International Labour Organization

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CHILD LABOUR

GLOBAL ESTIMATES 2020, TRENDS AND THE ROAD FORWARD

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CONTENTS

Executive summary 6

Introduction 14

Current levels and trends 20

- Global and regional overview 21
- Profile of children in child labour 28
- Characteristics of child labour 37
- Child labour and education 47
- Child labour, national income and state fragility 50

The impact of COVID-19 54

The road forward 60

Annex 72

- Statistical tables 74
- Overview of the methodology 79

Endnotes 83

Executive summary



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Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward takes stock of where we stand in the global effort to end child labour. Published in the United Nations International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), co-custodians of target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the report describes the scale and key characteristics of child labour today, and changes over time.

In line with child labour estimates produced by the ILO every four years since 2000, the 2020 calculations are based on the extrapolation of data from national household surveys. The new estimates use more than 100 household surveys covering two thirds of the world's population of children aged 5 to 17 years.

What the report tells us is alarming. Global progress against child labour has stalled for the first time since we began producing global estimates two decades ago. In addition, without urgent mitigation measures, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to push millions more children into child labour.

These results constitute an important reality check in meeting the international commitment to end child labour by 2025. If we do not muster the will and resources to act now on an unprecedented scale, the timeline for ending child labour will stretch many years into the future.

GLOBAL ESTIMATES AND TRENDS

Child labour remains a persistent problem in the world today. The latest global estimates indicate that 160 million children – 63 million girls and 97 million boys – were in child labour globally at the beginning of 2020, accounting for almost 1 in 10 of all children worldwide. Seventy-nine million children – nearly half of all those in child labour – were in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development.

Global progress against child labour has stagnated since 2016. The percentage of children in child labour remained unchanged over the four-year period while the absolute number of children in child labour increased by over 8 million. Similarly, the percentage of children in hazardous work was almost unchanged but rose in absolute terms by 6.5 million children.

The global picture masks continued progress against child labour in Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In both regions, child labour trended downward over the last four years in percentage and absolute terms. Similar progress in sub-Saharan Africa has proven elusive. This region has seen an increase in both the number and percentage of children in child labour since 2012. There are now more children in child labour in sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined. Global child labour goals will not be achieved without a breakthrough in this region.

Continued progress was registered over the last four years among children aged 12 to 14 and 15 to 17. Child labour in both age groups declined in percentage and absolute terms, continuing a consistent downward trend seen in previous estimates. Child labour rose among young children aged 5 to 11, however, after the 2016 global estimates signalled slowing progress for this age group. There were 16.8 million more children aged 5 to 11 in child labour in 2020 than in 2016.

The COVID-19 crisis threatens to further erode global progress against child labour unless urgent mitigation measures are taken. New analysis suggests a further 8.9 million children will be in child labour by the end of 2022 as a result of rising poverty driven by the pandemic.

Yet the predicted additional rise in child labour is by no means a foregone conclusion. The actual impact will depend on policy responses. Two additional scenarios demonstrate the huge influence of social protection coverage on child labour in the near term. Where social protection coverage is allowed to slip, a significant further increase in child labour

could occur by the end of 2022. A rise in social protection coverage, on the other hand, could more than offset the impact of COVID-19 on child labour, returning us to progress on the issue.

Other key results from the 2020 global estimates include:

- **Involvement in child labour is higher for boys than girls at all ages.** Among all boys, 11.2 per cent are in child labour compared to 7.8 per cent of all girls. In absolute numbers, boys in child labour outnumber girls by 34 million. When the definition of child labour expands to include household chores for 21 hours or more each week, the gender gap in prevalence among boys and girls aged 5 to 14 is reduced by almost half.
- **Child labour is much more common in rural areas.** There are 122.7 million rural children in child labour compared to 37.3 million urban children. The prevalence of child labour in rural areas (13.9 per cent) is close to three times higher than in urban areas (4.7 per cent).
- **Most child labour – for boys and girls alike – continues to occur in agriculture.** Seventy per cent of all children in child labour, 112 million children in total, are in agriculture. Many are younger children, underscoring agriculture as an entry point to child labour. Over three quarters of all children aged 5 to 11 in child labour work in agriculture.
- **The largest share of child labour takes place within families.** Seventy-two per cent of all child labour and 83 per cent of child labour among children aged 5 to 11 occurs within families, primarily on family farms or in family microenterprises. Family-based child labour is frequently hazardous despite common perceptions of the family as offering a safer work environment. More than one in four children aged 5 to 11 and nearly half of children aged 12 to 14 in family-based child labour are in work likely to harm their health, safety or morals.
- **Child labour is frequently associated with children being out of school.** A large share of younger children in child labour are excluded from school despite falling within the age range for compulsory education. More than a quarter of children aged 5 to 11 and over a third of children aged 12 to 14 who are in child labour are out of school. This severely constrains their prospects for decent work in youth and adulthood as well as their life potential overall. Many more children in child labour struggle to balance the demands of school and child labour at the same time, which compromises their education and their right to leisure.

THE ROAD FORWARD

The 2020 ILO-UNICEF global estimates indicate a critical juncture in the worldwide effort against child labour. Global progress has ground to a halt over the last four years after having already slowed considerably in the four years before that. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis threatens to further erode past gains. While there are nearly 86 million fewer children in child labour now than when we began measuring global levels in 2000, recent trends suggest we are falling far behind on the collective commitment to end child labour in all its forms by 2025. In this United Nations International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, we must act with renewed urgency to put progress back on track.

Immediate steps are needed to avoid falling further behind during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has clearly heightened the risk of child labour, above all through a sharp rise in poverty that may increase families' reliance on child labour, and through school closures that deny families the logical alternative to sending children to work. To reduce these risks, expanded income support measures for families in situations of vulnerability, through child benefits and other means, will be critical. So too will back-to-school campaigns and stepped-up remedial learning to get children

back in the classroom and help them make up for lost learning once there, when conditions permit.

During the acute and recovery phases of the crisis, it will be important not to lose sight of broader policy imperatives for ending child labour. These have long been clear:

- Extending social protection for children and their families to mitigate the poverty and economic uncertainty that underpin child labour.
- Ensuring free and good-quality schooling at least up to the minimum age for entering employment to provide a viable alternative to child labour and afford children a chance at a better future.
- Guaranteeing that every child's birth is registered so that children have a legal identity and can enjoy their rights from birth.
- Promoting decent work that delivers a fair income for young people (of legal working age) and adults, with a particular emphasis on workers in the informal economy, in order for families to escape poverty-driven child labour.
- Promoting adequate rural livelihoods and resilience, including through supporting economic diversification, investing in basic services infrastructure, extending social protection and devising agricultural extension policies for crop diversification. Family farms and enterprises that depend on the (mostly unpaid) labour of their children need greater support to improve their livelihoods and end that dependence.
- Ensuring that necessary laws and regulations are in place to protect children, backed by enforcement machinery and child protection systems, and the services required to apply them.
- Addressing gender norms and discrimination that increase child labour risks, particularly for girls, related to domestic work and unpaid household chores.

Special attention should address the heightened risk of child labour in growing crises, conflicts and disasters. Child labour concerns should factor in all phases of humanitarian action – from crisis preparedness and contingency plans to humanitarian responses to post-crisis reconstruction and recovery efforts.

Addressing child labour risks in domestic and global supply chains continues to be important. Especially relevant are the informal micro- and small enterprises operating at the lower tiers of supply chains, where child labour and other human rights risks are often most pronounced. Governments can lead through public procurement that discourages child labour risks in vendor supply chains.

The COVID-19 crisis has made actions across all these policy areas and contexts even more urgent at a time when governments are grappling with restricted fiscal space. Sound policy choices and resource allocation decisions will be critical. Strengthening the country-level evidence base on child labour can help to identify local priorities and guide policy and spending decisions. Social dialogue among governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations is also key to developing appropriate and responsive policies for addressing child labour and related challenges, wherever they occur.

Governments will need to adopt creative resource mobilization strategies to expand their fiscal space. Given budget shortfalls generated by the pandemic, the international community will need to fill the financing gap. Many industrialized countries still fall short of long-standing commitments to official development assistance (ODA) and financing for sustainable development. This needs to change.

Debt relief should be extended and debt re-structured in already heavily indebted countries so that social spending is not crowded out by increasing debt service payments. We must avoid the mistakes of the past that saw urgently

needed credit flows made contingent on austerity measures that inflicted the most harm on children and families in greatest need.

The COVID-19 crisis has served as an important reminder of the need for international cooperation and partnership in overcoming global challenges. This is as true for ending child labour as for other critical development priorities in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Eliminating child labour is a task too big for any one party to solve alone. Countries must work together within the spirit of article 8 of the universally ratified ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182).

Alliance 8.7 plays an important role in facilitating cooperation on child labour among governmental and non-governmental actors. A global partnership launched in 2016, Alliance 8.7 groups governments, multilateral organizations, workers' organizations, employers' organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and think tanks to find ways of accelerating action on target 8.7. The alliance focuses on three strategies: conducting research and sharing knowledge, driving innovation, and increasing and leveraging resources.

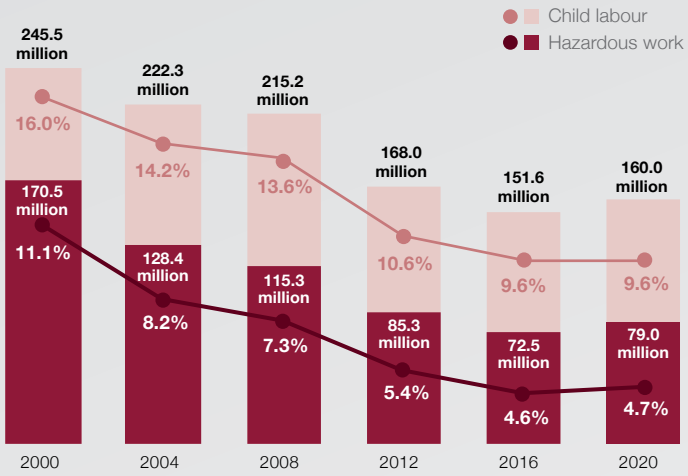
It is urgent to put action to end child labour back on track, in line with global commitments and goals. The evidence in this report outlines the risks and points to the solutions. While ambitious measures and investments are required, the COVID-19 pandemic has amply illustrated that these are possible when the well-being of humanity is at stake. We have made a promise to children to end child labour. There is no time to lose.

Child labour at a glance

Trends

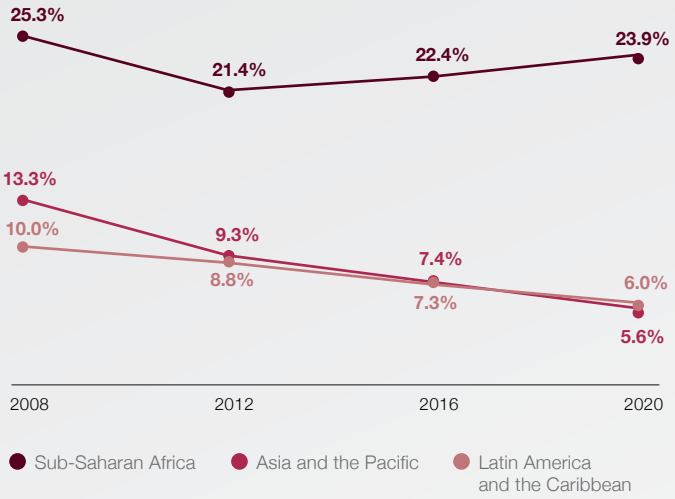
Global progress against child labour has stalled since 2016

Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour and hazardous work



Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean have seen steady progress on child labour since 2008; similar progress has eluded sub-Saharan Africa

Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by region

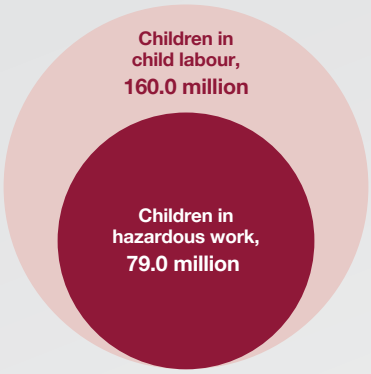


Notes: The figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. Comparable historical data prior to 2016 were not available for other regions.

Current situation

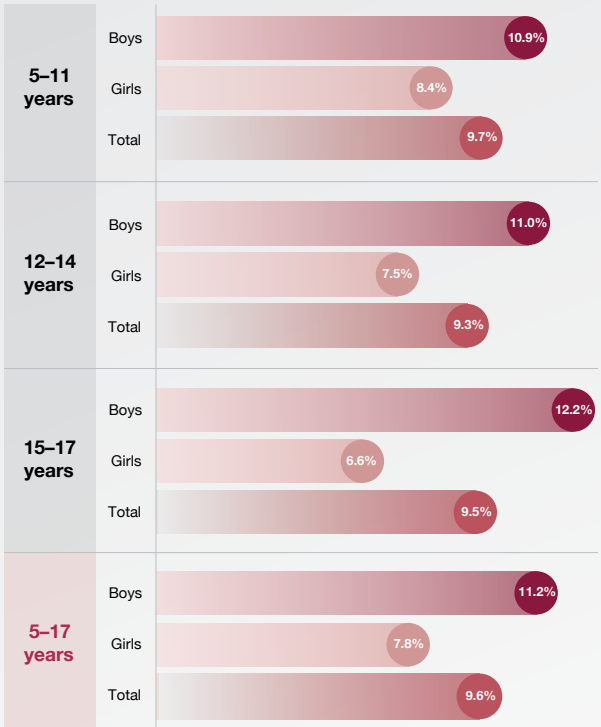
Worldwide, 160 million children are engaged in child labour; 79 million of them are performing hazardous work

Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour and hazardous work



Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls at every age

Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by age and sex



We have made a promise to children to end child labour

Sub-Saharan Africa stands out as the region with the highest prevalence and largest number of children in child labour

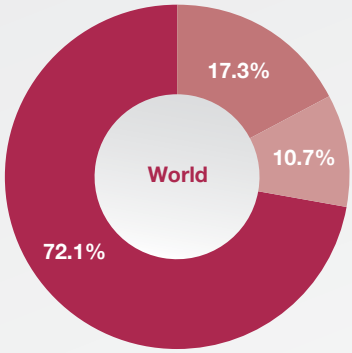
Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by region

Notes: The size of the bubbles is proportionate to the absolute number of children in child labour. The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. For this reason, region-specific numbers do not add up to the global total.



Most children in child labour work within their own family unit

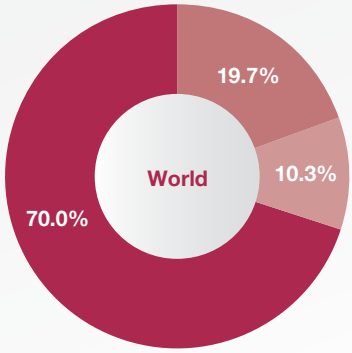
Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by status at work



Note: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.

The agricultural sector accounts for the largest share of child labour worldwide

Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by sector of economic activity



Impact of COVID-19

Without mitigation measures, the number of children in child labour could rise from 160 million in 2020 to 168.9 million by the end of 2022

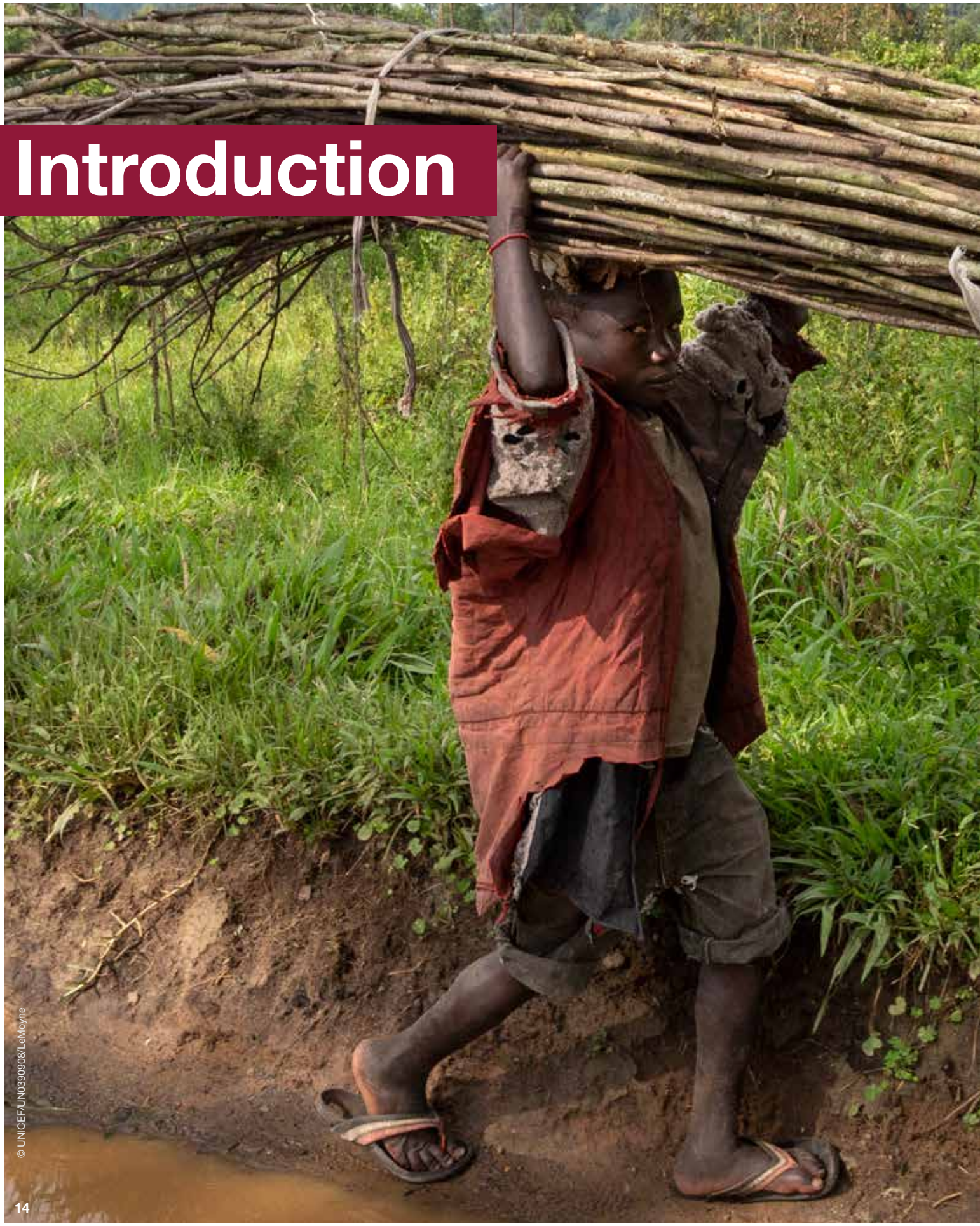
Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, projected to the end of 2022



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There is no time to lose

Introduction



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Every day, Archie wakes at 5 a.m., gets dressed, has breakfast and walks to work. There he squeezes himself into a narrow gap to dig blindly for gold in a deep underground pit, often underwater, breathing through a hose connected to a diesel-powered compressor. After 10 or 12 hours of labour, he returns home, has some dinner and goes to sleep. Archie is 11. Some of his young friends who work at the pit haul sacks of sand and gravel weighing more than they do, all day long.

Rafael, 12, sleeps in a shack in the woods. He does not have much to eat, mainly rice and black beans. He drinks from the water pit that he shares with the bulls on the farm where he has been working for five years, helping to pay off his father's debt.

Taisha, 16, cooks breakfast, cleans the house and cares for her grandmothers, which takes up most of her day. With her school closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, her chores have increased. She tries to watch educational programmes on television but does not have enough time to keep up. As the only member of her family ever to go to school, she gets very little support.

Around the world, 160 million children like Archie, Rafael and Taisha toil in child labour today. At an age when they should be nurtured and supported through education, adequate health and social protection, and enough play and leisure time, they have to work instead. The reasons vary: poverty, few options for education, little energy after work to study or no role models. The consequences, however, are sadly consistent. With tired bodies and weary minds, their chances to learn and thrive are diminished along with their prospects for a bright future.

This report presents numbers that tell the story of what children in child labour experience. It offers evidence crucial to making decisions to fulfil obligations, both moral and legal, to end child labour. Issued during the United Nations International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, the report takes stock of the global drive to end child labour and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. What it reveals is alarming. Global progress against child labour has stalled for the first time since 2000. Further, without urgent mitigation measures, the current crisis will likely push millions more children into child labour.

These results are an important reality check in assessing prospects for ending child labour by 2025, in line with target 8.7 of the SDGs. If we do not muster the will and resources to act now on an unprecedented scale, the timeline for ending child labour will stretch many years into the future.

Jointly published for the first time by the ILO and UNICEF as co-custodians of target 8.7, the report details the scale and characteristics of child labour in the world today, and tracks its evolution over time. Like estimates produced every four years since 2000, the 2020 calculations are based on the extrapolation of data from national household surveys. The new estimates use data from more than 100 household surveys covering two thirds of the world's population of children aged 5 to 17.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. The next section provides an overview of the 2020 global and regional estimates, and trends since 2000. The third section profiles child labour today, considering the age, sex and residence of children in child labour, the characteristics of the work they perform, and how child labour interferes with their education. The fourth section assesses the likely impact of the COVID-19 crisis on child labour through the end of 2022. The report concludes with a discussion of key policy priorities to return to a path of progress as we navigate the COVID-19 crisis and rebuild in its aftermath.

If we do not muster the will and resources to act now on an unprecedented scale, the timeline for ending child labour will stretch many years into the future.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

CHILD LABOUR IN THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

SDG TARGET 8.7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

The international community has recognized the importance of ending child labour as part of achieving SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth. Under this goal, target 8.7 is to end child labour in all its forms by 2025. Ending child labour will also contribute to progress on many other SDGs, especially on education and health.



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Statistical concepts and definitions

Three main international human and labour rights standards – the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Convention (No. 138) and the universally ratified ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) – set legal boundaries for child labour and provide grounds for national and international actions to end it. In 2008, the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians approved a resolution on child labour statistics that translates these legal standards into statistical terms for measurement purposes.[1] The statistical concepts and definitions underpinning the 2020 estimates are consistent with this resolution.

Child labour comprises work that children are too young to perform and/or work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm children's health, safety or morals. In more technical terms, child labour encompasses work performed by children in any type of employment, with two important exceptions: permitted light work for children within the age range specified for light work; and work that is not classified as among the worst forms of child labour, particularly as hazardous work, for children above the general minimum working age. A broader statistical definition includes hazardous unpaid household services, commonly referred to as hazardous household chores.

Employment encompasses any form of market production and certain types of non-market production (principally that of goods such as agricultural produce for own use). Employment includes work in both the formal and informal economy, inside and outside family settings, for pay or profit (cash or in-kind, part-time or full-time) and domestic work outside the child's own household for an employer (paid or unpaid).

The concept of **permitted light work** stems from article 7 of ILO Convention No. 138, which states that national laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons from 13 years of age (or 12 years in countries that have specified the general minimum working age as 14 years) in light work that is not likely to harm their health

or development. It should also not limit school attendance, participation in vocational orientation or training programmes, or the capacity to benefit from instruction. For statistical measurement, light work in this report includes employment and non-hazardous work for less than 14 hours a week performed by children aged 12 to 14.

The **worst forms of child labour** comprise categories set out in article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182. These entail all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Hazardous work refers to work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm children's health, safety or morals. When a country ratifies ILO Convention No. 138 and ILO Convention No. 182, they commit to determining their own hazardous work list. While the list is decided by individual countries after consultation with organizations of employers and workers, the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190), supplementing ILO Convention No. 182, urges consideration of work that exposes children to physical, emotional or sexual abuse; work underground, underwater, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or that involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; work in an unhealthy environment that may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes or to temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to their health; and work under particularly difficult conditions, such as for long hours or during the night, or that does not allow returning home each day. For statistical measurement, in this report, hazardous work includes that in designated hazardous industries and/or hazardous occupations and/or that entails 43 hours or more per week.

