

CHILD LABOUR RESCUES – POLITY

NEWS: Recently, the **Centre for Legal Action and Behaviour Change (C-LAB)**, in partnership with the **Just Rights for Children (JRC) network**, released a report related to **child labour rescues in 2024–25**.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Child Labour Rescues in India (April 2024 – March 2025)

- **Total Children Rescued:**
Over **53,000 children** were rescued across **24 States and Union Territories** during the one-year period.
- **Top Rescuing States:**
 - **Telangana** led with **11,063 rescues**, indicating a strong enforcement and monitoring system.
 - Followed by **Bihar (3,974)**, **Rajasthan (3,847)**, **Uttar Pradesh (3,804)**, and **Delhi (2,588)**.

Alarming Trends

- **Age Group Most Affected:**
Nearly **90% of rescued children** were between the ages of **10 to 14 years**.
- **Worst Forms of Child Labour Identified:**
Children were found working in **high-risk and exploitative sectors**, including:
 - Spas and massage parlours
 - Orchestras and entertainment industries
 - Other informal and hidden hazardous jobs

Legal Action and Enforcement Measures

- **FIRs and Arrests:**
 - A total of **38,388 First Information Reports (FIRs)** were registered.
 - **5,809 arrests** were made, with **85% of arrests** directly linked to child labour violations.
- **Enforcement Leading States:**
 - **Telangana, Bihar, and Rajasthan** emerged as **leaders in law enforcement** with high numbers of arrests.
 - States like **Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh**, despite high rescue numbers, showed **weaker legal follow-up**, with relatively **fewer arrests**.

Definitions of a Child

- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):**
Defines a child as **any individual below 18 years of age**. India ratified this convention in **1992**.
- **International Labour Organization (ILO):**
Defines a child similarly — as **any person under the age of 18**.
- **ILO on Child Labour:**
Child labour includes any form of work that:
 - **Deprives children of childhood and dignity**
 - **Is harmful to their mental or physical development**
 - **Obstructs education and healthy development**

Constitutional Provisions Protecting Children

- **Article 15(3):**
Allows the State to make **special provisions for children**, recognizing their vulnerability and need for protection.
- **Article 21A:**
Guarantees **free and compulsory education** for all children aged **6 to 14 years**.
Introduced through the **86th Constitutional Amendment, 2002**, it is a crucial tool in combating child labour.
- **Article 24:**
Prohibits employment of children under 14 years in **factories, mines, or other hazardous occupations**.
- **Directive Principles (Article 39(e) & 39(f)):**
 - Calls for protection of children from **economic compulsion and exploitation**.
 - Ensures that childhood and youth are **not abused or abandoned**.
- **Article 45:**
Directs the State to provide **early childhood care and education** for all children under six, laying a foundation for long-term development and learning.

Key Legal Frameworks

- **Minimum Wages Act, 1948 (Amended 1986):**
Recognizes a **child as a person below 14 years**, restricting employment.
- **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016:**
 - **Prohibits employment of children in all occupations.**
 - **Adolescents (14–18 years)** are barred from hazardous work.
 - Imposes **finances and penalties** on those who engage children in labour.
 - Empowers authorities to act against both employers and facilitators.

Structural Reasons Behind Child Labour in India

- **Poverty and Economic Distress:**
 - Remains the **primary reason**, especially in rural and urban informal sectors.
 - Families unable to meet basic needs often depend on **child income**.
- **Lack of Access to Quality Education:**
 - **Dropouts** due to poor infrastructure, lack of teachers, or inability to afford schooling.
 - Children outside the education system become easy targets for labour.
- **Low Parental Awareness:**
 - **Illiteracy among parents** leads to underestimating the long-term value of education.
 - They may unknowingly support exploitative practices.
- **Demand for Cheap and Nimble Labour:**
 - Industries like **beedi-making**, **carpet weaving**, and **fireworks** prefer child workers for their **nimble fingers** and **low wages**.
- **Social and Cultural Norms:**
 - In some areas, child labour is considered **normal or necessary**.
 - Girls are especially vulnerable to **domestic and care work** from a young age.
- **Migration and Trafficking:**
 - Children from **marginalised communities** are often trafficked or migrate with families to cities, where they end up in **exploitative jobs** without protection.

Consequences of Child Labour

- **Loss of Education:**
 - Most working children miss school or drop out permanently, **limiting future opportunities**.
- **Physical and Mental Harm:**
 - Exposure to dangerous tools, chemicals, and stress leads to **long-term health problems**.
- **Perpetuation of Poverty:**
 - Child labour prevents skill-building, ensuring that **future earning potential remains low**, creating a **cycle of poverty**.
- **Increased Vulnerability:**
 - Working children are often **abused, exploited, and trafficked**, especially in informal sectors.

National Policy and Government Initiatives

- **National Policy on Child Labour (1987):**
 - Focused on **rehabilitating children** engaged in hazardous jobs.
 - Promoted **convergence of welfare schemes** to support families and reduce dependency on child income.
 - Supported **project-based interventions** in high-prevalence areas.
- **National Child Labour Project (NCLP):**
 - Targets districts with high child labour rates.
 - Provides **special training centres, bridge education, vocational skills, mid-day meals, and stipends.**
 - Helps children **re-enter the formal education system.**
 - Now integrated into the **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.**
- **SAFAL (Support for Action Against Child Labour):**
 - Aims to **strengthen enforcement and community monitoring.**
 - Encourages involvement of civil society and local institutions in the fight against child labour.

Model State Action Plans and Success Stories

- **Model Action Plans:**

Circulated by the **Ministry of Labour & Employment** to help states:

 - Improve rescue operations
 - Ensure proper rehabilitation and reintegration
 - Enforce child labour laws more effectively
- **Community Success Example – Velpur Mandal (Telangana):**
 - Demonstrated significant success in eliminating child labour through:
 - **Active community engagement**
 - **School retention programs**
 - **Strict local enforcement and monitoring**
 - Serves as a **model for other regions.**

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rajasthan-telangana-bihar-child-labour-rescues-2024-25-report-10083485/>