

# Social protection and child labour in Asia

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Evie Browne  
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## Question

*What is the evidence on social protection's contribution to reducing child labour? What is the evidence on how to make social protection more effective for children's vulnerability, with regards to modern forms of slavery? Please focus on Asia.*

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## 1. Overview

Social protection is increasingly recognised as a key route to reducing children's poverty and vulnerability. It is assumed to have direct or indirect effects on specific challenges that children face, such as child labour. Child labour is not often included as a main aim of social protection, and therefore is not commonly tracked systematically (de Hoop & Rosati, 2014). There is limited evidence which suggests that social protection programmes have successfully reduced child labour. Most of this evidence comes from Latin America, where social protection programmes are well-established and have been measured over the long-term. This report looks at the general evidence on social protection and child labour, and focuses on programmes in Asia.

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Child labour is defined by the ILO as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development”<sup>1</sup>. Helping around the house and assisting in a family business is not usually considered child labour unless it interferes with their development, often through reducing their amount of time in school.

Social protection is commonly defined as “a set of public actions that address poverty, vulnerability and exclusion and provide the means to cope with the major risks that may be encountered throughout the life cycle” (ILO, 2013a).

The literature suggests that social protection programmes have a small effect on reducing child labour. Social protection is broadly successful in reducing child labour, but this outcome is not often measured, meaning the evidence is lacking or weak. Many reports suggest that the effects of social protection are dependent on the precise details of the project and its context – there are examples of programmes decreasing wage work outside the household for children but increasing their domestic chores, or different results for boys and girls.

Cash transfers seem to work to reduce child labour, although the effects are usually small. Most programmes have shown reductions in the number of hours worked or intensity of work, not removing child labour altogether. Conditionality does not seem to have a strong influence on child labour, although there are no studies empirically testing this in Asia. The size of the transfer is consistently raised as a problem for child labour. Transfers are generally too small to make a big difference to household finances, and not enough to take children out of work completely. The literature theorises that a larger transfer would reduce child labour much more significantly, but this has not been tested.

The public works programme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in India is the only workfare programme in Asia which provides evidence on child labour. It has produced some negative results. Parents sometimes allow their children to work in the programme, although they are not allowed to if they are under 18, and sometimes caregivers’ increased work in the programme means that children have an increased burden of domestic or household enterprise work. Some of the literature concludes that public works programmes, asset-based or income-generating programmes do not reduce child labour, as these can increase children’s time spent on family work through a substitution effect.

Child labour often refers to and measures work for money outside the household. When domestic chores and helping out in family businesses are included in the definition of work, impacts from programmes can be considerably different. Sometimes there is a displacement effect, where increased adult work transfers the burden of domestic work onto older children. Domestic work is also performed by girls more than boys, and this work may be more hidden from programme implementers.

In general, boys tend to benefit more from social protection than girls. This is probably due to their higher presence in wage work or economic activity outside the household, which is more visible and more easily addressed by social protection programmes. Caregivers often prioritise boys’ education over girls’ and if a programme only supports one child out of work and back to school, they may choose a boy.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

Reducing child labour is closely associated with increasing school attendance, and schooling is often the metric used to measure child labour.

## 2. Theory of change

Social protection is widely thought of as helping break the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and therefore has a strong focus on children, both directly and indirectly (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). Social protection programmes have provided improvements to children's nutrition, health and schooling, thus contributing to their current and future wellbeing and reducing vulnerability to harmful practices such as child labour (ILO, 2014). Poverty, and/or economic shock, is the main reason why households turn to child labour, although there are significant variations and nuances to this. Social protection addresses the root causes of child labour: poverty, exclusion and vulnerability that drive families to send children to work (Singh & McLeish, 2013).

Social protection can help to prevent child labour through three direct mechanisms (Singh & McLeish, 2013):

- improving the economic position of households, enabling them to keep children in school for longer and reducing the necessity to send children to work
- increasing the resilience of households to economic shocks making them less likely to have to resort to taking children out of school and into work
- through creating positive incentives to keep children in school and out of work, for example by making social protection benefits conditional on the achievement of certain health and education objectives.

