

ISER statement in commemoration of World Day Against Child Labour 2026

Twenty-seven years have passed since the adoption of the International Labour Organization's [Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention](#), recognising that no child should engage into work that robs them of their health, education, safety, and future.

Yet for [an estimated 138 million children worldwide](#), that commitment remains unfulfilled. This means that at least 1 in every 5 children globally spends their day working in agricultural fields, mines, domestic labour or informal workplaces instead of classrooms or playgrounds. Agriculture remains the dominant site of child labour, accounting for 61 percent of all child labour cases among [children aged 5–17 years](#), followed by services and industry.

In Uganda, the situation remains deeply concerning. Child labour has increased from approximately 4 million children in 2020 to 6.2 million in 2024, with rural children bearing the greatest burden, according to the [national labour force survey](#). The persistence of child labour contributes to absenteeism, poor learning outcomes and early school drop-out.

It is worth noting that child labour persists not only because families are poor, but because economic systems allow profit to outweigh protection.

ISER's research, *'I must work to eat'* reveals poverty as the most immediate factor that pushes households into situations where a child's education is sacrificed to secure every day basic household needs. This pressure is compounded by limited access to quality and affordable education, unemployment and underemployment among adults, weak social protection systems, and informal and unregulated labour markets that sustain child labour even where laws prohibit it. In this context, child labour becomes an economic coping mechanism for households with few viable alternatives.

This year's commemoration theme, *"Red Card to Child Labour: Fair Play for Children, Decent Work for Adults,"* articulately points us towards the solution. Child labour cannot be eliminated in isolation from the conditions that sustain it. Children are less likely to work when adults have decent jobs, when schools are accessible and affordable, when social protection cushions families from shocks, and when labour laws are effectively enforced.

Acknowledging that the promise made to children 27 years ago remains unfulfilled and drawing inspiration from [Marrakech Global Framework for Action against Child Labour](#), ISER calls upon;

- The government of Uganda to increase investment in quality public education, expand social protection coverage and create decent employment opportunities for adults.
- Business actors must ensure that supply chains are transparent and human rights due diligence is a standard practice rather than a voluntary commitment.
- Locally, all communities must adopt a “whole-of-society” approach where every community member is a guardian of children's rights.

For more information, contact info@iser-uganda.org