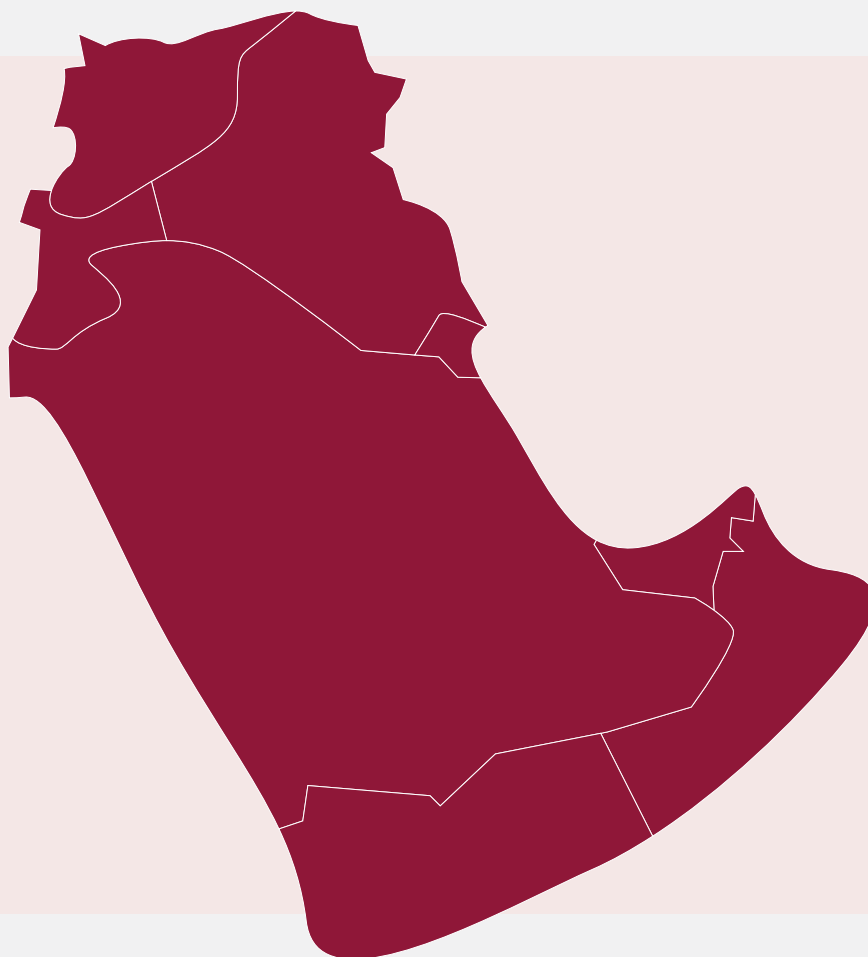


Child labour statistical profile: Arab States

PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

This profile provides statistics on child labour prevalence and characteristics in the Arab States region, based on the ILO-UNICEF 2020 Global estimates of child labour.¹ The region comprises 11 countries and territories: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, defined in accordance with the regional groupings utilised by the ILO Department of Statistics.²



1 All data and information in the ILO-UNICEF 2020 Global estimates of child labour report is based on figures predating the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. ILO and UNICEF. *Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward*, Geneva and New York, 2021.

2 ILO Department of Statistics: [Country groupings](#) web page.

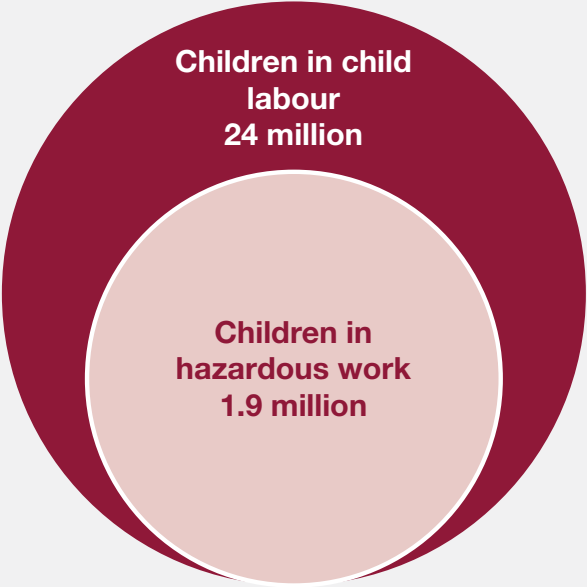
Child labour remains widespread in the Arab States. The 2020 ILO-UNICEF global estimates show that 2.45 million children – 0.69 million girls and 1.76 million boys – were in child labour at the beginning of 2020, accounting for almost 6 percent of all children in the region. Four out of every 5 of those in child labour – 1.9 million children in absolute terms – were in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development.

These figures place the Arab States in the mid-range of world regions in terms of the prevalence of child labour and hazardous work. The prevalence of child labour in the Arab States is well below the global average, while prevalence of hazardous work in the region is about the same as the world figure.

