



International
Labour
Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHILD LABOUR

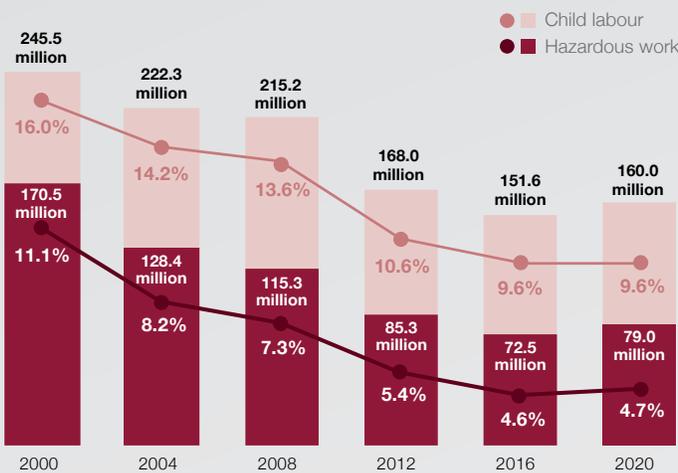
GLOBAL ESTIMATES 2020, TRENDS AND THE ROAD FORWARD

Child labour at a glance

Trends

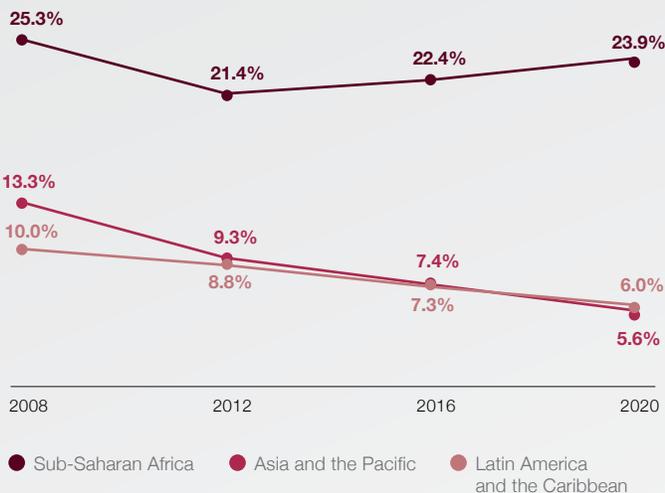
Global progress against child labour has stalled since 2016

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

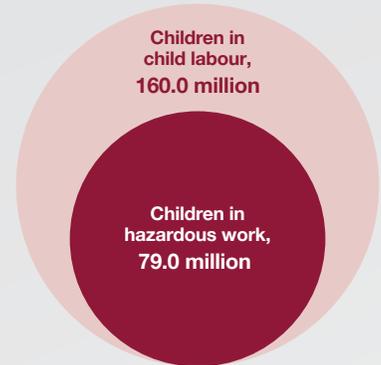


Notes: The figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting. Comparable historical data prior to 2016 were not available for other regions.

Current situation

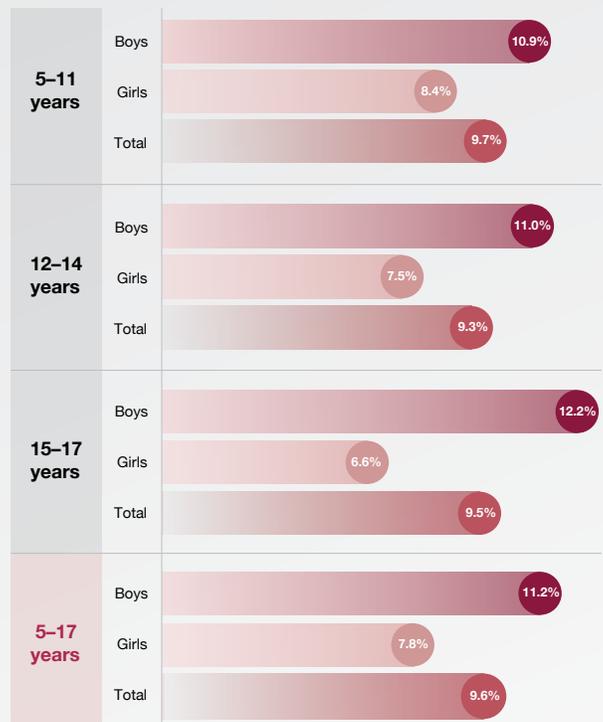
Worldwide, 160 million children are engaged in child labour; 79 million of them are performing hazardous work

