▶ Statistical Brief[1]

October 2021

Child labour in Europe and Central Asia
Prevalence and characteristics

This Brief provides statistics on child labour prevalence and characteristics for Europe and Central Asia. The region is comprised of 50 countries divided into 4 sub-regions (see map) – Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern, Southern and Western (NSW) Europe, and Western Asia – defined in accordance with the country groupings utilised by the ILO Department of Statistics.

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[1] Disclaimer : All data and information within this report is based on figures predating the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis

**Child labour continues to affect millions of children in the Europe and Central Asia region.** The 2020 ILO-UNICEF global estimates show that 8.3 million children – 3.2 million girls and 5.1 million boys – are in child labour, accounting for 5.7% of all children in the ECA region. An extremely high share of child labour is hazardous in nature. Ninety-five percent of those in child labour – 7.9 million children in absolute terms – are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development.

These figures place the ECA region in the mid-range of world regions in terms of the prevalence of child labour but second-highest in terms of hazardous work prevalence.

It is worth underscoring that the child labour estimates for the ECA region for the other world regions *predate* the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, which has substantially added to the situations of household vulnerability that drive much of the child labour phenomenon. The estimates, therefore, likely understate the actual prevalence of child labour in the ECA region and elsewhere.
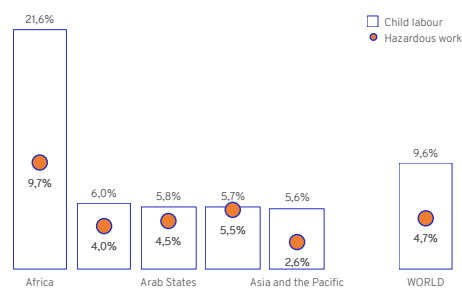
1.Involvement in child labour and hazardous work

Percentage and number of children in child labour and hazardous work, children aged 5-17 years

Children in child labour
8.3 million

Children in hazardous work
7.9 million
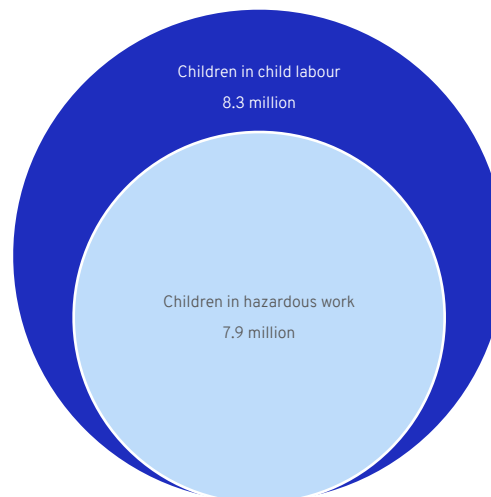
2.Child labour and hazardous work in world regions

Percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, children aged 5-17 years, by world region

☐ Child labour
● Hazardous work

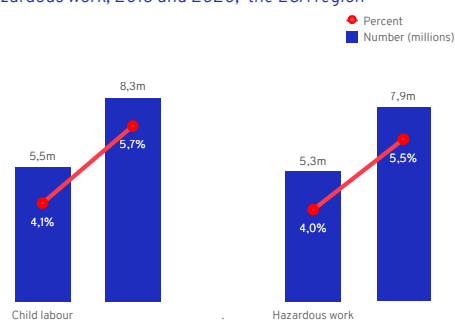|		
Africa	21,6% / 9,7%	
Arab States	6,0% / 4,0%	
	5,8% / 4,5%	
Asia and the Pacific	5,7% / 5,5%	
	5,6% / 2,6%	
WORLD	9,6% / 4,7%	

Preliminary estimates of trends suggest that child labour and hazardous work in the ECA region rose in both percentage and absolute terms over the period from 2016 to 2020. The percentage of children in child labour rose by 1.6 percentage points, while their number rose by 2.8 million over the 4-year period. Trends in hazardous work followed a similar pattern. However, these trend figures should be interpreted with caution, owing to the relatively limited number of country datasets for the two reference years and to refinements in the estimation methodology. A more precise analysis of trends in the region will require an expansion of country-level child labour data collection efforts (see also below).

