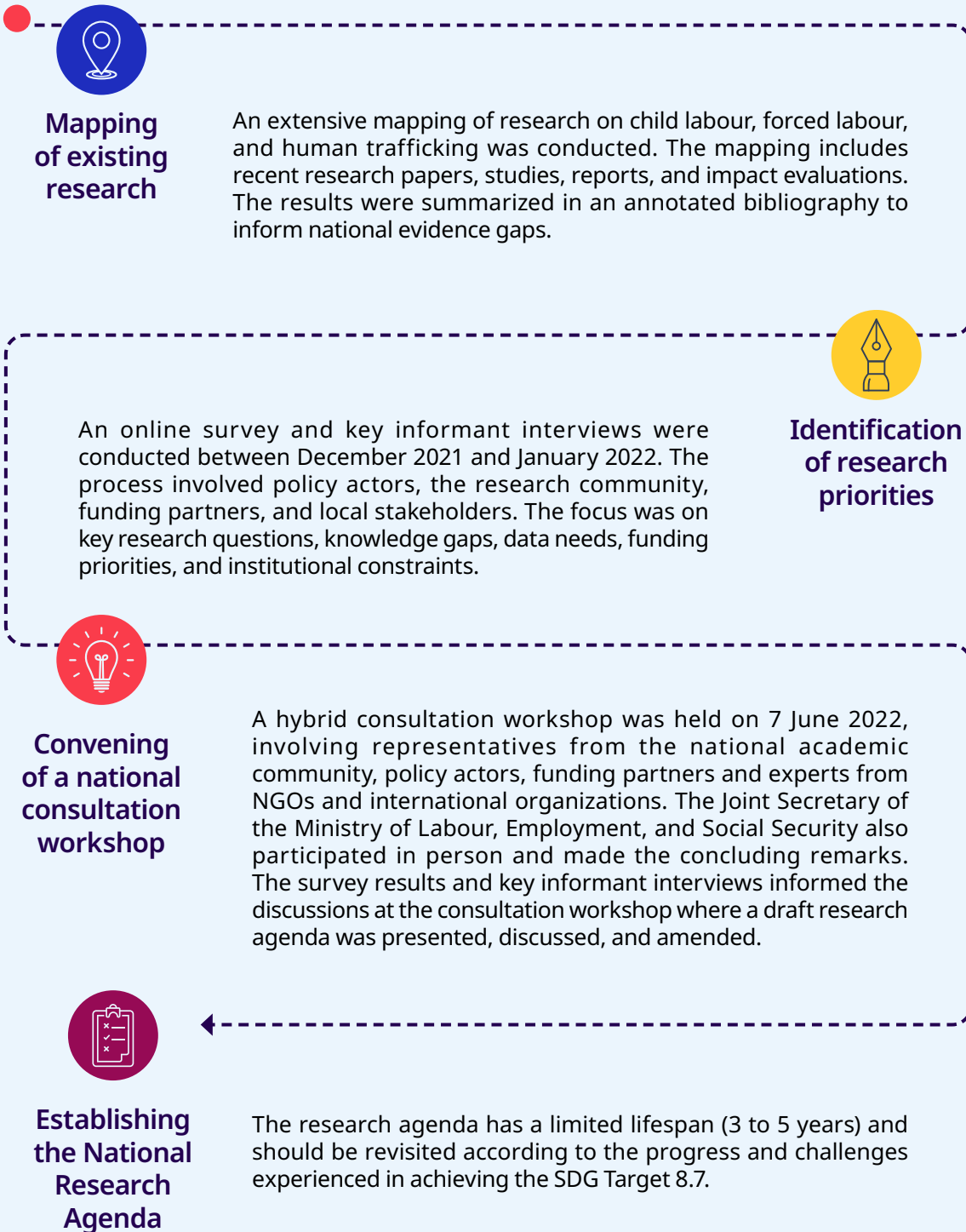# Why do we need a National Research Agenda?

