

CHILD LABOUR IN AFRICA

Draft of 30 April 2022

Funding for this brief is provided by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) under cooperative agreement number IL-30147-16-75-K-11 of the Project “Measurement, awareness-raising and policy engagement to accelerate action against child labour and forced labour” (MAP16 Project) (GLO/18/29/USA). One hundred per cent of the total costs of the Project GLO/18/29/USA is financed with federal funds, for a total of USD 23,945,000.

1. Introduction

The latest Child Labour Global Estimates (2020),¹ published jointly by the International Labour Office (ILO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), indicate a worsening of the child labour situation in Africa since the last report in 2016. For the first time since the publication of the first global estimates in the year 2000, there is a reversal in the global trend, with the estimated total number of children in child labour increasing from 152 million in 2016 to 160 million in 2020. This change was due entirely to an increase in Africa. While the proportion of children aged 5 – 17 years who are in child labour declined in Asia and the Pacific from 7.4 per cent in 2016 to 5.6 per cent in 2020, and in Latin America and the Caribbean from 7.3 to 6.0 per cent over the same period, Sub-Saharan Africa saw an increase from 22.4 to 23.9 per cent. Overall, in Africa as a whole, the number of children in child labour rose from 72.1 to 92.2 million, an increase of 27.9 per cent, and the prevalence rate, from 19.6 to 21.6 per cent. The increase in the number of children in child labour was, in relative terms, even bigger in North Africa, from 2.1 to 5.6 million (166.7 per cent)². Similarly, for the continent as a whole, the number of children in hazardous work increased quite substantially over the same period, from 31.5 to 41.4 million, and the prevalence rate from 8.6 to 9.7 per cent. Comparing these estimates and those of children in employment (99.4 m in 2016 and 124.1 m in 2020)³, the relative increases in children in employment, child labour and hazardous work over the four-year period were, respectively, 24.8, 27.9 and 31.4 per cent. Thus, over this last four-year period, the more harmful the work, the faster has been the increase. Africa now has more children in child labour than the rest of the world combined.

These figures do not reflect the likely impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has included huge job losses, major disruptions in schooling and a significant worsening of poverty, on child labour. The pandemic and its effects are likely to further worsen the child labour situation in many countries across the continent, unless adequate mitigation measures are put in place to address the resulting increase in poverty and vulnerability.

The deterioration of the child labour situation has occurred in a context where, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, the international community has committed to “[take] immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”⁴ Under the AU’s *Agenda 2063*, which was adopted in 2015, Africa has also committed to the realization of “[an] Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.”⁵ Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 includes the following as an expected outcome of Goal 18 (“Engaged and empowered youth and children”) in the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan: “Child labour exploitation, marriages, trafficking and soldiering would have

¹ International Labour Office and United Nations Children’s Fund, *Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward*, 2021.

² The figures for North Africa are obtained by subtracting the estimates for Sub-Saharan Africa (69.985 million in 2016 and 86.6 million in 2020) from those of Africa (72.113 million in 2016 and 92.2 million in 2020). See ILO (2017b, 27) for the 2016 figures, and ILO and UNICEF (2021, 74) for those of 2020. Here, North Africa refers to a regional grouping used for ILO reporting; it is Africa other than Sub-Saharan Africa.

³ The ILOSTAT “Children in employment” Database defines this indicator as children aged 5 – 17 years who were “engaged in any form of market production and certain types of non-market production (principally that of goods such as agricultural produce for own use). This includes work in both the formal and informal economy, inside and outside family settings, for pay or profit (cash or in-kind, part-time or full-time) and domestic work outside the child’s own household for an employer (paid or unpaid).” (ILO, n.d.; see also ILO 2017a, 20). The estimate for 2016 is from ILO (2017a, 9), and that of 2020, from ILO and UNICEF (2021, 82).

⁴ SDG Target 8.7; see UN (n.d.).

⁵ Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063; see AU (2015a, 29).

ended by 2023.”⁶ In pursuit of this goal and SDG 8.7, African Heads of State adopted, in February 2020, an ambitious continental *Ten-Year Action Plan on Eradication of Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in Africa (2020-2030)*.

Africa thus has, to a very large extent, a robust framework for forging ahead in the fight against child labour. However, the region also faces formidable development and institutional challenges that impede progress in this regard. The present paper seeks to examine a number of factors that constitute key development challenges to progress on child labour on the continent, provide an overview of current policies for addressing them, and identify a set of policy priorities for the continent in the lead-up to the 2025 target date.

Box 1.1: Definitions and legal framework

Child labour is work by children below the official **minimum age for employment** or for a given type of work [the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)], i.e.:

- in general, 15 years or the age of completion of compulsory schooling, if higher; upon ratification of C. 138, countries with “insufficiently developed” economies or educational facilities can opt for an interim general minimum age of 14 years;
- 18 years for work “likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons”; and
- 13 years for **light work**, i.e., work not likely to be harmful to the child’s health or development or to prejudice his/her schooling or vocational training (C. 138, Art. 7). Countries opting for an interim general minimum age of 14 years set 12 years as the minimum age for **light work**.

Worst forms of child labour [the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), Article 3]:

- a. All forms of slavery or similar practices (e.g., trafficking, debt bondage and serfdom, forced labour, forced or compulsory recruitment for use in armed conflict);
- b. Use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution or pornography;
- c. Use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities (especially production and trafficking of drugs);
- d. Work likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children, i.e., **hazardous work**.

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190) suggests the following for consideration in national definitions of **hazardous work**:

- work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse;
- work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools;
- work in unhealthy environments exposing children to hazardous substances, agents, processes or temperatures, noise levels or vibration damaging to health;
- work under difficult circumstances, including long hours, during the night; and
- work involving unreasonable confinement to the employer’s premises.

⁶ AU (2015b), p. 22.

2. Key characteristics of child labour in Africa

Work by children is relatively common across Africa. Of the estimated 426 million children aged 5 – 17 years in 2020, nearly 30 per cent (124 million) were in employment. This category includes acceptable work such as activities by children above the minimum age for employment that do not affect the child’s health or personal development or interfere with schooling, for example helping with family business or earning pocket money outside of school hours or during school holidays.⁷ Indeed, not all work by children is considered as child labour. However, as shown below in Fig. 2.1 and in Table 2.2, the vast majority of working children on the continent are engaged in the kinds of detrimental work targeted for eradication by national legislation and the continental and international conventions relating to child labour.

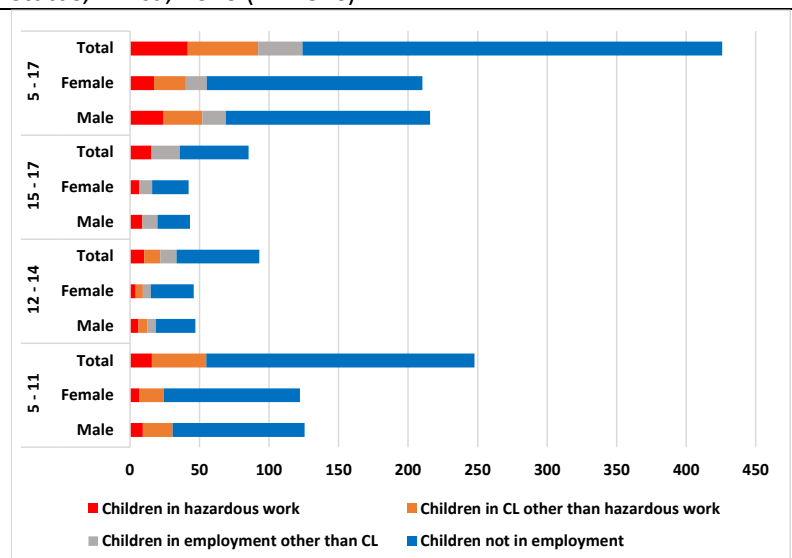
Table 2.1: Estimates of child population and percentages in employment, child labour and hazardous work, Africa, 2020

Age group	Child population (millions)			Children in employment (%)			Children in child labour (%)			Children in hazardous work (%)		
	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes
5 - 11	125.6	122.2	247.8	24.3	19.9	22.1	24.3	19.9	22.1	7.3	5.3	15.7
12 - 14	47.0	45.9	92.9	39.7	32.4	36.1	26.8	20.1	23.5	12.8	9.0	10.2
15 - 17	43.1	42.2	85.3	45.8	37.9	41.9	20.7	15.6	18.2	20.7	15.6	15.5
5 - 17	215.7	210.2	426.0	32.0	26.2	29.1	24.1	19.1	21.6	11.2	8.2	41.4

Source: Population data from ILO (n.d.), “Child population by sex and age (thousands),” ILOSTAT Data Explorer (Accessed March 2022); data on children in employment from ILO (n.d.) “Children in employment by sex and age (thousands),” ILOSTAT Data Explorer (Accessed March 2022); child labour data, including hazardous work, from ILO 2021d.

Table 2.1 and Fig. 2.1 provide a broad overview of the children’s employment and child labour situation at the continental level. As expected, the proportions of children in employment increase with age for both sexes. Male rates are higher than those of females for all age groups. For child labour, the prevalence rates are quite similar for ages 5 – 11 and 12 - 14, but, as with employment, higher for boys than for girls for all age groups. For the overall (5 – 17) age group, the rates for boys and girls are 24 and 19 per cent, respectively. It should be noted, however, that the estimates of both

Fig. 2.1: Distribution of children by sex, age-group and work status, Africa, 2020 (millions)



Source: Based on data on population and children in employment from ILOSTAT Data Explorer (see under Table 2.1), and child labour data, including hazardous work, from ILO 2021d.

⁷ ILO, n.d., “What is child labour?”, <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>.

employment and child labour for girls do not include household chores in their own homes.⁸ The gender gap for child labour narrows when household chores are taken into account. For example, when performance of household chores of more than 21 hours a week is factored in, the child labour prevalence rates for girls and boys aged 5-11 years increase to 25.1 and 26.9 per cent, respectively, from 19.9 and 23.3 per cent with household chores excluded. For the 12 – 14 years group, the corresponding rates are 25.0 and 25.8 per cent for girls and boys respectively, vs. 13.9 and 20.1 per cent when household chores are excluded. Moreover, more girls are engaged in domestic work outside their homes than boys, a hidden form of work often not fully captured in surveys.

The large proportions of working children who are in child labour should be of particular concern to policy makers. Equally of great concern is the fact that employed children increasingly engage in hazardous work with age, and that the proportion of children in child labour who are engaged in hazardous activities is high even among the youngest age group (over a quarter for both sexes; see Table 2.2). Of the 92.2 million children in child labour, 41.4 million (44.9 per cent) are engaged in hazardous work (15.7 million in the 5-11 years age group, 10.2 million in the 12-14 age group, and 15.5 million in the 15 – 17 years age group). Another point worth noting is that, as is evident in Table 2.2, the children in this last category (ages 15 – 17) are in child labour because they are engaged in activities that are hazardous (or would be in other WFCL if data were available), since they are above the minimum age for employment. Available data show that children in this age group who are in child labour “suffer higher levels of work-related illness and injury than other employed children in this age range... [and] are also more likely than other employed 15-17 year-olds to have dropped out of school prematurely” (ILO 2017a, 41).

Table 2.2: Percentages of children in employment who are in child labour and in hazardous work, and of those in child labour who are in hazardous work, Africa, 2020.

Age group	Children in child labour as per cent of children in employment			Children in hazardous work as per cent of children in employment			Children in hazardous work as per cent of children in child labour		
	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes
5 - 11	100.0	100.0	100.0	30.2	26.8	28.7	30.2	26.8	28.7
12 - 14	67.5	62.0	65.1	32.4	27.8	30.3	47.9	44.8	46.6
15 - 17	45.2	41.2	43.4	45.2	41.2	43.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
5 - 17	75.5	72.7	74.3	35.1	31.2	33.4	46.4	42.9	44.9

Source: Based on data on population and children in employment from ILOSTAT Data Explorer (see under Table 2.1), and child labour data, including hazardous work, from ILO 2021d.

It is important to note that the continental averages mask significant differences between regions. Child labour is more prevalent in Africa’s middle belt than in the northern and southern parts. Among the five AU regions,⁹ the proportion of children aged 5 – 17 years who are in child labour ranges from 6.1 per cent in Northern Africa to 29.8 per cent in Eastern Africa (Fig. 2.2).¹⁰ Eastern

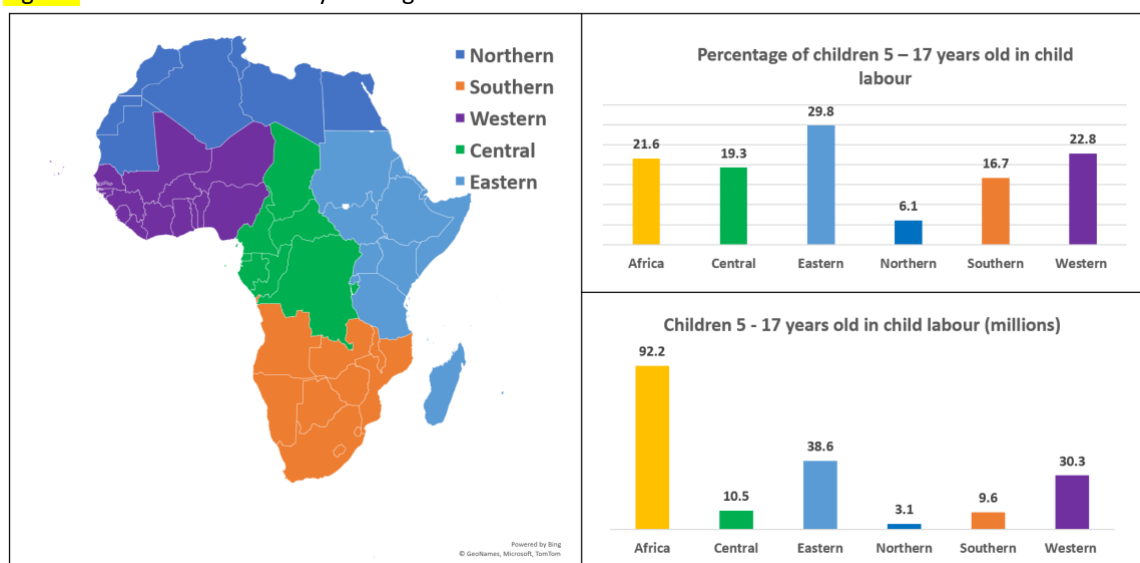
⁸ See definition for the employment indicator in Footnote 3.