Region-wide estimates disguise huge differences in child labour prevalence and numbers *within* the ECA region. Central Asia stands out as having by far the highest prevalence of child labour. Fifteen percent of all Central Asian children are in child labour, compared to 8.6% of children in Western Asia and 6.8% in Eastern Europe and 1.3% in NSW Europe. This ranking changes somewhat when expressed in absolute terms. Eastern Europe is host to the largest *number* of children in child labour, followed by Central Asia, Western Asia and finally NSW Europe.

The four sub-regions also differ in terms of the age composition of child labour. NSW Europe stands out in particular in this regard. Child labour in this sub-region is concentrated primarily at the upper end of the 5 to 17 age spectrum while the opposite pattern prevails in the other three sub-regions.

3. Regional child labour trends
Number and percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, 2016 and 2020, the ECA region
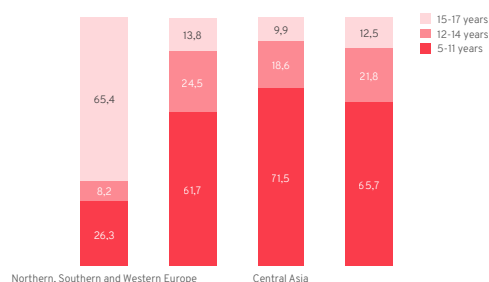

4. Intra-regional differences in child labour
(a) Percentage and number of children in child labour, by sub-region[a]
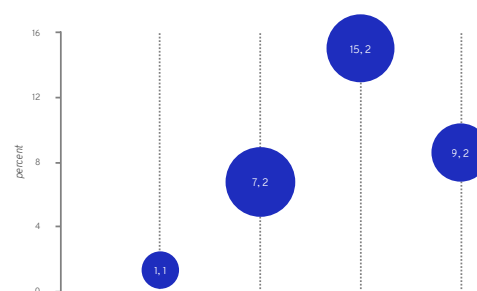
Note: (a) Circle size is proportionate to number of children in child labour

*(b) Age distribution of the children in child labour, by sub-region*

Child labour prevalence is higher for boys than for girls in the ECA region.
For the overall 5-17 years age group, the share of girls in child labour is roughly two-thirds that of boys. The gender gaps grows more pronounced with age – child labour prevalence is about one-fourth for boys compared to girls among 5 to 11 year olds but is but is more than twice as high for boys compared to girls among 15 to 17 year-olds.

It is worth recalling in interpreting these numbers that they do *not* reflect children's involvement in household chores in their own homes**.** Expanding the definition of child labour to include involvement in household chores for 21 hours or more per week, the hours threshold adopted for international reporting on Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, child labour prevalence increases for both sexes, especially among 5-11 year-olds. This result underscores the importance of systematically collecting data on household chores as part of national statistical programmes on child labour.

5.Age and gender profile of child labour
Percentage of children in child labour by age group and sex
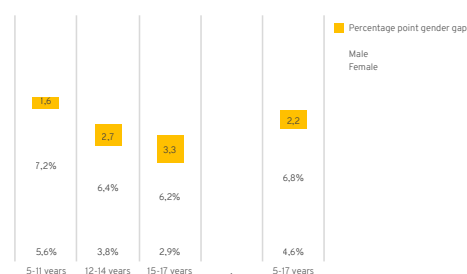
6.Child labour and household chores
Percentage of children in child labour (including and excluding household chores performed for 21 hours or more per week), by sex and age range
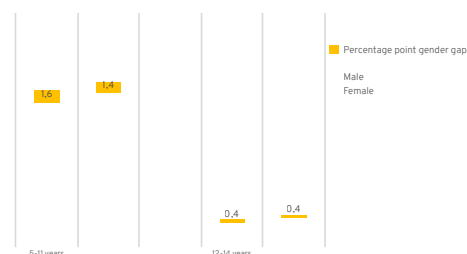
Notes: Household chores refer to services children provide without pay for their own households. These include caring for household members, cleaning and minor household repairs, cooking and serving meals, washing and ironing clothes, and transporting or accompanying family members to and from work and school. For statistical measurement, where household chores are included in the calculation of child labour, hazardous household chores refer to those performed by children below the general minimum working age for 21 hours or more per week.

Child labour is much more common among children living in rural areas. For the 5-17 years age group as a whole, the prevalence of child labour in rural areas is more than two and a half times that of urban areas. This rural-urban gap persists across all age ranges, but is slightly less pronounced among older, 15 to 17 year-old children in child labour, a reflection of the diminishing importance of child labour in agriculture as children enter into this age range (see below).

