



BEYOND 2025: A STRATEGIC ROADMAP FOR ERADICATING CHILD LABOUR

ABSTRACT

As the world falls short of SDG 8.7's 2025 target, the fight against child labour demands renewed urgency, bold commitments, and systemic change. This document presents the outcomes of a high-level strategy meeting convened by the Global March Against Child Labour, bringing civil society, trade unions, and key allies together to chart a path forward. It outlines a comprehensive strategy that integrates community-driven solutions, economic justice, education reform, and corporate accountability to dismantle child labour at its roots. With a focus on multi-stakeholder collaboration, regional adaptation, and evidence-based advocacy, this roadmap calls for collective action to ensure every child's right to freedom, education, and dignity.

*GlobalMarch Against Child Labour
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FOREWORD



In the nearly quarter-century that the Global March Against Child Labour has been waging its fight against this scourge, we can point to the success of the only universally ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour, and arguably the most successful labour rights campaign in recent history. Between 2000 and 2016 the number of child labourers worldwide dropped by 28% -- that's 94 million fewer children working and instead going to school. But starting before COVID and

exacerbated by the pandemic, that progress has stalled and now has gone into reverse as we have seen a dramatic increase in child labour in the past few years.

Recognizing this challenge, the Global March convened a Strategy Meeting in January 2025 of leading child labour organizations and trade unions from five continents to assess the current moment and focus on the most effective way forward. This document represents a state-of-the-art/state-of-play for the core members and partner organizations of the Global March. It reflects on priority economic sectors, describes the model of the Area Based Approach (ABA) as an adaptable, universal community mechanism; and identifies the key aspects and differences in each country and regional situation which invites ways to adapt the ABA and be creative with other local initiatives.

This is more than a descriptive document – it's a plan of action to marshal all our resources during a difficult period to keep focused on the most important thing – finding opportunities to directly get children out of labour and families out of poverty. The task is difficult, but we are confident we have the tools and commitment to meet it. Thanks to all the participants from around the world that worked together to formulate this program.

-Timothy Ryan

Chairperson, Global March Against Child Labour

CONTEXT

The fight against child labour has reached a tipping point. The collective failure to achieve SDG 8.7 by 2025 is not just a missed deadline but a stark reminder of the millions of childhoods stolen. This breaking point demands a renewed, uncompromising commitment to act. For over 25 years, Global March Against Child Labour (GMACL) has been the world's leading force in the fight against child labour, with a legacy of mobilising governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), businesses, and trade unions to take bold, collective action. As the largest global network dedicated to this cause, we stand as the consistent and resolute leader in this fight.

On January 22-23, 2025, global civil society and trade union leaders, joined by key allies of the Global March, convened in Brussels for a two-day strategy meeting to confront the current state of child labour. With the urgency presented by the failure to meet SDG 8.7, participants critically assessed the current state of child labour and deliberated on the gaps, opportunities, and pathways forward. This document captures the outcomes of these in-depth discussions highlighting key priorities for the GMACL network, their approach and a comprehensive strategy that includes regionally and globally agreed-upon actions. It reflects a unified commitment to intensify efforts, collaborate across sectors, and prioritise community solutions to eradicate child labour.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTION

1. Promoting Community-Led and Owned Good Practices to Address Child Labour and its Root Causes Sustainably

Child labour eradication is most effective when communities take ownership. GMACL promotes and scales successful models like Area-Based Approaches (ABA), Landscape Approaches (LSAs), and Child Labour-Free Zones (CLFZs) to ensure locally driven, sustainable solutions. These frameworks unite children and youth, local governments, CSOs, trade unions, and the private sector in collective action. Key priorities include:

- Strengthening community leadership in child labour elimination efforts
- Promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration to reinforce local ownership
- Scaling up proven, tailored approaches such as CLFZs and ABAs to new regions that focus on addressing its economic root causes
- Integrating child and youth participation in designing and implementing solutions
- Ensuring local governments and businesses play an active role in sustaining child labour-free communities

2. Addressing the Economic Root Causes of Child Labour

Breaking the cycle of child labour requires tackling poverty and ensuring families earn a living income. GMACL pushes for fair wage policies, integrates living income strategies into community-led approaches like ABA, and promotes responsible business practices. Key priorities include:

- Strengthening advocacy for living income and social protection
- Enhancing trade union capacity to organise informal workers and monitor labour conditions in high-risk areas of child labour
- Leveraging international due diligence frameworks to hold businesses accountable
- Promoting policies that address economic vulnerabilities driving child labour

3. Strengthening Public Education as a Key Strategy to Eradicate Child Labour

Education is a fundamental right and the strongest alternative to child labour. GMACL advocates for greater investment in public education to ensure access to quality schooling, particularly in high-risk areas. Key priorities include:

- Pushing for increased government funding for education
- Eliminating barriers like gender inequality, poor infrastructure, and lack of resources
- Strengthening CSO engagement in global education funding and policy
- Aligning child labour eradication with education campaigns such as “Go Public Fund Education.”

