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CHILD LABOR IN PUNJAB: A COMPARATIVE LEGAL ANALYSIS OF DOMESTIC COMPLIANCE WITH THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Kamran Manzoor

LLM Human Rights Law, International Islamic University Islamabad

kamranmanzoor943@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *
Kamran Manzoor

Abstract
This study examines that despite Constitutional guarantees and legislative frameworks in Punjab, Child labour persist as a widespread and well-documented problem with data revealing that more than 13.4% children in Punjab are engaged in labour which directly contradicts Pakistan's commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, making it an issue that demands serious attention and effective action. This comparative legal analysis assesses the extent to which provisions of provincial laws comply with CRC standards and examines the effectiveness of provincial agencies in curbing the issue of child labour. The study focuses on the fundamental rights that every child is entitled to and reveals that significant gaps in legal definitions, inconsistent enforcement, institutional weaknesses and economic constraints contribute to Punjab's inability to fully meet its obligations. A few recommendations have been given which can be utilized to address the issue and eliminate the hindrances to compliance with CRC. It concludes that further work in the area of child protection is needed and there is still room for improvement. Comprehensive legal reforms, institutional strengthening, and effective enforcement are essential for advancing child protection in Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

"A child for full and harmonious development of his or her personality should grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding and should be fully prepared to live as an individual in society, embodying the principles of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, justice, and unity." In a civilized society, every child has inherent rights, including respect, dignity, freedom from oppression, and social and legal equality. Child labour is one of the prevalent global issues that denies millions of children their fundamental rights to health, education, development, non discrimination and having their best interests considered first. The term child labour is a relative term and different cultures and societies define it differently (Dessy et al. 2001). International labour organization defines Child labour as work that deprive children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. (Grand, 1983) defines Child labour as the employment of children when they are too young to work on wages or when they are employed for jobs unsuitable or unsafe ." Similarly (Folk, 1987) define child labour as "any work done by children which interferes with their full physical development, their opportunities for a desirable education or their needed recreation."

Child Labour has severe and irreversible physical, psychological, and moral consequences to well being

of children (Burrone & Giannelli). Child labour deprives children of childhood exposing them to physical and emotional abuse which restrains their access to education. The exploitation, health problems, malnutrition and trauma on the children who have been influenced by labour has long term effects on their lives and future. Child labour is a significant issue in Pakistan where its degree is very high. Punjab which is a place of residence to a majority of the population records high numbers of child labour. Punjab child labour survey 2019-20 released in October 2022, indicated that 13.4% of the children under the age of 5-14 were engaged in some form of work.

This study aims to examine whether the domestic legal and institutional framework in Punjab effectively fulfill its CRC obligations. It will explore constitutional provisions that guarantee free and compulsory education and protection from exploitation, the practical implementation challenges and additional measures that could better protect children in Punjab. By comparing domestic laws with international standards, this study seeks to identify gaps and recommend some reforms that can meaningfully advance children's rights in Punjab.

FUNDAMENTALS OF CHILD PROTECTION:

It is the best interest of child that should be kept in mind as one of the major concerns in every action and their right to life should be taken into account (Jebb, 1989). The international humanitarian system has a fundamental duty of child protection since it deals with child safety, dignity, and survival. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is based on four main principles namely non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, right to survival and development and respect of the child's views. In Article 3 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan it is provided that *the State shall ensure the elimination of exploitation and the gradual fulfillment of fundamental principles, from each according to his ability, to each according to his work.* The Constitution of Pakistan 1973, has a detailed structure on how to protect the children against exploitation as stated in the Art. 11(3) that *No child below the age of 14 years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment*. Articles 9 and 14 recognize a child's right to life, dignity, and development. Courts enforce their rights stated by Articles 9 and 14, and these rights are directly violated by child labour. Article 25(A) provides that *The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years,* which is a very positive law considering that it is used as an alternative to child labour as opposed to some being subjected to exploitable employment. Article 37(e) and Articles 38 guide the State to prevent the exploitation of children as well as to provide human employment conditions and prevent economic hardships causing children to enter the labour market. These principles confirm that children are complete human beings and they should be treated and given equal treatment and protection. Children should be immunised against dangerous environments since they are not mature enough to defend themselves both physically, mentally and emotionally and thus, cannot defend themselves adequately without support.

