



FINAL EVALUATION BRIEF | MAY 2024

# ARGENTINA CLUSTER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

## OVERVIEW

The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) leads the United States Department of Labor's (USDOL) efforts to ensure that workers worldwide are treated fairly and can share in the benefits of the global economy. ILAB's mission is to promote a fair global playing field for workers in the U.S. and around the world by enforcing trade commitments, strengthening labor standards, and combating international child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.

In support of these objectives, the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT), works to combat international child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking in collaboration with governments, workers, businesses, and others. In response to the persistent issue of child labor in Argentina, ILAB/OCFT is actively engaged in combatting this challenge through a cluster of projects. Notable among these initiatives are the **Project to Promote Workplace-Based Training for Vulnerable Youth in Argentina (NOEMI)**, the endeavor titled **Improving the Capacity of Labor and Agriculture Stakeholders to Address Child Labor in Agricultural Areas of Argentina (OFFSIDE)**, and the Multi-stakeholder Strategy on **Child Labor Elimination in Agriculture in Argentina (PAR)**.

USDOL commissioned DevTech Systems, Inc. to conduct an independent final performance evaluation of a cluster of programs funded by ILAB in Argentina. Full report results and learning: [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY RESULTS



### NOEMI: EMPOWERING VULNERABLE YOUTH

- Grounded in a 2017 pre-situational diagnosis, the NOEMI addressed critical gaps in internship methodologies and was highly aligned with the Argentine context, focusing on vulnerable youth within the educational system.
- NOEMI strengthened the capacity of key actors by targeting legal frameworks, stakeholder best practices, and educational inclusion methodologies. This holistic approach empowered government, employers, workers' organizations, and civil society to establish and expand programs for adolescents and youth.

### OFFSIDE: BUILDING CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE

- OFFSIDE aimed to increase knowledge of child labor challenges and opportunities in the labor and agricultural sectors.
  - As such, it built stakeholder capacity to support the National Action Plan (NAP) implementation. While its influence on the new NAP remains unclear, its strong foundation in stakeholder engagement positions it to advance action against child labor in Argentina's agricultural areas.
  - OFFSIDE's cutting-edge research bolstered understanding and commitment to ending child labor, aligning with stakeholder priorities.
- Stakeholders praised OFFSIDE's strategies for fostering collaboration across sectors and government levels.

### PAR: FOSTERING COLLABORATION AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE

- PAR's multifaceted approach strengthened the child protection system, elevated child labor on the political agenda, enhanced government officials' capacity to address child labor and aligned national and local policies.
- PAR engaged businesses in key sectors like blueberry, yerba mate, and lemon to adopt the Social Compliance System (SCS) initiative. This strengthened internal compliance and enhanced their reputations as champions against child labor. PAR's alignment with other initiatives fostered collaboration between government agencies and heightened community awareness, marking significant progress in combating child labor.

## EVALUATION METHODS



The evaluation team used a mixed methods and participatory approach, specifically a two-step outcome harvesting methodology informed by utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE) principles. This U-FE approach ensured the evaluation's usefulness by integrating intended users into the process, leading to more relevant findings and increased likelihood of their use. This aligns with best practices and the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, guaranteeing validated findings, conclusions, and recommendations directly addressing ILAB's learning priorities.

Notably, the evaluation for the NOEMI, OFFSIDE, and PAR projects assessed performance across eight key areas: relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, equity and inclusion, and implementation of previous recommendations. The cluster evaluation went further, examining each project's achievements in meeting objectives by considering factors like the validity of their theories of change, alignment with stakeholder and target group needs, collaboration with other interventions, efficiency in delivering results, identification of unintended effects, potential for sustained benefits, lessons learned, promising practices, and the incorporation of inclusion and equity elements.