4. Strengthening Collective Advocacy Actions amongst Trade Unions and CSOs

Collaboration between trade unions and CSOs is critical for stronger advocacy. GMACL works to unify these actors in the fight against child labour by:

- Building partnerships to drive policy reforms and legal enforcement
- Establishing transparent monitoring and coordination systems
- Mobilising resources for data-driven advocacy and evidence-based policymaking
- Amplifying the voices of workers and communities to push for systemic change

5. Enhancing Regional Cooperation, International Collaboration and Accountability

Regional cooperation is often fragmented, weakening the global fight against child labour. GMACL is committed to strengthening international efforts by:

- Engaging with regional bodies in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America to advance child labour action plans
- Monitoring the implementation of ILO Conventions 138 and 182
- Supporting affiliates in tracking National Action Plans (NAPs) and reporting to UN mechanisms
- Using data-driven advocacy to hold businesses accountable for exploitative practices

- Additionally, GMACL and ITUC will contribute to the 2026 Child Labour Agenda review, ensuring past commitments are upheld before new pledges are made

6. Integrating Child Labour Risks with Corporate Sustainability and Trade Agreements

Child labour elimination must be central to corporate sustainability and trade policies. GMACL will:

- Advocate for stronger child rights integration in European Union (EU) sustainability directives (CSRD, CSDDD)
- Engage policymakers-MEPs, trade negotiators, regulatory bodies—to push for enforceable trade policies
- Work with multi-stakeholder initiatives to ensure corporate due diligence frameworks actively address child labour
- Push for fair economic practices that align global trade with child labour-free objectives
- Through strategic lobbying and coalition-building, GMACL aims to make corporate responsibility a key driver in the fight against child labour

Key cross-cutting issues, such as gender empowerment and child and youth participation, will be embedded across all strategic priorities to ensure inclusivity and equitable impact. These priorities will also adapt to context-specific challenges by integrating evolving and cross-cutting components like climate change, migration, and other socio-economic factors that influence child labour.

APPROACH

GMACL adopts a comprehensive, evidence-driven approach that integrates community-led action with high-level advocacy to sustainably eradicate child labour. This dual strategy—**combining grassroots interventions with advocacy actions**—ensures that not only efforts on the ground are reinforced by policy but that hyperlocal good practices and models inform policies and lead systemic change at national and international levels.

Community-Led, Sustainable Solutions

GMACL prioritises community ownership in child labour eradication, recognising that lasting change happens when solutions are driven and sustained locally. Through models like ABA, Landscape Approaches (LSAs), and CLFZs, GMACL fosters collective action among children and youth, local governments, CSOs, trade unions, and the private sector.

Our community-driven strategy focuses on:

- Strengthening local leadership to drive child labour eradication efforts.
- Promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration to reinforce community ownership.
- Expanding successful models like CLFZs and ABAs to new regions, addressing economic root causes.

- Embedding child and youth participation in designing and implementing solutions.
- Engaging local governments and businesses in sustaining child labour-free communities.

Advocacy Linked with Grassroots Action

GMACL's top-down and bottom-up approach ensures that grassroots interventions inform and strengthen advocacy efforts. Implementing ABA to eradicate child labour serves as a key grassroots intervention, with learnings feeding into advocacy at all levels.

At the global level, GMACL leverages its position in Alliance 8.7 and engages with political bodies like the European Union to push for stronger policies and commitments. It collaborates with international stakeholders, northern governments, donors, and international NGOs to:

- Ensure continued Pathfinder government engagement with CSOs.
- Mobilise resources for effective child labour eradication programs.
- Keep stakeholders informed on the evolving child labour situation on the ground, amplifying the perspectives of its partners.

By combining community-led action with global advocacy, GMACL ensures that child labour eradication is not just a project but a sustained, systemic transformation that empowers communities while driving policy change.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW AND PRIORITIES

South Asia

Addressing child labour in South Asia presents complex challenges, including the declining influence of trade unions, weak enforcement of child labour laws, and the invisibility of exploitation in the informal economy, exacerbated by urban migration. While local initiatives like child labour-free municipalities (CLFMs) show promise, national replication remains insufficient due to underfunded enforcement systems, fragmented CSOs' voices and actions, and lack of coordination among government bodies. Regional cooperation in South Asia lacks a unified agenda for advocacy around child labour despite frameworks like SAIEVAC under SAARC, and international commitments remain under-implemented, with declining funding further hindering progress.

