From research to action

▶ **Uganda: National Research Agenda**

Building the evidence base for informed policy action against child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking

▶ Why do we need a National Research Agenda?

The 2021 Uganda National Labour Force Survey suggests that child labour has increased to 40 per cent (6.2 million) of all children aged 5-17 years in the survey year 2021, up from 38 per cent in 2019/2020.[1] With school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, a UNESCO report documents that a further 8 per cent of children might be in child labour. There is no nationally representative data available on forced labour and human trafficking although the problem persists in Uganda.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community committed to ending child labour in all its forms by 2025 and to eradicating forced labour by 2030 (SDG Target 8.7). The headline figures emerging in Uganda make clear that a substantial acceleration of progress will be needed to achieve SDG Target 8.7. Moreover, the economic impact of COVID-19 are placing unprecedented strain on governments and families, the results of which may stall country efforts to address child labour and forced labour.
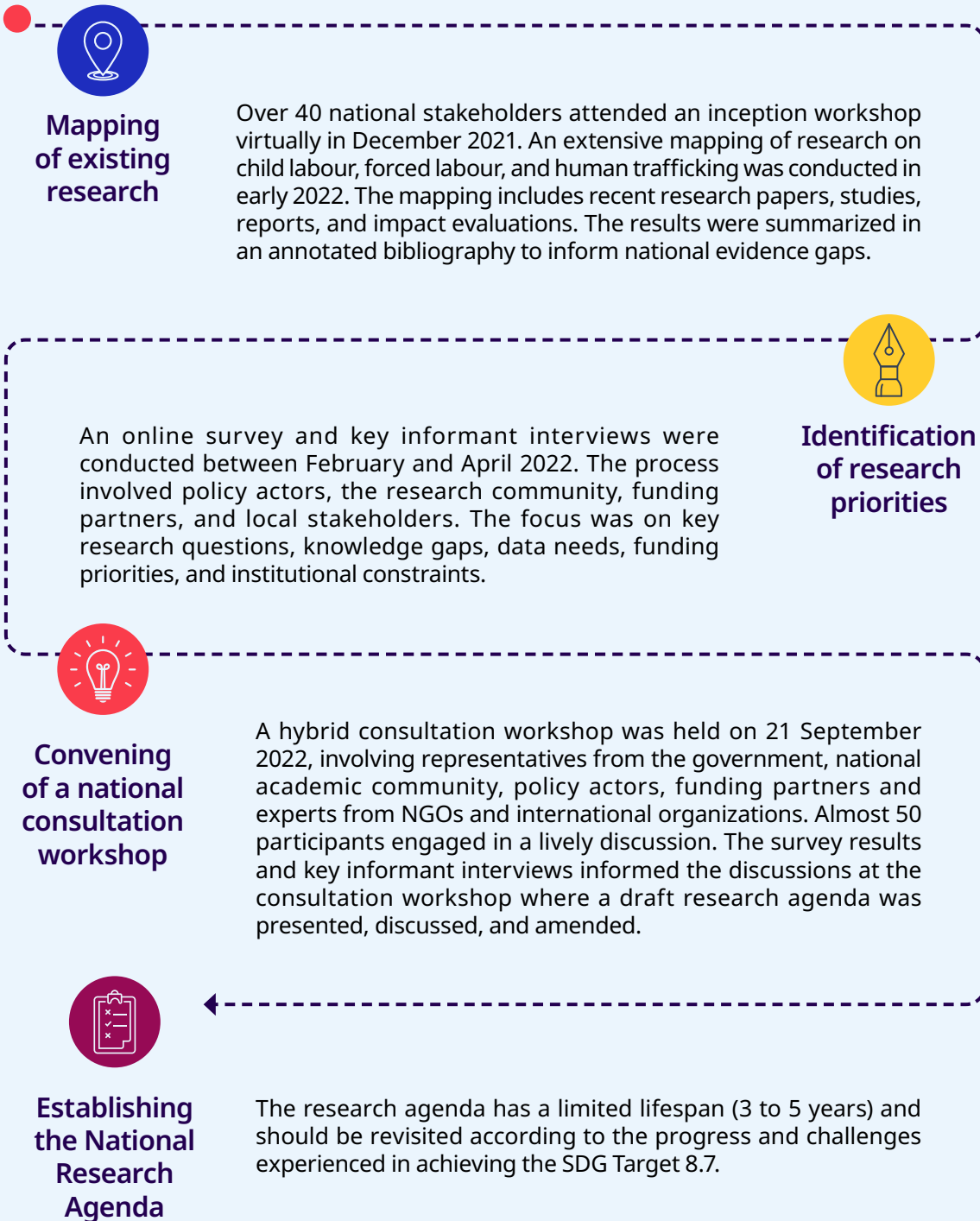
Policy choices will be critical to achieve SDG Target 8.7, and ready access to reliable evidence will be essential to informing these choices. A growing body of evidence available at international and country level, has helped increasing a better understanding of the policy mix that should be implemented to achieve real progress in tackling child labour and its root causes. However, significant gaps still exist and hamper policy development.