Pakistan over the years has passed and promulgated laws for child protection, however, the practical application of these laws has not been much of a success. Various reasons account for the lack of success of child protection laws, foremost of which are the scarcity of the concern and interest of the important stakeholders in this regard. Additionally, the general masses are not apprised of the essence and importance of child protection laws. This culminates in the general population being least interested in the topic of child protection thereby resulting in no substantial debate or criticism (Fozia, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Child labour in Punjab is a prevalent issue driven by a convergence of legislative shortcomings, economic pressures and emerging environmental challenges. Recent academic literature has gone through various aspects of this problem providing valuable insights while highlighting areas for further investigation.

In a study Talha et al. (2023) examined the position of child rights considering that despite being a signatory to the CRC, and having different laws to safeguard the basic rights of children, millions of children in Punjab are out of school and working in labour. The study also states the cause of the failure to be due to poor implementation, absence of awareness and lack of concern by the society towards the safety and health of children, their education and fair

treatment in Punjab. It gives an account of the legal framework, such as the Employment of Children Act 1991, the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act 2004, but discovers that enforcement is still incomplete and in most cases, poverty, extended families, and the inefficiency of administrative machinery are a dragging force. The economic pressures push parents to labour their children and deny them a life full of childhood, primary education and healthy upbringing. The study recommends that there should be stronger institutions, improved co-ordination of actions between the federal and provincial government and more publicity to help curb these recurrent breaches.

A recent research by Phattanasin et al. (2025) provides in-depth analysis of Pakistan's efforts to synchronize its child protection laws with the international standards particularly the CRC and the ILO convention. Despite formal commitments, child labor is still very rampant, particularly in hazardous sectors because of the weak enforcement of the law and lack of resources. Phattanasin et al. (2025) emphasized that despite having institutions such as the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau, the institution is usually limited in scope and availability, focusing mostly on the homeless and disadvantaged children. It further points out the lack of clarity in legal definitions and difficulty in monitoring and prosecuting the child labor violations.

A related study by Akhtar et al. (2024) offers a thorough analysis of the laws concerning child protection through the lens of international standards, especially the CRC. It points at significant gaps in defining the law, the lack of uniform application, and variations between provinces. The challenges hindering the practical realization of children's rights, such as issues related to access to justice, awareness, and the roles of various stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies and civil society are also mentioned in the study.

Tufail et al. (2025) found parental literacy, school enrollment, poverty and unemployment as the most significant factors that affected child labor in Punjab. The fact that schooling is quite expensive and the opportunities of primary education are scarce is also forcing children into the labour force. The study examined that structural poverty is less significant in the case where education and household status is moderated Tufail et al.(2025). It was found that the reduction of child labour even in poor areas is steep due to improved parental literacy and advanced school attendance. Among the policy interventions suggested by this research are that the parents be trained in literacy campaigns, better access to education, better access to adult employment opportunities and more strict enforcement of the law in securing the rights of children.

The research by Arif et al. (2024) demonstrates that child labour, especially in rural and indigent areas of Punjab is strongly related to the economic deprivation, insufficient educational facilities, and poverty. Despite national and international commitment to free and compulsory primary education, millions of children are out of primary school, and the rate of dropout is prone to the instability of the economy, homelessness and the families required to have the children earn a living only increases and worsens the situation further. Research points to the fact that education is perceived by families as a luxury but not a need when immediate survival is at stake Arif et al.(2024). Moreover, most of the schools in the province are often not well equipped, making it difficult for the marginalized children to access the educational services. Although the relationship between poverty, resource scarcity, and child labor has been already confirmed, there is still a gap in research concerning the long-term educational outcomes for children involved in labour.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PUNJAB'S LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS:

