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INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Enabel

COMBATING CHILD LABOUR IN UGANDA:

Lessons from Select Sub-Saharan Countries

ABRIDGED VERSION

July 2026

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1.0 Introduction

Child labour remains one of the most persistent challenges to human development in the 21st century, effectively depriving millions of children of their potential, dignity, and fundamental rights.[1] At the beginning of 2020, it was globally estimated that approximately 160 million children were engaged in child labour, with nearly half of these involved in hazardous work.[2] Compared to other regions, there are mixed results in addressing child labour in Sub – Saharan Africa. As of 2024, an estimated 87 million children in Africa are engaged in child labour, exceeding the combined total of all other regions.[3] More recent data from February 2026 indicates that in Eastern and Southern Africa alone, approximately 41 million children (nearly 1 in 5) are trapped in child labour.[4]

At the beginning of **2020**
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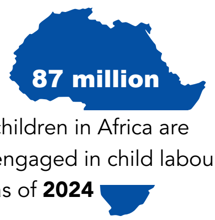
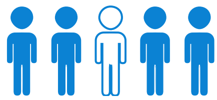


children in Africa are
engaged in child labour
as of **2024**

February **2026** indicates
41 million children
are trapped in child labour



nearly **1 in 5**

There are more children in child labour in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined, signalling a critical need for localised, evidence-based interventions. The persistence of child labour points to failure by the globe to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 8.7 that committed to end child labour by 2025. In the context of Uganda, despite the legal, policy and institutional commitments, the persistence of child labour suggests a disjuncture between law and lived realities.[5] The proportion of children involved in child labour rose from 38.5% in 2019/20 to 39.5% in 2021.[6] This is especially

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1 L Kiss et al 2023, *Violence against children and child labour in Uganda: What evidence exists? Policy Brief* p. 2 & ILO and UNICEF (2021), *Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward p.* 16.

2 Ibid.

3 Stop Child Labour *Cooperating with the private sector in child labour free zones in Africa* (2017) 8; ILO & UNICEF (n 1) 21-24.

4 UNICEF '41 million children in Eastern and Southern Africa trapped in child labour' 12 June 2021 https://www.unicef.org/esa/press-releases/41-million-children-eastern-and-southern-africa-trapped-child-labour (accessed 18 March 2026); UNICEF *Child Labour in Eastern and Southern Africa: Regional Report* (2026) 3 & 5.

5 *See*, UBOS 2022, *National labour force survey 2021: Main report*, p. xi.

6 MoGLSD 2023, *Statistical abstract 2021/2022*, P. iii

true for the agriculture[7] and extractive sectors,[8] especially in the Albertine[9] and Busoga regions.[10]

The proportion of children involved in child labour in Uganda rose from **38.5%** in 2019/20 to **39.5%** in 2021

The study largely relies on desk review of the legal and policy landscape across Sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa as well as interviews with some local government officials from Bugiri, Bugweri, Kikuube and Hoima districts. Being a comparative study, it highlights the regional strategies that are contextually appropriate to Uganda. So far, poverty, absence of free and high-quality learning, weak legal protection against child labour coupled with weak enforcement, and lack of universal social protection are regarded as the key drivers of child labour on the continent.[11]

2.0 What is Child Labour?

Both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) prohibit child labour and define it as work that perpetuates economic exploitation, hazardous and interferes with the child's education, or found harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.[12] 'Child labour' and 'child work' are different; the latter being salutary activities within a family setting intended for socialisation and skill acquisition.[13] However, when such activities interfere with school attendance or exceed specific hour thresholds they are formally classified as child labour.[14]

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[7] ILO 2012, 'Hazardous child labour in agricultural sector in Uganda', P. 2.

[8] YC Rivera 2020, Tackling child labor in artisanal gold mines in Uganda' p. 122.

[9] UBOS 2021, 'Child labour on the rise in Hoima and Kikuube districts' P. 1

[10] K Hamidu *et al* 2019, *A study on child labour and its gender dimensions in sugarcane growing in Uganda, P.* 15.

[11] ILO & UNICEF, 2025, supra.

[12] UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 32; & African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) Articles 11 & 15.

[13] OM Musah 'Communicating Child Labour Eradication to Africa against Dwindling Western Efforts at Goal Attainment' (2025) 1(6) *UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 210 & 213.

[14] As above 209-210.