It is worth underscoring that the child labour estimates for the Arab States and for the other world regions predate the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, which has substantially added to the household vulnerability that drives much of the child labour phenomenon. The estimates, therefore, likely understate the actual prevalence of child labour in the Arab States and elsewhere.

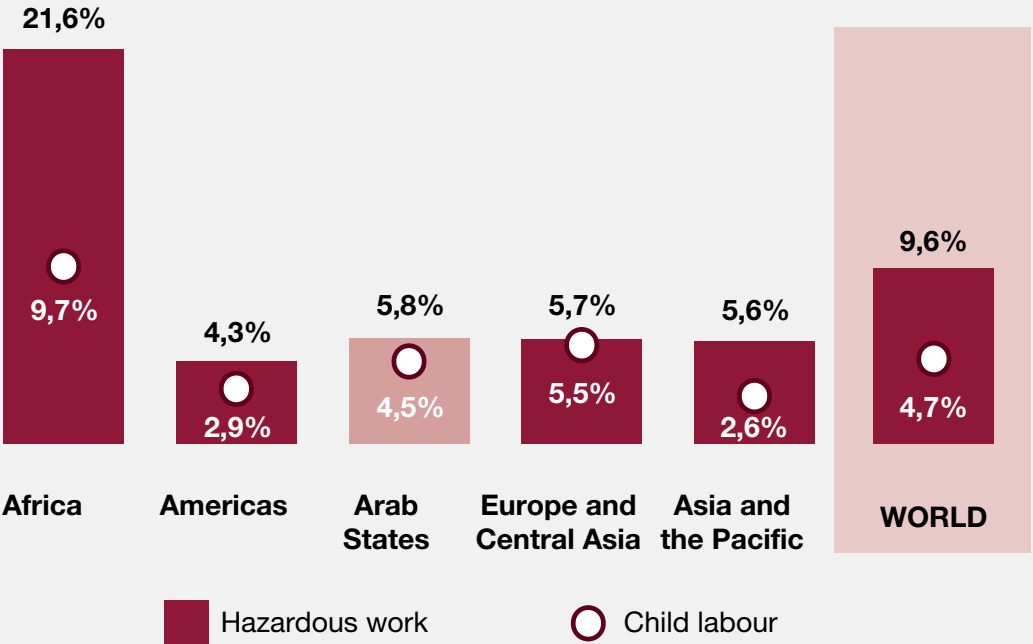
Involvement in child labour and hazardous work

Figure 1 Number of children in child labour and hazardous work (5-17 years)



Child labour and hazardous work in world regions

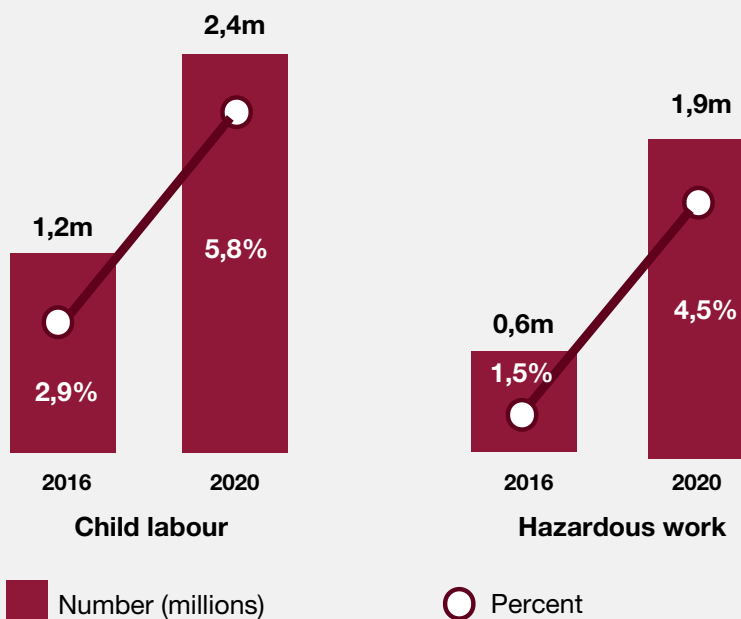
Figure 2 Percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, by world region (5-17 years)




Preliminary estimates of trends suggest that child labour and hazardous work in the Arab States rose in both percentage and absolute terms over the period from 2016 to 2020. The percentage of children in child labour rose by 3 percentage points, while their number rose by 1.2 million over the 4-year period. However, these trend figures should be interpreted with caution, owing to the relatively limited number of country datasets for the two reference years and to refinements in the estimation methodology.³ A more precise analysis of trends in the region will require an expansion of country-level child labour data collection efforts (see also below).