The identification of priority areas of research will be essential to support the policy efforts of Uganda to eliminate child labour and forced labour. It was in this light that in 2020 the ILO's "Research to Action" (RTA) project launched a process towards the development of a national research agenda. Through this participatory process, involving the academic community and experts from international organizations, policy actors, NGOs, and donors, the Uganda National Research Agenda was established.
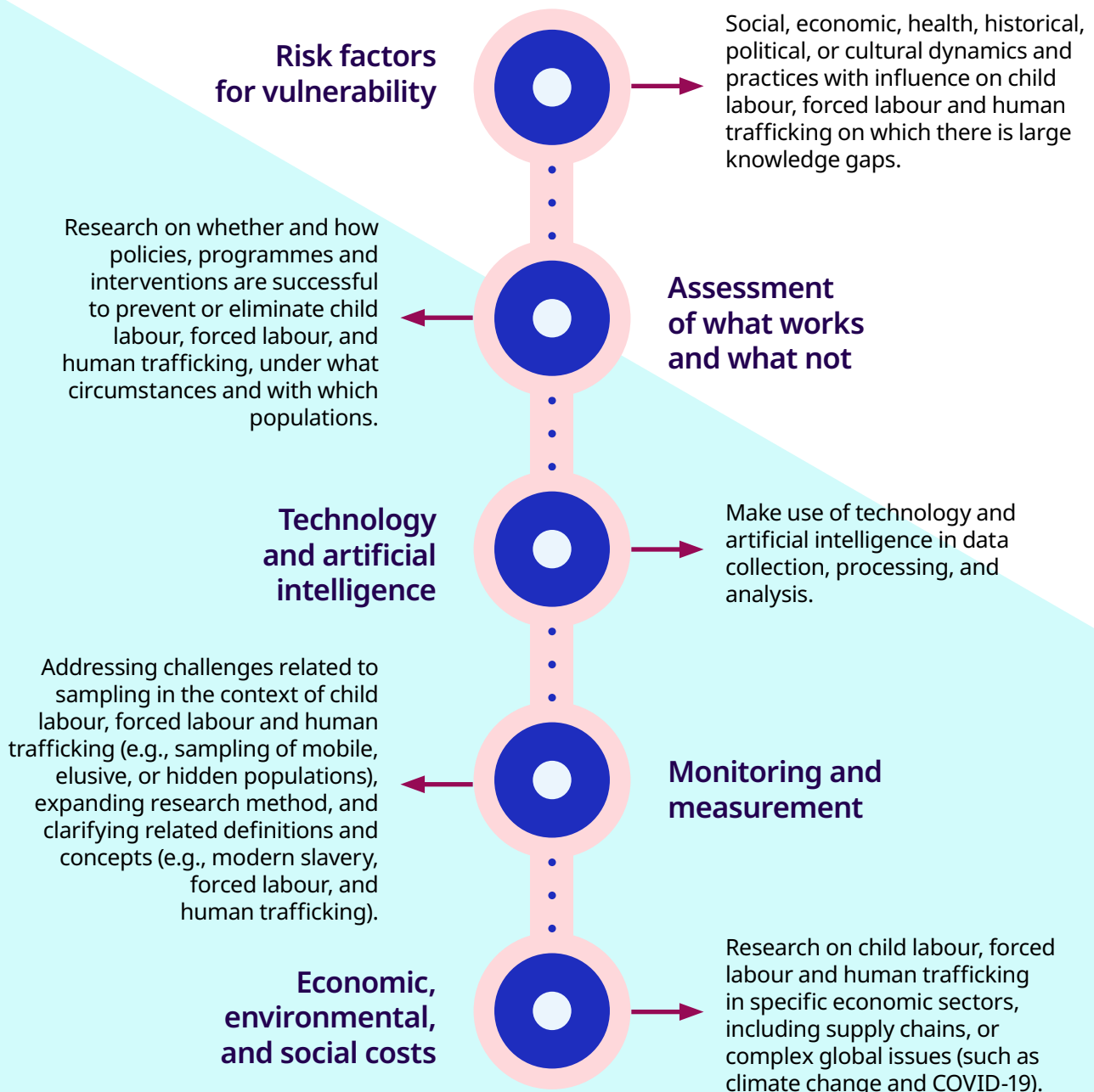
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1 See also: Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021, *Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020*.