⁹ According to the *African Union Handbook 2021* (2021, 18), the regions are: **Central Africa** (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Republic, DR Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe); **Eastern Africa** (Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda); **Northern Africa** (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sahrawi Republic and Tunisia); **Southern Africa** (Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe); and **Western Africa** (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo).

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the child labour statistics presented in this section are based on data from ILO (2021d).

Africa also has the largest number of children in child labour, 38.6 million, which is nearly 42 per cent of the total.

Fig. 2.2: Child labour levels by AU Region



Source: Child labour data from ILO (2021d); Africa regions map based on AU (2021), p. 18.

A particular characteristic of child labour on the continent is the preponderance of very young children. Although, as shown in Table 2.1, child labour is prevalent among children in all age groups, a significant majority of nearly 60 per cent of the 92 million children in child labour (i.e., about 55 million – 24.3 million girls and 30.6 million boys) are in the youngest age group of 5 – 11 years. Another 24 per cent (about 22 million – 9.2 million girls and 12.6 million boys) are in the 12 – 14 age group. The oldest age group, 15 – 17 years, represents just under 17 per cent (15.5 million – 8.9 million boys and 6.6 million girls) of the total. As a comparison, the proportion of children in child labour who are in the youngest age group is 54 per cent in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 51 per cent in Central and Southern Asia, and 39 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean (ILO and UNICEF 2021, 29).

Other notable characteristics of child labour in Africa include the following:

- Child labour is predominantly a rural and agricultural phenomenon. The available data indicate that about 82 per cent of children in child labour are in rural areas, and just over 80 per cent work in agriculture. However, certain forms such as child domestic work are more common in urban areas.
- Child labour occurs predominantly in family production units as unpaid work, particularly in subsistence and small-scale agriculture. Based on the available data, over 81 per cent of children in child labour are contributing family workers, with another 10 per cent as own-account workers, essentially all working in the informal economy.
- Many children in child labour (about 72 per cent of the overall 5 – 17 age group, 55.1 million) are combining school with work. Large numbers (21.5 million, i.e., 28 per cent of the total) are out of school. Moreover, children in hazardous work are much more likely to be out of school.

3. Key Development Challenges Affecting Child Labour in Africa

The high concentration of child labour in rural areas in agriculture and in family or own-account production units underscores its close link with poverty and related factors such as informal employment. These are areas or sectors where poverty is also concentrated. Child labour's major root causes include widespread poverty linked to the predominance of subsistence farming and the informal economy, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, poor access to social services such as quality education and health care, vulnerability to external shocks in the absence of adequate social protection and social safety nets, and socio-cultural factors such as gender roles and inequality.¹¹ Precarious forms of migration, conflict and disruptions linked to climate change are additional risk factors. In many countries, the different factors are compounded by demographic dynamics, while institutional factors such as inadequate laws and weak law enforcement constitute additional underlying causes.

Many of these factors reflect daunting structural challenges faced by most African economies, resulting in low productivity and labour underutilization, low levels of industrialization, large proportions of the workforces being in precarious forms of employment, for example as own-account or contributing family workers in the rural or urban informal economy, and generally poor working conditions, among other decent work deficits. For young people, including children above the minimum age for employment, as for adults, poor labour market outcomes, sometimes partly a consequence of child labour during childhood, may also contribute to prolonged poverty and vulnerability and, further down the line, more child labour and less education for the next generation of children. The following sections provide an overview of several of these key issues and challenges.

3.1 Poverty levels and trends

Extreme poverty

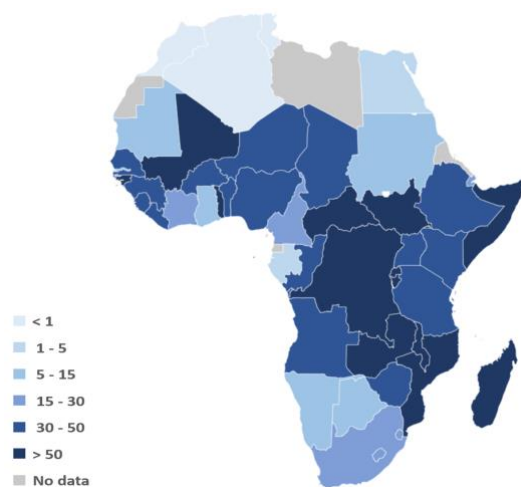
Poverty affects large proportions of the population in Africa. According to data from the World Bank, a third of the population of the continent (434 million people) were estimated to be in extreme poverty in 2019.¹² There are, however, significant differences both between and within AU regions and countries (Map 3.1), with regional estimates of extreme poverty rates ranging from 4.4 per cent in Northern Africa to 58.8 per cent in Central Africa. The estimated rates for Eastern, Southern and Western Africa for 2019 were, respectively, 32.8, 42.9 and 34.8 per cent. For Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, 39 per cent of the population was estimated to be below the \$1.90 poverty line in 2019.

Rates of extreme poverty have been falling since the 1990s. However, across much of the continent, the declines have not been fast enough to keep up with population growth. Consequently, the number of poor people has been increasing (Fig. 3.1). Poverty rates have fallen more slowly in Sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions of the world, and are now much higher there than elsewhere (Table 3.1). Moreover, as shown in Fig. 3.2, the rate of decline in extreme poverty has slowed in all AU Regions since approximately 2012-2013. The World Bank's *Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report 2020* attributes the slow progress in poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa relative to other world regions to factors such as "fragility", "conflict", "policy effectiveness" and "institutional stability" (World Bank 2020a, 47).

¹¹ The discussion here draws on material presented in Ofosu (2016).

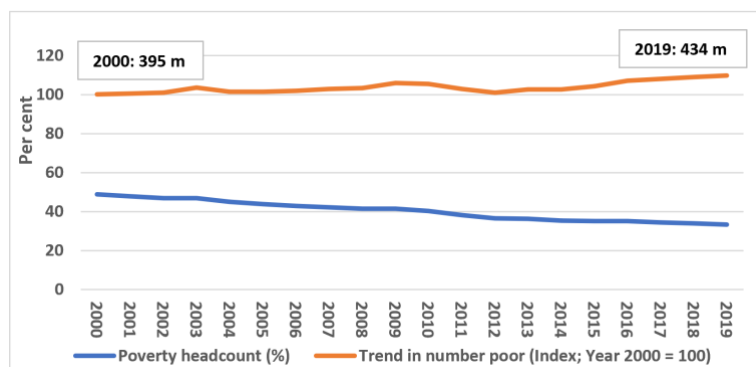
¹² That is, they were below the \$1.90 international poverty line. Figures are in 2011 Purchasing Power Parity dollars. Poverty data from World Bank, "PovcalNet: the on-line tool for poverty measurement developed by the Development Research Group of the World Bank", PovcalNet database, accessed October 2021.

Map 3.1: Percentage of population below the \$1.90 PPP poverty line, 2019



Source: Based on 2019 poverty data from World Bank, "PovcalNet: the on-line tool for poverty measurement developed by the Development Research Group of the World Bank", PovcalNet database, accessed October 2021.

Fig. 3.1: Africa, Poverty headcount ratio and numbers poor at \$1.90 (2011 PPP), 2000 - 2019



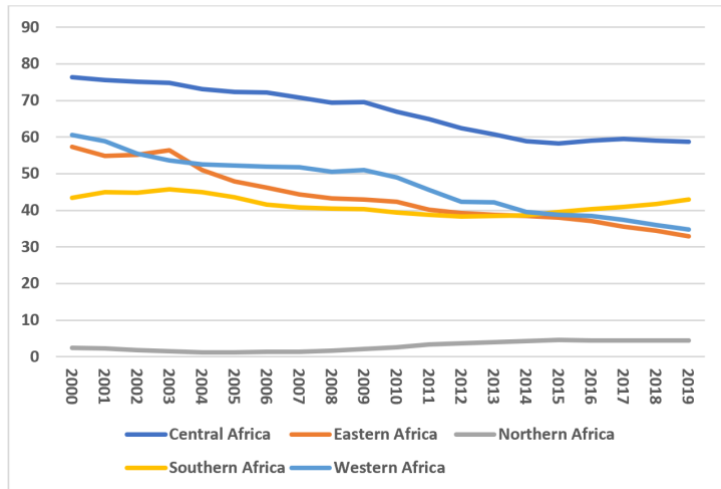
Source: Based on poverty data from World Bank, PovcalNet database, and population data from UN Population Division through the World Bank [Health Nutrition and Population Statistics | DataBank \(worldbank.org\)](https://data.worldbank.org/Health/Nutrition-and-Population-Statistics) database, accessed October 2021.

Table 3.1: Poverty headcount ratio (\$1.90) by world region, circa 2017

Region	Ratio (%)
East Asia and Pacific	4.1
Europe and Central Asia	0.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.4
Middle East and North Africa	4.2
South Asia	8.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	38.5
Rest of the world	0.8
All regions	10.4

Source: World Bank (2020a), Table 1.1, p. 44.

Fig. 3.2: Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 PPP by AU Region, 2000-2019 (%)



Source: World Bank, PovcalNet database, accessed October 2021.

Poverty is much higher in rural areas, though urban poverty is a growing phenomenon in Africa. Eighty-three per cent of people in extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa are in rural areas. Rural poverty is closely correlated with employment in the agricultural sector (World Bank 2020a, 123).

Higher poverty lines

The \$1.90 threshold represents the international poverty line for the World Bank’s category of Low-Income Countries.¹³ Twenty-three African countries, representing 41 per cent of the continent’s population in 2019, are in this category.¹⁴ Two other poverty lines, at \$3.20 and \$5.50, represent the “typical” poverty thresholds for Lower-Middle-Income and Upper-Middle-Income countries, respectively.¹⁵ Twenty-three African countries, representing 53 per cent of the continent’s population in 2019, are in the former category. In the latter category, there are seven countries accounting for 5.8 per cent of the population. Thus, for more than half of Africa’s population, the \$1.90 poverty line actually understates the extent of poverty. In 2019, 58 per cent of the continent’s population (756 million) were below the \$3.20 poverty line, while 80 per cent (1.04 billion) were below the \$5.50 line.¹⁶ In addition to indicating how widespread poverty is, these numbers also underscore the fact that even many who have escaped extreme poverty are vulnerable to falling back. This point is particularly salient given the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and the risks associated with climate change (World Bank 2020a, 40).

Child poverty

The proportion of children living in poverty is worse than that of the general population. According to household survey data compiled by UNICEF and the World Bank, 45.8 per cent of children (234 million) in Sub-Saharan Africa were living below the \$1.90 poverty line in 2017, compared to 40 per cent of the general population (Silwal et al. 2020). Among 46 African countries for which household data on child poverty are available, the \$1.90 headcount ratio ranged from 0.5 per cent for Tunisia to

¹³ See, for instance, [WDI - Poverty and Inequality \(worldbank.org\)](https://worldbank.org), accessed November 2021.

¹⁴ See [World Bank Country and Lending Groups – World Bank Data Help Desk](https://worldbank.org), accessed November 2021.

¹⁵ See [WDI - Poverty and Inequality \(worldbank.org\)](https://worldbank.org), accessed November 2021.

¹⁶ Based on poverty data from World Bank, PovcalNet database, and population data from UN Population Division through the World Bank [Health Nutrition and Population Statistics | DataBank \(worldbank.org\)](https://worldbank.org) database, accessed October 2021.

86.3 per cent for South Sudan.¹⁷ At the \$3.20 poverty line, the proportion ranged from 4.9 to 95.9 per cent, also for Tunisia and South Sudan, respectively. Similarly, the proportions of children below the \$5.50 threshold ranged from 23.5 to 99.4 per cent, again for Tunisia and South Sudan, respectively. As underscored in World Bank (2018, 141), poverty has many profound negative effects that are much worse on children than on adults.

Multidimensional poverty

The picture painted above of the widespread nature of poverty in Africa is reinforced when estimates of the World Bank's multidimensional poverty measure, which includes deprivations in access to education and basic infrastructure in addition to monetary poverty, are considered. For instance, for (circa) 2017, 53.8 per cent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa were estimated to be multidimensionally poor, with the following individual dimensions: 38.5 per cent of households were in extreme monetary poverty, 32.3 per cent were deprived in terms of educational attainment, 19.5 per cent in terms of educational enrolment, 46.2 per cent in terms of access to electricity, 59.9 per cent in terms of access to sanitation, and 29.3 per cent in terms of access to drinking water¹⁸ (World Bank 2020a, 44). In comparison, the global averages for these indicators were 10.4 per cent for extreme monetary poverty, 13.2 per cent for educational attainment, 7.0 per cent for educational enrolment, 22.7 per cent for sanitation, and 9.4 per cent for drinking water. Given prevailing gender differentials in education and social norms, for example the division of labour in meeting household needs for energy and water, these high levels of multidimensional poverty have greater incidence on girls and women than on boys and men.

