

# Global estimates and trends of child labour 2000-2012

## Q & A



International  
Labour  
Office

### What is the report “Marking progress against child labour” about?

- The report presents the fourth and latest global estimates and trends of child labour, released by the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), four years since the previous estimates. It shows the new global estimates for 2012, presents the trends from 2000 to 2012, and sets out some priorities on the way forward to the international target of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016. It provided inputs to the Brasilia Global Conference on Child Labour held in October 2013.

### What do you mean by “child labour”, “worst forms” and “hazardous work”?

- “Child labour” refers to work undertaken by children below the appropriate legal minimum working age, based on the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), as well as the worst forms of child labour defined by the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, (No. 182).
- The “worst forms of child labour” comprise: (a) slavery and forced labour, including child trafficking and forced recruitment for armed conflict; (b) the use of children in prostitution and pornography; (c) the use of children in illicit activities; and (d) any activity or work by children that, by its nature or conditions, is likely to harm or jeopardise their health, safety or morals – often referred to as “hazardous work”.
- In sum, “hazardous work” which is taken as a proxy for the “worst forms of child labour”, is a subset of “child labour”, which is in turn, a subset of children in “employment” (or “working children”).
- For the detailed concepts and statistical definitions as well as the methodology used, please see the Annex to the Report, and also a separate publication “Global child labour trends 2008 to 2012”.

### What do the new child labour estimates show?

- Worldwide there are 264 million children in employment in the 5-17 years group. Among them, **168 million are child labourers**, accounting for almost 11 per cent of this age group.
- About half of all child labourers, **85 million** in absolute terms, **are in hazardous work**, directly endangering their health, safety and moral development.

### What are the significant trends over the 2000-2012 period?

- The global child labour figure for 2012 is almost 78 million smaller than that for 2000 (246 million) - **a reduction of nearly one-third**.
- The number of children in **hazardous work**, which constitutes by far the largest share of the worst forms of child labour, **declined by half** during the 12-year period, from 171 to 85 million.



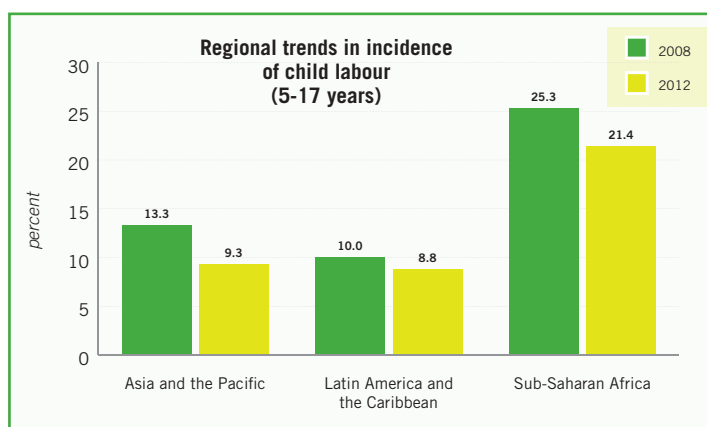
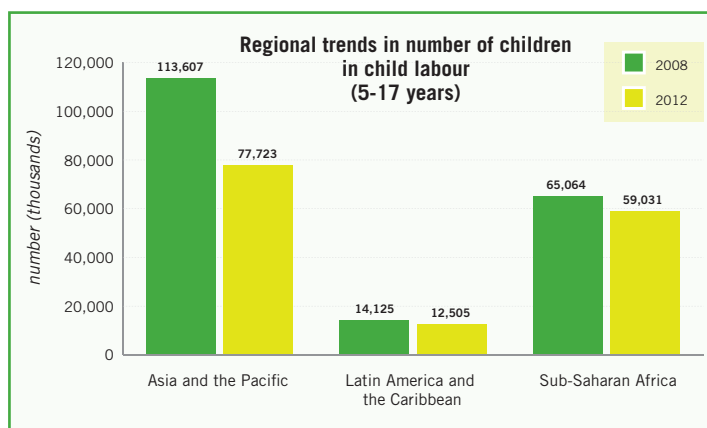
- The latest results show that we are moving in the right direction. The decline in child labour was especially marked during the most recent four-year period (**2008-2012**), both in the number of child labourers (from 215 to 168 million) and in the number of children in hazardous work (from 115 to 85 million).

### Does that mean that the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016 will be reached?

- Unfortunately, even at the improved current pace, we will fall substantially short of our 2016 target for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.
- Ending the scourge of child labour in the foreseeable future is going to require a substantial acceleration of efforts at all levels.