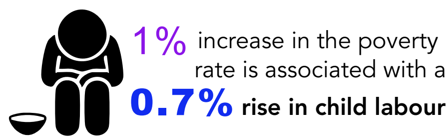
Additionally, human rights law enjoins states to allow children of certain age to work albeit in compliance with set regulations. Thus, the requirement to adopt in their respective legislations a minimum age of work; hours and conditions of employment; penalties or other sanctions for non – compliance; and functioning labour inspection and enforcement systems.[15] The minimum age for employment is fixed at not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any event, not below 15 years, subject to limited flexibility for developing states.[16] For instance, allowing an initial minimum age of 14 years.[17]

Hazardous work is strictly prohibited for anyone under the age of 18.[18] Such work includes all forms of slavery, debt bondage, forced labour (including child soldiering), and the use of children for prostitution or illicit activities.[19] This is in addition to work with exposure to physical abuse, work underground or in confined spaces, handling heavy loads, and work in unhealthy environments involving toxic substances.[20]

2.1 Major Drivers of Child Labour

The persistence of child labour in Africa is driven by a complex intersection of structural, economic, and social factors;

Widespread poverty is the fundamental economic driver of child labour.[21] Statistical estimates suggest that a 1% increase in the poverty rate is associated with a 0.7% rise



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[15] See UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *General comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights,* CRC/C/GC/16, 17 April 2013, Para 56.

[16] Minimum Age Convention 138 of 1973 Art. 3(1); Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 of 1999 Art. 3(d). See UN Human Rights Council 'Worst forms of child labour: assessing progress and persisting challenges: Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata' (10 July 2025) UN Doc A/HRC/60/28, p.3

[17] Ibid.

[18] UN Human Rights Council *Worst forms of child labour,* (n 16) 4; EV Edmonds *Defining child labour: A review of the definitions of child labour in policy research* (2008)19

[19] ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 of 1999 art 3.

[20] ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation 190 of 1999 para II(3)(a)-(e). See Edmonds (n 18) 19-20.

[21] H Liang 'A study on Africa child labour issues and recommendations' (2025) *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 824

in child labour.[22] Additionally, the education gap. Whereas many African countries have abolished primary school fees, indirect costs such as uniforms, transport, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) levies remain prohibitive.[23] Also, the poor quality of rural education leads parents to perceive farming or vocational apprenticeships as a more rational economic client model than formal schooling.[24]

Also, the informality and unregulated markets contribute to child labour on the continent. Approximately 86% of jobs in Africa are in the informal economy, which is largely beyond the reach of labour inspectors and government regulation.[25] Lastly, the impact of climate change, conflicts and diseases. Africa is home to a high share of the world's fragile and conflict-affected countries.[26] Climate-induced disasters, such as droughts and floods, frequently destroy family livelihoods, pushing children into the workforce as a negative coping mechanism. Conflict also leads to displacement and the recruitment of children into armed groups, which are among the worst forms of labour.[27]

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated child labour through two compounding mechanisms: the prolonged closure of schools, which removed the protective effect of education and school meals for millions of children; and the catastrophic loss of household income during lockdowns, which left families with no option but to turn to child labour for survival.[28] Lastly, lack of Child-Sensitive Social Protection. The weak or non-existent social protection systems leave families without a financial buffer against economic shocks.[29]

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[22] RB Frempong *Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: Empirical Evidence and New Perspectives* unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bayreuth (2019) 16 & 99.

[23] Dunne et al 2023, Education and work: Children's lives in rural sub-Saharan Africa in *Children's Work in African Agriculture* P.81 at 85.

[24] P Nyavor *The challenges and prospects of eliminating child labour in Ghana's cocoa sector: The case of Asunafo South District* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Ghana, 2021) xxiv.

[25] DI Insider 2023, Addressing child labour issue in Africa for a sustainable future,

[26] ILO and UNICEF (n 1) 27.

[27] ACERWC Secretariat *Report of the Child Rights Symposium with Regional Economic Communities, 26-27 June 2025* (2025) 14.

[28] Human Rights Watch, Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) & Friends of the Nation *'I must work to eat': Covid-19, poverty, and child labor in Ghana, Nepal, and Uganda* (26 May 2021), available at https://iser-uganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/I_Must_Work_to_Eat.pdf (accessed 11 April 2026).

[29] UNICEF & ILO The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour: Evidence review and policy implications (2022) 19

2.2 Continental Strategies and their Effectiveness

Africa has adopted several ambitious frameworks to combat these drivers, though their effectiveness varies significantly across jurisdictions.