Hazardous work by children is often treated as a proxy category for the worst forms of child labour for two reasons. First, reliable national data on the worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work, such as children in bonded and forced labour or in commercial sexual exploitation, are still difficult to find. Second, children in hazardous work account for the overwhelming majority of those in the worst forms of child labour.

Unpaid household services, or household chores, refer to services children provide without pay for their own households. These include caring for household members, cleaning and minor household repairs, cooking and serving meals, washing and ironing clothes and transporting or accompanying family members to and from work and school. In more technical terms, these tasks constitute a 'non-economic' form of production and are excluded from consideration in the United Nations System of National Accounts, the internationally agreed guidelines for measuring national economic activity.

Hazardous unpaid household services involve long hours, an unhealthy environment, unsafe equipment or heavy loads and/or dangerous locations. For statistical measurement, where household chores are included in the calculation of child labour in this report, hazardous household chores refer to those performed by children below the general minimum working age for 21 hours or more per week.[2] This broader definition is only used in discussing differences in child labour by sex.

Current levels and trends



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GLOBAL AND REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Child labour remains unacceptably common in the world today. At the start of 2020, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 160 million children – 63 million girls and 97 million boys – were in child labour, or 1 in 10 children worldwide. Seventy-nine million children – nearly half of all those in child labour – were in hazardous work directly endangering their health, safety and moral development.

This global estimate masks large variations across regions. Child labour prevalence stands at 24 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, three times that of Northern Africa and Western Asia, the region with the second highest prevalence. In absolute terms, the nearly 87 million children in child labour in sub-Saharan Africa are more than in the rest of the world combined.

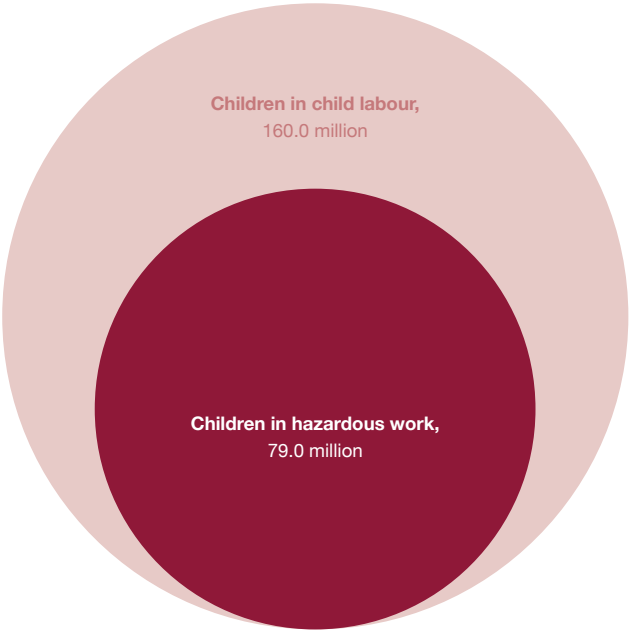
Recent history provides cause for concern. In the last four years, for the first time since 2000, the world did not make progress in reducing child labour. The absolute number of children in child labour increased by over 8 million to 160 million while the proportion of children in child labour remained unchanged. Children in hazardous work mirrored these patterns: The share remained almost unchanged but the number rose by 6.5 million to 79 million.

The pace of progress has varied dramatically across regions. The proportion and number of children in child labour have declined consistently since 2008[3] in Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. Similar progress has proved elusive in sub-Saharan Africa, where child labour has actually gone up since 2012, a trend especially pronounced over the last four years when the region accounted for much of the global increase.

At present, the world is not on track to eliminate child labour by 2025. In order to meet this target, global progress would need to be almost 18 times faster than the rate observed over the past two decades. According to pre-COVID-19 projections based on the pace of change from 2008 to 2016, close to 140 million children will be in child labour in 2025 without accelerated action. The COVID-19 crisis is making these scenarios even more worrisome, with many more children at risk of being pushed into child labour.

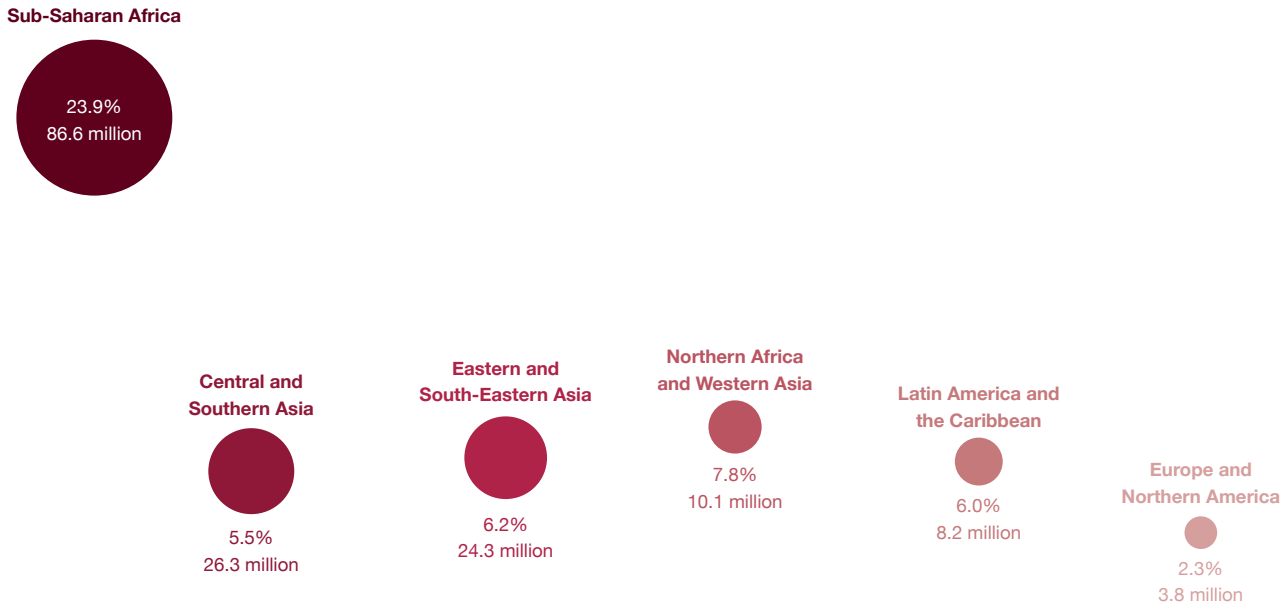
Worldwide, 160 million children are engaged in child labour; 79 million of them are performing hazardous work

Fig 1. Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour and hazardous work



Sub-Saharan Africa stands out as the region with the highest prevalence and largest number of children in child labour

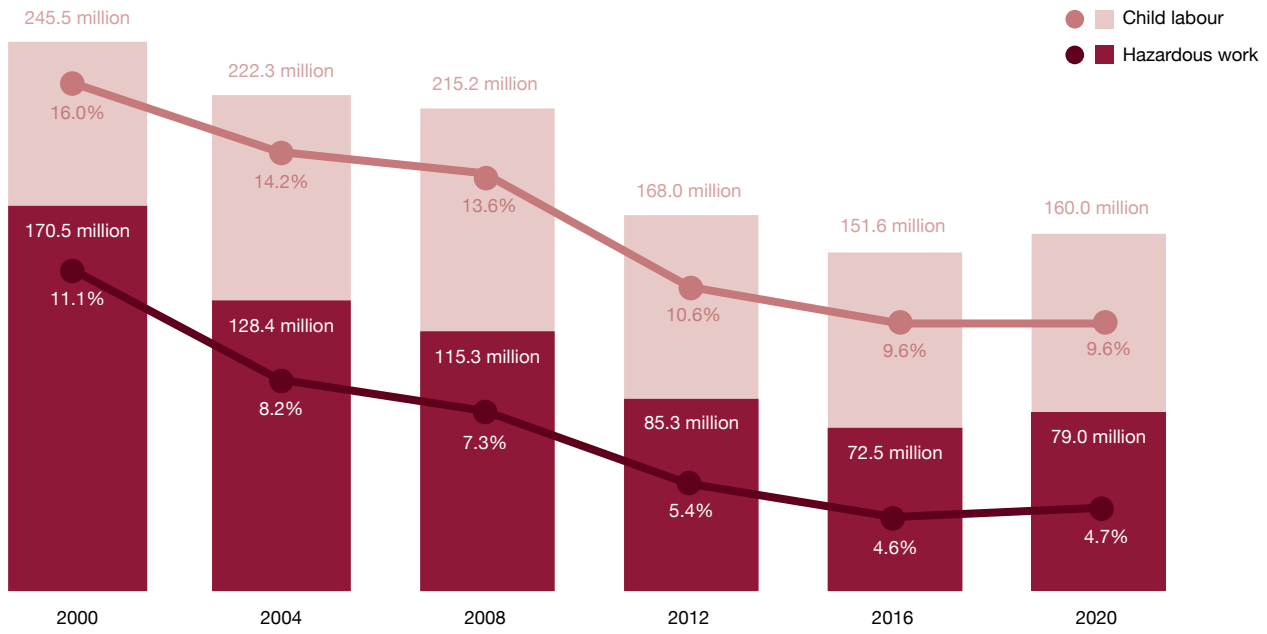
Fig 2. Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by region



Notes: The size of the bubbles is proportionate to the absolute number of children in child labour. The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. For this reason, region-specific numbers do not add up to the global total.

Global progress against child labour has stalled since 2016

Fig 3. Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour and hazardous work

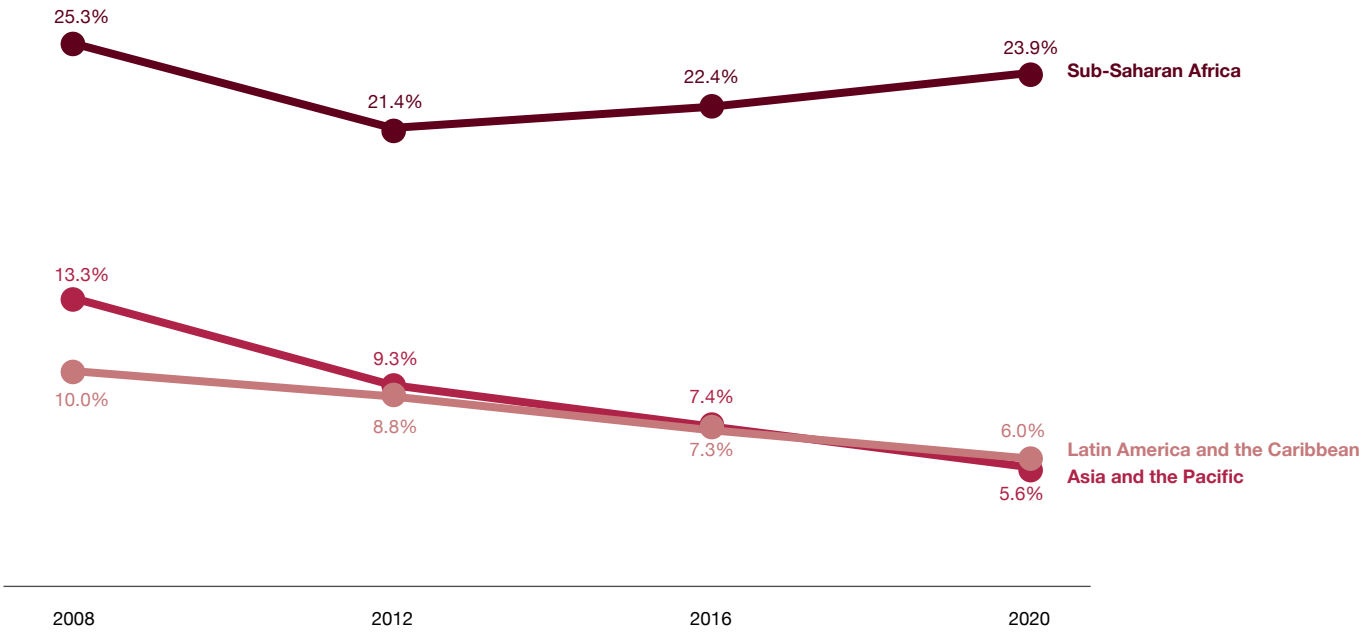




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Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean have seen steady progress on child labour since 2008; similar progress has eluded sub-Saharan Africa

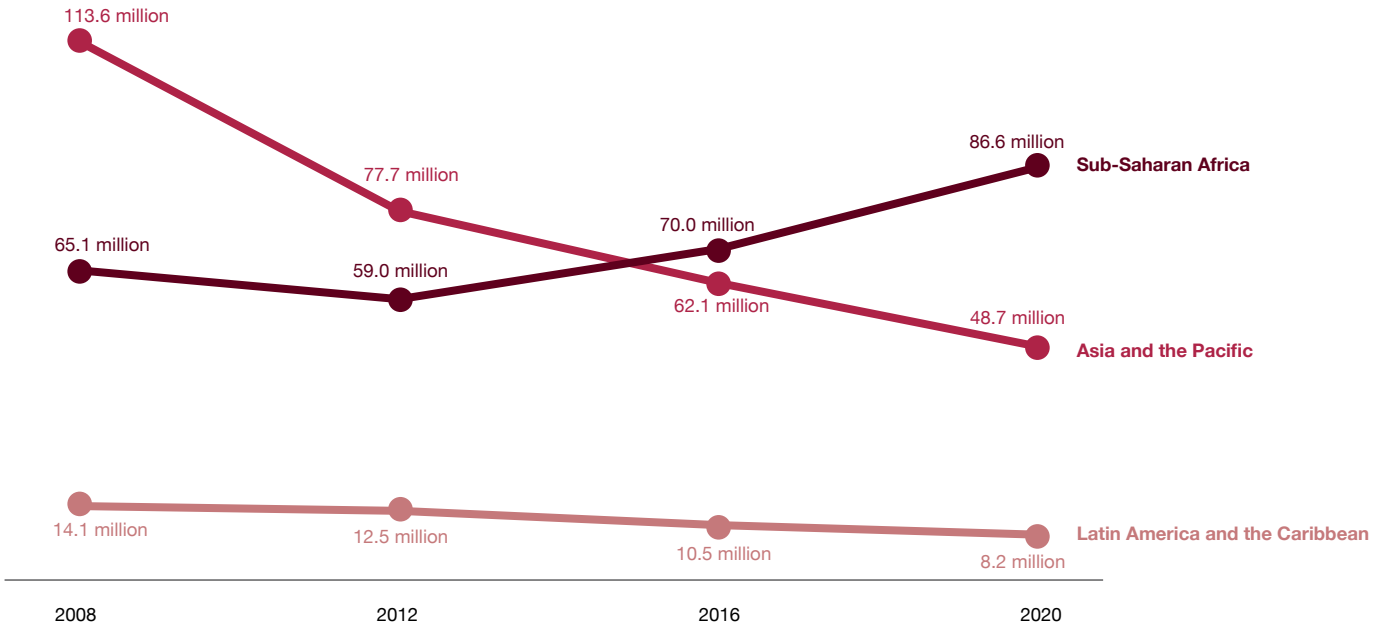
Fig 4. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by region



Notes: The figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. Comparable historical data prior to 2016 were not available for other regions.

The number of children in child labour has increased in sub-Saharan Africa, while it has declined in other parts of the world

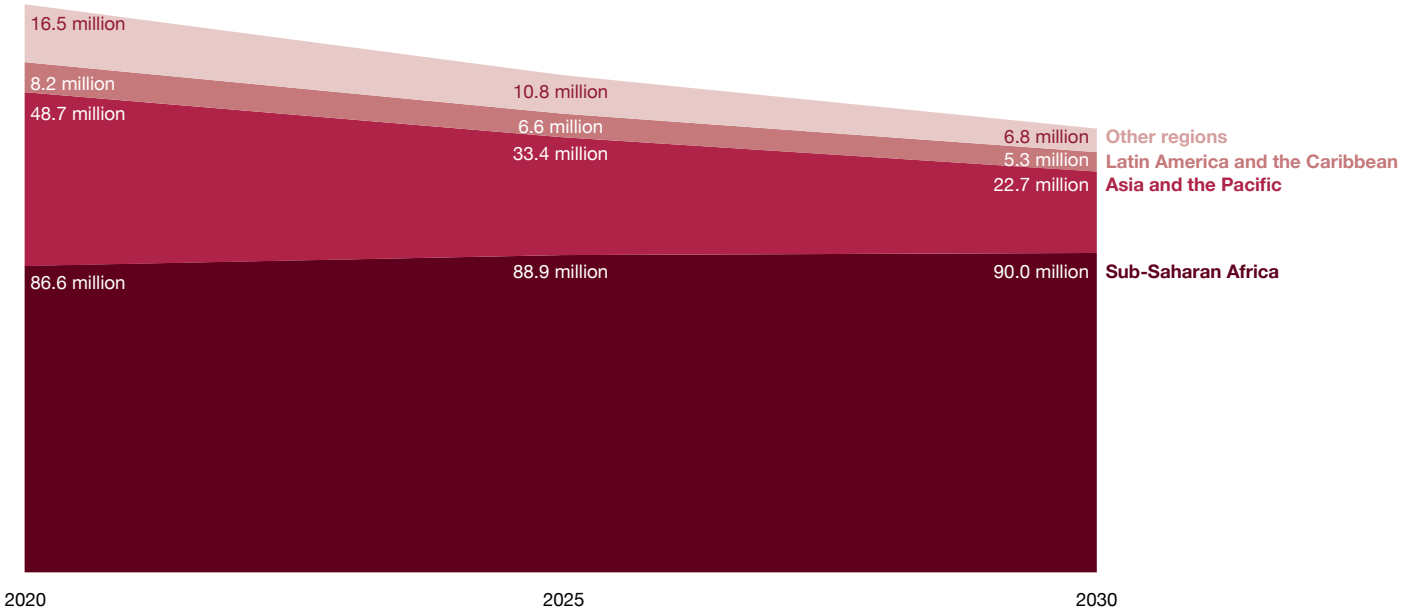
Fig 5. Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by region



Notes: The figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. Comparable historical data prior to 2016 were not available for other regions.

Without accelerated action, close to 140 million children will be in child labour in 2025 and 125 million in 2030

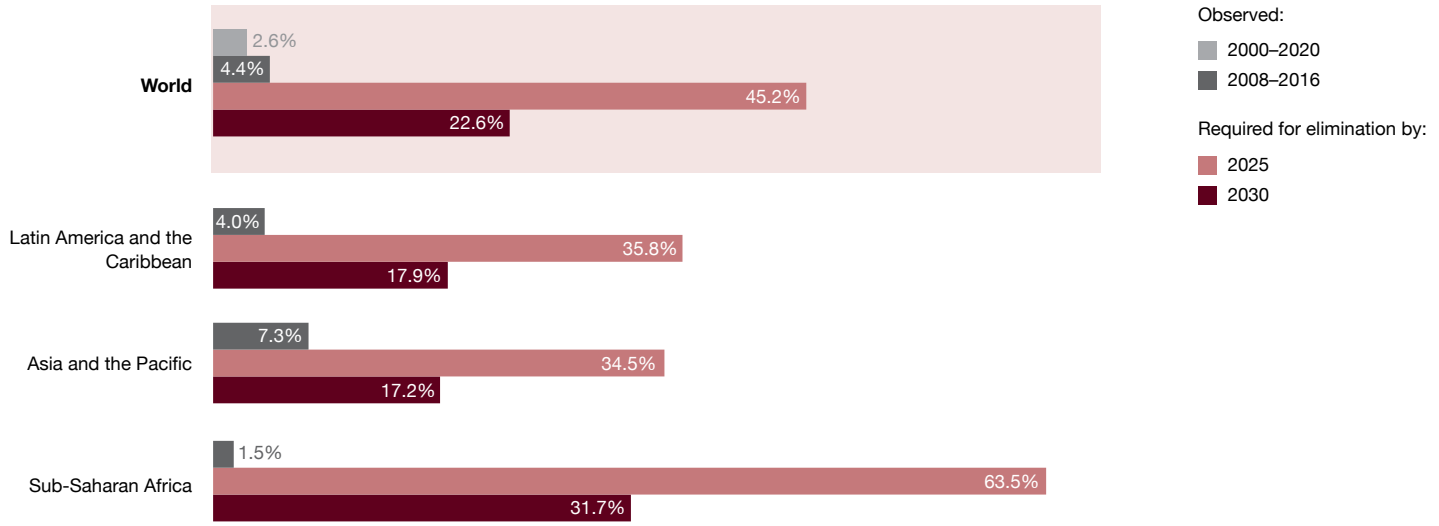
Fig 6. Projected number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour if progress from the 2008–2016 period continues



Notes: The projections build on trends in the percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour between 2008 and 2016, which is the period with the fastest reduction in child labour over the last two decades. They take into consideration demographic trends and show expected values if this progress were to continue. These estimates do not take into account the possible impact of COVID-19. The figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. Required rates could not be calculated for other regions due to the lack of historical data.

Meeting the SDG target to eliminate child labour will require substantial acceleration

Fig 7. Average annual rate of reduction in the percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, observed and required for elimination



Notes: The observed average annual rates of reduction quantify the rate of progress in the prevalence of child labour over each period. A higher rate indicates faster progress. Required rates are calculated to illustrate rates necessary to end child labour by 2025 and 2030. These estimates do not take into account the possible impact of COVID-19. This figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. Required rates could not be calculated for other regions due to the lack of historical data.



Explaining regional trends

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What drives progress in reducing child labour? Some insights come from looking at how regional child labour patterns correlate with broader demographic, economic and development trends.

Poverty reduction. Sub-Saharan Africa has succeeded in reducing poverty in recent years but levels remain high relative to other regions. More than 40 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still lives in extreme poverty.[4] The region saw steady economic growth of over 2 per cent annually for all but one of the last five years, but given rapid population growth, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita actually declined and continues to be low relative to other regions of the world.[5] Rates of inequality remain at persistently high levels in many sub-Saharan African countries.[6]

Levels of informality. Regions making faster progress in reducing child labour have had greater success in reducing informal economic

activity although levels remain high. Many African countries are improving the conditions of informal workers[7] but the region still lags behind in transitioning to formality. Eighty-six per cent of African jobs are in the informal economy, more than any other region.[8] Some of the worst labour practices are clustered in the informal economy, which is mostly unregulated. Informality is associated with lower and less regular incomes, inadequate and unsafe working conditions, extreme job precarity and exclusion from social security schemes, among other factors. All of these can spur families to turn to child labour in the face of financial distress.

Social protection. Despite progress in extending social protection, coverage still falls short in all regions in terms of universality and the adequacy of benefits. A number of African countries have made notable efforts,[9] with spending on social safety nets as a share of income equal to the world average.[10] The region as a whole, however, still has much lower coverage than other regions. Only 17 per cent of the population in Africa is covered by at least one social protection benefit, compared to 66 per cent in the Americas, 43 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and 83 per cent in Europe and Central Asia.[11] Social protection in many cases determines whether or not families resort to child labour.

Education exclusion. There has been a significant net decline in children out of primary school in recent years in all regions. Yet the gap in education exclusion rates between sub-Saharan Africa and other regions remains large.[12] Although public spending on education in sub-Saharan Africa as a share of GDP has trended upwards in recent years, it remains well below the world average.[13]

Population growth. Population growth patterns influence child labour trends with stark differences among regions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a drop in the number of children in child labour by 6 million from 2008 to 2020 occurred as the population aged 5 to 17 fell by 4.8 million. Asia and the Pacific over the same period saw the number of children in child labour decline by 64.9 million as the population aged 5 to 17 increased by 12.8 million. In sub-Saharan Africa, by contrast, the child labour population grew by 21.5 million from 2008 to 2020, while the total population aged 5 to 17 rose by 104.8 million.[14] Considering population growth casts child labour in sub-Saharan Africa in a very different light. The region has kept millions of children out of child labour over the last 12 years even if it has not managed to keep pace with population growth.

