

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD LABOR PREVENTION  
IN INDUSTRIAL - CONSTRUCTION SECTOR  
(Case study in Ha Noi)**

**Authors:**

- Ph.D. Nguyen Thi Thanh Thuy - Vietnam Women's Academy (VWA)  
Email: thuy6690@gmail.com**
- Ph.D. Candidate. Tran Thị Thanh Huyen - University of Languages & International  
Studies, Hanoi National University (ULIS, HNU)  
Email: huyenapa2010@gmail.com**
- M.A. Dinh Thi Nguyet - National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA)  
Email: dinhnguyetllcs@gmail.com**

**Background**

Since the beginning of 2020, under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many fields have been severely affected, leading to an increase in poverty, which in turn also leads to an increase in child labor in the field of construction, especially in Vietnam's big cities. The second National Survey on Child Labor (2018) in Vietnam has shown that there are nearly 520,000 child laborers working in heavy, hazardous and dangerous jobs, which can affect health, safety and morals of children. Child labor working in hazardous environment can often be seen in the industrial and construction sectors. The number of hours from underage workers in heavy and hazardous jobs tends to be high, with 40.6% of children in this group working more than 40 hours a week (ILO, MOLISA, GSO, 2018). In addition to children's health and safety risks, the negative effects of enrolling in the economy on children's academic pathway are also considered when compared with the national average school attendance rate. The percentage is 94.4% in the country, whereas only half of the child laborers are able to attend school, this figure is only 38.6% in the group of child laborers who do hazardous and dangerous jobs (ILO, MOLISA, GSO, 2018).

The process of urbanization and industrialization is taking place strongly from rural to urban areas, and as a result, there is a large number of child laborers participating in this phenomenon. Coupled with the impact of COVID-19, the prevention of child labor in the industry-construction sector has also been significantly affected. In this article, the authors use document analysis, expert interview and sociological investigation methods (with 30 of child laborers in the construction field in Hanoi) to analyze the impacts of COVID-19 on the prevention of child labor in the construction sector in Hanoi.

## 1. Legal regulations on child and child labor protection in Vietnam

Vietnam is the first country in Asia and the second in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on February 20, 1990. Vietnam has also ratified two basic ILO Conventions related to child labor: The Minimum Age Convention (Convention 138, 1973) and the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (Convention 182, 1999). Vietnam has actively domesticated the provisions of international law. Up to now, the national legal system on child protection and care has been relatively complete, ensuring the consistency, synchronism and harmony with international law, creating a comprehensive legal corridor for children. to deal with children's problems, including those related to child labor.

The Vietnamese Party and State have consistent views and policies on ensuring children's rights, which is clearly and transparently reflected in the Party's documents and the State's Constitution.

The first State's Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1946 recognized the children's rights, which is "*Children shall receive support in their Education.*" (Article 14). The consistent view on child protection and care is reflected throughout the 1959, 1980, 1992 and revised constitutions in 2013. Article 37 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates that "*Children enjoy protection, care and education by the State, family and society and are allowed to participate in children's affairs. Infringement, persecution, maltreatment, abandonment, abuse and exploitation of labor and other forms of violating children's rights are strictly prohibited.*" (Vietnam National Assembly, 2013)

The 2016 Children's Law mentioned: "*A child is a human being below the age of 16*" (Article 1) and "*Children have the right to be protected, in any form, from the labor exploitation. They must not work when they are under the working age and they must not work overtime or do arduous, harmful or dangerous works as regulated by the law. They are protected from being forced to do jobs or arranged in working places that cause adverse influence on their personality and comprehensive development.*" (Article 26) (Vietnam National Assembly, 2016). Thus, exploitation of child labor is a violation of the law.

