

# **ELIMINATING CHILD LABOUR: A VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVE**

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## **Abstract**

Child labor is a global problem occurring in all countries. The ILO report released in 2017 shows that, despite the decreasing trend, by the end of 2016, there are still 152 million child laborers globally, of which 73 million are in hazardous work. In Vietnam, thanks to the State and the community's continuous efforts, the number of child laborers has continuously decreased in recent decades. Vietnam has also acceded to all international treaties on the elimination of child labor, including the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and both of 2001 Protocols supplementing this Convention on the prohibition of the use of children in armed conflict and the prohibition of trafficking, prostitution and the use of children in the production of pornographic products, together with the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). At present, Vietnam still has about 1 million child laborers (out of nearly 20 million children).

This paper examines the situation and the causes of child labor in Vietnam and, based on that, provides recommendations on eliminating child labor in Vietnam in coming years. Using official statistics from government agencies and local social organizations for analysis, the authors argue that there are various causes of child labor in Vietnam. Therefore, to address this problem, it is necessary to use different legal and social measures simultaneously; and engage different actors such as the state, the community, the family, and the school in the fight against child labor. The authors also believe that child labor in Vietnam in the short term will continue to decline, but to eliminate this situation, continuous and long-term efforts are required.

**Keywords:** Child labor, elimination of child labor, Vietnam

## **1. Reality and consequences of child labor in Vietnam**

The reality of child labor was primarily seen in the number of children participating in economic activities, which was gathered from a survey with a small sample and scope in some localities or fields and the survey of living standards of households in Vietnam because there has not been any official investigation into child labor in national level.

Survey of household living standards, which were conducted since 1992, showed that the percentage of children in economic activities continued to decline with 45 percent in 1992-1993; 30 percent in 1997-1998; 27 percent in 2004 and about 6.7 percent in 2006.<sup>1</sup> However, the

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<sup>1</sup> Figures of the above surveys refine children in the age group of 10 to 14. This is the only group with the number in all

number of children who participate in economic activities in Vietnam is still high. Specifically, according to the household living standards survey in 2006, 6.7 percent of children from 6 to 14 meant 930,000 children participated in economic activities, with 296,847 children from 6 to 12 and 37,139 children from 6 to 9 years old. According to this survey, the children in economic activities in Vietnam can be classified into four main groups: working for others, doing family business, both working for others and doing family business and making their own living, in which the percentage of children making their living was on the rise from 1992 to 1999 and then saw a considerable decline from 2000 to 2004. On the contrary, the percentage of children doing family business declined from 1992 to 1999 but increased from 2000 to 2004. The percentage of children from 6 to 10 working for others saw a substantial decline from 2000 to 2004, but an increase was noted for children of two age groups 11 to 14 and 15 to 17.

The above statistics of children in economic activities provide a comprehensive overview to evaluate the child labor reality in Vietnam. However, because the term "children participating in economic activities" is broader and includes child labor, they did not truly reflect the reality of child labor in Vietnam.

The Survey about child labor in 2012 (published in 2014), which was conducted by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Society in cooperation with Statistics Administration and ILO Hanoi, showed that as of 2012, among 18.3 million Vietnamese children, about 2.83 million ones participated in economic activities and 1.75 million children were identified as child labor, in which 40.2 percent were female children. The number of child labor in 2012 accounted for 9.6 percent of the children population and about 62 percent of total children in economic activities. Almost 85 percent of child labor live in rural areas, and about 60 percent of them are in the age group of 15 to 17. Children start working from an early age, mostly from 12 years old. Among 1.75 million child labor, about 1.315 million, account for 75 percent are in the risky professions, which are not allowed to employ child labor or have hazardous working conditions as specified by Circular 09/TT-LB dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1995. About 67 percent of child labor are working in agriculture, 15.7 percent in industry and construction, and 16.7 percent in service sectors. Child labor performs 97 specific tasks, in which 17 tasks are in the above sectors (including 11 tasks in the agricultural field; 3 tasks in industrial and construction fields, and three tasks in the service sectors). Popular working locations of child labor include (1) paddy field/farm/or garden, (2) at home, and (3) unspecified. A large number of children in these work suffer negative influences on their health and physical development. Among 1.75 million child labor, almost 569,000, accounting for 32.4 percent, work over 42 hours a week on average. Long working hours affect their learning. Almost 55 percent of child labor did not go to school (over 5 percent had never gone to school).