Regional child labour trends

Figure 3 Number (in millions) and percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work (2016 and 2020)



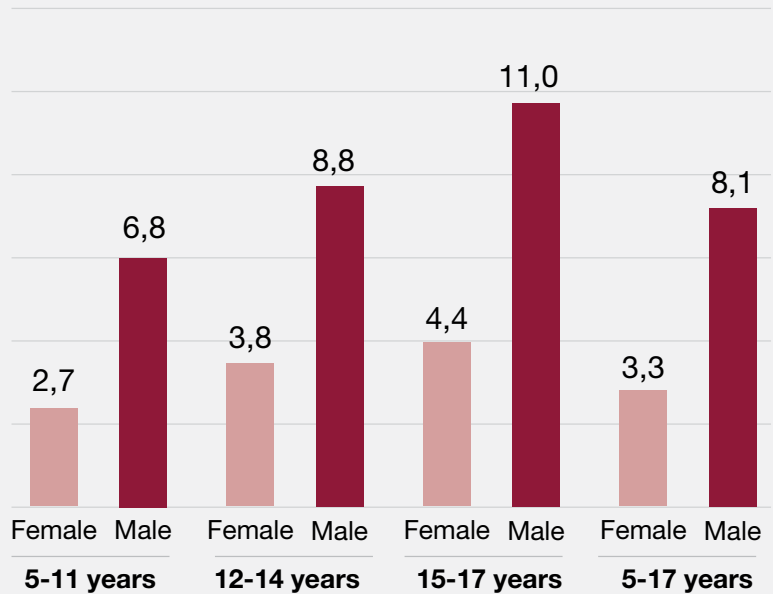
2.45 million children

were in child labour

³ ILO and UNICEF, Methodology for the 2020 global child labour estimates, forthcoming.

Child labour is much more common among male children than female children, underscoring the important gender dimension in the child labour phenomenon in the Arab world. For the overall 5-17 years age group, the percentage of boys in child labour is roughly two and a half times that of girls. This pattern persists across all age ranges. It is worth recalling in interpreting these numbers, however, that they do not reflect children's involvement in household chores in their own homes, a category of work for which girls shoulder a disproportionate burden (see also below). Girls are also more present in domestic work outside their own homes, a form of child labour that is hidden from public view and often not fully captured in child labour estimates.

Age and gender profile of child labour

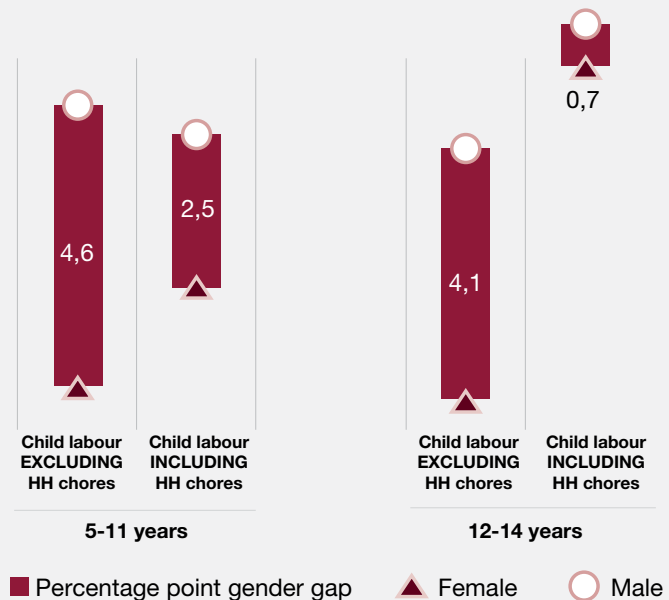
Figure 4 Percentage of children in child labour by age group and sex



When household chores are taken into account, the gender gap in child labour prevalence narrows considerably. Expanding the definition of child labour to include involvement in household chores for 21 hours or more per week, the hours threshold adopted for international reporting on Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals,⁴ 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. Indeed, for the 12 to 14 age group, the child labour prevalence for boys and girls is almost equal when household chores are taken into account. These results underscore the importance of systematically collecting data on household chores as part of national statistical programmes on child labour.⁵

Child labour and household chores

Figure 5 Percentage of children in child labour (including and excluding household chores performed for 21 hours or more per week), by sex and age range