Child labour is firmly ingrained in our culture, and the children subjected to it have come to accept it as their fate. Child labour, or the economic abuse of children, is utmost severe child abuse & neglect practice. Children labor in practically every area of the nation's economy. Many of them work in dangerous jobs and are historically and economically tied (Sewani, 2012). Both national and provincial legislations influence the prevention of child labour by legal and institutional facilities in Punjab. Laws such as Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016, The Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children's Act, 2004, Punjab Prohibition of child labour at Brick kilns Act, 2016 and Punjab Domestic workers act, 2019 match with the

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These laws ban child labour, provide minimum working age and give the violation penalties. Punjab has come a long way in legislative front by amending and updating its law to make it tough on child labour. However, even with this legal compliance, child labour in Punjab continues to persist and this means that legal provisions alone might not be sufficient to fully comply with the CRC.

Some of the arguments that have been put forward to support the framework in Punjab include the presence of comprehensive laws and child protection institutions have been established. These frameworks offer the legal ground for prosecuting offenders and guarding the rights of children. The arguments against their effectiveness, however, include poor enforcement, failure to coordinate the working of the agencies, inadequate data, and the economic factors such as poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Research evidence reveals that, in both rural and urban Punjab where child labour has predominately been frequent, even after legislation, child labour persists and majority of children continue to work under hazardous conditions and suffer abuse, a common occurrence attributed to economic need and the lack of institutional control.

Countries that have made a significant progress in the fight against child labour have adopted a holistic legal framework, strong enforcement, a system of social protection and stakeholder cooperation. Laws on a minimum working age and the banning of hazardous child labour have been established in most countries, in accordance with the ILO Convention 138 and 182. Compulsory schooling was extended by Turkey and educational infrastructure was ameliorated resulting in a decrease of 24 percent in child labour among 12-17 years old (Dayıoğlu, 2022). During the period between 2004 and 2014, 59 countries amended their child labour laws and 57 of which passed specific policies and programs to fight child labour showing importance of continuance legal adoption.

To enhance adherence to the CRC, Punjab should make its enforcement mechanisms more robust, ensure regular and updated data collection and establish a coordinated child protection case management and referral system. The recommended policies include greater funding for education and healthcare, providing financial support to vulnerable families, promoting public awareness about children rights and encouraging the partnership between the government, the NGOs and international organizations. Tough fines for violators and frequent monitoring of workplaces are also necessary. Although the legal and institutional provisions of Punjab give a required foundation in ensuring compliance with CRC, the practice is hampered with poor enforcement, economic issues and institutional failures. The solutions to these problems involve the approach that would combine legal, social, as well as economic options, so that the rights of children are not only secured legally, but also, practically.

PROVINCIAL LAWS:

5.1 The Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016

The Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016 defines a child as a person who is below the age of 15 years and imposes absolute ban on the employment of children in any establishment. The law draws a clear distinction between children and adolescents where the adolescents are classified as the individuals who have attained the age of fifteen years but are below eighteen years. According to the Act, adolescents should not be subjected to hazardous work. They are not supposed to work in hazardous occupations and the Schedule to the Act provides a list of thirty-eight types of hazardous work that adolescents cannot be involved in. The employers are strictly prohibited by law to hire or permit adolescents to perform any work which is classified in such a list as prohibited. The Act regulates the working conditions of adolescents in order to safeguard their education and wellbeing. The employers are required to organize working hours in a way that does not interfere with the school or vocational training schedule of the adolescent. Besides, the adolescents should receive at least one hour of break every day, one day off a week, and not be allowed to work after 7 p.m. or before 8 a.m. In order to ensure strict adherence, the Act obliges the employers to keep a register containing information about adolescent workers including their names, ages, hours worked, break periods and the type of work they do. This record keeping requirement assists in monitoring and enforcement by labour authorities. The violations of the Act are punishable by imprisonment ranging

from seven days to six months and fines between 10,000 rupees and 50,000 rupees. The sentence in case a child or an adolescent is a victim of slavery, forced labour, a debt bondage, or a human trafficking is much more substantial because the sentence is enhanced with imprisonment from 3 to 7 years and fines ranging from 200,000 to 1 million rupees. Recurrent offences are punished with long sentences. Section 14 of the Act empowers the labour inspectors to seal an establishment that violates the provisions of this act. The Act provides that the government shall appoint a committee to be known as the Provincial Committee on Child Labour to advise the government on appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to eradicate child labour.

The Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016 aligns broadly with Article 32 of the CRC which imposes an obligation upon States to protect children against economic exploitation and work that is deemed hazardous or harmful to their health, education or development. By prohibiting the employment of children below fifteen years and strictly regulating adolescent work the Act reflects the CRC's core objective of shielding children from premature labour. Its provisions regarding working hours, compulsory rest time, forbidding night work, and the requirement that such employment must not interfere with education correspond to the CRC's emphasis on the child's right to education under Article 28 and overall development under Article 6. The Act also complies to the CRC through its strong enforcement mechanism which includes criminal sanctions, imposition of stricter penalties on forced labour, crimes involving trafficking and slavery and the mandate given to labour inspectors to seal down the non-compliant establishments. The formation of a body of Provincial committee on child labour also contributes to institutional control and co-ordination of policies, as suggested by the CRC. The act differs from the standards set out in CRC in its definition of a child. Article 1 of the CRC defines a child as every human being below eighteen years of age, however the Act restricts the definition to under fifteen years and permits regulated employment of adolescents between fifteen and eighteen, narrowing the scope of protection. To sum up, while the Act advances in the right direction in terms of fulfilling the CRC goals through the prohibition of child labour, regulation of the child work and its enforcement, a stronger focus on the definition of the age and the implementation of child-centred protection into the law is necessary to completely eliminate the issue.

5.2 The Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children's Act, 2004

The Act was enacted in 2004 by the Punjab government to protect destitute and neglected children in the province. A "destitute and neglected child" under this Act is a person below 18 years of age who meets certain criteria such as being found begging, being abused or exploited, being beyond parental control, being vulnerable due to disability or child labour, etc. The primary focus of the act is on the rescue, custody, care, protection, and rehabilitation of destitute and neglected children. In order to deliver these purposes, the Act assigns responsibility to the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CP&WB) which serves as the key implementing authority. To provide shelter, care, and rehabilitation services, the Bureau operates child protection units, appoints child protection officers , runs drop-in centres and manages child protection institutions. As part of its protective mandate the CP&WB has created a child helpline (1121) to offer immediate assistance to children facing violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect. In addition, the Bureau registers, regulates, and supervises child protection institutions in the whole province. The Act further provides for the establishment of Child Protection Courts to enhance judicial oversight in matters concerning destitute and neglected children. These courts have the authority to summon children, give them into the custody of appropriate persons or agencies, issue search warrants that help in tracking down missing children and direct parents or guardians to provide financial support for children placed in protective custody. Although this is a statutory requirement, implementation remains minimal, as only one Child Protection Court has been established so far which functions within the premises of the CP&WB in Lahore.

Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act 2004 closely aligns with Article 1 of the CRC by defining a child as a person below eighteen years of age, ensuring inclusive protection for all children, including adolescents. The act recognizes multiple types of

vulnerability such as abuse, exploitation, child labour and lack of parental care which reflects the CRC's approach to child protection under Articles 19, 32, 34, and 39. The emphasis of the Act on rescue, custody, care, protection, and rehabilitation is in compliance with Article 20, which focuses on special protection for children deprived of a family environment, while the institutional role of the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau, such as shelters, drop-in centres, and rehabilitation services, supports the CRC's objectives for physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration under Article 39. The establishment of the Child Helpline (1121) and regulatory oversight of child protection institutions indicate compliance with Article 19's requirement for effective administrative mechanisms to prevent abuse and respond to violations. The provision for Child Protection Courts is in line with the CRC's demand for child-sensitive justice and safeguards under Article 3, though the number of courts operating undermines access to justice. The Act is generally in line with the CRC in terms of definition of a child, protection measures, rehabilitation focus and institutional framework; however full compliance requires more effective implementation of child protection courts, explicit integration of the best interests principle, and meaningful recognition of children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

