

# Standing Committee Report Summary

## National Policy on Child Labour – An Assessment

- The Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles and Skill Development (Chair: Mr. Bhartruhari Mahtab) presented its report on ‘National Policy on Child Labour – An Assessment’ on December 20, 2023. The Committee has made several recommendations to Ministries that are directly and indirectly involved in eliminating child labour. Key observations and recommendations include:
  - **Prevalence of child labour:** As per the 2011 Census, which is the latest available data, there are about one crore working children in the age bracket of 5-15 years. The Committee suggested that various Ministries coordinate to conduct periodic surveys to estimate the number of child labourers. Children typically work in the unorganised sector, in industries such as garages, brick kilns, and construction sites. Some establishments outsource manual work to contractors. In case the contractors hire child labour, the principal employer is not held accountable. The Committee suggested that the principal employer be held responsible in such cases.
  - **Preventing instances of child labour:** The Committee highlighted that the Social Justice Ministry must play a more significant role in eliminating child labour. It noted that economic upliftment will ultimately prevent children from being engaged in labour. The Committee has made several recommendations to strengthen existing schemes of the Ministry. The recommendations include providing free competitive exam coaching to marginalised children and rehabilitating individuals with substance abuse issues.
  - It also recommended that the Housing Ministry ensure that existing legal benefits reach construction workers so that their children are not forced to work. The Committee also recommended that the Labour and Home Affairs Ministries check the functioning of placement agencies, which typically traffick children to employ them in domestic labour.
  - **Rescuing child labourers:** In the past five years, about two lakh children engaged in child labour have been rescued. The Committee observed that, in comparison, very few FIRs were registered, and very few children were produced before Child Welfare Committees (a requirement under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015). It suggested penalising police officers for not registering FIRs, similar to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.
- **Rehabilitation** includes conducting special training programs to prepare children for mainstream education. Permission to open new training centres has not been granted since the merger of the National Child Labour Project with Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in 2021. The Committee recommended that: (i) the Labour Ministry and the Department of School Education and Learning (DoSEL) coordinate to continue these training programs and (ii) DoSEL increase the capacity of training centres.
  - The Committee also observed that: (i) annual financial assistance of Rs 6,000 per child has not increased in the past 14 years, and (ii) the number of anganwadis/shelters is inadequate. It recommended increasing the financial assistance in line with inflation, and the number of shelters and anganwadis, as per requirements.
  - **Reducing dropout rates among adolescents:** The proportion of students who drop out of school is higher at the secondary/senior-secondary level than at the elementary level. The Committee recommended that: (i) adolescents be covered under the RTE Act, 2009 to provide them with free and compulsory education, and (ii) hot cooked meals be provided to secondary and senior secondary level students. It also suggested that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs coordinate with DoSEL to address the high dropout rates among tribal students.
  - **Utilisation of funds:** The Supreme Court (1996) mandated a rehabilitation fund for child labourers. So far, guidelines have not been issued for utilising the Fund. The Committee recommended that: (i) guidelines be formulated, (ii) the amount of contribution for other such Funds be increased as per inflation, and (iii) a district corpus fund be created. The district fund will meet the immediate relief needs and rehabilitation needs.
  - **Stricter punishments in certain instances:** The Committee observed that despite penalty revisions, children continue to be employed in domestic work, roadside eateries, and garages. It suggested that the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 be amended to add stricter punishments such as cancellation of licence or attachment of property.

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