

Marrakech Framework:

Helping SDG signatories close child-labor shortfall

THE Marrakech Global Framework for Action Against Child Labour Global has released a “Roadmap to 2030” to help sustainable development goals (SDGs) signatories ultimately eradicate child labor, after the international community failed to meet a 2025 deadline for doing so.

The framework, adopted during a conference between Feb. 11 and 13, aims to address the “intolerable situation” for the 138 million children who remain in child labor, including 54 million performing hazardous work.

Julius H. Cainglet, vice-president of the Federation of Free Workers, told *BusinessWorld* that the new framework builds upon the 2022 Durban Call to Action.

Mr. Cainglet, a trade unionist from the Philippines and conference delegate, said via teleconference: “It’s clear that we made a

step forward decisions meant to complement and give more flesh to the previous Durban Declaration.”

Delegates agreed that “gradual change is no longer enough” to ensure a sustained reduction. Mr. Cainglet said discussions highlighted emerging challenges, including the online exploitation of children, as well as the effects of climate change and recurring economic crises on vulnerable households.

In the Philippines, the Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) reported that though child labor numbers are declining, the scale of the problem remains significant.

Merriam Leilani M. Reynoso, director of the Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns, said the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that in 2024, an estimated 861,000 children aged 5 to 17 were working, with

509,000 — or 59.1% — classified as child laborers.

Ms. Reynoso told *BusinessWorld* via messenger chat that while the numbers have declined from 828,000 in 2022 and 678,000 in 2023, they remain particularly concentrated in agriculture.

“The agriculture sector continued to account for the largest share of child laborers at 64.4%,” she said, followed by services at 29% and industry at 6.6%.

To address the problem, the government has tasked the National Council Against Child Labor (NCACL) to oversee the Philippine Program Against Child Labor.

“The NCACL is tasked to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the Philippine Program Against Child Labor by all concerned agencies and organizations for the protec-

tion of the rights of the vulnerable, especially the children, strengthen related institutional mechanisms, and establish further measures to contribute to the prevention, reduction, and elimination of any form of child labor,” Ms. Reynoso explained.

Mr. Cainglet said the root cause of child labor is household poverty and argued that ensuring a living wage for adult workers is the most effective intervention.

“If a parent receives a living wage, the child no longer needs to work,” he said.

According to a December 2025 estimate by the IBON Foundation, a family of five in Metro Manila requires daily income of P1,251 — or about P27,201 per month — to live decently.

By comparison, the current minimum wage in the National Capital Region stands at P695 per

day. Minimum wage rates are set by the National Wages and Productivity Commission.

At the household level, Ms. Reynoso pointed to the Child Labor Prevention and Elimination Program, which adopts what she described as a “strategic and holistic” approach to assisting child laborers and their families.

In 2025, DoLE’s Integrated Livelihood Program provided assistance to 9,951 parents of child laborers. According to Ms. Reynoso, this included providing raw materials and tools for various small businesses, such as “rice retailing, snack vending, tailoring, fishing tools... hog raising... and the provision of fishing boats” to ensure alternative income for families.

The Marrakech Framework also introduces a stronger focus on psychosocial support and

mental health services for child labor survivors. Mr. Cainglet said this is a critical addition for children who “would rather work than play” and miss out on normal stages of development.

However, he noted persistent policy gaps at the national level, citing inconsistencies between labor laws and the K-12 education system.

“You’re already 18 years old, yet you’re still in Grade 11 or Grade 12. But a 15-year-old is allowed to work,” he said, arguing that the legal minimum working age should align with the completion of basic education.

The Marrakech Framework concludes with a commitment to universal ratification of ILO Convention 138 and a roadmap to monitor progress via the Child Labour Observatory, with the goal of reaching zero child labor by 2030. — **Erika Mae P. Sinagang**

OPINION

HMO coverage for nontraditional families

We’re very strict in limiting Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) benefits to employees and their legitimate families. That’s why I’m surprised to know of companies that extend the coverage even to unmarried workers with children born out of wedlock. Are we missing something? — **Stone Maple**.