The recent National Survey about child labor in 2018 showed that<sup>2</sup> the number of children

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surveys living standards of households to compare over time.

<sup>2</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, tr.9-10.

aged 5 to 17<sup>3</sup> (considered children in the Survey) in Vietnam is 19,254,271, accounting for 20.3 percent of the total population, with 51.1 percent are boys, and 47.9 percent are girls. According to the survey estimates, 1,754,066 children participated in economic activities (who are considered child labor, working children), which accounted for 9.1 percent of the total children from the age of 5 to 17 in the country. Among the children in economic activities, 1,031,944 were identified as child labor, accounting for 5.4 percent of the total children from 5 to 17 and accounting for 58.8 percent of children's economic activities. Among the child labor, 519,805 children were identified as child labor, who worked in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs, account for 2.7 percent of children from 5 to 17 and 29.6 percent of children in economic activities and almost 50.4 percent of child labor. The majority of child labor in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs are boys; boys' percentage increased from 54.5 percent of children in economic activities to 59 percent of child labor. It reached 67.2 percent of child labor in heavy, dirty, and dangerous jobs. Similarly, most children in economic activities, child labor, and working children aged from 15 to 17 in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs accounted for 56.4 percent; 51.2 percent and 71 percent, respectively. Almost 20.1 percent of working children (economic activities) endured long working hours of more than 40 hours a week.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of children working more than 40 hours a week among child labor was 34.2 percent. Among child labor doing heavy, contaminated, and dangerous work is almost 40.6 percent. The survey found out that more than 1/2 of children in economic activities were in the unpaid family business; the rest were in paid jobs and self-employed jobs. For paid labor, the average income leveled 2.5 to 3.5 million dongs a month.<sup>5</sup> Which was about 3/4 average income of workers in the labor market.

Generally, compared to the findings of the National Survey of child labor in 2012, the National Survey of child labor in 2018 continued to provide evidence, which demonstrated positive development in the situation of children in work in Vietnam<sup>6</sup>. The scale and trend of working children have seen considerable decline while children's education in work has witnessed remarkable improvement. For example, the percentage of children in work (economic activities) in children population aged from 5 to 17 declined from 15.5 percent in 2012 to 9.1 percent in 2018; the percentage of schooling children in work increased from 43.6 percent in 2012 63 percent in 2018. The findings also showed that the percentage of child labor in Vietnam was lower than the regional and international average<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of consequences, several researchers have pointed out that child labor has a

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<sup>3</sup> Children from 5 to 17 years old in the national survey about child labor 2018 include children from 5 to 15 years old and a juvenile from 16 to under 18 years old.

<sup>4</sup> The working duration of over 40 hours/week can harm most children's health, learning time, and time for activities necessary for the physical and mental development of children, such as sports and entertainment.

<sup>5</sup> This income is calculated based on the figures of working children, who were paid (paid working children)

<sup>6</sup> The national survey about child labor 2012 and the national survey about child labor 2018 used consistent concept and criteria for working children (children in economic activities)

<sup>7</sup> In 2016, the rate of child labor in the world was 9.6 percent and in Asia-Pacific is 7.4 percent (Report "Global Estimates of Child Labor: Results and trends, 2012-2016", ILO, 2017).

negative influence not only on the life and development of the children but also on the family, community, and country where the children live.<sup>8</sup>

The negative effect of child labor on the country was seen in the sense that it hinders the country's development and competitiveness. This is because if the children had to work early, they would not be educated and trained with professional knowledge and skills, which are necessary preparation to take the jobs in the economy, which requires the workers to have the proper knowledge. In the context of the knowledge economy, a low-skilled workforce will affect the quality of human resources, which decreased the country's competitiveness in the global economy.

