

## **TDHIF Policy Paper on Child Labour**

**Terre des Hommes works towards the abolition of the worst forms of child labour and to the creation of fruitful life prospects for children involved in these forms of labour across the world pursuant to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).**

### **What is child work and child labour?**

In its fight against child labour, Terre des Hommes makes a distinction between child work and child labour to serve the best interests of the child in line with article 3(1) of the CRC, and gives top priority to eradicating the latter. Child work refers to the participation of children in any paid or unpaid economic activity, or activities to support families and family caregivers, which does not have negative impact on their health, social, mental and physical development. It is light work for a limited amount of hours, according to their age and abilities, that doesn't interfere with a child's education or leisure activities.

On the contrary, child labour refers to all forms of work that jeopardize a child's physical, mental, educational or social development, such as slavery, sexual exploitation and hazardous work.

### **Legal framework and international commitments**

The international legal framework on child labour includes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the communications procedure for child rights violations. ILO Convention No. 138 (1973) establishes that the minimum age for work should not be below the age for finishing compulsory education and in any case not under 15. ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) defines the worst forms of child labour which include hazardous work, slavery, child trafficking, serfdom, forced labour and sexual exploitation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

### **Key facts:**

- 152 million children aged 5-17 years are involved in child labour worldwide. About 73 million of them are carrying out hazardous forms of labour. Modern slavery is a reality for more than 10 million children.
- Children often suffer from severe consequences of labour including health impacts, injury and death, violence and abuse and negative impacts on their psychological and physical development.
- In contrast to child labour, light forms of work can help children develop skills in addition to those they develop through school education.
- Child labour remains concentrated primarily in agriculture (70.9 per cent). Almost one in five child labourers work in the services sector (17.1 per cent) while 11.9 per cent of child labourers work in industry. Thousands of child domestic workers are hidden within households, working long hours for little or no pay, living in abusive situations, without regular contact with their family.

- Poverty, family struggle, economic hardship, lack of decent work opportunities as well as unsafe migration, displacement, war, environmental degradation and climate change or social norms are among the root causes for children's work and labour.
- The transition from school to work as well as having access to decent work opportunities for youth are a major challenge. More than 64 million youth are unemployed worldwide and 145 million young workers live in poverty.
- So far, working children's own perspective is often neglected in national and global policy debates although they have the right to be heard in all matters affecting their lives (Art. 12 CRC).

### **Terre des Hommes' approach**

Terre des Hommes addresses child labour and its worst forms with an integrated approach consisting of policy influencing activities, awareness-raising, creating decent alternatives for children and prevention, targeting all stakeholders involved including businesses and offering direct assistance to victims of child labour and exploitation. Terre des Hommes strives for an immediate improvement of labour standards, the regulation of working hours and living wages for adolescents to decrease the direct danger for a child's health and development.

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. Trade measures should therefore always be combined with poverty reduction strategies, social and economic development aid, alternatives for child labourers and their families and the enforcement of labour laws and decent wages for adult workers. Terre des Hommes does not believe that a boycott of products made with child labour can be a solution for abolishing child labour. A ban will not change any of the social and economic needs, which compel children to enter employment.

### **Key recommendations**

- 1.** Strive to end the worst forms of child labour and to withdraw children from the worst forms is the highest priority, in a coherent way that meets their aspirations.
- 2.** Support the participation of child workers in efforts to end the worst forms of child labour, ensuring their involvement as actors and advocates at the heart of all interventions.
- 3.** Adopt a holistic view and multi-dimensional approach. This means looking at a pattern of child labour and carefully identifying what works for working children – girls and boys - in a given and specific context. The key question to ask is: What makes the lives of children better and ends exploitation in a sustainable way? This question should be answered in the best interests of the child (Art. 3 CRC). A multi-dimensional approach requires for example providing access to inclusive, equitable and quality education, strengthening labour rights, living wages and social protection systems.
- 4.** Cooperate with all stakeholders contributing to ending the worst forms of child labour. To end patterns of exploitation, the importance of strong cooperation, coordination and joint activities cannot be underestimated.