

Child Labour – What Can We Do about It?

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Abstract: **Background:** Despite increasing knowledge of its harmful consequences, child labour is a persistent issue in developing countries; moreover, the number of working children has increased in recent years. **Research objectives:** To explore the issue of child labour by defining its drivers and indicating strategies for reducing its extent and impacts. To answer the following research question: What are the feasible solutions to the problem of child labour that might also be applied in the context of social economy or social entrepreneurship? **Research design and methods:** The authors rely on a combination of an analytical and synthetic approach and draw mostly on a review of the literature as well as normative acts (in the latter case, taking advantage of the dogmatic-legal method). Information resources comprise scientific research, studies of international institutions, legal acts, and websites. The last section employs heuristic methods to identify new sectors of social economy activity in the context of efforts to combat and prevent child labour. As a result, the considerations are primarily qualitative in nature. **Results:** Despite the absence of instances of direct implementation of social economy (entrepreneurship) solutions designed to address the problem of child labour in developing countries, it is possible to identify numerous prospective domains and instruments where this sort of activity might be conducted. **Conclusions:** Child labour is a complex issue in developing countries since both internal and external factors contribute to its emergence and perpetuation. Its abolition requires immediate cooperation of multiple institutions and organisations from the governmental, private, and social spheres. It appears that social economy organisations should be included in the list of existing actors in this field.

Keywords: child labour, children's rights, social economy, worst forms of child labour

JEL Codes: J13, J81, J83, O15, I25

Suggested citation:

Frączek M., Żyła, A. (2022). Child Labour – What Can We Do about It? *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, 2, <https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2022.2.03>

I. Background

Today, child labour is a major worldwide issue that, unfortunately, receives insufficient attention. This is demonstrated by the fact that 2022 saw the first increase in the number of working children in third-world countries in 20 years.¹ Given that between 2000 and 2016 the magnitude of this phenomenon steadily declined, the current situation raises serious concerns among the authorities of affected nations. These disturbing statistics prompted the authors of this article to investigate child labour in more depth, analyse its causes and effects, but most importantly, to explore and discuss the solutions employed by a variety of institutions, includ-

¹ According to the Human Development Index, third-world or developing countries are categorised as medium and underdeveloped ones.

ing international organisations, nation states, businesses, and the third sector, which could also be applied to the operations of social economy entities.

II. Definitions of child labour

Due to its complexity and multifaceted nature, child labour has proven challenging to define throughout the previous several decades. Hence, it is vital to take into account the many definitional approaches to the fundamental concepts used to characterise this topic in order to adopt a structured approach to the issue.

In Polish and international literature, the term *child* does not have a universally accepted definition. Although it is often expressed in terms of various age restrictions and may be interpreted in many ways depending on the area of interest, its fundamental meaning remains the same. For our purposes, the legal framework that seems most pertinent defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, OJ. 1991 no. 120 item 526, Article 1).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) provides the most relevant definition of child labour as work that deprives children of their childhood, prevents them from regularly participating in education, is mentally and physically dangerous, and damages their social and moral development. Yet, as the ILO points out, this idea is understood differently in different countries and even regions of a country where this problem arises. Child labour is frequently regarded as a negative phenomenon since it is usually equated with employment, the conditions of which (such as working hours and demands that are inappropriate for the child’s age) have a negative impact on the child’s development. (ILO. What is child labour? Defining child labour; accessed 02.09.2022; available at: <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>).

The issue of child labour is strongly linked to the establishment of a minimum age for children to work. Currently, most countries have laws setting a minimum age for employment. Most solutions adopted within the framework of national legislation draw on the provisions of the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138 of 1973 (ILO Minimum Age Convention, adopted in Geneva on 26 June 1973, OJ. 1978 no. 12 item 53). This convention outlines three age limits, crucial in the fight against child labour worldwide: “The minimum age of working children shall not be less than 15 years” (Article 2(3)). However, in order to meet the needs of underdeveloped countries, which face more difficulties in achieving this goal, an age limit of 14 years has been set for a transitional period (Article 2(4)). Moreover, children aged 13 to 15 can perform light work (Article 7(1)).