Other challenges. Multiple points of crisis contribute to high levels of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa. The region has the majority of fragile and conflict-affected countries; at least one quarter of all countries were fragile or in conflict in every year from 2015 to 2020.[15] Further, the region is home to 39 per cent of the world's refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons, a higher share than any other region.[16] The Arab States region is also particularly affected by crises linked to conflict and state fragility.

The global HIV/AIDS pandemic also continues to exact a disproportionate toll on sub-Saharan Africa, which has the largest number of people living with HIV and accounts for 59 per cent of new infections.[17] In addition, the region's limited resilience to climate change puts livelihoods at risk and undercuts prospects for moving out of poverty. Climate-related natural disasters, including floods and droughts that cause large-scale crop and livestock losses, occur with increasing regularity.



PROFILE OF CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR

Child labour across ages

The results of the global estimates make clear that child labour remains an important concern across the spectrum of children aged 5 to 17. Of the 160 million children in child labour, 89.3 million are young children aged 5 to 11, 35.6 million are children aged 12 to 14, and 35 million are children aged 15 to 17.

Child labour among children aged 12 to 14 and 15 to 17 continued to fall in both absolute and percentage terms over the last four years. By contrast, the 2016-2020 period saw a worrying rise in child labour among young children aged 5 to 11. In 2016, there were signs of slowing progress among young children. Today the trend line is moving in the wrong direction. The reason for backtracking is not clear and needs to be investigated as a priority.

Hazardous work accounted for about two fifths of the total number of additional children aged 5 to 11 in child labour during the four-year period. While children of all ages must be protected from hazardous work, its persistence and now growth among younger children is a particular concern.

Boys and girls in child labour

Involvement in child labour is more common for boys than girls at all ages. For children aged 5 to 17, child labour prevalence is nearly one third higher for boys. The gender gap grows with age, and boys are roughly twice as likely as girls to be in child labour in the 15 to 17 age range.

Comparisons of child labour estimates for boys and girls must be accompanied by an important caveat. The definition of child labour upon which the estimates are based does not include involvement in household chores in children's own homes, an area of work for which girls shoulder a disproportionate burden of the responsibility in most societies.

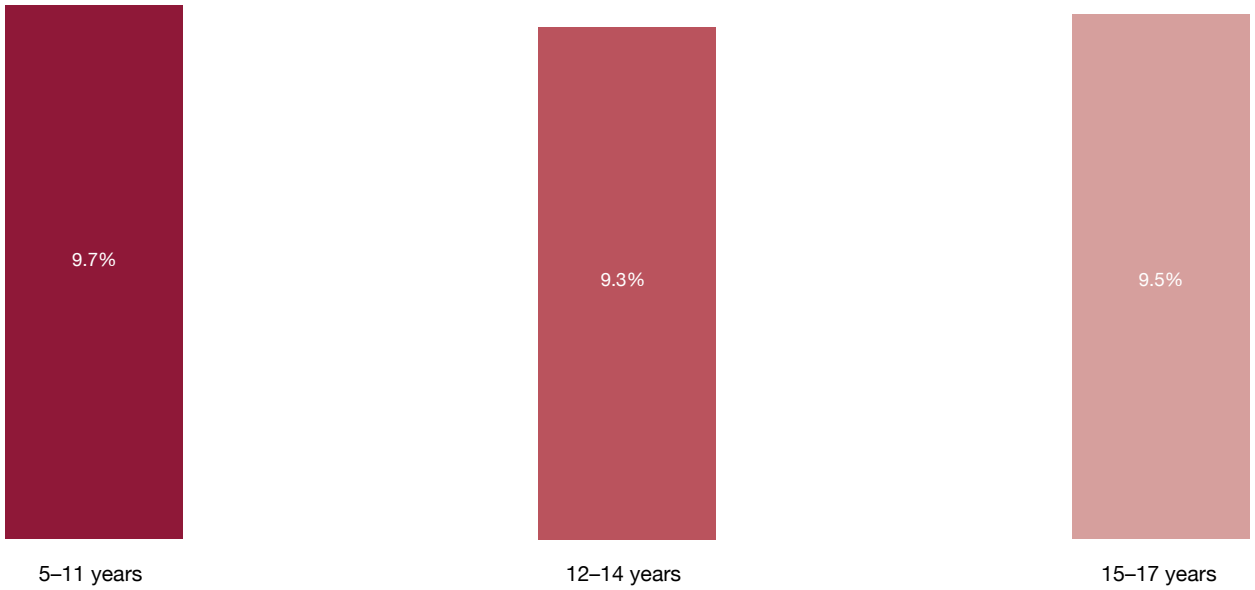
The 2020 global estimates look for the first time at how the inclusion of household chores affects overall child labour estimates as well as estimates of male child labour relative to female child labour. The results are noteworthy. When the definition of child labour is expanded to include involvement in household chores for 21 hours or more per week, child labour prevalence increases for both sexes, but the rise in female child labour is much larger. As a result, the gender gap in child labour prevalence is reduced by almost half, from 2.8 percentage points to 1.6 percentage points.

Child labour in rural and urban settings

Estimates of child labour by rural or urban residence, available for the first time in the 2020 global estimates, indicate that child labour is much more common in rural areas. The prevalence of child labour there is about three times higher than in urban areas. Child labour in rural economies primarily takes place in agriculture.

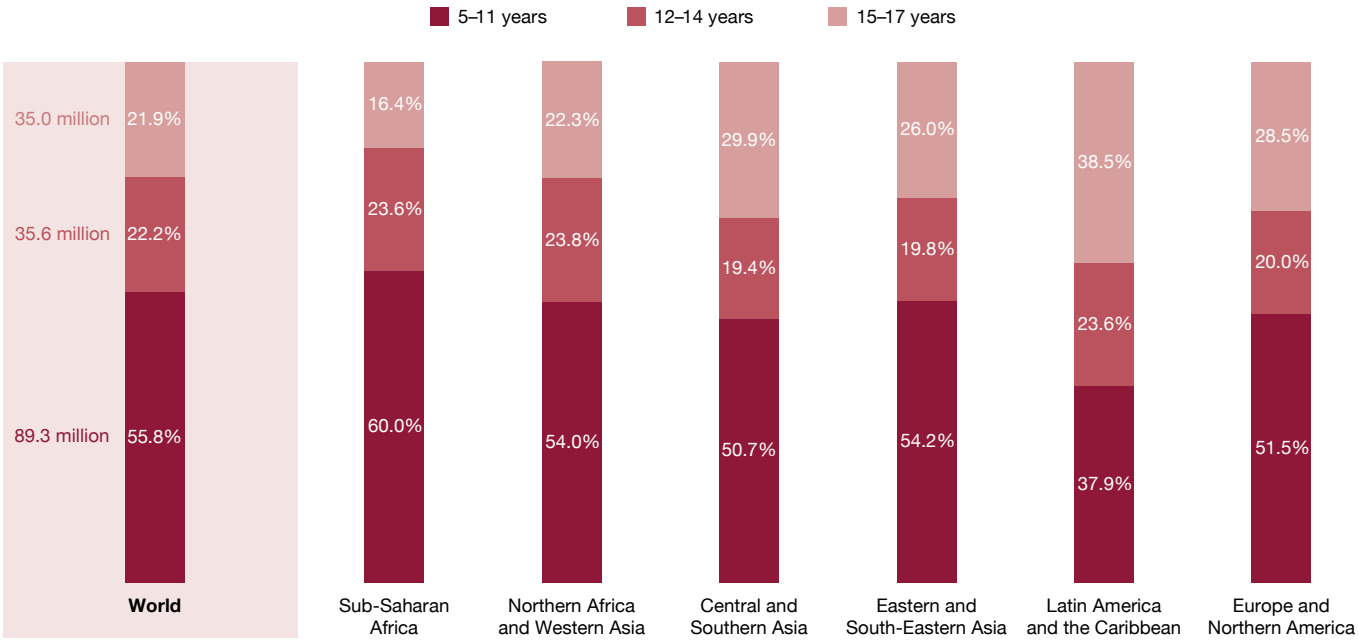
The proportion of children in child labour is similar across age groups

Fig 8. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by age



Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest share of young children in child labour, while Latin America and the Caribbean has the largest share of older children

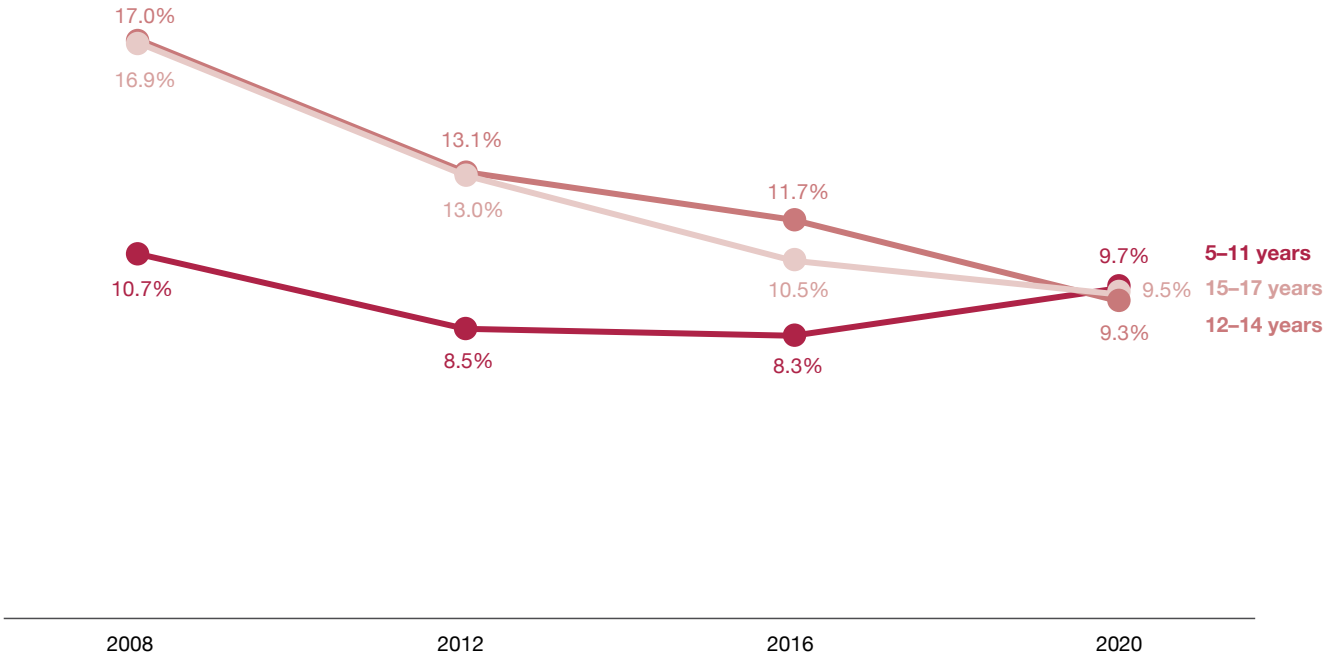
Fig 9. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by age and region



Notes: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent and age-specific numbers do not add up to the global total. The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. Caution is warranted when interpreting data for Europe and Northern America due to the small number of children in child labour.

Since 2008, child labour has declined steadily among children aged 12 and older; the last four years saw a worrying increase among younger children

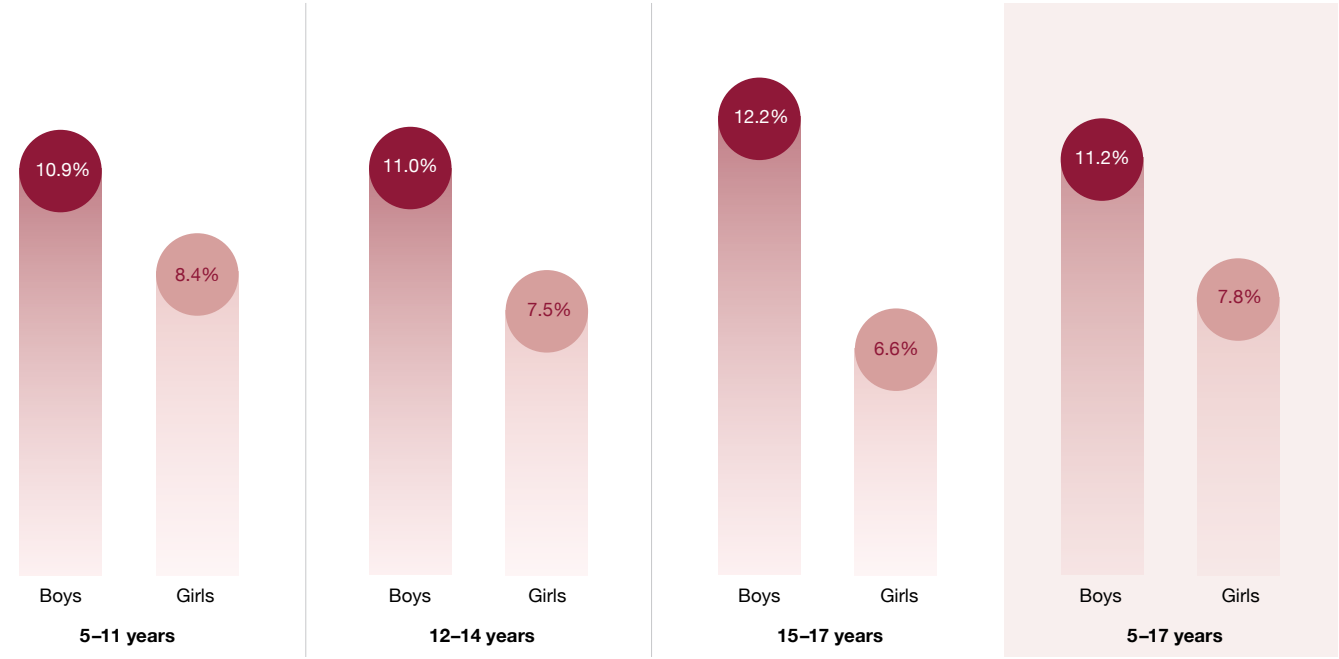
Fig 10. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by age





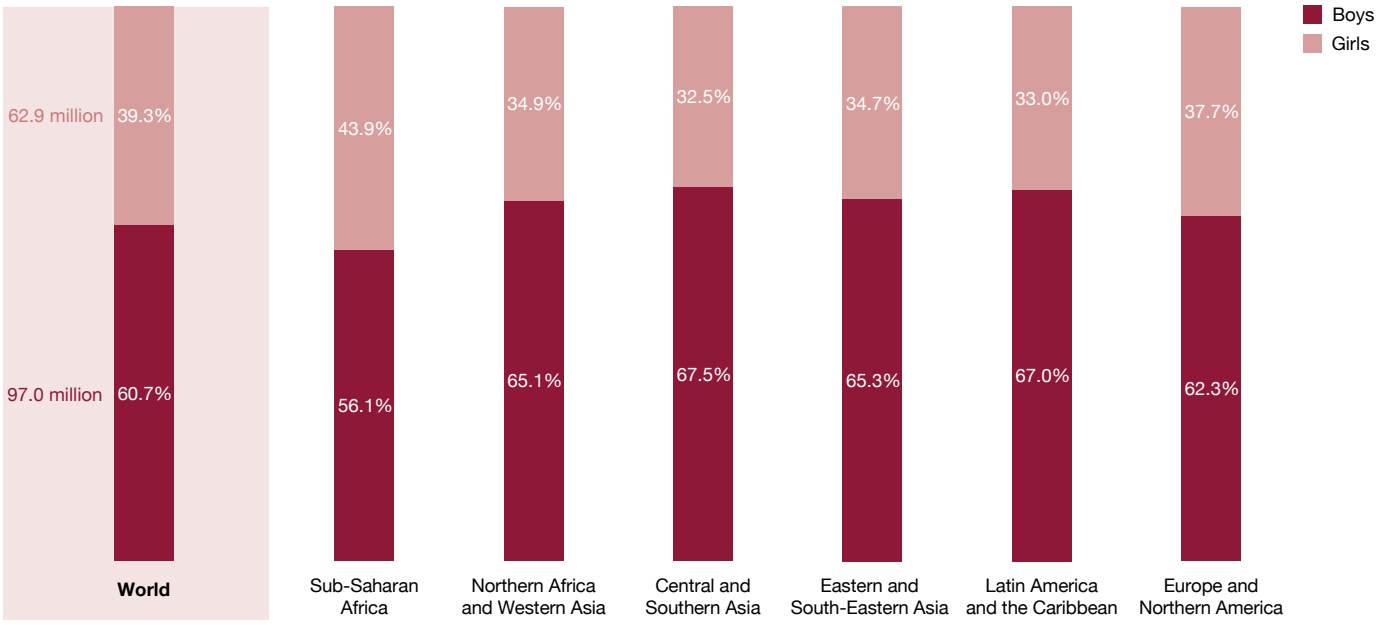
Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls at every age

Fig 11. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by age and sex



Boys account for the largest share of children in child labour across all regions

Fig 12. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 in child labour, by sex and region

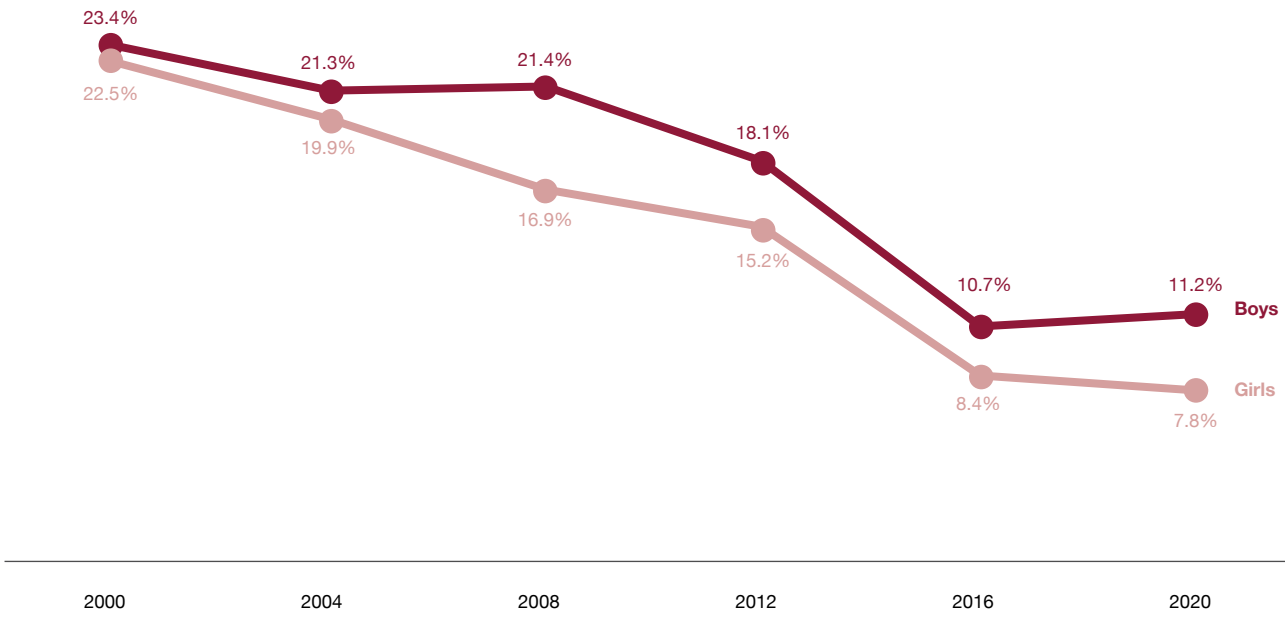


Notes: Due to rounding, sex-specific numbers do not add up to the global total. The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. Caution is warranted when interpreting data for Europe and Northern America due to the small number of children in child labour.



Child labour has declined faster among girls than boys

Fig 13. Percentage of boys and girls aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by sex

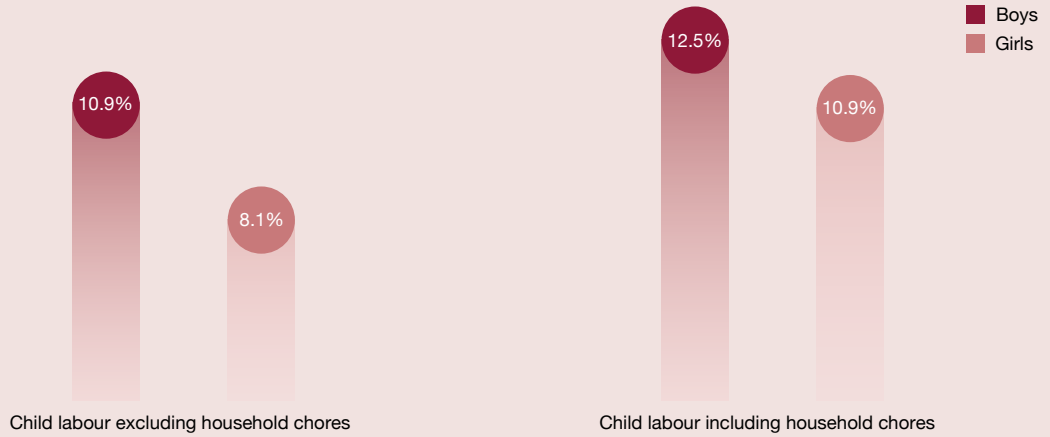




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When household chores are taken into account, the gender gap in child labour prevalence narrows

Fig 14. Percentage of children aged 5 to 14 years in child labour (including and excluding household chores performed for 21 hours or more per week), by sex



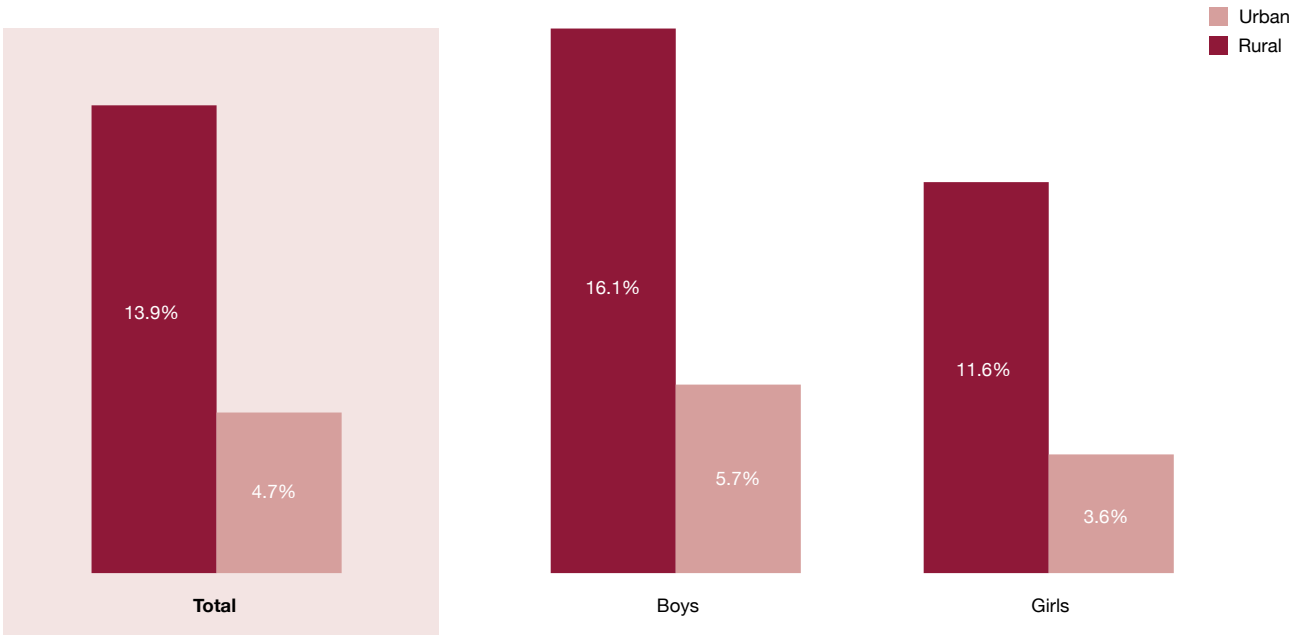
Notes: Household chores refer to services children provide without pay for their own households. These include caring for household members, cleaning and minor household repairs, cooking and serving meals, washing and ironing clothes, and transporting or accompanying family members to and from work and school. For statistical measurement, where household chores are included in the calculation of child labour, hazardous household chores refer to those performed by children below the general minimum working age for 21 hours or more per week.