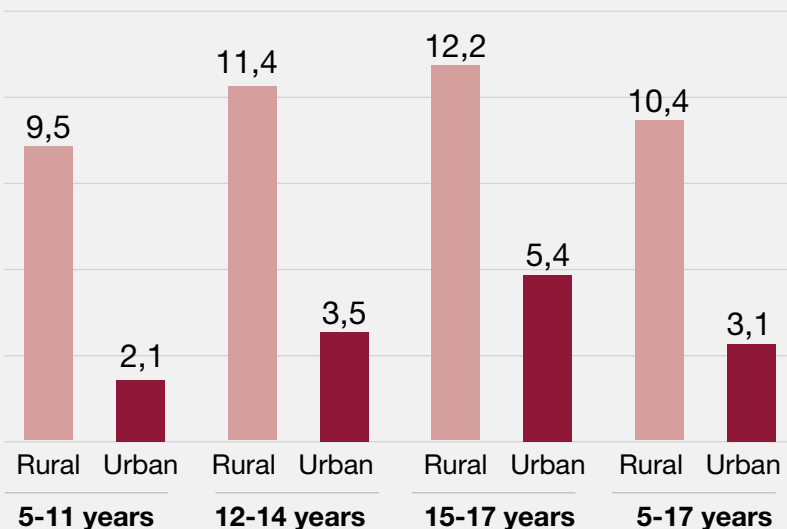


Notes: Household chores refer to services children provide without pay for their own households. These include caring for household members, cleaning and minor household repairs, cooking and serving meals, washing and ironing clothes, and transporting or accompanying family members to and from work and 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.

4 Two indicators are used for measuring child labour for the purpose of reporting on Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the first based on the SNA production boundary (Indicator 8.7.1) and the second on the general production boundary (Indicator 8.7.2). The weekly hours threshold for household chores of 21 hours is consistent with that used for Indicator 8.7.2.

5 Resolution IV of the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (paras. 36 and 37), provides guidance on defining and measuring household chores.

Child labour is much more common among children living in rural areas. Another striking feature of child labour in the Arab States is its heavy concentration in rural areas. For the 5-17 years age group as a whole, the prevalence of child labour in rural areas is more than three times that of urban areas. This rural-urban gap persists across all age ranges, but becomes slightly less pronounced as children grow older. This a reflection of the diminishing importance of child labour in agriculture as children move across the 5 to 17 years age spectrum (see below).



Child labour and residence

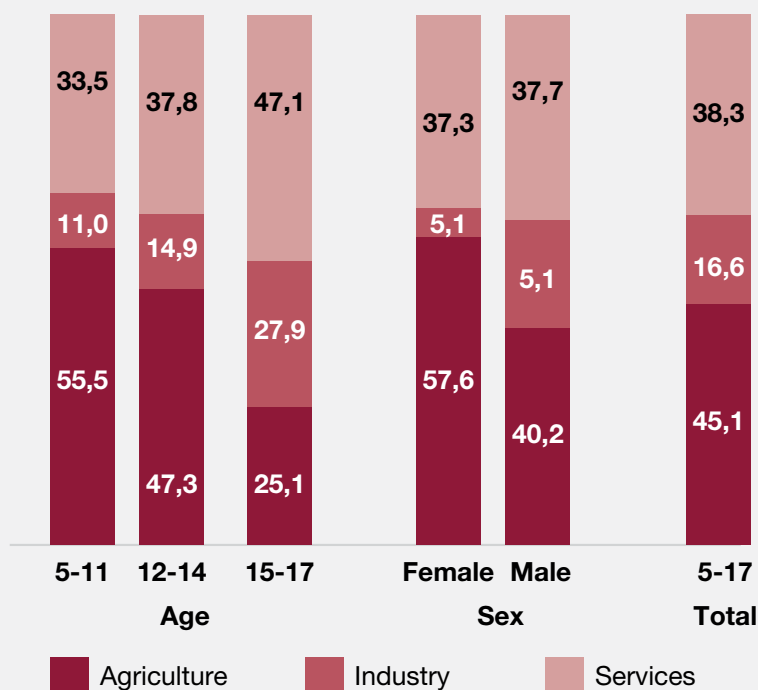
Figure 7 Percentage of children in child labour, by residence

Agriculture accounts for the largest share of children in child labour. For the 5-17 age group as a whole, 45% of children in child labour are found in agriculture, which consists primarily of family subsistence and smallholder farming, but also includes commercial plantations, capture fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing. Thirty-eight percent work in services and the remaining 16% in industry.

These aggregate figures mask important differences in the composition of child labour by age and sex. Agricultural child labour predominates for younger children in child labour, underscoring the role of agricultural work as entry point into child labour. The relative importance of child labour in agriculture declines sharply, and the relative importance of industry and services rises, as children grow older. This shift is particularly pronounced in moving from the 12-14 to 15-17 years age group. Gender considerations appear important in determining the kind of child labour performed: girls are relatively more likely than boys to work in agriculture while the opposite pattern prevails for child labour in industry.