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



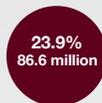
We have made a promise to children to end child labour

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

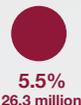
Percentage and number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour, by region

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.

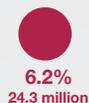
Sub-Saharan Africa



Central and Southern Asia



Eastern and South-Eastern Asia



Northern Africa and Western Asia



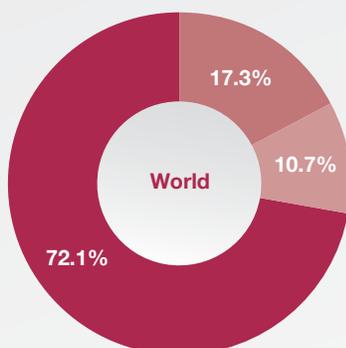
Latin America and the Caribbean



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

- Contributing family workers
- Employees
- Own-account workers

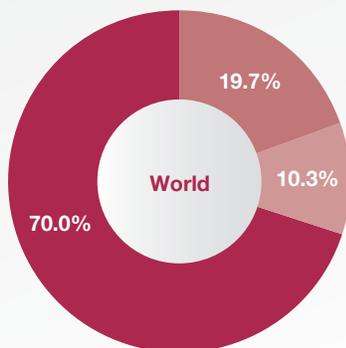


Note: Due to rounding, figures in percentages do not add up to 100 per cent.

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

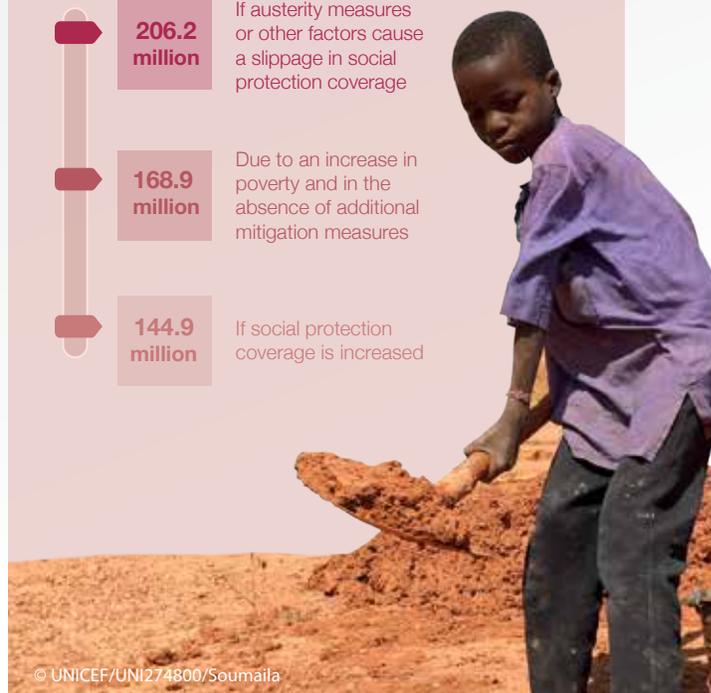
- Agriculture
- Services
- Industry



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



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.

► **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.

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.

ARTICLE 8 OF ILO CONVENTION NO. 182: Members shall take appropriate steps to assist one another in giving effect to the provisions of this Convention through enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance including support for social and economic development, poverty eradication programmes and universal education.

CHILD LABOUR AND HAZARDOUS WORK

		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.



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