The African Union (AU) has spearheaded the *Ten-Year Action Plan on Child Labour* (2020–2030) and integrated elimination targets into *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and Agenda 2040.*[30] These frameworks emphasise a 'whole-of-society' approach, linking child protection to universal education and social protection.[31] Regional Economic Blocks such as ECOWAS, SADC, and IGAD have established regional action plans and codes of conduct to harmonise legal standards across borders.[32] For example, IGAD recently adopted a child protection framework that includes meaningful child participation in policy design.[33] The Child Labour Free Zones (CLFZs) model, supported by coalitions like Stop Child Labour, focuses on area-based elimination regardless of the sector.[34] A notable success is the West Nile CLFZ in Uganda, where collaboration between teacher unions, NGOs, and private coffee companies returned 500 children to school within two years.[35]

Increasingly, Multi-National Companies (MNCs) are being engaged through Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS) and National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights (NAP – BHR) require them to eliminate child labour in their supply chains.[36] This is strengthening corporate accountability. However, these remain largely 'policy enclaves' focused on export-oriented supply chains (like cocoa and coffee), often failing to address the broader community welfare or the informal sector.[37]

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[30] African Union Commission *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want – framework document* (2015) 87 & 157.

[31] Africa Tripartite Regional Consultation on Child Labour, *Final Report: In Preparation of the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour (Morocco, 2026)* (2025) 2.

[32] Stop Child Labour (n 3) 22; ACERWC Secretariat (n 27) 6-7.

[33] ACERWC Secretariat (n 27) 14.

[34] Stop Child Labour (n 3) 10 & 12.

[35] Stop Child Labour (n 3) 34.

[36] J Engelbertink & A Kolk 2021, 'Multinational Enterprises and child labour: Insights from supply-chain initiatives in different sectors' *Journal of Modern Slavery: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Human Trafficking Solutions,* Vol. 6(4) PP. 94-95; & Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development *The National Action Plan on Business And Human Rights* (2021) 20.

[37] Abdulkareem et al 2021, 'Reflecting on the trend of child labour in South Africa' *African Journal of Democracy and Governance,* Vol 8(12) P. 74.

Despite these efforts, institutional effectiveness is frequently hampered by an 'enforcement gap.'[38] Furthermore, cultural tensions persist; Western-centric definitions of child rights are sometimes viewed as foreign concepts that clash with traditional social maturity norms.[39]

3.0 Uganda 

In Uganda, a child is any person below the age of 18 years.[40] Article 34(4) of the Constitution protects children from social and economic exploitation and prohibits their employment in work that is hazardous and interferes with their education, or harms their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. However, Article 34 (5) makes an exception to sixteen years for the purposes of light employment. Equally, the Children Act, with its best interest principle of the child, also prohibits harmful employment; the Employment Act provides for the working hours of children 12-13 years for light work under the supervision of an adult;[41] the Education Act provides for compulsory primary education for all children that have attained the age of six years;[42] and the Occupational Safety and Health Act provides for protection from hazardous materials.[43] Uganda is also party to and has ratified the key international instruments that define global standards for child protection.[44]

However, there are gaps. Firstly, the Education Act mandates school attendance until age 12 (completion of primary school).[45] This creates a three-year gap where children are neither required to be in school nor legally permitted to work, often pushing them into the unregulated informal sector.[46]

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38 Liang (n 21) 824.

39 MM Hoque 'Reviewing child labour and its worst forms: Contemporary theoretical and policy agenda' (2021) 32 - 34.

40 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995 Art 257(c).

41 Children Act, Cap 62, Section 3 and Employment Act, Cap 226, Section 31.

42 Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act, Cap 247, Section 11(3).

43 Occupational Safety and Health Act, Cap 231, Sections 82-93.

44 ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age) was ratified March 25, 2003; ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) was rratified June 21, 2001; the UN CRC was signed Aug 17,1990 & ratified Sept 16, 1990; African Charter on the Rights & Welfare of the Child was signed Feb 16, 1992 & ratified Aug 17, 1994.

