



Vietnamese Law on the Prevention and Abolition of Child Labor under the Impact of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement



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ABSTRACT

Objective – This paper aims to analyze the Vietnamese legal framework on the prevention and abolition of child labor under the influence of the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). The study explores how EVFTA commitments, particularly those embedded in the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Chapter, shape Vietnam’s legal reforms, institutional adjustments, and enforcement responsibilities relating to child labor.

Methodology – The research employs a qualitative approach based on analysis, synthesis, and comparison of secondary data, including international conventions, Vietnamese legislation, academic publications, policy reports, and EVFTA provisions. The study examines the interaction between trade law and labor standards using theoretical lenses such as legalization theory and normative diffusion.

Findings – The results show that Vietnam has aligned key elements of its domestic legal framework with ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 following the EVFTA. This alignment is reflected in the establishment of a statutory minimum working age, clearer prohibitions on hazardous work, strengthened child protection standards, and increasing attention to child labor data collection. However, significant enforcement challenges persist, including limited inspection capacity, inconsistent administrative reporting, a large informal labor sector, and socio-economic drivers that continue to push children into labor.

Novelty – The originality of this study lies in its integrated analysis of Vietnam’s child labor regulations within the broader context of new-generation FTAs, highlighting how trade commitments can influence domestic labor governance. The paper contributes a legal-institutional perspective that links EVFTA obligations with practical implementation barriers, offering insights into compliance expectations shaped by recent developments in EU trade policy.

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1. Introduction

Child labor remains one of the most persistent global challenges in the context of deepening globalization and expanding trade liberalization.

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While economic integration is often expected to generate development opportunities, scholars have long cautioned that trade liberalization may not automatically improve living standards or human capital in developing economies and may even exacerbate vulnerabilities where competitive pressures create incentives for cheap and informal labor. The scale of the problem remains substantial: in 2020, an estimated 160 million children - equivalent to one in ten globally - were engaged in child labor across various sectors. Eliminating child labor in all its forms is therefore a central objective of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and a shared priority of the international community. In response, many states and international organizations have incorporated child labor standards into binding and non-binding regulatory frameworks, including new-generation free trade agreements. Among these, the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) represents a significant milestone, as it embeds labor rights - including the elimination of child labor - as integral components of sustainable trade cooperation. This paper analyzes how Vietnam's legal framework on child labor has evolved under the EVFTA and identifies key challenges to effective implementation.

2. Literature Review

Child labor has long been a topic of discussion among researchers, scholars, and policymakers worldwide. Thus, numerous studies on child labor exist, both domestically and internationally.

2.1 Research on Child Labor

Studies on child labor in Vietnam and abroad are diverse and have a long history. Additionally, child labor-related research has been analyzed from various academic perspectives, including economics, sociology, and legal studies. Therefore, this article focuses on reviewing studies on child labor from a legal perspective, highlighting the following key works:

To date, there is no globally unified definition of child labor, particularly regarding age distinctions in national laws. However, most studies adopt definitions from the International Labour Organization (ILO). According to the ILO, "child labor" refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity and is harmful to their physical and mental development. This term applies to work that: (i) is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and/or (ii) interferes with a child's schooling by depriving them of educational opportunities, requiring them to leave school prematurely, or forcing them to combine excessive work with schooling. This definition has been widely accepted and expanded upon in later research.

In Vietnam, labor laws do not use the term "child labor" but instead refer to "juvenile labor." Article 143, Clause 1 of the 2019 Vietnamese Labor Code defines "juvenile labor" as "workers under 18 years old." Based on this, (Loi, 2012), in his dissertation "Improving the Law on Juvenile Labor in the Context of International Integration," identified key differences between juvenile labor and other types of labor and analyzed distinctions between the concept of juvenile labor in Vietnam and globally. Further clarifying the concept of "child labor," (Phuong, 2014) differentiated between the terms "child labor" and "children engaged in work." While these terms remain inconsistent in national laws outside of ILO training materials, Phuong argues that "children engaged in work" refers to children performing tasks that do not hinder their physical development, education, or play - potentially contributing to their healthy development. In contrast, "child labor" involves excessive, hazardous work beyond the child's capacity, forced labor, or situations where children are physically and sexually exploited. Similarly, (Nhun & Giang, 2022) described child labor as a state in which individuals under 18 engage in work that affects their mental, physical, intellectual, moral, or personal development, or work at a young age that deprives them of educational opportunities. The

term “eliminating child labor” refers to eradicating situations where children must perform harmful work or start working at a young age, thereby losing opportunities for education and development.

