

Survey of cotton-farming sector underway in Telangana to identify child labour

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- **Districts of Gadwal, Adilabad, Warangal (rural) and Nagarkurnool were found to be employing children under 14 years of age in cotton farming**
- **The survey has been undertaken under the National Child Labour Project**

Hyderabad: The Telangana government's Labour department and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have started a two-year study into the entire cotton supply-demand chain after a survey revealed that cotton farming within the agriculture sector employs a majority of the child labour (under 14 years specifically) in a handful of districts. The study is part of the government's ongoing child labour survey across Telangana in 21 districts (out of 33).

"As per our survey reports, we found out that while employment of children under 14 years has come down across the state by 60% to 70%, the agriculture sector and more specifically the cotton farming within it, employs almost 50% of child labour under 14 years. To counter that, the state government is working with the ILO in the selected four districts where it is rampant, to study the entire chain, including the labour unions," said Dr. E. Gangadhar, joint commissioner, Labour Department.

According to the survey by the [Labour Department](#), the districts of Gadwal, Adilabad, Warangal (rural) and Nagarkurnool were found to be employing children under 14 years of age in cotton farming. "The reason behind it is that children are preferred to be used for the cross-pollination and plucking (of the crop) process as they have small hands, so that it can be done more carefully," Dr. Gangadhar informed. He added a few more districts might be added for the survey in the coming days.

The Labour department's survey of the entire state started after the 10 districts of Telangana were reorganized into 31 in 2016, as 21 new districts were created (two more created later in February this year, totaling to 33 presently). The funds for the survey were sanctioned by the Centre for the new 21 districts (after 2016). More is expected to be given to the additional two districts created in 2019) after Telangana set up Child Labour Societies in all 31 districts as mandated by law.

The survey has been undertaken under the National Child Labour Project, which mandates that a survey must be taken up before starting special training centres to running bridge (skill) courses for rescued children. "Phase one of the survey which studied 10 districts has been completed and phase two with the remaining districts is about to finish," Dr. Gangadhar told *Mint*.

He added that the Labour department officials will now concentrate on finding children aged between 14 to 18 years, who are working in hazardous places, as it is not permissible under the Child Labour Act. "The hiring of children under 14 has come down due to various reasons including convergence between us, the police and officials of the Women and Child Welfare department who are also involved in rescuing children," Dr. Gangadhar stated.

He explained that data on mandals (in districts) with high rates of out-of-school children and drop outs from schools was collected from the Centre-run Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme for the survey. The task was given to the Hyderabad-based Centre for Economic and Social Sciences (CESS), an autonomous body established by the state government.

A child rights activist, who did not want to be quoted, said that the Labour department's effort to identify and study cotton-farming must be applauded. "But finding out the problem is just a start, as there must be an outcome once the entire survey is done. Child labour has been rampant in Telangana and in the joint Andhra Pradesh state earlier, especially in many small industries which employed children aged 8 or 9 years as well. While it has visibly come down, there is a long way to go. Since the first steps have been taken to curb it, this is a good initiative," he added.

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