

Violence Alleviation: Analyzing The Phenomenon of Child Labor in Mexico

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Abstract. Child Labor protection in Mexico is a serious issue involving children's rights and social equity. Although the Mexican government has taken some steps to reduce child labor, the problem persists. According to surveys conducted by relevant government organizations, child Labor has negative impact on the right of Mexican children, who are often forced to perform dangerous work, affecting their physical and mental health and education. The Mexican government has made efforts in the aspects of finance, prevention and enforcement, and these efforts have produced some positive results, but some are also facing disputes. These are far from enough. This paper proposes four suggestions including improving the administrative supervision of child labor, improving the trial or prosecution of child labor issues, providing Mexican children with access to quality education and ensuring adequate funding for law enforcement and justice agencies to investigate. It must be pointed out that only comprehensive policies and social engagement can effectively address the issue of child labor in Mexico and protect the rights and future of kids.

Keywords: Mexico, child labor, children rights, social equity, solutions.

1. Introduction

The protection of children's rights is a global goal. Ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children is the second of the 16 goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Today, some 218 million children are still in the workforce worldwide, many in full-time employment. These children have no access to education and no time to play. Many of them do not receive proper care from the employer, suffer from malnutrition, and children are deprived of their rights. More than half of these children are engaged in the worst forms of labor, such as working in high-risk conditions, in slavery or forced labor, in illicit activities such as drug trafficking or prostitution, or in armed conflict [1].

Child labor leads to a number of problems and violates international and national laws. Firstly, the child labor deprives children of schooling and places them under pressure to work. The inadequate education rates lead to low social quality and limit a country's future development. Moreover, child labor forces children to drop out of school or cannot receive adequate education, limiting their opportunities for learning and growth and affecting their future development and social status. What's more, early exposure to society will also affect children's physical and mental development. The child labor is often engaged in hazardous work and exposed to harmful environments and conditions, resulting in physical impairment and an increased risk of disease and accidents. It's hard for the government can immediately provide well protect the personal safety of minors, and the social crime rate will also increase.

The most brutal forms of child labor occur in Mexico, where it may encompass commercial sexual exploitation, which occasionally results from human trafficking, and illegal operations including drug manufacture and trafficking. In Mexico, kids are also involved in risky agricultural work, such as harvesting tomatoes, sugarcane, coffee, and chile peppers. [2] According to data from the United States Department of Labor (USDOL)-funded National Child Labor Survey (ENTI 2019), 3.1 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 work as minors, with 52% of them doing hazardous tasks. Additionally, it reveals that 61% of child laborers are boys and 25% of them do not attend school, and that child labor primarily occurs in the central and southern states of Oaxaca, Puebla, Chiapas, and Michoacán.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on Mexico's economy, leading to an increase in child labor. Experts estimate that the number of kids engaged in child labor will continue to rise due to the pandemic. In addition, Government figures show that asserts a minimum of 50% of Mexican homes lack a computer or Internet access, while eighty percent of them are indigenous families. As a result, at least 2.5 million children who learn online, on TV and radio are not continuing their basic education during the pandemic. Children who experience school dropout and lack of access to education are more susceptible to child labor.[2,3,4]

Besides, Compared to non-indigenous children, indigenous children are less likely to attend school, because there are no schools near their homes, educational materials and mother-tongue instruction. According to National Human Rights Council (CNDH), Native American communities are especially susceptible to human trafficking and child labor because of their lack of education, difficulty communicating in other languages, and prejudice against people of color. [5] The Mexican government has made some efforts to deal with the problem of child labor. This paper specifies these efforts, analyzes their effectiveness, and puts forward suggestions for Mexico to better solve the problem of child labor.

2. Efforts to Deal With Child Labor in Mexico

2.1. The efforts

The Mexican government has come up with many ways to help children protect their rights and lift the children out of violence. In this section, this paper will focus on the three ways in one policy case happened in 2021 and analyze whether they are effective.

In respect to financial assistance, the labor inspectorate's budget was boosted by more than \$100,000 in 2021 compared to 2020 by the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS). Furthermore, a total of about \$1.4 million in funding was supplied to each state's labor inspectorate by the States of Mexico, Hidalgo, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz. [6] The government developed and implemented the National Program for Children and Adolescents 2021–2024, and the Benito Juárez Wellbeing National Scholarship Program reached 9.8 million pupils in an effort to motivate society to popularize children's education and assist more impoverished families. [7]

The Mexican government has also made great progress in prevention. The Mexico government enhance the frequency of labor inspections by 5,000 times, while establishing a new voluntary labor reporting system to verify compliance with the Labor Law [8,9]. There is no doubt that the rural revitalization strategy has made an important contribution to the development of child labor regulation. The strategy has reduced families' reliance on child labor due to poverty by improving economic and educational standards in rural areas. Specifically, Mexico has implemented rural economic development programs to promote economic diversification and job creation in rural areas. By investing in areas such as agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts and tourism, the incomes of rural residents have been raised and their dependence on child labor reduced.

