

# Data on the prevalence of the worst forms of child labour

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## Question

*What data do we have about the prevalence of the worst forms of child labour? How robust are the data and what are the limitations of existing data sets?*

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## 1. Overview

This rapid review synthesises findings from rigorous academic, practitioner, and policy references published in the past fifteen years that discuss the prevalence of the worst forms of child labour. Globally, children are routinely engaged in paid and unpaid forms of work that are considered not harmful to them. They are classified as child labourers when they are either too young to work or are involved in hazardous activities that may compromise their physical, mental, social or educational development<sup>1</sup>. According to the International Labour Organisation (IPEC, 2013: 7) the term “child labour” is a subset of “children in employment”, it includes all children in employment 5-11 years of age; excludes those in the 12-14 year age group engaged in “permissible light work”; and, from among the 15-17-year-olds, includes only those in hazardous work or other worst forms of child labour.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-labour/>

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*The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.*

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The issue of child labour is guided by three international conventions: the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 138<sup>2</sup> concerning minimum age for admission to employment and Recommendation No. 146 (1973)<sup>3</sup>; ILO Convention No. 182<sup>4</sup> concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and Recommendation No. 190 (1999)<sup>5</sup>; and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>6</sup>. These conventions frame the concept of child labour and form the basis for child labour legislation enacted by countries that are signatories. The ILO defines the worst forms of child labour as follows (article 3 of ILO No. 182):

- A. all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- B. the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- C. the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- D. work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children

Estimates on the prevalence of child labour and the worst forms of child labour are challenging to generate and subject to much debate. According to the ILO (2002), in 2000 there were 245.5 million children involved in child labour, engaged in work that was damaging to their mental, physical and emotional development. An estimated 178.9 million children (aged 5–17) were engaged in the worst forms of child labour (see figure 2). In 2012, ILO (2012) estimated that 264 million children between the ages 5-17 were actively participating in some kind of economic activity globally, with 168 million of these children carrying out work defined as child labour. An estimated 85 million of these were engaged in hazardous work (often used as a proxy for the worst forms of child labour). Whilst this figure includes children in hazardous work, it does not capture the other worst forms of child labour, last estimated to involve at least 8.4 million children in 2000 (Donger, 2016; ILO, 2002; US DoL, 2016).

Key findings of this rapid literature review are:

- While data on the worst forms of child labour and information about government efforts to address this issue are improving, data are still insufficient to provide a complete understanding of the problem
- Sources of data on child labour (including the worst forms of child labour) include the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and the Child Labour Surveys of the ILOs

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C138](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312484](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312484)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100::NO:12100:P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C182:NO](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:C182:NO)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312528](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312528)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) surveys. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have adopted the MICS module on child labour in its questionnaires (UNICEF, 2012). Many countries also produce national labour estimates and reports that often include data on child labour and/or employment among children.

- The existence of the worst forms child labour often involves violations of laws and regulations, including serious criminal violations. Information on all forms of child labour may be difficult to gather and intentionally suppressed. Additionally, the victims of the worst forms of child labour may be vulnerable politically underrepresented or marginalised and therefore unable to claim their rights or communicate their situations.
- Global estimates of children in worst forms other than hazardous are not consistently measured directly by the ILO, due to the often hidden and illicit nature of these extreme forms of child labour and the subsequent lack of reliable data on them in most countries.
- Adequately accounting for gender concerns is critical to the success of interventions against child labour and of later interventions promoting successful transition to decent work (ILO, 2015). Girls are considered to be also particularly vulnerable to worst forms of child labour such as commercial sexual exploitation and to hidden forms of child labour such as domestic work in third-party households.
- A number of definitional challenges and methodological issues underlie the challenges of recording numbers of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour. These include issues associated with defining child labour, definitions of the worst forms of child labour and issues associated with variations in data available and its collection.

## **2. What are the worst forms of child labour and what data sources exist?**

The Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour was adopted by the ILO in 1999 as ILO Convention No 182. This convention asks signatory countries to clarify the definition of worst forms of child labour at the country level and to develop specific plans for its eradication. Article 3 of convention No. 182 contains several guidelines for the types of activities that should be considered for persons under the age of 18. These include all forms of slavery and "practices similar to slavery." This later clause includes the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour including for the purposes of armed conflict. Children in prostitution, pornography, the production or processing of drugs are also included as "worst forms" of child labour. Article 3 (d) represents the most ambiguous part of the convention referring to "work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children." Article 4 of the convention is explicit that it is up to individual countries to define what types of work are considered "worst forms" of child labour under this clause (see figure 1) (Donger, 2016). International standards set the framework for minimum age, but national legislation can determine the national minimum age for employment and criteria for unlawful work, working conditions as well as working hours for children.