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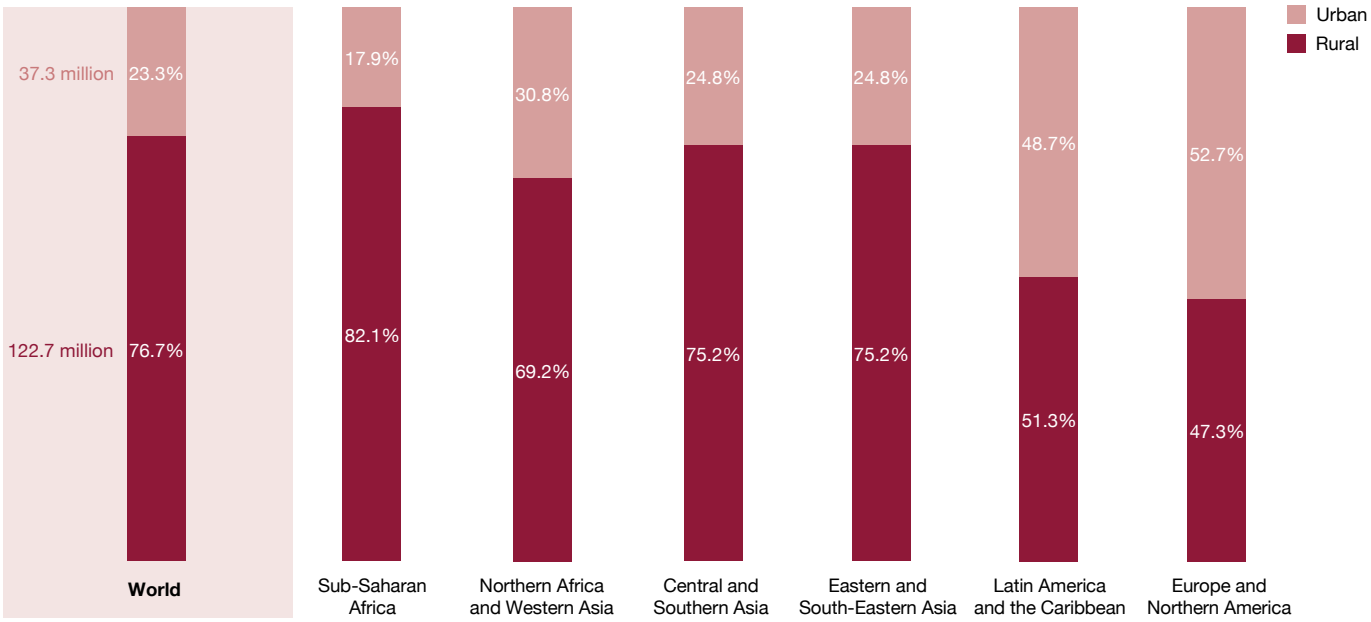
The prevalence of child labour in rural areas is close to three times higher than in urban areas

Fig 15. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by residence and sex



Child labour is more common in rural than in urban areas in almost all regions

Fig 16. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by residence and region



Notes: The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. Caution is warranted when interpreting data for Europe and Northern America due to the small number of children in child labour.



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CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD LABOUR

Most child labour – for boys and girls alike – occurs in agriculture. This is especially the case among younger children, for whom agriculture often serves as an entry point. Child labour takes place in family subsistence and smallholder farming, commercial plantations and other forms of commercial farming, agro-industrial complexes, capture fisheries, aquaculture, post-harvest fish processing and forestry.

Services and industry account for smaller but still substantial shares of children in child labour. In services, child labour includes domestic work and work in commerce, transport and motor vehicle repair. Child labour in industry comprises work in construction, mining and manufacturing. While agriculture has roughly equal shares of boys and girls in child labour, a greater degree of gender specialization occurs in services and industry. Girls in child labour are much more likely to be in services, including domestic work, and boys are more prone to be in industry.

The sectoral composition of child labour differs considerably across regions, although agriculture accounts for the largest share everywhere. In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture plays the most important role, accounting for over four of every five children in child labour. Shares in services and industry are higher in other regions, but only two, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Northern America, have combined shares of these two sectors exceeding that of agriculture. Not coincidently, these two regions have the highest shares of children aged 15 to 17 in the overall child labour population.

Child labour is frequently hazardous wherever it takes place, with many variations. In family smallholder and commercial farming, common hazards include exposure to inorganic fertilizers, pesticides and other dangerous agrochemicals; physically strenuous tasks such as carrying heavy loads; long periods of standing, stooping and bending, and repetitive and forceful movements in awkward body positions; exposure to extreme temperatures; use of dangerous cutting tools such as machetes and scythes; and use of and exposure to farm vehicles and heavy farm machinery.[18] In capture fisheries, children can face prolonged periods at sea, away from their families, in situations of extreme vulnerability stemming from their isolation on the fishing vessel, the tasks they must perform, and the dangers of inclement weather and extreme temperatures, among others.[19]

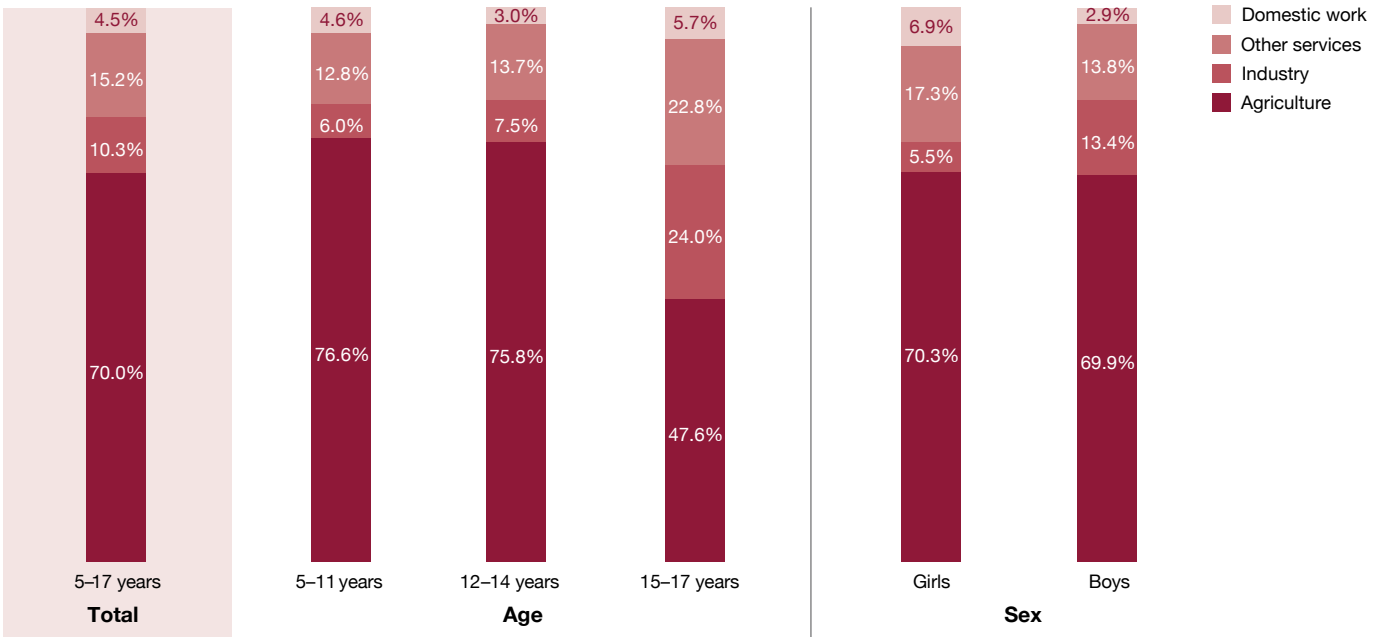
Artisanal and small-scale mining can force children to work in deep underground shafts, haul heavy loads of rock and use toxic chemicals to separate minerals or precious metals from ore.[20] The isolated nature of domestic work renders children particularly vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Street vending hazards can include night work, exposure to traffic and motor vehicle exhaust fumes and, in extreme cases, the risk of being drawn into illicit activities.

These are just a few examples of countless hazards that children in child labour may confront, all of which must be urgently addressed in line with the universally ratified ILO Convention No. 182.

The largest share of child labour takes place within the family, where hazardous work accounts for a substantial portion, counter to the common perception of the family as a safer working environment. In sub-Saharan Africa, 82 per cent of all child labour occurs within the family. The relative importance of family work has grown in the last four years, reflecting the growth in the shares of young children and African children in the overall child population. Both groups are especially likely to engage in family work.

The agricultural sector accounts for the largest share of child labour worldwide

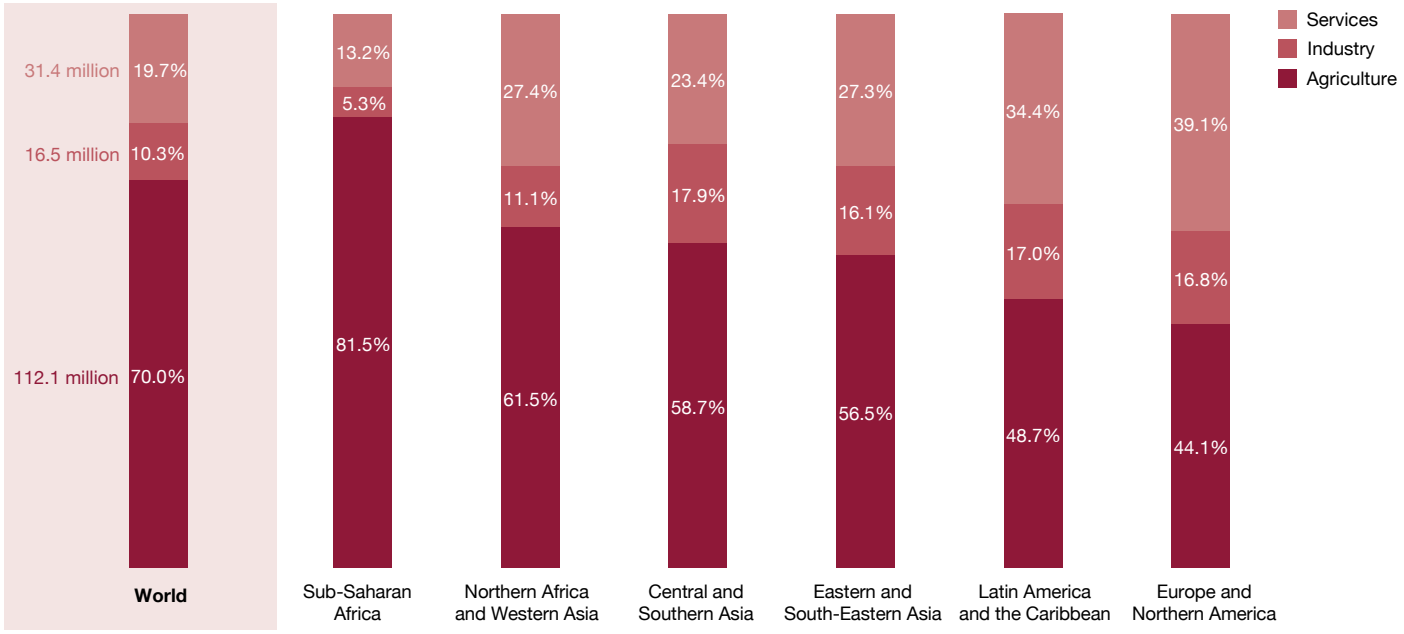
Fig 17. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by sector of economic activity, age and sex



Note: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.

The sectoral composition of child labour varies considerably across regions

Fig 18. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by sector of economic activity and region



Notes: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent. The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. Caution is warranted when interpreting data for Europe and Northern America due to the small number of children in child labour.

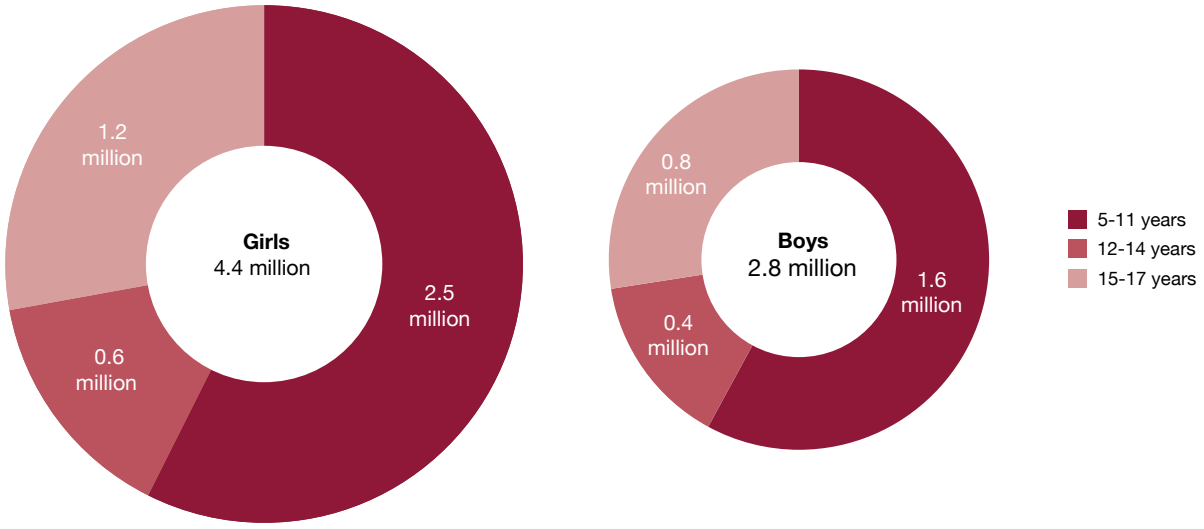


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Worldwide, 7.1 million children are engaged in forms of domestic work that constitute child labour

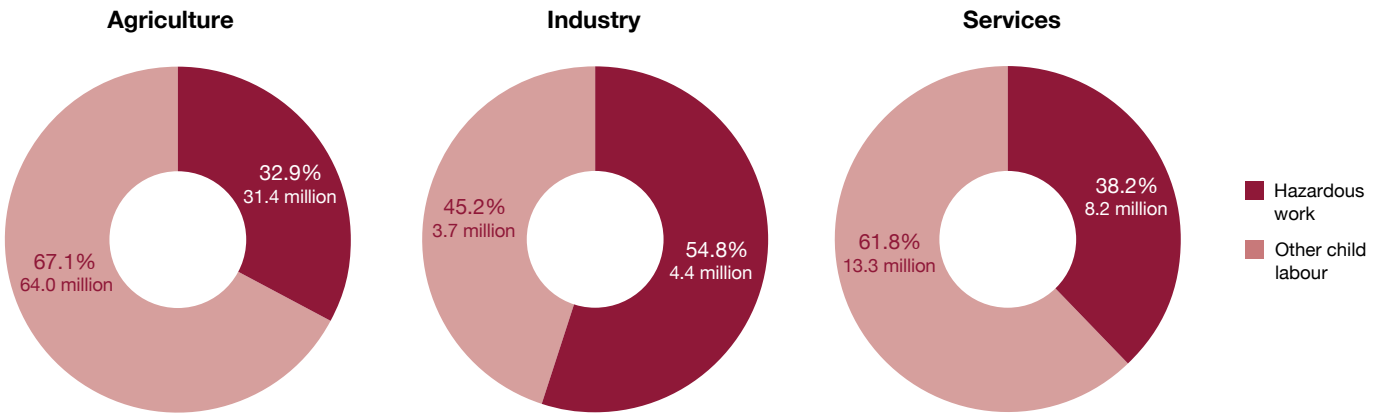
Fig 19. Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour in domestic work, by age and sex



Note: Due to rounding, age-specific numbers for girls do not add up to the total.

Hazardous work constitutes a sizeable share of child labour among children aged 5 to 14 across all three sectors

Fig 20. Number and percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 14 years in child labour, by hazardous work status and sector of economic activity

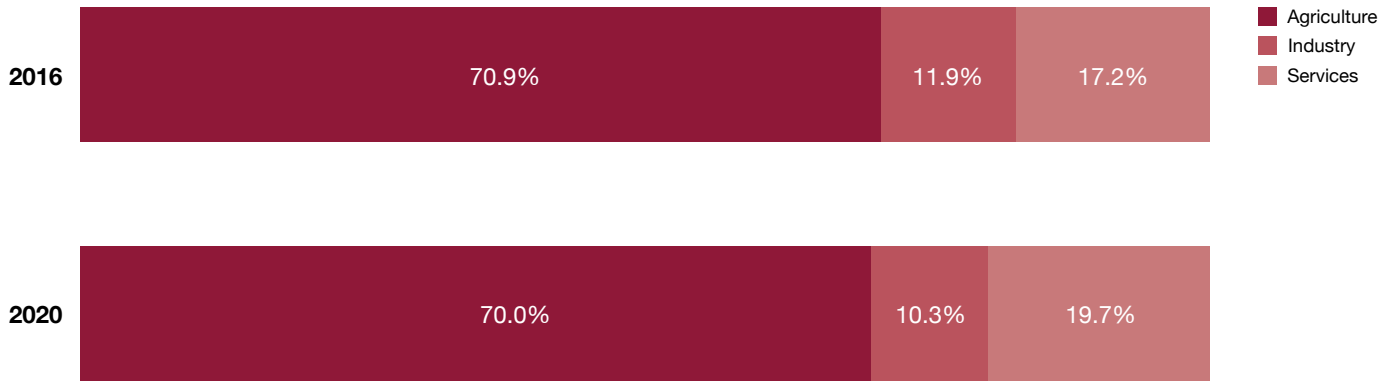




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The sectoral composition of child labour changed only marginally between 2016 and 2020

Fig 21. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by sector of economic activity

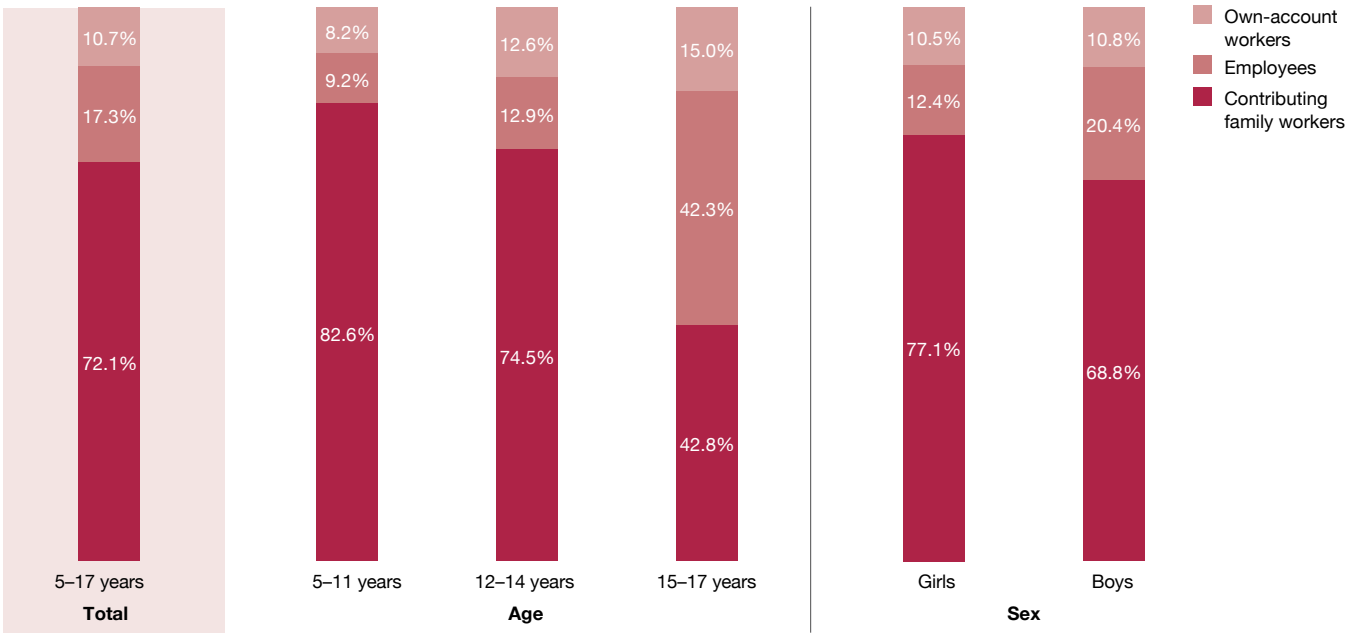




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Most children in child labour work within their own family unit

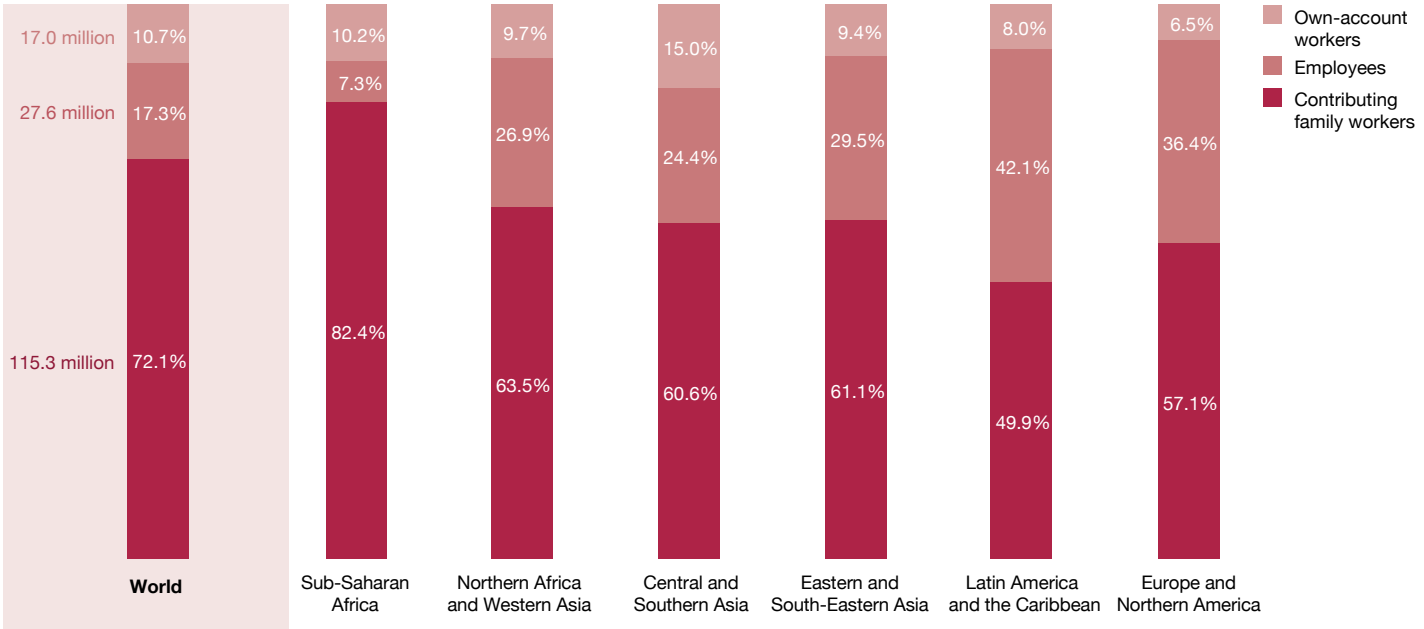
Fig 22. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by status at work, age and sex



Note: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.