Also, The Mexican government has issued a document that provides for the protection of minors from work hazards. Among them, Article 176 of Mexican Law for the Protection of Minors Working or in Work Situations stipulates that children may not be engaged in such activities when using chemicals, operating machinery, operating heavy vehicles and performing other tasks determined by the competent authorities. The STPS also classifies the activities under Section 176 and determines which activities are low risk and therefore allowed to be carried out by minors [10].

2.2. The effect of the efforts

There is still opportunity for improvement in the Mexican government's efforts to combat child labor, as seen by the fact that written complaints are the only reason federal and state labor inspectors visit the department. Furthermore, there is no internal mechanism in place at the Secretariat for Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) to monitor instances of child labor infractions. The 529 federal labor inspectors throughout the nation might not be sufficient to fulfill the needs of the nation's

approximately 57 million workers in the event of a labor shortage in the SRPS's operational region. Financial and personnel resources are not allocated to law enforcement to the proper extent[11]. Social initiatives to stop and prevent child labor are likewise inadequate, and criminal law enforcement organizations lack both financial and human resources.

According to the Mexico's new law "Mexican Law for the Protection of Minors Working or in Work Situations". The Act allows children to engage in low-risk agricultural activities while setting out the conditions and regulations that children should follow when engaging in these activities to ensure their safety and welfare. Reformers point out that permitting kids to work in low-risk agriculture could lead to an increase in job options in rural areas. [6] Critics countered that the changes may expose kids to harsh and hazardous environments, jeopardizing their health and wellbeing. The Mexican government has formed a working group to examine current laws prohibiting the importation of goods made through forced or compulsory child labor in an effort to find a solution. They also intend to implement "the Mexico Modest Progress Ban on the Findings of the 2021 Survey on the Worst Forms of Child labor." In these approaches, critics drew attention to the fact that the working group failed to offer an update on the draft's progress. Critics called attention to the fact that the working group neglected to offer an update on the draft plan's progress within the reporting period. [6] Furthermore, youngsters in Mexican society are naturally pushed to drop out of school before completing their mandatory education, as the earliest age for employment of 15 years old is lower than the compulsory school age.

In addition, economic difficulties, social inequality and other problems are also one of the root causes of child labor, which need more comprehensive policies to solve. Therefore, the Mexican government needs to further strengthen supervision and improve the efficiency of law enforcement, while adopting broader economic and social policies to reduce child labor and protect children's rights.

3. Proposed Solutions and Changes

3.1. Improve the administrative supervision of child labor

First, strengthening the labor inspection legal framework, including improving the role of administrators and better functioning labor inspectors. Substantially increase the number of labor inspectors to ensure adequate workforce coverage, in line with ILO technical recommendations. Strengthening labor inspectors' fundamental right to work and increasing labor force participation in the formal sector. Boost labor inspectors' energy levels and make clear what areas they are authorized to investigate. National and state labor officials should get training on ending child labor and safeguarding teenage workers, as well as recommendations on how to spot and deal with child labor infractions.

Second, we need to strengthen inter-departmental coordination. The Government has issued the National labor and Social Welfare Secretariat Plan (2020-2024). The government launched 484 investigations between January and July of 2021, according to information that is publicly available, and at least 42 individuals were found guilty of offenses linked to child labor as a result. The exact number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions is not disclosed. Because such data are not publicly available, there is an information gap between government agencies. This resulted in poor coordination among government agencies and inconsistent data sharing, hindering the preparation of comprehensive statistics. [6,8] To avoid this phenomenon, this paper suggests that the government should take the initiative to cooperate with institutions or social organizations to jointly build a healthy environment for Mexican children. At the same time, it is important to ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and able to fulfill their mandates.

3.2. Improve the trial, or prosecution of child labor

This paper suggests that the government strengthen the judicial capacity building of procuratorial organs and courts. According to the inability of judges and prosecutors to handle cases involving human trafficking, many first-degree defendants are unjustly charged with smaller offenses or are

found not guilty. Due to the disregard of laws or rules, the social atmosphere will also be greatly affected; In general, the government should strengthen the punishment standard for those who violate the law, let the Mexican society and people see that the government attaches great importance to the problem of child labor, and at the same time, it can play a deterrent role.

