

## COVID's impact on Child Labour

### Why in news?

The economic downturn and huge health costs triggered by the pandemic have increased the number of child labours across the country.

### What is Child labour in India?

- The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 defines 'child' as any person below the age of 14.
- Child labour is the employment of a Child in any employment including as a domestic help.
- It does not include helping own family in non-hazardous occupations.

### What are the government initiatives to prevent child labour?

- **Constitutional provision - Article 21A** of the Indian Constitution was added to prevent child labour and provide free education to them.
- It mandates that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the ages of 6-14 years in the manner prescribed by the State.
- **Legal Provision** - The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009, gave affect to this constitutional provision.
- 'Compulsory Education' casts an obligation on the appropriate authorities to ensure admission and sustenance of compulsory elementary education for such children.

### How Covid-19 has impacted the vulnerable sections of India?

- The Covid-19 pandemic has brought the world to its knees.
- The pandemic exposed multiple fault-lines in the healthcare, education, economic, and job-related sectors.
- The effect of the pandemic has been deep and long lasting among the marginalised sections of society, especially women and children.
- **Effects** - Households in poor economic conditions were pushed to the brink of poverty.
- These conditions have exacerbated the social inequities.
- These conditions have exposed women and children to abuse, violence and lack of security.

### How Covid-19 has impacted child labour in India?

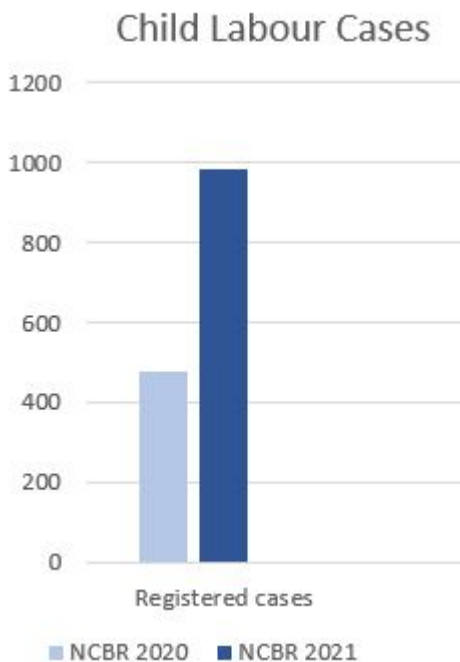
*A 2022 report by UNICEF and ILO said that as COVID has put children at risk of child labour globally.*

## Child Labours in India pre and post pandemic

According to 2011 Census data, there were 10.1 million child labourers in India.

- As per the National Crime Bureau Report 2022, in 2021, around 982 cases were registered under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.
- The highest number of cases were registered in Telangana, followed by Assam.
- The figures saw a significant increase from 476 cases registered under the Act in 2020.

- **Adolescents** - The RTE Act leaves the children between the ages of 14-18 years (adolescents) out of its purview.
- Moreover, the Child Labour Act allows adolescents to engage in work if it does not qualify under hazardous occupations.
- This section of the children become most prone to the perils of child labour.
- **Breadwinners** - The pandemic triggered economic downturn has put excessive pressure on children to be income earners for the family.
- **Reasons**
  - Adult family members have lost their jobs
  - Adult family members have not survived the pandemic.
  - Catastrophic health costs associated with the pandemic
- **Hazardous occupations** - The above reasons has driven children to take up work in exploitative and hazardous circumstances.
- Closure of schools globally has also led to a surge in child labour around the world.



## What should be done to the rescued child labours?

- **Post-rescue Rehabilitation** - Children after rescued from the jobs where they were employed illegally should be given rehabilitation.
- Rehab ensuring that they do not once again get trapped in that cycle of exploitation.
- The children after rescue from labour should be integrated and assimilated into the education system to build a better future for them.

- District and local administrations have to take proactive steps to ensure this part.
- **Implementation of RTE** - A stronger implementation of RTE, in terms of mobilisation of resources and all the actors in the ecosystem along with a robust infrastructure.
- **Awareness at hotspots** - Literacy awareness programmes targeting primary education for children must be undertaken by local authorities, especially in regions where the number of child labourers is high.
- **Including adolescents** - These rehab and awareness programmes must also consider adolescents who are not covered by RTE and are forced to work in hazardous environments.
- **Synergy of policies** - Policies amplifying the spread of education and curtailing child labour should be cohesive and complementary in nature.
- **Mental health** - The special care and protection for these children should be extended taking their mental and physical immaturity into account.

## Reference

1. [Business Line - COVID has led to major rise in child labour](#)