▶ The process in Uganda

Mapping of existing research

Over 40 national stakeholders attended an inception workshop virtually in December 2021. An extensive mapping of research on child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking was conducted in early 2022. The mapping includes recent research papers, studies, reports, and impact evaluations. The results were summarized in an annotated bibliography to inform national evidence gaps.

Identification of research priorities

An online survey and key informant interviews were conducted between February and April 2022. The process involved policy actors, the research community, funding partners, and local stakeholders. The focus was on key research questions, knowledge gaps, data needs, funding priorities, and institutional constraints.

Convening of a national consultation workshop

A hybrid consultation workshop was held on 21 September 2022, involving representatives from the government, national academic community, policy actors, funding partners and experts from NGOs and international organizations. Almost 50 participants engaged in a lively discussion. The survey results and key informant interviews informed the discussions at the consultation workshop where a draft research agenda was presented, discussed, and amended.

Establishing the National Research Agenda

The research agenda has a limited lifespan (3 to 5 years) and should be revisited according to the progress and challenges experienced in achieving the SDG Target 8.7.

▶ Five broad thematic areas

Risk factors for vulnerability

Social, economic, health, historical, political, or cultural dynamics and practices with influence on child labour, forced labour and human trafficking on which there is large knowledge gaps.

Research on whether and how policies, programmes and interventions are successful to prevent or eliminate child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking, under what circumstances and with which populations.

Assessment of what works and what not

Technology and artificial intelligence

Make use of technology and artificial intelligence in data collection, processing, and analysis.

Addressing challenges related to sampling in the context of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking (e.g., sampling of mobile, elusive, or hidden populations), expanding research method, and clarifying related definitions and concepts (e.g., modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking).

Monitoring and measurement

Economic, environmental, and social costs

Research on child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in specific economic sectors, including supply chains, or complex global issues (such as climate change and COVID-19).

Above all, sustainable and ethical data collection is needed. Ideally, data should be centralised and accessible to researchers. Consideration should be given to the use of existing administrative and other data to inform our understanding of these issues. Channels to disseminate research findings to policy actors and practitioners should be improved.