7. Child labour and residence
Percentage of children in child labour, by residence

	5-11 years	12-14 years	15-17 years	.	5-17 years
Urban	4,3	3,3	3,3		3,8
Rural	10,9	9,0	7,4		9,7

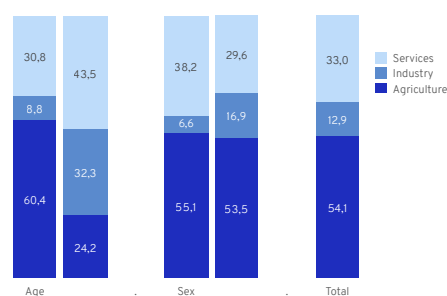■ Percentage point rural-urban gap
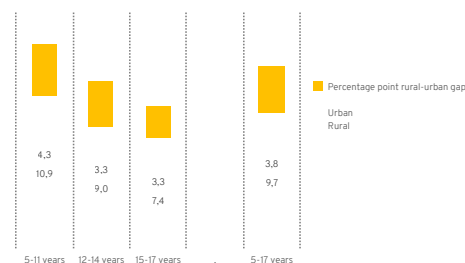
Agriculture accounts for the largest share of children in child labour. For the 5-17 age group as a whole, more than half of all children in child labour are found in agriculture, which consists primarily of family subsistence and smallholder farming, but also includes commercial plantations, capture fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing. Thirty-three percent work in services and the remaining 13% in industry.

These aggregate figures mask important differences in the composition of child labour by age and sex. Agricultural child labour predominates for younger children in child labour, underscoring the role of agricultural work as entry point into child labour. The relative importance of child labour in agriculture declines sharply, and the relative importance of industry and services rises, moving to the 15 to 17 age range. Gender considerations appear relevant in determining the kind of child labour performed: girls are relatively less likely than boys to work in industry, while the opposite pattern prevails for child labour in services.

8. Child labour and branch of economic activity
Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by branch of economic activity, age range and sex

|	Age		.	Sex		.	Total
Services	30,8	43,5		38,2	29,6		33,0
Industry	8,8	32,3		6,6	16,9		12,9
Agriculture	60,4	24,2		55,1	53,5		54,1

■ Services
■ Industry
■ Agriculture

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

9. Sectoral composition of child labour and working-aged employment

Percentage distribution of children in child labour and employed persons of working age,[a] by branch of economic activity and age range
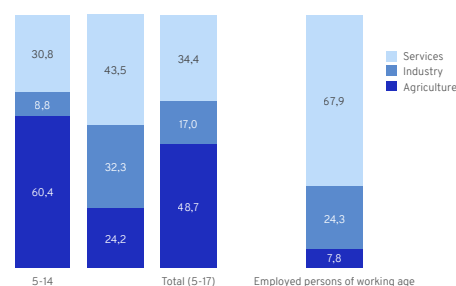
Note: Data for employed persons of working age from International Labour Organization, "Employment by sex and economic activity – ILO modelled estimates," ILOSTAT, Accessed 20-10-2021.

Child labour consists in large part in unpaid work within the family unit.
Overall, nearly two-thirds of all children in child labour work for their own families, while 30% work as employees for third parties and the remaining 7% work for their own account.

Again, however, aggregate figures mask important differences by age and sex. The relative importance of family work declines sharply moving from the 5 to 14 to the 15 to 17 age groupswhile the relative importance of work as employees moves in the opposite direction. This reflects broader patterns that see children moving out of informal (primarily family-based) agriculture and into more formal work arrangements as employees as they grow older. Girls in child labour are more likely than boys to work for their own families, while the opposite pattern prevails for work as employees.

10. Child labour and status in employment

Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by status at work, age range and sex
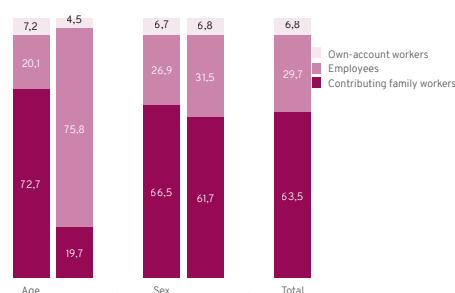
Children in hazardous work are much less likely to attend school. Among children in the age ranges most closely aligned with compulsory schooling, i.e., 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds, 77% and 78%, respectively, of children in hazardous work attend school. By contrast, school attendance is virtually universal among children in these age ranges in non-hazardous child labour.