3.2 Access to education

In stipulating that the minimum age for employment or work should “not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling” (and at least 15 years), Convention No. 138 (Art. 2.3) underscores the critical link between the need for universal education and the necessity of ending child labour. Access to quality education is a key child right, as spelt out in Article 28 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, an essential element of national policies needed to ensure that the minimum working age is consistent with “the fullest physical and mental development” of children (C. 138, Art. 1), and an important objective for all countries in Africa.

There has been a substantial improvement in access to education

Africa has made substantial progress in expanding access to education for children over the last three decades. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of children of school age who are out of school declined by 60 per cent at the primary school level between 1990 and 2019, and by 26 and 17 per cent, respectively, at the lower and upper secondary levels between 1998 and 2019.¹⁹ In 2019, the

¹⁷ Silwal et al., Table 13, pp. 10 – 11. Similarly for the \$3.20 and \$5.50 headcount ratios.

¹⁸ The World Bank defines the individual indicators as follows: “Monetary poverty: a household is deprived if income or expenditure, in 2011 purchasing power parity U.S. dollars, is less than US\$1.90 per person per day. Educational attainment: a household is deprived if no adult (grade 9 equivalent age or above) has completed primary education. Educational enrollment: a household is deprived if at least one child (grade 8 equivalent age or below) is not enrolled in school. Electricity: a household is deprived if it does not have access to electricity. Sanitation: a household is deprived if it does not have access to even a limited standard of sanitation. Drinking water: a household is deprived if it does not have access to even a limited standard of drinking water.” (World Bank 2018, 99).

¹⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, the education statistics provided in this section were computed from data compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS), downloaded from the World Bank [Education Statistics - All Indicators | DataBank \(worldbank.org\)](https://data.worldbank.org/education) database, accessed October-November 2021.

out-of-school rates for the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels were, respectively, 18.7, 36.7 and 56.4 per cent.

Though comparable data are not available for Northern Africa as a whole, the available information shows that progress there has been at least equally remarkable. For example, in Morocco, the out-of-school rate declined from 44 per cent in 1990 to 0.4 per cent in 2019 at the primary school level, from 46 per cent in 1999 to 9.4 per cent in 2019 at the lower secondary level, and from 52.8 per cent in 2005 to 27.9 per cent in 2019 at the upper secondary level. Similarly, in Egypt, the out-of-school rates at the primary and lower secondary levels declined from 12.6 and 24 per cent in 1994 to 0.4 and 2.4 per cent, respectively, in 2019. The out-of-school rate at the Upper Secondary level in Egypt was 23.4 per cent in 2019.

Millions of children are out of school

Despite this improvement, however, millions of children remain out of school, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. As shown in **Table 3.2**, more than 97 million children of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary age were out of school in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2018. And, though the

Table 3.2 Children out of school in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2018

School level	Out-of-school Rate (%)			Number out of school (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female
Primary	18.8	16.3	21.4	32.2	14.1	18.1
Lower secondary	36.7	35.3	38.1	28.3	13.7	14.5
Upper secondary	57.5	54.5	60.5	37.0	17.7	19.3
Primary, lower & upper secondary	31.2	28.9	33.6	97.5	45.5	52.0

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "New-methodology-shows-258-million-children-adolescents-and-youth-are-out-school", Fact Sheet no. 56, September 2019.

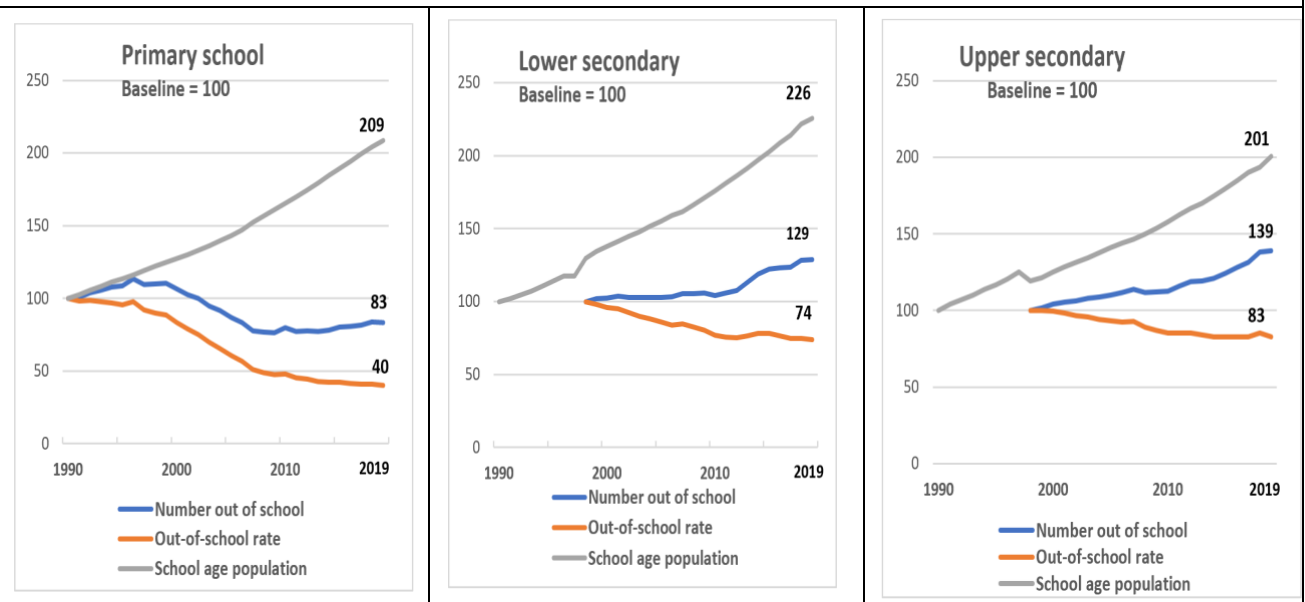
situation was much better in Egypt and Morocco, over 2.2 million children of the same age-group were also out of school that year in these two countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, progress in reducing the numbers of children out of school and out-of-school rates

has slowed significantly over the last five or so years (**Fig. 3.3**; see also USDOL 2021, 6).²⁰ Moreover, it is worth noting that declining out-of-school rates have not translated into a fall in the proportion of children in child labour. As indicated in Section 2, many children are combining school with work.

Rapid population growth is a major reason for the relatively slow progress. For example, the estimated number of children of primary school age increased from 87 million in 1990 to 181 million in 2019. Similarly, the number of children of lower secondary age increased from 36 to 81 million during that period, while those of upper secondary age increased from 34 to 69 million. The Sub-Saharan region has thus seen huge increases in the numbers of children to be educated and in the numbers at school, but progress has lagged population growth. **Fig. 3.3** shows the relative changes in the numbers of children of school age and of those out of school, as well as in the out-of-school rate, in recent decades.

²⁰ A recent change by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in the methodology of calculating the out-of-school number and rate, by counting children of primary school age who were in pre-primary education as being in school rather than out-of-school as was previously done, resulted in a "noticeable reduction" in the estimates. For Sub-Saharan Africa, the UIS calculates that the new methodology resulted in estimates that are two percentage points lower than if the reclassification had not been done, and notes that the new approach more accurately reflects participation in education but did not affect the overall trend previously estimated, which is one of stagnation in recent years, as outlined here (UIS 2019). Nevertheless, the UIS database lacks data on pre-primary education for nearly half of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, hence the picture is not entirely complete.

Fig. 3.3 Children out of school, out-of-school rate and school age population, Sub-Saharan Africa 1990 - 2019



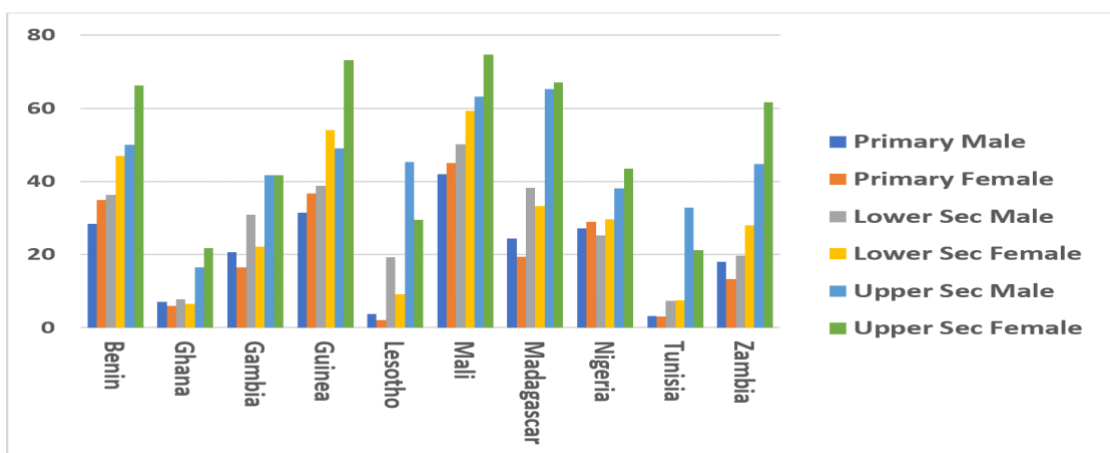
Source: UIS data from the World Bank Education database, following similar charts from UNESCO, [Access | GEM Report SCOPE \(education-progress.org\)](#), accessed October-November 2021

For a number of countries in the Sub-Saharan region, besides demographic dynamics, conflict, natural disasters and other disruptions linked to climate change have also impeded progress towards universal education.

Big inequalities persist in access to education

Beneath these overall levels and trends lie striking disparities in access to education. For example, among ten countries reporting SDG 4 (Quality education) data by residence and income quintiles, differentials in out-of-school rates are considerable between groups defined by sex, residence type (urban, rural) and income category. Fig. 3.4 shows inequalities by sex among the ten countries. A few countries are approaching universal access at the primary (Ghana, Lesotho, Tunisia) and lower secondary (Ghana, Tunisia) levels. Also, in an increasing number of countries, out-of-school rates are lower for girls than for boys at the primary (Ghana, The Gambia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Tunisia, Zambia) and lower secondary levels (Ghana, The Gambia, Lesotho, Madagascar). However, in countries like The Gambia, Lesotho and Madagascar, the large gap in favour of girls at the primary

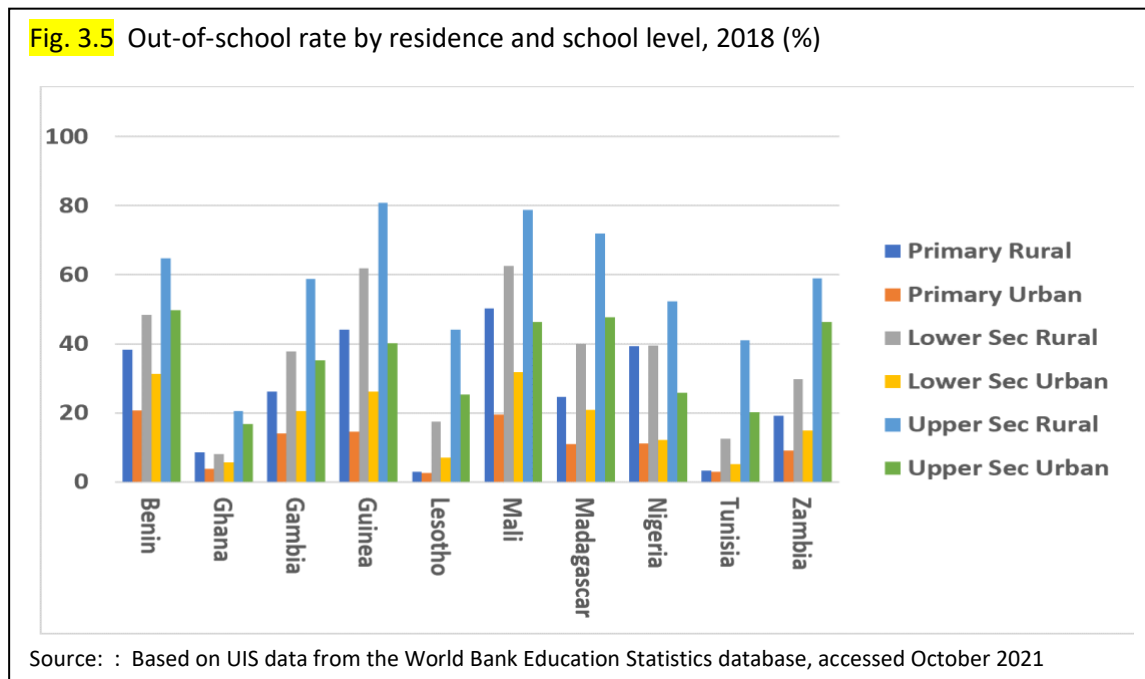
Fig. 3.4: Out-of-school rate by sex and school level, 2018 (%)



Source: Based on UIS data from the World Bank Education Statistics database, accessed October 2021].

and lower secondary levels is not due to progress towards universal access. Rather, it is likely indicative of a failure in getting more boys into school. A similar failure is evident in the data for Lesotho and Tunisia at the upper secondary level. In most African countries, however, the traditional disadvantage of girls is still evident at all levels.