Child labour and branch of economic activity

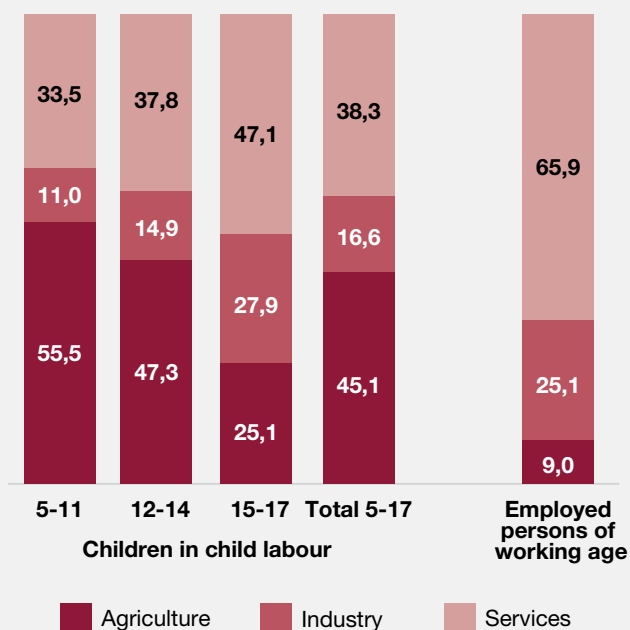
Figure 7 Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by branch of economic activity, age range and sex



The sectoral breakdown of child labour differs considerably from that the adult labour force. In other words, the sectoral breakdown of child labour is not merely a reflection of broader employment patterns. Overall, children in child labour are significantly over-represented in agriculture sector and under-represented in the services sector and industry in comparison to employed persons of working age. These patterns are especially pronounced in the case of younger, 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds in child labour. The relatively greater importance of agriculture in child labour is not surprising, as the informal, low-skill and low-technology production that characterises much of the agriculture sector is more conducive to the involvement of children, providing them with an entry point into the labour force.

Sectoral composition of child labour and the adult labour force

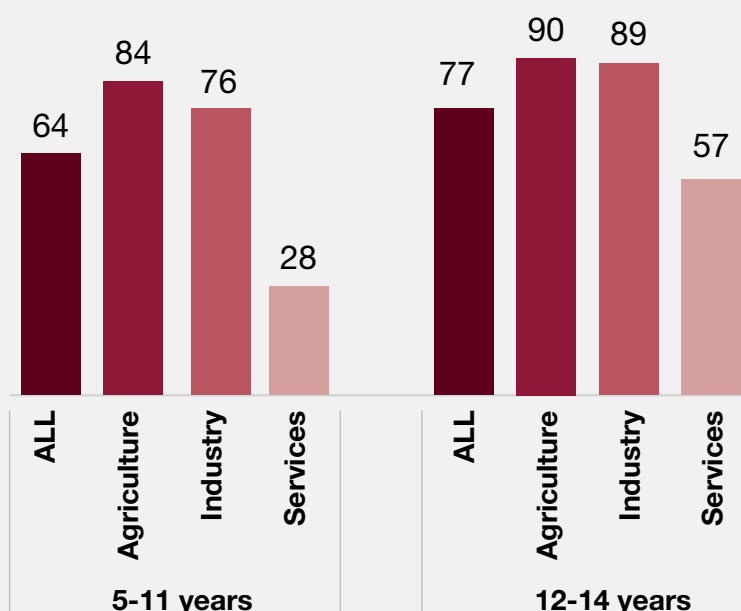
Figure 8 Percentage distribution of children in child labour and adult labour force, by branch of economic activity and age range



A very high share of child labour is hazardous in nature. Nearly two-thirds of all 5 to 11 year-olds in child labour, and over three-quarters of all 12-14 year-olds in child labour, are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development. While there are no possible exceptions for hazardous work – all children must be protected from hazardous child labour – the group of young children facing hazardous work conditions directly endangering their health, safety, and moral development is of special concern. Not surprisingly, the degree of hazardousness is not uniform across child labour in different branches of economic activity. For both 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds, child labour in agriculture and industry is much more likely to be hazardous than child labour in service sector, although the degree hazardousness is high even in the last.

Hazardous work and branch of economic activity

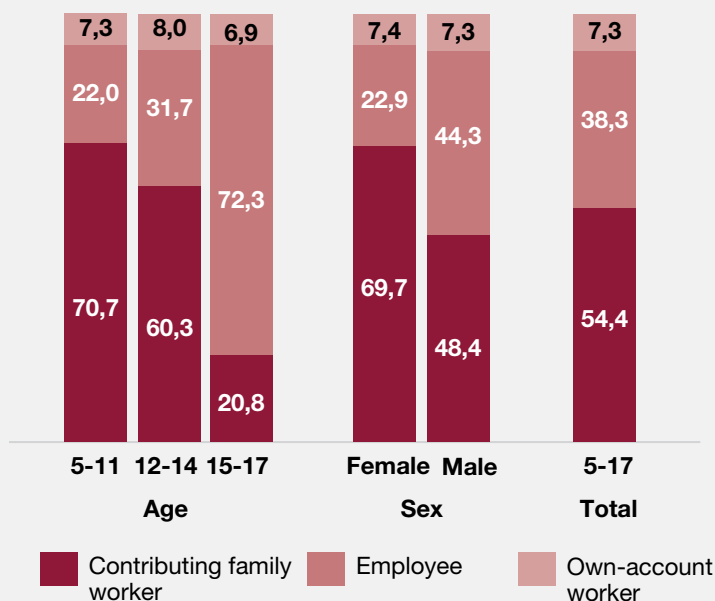
Figure 9 Percentage distribution of children in child labour and employed persons of working age, (a) by branch of economic activity and age range



