

## **Domestic Child Labour in Pakistan**

### *Study Launch*

Child Domestic Workers (CDWs) in Pakistan are a critical aspect of child labour, often referred to as a ‘hidden phenomenon’ due to its occurrence within private households. This makes it challenging to accurately estimate the number of CDWs. However, based on available data, one can approximate their prevalence. For example, in 2017, Pakistan had approximately 32.2 million households. An estimate suggests that one in every four households employs a domestic worker, predominantly young girls aged 10 to 14z. This implies that around 8.05 million households might have domestic workers. If one considers that every second household among these employs a CDW, their total number would be around 4.03 million. Alternatively, if every third household in this group employs a child, the number would be approximately 2.68 million. These figures, while estimative, highlight a significant issue of child labour within the domestic sector in Pakistan. It points to a widespread practice of employing children, particularly young girls, in domestic work, often under conditions that may not align with their rights and welfare.

Pakistan’s commitment to international conventions and the development of national and provincial legislation aimed at protecting children, including from Child Domestic Labour (CDL), reflects an awareness of the issue. However, the persistent threat of CDL highlights gaps in implementation and understanding. Despite ratifying various International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations conventions that protect children in all contexts, and enacting several legislations, the problem of CDL remains. This disconnect suggests that laws and policies alone are not sufficient to address the issue effectively. The lack of comprehensive research further complicates the situation, as most studies offer limited insight into the nuances of CDL, hindering efforts to eliminate it.

One critical challenge is the inconsistency in legal definitions across provincial and national laws. Terms like ‘child’, ‘child labour’, ‘CDL’, ‘hazardous work’, and ‘light work’ lack a unified operational definition, leading to confusion among stakeholders responsible for addressing CDL. This inconsistency undermines the effectiveness of legal and institutional frameworks designed to protect children. Moreover, although there are numerous national and provincial institutions and mechanisms to prevent child labour, including CDL, their effectiveness in protecting children from abuse, exploitation, or worse outcomes in domestic work environments has been inadequate. This ineffectiveness indicates systemic issues in the implementation and enforcement of laws and policies.

To effectively address and eventually eradicate CDL in Pakistan, it is crucial to identify and address gaps in the current framework of laws, policies, and administrative procedures. This session aims to discuss these areas, pinpointing where and how improvements can be made to better protect children from domestic labour.

### **Bibliography**

Detho, I.A. 2023, ‘Domestic Child Labour in Pakistan’, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, <<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/20532-20230928.pdf>>.

### **Panel Organisers**

Mr Abdullah Dayo, Programme Advisor, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: [abdullah.fes@de](mailto:abdullah.fes@de)

Dr Sajid Amin Javed, Deputy Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: [sajidamin@sdpi.org](mailto:sajidamin@sdpi.org)

Mr Muhammad Umar Ayaz, Research Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: [umar@sdpi.org](mailto:umar@sdpi.org)