### What does the Report say about regional trends?

- The largest number of child labourers is found in the Asia-Pacific region but this region also registered the largest decline during 2008-2012.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest incidence, despite a decline in incidence from 25.3 per cent in 2008 to 21.4 per cent in 2012.
- In Latin America, numbers remain relatively low but persistent, especially in hazardous work.
- In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2012 child labourers numbered 9.2 million, or 8 per cent of the children (5-17 years).



### Is there any finding on child labour and national income?

- Yes, for the first time, global estimates are presented for different levels of national income. These estimates reveal that **middle-income countries** account for the largest number of child labourers: there are total of 93.6 million child labourers in middle-income countries, compared with 74.4 million in low-income countries. The fight against child labour is therefore by no means limited to the poorest countries.
- However, the incidence of child labour is highest in poorer countries: 23 per cent of children in low-income countries are child labourers, compared to 9 per cent in lower middle-income countries and to 6 per cent in upper middle-income countries.
- Estimates of child labour are not available for high-income countries due to data limitations.

### What are the estimates and trends by age group?

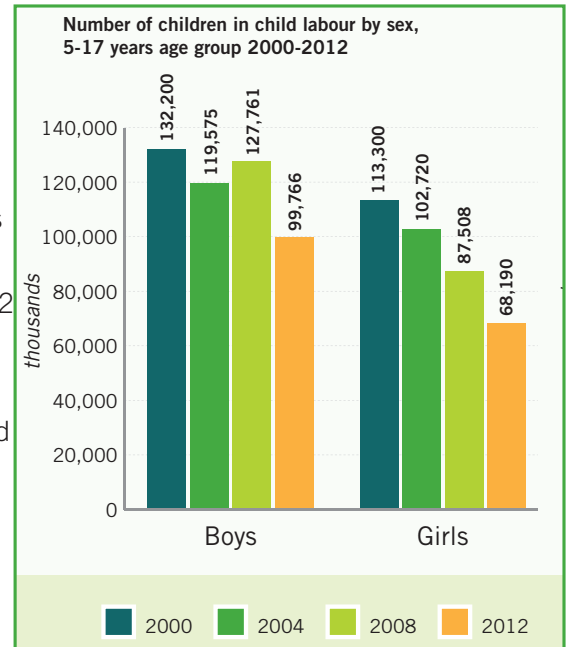
- It is encouraging that progress between 2000 and 2012 was especially pronounced among **younger children** (5-14 year-olds); child labour fell by over one-third from 186 million to 120 million and hazardous work even more dramatically, from 111 to 38 million.
- Nonetheless, child labourers in the **5-11 years age group** – of primary school age – still numbered 73 million in 2012, or 44 per cent of all child labourer, and constitute a particular concern.
- Progress fluctuated among older, **15-17 year-old**, children. An absolute decline in child labour (11.7 million) over



the 2000-2012 period, masked a sharp rise in child labour in the 2004-2008 period. These older child labourers, numbering 47.5 million in 2012, also fall within the scope of **youth employment** policy, and their numbers are influenced by the cyclical evolution of the economy and of the labour market. They are of working age, and therefore, the estimates for 15-17 year-olds in child labour are equal to that for hazardous work.

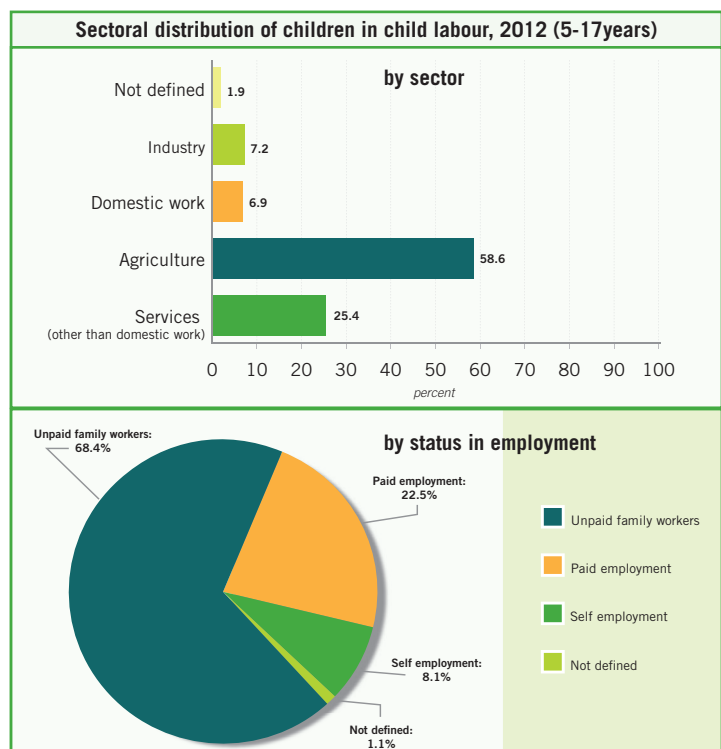
### What are the estimates and trends by sex?

