



# **Child Labour in Maharashtra's Unorganized Hotel and Dhaba Industry: Socio-Economic Causes, and Developmental Implications**

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## **Abstract**

Child labour continues to pose a significant challenge to inclusive development in India, particularly within informal economic sectors. Maharashtra, despite being one of the most industrially advanced states, exhibits persistent instances of child labour in the unorganized hotel and dhaba industry. This paper examines the socio-economic determinants, working conditions, legal framework, and policy implementation gaps related to child labour in Maharashtra's informal hospitality sector. The study is based on secondary data sources including government reports, census publications, labour department records, and scholarly literature. The analysis reveals that poverty, rural distress, seasonal migration, educational exclusion, and weak regulatory enforcement are key contributors. The findings suggest that elimination of child labour requires integrated socio-economic reforms, strengthened enforcement mechanisms, and community-based interventions. The paper concludes by proposing policy recommendations aligned with sustainable development objectives.

**Keywords:** Child Labour, Unorganized Sector, Maharashtra, Informal Economy, Hospitality Industry, Poverty, Migration, Sustainable Development.

## **Introduction:**

Child labour remains one of the most persistent socio-economic challenges in the contemporary world. According to the latest estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF (2024), approximately 138 million children globally are engaged in child labour, of which nearly 54 million are involved in hazardous work that threatens their physical and psychological well-being. Although the global number has declined significantly since 2000, the international community has failed to fully achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 8.7) of eliminating child labour by 2025.

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In India, child labour continues to exist despite constitutional safeguards and legislative measures such as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. According to Census 2011, about 10.1 million children (5–14 years) were engaged in various forms of labour, particularly in agriculture, small-scale industries, domestic work, and informal sectors. The problem is deeply rooted in poverty, illiteracy, migration, and socio-economic inequalities.

In the state of Maharashtra, one of India's major industrial and agricultural regions, child labour has been historically significant, especially in brick kilns, sugarcane cutting, small workshops, and roadside establishments. Census data (2011) recorded approximately 4.96 lakh child workers in the state. Despite legal interventions and rescue operations, hidden and informal employment continues to pose serious challenges.

Thus, child labour is not merely an economic issue but a multidimensional social problem that requires coordinated policy action, strict law enforcement, and inclusive educational strategies at global, national, and state levels.

Child labour represents a structural socio-economic issue that intersects poverty, inequality, education, and labour market dynamics. Although India has achieved considerable economic growth, disparities remain pronounced. Maharashtra, characterized by rapid industrialization and urbanization, attracts large-scale migration from economically distressed regions such as Marathwada and Vidarbha.

The unorganized hotel and dhaba sector—comprising roadside eateries, small restaurants, and informal food establishments—functions largely outside strict regulatory supervision. Within this setting, children are often engaged in low-paid, labour-intensive activities. This study critically examines the persistence of child labour within this sector and evaluates its broader developmental implications.

### **Review of Literature:**

Existing literature on child labour in India highlights poverty, family indebtedness, and lack of educational access as primary causes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasizes that informal sectors are particularly vulnerable due to weak monitoring systems.

Studies on Maharashtra have largely focused on agricultural labour and urban domestic work, while limited research has addressed child labour in small hospitality establishments. This paper attempts to bridge this research gap by focusing specifically on hotels and dhabas within the unorganized sector.



The ILO defines child labour as work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, dignity, and education, and is harmful to physical and mental development.

Legal Framework in India Child labour in India is governed by: Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act

National Child Labour Project (NCLP)

The 2016 amendment prohibits employment of children below 14 years in all occupations, with limited exceptions. However, enforcement challenges remain in informal establishments.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary data. Sources include: Census of India National Sample Survey (NSSO) Maharashtra Labour Department Reports Academic journals Government policy documents

The study uses qualitative content analysis to examine socio-economic patterns and policy effectiveness.

### **Socio-Economic condition of Child Labour:**

#### **Poverty and Income Inequality**

Despite economic growth, regional disparities persist in Maharashtra. Families below the poverty line often rely on children's earnings for survival.

#### **Rural Distress and Seasonal Migration**

Frequent droughts in Marathwada and agrarian crises in Vidarbha compel families to migrate to urban centres such as Mumbai, Pune, and Nashik. Migrant children face educational disruption and are more likely to enter informal employment.

Educational Exclusion Though the RTE Act mandates compulsory education, dropout rates remain significant among migrant and economically weaker communities.



## **Informal Labour Market Structure**

Hotels and dhabas often operate without formal registration, labour records, or compliance checks. The absence of accountability encourages the employment of minors.

### **Nature of Work and Working Conditions:**

Children employed in small hotels and dhabas typically perform: Dishwashing and cleaning

Serving customers assisting cooks Cleaning floors and premises working hours range between 8–12 hours daily. Wages are minimal and often paid in cash without documentation. Exposure to kitchen heat, sharp tools, and heavy workloads increases health risks..

Developmental Implications Child labour adversely affects: Human capital formation

Educational attainment Physical and mental health Long-term earning capacity It perpetuates intergenerational poverty and undermines inclusive development.

### **Findings:**

The study indicates that: Economic vulnerability remains the dominant cause. Migration significantly increases exposure to informal employment. Informal hospitality establishments lack regulatory oversight. Policy implementation gaps reduce effectiveness of legal provisions. Preventive measures are less effective than reactive interventions.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

Strengthening inspection mechanisms in informal sectors. Introducing digital registration of small hospitality units. Enhancing livelihood programs for migrant families. Strengthening school retention programs for migrant children. Expanding community-based monitoring committees. Increasing penalties for repeated violations.

### **Conclusion:**

Child labour in Maharashtra's unorganized hotel and dhaba industry reflects deeper socio-economic inequalities and institutional weaknesses. While legislative frameworks provide a strong foundation, enforcement limitations and poverty-driven compulsions sustain the problem. A comprehensive strategy



integrating economic support, educational access, community participation, and strict regulatory oversight is necessary to ensure sustainable eradication of child labour.

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