



Children's Rights in the Garment and Footwear Supply Chain

A Practical Tool for Integrating
Children's Rights into Responsible
Sourcing Frameworks
JUNE 2020

Acknowledgements

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A woman working in a garment factory in Tan Binh District, Ho Chi Minh City.

Introduction

➔ This guidance tool is designed to support companies in the garment and footwear sector to integrate child rights into their responsible sourcing programmes. It explores practical steps companies can take – individually and collectively – to ensure children are recognized as important stakeholders in their responsible sourcing efforts. The suggested steps do not foresee the creation of parallel processes. Instead, they provide guidance on how to integrate child rights into existing sourcing policy and practice. The guidance includes metrics, which support the measurement and reporting on child rights integration and outcomes over time.

MORE THAN 60 MILLION WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED in the garment and footwear sector worldwide.¹ Many of them are parents and caregivers who support families. UNICEF estimates that more than 100 million children are affected in the garment and footwear supply chain globally – as workers, children of working parents and community members near farms and factories.

The garment and footwear industry has enormous potential to contribute to social and economic development. It can support industrial growth, provide decent work and improve livelihoods. At the same time, however, decent work deficits, poor living conditions and widespread discrimination against women undermine the industry's contribution to positive social impact.

Children are a particularly vulnerable stakeholder group in the garment and footwear supply chain, as in many sectors. Child labour and exploitative conditions for young workers are significant concerns, especially in deeper tiers. Moreover, working conditions in many garment and footwear producing countries lack adequate support systems for working parents, especially mothers. In the absence of family-friendly policies, children are at risk of poor health and nutrition, neglect and limited access to basic services, including childcare. Children of garment workers also risk being trapped in poverty, due to low wages and poor

living conditions, which denies them a chance to develop and reach their full potential.

Over the past two decades, garment and footwear companies have invested significant resources to develop responsible supply chain management systems. The prevailing approach has been grounded in compliance – enforcing codes of conduct and auditing supplier performance against minimum commitments. These approaches have contributed to improved awareness and standards in formal tiers of the supply chain – such as in relation to occupational health and safety, working hours and child labour.

However, the limitations of compliance-driven approaches have become widely apparent in recent years. Beyond-compliance approaches have become more common, which go beyond a 'snapshot analysis' and seek to address underlying and multifaceted root causes.² While these approaches often include child labour, they rarely address other impacts on children and working parents. They also tend to be limited to the workplace, failing to address wider impacts in communities where workers live. There is, therefore, a critical need to enhance these approaches to improve the lives of workers and their families and thereby contribute to systemic change. Integration of child rights considerations into responsible supply chain processes is an important component of these efforts.

➔ Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), businesses have a responsibility to act with human rights due diligence to avoid negative social consequences related to their business activities and supply chains.

Network on Children's Rights in the Garment and Footwear Sector

Recognizing the need for the garment and footwear sector to more effectively address adverse impact on children, and thereby reduce sustainability risks, in 2017 UNICEF and Norges Bank Investment Management established the *Network on Children's Rights in the Garment and Footwear Sector*. The network was set up to facilitate a dialogue between garment and footwear brands, manufacturers and civil society experts to raise awareness, share innovative practices and promote action to improve the human rights impact on children in the sector.³

One of the key discussions in the network focused on the need to develop guidance for companies to more effectively integrate children's rights into responsible sourcing approaches. A need for relevant child rights metrics was also expressed, which allow companies and investors to measure and track progress in meaningful ways. Until now, child rights risks beyond child labour are rarely called out in existing audit, monitoring and reporting mechanisms. This document attempts to fill this gap by

- gathering available evidence on how children are impacted in the garment and footwear supply chain;
- identifying limitations in current approaches to effective management of these impacts; and
- developing guidance and metrics for companies to take steps to integrate child rights into their approaches to supply chain management.



Jisha, 3, is held by a caregiver at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) day care centre located at a garment factory in Narayanganj, outside Dhaka, Bangladesh. Both of the child's parent work at the garment factory.

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The document also addresses the role of investors and includes recommendations on how they can use their leverage to encourage better integration of child rights in companies they invest in.

The findings and recommendations in this report are made with both garment buyers ('brands', 'retailers') and producers ('suppliers', 'manufacturers') in mind. Importantly, this guide recognizes the critical role of governments as a duty-bearer to protect children's rights and to promote their progressive realization, including in the context of business activities. Against this backdrop, this guide seeks to promote an understanding of 'shared responsibility', which includes collective action by all relevant stakeholders, to address child rights at the systemic level.⁴

Approach to developing this tool

As part of the *Network on Children's Rights in the Garment and Footwear Sector*, UNICEF partnered with Article One, a business and human rights consultancy, to develop this guidance tool. The research was carried out in 2017 and 2018 and included: three workshops with network companies, manufacturers and experts; a detailed desk review of over 25 apparel and footwear companies; and in-depth stakeholder interviews. In September 2019, a draft version of the tool was shared with network participants for review and feedback, which has been incorporated into this version of the tool.

STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS & WEBINARS



Three stakeholder workshops were held: two in Geneva, Switzerland (November 2017 and 2018) and one in Dhaka, Bangladesh (May 2018) to gather input from buyers and manufacturers in the development of the guidance tool. The workshops were attended by international garment and footwear buyers, local manufacturers, civil society organizations and civil society experts. The companies engaged in the workshops covered more than one million employees in their own operations and an estimated eight million workers in their supply chains.⁵ The manufacturers who participated in the workshop in Dhaka collectively employed more than 80,000 workers (of which more than 52,000 were women).⁶ In addition, four webinars were held between 2017 and 2019 that provided additional opportunities for discussion and stakeholder input.

COMPANY AND LITERATURE REVIEW



The second phase of research consisted of an in-depth review of 25 leading garment and footwear brands with regard to their approach to managing child rights risks. A literature review was also conducted, focusing on existing knowledge of responsible supply chain management, human rights due diligence approaches in the supply chain, and integration of children's rights.

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