Work within children's own family accounts for the largest share of child labour. Overall, more than half (54%) of all children in child labour work for their own families, while 38% work as employees for third parties and the remaining 7% for work for their own account. Again, however, aggregate figures mask important differences by age and sex. The relative importance of family work declines sharply with age while the relative importance of work as employees moves in the opposite direction. The breakdown by sex provides further evidence of gender specialisation in types of work assigned to children. Girls in child labour are much more likely than boys to work for their own families, while the opposite pattern prevails for work as employees.

Child labour and status in employment

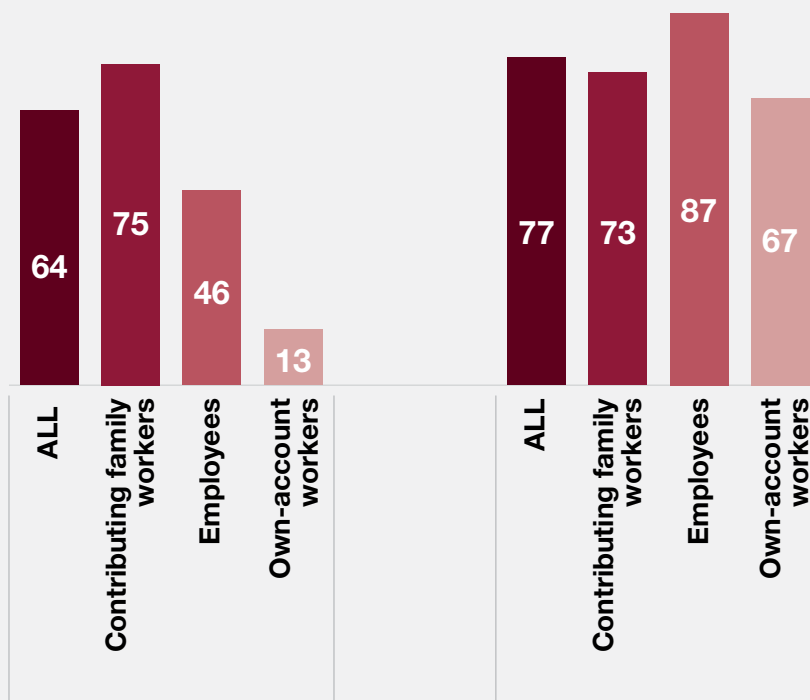
Figure 10 Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by status at work, age range and sex



A substantial share of child labour performed within children's own families is hazardous. Indeed, for 5 to 11 year-olds, fully three-quarters of family-based child labour is hazardous, a much higher share than for child labour performed as employees or own-account workers. For 12-14 year-olds, the degree of hazardousness is very high for child labour across all three categories of status in employment.

Hazardous work and status in employment

Figure 11 Percentage of child labour constituting hazardous work, by status in employment (5-14 years)