▶ Main agenda

| Theme	Key topics/ dimensions	Related research questions	Related policy/ programme response
Risk factors for vulnerability	Migration	What are the vulnerability factors for migrants in child labour and forced labour?	• Decent work conditions/ related programmes (including targeting of specific services) • Social protection policies
	Informality	How does informality act as a driver for child labour and forced labour?	
	Demographics	How to improve prevalence studies on forced labour? How does care for elders affect children's time allocation and education outcomes?	
	Child marriage	What is the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage?	
	Culture and social norms	What role does cultural and traditional practices play in increasing vulnerability to child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking?	
	Household chores	What is the impact of household chores on children's health and education outcomes (including drop-out rates and grades)?	
	Physical and mental health	What are the short- and long-term impacts of children working in (specific) potentially hazardous forms of work?	
Assessment of what works and what not	Skill development (early childhood)	What is the effect of early childhood development programmes on child labour and schooling?	• Legal commitment • Labour recruitment practices • Education policies • Social protection and livelihood programmes
	Awareness raising and information campaigns	What is the effect of awareness raising campaigns on policy action (and/or reducing the prevalence of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking)?	
	Vocational training	What is the role of technical and vocational education and training in small and medium enterprises in reducing child labour?	
	Monitoring and law enforcement	How effective are labour standards and other law enforcement services in reducing child labour and forced labour?	
	Survivors of forced labour and human trafficking	What is the effect of involving survivors in intervention programmes? What strategies are effective at mitigating trauma from these experiences?	
	Legal frameworks	What is the effectiveness of the current legal regimes and enforcement practices in detecting child labour, forced labour and human trafficking cases over time?	
	Social protection and livelihood programmes	What kind of programmes are (the most) sustainable and effective at preventing child and families from child labour and forced labour? What aspects of social protection and livelihood programmes (e.g., cash transfers, credit, parental work) help combatting child labour and forced labour and how?	
Technology and artificial intelligence	Ethical data collection	What is the impact of technology and artificial intelligence in data collection in a given context?	• Identification, withdrawal, rehabilitation, and referral mechanisms • Community monitoring systems

Theme	Key topics/ dimensions	Related research questions	Related policy/ programme response
Monitoring and measurement	Sampling	How can be the range of sampling methods be improved in forced labour research?	• Identification, withdrawal, rehabilitation, and referral mechanisms • Community monitoring systems
	Methods	What are the common indicators needed to monitor child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking? How can different research methods address the interlinkages between child labour and forced labour? How can research better involve and benefit local communities and workplaces?	
	Definitions and concepts (e.g., child labour, child protection, modern slavery, forced labour, human trafficking)	How to compare findings and data collection procedures given different definitions and concepts?	
Economic, environmental, and social costs	Climate change	How does climate change influence the risk of child labour and forced labour? How does climate change modify the vulnerability factors of child labour and forced labour?	• Labour recruitment • Due diligence • Freedom of association and collective bargaining
	Supply chains	What is the role of global supply chains on child labour and/ or forced labour (taking into account broader economic structures and especially third party goods/suppliers)?	
	Specific economic sectors	What is the prevalence of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking in specific sectors (e.g., small holder mining, agriculture, sugar cane, coffee)?	
	COVID-19	How has COVID-19 impacted the determinants of child labour and forced labour? How has COVID-19 impacted the push/pull factors leading to child labour and forced labour?	

▶ Uganda as a Pathfinder country

In December 2018, Uganda became a Pathfinder country of the Alliance 8.7. In response to the Durban Call to Action, the Government of Uganda is scaling up action to:

1. Accelerate multi-stakeholder efforts to prevent and eliminate child labour, with priority given to the worst forms of child labour, by making decent work a reality for adults and youth above the minimum age for work.

2. End child labour in agriculture.

3. Strengthen the prevention and elimination of child labour, including its worst forms, forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, and the protection of survivors through data driven and survivor-informed policy and programmatic responses.

4. Realize children's right to education and ensure universal access to free, compulsory, quality, equitable and inclusive education and training.

5. Achieve universal access to social protection.

6. Increase financing and international cooperation for the elimination of child labour and forced labour.

▶ Call to action
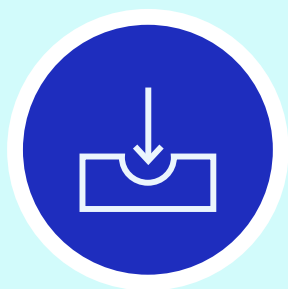
Collaborate

Innovate

Accelerate

During the consultation workshop in September 2022, the stakeholders emphasised the importance of bridging research to policy actions. Research needs to be disseminated in formats that are useful and accessible to policy actors. For example, the stakeholders are in favour of a central repository of data and research.