45 E Njieassam 'Child labour in artisanal and small-scale gold mines in Uganda: are legal protections adequate?' (2023) 67(1) *Journal of African Law* 54

46 Uganda Bureau of Statistics & Understanding Children's Work (UCW) Programme *Understanding children's work and youth employment outcomes in Uganda* (2014) 20

Secondly, many minimum age protections do not apply to children working without a formal employment relationship, leaving the vast majority of children in subsistence agriculture and domestic service without legal recourse. Thirdly, despite the country's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR) acknowledging child labour as a major issue especially in the agriculture, domestic services, and extractive industry (especially artisanal and small-scale mining) value chains, it did not adopt specific and effective actions towards addressing the root causes of child labour.[47]

Fourthly, enforcement is split between the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) and district local governments. Worse still, District Labour Officers report to local authorities rather than the central Ministry. Resultantly, coordination and reporting are frequently broken. Furthermore, there are limited labour inspectors.[48]

56%
of children live in multidimensional poverty

Besides, structural poverty remains a significant predictor, as 56% of children live in multidimensional poverty and are often forced to work to meet basic needs.[49] The HIV/AIDS epidemic has also left a legacy of orphanhood and child-headed households where survival depends on premature entry into the workforce.[50] Additionally, The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these vulnerabilities, as school closures and income losses pushed more children toward hazardous work.[51]

Additionally, the cost of education and cultural norms that view agricultural work as traditional socialisation rather than exploitation continue to fuel the crisis.[52] Consequently, the uneducated child labourers become unskilled adult workers who, in turn, are forced to rely on their own children's labour to meet subsistence needs.[53] Yet research indicates that once a child enters paid employment, it becomes increasingly difficult to reintegrate them into the formal classroom.[54]

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47 MoGLSD 2021, the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, p. 20.

48 C Labor 'Prevalence and sectoral distribution of child labor' (2018) 5 *Institute for Statistics* 6.

49 ILO 'Child labour in Uganda: The case of joining forces' (2024) 2, available at https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/child-labour-uganda-case-joining-forces (accessed 16 February 2026); T Mwebaze *Extent and determinants of child labour in Uganda* (2007) 22

50 D Haguma *Child labour and the wellbeing of children: the law and practice in Uganda* (2013) 3 & 33.

51 Human Rights Watch et al, supra n 28

52 ILO (n 49) 2

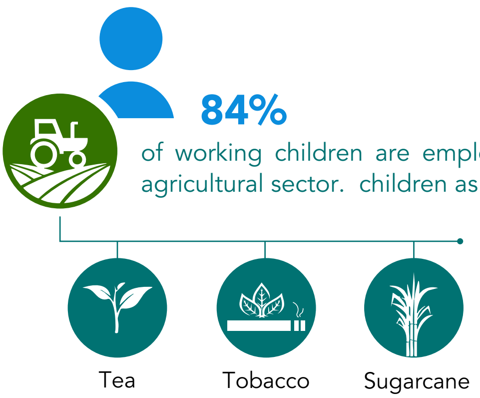
53 Mwebaze (n 49) 5.

54 ILO and UNICEF (n 1) 62.

3.1 The situation in the Busoga subregion and the Albertine region

The Busoga subregion, which is composed of 11 districts and one city accounts for up to 45% of children from poor households involved in work.[55] The subregion is characterized by labour-intensive economic activities that drive high demand for underage workers, particularly in sugarcane and rice plantations.[56] Furthermore, the subregion hosts artisanal gold mining sites where children are exposed to mercury and other hazardous conditions.

The Albertine region, covering 8 districts and one city also faces a severe child labour crisis, with a reported prevalence of 26% in Masindi alone.[57] Agriculture accounts for 84% of working children in this region,[58] with a specific focus on tobacco, sugarcane and tea cultivation. In the tobacco sector, children as young as 12 are involved in preparing land and harvesting, exposing them to harmful tobacco fumes and respiratory risks.[59] Those in the tea sector perform strenuous tasks such as carrying loads up to 24 kilograms and are at risk of pesticide exposure and snake bites.[60] Others are involved in the extractive sector, specifically stone quarrying and sand mining, where children work long hours with dangerous tools.[61]



[55] R Luwangula *Final Evaluation of 'Eradicating Child Labour in Uganda' Project: Final Report* (2023) vi; Terre des Hommes (n 18) 2.

[56] Luwangula above 11& 38.

[57] Masindi District Local Government *The District Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour* (2023) 4 & 9.

[58] Masindi (n 57) 9 & 15.

[59] Masindi (n 57) 42-43.

[60] Masindi (n 57) 43.