5.3 The Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act, 2016

This Act defines a child as a person who has not completed the fourteenth year of age. Under this Act, it is unlawful for any person to employ or permit the employment of a child in a brick kiln or to permit or allow a child to work in any capacity in a brick kiln. Section 3 of the Act states that every engagement or appointment of a worker requires a written contract using a prescribed form between the worker and the employer. This contract must specify the terms and conditions of employment or engagement, including the amount of any 'advance' (peshgi) given to the worker i.e. money paid in advance to brick kiln workers as a form of loan that obliges the worker to provide services until he repays the advance. The contract must also specify the wage the worker will receive and the schedule for repaying the advance. The contract can be terminated by either party. The employer may give the worker an advance, but it should not exceed 50,000 rupees. If a child older than 5 years is found working in a brick kiln during school hours, he/she shall be deemed to be employed, engaged or admitted to work in the kiln unless proved otherwise. Violation of the provisions of the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act, 2016 shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than seven days and not exceeding six months and with fine which shall not be less than 50,000 rupees and not exceeding 500,000 rupees. A parent or guardian who permits his child to work in a brick kiln shall be equally liable, in addition to the employer, for the offence.

The Punjab Prohibition of Child labour at Brick Kilns Act, 2016 aligns with the Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) particularly Article 32 which requires States to safeguard children from economic exploitation and hazardous labour. Brick kilns are internationally considered worst forms of child labour as it exposes them to physical risks, excessive working hours, bonded labour, and the Act's absolute prohibition on the employment of children in this sector clearly advances the CRC's objective of shielding children from hazardous work. The right to education has also been supported by the Act under Articles 28 and 29, giving a legal presumption that any children caught working at kiln are treated as employed unless it is proved otherwise, strengthening the enforcement and deterring the activities that deny children an opportunity to attend school. The regulation of written employment agreements and limitations on advanced payments (peshgi), reflect CRC guidelines against economic exploitation and trafficking as well as slavery-like practices as mandated under Articles 32, 34 and 35. Criminal sanctions, including confinement and fines as well as liability of parents suggest that the legislation is very keen on child labour prevention, but from CRC perspective, when punitive acts are taken against parents without accompanying social security, the act might have a reverse effect on children. One of the major divergences from CRC standards is the fact that the Act defines a child as below 14 years and does not include any adolescents between fourteen and eighteen years despite their entitlement to protection by the international law. The Act effectively prohibits hazardous child labour and safeguards education, still

it falls short of full CRC compliance due to its restrictive age definition and lack of rehabilitation and participatory mechanisms, which would be necessary for complete alignment.

5.4 The Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019

Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019 aims to protect the rights of the domestic workers in the province with specific reference on the fair wages, adequate working hours, and safe working conditions. The Act strictly prohibits the employment of children as domestic workers. Section 3 specifically prohibits employment of children who are younger than fifteen years of age as domestic workers. It also stipulates that only light work can be given to the children aged between fifteen and seventeen, hence acknowledging the need of greater protection of the adolescents as per their age and abilities. Mechanisms of enforcement of violations are also given in the Act. Any employer who is caught employing a child as a domestic worker can be fined up to 50,000 rupees. Besides protecting children, the Act takes care of economic rights of domestic workers by stipulating that the wages given to the domestic workers should not be lower than the minimum wage set by the government. The Act provides that a copy of the employment agreement of every domestic worker must be sent to the labour inspector of the area and hence enhancing the monitoring processes and the adherence to the labour standards.

The Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019 advances Article 32 of the CRC by protecting the children from economic exploitation and work dangerous to their health, education, or development. By prohibiting the employment of children under fifteen years as domestic workers, the Act recognises domestic work as a high-risk sector for abuse and exploitation, restricting adolescents aged fifteen to seventeen to light work, aligning with the CRC's standards for regulated, age-appropriate employment that does not interfere with education or development. The Act is also aligns with Articles 19 and 34 of the CRC, by adressing the vulnerability of children working in the household settings where chances of violence, lack of care, and sexual abuse are high. The need to have written employment contracts and submission to the labour inspectors makes such contracts more accountable, which is an indication that the CRC emphasizes administrative action to protect children. The Act does not completely comply in defining and treatment of children. The CRC defines a child as a person who is below the age of eighteen yet the Act allows the adolescent child mainly between the age of fifteen and seventeen to work limited hours, narrowing the protective scope. It also does not provide clear safeguards regarding education, restrictions to working hours as well as more customized monitoring to child domestic workers, which is crucial to ensure that such work does not compromise their health, development, or dignity.

5.5 The Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014

Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014 seeks to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age of 5 and 16 in Punjab in accordance with Article 25(A) of the Constitution of Pakistan. The Act imposes a legal obligation on parents to enroll their children and make sure that they attend their classes regularly and establishes monitoring and enforcement measures to guarantee the adherence. It offers an establishment of a fund to assist the children from disadvantaged backgrounds and appointment of education officers to monitor the implementation of the act. The Act also contains provisions for the punishment of parents who fail to fulfil their legal obligation to provide for the education of their children. If a child over the age of five has not been admitted to any school or has not been able to complete education after admission, the local government has the responsibility to develop a mechanism to ensure the child's admission to a school according to age, previous grade and other circumstances.

The Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014 conforms to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, especially with regard to right to education, under the Articles 28 and broader principles of non-discrimination and best interests of the child under Articles 2 and 3. Through ensuring free and compulsory education for children between the ages of five and sixteen the Act ensures access to education for all children irrespective of their background, consistent with the CRC's mandate to make primary education compulsory and freely available. The Act also

establishes measures to assist the needy children through a fund for disadvantaged children and the appointment of education officers to monitor implementation, reflecting on the high value of State responsibility to ensure educational access and quality. The legal obligation on parents to send their children to schools along with provisions for local governments to facilitate school admissions, further motivate the achievement of the CRC objective of universal education. The Act does not openly address the right to inclusive and quality education and protection against discrimination within schools, or measures for children with disabilities, which are central to the CRC. In conclusion, the Act substantially complies to the CRC standards of assuring free and compulsory education and safeguarding the right of enrollment and attendance, but full alignment would require child-centred principles and participation rights and provisions for inclusive and quality education to all.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:

The Labour and Human Resource Department serves as the principal authority for the prevention and regulation of child labour in Punjab. It is responsible for making and implementing labour-related policies, laws, and regulations with its major role to safeguard the rights and welfare of workers. The department focuses on promoting healthy labour management and labour relations including proper housing, health, and safety as well as security of the workers. It implements government policies and programmes to eradicate child labour gradually, and coordinates efforts to combat child labour and bonded labour. To enforce these objectives, the department monitors workplaces and conduct inspections to identify and adress occurrences of child labour.

" In Punjab there are over 100 labour inspectors who have conducted a total of nearly 50,000 inspections in 2021. During these inspections, 1,029 cases of child labour violations were found. However, the exact number of convictions resulting from these cases is not available. The information provided by officials indicates that the conviction rate was low."

Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CP&WB) is an autonomous body established under the Punjab destitute and Neglected Children Act of 2004 and is responsible to advance and safeguard the rights and welfare of the children. The CP&WB under the administrative control of the Home Department offers complete care, rehabilitation, education and training of the destitute and neglected children. The Bureau has set up the Child Protection Institutions in Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Sahiwal, Multan, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan. It provides services such as shelter, medical support, counseling, education, vocational training and family tracing and reunification to support the children's recovery and successful reintegration into society. Moreover, the CP&WB has established permanent and mobile Open Reception Centres (ORCs) at strategic locations to ensure that the locations are used as referral sites in a bid to find, track down, or collect lost, runaway, or abandoned children. There is also the Children Helpline (1121) that is specifically created to render advice, support, and organization of rescuing and protecting children.