An analogous pattern is observed with regard to differentials by residence: rural areas are at a disadvantage in all 10 countries, but the differences are smaller in countries approaching universal access (Fig. 3.5). Similarly, the differences between the poorest and the richest quintiles are quite substantial but narrow as countries approach universal access. For example, at the primary school level, differences in out-of-school rates between the richest and poorest quintiles range from about



1.5, 4.0 and 15.1 percentage points in Tunisia, Lesotho and Ghana, respectively, to over 40 percentage points in Guinea and Madagascar, over 50 in Mali, and over 60 in Nigeria.

It is important to note that these disadvantages are often cumulative, with girls in poor rural households usually having the least access. Moreover, the residence and income differentials are indicative of the close link between monetary poverty and lack of access to education. These patterns underscore the need for specific measures focusing on disadvantaged groups if progress is to be made towards universal pre-tertiary education.

Low school completion rates and poor learning outcomes

Besides the large numbers of children out of school, a major concern is low school completion rates. Against the SDG 4 goal of universal completion of upper secondary education by 2030, completion rates at the end of lower secondary (for a cohort starting primary school) are well below 100 per cent in most countries. In a World Bank analysis of data for a number of Sub-Saharan countries from the Living Standards Measurement Surveys, Bashir et al. (2018, 178) found the proportion of learners who continue from primary grade one through to grade nine ranging from a high of 90 per cent for Ghana to a low of 16 per cent for Malawi. Another study by the US Department of Labor shows declines in completion rates at the primary school level in recent years (USDOL 2021, 6). Learners from disadvantaged and vulnerable households were more likely to drop out, according to the World Bank study. Reasons cited by parents for dropping out before completion included cost of schooling, poor quality of education and, for young children, distance to school. The analysis concluded that a combination of supply-side (e.g., availability of schools within walking distance) and demand-side

factors (cost of sending children to school, both direct and indirect) are responsible, with the latter becoming increasingly more important as supply constraints are eased (Bashir et al 2018, 179-180). Direct and indirect costs were found to be often higher in rural than in urban areas, which is consistent with the data on poverty and out-of-school rates.

In addition to millions of school-age children not attending school, millions of others in school are also not learning enough (ACPF 2018, 16 – 17). A 2017 study by the UIS found that, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 87 per cent of children of primary school age and 89 per cent of those of lower secondary school age will not achieve the minimum proficiency levels in reading by the time they reach the normal age for completing the respective school level, compared to world averages of 56 and 61 per cent, respectively (UIS 2017).²¹ About a third (202 million) of the global estimate of 617 million children who are not achieving minimum proficiency at the primary and lower secondary levels are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Western Asia and Northern Africa,²² the proportions not achieving the minimum proficiency levels in reading were 54 per cent at the primary level, and 64 per cent at the lower secondary level. The study also found that 83 and 86 per cent, respectively, of children at the primary and lower secondary levels in the Sub-Saharan region will not achieve the minimum proficiency levels in mathematics at the time they reach normal age for completing school. Corresponding figures for Western Asia and Northern Africa were 54 and 62 per cent, while world averages were 55 and 58 per cent. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, girls are more disadvantaged than boys (86 per cent vs. 82 per cent for mathematics, and 90 vs 86 for reading for the school levels combined). Factors contributing to the poor learning outcomes include poorly qualified teachers, teacher absenteeism, and overcrowded classrooms with high pupil-teacher ratios (ACPF 2018).

Overall, the existence of important access and quality gaps in relation to infrastructure – including schools in deplorable conditions and unavailability of schools to continue to in underserved areas –, teaching and learning materials, teaching and learning outcomes, and affordability, are important contributory factors to the problem of high out-of-school rates (Bashir et al. 2018; Sabates et al. 2010)). In addition, many children start school late relative to the regular entrance age, which increases the risk of dropping out for work (Sabates et al. 2010).

Educational access and quality have worsened following the outbreak of COVID-19

The prevailing disparities in educational access and quality have been made worse by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a recent UNICEF and African Union Commission report, over 90 per cent of learners in Africa experienced disruptions in learning at the peak of the pandemic-related school closures (UNICEF and AUC 2021, 8). Another study by UNESCO found that, between February and mid-September 2020, schools in Sub-Saharan Africa had lost 18 weeks to full closure and 12 weeks to partial closure; in Western Asia and Northern Africa, the corresponding losses were 22 weeks to full closure, and 20 to partial closure (UNESCO 2021, 29). Globally, learners lost about two-thirds of a typical school year as a result of the closures. Although many governments introduced remote learning programmes, more than half of learners from pre-school to the upper secondary level could not be reached. Moreover, digital learning programmes introduced as alternatives to face-to-face learning exacerbated existing gender, geographic and income disparities in access, given unequal availability of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and devices. Depending on the duration of closures and the accessibility and effectiveness of the remote learning schemes in any given country, COVID-19 disruptions are likely to

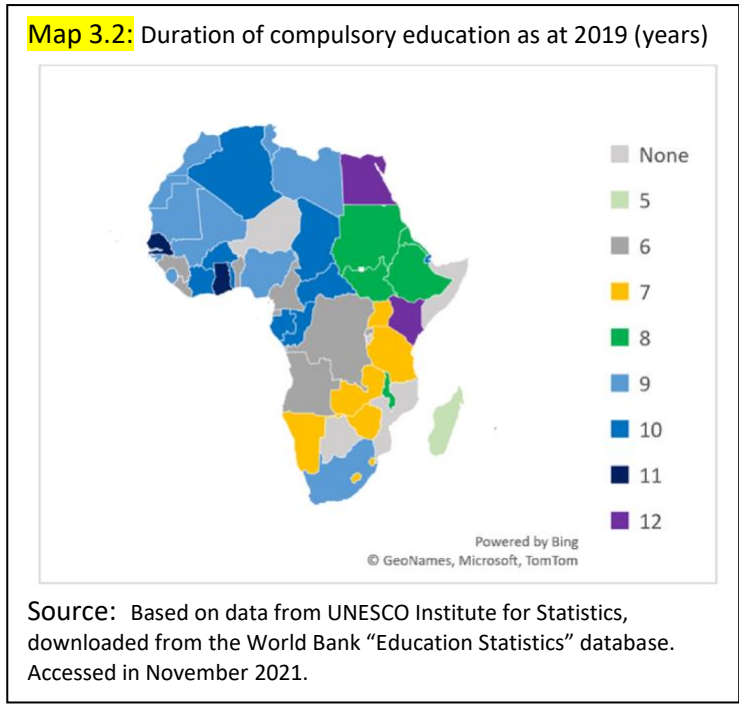
²¹ At each of the two school levels, the number includes children who are in school and are expected to reach the last grade of their respective school level without achieving the minimum proficiency level – these form the largest majority of the children, two-thirds at the primary level in the global estimate – as well as those who will drop out, or who start school late and thus won't achieve the required proficiency level by the time they reach the normal completion age for the school level, and those who are out of school and are not expected to go to school (UIS 2017, 10).

²² The UIS paper does not provide separate estimates for Northern Africa.

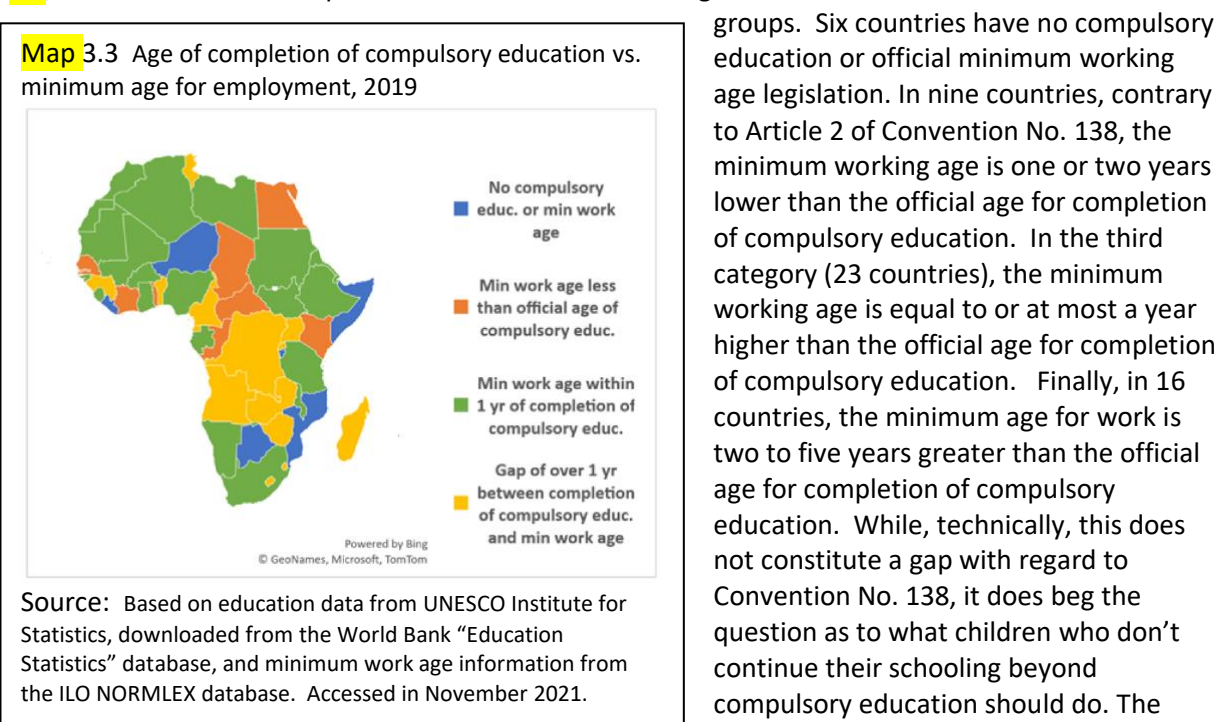
have dealt a major blow to educational attainment and outcomes (World Bank 2020b). In addition, available evidence suggests that many children were sent to work during the school closures (see Section 3.7). Given that working children are more likely to drop out of school, it is possible that the out-of-school situation has gotten worse since the pandemic, with girls most likely to be affected (UNESCO 2021).

Uneven progress in harmonizing compulsory education with minimum age for employment

We conclude this section by looking at the extent to which African countries have harmonized education and labour legislation to better address child labour. As noted earlier, Convention No. 138 provides that the minimum age for employment should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling. Although a large majority of countries on the continent have compulsory education laws, these are generally not enforced. Statutory compulsory education durations range from a low of 5 years in Madagascar to a high of 12 years in Egypt and Kenya, with nearly two-thirds of countries offering up to 9 years (Map 3.2). A handful of countries, Botswana, Burundi, Mozambique, Niger and Somalia, have yet to introduce compulsory education.



It is instructive to compare the age of completion of compulsory education, as implied by the official entrance age and the duration, with the minimum age for admission to employment or work. In Map 3.3, the results of this comparison have been used to categorize countries on the continent into four groups.



Six countries have no compulsory education or official minimum working age legislation. In nine countries, contrary to Article 2 of Convention No. 138, the minimum working age is one or two years lower than the official age for completion of compulsory education. In the third category (23 countries), the minimum working age is equal to or at most a year higher than the official age for completion of compulsory education. Finally, in 16 countries, the minimum age for work is two to five years greater than the official age for completion of compulsory education. While, technically, this does not constitute a gap with regard to Convention No. 138, it does beg the question as to what children who don’t continue their schooling beyond compulsory education should do. The

result of this exercise is one indicator, among others, of a need for harmonizing laws and policies in different sectors to ensure synergy.

3.3 Predominance of agricultural and informal employment

As noted earlier, most child labour takes place within the informal economy: in the subsistence and small-scale segments of the agricultural sector or the informal segments of the urban economy. An estimated 80.7 per cent of children in child labour are in agriculture, with 13.7 per cent in services, mainly in informal activities such as domestic work and petty trading, and 5.5 per cent in industry (ILO 2021d), again mostly in informal employment in artisanal mining and quarrying, construction and artisanal production of various goods. The large proportion of children working in agriculture reflects the sector's importance as a provider of employment on the continent. Though declining over the years, agriculture still represented 50.7 per cent of total employment in 2019, compared to 53.5 per cent in 2011 (ILO 2020b, 13). Over the same period, the share of the services sector in total employment increased from 34.1 to 36.1 per cent, while that of industry grew only very slowly, from 12.5 to 13.2 per cent. Agriculture in Africa is largely dominated by women workers, 54 per cent of whom are in the sector, compared to 49 per cent of men workers.

The predominance of small-scale and mostly subsistence agriculture in Africa, with heavy reliance on family labour, also explains the concentration of child labour in the sector. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 95 per cent of farms in Sub-Saharan Africa are family farms (i.e., they rely on family labour) of less than five hectares in size (over 60 per cent are smaller than one hectare).²³ There is thus a need for major transformations in the sector to enable labour needs to be met without recourse to child labour (ILO 2020b, 43).