The 2019 Labor Law stated that: "*A minor employee is an employee under 18 years of age*" (Article 143) (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019), "*Minor employees may only do works that are suitable for their health in order to ensure their physical health, mental health and personality development*" (Article 144) (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019). Article 146 of the Labor Law also stipulates the working time for people under 15 years old: "*The working hours of minor employees under 15 shall not exceed 04 hours per day and 20 hours per week. Employers must not request minor employees to work overtime or at night*" (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019); for persons aged from 15 to under 18 years old, the Law stated that "*The working hours of employees aged 15 to under 18 shall not exceed 08 hours per day and 40 hours per week.*"

*Employees aged 15 to under 18 may work overtime or at night in certain works and jobs listed by the Minister of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs”*( Vietnam National Assembly, 2019). The Law also implies that *“A person aged 15 to under 18 must not be assigned to the following locations: Underwater, underground, in caves, in tunnels; Construction sites; Slaughter houses; Casinos, bars, discotheques, karaoke rooms, hotels, hostels, ...”* (Article 147) (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019)

Circular 09/2020/TT-BLĐTBXH stated in the use of under 15 laborers: *“Conducting a written labor contract with a person under 15 years of age and his/her legal representative”* (Minister of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2020). It is also stated in the circular that: *“Only recruit and employ people from 13 years old to under 15 years old to do light work”* and *“Under 13 years old children must not be employed, with the exception of performing arts, physical training and sports activities that do not harm the physical, intellectual and personality development of persons under the age of 13 and must be approved by the Minister of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs”*. (Minister of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2020)

Thus, up to now, the Vietnamese legal system has quite clear and basic provisions on children, children's rights, children's protection obligations as well as child labor. These regulations ensure consistency, synchronization and harmony with international law, creating a comprehensive legal corridor to solve children's problems, including those related to child labor prevention and reduction child labor.

## **2. Child labor’s prevention and reduction program in the period 2016-2020**

In addition to perfecting the legal system in the prevention and reduction of child labor, the State also has other social security assurance programs, such as policies to support poverty reduction, localities in extremely difficult areas; subsidy policy for orphans, disabled children, and wandering children, who are raised in social protection establishments; the policy of providing compulsory education, the policy of tuition fee exemption and reduction, the provision of free health insurance... The State provides for tax exemption for vocational training institutions dedicated to helpless orphans. For children with disabilities, these centers are also supported with mandatory facilities, equipment and teaching facilities, as well as teachers’ training, and receive loans with low and preferential interest rates. These policies have contributed to preventing and limiting the problem of child labor in Vietnam. In the period of 2016-2020, the programs concentrated on supporting children and families with children in poverty reduction and access to education. Some programs are:

- Child labor prevention and reduction program the period 2016-2020 (according to Decision No. 1023/QĐ-TTg, dated June 7, 2016) with the goal of effectively implementing the prevention and reduction of child labor. Children at risk and children who work against the

law are detected, intervened and supported in a timely manner to integrate into the community and have opportunities for development.

- Project to support children with disabilities to access protection, care and education services in the community for the period 2018-2025 (according to Decision No. 1438/QĐ-TTg, dated October 29, 2018) with the goal to 2015; children with disabilities have access to care and protection services in the community to integrate into society and have the opportunity to fully realize their rights.
- The Preschool Education Development Project for the period 2018-2025 (according to Decision 1677/QĐ-TTg, dated December 3, 2018) has the goal of strengthening and developing the network of preschools and classes suitable to socio-economic conditions of the locality, meeting the children's education needs, in the pathway of standardization, modernization, socialization and international integration. Diversify methods, improve the quality of child rearing, care and education towards meeting regional and international quality standards of preschool education; consolidate, maintain and improve the quality of preschool education generalization for 5-year-old children, well-prepare children for primary school; develop preschool education for children under 5 years old.
- Project on mobilizing social resources to support children in extremely difficult communes in ethnic and minority areas in the period of 2019-2025 (according to Decision No. 588/QĐ-TTg, dated May 17, 2019) with the aim of improving the health status of children through medical examination and treatment, supporting nutritious meals for preschool and primary school children, assisting participation in cultural, entertainment and recreational activities, providing warm clothes for children.
- Resolution No. 121/2020/QH14 of the National Assembly, dated June 19, 2020, on strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of law and policies implementation on child abuse prevention.
- Directive No. 23/CT-TTg, dated May 26, 2020, on strengthening solutions to ensure the implementation of children's rights and protection.
- Decision No. 1472/QĐ-TTg, dated September 28, 2020, on issuing the Plan for the implementation of Resolution No. 121/2020/QH14, dated June 19, 2020, on continuing the effective and efficient implementation of the laws and policies on child abuse prevention and control.
- Decision No. 23/QĐ-TTg, dated January 7, 2021 on issuing the National Action Program for Children for the period 2021-2030 (including the contents integration of the Child

Protection Program and the Program to promote the children's right to participate in their problem).