IN THE WORKPLACE
REY ELBO

To people with old-school thinking, this may seem like misplaced generosity that supports immorality. But for organizations trying to attract, motivate, and retain talent in a competitive labor market, this is not charity — it’s a strategy to win the war for talent.

Some people equate this as a choice between “immorality” and organizational survival. The solution? Expand benefits gradually without framing it in terms of morality. If an organization insists on covering people who are “legally married” and their legitimate children, it immediately discriminates against employees who have to pay out-of-pocket simply because their family structure isn’t covered by a marriage certificate.

The result? Lower morale, higher stress, and an unspoken perception of inequality. The truth is that management knows that justice and fairness are not just elements of a moral compass, but more of a productivity tool. Some managers justify this by saying they can’t judge but must support their workers as whole persons.

When employees are loved and protected, they stay longer. This sends a message that no motivational poster or inspirational speaker can match.

REDUCING TURNOVER

Turnover is one of the most expensive experiences for any organization. Gallup found that when a worker resigns, the average cost of replacement typically ranges from 30%-50% of annual salary for entry-level employees, 50%-100% for mid-level professionals, and 100%-200% (or more) for managers and executives.

While waiting for the right opportunity to move, imagine an employee whose partner or child faces a medical emergency but has no coverage. That employee will either take extended leave, become mentally preoccupied with financial worries, or resign to join a company that offers better family security.

Companies extend HMO coverage to avoid this costly chain reaction. A few thousand pesos invested in dependent benefits prevents hundreds of thousands in turnover losses. From a financial perspective, it is one of the cheapest retention strategies available.

PERSONAL PROBLEM?

One thing every experienced manager knows is that there is no such thing as a personal problem if it adversely affects the worker’s performance. When a child is sick, a partner is hospitalized, or a family medical bill is pending, the employee’s focus at work immediately suffers.

Extending HMO benefits to non-traditional dependents is a preventive measure. It stabilizes the employee’s emotional and financial environment, which in turn stabilizes performance. Employees who have peace of mind about their medical expenses demonstrate higher engagement, make fewer errors, and reciprocate with loyalty.

Healthy families support healthy productivity. It’s a simple equation, but one that companies used to ignore until recently.

MODERN INTERPRETATION

In a society like the Philippines where family ties extend beyond legal definitions, companies have learned to design benefits that reflect reality rather than legal paperwork. Some organizations recognized early on that insisting on

marriage certificates creates unnecessary barriers.

Others realized that they were unintentionally penalizing single parents — the very individuals who often need support the most. Today, more companies embrace a more humane definition of family: the people who depend on the worker emotionally and financially, regardless of marital status.

This shift is subtle but powerful. It signals respect for the diverse ways people build their lives as it removes the stigma surrounding unconventional family arrangements.

Extending HMO benefits to non-traditional dependents is not a fad or a corporate indulgence. It’s a deliberate strategy built on fairness, competitiveness, inclusion, productivity, and financial sense.

At the end of the day, when employees feel their families are protected, they will protect the company in return.

Consult REY ELBO on your workplace issues for free. E-mail elbonomics@gmail.com or DM Facebook, LinkedIn, X or via <https://reyelbo.com>. Anonymity is guaranteed.



S&P
from S1/1

“It was really an observation of the fact that institutional settings in the Philippines have strengthened quite considerably over the last decade or so. And that has led to very good growth outcomes and at the same time sustainable public finance.”

Still, Mr. Phua noted that political concerns emerging from the flood mess could slow some of the country’s credit improvement.

However, he added that the economic spillover from the corruption allegations against several Public Works officials, lawmakers and private contractors as well as the impeachment complaints against the President due to the flood control issue may only be “temporary.”

Last year, the Philippines missed its growth target for a third straight year after gross domestic product (GDP) slowed to a post-pandemic low of 4.4% as weak confidence dampened investments, household consumption and government spending.

Despite this, S&P sees the economy rebounding to a 5.7% growth this year. If realized, the government will meet its 5%-6% goal for the year.