This minimum age condition, among other things, allows for a distinction between positive and negative perceptions of child labour. Positive consequences are associated with the involvement of a child above the minimum age in work that does not adversely affect his or her physical and mental health and may have a promising impact on his or her future (e.g. in economic and vocational terms). Children can thus learn responsibility and self-reliance, while contributing resources that positively impact on the life of the whole family. On the other hand, when the term „child labour” is used pejoratively, it only refers to children who are employed in the harshest and most dangerous types of work and are younger than the legal minimum age for employment (Terre des Hommes 2019; Terre des Hommes position on child labour; Accessed 01.09.2022; available at <https://www.terredeshommes.org/terre-des-hommes-position-on-child-labour/>; pp. 1–2). In such circumstances, children face constant threats to their

health and lives; moreover, they are denied the opportunities provided by education, to which they have limited access due to their obligations to the employers.

III. Areas of child labour

Child labour, as an extremely complex phenomenon, takes many forms that result from, among other things, the legal framework enacted by the state and the prevailing market conditions. Children find employment in a variety of areas, but mostly in agriculture, services or industry (ILO, UNICEF 2021, p. 13).

Farm work is the most common and hazardous sector of child labour (Gamlin, Hesketh 2007, p. 2), involving more than 70 per cent of working children, or more than 112 million girls and boys (ILO, UNICEF 2021, p. 6). Child farm work carries a number of risks, including exposure to pesticides, dusts, and chemicals that cause allergies, poisoning or skin disorders (Gamlin, Hesketh 2007, p. 9). Agricultural work also exposes young people to potentially hazardous weather conditions, especially if they are expected to work for several, often more than ten hours in the sun. This may lead to dehydration and general weakness (ILO 2004, p. 58). Headaches, nausea, lack of energy, and physical and mental exhaustion are inherent conditions associated with daily farm work (Mull, Kirkhorn 2005, p. 652). According to the Eclt Foundation, children working on family farms contribute to sugarcane, cotton, tobacco and coffee production and help in cattle farming (Eclt foundation, *Child Labour in Agriculture: Facts and Figures*; accessed 01.09.2022; available <https://www.eclt.org/en/news/child-labour-in-agriculture>).

Another space for child labour is prostitution, a form of violence that targets the most vulnerable group in society. The United Nations defines it as “the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of compensation” (Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, adopted in New York on 25 May 2000, OJ. 2007 No. 76, item 494, Article 2(b)). Without a doubt, this practice breaches the most fundamental human rights of freedom and dignity, yet about one million youngsters participate in it each year. It contributes to various physical and mental disorders in children, including HIV infections and depression. Furthermore, prostitution leads to unwanted pregnancies as well as addiction to alcohol and psychoactive drugs (Willis, Levy 2002, pp. 1418–1420). It is worth emphasising that, contrary to popular belief, boys are increasingly engaging in prostitution. Such circumstances are especially common in large cities, where sex tourism is a major issue (Klain 1999, p. 2). Due to the varied and disparate approaches to dealing with child prostitution in different countries, eradicating this problem is extremely challenging. While most nations outright prohibit the involvement of children in prostitution, other developing countries only impose age restrictions, which are not observed by local communities in any case (Clark, Clark, Adamec 2007, p. 69).

There is no doubt that child labour in mines – another segment of child labour cited here – exposes children to enormous risks and puts their health as well as their lives at risk (ILO 2019, p. 2). Children operate dangerous machinery, carry loads often exceeding their weight, and are exposed to a variety of injuries with long-term negative health consequences (ILO 2019, p. 3). Due to the continuing physical growth, child miners experience these incredibly challenging working conditions far more keenly than adults. This vulnerability has a long-term detrimental impact on children’s physical and emotional health (ILO, IPEC 2006, p. 1).

IV. Causes of child labour

Several variables contribute to the incidence of child labour. The most serious ones include poverty, a lack of access to education, and the low level of economic development of their home country.

Poverty in third-world countries is viewed as one of the primary causes of child labour. According to studies, the children's employment rate is higher in developing countries, and as poverty levels fall, so does the number of working children. This is due to the fact that child labour frequently constitutes a significant source of revenue for the household without which the entire family could face severe financial difficulties (Anker 2000, p. 262). Due to the widespread poverty in third world countries and the resultant necessity for children to work, they are deprived of opportunities for healthy development and education. This, in turn, contributes to fewer opportunities in terms of social advancement. For this reason, children remain in the same communities for the rest of their lives with no prospect for improving their living conditions (Saad-Lessler 2010, p. 327), which is often referred to as the 'inheritance of poverty.'

Education is also a major factor in child labour with a two-pronged impact on the phenomenon under discussion. Children are forced to work due to a lack of access to education and a poor level of human capital; as a result, their early employment prevents them from engaging in education, which restricts their future competitiveness on the labour market, creating a self-perpetuating vicious circle.