Of the estimated 41.4 million children in hazardous work, 31.4 million (75.6 per cent) are in agriculture, while about 3 million and 7 million, respectively, work in industry and services (i.e., 7.6 and 16.7 per cent). The children in hazardous agriculture consist of 13.3 million aged 5 – 11 years, 7.8 million aged 12 – 14 years, and 10.3 million in the 15 – 17 age group. Most children in hazardous work in agriculture are in subsistence or cash-crop farming, in family units. About 75 per cent are contributing family workers, 10 per cent own-account workers, and 15 per cent employees. As would be expected, the proportion of contributing family workers is highest in the youngest age group, at 88 per cent, but decreases with age to 61 per cent in the 15 – 17 years age group, while employees increase from 6.8 to 25.5 per cent.

That so many millions of children are carrying out hazardous work in agriculture should be of particular concern to policy makers. The agricultural sector has been characterized as “one of the three most dangerous sectors in terms of occupational safety and health, irrespective of the age of the worker.”²⁴ Like elsewhere in the developing world, use of agricultural chemicals and machinery by farmers has been increasing in Africa in recent years, resulting in increased rates of injury and poisoning among child workers.²⁵ Although not all agricultural tasks are harmful, many children work without adequate protection and training. Children are particularly vulnerable to toxic chemicals and accidents from machinery and dangerous implements.

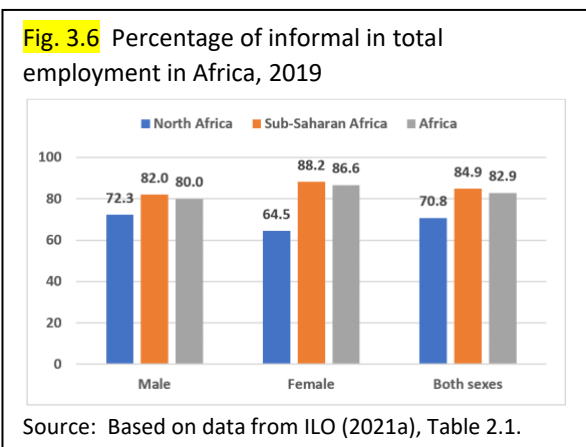
²³ FAO. n.d. “Family farming in Africa”. See also Lowder et al. (2019) for further information on various characteristics of family farms around the world, including in Africa.

²⁴ ILO. n.d. “[Occupational Safety and Health \(OSH\) and hazardous work of children in agriculture \(ilo.org\)](#)”. See also (UCW 2018a 11), and ILO. n.d. “Child labour in agriculture (IPEC)”.

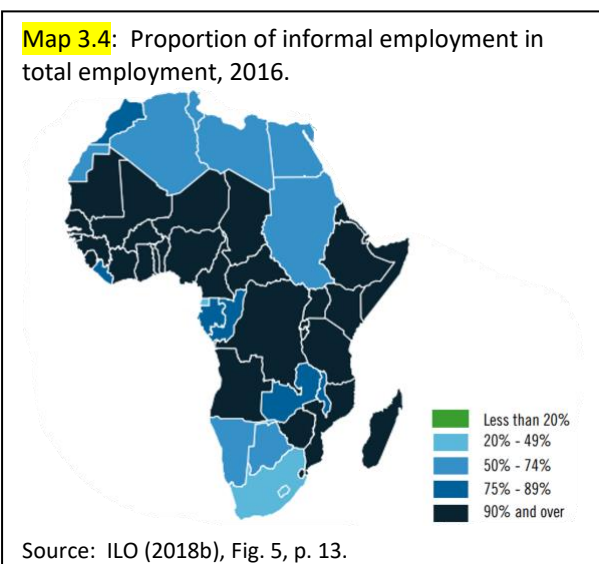
²⁵ ILO. n.d. “[Occupational Safety and Health \(OSH\) and hazardous work of children in agriculture \(ilo.org\)](#)”.

The two other sectors among the three most dangerous for workers of all ages are mining and construction (UCW 2018a). Many African countries have seen a boom in informal artisanal and small-scale mining in recent years (see, e.g., Reuters 2020). Increasingly, these artisanal operations are making use of dangerous machines and toxic chemicals, such as cyanide and mercury in the case of gold mining, and accidents are frequent. In Africa, child labour is common in mines producing gold, copper, diamonds, cobalt, coltan, salt, mica and other minerals, and in stone quarries.²⁶ However, there is a lack of data on the numbers involved, in part because the activities are often illegal. There is a need for data and research on the extent and nature of child labour in this sector, and on effective policy interventions.

Though conditions vary substantially, most employment in the informal economy is not subject to national laws relating to labour and social protection (or is not covered in practice) and is characterized by precarity, low pay or, for employers, own-account workers and contributing family workers, low income. Occupational safety and health conditions also tend to be poor, among other decent work deficits.



As with agriculture, the concentration of child labour in the informal economy also reflects the latter's predominance in much of Africa. According to a recent ILO publication (2021a, Table 2.1), nearly 83 per cent of employment on the continent was informal in 2019 (80 per cent among males and 87 per cent among females, with significantly higher levels in Sub-Saharan Africa relative to North Africa; see Fig. 3.6). Data for 2016 (ILO 2018b, Table 2, 28-29) show important differences between rural and urban areas (88.5 vs. 76.3 per cent), and between agriculture (97.9 percent), industry (77.4 per cent) and services (70.2 per cent).



Levels of informal employment are highest in Western Africa and, to a slightly lesser extent, Eastern and Central Africa, and lowest in Southern Africa, with Northern Africa in between. There are also variations between countries within each of the regions, often reflecting differences in the level of economic/industrial development and the nature of agriculture. Map 3.4 provides a broad overview based on data for 2016.

Causes of informality

Multiple causes underlie the high levels of informality across much of the continent, some relating to economic structure and the capacity of institutions to implement and support policies

²⁶ See, for example, ILO. n.d. "Child labour in mining and quarrying", <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Miningandquarrying/lang-en/index.htm>; and O'Driscoll (2017). Internet news sites are replete with reports of children doing dangerous work in mining in countries across the continent.

that enhance growth in decent work, and others relating to the capabilities of enterprises and individuals. The key factors include:²⁷

- the inability of the economy to create quality (formal sector) jobs;
- lack of access to productivity-enhancing knowledge, technology, infrastructure, capital, finance and other business services for many informal enterprises or production units;
- poverty and low levels of education among many workers;
- deficiencies in the regulatory framework, including gaps in policy implementation and labour code enforcement; and
- disruptions in economic activity caused by events such as conflict, natural and human-induced emergencies, epidemics and pandemics, and loss of formal sector jobs.

For many countries, the continuous increases in the annual stream of new entrants into the labour market resulting from rapid population growth, with many young job-seekers inadequately prepared (in terms of education and skills²⁸) for the job market, is an additional challenge.

Efforts towards formalization

Countries across the continent have taken steps towards formalization. However, there is a tendency to focus more on issues of regulation and taxation and not enough on addressing the structural issues that drive many poor workers into informal employment, including quality gaps in education and inequalities in access to economic infrastructure, capital, knowledge and technology, and various kinds of governmental support (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021). Data on the outcomes of national formalization efforts are very limited and they show no discernible trends.²⁹

3.4 Employment and labour market conditions for adults and young people

The predominance of informal employment involving poor working conditions is just one of several indicators of widespread decent work deficits in Africa. Decent employment is essential for enabling households to move out of poverty and to meet basic needs without sending children to work prematurely. Better opportunities for decent work, especially for young people, also encourage families and children to invest in education, keeping children longer at school than they would if employment prospects were worse (ILO 2018c, 34). In contrast, poor labour market outcomes may serve as a disincentive for children remaining at school, especially among economically vulnerable households (ILO 2017a, 53; Lam and Elsayed 2022, 167). Unfortunately, however, for large proportions of workers across much of the continent, the employment situation can only be described as precarious (Sparreboom and Albee 2011; ILO 2020b; Fox et al. 2020). Besides the predominance of agricultural and informal economy employment, other contributing factors include the concomitant large numbers of own-account and contributing family workers, and relatively high levels of unemployment and, especially, underemployment, combined with ongoing increases in the labour force, which can intensify the pressure on the labour market (ILO 2020b; ILO 2021a, 43). Between 2010 and 2020, Africa's labour force increased from 391 million to 489 million, an average annual increase of 9.8 million.³⁰

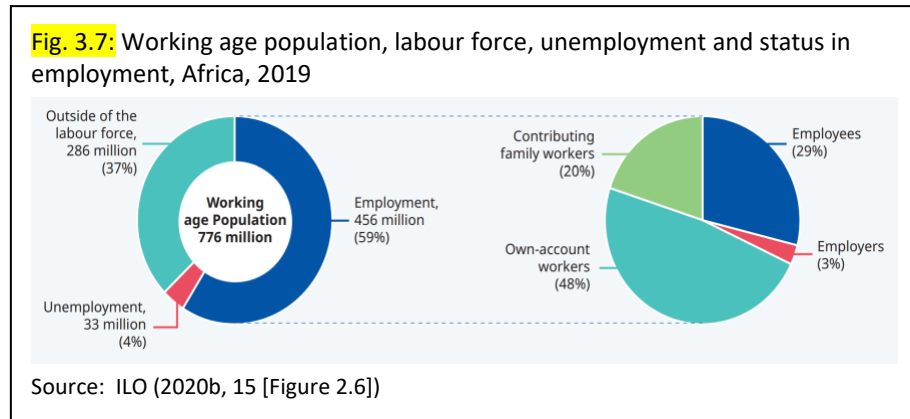
²⁷ See ILO (2021e) and Ohnsorge and Yu (2021) for further discussions of the underlying causes of informality.

²⁸ See [Section 3.4](#) and, for a more in-depth treatment, ILO (2018c and 2020b) and Sparreboom and Staneva (2014).

²⁹ Based on analysis of data from ILO (n.d.). "SDG Indicator 8.3.1 – Proportion of informal employment in total employment by sex and sector (%)", ILOSTAT Data Explorer, accessed October 2021.

³⁰ Based on data from ILOSTAT Explorer, "Labour force by sex and age -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2021". It is worth noting, however, that the continental estimates mask important regional differences. The annual labour force growth rate over this period for Sub-Saharan Africa was 2.5 per cent, compared to 0.7 per cent for

Data on status in employment provide an indication of the labour market situation on the continent. Many workers pushed into agriculture or the urban informal economy for lack of decent waged or salaried jobs end up



as own-account or contributing family workers (ILO 2020b, 15). According to ILO estimates, 68 per cent of the 456 million employed persons in Africa in 2019 were in these two categories (Fig. 3.7). While similar proportions of the employed women and men were own-account workers (approximately 64.7 per cent), women workers were much more likely than their male counterparts to be contributing family workers (32.3 vs. 13 per cent), meaning they were also more likely to be in activities with “low pay, poor access to social protection and generally inferior working conditions” (ILO 2020b, 15). Nevertheless, many own-account workers, both male and female, work under similarly poor conditions.

Unemployment and labour underutilization

Measures of unemployment and underemployment also point to difficult labour market conditions across the continent. According to ILO estimates, there were about 34 million unemployed persons in Africa in 2019, including 12.2 million young persons aged 15 – 24 (ILO 2020b, 17). The number of unemployed persons has risen by some 6.4 million since 2010. The unemployment rate for the continent for 2019 was 7 per cent, compared to a world average of 5.4 per cent. Women had slightly higher rates than men. At the regional level, the highest unemployment rates in 2019 were in Northern Africa (11.1 per cent) and Southern Africa (27.7 per cent); rates in the remaining regions ranged from 3.8 per cent in Eastern Africa and 5.4 per cent in Central Africa to 6.2 per cent in Western Africa.³¹

Compared to the global average, the continent’s unemployment rate is not particularly high. However, given the very large proportions of people employed in the informal economy, the rate does not adequately reflect the health of labour markets on the continent. It is thus important to look at broader measures of labour underutilization. The ILO estimates the total labour underutilization³² in 2019 at 114.6 million, and in 2020 at 117.5 million. These correspond to composite labour underutilization rates of 22.1 and 22.0 per cent, respectively (ILO 2020c, 41). Total labour underutilization in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa for 2020 were 20.9 and 96.6 million, respectively, corresponding to composite labour underutilization rates of 24.9 and 21.5 per cent.

Northern Africa. Moreover, on average, the youth labour force (ages 15 – 24) increased by 1.7 million per annum in Sub-Saharan Africa, while decreasing by 380 thousand in Northern Africa.

³¹ Estimates of unemployment rates in this paragraph are ILO modelled estimates from ILOSTAT, “Unemployment rate by sex and age -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2021” [accessed April 2022]. Note that, as elsewhere in this section, “regions” refers to regional groupings used for ILO reporting, as contained in the ILOSTAT database.

³² Labour underutilization figures in this paragraph refer to the composite measure LU4, which is the percentage of the extended labour force that is in time-related underemployment, unemployment, or the potential labour force; see ILO (2013), especially para. 73(c) for definitions.

