

Ratification of Child labour conventions

Why in news?

\n\n

\n

- India ratified two key global conventions on combating child labour on June 13th.

\n

- This is a "great step forward" in bringing all the world's children under the ambit of the legislations.

\n

\n\n

What is the background of the issue?

\n\n

\n

- All children have the right to be protected from child labour. Yet, around the world, there are still 168 million children in child labour, Eighty-five million of them are engaged in hazardous work.

\n

- The government of India had in March this year approved ratification of two fundamental conventions of the ILO to address concerns related to child labour.

\n

- With the ratification, India would join majority of countries that have adopted the legislation to prohibit and place severe restrictions on the employment and work of children.

\n

- The ILO treaties are about the minimum age at which a person may begin work and the hazardous industries where she may not.

\n

- Crucially, conventions 138 and 182 of the United Nations body leave it to the member-states to determine what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable work for children at different ages.

\n

- Such flexibility has given the Indian government wiggle room in adopting the international standards in question, even though the 2016 legislation falls

several notches below a comprehensive prohibition of child labour.

\n

\n\n

What are the provisions of the act?

\n\n

\n

- The Act contains the controversial provision that condones the employment of children below 14 years under the rubric of family enterprises and the declassification of several industries as hazardous occupations.

\n

- The detrimental effects on the ground from these dilutions of the original 1986 Act could be widespread.

\n

- With roughly 90% of the workforce continuing to remain outside the ambit of the organised sector, protecting vulnerable children from exploitation is difficult.

\n

- The rules notified by the Ministry of Labour and Employment for the enforcement of the 2016 amendment include some small concessions.

\n

- Under these stipulations, children may work in domestic enterprises only for three hours after school, and not between 7 p.m. and 8 a.m. These restrictions are intended to ensure attendance at school.

\n

- But given the sensitivities involved in monitoring activities within traditional households, effective enforcement will pose a challenge, and the rescue of vulnerable children will remain an uncertain proposition.

\n

\n\n

What is the way forward?

\n\n

\n

- India's ratification of the two conventions, after more than 165 countries have legally bound themselves to their obligations, is itself a sad commentary on the priorities of successive governments, cutting across party lines.

\n

- The ILO's Minimum Age Convention of 1973 entered into force in 1976 and the instrument pertaining to the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in 2000.

\n

- While policymakers are no doubt alert to the inequities that perennially plague Indian society, the practical realities are too painful for the millions who languish on the margins.

\n

- Any genuine enforcement of a minimum age at work will elude governments so long as a universal minimum wage of subsistence for the adult workforce is not implemented scrupulously.

\n

- On this score, the record of different States is at best patchy.

\n

- This scenario is unlikely to improve in the absence of a vibrant mechanism of collective bargaining among stakeholders.

\n

- Together with the near universal ratification of the convention on the Rights of the Child, that sends a resounding message about our common cause and our common standards that protect children's human rights.

\n

- Without this, the total elimination of child labour will remain a difficult task.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