[61] Masindi (n 57) 4.

3.2 Uganda's efforts to end child labour! Are they effective?

Uganda has adopted several strategies such as the National Child Labour Policy (2006) and the Second National Action Plan (NAP II 2020–2025), which aim to reduce child labour to 4% by 2025 but this has not been achieved[62] due to the following reasons;

The inefficiency of poverty alleviation programs. Uganda's economy is largely agrarian with 33.1% of the households engaged in subsistence production.[63] Despite the implementation of several poverty alleviation programs over the years, the poverty levels remain high.[64] Approximately, 27% of the households live in multidimensional poverty with deprivation in basic needs like health, and education.[65] With such conditions, households are pushed to engage children in child labour for their survival.[66]

27%
the households live in multidimensional poverty

Low levels of social protection coverage. Despite the high poverty levels, the social security coverage is still low. For instance, the government is currently implementing the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) program that provides a monthly paltry grant of Uganda Shillings Twenty-Five Thousand Shillings (UGX 25,000) to vulnerable older persons aged 80years and above, thus covering a small section of the population.[67]

The government's SAGE programme provides a monthly grant of
UGX 25,000
to persons aged
80 years and above

Subsidised universal primary and secondary education (UPE and USE) programs window dressed as free primary and secondary education. The implementation of UPE and USE has boosted school enrolment, but their effectiveness is limited by high dropout rates and

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62 UBOS & UCW (n 46) 82-83; US Department of Labor *2023 Findings on the worst forms of child labor: Uganda* (2024) P. 5.

63 UBOS 2024: The National Population and Housing Census 2024; Final Report, Volume 1 (Main), Kampala, Uganda, P. 281.

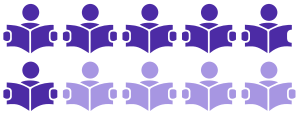
64 See Simon, Wakwale & Oloba, Joseph. (2025). Government Poverty Alleviation Programs and Poverty Reduction in Uganda: Evidence from Mbale District. International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies. 5. 591-601. 10.62225/2583049X.2025.5.6.5245.

65 UBOS 2026: Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024, Kampala

66 Human Rights Watch *et al* 2021, "I Must Work to Eat" Covid-19, Poverty, & Child Labor in Ghana, Nepal, & Uganda.

67 UBOS & UCW (n 46) 87; Masindi (n 57) 4.

a primary completion rate of only 52.7%.[68] This is due to limited infrastructure, staffing and operation funds that force school administrators to charge non-tuition fees.[69] Unfortunately, this is contributing to school dropout especially among children from poor backgrounds. It has been reported by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics that 6 out of 10 learners are dropping out of school due to high education costs.[70]



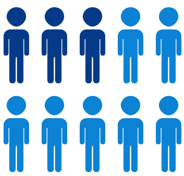
6 out of 10 of the learners who drop out of school attribute their dropping out to education costs.

Weak enforcement of laws and policies. In compliance with international human rights obligations, Uganda has enacted laws that provide for; (a) a minimum age for admission to employment; (b) appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment; and (c) penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of these provisions.[71] Additionally, there is a persistent enforcement-implementation gap, where the government fails to provide operational funding for labour inspectorates, leaving the informal, mining and agricultural sectors largely unmonitored.

4.0 Comparative Review of Other Jurisdictions

4.1 Kenya 

3 out of every **10** children in Kenya are engaged in work for survival



In Kenya, agriculture remains the cornerstone of the economy while the extractive sector is still growing.[72] The largely agrarian economy has implications on the country's labour force. For instance, 3 out of every 10 children in Kenya are

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[68] S Tuna 2013, *The concept of child labour and its protection by child labour laws* (Unpublished LLB dissertation, Kampala International University, P. 3.

[69] National Planning Authority (2018), *Comprehensive Evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy Thematic Report 5: Financing and Costing of UPE,* Kampala; & Auditor General's Value for Money Audit Report on UPE for the Year 2023.

[70] UBOS, 2021. *Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. Kampala, Uganda; UBOS,* p. 29 accessed on April 11, 2026.