The negative effect of child labor on the family is demonstrated when the family allows or forces their children to drop out of school to start working early. They will encounter difficulty or will not have the capacity to accomplish tasks, which require advanced knowledge and skills. Most of them will be "tied" to simple work, basic jobs with low or precarious income. Their family, therefore, will fall into poverty and stagnation in the long run.

Meanwhile, the negative influence of child labor on the children themselves is seen in the following aspects.

*Physical influence:* Because of their immaturity, inexperience, inadequate health, and stamina, children are more vulnerable and encounter more physical risks in their work compare to adults. For example, working children may suffer from accidents, which caused injury, disability, or death. Children working in insecure conditions can face long-term health problems.

*Mental influence:* In some cases, mental consequences to working children can include slow intellectual development, unconfidence, social exclusion; they may have difficulty in establishing a relationship and maintaining self-esteem; they may develop violent attitude or stress, anxiety, autism, or even come to the idea of injuring themselves.

*Perception:* In many cases, the children's perception is influenced by what they do, for example, declining perception, communication capacities, which are essential factors for social accommodation and success.

*Education:* Heavy work or long working hours can cause the children to drop out of school early or lose their comprehension capacity in the learning process. More seriously, the work takes away from the children the time necessary for study, and their learning achievements will be affected, leaving them behind their peers or unabandoned, or they will encounter difficulty in joining their classmates.

In summary, child labor can leave a negative influence on many stakeholders. They not only take the chance of the children and their families to get out of poverty to have a better life in the future but also cause serious risks for the development of the country and nation.

As in other countries, child labor in Vietnam has resulted in many short-term and long-term consequences not only to the children themselves but also to the family and society.

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<sup>8</sup> *Child labor: Coursebook for undergraduate students*, id, p.16-20.

Specifically, the above mentioned National Survey findings of child labor in 2018 demonstrated the adverse effects of child labor in different aspects, especially to their health and education.

*Health:* As shown from the estimates of the Survey, among 1,031,944 child labor, 352,385 have to work more than 40 hours a week, accounting for 34.2 percent of the total children - this working duration can have a negative influence on the health of most children<sup>9</sup>. Besides, in the working process, some children have to carry heavy stuff or operate the machine and production facilities. They can have a profound influence on the physical development and the safety of the children. According to the survey, almost 10.5 percent of child labor had to carry heavy stuff, weighing more than 30 kilograms, and almost 9.1 percent of child labor had to operate machines and production facilities.<sup>10</sup> The working environment is also an essential factor, which influences children's health. According to the survey, 27.7 percent of children work in conditions exposed to dust, rubbish, and smoke; 11.5 percent in loud noise and strong movement; almost 11 percent in either too hot or too cold environment; more than 8 percent in an environment exposed to chemicals.<sup>11</sup> Notably, more than 3.2 percent of child labor work in construction sites; over 3 percent of child labor work in water environments. These places are not safe for the children.<sup>12</sup>

The findings of the survey also showed that, in their working process, about 13.3 percent of child labor suffered from skin and open injuries; over 4 percent endured contortion, sprain, or bruise caused by falling and strike.<sup>13</sup> Particularly, child labor in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous conditions face more health and safety hazards, with almost 18 percent of them suffer from skin and open injury; 5.9 percent suffer from contortion, sprain, or bruise caused by falling and strike; over 3 percent suffer from respiratory diseases.<sup>14</sup>

*Learning:* According to the findings of the National Survey about child labor in 2018, the number of working children, especially those in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous conditions, who received schooling, saw a considerable decline compared to children in general. Specifically, among 519,805 children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous working conditions, only 38.6 percent of children continued their study; 60 dropped out of school, and 1.4 percent had never gone to school.<sup>15</sup> The older they got, the less they participated in the learning process. Specifically, the percentage of children aged from 5 to 12 who did not go to school is 20 percent, while it was 34.7 percent for age group 13 to 14 and 72.8 percent for 15 to 17<sup>16</sup>.