Youth employment and labour market conditions

While the employment situation is bad for most workers of all ages, the labour market conditions faced by young people tend to be significantly worse than those of adults. **Table 3.3** provides recent ILO estimates of several indicators of labour market performance for young people aged 15 – 24

Table 3.3: Selected labour market indicators by broad age group, Africa

Indicator	Africa			Northern Africa			Sub-Saharan Africa		
	Total (15 +)	Youth (15-24)	Adults (25+)	Total (15 +)	Youth (15-24)	Adults (25+)	Total (15 +)	Youth (15-24)	Adults (25+)
Labour force (millions)	491.0	112.0	378.0	73.8	10.3	63.5	417.0	102.0	314.7
Labour force participation rate (%)	63.2	44.6	72.0	45.3	25.5	51.9	67.9	48.3	78.2
Informal employment rate (%)	85.8	94.9	82.8	67.3	87.5	63.7	89.2	95.5	86.6
Unemployment rate (%)	6.8	11.2	5.5	11.7	28.5	9.0	6.0	9.4	4.8
Labour underutilization (LU4, %)	21.5	30.4	18.7	25.5	50.3	20.8	20.7	28.0	18.3

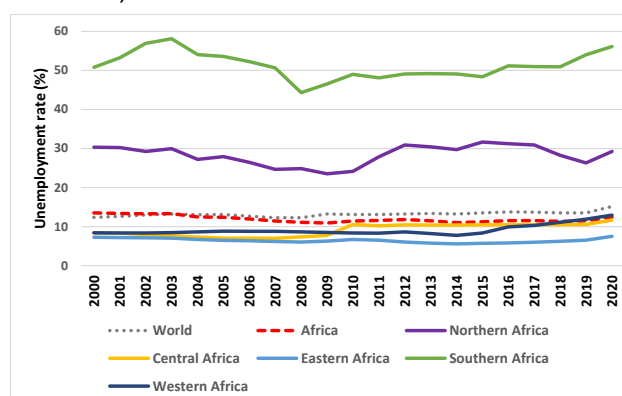
Note: Informality data are for 2016; the rest are for 2019.

Source: Informality – ILO (2018b, pp. 28 – 29, Table 2; labour force, unemployment and labour underutilization: ILO (2021a, Appendix C).

years, alongside those of adults aged 25 years and above, and of the total population of working age (age 15+). At the continental level, the data show that young workers are 15 per cent more likely to be in informal employment, twice as likely to be unemployed, and more than 60 per cent more likely to have underutilized labour than adults. Additionally, in 2020, 63 per cent of young workers aged 15 – 24 were in working poverty, compared to 50 per cent of working adults aged 25 and over (ILO 2020b, 22). At the regional level, data for Northern Africa show even greater disparities, with the young workers well over a third more likely to be in informal employment (owing to a lower, though still high, adult informality rate relative to the continental average), more than three times as likely to be unemployed, and nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to have underutilized labour. In contrast, as would be expected owing to its demographic weight, estimates for Sub-Saharan Africa are close to the continental averages.

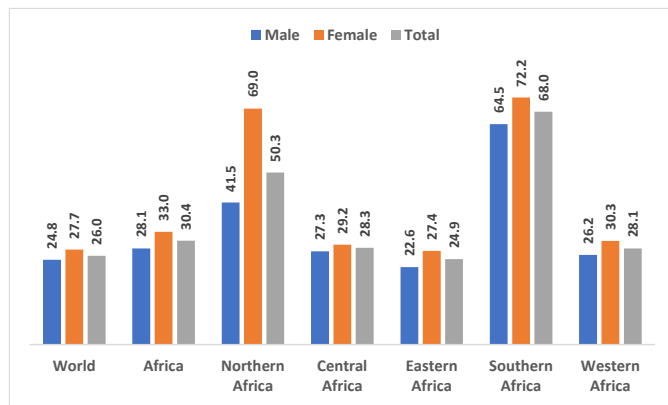
The continent’s youth unemployment rate has been close to the global average over the last two decades (**Fig. 3.8**). The ILO estimate for the year 2000 is 12.5 per cent for Africa and 15.2 per cent for the world as a whole. However, the continental figure masks substantial regional differences. Regional estimates for 2020 range from 7.5, 11.7 and 12.9 per cent, respectively, for Eastern, Central and Western Africa, to 29.3 per cent for Northern Africa and 56.1 per cent for Southern Africa. The lower unemployment rates for Eastern, Central and Western Africa, however, prevail in a context where rates of informal employment are significantly higher than in Northern and Southern Africa. Regional estimates of the youth informality rate in 2016 are 56.4 per cent for Southern Africa, 87.5 per cent for Northern Africa, and 95.1, 96.7 and 97.9 per cent for Central, Eastern and Western Africa (ILO 2018b, 29). Nevertheless, when a broader labour

Fig. 3.8: Youth unemployment rates (ages 15 – 24), global and Africa, 2000 - 2020



Source: ILOSTAT Explorer, “Unemployment rate by sex and age - ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2021”.

Fig. 3.9: Youth composite rates of labour underutilization (LU4) by sex, age 15 - 24, World and Africa regions, 2019 (%)



Source: ILOSTAT Explorator, "Composite rate of labour underutilization (LU4) by sex and age -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2020".

underutilization indicator such as the composite LU4 measure is used, the pattern of regional differences remains largely unchanged (Fig. 3.9).

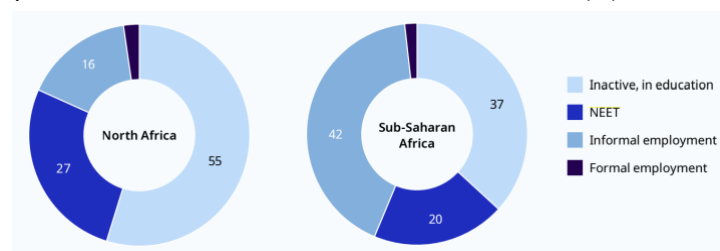
Gender differences in the estimated youth unemployment rates in Africa are relatively small – 11.8 per cent for men vs. 12 per cent for women in 2019 (ILO 2020b, 17). However, gender differences are slightly bigger with regard to the youth composite labour underutilization rate (28 per cent for men vs. 33 per cent for women). The gender gap is particularly large in Northern Africa.

Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)

The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) provides an additional angle for viewing the prevailing labour market conditions for the youth. According to ILO estimates, in 2019, 20 per cent of young people in Sub-Saharan Africa aged 15 – 24 were in NEET status, while 37 per cent were in education and inactive (Fig. 3.10).

Forty-three per cent were employed, almost entirely in informal employment (42 per cent, compared to only one per cent in formal employment). The corresponding estimates for Northern Africa show 27 per cent in NEET status and 55 per cent in education and inactive, with 16 and 2 per cent, respectively, in informal and formal employment.

Fig. 3.10: Labour market status of young people aged 15 – 24 years, Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, 2019 (%)

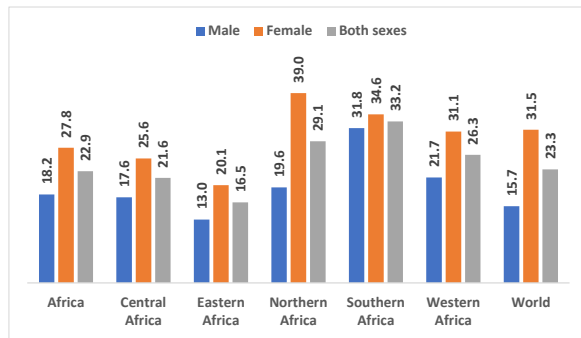


Source: ILO (2021a, 46, Figure 2.1)

The NEET rate can be taken, among other things, as an indicator of the extent to which young people have access to education and training programmes for improving their employability in the future, or have difficulties in finding a job, or are discouraged from doing so, and therefore the quality of the transition from school to work.³³ Globally, NEET rates are highest in Middle-Income countries and lowest in High-Income countries, with Northern and Southern Africa and Southern Asia having the highest rates (O’Higgins 2019). In Africa, the highest NEET rates are in Upper-Middle Income countries, and the lowest rates in the Low-Income countries (ILO 2020b, 24-25). Female NEET rates tend to be higher, often substantially, than male rates in Low- and Middle-Income countries across the world, partly because of many young women being inactive for family and other reasons (Elders 2015; O’Higgins 2019).

³³ The NEET rate is the indicator for SDG Target 8.6. For a discussion of some difficulties in understanding and interpreting this indicator, see Elder (2015).

Fig. 3.11: Share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) by sex, age 15 - 24, World and Africa regions, 2020 (%)



Source: ILOSTAT Explorer, "Share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) by sex -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2021".

Fig. 3.11 provides regional estimates of the youth NEET rate by sex for 2020. Unlike the unemployment rates, the NEET rates indicate significant gender disparities in all regions, with the biggest gap in Northern Africa. Among the regions, young women in Northern Africa have the highest NEET rate (39 per cent). For both sexes combined, the proportions in NEET status are lowest in Eastern Africa, followed by Central, Western, Northern and Southern Africa.

It is clear from the foregoing that large proportions of adults and young people in Africa lack opportunities for decent employment, with many forced to eke a living in precarious low-productivity and low-income

jobs, while others endure periods of unemployment. Reasons for these will vary from country to country and may include long periods of subdued or even negative economic growth, undue reliance on sectors that are not job-intensive, such as extractive industries, for growth, and weaknesses in the regulatory environment, along with rapid population growth. For many countries on the continent, deficiencies in educational systems and outcomes, including skill gaps and mismatches, may also be an important factor. As discussed in Section 3.2, lack of access to quality education and the poor quality of what education there is for large numbers of children contribute to mismatches between qualifications and the skills required in the labour market, which in turn affect school to decent work transitions and contributes to the observed high levels of youth unemployment, and underemployment in the informal economy (Sparreboom and Staneva 2014). However, by far the most important factor has been limited jobs growth in the formal wage sector, largely because transformation from low-productivity agriculture and non-farm informal sectors to high-productivity sectors has been slow across much of the continent (ILO 2020b; Fox et al. 2020; Lam and Elsayed 2022, 176).

Youth employment programmes

Most African countries recognize the need to address youth employment (and employment creation more generally) in national policies and programmes (Fox et al. 2020, Ismail 2018, ILO 2012). National approaches include the pursuit of general macro-economic and employment policies, specific youth employment programmes and direct employment schemes, active labour market policies and programmes such as incentive schemes, subsidies, training programmes and employment services, technical education and training, skills training and apprenticeship programmes, labour-based public works programmes, and youth entrepreneurship development schemes. A number of these programmes have been designed and implemented with support from the ILO and other international partners.³⁴ Many, however, are often of a small scale and/or tend to focus too narrowly on youth-specific interventions without addressing the broader factors that constrain the growth of decent formal sector wage employment (Fox et al. 2020). Among those factors are the dominance of subsistence agriculture and low levels of industrialization; gaps in infrastructure such as energy supply and transportation networks, including reliable ports and logistics services; small markets with limited support for economies of scale; limited availability of technology, affordable credit and financial services for small enterprises; and policy and regulatory

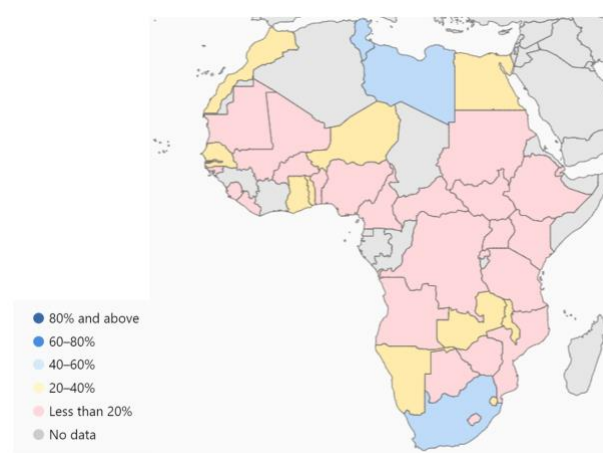
³⁴ ILO. n.d. "Youth employment in Africa". <https://www.ilo.org/africa/areas-of-work/youth-employment/lang-en/index.htm>.

environments that are not conducive to employment growth (e.g., with regard to transaction costs, levels of risk for businesses and households, barriers to competition, protection of human rights and property security, and respect for core labour standards) (Fox et al. 2020; ILO 2020b).

3.5 Inadequacy of social protection

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of, and need for, adequate social protection in all countries. Many economically vulnerable people, especially those in the informal economy, have borne a disproportionate share of the pandemic’s health and economic impacts with little or no public assistance. An estimated 46.9 per cent of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit (SDG 1.3; ILO 2021b, Table A4.2). However, there are wide disparities between (and within) the world regions. Although, according to one study, every country in Africa has implemented at least one social protection scheme (Beegle, Coudouel and Monsalve 2018, 4), only 17.4 per cent of the population is covered by at least one benefit (33.8 and 13.7 per cent, respectively, for Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa), compared to 40 per cent for the Arab States, 44.1 per cent for Asia and the Pacific, 64.3 per cent for the Americas, and 83.9 per cent for Europe and Central Asia. Moreover, this low average hides wide variations in coverage between countries, with only two countries achieving a coverage rate higher than 40 per cent (Map 3.5).

Map 3.5: Proportion of population covered by at least one social protection benefit (SDG 1.3.1)



Source: ILO 2021c, Social protection effective coverage, Africa. [ILO | Social Protection Platform \(social-protection.org\)](https://social-protection.org/), accessed November 2021

Table 3.4 Social protection effective coverage, Africa, 2020 or latest available year

Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (excl. health) [SDG 1.3.1]	17.4
Children	12.6
Mothers with new-borns	14.9
Workers in case of work injury	18.4
Persons with severe disabilities	9.3
Unemployed	5.3
Older persons	27.1
Labour force covered by pension scheme (active contributors)	13.4
Vulnerable persons covered by social assistance	9.3
Universal health coverage [SDG 3.8.1]	47.9

Source: ILO 2021c, accessed October 2021.