**Figure 1: International standards on child labour**

Children (5-17 years old) in productive activities			
Children in employment			Children in other productive activities
Child Labour		Permissible light work (12- 14 years old)	
Worst forms of Child labour	Employment below min age  Hazardous unpaid household services	Work not designated as worst forms (15- 17 years old)	
Hazardous work by children	Other worst forms of child labour		
<p>Exposure to physical, psychological or sexual abuse.</p> <p>Underground, under water, dangerous heights, confined spaces.</p> <p>Dangerous machinery, equipment or tools, heavy loads.</p> <p>Unhealthy environment, hazardous substances, temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to health.</p> <p>Long hours, night work, other particularly difficult conditions.</p>	<p>All forms of slavery or similar practices (the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, forced or compulsory labour including recruitment for use in armed conflict).</p> <p>The use or offering of a child for prostitution and/or pornography.</p> <p>Illicit activities including the production and trafficking of drugs, as well as work which when performed is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of the child (as determined by national authorities)</p>		

Source: IPEC (2013: 18)

The concept of the worst forms of child labour includes both hazardous work and other worst forms of child labour. Hazardous child labour represents the largest category of the worst forms

of child labour. The concept focuses attention on children, as well as the work they perform. These forms of child labour are considered to be the most intrinsically harmful, but also the ones performed by the most vulnerable children.

Hazardous work by children is considered to be any activity or occupation that, by its nature or type, has or leads to adverse effects on the child's safety, health (physical or mental) and moral development (ILO, 2002). Hazards could also derive from excessive workload, physical conditions of work, and/or work intensity in terms of the duration or hours of work even where the activity or occupation is known to be non-hazardous or "safe".

Sources of data on child labour (including the worst forms of child labour) include the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and the Child Labour Surveys of the ILO's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) surveys. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have adopted the MICS module on child labour in its questionnaires (UNICEF, 2012). Many countries also produce national labour estimates and reports that often include data on child labour and/or employment among children.

According to UNICEF (2012: 1) in their comparative analysis of surveys, an increase in the types of data gathering on child labour in the past decade has been accompanied by a divergence in estimates on the scale of this challenge to children's rights and well-being. They note that the possible explanations for these variations include differences in how child employment and child labour are defined, the timing of the surveys, and the characteristics of the surveys themselves, such as the questionnaires used, methods used by interviewers, the details covered, and the ways in which data are processed.

## **Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)**

Data on child labour have been collected in MICS since 2000 through a standard module questionnaire. A standard definition of child labour was used to calculate the prevalence of child labour across countries. In 2010, following consultations with ILO, the standard MICS questionnaire was revised to make it consistent with currently available international standards (UNICEF, 2014).

The MICS module covers children 5 to 17 years old and includes questions on the type of work a child does and the number of hours he or she is engaged in it. Data are collected on both economic activities (paid or unpaid work for someone who is not a member of the household, work for a family farm or business) and domestic work (household chores such as cooking, cleaning or caring for children). The MICS child labour module also collects information on hazardous working conditions (UNICEF, 2014).

## **ILO-supported Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) surveys**

SIMPOC questionnaires have been developed to be used in a variety of data collection methods, including in stand-alone, household-based, child labour surveys and as a separate module in other household-based surveys (UNICEF, 2012). No specific operational definition of child labour is used in SIMPOC surveys across countries, but estimates are calculated on the basis of the definition used in the national legislation of individual countries. As a result, the definition of child labour that is used to calculate child labour estimates differs markedly among countries, as do the resulting estimates.

The primary aims of the Child Labour Survey model questionnaire include the measurement of the prevalence of employment among children and of child labour. It does this through a set of 56 employment-related questions. MICS, with its multiple goals and topics, has a more concise child labour module (UNICEF, 2012).

