



ADDRESSING DRIVERS OF THE DEMAND FOR CHILD LABOR IN ETHIOPIA

A Call to Action

Background

Slavery still exists in today's modern world. It is a growing global challenge with serious repercussions on the well-being of the victims. From the estimated 40 million people in modern slavery, 25 million are those under labor exploitation. Children, defined by the Ethiopian law as those under the age of 18, constitute a significant proportion (1/4) of those underage labor and sexual exploitation. According to the 2018 report by the National Statistical Agency of Ethiopia and ILO, the country's estimated 71.0 percent of all children aged 5 to 17 years were engaged in household chores within their households. Besides, Ethiopia is one of the sources, transit, and destination countries for trafficking (both internal and external). The same report also indicates that Children in Ethiopia are victims of the worst form of child labor, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, and illicit activities, in particular the production and trafficking of drugs. This policy brief proposes policy orientations and tangible actionable strategies to combat drivers of the demand for child labor in Ethiopia based on recent research.

Research Overview

As part of the "Combating Modern Slavery (CMS) Ethiopia, 2021-2023" project, Woord en Daad commissioned research on the "Drivers of the Demand for Child Labor: A Case Study of Addis Ababa, Hosana and Wolaita" between September and October 2021. Through fieldwork and interview of several brokers, employers, and victims (child laborers), the study generated evidence for factors that drive child labor on the demand side (i.e., why employers need young workers), impacts of previous interventions, and policy recommendations for mitigating child labor in the future.

Key Findings

- They are obedient and submissive to their employers
- There are fewer turnovers with underage laborers
- Underage workers are less violent towards their employers
- They are more flexible and can easily learn a language and other skills.
- Which areas of business are young workers preferred for? Young workers are more preferred for tea rooms, breakfast houses, hotels & restaurants, jebena bunna/street coffee vending, household work, waitressing, and "hulegeb" or mixed service. Yet, there are also some downsides with young laborers: child laborers have limited knowledge of cleaning and hygiene and they are less dependable to care for infants.
- From the research participants (brokers, employers, and victims), brokers have most frequently reported receiving multiple awareness creation events or meetings with government or non government organizations. Employers and victims who took part in this research have not taken part in any awareness creation activities. Yet regardless of the training, all categories of research participants (brokers, employers, and victims) admitted that they know child labor is illegal, but still, it is fine to practice it and the legal enforcement environment is loose or corrupt.
- Many informants (excluding the victims) even questioned the law itself that prohibits child labor in Ethiopia's context. They argued it is good for child laborers to work, or they would become street beggars. As long as they had no opportunity to go to school or make their living with their parents, it is good for them to work. This claim generalizes that poverty is the only driver of child labor. The view of informants does not consider social attitudes that are also responsible for child labor, proving that previous interventions have little impact in changing such attitudes.

- Why do employers need child laborers?
- Child laborers are less paid compared to those who have attained the legal age

Policy recommendations: What should be done in the future?

- 1. Poverty alleviation:** Poverty influences not only the supply side of child labor but also the demand. Employers demand child laborers for their small business and household labor because their business is small as well to employ qualified workers of age or, even when they can pay, they prefer to exploit young workers with a low wage. Poverty on the supply side reinforces child labor on the demand side as well. Creating poverty alleviation mechanisms by supporting children to stay in school is important, such as income diversification of the household.
- 2. Family planning:** Many households normally have a family size larger than their household economy can support. Boys and girls who are “excess” to the family were forced to leave their households so exposed to employers who take advantage of their problems. Government and non-government actors need to encourage households to have a better family planning uptake. According to the country’s statistical agency report in 2017, Ethiopia’s fertility rate ranges from 7 children per woman in the Somali region to 1.8 children for Addis Ababa, 4.4 for the Southern Region of Ethiopia where this research was conducted, and 4.6 country average. Ethiopia’s population policy may need to limit legally the number of children directly (which is lacking currently) or use indirect mechanisms such as strong interventions to change high attitudes towards many children.
- 3. Changing attitudes:** Regardless of any training or any awareness creation opportunities the actors have taken previously, all informants admitted they know child labor is illegal. Yet, they practice it. So what kind of awareness creation intervention can bring change? First, interventions that focus on value change should be prioritized. Knowledge alone is not

enough to stop the problem, but there must be a change in values that do not encourage child labor. Second, research participants who said they have previous experiences of receiving awareness creation interventions did not appreciate the training they received. Those offered by government organs are just meeting-like, delivered in a big hall for many brokers. The training by NGOs is done because such organizations have to do their job, i.e., training for training’s sake. There need to be more innovative and impactful approaches to awareness creation.

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- 4. More stakeholders and strong coordination:** Interventions were also not inclusive of all actors. Government organizations directly concerned with this activity (social and labor affairs offices, the police, justice office, and the court), churches, schools, and transport service providers should also be engaged to fight child labor. For instance, transport service providers could work either by rejecting underage passengers or they can report to the legal bodies at destinations. Having more stakeholders alone does not bring results; there should be a strong coordination and platform.
- 5. Fight corruption in law enforcement:** Even though the concerned government bodies (labor affairs office and police) regulate informal child trafficking, the problem is still rampant. The regulatory mechanism is not strong, and the research found that brokers can easily bribe individuals in charge of such activities. A clear violation of the law is even skipped as inspection officers are bribed. So, corruption in this area of underage labor should be at least minimized.

6. **Expand labor inspection authorities' mandate:** Besides, inspection activities need not be limited to only visiting employment agency (broker) offices. The inspectors may be authorized to check valid employment contracts, inspect the age of employees when it appears to be doubtful of one's legal age, and have access to businesses and households to inspect child labor.
7. **Schooling opportunities for domestic workers:** The labor law for the domestic household workers is currently silent (so, employing underage domestic household workers, known in Amharic as yebetserategna, is not a crime in Ethiopia). Besides, there must be an obligation by the employers, for example, to create a schooling opportunity for domestic child laborers. Currently, one of the major criteria employers use to recruit domestic child laborers is that the latter do not go to school.
8. **Address grey area in the labor law:** From the above follows that there is a grey area and ambiguity between child work and child labor in the law. Brokers and employers use this grey area to continue practicing child labor. Thus, the law must put a clear demarcation between child work and child labor.

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Conclusion

- Despite the law and several interventions by government or non-government organizations to combat child labor in Ethiopia, the problem persists. An attempt to combat child labor in Ethiopia can be undermined unless the demand side of the problem is also addressed.
- Addressing the demand side has to focus on the long-term and short-term measures. Long-term measures should focus on poverty alleviation, addressing grey areas in the law, family planning, and changing values, while immediate measures should include effective intervention mechanisms and include all actors that have the potential to influence the fights against in demand for child labor.



Norad



**Woord
en Daad**

Contact Us

**Addis Ababa University
Main Campus at Sidist Kilo
P.o.box: 31971
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia**

**Email: info@ossrea.net
Website: www.ossrea.net
Tel: +251-1-11239484
Fax: +251-1-11223921**