Due to very low educational standards compounded by a lack of opportunities, third-world children frequently do not receive any education at all. Parents who are considering enrolling their child in school usually have to decide between a far-off school with a subpar education and the prospect of additional income in the household budget. When faced with this choice, they often favour the latter option. Thus one factor that has the potential to have a considerable impact on the rising risk of child migration into the workforce is education, including access to it (Khan 2001, p. 98). In order to change the outcome of this peculiar cost-benefit analysis, parents need to recognise the value of their child's school attendance, they must be able to see the advantages of learning and apply them to their children's daily responsibilities. This can only be accomplished by raising the standard of instruction, which calls for hiring better teachers and tailoring the curriculum and distribution of content to better meet the requirements of pupils (ILO 2004, pp. 120–121).

Studies by the OECD show that when a nation becomes more industrialised, its economic potential increases, which in turn raises the standard of living for a major proportion of the populace; as a result, fewer children are forced to work. One factor is a shift in the economy's profile – a growing proportion of individuals are engaged in the industrial sector, a trend that is matched by declining employment in agriculture, where, as was mentioned above, the vast majority of children work. Furthermore, the literature indicates a link between economic growth and technological development, which favours a decline in the number of children typically performing simple physical tasks. This is especially true of agriculture, where mechanisation reduces the demand for unskilled workers (Thévenon, Edmonds 2019, pp. 29–34).

V. Consequences of child labour

It is worth emphasising at this point that not all child labour has negative consequences. If it is done on a time-limited basis and adapted to children's abilities and, most importantly,

does not interfere with their participation in school activities, it may even have a positive impact on children and their families (ILO 2004, p. 16).

Regrettably, in developing countries, the aforementioned conditions are frequently disregarded and, as a result, it is much more common for children (and their immediate environment) to experience mainly negative effects of employment.

Education is widely regarded as one of the crucial ways in which to improve one's social or economic status, broaden one's opportunities, and, most importantly, is a fundamental right of all people. Such possibilities and benefits are denied to children who work instead of attending school (Heady 2000, p. 2). Statistics from a study by UNICEF and the ILO reveal that more than one-third of children who work do not attend school (ILO, UNICEF 2021, p. 8), and even when they do, their academic performance is very poor. Unsurprisingly, this is due to exhaustion, lack of energy, and lack of time to rest, study, or play (Mavrokonstantis 2011, p. 17).

The health of children is adversely affected by their employment under hazardous conditions, as well as by deficient work organisation, a lack of precautions, and lax safety regulations. This leads to a higher risk of accidents that leave victims disabled and, in the worst circumstances, dead (Kaur, Byard 2021, p. 210). The most current ILO and UNICEF report raises awareness of the 79 million children (nearly half of all those who work) who are employed in conditions that are harmful to their physical and mental health (ILO, UNICEF 2021, p. 8). Furthermore, an evident but often overlooked fact is that children who begin working at a young age are considerably more likely to suffer from occupational diseases than adults who work under the same conditions but only began working after reaching adulthood. Furthermore, working in hazardous conditions has an increasingly negative impact on the mental health of children. It is an unsettling fact that very young people raised in challenging environments, particularly work-related ones, face a higher risk of developing all manner of mental dysfunctions, depression, concentration problems, and reduced self-esteem. Unfortunately, despite this undeniable evidence, interest in children's mental health is not as strong as that in their physical health (Aransiola, Justus 2018, p. 49).

Gender is a feature that contributes to the unfairness and inequality that people experience from a very early age. This form of bias is also associated with the kind of jobs that children perform. Compared with girls, who often work as nannies or housekeepers, boys are more likely to work physically outside of the home. There is no disputing the fact that this employment disparity does not provide boys and girls with the same development opportunities, which puts them at a disadvantage in terms of their future in the workforce (The World Bank 2005, p. 3). Moreover, if parents decide to send their child to school, they usually choose their male offspring. Educating a daughter appears to be unprofitable for the family, as she will mainly play the role of mother and wife in adulthood anyway. Such circumstances exacerbate gender inequality in access to education (NGO Group for the CRC 2002, p. 1).

The impact of child labour on the adult labour market, on the other hand, receives less attention. Interestingly, as Bekele and Boyden argue, child labour can contribute to adult unemployment and reduced adult wages (Bequele, Boyden 1988, p. 90). Indeed, employers tend to hire young people, because it makes economic sense (using very narrow understanding of economic rationality) – children do not generate as much cost or demand as much money as adults do, and they are also more obedient (Galli 2001, p. 13).