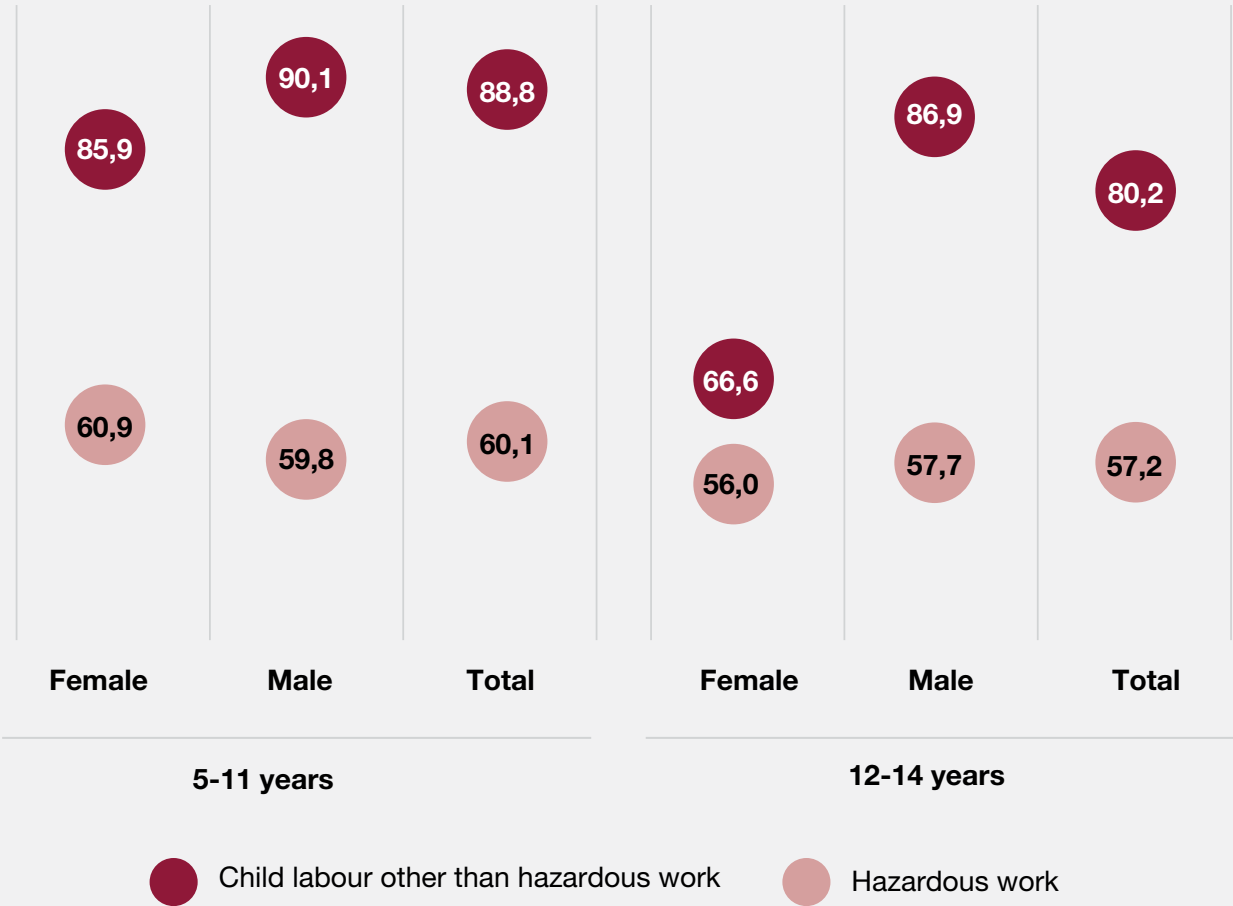


School attendance is especially low for children in hazardous work. While all children in child labour are disadvantaged in terms of their ability to attend school, this is particularly the case for children in hazardous work. Among children in the age ranges for compulsory schooling in most Arab States, i.e., 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds, just 60% and 57%, respectively, of children hazardous work attend school, far below the attendance rates of children in non-hazardous child labour, who in turn lag behind the attendance rates of children not in child labour.

It is also worth underscoring that educational disadvantage associated with child labour is not limited to lower school attendance. Even among children in child labour that manage to also attend school, the hours and energy required by their work can interfere with their ability to fully benefit from their classroom time and to find time for study outside the classroom, in turn compromising their educational performance.

Child labour and school attendance

Figure 12 School attendance rates, by involvement in child labour and hazardous work, age range and sex

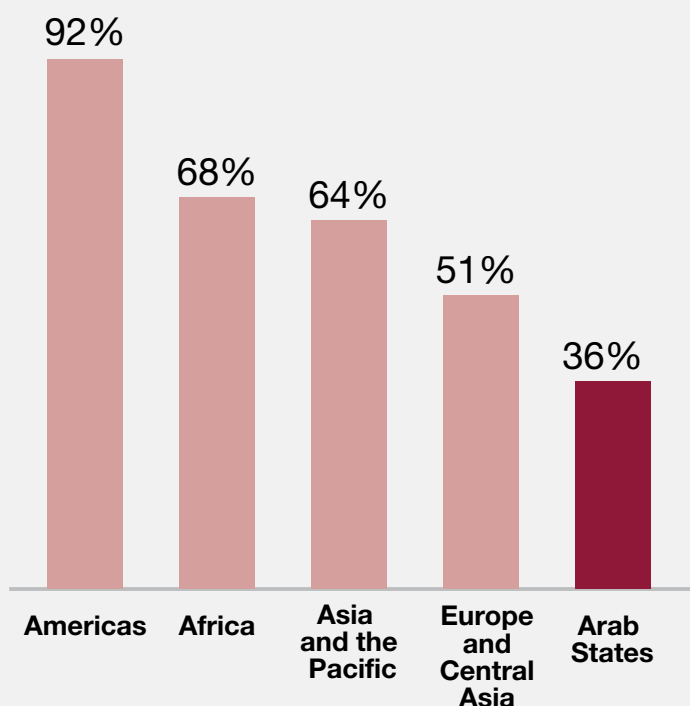


The timely collection of child labour data remains an important challenge in the region. Representative data for the period from 2016 to 2020 is available for only about one-third of the total child population in the Arab States, by far the lowest level of child labour data coverage of

the five world regions. Limited data on child labour in the region hampers the development and targeting of child labour policies and constitutes a major obstacle to monitoring progress against child labour. Greater investment in child labour data collection therefore constitutes an important regional priority.