Moving forward, priorities must include revitalising collective action of trade unions and CSOs to form a strong collective South Asia agenda with a focus on data-driven advocacy to achieve SDG 8.7; promoting free, quality and public-funded education; amplifying youth voices in policymaking; promoting child labour monitoring into education; and social protection systems and advocating for larger replication of area based effective models such as the CLFMs.

Action

- *Strengthen CSO Collaboration and Experience Sharing:* Promote the sharing of best practices and lessons learned across CSOs in South Asia, creating a more cohesive and unified regional advocacy platform for child labour eradication.
- *Leverage SAIEVAC Regional Action Plan (RAP):* Utilise the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) RAP as a strategic tool to advance child labour eradication efforts and align regional initiatives with international frameworks.
- *Advocacy for Education Systems:* Promoting free, quality, publicly funded education for all children, incorporating child labour monitoring within the education sector.
- *Advocate for Improved Legislation and Enforcement within South Asian Countries:* For example, Link child labour laws with the minimum age for education. Define family work, and update the hazardous work list.
- *Enhance Regional and International Collaboration:* Foster closer collaborations between national and regional platforms (e.g., ITUC support and NAC) to increase pressure on governments and strengthen cross-border advocacy to address child labour in the region.
- *CSO SDG 8.7 Forum:* Expand and strengthen the South Asian CSO SDG 8.7 Forum to amplify collective voices advocating for the realization of SDG Target 8.7 and to ensure accountability towards achieving child labour elimination goals.
- *NAPs on Business and Human Rights (BHR):* Align national policies with regional BHR action plans to ensure businesses take responsibility for eradicating child labour in supply chains, leveraging the momentum of the ongoing NPA on BHR in the region.

West Africa

The regional landscape for addressing child labour faces significant challenges in the informal economy where exploitation remains pervasive for both children and adults. Despite the potential of the ABA to address root causes like education gaps, health insecurity, and lack of social protection, its implementation is hampered by weak enforcement, fragmented governance structures, and insufficient follow-up on policies. Government interest and funding for ABA remains limited, while CSOs cannot coordinate amongst each other as well as with trade unions and collect and utilise data effectively to inform policies or report on child labour. Coordination among other key stakeholders especially the private sector, CSOs and governments is weak, and diminishing momentum in advocacy risks further setbacks. Without stronger community ownership, better integration of ABA into policy frameworks, and independent (non-project related) multi-stakeholder collaboration, progress on eradicating child labour and reaching underprivileged populations will remain stalled.

Thus, action in West Africa must prioritise: expanding ABA using Ghana's CLFZ guidelines as a model and facilitating inter-country learning sessions; promoting free, quality and publicly funded education; leveraging Pathfinder country status to influence policies via ECOWAS, parliamentarians, and governments; improving coordination among CSOs, trade unions, governments, and private sector actors; advocating for labour rights and targeted interventions in the informal economy; and building CSO capacity for data collection and showcase success stories to sustain momentum.

Action

- *Strengthening Coordination of Trade Unions and NGOs:* Leverage the existing coordination between trade unions and NGOs to assess roles and responsibilities in community-level actions, ensuring alignment with collective policies and protocols for implementing Child Labour-Free Zones (CLFZ).
- *Advocating for Education:* With the increasing prioritisation of education, there is a need for stronger advocacy to ensure that education is publicly funded and accessible, of high quality, and integrated with child labour prevention efforts.
- *Replicating Successful Models:* Replicating Ghana's successful Child Labour-Free Zones (CLFZ) model in other countries presents an opportunity for regional expansion and improved child labour eradication strategies across West Africa.
- *Leveraging Regional and National Policies:* Advocate for the implementation of the ECOWAS National Policy on Child Labour Elimination and engage with the African Union, ECOWAS, and national governments to strengthen regional and national child labour eradication frameworks.
- *Improving Data Collection and Advocacy:* Strengthen CSO capacity to collect and report outcome data on child labour eradication efforts, ensuring that regional blocs, such as ECOWAS, receive updated information for informed decision-making and improved action.