Reducing child labour is closely connected with increasing school attendance as children move from working back into school. Thus programmes which increase school attendance are assumed to have positive impacts on child labour. This is not always the case as sometimes children continue to work alongside school. However, school attendance is an easily measured proxy for child labour. Many of the programmes discussed here aim at increasing school attendance, but note reduced child labour as a secondary outcome. School attendance and child labour are linked through household economic decision-making. Often (but not always) sending children to work is a decision made to increase the household's income. A lack of cash is also often cited as a barrier to schooling, which can have high costs for uniforms, materials, and fees. Thus the theory of change is that an increase in household income would both alleviate the need for children to work, and enable households to afford school costs.

Other forms of social protection can have positive impacts on child labour, such as old-age pensions being used to pay for children's education. Measures to reduce the income insecurity of adults, including unemployment protection, employment guarantee schemes, disability benefits, maternity benefits and social pensions, also contribute to mitigating vulnerability for poor households, and can contribute to preventing and reducing child labour (ILO, 2014).

## 3. Child wellbeing and social protection

Social protection is widely considered to have beneficial effects on several dimensions of child wellbeing. Social protection helps ensure access to social services, nutrition and education (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). The ILO recommends that social protection form a central pillar of responses against child labour, although it cannot eliminate child labour without other social

mechanisms (ILO, 2014). ILO recommends a comprehensive social security system to combat child vulnerability.

The ILO assumes that social security generally has a positive effect on child vulnerability, through reducing household vulnerability and alleviating poverty (ILO, 2014). UNICEF conclude that social protection programmes directly focusing on children have strong positive effects on their wellbeing overall (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). However, programmes not focusing on children have mixed effects. Positive impacts include old age pensions paying for children's education, while negative ones increase income generating activities for adults resulting in children's increased domestic labour. Programmes tend to work better for children when the political environment prioritises child wellbeing, and when they are integrated with other social services.

Recent years have seen an increasing emphasis on social protection for child wellbeing, termed 'child-sensitive social protection' (CSSP) (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). CSSP aims to carefully consider the effects of any policy or programme on child welfare, and effects on children are closely monitored (ILO, 2013a). Social protection is increasingly seen as a key route to ensuring children's nutritional, health and education status and protecting them from abuse and exploitation. A joint statement on CSSP was issued in 2009 by DfID, HelpAge International, Hope & Homes for Children, Institute of Development Studies, ILO, Overseas Development Institute, Save the Children UK, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank (ILO, 2014). The Joint Statement on Advancing Child-sensitive Social Protection<sup>2</sup> sets out that the design, implementation and evaluation of child-sensitive social protection programmes should aim to:

- avoid adverse impacts on children, and reduce or mitigate social and economic risks that directly affect children's lives;
- intervene as early as possible where children are at risk, in order to prevent irreversible impairment or harm;
- consider the age and gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities of children throughout the life cycle;
- mitigate the effects of shocks, exclusion and poverty on families, recognising that families raising children need support to ensure equal opportunity;
- make special provision to reach children who are particularly vulnerable and excluded, including children without parental care, and those who are marginalised within their families or communities due to their gender, disability, ethnicity, HIV and AIDS, or other factors;
- consider the mechanisms and intra-household dynamics that may affect how children are reached,
- paying particular attention to the balance of power between men and women within the household and broader community;
- include the voices and opinions of children, their care-givers and youth in the understanding and design of social protection systems and programmes.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCY/Resources/395766-1187899515414/CSSP\\_joint\\_statement\\_8.20.09.pdf](https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCY/Resources/395766-1187899515414/CSSP_joint_statement_8.20.09.pdf)

UNICEF has adopted a definition of social protection that explicitly focuses on children (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). Sanfilippo et al. (2012: 34) recommend that child-sensitive social protection instruments should:

- incentivise and/or support caregivers to invest in children's health and education regardless of their gender, age or rank-order in the household;
- incentivise and/or support caregivers to avoid choices and coping strategies that are harmful to children such as limiting food intake, limiting access to school and learning, limiting access to health care, limiting parenting or promoting child labour, begging, prostitution or other forms of abuse;
- incentivise and/or support caregivers to provide adequate protection from all forms of violence;
- substitute for the absence of caregivers in providing food (including safe water), shelter, health services, education, protection and other essential services for children.

CSSP is widely supported, although not all social protection programmes adopt this approach. It particularly focuses on vulnerability, not just poverty. CSSP has strong potential for supporting children's wellbeing overall, and for reducing child labour. Evidence on CSSP is somewhat thin, as it is a recent approach.

The only specific CSSP evaluation for Asia comes from Save the Children. Smith and Watson (2015) evaluate Save the Children's CSSP approach in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Programmes started in 2011, with overall objectives to reduce childhood poverty and vulnerability by increasing retention in school, reducing child labour, and improving nutrition and health seeking behaviour for children. The analysis of four project sites shows that the approach contributes to child wellbeing in education and child labour, with lesser evidence that it supports improvements to health and nutrition. The greatest impacts were felt in terms of greater access to existing social protection schemes. In many cases, communities did not know they were eligible for social protection, and awareness-raising enabled them to remove their children from work and send them to school with the help of a social protection grant. Sensitisation about the dangers of child labour was also effective in encouraging caregivers to reduce their children's labour. When sensitisation was coupled with grants providing access to school, child labour decreased and school attendance increased. In one area in Bangladesh, schools were made completely free to access, which resulted in a huge increase in attendance, including many child migrant domestic workers who were brought back by their parents to attend school. Enabling factors were largely seen in the areas of communications and linkages: community-based structures; interaction between vulnerable groups; interaction with local government and duty bearers; and intensive support at household level.

## **4. Cash transfers**

The strongest evidence on social protection comes from cash transfer programmes. CTs are generally shown to reduce child labour, although the contexts and delivery of CTs affects by how much (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). Reduction in child labour is closely related to increases in school attendance, and often measured through this metric. The results change when examining income-generating work outside the house versus domestic work – some CTs reduce economic activity but increase domestic work.

ODI recently produced a rigorous review examining the design, implementation and impacts of cash transfers (Bastagli et al., 2016). This review retrieves, assesses and synthesises the evidence on the effects of cash transfers on individuals and households through a rigorous review of the literature of 15 years, from 2000 to 2015. It focuses on non-contributory monetary transfers, including conditional and unconditional cash transfers, social pensions and enterprise grants.

This global review finds that there are strong links between cash transfers and the reduction of child labour. There are statistically significant results in the amount of time spent working, and the non-statistically significant results also show reductions in child labour. Reductions are clearly linked to the receipt of the cash transfer. The evidence also highlights a clear link between cash transfer receipt and increased school attendance and decreased absenteeism. Boys seem to experience more benefits than girls. In Pakistan, the review suggests that boys aged 5 to 14 experience reductions in child labour as a result of the Benazir Income Support Programme. This is explained by boys' higher presence in economic activities outside the home. Girls' duties inside the home, while constituting a form of child labour, are unlikely to change as a result of cash transfers without a corresponding cultural change. The Punjab's Female School Stipend Program for girls in Pakistan resulted in a decrease of labour for girls aged 15 to 16. There is a slight suggestion that conditionalities or the perception of conditionalities to send children to school have some positive impact on child labour. Geographically, the most successful programmes in reducing child labour are in Latin America, with no significant results found in sub-Saharan Africa.