Lack of social protection results in vulnerability among the poor, particularly for informal economy workers and, especially, women (ILO 2021b, 40). ILO analysis of data for 140 countries available in the organization’s World Social Protection Database and the World Bank’s World Development Indicators shows that the share of a country’s GDP spent on public social protection programmes is strongly associated with lower levels of poverty.³⁵

Table 3.4 shows the estimated rates of effective coverage for nine types of social protection schemes at the continental level. As with SDG 1.3.1, coverage rates are very low in all categories. In fact, even the benefit type with the highest level of coverage, Universal health coverage (SDG 3.8.1), at 47.9 per cent,

³⁵ ILO (2021b, Fig. 2.2, p. 44). The analysis was based on a poverty threshold of US\$3.20 (2011 PPP).

means over half of the continent's population lack adequate access to health care.

Types of child and family social protection schemes

Depending on the family or household situation, any of the benefit types mentioned in **Table 3.3** may assist in improving the living conditions of a child. However, benefit schemes specifically designed for improving children's welfare are particularly important for mitigating the vulnerabilities often associated with child labour. Among such schemes are:³⁶

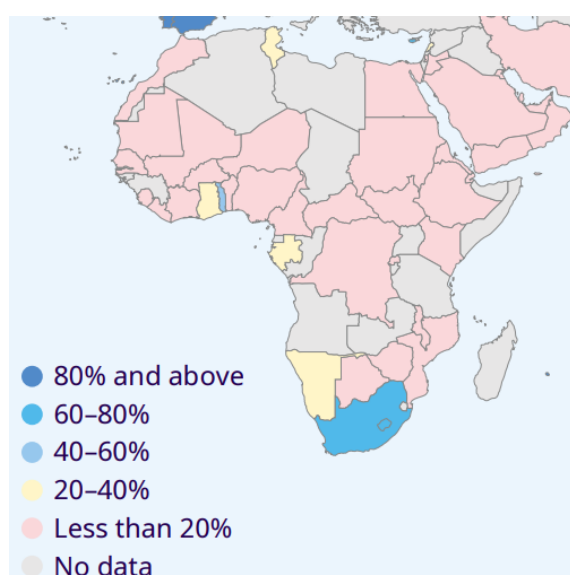
- Income security benefits (universal or targeted, conditional or unconditional, contributory or non-contributory, tax-financed child or family cash benefits, or tax rebates for families with children);
- Social protection benefits for care-givers of infants or children with disabilities or illness;
- Access to relevant services during the pre-school period, such as healthcare and childcare;
- Benefits/services preparing for school and while of school age (school feeding, vaccination or health programmes and other in-kind transfers such as free school uniforms, schoolbooks and after-school care); and
- Benefits/services for families in specific need, such as social pensions or unemployment benefits.

Child and family cash benefit programmes, in particular, play an important role in providing income security and constitute an essential component of national social protection systems (UNICEF and ILO 2019).

Social protection coverage and child labour

Extensive research covering social protection programmes targeting the well-being of children in a number of countries around the world, particularly in Latin America, indicates that schemes such as cash transfers, both conditional and unconditional, have been effective in reducing child labour among poor households, especially when combined with complementary interventions such as provision of educational infrastructure.³⁷ Over the last decade or two, an increasing number of African countries have been introducing social protection schemes targeting vulnerable population groups, including children and families. However, as with other benefit schemes, effective coverage rates are low in most countries (**Map 3.6**; average coverage for Africa: 12.6 per cent). On the continent as a whole, among countries reporting data on SDG 1.3.1, only eight have coverage rates above 10 per cent for programmes providing child and family cash benefits (Benin, 11.6 %; Nigeria, 12 %; South Sudan, 17.7 %; Namibia, 22.8 %;

Map 3.6: Percentage of children 0–14 years receiving child and family cash benefits, 2020 or latest available year



Source: ILO (2021b), Fig 4.2, p. 92.

³⁶ Adapted from ILO (2021b, 88).

³⁷ See, for instance, de Hoop and Rosati (2014) and ODI and UNICEF (2020); see also de Hoop et al. (2011) for a counterexample resulting in an increase in child labour.

Ghana, 25.9 %; Tunisia, 28.6 %; Cabo Verde, 37.9 %; and South Africa, 76.6).³⁸ Across the continent, 470 million children have no coverage (ILO 2021f, 15-16). Moreover, as noted earlier, although coverage for universal health care benefits is much higher at nearly 48 per cent, over half of the population still lack adequate access to adequate health care. Health care coverage is important for reducing vulnerability to illness-related external shocks and has been found to encourage parents not to send their children to work (ILO 2014).

The causes of low coverage in Africa include absence of laws and strategies for translating constitutional guarantees into effective rights, underfunding and weak governance and administration of existing schemes, fragmentation and lack of policy and institutional coordination, and neglect of rural areas and fragile zones as well as population segments such as informal economy workers, migrants, refugees and other minority groups (ILO 2021f, 18). A 2019 review of data on cash benefit schemes covering 180 countries and territories around the world, undertaken by UNICEF and ILO, found that 72 countries, including 20 from Africa, had no child or family benefit schemes supported by national legislation, even though some of those countries may have cash benefits or other social assistance schemes. As noted by the authors of the study, benefit schemes that are anchored on legislation “tend to be stable in terms of funding and institutional frameworks and provide legal entitlements to eligible individuals and households” (UNICEF and ILO 2019, 18). Twenty-nine African countries were found to have programmes anchored on national legislation. However, 24 of those provided only employment-related contributory schemes based on statutory provisions for beneficiaries meeting social insurance conditions that are unlikely to be accessible to the most vulnerable children. Five countries had non-contributory means-tested social assistance programmes, while one had both a contributory employment-based social insurance scheme and a non-contributory social assistance scheme. Only one country had a universal (non-means-tested) non-contributory scheme. Moreover, most had very limited coverage. Given the context of widespread poverty, inequality, millions of children in child labour being out of school, and millions of others having to combine school with work, addressing the causes of low coverage and scaling up national programmes is an urgent and essential policy response. Furthermore, given the predominance of informal and rural agricultural employment, programmes specifically designed to reach families trying to eke out an existence in the informal economy are particularly relevant. Informal economy workers are often excluded from standard contributory schemes because their earnings are often too low and too irregular to make monthly contributions, or because they may be otherwise ineligible for contributory schemes linked to formal employment.

3.6 Other important causal factors

Some socio-cultural factors facilitate child labour

A number of long-standing social, cultural and traditional factors facilitate or contribute to the high prevalence of child labour. Among these are a general lack of knowledge or awareness of child labour and broader children’s rights and welfare issues, as well as the hazards faced by children in child labour and the consequences for their health, development and well-being. A related factor is low levels of adult literacy or education: educated parents are known to be more likely to send their children to school rather than work. For example, studies conducted under the ILO-UNICEF-World Bank Understanding Children’s Work project found significant differences in children’s school attendance and child labour relative to the education level of the household head, even after controlling for income and other factors.³⁹

³⁸ Based on country data from ILO (n.d.), “Children/households receiving child/family cash benefits, latest period,” ILOSTAT Data Explorer, accessed November 2021.

³⁹ See UCW (2018a) for an example from Malawi, UCW (2018b) for another from Tanzania, and UCW (2016) for a third from Ghana.

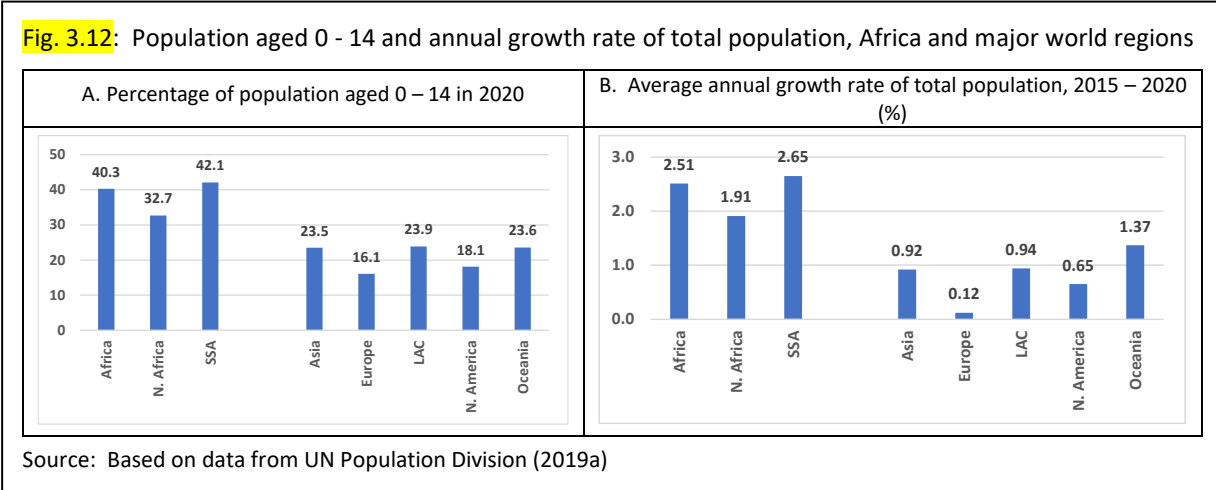
Another key factor is traditional gender roles and inequalities, which operate through, for instance, unequal access to education and resources, or through norms and expectations about the work of girls as opposed to that of boys. In addition, in a number of societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, the traditional practice of child fostering is sometimes abused to exploit children, including by human traffickers (Okunola and Ikuomola 2010; Kagabo 2014). Other traditional and religious practices have similarly served as a means to child labour, for example in street begging.

These social, cultural and traditional factors can make it difficult to build strong social and political support for dealing with child labour. In turn, inadequate social and political support constrains effective and large-scale national action.

Demographic factors have an impact on child labour

In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, national efforts at addressing a number of development issues that underlie child labour are made more difficult by demographic and related health factors. High fertility and rapid population growth create pressures in a number of areas relevant to socio-economic development, including poverty reduction, education, health and youth employment.

Africa’s population is young and growing relatively fast. The continent’s total population in 2020 is estimated at 1.34 billion, of which 40.3 per cent (541 million) were in the 0 – 14 age group.⁴⁰ The proportion of the population in the 0 – 14 age group was 42.1 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 32.7 per cent in Northern Africa. As shown in Fig. 3.12 (panel A), these proportions are much higher



than those of the other major world regions. At 2.51 per cent per annum in the period 2015 – 2020, Africa’s population is also growing much faster than the other major world regions (panel B). Over the five-year period to 2020, the population aged 0 – 14 grew at an average annual rate of 2.1 per cent, a bit lower than the total population, indicating fertility decline, although slow, is beginning to moderate population growth. The continent’s total fertility rate in 2020 is estimated at about 4.3 children per woman, from 5.2 in the year 2000.⁴¹ Nevertheless, fertility rates in most countries on the continent remain much higher than the global average of 2.4 children per woman (2.7 in the year 2000), and account for much of the high levels of population growth. As seen in Section 3.2, national efforts at expanding access to education have not been able to keep up with growth in the school-age population in many countries on the continent. As a result, infrastructure, teachers, teaching materials, etc., have been stretched, impacting the quality of education, while many children remain out of school. Youth populations have also been growing relatively fast, so that whereas the youth

⁴⁰ Unless otherwise specified, the population statistics presented in this paragraph are from UN Population Division (2019a).
⁴¹ The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is the average number of children per woman aged 15-45 years. The TFR figures given here are the arithmetic averages for the adjoining five-year periods as provided in UN (2019, 136 – 137).

labour force has stabilized or even declined in most regions of the world over the last decade, it continues to grow in Africa, doubling from 61.8 million in 1990 to 115.8 million in 2020 (ILO 2020b, 20 -21).

A different kind of pressure is created by high morbidity and mortality from pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and COVID-19, which can result in large numbers of dependent vulnerable people, including orphans. In addition, precarious forms of migration can serve as an important risk factor for hazardous work and other WFCL.

The world has seen steady increases in the number of migrants over the years. The number of international migrants is estimated at 281 million in 2020, 3.6 per cent of the global population, compared to 173 million (2.8 per cent) in the year 2000 (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 23). The number of migrants within their own countries is even bigger, the most recent estimate being 740 million in 2009. Children constitute a significant percentage of the migrant population, although the proportion has been falling in recent years. Currently, about 14.6 per cent of international migrants are aged 19 years or younger, compared to 18.9 per cent in 1990.

The estimated number of international migrants in Africa in 2020 is 25 million, of which 21 million are Africans living in other African countries, an increase from about 18 million in 2015. A major component of migration on the continent results from displacement as refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced persons, mainly within Africa.

Millions of children under age 18 migrate internally or externally, with or without their parents.⁴² Although migration can offer many positive experiences in terms of opportunities for education, employment and personal development, migrant children, especially those in irregular migration, are also vulnerable to smugglers, human traffickers and debt bondage (ILO 2018c; ILO 2017; AU 2018). Many child migrants work in agriculture or as domestic workers in homes, often working for long hours, in hazardous activities, and suffering from isolation, violence, non-payment of wages, and denied school attendance.⁴³ Migration, both permanent and seasonal, frequently result in school dropout, either for lack of educational facilities for migrant children or because parents may not see the value of schooling during periods of great economic need (Terre des Hommes 2017). Within source countries, children left behind by migrating parents may also become victims of child labour (Braams 2019).

