



Child rights and due diligence

13 February 2019, 17.00 - 18.00

Partner

UNICEF

Objective of the session

Going beyond child labour, the session will discuss the importance of integrating child rights into human rights due diligence. The session will raise awareness on the wide range of impacts on children in the supply chain, and discuss practical barriers, opportunities and company examples to identify and prevent harm to children through risk-based due diligence. It will also discuss the role of investors and the importance of better metrics to measure how due diligence efforts can translate into improved outcomes for workers, families and communities.

Background



Source: https://www.unicef.org/csr/files/Impact_Areas_in_Global_Supply_Chains.pdf

Governments play a critical role in promoting responsible business conduct that ensures decent work and contributes to improved living standards. Yet, decent work deficits remain widespread in the garment and footwear supply chain, which affect both workers and their families. From agricultural production to textile processing and garment manufacturing, children are impacted along the supply chain in many different ways – as workers, as children of working parents and as members of a community affected by adverse impacts along the garment and textile value chain. Child labour and conditions for young workers, including hazardous work, remain persistent challenges. Beyond child labour, the lives of children are impacted by inadequate living standards and poor working conditions for parents, including low wages, long hours and discriminatory practices against women.

While the industry employs tens of millions of women, maternity protections in line with international standards are

often absent. Exploratory UNICEF research in Bangladesh and Vietnam shows that garment factories frequently fail to comply with laws and regulations on maternity leave and pay, childcare and breastfeeding support.¹ This can have significant implications for child well-being as sufficiently paid maternity leave is critical for mothers to recover from childbirth and provide the necessary care for their infants. Women are also at risk of losing employment during pregnancy or after child birth, which means they may lose vital income to provide for themselves and their infants.

Impact on children in the garment and footwear supply chain is not restricted to the workplace. Workplace and community impacts are often interlinked. Higher wages, for example, can positively affect the health status and education opportunities of worker's children. Likewise, access to better nutrition and improved WASH standards in the community can improve worker health and well-being, contribute to higher productivity and reduce absenteeism and worker turnover. Effective due diligence approaches, therefore, should build on the nexus between workplace and community conditions.

Integrating child rights into due diligence

Despite children being a particularly vulnerable stakeholder group, due diligence approaches in the garment and footwear sector rarely address children's rights specifically. Integrating child rights into due diligence requires approaches that enable companies to identify, prevent, address and monitor the direct and indirect impact they may cause or contribute to on children – in the workplace and beyond. A review of 25 leading international apparel and footwear brands demonstrated that few companies had supply chain policies and systems in place to identify and address negative impact on children's rights, beyond child labour.² The review also showed that prevailing responsible sourcing efforts were heavily focussed on compliance, with supplier codes of conduct and social auditing as the basis for supplier performance assessment. Moreover, companies tend to focus on where they have most control, rather than where the risk of negative consequences for vulnerable stakeholders is highest (e.g. focus on tier-one rather than deeper tiers of the supply chain). While in more recent years the compliance model has been complemented by a growing number of 'beyond compliance' approaches aimed at tackling systemic root causes, more approaches are needed that increase worker voice, improve supplier capacity and encourage multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Discussion questions

The session will explore:

- What are the diverse ways in which children are affected in the garment & footwear supply chain?
- What are the shortcomings in current industry practices? What are specific examples of company practices to integrate child rights into due diligence?
- How can we measure effectiveness of due diligence efforts and the positive impact on workers, their families and the communities in which they live? What role can investors play?
- What is the role of governments and public policy to drive positive change in company practices?

For more information

- UNICEF, *Better Business for Children. Understanding Children's Rights and the Ready-Made Garment Sector in Bangladesh*, May 2018: https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/sites/unicef.org.bangladesh/files/2018-07/BB4C-Baseline%20Assessment-Executive%20Summary_Design_FINAL_without%20cutmark_v03.pdf
- UNICEF, *The Apparel and Footwear Sector and Children in Vietnam*, June 2017: <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/sites/unicef.org.vietnam/files/2018-07/Footware%20Report%20Eng%20revised.pdf>

¹ See, for example, UNICEF (2015): *The Ready-Made Garment Sector and Children in Bangladesh*.

² Review undertaken by Article One as part of the *Network on Children's Rights in the Garment and Footwear Sector* led by UNICEF and Norges Bank Investment Management (NBIM)

