

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD LABOUR: INSIGHTS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY



GLOBAL MARCH

Against Child Labour
Contra el Trabajo Infantil
Contre le Travail des Enfants

Introduction

In June 2020, Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) launched a survey called “COVID-19 and Child Labour Survey” asking its active civil society members in Africa, Asia and Latin America about their biggest concerns and challenges in their fight against child labour amidst the COVID-19 crisis. We shared the survey with key child rights organisations/NGOs, trade unions and teachers’ associations of our network (referred here collectively as civil society organisations/CSOs), and received responses from 40 organisations in 31 countries. Thanks to their responses, we now have a better understanding of how COVID-19 is affecting children and communities across continents, what are the risks for children and organisations in the future, and how these organisations are responding or would like to respond to the exacerbated situations for vulnerable children.

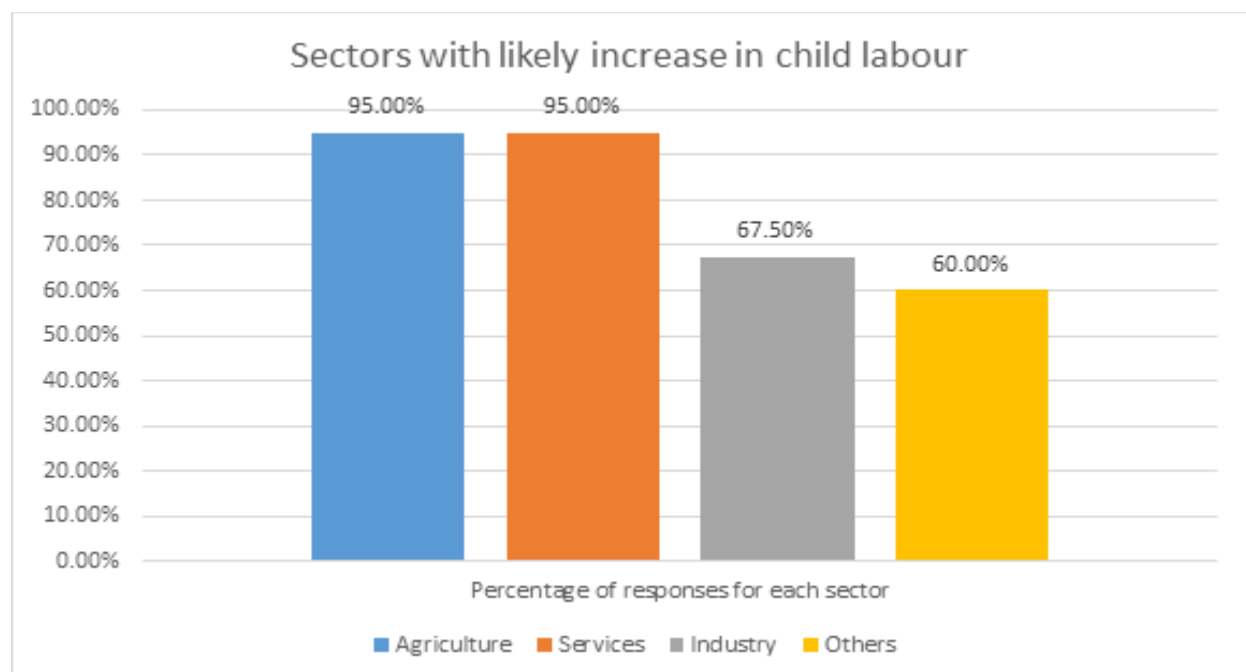
The survey data revealed can guide the work of the anti-child labour movement and assist in informing and improving decision-making by governments and donor institutions, allowing them to respond to the organisations and the children they aim to protect. This data can further guide future priorities for more systematic interventions including research, programmes and advocacy. Also, it can guide policies to be gender sensitive/responsive and assist in bolstering rapid and urgent efforts of governments and donors to achieve SDG Target 8.7.

Respondents

The survey received 40 CSO responses in total, spread across 31 countries, i.e. 15 organisations from Africa, 11 from Asia, and 14 from Latin America (7 from Central America and 7 from South America).

Key Findings

1: Agriculture and services sector will equally face an increase in child labour amidst COVID-19



95% of CSOs believe that both agriculture and services sector is likely to have an increase in child labour due to COVID-19, while 67.5% of the CSOs believe that industry sector will face an increase as well, however it would be much lesser than the other two sectors.

