

Terre des Hommes warns of a dramatic increase in child labour as a result of the Corona pandemic.

On the occasion of the World Day against Child Labour, Terre des Hommes issues a warning that the Corona pandemic will lead to a dramatic increase in child labour. For millions of children, the pandemic means hunger, exploitation and the end of educational opportunities.

Even before the Corona pandemic:

- **Children were disproportionately affected by poverty, with 386 million children living with under 1.90 US dollars per day. Children and adolescents under the age of 18 make up a third of the world's population, but 48 percent of the people living in poverty.**
- **According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 152 million children worldwide are involved in child labour, 73 million of them in one of the worst forms of child labour (such as slavery, bonded labour, dangerous work, sexual exploitation).**
- **263 million girls and boys of school age worldwide were unable to attend school.**

Although there is still no global overview of the number of children who have to work during and after the lockdowns, the United Nations estimates that an additional 66 million children are at risk of extreme poverty as a result of the Corona pandemic.²

Terre des Hommes warns that the economic crisis resulting from the Corona pandemic will force several million children worldwide into exploitative working conditions.

Children who are already disadvantaged are particularly at risk: poor and neglected children, street children, girls, refugee children and children of migrants, children in crisis regions and children without parental care.

Terre des Hommes partner organisations are reporting a visible increase in child labour in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In large cities there are more children who are begging. On plantations and farms, school-age children work with their parents and sell vegetables or fruit in the streets. In the Philippines, the demand for children are forced into sexual exploitation online is increasing. Europol reports that overall the demand for child sexual abuse material on the internet has increased since the beginning of the lockdowns.

Loss of educational opportunities leads to exploitation of children

According to UNESCO, 1.5 billion students in 188 countries were unable to attend school during lockdowns in May. The school closures acutely contribute to malnutrition and hunger as many children are losing the most important and often only daily meal. According to the World Food Programme, at least 365 million children are currently affected.

- **It is feared that in poorer countries many girls and boys will completely lose their connection to education and will not return to school at all, as they have to contribute to the family income or the families can no longer afford to attend school.**
- **Children from poor families who live in areas without electricity or who cannot afford computers and internet connections, have no opportunity to continue to learn during a lockdown and fear that they will lose their access to education.**
- **Schools and programmes for children, such as protection centres or youth centres, are also currently failing in their function as early warning systems. The pandemic has effectively hidden from sight occurrences of domestic violence in families as well as attempts by employment agencies or moneylenders to recruit children as workers. Terre des Hommes partner organisations report from India and Zimbabwe that more and more children - girls and boys alike - are running away from home and living on the streets where they are at risk of exploitation.**



Loss of income plunges families into extreme poverty: The example of India

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India has the highest number of child workers (in absolute figures). According to estimates by the Indian Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL), 40 million children were working before the outbreak of the Corona pandemic.

The lockdown has hit day labourers and migrant workers particularly hard - and thus a large majority of the population.

- **90 percent of Indian workers are employed in the informal sector and they work without a contract or social security. Most of them are daily wagers without any safety net, who work far away from home in agriculture or on construction sites. In addition, millions of workers from factories were dismissed with the lockdown and often outstanding wages were no longer paid.²**
- **After only a few days of lockdown, families were starving. Although the Indian government has started a programme for the distribution of food many in need families were left behind. If families are registered in their place of birth but work in another state they have no right to state aid. Particularly discriminated groups, such as so-called "caste-less" communities in the countryside, the hundreds of thousands of homeless people and "sidewalkers" in the big cities received no help.**
- **Already in the first weeks of the lockdown, school children all over India started to work selling fruit or vegetables, work in households or in the fields.**
- **Terre des Hommes partner organisations report that families impoverished by unemployment are increasingly borrowing money to buy food or pay rent. Money lenders speculate with the need, demand excessively high interest rates and target people who are not only extremely poor but also belong to a discriminated group. 99 percent of the population who live in debt bondage or other forms of modern slavery are members of the so-called lower castes or caste-less (Dalits). If families cannot pay as expected, the moneylenders demand that a family member work off the debts, often this is a child.³**

Terre des Hommes demands that national governments, the European Union and the international community give priority to the needs of children in their Corona aid programmes.



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- **The opening of schools after the lockdowns should be accompanied by nationwide reintegration campaigns to prevent children from dropping out of school.**
- **Food or direct aid to families in need is indispensable in the acute phase and to prevent negative medium and long-term consequences, such as child labour.**
- **Local authorities must work with farms in the formal and informal sectors to end the occurrence of child labour. Internationally operating companies must also be particularly vigilant in scrutinising their supply chains to detect and end child labour. Terre des Hommes encourages companies not to immediately leave areas and production sites where child labour have been identified in their supply chains but - instead - to engage actively to improve the situation.**
- **The EU and its Member States are currently negotiating the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) regulation. The upcoming German EU Presidency should take a leading role in being vocal to ensure that the interests of children are to be given high consideration when this fund is allocated. Investments in the key services for children, for example in health and nutrition, education and protection against violence is particularly effective.**
- **In view of the medium-term consequences of the crisis, long-term and structure-building development measures must not be scaled back. Social security and education systems must be strengthened.**

Children from India and Zimbabwe report on their situation:

*all names are changed

Shackman, 18 years, Zimbabwe

“ When I woke up this morning, I cried. It’s very difficult with us. I see many children, even very small ones, selling something on the street now: vegetables, some onions. They carry little baskets on their heads and offer their goods. They have to be very careful, because the police chase away everyone on the street, including children. Some policemen even beat them. But we have to eat something, the children need the money. I don’t understand many parents: they send their children on the street to earn a little money. Why don’t they go themselves? Another problem is that in many families there is beating. Now children have nowhere to go, the school cannot help, nobody. I know five girls who ran away from home in the last few weeks. They live on the street, they have to beg. I’m afraid they have to sell themselves to men. ”

Tim, 17 years, Zimbabwe

“ We are now in our sixth week of lockdown. I don’t mind being at home in itself. But what scares me is that my grandma hardly eats at all anymore. We’re running out of food and money. She won’t eat anything. How can I hope for a better future when not even the next meal is safe? I have to go and fetch water every day, it takes almost six hours! The community cannot keep up the water supply, not a drop comes out of the water cranes. We still have a few wells, but you can imagine how full it is there, a big crowd. Six hours of queuing every day. We have no choice but to take the risk. I’m afraid I’ll get infected. Every day my future prospects get worse: I go to high school and learn math and science: physics, chemistry. It’s quite demanding and I have to learn a lot. So far, I have been going to the school library. I can’t afford books. And I can’t afford internet or a mobile phone either. We don’t even have electricity at home, it’s far too expensive for us. That’s why I can’t get information for school from the internet. The school library is closed. There is nothing I can do! How am I supposed to get back into class? What we need is water, food and access to the library! ”

Ritu, 12 years, housemaid, India (Davanagere in the state of Karnataka, 250 km northwest of Bangalore, population approx. 435,000)

Ritu has been working as a maid since the beginning of the lockdown. Until then, she and her two brothers went to the public school in their slum area. Her father got the family through as a garbage collector but food was always scarce. Since the lockdown on March 23, the schools have been closed and Ritu’s father is not allowed to work. Already two days after the lockdown the family had neither money nor supplies. Ritu’s father has found employment for his daughter with a middle class family. She washes, rinses and cleans for them daily and earns 1,000 rupees a month, the equivalent of about 12 euros. This work is illegal, both because of the curfew and because young people in India are not allowed to work until the age of 14. Since Ritu’s family neither owns books nor can afford electricity or an internet connection, Ritu cannot study, even if she had the strength to do so in the evening after work.

“ My parents always sent my brothers and me to school. We hoped that we would get a better job one day. I don’t know if I can go back to school, ” says Ritu.

Ravi, age 12, construction worker, India

Ravi's mother is a cleaning lady; the father is a garbage collector. The family lives in a poor district of the city of Devanagere in the state of Karnataka in India. Ravi went to the sixth grade of the public school in his neighbourhood. Since the lockdown he has been working on a construction site, which is illegal both because of the curfew and the ban on child labour. But only a few days after the curfew began on 23 March, all the family's money was spent. Neither parent can work because of the curfew. The family has debts which they had to take out to pay a doctor's bill - there is no health insurance for garbage collectors and cleaning ladies. Now they cannot pay the instalments. The moneylender has already asked if Ravi will work off the debts. The boy brings 250 rupees' home from the construction site every day, about 3 euros. That is just enough for food.

“ I want to go back to school. I want to study. But how are we going to pay the debt? We'll probably have to borrow more money to pay the rent. And then they charge more interest. ”

Anamika and her three primary school age children, farm workers, India

Anamika lives with her husband and three children in a village in the Kushinagar district of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The family belongs to the Mushari minority, a group considered to be casteless. The Mushari were nomads who lived on cattle breeding. Today, the approximately 10,000 families in Kushinagar are settled but do not own land. Anamika is in her mid-20s, she does not know exactly, because her birth was not registered. She works as a day labourer on a big farm, her husband works on building sites, also as a day labourer.

“ We have done everything so that our children can go to school. Now they have to cooperate if we don't want to starve, ” Anamika says desperately. Like all Mushari families, Anamika had nothing to eat a few days after the lockdown on March 23. The construction site where her husband worked is closed.

“ We could start on a big farm. They pay daily, but much less than usual. Just enough to feed us once a day. They know we have no other choice. ” They pick vegetables and watermelons and load the harvest onto trucks. The three children went to primary school. Now they all work together.

“ We won't make it otherwise ”, says Anamika. She wants to avoid at all costs that the family has to borrow money. Because she knows that moneylenders charge high interest rates. Interest that they could never pay.

“ I want my children to go back to school when the lockdown is lifted. I have worked all my life for this! But I don't know if we can do it. ”

Of the 10,000 Mushari families in Kushinagar district, 4,000 are currently working on large farms with their children.

Annex

1. Children whose parents work in the informal sector - as street vendors, housemaids, garbage collectors, construction or farm workers - are particularly affected during the global lockdowns. Worldwide, 2 billion people work in the informal sector without any social security such as health or unemployment insurance. According to estimates by the International Labour Organization, 1.6 billion people in the informal sector lost their income in May 2020 because they were unable to work due to lockdowns. In emerging and developing countries, up to 95 percent of people work in the informal sector.

2. This occurred, for example, at one of the world's largest textile locations, the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu with 3.2 million employees.

3. While illegal since 1976, this system still exists in practice. It is estimated that 8 million adults and children in India work in a form of slavery such as debt bondage, forced labour or the so-called "Sumangali system" with temporary work, forced and child marriages. Children who work off their family's debts slave away in households, in brickworks, on building sites and in agriculture. Since their minimum wage is never enough, the "debts" grow constantly and the children have no chance to escape this vicious circle.



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