These numbers are evidence of the negative influence of labor on the education of children in Vietnam. Children in economic activities, especially those who work long hours in unsafe

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<sup>9</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 4.4.

<sup>10</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 4.4.

<sup>11</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 4.7.

<sup>12</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 4.7.

<sup>13</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 4.12.

<sup>14</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 4.12.

<sup>15</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 5.2.

<sup>16</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, section 5.2.

conditions with heavy, contaminated, and dangerous factors, suffered a high school dropout rate (please see the table below for specifics).

**Schooling situation of child labor in heavy, contaminated,  
and dangerous conditions in Vietnam<sup>17</sup>**

Schooling situation	Total	%	Gender		Age group		
			Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
			%	%	%	%	%
<b>General</b>	<b>519,805</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>
Going to school	200,550	38.6	32.7	50.6	77.5	63.6	26.0
Dropping out	311,881	60.0	66.2	47.2	20.0	34.7	72.8
Never go to school	7,374	1.4	1.1	2.1	2.5	1.7	1.2

In summary, as in other countries, child labor in Vietnam has closed them in a looping circus: poverty - early school dropout for work - soft skills - low income - poverty. In such a context, it is challenging for the family of working children to have sustainable development and for the country to have a skillful workforce, who can compete with other countries in the region and the world. Therefore, it is vital to prevent and eliminate child labor, mainly when Vietnam was evaluated as a country with ample human resources, but they lack the skills and qualifications. It places Vietnam in a position, which is less competitive than several developing countries.

**2. Main causes of child labor in Vietnam**

There are different causes of child labor in the world. Each of the causes has a different role and impact in a different context.<sup>18</sup>

Sociologists classified causes of child labor into "internal causes" and "internal causes." The former is understood as factors from the family; for example, the family's increased physical needs forced the children to work. The latter is understood as outside factors that affect the family (and generally affect all the families); for example, economic crisis made all the family members make a living.<sup>19</sup>...

The table below summarized the two leading causes of child labor as specified above.

Internal causes	External causes
(1) Family with economic difficulty - Family with father or mother only	(1) Poverty, unemployment; political, economic, and social crisis <sup>22</sup> .

<sup>17</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings*, Hanoi, March 2020, table 5.2.

<sup>18</sup> Referred from *Child labor: a coursebook for undergraduate students*, id, Chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Referred from *Child labor: a coursebook for undergraduate students*, id, Chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup> Countries, who fall into economic crisis, had to cut down on social support programs. It directly affected poor households, forcing them to mobilize all members, including children, to work to make ends meet. A political crisis created similar effects because it often comes together with a social and economic crisis. For example, in the early stage of political transformation, countries in Socialist block in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe witnessed reduced employment, devastated social security system, which resulted in an increasing situation of child labor.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family with sick or unproductive members</li> <li>- Family without social support or allowance</li> </ul> <p>(2) “Unorganized family” with poor spiritual values, dysfunctional and nonunified relationships<sup>20</sup>, materialistic members with unstandardized lifestyle<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p>(3) Family members, especially parents' education, are low and do not understand the meaning of education to children.</p> <p>(4) Parents lack the skills to educate and take care of their children; have an old-fashioned understanding of child labor.</p>	<p>(2) Inaccessible and low-quality education</p> <p>(3) Effect of HIV/AIDS<sup>23</sup>.</p> <p>(4) Complicated living environment. Society has an old-fashioned view of child labor.</p> <p>(5) The State lacks an adequate legal framework to prevent and eliminate child labor.</p> <p>(6) Social security system is weak and short of resources.</p> <p>(7) Rapid urbanization and migration</p> <p>(8) The household belongs to minority groups<sup>24</sup>.</p> <p>(9) Discrimination against women and female children.</p>
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As a supplement to sociologists' classification, economists identify the causes of child labor with regards to "supply" and "demand," which are tied to the labor market. Specifically, the supply side includes factors, which make the families allow or force the children to participate in the labor market (such as poverty, hunger, low education, old-fashioned view of child labor). In contrast, the demand side includes factors that make the employers hire children (such as cheap labor, the children's obedience, the skillfulness of the children in specific assignments). The supply and demand have a mutual relationship and jointly increase the severity of the child labor situation.