A similar World Bank systematic global review (de Hoop & Rosati, 2014) finds broad evidence that cash transfers have strong effects on reducing child labour. Three programmes suggest that unconditional cash transfers that aim to encourage investment in human capital tend to lower child participation in economic activities. The receipt of old age pensions is associated with a decrease in child daily hours worked and increase in school participation, in South Africa and Brazil. These findings support the hypothesis that cash transfers without a human capital accumulation objective can still reduce child labour. Conditionalities also have a positive effect on child labour through slightly reducing the number of hours worked, although this is a weak finding. They do not increase child labour, a theoretical possibility. The authors find that the impact of conditional cash transfers on child labour generally appears to be larger for the poor. Cash transfers appear to cushion the effect of economic shocks that may lead households to use child labour as a coping strategy. Testing whether there are stronger effects for older or younger children, the authors find no evidence of a correlation. However, testing by gender shows that CCTs result in a 3.3 percentage point stronger reduction in child labour for males than females. This is mostly explained by the fact that boys are more likely to be undertaking economic activities outside the house. The authors found no evidence that larger transfer amounts are associated with a larger reduction in child labour. In conclusion, the use of cash transfers as an anti-poverty strategy seems to be effective to reduce child labour.

Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme was one of the only ones in the world which had a specific aim to reduce child labour. LEAP provides bi-monthly cash transfers and health insurance to the elderly, disabled and those unable to work. Transfers are conditional on health and education stipulations, and on non-trafficking of children and non-



involvement in the worst forms of child labour. However, the child labour condition was removed in 2012<sup>3</sup>, and in practice, these conditions are not enforced (Roelen & Karki Chettri, 2014).

In Ghana, Roelen and Karki Chettri (2014) find that children are expected to help on family farms and stalls, and household work, after school. Ghana is also a country of origin, transit and destination for forced labour and sex trafficking. The cash transfers were shown to improve carers' ability to meet children's basic needs and improved access to school. LEAP also had some impact on keeping families together, as poverty was identified as the main reason for people leaving the family and children being cared for by the extended family. In a context of child labour and trafficking, keeping families together helps resist the practices of traffickers. Several reviews of the LEAP programme note a small reduction in child labour, but these are not reported systematically or with strong evidence. A draft working paper reviewed the effects on child labour using a longitudinal dataset and found that the programme had no effect on participation of children in farming but it did lead to a reduction in the hours of work per day (Ayifah, 2015). The largest effect of the scheme occurs in extremely poor households with 2.7 hours reduction in the hours of work per day. But the LEAP programme had no effect on both participation and hours of work in male headed and poor households. The author suggests that the results may be because the amount of the transfer is too small to allow household to recall children from working. She also highlights that there are many other factors influencing whether a child is sent to work or not: average age of children in a household, proportion of children in school, number of children, household size and household wealth as well as debt owing status of the household.

The LEAP transfers arrive at irregular intervals, making it hard for recipients to plan, and undermining the programme's positive effects (Roelen & Karki Chettri, 2014). The transfers are also small and can be tokenistic in large families. The programme appears to have positive effects without enforcing the child labour conditions, making it unclear whether conditionality is necessary (Roelen & Karki Chettri, 2014).

Indonesia's Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), a conditional cash transfer, has some evidence to suggest it has reduced child labour. A randomised control trial was conducted in 2016 which shows that child labour has decreased, consistent with the increase in school attendance (Satriawan, 2016)<sup>4</sup>. There are significant improvements for children aged 7 to 12 on wage work during the last month, and on 13 to 15 year olds who work more than 20 hours a month. The World Bank midline evaluation (Alatas, 2011) did not find improvements on child labour or school attendance, suggesting that these results are either weak, or only visible in the long-term. The midline report highlights that the cash disbursements did not coincide with the academic year, and were too low to cover additional fees, which may explain why enrolment did not increase. At midline, child labour in wage work decreased by a small amount, but work in family enterprises increased slightly. The report recommends focusing on the different opportunity costs for different types of families to better explain these results.