### 3. Global prevalence of worst forms of child labour

According to the ILO (2002), in 2000 over 245.5 million children were involved in child labour, engaged in work that is damaging to their mental, physical and emotional development. An estimated 178.9 million children (aged 5–17) were engaged in the worst forms of child labour in sectors including agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, service industries and domestic service. This includes all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery such as the trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for armed conflict, child prostitution and any forced work which is likely to harm the health or safety of children i.e. hazardous. Children in hazardous work represented the majority of these (170.5 million) with 8.4 million children engaged in unconditional worst forms of labour. Of those involved in hazardous work, 111 million were aged 5-14 and 59 million aged 15-17. ILO (2002) also disaggregated the number of children engaged in different types of unconditional worst forms of child labour (see table 1).

**Table 1: Estimated number of children involved in the unconditional worst forms of child labour**

Type of worst form of child labour	Global number of children in millions
Forced and bonded labour	5.7
Forced recruitment into armed conflict	0.3
Prostitution and Pornography	1.8
Other illicit activities	0.6
Trafficked children*	1.2
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>8.4</b>
Children in hazardous work	170.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>178.9</b>

\* Children are generally trafficked into another worst form of child labour. Therefore, the number of trafficked children cannot be included in a calculation of the total number of children in the worst forms of child labour, as this would result in double-counting.

Source: ILO (2002: 18; 2002a: 25)

More recent estimates indicate that, from 2008-2012, the number of child labourers declined from 215-168 million. Out of these, the number of children exposed to hazardous work – often used as a proxy for the worst forms of child labour fell from 115-85 million (IPEC, 2013). The US DoL (2016: 7) in their most recent report ‘Findings on the Worst forms of Labor’ note that global estimates on the number of children engaged in other, unconditional or categorical worst forms of child labour do not exist. Trends in children in employment, child labour and hazardous work

are presented in table 2. New estimates of child labour and modern slavery are scheduled to be released in September 2017.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2: Children in employment, child labour and hazardous work, 5-17 years age group, 2000-2012**

		Children in Employment		Child Labour		Hazardous work	
		('000)	%	('000)	%	('000)	%
World	2000	351,900	23	245,500	16	170,500	11.1
	2004	322,729	20.6	222,294	14.2	128,381	8.2
	2008	305,669	19.3	215,209	13.6	115,314	7.3
	2012	264,427	16.7	167,956	10.6	85,344	5.4

Source: IPEC (2013: 3)

The existence of child labour, particularly in its worst forms, often involves violations of laws and regulations, including serious criminal violations. Information on child labour may be intentionally suppressed (US DoL, 2012; 2014). The victims of the worst forms of child labour may also be too vulnerable or politically underrepresented or marginalised to claim their rights or communicate their situations. These factors make information on the worst forms of child labour often difficult to obtain (US DoL, 2016).

## Hazardous work

Hazardous work by children, one aspect of the worst forms of child labour, includes any activity or occupation that, by its nature or type, has or leads to adverse effects on the child's safety, health and moral development. More specifically, hazardous work is work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions that could result in a child being killed, injured and/or made ill as a consequence of poor safety and health standards and working arrangements<sup>8</sup>. In 2012 it is estimated that there are a total of 85 million children engaged in hazardous work in the 5-17 years age group and 38 million in hazardous work in the core 5-14 years age group. Hazardous work accounts for 51 per cent of child labour among 5-17 year-olds and 31 per cent of child labour among 5-14 year-olds (IPEC, 2013: 20).

<sup>7</sup> In March 2017, the ILO and Walk Free Foundation announced that they will jointly develop a single global estimate of modern slavery. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) will provide data from IOM's victim assistance database. The *2017 Global Estimate of Child Labour* represent a collaboration among multiple partners. These collective efforts will be released as the *2017 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery and Child Labour* by Alliance 8.7, authors and partners at a launch in New York during the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly (Sept 2017). The estimates will be accompanied by world reports which present the main trends in terms of the nature of the problems, programmes and policies, and innovative practices and effective intervention models.