Child labor and its eradication are global concerns, extensively researched by scholars and policymakers. Due to economic, social, and cultural differences, the causes of child labor vary across nations and regions. (Fors, 2012) identified key factors leading to child labor, including: (i) Poverty, imperfect markets, and parental conditions often drive decisions to send children to work. No single policy tool can eliminate child labor alone. (ii) Successful elimination of child labor requires addressing its root causes and providing viable alternatives, including access to quality education, market reforms, and economic support. (iii) The study emphasized that child labor results from multiple interacting factors - poverty, market imperfections, and education access - necessitating further research to understand their interactions.

Regarding child labor in Vietnam, (Rosati & Tzannatos, 2006) attributed it to: (i) Poverty, (ii) Lack of access to education, (iii) Cultural factors, and (iv) Weak enforcement of labor laws. Their findings indicated that child labor is more common in rural areas, among ethnic minorities, and in low-income households. Đỗ Thị Dung (2012) identified fundamental causes of child labor law violations in Vietnam, including: (i) Poverty, lack of education, and irresponsible parenting, (ii) Employers’ lack of legal knowledge and profit-driven motives, (iii) Weak government enforcement, and (iv) Negative impacts of the market economy. (Phuong, 2014) further analyzed reasons for widespread child labor exploitation in Vietnam, such as: Inconsistent age definitions in legal documents; Gaps in legal frameworks regarding management responsibilities and enforcement mechanisms; Ineffective detection and punishment of child labor violations; Lack of identity documents for children to verify their age; Limited legal awareness and self-protection abilities among children.

2.2 Research on Commitments to Eliminating Child Labor in New-Generation FTAs

Studies on child labor elimination as part of new-generation FTAs remain limited, with notable works including: (Harrison et al., 2019) examined the European Commission’s efforts to incorporate labor standards into FTAs through Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters. However, the study highlighted weaknesses in current TSD chapters, which are often ineffective in practice. (van ‘t Wout, 2022) analyzed the enforcement mechanisms of TSD chapters in EU FTAs with South Korea, Canada, and Japan. The study concluded that enforcement mechanisms remain largely unchanged, requiring further research on non-compliance and enforcement effectiveness. (Tyc, 2023) highlighted the shift in the European Commission’s trade policy approach from the EU-South Korea FTA to the EU-New Zealand FTA regarding labor rights enforcement, including child labor. The EU-New Zealand FTA, signed in 2022, introduced penalty clauses for severe labor rights violations.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Interaction Between Trade Law and Labor Law Standards in New-Generation FTAs

The relationship between international trade agreements and domestic labor regulations has increasingly attracted scholarly attention as new-generation free trade agreements (FTAs) incorporate labor rights as legally relevant components of trade governance. The theoretical underpinning of this interaction can be explained through the lenses of legalization theory (Abbott et al., 2000) and the normative diffusion framework (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), both of which clarify how international commitments shape domestic legal reforms. According to legalization theory, the extent to which an international agreement influences state behaviour depends on three elements: obligation, precision, and delegation. Within the EVFTA, the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter imposes binding obligations requiring parties to “respect, promote and effectively implement” the fundamental labor standards of the International

Labour Organization (ILO), including Convention No. 138 on minimum age for employment and Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor. Although the TSD chapter does not create direct sanctions comparable to commercial dispute mechanisms, its normative and procedural obligations nevertheless create pressure for legislative harmonization, reinforced through mechanisms such as cooperative dialogues, panel reviews, and public monitoring.

From the perspective of normative diffusion, the EVFTA serves as a channel through which international labor standards are internalized within domestic legal systems. The agreement embeds ILO core standards into a broader framework of trade cooperation, thereby transforming them from abstract international principles into concrete benchmarks for market access and regulatory legitimacy. In this context, child labor standards - previously governed mainly by labor law and human rights law - become subject to trade-related incentives and scrutiny. This interaction strengthens the domestic salience of ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182, not by imposing direct coercive force but by linking compliance with expectations of responsible trade, international reputation, and the benefits associated with preferential access to the EU market. Consequently, the EVFTA operates as both a normative and institutional driver compelling Vietnam to review, amend, and enhance its child labor regulations in line with international standards.