This trend is consistent with a rich evidence base that informs of the disruption of education, limited/lack of employment options for the parents during the worldwide lockdowns to contain the spread of the pandemic and the ease of getting into informal work by children, constituting agriculture and service sectors. These scenarios are true for all regions including Africa, Asia and Latin America.

During the survey analysis, some common agricultural products and areas of work in the service and industry sector where CSOs believe child labour could continue to be found, came to be highlighted. Some of these include: (See Annexe 1 for full details.)

Agriculture sector: sugarcane, coffee, rice, livestock related work, fishing etc.

Service sector: domestic work, street and retail vending and working in small eateries and shops etc

Industry sector: garment and shoes, mining and construction work etc

Other sectors: pornography, begging and waste collection etc

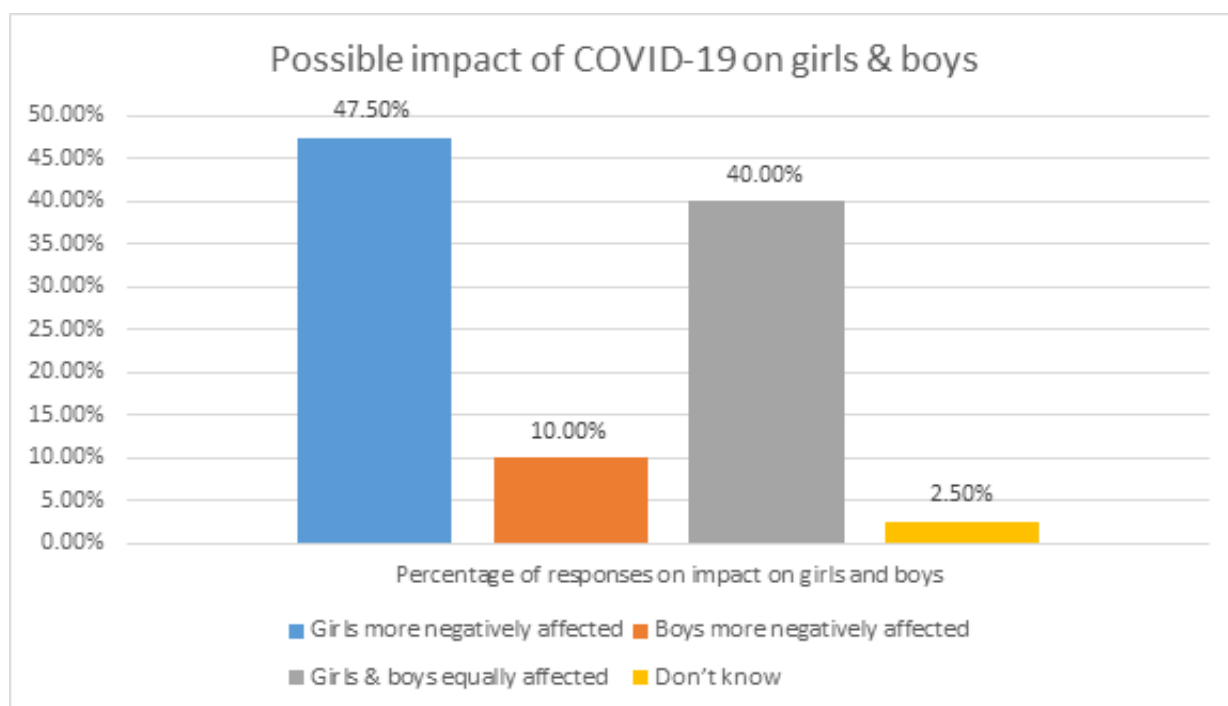
2: COVID-19 has led to an economic crisis and has shed light on pre-existing socio-economic inequalities and inability of the State to protect the vulnerable that will contribute in increasing child labour

The top 5 reasons for increase in child labour in agriculture and service sector are:

1. Closing down of schools for a long period of time along with online classes unadjusted to the realities of different boys and girls.
2. Increase in poverty, hunger, unemployment and reduction in household income
3. Failure of public and social protection policies and relaxation in enforcement of child labour laws
4. Increase in informal work and lowering of costs by companies to grapple with economic crisis
5. Violence and lack of engagement or recreation options for children at home

Few CSOs also mentioned that indigenous communities are likely to be affected severely.