In general, poverty and hunger are the leading and most common causes of child labor. However, it is noted that poverty and hunger are not the only cause of child labor. In addition to poverty and hunger, other causes include education, understanding, the effect of HIV/AIDS, the effectiveness of the legal system. These causes emerge and influence the reality of child labor to a different extent in different situations.

In Vietnam, the National Survey about child labor in 2018 identified the causes for the three groups of child labor: children in economic activities; working children; working children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs as follows:

<sup>20</sup> The *dysfunctional family* concept refers to a family with a father, mother, or other members, who are addicted to alcohol, drug, violence, or sex. In such families, children are abandoned, even abused, and exploited.

<sup>21</sup> Parents and children's materialistic lifestyle can push or force children to work early, even to do anything to earn money and satisfy their needs, mainly when the thought influences them that they must do anything to have what their peers have.

<sup>23</sup> HIV/AIDS erases health and takes away the lives of mature members, bread earners in the family, forcing the children to make a living or become the family's bread earners. AIDS-infected children often drop out of school due to discrimination. For many other children, when they saw their parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends, teachers, and other people in the community die from the pandemic, they felt lonely, lost trust in the future, increasing the possibility of dropping out of school to work early and live a short life.

<sup>24</sup> In many countries, child labor is common in immigrant families or minority families. These groups are left on the side of society and live in poverty.

### *Causes of children in economic activities<sup>25</sup>*

The report of the Survey identified several causes of child labor in Vietnam, who participated in economic activities, in which more than 33.3 percent of children started working because they wanted to participate in their family business, to support their family; over 17.9 percent started working because to make a living for the family and to contribute to household income and about 6.2 percent of children wanted to make earning for themselves. However, more than one-third of children in economic activities did not specify their labor causes (see details in the table below).

#### **Causes of Vietnamese children participating in economic activities<sup>26</sup>**

Causes	Total	%	Gender		Age group		
			Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
			%	%	%	%	%
<b>Nation-wide</b>	<b>1,754,066</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>
Making earning for themselves	109,163	6.2	7.0	5.4	3.5	1.8	9.0
Making earning for their household	314,694	17.9	19.2	16.5	11.0	17.9	20.6
Want to participate in the business of the household	584,888	33.3	32.9	33.9	39.2	37.3	29.6
Want to learn the job/secure employment	36,284	2.1	3.0	1.0	0.0	0.2	3.6
Do not go to school	84,741	4.8	6.3	3.0	2.4	2.5	6.7
Other causes	31,459	1.8	2.0	1.5	2.3	2.3	1.4
Unidentified	592,837	33.9	29.6	38.7	41.6	38.0	29.1

### *Causes of working children<sup>27</sup>*

The National Survey findings of child labor in 2018 showed that the causes for working children are very similar to those of children in economic activities. However, it became clearer that the child labor started work to make their earnings with almost 30 percent of child labor in economic activities to earn while only 24.2 percent of children in economic activities started work for this purpose. This tendency is most demonstrated in the older children group with almost 40.1 percent of child labor from the age of 15 to 17 started working to make their earning (accounting for 12.1 percent of children economic activities) (for details, see the table below)

#### **Causes for child labor in Vietnam<sup>28</sup>**

Causes	Total	%	Gender	Age group
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<sup>25</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, section 3.3.

<sup>26</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, table 3.3.

<sup>27</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, section 4.3.

<sup>28</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, table 4.3.

			Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
			%	%	%	%	%
<b>Nation-wide</b>	<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>
Making earning for themselves	95.956	9,3	9,8	8,5	3,9	3,6	14,6
Making earning for their family	213.319	20,7	21,9	18,9	10,2	24,8	25,5
Want to participate in the business of the household	281.651	27,3	27,4	27,1	37,6	27,8	20,9
Want to learn the job/secure employment	32.549	3,2	4,2	1,7	0,0	0,4	6,0
Did not go to school	68.688	6,7	8,2	4,4	2,7	4,6	9,8
Others	11.561	1,1	1,0	1,3	1,2	0,5	1,3
Unidentified	328.220	31,7	27,5	38,1	44,4	38,3	21,9

### *Causes of working children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs<sup>29</sup>*

The National Survey findings of child labor in 2018 showed that the causes of working children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs are much similar to those of children in economic activities and child labor. However, it is a more transparent trend that working children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs started working to make the earning for themselves and for their family with 39.6 percent of these children having this objective and more than 44.7 percent of older children (children aged 15 to 17) have the same objective.

### *Causes of working children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs<sup>30</sup>*

Causes	Total	%	Gender		Age group		
			Male	Female	5-12	13-14	15-17
			%	%	%	%	%
<b>General causes</b>	<b>519,805</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>
Make earning for themselves	64,996	12.5	13.1	11.4	4.8	2.3	16.3
Make earning for their family	140,925	27.1	26.6	28.1	18.0	27.9	28.4
Want to participate in the household business	148,479	28.6	27.1	31.5	61.3	38.0	20.9
Want to learn a job/secure employment	26,261	5.1	5.7	3.8	0.0	0.8	6.9
Did not go to school	37,547	7.2	9.4	2.7	2.3	3.5	9.0
Others	7,457	1.4	1.3	1.8	0.0	0.5	1.9

<sup>29</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, section 5.3.

<sup>30</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, table 5.3.

Unidentified	94,140	18.1	16.8	20.7	13.6	27.0	16.6
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With a broader perspective, the reality of child labor in Vietnam stemmed from prevalent causes in the world, including:

*Poverty and hunger:* The percentage of poverty and hunger in Vietnam since Doi Moi (1986) declined rapidly, but a number of households still fall into this condition, especially in rural and mountainous areas. Poverty and hunger forced many families to employ the children. They allowed them to drop out of school early to participate in economic activities.

*Awareness:* In some areas of Vietnam, especially in rural and mountainous areas, several parents still believed that children need to work early to "grow up" and contribute to the family economy. In some cases, especially in traditional craft villages, some families believed that children need to drop out of school to "follow the job" and continue their ancestor's traditions.

*Culture:* The discrimination against women and female children is still extreme in some areas of Vietnam, especially in the rural and mountainous areas, limiting the learning opportunities for female children, forcing them to drop out of school or get married early.

*Economy:* Although Vietnam achieved actual results in economic development since Doi Moi (1986), unemployment, low income, and inadequate employment opportunities are still prevalent in some areas, especially in mountainous areas. In these areas, children have to work with their parents to make a living for their families.

*Education:* Since Doi Moi, education has seen significant reforms, giving conditions and chances for better education to the people. However, education infrastructure in rural, mountainous, and remote areas is abysmal. Some families cannot afford the tuition fee for their children. As it is challenging to pursue learning, many children drop out of school and start working early.

*Migration:* Since Doi Moi, industrialization and urbanization in Vietnam are speedy and closely related to the free migration from rural areas to urban areas. Many of the migrants are children. Some of the children who are from low-income families and do not have stable employment, while the city's education expenses are very high, have to drop out of school early and help their parents make a living.

*Society:* In contrast with economic development, family values in Vietnam seemed to decline since Doi Moi, which was seen in a family crisis and increasing rate of divorce. Family crises and divorce cause some children to drop out of school and start working when they are small.

*Natural disasters, pandemics:* Natural disasters and pandemics are common in some areas of our country, which cause some children to be orphans or to live in specially disadvantaged families. These children are often taken into the loop of child labor.