### **3. Current status of child labor in Vietnam's industry - construction sector through the results of the national survey on child labor 2012-2018**

Vietnam has undergone two national surveys on child labor: The first (2012) and the second (2018) were conducted by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the General Statistics Office with the assistance of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Survey results show that, in 2018, an estimated 9.1% of children aged 5-17 across the country (more than 1.75 million) participated in economic activities, of which 5.3% were children. (more than 1 million) are children's laborers. This rate is 2% lower than the average rate for the Asia and Pacific region.

Child labor includes work that physically and mentally harms children, hinders access to education and negatively impacts children's development. The 2018 survey collected information from 29,192 children between the ages of 5 and 17. Child labor in two national surveys was identified as "*Children engaged in heavy, hazardous and dangerous work, jobs prohibited by national law, and bad forms of child labor*" under the convention 182 of the International Labor Organization. At the same time, based on children's age and length of working time to determine child labor with other jobs, specifically as follows: (i) Children from 5 to under 13 years old participate in economic activities 1 hour or more a day, or 5 hours or more a week for any performing arts and gifted athlete work that falls under the category of employing people under 13 years of age specified in Circular No. 11/2013/TT-BLĐTBXH, dated June 11, 2013; (ii) Children aged from 13 to under 15 years old engage in economic activities for 4 hours or more a day or 20 hours or more a week; (iii) Children aged 15-17 are engaged in economic activity for 8 hours or more a day or 40 hours or more a week.

Aligned with the global trend, the 2018 survey on child labor shows that 84% of child laborers in Vietnam are concentrated in rural areas, and more than half of them work in agriculture, forestry and fishery. Other areas with high numbers of child laborers include: services, industry and construction. About 40.5% of child laborers are unpaid household workers.

One issue of concern that the survey revealed is that there are nearly 520,000 child laborers engaged in heavy, hazardous and dangerous jobs that pose a risk of harm to children's health, safety and morals. Child laborers do hazardous jobs often found in the industrial and construction sectors. The number of hours worked by child laborers in heavy and hazardous jobs tends to be high, with 40.6% of children in this group working more than 40 hours a week.

In addition to children's health and safety potential risks, the survey highlighted the negative effects of economic participation on children's school attendance. Specifically, as children's participation in economic activities increases, the percentage of children attending school decreases. Compared with the national average school attendance rate of 94.4%, only half of child laborers go to school,

and this figure is even lower in the group of child laborers who do heavy and hazardous work, with only 38.6%. However, the 2018 survey data shows that the trend has improved positively, as the school attendance rate of children participating in labor has increased to 20% compared to 2012.

**a. Child labor sorted by regions and types of work**

Results from the national survey on child labor show that there are 1,031,944 child laborers nationwide, of which 5.4% of them are aged 5-17. In urban areas, the percentage of child laborers is 4% lower than in rural areas. Of the total number of child laborers, nearly 59% are boys and over 41% are girls.

**Table 1: Child labor sorted by regions (Unit: Percentage)**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Children aged 5-17</b>	<b>Children aged 5-17 in economic activities</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>5-12</b>	<b>13-14</b>	<b>15-17</b>
Nationwide	1.031.944	5,4	58,8	59,0	41,0	30,8	18,0	51,2
Urban areas	161.621	2,6	61,6	57,5	42,5	20,2	15,2	64,6
Rural areas	870.323	6,6	58,3	59,3	40,7	32,7	18,5	48,8

(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

It is estimated that over 43% of child laborers are household workers, and 31.7% of paid workers. However, there are still 198,505 children, accounting for 19.2%, working in self-sufficient work. Child labor sorted by sex shows that statistics of boys are higher than that of girls: paid work nearly twice as high, household work and other forms of unspecified work are 16% higher. Only in the form of self-sufficient work, the rate of girls is more than 4% higher than that of boys.