The development of communities, societies and states is influenced by many factors, one of which is the of child labour. Working children, as previously said, have very limited access to education, which is vital for generating economic growth in a country by increasing the

amount of human capital. Furthermore, an uneducated society is mostly unaware of its rights, which prevents the establishment of a democratic state (Galli 2001, p. 7). It should be emphasised that hiring low-cost young workers discourages employers from developing and investing in their enterprise, which significantly limits technological development and productivity growth in the economy as a whole (Galli, 2001, p. 8). According to Zheng (2021, p. 70), countries with high rates of child labour are falling further and further away from the development mainstream as social stability, employment dynamics, improvements in educational quality, and the development of the social economy are all declining, the latter being especially interesting from the perspective of this article.

VI. Instruments to reduce the scale and impact of child labour

Without doubt, child labour should be eradicated, and the necessary measures must be implemented as quickly as feasible. Presently, a lot is being done to tackle this problem, particularly by large international organisations like UNICEF and the International Labour Organisation.

With its outreach programmes, UNICEF seeks out places where children are employed, discourages them from work, and assists those children who need to work. These efforts involve specialised social workers who, in collaboration with local authorities, analyse the problem and attempt to mitigate it by disseminating healthy societal values that oppose violence, exploitation, and abuse of children (UNICEF, Child labour; accessed 01.09.2022; available <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour>).

As an organisation concerned with employment issues, labour standards, and gender equality, the ILO places a high priority on preventing child labour. To that end, it established a special entity, the Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), tasked with reducing, first and foremost, the worst types of child labour (ILO, About the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) accessed 01.10.2022; available <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/programme/lang--en/index.htm>).

One of the main tactics for eliminating child labour is international cooperation. It has led to a spate of legislation that almost all nations have adopted in an effort to reduce the prevalence of child labour (ILO 2004, p. 196). These include, for example, the establishment of sanctions enforced by national and international organisations to discipline countries that pursue inconsistent child labour policies, thus impeding the eradication of the problem (ILO 2004, p. 203).

ILO Conventions 138 and 182 are of utmost significance in the international arena for the abolition of child labour. Both of these statutes require ILO's signatories to abide by the established rules, even if they have not ratified them. Convention No. 138, which was discussed in the previous section, sets a minimum age for children to work, whereas Convention No. 182 specifies the worst types of child labour and requires state authorities to provide aid to affected individuals (ILO and Inter-Parliamentary Union 2002, p. 36).

In order to improve the wellbeing of children in developing countries, comprehensive regulations that lay down specific responsibilities and impose sanctions in the event of non-compliance should be enacted (ILO 2018, p. 32). Now, tighter enforcement is required, as is the creation of stricter rules that will effectively deter the condoning of child labour due to the predominance of informal work arrangements and the failure to incorporate the agreed-upon provisions into domestic legislation (ILO 2004, pp. 203, 204). However, in the authors' opinion, bottom-up actions that focus less on criminalisation or ostracism and more on testing, imple-

menting, and disseminating effective methods for reducing the prevalence of child labour and its detrimental social and economic effects should be at least as important.

Child labour in the industrial sector affects most underdeveloped countries. Very young people often make products intended for the global market. What is interesting, but also disturbing, the more complex and intricate the supply chain, the higher the risk of child involvement in this process (ILO 2018, p. 57). The work done by the Fair Trade organisation, which promotes conscientious consumption in industrialised countries, is a crucial step in the fight against child labour. Its certification process informs consumers that particular products bearing the Fair Trade logo comply with the organisation's standards, one of which is the restriction on the use of child labour. Fair Trade ensures that high-quality goods are manufactured under ethically sound circumstances and that purchasing them contributes to eliminating child labour (Baradaran, Barclay 2011, p. 32). Product certification enables new manufacturers to enter the global market providing a significant economic incentive for entrepreneurs to adopt the Fair Trade standards. Such a strategy results in improved working conditions for workers, including higher incomes, access to education, and overall job security (Baradaran, Barclay 2011, p. 1).