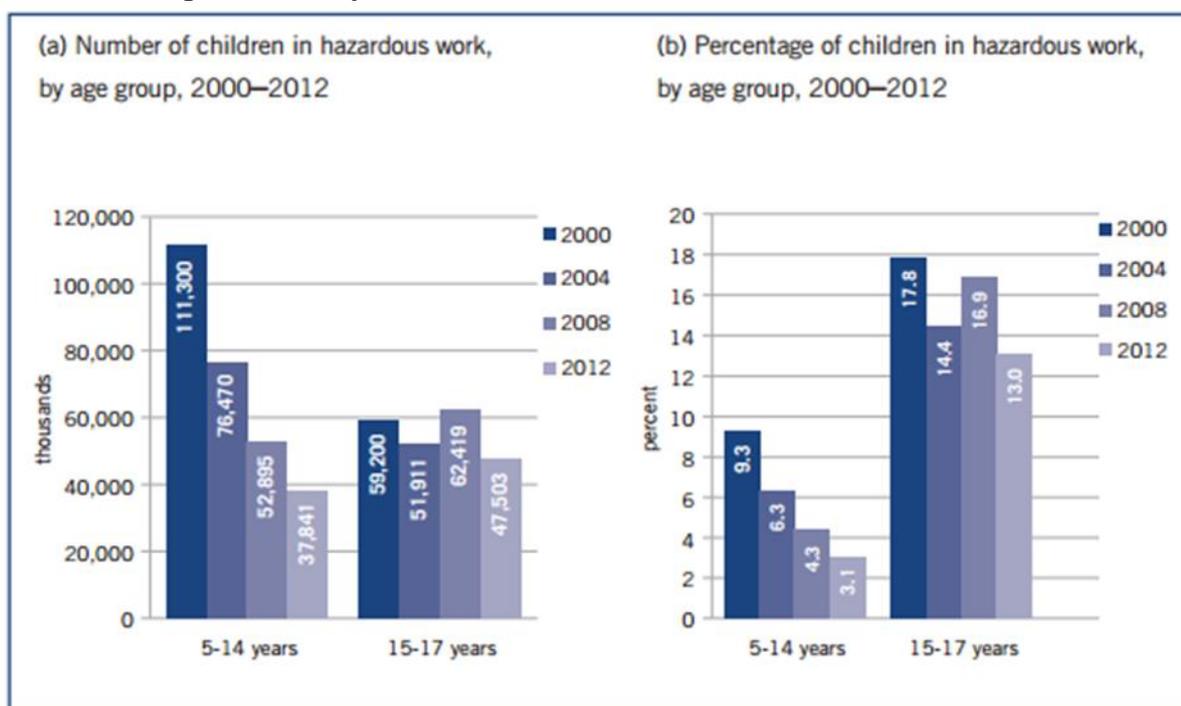
<sup>8</sup><http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/WorstFormsofChildLabour/Hazardouschildlabour/lang--en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=global>

The latest ILO global estimates for the year 2012 suggest that both the share and absolute numbers of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years in hazardous work remains considerable. Out of a total of 47.5 million adolescents aged 15 to 17 years, 13 per cent were in hazardous work in 2012 (IPEC, 2013). The ILO global estimates also show a general decline in the incidence of hazardous work, although this decline has been much slower among adolescents aged 15 to 17 years than among those aged 5 to 14 years. While hazardous work incidence among children aged 5 to 14 years fell by two-thirds over the 2000 to 2012 period, from 9.3 per cent to 3.1 per cent, the decline among adolescents aged 15 to 17 years was less dramatic, going from 17.8 per cent in 2000 to 13 per cent in 2012 (ILO, 2015: 44). Moreover, hidden in this overall decline was an increase in the incidence of hazardous work in the 15–17 years age group in the period from 2004 to 2008. Figure 2 provides estimates for trends in the decline in incidence of hazardous work across age groups. Boys’ involvement in hazardous work substantially exceeds that of girls’ with 38.7 million 15 to 17 year-old boys in hazardous work in 2012 compared to only 8.8 million of their female peers (ILO, 2015: 43).

The latest ILO global estimates for the year 2012 indicate that both the share and absolute numbers of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years in hazardous work is considerable (IPEC, 2013):

- adolescents aged 15 to 17 years in hazardous work total 47.5 million;
- adolescents aged 15 to 17 years in hazardous work account for 40 per cent of all those employed in the 15–17 years age group, a clear indicator of the decent work deficit facing this age group;
- adolescents aged 15 to 17 years in hazardous work account for over one-quarter (28 per cent) of the overall group of children in child labour.

**Figure 2: The decline in incidence of hazardous work has been much slower among adolescents aged 15 to 17 years**



Source: ILO (2015: 44)

## Forced labour

According to the 2012 ILO estimate of forced labour, there were about 5.5 million children aged 17 years and below, representing 26 per cent of the global total of 20.9 million forced labour victims: involved in various forms of forced labour: for sexual exploitation (960,000 children); forced labour for labour exploitation (3,780,000); and forced labour imposed by the State (709,000) (IPEC, 2013: 22). While it is not possible to calculate the exact extent of the overlap, it can be assumed that many of these child victims of forced labour are also accounted for as being engaged in hazardous work.