Although Nepal has made moderate progress in combating child labour during the last decade, the latest 2018 National Child Labour Survey shows that there are still 1.1 million children in child labour, accounting for more than 15 percent of the 5-17 years population. There is no nationally representative data available on forced labour and human trafficking although the problem persists in Nepal.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 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). The headline figures emerging in Nepal make clear that a substantial acceleration of progress will be needed to achieve SDG Target 8.7. Moreover, the economic impact of COVID-19 are placing unprecedented strain on governments and families, the results of which may stall country efforts to address child labour and forced labour.
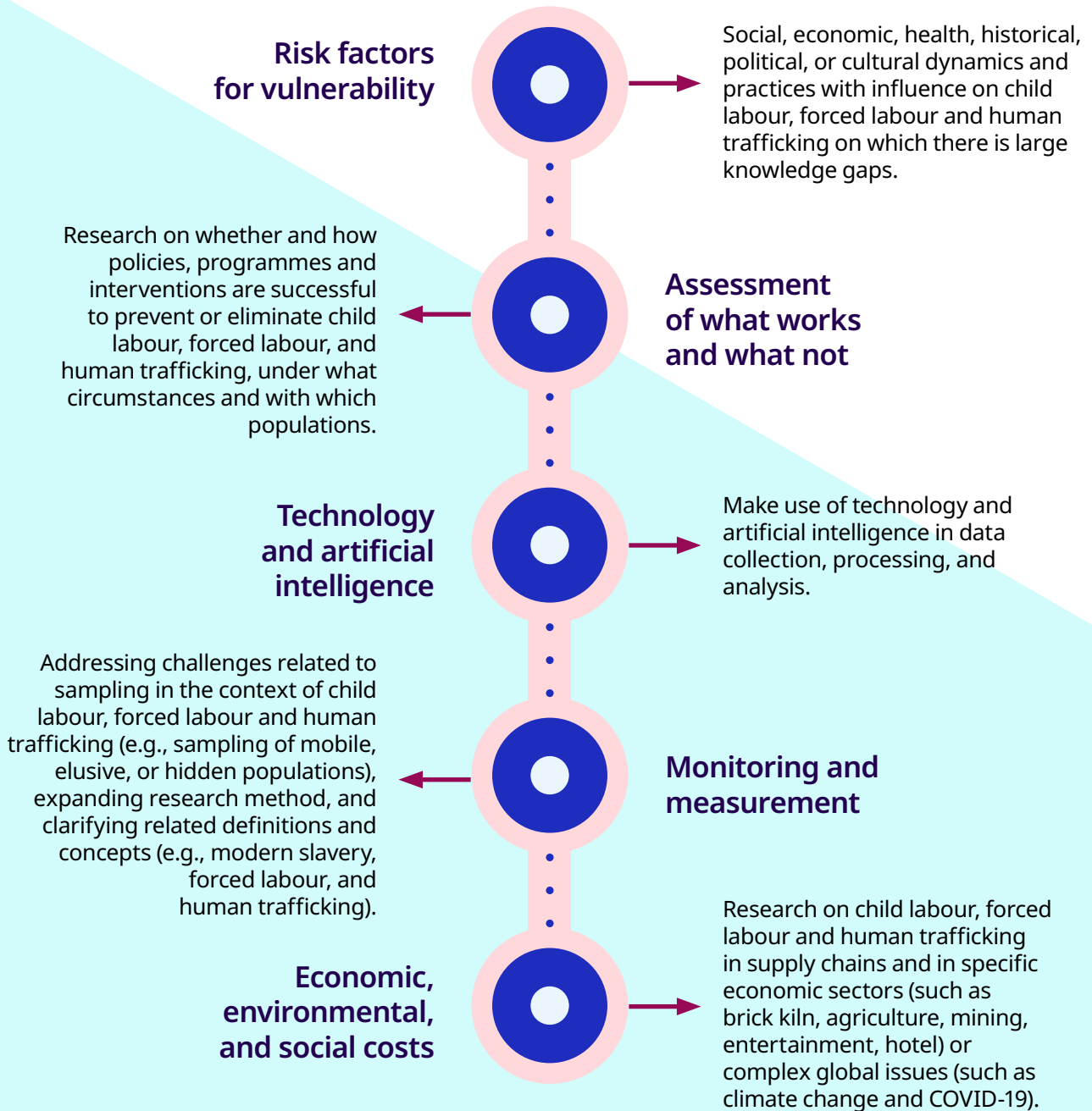
Policy choices will be critical to achieve SDG Target 8.7, and ready access to reliable evidence will be essential to informing these choices. A growing body of evidence available at international and country level, has helped increasing a better understanding of the policy mix that should be implemented to achieve real progress in tackling child labour and its root causes. However, significant gaps still exist and hamper policy development.

The identification of priority areas of research will be essential to support the policy efforts of Nepal to eliminate child labour and forced labour. It was in this light that in 2020 the ILO's "Research to Action" (RTA) project launched a process towards the development of a national research agenda. Through this participatory process, involving the academic community and experts from international organizations, policy actors, NGOs, and donors, the Nepal National Research Agenda was established.

