

# Global Estimates of Child Labour



**ALLIANCE**



## **RESULTS AND TRENDS, 2012-2016 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



Global estimates of  
child labour:

Results and trends,  
2012-2016

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Executive summary

**GENEVA, 2017**



# Executive summary

Table 1

## Global estimates results at a glance

		Children in employment		Of which: Children in child labour		Of which: Children in hazardous work		
		2012	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016	
<b>World (5-17 years)</b>	Number (000s)	264 427	<b>218 019</b>	167 956	<b>151 622</b>	85 344	<b>72 525</b>	
	Prevalence (%)	16.7	<b>13.8</b>	10.6	<b>9.6</b>	5.4	<b>4.6</b>	
<b>Age range</b>	5-14 years	Number (000s)	144 066	<b>130 364</b>	120 453	<b>114 472</b>	37 841	<b>35 376</b>
		Prevalence (%)	11.8	<b>10.6</b>	9.9	<b>9.3</b>	3.1	<b>2.9</b>
	15-17 years	Number (000s)	120 362	<b>87 655</b>	47 503	<b>37 149</b>	47 503	<b>37 149</b>
		Prevalence (%)	33.0	<b>24.9</b>	13.0	<b>10.5</b>	13.0	<b>10.5</b>
<b>Sex (5-17 years)</b>	Male	Number (000s)	148 327	<b>123 190</b>	99 766	<b>87 521</b>	55 048	<b>44 774</b>
		Prevalence (%)	18.1	<b>15.0</b>	12.2	<b>10.7</b>	6.7	<b>5.5</b>
	Female	Number (000s)	116 100	<b>94 829</b>	68 190	<b>64 100</b>	30 296	<b>27 751</b>
		Prevalence (%)	15.2	<b>12.4</b>	8.9	<b>8.4</b>	4.0	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Region (5-17 years)</b>	Africa	Number (000s)	--	<b>99 417</b>	--	<b>72 113</b>	--	<b>31 538</b>
		Prevalence (%)	--	<b>27.1</b>	--	<b>19.6</b>	--	<b>8.6</b>
	Americas	Number (000s)	--	<b>17 725</b>	--	<b>10 735</b>	--	<b>6 553</b>
		Prevalence (%)	--	<b>8.8</b>	--	<b>5.3</b>	--	<b>3.2</b>
	Asia and the Pacific	Number (000s)	129 358	<b>90 236</b>	77 723	<b>62 077</b>	33 860	<b>28 469</b>
		Prevalence (%)	15.5	<b>10.7</b>	9.3	<b>7.4</b>	4.1	<b>3.4</b>
	Europe and Central Asia	Number (000s)	--	<b>8 773</b>	--	<b>5 534</b>	--	<b>5 349</b>
		Prevalence (%)	--	<b>6.5</b>	--	<b>4.1</b>	--	<b>4.0</b>
	Arab States	Number (000s)	--	<b>1 868</b>	--	<b>1 162</b>	--	<b>616</b>
		Prevalence (%)	--	<b>4.6</b>	--	<b>2.9</b>	--	<b>1.5</b>

The Sustainable Development Goals include a renewed global commitment to ending child labour. Specifically, target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls on the global community to:

*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 current report, the fifth edition of the ILO's quadrennial report series on global estimates of child labour, charts how far we have come and how far we still have to go to honour this commitment to ending child labour. The report describes the scale and key characteristics of child labour in the world today, as well as changes in the global child labour situation over time. It also discusses key poli-

cy priorities in the campaign to reach the 2025 target. The report, and the global estimation exercise that underpins it, form part of a broader inter-agency effort under Alliance 8.7 to measure and monitor progress towards target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2016 estimates tell a story both of real progress and of a job unfinished. They show a dramatic decline in child labour over the 16 years since the ILO began monitoring child labour in 2000. But the estimates also indicate that the pace of decline has slowed considerably in the last four years, precisely at a time when substantial acceleration is needed to reach the ambitious 2025 target date for ending child labour. The bottom line is that we remain far removed from the world we want: 152 million children are still engaged in child labour, almost half of them in its worst forms.

## Global figures

**The challenge of ending child labour remains formidable.** A total of 152 million children – 64 million girls and 88 million boys – are in child labour globally, accounting for almost one in ten of all children worldwide. Nearly half of all those in child labour – 73 million children in absolute terms – are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety, and moral development. Children in employment, a broader measure comprising both child labour and permitted forms of employment involving children of legal working age, number 218 million.