East Africa

Child labour remains deeply entrenched, compounded by vulnerabilities such as artisanal mining, migration, worsening of agricultural economies and conflict-affected communities. Weak government investment and commitment hinder responsiveness while narrowing civic space which directly impacts advocacy efforts. Challenges in education, including poor-quality public schooling and high dropout rates, exacerbate the problem by restricting access to employment opportunities and perpetuating poverty cycles. Social protection mechanisms and access to decent work remain inadequate, leaving many rural families without essential support. Furthermore, cross-border child labour issues highlight the urgent need for coordinated regional responses, but weak multi-stakeholder coordination and insufficient inter-pathfinder learning undermine efforts to address child labour across sectors like agriculture and mining.

To amplify the collective efforts to address child labour in the region, priorities must include: Strengthening regional collaboration and multi-stakeholder efforts to tackle child labour across sectors like agriculture and mining; Promoting investments in social protection systems and access to decent work for rural and vulnerable families; Pushing for free, quality public education to reduce dropouts and break poverty cycles; Focusing on artisanal mining, migration, and conflict-affected communities to address root causes of child labour and; Facilitate knowledge-sharing among Pathfinder countries to build regional capacity and drive policy solutions.

Action

- *Strengthening Regional Collaboration and Multi-Stakeholder Efforts:* Foster regional collaboration and multi-stakeholder coordination to address child labour in key sectors like agriculture, mining, and artisanal mining, ensuring a more cohesive and comprehensive regional response to child labour.
- *Investing in Social Protection and Decent Work:* Advocate for enhanced investment in social protection systems and decent work opportunities for rural and vulnerable families. These initiatives should be integrated with efforts to eliminate child labour, providing families with the support they need to break the cycle of poverty.
- *Improving Education Access and Quality:* Push for the implementation of policies that ensure free, quality public education, reduce dropout rates, and give children the opportunity to break free from poverty and child labour. School feeding programs should be promoted as an essential tool to improve school attendance and nutrition, particularly for vulnerable children, ensuring that they can learn without the added burden of hunger.
- *Addressing Root Causes of Child Labour in Vulnerable Communities:* Focus on addressing the root causes of child labour, particularly in agricultural commodities such as coffee, cocoa, artisanal mining, migration, and conflict-affected communities, where children are most vulnerable.
- *Promoting Area-Based Approaches (ABA) and Knowledge Sharing:* Advocate for the expansion of CLFZs to effectively address child labour at the local level by engaging communities and stakeholders in the creation of sustainable, context-specific solutions.
- *Leveraging Pathfinder Countries Relationship:* Facilitate knowledge-sharing among Pathfinder countries to build regional capacity, foster policy solutions, and strengthen efforts to create child labour-free zones (CLFZs) and interventions that integrate education, social protection, and child labour monitoring systems.

South America

The region faces significant setbacks in eradicating child labour due to political regression, weakened social protection systems, and the growing influence of anti-rights movements opposing global commitments like SDG Target 8.7. The region is further challenged by migration, climate change, and domestic child labour, particularly affecting girls, which exacerbates inequalities and rights violations. Strategic priorities include addressing child labour in agriculture with a gender-sensitive approach, integrating eradication efforts into poverty reduction policies, tackling the impact of climate change on rural child labour, and ensuring access to quality, inclusive education. Additionally, fostering cross-regional collaboration and strengthening alliances with key stakeholders like CLADE, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Latin America and Caribbean Initiative Free from Child Labour are essential for sustainable progress.

Priorities in the region include but will not be limited to: Strengthening Global Advocacy and Accountability to ensure full implementation of SDG 8.7; holding governments accountable for child labour commitments and advocating for child labour eradication in subnational development plans;

Addressing poverty, migration, climate change, and the gendered aspects of child labour, especially in agriculture and rural areas; Advocating for accessible, relevant, and quality education for all children, especially those in child labour, to empower their rights and future opportunities; Involving children and adolescents in advocacy efforts, ensuring their voices are central to the fight against child labour; Strengthening partnerships with regional networks, development partners, and ILO to increase support for policies and actions against child labour, particularly in supply chains and vulnerable sectors.