## Gender differentials

Adequately accounting for gender concerns is critical to the success of interventions against child labour and of later interventions promoting successful transition to decent work (ILO, 2015). Girls are considered to be also particularly vulnerable to worst forms of child labour such as commercial sexual exploitation and to hidden forms of child labour such as domestic work in third-party households. The ILO (2002: 18) reports that in 2000, girls represented 49 per cent of economically active children of which 48 per cent were engaged in child labour or which 45 per cent were involved in hazardous work.

Other research indicates that girls are also more involved in hidden and therefore underreported forms of child labour. It is estimated that girls make up roughly 90 per cent of children involved in domestic work (ILO, 2005; Donger, 2016). Donger (2016) comments that current international standards do not address the unique circumstances of these youth, the specific conditions in which child domestic work is performed, and the specific vulnerabilities to serious physical, emotional, and sexual abuse these can create. While the provisions of other ILO conventions technically apply to the most exploitative forms of domestic work, traditional perceptions of domestic workers as “helpers” rather than “workers,” and the location of employment in private households has meant that, in practice, these protections have not extended to domestic workers, including child domestic workers. In many countries, national labour legislation exempts domestic workers from their protections (HRW, 2009).

### Gender and hazardous work

For the 5-17 years age group as a whole, boys account for nearly two-thirds of all children in hazardous work. This pattern, however, is driven entirely by older children in the 15-17 years age group, in which boys account for 81 per cent of all children in hazardous work (and in child labour) (ILO, 2015). Among younger children, the gender pattern is the opposite: the number of girls in hazardous work is greater than that of boys. For 5-11 year olds, girls account for 58 per cent of all children in hazardous work, outnumbering boys by 2.8 million. For 12-14 year-olds, girls account for 56 per cent of all children in hazardous work and outnumber boys by 2.3 million. Hazardous household chores, which are likely predominantly performed by girls, are not reflected in these figures (IPEC, 2013: 21).

## 4. Prevalence of worst forms of child labour across regions and sectors

The largest numbers of children in hazardous work are found in the Asia and the Pacific (33.9 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (28.8 million) regions. There are 9.6 million children in

hazardous work in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region and 5.2 million in Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The percentage of children in hazardous work is highest in the Sub-Saharan Africa region (10 per cent), followed by the LAC region (7 per cent), MENA region (5 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific region (4 per cent) (IPEC, 2013: 20).

**Table 3: Worst forms of child labour: prevalence across regions**

Region	Year	Child Population	Hazardous Work		
		('000)	('000)	%	% Change
Asia and the Pacific	2008	853,895	48,164	5.6	
	2012	835,334	33,860	4.1	-1.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	2008	141,043	9,436	6.7	
	2012	142,693	9,638	6.8	0.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	2008	257,108	38,736	15.1	
	2012	275,397	28,767	10.4	-4.7

Source: IPEC (2013: 5)

During the years from 2008 and 2012 the Sub-Saharan Africa region has been able to reduce the number of children in hazardous work by 4.7 per cent; Asia and the Pacific by 1.5 per cent. A slight increase of 0.1 per cent was recorded in in the LAC region. The US DoL in their flagship report on Findings of the worst forms of child labour<sup>9</sup> presents slightly different figures. These annual reports draw on information gathered through desk research, U.S. embassy reporting, and field work. Information is also gathered from some foreign governments. Desk research consists of an extensive review of mostly online materials, which included both primary and secondary sources.

## Asia and the Pacific

In Asia and the Pacific, 77.8 million children ages 5-17 are engaged in child labour, which equates to 9.3 per cent of all children in the region (US DoL, 2016: 30). Children in the Asia and Pacific region continue to engage in child labour, predominately in agriculture. In many of the region's coastal and island countries, children work in the fishing and seafood industries; while in Central and South Asia, many children work in cotton cultivation. Children in South Asia work as forced and bonded labourers in textiles and manufacturing. Throughout the Asia and Pacific region, children are employed as domestic workers in third-party households. Commercial sexual

<sup>9</sup> The Findings of the worst forms of child labour report is published annually in September

exploitation is also a concern, particularly in Kazakhstan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, the Solomon Islands, Thailand, and Vanuatu (US DoL, 2014: xxviii; 2015).