*Law, policy:* Even though the legal system and policy system about preventing and eliminating child labor have been revised, modified, and supplemented comprehensively, they

still contain some inappropriate contents. For example, the current policies and laws effectively prevent child labor in mainstream economic sectors. However, they have limited effect in the alternative economic sectors and in the rural and mountainous areas. Besides, the implementation of specific policies and laws remains ineffective. These limitations are also the causes, which lead to child labor in Vietnam nowadays.

It can be seen from the above causes that:

- 1) Child labor harms children's access to education. The more children participate in economic activities, the more children do not have chances to go to school. The percentage of children in economic activities who do not go to school is almost 37, increasing to 50 percent with child labor group and 61.4 percent with working children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs.
- 2) One out of three children start working because they want to participate in their family's business; one out of four children start working because they want to make earning for themselves or their family. The cause of earning increased sharply from the children in economic activities to child labor and children in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs at 24.1 percent, 30 percent, and 39.6 percent, respectively.
- 3) The survey found working children in all three sectors of the national economy. Agriculture attracts more than half of children in economic activities.
- 4) Children start working (economic activities) in 97 specific jobs. A two-thirds concentrate on 21 jobs, including 8 in agriculture, 6 in industry and construction, and 7 in service sectors.

### **3. Solutions to eliminate child labor in Vietnam**

Child labor is a burning issue in developing countries, including Vietnam. Eliminating child labor is not only to promote economic integration and global trade but also to protect children's rights and ensure the best future for them because they are the future human resource of the country. If child labor persists, children do not go to school, children cannot learn the job to secure stable employment, the country will suffer from low skilled human resources, and the poverty loop will continue, affecting the country's development in the long run. To prevent and eliminate child labor, the government should have specific, synchronous plans, which focus on practical solutions in Vietnam as follows<sup>31</sup>:

*First*, promote education for children. Elimination of child labor and education for children are closely interrelated. There are three education approaches: universalize primary education, facilitate learning on the job and reduce tuition fees. Besides, it is essential to educate female children, dropout children, and working children to come back to school or participate in unofficial education. Suppose the official schools cannot meet the requirement for education. In that case, it is vital to organize non-official education programs and vocational programs for children.

It is also essential to develop the mechanisms to support working children to get access to popular education and vocational education by enhancing their access to state's support

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<sup>31</sup> ILO-GSO-MOLISA, *National survey about child labor 2018: Key findings, Hanoi, March 2020*, p.65.

policies (policy of reducing, exempting tuition fees, supporting learning materials and learning tools) to help working children to get knowledge and learn the skills, which are suitable to their needs and working capacities.

*Second*, supplement and specify legal regulations about child labor in general and prevention and elimination of child labor in particular. Legal regulation about eliminating child labor is still very general. It lies in different laws such as Labor Law, Children Law, Criminal Law, and some under law documents. Therefore, Vietnam needs to supplement, improve legal regulations about the elimination of child labor and focus the regulations on one legal framework, which is highly effective in order to enhance the effectiveness of applying and implementing law about this issue.

In the process to improve the laws about the elimination of child labor, it is essential to accommodate them to the standards in international conventions, which have been ratified by Vietnam (Convention 138 and Convention 182), to establish standards, which are suitable to Vietnam's economic and social conditions as well as to learn from progressive regulations about the elimination of child labor in other countries in the world. It is essential to review and add the list of sectors and jobs, which forbid the use of child labor, especially in heavy, contaminated, and dangerous jobs in agriculture or other jobs in non-official fields. Jobs in agriculture should be reviewed to identify and update the list of dangerous jobs in this field according to Convention 138 of ILO.

To assign the family's responsibility in the protection and care of children, but when the family does not have the capacity and condition to do so, it is essential for the society and state to support them with this responsibility. This support is realized through the system of policies and national action programs to solve urgent problems relating to children. It is vital to give priorities to disadvantaged children and vulnerable children, poor children and facilitate equal chance of development for children.

*Third*, establish and operate the monitoring system of child labor. The supervision of child labor must be established towards different actors, including enterprises and households. Child labor supervision must be implemented regularly and comprehensively because child labor is common in non-official economic sectors, where labor inspectors encounter difficulty in discovering child labor and exploited children. Child labor should be supervised by different actors, who are in close cooperation.

