

Child Labour in India

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Child Labour in India: Progress in Rescues, Gaps in Justice

Context:

In **2024-25**, India intensified its efforts to tackle **child labour**, with more than **53,000 children rescued** nationwide. A report jointly published by **Just Rights for Children (JRC)** and the **Centre for Legal Action and Behaviour Change (C-LAB)** exposes the **scale of child exploitation**, enforcement trends, and the urgent need for stronger institutional mechanisms.

Leading States in Rescue and Arrests

- **Top 3 states in child labour rescues and arrests:**

- **Telangana**
- **Bihar**
- **Rajasthan**

- These states led not just in rescue operations, but also in **legal action**, reflecting **stronger enforcement mechanisms**.
 - Other states like **Uttar Pradesh** and **Madhya Pradesh**, despite high rescue numbers, showed **weaker prosecution rates**.
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Scale of Rescue Operations

- **Time period:** April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025

- **Total rescue operations: 38,889**
 - **Children rescued: 53,651**
 - Conducted across **24 states and UTs** by a network of **250+ NGOs**, in coordination with **law enforcement agencies**.
 - **Top 5 states by number of children rescued:**
 - **Telangana:** 11,063
 - **Bihar:** 3,974
 - **Rajasthan:** 3,847
 - **Uttar Pradesh:** 3,804
 - **Delhi:** 2,588
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Worst Forms of Child Labour: Alarming Trends

- Nearly **90% of rescued children** were found in sectors listed under the **worst forms of child labour** (ILO Convention 182), including:
 - Spas and massage parlours
 - Domestic work
 - Orchestra troupes
 - Informal entertainment
 - **Sexual exploitation**, including pornography and prostitution
- These findings underscore the **urgent need for targeted legal action** and **protective rehabilitation frameworks**.

Enforcement and Legal Action

- **85% of FIRs** registered were directly related to **child labour offences**.
- Arrests were highest in **Telangana, Bihar, and Rajasthan**, indicating **better follow-through** on rescue operations.
- The report highlights that **prosecution acts as a deterrent**, raises public awareness, and helps in breaking the **cycle of exploitation**.

Key Recommendations from the Report

1. Launch a **National Mission to End Child Labour** with proper funding and staffing.
2. Form **district-level Child Labour Task Forces**.
3. Set up a **Child Labour Rehabilitation Fund**.
4. Create a **national rehabilitation policy** with a focus on long-term support.
5. Extend **compulsory education to 18 years**, beyond the current **RTE cap of 14 years**.
6. Frame **state-specific policies** addressing local socio-economic realities.
7. Enforce **zero-tolerance for child labour** in **government procurement**.
8. Expand the list of **hazardous occupations** under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act.
9. Extend the **SDG 8.7 deadline to 2030** for realistic implementation.

India's Global and National Commitments

- India is a signatory to **ILO Convention 182**, which mandates the **elimination of the worst**

forms of child labour.

- While legal reforms have progressed, the report stresses the need for:
 - **Institutional convergence**
 - **Judicial accountability**
 - **Robust rehabilitation systems**
- As JRC rightly notes:
“Justice for children trapped in the worst forms of child labour will only be achieved when the culprits are punished and strong protection mechanisms are in place.”



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