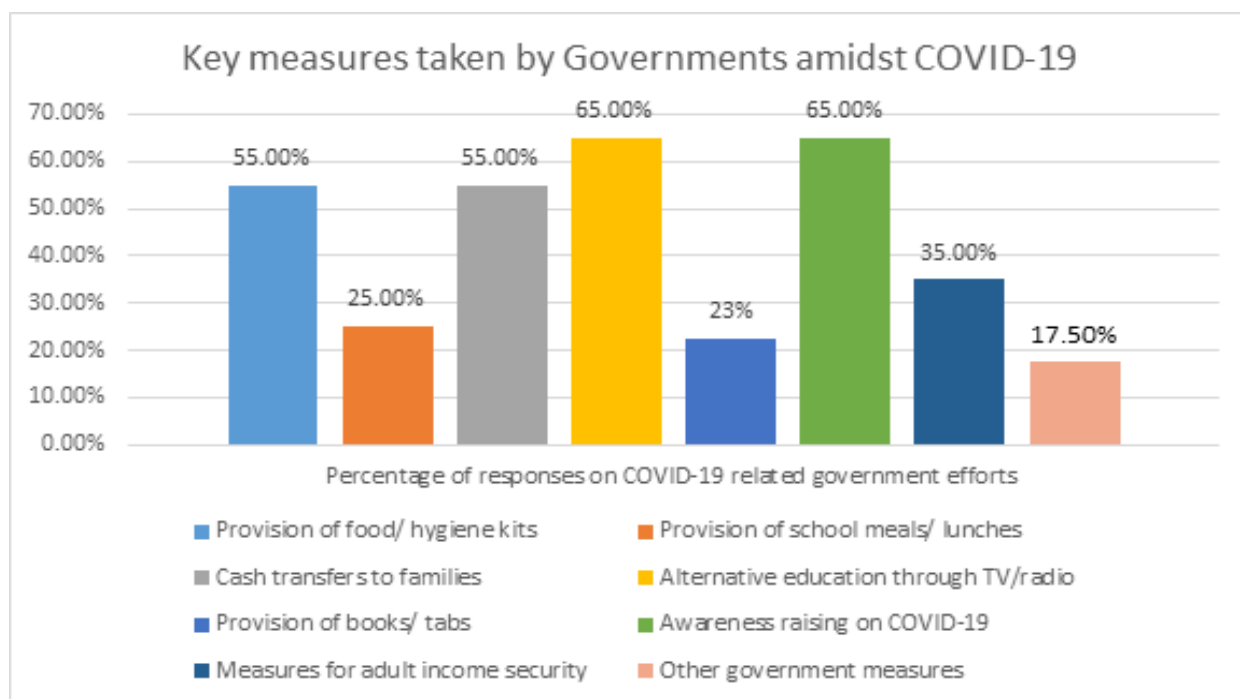
3: Girls are more likely to be negatively affected by COVID-19 than boys



A majority of the CSOs believe that girls are more likely to be negatively affected by COVID-19 than boys. It was also reported that COVID-19 has magnified the pre-existing discriminatory social norms, gender roles, and power dynamics responsible for the same. For instance, some of the reasons for girls being more adversely affected include school closures, early marriage, early pregnancies, inability of parents to pay school fees, gendered role in society, triple work burden, lack of guidance and encouragement and inability of the Government to protect vulnerable girls. However, it is worth noting that some CSOs point to differential harms for boys as well, that include facing pressures to engage in income-generating activities outside the house by dropping out of school.

4: Even though governments took steps to improve access to education, on the ground experiences of children show many could have been left behind

With COVID-19 worsening the situation of most people, many governments took considerable steps to protect its citizens. We asked CSOs to choose from the few options (mentioned in the figure) on the measures their governments took to protect children and families from COVID-19 and ensure they go back to school after the lockdown opens.



Even though 65% of CSOs said that their governments provided for both alternative education through TV, radio and other means while maintaining social distancing, and carried out awareness raising activities on COVID-19, their efficacy remains questionable. The overall discussion shared by the CSOs in this survey reveals a scenario similar to the one described in a study carried out by [UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures \(June-July 2020\)](#). This study revealed that while many governments have implemented some kind of remote learning policy or broadcast learning programme, 463 million students around the globe remain cut off from education, mainly due to a lack of remote learning policies or lack of equipment needed for learning at home (internet, phone, computers, TV, radio). The UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank Survey also revealed that globally, 3 out of 4 students who cannot be reached by remote learning opportunities came from rural areas and/or poor households.