Family work predominates across all regions

Fig 23. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by status at work and region

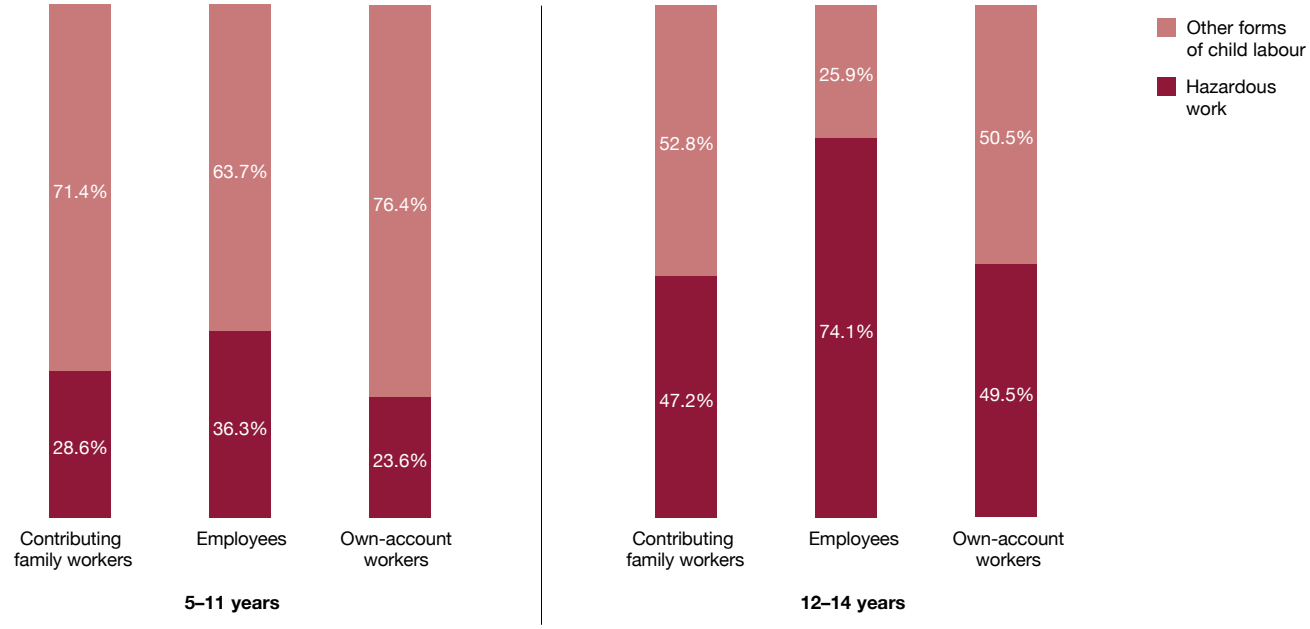


Notes: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent and numbers do not add up to the global total. The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. Caution is warranted when interpreting data for Europe and Northern America due to the small number of children in child labour.



A significant share of child labour within the family is hazardous

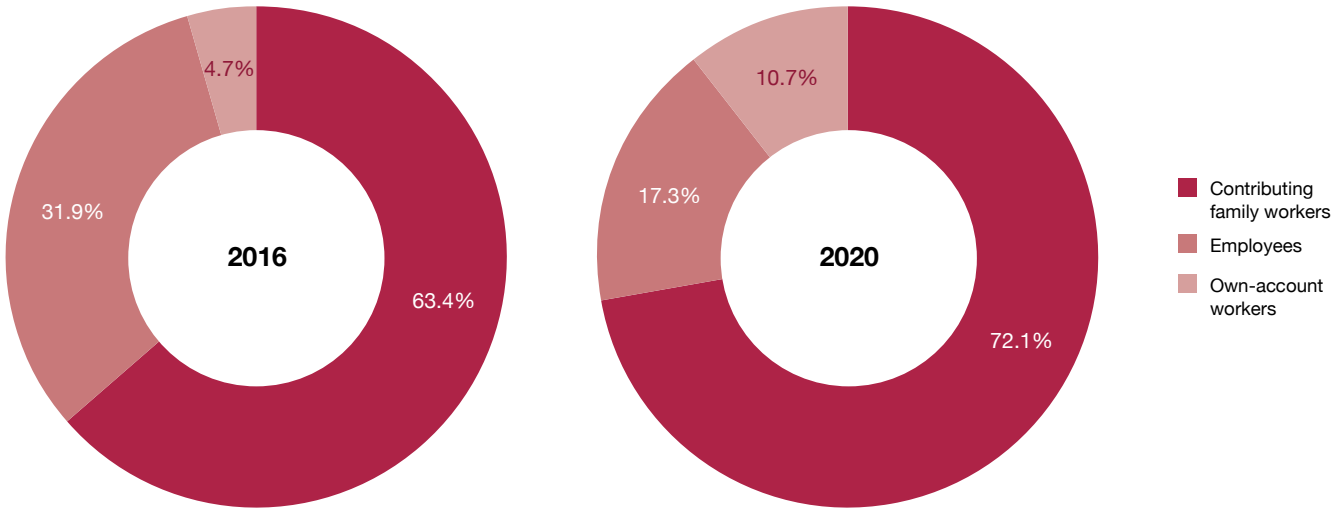
Fig 24. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 14 years in hazardous work and other forms of child labour, by status at work and age





Family work has grown in relative importance over the last four years

Fig 25. Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by status at work



Note: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.



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CHILD LABOUR AND EDUCATION

More than one third of all children in child labour are excluded from school. Hazardous child labour constitutes an even greater barrier to school attendance.

Especially worrying is the large share of younger children in child labour who are excluded from school despite falling within the age range for compulsory education. Nearly 28 per cent of 5 to 11 year olds and 35 per cent of 12 to 14 year olds in child labour are out of school. This severely constrains their prospects for decent work in youth and adulthood as well as their life potential overall. Boys and urban children in child labour are slightly more likely to be out of school, but differences by sex and residence are not large.

There is rarely a single reason for why children are in child labour instead of attending school. In many cases, the work demands so much time and energy that it becomes impossible for children to enter, persist and succeed in schooling. In other instances, children work because they lack access to quality, free schools providing a worthwhile alternative. Decisions concerning children's education can be influenced by family perceptions of its importance and the potential returns in the labour market.

For every child in child labour who has reached a compulsory age for education but is excluded from school, another two struggle to balance the demands of school and work. They face compromises in education as a result and should not be forgotten in the discussion of child labour and education. Children who must combine child labour with schooling generally lag behind non-working peers in grade progression and learning achievement, and are more likely to drop out prematurely.

Over one third of children in child labour are out of school

Fig 26. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour not attending school, by age, sex and residence



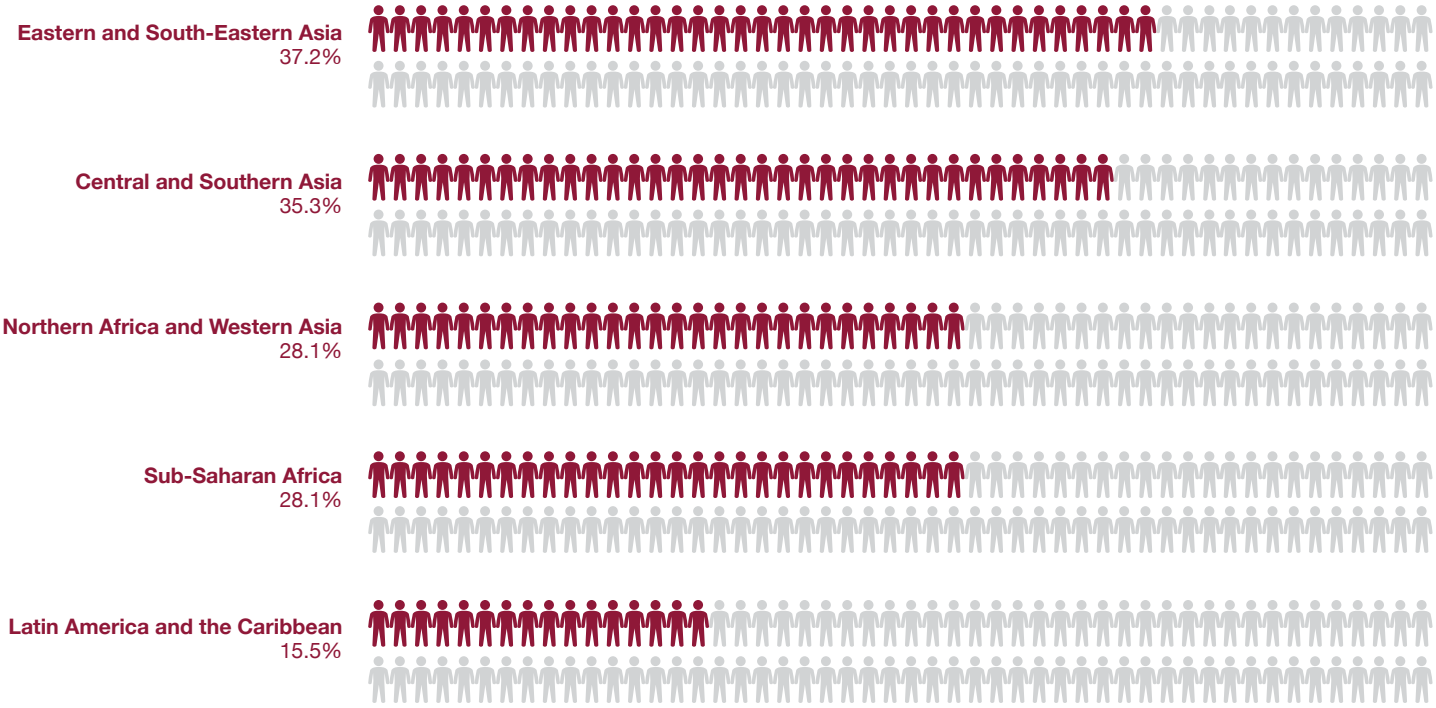
Children engaged in hazardous work are even less likely to attend school

Fig 27. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in hazardous work not attending school, by age, sex and residence



Across all regions, significant shares of children in child labour are out of school

Fig 28. Percentage of children aged 5 to 14 years in child labour not attending school, by region



Notes: The figure shows regional groupings used for SDG reporting. The region of Oceania is omitted because of low data coverage. The region of Europe and Northern America is omitted because of the low levels of children in child labour and out of school.



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CHILD LABOUR, NATIONAL INCOME AND STATE FRAGILITY

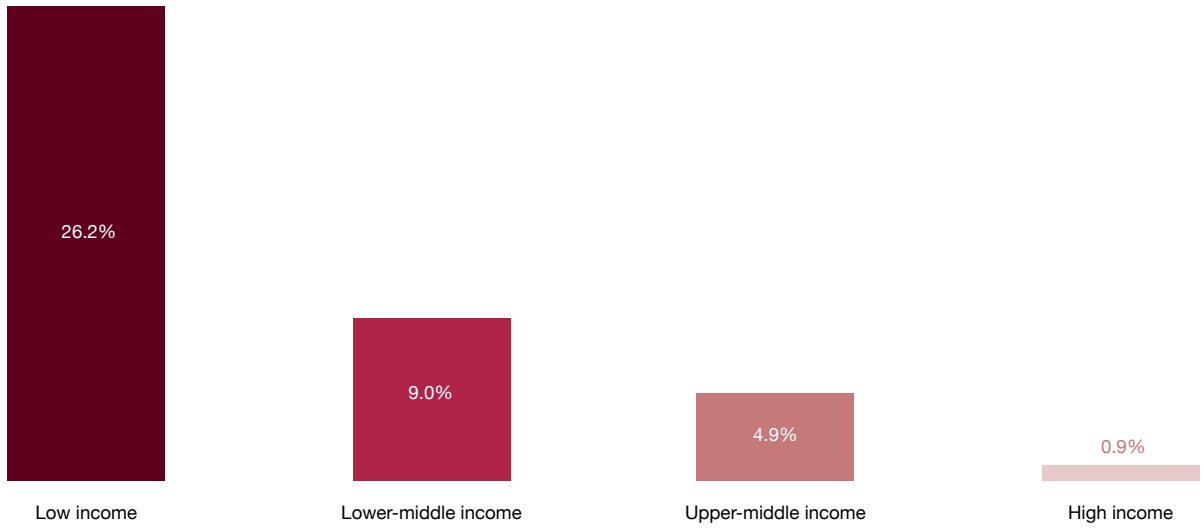
The percentage of children in child labour is highest in low-income countries. This is not surprising given a strong two-way link between child labour and national income. High levels of child labour hinder current income growth by reducing unskilled wages and discouraging skill-intensive technologies. They also dampen future growth by interfering with children's education and physical development, leading to a less productive adult workforce. Rising national incomes improve the ability of families to make adequate livelihoods and cope with shocks without resorting to child labour.[21]

Child labour is by no means strictly a low-income country problem, however. Three of every five children in child labour live in middle-income countries. For greater national wealth to translate into reduced child labour, economic growth must be inclusive and its benefits equitably distributed. The tax revenues it generates must be invested in programmes and services that make a difference for children, above all in education and social protection. That large pockets of child labour persist even in relatively rich countries points to important remaining policy challenges.

Countries with high levels of institutional and social fragility[22] tend to have more child labour, triple the global average. While this simple correlation should not be overinterpreted, it underscores the importance of stability, policies for social inclusion and equity, and robust public institutions to prevent child labour.

Not surprisingly, child labour is most prevalent in low-income countries

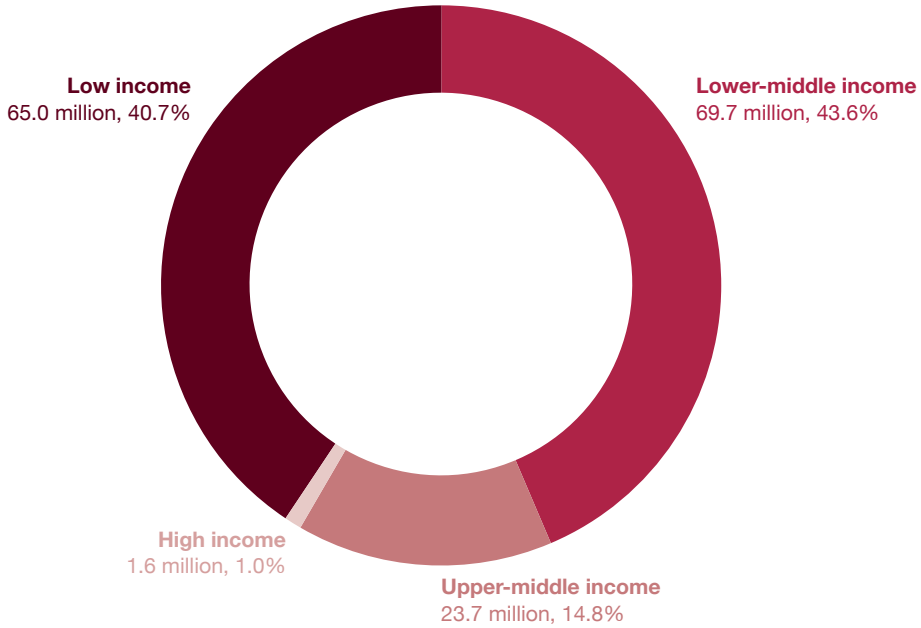
Fig 29. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by national income group



Notes: Low-income countries had a gross national income (GNI) per capita in 2020 of $1,045 or less, lower-middle-income countries of between $1,046 and $4,125, upper-middle-income countries of between $4,126 and $12,735, and high-income countries of $12,736 or more. Calculations used the World Bank Atlas method.

Yet more than half of all child labour occurs in middle-income countries

Fig 30. Number and percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by national income group

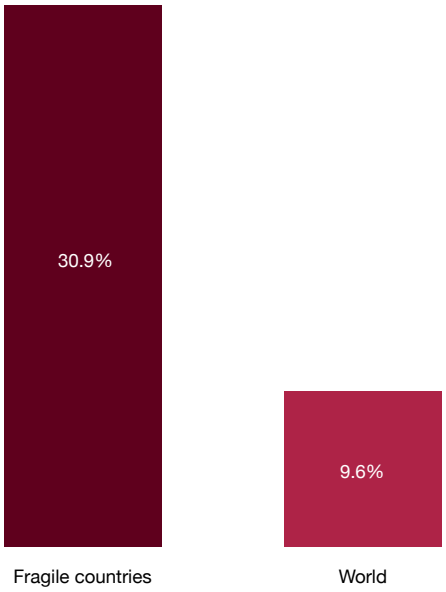


Notes: Low-income countries had a GNI per capita in 2020 of $1,045 or less, lower-middle-income countries of between $1,046 and $4,125, upper-middle-income countries of between $4,126 and $12,735, and high-income countries of $12,736 or more. Calculations used the World Bank Atlas method. Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.



Child labour in situations of fragility is three times higher than the world average

Fig 31. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, worldwide and in countries with high levels of institutional and social fragility

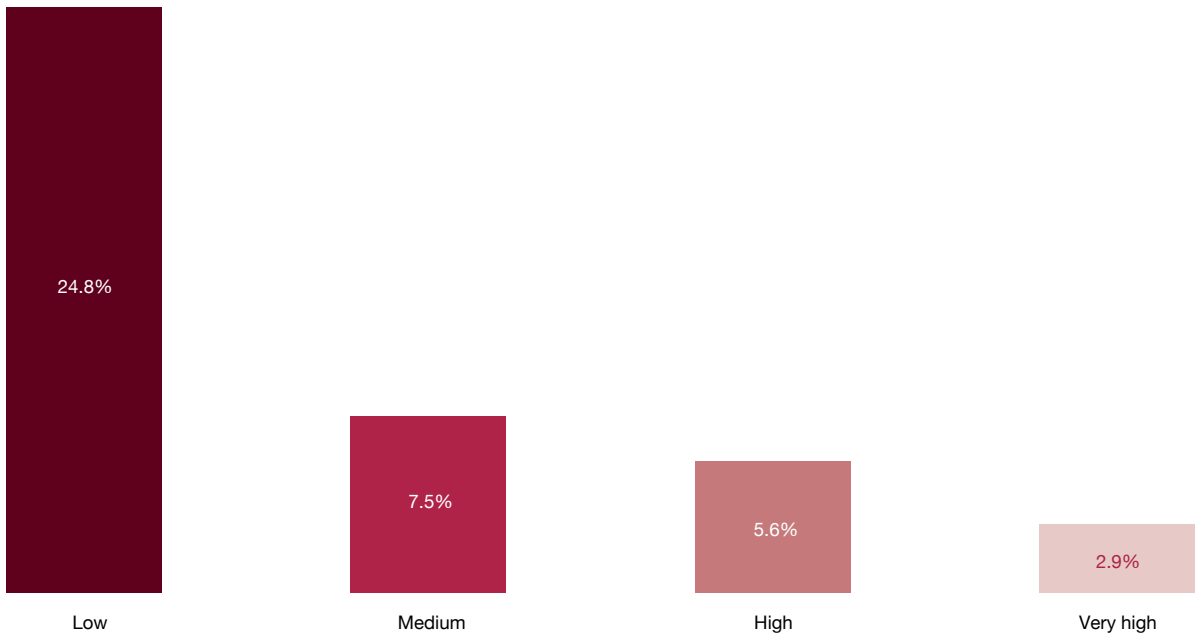


Notes: According to the Revised Classification of Fragility and Conflict Situations for World Bank Group Engagement, fragile countries are defined as those with one or more of the following: (a) the weakest institutional and policy environment (as measured using a set of 16 criteria grouped into four clusters: economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public sector management and institutions); or (b) the presence of a UN peacekeeping operation, since this reflects a decision by the international community that a significant investment is needed to maintain peace and stability there; or (c) flight across borders of 2,000 or more per 100,000 population, who are internationally regarded as refugees in need of international protection, as this signals a major political or security crisis. Countries satisfying these criteria and also engaged in medium- or high-intensity conflicts are not considered, since such countries have gone beyond fragility.



Child labour declines as the level of human development increases

Fig 32. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by the Human Development Index



Notes: Countries are grouped into four categories according to the 2019 Human Development Index, which links measures of education, health and income. The ranges are: very high (0.800 or greater), high (0.700–0.799), medium (0.550–0.699) and low (less than 0.550).

The impact of COVID-19



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The intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic with child labour globally offers substantial cause for concern. In 2020, the pandemic increased the number of children in income-poor households by an estimated 142 million, adding to the 582 million children already in poverty in 2019.[23] Their families have suffered job and income losses, seen cuts in remittances and experienced a host of other shocks.

In such circumstances, a large body of evidence affirms that families may turn to child labour as a coping mechanism.[24] School closures during lockdowns add to the risks, especially for children in vulnerable situations, as they are even more likely to work when going to school is not a viable option. When children leave school and enter paid employment, it can be very difficult for them to resume their education.[25]

Growing anecdotal evidence sheds light on how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting children. Human Rights Watch, for example, collected testimonies from 81 children in Ghana, Nepal and Uganda who have been newly pushed into child labour or endure more difficult work circumstances. Some indicated that their families no longer had sufficient food and they were working to get enough to eat. Children said that their work was frequently long and arduous – one third in each country had to work for at least 10 hours a day, and some described working for as many as 16 hours. Those already working before the crisis struck said they were working more since the closure of schools.[26]

Other accounts are emerging around the world. An International Cocoa Initiative assessment of 263 communities in Côte d'Ivoire found a significant increase in child labour in cocoa businesses from July to September 2020 compared to the same period 12 months earlier.[27] Data from Ecuador indicated a more than one-third rise in child labour prevalence since the pandemic began.[28] In Egypt, children are reportedly being sent to work in cotton cultivation and other agricultural work.[29] In São Paulo, Brazil, child labour increased by 26 per cent between May and July 2020 in households assisted by UNICEF.[30]

Several reports have emphasized school closures as driving child labour. In a survey of eight West African countries, children consistently reported working because there was no school. They said that their presence at home raised the expectation that they should work to help their families, which made distance learning difficult even when it was available.[31] In Burkina Faso, reports of more children working alongside their parents in granite mining have indicated that this is in part because their parents did not want to leave them at home unsupervised during school closures.[32]

The impact of the pandemic on child labour, however, does not always fit common assumptions. Preliminary analysis of the limited number of countries with survey data from before and after the pandemic suggests that the most common immediate effect has been a decline in children's involvement in economic activity.[33] The large-scale destruction of jobs arising from the lockdowns and from the fall-off in demand in some economic sectors appears, at least in these countries, to have affected jobs performed by children. These results, however, refer to children's economic activity, which is a broader concept than child labour as it includes permitted forms of children's work. The results also relate primarily to older children, aged 15 to 17, in middle-income countries.

A modelling exercise provides further insights into the likely near-term impact of COVID-19 on child labour. Based on a simple model that uses the latest poverty projections to predict changes in child labour up to 2022,[34] it suggests that the net effect of the pandemic during this period is likely to be a substantial additional rise in child labour. Any immediate decline due to disruptions in the broader labour market is likely to be significantly outweighed by a poverty-driven rise in child labour over a slightly longer time horizon.

The model predicts 8.9 million more children in child labour by the end of 2022. Young children aged 5 to 11 account for over half (4.9 million) of the total predicted additional children in child labour. This escalation reflects only the poverty effects of the crisis; the calculation likely understates the total impact of COVID-19 on child labour, such as through unprecedented disruptions to children's education.

Yet the increase in child labour is by no means a foregone conclusion. In addition to the 'baseline' scenario reported above, in which social protection remains constant, two additional scenarios were considered. Both demonstrate the substantial influence of social protection coverage on child labour. In the first 'downside' scenario, social protection coverage slips from the current level in each national income group by an amount proportional to the standard deviation of current coverage levels in each group (Table 1). In the second 'mitigated' scenario, the opposite occurs. Globally, the goal for social protection is much more ambitious, calling for nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures, including social protection floors, for all.