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

11. Child labour and school attendance

School attendance rates, children aged 5-17 years, by involvement in child labour and hazardous work

● Child labour other than hazardous work   ● Hazardous work

The timely collection of child labour data remains an important challenge in the region. Representative data for the period from 2016 to 2020 is available for only about one-half of the total child population in the ECA region, the second lowest level of child labour data coverage of the five world regions. Data coverage, however, varies considerably across the four sub-regions, from 82% in NSW Europe and 43% in Eastern Europe to just 18% in Central Asia and 6% in Western Asia. Limited data on child labour in the region hampers the development and targeting of child labour policies and constitutes a major obstacle to monitoring progress against child labour. Greater investment in child labour data collection therefore constitutes an important regional priority.

12. Coverage of child labour data

Percentage of child population for which representative data are available for the 2016 to 2020 period, by sub-region
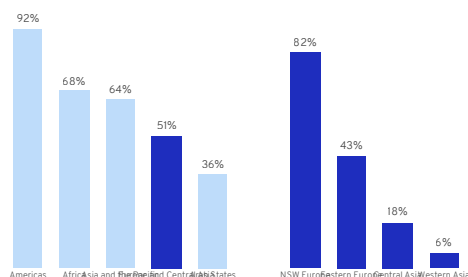
Statistical tables

			TOTAL								
			5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		
			%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	
CHILD LABOUR	**Total**	**2020**	6.4	5,180	5.1	1,690	4.6	1,437	5.7	8,306	
	Residence	Urban	4.3	2,293	3.3	720	3.3	719	3.8	3,732	
		Rural	10.9	2,887	9.0	970	7.4	718	9.7	4,574	
	Sub-region	Northern, Southern and Western Europe	0.6	215	0.5	67	3.7	534	1.3	816	
		Eastern Europe	7.3	1,744	7.4	693	4.6	390	6.8	2,827	
		Central Asia	17.9	1,922	13.1	499	8.0	265	15.1	2,687	
		Western Asia	10.3	1,299	8.3	430	4.8	247	8.6	1,977	
	School attendance	Child labour other than hazardous work	100.0	344	100.0	61	-	-	100.0	404	
	Children in child labour by sector of economic activity	Agriculture	53.6	2,779	81.2	1,371	24.2	348	54.1	4,498	
		Industry	10.0	516	5.3	89	32.3	464	12.9	1,069	
		Services	36.4	1,886	13.6	229	43.5	624	33.0	2,739	
	Children in child labour by status in employment	Employees	25.9	1,339	2.4	40	75.8	1,088	29.7	2,468	
		Own-account workers	6.8	351	8.6	145	4.5	65	6.8	561	
		Contributing family workers	67.4	3,489	89.1	1,505	19.7	283	63.5	5,278	
	SDG child labour indicators	SDG 8.7.1.1	6.4	5,180	1.1	367	0.9	279	4.0	5,826	
		SDG 8.7.1.2	6.8	5,470	1.3	429	0.9	279	4.3	6,178	
HAZARDOUS WORK	**Total**	**2020**	6.0	4,837	4.9	1,629	4.6	1,437	5.5	7,902	
	Residence	Urban	4.0	2,129	3.1	691	3.3	719	3.6	3,538	
		Rural	10.2	2,708	8.7	938	7.4	718	9.3	4,364	
	Sub-region	Northern, Southern and Western Europe	0.6	200	0.4	64	3.7	534	1.3	798	
		Eastern Europe	6.9	1,636	7.2	674	4.6	390	6.5	2,700	
		Central Asia	16.7	1,791	12.6	479	8.0	265	14.2	2,536	
		Western Asia	9.6	1,209	7.9	412	4.8	247	8.1	1,868	
	School attendance	Children in hazardous work	76.9	3,721	77.8	1,267	76.1	1,093	77.0	6,081	
	Children in hazardous work by sector of economic activity	Agriculture	57.4	2,778	83.2	1,355	24.2	348	56.7	4,481	
		Industry	9.0	437	4.9	79	32.3	464	12.4	981	
		Services	33.5	1,621	12.0	195	43.5	624	30.9	2,440	
	Children in hazardous work by status in employment	Employees	21.1	1,023	1.6	26	75.8	1,088	27.0	2,137	
		Own-account workers	6.7	326	6.9	112	4.5	65	6.4	503	
		Contributing family workers	72.1	3,488	91.6	1,491	19.7	283	66.6	5,263	