*Fourth*, support the livelihood for poor and pro-poor households with child labor as well as organize orientation activities for children in these families. Livelihood, awareness, and law are the main factors connecting to child labor. Therefore, in order to prevent and eliminate child labor, it is crucial to eradicating poverty, hunger, and create employment, maintains a sustainable employment market so the parents can have a stable income and do not have to force their children to work early.

Localities need to set poverty reduction as one of the leading objectives in their economic

and social development programs. Local governments need to devise the best policies to support poor households with stable employment and income, work closely with local enterprises to employ vocationally trained households, and promote a sustainable economy, which is closely related to the 1956 vocational training program the fundamental rights of the children.

For a family with potential or existing child labor, it is crucial to provide them with a loan and vocational training so they can have the means to improve production, business and stabilize their life with programs such as employment creation program, poverty reduction program, new rural village program, healthcare program, population and family planning program to make sure that these families receive support to secure their livelihood and make income to reduce the scale and number of child labor in agriculture and allow their children to go to school.

*Fifth*, enhance the role and responsibility of enterprises in eliminating child labor. The enhancement of understanding about the consequences of employing and using child labor should be considered an essential solution to eliminate this problem, helping to prevent child labor from both sides: the children and the employers. It is also essential to raise the awareness of their family, especially those in traditional craft villages and rural areas, where people often think that making children work early is a way to inherit family tradition. Therefore, this can be done with some measures such as: Establishing operational rules and organizing national forum about child labor and enterprises to share information about implemented activities, methods, and best practice; designing conduct code for employers about preventing and reducing child labor; promoting the application of international labor standards in the context that Vietnam is actively integrating into the global economy with a new generation of a free trade agreement and signing commitment among stakeholders.

*Sixth*, continue to develop and organize a national program to protect the children with the focus on (1) developing the children protection program on three levels (prevention, intervention, support); (2) developing the children protection staff at the commune level according to Regulation 56/2017/NĐ-CP dated 9<sup>th</sup> May 2017, which specified the articles in Children Law. It is vital to promote the implementation of a National action plan from 2019 to 2025 to accomplish objective 8.7, which is to solve child labor in some sectors such as child labor prevention in agriculture, child labor prevention in the economy and supply chain, child labor prevention in children trafficking for economic exploitation and child labor prevention in education.

*Seventh*, devise a communication strategy about child labor and communicate about child labor to attract social interest, focusing on the parents in education and agriculture. It is essential to communicate international standards in child labor and prevent child labor in the supply chain. The change of awareness should start from each family, parent, and employer. Proper awareness leads to proper action, so it is vital to intensify the communication both in breadth and depth, which is suitable to each region and areas and is done regularly for a long-term effect to change

the awareness and change the behavior—advocating the participation of social organizations, enterprises, and individuals. Discover and report immediately to authorities about cases of employing and exploiting children. Enhance the education and communication of law about the prevention of children to enhance child labor's legal understanding in the community, family, and employer. It is also essential to support, facilitate and persuade disadvantaged families not to force their children to make a living.

*Eighth*, enhance the capacity for inspectors in the field of labor, invalids, and society; accelerate the inspection, examination, especially to non-official sectors with measures such as inspecting, monitoring the responsibility of local units, organizations, and governments in protecting the children; instruct and mobilize financial resources for the protection of children; organize inspection delegation of National Council on Children at ministries, agencies and provinces to ensure the implementation of children rights, especially in non-official economic sectors, industrial zones, and processing zones.

*Last*, construct the mechanism to promote inter-sector participation and cooperation, especially the collaboration between Labor, Invalids, and Society with Education and Training, Public Security, social organizations, and enterprises at national, provincial, district, and local levels in eliminating child labor. It is an urgent task to develop the network of children protection to prevent, discover and support child labor early. This network will ensure the children's rights and provide specific, timely information, legal support, psychological support, and other protection services for children in general and child labor in particular.

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