Moreover, the TSD chapter's requirement that parties "not weaken or reduce" labor protections to attract trade or investment introduces an additional safeguard against regulatory regression. This principle reinforces the stability of domestic reforms by ensuring that improvements in labor law, such as raising the minimum working age, refining definitions of hazardous work, and strengthening enforcement mechanisms, cannot be undermined in pursuit of competitive advantages. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate the legal mechanisms through which international trade commitments interact with labor law principles, providing a conceptual foundation for understanding Vietnam's efforts to align its child labor regulations with the obligations established under the EVFTA.

3. Research Methodology

This study primarily uses secondary data collected from books, journals, theses, dissertations, and reports from relevant organizations. The research employs analysis, synthesis, and comparison methods to examine Vietnamese legal provisions on the elimination of child labor under the EVFTA's influence. Based on these findings, the study proposes recommendations to improve the Vietnamese labor law.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Minimum Working Age Under Vietnamese Law

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, adopted in 1973, requires member states, in their declaration accompanying the ratification of the Convention, to specify the minimum age for employment or work within their territory and on registered means of transport. According to Articles 4 to 8 of this Convention, no one below this minimum age can be employed or work in any occupation. Additionally, the minimum age must not be lower than the age of completion of compulsory education and, in any case, must not be below 15 years old. For member states with less developed economies and educational conditions, after consulting relevant employer and worker organizations, the minimum working age may initially be set at 14 years.

Vietnam ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment on June 24, 2003. Currently, Vietnam's labor laws are aligned with the minimum working age requirements of Convention No. 138. Specifically, Clause 1, Article 3 of the 2019 Labor Code of Vietnam states: "The

minimum working age of a worker is 15 years old, except as provided in Section 1, Chapter XI of this Code.” This provision continues the spirit of Clause 1, Article 3 of the 2012 Labor Code, but is articulated more clearly to align with the Convention’s content.

In addition to the general regulation on the minimum working age, Vietnamese law dedicates a separate chapter to defining the age requirements and permissible or prohibited types of work and working conditions for minor workers. Specifically:

(i) For individuals aged 15 to under 18: They are prohibited from performing tasks such as carrying, lifting, or transporting heavy loads beyond their physical capacity; manufacturing or trading in alcohol, beer, tobacco, narcotic substances, or other mind-altering substances; and working in environments involving chemicals, gases, or explosives.

(ii) For individuals aged 15 to under 18: They are not allowed to work in hazardous environments, including underwater, underground, caves, tunnels, construction sites, slaughterhouses, casinos, bars, nightclubs, karaoke rooms, hotels, guesthouses, massage parlors, lottery outlets, electronic gaming service centers, or any workplace that may harm their physical, mental, or moral development.

(iii) For individuals aged 13 to under 15: They are permitted to engage in light work as listed by the Minister of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, including artistic performances, sports, software programming, and traditional crafts such as ceramic glazing, pearl shell cutting, dó paper making, conical hat making, and brocade weaving.

(iv) For individuals under 13 years old: They may only engage in artistic, physical, and sports-related activities that do not harm their physical, intellectual, or moral development and must have the approval of provincial labor authorities.

4.2 The Worst Forms of Child Labor Under Vietnamese Law

ILO Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, adopted in 1999, mandates that each member state that ratifies it must take urgent and effective measures to ensure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor. Article 3 of this Convention defines “the worst forms of child labor” as: a) All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, including child trafficking, debt bondage, forced labor, and forced recruitment of children for armed conflict. b) The use, procurement, or offering of children for prostitution, the production of pornography, or pornographic performances. c) The use, procurement, or offering of children for illicit activities, particularly for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in international treaties. d) Work that, by its nature or conditions, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.

Vietnam ratified this Convention on November 17, 2000, and has taken specific actions to implement its provisions:

Firstly, Vietnamese labor law has codified the types of work mentioned in Article 3(d) of Convention No. 182 under Article 147 of the Labor Code and Circular No. 09/2020/TT-BLĐTBXH issued on November 12, 2020. Annex III of this Circular lists 69 types of work harmful to minors’ physical, intellectual, and moral development, while Annex IV specifies workplaces that pose such risks.