[71] See the Employment Act and the Attendant Regulations

[72] See Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) 2024. Kenya Census of Agriculture Pilot Report For 2024/2025. Nairobi, Kenya; & Ministry of Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs, Kenya Mining Investment Handbook, p. 17.

engaged in work for survival.[73] Many children are engaged in physically demanding and, at times, hazardous activities, risking their exposure to toxic substances, agricultural chemicals, and dangerous tools. This is not to say that the Kenyan government has not taken any action to eradicate child labour. For instance, the 2024 interstate partnership with Uganda and Malawi to address child labour in the tea plantations by training of prosecutors on child protection practice, and the trial of child trafficking cases among others. However, child labour still persists.

Similar to Uganda, the persistence of child labour in Kenya is driven by an intersection of poverty, educational opportunity costs, pandemics, climate change and cultural norms. Poverty remains the primary driver; as noted in the *luxury axiom,*[74] parents often only withdraw children from school when household income falls below a survival threshold.[75] In 2022, approximately 38.6% of the population lived below the poverty line, with 40.3% of children residing in poor households.[76] For these families, a child's income is not a choice but a 'survival imperative.'[77]

4.2 Ghana 

In February 1990, Ghana became the first country to ratify the CRC, committing to adopt the convention into national law.[86] Ghana's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture, which accounts for a major portion of its gross domestic product, with the cocoa industry being a primary contributor.[87] Other vital economic activities include fishing, and mining,

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[73] Terre des Hommes *Kenya Factsheet 2025* (2025) P. 3

[74] AB Osaiyuwu 2023, *Exploring Child Labour: An Examination of Child Trading in Nigeria* PhD thesis, Anglia Ruskin University, PP. 29 - 30 & 42.

[75] A Githitho-Muriithi 2010, Education for all and child labour in Kenya: A conflict of capabilities? P. 2 Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 4613; Ministry of Labour and Social Protection *National action plan for the elimination of child labour 2024-2028* (2024) 12

[76] *National policy on the elimination of child labour* (27 January 2025) 10-11

[77] Ministry of Labour (n 78) 12.

[78] UNICEF Ghana 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' https://www.unicef.org/ghana/convention-rights-child (accessed 19 March 2026). CRC was adopted by States on 20th November 1989, Ghana signed it on January 29th 1990 and would later ratify it a week later.

[79] A Ansong & KS Agomor (2024), 'Exploring legal and non-legal approaches to eliminating child labor in the cocoa industry in Ghana' *Journal of Legal Studies,* Vol. 33(47) P. 2; RA Aglagoh *The legal framework for the protection of victims of the worst forms of child labour in agriculture in Ghana: A human rights based approach* (2024) 13.

specifically for gold.[80] Like other African countries, it also struggles with high levels of poverty and inequality, especially in rural areas, and a large informal sector that lacks robust productivity and job security.[81] Earlier surveys, such as the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 (2014) and Round 7 (2020), indicated a slight increase in the incidence of child labour among children aged 7-14, from 28.8% to 29.2%.[82]

Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 (2014) and Round 7 (2020)

slight increase in child labour incidence among children aged **7-14**

29.2%

28.8%

Similar to the jurisdictions discussed above, poverty is the single most significant economic driver; it is the 'tree trunk.'[83] Socio-culturally, the norm of informal apprenticeship plays a vital role.[84] Many parents believe that involving children in family occupations like fishing or cocoa farming early in life - sometimes as young as five - is a traditional form of schooling.[85] Furthermore, social factors such as unplanned parenthood and the resulting inability to provide for numerous children often lead families to send children to work in order to supplement household income.[86]

4.3 South Africa 

Approximately 5 out of every 100 children in South Africa are classified as being engaged in child labour.[87] Between 2010 and 2019, the number of children engaged in child labour declined by approximately 210,000 and in percentage terms it reduced from 7.04% in 2010 to 5.02% in the same period.[88]

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80 AF Hammond & C Dowuona-Hammond (2025), 'A review of the legal, policy and institutional framework on child labour in Ghana' *African Human Rights Law Journal*, Vol. 25, P. 200-201.

81 T Crabbe, Forest Trends & FERN (2020), *Child Labour Laws and Policies in Ghana with Specific Emphasis on the Cocoa Sector*, P. 5.

82 Hammond (n 80) 199; Aglagoh (n 79) 13.

83 Ansong (n 79) 2.

84 Ansong (n 79) 11

85 Aglagoh (n 79) 13 & 128; Ansong above.

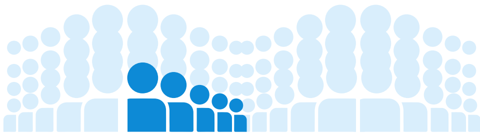
86 Ansong (n 79) 12-13.