**The dynamic picture indicates that we are moving in the right direction.** Child labour declined during the period from 2012 to 2016, continuing a trend seen since the publication of the ILO's first global estimates of child labour in 2000. The 16-year period starting in 2000 saw a net reduction of 94 million children in child labour. The number of children in hazardous work fell by more than half over the same period. There were almost 134 million fewer children in employment in 2016 than in 2000. Real advances have been made in the fight

against child labour, providing an important foundation for efforts moving forward.

**But progress slowed during 2012 to 2016.** A narrower focus on the most recent four-year period indicates a significant slowing down of progress. The reduction in the number of children in child labour amounted to 16 million for the 2012 to 2016 period, just one third of the 47 million reduction recorded during 2008 to 2012. Expressed in relative terms, the share of children in child labour fell by only one percentage point during 2012 to 2016 compared to three percentage points in the previous four-year period. The decline in hazardous work slowed in a similar fashion.

**We must move much faster if we are to honour our commitment to ending child labour in all its forms by 2025.** A simple projection of future progress based on the pace of progress achieved during 2012 to 2016 – the business-as-usual scenario – would leave 121 million children still in child labour in 2025, of which 52 million would be in hazardous work. A similar calculation indicates that even maintaining the pace achieved during 2008 to 2012 – the fastest recorded to date – would not be nearly enough. We are moving in the right direction, but we will need to move much more quickly to completely eliminate child labour by 2025.

## Regional figures

**The Africa region and the Asia and the Pacific region together host nine out of every ten children in child labour.** Africa ranks highest both in the percentage of children in child labour – one-fifth – and the absolute number of children in child labour – 72 million. Asia and the Pacific ranks second highest in both these measures – 7 per cent of all children, 62 million in absolute terms, are in child labour in this region. The remaining child labour population is divided among the Americas (11 million), Europe and Central Asia (6 million), and the Arab States (1 million).

**A breakthrough in Africa will be critical to ending child labour worldwide.** The 2016 estimates suggest that *sub-Saharan* Africa, the regional grouping for which we have comparable estimates for 2012, witnessed a rise in child labour during the 2012 to 2016 period, in contrast to the other major regions where child labour continued to decline, and despite the number of targeted policies implemented by African governments to combat child labour. It is likely that the retrogression was driven in important part by broader economic and demographic forces acting against governmental efforts, although this is a matter requiring further research.

**There is a strong correlation between child labour and situations of conflict and disaster.** The Africa region has also been among those most affected by situations of conflict and disaster, which in turn heighten the risk of child labour. The incidence of child labour in countries affected by armed conflict is 77 per cent higher than the global average, while the incidence of hazardous work is 50 per cent higher in countries affected by armed conflict than in the world as a whole. This situation underscores the importance of prioritizing child labour within humanitarian responses and during reconstruction and recovery; governments, workers' and employers' organizations, and humanitarian actors all have a critical role to play in this context.

## Characteristics of child labour

**The agricultural sector accounts for by far the largest share of child labour.** The sector accounts for 71 per cent of all those in child labour and for 108 million children in absolute terms. Child labour in agriculture relates primarily to subsistence and commercial farming and livestock herding. It is often hazardous in its nature and in the circumstances in which it is carried out. Children in child labour in the services and industry sectors number 26 million and 18 million, respectively, but these sectors are likely to become more

relevant in some regions in the future in the face of forces such as climate change displacing families from their farms and into cities.

**Most child labour takes place within the family unit.** More than two-thirds of all children in child labour work as contributing family labourers, while paid employment and own-account workers make up 27 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, of those in child labour. These numbers underscore an important broader point concerning the nature of child labour in the world today. Most children in child labour are *not* in an employment relationship with a third-party employer, but rather work on family farms and in family enterprises; understanding and addressing family reliance on children's labour will therefore be critical to broader progress towards ending child labour.