## PROMISING PRACTICES



Stakeholders identified several promising practices stemming from the implementation experience of NOEMI, PAR, and OFFSIDE projects:

1. **Emotional Support Groups:** NOEMI identified the need for informal meetings where students, particularly those outside mainstream schools, could receive emotional and psychological support in a safe space.
2. **Student Pitches to Businesses:** NOEMI adopted a groundbreaking approach where students directly presented their ideas to entrepreneurs. This fostered communication and trust between youth and businesses, promoting student engagement and increased interest from the private sector.
3. **Multi-Layered Support:** NOEMI offered a unique support system for youth participants. It included socio-educational and employment tutors in schools, along with dedicated business tutors for internships. This comprehensive approach enhanced academic and professional development, while also supporting the emotional well-being of students.
4. **Leveraging Existing Systems:** OFFSIDE strategically worked within existing government structures at national, provincial, and municipal levels. This approach minimized challenges, while maximizing sustainability and scalability of interventions.
5. **Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** Both PAR and OFFSIDE projects effectively utilized a multi-actor approach. This involved collaboration with government, NGOs, private sector, worker and employer organizations, and community members. This comprehensive strategy ensured diverse perspectives and expertise were incorporated into solutions for combating child labor.
6. **Tailored Inter-Institutional Protocols:** PAR successfully addressed local challenges by developing customized protocols and manuals for child labor cases. These tools facilitated standardized processes across different jurisdictions, leading to more efficient and effective interventions.
7. **Enhanced Inter-Institutional Collaboration:** PAR fostered stronger cooperation between entities working on child labor and protection. This included formalizing roles and establishing inter-institutional collaboration tables. This model of well-defined collaboration promotes more cohesive and impactful interventions.

## LESSONS LEARNED



Stakeholders identified the following lessons learned garnered through the implementation of the NOEMI, OFFSIDE, and PAR projects:

1. **Empowering Local Impact:** A bottom-up approach effectively generates multi-level impact and facilitates scalable policy change.
2. **Collaboration is Key:** Multi-level and cross-sectoral coordination strengthens programmatic impact and broadens reach.
3. **Co-Created Solutions:** Co-creation exemplifies the power of stakeholder collaboration in building effective solutions.

4. **Ground-Truthing for Policy Shifts:** Exposing national officials to on-the-ground realities through field visits shifted perceptions and influenced policy decisions.
5. **Flexibility for Context:** The projects avoided rigid, pre-defined implementation manuals, allowing for adaptation to local contexts.
6. **Private Sector Engagement:** Involvement and even small financial contributions of the private sector in collaborative spaces with government and municipalities can yield significant benefits.
7. **Local Expertise Matters:** Deploying local teams alongside government officials increases program visibility and facilitates hands-on guidance for effective implementation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings, the evaluation team presents the following recommendations for consideration by grantees, USDOL, and the Government of Argentina:

### GRANTEE

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Diversify Funding Sources:</b> Continue developing a robust funding strategy, diversifying income through private sector partnerships and international grants. This approach is essential to mitigate potential public funding cuts and ensure sustained project activities.</li> <li>2. <b>Intensify Community Awareness Campaigns:</b> Strengthen efforts to shift cultural norms around child labor, particularly in regions like Misiones, using local media, schools, and community leaders effectively. Expand targeted awareness campaigns across various platforms including radio, social media, and public events to communicate the adverse effects of child labor and promote educational opportunities.</li> <li>3. <b>Expand the Social Compliance System:</b> Scale up the SCS model to include a wider array of companies and sectors focusing particularly on integrating medium and small producers along the value chain. Extend the SCS' reach to engage small producers who supply larger companies. Strengthen the SCS' connection with international markets to enhance export value. Implement targeted sensitization campaigns to educate consumers about the</li> </ol> | <p>advantages of purchasing child-labor-free yerba mate, thereby boosting its market value.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. <b>Enhance Coordination:</b> Grantees should amplify their collaboration efforts, now more than ever considering the political environment, to maximize the impact. By pooling resources and expertise, they can amplify their geographic reach and effectiveness. Through sharing best practices, jointly implementing projects, and coordinating advocacy, grantees can address gaps comprehensively and innovate more effectively. Moreover, collaborative initiatives hold the potential to enhance visibility and credibility, presenting a unified front toward eradicating child labor.</li> <li>5. <b>Continue to Prioritize Advocacy at the National Level:</b> Advocacy efforts at the national level should not only be maintained but enhanced to ensure child labor remains a priority, despite the challenging political environment. Grantees should identify and support influential champions who can drive policy changes, secure funding, and keep the issue on the national agenda. By engaging in strategic networking, building alliances, and using data-driven advocacy, grantees can maintain momentum and ensure ongoing efforts to eradicate child labor receive the necessary attention and resources.</li> </ol> |
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### USDOL-ILAB