## **Europe and Eurasia**

Regional statistics on child labour do not exist for Europe and Eurasia. However, children in Europe and Eurasia that are engaged in child labour are predominantly involved in agriculture and street work. Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including in commercial sexual exploitation and forced begging, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (US DoL, 2016: 33)

## **Latin America and the Caribbean**

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 12.5 million children ages 5 to 17 are engaged in child labour, or 8 per cent of all children in the region. Children are primarily engaged in child labour in agriculture and street work. Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including being used by gangs to commit illicit activities. Many migrant children, as well as children of indigenous and African descent, remain particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour (US DoL, 2016: 36).

## **Middle East and North Africa**

In the Middle East and North Africa, 9.2 million children ages 5 to 17 are engaged in child labour, or 8 per cent of all children in the region. Children are engaged in child labour, primarily in agriculture, domestic work, and street work. Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including in armed conflict (US DoL, 2016: 39).

## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest incidence of child labour. An estimated 59 million children ages 5-17 are engaged in child labour, or more than one in five children in the region. Nearly 29 million of these child labourers are engaged in hazardous work (US DoL, 2014: xxxvi). Children are engaged in child labour, largely in agriculture, mining, and domestic service (US DoL, 2016: 41).

## **Sectors**

IPEC (2013: 7-8) highlight that the 2012 global estimates provide an update on the sectors where child labourers are most prevalent; Agriculture accounts for 59 per cent of all those in child labour and over 98 million children in absolute terms. Child labour in agriculture consists primarily of work on smallholder family farms, although it also extends to activities such as livestock production, fishing and aquaculture. The numbers of child labourers in services and industry are also significant. A total of 54 million are found in the services sector and 12 million in industry. The services sector includes domestic work, which involves a total of 11.5 million children. Child labour in the services sector also includes primarily informal work in hotels and restaurants, in street selling and other forms of commerce, in car repair shops and in transport. Child labour in industry relates primarily to work in construction and in manufacturing, again mainly in informal settings. Boys outnumber girls in all sectors with the important exception of domestic work, a form of work that takes place hidden from public view and outside the reach of workplace inspections, leaving concerned children particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. With

respect to status in employment, child labourers work primarily without being paid by their own families. Unpaid family workers account for more than two-thirds of child labourers (68 per cent), followed by paid employment (23 per cent) and self-employment (8 per cent).

## Other worst forms of child labour

As noted throughout this report, data on the other worst forms of child labour is either missing, limited or subject to significant caveats. Data gathered in 2000 and presented by the ILO in 2002 estimates the following figures of children involved in various types of worst forms of child labour (ILO, 2002; ILO, 2002a: 27). See table 4 for estimated number of children in unconditional worst forms of child labour:

**Trafficking of children:** Children were found trafficked to and from all regions. About 1.2 million children are affected, involving both boys and girls of various ages. Gender and age seem closely correlated with the purpose of trafficking. Boys tend to be trafficked for forced labour in commercial farming, petty crimes and the drug trade, girls appear to be trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and domestic service. Trafficking patterns and routes are often highly complex, ranging from trafficking within one country and cross-border flows between neighbouring countries to inter-continental and globalised trade. Most trafficked children appear ending up in another worst form of child labour.

**Children in forced and bonded labour:** This is an area beset with severe problems of quantification. ILO estimated that there were about 5.7 million children in forced and bonded labour, of which the majority (5.5 million) were concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region. There is also evidence of forced and bonded child labour in the African and Latin American regions and some forced child labour exists in developed countries. There were, however, no reliable estimates of its extent.

**Children in armed conflict:** It is estimated that approximately 300,000 children are being used in armed conflict around the world at any given time. The African and Asian-Pacific regions account for the vast majority of child soldiers. Most of them are reported to be in the 15-17 age bracket. No reliable figures are available on the gender distribution of child soldiers, but boys seem to dominate.

**Children in prostitution and pornography:** About 1.8 million children are affected. It is prevalent in all major world regions, particularly in Latin America & the Caribbean, the Asian-Pacific region and developed economies. Patterns are complex and tend to differ between countries and regions. For instance, whereas in some cases the commercial sexual exploitation of children seems clearly related to tourism, in others it mainly serves a domestic market. Most affected children are reported to be in the 15-17 age range.

**Children in illicit activities:** About 600,000 children were estimated to be engaged in illicit activities. Reliable data are difficult to come by. Those available mostly relate to drug production and trafficking. No particular age group seems prevalent.