Social protection programmes are regarded as one of the most important measures for combating poverty and the related issue of child labour. They ensure access to essential rights and services for those in need, giving children equitable opportunities to thrive in a supportive environment. There is currently no template for a one-size-fits-all programme to address child labour within larger social policy. Eliminating such a convoluted problem necessitates similarly comprehensive and complementary socioeconomic activities. A well-designed social protection system, backed up by economic incentives, should comprise a tailored set of programmes to fulfil the specific needs of a community. Addressing child labour may necessitate, among other things, cash transfers, employment promotion and unemployment protection as well as health plans and assistance for persons with disabilities (ILO 2018, p. 49; ILO, Child Labour and Social Protection; accessed 09.10.2022; available https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Campaignandadvocacy/wdacl/2014/WCMS_245210/lang--en/index.htm). The authors of this study believe that these incentives should target the population of working children both directly and indirectly, when their parents or entire families stand to benefit from these measures.

Promoting educational activities in third-world nations, which offer development possibilities for large numbers of children, is the strategy that, according to the authors of this article, most successfully reduces the scope and negative impacts of child labour. It is currently one of the top areas of focus for NGOs, government agencies, and even for-profit companies (Osment 2014, p. 23), which, under the aegis of corporate social responsibility financially support the operation of schools in developing countries. Regrettably, many nations still struggle to provide free access to education. The development of curricula that are suited to the requirements of children, as well as a lack of schools and inadequately trained teachers, are significant obstacles to delivering high-quality education (ILO 2004, p. 120). Lesson content should be tailored towards children's overall physical and mental development in order to better prepare them for everyday challenges, and curricula should be enjoyable rather than focused on memorising unnecessary facts (Osment 2014, p. 23). The future of children depends on education. The sooner educational programmes are revised and implemented, the better occupations graduates will be able to apply for, and thus their chances of socioeconomic advancement will dramatically grow (ILO 2018, p. 57).

VII. Potential fields of activity for social economy and social entrepreneurship

A review of the literature on the subject clearly reveals that neither social entrepreneurship nor social economy has been consistently or directly linked to the problem of limiting the incidence and effects of child labour.² For this reason, the authors, drawing on their reflections, experience, and good practices documented in the literature, decided to propose a set of areas and tools that might serve as a space for action for entities that fuse economic logic with the achievement of social objectives.

Since local activities have a major impact on the number of working children, it makes sense to start there, before moving to the global or national levels. Community-led grassroots projects are crucial, particularly in the context of social economy (both broadly and strictly conceived). The initiatives that involve local residents in dismantling deeply entrenched informal institutions, such as child labour, are those that yield the most tangible outcomes. Societies in developing nations do not fully understand the detrimental effects of child labour, and their citizens are not aware of either their human or labour rights. Therefore, local organisations (such as those in Kenya and the Philippines) use indigenous culture and art in the form of performances and campaigns that clearly explain the problem of child labour in order to help the communities in question bring about changes in their social patterns and cognitive scripts. Some of these events also involve young actors who, in order to convey their predicament, perform brief scenes from their challenging day-to-day lives. Such initiatives resonate with local audiences, explain the situation in an engaging manner, highlight the risks of child labour, and encourage education. Finally, what is important, they do not require large sums of money (ILO-IPEC 2001, p. 29).

Local officials, who are viewed by their communities as all-powerful and all-knowing leaders, also have a huge impact on small rural populations. Individuals with local roots often enjoy much greater credibility than representatives of external NGOs. With this rationale in mind, local leaders (in conjunction with social economy actors) have powerful tools in their hands to convey knowledge about the harms of child labour and influence a change in how it is perceived (ILO-IPEC 2001, p. 30) using negative incentives (e.g. social ostracism towards individuals, businesses exploiting child labour) or positive ones (promoting good practices to combat child labour).

Cross-sectorial collaboration can be advantageous to a community. The partnership between the Aide et Action Foundation, the local brick factory's business association, and the Telangana state government in India is a prime example of this type of cooperation. The state police conducted inspections of unauthorised underage labourers as part of the initiative. These children were then enrolled in public schools or temporary ones established in their workplaces. Children were given the opportunity to study and work part-time to help support their families. Crucially, neighbourhood officials constantly kept watch on the makeshift classrooms and provided the pupils with food and basic educational materials (Aide et Action 2020, India: 2,600 children supported to escape child labour; accessed 09.10.2022; available <https://seac.aide-et-action.org/india-child-labor/>).

In an effort to reduce the prevalence of child labour, the authors propose the following direct-impact instruments:

² The Scopus database yielded no results for the combined terms 'child labour' and 'social economy,' whereas a search for 'child labour' and 'social entrepreneurship' yielded only two references (Baporikar 2017; Overall 2017).