The Human rights and Minority affairs department in Punjab is mandated to promote and protect human rights and uphold the rights of the minority groups. This involves policy making, harmonising and monitoring of laws, legislation and practices with international human rights covenants and agreements, advocating human rights and minority rights, complaints management, legal protection, raising awareness and establishing as well as managing the Punjab Treaty Implementing Cell.

PUNJAB'S EFFORTS AGAINST CHILD LABOUR:

Child labour in Punjab is a complex issue that involves the coordination among government agencies, UN agencies, and the civil society organisations each contributing according to their roles and mandate. Although there are many projects and initiatives, several notable interventions illustrate the diverse approaches taken to combat child labour in the province. The tragic murder of child labour activist Iqbal Masih in 1995 was a trigger to initiate change in the carpet weaving and football industries, causing the industries to be drawn into focus by the international community and they started to pledge to put an end to the use of child labour in their supply

chains with the aid of the ILO and UNICEF. The football industry of Sialkot introduced a programme in 1997 to eradicate child labour in the football sewing industry by opening the factories to monitoring, and today more than 95 per cent of the football exports of Pakistan are carried by the companies that have joined the initiative, improving working conditions, product quality, and industry reputation. There have been more challenges in carpet weaving, which was more of a home-based and decentralized business; however with the efforts of the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association in conjunction with the ILO and NGOs, over 300 schools that educate approximately 14000 children involved in carpet production, although the development is still in progress. Other sectors have also been taken care by the Punjab Labour Department, such as the brick kiln industry where legal aid offices were established in relation to assisting bonded labourers and two project of bonded labour elimination were successfully implemented in six districts, which provided access to national identity cards, non-formal education, hygiene facilities, micro-credit, legal assistance, and school enrolment to children of workers. The Punjab social protection Authority also gave cash benefits to families of approximately 80,000 children. In the Surgical manufacturing industry in Sialkot, non-formal education and pre-vocational training, which drastically decreased the number of the children working in this sector and enhanced the overall working conditions, formed part of the multi-sectoral strategy to the elimination of child labour in Punjab.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There is an urgent need for Punjab to align its labour laws, education laws and child protection laws in order formulate a legal framework that will protect the children against exploitation and ensure their right to education.
2. Increasing the minimum employment age to 16 is essential in Punjab Restriction on Employment Children Act (2016), Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act (2016), Punjab Domestic Workers Act (2019), Punjab Home-Based workers Act (2013), which should be in line with Article 25 (A) of the Constitutions of Pakistan and Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014. Moreover, Article 11(3) of the Constitution of Pakistan should be amended and minimum working age be increased to 16 years bringing it in conformity with the age provided under Article 25(A) of the Constitution of Pakistan.
3. The scope of Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act, 2004 should also be expanded and not restricted to destitute and neglected children only because Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CP&WB) is the primary child protection agency in Punjab and all the children who need protection should be included in the purview of CP&WB. It is suggested that there should be the addition of the term child abuse to cover other forms of child abuse such as economic exploitation, child trafficking and exploitative domestic or commercial child labour.
4. Make amendments in labour laws to enhance the powers of labour inspectors. More powers should be given to the labour inspectors to conduct on-site inspections without any prior notice or information.
5. Child labour eradication and prevention strategies should be inculcated in the education and social protection policies of the government.
6. It is recommended to amend the Punjab Restriction on Employment Children Act, 2016 to extend the scope of 'establishment' to refer to all occupations and other forms of work to ensure that there is no unregulated sector or work e.g. tea stalls, agriculture and auto-mechanic workshops.

CONCLUSION:

Punjab has formally made some progress toward fulfilling its obligations under the CRC, but continued occurrence of child labour shows that legal compliance alone is not enough. Real progress is dependent on stronger enforcement, well-resourced institutions and practical mechanisms that hold employers accountable. At the same time child labour cannot be eliminated without relieving the economic pressures that push families to rely on children's earnings. Social protection programmes, accessible schooling and clear referral systems for at-risk children are essential along with legal reforms. Punjab can move from formal alignment with CRC standards to meaningful protection of children's rights in practice by combining strict employer accountability mechanisms with continual investment in education and targeted support for vulnerable households.

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