Secondly, Vietnam was the second country in the world and the first in Asia to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 without reservations. Over the years, Vietnam has continuously improved its domestic legal framework to better protect children’s rights under this Convention.

The 2016 Law on Children specifically includes provisions to prevent child labor exploitation, such as: Stipulating that “children have the right to be protected from all forms of labor exploitation, not to be forced to work before reaching the legal working age, or work excessive hours, or in hazardous, toxic, or dangerous conditions.” Prohibiting acts such as child trafficking, kidnapping, abuse, sexual exploitation, forced labor, and using children for illegal activities.

Finally, Vietnam’s criminal law also penalizes certain acts related to the worst forms of child labor, including: Luring, coercing, or harboring minors to commit crimes; Distributing obscene materials, with aggravated penalties for involving minors; Organizing or facilitating prostitution, including involving minors under 18; Using minors under 16 for pornography; Trafficking minors under 16; Organizing or coercing minors to use drugs; Violating regulations on employing minors under 16; Forced labor, with aggravated penalties for victims under 16.

4.3 Labor Standards for Minor Workers Under Vietnamese Law

Employment Contracts: Employers hiring workers under 15 must sign a written contract with both the minor worker and their legal representative. Additionally, the employer must meet certain conditions, such as: (i) Holding a criminal record certificate issued within six months confirming no history of child abuse offenses. (ii) Signing a declaration stating they have never been criminally prosecuted or administratively sanctioned for child abuse. The labor contract must include detailed provisions, such as personal identification details, accommodation arrangements (if the child works away from home), and conditions to ensure continued education. Contracts for children under 13 require prior approval from the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs.

Working Hours: To prevent exploitation and ensure minors have time for rest, education, and recreational activities, Vietnamese law specifies: (i) Workers under 15 may not work more than 4 hours per day or 20 hours per week and cannot work overtime or at night. (ii) Workers aged 15 to under 18 may work up to 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week. They can work overtime or at night only in permitted occupations (e.g., artistic performances, sports, journalism, tutoring, street vending, food processing, etc.).

Wages and Income: Wages for minors must be based on productivity and work quality but cannot be lower than the government-set minimum wage, ensuring non-discrimination and fair compensation.

Occupational Safety and Health: Ensuring safe working conditions is crucial, particularly for minors who are more vulnerable to workplace accidents. The 2015 Law on Occupational Safety and Health requires Employers to provide health check-ups at least once a year for workers, and at least once every six months for minor workers.

4.4 The Implementation Capacity of the Commitment to Eliminate Child Labor in the EVFTA and Recommendations

In assessing Vietnam’s progress in implementing labor commitments under the EVFTA, it is also useful to situate the country’s experience within the broader context of how other partners in the EU’s FTA network have approached similar obligations. The EU–South Korea FTA, for instance, witnessed the first-ever activation of the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) dispute mechanism when the EU challenged Korea’s delay in ratifying fundamental ILO conventions - demonstrating that the EU is willing to pursue formal review processes when labor commitments are not adequately fulfilled. Mexico, under the modernization of the EU–Mexico Global Agreement, undertook far-reaching institutional and judicial labor reforms, including the establishment of independent labor courts and reinforced inspection mechanisms,

reflecting the depth of structural change expected by the EU when assessing compliance. The more recent EU–New Zealand FTA even incorporates the possibility of financial penalties for persistent violations of core labor rights, marking a shift toward stronger enforceability. These comparative experiences show that the EU increasingly expects measurable progress in both legal harmonization and practical enforcement. Against this backdrop, Vietnam’s implementation of its child labor commitments can be more clearly understood in terms of both its notable achievements and the challenges that remain within its domestic regulatory and enforcement systems.

After more than four years of official enforcement, the EVFTA has marked an important milestone in the cooperation and development relationship between Vietnam and the EU. At the same time, this agreement has also opened a new phase and brought significant impacts on Vietnam’s economy and institutions. The implementation of labor commitments in general and the commitment to eliminate child labor, in particular, has driven positive changes in the legal framework and increased societal awareness of this issue. Some of the key achievements include:

Firstly, Vietnam has ratified two core ILO conventions related to child labor elimination: Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973) and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999). This is of great significance in four aspects: legal, economic, social, and international relations.