**Table 2: Child labor sorted by types of work (Unit: Percentage)**

<b>Types of work</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>5-12</b>	<b>13-14</b>	<b>15-17</b>
Nationwide	<b>1.031.944</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>59,0</b>	<b>41,0</b>	<b>30,8</b>	<b>18,0</b>	<b>51,2</b>
Paid work	327.624	31,7	66,2	33,8	3,5	15,0	81,5
Self-sufficient work	198.505	19,2	47,6	52,4	56,5	21,7	21,8
Household work	445.162	43,2	58,9	41,1	39,1	18,5	42,4
Unspecified work	60.653	5,9	58,2	41,8	32,0	18,4	49,6

(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

Regarding the age of participating in different types of labor: in the type of paid work, children aged 15-17 participated with the highest rate of 81.5%; The type of self-sufficient workers, aged 5-12 years old has the highest participation rate with 56.5%; Type of household work and other forms, the proportion of 15-17 age group and 5-12 age group has high participation rate, of which 15-17 is the highest with 42.4%; Unspecified work, children aged 15-17 participated has the highest rate of 49.6%.

#### **b. School attendance status**

Compared with children who participate in economic activities, the school attendance of child laborers has decreased significantly, out of a total of 1,031,944 child laborers, half of them are still going to school and 48.6% have dropped out and 1.4% have never attended school. In general, boy laborers tend to attend school more than girls, and as the age increases, child labor tends to drop out more, the proportion of children aged 5-12 do not go to school is nearly 9%, increasing to 38.8% in the 13-14-year-old group and 75.8% in the 15-17-year-old group.

**Table 3. Child laborers school attendance status (Unit: Percentage)**

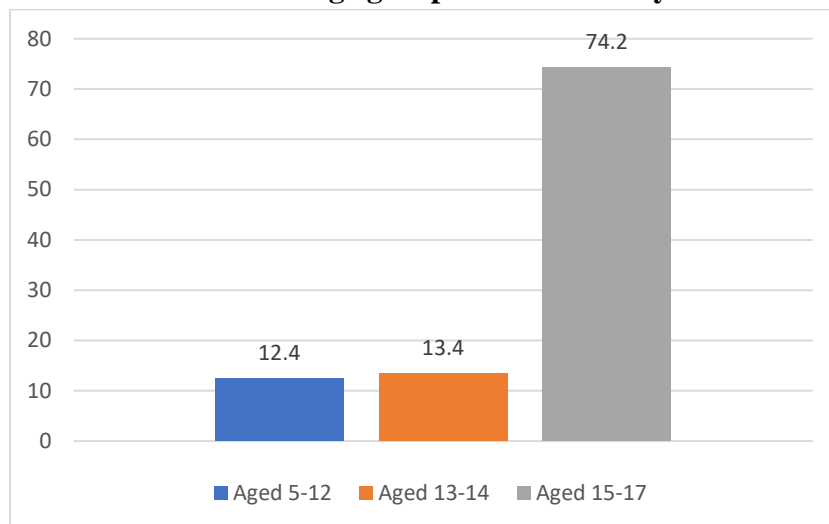
	Total	%	Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
Nationwide	1.031.944	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Currently attending school	515.794	50,0	45,9	55,9	89,1	59,7	23,1
Currently not attending school	501.095	48,6	53,0	42,2	8,9	38,8	75,8
Never attended school	15.055	1,4	1,1	1,9	2,0	1,5	1,1

(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

**c. Child labor in the industry – construction sector**

Child labor tends to gradually withdraw from the agricultural sector, increasing more into the industry, construction and service sectors; especially in the industrial and construction sector. Of the total 4 sectors witness the participation of child labor, 53.6% are in agriculture, 23.7% in industry - construction; 20.8% in the service sector and 1.9% unspecified. Compared to the survey results in 2012, the child labor force in the industry - percentage of construction sector increased from 15.8% to 23.7% in 2018. Regarding the gender, the participation in child labor in the construction sector in 2018 had 64.6% boys and 35.4% girls.

**Chart 1: Classification of child labor age groups in the industry-construction sector in 2018**



(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)



Thus, in the industry-construction sector alone, the 15-17 age group has the highest proportion with 74.2%, the second highest is the 13-14-year-old group, the 5-12-year-old group accounts for 12.4%. The requirements of this occupation include health and fitness, hence explained the highest part is from the 15-17 age group.