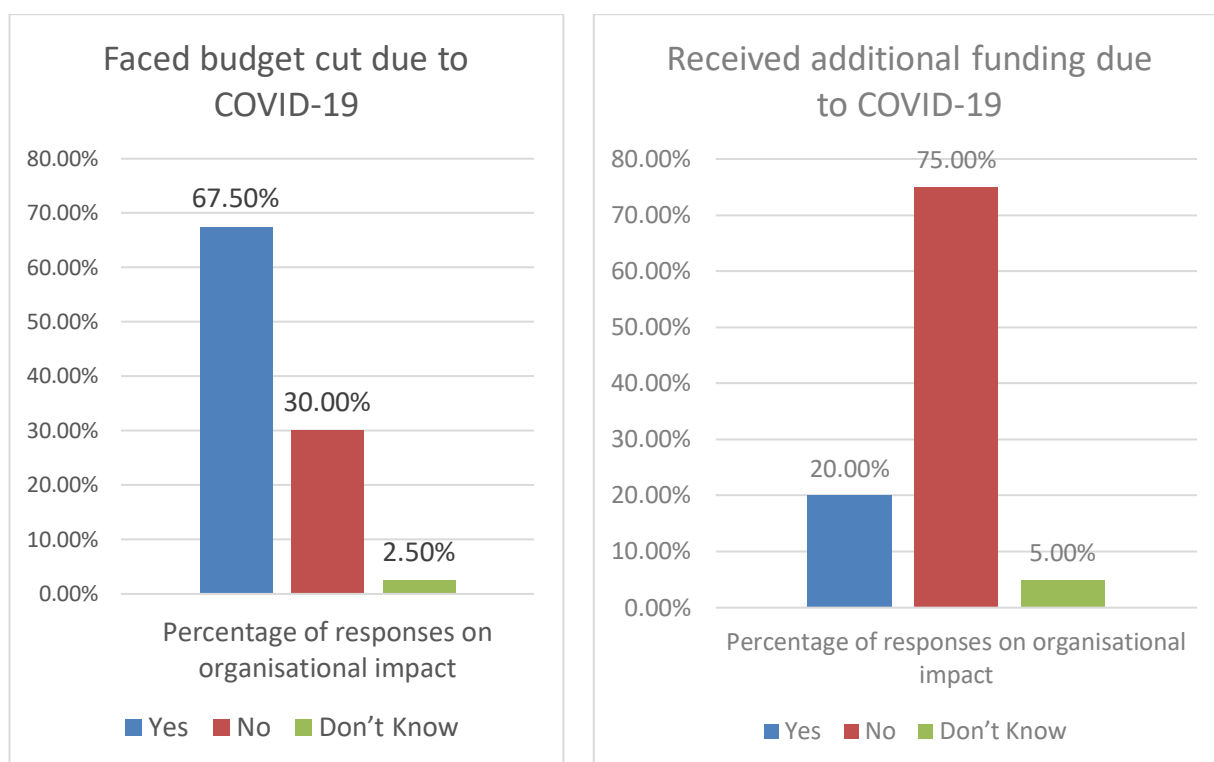
5: Government needs to strengthen social protection and education systems in a post COVID-19 world and provide universal access to all, especially to the more vulnerable

To ensure children continue their education and are protected from the negative impacts of COVID-19, we asked the CSOs to share some key interventions that they feel should be carried out. Below are top 5 answers:

1. Government should ensure that a free and compulsory education policy is implemented and child labour laws are enforced.
2. Provision of health, hygiene and safety kits to children for protection from COVID-19
3. Provision of school books, lunches, bags and uniforms and scholarships can be a motivation for children to return to schools, especially for the vulnerable children and children from low-income families.