Secondly, Vietnam’s legal system has been amended and supplemented to align with the common standards of the ILO and EVFTA. Specifically, the Vietnamese Labor Code stipulates the minimum working age; issues a list of permissible and prohibited jobs and working conditions for minors; defines workplaces that harm the physical, intellectual, and moral development of minors; and sets labor principles and standards for underage workers. In addition, the Law on Children includes provisions to protect children from labor exploitation, and the Criminal Code imposes sanctions against certain worst forms of child labor. These legal frameworks serve as crucial foundations for Vietnam to effectively implement its commitment to eliminating child labor under the EVFTA.

Thirdly, investigations and data collection on child labor have gradually received more attention. Vietnam has conducted two specialized child labor surveys, in 2012 and 2018, led by the General Statistics Office and the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs. The data from the second survey has been used as a basis for planning from 2021 to 2025. Furthermore, state agencies in Vietnam collect child labor data through labor-employment surveys, household living standards surveys, and surveys reflecting the status of children and women.

Despite efforts to improve laws and enforce child labor elimination commitments under the EVFTA and ILO, child labor remains widespread. This poses a significant challenge for Vietnam in achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. According to the 2023 report on the status of working children and child labor in Vietnam, conducted by the General Statistics Office, there were 269,604 child laborers aged 5–17 nationwide, accounting for 36.9% of all working children. The agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors had the highest proportion of child labor at 38.9%, followed by the industrial sector at 29.6%. Alarming, 94,300 children (35.0%) were engaged in hazardous work, and approximately 12 out of every 100 child laborers suffered at least one health issue due to labor activities (General Statistics Office and International Labor Organization, 2025).

Despite these concerning figures, several structural and institutional limitations continue to hinder Vietnam’s ability to enforce its child labor elimination commitments in practice effectively. One of the most

significant challenges lies in the limited inspection capacity, as the number of labor inspectors remains disproportionately small compared to the scale of enterprises and the extensive informal sector where most child labor violations occur (Tam An, 2022). This shortage makes it difficult to detect and address exploitative practices, particularly in household-based production, seasonal agricultural work, and artisanal cottage industries - areas that generally fall outside routine inspection coverage.

Additionally, the predominance of informal labor arrangements blurs the boundaries between legitimate household assistance and prohibited child labor, thereby complicating monitoring and enforcement efforts. Some parents, particularly those in poor households and ethnic minority communities, believe that involving their children in work from an early age is a natural responsibility and a necessary source of family income (Kim Vu, 2013) (Quoc Hong, 2019) (An Linh, 2021). For them, the immediate economic benefit from child labour takes precedence over the long-term, but less tangible, value of education. In addition, a segment of parents not only accept but actively direct their children into income-generating activities such as street vending or begging, viewing these as primary sources of household income.

Data transparency and consistency also pose persistent obstacles, as national child labor surveys are conducted intermittently and administrative reporting varies significantly across localities in both accuracy and completeness. In addition, the workforce responsible for child protection at the local level remains limited, with many staff members simultaneously assigned multiple duties (Nu Vuong, 2022). Maintaining, operating, and regularly updating administrative databases requires substantial financial and human resources, especially at the commune and ward levels. Many localities still lack dedicated personnel with adequate information technology skills. The capacity of grassroots officials in collecting, analysing, and most importantly using data to make early intervention decisions remains limited.

These gaps between legislation and actual implementation illustrate the complex environment in which Vietnam must operate to fulfill its EVFTA and ILO obligations. They also underscore the need for complementary reforms aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, improving data collection and reporting systems, and expanding oversight mechanisms across both formal and informal sectors to ensure that legal advancements translate into tangible improvements in child labor prevention and protection. Given this situation, and to continue fully and effectively implementing the commitment to eliminating child labor under international labor standards and the EVFTA, Vietnam must take several synchronized measures:

In the short term, Vietnam should focus on actionable reforms that can immediately enhance its capacity to prevent and detect child labor, particularly in informal and high-risk sectors. First, monitoring and supervision must be strengthened, especially in household-based production, agricultural activities, handicraft villages, and subcontracting chains, where most hidden forms of child labor occur. This includes more frequent unannounced inspections, targeted inspection campaigns during peak production periods, and improved coordination between labor inspectors and commune-level child protection officers. Second, exceptions allowing children aged 13 to under 15 to engage in “light work” should be subjected to tighter regulatory controls. Clearer definitions of permissible tasks, mandatory notification to local authorities, and risk-based assessment criteria are necessary to ensure that these exceptions do not become loopholes facilitating exploitative practices. Third, working-hour violations must be addressed through stricter penalties and improved enforcement in the informal sector, where minors commonly exceed legal limits without oversight. Finally, short-term reforms should include enhanced data collection and harmonized reporting mechanisms to support more accurate national monitoring and EVFTA compliance assessments.