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <b>Support for Ongoing and Future Projects:</b> Provide funding to either existing projects or forthcoming initiatives to sustain and build upon the progress achieved by the PAR and NOEMI projects to further the success of the SCS in established sectors like yerba mate and lemon, and to initiate expansion into new sectors such as strawberries. Expand the municipal model to additional municipalities in Misiones to ensure the ongoing support for essential educational and childcare services for vulnerable families. Additionally, incorporate activities in future ILAB programming that connects and aligns with the NOEMI project's "Vocational Development Path" to enhance the</li> </ol> | <p>project's institutional foundation in Tucuman, ensuring a cohesive approach to institutional development.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Maintain National-Level Engagement:</b> While focusing on territorial and provincial levels is essential for effectively tackling child labor, it is equally important not to overlook the national level. The current shift in portfolio actions toward the subnational levels risks creating a vacuum in national leadership and advocacy, potentially stalling the progress made in placing child labor on the political agenda. Despite the challenges posed by the current administration, it is crucial for the US Government, as well as its grantees and implementers, should continue</li> </ol> |
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applying pressure on the Argentine government. This should involve targeted advocacy to ensure that the fight against child labor remains a high priority and receives the necessary attention and resources at the national policy level.

8. **Enhance Flexibility in Funding Mechanisms:** Embed greater flexibility within future USDDOL contracts and cooperative agreements to ensure they can be adjusted in response to changing local conditions and unforeseen challenges. While these mechanisms are already designed with some flexibility, increasing this flexibility will enable implementers to respond promptly and effectively to evolving project demands. Additionally, grantees could establish a reserve within the project budget specifically designed to address emerging needs and ensure swift adaptation to new circumstances.
9. **Promote Knowledge Exchange:** Facilitate knowledge exchange programs or learning events that connect different interventions and countries grappling with similar issues related to child labor. Organize international conferences, workshops, and stakeholder visits to share and disseminate best practices and innovative solutions for eradicating child labor and enhancing global cooperation and

learning. These exchanges will also provide valuable learning opportunities for the U.S. enhancing global cooperation and mutual learning.

10. **Strengthen Enforcement Initiatives:** Coordinate with ILAB's Office of Trade and Labor Affairs (OTLA) to bolster initiatives aimed at improving the capacity of the labor inspectorate, ensuring more rigorous oversight and effective follow-up on child labor violations in Argentina. Consider promoting initiatives that provide comprehensive training and resources to labor inspectors in Argentina and develop an enhanced monitoring and evaluation system to ensure thorough compliance and enforcement.
11. **Continue to Gather New Evidence and Learning:** Provide additional funding for external evaluations to continue to assess OFFSIDE and PAR's performance, impact, and scalability and to identify best practices for future expansion. This evaluation could analyze the activities of OFFSIDE and PAR that extended beyond this evaluation and their effectiveness in achieving project objectives. The evaluation findings could inform potential strategies for scaling up successful interventions through continued collaboration with stakeholders.

## ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT

12. **Restore Budget Allocations:** Urgently restore and ensure continuous funding for critical programs such as "Volvé a la Escuela" and the "Good Harvest" initiative. This funding is crucial to prevent families from facing poverty and the associated risks of child labor. By supporting these programs, the government can safeguard vulnerable populations and maintain the momentum toward eliminating child labor.
13. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Update and enhance the legal frameworks to provide clearer guidelines and enforce stricter penalties for child labor violations, including adolescent labor. This could include, for example, updating the hazardous list with innovative methodologies by sectors. Implement regular training sessions for law enforcement agencies to ensure that these laws are applied uniformly across all regions, thereby improving the effectiveness of enforcement efforts nationwide.
14. **Enhance CONAETI's Operational Capabilities:** Strengthen the existing framework of CONAETI by enhancing its operational capabilities. This improvement will enable a more cohesive and proactive management of child labor issues, helping to effectively operationalize the NAP across both national and provincial levels. To achieve these objectives, it is crucial to allocate the necessary resources to CONAETI, enabling it to efficiently perform these expanded functions. This enhancement will ensure a more dynamic and responsive approach to the eradication of child labor throughout Argentina.
15. **Encourage Private Sector Engagement:** Develop incentives for private companies to implement and sustain SCS. Create a rewards program that offers tax incentives and public recognition to businesses that demonstrate a commitment to eradicating child labor. This program will not only encourage compliance but also publicly commend those companies taking active steps toward a child-labor-free supply chain.



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