In Indonesia, the Jaringan Pengaman social scholarship programme provided (among other benefits) school grants to pupils at the time of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s in order to minimise increases in school dropout. As a consequence, child labour was reduced by 27 per

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/ghana>

<sup>4</sup> The full evaluation document appears not to be publically available.

cent on average (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). The effect becomes stronger as children grow older, since the incidence of child labour is higher among adolescents, and because the size of the scholarship increases with age.

Pensions are widely accepted to reduce child labour. Pensions increase children's attendance at school, and reduce their labour (ILO, 2013a). This happens in intergenerational households when OAPs spend part of their pension on children's schooling expenses.

The ILO finds that cash transfers increase school attendance, but it is unclear whether they also reduce child labour, as children sometimes continue to combine school and work (ILO, 2014). The most successful programmes are those which focus on the poorest children and those which link to supply-side interventions such as healthcare and education (ILO, 2013a). The least successful are programmes which invest in household assets and income-generating activities, as these create opportunities for children to do more family work. Conditionality reduces child labour, but to varying extents depending on the programme context (ILO, 2013a). There is no solid evidence either way (ILO, 2013a).

## 5. Other types of social protection

In 2009, the World Bank conducted an impact evaluation review of programmes which work to reduce child labour (Paruzzolo, 2009). Overall, reducing the direct or indirect cost of schooling (including conditional cash transfer programmes) has proved effective in increasing school enrolment and school continuation. However, more research is needed on the effect of these programmes on child labour and the extent to which school attendance reduces child labour. On the other hand, evidence for the impact of interventions to improve school quality or school attendance is weak. None of the study results show consistent effects on school attendance or child labour. Programmes investing in early childhood education seem to increase school attendance and through this likely reduce the risk for child labour. Because child labour is commonly used by households as a buffer against shocks, risk-coping strategies are likely to reduce child labour. There is evidence that credit provision and other risk-coping programmes increase school attendance.

There is not enough evidence from a child labour perspective to draw conclusions on public employment programmes (ILO, 2013a). Nor is there enough evidence on unemployment protection. However, the large-scale public works programme MGNREGS in India provides some evidence which shows that impacts on child labour are mixed, and not always positive.

There are clear indications that MGNREGS households prioritise children's education and healthcare and spend more of their income on it when they have enough (ILO, 2013b). Most MGNREGS income is spent on food and consumption items. The ILO report concludes that MGNREGS, along with other child-focused social protection in India, has generally increased child wellbeing and decreased child labour. The same study assesses that the income earned through MGNREGS is too small to have a significant impact on overall child wellbeing indicators, so it is unclear whether this social protection programme works well for children.

A review by Save the Children (2016) of the MGNREGS in Rajasthan finds that the programme has mixed impacts on child labour. If household resources increase, children may be withdrawn from labour, but if adults take up new jobs, child labour can increase to compensate. The study shows that women's participation in MGNREGS increases children's care and domestic duties, as they take over their mother's previous duties. A further review using cross-sectional and panel



data concludes that the MGNREGS increases time spent on education for younger children but also increases time spent working outside the household for older children (Islam & Sivasankaran, 2014). The authors suggest the increase in work may be due to older children taking over household enterprises while adults work in MGNREGS.

Although MGNREGS does not allow enrolment of people under 18, there are cases where this happens. In Rajasthan, in some cases, adult women mark themselves present at worksites, then leave their adolescent daughters to undertake the work (Save the Children, 2016). ILO's study (ILO, 2013b) is primarily based on a survey conducted at MGNREGS worksites in two districts in Uttar Pradesh in the north and two districts in Tamil Nadu in the south. Interviews with 400 workers were also carried out. The study found that no one under the age of 14 was working in the programme, and only three adolescents aged 15 to 18. A small number of households reported that their children had worked in MGNREGS at other times. Children were enrolled to support their parents at the worksites or to earn extra money for the household.