**Forced labour of children requires special attention.** According to the 2016 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery,<sup>1</sup> there were about 4.3 million children aged below 18 years in forced labour, representing 18 per cent of the 24.8 million total forced labour victims worldwide. This estimate includes 1.0 million children in commercial sexual exploitation, 3.0 million children in forced labour for other forms of labour exploitation, and 300,000 children in forced labour imposed by state authorities. This extreme form of child labour, in which the children suffer both the impact of the hazardous working conditions *and* the trauma of coercion, threats of penalty, and lack of freedom, require urgent action from governments and the international community.

## Other key results

### CHILD LABOUR AND NATIONAL INCOME

**Child labour is most prevalent in low-income countries but it is by no means only a low-income country problem.** The prevalence of child labour is highest in the low-income countries, at 19 per cent. By comparison, 9 per

cent of children in lower-middle-income countries, 7 per cent of children in upper-middle-income countries, and 1 per cent of children in upper-income countries are in child labour. But expressed in absolute terms, 84 million children in child labour, accounting for 56 per cent of all those in child labour, actually live in middle-income countries, and an additional 2 million live in high-income countries. These statistics make clear that while low-income countries will require special attention, the fight against child labour will not be won by focusing on low-income countries alone.

### AGE PROFILE OF CHILD LABOUR

**Children aged 5 to 11 years form the largest share of those in child labour and also form a substantial share of those in hazardous work.** Forty-eight per cent of all those in child labour are in the 5–11 years age bracket, 28 per cent are aged 12–14 years, and 25 per cent fall into the 15–17 years age range. Younger children constitute a smaller but still substantial share of total children in hazardous work. A quarter of all children in the hazardous work group – 19 million children in absolute terms – are aged 5–11 years. While there are no possible exceptions for hazardous work – *all* children must be protected from hazardous child labour – the group of very young children facing hazardous work conditions directly endangering their health, safety, and moral development is of special concern.

**There are still substantial numbers of children in child labour who are above the minimum working age.** Recent progress has been fastest among children aged 15–17 years, but there are almost 38 million children – 24 million boys and 14 million girls – in this age range in child labour. It should be recalled that 15–17 year-olds are above the minimum working age and therefore are *not* counted as child labourers because they are too young. Rather, they are in child labour because their work is or may be physically or psychologically injurious to their health and well-being. This basic fact is reinforced by country-level statistics indicating that 15–17 year-olds in child labour suffer higher levels of work-related

illness and injury than other employed children in this age range. They are also more likely than other employed 15–17 year-olds to have dropped out of school prematurely.

### GENDER PROFILE OF CHILD LABOUR

**Boys appear to face a greater risk of child labour than girls.** There are 23 million more boys than girls in child labour and 17 million more boys than girls in hazardous work. The gender gap increases with age. The difference in child labour incidence is less than one percentage point for 5–11 year-olds, rising to three percentage points for 12–14 year-olds and to five percentage points for 15–17 year-olds. But it is possible that these figures understate girls' work relative to that of boys. As pointed out in previous global reports, girls may be more present in less visible and therefore under-reported forms of child labour such as domestic service in private households. It is also worth noting that the decline in child labour among girls was only half that among boys during the 2012 to 2016 period, meaning that the gender gap in child labour has narrowed.

**Girls are much more likely than boys to shoulder responsibility for household chores, a form of work not considered in the child labour estimates.** Estimates of children's involvement in household chores, produced for the first time for the 2016 Global Estimates, indicate that girls are much more likely than boys to perform household chores in every weekly hour bracket. Girls account for two-thirds of the 54 million children aged 5–14 years who perform household chores for at least 21 hours per week, the threshold beyond which initial research suggests household chores begin to negatively impact on the ability of children to attend and benefit from schooling. Girls account for a similar share of the 29 million children aged 5–14 years performing chores beyond a threshold of 28 hours per week, and of the nearly 7 million performing chores for 43 or more hours each week. Girls are also more likely than boys to perform "double work duty", meaning both work in employment and in household chores.



## CHILD LABOUR AND EDUCATION

**Child labour is frequently associated with educational marginalization.** The 2016 Global Estimates are also the first to address the relationship between schooling and child labour, in turn one of the most important determinants of the impact of child labour on decent work and sustainable livelihood prospects later in the life cycle. The estimates indicate that a very large number of children in child labour are completely deprived of education – for the 5–14 years age group, there are 36 million children in child labour who are out of school, 32 per cent of all those in child labour in this age range. While the remaining 68 per cent are able to attend school, a growing body of research suggests that these children too are penalized educationally for their involvement in child labour. The time and energy required by work interfere with children’s ability to derive educational benefit from their time in the classroom and to find time outside the classroom for independent study. As a result, children in child labour tend to perform relatively poorly in terms of learning achievement and to lag behind their non-working peers in terms of grade progression.