The results from the survey have identified 89 specific jobs that child laborers are participating in, of which 24 jobs attract 85.6% of the total number of child laborers. Among 24 jobs with many child laborers participating, there are 9 jobs in the agricultural sector, accounting for 62.2% of child laborers; 7 jobs are in the industrial and construction sector, taking up 18.3% of children who are in economic activities and 8 jobs are in the service sector, comprising of 19.5% of child laborers.

**Table 4: Work of child labor in the industry-construction sector in 2018**

Work	Total	%	Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
Processing and preserving seafood and aquatic products	17.129	1,9	51,9	48,1	13,0	14,9	72,1
Other food production	10.505	1,2	61,1	38,9	46,9	30,2	22,9
Sewing of clothing (except fur clothing)	44.597	5,0	60,8	39,2	8,3	11,5	80,2
Making products from wood, bamboo	11.776	1,3	63,1	36,9	14,3	16,5	69,2
Manufacture of paper and paper products	15.861	1,8	36,2	63,8	59,1	1,0	39,9
Production of beds, cabinets, tables and chairs	15.822	1,8	86,9	13,1	0,0	25,4	74,6
Houses construction	45.620	5,2	97,1	2,9	0,0	7,2	92,8

(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

Of the seven types of work in the industry-construction sector, male child laborers tend to participate more than female laborers. In which, the group of "Houses construction" has the highest

percentage of male child laborers, with 97.1%, the highest among 7 work groups, whereas female child laborers only accounted for 2.9%. Only one job “Manufacture of paper and paper products” had a higher percentage of female than male.

#### **d. Working hours**

According to the survey, out of a total of 1,031,944 child laborers, there are 352,385 of them working 40 hours/week or more, accounting for 34.2% of the total number of child laborers. This is the level of working time that has a negative impact on the health of the majority of children. The majority of child laborers working more than 40 hours/week fall into the age group of 15-17 years old (58.7%) and there is not much difference between boys and girls. However, among child laborers working more than 40 hours/week, there are still nearly 12% of children under the age of 15, which is a remarkable finding and needs to be prevented as soon as possible.

**Table 5: Weekly working hours of Child Laborers**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>5-12</b>	<b>13-14</b>	<b>15-17</b>
General	1.031.944						
<= 5 hours	111.380	1,9	51,9	48,1	13,0	14,9	72,1
5-<= 20 hours	330.131	1,2	61,1	38,9	46,9	30,2	22,9
20-<=40 hours	218.966	5,0	60,8	39,2	8,3	11,5	80,2
> 40 hours	352.385	1,3	63,1	36,9	14,3	16,5	69,2
Unspecified	19.082	1,8	2,1	1,3	1,0	2,5	2,0

(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

#### **e. Working conditions**

**Working conditions**, in fact, the child laborers participate in economic activities mainly in the informal sector with hired jobs and more commonly self-employment, as well as production and

household's business. Most of the jobs that child laborers can participate in have an unsafe working environment and conditions, it is estimated from the survey that 27.7% of child laborers work in conditions that exposed to dust, garbage, smoke; 11.5% worked in environments with loud noises and strong movements; nearly 11% work in a place that is too hot or too cold; over 8% work in an environment exposed to chemicals. In particular, more than 3.2% of child laborers work at construction sites, more than 3% work underwater... these are unsafe places for children. The results of in-depth interviews of the authors at a number of construction sites and private mechanical workshops in Hanoi also show that the working environment of child laborers still poses many potential risks.

*#It is impossible to avoid dust, noise, and labor accidents... while working on a construction site but I'm used to it, so I'll just do it as usual, as long as I have a stable income. (Interviewee, 17 years old male construction worker at Dai Mo, Ha Noi)*

*#I think the oxyacetylene welding is the most harmful to the eyes, it's better to wear glasses often. The more difficult part is that I have to carry iron, steel ... when dividing products to assemble welds also requires muscles. It is impossible to do it without strength. (Interviewee, 17 years old welder at Dai Mo, Ha Noi)*