In Bangladesh, some microcredit programmes have increased child labour (Sanfilippo et al, 2012). Microcredit increases the probability of child labour for girls by 7.9 per cent to 13.7 per cent. The probabilities rise to 8.4 per cent and 14.3 per cent when women are borrowers. This seems to be because children are taken out of school and start working on small household enterprises set up with microcredit funding.

An old evaluation of the Food-For-Education programme (FFE) in Bangladesh shows promising results on child labour (Ravallion & Wodon, 2000). The provision of monthly rice rations in exchange for primary school attendance results in a small decrease in child labour and increase in school attendance. The government programme first targets deprived areas, then community groups select participating households. Households receive around 100kg of rice per year. The authors calculate that the value of the rice is about 13 per cent of the average monthly earnings of boys and 20 per cent of that for girls. The results show that, for both boys and girls, FFE participants have a mean enrolment rate that is 0.15 higher than non-participants while the child labour participation rate is 0.05 lower for FFE participants. So these figures suggest partial displacement of child labour by schooling; about one third of the extra school attendance comes from work. The displacement of child labour is smaller than the gain in schooling. The results show that an extra 100 kg of rice reduces the incidence of child labour by 0.04 and 0.02 for boys and girls respectively.

Although Nepal has a comprehensive social security system and several programmes which specifically target children, none has the intended aim of decreasing child labour (Roelen & Karki Chettri, 2016). The review of these social protection programmes shows that none could provide evidence of any impacts on child labour, either positive or negative.

Singh and McLeish (2013) look at internal child migrants in Indonesia, to see how social protection mitigates their vulnerability to child labour. It concludes that child migrants are often overlooked by existing social protection policies, due to their mobility and lack of registered status. There are stringent registration requirements which prevent migrants from benefiting from social programmes. There are several social protection programmes which would be relevant for preventing the labour of child migrants, but there is little evidence on their efficacy and poor outcome tracking.

Social protection for adult health (insurance, or access to services) has some evidence to show that it reduces child labour, as adult sickness can force children into work (ILO, 2013a).

The ILO notes some important knowledge gaps (ILO, 2013a):

- Impact on girl child labourers. Most surveys employed in evaluations ask only about paid, or even unpaid, market work, thereby missing much of the child labour burden borne by girls, who are disproportionately assigned to household chores in their own homes.
- Impact on worst forms of child labour. Most impact evaluations focus only on broad categories of productive activities without distinguishing activities constituting worst forms of child labour.
- Long-term impact. Impact evaluations focus almost exclusively on short-term outcomes.
- Impact of complementary advocacy activities. The ILO and other organisations frequently accompany social protection interventions addressing child labour with advocacy and information campaigns against child labour. Unfortunately, there is very little quantitative evidence concerning the direct impact of these complementary advocacy activities or of how they interact with social protection in influencing child labour outcomes.

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Smith, G. and Watson, C. (2015). *Assessment of Save the Children's 'Child Sensitive Social Protection' Approach in South Asia*. Save the Children Finland. [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pelastakaalapset/main/2016/03/11123216/CSSP\\_Assessment\\_web.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pelastakaalapset/main/2016/03/11123216/CSSP_Assessment_web.pdf)

## 7. Further resources

**ILO Child Labour and Social Protection website:**

[http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Campaignandadvocacy/wdacl/2014/WCMS\\_245210/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Campaignandadvocacy/wdacl/2014/WCMS_245210/lang--en/index.htm)

**ILO Child Labour in South Asia hub:** <http://ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/child-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

**Understanding Children's Work:** <http://www.ucw-project.org/>

**Save the Children guide: Putting Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programmes into Practice: Experiences from South Asia:**

<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/putting-child-sensitive-social-protection-programmes-practice-experiences-south-asia>

## Resources on child labour and social protection outside Asia

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Miller, C., & Tsoka, M. (2012). Cash Transfers and Children's Education and Labour among Malawi's Poor. *Development Policy Review*, 30(4), 499-522. <http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/evidence/impact-evaluations/details/1663/>

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