87 D Yu *et al*, 'Examining child labour activities in South Africa' (2025) 54 *Child & Youth Care Forum* 1338 & 1352.

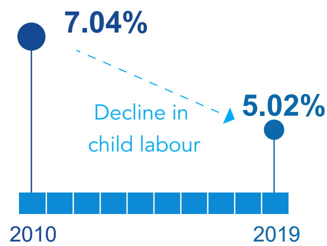
88 Yu et al P. 1338 & 1352.

Similarly, household poverty is still a primary determinant, compelling families to engage children in child labour.[89] Relatedly, high rates of adult unemployment and severe income inequality also push families to utilise children in work in seek for basic needs like food.[90]

The HIV/AIDS pandemic exacerbated child vulnerability by increasing the prevalence of child-headed households and orphans, who end up in the labour market at an early age.[91] Additionally, social norms regarding informal apprenticeship influence the decision-making of parents, particularly in rural areas to involve their children in work that is not fit for their age.[92]



5 out of every 100 children in South Africa are classified as being engaged in child labour



Comparative Lessons for Elimination of Child Labour for Uganda from Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa

Area	Kenya	Ghana	South Africa
Education policy	Free Primary Education (FPE) introduced in 2003; Implementing 100% Transition Policy from primary to secondary; ministerial fee guidelines regulate non-tuition charges.	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education + Free Senior High School; Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP).	No-fees policy that covers 81% of poorest primary schools in the county; compulsory schooling to Grade 9/age 15; free education for orphans, conditional, partial or exemption policies for parents who cannot afford school fees in schools that charge fees, school meals in public schools.

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[89] Yu et al (n 87) 1341. *See* DV Veeran (2003), 'Combating child labour – A South African challenge' *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, Vol. 39(1), P. 15.

[90] *See* D Budlender & D Bosch (2002), *South Africa: Child domestic workers: A national report*, P. 15.

[91] Thévenon O and Edmonds E (2019), 'Child labour: Causes, consequences and policies to tackle it' *OECD Social, Employment, and Migration Working Papers No 235* 56; Yu et al (n 96) 1338.

[92] Abdullah et al (2022), 'Social norms and family child labor: A systematic literature review' *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Vol. 19*(7), P. 9.

Area	Kenya	Ghana	South Africa
Cash transfers	Cash Transfers to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) covering over 440,000 households with KShs 2,000 per month leading to 12% reduction in on-farm child labour; increased secondary enrolment in beneficiary households.	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP): provides bi-monthly cash transfers (GHS 64-106/ household); soft conditions on school enrolment and no involvement of children in child labour are part of the conditions to benefit from LEAP.	Child Support Grant reaching over 13m children by providing R580 per child per month; Old Age Pension of older persons starting from 60 years and above. These two programs have increased school attendance and reduced child labour in recipient households.
Legal protections	Children Act 2022 & Employment Act: set minimum age 13 (light work), 16 (industry); night work prohibited for all children.	Children's Act set minimum age 15 (general), 13 (light work), 18 (hazardous).	Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) prohibits employment of any child under 15 years or still in subject to compulsory schooling. In 2013, BCEA was amended to cover children working in informal/ uncontracted workers; Occupational Health & Safety Act contain provisions that protect health & safety of children lawfully permitted to work.
Corporate accountability	NAP-BHR considers mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) for companies; 2024 interstate partnership (Uganda, Kenya, Malawi) on tea plantations.	National Steering Committee on Child Labour (NSCCL) and the Child Labour Coordinating Secretariat coordinates cross-sector enforcement and reporting.	Child Labour Action Program (CLPA) coordinates multi-department enforcement; targeted ILO/ Department of Labour inspections in KwaZulu – Natal (KZN) and Western Cape.
Labour inspectorate	Child labour committees in key counties; the 2024 interstate collaboration on	In 2023, Inspectors were increased from 48 to 179 leading to more	Targeted area-based enforcement; training of community organisations and public officials.