▶ The process in Nepal

Mapping of existing research

An extensive mapping of research on child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking was conducted. The mapping includes recent research papers, studies, reports, and impact evaluations. The results were summarized in an annotated bibliography to inform national evidence gaps.

Identification of research priorities

An online survey and key informant interviews were conducted between December 2021 and January 2022. The process involved policy actors, the research community, funding partners, and local stakeholders. The focus was on key research questions, knowledge gaps, data needs, funding priorities, and institutional constraints.

Convening of a national consultation workshop

A hybrid consultation workshop was held on 7 June 2022, involving representatives from the national academic community, policy actors, funding partners and experts from NGOs and international organizations. The Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, and Social Security also participated in person and made the concluding remarks. The survey results and key informant interviews informed the discussions at the consultation workshop where a draft research agenda was presented, discussed, and amended.

Establishing the National Research Agenda

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.

▶ Five broad thematic areas

Risk factors for vulnerability

Social, economic, health, historical, political, or cultural dynamics and practices with influence on child labour, forced labour and human trafficking on which there is large knowledge gaps.

Research on whether and how policies, programmes and interventions are successful to prevent or eliminate child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking, under what circumstances and with which populations.

Assessment of what works and what not

Technology and artificial intelligence

Make use of technology and artificial intelligence in data collection, processing, and analysis.

Addressing challenges related to sampling in the context of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking (e.g., sampling of mobile, elusive, or hidden populations), expanding research method, and clarifying related definitions and concepts (e.g., modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking).

Monitoring and measurement

Economic, environmental, and social costs

Research on child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in supply chains and in specific economic sectors (such as brick kiln, agriculture, mining, entertainment, hotel) or complex global issues (such as climate change and COVID-19).

Above all, more and ethical data collection is needed. Consideration should be given to the use of existing administrative and other data to inform our understanding of these issues, especially on forced labour and human trafficking. Multi-stakeholder discussions should be held regularly.

▶ Main agenda

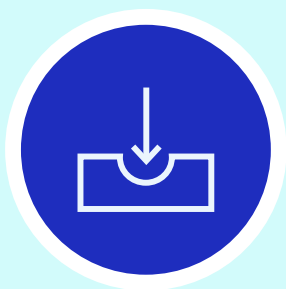| Theme	Key topics/ dimensions	Related research questions	Related policy/ programme response
Risk factors for vulnerability	Migration	What is the prevalence of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking among cross-border migrants (or within the region)?	• Decent work conditions/ related programmes (including targeting of specific services) • Social protection policies
	Informality	How does informality and poverty (multidimensional and absolute) act as a driver for child labour and forced labour?	
	Demographics	What are the characteristics of forced labour, including bonded labour?	
	Child marriage	What is the relationship between child marriage and child labour?	
	Ethnicity	What role does race, ethnicity or other minority status play in vulnerability to child labour and forced labour?	
	Gender-based/ domestic violence	What is the effectiveness of some existing programmes on women and children?	
	Physical and mental health	What are the long-term impacts of children working in (specific) potentially hazardous forms of work?	
Assessment of what works and what not	Skill development (early childhood)	What is the effectiveness of skill development/early childhood programme in reducing child labour and forced labour?	• Legal commitment • Labour recruitment practices • Education policies • Social protection and livelihood programmes
	Awareness raising and information campaigns	What is the effect of awareness raising campaigns on culturally rooted practices (e.g. Haliyah Haruwa, Charuwa) and policy action?	
	Vocational training	What is the role of technical and vocational education and training in small and medium enterprises in reducing child labour?	
	Monitoring and law enforcement	What are the challenges in programme implementation and service delivery in the elimination of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking?	
	Survivors of forced labour and human trafficking	What strategies are effective at mitigating trauma from these experiences?	
	Social protection and livelihood programmes	What kind of programmes are (the most) sustainable and effective at preventing child and families from child labour and forced labour? What aspects of social protection and livelihood programmes (e.g., cash transfers, credit, parental work) affect child labour and forced labour and how?	
Technology and artificial intelligence	Ethical data collection	What is the impact of technology and artificial intelligence in data collection in a given context?	• Identification and referral mechanisms • Community monitoring systems
Monitoring and measurement	Sampling	What is the prevalence of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking among the under-represented population?	• Identification and referral mechanisms • Community monitoring systems
	Methods	What is the monetary cost required to address child labour, forced labour and human trafficking issues in Nepal?	
	Definitions and concepts (e.g., modern slavery, forced labour, human trafficking)	How to compare findings and data collection procedures given different definitions and concepts?	