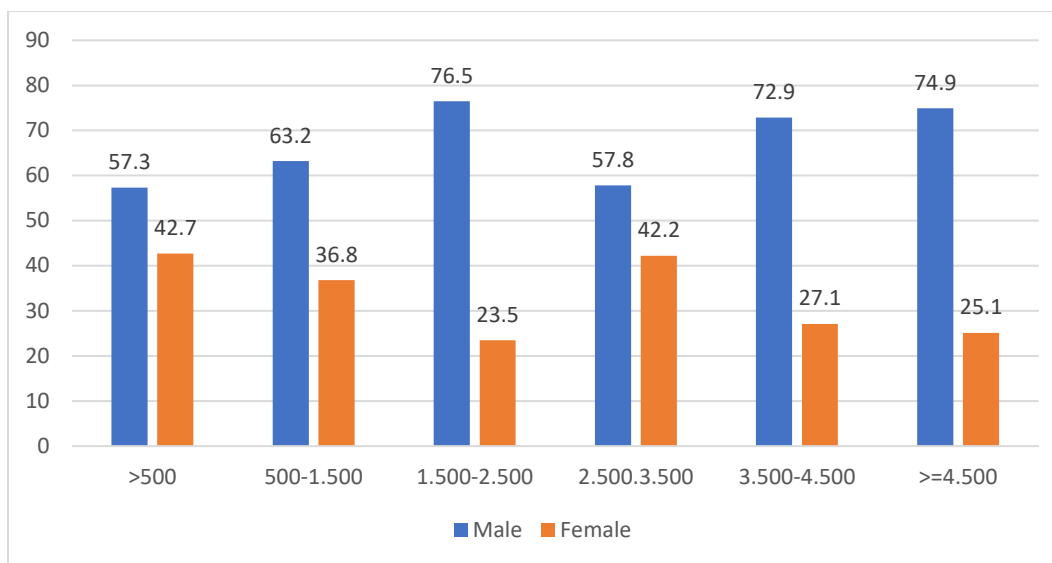
In the process of working, some children have to carry heavy objects or operate machinery and equipment for production. These are factors that seriously affect the physical and safety of child laborers.

It is estimated that in the 2018 survey, 10.5% of child laborers used to have to carry objects weighing 30 kg or more and nearly 9.1% of child laborers had to operate machinery and production equipment. However, the majority of child laborers who have to carry heavy objects or operate machinery and equipment during their work fall into the group of boys aged 15-17, which is nonetheless the age of greater maturity, physical health and a better sense of labor safety.

#### **f. Income**

The survey results showed that nearly 71.3% of child laborers could not determine the average monthly income within 12 months. However, based on the average income of the identified children, it can be seen that the income level of child laborers is commonly at 2.5 million VND/month or more and this income is mainly in the 15-17 group age.

#### **Chart 2: Classification of income by gender of child laborers (Unit: thousand VND)**



(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

#### g. Reasons behind being a child laborer

There are many reasons that lead to children participating in child labor. In which, the main reason is that they want to participate in household production and business, accounting for 27.3%, the second is generating income for the family with 20.7%, followed by generating income for themselves with 9.3%. In addition, there are other reasons such as not going to school, wanting vocational training, other and unspecified, accounting for a smaller proportion.

**Table 4: Reasons behind being a child laborer**

Categories	Total	%	Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
Nationwide	<b>1.031.944</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Generating income for themselves	95.956	9,3	9,8	8,5	3,9	3,6	14,6
Generating income for the family	213.319	20,7	21,9	18,9	10,2	24,8	<b>25,5</b>
Participate in household production	281.651	27,3	27,4	27,1	37,6	27,8	<b>20,9</b>

and business							
Wanting vocational training/to have a job	32.549	3,2	4,2	1,7	0,0	0,4	6,0
Not going to school	68.688	6,7	8,2	4,4	2,7	4,6	9,8
Other	11.561	1,1	1,0	1,3	1,2	0,5	1,3
Unspecified	328.220	31,7	27,5	38,1	44,4	38,3	21,9

(Source: 2018 National survey on child labor)

The cause of child labor by gender from the research results shows that there is not much a big difference between the reasons behind being a child labor of boys and girls. However, in terms of causes, the rate in boys is somewhat higher, especially the reason for "Not going to school" in boys is almost twice that of girls.