The results are dramatic. Extending social protection by the amounts specified in Table 1 would reduce the number of children in child labour by 15.1 million by the end of 2022, more than offsetting the impact of COVID-19 and accelerating progress towards ending child labour altogether. If austerity measures or other factors cause a slippage in coverage, again by the amounts specified in Table 1, the outlook will worsen. A predicted 46.2 million additional children would enter child labour through the end of 2022. In both scenarios, the biggest changes occur among the youngest children in child labour. The potential for expanding social protection for children, through universal child benefits and other means, is further explored in the final chapter of this report.

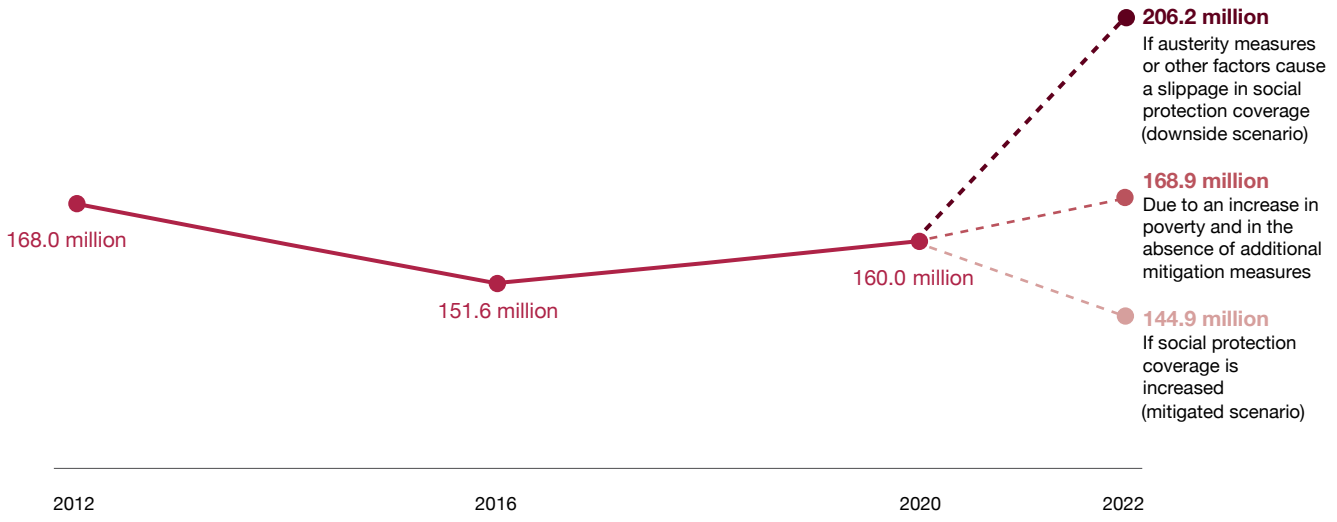
Table 1

Adjustments in social protection coverage in the mitigated and downside scenarios

Income group	Average social protection coverage level, percentage	Standard deviation, percentage	Adjusted coverage levels, percentage		Percentage point change in coverage
			Mitigated scenario	Downside scenario	
Low income	11.0	6.7	11.7	10.3	+/- 0.7
Lower-middle income	29.8	22.0	36.4	23.2	+/- 6.6
Upper-middle income	49.0	22.7	60.1	37.9	+/- 11.1
High income	78.1	25.4	97.9	58.3	+/- 19.8

Without mitigation measures, 8.9 million more children will likely be engaged in child labour by the end of 2022

Fig 33. Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, observed and projected





The journey to universal ratification of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention

For once, we can be celebratory. In August 2020, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) became the first ILO convention ratified by all member states. This historic first means that all children now have legal protection against the worst forms of child labour. Importantly, this may also mark the beginning of the end of child labour as we know it.

The challenge

The ILO's work on child labour for the first 60 years or so focused on the adoption of conventions on the minimum age for admission to employment in specific industries or occupations, culminating in the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Convention (No. 138) in 1973. But the record of ratification and implementation through national laws and practices remained disappointing. Even the much acclaimed and comprehensive ILO Convention No. 138 was, by the 1990s, ratified by only 49 countries, mostly industrialized, with a few from Africa and Latin America. None were from Asia where half the world's child workers were found. It was clear by the mid-1990s that the ILO had reached a cul-de-sac of sorts.

ILO Convention No. 138 was a marvellous intellectual construct – long on vision and robust in its conception and practical relevance in a world with varying levels of development and cultures. It was explicit in its goal and held the moral high ground in calling for the eventual abolition of child labour. It was a model par excellence in its realism and conception as an international legal instrument. It gave a central recognition to differences in economic conditions and the reality of resource constraints and to the determination of varying minimum ages for employment to guide national policy. One seldom finds an international convention with such an elegant intellectual architecture, simple in its stated objective but quite varied and rich in its articulation of obligations and guidelines for action. Yet this richness was also one of the major reasons for its low and slow ratification. Even where there was political will, policymakers were overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem, the magnitude of the task and the challenge of where to begin.

The worst forms of child labour: A strategic breakthrough

While progress in ratifying ILO Convention No. 138 stalled, by the mid-1990s, the worldwide movement against child labour had gained considerable strength and momentum. There was new recognition that the problem was vast and morally reprehensible, and that

it was bad not only for children and families but also for society at large. All sides appreciated the need for action and the challenges it posed. Advocates of total abolition were growing sympathetic to the concerns of the less developed countries and their constrained capacity for action. For their part, developing countries were becoming more concerned about growing international pressure, especially as child labour came to be an increasingly important consideration in trade negotiations and a prominent item on the human rights agenda. There was thus a need to find common ground for global action. The question was, what and how? Perhaps more specifically, where to begin? The converging view and conclusion were simple, now so obvious but at the time quite radical: first things first. This led to a proposal for a convention that espoused priority national and global actions on the worst forms of child labour.

A major concern among many advocates was the possibly negative impact of the proposed convention on the overall objective to abolish child labour in general and ratify ILO Convention No. 138 in particular. Although there was considerable apprehension, there was finally an overwhelming consensus that a new convention on the worst forms of child labour would not only reinforce and accelerate the campaign against child labour but also give impetus to the ratification of ILO Convention No. 138, the most important and foundational international instrument on the subject.

The discussions and debates surrounding the draft proposal were on the whole smooth. There were no fundamental changes. The ILO had been considering use of the terms 'extreme' or 'intolerable' forms of child labour but the International Labour Conference Committee decided to call the new instrument, in retrospect wisely, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. The result was a well-conceived, logically structured and clearly written draft.

Even so, no one dreamed of what would happen later. The Convention was adopted unanimously, without a single abstention, a first in the ILO's history. The thunderous applause and spontaneous explosion of joy that saw committee members hugging on the conference floor were probably unique in the history of the organization.

What followed has been an even greater surprise – the universal ratification of the Convention. It is a journey and a milestone that should be celebrated, for ratification is far more than a symbolic act. When a country ratifies ILO Convention No. 182, it commits to taking immediate and effective measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour. Ratification is thus a powerful stimulus to action.

What of the future?

Universal ratification of ILO Convention No. 182 is one important step in the global effort against child labour. Yet it is only one step. We must also defend and promote ILO Convention No. 138 to achieve universal ratification of this foundational instrument on child labour. And we must continue the hard work of implementing these conventions, everywhere, all together.

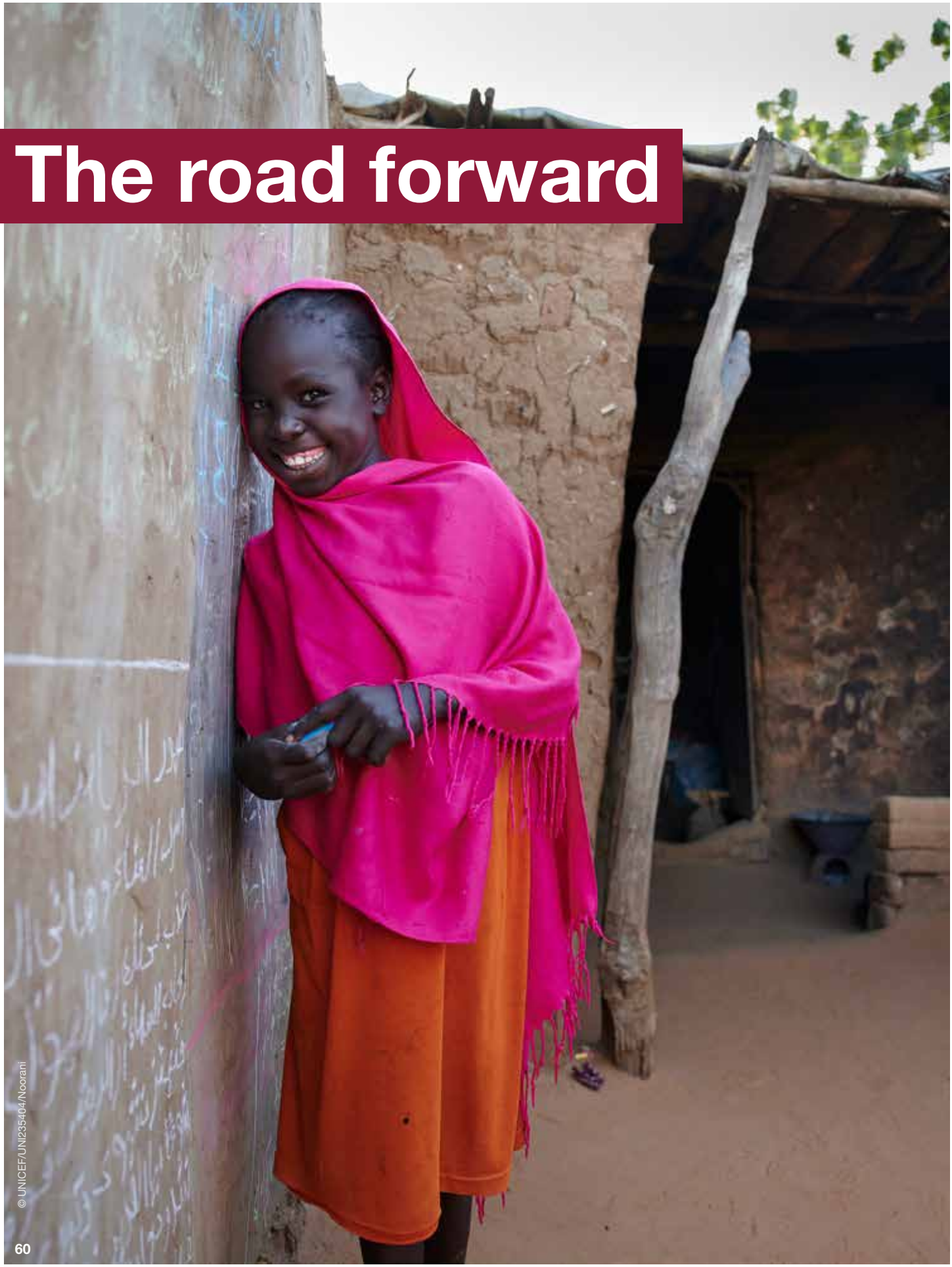
The challenge of child labour continues, in old forms and new. There are still many pockets of exploitation and abuse that remain hidden, such as child domestic work and child trafficking. There are also emerging problems of sexual abuse and exploitation associated with the reach of the Internet and other new technologies. Children will remain vulnerable for one reason or another. It is our duty to stay vigilant and establish mechanisms to detect, monitor and take effective action for their protection.

Poverty remains a persistent and ever-present danger, to borrow from the language and spirit of the ILO 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation.[35] We have to think big and have the courage to envision a world free from child poverty, one that provides social protection for all from cradle to grave. Only then will children truly be protected from the scourge of child labour.

Assefa Bequele

Assefa Bequele was the representative of the ILO Director-General on the International Labour Conference Committee that finalized the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention.

The road forward



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We are at a critical juncture in the worldwide drive to stop child labour. Global progress has ground to a halt over the last four years after slowing considerably in the four years before that. COVID-19 threatens to further erode past gains. While nearly 86 million fewer children are in child labour now than when we began measuring the phenomenon globally in 2000, recent trends affirm we have fallen far behind on our collective commitment to ending all forms by 2025. In 2021, the United Nations International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, we must urgently put progress back on track.

A first imperative is to prevent further regression amid the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has clearly heightened the threat of child labour.[36] This stems from a sharp rise in poverty and school closures that have denied families logical alternatives. To reduce these risks, expanded income support measures for families in situations of vulnerability, through child benefits and other means, will be critical. So are back-to-school campaigns and stepped up remedial learning that bring children back to classrooms and help them make up for lost learning, as conditions permit.

An evidence-based policy roadmap

As the world seeks to respond to and build forward from the COVID-19 crisis, we should not lose sight of broader policy measures to end child labour.[37] Extending social protection can mitigate the poverty and economic uncertainty that underlie child labour, while investing in free, good-quality schooling can provide a viable alternative and open doors to a better future. Every birth should be registered so that children have a legal identity and can enjoy their rights from birth. Expanding decent work would deliver a fair income for all adult workers and their families, including those in the informal economy where vulnerability to child labour is greatest. A cross-section of policies should recognize the equal worth of girls and boys and tackle harmful gender norms. And necessary laws and regulations must be in place to protect children, backed by enforcement and child protection systems to apply them. Information and communication technology can be leveraged in efforts across all these areas.

The pandemic has made such actions more urgent even as governments are grappling with growing budgetary pressure. Much depends on making sound policy choices and resource allocation decisions. Strengthening national evidence on child labour can help to identify local priorities and guide policy and spending choices. Social dialogue among governments and employers' and workers' organizations is essential to shape responsive policies to address child labour and related challenges wherever they occur.

While governments can and should adopt resource mobilization strategies to expand their fiscal space,[38] the profound impact of the pandemic further increases the urgency of international support to help fill the financing gap. Many industrialized countries still fall short on their long-standing commitment to ODA and to financing sustainable development.[39] This needs to change. Debt relief should be extended and debt restructured in heavily indebted countries so that increasing debt service payments do not crowd out social spending.[40] We must avoid the mistakes of the past, where urgently needed credit flows hinged on austerity measures that cut essential services and inflicted enduring harm on children and families in greatest need.

Make social protection universal

Most children who work do so because their families depend on their wages, production or domestic work (including unpaid, often by girls) to make ends meet. Household economic shocks and the loss of a parent or caregiver can increase the chance that a child will go to work.[41] Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly one in three children in low- and middle-income countries lived in families below national poverty lines. The pandemic exacerbated child poverty, with the number of children in income-poor households increasing by over 142 million in 2020.[42]

Adequate social protection mitigates the socio-economic vulnerability underpinning child labour[43] and offsets poverty, gender inequality and deprivation in childhood.[44] Yet even before the pandemic, nearly three quarters of children, 1.47

billion, lacked social protection.[45] Despite the unprecedented social protection response to the COVID-19 crisis,[46] most measures are temporary and insufficiently sensitive to children and gender.[47] Few, if any, address the heightened risks of child labour among children forced to move or affected by disabilities, among other vulnerable groups.

Universal child benefits offer one critical component of the solution. Defined as cash (or tax) transfers provided on a regular basis to all families with children, these benefits are a simple and proven means of cushioning children and their families from poverty and improving access to education and health care. They can incentivize birth registration, making children and their physical whereabouts more visible to state institutions,[48] and can contribute to integrated social and child protection systems. As children grow, benefit payments can be linked with care services and provide further incentives for families to stay in contact with state institutions and services. This allows for better planning and resource allocation for these services, including child protection systems. Quasi-universal child benefits, designed to exclude only the wealthiest families, are another option.

The potential for cash transfers to limit child labour is straightforward and well documented.[49] Regular cash transfers improve school attendance and discourage child labour by providing income security. They free families from reliance on children's earnings or production, enabling them to send their children to school instead. Cash transfers also help offset out-of-pocket schooling costs that can be an important barrier to school attendance.

Cash benefits are not a panacea. While they help reduce child labour, there is a risk that families will invest transfers in microenterprises and actually stimulate demand for child labour.[50] Preventing such outcomes requires integrating child labour and gender considerations into the design and implementation of benefit schemes along with other dimensions of marginality.[51] Also important are measures to address the dependency of household microenterprises, particularly small family farms, on child labour.

An effective social protection floor for children involves a combination of social insurance and tax-financed benefits.[52] Elements of comprehensive systems that benefit children include unemployment protection, old-age pensions, maternity/parental leave benefits, sick leave and disability benefits. All stem the chances that families will resort to negative coping mechanisms, including child labour, in the face of shocks.

Financing remains a major concern, with funding gaps in social protection widening by about 30 per cent since the onset of COVID-19.[53] Despite unprecedented fiscal stimulus measures, only 2 per cent of these supported children and families.[54] Additional investment in social protection can come from multiple sources, including progressive taxation and reallocations of existing spending, such as away from harmful fossil fuel subsidies. The ILO and UNICEF, as well as the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, have developed ideas, strategies and tools for developing sustainable financing.

Safeguard and advance children's education

COVID-19 has dealt an enormous setback to education. At their peak, pandemic-related school closures affected over 90 per cent of the world's students.[55] Substitute remote learning failed to reach 463 million learners.[56]

This education emergency could spiral into a child labour emergency. Since schools provide crucial services, such as school meals,[57] interruptions can intensify household food insecurity and financial stress, which increase the risk of child labour. Once children are out of school and enter paid employment, it can be very difficult to get them back.[58]

As schools reopen, back-to-school campaigns and outreach will be vital in making sure children are able to return, particularly those already working

and those without access to remote learning. Outreach will require close collaboration between schools and social service workforces.

The reopening of schools is an opportunity to reimagine education that is higher quality and helps young people develop skills for work and a productive life.[59] Low-quality education otherwise propels dropouts and early entry into paid work. Six out of 10 students lack basic literacy and numeracy skills even after several years in school.[60] One essential step is having an adequate, qualified, professional and competent teaching force with decent working conditions.[61] Opportunities for strengthening informal education and formal classroom settings should be fully explored. Digital learning should be integrated into education for every child and young person so that never again are the world's disadvantaged children left on the wrong side of the digital divide.

For children not reached by remote learning, catch-up and remedial programmes will help prevent them from dropping out of school and entering work prematurely. Even before COVID-19, more than 258 million children and youth were out of school worldwide.[62] Many were in child labour or at risk of it. This group must not be forgotten.

There are some well-known solutions for getting and keeping children in school.[63] These include aligning the minimum working age and the end of compulsory schooling, and establishing early childhood development, childcare and pre-primary education, which increase the chance that students not only stay in school but also succeed. Abolishing school fees and eliminating costs for books, uniforms and transport keeps education affordable. Universal child benefits can help offset such costs. Gathering more evidence about the links between education and child labour can more precisely define the most effective interventions for keeping children in school.

Much depends on financing. Even before the crisis, few governments met the international benchmarks of allocating 15-20 per cent of public expenditure and 4-6 per cent of GDP to education.[64] Addressing entrenched spending inequities should begin with prioritizing lower levels of education so poor children


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get their fair share and are less vulnerable to child labour.[65] Maintaining and increasing ODA will make the difference in many low-income countries.

Register every child at birth

Birth registration gives children a legal identity so they can enjoy all of their rights from birth. A birth certificate with proof of legal identity and age is often required to access social services, including social protection, health, education and justice. Without this, children are at risk of multiple deprivations and vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, including the worst forms of child labour.

Globally, 237 million children do not have a birth certificate. To register all children from birth, states should adopt policies and laws for free and universal registration; link civil registration to other systems, including for identity management, health, social protection and education as entry points for identifying and registering children; invest in safe and innovative technology to facilitate birth registration and ensure timely, accurate and permanent records; and engage communities and families, especially the hard-to-reach, to encourage registration for every child through communication on its benefits.

End gender norms and discrimination

Gender roles often determine the type, conditions and hours of work performed by boys and girls. Within families, girls typically perform more household chores, a burden likely to increase during school closures. When the calculation of child labour factors in such chores, the gender gap in child labour prevalence is reduced. Girls are also more likely to engage in domestic work in third-party households. This form of child labour is normally hidden from public view and beyond the scope of labour inspectorates, leaving children especially vulnerable to abuse.

Explicit laws, enforcement mechanisms and child protection interventions are needed to counter the risks faced by girls and boys engaged in domestic work. Social or public works programmes can include information and behaviour change components to prevent gender-based violence and other abuses.

Community-based dialogue, social and behaviour change interventions, and parenting programmes can help counter unequal gender norms that encourage overburdening girls with household chores in their own homes.[66] Cash transfers and other social assistance programmes, which help reduce the economic insecurity that leads to child labour, can be explicitly designed to diminish financial barriers to quality learning for girls.

The education sector has a crucial role in overturning harmful gender norms and stereotypes that influence child labour. Girls need support to pursue education that leads to equal employment opportunities in all sectors, including in fields such as science and technology. Governments must increase flexible learning paths so that all girls and boys benefit from quality education, including in humanitarian crises. Schools should deliver gender-transformative education programmes that build job skills and counter gender bias for certain types of work, generating incentives to keep both girls and boys in school.

Other important measures encompass a better distribution of female and male teachers from pre-primary through secondary education, gender-responsive policies advancing the careers of both male and female teachers, and investing in professional development that equips teachers with skills to create safe learning environments and transform harmful gender norms in the classroom and beyond.

Orient child protection systems around prevention and response

Eliminating child labour requires actions on multiple fronts. Child protection systems, which bring together different actors, can catalyse policies and legislation to reduce child labour risks. They can mobilize human and financial resources, service delivery structures, coordination mechanisms, and monitoring and data systems to identify vulnerabilities.

Brokering links among education, health, social protection and justice systems can trigger comprehensive, large-scale prevention of and responses to child labour. The COVID-19 crisis, however, has further stretched already resource-constrained child protection systems. Pandemic response and recovery plans must prioritize strengthening them, including by investing in the social service workforce so that it can sustain child protection and other essential services.

Responding to child labour also calls for aligning child protection systems with systems to enforce labour standards. Both child protection and labour laws should extend adequate legislative protections, and child protection services and labour inspectorates should work in tandem to detect and respond to child labour. Effective coordination is especially urgent given the concerning increase in hazardous child labour.

Children, families and communities are central to child protection systems and efforts to stop child labour. Well-functioning, community-based mechanisms can stir awareness of the harms of child labour, and promote care and positive parenting. They can help child protection services to identify vulnerable children and families and make links to other services, such as those to end poverty and diversify rural livelihoods.

Expand decent work and accelerate the transition to formality

The COVID-19 crisis has cast a glaring light on the vulnerability of workers in the informal economy, where rights routinely go unprotected. Workers in the informal economy, often in self-employment and subsistence work, have little opportunity to organize and bargain collectively, have limited or no assurances of occupational health and safety, and lack adequate social protection, all of which amplify the devastating impact of the pandemic. At the height of the first wave of the virus, an estimated 1.6 billion informal economy workers were labouring in the hardest-hit sectors and/or suffered income losses from lockdown measures.[67] Massive income declines led to spikes in poverty among these workers and their families, even as enhanced income protection measures adopted in the wake of COVID-19 largely excluded the informal economy.

The fallout on child labour starts with the poverty and economic instability associated with informal work, which make it more likely that families will resort to child labour. If informality increases, demand for child labour may intensify, given that informal work requires few skills and is largely unregulated. Informality also undermines the economic base for taxation to finance social protection, education and health care, all of which deter child labour in crises and more generally. Finally, the informal economy has few structures for social dialogue and labour relations, both antithetical to child labour.

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the imperative for labour market policies to accelerate transitions from the informal to the formal economy and ultimately to decent work. Multiple policies are typically required, adapted to specific national and local contexts.[68] Some overarching priorities always apply, however, starting with labour and social security laws that cover all workers and economic units without exception as well as productive policies that enable a conducive business environment to create formal jobs.