The Uganda National Research Agenda offers opportunities to all stakeholders to initiate and support research addressing the identified priority areas. More coordination and dialogue between the governmental and research communities will help accelerate policy actions.

To this end, all stakeholders will contribute to deepening the understanding of the root causes of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking and inform the policies needed to move towards the achievement of SDG Target 8.7.

Within each thematic area, there are only a few core research questions with the objective of encouraging researchers, including junior researchers, to build on to address evidence gaps. The openness also allows flexibility for practitioners and researchers to fine tune research questions to meet specific priorities and needs in their fields of specialization.

We invite and encourage new collaborations and innovative approaches to implement the Uganda National Research Agenda. We also count on further financial and technical commitments to translating research into policy action and solutions to sustainable development.

We welcome your comments and feedback! If you have any suggestions and questions on the Uganda National Research Agenda, please write to us at rtaproject@ilo.org with the subject title "Uganda National Research Agenda".
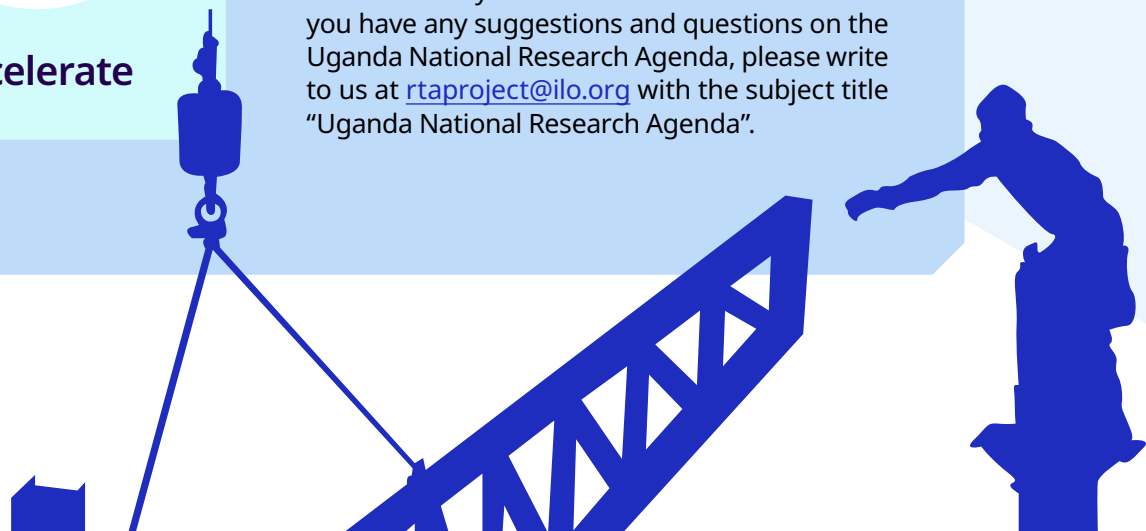
▶ The "Research to Action" (RTA) project

Using knowledge to accelerate progress in the elimination of child labour and forced labour

The ILO's "Research to Action" (RTA) project centers on bridging the divide between policy research and policy action to tackle issues of child labour, forced labour and human trafficking. The primary objectives of the project are to increase access to evidence, facilitate understanding of available research and gaps, enhance capacity to provide evidence and fill gaps and promote new interest and engagement in the subject area. The RTA project collaborates closely with the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Protection Division. The RTA project is funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL).

▶ Acknowledgements

The RTA project thanks the Government of Uganda. The project also thanks the International Advisory Board (IAB) for their valuable guidance through multiple consultation workshops. The IAB consists of technical experts from the ILO, international organizations, employers' and workers' organizations, United States Department of Labor (USDOL), Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder countries, national statistical offices, INGOs and the research community.

▶ rtaproject.org