- Cooperation (partnership) of social economy entities with private firms aimed at devising business models in which the employment of children would be limited to a set number of hours in safe conditions. This type of action would thus primarily aim to reduce the negative consequences of child labour in developing countries, while taking into account the current developmental conditions, which frequently make it necessary – for economic, cultural, or social reasons – to keep children engaged in activities that generate income for their households;
- Encouraging local social economy actors to participate in Fair Trade-type models, which would allow them to use indigenous resources and potentials (e.g. cultural, ethnic, raw and natural materials), offer their products to consumers in domestic and global markets, and limit the scope of child labour primarily to assistance within the framework of income-generating activities undertaken by their parents (assistance in household work, family business, handicraft, cottage industry, etc.). In doing so, it is vital to provide educational opportunities for children, so that the Fair Trade label represents not only the abolition of child labour but also the promotion of education for children whose parents are involved in the manufacture of items bearing the logo.

In terms of indirect instruments, there are numerous areas where significant progress will translate into a targeted reduction in the level of child labour, such as education, childcare infrastructure (both institutionalised and informal), improving parents' employment prospects, raising legal awareness, and changing social patterns. Many of the topics listed above are common spheres of activity for social economy actors, which increases the likelihood of achieving high impact effectiveness.

Following up on one of the previous themes, adult employment is a less evident concern associated with the extent of child labour, despite the fact that these two labour segments are closely linked. The availability of low-wage child labour, as previously mentioned, contributes to adult unemployment; as a result, boosting the labour-market status of adults is a vital step towards minimising the numbers of working minors. In this context, the involvement of organisations that support adult employees in fighting for their rights and appropriate working conditions is crucial. There is significant potential for action for the social economy sector, which after all, among other things, serves vocational integration, job creation, and local development. Another measure involves providing micro-credits to people who need capital to start their own income-generating businesses, which may eventually replace the need for a child-provided income. Adults would also benefit from training and/or apprenticeship opportunities provided by other organisations in order to obtain the necessary skills and career guidance (ILO, Nippierd, Gros-Louis, Vandenberg 2007, p. 22). The impact of improved adult employment conditions on children's life has been demonstrated in Brazil, where an increase in the number of jobs available for qualified adult workers resulted in more hours spent in school by children (ILO 2018, p. 34).

VII. Summary

This article aims to demonstrate the complex interplay of factors that contribute to child labour in developing countries, including its characteristics, causes and effects. It concludes with a variety of workable remedies involving stakeholders from a number of sectors of the economy.

The authors' review of the literature on the subject reveals a lack of directly targeted, structured, and practical instances of the application of social economy solutions to address the serious socio-economic challenge of child labour in developing countries. This may be due to a number of factors that, for the time being, can be summarised in the authors' working hypotheses, which require further research.

The first factor is the generally weak entrenchment of social economy actors in these countries, which reflects their low level of socio-economic development. Secondly, even if they are there, the issue of child labour does not rank among their primary social concerns. Thirdly, the specificity and complexity of the problem of child labour means that, from a macro perspective, the instruments devised by international organisations (e.g. regulations contained in conventions subsequently adopted in national legislation), actions taken by large NGOs or transnational corporations which, by transferring new technologies, business models, and practices specifically prohibiting child labour to developing country markets can significantly affect local employment relations. The fourth reason for the social economy's negligible contribution to reducing child labour is that in recent years, approaches other than social economy have been developing much faster not only in academic and public discourse, but also in public policies and in business practice in an attempt to combine economic values with socially rooted ones. Ideas such as sustainable development, the economy of values, and corporate social responsibility are all worth mentioning here. As part of the last trend, enterprises wishing to demonstrate their sensitivity to important social issues have been exceptionally active. This new fashion means that a number of activities previously subsumed under the theoretical and practical umbrella of social economy are now associated with CSR.

Nonetheless, the authors believe that social economy and social entrepreneurship have the potential for growth in developing countries since their initiatives may become an important complement to the efforts of actors traditionally involved in mitigating the negative impacts of child labour. Their keen understanding of the local context, which manifests itself, among other things, in the judicious use of human, cultural, natural, economic, and social assets, will be central to this process. Still, it is also important to take advantage of the opportunities that arise from external conditions and resources. Business models such as Fair Trade not only facilitate participation in global trade and increase the economic potential of developing economies, but they also allow for the achievement of desirable social goals, such as reducing the incidence and harmful effects of child labour.

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Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

This work was supported by the Minister of Education and Science within the “Regional Initiative of Excellence” Programme for 2019-2022. Project no.: 021/RID/2018/19. Total financing: 11 897 131,40 PLN.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Published by Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland