



# Tackling the issue of child labour

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**Forum:** United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

**Issue:** Tackling the issue of child labour

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## Introduction

Tackling the issue of Child Labour has remained largely at the forefront of what the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) aims to do. With numbers approximating 160 million children within the labour force at the beginning of 2020, numbers have only increased in the three years since. Child Labour is recognised by UNICEF as the event in which children subject to labour, whether it be paid or unpaid, are involved in activities classified as hazardous and that may pose a threat to their mental, physical, educational and/or social development, subsequently compromising the quality of living. Furthermore, these instances may also boil down to children being too young to work, many documented and undocumented cases being of children beginning at the age of 5.

With the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, UNICEF further recognised the threat that this would pose to children in the labour force. The epidemic paved the way for the necessity to hire without providing an income as well as grounds for dangerous and threatening work, largely in the world's least developed states. These regions are classified in large as; West and Central Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, in which 26% of children between the ages of 5-17 are engaged in Child Labour. Although numbers show little disparities in gender, girls and boys being equally subject to work, there are differences in the type of work being carried out. Girls have been documented as more likely to carry out unpaid domestic work.

As an organisation, UNICEF works in over 150 countries in order to protect children from abuse, violence and any possibility of structural harm. Through partnerships with governments alongside numerous organisations and businesses, UNICEF has worked continuously towards the aim of child protection as well as restoration and rehabilitation of survivors through social services. This committee and its goals should work concurrently with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, most specifically that of **Target 8.7** stating: *“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 report as a whole will be an overview of statistics and facts regarding child labour in various regions of the world in order to provide a precise yet zoomed-out view of child exploitation globally.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Child**

“A child is any person under the age of 18.” Nation-specific ages will not apply to the committee.

### **Labour**

Any form of practical work that requires/involves mental and predominantly hard physical effort.

### **Physical Abuse**

“Involves hurting or trying to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, burning, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use, or using other physical force.”

### **Psychological Abuse**

Also known as ‘verbal’ or ‘emotional’ abuse is the calculated “infliction of mental anguish or the provocation of the fear of violence or isolation in the” victim.

### **Protection**

“Protection encompasses all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with human rights law and international humanitarian law.”

### **Slavery**

“Situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.”

### **Exploitation**

“The deliberate maltreatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over another person.”

### **Hazardous Labour**

“Work that is performed by children in dangerous and unhealthy conditions that can lead to a child being killed, injured or made ill as a result of poor safety and health standards or employment conditions.”

## General Overview

## Reasons and Consequences

UNICEF has identified numerous reasons why nearly 1 in 10 children worldwide have become subject to child labour and hazardous work. Various reasons will be highlighted, the most significant occurrences being financial hardships, challenges or uncertainty that families face. These arise predominantly as a result of poverty, the job loss of a primary wage earner (prevalent during pandemics such as Covid-19) and/or the illness of a guardian. Much of the children, who in turn become adults, forced into such hazardous labour tend to originate from impoverished families and communities in which such labour is not uncommon. When forced labour becomes societally entrenched and communities develop as a result of this, it becomes increasingly difficult to end such a cycle. For this reason, UNICEF has identified the regions in which child labour is most prominent and highlights the necessity to tackle such an issue.

Children are often trafficked within poorer societies and families, and to a large extent, these children are girls. Trafficked children become subject to human rights violations such as but not limited to: violence, abuse and sexual exploitation. These under-18 'workers' are further required to break laws when working, getting them in trouble with local law enforcement, governments and militia if applicable. The trafficking of boys is largely connected to their exploitation by armed forces or groups and for girls, this abuse is intertwined with the threat of sexual exploitation. It is vital to acknowledge that these abuses are often done with the knowledge of families and guardians; therefore heightening the challenge UNICEF faces when working towards eliminating child exploitation and labour. Child labour is a notion that is not only limited to families and societies, however, with 1.2 million children being trafficked and sold to other districts, countries or even continents; consequently turning this into an international affair. Furthermore, migrant and refugee children are also placed into a high-risk category as many of these children have either been uprooted by conflict, disaster or poverty or have been born into camps in which tens of thousands of people are held in foreign states. Such children are particularly vulnerable when migrating alone or taking irregular routes with their families in which the prospect of death or abandonment is high.