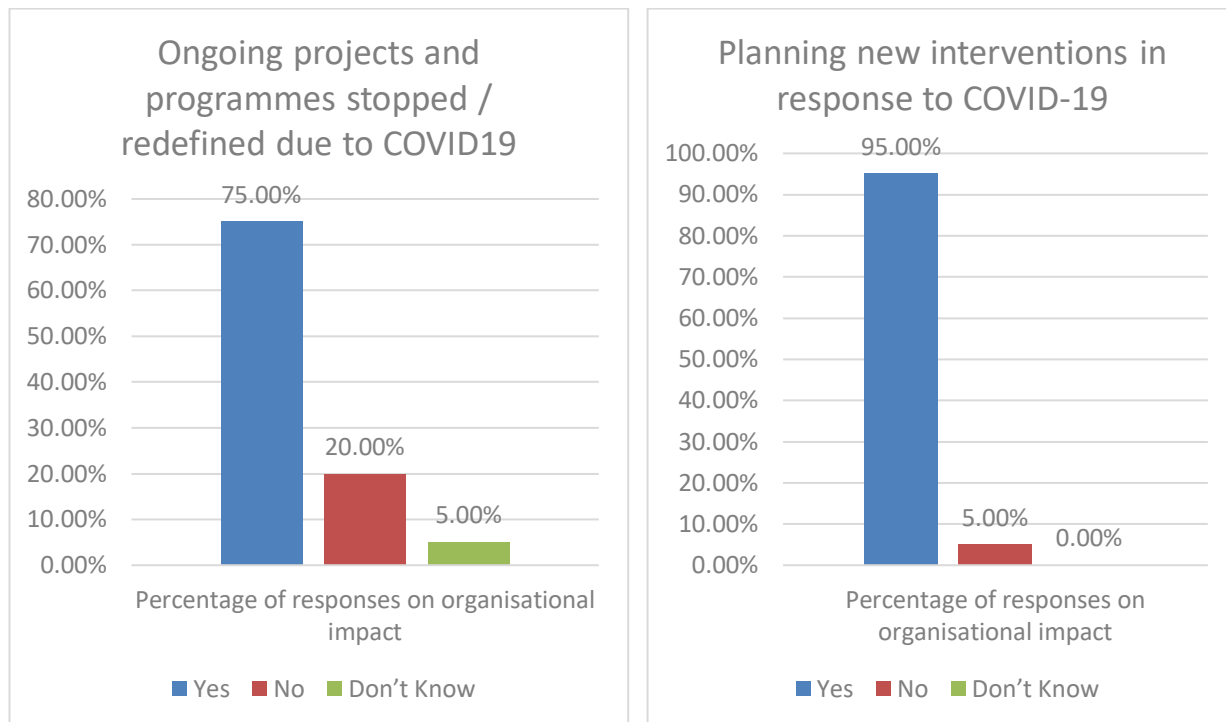
4. Community awareness, capacity building and monitoring to ensure children remain in schools, are protected from COVID-19 and other issues such as child labour, trafficking, child marriage and adapt to the “new normal” preventing mental health issues amongst children.
5. Children and their parents must be covered under social safety net programmes, including provision of financial/ income support for families

6: A significant proportion of organisations are experiencing budget cuts and have not received additional funding



Nearly 70% of CSOs reported experiencing budget cuts due to the impact of COVID-19, with 75% of the CSOs reported not receiving any additional funding. As per the [Devex's COVID-19 Trends Tracker survey](#), immediate cuts to development funding are being seen across all regions, with most organisations fearing closure. Additionally, [European Commission's proposed Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\)](#) which envisages cutting civil society funding by about 25 per cent, will leave a large number of organisations downsizing, closing projects and being negatively impacted overall.

7: Most organisations have stopped programmes and planning new interventions in response to COVID-19



75% CSOs reported that some or all of their programmes had been stopped, while 95% CSOs informed of planning new interventions in response to COVID-19. However, despite donors pulling back funding from organisations, the commitment of these organisations to serve the children and vulnerable communities remain unhindered, and they have planned, adapted, innovated and found ways to continue working for their goal to end child labour and promote education for all. During the onset of the COVID-19 virus in various countries, Global March's members across Africa, Asia, Latin America proved to be on the forefront [providing social assistance](#) to families in various forms including awareness on COVID-19, food, masks, hygiene kits and learning materials to children etc.

Further CSOs suggested support from the Global March for technical support for lobby and advocacy, assistance in funding, creation of knowledge materials and visibility of publications, training of technical skills and best practices and for facilitating coordination amongst members globally and with the international community.

8: A unified advocacy ask of prioritising education, economic assistance to families and law enforcement agreed by all CSOs

Given the serious challenge that COVID-19 has posed in front of us, Global March has identified key responses, priorities for the government, policymakers and the international community, forming the basis of its advocacy. (See [Position Paper on Impacts of COVID-19 on Child Labour](#)). There is a unanimous agreement on prioritising efforts to continue education for the hardest to reach children, using all available means and technology; providing economic assistance, including cash transfers, to low-income

families (such as from informal sector) that will be hit first and hardest; and ensuring there is no relaxation of child labour regulations and enforcements by governments in countries (if the case may be).