**Table 4: Estimated number of children in unconditional worst forms of child labour (2000)**

Region	Trafficked ('000s)	Forced & bonded labour ('000s)	Armed conflict ('000s)	Prostitution & pornography ('000s)	Illicit activities ('000s)
Asia/Pacific	250	5,500	120	590	220
Latin America & Caribbean	550	3	30	750	260
Africa	200	210	120	50	n/a
Transition economies	200	n/a	5	n/a	n/a
Developed industrialised economies	n/a	n/a	1	420	110
<b>Total (rounded)</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>5,700</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>1,800</b>	<b>600</b>

Source: ILO (2002a: 27)

## 5. Definitional challenges and methodological issues

A number of definitional challenges and methodological issues underlie the challenges of recording numbers of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour. These include issues associated with defining child labour, definitions of the worst forms of child labour and issues associated with variations in data available and its collection.

### Definitional challenges

There is no uniform legal definition of child labour and whether children's work constitutes child labour and more specifically the worst forms of child labour depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed and the conditions of work. Further to this the term worst forms of child labour covers a variety of exploitative and dangerous working situations for children. This presents barriers to data collection and cross-country comparison (Donger, 2016). Inconsistency in how practitioners define child labour and the worst forms of child labour permeate the literature (Global Protection Cluster, 2014).

Definitions of the relevant age of the child and the type of work vary across studies and surveys. The ILO tends to report figures of economically active children for the broadest age bracket (5-17 years of age). The World Bank – World Development Indicators also report figures of economically active children, but use a narrower age definition (7-14 years of age). In both cases, 'economically active' refers to children who work for at least one hour during a reference week. Children in child labour, including those in worst forms of child labour and children in employment below the minimum age, excluding children in permissible light work—where "permissible light work" is defined as any non-hazardous work by children (ages 12 to 14) of less than 14 hours during the reference week (IPEC, 2013: 13).

The worst forms of child labour includes work considered hazardous to children as well as those other (IPEC, 2013), unconditional (ILO, 2002) or categorical (US DoL, 2016) worst forms of labour which involve slavery, prostitution and trafficking etc.

The Global Protection Cluster (2014: 14) comment that the worst forms of child labour are often given only a cursory mention, particularly for forms such as children involved in illicit activities. Practitioners and documents frequently reference child labour rather than the worst forms of child labour. They also refer to exploitation and abuse in general terms without defining the types of exploitation present. Distinguishing what was actually meant by the terminology used is often challenging or impossible (Global Protection Cluster, 2014: 14).

It is important to reiterate that the ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 state that the specific types of employment or work constituting hazardous work are determined by national laws or regulations or by the competent authority. According to the ILO (2015: 42), from a legal standpoint there is no standard international list of hazardous jobs and occupations. Rather a series of unique national lists are utilised with what constitutes hazardous work differing from one country to the next. Following from this, there can be no standard statistical measure of hazardous work that is valid across all countries.

The ILO (2002: 11) note that the boundaries of hazardous work are not easy to draw, especially when the harm being done to children is not obvious in the short term. There also exists a major difficulty in counting and researching children working in the informal economy, in private homes, in family enterprises and in illegal and hidden activities.

The ILO definition of the worst forms of child labour includes work that is likely to jeopardise health and safety. The relationships between child labour and health are complex. They can be direct and indirect, static and dynamic, positive and negative, causal and spurious. The diversity of potential relationships makes their empirical disentanglement a difficult exercise (O' Donnell et al, 2002).

There is also a degree of definitional ambiguity regarding different types of other worst forms of child labour. For example, apart from the explicit inclusion of "forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict" in Article 3 of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), there is no specific definition of what constitutes forced labour of children. Therefore, the generic definition contained in the Forced Labour Convention is applied. However, the concepts of "involuntariness" and "penalty/ menace of a penalty" presented for adults, need to be reassessed in the case of forced labour of children (ILO, 2012: 22).

More broadly, varied perceptions of work and childhood exert an influence on data collection. For example, in countries where agricultural work is common among children and an important source of livelihood for their families, it is more likely to be recognised as work (UNICEF, 2012). Adult perceptions about the meaning of childhood also matter. In countries with high rates of school enrolment, schooling might be seen as children's main activity. In countries with lower enrolment rates, children's work is more likely to stand out as their primary activity and they are, therefore, classified as employed (UNICEF, 2012: 2-3).

