

# TOOL



**THE ALLIANCE**  
FOR CHILD PROTECTION  
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

## Signs of Child Labour

A number of signals can indicate that children are involved in child labour or the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) such as forms of slavery, commercial sexual exploitation, or trafficking. A child can display one or multiple signs. Sometimes humanitarian actors may suspect that something is not right and use their professional skills to talk to a child and find out more information. None of the following signs in isolation or in combination can give complete certainty of involvement in child labour/WFCL; it is important to train staff members, such as case workers, to assess the situation of the individual child.

**Humanitarian actors who identify a child who may be in child labour/WFCL should take action in line with locally agreed (inter-agency) reporting procedures.**

### POTENTIAL SIGNS OF CHILD LABOUR/WFCL

- A child who may be visible in the community but does not attend school or other available activities or services for children.
- A child who may report not being able to access services or distributions because of problems with registration, ration cards, discrimination, transport, being too busy, and so on.
- A child who at school displays poor performance, low attendance, disruptive behaviour or is dropping out of school or other activities, which may indicate long hours spent working.
- Children who may know of other children who have dropped out of school or are planning to drop out. Similarly, poor school attendance or cases where children have recently stopped attending school can be useful opportunities to identify potential child labour risks.
- A child who is known to do light work may start to complain of longer hours or tiredness.
- A child who is attending activities or services may complain of aches, pains and injuries that they have from the work they do, or they may be visibly injured and show signs of unexplained physical harm or common workplace injuries seen in adults.
- A child may experience general health problems such as drowsiness and exhaustion; nutritional problems; feeling unwell and having general ailments; rashes or skin infections; animal or insect bites or injuries; hearing, vision, skin, dental problems.
- A child may experience psychosocial reactions such as stress, depression, mood swings, changes in temperament, the use of drugs, cigarettes and/or alcohol, inability to concentrate, self-destructive behaviour (self-harm/suicide) or running away from home.
- Parents/caregivers or other family members might not disclose information about

the child, whether she or he goes to school or works, or where the child is staying.

- A child or their caregivers may give confused family histories or confused accounts of their displacement/journey to a new country or area. There may be discrepancies or contradictions in the information they give, or they may give prepared stories similar to those of other children.
- A child may regularly return home late at night or spend whole nights away from home with unknown people or in places linked to criminal activity or sexual exploitation.
- A child may go missing for periods of time or may one day disappear altogether; children from the same family may one day disappear.
- Children report persons in their communities talking about children going to unusual or “better places”, or “easing the burden” which can indicate trafficking risks.
- A child may seem like a willing participant in their exploitation; however, this does not mean they have a choice or benefit from the arrangement.
- A child may display inappropriate sexualised behaviour or language with peers or adults, over-familiarity with strangers or dress in a sexualised manner.
- A child may have unexplained gifts, possessions or money that are inconsistent with household income.
- A child may experience health problems that indicate sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, for instance, sexually transmitted infection/diseases; pregnancies, miscarriage or abortions; physical injuries to internal and sexual and reproductive organs from aggression and violence; clinical evidence of sexual activity that is inconsistent with the child’s age.
- A child may experience health problems that indicate heavy and hazardous work such as physical problems: broken bones; internal and soft tissue injuries; serious cuts, bruises and burns; pesticide poisoning; breathing and respiratory difficulties; asbestosis and cancer; growth deficiencies and musculoskeletal disorders.
- A child may show signs of physical or psychological abuse or injuries from violent assault or controlling measures, such as bruises, internal and soft tissue injuries.
- As children experience health and welfare problems from unmet basic needs, neglect or inadequate living conditions, they may look malnourished, unclean, appear withdrawn, have few or no personal possessions, be wearing inappropriate clothing or footwear, seem to wear the same or dirty clothing, lack bodily hygiene or have lice.
- A child may be involved in criminal activities or are living and working on the street.
- A child may regularly travel distances to work in another location, district or city.
- Finally, a child or their caregiver may directly disclose through participation in humanitarian services or programmes that children work, contribute to household income, or are working in other geographic areas or households.

## **SPECIFIC SIGNS OF SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING**

- A child who is withdrawn or reluctant to seek help or give personal details for fear of deportation, concern regarding their immigration status, or being in a situation of dependency.

- A child being brought or moved from another part of the same country or from an entirely different country.
- A child having their travel or visa arranged by someone other than themselves or their family.
- A child having limited knowledge of the local language or area where they live.
- A child who has false documentation, no passport or identification documents.
- A child who spends a lot of time doing household chores, rarely leaving their home, with no freedom of movement and no time for playing.
- A child who is frequently missing from alternative care, home or school, including abnormal patterns of enrolment across different schools.
- A child who is orphaned, unaccompanied or separated from their family, living in unregulated, informal care arrangements.
- A child who has no evidence of parental permission for them to travel to the location or no evidence of a pre-existing relationship or knowledge of the accompanying adult. A child who is unable to confirm the name and address of persons meeting them or is accompanied by an adult who always insists on remaining with the child and whom the child is uncomfortable with.
- A child who is with a significantly older partner or has been married underage.
- A child who is unrelated or new is discovered at an address.