	BOYS								GIRLS							
	5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
	7.2	2,984	6.4	1,087	6.2	999	6.8	5,070	5.6	2,196	3.8	603	2.9	437	4.6	3,237
	4.9	1,350	4.3	485	4.7	524	4.7	2,359	3.6	943	2.2	235	1.8	194	2.9	1,373
	12.0	1,634	10.9	602	9.5	475	11.2	2,710	9.7	1,253	7.0	368	5.2	243	8.2	1,864
	0.8	128	0.6	43	5.4	394	1.8	565	0.5	86	0.3	24	2.0	140	0.8	250
	8.2	1,001	9.1	439	5.8	252	7.9	1,693	6.4	743	5.5	254	3.3	137	5.6	1,134
	19.6	1,075	16.1	314	10.1	171	17.1	1,560	16.2	847	10.0	185	5.8	94	12.9	1,126
	12.0	779	10.9	290	6.9	182	10.6	1,251	8.5	520	5.6	140	2.6	65	6.5	725
	100.0	195	99.9	38	-	-	100.0	233	100.0	149	100.0	22	-	-	100.0	171
	55.6	1,658	77.1	838	21.8	218	53.5	2,714	51.0	1,121	88.4	533	29.7	130	55.1	1,784
	13.1	392	7.3	80	38.3	383	16.9	854	5.6	124	1.6	9	18.7	82	6.6	215
	31.3	934	15.5	169	39.9	399	29.6	1,501	43.3	952	10.0	60	51.6	226	38.2	1,238
	26.2	782	3.3	35	78.2	781	31.5	1,598	25.4	557	0.7	5	70.3	307	26.9	869
	6.6	196	9.5	103	4.5	45	6.8	344	7.1	155	6.9	42	4.5	20	6.7	217
	67.2	2,005	87.2	948	17.3	173	61.7	3,127	67.6	1,484	92.3	557	25.2	110	66.5	2,151
	7.2	2,984	1.3	225	1.1	179	4.6	3,387	5.6	2,196	0.9	142	0.7	100	3.5	2,439
	7.5	3,097	1.5	250	1.1	179	4.7	3,525	6.1	2,374	1.1	179	0.7	100	3.8	2,653
	6.8	2,789	6.2	1,048	6.2	999	6.5	4,836	5.2	2,048	3.6	581	2.9	437	4.4	3,066
	4.5	1,254	4.1	466	4.7	524	4.5	2,244	3.3	875	2.1	225	1.8	194	2.7	1,294
	11.3	1,535	10.5	582	9.5	475	10.7	2,592	9.1	1,173	6.8	356	5.2	243	7.8	1,772
	0.7	120	0.6	41	5.4	394	1.7	555	0.5	80	0.3	23	2.0	140	0.8	243
	7.7	940	8.9	427	5.8	252	7.6	1,620	6.0	696	5.4	247	3.3	137	5.3	1,080
	18.3	1,003	15.5	302	10.1	171	16.1	1,476	15.1	788	9.6	177	5.8	94	12.2	1,060
	11.2	726	10.4	278	6.9	182	10.0	1,185	7.9	483	5.3	134	2.6	65	6.1	683
	77.2	2,153	77.5	812	75.2	751	76.8	3,716	76.6	1,568	78.4	455	78.2	342	77.1	2,365
	59.4	1,657	79.3	831	21.8	218	56.0	2,707	54.7	1,121	90.2	524	29.7	130	57.9	1,774
	11.9	331	6.8	71	38.3	383	16.2	784	5.2	107	1.4	8	18.7	82	6.4	197

28.7	801	13.9	146	39.9	399	27.8	1,345	40.0	820	8.4	49	51.6	226	35.7	1,095
21.6	603	2.3	24	78.2	781	29.1	1,409	20.5	420	0.2	1	70.3	307	23.7	728
6.5	182	7.4	78	4.5	45	6.3	304	7.1	145	5.9	34	4.5	20	6.5	198
71.9	2,004	90.3	946	17.3	173	64.6	3,123	72.5	1,484	93.9	545	25.2	110	69.8	2,139