



**ALLIANCE**

# Frequently Asked Questions

**2016 GLOBAL ESTIMATES  
OF CHILD LABOUR**

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# A. Background and partnership

## **Why are global estimates necessary?**

Accurate and reliable data is a vital tool in tackling complex social challenges. Not only does it raise awareness about specific issues, but it enables policy makers to take strategic decisions based on evidence, guide implementation to tackle bottlenecks and development partners to address funding gaps.

## **Why are these new estimates produced under Alliance 8.7?**

The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour are presented as a contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Target 8.7, which calls for immediate and effective measures to end forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking, as well as child labour in all its forms. It is intended to inform policy making and implementation for achieving the target.

The collaborative development of these estimates are an integral and necessary part of Alliance 8.7, a global partnership involving governments, workers' and employers' organisations, UN agencies, regional organisations, partners for development, private enterprises civil society organizations, academia, experts, the media and others, supporting the attainment of SDG Target 8.7.

The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour were developed by the International Labour Organization. The Global Estimates also benefited from consultations with UN partner agencies and external experts.

The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour were released on 19 September 2017 along with the 2016 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery. The collective package of global estimates is known as the 2017 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery and Child Labour.

## **When were the previous global estimates of child labour released?**

Previously, the ILO has produced Global Estimates of Child Labour in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012.

# B. Terminology and methodology

## What is child labour?

“**Child labour**” basically refers to two concepts: 1) Work undertaken by children below legal minimum working age (in most countries at least 15 years), and 2) “worst forms of child labour”. The concepts are defined by the ILO Minimum Age Convention N°138 from 1973 and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention N° 182 from 1999. An interim declaration minimum age of 14 years is also possible in countries with insufficiently developed economies and education systems. It is a fundamental principle to protect the rights of children so that they have access to education and to finish at least compulsory education, before entering the labour market.

Laws may also permit **light work** for children aged 13–15 (for limited hours and not harming their health, safety or school attendance and achievement), or for those aged 12–14 if the minimum age is set at 14.

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 the conditions in which it is carried out, is likely to harm their health, safety or morals – often referred to as “hazardous work”.

The detailed concepts and statistical definitions are referred to in the Annex of the report *Global estimates of child labour: Results and Trends 2012-2016* as well as the separate publication *Methodology of the global estimates of child labour*.

## What is hazardous work?

*Children in hazardous work* are those involved in any activity or occupation that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm their health, safety or morals. In general, hazardous work may include night work or long hours of work, exposure to physical, psychological or sexual abuse; work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces; work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; and work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging their health.

For the 2016 Global Estimates of Child labour, hazardous work is measured on the basis of a list of hazardous industries and occupations, excessive working hours, and hazardous working conditions (such as night work).

## What are the data sources?

The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour are based on the extrapolation from 105 national household surveys that cover more than 1,100 million children between 5 and 17 years which means, 70% of all world's children in this age group (against 44% in 2008 and 53% in 2012). These include child labour surveys implemented with the assistance of the ILO, multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS), implemented with the assistance of UNICEF, demographic and health surveys (DHS) from USAID, labour force surveys (LFS) and other national household surveys.

## What regions are covered?

Disaggregated estimates are provided for five world regions: Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Americas, and Europe and Central Asia. These regions are defined in accordance with the regional classification system employed by the ILO STATISTICS department.

For the 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour, data from OECD countries and China are included for the first time.

## Are all children in child labour included in the Global Estimates?

The Global Estimates include information from household surveys on age groups and working hours, as well as hazardous child labour. The surveys do NOT capture information on the other worst forms of child labour (slavery, trafficking, armed conflicts, prostitution, illicit activities, etc.).

An estimate of forced labour of children and sexual exploitation of children (covering the use of children in prostitution and pornography) is presented in the Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage.

New survey tools are needed to improve measurement of forced recruitment of children for armed conflict and the use of children in illicit activities.

# C. Results and trends

## How many children are in child labour?

Worldwide 218 million children between 5 and 17 years are in employment. 152 million of them are in child labour; almost half of them, 73 million, work in hazardous child labour. That means, one out of ten children in the world are in child labour; one out of 20 in hazardous child labour, with huge variations between countries, regions, sectors and occupations.

## Is all work done by children classified as child labour and therefore prohibited?

No, as the figures show, there are 66 million children in employment, but not in child labour. This includes 12-14 year old boys and girls who are working in non-hazardous light work for less than 14 hours a week, and 15-17 years olds working in non-hazardous work (and for less than 43 hours a week). All working children below 12 are considered to be in child labour.

## Where is the highest prevalence of child labour?

### Regions

In absolute terms, almost half of child labour (72 million) is to be found in Africa and another 62 million in the Asia and Pacific Region. In terms of prevalence, one out of five children in Africa (19.6%) are in child labour, whilst prevalence in other regions is between 3% and 7% (2.9% in the Arab States, 4.1% in Europe and Central Asia, 5.3% in the Americas and 7.4% in Asia and the Pacific). The regional rankings of prevalence for hazardous work show a similar pattern.

### Age groups

Almost half of all child labourers (73 million) are between 5 and 11 years old. 42 million (28%) are between 12 and 14 years old. 37 million (24%) are between 15 and 17. Hazardous child labour is most prevalent amongst the 15 to 17 years old. Nevertheless up to a fourth of old hazardous child labour (19 million) is done by children less than 12 years old.

### Gender aspects

In 2016, there were 88 million boys and 64 million girls in child labour. Boys account for 58% of all children in child labour and 62% of all children in hazardous work. Boys appear to face a greater risk of child labour than girls, but this may also be a reflection of an under-reporting of girls' work, particularly in domestic child labour.

### Sectors

Child labour is concentrated primarily in agriculture (71 per cent), which includes fishing, forestry, livestock herding and aquaculture, and comprises both subsistence and commercial farming. 17% work in services and 12% in the industrial sector, including mining.

## What are the significant trends over the 2000-2016 period?

Since 2000, **total child labour** has been reduced by 38%, from 246 to 152 million. Hazardous child labour even has come down by 58%, from 171 to 73 million. Nevertheless, the new estimates also show that the pace of reduction has significantly slowed down since 2012, from 168 to 152 million in child labour, and from 85 to 73 million in hazardous child labour. This compares with a reduction of 47 million from 2008 to 2012, 30 million of whom were in hazardous work.

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

Between 2000 and 2016 child labour fell across all age groups, but with different levels of progress, particularly over the last four-year period since 2012.

While some further decline has been registered for the 12 to 14 and 15 to 17 years old, virtually no progress has been made between 2012 and 2016 amongst children between 5 and 11 years. Figures for this age group dropped by less than half a million (1%) and even stagnated for hazardous child labour.

The overall downward trend in child labour between 2012 and 2016 was therefore mainly due to a fall in child labour rates among adolescents. This may reflect the efforts undertaken to tackle the wider youth unemployment crisis – whether in decent youth employment or in hazardous work for children of this age group.

## What are the estimates and trends by sex?

In the period 2000-2016, there was reduction of 43 per cent in the number of girls in child labour as compared to 34 per cent for boys.

## Do you have more details on these trends?

Beyond the general slowdown in progress, the 2016 results highlight a number of specific areas of concern:

- 1) Child labour increased in Africa, despite the fact that many African countries have taken strong action to combat child labour.
- 2) Progress made during 2012 to 2016 was primarily limited to adolescents between 15 and 17 years. While numbers for child labour in this age group fell by more than one fifth, virtually no progress has been made amongst those between 5 and 11 years.
- 3) The decline in child labour among girls was only half that of boys from 2012 to 2016.
- 4) Recent progress is in part attributable to broader labour market conditions, and therefore may be fragile. In many countries, the worldwide youth unemployment crisis has made it difficult for children above the minimum working age to find jobs. The lower demand for adolescent workers may explain lower levels of involvement in hazardous child labour.
- 5) The latest estimate on forced labour of children shows very little change in the number of children in forced labour, in commercial sexual exploitation and in other sectors of the private economy. The few studies undertaken on children victims of forced labour all mention the difficulty of identifying and targeting these children.

## Has the distribution of child labour by sector changed?

Between 2012 and 2016, child labour in agriculture increased from 59% to 71% while it also increased in industry from 7 to 12% and declined in services from 32 to 17%. These

changes may reflect the shifts in the regional distribution of child labour worldwide, with a greater concentration of children in child labour in Africa where prevalence in agriculture is particularly high.

## **What about changes in the employment status of children?**

In 2016 as well as in 2012, more than two thirds of child labour were family workers. Self-employed child labour doubled from 4 to 8% while the percentage of children in paid (commercial) employment slightly dropped, from 27 to 23%. The percentages for hazardous child labour show similar patterns.

These figures suggest that around half of all children in child labour are unpaid contributing family workers in the agricultural sector in the African Region. Indeed, given the greater proportion of the population in Africa that depends on agriculture for their livelihoods than in other regions, that percentage may be even higher.

## **What is the relationship between child labour and national income levels?**

For the second time, global estimates are presented for different levels of income. These estimates reveal that child labour is most prevalent in low-income countries but it is by no means only a low-income country problem. Child labour rates vary from 19.4 percent of children in low income countries, 8.5 percent in lower-middle income countries, and 6.6 percent in upper middle income countries, down to 1.2 percent in high income countries.

Statistics on the absolute number of children in child labour clearly underscore the importance of middle-income countries. More than half of all child labour (84 million or 56%) is found in middle-income countries, and an additional two million live in high-income countries. These results make clear that poverty is not the only driver of child labour, and that economic growth alone will help to reduce, but will not be sufficient to eliminate it. Family and community poverty driven by inequitable labour markets and often linked to social exclusion and discrimination are far more closely linked to child labour than GDP alone.

## **How long do children work?**

For the first time, the global estimates provide figures that show the working hours of children in child labour. A high number of hours worked might be detrimental to education, health and leisure.

- Only one third of children in child labour between 15 and 17 years work less than the 43 weekly hours considered to be “non-hazardous”.
- In the age group between 12 and 14 years, three out of four children work more than 14 hours and 15% already more than 43 hours.
- Even amongst the youngest age group of child labourers (5 to 11 years), a third already works for more than 14 hours and 6% for more than 43 hours.

## **How many children in child labour are not attending school?**

The Global Estimates clearly show that child labour affects school attendance. A third of children in child labour between 5 and 14 years – ages considered of compulsory schooling – are not attending school. 20 million of them are less than 12 years old. School attendance rates are considerably higher for those children that do not have to work. At the same time, we know that combining work and school at this age often hinders school attendance and damages the ability to benefit from education.

## **Do we have estimates of household chores done by children for their own households?**

For the first time, the Global Estimates provide data on the 800 million children between 5 and 17 years that are performing unpaid household services for their own households on a regular basis. Girls in all age groups perform more household chores and spend more working hours than boys.

Some 54 million children between 5 and 14 years dedicate more than 21 hours a week on household chores; two out of three are girls. 21 hours is the threshold suggested by researchers to affect school attendance.

# D. The way forward

## **What are some of the overarching policy priorities in the drive to end child labour?**

Ending child labour will require a multi-faceted, committed and immediate response that addresses the array of economic and social drivers behind it. There can be no one-size-fits-all solution; responses need to be adapted to the very diverse root causes, conditions and circumstances in which child labour still occurs. Based on the analysis of prevalence and trends, it is nonetheless possible to identify some overarching policy priorities to achieve the elimination of the worst forms of child labour until 2025 and of all child labour by 2030:

- Decent family incomes derived from decent work by adult family members (and by youth of legal working age) are crucial if families are to escape poverty-driven child labour;
- Family farms and enterprises that depend on the (mostly unpaid) labour of their children need greater support to improve their functioning and incomes in order to end that dependence;



- Stronger social protection systems, including social protection floors, are necessary to offset the vulnerabilities that can lead to a household's reliance on children's labour;
- Free, universal and compulsory education of good quality up to the minimum age for admission to employment provides parents with the opportunity to invest in their children's education, makes it worthwhile for them to do so and combats poverty-driven exclusion from access to schooling;
- Properly designed labour market policies can help in both, reducing the demand for child labour and ensuring that the investment in education translates into better employment perspectives and decent work when the legal working age is attained.
- National legislation consistent with international labour standards supports such commitment and provides a framework for national action towards this goal.

## **Addressing the age, gender and regional dimensions of child labour is critical for success.**

**Age:** Almost half of all those in child labour are younger than 12 years. More attention to these especially vulnerable children is therefore essential, particularly in light of the stagnation in progress over the last four years. Special attention must also be paid to the challenges of hazardous child labour, occupational safety and health and decent work for 15–17 year-olds in child labour.

**Gender:** Child labour is different in extent, nature and consequences for boys and girls. Policy measures should address these differences by focussing on specific risk factors related to gender patterns. This applies particularly – but not only – for household chores.

**Regions:** The lack of progress and the high prevalence of child labour in Africa, calls for particular attention.

**Sectors:** That applies not least to child labour in agriculture, which has increased significantly in absolute numbers and as an overall percentage of all child labour.

It is also critical that policies and measures in all of these areas will be gender-sensitive, based on evidence and informed by research, data and statistics on the specific profile of child labour in the countries, sectors and age-groups concerned.