Area	Kenya	Ghana	South Africa
	elimination of child labour in tea plantations between Kenya, Uganda & Malawi.	worksite inspections and convictions.	
Child Labour Free Zones	Community committees in Kwale, Kajiado, Mombasa, Nairobi.	Child Labour Free Zones (CLFZs) in cocoa and galamsey zones; community monitoring model.	Not a primary strategy; sector-based enforcement preferred.
OVC support	Presidential Secondary School Bursary (KShs 1.35M per constituency, 290 constituencies); CT-OVC for poorest households.	LEAP offers cash transfers every two months to vulnerable households; GSFP school feeding.	Child Support Grant; no-fee policy includes full orphan exemption from all school fees. Conditional, partial or full exemption for some parents who cannot afford.
Key lesson for Uganda	Regulate all school fees (not just tuition); expand OVC bursary; scale CT-OVC model with government funding.	LEAP model for SAGE reform; CLFZs replicable; build shock-responsive social protection; strengthen enforcement beyond single-commodity focus.	Extend legal protections to informal/uncontracted workers; implement no-fee model with orphan exemptions; expand CSG-style cash transfers.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The elimination of child labour in Uganda requires a shift from fragmented, piecemeal interventions toward a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach. The following targeted recommendations are addressed to specific duty-bearers.

5.1 MoGLSD

i. Establish an Information Management System tracking employer compliance with employment, health, and safety standards, enabling strategic deployment of limited enforcement personnel.

ii. Integrate District Labour Offices into a centralised reporting structure, providing institutional backing to enforce compliance, particularly against high-influence local corporate actors.

iii. Amend the Employment (Employment of Children) Regulations 2012 to extend protections to children working without formal contracts – modelled on South Africa's 2013 BCEA amendment – closing the loophole most exploited in subsistence agriculture and domestic service.

5.2 MoGLSD and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED)

i. Implement the Cabinet resolution reducing SAGE eligibility from age 80 to 65 years, directly aligning the programme with Uganda's national life expectancy of 68.2 years.

ii. Pilot universal, child sensitive cash transfers targeted at primary caregivers of children, modelled on Kenya's CT-OVC and South Africa's Child Support Grant, as essential buffers against uninsured shocks in flood-prone Busoga and drought-affected Albertine.

iii. Significantly increase funding for District Labour Offices. The current ratio of 180 inspectors for 18 million workers is functionally equivalent to no oversight.

5.3 Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and Parliament

i. Review the Companies Act and introduce mandatory human rights due diligence obligations for companies, particularly large-scale plantations and extractive sector operators, requiring transparent periodic human rights reviews covering full supply and value chains.

5.4 Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and Parliament

i. Amend the Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act to fund and provide for genuinely free and compulsory basic education and explicitly prohibit the employment of children of compulsory school-going age.

ii. Issue binding regulations for all school charges – both tuition and non-tuition – modelled on Kenya's ministerial fee guidelines, to prevent the cost-driven dropout that is a primary driver of child labour.

5.5 MoES, MoFPED and Parliament

i. Increase the capitation grant allocation to UPE and USE schools to at least the National Planning Authority's recommended threshold.

ii. Recruit and deploy sufficient teachers in UPE and USE schools.

iii. Provide sufficient instrunction materials and infrustracturein UPE and USE schools.

iv. Implement a universal, government-funded school feeding programme across all UPE and USE schools, serving as both a nutritional intervention and attendance incentive.

5.6 District Local Governments especially the labour and education offices

i. Sensitize the communities on the difference between child work and child labour and its dangers to children and society in general.

ii. Routinely monitor and inspect work places especially plantations and mines to ensure that children are not engaged in child labour.

iii. Arrest and prosecute culprits of child labour in the courts of law to act as example to the rest of the society.

iv. Undertake effective monitoring and supervision of UPE and USE schools to ensure that children attend school regularly.

v. Coordinate with SMCs and Local Council leadership to ensure that parents who withdraw their children out of school and engage them in child are brought to book.

5.7 Business entities

i. Establish due diligence mechanisms for elimination of human rights abuses such as child labour in their respective supply chains.

5.8 Community Leaders, Households, and Civil Society

i. Challenge social norms that view child labour as traditional socialisation. Empower communities to identify and report invisible forms of exploitation, including hidden domestic servitude and artisanal mining.

ii. Promote the meaningful participation of children as agents of change through school clubs, youth councils, and advocacy platforms.

iii. Undertake continued awareness creation to enable the communities understand the difference between child work and child labour.

iv. Target the root causes of gender inequality, specifically the disproportionate burden of household chores placed on children, which reinforces underinvestment in their education and perpetuates cycles of poverty.

v. Support parents/ guardians that are willing to act against persons that engage their children in child labour with litigation costs or even leading them to the responsible government offices.

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