**h. Child labor health and safety issues**

In the process of working, children encounter health and safety problems. Each child may experience one or more risks or accidents ... commonly are skin wounds, open wounds, dislocations, sprains, bruises, respiratory diseases, skin, eyes ... It is estimated that 13.3% of child laborers have ever suffered from skin wounds, open wounds; more than 4% have dislocated, sprained or bruised due to impact or fall. The majority of child laborers who encounter accidents and injuries during their work fall into the group of male children aged 15-17; However, skin and abdominal diseases fall into the group of young children, especially the group of 5-12 years old.

**4. Impact of COVID-19 on the prevention and alleviation of child labor in the industry-construction sector**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great impact on socio-economic development in Vietnam, especially during the first 6 months of 2020, in which children are also one of the affected groups by the pandemic.

In the report “*COVID-19 and child labor: a period of crisis - a time for action*”, the number of child laborers in the world has decreased by 94 million children since 2020. But now, that

achievement is faltering. In Vietnam, by the end of the first quarter of 2020, the ILO estimates that between 4.6 and 10.3 million workers may be affected by the pandemic, which will increase the risk of child labor. It is estimated that more than one million children aged 5-17 are participating in child labor in Vietnam. More than half of them are doing dangerous jobs. As the pandemic affects family incomes, these children are also at risk of working longer hours or in worse conditions.

The results of the in-depth interviews of the authors show that children working in the field of industry – construction <sup>[1]</sup> also face many difficulties, however, they still work during the pandemic. The main impacts they mentioned are:

With health and safety in disease prevention: the provision of masks, protection, and disinfection for children is inconsistent at construction sites. For large construction sites, the children are equipped and protected, while for small projects, most of the children have to be self-prepared. They are still vague about ways to prevent infection or look down on them, thinking that they are young and healthy, so if they get sick, it won't be serious. In general, the children are still worried that the epidemic is inevitable, which is directly affecting their psychology and health.

Their working time did not decrease due to the epidemic, but their income was somewhat reduced due to many reasons from the employer. The common desire is to have a job and an income to cover the difficulties of their family and themselves, but their workplace is also affected by the epidemic, which is the employer's argument.

The issue of children's academic pathway is also a matter of concern for the prevention of child labor in Hanoi. In the interview group, most of the children stopped going to school, only 2/15 of them continued to attend the Continuing Education program in the evening or at the weekend.

Regarding social protection, the children almost did not receive any support from the Government, organizations and individuals' programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also only heard about the support packages, but they do not know what they will receive, and who they will meet to receive support.

The main findings of the authors also show that the results are quite similar to the joint report of the ILO and UNICEF that mentioned the contributing factors to child labor. Vulnerable populations such as workers in the informal economy and migrant workers will suffer the most from the economic downturn, de-formalization, rising unemployment, and falling living standards, health-related effects and lack of social protection. The COVID-19 pandemic could cause poverty to increase. Therefore, it will also lead to an increase in child labor because households have to

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<sup>1</sup> The authors interviewed 30 children: 15 of them work in construction sector, the other work in private industrial sector in Hanoi, Vietnam.

use all possible means to survive. Research in some countries shows that when poverty increases by 1%, child labor will increase by at least 0.7%.

In Vietnam, a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on child labor is being carried out nationwide with the support of the ILO. This assessment will provide information for the development of the National Action Plan on prevention and alleviation of child labor for the period 2021-2025. In recent years, the fight against child labor has made remarkable progress. However, more activities need to be done to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7 on eliminating child labor by 2025. Nevertheless, the immediate solutions are to support and help groups of children. Labor in the industry-construction sector should also be taken into account so that they do not experience too much damage, consequences and impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, among the more strategic and long-term solutions that management agencies in the field of child protection need to consider, there should be more specific programs and solutions to prevent child labor in the in the construction industry.

## **5. Recommendations on solutions to prevent child labor in the industry-construction sector**

Solutions for child labor prevention and reduction have always been invested by the Party, National Assembly and Government. The representative of the International Labor Organization in Vietnam said that, although the results of the survey showed positive signs of progress from 2012 to 2018, child labor still has the potential to increase again, especially due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socio-economy and the impact of terrible floods in Vietnam in recent times. In times of crisis and declining job opportunities and family income, making the root causes of child labor even more developed, many families are forced to use child labor as a coping mechanism, thereby pushing many children into labor force, whereas children already engaged in child labor are at risk of working longer hours or in more hazardous conditions.