## Data sources and methodology

The 2016 estimates use data from a total of 105 national household surveys covering more than 70 per cent of the world population of children aged 5 to 17 years. All world regions are covered, and data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and China are included for the first time. The ILO gratefully acknowledges the contributions of numerous national statistical offices, and of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the demographic and health surveys programme of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) in facilitating access to the data utilised. The United States Department of Labor provided

important financial support to the ILO’s statistical work on child labour. The 2016 estimates are based on the extrapolation of data from the surveys following a similar methodology as that used for the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 estimates. The methodology and data used in producing the 2016 Global Estimates are summarized in Appendix 1 of this report and are discussed in greater detail in the companion technical paper: *Methodology of the global estimates of child labour, 2012-2016*.

## Conclusions and way forward

How do we get from where we are now to where we want to be by 2025? Thanks to a growing body of practical experience, research, and impact evaluations, we know a fair deal about the broad strategies and policies that are of most relevance in the fight against child labour.

**Policy responses to child labour need to be integrated into broader national development efforts and adapted to local circumstances.** We know that child labour is the product of an array of economic and social forces, and attempting to address it without consideration of these forces is therefore unlikely to be successful. This means, above all, mainstreaming child labour into broader social development policies, rather than treating it as an isolated issue. Ensuring that child labour concerns are reflected in broader policies in the areas of education, social protection, labour markets and labour standards is especially relevant to progress against child labour. We also know from experience that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing child labour. Rather, strategic responses need to be tailored to the variety of contexts in which child labour persists. This includes contexts of state fragility and armed conflict, where a large share of children in child labour live. It also includes contexts affected by forces such as climate change, economic informality, urbanization, and globaliza-

tion, each of which presents special challenges in terms of protecting children from child labour.

**Policy responses should also address the age, gender and regional dimensions of child labour.**

Just under half of all those in child labour are below 12 years of age and continued attention to these especially vulnerable children is therefore essential, particularly in light of the apparent stagnation in progress for this group over the last four years. Renewed attention must also be paid to 15–17 year-olds in child labour. This group is relevant to the fields of child labour, youth employment, and occupational safety and health, but has hitherto rarely been accorded priority in any of them. This must change. Differences between boys and girls in terms of the extent and nature of their involvement in child labour underscore the continuing relevance of policy measures that address the role of gender in determining whether children are sent to work and the risks they face once there. The results indicating that girls shoulder disproportionate responsibility for household chores also raise important gender concerns that merit consideration in child labour policies. In regional terms, Africa, where child labour is highest in both proportionate and absolute terms, and where progress has stalled, remains a particular priority.

**Continued investment in building the knowledge base on child labour is needed to inform policy responses.**

There is an ongoing need for information about the *impact* of policies and interventions on child labour. With the exception of cash transfers, still too little is known about the effectiveness of interventions in policy areas of relevance to child labour, which, in turn, is impeding policy development. There is a general need for more knowledge of the implications for child labour of broader global challenges, including climate change, migration, inequality, urbanization, and changes in the world of work. We also need to know more about how child labour is linked to other violations of fundamental labour rights. The effective targeting of policies will require better information on children in the worst forms of child labour other

than hazardous work, building on the research and methodological work already undertaken by the ILO and other bodies.

**International cooperation and partnership will also be critical to progress.**

Alliance 8.7 has a key role to play in supporting governments in efforts towards ending child labour by the 2025 target date. The Alliance focuses on accelerating action, conducting research and sharing knowledge, driving innovation, and increasing and leveraging resources. It brings together all actors, including the critically important social partners – workers’ and employers’ organizations – as well as civil society organizations. In many countries, the cost of required action far exceeds available government resources, meaning that international resource mobilization will also be imperative to achieve success in the fight against child labour, within the spirit of Article 8 of ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). The returns on investment in ending child labour are incalculable. Children who are free from the burden of child labour are able to fully realize their rights to education, leisure, and healthy development, in turn providing the essential foundation for broader social and economic development, poverty eradication, and human rights.





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AND CHILD LABOUR

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