- The fall in child labour of **girls** was particularly pronounced; in the period 2000-2012, there was a reduction of 40 per cent in the number of girls in child labour as opposed to 25 per cent for boys. This particular progress for girls may be due to the UN-wide emphasis on girls' education during this period and other progress in gender equality.
- The total number of child labourers (5-17 years age group) in 2012 is much higher among boys than girls (99.8 million boys versus 68.2 million girls). While there is little difference by sex in the number of 5-14 year-olds in child labour (51 per cent are boys and 49 per cent girls), there is a considerable gender gap in the 15-17 years age group (81 per cent are boys and only 19 per cent are girls).



### Are there further analyses, for instance, by sector, or by status in employment?

- **Agriculture** remains by far the most important sector, accounting for 59 per cent of all those in child labour and for over 98 million children in absolute terms. The share of total child labourers in **services** rose from 26 per cent in 2008 to 32 per cent in 2012. Some of this increase could be due in part to the decline in “not defined” category in 2012, pointing to a better measurement, in particular in the informal economy. The services sector accounted for 54 million child labourers (including 11.5 million in **domestic work**) in 2012 and the industry sector for 12 million.
- Over two-thirds (68 per cent) of child labourers were **unpaid family workers** in 2012 while 22.5 per cent were in paid employment and 8 per cent were in self-employment. This composition is similar to that of 2008 with the exception of a slight shift towards self-employment (from 5 per cent of child labourers to 8 per cent) over the four year period.



### Has the global economic crisis had any impact on of child labour?

- The 2008-2012 period showed a faster rate of decline in child labour. There is no apparent negative effect of the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 on the global child labour situations as had been feared – this is good news.

- The Report suggests at least two reasons: First, while developing economies were not spared by the crisis, they have generally been quicker to rebound from its effects, although often on a lower growth path. Second, it is likely that the slower economic growth in the aftermath of the crisis has dampened labour demand, including demand for older children of working age, requiring attention to the risk of child labour among older children when the global economy starts to recover. In many countries the progress that has been achieved is fragile and must be monitored and strengthened to ensure sustainability.

### What are the reasons for the progress in the reduction of child labour?

- The significant progress demonstrates that the overall strategy as set out in the ILO action plans including *The Hague Roadmap* appears to be sound and producing positive results. The integration of the actions being taken in legislation and enforcement, education, social protection and promotion of decent work opportunities at the national and community levels appears to be a formula for success. Supporting direct action on the ground with upstream policy development, implementation and monitoring must remain a high priority for governments and organizations of workers' and employers' as well as for donors and other supporting partners.

### Are countries taking action as required by the ILO's Conventions on child labour?

- Much progress has been made in the ratification of the Conventions. Convention No.182 is close to achieving universal ratification – just 8 short of the ILO's 185 Member States. Convention No. 138 on minimum age has now been ratified by 166 Member States.
- However, impressive this global picture is, it is even more important to follow up to ratification with practical actions for implementation. The report includes a figure showing the reported actions taken by countries under these two Conventions as noted by the ILO Committee of Experts. It shows an encouraging picture of general increase in the number of actions taken and reported, ranging widely from monitoring mechanisms through to national policies and attention to children at risk to improved legislation on various specific issues.

### How can governments and others accelerate action against child labour?

- Key priorities for accelerating progress include:
  - improving statistical data at global and national levels;
  - a multi-faceted policy response, reinforcing actions across all four broad policy areas: legislation, education, social protection and labour market policy;
  - age and gender specific responses;
  - a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa;
  - a continued focus on agriculture and a new focus on other sectors;
  - building the knowledge base, monitoring and evaluation;
  - international cooperation and partnerships, so as to enhance all of the above.
- These elements are consistent with and reinforce the broader set of existing strategies, while at the same time call attention to new developments.

### What is the role of the ILO?

- The ILO has been leading the fight against child labour through the combination of international labour standards and its supervisory system, on the one hand, and technical cooperation and assistance on the other. The ILO's activities, especially through IPEC, include technical advisory assistance, pilot projects supporting direct action, capacity building of stakeholders, as well as helping to craft global and national frameworks.