The consequences of child labour are labelled by UNICEF as 'staggering'. The acknowledged hazardous conditions may result in extreme forms of bodily and mental harm, or in many cases, death. Bodily harm is defined largely by any hurt or injury that may hinder the quality of a person's health whilst mental harm poses a similar threat with hindrance to emotional and psychological well-being. In addition, the risk of slavery and economic or sexual exploitation is also recognised as a high and common consequence of reported child labour cases within states, nations and regions in which the issue of child labour lies prominent. Such areas will be explored further in the report. In almost

every case, children and adolescents are removed from schooling, educational institutions and any form of health care; thus threatening fundamental human rights and restricting the development of futures. Furthering this, the systematic trafficking of children more often than not will also expose affected children to illnesses and diseases such as HIV infection which leaves scars on generations.

### Child Labour in Africa

It has been estimated and recorded that within the African continent, one-fifth of children under the age of 18 are involved in child labour, and 9% of all African children are in hazardous work. When recorded with other regions of the world, these statistics reign as the highest and largest in the world. The continent is home to 1.4 billion people with children (U17) making up around 650 million, nearly half, of this population. Within this increasing population of children, one that has been estimated to hit one billion by 2055, around 72.1 million of them have been recorded to be involved in child labour and an estimated 31.5 million in hazardous labour. A majority of child labour in Africa is unpaid work as these children are also not employed on official terms by third-party organisations. Instead, they work to preserve family businesses and enterprises, most often farms.

Over years there have been measures implemented and taken in order to reach the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as reduce statistics regarding child labour in Africa. These progresses however seem to have been stalled for several years, largely in the Sub-Saharan African region between 2012-2016 and numbers went up. As a continent, Africa suffers greatly from economic recession post-Covid and a high youth-dependency ratio which increases the birth of children due to a lack of safe contraceptives/birth control methods. The birth of children is increased by the need for workers and communal businesses, thus provoking numbers of child labour and involvement in hazardous work. To further this, the continent's colonial history and border creation have become a greater cause for situations such as state fragility and crisis referring to the loss of a strong governmental body. This lack of power within a state leads to difficulty in the upkeep of laws and policies, thereby heightening the risk of child labour.

Majority of reported and estimated cases of child labour in Africa centre around the agriculture sector, accounting for the largest number. The absolute terms of numbers surrounding this are 61.4 million children, meaning around 85% of the child labour workers in Africa work in agriculture. Agriculture work surrounds the practice of working with crops, animals, farming and natural resources, all amenities in which Africa is known for its abundance; however, the involvement of child labour typically relates to commercial farming, subsistence and livestock herding. These

sectors of labour are acknowledged greatly as hazardous due to the general nature of the work but also due to the circumstances and scale at which they are carried out. Another 11% or 8.1 million of children involved in child labour in Africa are found in services whilst the next 2.7 million children or 4% are recorded to be found in the industry.

### Child Labour in the Arab States

When referring to the Arab States this report includes Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The Arab States have been largely and globally criticised for their continuous human rights violations towards labourers and more specifically migrant workers, many of whom originate from South Asia and the Philippines. These occurrences are largely centred around the Emirates, with many other Arab states being left to deal with armed conflict and exponential numbers of population displacement in past decades; thusly coinciding with a growing number of child labour cases as well as refugees fleeing nations into neighbouring ones or moving transatlantically. Those who have been internally displaced, including children who have been separated from their families either due to force or death, have become large populations in the region of the Arab States and contribute to many of the reasons why there are many observed cases of child labour. These contributions to the growing numbers include but are not limited to, economic fragility, displacement, weakened service provision, conflict and the lack of alternatives for familial incomes and lives. Studies from the ILO have backed claims stating that the countries hosting the highest numbers of children in the labour force are those that are the poorest in the region.

Two conventions created and initiated by the ILO were ratified by all Arab States, the two being: the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and the minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). These work concurrently with the Arab States and all other signatory states to combatting child labour, something that nations around the Arab region have worked towards within their individual governments as well. Alongside the support of the ILO, such states are developing and have developed well-versed plans to address and tackle the issue of child labour, implement initiatives to decrease the number of cases as well as improve statistics and data modules surrounding the issue.

It has been estimated that of all children in the Arab States, 3% are involved in child labour, 1.2 million children, the density growing depending on the economic state of the nation. About 1.5% of these children, 616,000 thus making up half of them, have been recorded as being forced into

hazardous work; however, in comparison to the rest of the world, these statistics are some of, if not the, lowest in the world. The different sectors in which child labour is prevalent are spread apart in agriculture, industry and the services sector, with the recorded cases adhering to at least one.

700,000 boys and girls or 60% of children involved in labour work in the agriculture sector; including, commercial farming on a large technocentric scale, and subsistence as livestock herding. 13% (144,000) of the remaining children are in the industrial sector whilst 27% (318,000) are found in the services sector of child labour. As stated before, the Arab States host some of the world's largest populations of migrant workers, therefore making the labour force consist mostly of adults who consciously make the move. This does not however excuse the violations made against them. 30% of children in the labour force are between the ages of 15 and 17, 32% are 12-15 years old and the remaining 38% are between 5 and 11 years of age.

### **Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific**

Despite being renowned for its multifaceted cultures and societies, as well as its reputation as an economically secure and accessible region, Asia and the Pacific still hosts the largest number of children in the workforce in all of the world. Such a high number falls at around 122 million from the ages of 5-14 years old, the statistic failing to include those 15-17 years old. These children are forced to work from such a young age to promote survival rates and help themselves, their families and whoever has employed them. These children along with millions of others are not and have never been enrolled in any type of educational institution, a pattern seen in past generations as well. The ILO has made continuous efforts to maintain documentation of child labour cases in Asia and the Pacific and has thus far concluded that the economic sectors in which the children are working are areas such as but in no way limited to, mining and quarrying, rubber and sugar-cane plantations, garment and footwear factories, entertainment and seafood processing.

Such a large amount of young children being forced into various areas of hazardous, unwilling and unpaid work leaves these minors vulnerable and susceptible to additional layers of exploitation: trafficking and sexual abuse. Patterns of continuation regarding the exploitation and abuse of children lead families and communities into what is known as a poverty trap, an area of life that becomes increasingly more difficult to get out of as time goes on and labour continues. For this reason, governments and organisations in Asia and the Pacific have worked towards emphasizing education for all children in order to provide them with the means to knowledge and skills to get well-paying jobs and develop business skills to work themselves out of the poverty trap, thus decreasing the number of children involved in child labour.

Statistics surrounding child labour in Asia and the Pacific found that in 2020, the year in which the Covid-19 pandemic spread, boys made up 65% of the children in the workforce, thus making them more likely to be exploited. There was a total recorded amount of 113.6 million children in 2008, which is significantly greater than the recorded 48.7 million children in 2020. Such a decrease depicts positive development in the work being done; however, make it is important to note that with the pandemic it became increasingly difficult for organisations to track such exploitations. The Asia Pacific region is home to over 650 million children between the ages of 5 to 14 years old, which is suspected to be the prime age of child labourers in the region, and 18.8% of this population is exploited for labour purposes.

### **Child Labour in Europe and Central Asia**

In 2020, the ILO alongside UNICEF estimated that Europe and Central Asia (ECA) saw 8.3 million children exploited within the child labour 'market', 5.1 million being boys and the other 3.2 being girls. This statistic makes up 5.7% of the total child population in the ECA region, significantly less than in past regions studied. What sets child labour in the ECA region apart, however, is just how much of the work done is hazardous – in this case, 95% of the children or 7.9 million. Such work runs risks of endangering safety, health and social, emotional, physical and mental development. Many of these numbers originate from states classified as Central Asia as well as Eastern Europe, two of the hosts to the greatest number of child labour workers in the world. 15.1% of children in Central Asia are exploited followed by Western Asia and then 6.8% in Eastern Europe.

The profile of child labour in the ECA region(s) is defined greatly by the gender gap in which the ratio of boys to girls grows exponentially as the population begins to age, which boys making up two-thirds of them. Within the ECA region(s) as well, however, household chores play a prominent role in child labour and the extent to which such chores correlate with labour laws. It has been established that 21 or more hours of household chores a week is classified as child exploitation and labour within a household. Such an establishment has led to governments underlying the importance of census' and data collection within households as well. It is important to note that such laws and classifications are not made in other regions of the world. Rural areas have been recorded to host a two-and-a-half-time increased likelihood of child labour due to the distance from crowded cities and the highlighted importance of family business upkeep such as farms and other agricultural practices. In these areas, however, the numbers of children decrease as children get older due to the ability to leave areas and get an education, something not seen in other regions of the world.

Much like the rest of the world, agriculture accounts for the majority of children involved in child labour and exploitation with 54% of them. Such agricultural practices include but are not limited to: capture fisheries, aquaculture and family subsistence and smallholder farming. Services account for 33% of children whilst the final 13% are forced to work in the industry. Much of these cases are found within family businesses, meaning they overlap with forced unpaid employment as well as household chores, greatly increasing offences.

### **Child Labour in Latin America and the Caribbean**

31 nations make up the region of Latin America and the Caribbean which has further been identified into three sub-regions: South America, Central America and the Caribbean. Research conducted in 2020 shows that in this region 8.2 million children are exploited and forced into labour at a young age with more than half being boys at 5.5 million and 2.7 million girls. This number accounts for 6% of all children within the LAC region, lower than other areas of the world but high within its given context. Hazardous work endangers two-thirds of the children meaning 5.5 million of them are exploited within a system that poses threats to health and safety. In past years, a decrease in the prevalence of child labour has been identified with a 2.3 million decrease between 2016 and 2020, showing that legislation and interventions have proved to be effective. This decrease in child labour has been most notable for the boys exploited, which has closed the gender gap; however, has left many more girls stuck in the system.

Within the LAC region, the Caribbean hosts the largest number of children in the labour force with 13% of its children being exploited. This number is a significant increase in comparison to the 4% of children in South America and 8% in Central America; however, it is again important to note the difference in population size with the latter two regions hosting a much greater population than the Caribbean. The 13% of children in the Caribbean account for 1.1 million children, 8% in Central America 3.3 million and 4% in South America 3.7 million children. For this reason, an emphasis on thorough statistical research and analysis is encouraged. Age composition data also differ largely in the LAC region as over half of the children in the Caribbean are between the ages of 5-11, much greater than the other two regions which are under 40%.

Rural areas and agricultural practices host the largest proportion of child labourers with data showing 49% being involved in such activities. The remaining 51% is split between 34% in services and 17% in the industry. Age gaps show that most of those working in agriculture is part of the youngest age category, leading analysts to believe that often within the LAC region, agriculture is

used as a beginning and entry point into child labour, furthering the notion of the predominance of agricultural practices in all regions of child exploitation and labour.

### Resources and Action

For past decades, UNICEF has established an organisation which hires professionals within fields of development, humanitarian law, international relations, and many more, in order to tackle issues such as child labour upfront. Much of what has been done includes supporting individual governments and for-profit agencies financially and in name in order to establish measures towards the eradication of child labour. Furthermore, UNICEF also prides itself on connections with local communities within reached states that have helped in developing cultural views and acceptance of child labour. This is done to prevent generational traditions of child labour and tolerance towards such violence whilst also making sure that proper financial alternatives are provided to such families and communities as well as access to educational opportunities and additional protection services.

### Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
26th June 1973	C138 Minimum Age Convention
17th June 1999	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention
10-11th May 2010	Global Child Labour Conference, the Hague
16th May 2012	Child Labour in Agriculture – IUF 26th World Congress
19th December 2016	Resolution 71/177 Adopted – Rights of the Child
2025	End goal for UN SDG Target 8.7

### Major Parties Involved

#### UNICEF

Founded on December 11th 1946, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has expanded its organisation and work to provide for children and mother’s who live under threats such as but not limited to, poverty, sickness, violence and exploitation.

#### International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The ILO was established in 1919 with the aim of joining the works of workers, employers and governments in order to demonstrate proper labour standards as well as to develop policies that would encourage the rights to equitable work for all women and men.

## Somalia

Somalia is a nation in Eastern Africa and is the state that hosts the most number of recorded child labour cases in the world. As of current, the Somali state has not criminally prohibited specific forms of child trafficking in their laws such as; commercial sexual exploitation, labour and recruitment for non-state armed groups. So far over 1 million cases of child labour have been reported out of the nation's 17 million person population.

## Iceland

Iceland is a secluded island nation in Northern Europe that has been reported as the best country in terms of children in the labour force. Statistics have shown that over 20% of all children above the age of 13 are working in light to medium work. There have been no reported cases of child labour, meaning the state is held in high regard when tackling the issue.

## Possible Solutions

[1] Government-mandated and regulated school enrollment. Emphasising attendance and areas of education such as but not limited to Literature, Mathematics, Sciences, and Humanities as well as optional *additional* electives specific to possible career paths.

[2] Providing a minimum of one meal a day to all students in primary levels of education, or until the age of 18, ensuring proper health and development standards.

[3] Regulated free health care for families dependent on one source of minimum income. Mandatory check-ups every 6 months until the age of 25.

[4] Management of income sources in refugee camps to ensure no foul play and possible exploitation. Background checks on discovered human trafficking cases to secure children and verify familial involvement in the situation.

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