Coverage of child labour data

Figure 13 Percentage of child population for which representative data are available for the 2016 to 2020 period, by region



Children

in hazardous work are much less likely to attend school



Statistical tables

			TOTAL								
			5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		
			%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	
CHILD LABOUR	Total	2020	4.8	1,171	6.4	601	7.8	675	5.8	2,448	
		2016									
	Residence	Urban		2.1	316	3.5	210	5.4	307	3.1	833
		Rural		9.5	856	11.4	391	12.2	368	10.4	1,615
	School attendance	Child labour other than hazardous work		88.8	371	80.2	109	-	-	86.7	480
	Children in child labour by sector of economic activity	Agriculture		55.5	650	47.3	284	25.1	169	45.1	1,104
		Industry		11.0	129	14.9	89	27.9	188	16.6	407
		Services		33.5	392	37.8	227	47.1	318	38.3	937
	Children in child labour by status in employment	Employees		22.0	258	31.7	191	72.3	488	38.3	937
		Own-account workers		7.3	86	8.0	48	6.9	46	7.3	180
Contributing family workers			70.7	828	60.3	363	20.8	141	54.4	1,331	
SDG child labour indicators	SDG 8.7.1.1		4.8	1,171	4.6	432	2.8	242	4.3	1,845	
	SDG 8.7.1.2		5.8	1,424	8.2	775	2.8	242	5.7	2,441	
HAZARDOUS WORK	Total	2020	3.1	754	4.9	465	7.8	675	4.5	1,894	
		2016									
	Residence	Urban		1.3	192	2.6	157	5.4	307	2.4	657
		Rural		6.2	562	9.0	308	12.2	368	8.0	1,238
	School attendance	Children in hazardous work		60.1	453	57.2	266	56.0	378	57.9	1,097
	Children in hazardous work by sector of economic activity	Agriculture		72.2	544	55.2	257	25.1	169	51.2	970
		Industry		13.1	99	17.1	79	27.9	188	19.3	366
		Services		14.7	111	27.7	129	47.1	318	29.4	558
Children in hazardous work by status in employment	Employees		15.6	118	35.8	166	72.3	488	40.8	773	
	Own-account workers		1.5	11	6.9	32	6.9	46	4.7	90	
	Contributing family workers		82.9	625	57.3	266	20.8	141	54.5	1,032	

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.
6.8	849	8.8	426	11.0	487	8.1	1,761	2.7	323	3.8	176	4.4	188	3.3	687
3.2	252	5.6	172	8.4	244	4.8	668	0.9	64	1.3	39	2.3	63	1.3	166
12.9	597	14.5	254	15.9	243	13.9	1,094	5.9	259	8.2	137	8.3	125	6.9	521
90.1	262	86.9	79	-	-	89.4	342	85.9	108	66.6	30	-	-	80.8	138
55.8	474	40.9	174	12.5	61	40.2	709	54.7	176	62.8	110	57.6	108	57.6	395
13.4	113	20.5	87	35.2	171	21.1	372	4.9	16	1.2	2	9.0	17	5.1	35
30.8	262	38.6	164	52.4	255	38.6	681	40.4	130	36.0	63	33.4	63	37.3	256
23.3	198	42.8	182	82.1	400	44.3	780	18.6	60	5.0	9	47.0	89	22.9	157
7.0	59	8.9	38	6.5	32	7.3	129	8.2	26	5.7	10	7.8	15	7.4	51
69.7	592	48.3	206	11.4	56	48.4	853	73.2	236	89.3	157	45.2	85	69.7	478
6.8	849	6.6	317	4.3	191	6.2	1,357	2.7	323	2.5	115	1.2	50	2.3	488
7.3	909	8.6	413	4.3	191	7.0	1,513	4.3	515	7.9	363	1.2	50	4.5	928
0.7	866	2.9	1,662	11.1	6,299	3.6	8,827	0.5	549	1.6	808	2.6	1,309	1.2	2,667
2.0	156	4.2	130	8.4	244	3.8	530	0.5	36	0.9	27	2.3	63	1.0	126
8.7	401	11.7	205	15.9	243	10.8	849	3.7	161	6.2	103	8.3	125	5.1	389
59.8	333	57.7	193	54.7	266	57.5	792	60.9	120	56.0	73	59.6	112	59.2	305
66.4	370	43.8	147	12.5	61	41.9	577	88.6	174	84.6	110	57.6	108	76.3	393
17.2	96	23.4	78	35.2	171	25.1	346	1.4	3	0.8	1	9.0	17	4.0	21
16.4	91	32.8	110	52.4	255	33.1	456	10.0	20	14.7	19	33.4	63	19.7	102
21.2	118	49.7	166	82.1	400	49.6	684	0.0	0	0.0	0	47.0	89	17.2	89
2.0	11	6.8	23	6.5	32	4.8	66	0.0	0	7.2	9	7.8	15	4.7	24
76.8	428	43.4	145	11.4	56	45.6	629	100.0	197	92.8	121	45.2	85	78.2	403

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