Vietnam needs to take strong actions soon and respond promptly to the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic to minimize the damage of the pandemic and natural disasters that are threatening the achieved accomplishments in the process of child labor prevention and mitigation and the risk of increasing the number of identified child labor cases in 2018, especially in urban areas such as Hanoi. From the analysis results, the authors would like to propose some of solutions to prevent child labor in the field of industry and construction, as well as solutions to support and protect children to have a safer life in times of COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Recommendations for the State and functional agencies in protecting children's rights.***

- Continuing to improve the legal system on child labor, updating with national conditions and integrate international law in the field of labor, forced labor and child labor. Conducting research and developing a separate set of law for child labor prevention to increase the ability to prevent child labor and strictly handle cases of child labor misuse.

- Ensuring the implementation of the law on child labor, strengthening sanctions to handle cases of violation of the use of child labor contrary to the provisions of the law, especially for children under 13 years of age, children working in a heavy and hazardous environment (such as industry - construction).
- Strengthening means of supporting child laborers to access to general education and vocational training through measures to increase the access of young laborers to the state's educational support policies (tuition fee reduction or exemption, scholarships for children with special circumstances, school supplies support, etc.) in order to support children to go to school in accordance with the children's needs and working ability. More specifically, it is necessary to develop educational support packages with conditions so that households can send their children to school and still have an alternative source of income for child labor.
- Strengthening the capacity of staff working in children's affairs, especially the inspectors of the Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs sectors, strengthening inspection and examination, especially in the informal sectors.
- Promulgating and implementing policies to support families with difficult circumstances and families with child laborers who are affected by COVID-19, especially in metropolitans like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City.
- Implementing vaccination for disadvantaged groups such as child laborers to limit the spread of the pandemic, and at the same time continue to propagate for children to take measures to prevent the outspread of COVID-19.

### ***Recommendations for child laborer users***

- Strengthening the roles and responsibilities of enterprises and users of child labor through measures such as: developing operating rules and organizing a national forum on child labor or enterprises to share information on activities and the identified challenges; Developing employer's code of conduct on child labor prevention and reduction; Promoting the application of standards compliance in international integration.
- Raising awareness for employers about the issue of using child labor, shortening the working hours of child laborers to a suitable level to their health, age of participation, etc.
- Strictly implementing the compulsory insurance payment for child laborers, including social, health, unemployment insurance...
- Ensuring labor safety and preventing the COVID-19 epidemic at the workplace to reduce the risk of labor accidents, disease transmission... for children.
- Coordinating with the State and the community to support families in difficult circumstances in special and urgent cases (labor accidents, fatal diseases, incapacity to work, etc.) in order to prevent the increase of child labor.



### ***Recommendations for the community and society***

- Forming care centers, educational centers for children with difficult circumstances, a child protection system, a network of child protection services for prevention, early detection and timely support for child labor; Providing specific and timely instructions on the receipt and processing of information related to child labor to ensure the rights of children; legal aid, psychological counseling and other child protective services.
- Building vocational guidance and training centers for disadvantaged children; Forming community support funds to support child laborers in special situations.
- Propagating children's awareness about risks in labor safety, especially in the field of industry-construction, the risk of disease transmission at industrial or construction sites... for children to be aware of the prevention and protection of themselves, in order to minimize the possible loss of children's physicality, mentality and health.

### ***Recommended for child laborer's families***

- Expanding job search channels, improving income, ensuring stable family life, as well as education and health care for children.
- Spending more time caring and nurturing children's physicality and mentality.
- Motivating and encouraging children to focus on their studies and return to school (in case children drop out of school early to join the labor force).
- Instructing children on basic measures for protecting their own health and preventing disease transmission and maintaining safety in the workplace...

### ***Recommended for child laborer***

- Changing self-perceptions about education, work, life, encountered problems and skills to prevent the spread of diseases, accidents, natural disasters, child labor exploitation...
- Raising awareness and self-understanding of children's rights and obligations, as well as the legal provisions on labor in general and child labor in particular.

## **REFERENCES**

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