Action

- *Strengthen Global Advocacy and Accountability for SDG 8.7:* Advocate for the full implementation of SDG Target 8.7 and hold governments accountable for their child labour commitments. This includes ensuring child labour eradication is integrated into subnational development plans and strengthening cross-regional collaborations with organisations like CLADE and ILO.
- *Address the Gendered Aspects of Child Labour:* Develop and implement gender-sensitive policies to tackle child labour, especially in agriculture and domestic work, where girls are disproportionately affected. Address the specific vulnerabilities of girls in migration and rural areas, and ensure their needs are central in all child labour eradication efforts.
- *Integrate Child Labour Eradication into Poverty Reduction Policies:* Position child labour eradication as a critical component of poverty reduction and social protection strategies. Focus on addressing the root causes of child labour, including the impacts of migration, climate change, and rural poverty, to break the cycle of exploitation.
- *Tackle the Impact of Climate Change on Child Labour:* Develop policies that connect climate change mitigation with child labour prevention, particularly in agriculture and rural communities. Ensure that climate policies prioritize children's rights and address the compounded vulnerabilities of children affected by climate-induced migration and environmental degradation.
- *Ensure Accessible, Quality Education for All Children:* Advocate for inclusive, relevant, and quality education for all children, especially those at risk of or already involved in child labour. Focus on creating educational opportunities for children in vulnerable sectors such as domestic work and agriculture and integrate education policies into broader child labour eradication strategies.
- *Empower Children and Adolescents/Youth in Advocacy:* Ensure the active involvement of children and adolescents in advocacy efforts, empowering them to speak out against child labour and engage in policymaking. Their voices should be central in shaping solutions.
- *Strengthen Partnerships and Collaboration:* Foster stronger partnerships with regional networks, development partners, and the ILO to create coordinated, multi-sectoral responses to child labour. Enhance support for policies that address child labour in supply chains and vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture, domestic work, and migration-affected areas.

CALL TO ACTION FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

Government Commitment:

- *Funding for Public Education:* Allocate a greater share of GDP towards ensuring access to quality education for all children, with a particular focus on rural and marginalised areas. Special emphasis should be placed on providing flexible schooling options for child labour survivors to enable their reintegration into the educational system.
- *Strengthen Labour Laws:* Enforce minimum wage laws, eliminate hazardous child labour, and enhance the capacities of institutions responsible for labour monitoring. This includes increasing the number of labour officers and ensuring effective implementation of child labour regulations.
- *Expand Social Protection:* Develop context-sensitive social protection schemes that specifically target the needs of families working in sectors with high child labour prevalence, such as agriculture and the informal sector. These schemes should be designed to reduce economic vulnerability and provide families with viable alternatives to child labour.
- *ABA Ownership, Funding, and Replication:* Take ownership of ABA models such as CLFZs by integrating them into national child labour elimination strategies. Commit to funding and replicating successful models to scale impact and ensure sustainability. Governments should actively engage with stakeholders, including CSOs and trade unions, to adapt ABAs to local contexts and address child labour holistically.

Private Sector Engagement:

- *Integrate ABA into Supply Chains:* Acknowledge child labour-free zones (CLFZs) and child labour-free products as an integral part of responsible sourcing strategies. Companies should pay fair prices to producers from these zones to ensure that communities are compensated for their efforts to eliminate child labour.
- *Enhance Transparency:* Implement rigorous due diligence processes to ensure that human rights are prioritised across all supply chains, with a particular focus on sectors like agriculture, where child labour risks are highest.

CSOs and Trade Unions:

- *Build a Unified Voice:* Develop a coordinated and collective agenda for advocacy that brings together the strengths of CSOs and trade unions. This unified voice can amplify demands for stronger policies, the enforcement of government commitments, and accountability from other stakeholders, including businesses and international bodies.
- *Complement Each Other's Roles:* Leverage the advocacy expertise of CSOs and the organising power of trade unions to mutually reinforce efforts. While CSOs can focus on community-level interventions and policy advocacy, trade unions can engage workers and employers to integrate child labour monitoring into workplace practices and advocate for fair wages and safe working conditions.
- *Monitor Government Commitments:* Actively track and evaluate the implementation of government policies and programs aimed at eradicating child labour. Share data-driven insights

and evidence to hold governments accountable for their commitments under SDG 8.7 and other international frameworks.

- *Demand Accountability from All Stakeholders:* Ensure that businesses, governments, and development partners are held accountable for their roles in addressing child labour. Advocate for transparent reporting from companies, effective enforcement of government regulations, and sustained support from international bodies.

International Bodies/Multilateral Stakeholders:

- *Include a Harmonised Approach towards Child Labour:* Ensure that the forthcoming and pre-existing legislations are consistently clear in their guidelines on child labour risks to standardise company approaches
- *Systemic and Programmatic Approaches:* Transition from pilot projects to comprehensive, scalable programs focused on child labour elimination, with a gender-sensitive lens and ABA lens
- *Strengthen Advocacy for CSDDD:* Preserve the integrity of the CSDDD amidst parliamentary opposition. Advocate for the inclusion of child labour-specific guidelines and ensure strong technical and administrative support for its implementation
- *Global Outreach and Collaboration:* Leverage EU delegations worldwide to prioritise child labour in discussions with partner countries, stakeholders, and development partners.