“For this year, I think our growth forecast for the Philippines is still relatively strong at 5.7%,” Mr. Phua said. “So, despite the economic slowdown of late, the Philippines continues to be an outperformer when compared to peers at a level of similar income.”

This, he added, comes on the back of a projected narrowing of the country’s fiscal and current account deficits over the next year or two, which could boost the case for a higher credit rating.

“Interestingly, because of the slowdown in infrastructure spending in the last few months, it is possible that you will start to see (the) fiscal deficit actually be lower than what was originally budgeted for,” Mr. Phua said.

“The other thing also is because of the slowdown in the projects and also the reduction in capital goods import, we are also starting to see that the current account deficit could come down to be narrower than before as well,” he added.

Based on latest data, infrastructure spending declined for the fifth consecutive month after falling by 45.2% year on year to P48 billion in November.

Meanwhile, the country’s budget deficit sharply narrowed during the same month, shrinking by 26.02% to P157.6 billion from P213 billion a year earlier.

However, single-digit growth in spending and revenue collection led the gap to widen to P1.26 trillion in the 11-month period.

The government wants to cap the fiscal deficit at P1.56 trillion by end-2025.

Meanwhile, the Philippines’ current account balance stood at a \$12.5-billion deficit by the end of the third quarter, latest Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) data showed. This was equivalent to -3.6% of the GDP.

The BSP expects the current account gap to end at \$15.5 billion in 2025 or -3.2% of GDP, before narrowing to \$15.3 billion or -3% of GDP this year.

Still, Mr. Phua said S&P will keep monitoring how further developments in the flood control scandal would impact the Philippines’ long-term credit rating prospects.



Power Maintenance Updates

by **MERALCO ADVISORY**

The following are scheduled power interruptions necessary for the regular maintenance and upgrade of our power distribution facilities, to ensure the delivery of safe and reliable electricity to your areas. Rest assured that Meralco is doing everything to quickly restore your electricity according to schedule.

MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026

CAVITE (IMUS CITY; AND DASMARIÑAS CITY)

BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 9:30AM AND THEN BETWEEN 10:30AM AND 11:00AM – THE WHOLE OF CIRCUITS IMUS 35WK AND 36WK

Portion of Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo Highway from near Padua St. in Bgy. Bayan Luma 7, Imus City to L & AE Home Enterprises including Dara Subd.; and C. Aguinaldo St. in Bgy. Salitran I, Dasmariñas City; Bayanihan Homes Subd., New Imus Village, Santiago Subd., Pag-Asa Subd., Villa Celina Subd., Hausland Subd., Plaridel III & IV Subds., Villa Nicasia 1 Subd., Villa Leticia Subd., Villa Celina Annex Subd. and Rita Sanchez Compound; Pag-Asa, RPR, L. S. Brotherhood and Taging Ilog Sts. in Bgys. Anabu I-A, I-B, I-C & I-D, Anabu II-A, II-B, II-C, II-D, II-E & II-F, Bayan Luma 7 & 8, Buhay Na Tubig and Tandang Luma V & VI in Imus City.

THURSDAY TO FRIDAY, MARCH 5 – 6, 2026

CALOOCAN CITY (BAGONG BARRIO)

BETWEEN 11:00PM (THU., 03/05/26) AND 4:00AM (FRI., 03/06/26) – PORTION OF CIRCUIT GRACE PARK 433RD

Portion of Katarungan St. from Malolos Ave. to Reparo Road including Waling – Waling, Rosal, Demokrasya, Kaganapan, Avocado, Atis, Galilea, Amapola, Anonas, Banal, Bulacan, Everlasting, Exodus, Getsemani, Gladiola, Herusalem, Mabuti, Macopa, Magdalena, Maligaya, Mirasol, Moises and Sampaguita Sts.

Portion of Panday Pira and KKK Sts. from Kapayapaan St. to G. De Jesus St. including La Suerte, Republika, Pioneer, Pag-Asa, Kaunlaran and Callejon Sts.

REASON: Preventive maintenance and testing work inside Meralco - Imus substation.

REASON: Installation of facilities and replacement of poles along Katarungan St. in Bagong Barrio, Caloocan City

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