3.3. Providing access to quality education

Providing access to quality education is essential to keep children in school rather than forced into the labor market. Ensuring free education, scholarships and reducing barriers to school can help encourage families to send their children to school.

It is important for poor families to have access to financial help. Like scholarship programs, scholarships and financial aid are offered to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to cover costs associated with education. These scholarships help reduce the financial burden on families and make education more accessible to disadvantaged children.

One example is a conditional cash transfer program. Mexico's PROSPERA program, now known as "Bienestar," is a conditional cash transfer program that provides financial support to families living in poverty. Families receive cash transfers on the condition that their children attend school regularly and have access to health services. The program helps motivate parents to send their children to school instead of getting them to work early.

3.4. Make certain there is sufficient financing available for law enforcement and judicial institutions to carry out investigations

In recent years, the Mexican government has invested a lot of money to solve the problem because of the huge increase in social attention. STPS increased its budget for labor inspections by more than \$100,000 in 2021 compared to 2020. In addition, the states of Mexico, Hidalgo, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz provided information on budgets allocated to state labor inspection agencies, totaling nearly US \$1.4 million. [6]A \$13 million project implemented by the International Labor Organization to establish the Mexican Government's integrated approach to combating child and forced labor aims to strengthen the Mexican Government's capacity and efficiency to collect and analyze data on child labor, forced labor and human trafficking to inform federal policy and programs.

The Mexican government still needs to invest more funding in addressing child labor, including by increasing the budgets of the executive branch and the judiciary to ensure that they can perform their duties effectively. This can not only strengthen the supervision and enforcement of child labor, but also improve the sanctions against illegal acts, thus effectively reducing the occurrence of child labor. At the same time, increased investment in child labor can also lead to the development of related areas, such as education, employment and social welfare, and promote the sustainable development of society as a whole.

It is essential to ensure adequate funding for both the executive branch and the judiciary. First, administrative agencies need funds to carry out oversight and carry out tasks, the Mexico government can provide training and education on child labor for law enforcement personnel to improve their understanding and implementation of child labor laws and policies and strengthen the fight against violations. It also includes recruiting and training labor inspectors, purchasing necessary equipment and tools, and conducting awareness and education activities. What's more, strengthening the cooperation with international organizations and other countries to share intelligence information and work together to combat transnational child labor and ensure that the problem of cross-border child labor is effectively addressed. Without adequate financial support, administrative agencies will not be able to effectively carry out their duties and thus effectively monitor and combat child labor.

Secondly, the judiciary also needs to be adequately funded to support judicial processes and judicial procedures to ensure that violations are pursued and punished. This includes funding the operation of the courts and the prosecutor's office, the provision of legal aid services, and the funding of personnel and training in relevant judicial bodies. In addition, anonymous reporting mechanisms can be established. The law enforcement agencies can use government funds to establish a suitable

reporting mechanism to encourage citizens and organizations to report suspected child labor to law enforcement so that timely action can be taken against illegal acts. If the judiciary lacks funding, slow judicial processes, delayed trials and inadequate accountability for violations will weaken the fight against child labor.

4. Summary

In conclusion, the issue of child labor in Mexico remains a significant challenge, deeply intertwined with economic, social, and educational factors. Despite efforts from both the Mexican government and various stakeholders, including international organizations like the international labor Organization, to combat this problem, it persists due to complex systemic issues. The prevalence of child labor reflects persistent poverty, unequal access to education, and a lack of effective enforcement of labor laws.

The Mexican government has taken steps to address child labor, including legislative measures, educational initiatives, and social assistance programs. However, more comprehensive and coordinated efforts are needed to effectively tackle the root causes of child labor and provide sustainable solutions. This paper provides some of the solution which includes targeted interventions to alleviate poverty, improve access to quality education, and strengthen enforcement mechanisms to protect children from exploitation.

Furthermore, collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners is essential to address the multifaceted nature of the issue. By working together, sharing resources, and implementing evidence-based strategies, progress can be made towards eradicating child labor in Mexico.

In the context of the \$13 million project implemented by the ILO to establish the Mexican government's integrated approach to combating child labor, it represents a significant investment in addressing this pressing issue. However, sustained commitment and ongoing monitoring and evaluation are crucial to ensure the effective implementation and long-term impact of such initiatives.

Ultimately, the protection of children from labor exploitation is not only a legal and moral imperative but also essential for fostering inclusive economic growth and social development in Mexico. By prioritizing the well-being and rights of children, Mexico can build a more equitable and prosperous future for all its citizens.

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