Widening the collective, representative voice of women and men who earn their living in the informal economy is an almost universal precondition for the transition to formality, enabling them to influence working conditions, productivity and incomes. A growing global body of experience offers guidance in building collective representation structures for different informal economy workers.[69] Extending social protection to them and their families is another core element that can draw on a wealth of existing practices.[70]

The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019 was adopted at the 108th International Labour Conference. It calls for investing in people

through a human-centred approach to the future of work. This means investing in jobs, skills and social protection, and actively advancing gender equality. It requires investing in labour market institutions so that wages are adequate, working hours are limited, and safety, health and fundamental rights at work are ensured. Policies must systematically back sustainable enterprises, economic growth and decent work for all.

Improve rural livelihoods

The 2020 global child labour estimates reconfirm what we have long known: Child labour occurs most often in agriculture, at 70 per cent of the total worldwide and up to 82 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. It is especially common among younger children, for whom the physical demands and hazards of farm work can be particularly damaging. COVID-19 may increase child labour in agriculture, at least in the short term, as families who have lost jobs elsewhere return to subsistence farming to survive. Broader progress in ending child labour thus largely centres on improving rural livelihoods and building more diversified economies, including in rural areas.

Child labour in agriculture takes many forms, each requiring specific strategies. On family smallholder farms, which host the largest share, families need to be able to reduce their dependency on child labour to sustain their livelihoods. Such farms must secure a fair price for what they produce and be able to enhance productivity by investing in labour-saving technologies or hiring adult workers instead of relying on children.[71] Small producer associations and well-functioning cooperatives can boost market and bargaining power in agricultural value chains and uphold price stability. Such groups can also pool adult labour and agricultural inputs, share knowledge and introduce new farming methods and technology.[72]

On larger commercial agricultural entities, children can often be found working alongside their parents. Piecework payment schemes, where income depends on kilos of crops picked or number of rows weeded, for example, can incentivize the use of children – especially if that means families will earn a living wage. Adequate and nearby day-care and school facilities can provide parents with a safe and worthwhile alternative to bringing their



children with them to the fields. Expanding workers' collective voice can be critical to combating child labour in such settings.

Systemic approaches to promote rural development and enhance rural livelihoods and resilience can diminish reliance on child labour. These should include specific attention to eliminating child labour in food systems,[73] which encompass production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products, and creating opportunities for sustainable adult livelihoods.

A well-designed social protection strategy combining contributory social insurance and tax-based social assistance can sustain the adequate protection of rural populations throughout their lives, including in confronting risks and contingencies specific to rural areas.[74] Employment-intensive investment in rural infrastructure and basic services, such as water and power systems, can offer jobs off the farm while improving farm productivity and reducing the need for tasks often done by children, such as hauling water and gathering fuel.[75]

Investment in developing the skills of rural youth can bolster farm productivity and contribute to a structural shift towards higher value added manufacturing and services.[76] Youth skills training is also an entry point for imparting key occupational health and safety information, which can in turn help in reducing hazardous child labour in agriculture and elsewhere.

Agricultural extension policies for crop diversification, the introduction of more resistant crop or livestock varieties, disaster risk reduction and insurance against weather-related crop failures can all enhance resilience to climate change. This is a growing concern in many rural agricultural zones where child labour occurs,[77] adding pressure on already poor families.

Reduce heightened risks of child labour in domestic and global supply chains

Child labour is more common in domestic production but appears also in global supply chains.[78] The pandemic should not add to this risk. Governments need to continue strengthening laws and enforcement mechanisms that require transparency and human rights due diligence in business operations and supply chains for firms of all sizes, nationally and internationally. This includes governments in wealthy countries where many international firms are based.

Public capacity to enforce labour laws and regulations has been strained as financial and human resources have been diverted to meet urgent needs linked to the pandemic.

The crisis also underscores how businesses must fulfil their responsibility to apply laws and take further measures to prevent, identify, mitigate and remediate child labour in their operations and supply chains, in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, ILO conventions and the Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.[79]

Assessments of child labour risks in supply chains can steer business responses to the COVID-19 crisis. These must include identifying and prioritizing 'hotspots' where risks are highest in terms of severity and scale. Special attention should be given to informal micro- and small enterprises operating on the lower tiers of supply chains, where child labour and other human rights risks are often most pronounced,[80] and fallout from the crisis has been particularly devastating. Such assessments require meaningful engagement by stakeholders, including workers, their representative organizations and community members, as they are best positioned to identify local risks and help formulate the most appropriate mitigation strategies.

Short-term crises may require immediate actions. But these should be accompanied by longer-term, systemic responses that make global supply chains more resilient, ethical and sustainable, and, concomitantly, more impervious to child labour and other human rights violations in future crises. Well-established, responsible business and purchasing

practices can help keep firms afloat and reduce child labour. Examples include long-term supplier contracts, clarity on future contracts, honouring commitments on orders and payments, fair payment schedules, and pricing capturing the true production costs and market values of products and services.

Industry-wide and cross-industry collaboration must aim to cut off the roots of child labour at lower tiers of supply chains, since individual companies often have limited leverage. A wide range of voluntary, business-led initiatives have emerged in recent years in recognition of this reality. Sustainability and effectiveness depend largely on integrating company action into existing efforts by governments, social partners, civil society and others active on ending child labour.

Address child labour in conflicts, disasters and other crises

Worldwide, one in every four children lives in a country struck by conflict, fragility and/or disaster.[81] The resulting displacement and disruptions to livelihoods, schooling, social protection, family support networks and the rule of law all heighten the risk of child labour.[82] The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt another blow to families already in acute distress.

Child labour concerns must inform all phases of humanitarian action: crisis preparation and contingency plans, humanitarian responses and post-crisis reconstruction and recovery. Before a crisis hits, preparedness planning should draw on existing data on prevalent forms of child labour, the strength of economic markets, the reach of social protection and essential services, and community-based supports. This evidence – combined with similar data on the economic impact of a crisis at the national, local, family and individual levels – can help formulate appropriate responses during and after the most acute phases.

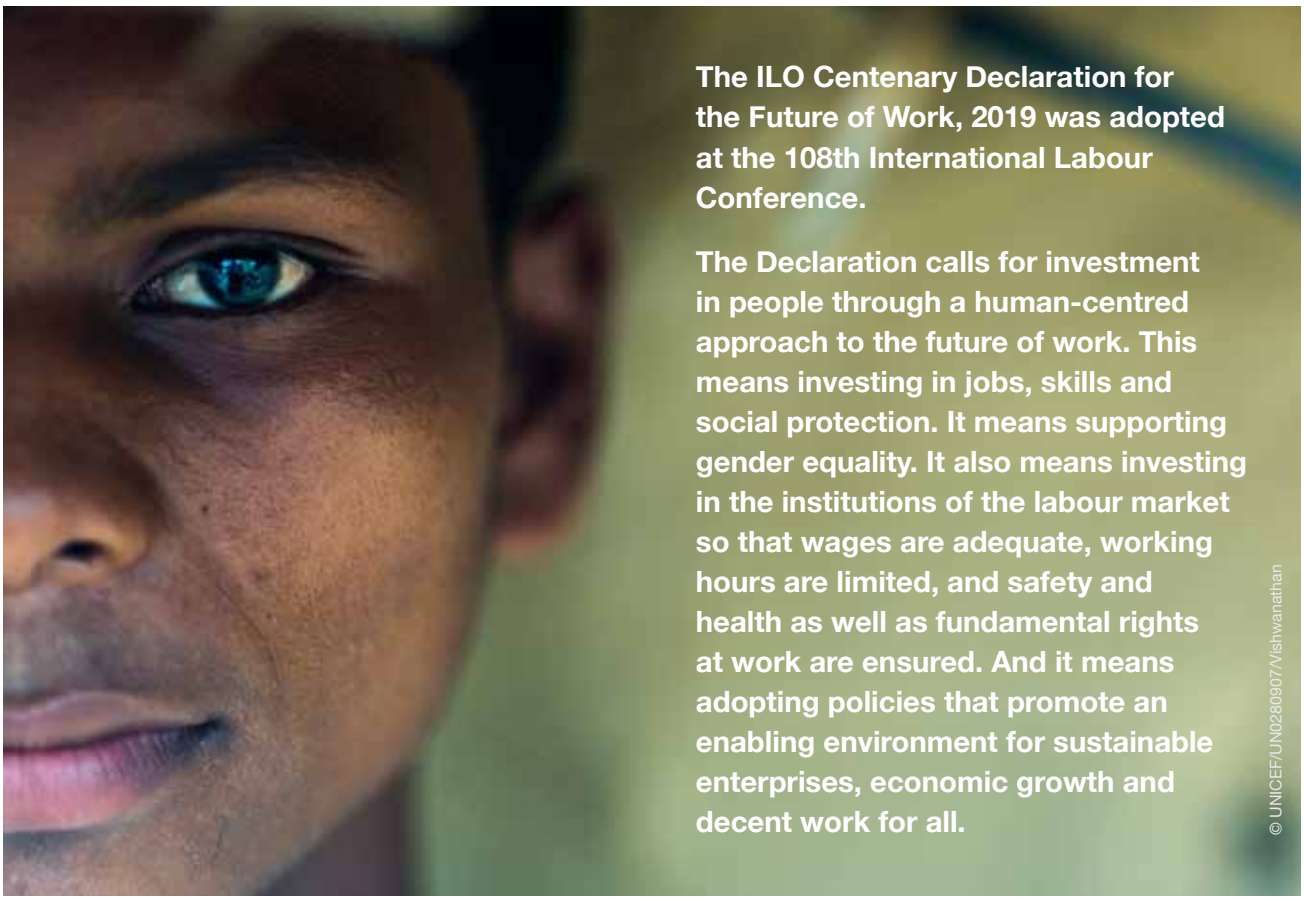
In all fragile and crisis situations, particular attention should be paid to sexual exploitation, trafficking and forced labour, including through abduction. Where armed conflict occurs, additional attention should go to the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups. Getting children back to school is essential to preventing a fall into child labour, including the worst forms.[83]

Measures to prevent and respond to child labour during a crisis should make links among the humanitarian, development and peace dimensions. They should help build social cohesion, resilience and peace, and strengthen existing government, economic and social structures. Supporting meaningful economic and livelihood opportunities for adult members of families in crisis situations is essential. The ILO Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205) calls for inclusive measures to promote decent work and income generation, including through employment-intensive investment strategies such as public employment programmes. Universal child benefits make practical sense in fragile places with limited capacities and very high shares of vulnerable children. They can help lay the foundations for elaborating a social protection system later on.

Responses to child labour should build on, strengthen and adapt existing humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms, partnerships and plans. The same applies to government and economic structures. Important resources to guide this work include the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action[84] and the Inter-Agency Toolkit on Preventing and Responding to Child Labour in Humanitarian Action,[85] both produced by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

Adopt adequate legal frameworks and promote compliance

Ratification of international legal standards on eliminating child labour is a powerful statement of government intent. In 2020, ILO Convention No. 182 became the first ILO convention to achieve universal ratification.[86] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has almost reached universal ratification, while 173 states have ratified ILO



Convention No. 138.[87] Relevant Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have also been widely ratified, by 170 countries for the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, and 176 countries for the Optional Protocol on child prostitution and child pornography.

Real progress, however, requires translating these intentions into national laws that are then used as a springboard for action. Laws and policies must also connect the array of different rights upholding freedom from child labour. They must protect and promote birth registration; ensure social protection; provide quality education, health care and nutrition; and extend protection from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Laws must be carefully aligned, avoiding situations such as where the minimum working age is below the age for completing compulsory education.

National laws and practices should reflect the close interconnection between ILO Convention No. 138 and ILO Convention No. 182. A unified approach to their application means, above all, recognizing that combating the worst forms of child labour does not override the imperative to end child labour in general. Children may not be in hazardous or the worst forms of labour but are still simply too young to work.

The legal architecture should safeguard other human rights in the world of work as child labour is intertwined with these. As enshrined in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, these rights include: freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively and freedom from forced labour and from discrimination in employment. While definitive in progress against child labour and towards decent work and social justice more broadly, these rights are at heightened risk of being undercut by the pandemic.

The lax enforcement of child labour laws remains a concern. Resource constraints limit the capacity of most public labour inspection systems, which in



any case rarely reach workplaces in the informal economy where most child labour is found. Non-state actors in some cases can complement the regulatory role of public labour administrations and help extend their reach and effectiveness. Trade unions, through their active presence in workplaces, can play a crucial role in identifying child labour and supporting public labour inspectorates. Local community-based child labour monitoring systems often function well in backing public labour inspectorates to identify and follow child labour cases. Social workers, teachers, childcare workers, youth workers, community development workers, welfare officers and a range of other social services actors can be enlisted to cast a wide net.

Realize the promise of international cooperation and partnership

COVID-19 has shown the world at large that the problems we face will not be solved without international cooperation and partnership. This is as true for ending child labour as for other priorities across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Countries must work in line with the spirit of article 8 of the universally ratified ILO Convention No. 182, which stipulates enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance for social and economic development, poverty eradication and universal education.

Financing may be the most important dimension of international cooperation and partnership. Given gaps in domestic public financing to address child labour, ODA could play an important role particularly in low-income countries where these funds make a substantial contribution to government budgets. Industrialized countries would need to reach their longstanding ODA commitment of 0.7 per cent of gross national income, up from the average of just 0.32 per cent in 2020.[88] They would also need to

allocate more funding specifically to eliminate child labour; in 2018, the issue drew only $60 million in ODA.[89] International financial institutions are active in many sectors critical to elimination and can make important contributions to required resources, including by providing and promoting debt relief and by continued support for essential social spending.

Founded in 2016, Alliance 8.7 facilitates cooperation on stopping child labour. It groups more than 240 partners from governments, multilateral organizations, workers' organizations, employers' organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and think tanks to define effective ways of accelerating progress towards SDG target 8.7 on ending child labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. The alliance focuses on increasing collaborative action, driving innovation and scaling up solutions that work. It also provides a platform for engaging in dialogue and sharing experience and information.[90]

Partnerships to prevent the exploitation of children in armed conflicts are integral to ending child labour. The Paris Commitments and Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the related Paris Principles Steering Group, the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and the Task Force on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action each bring together governments, practitioners, donors, advocates, United Nations entities and technical experts determined to stop children from fighting wars, as one of the most egregious types of child labour.

Exchanging experiences and good practices among countries can accelerate change. The Pathfinder Country initiative[91] includes over 20 member countries from the Global North and South. They commit to going further and faster towards achieving target 8.7, and to documenting and sharing experiences and lessons in ending child labour, forced labour and modern slavery.

Other key initiatives align government, multilateral and business partners. The International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture brings together the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the ILO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, trade union groups[92] and others to eliminate child labour in agriculture. The Child Labour Platform, co-chaired by the International Organisation of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation, and including the ILO and UNICEF, tackles child labour in supply chains. The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children also supports ending child labour. Global partnerships around education and universal social protection play valuable roles as well.

Getting back on track

It is urgent to put action to end child labour back on track, in line with global commitments and goals. The evidence in this report outlines the risks and points to the solutions. While ambitious measures and investments are required, the COVID-19 pandemic has amply illustrated that these are possible when the well-being of humanity is at stake.

We have made a promise to children to end child labour. There is no time to lose.

Annex



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STATISTICAL TABLES

CHILD LABOUR Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour

		Total							
		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
World total		9.7	89,300	9.3	35,600	9.5	35,000	9.6	160,000
Residence	Rural	14.6	72,400	13.7	27,700	12.4	22,600	13.9	122,700
	Urban	4.0	16,900	4.4	7,900	6.6	12,400	4.7	37,300
ILO regions	Africa	22.1	54,900	23.5	21,800	18.2	15,500	21.6	92,200
	Sub-Saharan Africa	24.7	51,900	25.8	20,500	19.5	14,200	23.9	86,600
	Arab States	4.8	1,200	6.4	600	7.8	700	5.8	2,400
	Asia and the Pacific	5.4	25,000	4.8	9,600	7.1	14,100	5.6	48,700
	Americas	3.0	3,100	4.3	1,900	7.2	3,300	4.3	8,300
	Latin America and the Caribbean	4.2	3,100	6.1	1,900	9.8	3,100	6.0	8,200
	Europe and Central Asia	6.4	5,200	5.1	1,700	4.6	1,400	5.7	8,300
SDG regions	Sub-Saharan Africa	24.7	51,900	25.8	20,500	19.5	14,200	23.9	86,600
	Central and Southern Asia	5.2	13,300	4.5	5,100	7.1	7,900	5.5	26,300
	Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	6.1	13,200	5.4	4,800	7.1	6,300	6.2	24,300
	Northern Africa and Western Asia	7.3	5,400	8.5	2,400	8.5	2,200	7.8	10,100
	Latin America and the Caribbean	4.2	3,100	6.1	1,900	9.8	3,100	6.0	8,200
	Europe and Northern America	2.2	2,000	2.0	800	3.0	1,100	2.3	3,800
UNICEF regions	East Asia and Pacific	6.2	13,600	5.4	5,000	7.2	6,500	6.2	25,100
	Europe and Central Asia	6.5	5,200	5.2	1,700	4.6	1,400	5.8	8,300
	Latin America and Caribbean	4.2	3,100	6.1	1,900	9.8	3,100	6.0	8,200
	Middle East and North Africa	5.5	3,600	7.2	1,700	8.6	1,900	6.5	7,200
	North America	-	-	-	-	1.2	200	0.3	200
	South Asia	4.4	10,400	4.0	4,200	6.9	7,200	4.9	21,800
	Sub-Saharan Africa	24.6	53,500	25.5	21,100	19.4	14,700	23.7	89,200
Children in child labour who are not attending school	Total	27.7	24,700	35.2	12,500	53.2	18,700	35.0	55,900
	Rural	28.3	20,500	35.8	9,900	54.1	12,200	34.8	42,700
	Urban	24.9	4,200	33.1	2,600	51.6	6,400	35.5	13,300
Children in child labour by sector of economic activity	Agriculture	76.6	68,400	75.8	27,000	47.6	16,700	70.0	112,100
	Industry	6.0	5,400	7.5	2,700	24.0	8,400	10.3	16,500
	Services	17.4	15,500	16.7	5,900	28.4	10,000	19.6	31,400
	Of which domestic work	4.6	4,100	3.0	1,100	5.6	2,000	4.5	7,100
Children in child labour by employment status	Employees	9.2	8,200	12.9	4,600	42.3	14,800	17.3	27,600
	Own-account workers	8.2	7,300	12.6	4,500	15.0	5,300	10.7	17,000
	Contributing family workers	82.6	73,800	74.5	26,500	42.8	15,000	72.1	115,300

Notes: Numbers are expressed in thousands and have been rounded. Because of the rounding, disaggregated numbers do not always add up to total values and figures in percentages do not always add up to 100 per cent. For the same reason, the values presented in earlier pages of the report do not always match the values presented in this table. The regional groupings used by ILO and UNICEF, as well as those used for SDG reporting, vary slightly. This explains why the values for some regions differ, even if the labels are the same. The dash for North America indicates that, in the absence of data, values are assumed to be null. Caution is warranted when interpreting values for Europe and Northern America due to low data coverage for children aged 5 to 14.

	Boys								Girls							
	5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
	10.9	52,000	11.0	21,800	12.2	23,300	11.2	97,000	8.4	37,400	7.5	13,800	6.6	11,800	7.8	62,900
	16.3	42,000	16.1	16,800	15.7	15,000	16.1	73,700	12.7	30,500	11.2	10,800	8.8	7,700	11.6	49,000
	4.6	10,000	5.4	4,900	8.6	8,300	5.7	23,300	3.3	6,900	3.4	3,000	4.5	4,100	3.6	14,000
	24.3	30,600	26.8	12,600	20.7	8,900	24.1	52,100	19.9	24,300	20.1	9,200	15.6	6,600	19.1	40,100
	27.1	28,800	29.3	11,700	22.0	8,000	26.5	48,600	22.3	23,100	22.2	8,700	17.1	6,100	21.2	38,000
	6.8	800	8.8	400	11.0	500	8.1	1,800	2.7	300	3.8	200	4.4	200	3.3	700
	6.4	15,700	6.0	6,400	10.1	10,500	7.2	32,500	4.2	9,400	3.3	3,200	3.8	3,600	3.9	16,200
	3.6	1,900	5.6	1,300	10.2	2,400	5.6	5,600	2.3	1,200	2.8	600	4.2	900	2.9	2,700
	5.1	1,900	8.1	1,300	13.9	2,300	7.9	5,500	3.3	1,200	4.1	600	5.6	900	4.0	2,700
	7.2	3,000	6.4	1,100	6.2	1,000	6.8	5,100	5.6	2,200	3.8	600	2.9	400	4.6	3,200
	27.1	28,800	29.3	11,700	22.0	8,000	26.5	48,600	22.3	23,100	22.2	8,700	17.1	6,100	21.2	38,000
	5.8	7,800	5.9	3,500	11.1	6,500	7.1	17,800	4.5	5,500	3.0	1,600	2.7	1,400	3.7	8,500
	7.7	8,700	6.6	3,100	8.7	4,100	7.7	15,900	4.4	4,500	4.0	1,700	5.3	2,200	4.5	8,400
	8.9	3,400	10.9	1,600	11.4	1,500	9.9	6,500	5.5	2,000	5.9	800	5.3	700	5.6	3,500
	5.1	1,900	8.1	1,300	13.9	2,300	7.9	5,500	3.3	1,200	4.1	600	5.6	900	4.0	2,700
	2.5	1,100	2.5	500	4.0	800	2.8	2,400	1.9	800	1.5	300	1.8	300	1.8	1,400
	7.7	8,900	6.6	3,200	8.8	4,200	7.7	16,300	4.5	4,700	4.0	1,800	5.4	2,300	4.6	8,800
	7.3	3,000	6.5	1,100	6.2	1,000	6.9	5,100	5.7	2,200	3.8	600	2.9	400	4.7	3,200
	5.1	1,900	8.1	1,300	13.9	2,300	7.9	5,500	3.3	1,200	4.1	600	5.6	900	4.0	2,700
	7.2	2,400	9.5	1,200	11.8	1,300	8.6	4,900	3.7	1,200	4.7	500	5.3	600	4.2	2,300
	-	-	-	-	1.6	100	0.4	100	-	-	-	-	0.7	-	0.2	-
	4.9	6,100	5.3	2,900	11.1	6,100	6.5	15,100	3.8	4,300	2.6	1,300	2.3	1,200	3.2	6,800
	26.9	29,700	29.0	12,100	21.8	8,300	26.4	50,100	22.1	23,800	22.0	9,000	16.9	6,300	21.1	39,200
	27.8	14,400	35.7	7,800	56.0	13,000	36.3	35,300	27.5	10,300	34.4	4,700	47.7	5,600	32.8	20,700
	28.4	11,900	36.2	6,100	57.2	8,600	36.0	26,600	28.3	8,600	35.2	3,800	48.0	3,700	32.9	16,100
	25.4	2,500	34.0	1,700	53.7	4,500	37.3	8,700	24.2	1,700	31.6	900	47.2	1,900	32.5	4,500
	77.7	40,400	76.1	16,600	46.7	10,900	69.9	67,800	75.1	28,100	75.3	10,400	49.3	5,800	70.3	44,300
	8.8	4,600	8.7	1,900	28.2	6,600	13.4	13,000	2.2	800	5.6	800	15.7	1,800	5.5	3,500
	13.5	7,000	15.2	3,300	25.1	5,800	16.7	16,200	22.7	8,500	19.0	2,600	35.1	4,100	24.2	15,200
	3.1	1,600	1.9	400	3.3	800	2.8	2,800	6.7	2,500	4.7	600	10.4	1,200	7.0	4,400
	11.6	6,000	16.2	3,500	43.9	10,200	20.4	19,800	5.8	2,200	7.7	1,100	38.9	4,600	12.4	7,800
	7.5	3,900	12.8	2,800	16.1	3,800	10.8	10,400	9.1	3,400	12.3	1,700	12.7	1,500	10.5	6,600
	80.9	42,000	71.0	15,500	39.9	9,300	68.8	66,800	85.1	31,800	80.0	11,000	48.4	5,700	77.1	48,500

HAZARDOUS WORK Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in hazardous work