**Figure 3: Statistical concepts**



Source: IPEC (2013: 16)

## Data limitations

For the worst forms of child labour, global estimates were based on an assessment and aggregation of existing national and regional estimates for each worst form. Global estimates of children in the worst forms of labour other than hazardous work are not measured directly, owing to the often hidden and illicit nature of these extreme forms of child labour and the consequent lack of reliable data on them in most countries (IPEC, 2013). While data on the worst forms of child labour and information about government efforts to address this issue are improving, data are still insufficient to provide a complete understanding of the problem (US DoL, 2011; 2016).

Lack of in-country data collection in the majority of the countries and lack of access to other in-country sources of information also impact on reporting. The US DoL (2016) also comments that countries with more closed government processes and less civil society participation may also have less information on the worst forms of child labour.

Broad data collection issues that underlie gaps in our understanding of the worst forms of child labour include (Donger, 2016: 15-16; ILO, 2008; IREWOC, 2010; IPEC, 2013):

- There is no universally agreed upon measure of child labour. Three basic categories are identified: economic activities, child labour, and hazardous work. Several limitations characterise these indicators. They are hard to measure, exclude important activities that children undertake in own household (chores) and are subject to important seasonal variations.
- Children in the worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work (also referred to as “unconditional worst forms of child labour”) pose a number of obstacles to reliable measurements based on existing statistical methods. Such groups of child labourers are mostly hidden from public view and often engaged in illicit activities. There is no known frame for applying a random sampling procedure, and it is often hard (if not impossible) to interview the child, either because the guardian or employer does not permit it or because the child refuses for fear of reprisals after the interview (ILO, 2008).
- The methodologies for gathering data on the worst forms of child labour are sector specific, as the workplace conditions and child labour characteristics vary among these forms of labour making comparison across types difficult.
- There exist measurement difficulties with other “hidden” forms of child labour, for example very limited data on household chores (distinct from domestic work in a third party household), which are excluded from the ILO’s methodology. Many children also work in less visible forms of child labour, like domestic work, at the family farm, or in the family business.
- The lack of standard international list of hazardous jobs results in national variation in regulations on child labour meaning there can be no standard statistical measure of hazardous work that is valid across all countries. Governments and NGO’s still do not systematically make the distinction between the worst forms of child labour and other forms of child work (IREWOC, 2010).
- Children move in and out of the work force more regularly than adults. Levison et al (2007) found that the methods used by labour force and household surveys to identify adult employment – asking about work in the past week – are often not effective for children that may work one week, not work the next, and have another job the following week.
- Child labour surveys are carried out infrequently (although there have been recent increases in the number of surveys carried out).
- Children in worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work by children are not measured directly. They are included in the global estimate to the extent that they also form part of the measurement of employment below minimum age and hazardous work by children. It is hoped that with improved methodology this category of child labour can be measured directly in future ILO global estimates (IPEC, 2013: 21).

As such there are still major problems of data availability and reliability for child labour more broadly and specifically for hazardous and unconditional worst forms of child labour. While those estimates that do exist represent a best attempt (with the methods and data currently available) the ILO highlights their limitations. Further research, using new methods, is urgently needed. There will always, however, be severe limits to the accurate measurement of these activities, particularly those that are clandestine or illicit.

### **Challenges capturing data regarding the worst forms of labour in specific contexts**

It is also important to note that the prevalence of the worst form of child labour are not static and likely to be exacerbated in times of crisis. Violent conflict generates worst forms of child labour (i.e. the association of children with armed forces and armed groups or forced labour by armed groups in mining or agriculture) (ILO, 2011). Conflict also impacts on the determinants of child labour: movements of population such as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees, separation of families, loss of parents and increased poverty are some of the many consequences of violent conflicts that will push war- affected children into work. In areas directly affected by conflict, a lack of work opportunities in the formal labour market is likely to push children into hazardous labour and other worst forms of child labour. Weak law enforcement, a culture of impunity, the dismantling of communities and the loss of traditional systems and values are contributing factors to a worsening children's rights situation.

Similarly, the Global Protection Cluster (2013) comment that there are a multitude of threats present during emergencies that compound the extreme vulnerabilities already faced by families who feel they have no choice but to have their children work. As a result, a very large number of children are at risk of being pulled into the worst forms of child labour during times of crisis (Global Protection Cluster, 2014: 12). In such contexts the ability to gather data on those at risk or involved in the worst forms of child labour is also constrained.

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## Key websites

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)  
<http://www.ilo.org/ipec/lang--en/index.htm>

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## About this report

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