Recommendations

COVID-19 health and economic crisis is indeed a big challenge for all stakeholders, however the focus on health and economy must not come at the expense of compromising on children's education and their right to be protected, especially from exploitation and abuse. The clock is ticking to reach the target of zero child labour by 2025 under the SDGs, and a further slackening of efforts to address it, will have negative implication on progress of other SDG goals and targets.

In light of the survey's findings, what can governments, and donors do to support the critical functions performed by organisations?

1. Listen to and support local CSOs working towards restoration of child rights and serving vulnerable families and create avenues for CSO contribution in meeting challenges posed by COVID-19 and other factors in addressing socio-economic issues including child labour and illiteracy.
2. Fund interventions that support the promotion of education and child labour eradication
3. Increase investments in children's overall well-being and protection including their health, nutrition, education and protection.
4. Governments need to re-shape the education and social protection systems to reach out to all children, especially the hard-to-reach category in the post COVID-19 world, promoting universal access to technology, internet and basic provisions for education, safety and protection
5. High time governments focussed on tackling the root causes of child labour and illiteracy rooted deep within pre-existing social and gendered norms and discriminatory practices along with addressing other main factors such as poverty which will be exacerbated due to COVID-19.
6. While interventions need to be promoted for protection and education for both girls and boys, girls need special interventions as they are likely to more negatively affected as proved by the survey results
7. Even though the last global estimates showed agriculture to have the highest number of children in child labour, the survey results show that the service sector is likely to come close to the prevalence of child labour in agriculture, with rise predicted in both these sectors due to COVID-19. Targeted interventions are therefore needed in these two sectors especially apart from the manufacturing sector. Governments and donors together with the support of civil society therefore must take this into account and promote action against child labour in these sectors.

End Note:

We would like to thank all our members who took time to fill this survey and help us understand the situation on ground and chart a way forward.

Annexe 1

During the survey analysis some common agricultural products and areas of work in the service and industry sector where respondents believe child labour could continue to be found, came to be highlighted. They are as stipulated below.

Please note the survey revealed many other country-specific commodities and other areas of work done by children, however the list below is intended to show the commonalities found across countries. An exhaustive list of all others can be made available upon request.

Agriculture Products:

1. *Sugarcane*: Tanzania, Nepal, Malawi, Philippines, Honduras, Colombia, India
2. *Coffee*: Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia, Malawi, Kenya, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Panama
3. *Cotton*: Malawi, Ghana, Burkina Faso, India
4. *Tobacco*: Guatemala, Malawi, Uganda, Bangladesh, Indonesia
5. *Corn & Beans*: Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Nepal, Indonesia
6. *Livestock*: Paraguay, Tanzania, Philippines, Kenya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Niger, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay
7. *Fishing*: Paraguay, Philippines, Kenya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ghana, Peru, Algeria, Paraguay
8. *Cocoa*: Ghana, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Brazil
9. *Palm Oil*: Indonesia, Ghana
10. *Rice*: Nepal, Tanzania, Philippines, Uganda, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ghana, Pakistan
11. *Tea*: Malawi, Kenya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka
12. *Fruits*: Guatemala, Brazil, Argentina, Panama, Colombia

Services:

1. *Adult Entertainment*: Nepal
2. *Small Eateries*: Nepal, Malawi, Japan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Paraguay, India
3. *Prostitution*: Malawi, Uganda, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Chile
4. *Shipping & packing*: Pakistan

5. *Child Domestic Labour*: Pakistan, Tanzania, Philippines, Uganda, Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Ghana, Peru, Nicaragua, Argentina, Colombia
6. *Street & Retail Vending*: Tanzania, Malawi, Philippines, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua, India
7. *Transport*: Kenya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Algeria, Cameroon
8. *Repairing & Maintenance*: Honduras

Industry:

1. *Brick*: Nepal, Peru, Argentina
2. *Garments & Shoes*: Nepal, Bangladesh, Peru, India
3. *Mining*: Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda, Indonesia, Burkina Faso
4. *Manufacturing*: Malawi, Indonesia, Cameroon
5. *Quarrying*: Malawi, Kenya, Indonesia, Burkina Faso, Guatemala
6. *Construction*: Kenya, Uganda, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Honduras
7. *Craft*: Niger, Algeria, Cameroon

Others:

1. *Pornography*: Nepal, Malawi, Japan, Chile
2. *Drug Trafficking*: Tanzania, Chile
3. *Begging*: Tanzania, Kenya, Brazil, Paraguay
4. *Scavenging*: Kenya, Bangladesh
5. *Waste collection*: Uganda, Ivory Coast, Argentina