Theme	Key topics/dimensions	Related research questions	Related policy/programme response
Economic, environmental, and social costs	Climate change	How do natural disasters influence the risk of child labour and forced labour?	• Labour recruitment • Due diligence • Freedom of association and collective bargaining
	Supply chains	What is the role of global supply chains on child labour and/or forced labour (with focus on the entertainment and hotel sector)?	
	Specific economic sectors	What is the influence of governance mechanisms on specific sectors (e.g., brick kiln, agriculture, mining, entertainment, hotel)?	
	COVID-19	How has COVID-19 impacted the determinants of child labour and forced labour?	

▶ Nepal as a Pathfinder country

In November 2018, Nepal has officially expressed interested to become a Pathfinder country of the Alliance 8.7 to eliminate child labour and forced labour. The country identified 7 priorities to achieve the SDG Target 8.7. The priorities and process are outlined in the latest Pathfinder Annual Progress Report and listed below:

1. Align federal laws related to child labour with national laws by 2019 and ensure coherence between child labour policies and education laws, in terms of children's ages, to establish a coherent countrywide legal framework.

2. Establish committees for child labour inspection at the provincial and local levels, to complement workplace inspection systems.

3. Enhance monitoring capacity and establish local committees for child labour monitoring and rescue.

4. Declare 10 child labour free municipalities by 2020, to serve as example for other municipalities.

5. Revise the Foreign Employment Act of 2008, and other related acts, to eliminate loopholes that leave room for abuse.

6. Establish bilateral agreements with destination countries to formalize a shared responsibility for labour recruitment issues and to protect migrant workers.

7. Mainstream forced labour and human trafficking into regular data collection and integrate databases for an informed policy response.

▶ Call to action
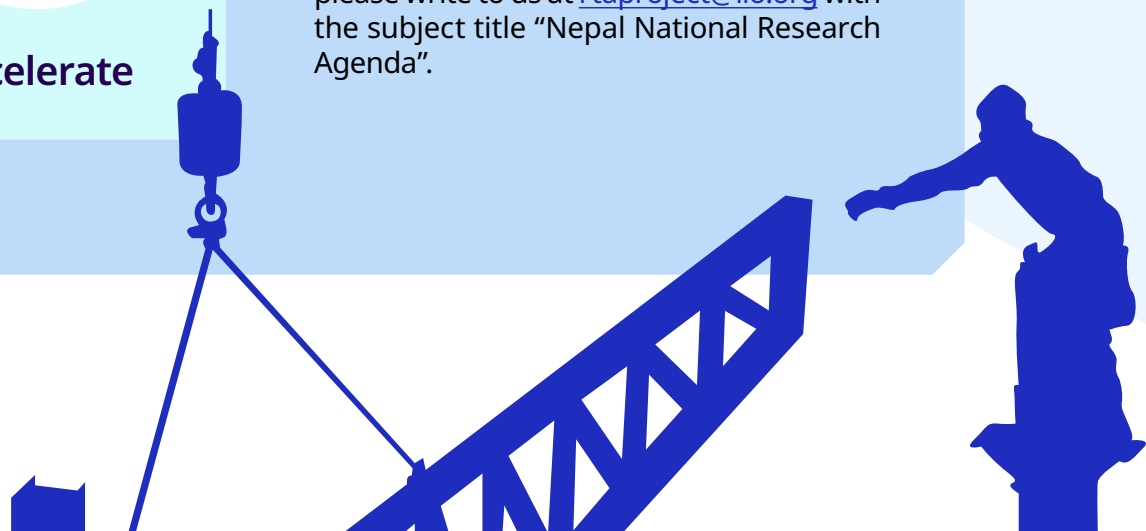
Collaborate

Innovate

Accelerate

The Nepal National 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 move towards the achievement of SDG Target 8.7.

Within each thematic area, there are 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.

We invite and encourage new collaborations and innovative approaches to implement the Nepal National Research Agenda. We also count on further financial and technical commitments to translating research into policy action and solutions to sustainable development.

We welcome your comments and feedback! If you have any suggestions and questions on the Nepal National Research Agenda, please write to us at rtaproject@ilo.org with the subject title "Nepal National Research Agenda".

▶ The "Research to Action" (RTA) project

Using knowledge to accelerate progress in the elimination of child labour and forced labour

The ILO's "Research to Action" (RTA) 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 collaborates closely with the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Protection Division. The RTA project is funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL).

▶ Acknowledgements

The RTA project thanks the Government of Nepal. The project also 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, employers' and workers' organizations, United States Department of Labor (USDOL), Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder countries, national statistical offices, INGOs and the research community.

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