In the medium term, Vietnam should prioritize reforms that strengthen institutional capacity and modernize the regulatory framework in line with ongoing structural changes in the labor market. Updating the list of permitted and hazardous occupations for minors is essential, particularly in response to the growth

of digital platform work, e-commerce logistics, on-demand delivery services, and informal gig-based labor involving minors. A national tripartite advisory council, incorporating government agencies, the ILO, enterprises, and civil society, should be established to conduct periodic reviews of emerging occupations and associated risks. Concurrently, Vietnam must invest in expanding and professionalizing the labor inspectorate by increasing staffing levels, improving specialized training on child labor detection, and equipping inspectors with tools to monitor new forms of informal work. Medium-term reforms should also promote responsible business conduct through sector-specific guidelines on child labor due diligence, supplier codes of conduct, and voluntary CSR initiatives. These efforts would help enterprises, particularly SMEs, better understand their obligations and integrate child labor prevention into internal management systems and supply chain oversight.

In the long term, Vietnam should pursue comprehensive structural reforms to ensure lasting compliance with international labor standards and evolving EVFTA expectations. A key priority is developing a roadmap toward a uniform minimum working age of 15 across all industries, thereby phasing out current exceptions for children aged 13 to under 15 and fully aligning domestic legislation with ILO Convention No. 138. In addition, Vietnam should work toward integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human rights due diligence (HRDD) obligations into national law, drawing inspiration from the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). A legally binding due diligence framework would require enterprises to identify, prevent, mitigate, and remediate child labor risks throughout their supply chains, moving beyond voluntary commitments and improving traceability across production tiers. Long-term reforms should also include the development of digital supply-chain monitoring systems, investment in inclusive education and social protection programs, and targeted poverty-reduction strategies in rural and ethnic minority communities—addressing the root causes that drive families to rely on children’s labor. Together, these long-term measures would support a sustainable and comprehensive approach to eliminating child labor in Vietnam.

5. Conclusion

To fulfill its EVFTA commitment to eliminate child labor, Vietnam has undertaken substantial efforts in recent years to review, amend, and modernize its domestic legal framework. These reforms are reflected in the establishment of a statutory minimum working age, clearer prohibitions on the worst forms of child labor, and progressively refined labor standards applicable to minors. The alignment of national legislation with ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 demonstrate Vietnam’s willingness to integrate international commitments into its legal order and to position itself as a responsible trading partner within the EU’s regulatory ecosystem.

However, legal harmonization represents only one dimension of the broader challenge of child labor elimination. Vietnam’s progress must be contextualized within a rapidly evolving labor market shaped by digitalization, shifting supply-chain dynamics, and increasing informal-sector participation. These structural changes, combined with heightened expectations in the European market for due diligence, supply-chain transparency, and responsible business conduct, require Vietnam to move beyond legislative compliance and toward more robust, proactive enforcement. Strengthening inspection capacity, refining occupational classifications for minors, and addressing persistent data gaps remain essential to bridging the divide between legal norms and on-the-ground practices.

Looking ahead, Vietnam must not only improve existing regulatory mechanisms but also anticipate new forms of child labor emerging from platform work, gig-based services, and informal production networks. Enhanced cooperation between government agencies, enterprises, and international partners will be vital to improving detection and prevention capacities. In the longer term, aligning domestic regulatory approaches

with global due diligence standards, particularly those arising from the EU's evolving sustainability and human rights frameworks, will help ensure that Vietnam's commitments under the EVFTA translate into meaningful and lasting protection for children.

Ultimately, eliminating child labor is not merely a matter of complying with treaty obligations; it is a continuous process that requires sustained legal evolution, institutional strengthening, and a holistic understanding of the socio-economic drivers that shape child labor in practice. As Vietnam deepens its integration into global value chains, the country's ability to meet these challenges will play a decisive role in shaping its international credibility, economic competitiveness, and, most importantly, the well-being and future of its children.

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