		Total							
		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
World total		2.8	25,900	4.8	18,100	9.5	35,000	4.7	79,000
Residence	Rural	4.0	20,000	6.8	13,700	12.4	22,600	6.4	56,300
	Urban	1.4	5,900	2.5	4,400	6.6	12,400	2.9	22,700
ILO regions	Africa	6.4	15,700	10.9	10,200	18.2	15,500	9.7	41,400
	Sub-Saharan Africa	7.1	14,900	12.0	9,500	19.5	14,200	10.7	38,600
	Arab States	3.1	800	4.9	500	7.8	700	4.5	1,900
	Asia and the Pacific	0.7	3,300	2.3	4,700	7.1	14,100	2.6	22,200
	Americas	1.1	1,200	2.6	1,200	7.2	3,300	2.9	5,700
	Latin America and the Caribbean	1.6	1,200	3.7	1,200	9.8	3,100	4.0	5,500
	Europe and Central Asia	6.0	4,800	4.9	1,600	4.6	1,400	5.5	7,900
SDG regions	Sub-Saharan Africa	7.1	14,900	12.0	9,500	19.5	14,200	10.7	38,600
	Central and Southern Asia	1.2	3,200	2.6	2,900	7.1	7,900	2.9	14,000
	Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	0.9	1,900	2.4	2,200	7.1	6,300	2.6	10,400
	Northern Africa and Western Asia	3.7	2,800	5.5	1,500	8.5	2,200	5.1	6,500
	Latin America and the Caribbean	1.6	1,200	3.7	1,200	9.8	3,100	4.0	5,500
	Europe and Northern America	2.1	1,800	2.0	700	3.0	1,100	2.2	3,700
UNICEF regions	East Asia and Pacific	0.9	1,900	2.4	2,200	7.2	6,500	2.7	10,700
	Europe and Central Asia	6.1	4,800	5.0	1,600	4.6	1,400	5.5	7,900
	Latin America and Caribbean	1.6	1,200	3.7	1,200	9.8	3,100	4.0	5,500
	Middle East and North Africa	2.0	1,300	4.2	1,000	8.6	1,900	3.8	4,200
	North America	-	-	-	-	1.2	200	0.3	200
	South Asia	0.5	1,300	2.2	2,300	6.9	7,200	2.4	10,800
	Sub-Saharan Africa	7.1	15,400	11.9	9,800	19.4	14,700	10.6	39,800
Children in hazardous work who are not attending school	Total	33.0	8,500	40.2	7,300	53.2	18,700	43.6	34,500
	Rural	33.3	6,600	41.2	5,700	54.1	12,200	43.6	24,500
	Urban	31.9	1,900	37.3	1,600	51.6	6,400	43.7	9,900
Children in hazardous work by sector of economic activity	Agriculture	71.9	18,600	70.5	12,800	47.6	16,700	60.8	48,100
	Industry	9.1	2,300	11.5	2,100	24.0	8,400	16.3	12,800
	Services	19.0	4,900	18.0	3,300	28.4	10,000	23.0	18,100
	Of which domestic work	2.6	700	3.5	600	5.6	2,000	4.2	3,300
Children in hazardous work by employment status	Employees	11.5	3,000	18.8	3,400	42.3	14,800	26.8	21,200
	Own-account workers	6.7	1,700	12.2	2,200	15.0	5,300	11.6	9,200
	Contributing family workers	81.8	21,100	69.0	12,500	42.8	15,000	61.5	48,600

Notes: Numbers are expressed in thousands and have been rounded. Because of the rounding, disaggregated numbers do not always add up to total values and figures in percentages do not always add up to 100 per cent. For the same reason, the values presented in earlier pages of the report do not always match the values presented in this table. The regional groupings used by ILO and UNICEF, as well as those used for SDG reporting, vary slightly. This explains why the values for some regions differ, even if the labels are the same. The dash for North America indicates that, in the absence of data, values are assumed to be null. Caution is warranted when interpreting values for Europe and Northern America due to low data coverage for children aged 5 to 14.

	Boys								Girls							
	5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
	3.3	15,500	5.8	11,400	12.2	23,300	5.8	50,200	2.3	10,300	3.7	6,700	6.6	11,800	3.6	28,800
	4.7	12,000	8.2	8,600	15.7	15,000	7.8	35,600	3.3	7,900	5.3	5,200	8.8	7,700	4.9	20,800
	1.6	3,500	3.1	2,800	8.6	8,300	3.6	14,700	1.1	2,400	1.8	1,600	4.5	4,100	2.1	8,100
	7.3	9,200	12.8	6,000	20.7	8,900	11.2	24,200	5.3	6,500	9.0	4,100	15.6	6,600	8.2	17,200
	8.2	8,700	14.0	5,600	22.0	8,000	12.2	22,400	6.0	6,200	9.9	3,900	17.1	6,100	9.1	16,300
	4.5	600	6.9	300	11.0	500	6.3	1,400	1.7	200	2.8	100	4.4	200	2.5	500
	0.9	2,200	3.0	3,100	10.1	10,500	3.5	15,800	0.5	1,200	1.7	1,600	3.8	3,600	1.6	6,400
	1.5	800	3.7	900	10.2	2,400	4.1	4,000	0.7	400	1.4	300	4.2	900	1.7	1,600
	2.2	800	5.4	900	13.9	2,300	5.7	3,900	1.0	400	2.1	300	5.6	900	2.3	1,600
	6.8	2,800	6.2	1,000	6.2	1,000	6.5	4,800	5.2	2,000	3.6	600	2.9	400	4.4	3,100
	8.2	8,700	14.0	5,600	22.0	8,000	12.2	22,400	6.0	6,200	9.9	3,900	17.1	6,100	9.1	16,300
	1.4	1,900	3.3	2,000	11.1	6,500	4.1	10,300	1.1	1,300	1.8	1,000	2.7	1,400	1.6	3,700
	1.1	1,300	3.0	1,400	8.7	4,100	3.3	6,800	0.6	600	1.8	800	5.3	2,200	1.9	3,600
	4.7	1,800	7.3	1,000	11.4	1,500	6.6	4,400	2.7	1,000	3.6	500	5.3	700	3.4	2,200
	2.2	800	5.4	900	13.9	2,300	5.7	3,900	1.0	400	2.1	300	5.6	900	2.3	1,600
	2.3	1,100	2.4	500	4.0	800	2.7	2,300	1.8	800	1.5	300	1.8	300	1.7	1,400
	1.1	1,300	3.0	1,500	8.8	4,200	3.3	7,000	0.6	600	1.8	800	5.4	2,300	2.0	3,700
	6.8	2,800	6.3	1,000	6.2	1,000	6.6	4,800	5.3	2,000	3.7	600	2.9	400	4.4	3,100
	2.2	800	5.4	900	13.9	2,300	5.7	3,900	1.0	400	2.1	300	5.6	900	2.3	1,600
	2.7	900	5.7	700	11.8	1,300	5.2	2,900	1.1	400	2.6	300	5.3	600	2.3	1,200
	-	-	-	-	1.6	100	0.4	100	-	-	-	-	0.7	-	0.2	-
	0.6	800	2.8	1,600	11.1	6,100	3.6	8,400	0.4	500	1.5	700	2.3	1,200	1.1	2,400
	8.1	9,000	13.9	5,800	21.8	8,300	12.1	23,100	5.9	6,400	9.8	4,000	16.9	6,300	9.0	16,800
	33.3	5,200	40.9	4,700	56.0	13,000	45.5	22,900	32.5	3,400	39.1	2,600	47.7	5,600	40.3	11,600
	33.6	4,000	41.9	3,600	57.2	8,600	45.5	16,200	32.7	2,600	40.0	2,100	48.0	3,700	40.2	8,300
	32.0	1,100	38.0	1,100	53.7	4,500	45.5	6,700	31.7	800	36.1	600	47.2	1,900	40.5	3,300
	75.2	11,700	71.1	8,100	46.7	10,900	61.0	30,700	67.0	6,900	69.5	4,700	49.3	5,800	60.3	17,400
	11.2	1,700	13.2	1,500	28.2	6,600	19.6	9,800	5.8	600	8.6	600	15.7	1,800	10.5	3,000
	13.6	2,100	15.8	1,800	25.1	5,800	19.4	9,700	27.2	2,800	21.9	1,500	35.1	4,100	29.2	8,400
	0.7	100	2.2	300	3.3	800	2.2	1,100	5.7	600	5.7	400	10.4	1,200	7.6	2,200
	14.5	2,300	23.9	2,700	43.9	10,200	30.3	15,200	7.0	700	10.2	700	38.9	4,600	20.8	6,000
	8.4	1,300	13.9	1,600	16.1	3,800	13.2	6,700	4.1	400	9.4	600	12.7	1,500	8.8	2,500
	77.1	12,000	62.2	7,100	39.9	9,300	56.5	28,400	88.9	9,200	80.4	5,400	48.4	5,700	70.4	20,300

CHILD LABOUR AND HAZARDOUS WORK: TRENDS

		Children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour				Children aged 5 to 17 years in hazardous work			
		2016		2020		2016		2020	
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
World total		9.6	151,600	9.6	160,000	4.6	72,500	4.7	79,000
Sex	Girls	8.4	64,100	7.8	62,900	3.6	27,800	3.6	28,800
	Boys	10.7	87,500	11.2	97,000	5.5	44,800	5.8	50,200
Age	5-11 years	8.3	72,600	9.7	89,300	2.2	19,000	2.8	25,900
	12-14 years	11.7	41,900	9.3	35,600	4.6	16,400	4.8	18,100
	15-17 years	10.5	37,100	9.5	35,000	10.5	37,100	9.5	35,000
ILO regions	Africa	19.6	72,100	21.6	92,200	8.6	31,500	9.7	41,400
	Sub-Saharan Africa	22.4	70,000	23.9	86,600	9.8	30,500	10.7	38,600
	Arab States	2.9	1,200	5.8	2,400	1.5	600	4.5	1,900
	Asia and the Pacific	7.4	62,100	5.6	48,700	3.4	28,500	2.6	22,200
	Americas	5.3	10,700	4.3	8,300	3.2	6,600	2.9	5,700
	Latin America and the Caribbean	7.3	10,500	6.0	8,200	4.4	6,300	4.0	5,500
	Europe and Central Asia	4.1	5,500	5.7	8,300	4.0	5,300	5.5	7,900
National income grouping	Low income	19.4	65,200	26.2	65,000	8.8	29,700	11.6	28,700
	Lower-middle income	8.5	58,200	9.0	69,700	4.9	33,500	4.3	33,600
	Upper-middle income	6.6	26,200	4.9	23,700	2.0	7,800	3.2	15,300
	High income	1.2	2,000	0.9	1,600	1.0	1,600	0.8	1,500

Notes: Numbers are expressed in thousands and have been rounded. Because of the rounding, disaggregated numbers do not always add up to total values.
Trend data are not available for SDG and UNICEF regions.

OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

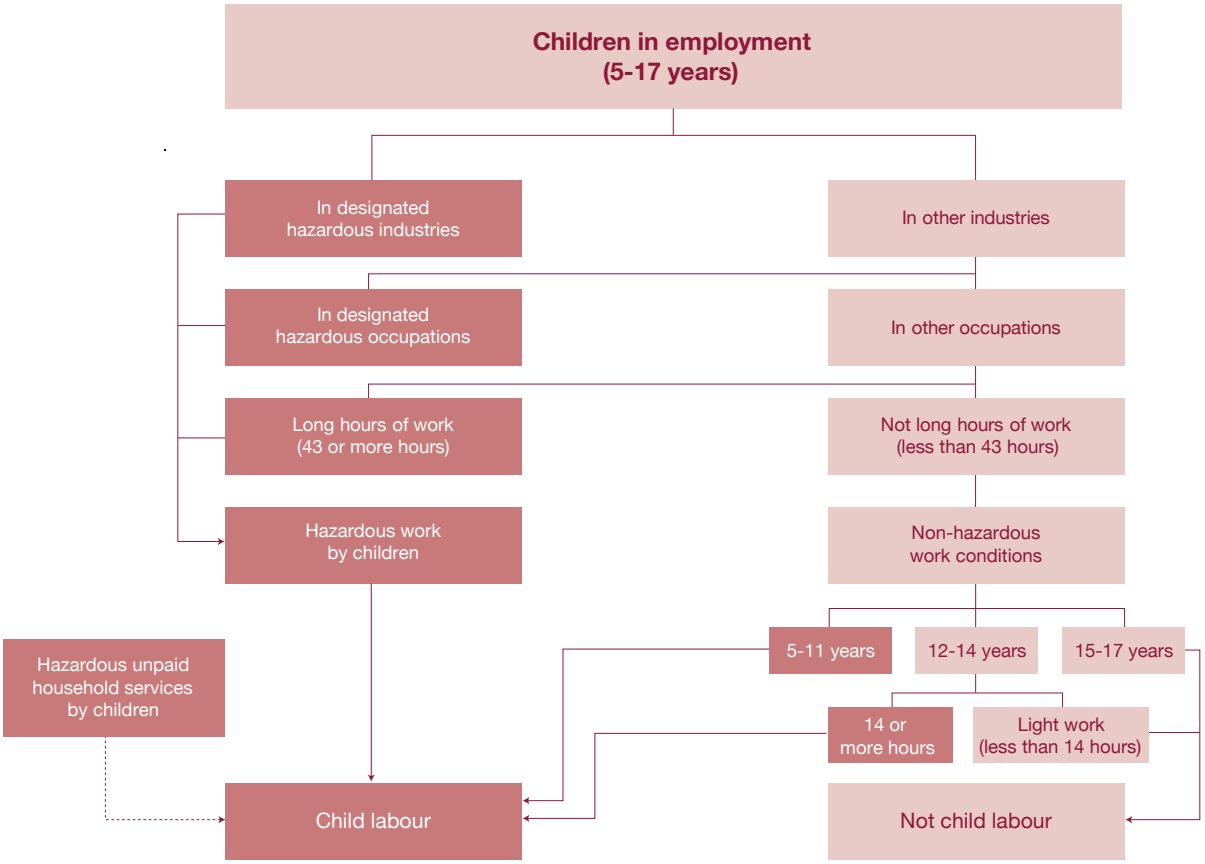
Definitions

The measurement framework for producing the 2020 global estimates of child labour aligns with the international standards on child labour statistics adopted by the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2008. Hosted by the ILO, the conference takes place every five years. Participants include experts from governments, mostly from ministries responsible for labour and national statistical offices, as well as from employers' and workers' organizations. Although the 20th conference in 2018 adopted a more recent resolution on child labour statistics, most countries still use the previous framework. Once a critical mass of household surveys applies the new statistical standards, it will be possible to produce global and regional estimates accordingly.

The starting point for measuring child labour is calculating the number of children aged 5 to 17 in employment. Among them, those in designated hazardous industries and hazardous occupations are identified as being in child labour. Designated hazardous industries are mining, quarrying and construction. Since the publication of the first global estimates of child labour in 2002, an ILO task force has defined 39 hazardous occupations for children.[93]

Children who work longer hours are also considered as being in child labour. Longer hours is defined as 43 or more hours per week, the same threshold used in earlier global estimates. The figure approximately corresponds to the normal hours of work for adults stipulated by national legislation, mostly from 40 to 44 hours.

Fig A1. **Measurement framework for the global estimation of child labour**



Note: The dotted lines refer to the measurement of hazardous unpaid household services being optional as per the 2008 Resolution Concerning Statistics of Child Labour.

The total number of children in designated hazardous industries, in hazardous occupations or working longer hours constitutes the overall number of children in hazardous work.

Obtaining the final estimate of child labour involves adding two more categories to the calculation: children aged 5 to 11 engaged in any form of employment and children aged 12 to 14 working 14 hours or more per week (see Figure A1). For those aged 12 to 14, the 14-hour threshold distinguishes between permissible light work and other work. The same threshold was used in earlier estimates. It corresponds to two hours of work per day over a calendar week, covering both school days and holidays.

The child labour statistical framework of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians provides a separate measurement of hazardous unpaid household services by children. The indicator captures the performance of household chores by children aged 5 to 14 for 21 or more hours per week. There are no hour thresholds for children aged 15 to 17.

Data sources

The estimates are based on a wide range of nationally representative household surveys that fully or partially cover children aged 5 to 17. In total, the estimates used 106 national data sets, tracking 66 per cent of the world's population of children in that age group. The data sets came from 32 national Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys implemented with UNICEF's support; 30 national labour force surveys conducted under Eurostat regulations with figures specific to children aged 15 to 17; 22 additional national labour force surveys or other national household surveys; 16 child labour surveys implemented with the ILO; and 6 Demographic and Health Surveys implemented mostly with funding from the United States Agency for International Development.

Eighty per cent of surveys were within the reference period of 2016 to 2020.

The harmonization of reference years was carried out as part of the calculation of extrapolation weights. The main means of harmonizing national data sets was by processing national household survey data according to a pre-defined framework favouring comparability across countries and over time, following internationally agreed standards, concepts and definitions. Population data came from the United Nations *World Population Prospects*, with annual indicators by broad age groups and sex, and for different countries and years based on the latest 2020 data.

Modelling strategy for imputation

For countries without data, an imputation model was constructed, premised on the understanding that data were not missing at random and that variables describing country characteristics contained useful information.

Two broad classes of indicators were produced on rates and distributions. Rates included children in employment (CiE), child labour, hazardous work, domestic work and the two indicators used for reporting on SDG target 8.7 (the proportion of children engaged in economic activity, and the proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores). The rates were computed based on the proportion of a relevant population. For instance, the CiE rate was calculated as a share of children in employment in the total population of children.

Distribution indicators were further breakdowns of the CiE, child labour and hazardous work rates, comprising status in employment, school attendance and economic activity.

Except for domestic work,[94] the rate indicators were defined at the country, sex, age and geographic levels as follows:

Age groups
- 5 to 11
- 12 to 14
- 15 to 17
- 5 to 17

Sex
- Male
- Female
- Total

Geography
- Rural
- Urban
- National

To produce modelled estimates, regression techniques established relationships between observed data and explanatory variables, which are good predictors of child labour according to the literature. The selection of explanatory variables was based on economic theory and empirical studies on the determinants of child labour. These explanatory variables were:

- GDP per capita (purchasing power parity, constant 2011, international dollars)
- Share of population aged 15 to 24
- Share of population aged 0 to 14
- Older population covered by social protection
- Percentage of population over age 25 with no schooling
- Percentage of population over age 25 with completed primary education
- Fertility rate
- Rural population share
- Agricultural employment percentage
- Unemployment rate (percentage, aged 15 to 24)
- Unemployment rate (percentage, aged 15 to 64)
- Labour income distribution, 7 to 10 decile inclusive
- Youth not in employment, education or training

Regional aggregates

The imputation procedure for missing rates and distributions provided a complete set of modelled estimates for each indicator and country in the world. The level at which data are available, however, depends on the indicator.

As an example, in Asia and the Pacific, for each sex, age and geography breakdown for the CiE model, we first obtained the total regional number of children in employment by adding the numbers of children in employment for each country. This was the numerator for the regional CiE rate. For the denominator, we added the total population of each country, producing the regional CiE rate. We can also express the rate as the average of country CiE rates weighted by their respective shares in the regional population. Specifically:

$$\widetilde{\mathrm{CiE}_{\text{Asia and Pacific},jkl}} = \frac{\sum_{i\in\text{Asia and Pacific}} CiE\ Level_{ijkl}}{\sum_{i\in\text{Asia and Pacific}} Total\ Population_{ijkl}}$$

$$= \frac{\sum_{i\in\text{Asia and Pacific}} \widehat{CiE_{ijkl}} * Total\ Population_{ijkl}}{\sum_{i\in\text{Asia and Pacific}} Total\ Population_{ijkl}}$$

$$= \sum_{i\in\text{Asia and Pacific}} \omega_i \widehat{CiE_{ijkl}}$$

where $\widetilde{\mathrm{CiE}_{\text{Asia and Pacific},jkl}}$ and $\widehat{CiE_{ijkl}}$ denote the aggregate rate of CiE in the Asia and the Pacific region and the rate of CiE in country i for sex *j*, age group *k* and geographic breakdown *l*, respectively. Moreover,

$$\omega_i \equiv \frac{Total\ Population_{ijkl}}{\sum_{i\in\text{Asia and Pacific}} Total\ Population_{ijkl}}$$

We computed regional values of all indicators in a similar manner.

Evaluation of the results

The 106 countries used to generate the estimates are a sample of all the countries in the world. If another sample had been selected, the results would have differed to a degree that is important to determine in order to understand the robustness of the estimated results. This can be done through the calculation of standard deviations associated with different global and regional estimates.

Accordingly, the standard deviations of the 2020 global and regional estimates were calculated to assess the change in estimates caused by sampling variability. This indicator of uncertainty does not account for the uncertainty associated with actual observations. Furthermore, the exercise cannot account for unknown bias in the modelling procedure. These limitations notwithstanding, the results indicate the margin of error resulting from the imputation of countries that has been excluded in a pseudo out-of-sample exercise.

The variation in the indicator of children in employment was estimated by running the econometric model 150 times. In each run, countries with a probability of 15 per cent were removed from the sample, which resulted on average in 15 countries dropped per run. This yielded the standard deviation of the global and regional estimates (see Table A1). Whereas this exercise did not compute a confidence interval (as we were not accounting for all sources of uncertainty, including input data uncertainty), it quantified the robustness of the modelled estimates.

Table A1. **Children in employment**

	Estimate (thousands)	Standard deviation (thousands)	Standard deviation (percentage)
World	222,088	2,258	1.0
Africa	124,122	1,051	0.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	115,766	978	0.8
Americas	14,672	85	0.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	12,422	87	0.7
Arab States	3,447	-	-
Asia and the Pacific	67,960	1,239	1.8
Europe and Central Asia	11,886	88	0.7

Notes: The table shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. The dash for the Arab States indicates that the standard deviation could not be calculated due to the small number of available data sets for this region.

ENDNOTES

1. See Resolution II concerning statistics on child labour in: International Labour Organization, 'Report of the Conference: 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, 24 November–5 December 2008', ICLS/18/2008/IV/FINAL, ILO, Geneva, 2009. Although there is a more recent resolution concerning statistics on child labour (20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2018), most countries still use the previous statistical framework (18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2008). The ILO is actively supporting the efforts of countries to transition to the most recent statistical standards. Once a critical mass of household surveys uses the new statistical standards, it will be possible to produce global and regional estimates based on them.
2. Two indicators are used for reporting on SDG target 8.7. The first is based on the production boundary of the United Nations System of National Accounts (Indicator 8.7.1) and the second on the general production boundary (Indicator 8.7.2). The 21 weekly hours threshold for household chores hours is consistent with the number used for indicator 8.7.2.
3. Prior to 2008, global estimates were limited to children in economic activity in the narrower 5 to 14 age range.
4. The World Bank, 'World Development Indicators', World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators>, accessed 7 June 2021. Latest years available. Extreme poverty is defined as living on less than $1.90 per person per day in 2011 purchasing power parity. The percentage of the population living in extreme poverty is 1 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific and 3.7 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.
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13. 'World Development Indicators'.
14. Figures for 2008 are from Diallo, Yacouba, et al., *Global Child Labour Developments: Measuring trends from 2004 to 2008*, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2010. Figures for 2020 are from United Nations, *2019 Revision of World Population Prospects*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp/>, accessed 7 June 2021.
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17. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *Seizing the Moment: Tackling entrenched inequalities to end epidemics – Global AIDS update 2020*, UNAIDS, Geneva, 2020.
18. See, for example, International Labour Organization, 'An Overview of Child Labour in Agriculture', ILO and the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Geneva, 2007, <www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_098346.pdf>, accessed 26 May 2021.
19. See, for example, International Labour Organization, 'Fishing and Aquaculture', ILO, Geneva, <www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Agriculture/WCMS_172419/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20ILO%20considers%20fishing%20a,time%20far%20away%20from%20home>, accessed 26 May 2021.
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