Fuelled by both rapid natural population growth and high levels of rural-urban migration, Africa is also urbanizing fast. The percentage of Africa's population living in urban areas has increased from 14.3 in 1950 to 42.5 in 2018, and is expected to reach 48.4 by 2030 (UN Population Division 2019b, 26, Table 1.10). The UN projects that Africa's urban population will increase, on average, by 23 million per annum between 2018 and 2030. If managed well, this increasing urbanization can contribute enormously to economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction (World Bank 2013). However, so far, many cities in Africa have grown rapidly without sufficient policy coordination, planning and respect for regulations, and without adequate infrastructure and public services for the poor. One result is the development of increasingly large urban sprawls and informal/unplanned settlements plagued with "high levels of congestion, pollution, illness, disease, crime and insecurity" (World Bank 2013, 3). Consequently, many large urban areas are becoming centres of informal employment and poverty, with increasing levels of hazardous child labour and other worst forms of child labour (WFCL).

⁴² ILO, n.d. "Child labour and migration", https://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Migration_and_CL/lang--en/index.htm.

⁴³ ILO, "Child labour and migration"; see also Braam 2019.

3.7 COVID-19, conflicts and effects of climate change

COVID-19's effect on poverty has been devastating

COVID-19 is having a huge destructive impact on public health, employment and livelihoods. The ILO estimates net job losses in Africa in 2020 relative to 2019 at 4 million, plus another 13 million “foregone” jobs that would have normally been created in the absence of the pandemic, resulting in declines in working hours and income, millions more workers being pushed into the informal economy, and increased poverty on a continent with limited social protection (ILO 2021a, 43-45). The job losses and shrinking income caused by the pandemic are affecting the “already poor” disproportionately, while creating millions of “new poor,” according to a World Bank study carried out in 2020 (World Bank (2020a, 1). Moreover, in contrast to the “already poor”, the “new poor” are “more urban, better educated, and less likely to work in agriculture than those living in extreme poverty before COVID-19.” These effects are occurring in a context in which poverty reduction on the continent was decelerating prior to the pandemic, slowing down significantly between 2013 and 2015 and, especially, between 2015 and 2017, as we saw in [Section 3.1](#). The above-mentioned World Bank study estimated that the pandemic would push between 26 and 40 million more people into extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 (World Bank 2020a, 5). As outlined in [Section 3.2](#), the pandemic’s impact on education has also been severe.

Conflicts and climate change have persistent effects

The COVID-19 pandemic is compounding the already difficult situations of populations living in extreme vulnerability as a result of conflicts and climate change. Conflicts have long-lasting destructive effects on livelihoods, schooling, healthcare and security, often causing large population displacements and forced migration of children that expose them to worst forms of child labour, and aggravating poverty and vulnerability, with women and children, especially girls, often suffering the most. The resulting deterioration of educational and health outcomes can have poverty impacts that persist for decades (World Bank 2020a, 12). Besides the effects on the general child population in conflict situations, children have been used as combatants, human shields, sexual slaves and suicide bombers, or forced to perform other worst forms of child labour, for example in the mining of conflict minerals (ILO (2018c, 14).

A majority of the 39 countries listed on the World Bank’s list of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations are in Africa.⁴⁴ At least a quarter of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were considered to be fragile or in conflict in every year between 2015 and 2020 (ILO and UNICEF 2021, 27). According to an ILO estimate, child labour in countries in the World Bank’s Fragile category may be three times as high as the world average (30.9 vs 9.6 per cent; ILO and UNICEF 2021, 52). Another ILO study estimates that, in 2016, children 5 – 17 years old in countries affected by armed conflict were 77 per cent more likely to be in child labour, and 50 per cent more likely to be in hazardous child labour, than the respective global averages (ILO 2017a, 31). Although comparable data for Africa are lacking, one may surmise from the presence of many African countries on these lists that the prevailing differentials are at least similar.

Natural disasters from climate change do not only have similar effects on livelihoods, schooling, health and security, consequently pushing children into child labour, but may also cause competition for natural resources and conflict. A growing number of studies highlight the emerging impacts of adverse environmental conditions arising from climate change and natural disasters on child labour, especially by exacerbating existing underlying causes such as poverty and vulnerability, food insecurity, and migration (e.g., Colmer 2013; Terre des Hommes 2017; Koohi-Kamali and Roy 2021).

⁴⁴ This list includes countries in medium- or high-intensity conflicts, and others classified as being in high institutional and social fragility; see World Bank, n.d., “[Classification of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/)”.

In agricultural areas, changing weather patterns may result in children working more on the family farm or being sent to work outside the home, at times under dangerous and harmful conditions, for instance in the artisanal and small-scale mining sector. Furthermore, poverty and vulnerability to climate change effects like flooding, droughts and vector-borne diseases are intertwined.

Millions of people living under or near the poverty line in Sub-Saharan Africa are vulnerable to shocks from conflict and climate change due, *inter alia*, to:⁴⁵

- Having lower-quality assets such as housing;
- Livelihoods dependent on agriculture and ecosystems vulnerable to natural disasters;
- Vulnerability to high food prices in case of supply shocks; and
- Greater susceptibility to climate-related diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria.

Emerging evidence show increase in child labour since the start of COVID-19

Evidence from several West African countries as well as Egypt and Uganda, some anecdotal, indicates an increase in child labour since the beginning of the pandemic (ILO and UNICEF 2021, 55-56). Some children who had not been working previously were sent to work, while others who had been working pre-COVID had more difficult work. The evidence also shows more children were put to work during the periods of school closures, with girls made to shoulder a heavier burden of household chores while boys were sent to work outside the home (UNESCO 2021). Children in households experiencing economic stress made worse by the pandemic were, especially, made to work more. Additional evidence has been provided by household survey data from Uganda, indicating significant increases in the child labour prevalence rate for both boys and girls, and in both rural and urban areas (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). Finally, scenario modelling by the ILO suggests that worsening poverty is likely to result in substantial increases in child labour worldwide. However, the analysis indicates that appropriate social protection measures would do more than reverse COVID-induced increases (ILO and UNICEF 2021, 56-57).

4. Key Policy Responses to Child Labour in Africa

Child labour is a complex phenomenon requiring coherent multi-sectoral interventions to address the underlying causes, with contributions from a broad range of actors and across a wide range of policy sectors. Key stakeholder institutions in Africa include governments, workers' organizations, employers' and business membership organizations, civil society organizations, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union (AU), along with partners such as the UN and its Specialized Agencies, and multilateral and bilateral agencies. This section provides an overview of some of the main actions being undertaken by these institutions, grouped at three levels for convenience. First and foremost is the country level, reflecting the fact that, with regard to national laws and the relevant international and continental conventions,⁴⁶ primary responsibility for the eradication of child labour lies with national governments, acting in partnership with the social partners, civil society and other non-governmental bodies, Business and international partners. Secondly, at the regional level, a number of RECs have been playing important facilitating roles to

⁴⁵ World Bank (2020a, 12), citing Hallegatte et al. 2016.

⁴⁶ At the global level, these include C. 138 and C. 182, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Conventions on forced labour, human trafficking, gender-based violence and discrimination; at the continental level are, *inter alia*, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

assist, mobilize, coordinate and monitor the efforts of their Member States in this fight. Thirdly, at the continental level, the AU's role reflects both the requirements for promoting and monitoring its instruments on child labour and other human and children's rights issues, furthering the achievement of continental goals such as Agenda 2063, and contributing to the broader global effort. All the key institutions mentioned above contribute to the fight against child labour, in one way or another, at the three levels.

4.1 Current policy approaches, gaps and challenges at the country level

Many African countries began reinforcing efforts towards the elimination of child labour as a follow-up to their ratification of Convention No. 182 and, especially, in the context of the *Decent Work Agenda in Africa 2007 – 2015* (DWAA),⁴⁷ which was adopted by the African constituents of the ILO in 2007. Within the programme of action of the DWAA was a call for all the Member States to implement national action plans (NAPs) with the aim of eliminating the WFCL by 2015. Though the target was missed by, it seems, all countries, many were able to lay a foundation for institutionalizing the necessary multi-sectoral policies and programmes. As a result, a majority of countries now have policy frameworks that seek to respond to the diverse aspects of the child labour problem. These usually include interventions aimed at strengthening national legislation through domestication of Conventions Nos 138 and 182, increasing coordination of policies that address the underlying causes of child labour, and putting measures in place targeting WFCL in specific sectors or areas, such as agriculture, fishing, mining and quarrying, domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and child trafficking. Others are direct actions to identify and withdraw children from WFCL and provide them education and training alternatives, sensitization and community mobilization activities, improving the availability of data on child labour, and institutional arrangements for programme implementation and coordination. These measures are often conceived as components of NAPs or National Child Labour Policies. They largely reflect provisions in Conventions Nos 138 and 182 and their accompanying Recommendations. At least 30 countries have adopted NAPs, with several of them on their second or third phases.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that some of the key components of NAPs, particularly those dealing with the underlying causes of child labour, such as education, health, employment and social protection, exist in their own right outside the NAP framework. They are highlighted within NAPs given the understanding that their contributions to the elimination of child labour are enhanced by the adoption of an integrated and coordinated policy approach. Section 3 covered several of the main sectoral issues. In this section, a few key areas that are more specific as “child labour interventions” are covered, namely, legislation and enforcement, awareness raising and social mobilization, and measures targeting child labour in supply chains, along with the critical issue of public spending on relevant sectors, especially education and social protection.

Domestication of relevant international conventions

African Member States of the ILO have achieved universal ratification of Convention No. 182. All but two (Liberia and Somalia) have also ratified Convention No. 138. Following ratification, most countries have carried out one or more of the following actions to align national legislation with the international instruments:

⁴⁷ See ILO (2007, para. 25).

⁴⁸ Based on information available in the ILO National Legislation database, NATLEX (ILO, [Results list of Browse by country - NATLEX \(ilo.org\)](https://natlex.ilo.org/), accessed November 2021), or in the comments of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR; ILO 2020a; ILO 2019a; ILO 2018d).

- Establish or update definitions of child labour.
- Fix minimum ages for employment or work.
- Enact or strengthen legislation prohibiting specific worst forms of child labour (CSEC, human trafficking, and other forms of forced labour).
- Establish lists of hazardous occupations or activities prohibited to children, in line with Article 4 of Convention No. 182 and Article 3 of Convention No. 138.
- Revise labour laws to cover issues relating to child labour.

As at the end of 2020, at least 20 countries have officially adopted or enacted instruments establishing hazardous child labour lists since ratifying the two Conventions. About 14 others have draft lists awaiting official adoption or enactment.⁴⁹ Most countries have also enacted anti-trafficking laws and set up institutional mechanisms to fight human trafficking.

Gaps in legislation and enforcement

Though progress has been made, many gaps persist in legislation and enforcement. Gaps often identified in the comments of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) include the need for:

- harmonization of legal provisions for minimum age for employment with those on the age for compulsory education;
- adoption and/or enforcement of compulsory education legislation;
- harmonization or consolidation and strengthening of laws in areas such as forced labour, child trafficking, CSEC, exploitation in pornography or other illicit activities, and forced recruitment for use in armed conflict; and
- extension of labour legislation and labour protections, both in law and in practice, to cover activities and child labour violations in the informal economy and informal employment relationships, notably in terms of the coverage of labour inspections.

Also, in connection with national actions against various WFCL, the Committee frequently notes that there are too few detections, investigations and prosecutions of offenders, insufficient sentencing, and insufficient assistance for victims (see, for instance, ILO 2018d; ILO 2019a; ILO 2020a).

Another frequent comment from the CEACR regarding gaps in the application of the two child labour Conventions is the need for more adequate national measures for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children withdrawn from WFCL. Given the large numbers of children in child labour who are out of school, including many in hazardous work, the need for provisions enabling the effective reintegration of these children into regular schools or alternative education programmes, including second-chance education and vocational training, is substantial. Although school systems in most countries are able to accommodate children older than the normal age of school attendance at the various levels, as demonstrated by gross enrolment ratios well above 100, in general reintegration of out-of-school children withdrawn from WFCL has not been on a large enough scale.

A further area where there is a major gap which handicaps the enforcement of child labour laws, and child protection and welfare in general, is the low coverage of birth registration in many countries across the continent. A birth certificate is usually essential for proving a child's legal identity and nationality, establishing his or her age, and, often, for access to a whole range of services such as education, health and justice, including protection from violence and exploitation. For instance,

⁴⁹ Based on information available in the ILO National Legislation database, NATLEX (accessed November 2021), or in the comments of the CEACR (ILO 2020a; ILO 2019a; ILO 2018d).

having an official document that serves as proof of age is useful to the prevention of child marriage, WFCL such as recruitment of children into armed forces, and child labour in general. According to estimates by UNICEF released in a November 2020 brochure, about 96 million children under age 5 in Africa were unregistered, constituting 57 per cent of all unregistered children worldwide (UNICEF 2020). About 38 million of these children were in Eastern Africa, 27 million in Western Africa, 16 and 14 million in Central and Southern Africa, respectively, and 500,000 in Northern Africa. Moreover, of the estimated 118 million children under age 5 on the continent who were registered, about 60 per cent did not have a birth certificate. Most countries in Africa are far behind in terms of progress towards the achievement of the SDG 16.9 target of universal birth registration by 2030.

Supply chain measures

National programmes in a number of countries include components involving close partnerships between governments, businesses or business membership organizations, workers' organizations, producers' co-operatives, civil society organizations, and international organizations, with the aim of eliminating child labour from specific supply chains. Such measures often include the provision of training, information, material and other kinds of support to primary producers such as farmers, to assist them in improving productivity, enhancing livelihoods and facilitating access to education and other social services. In addition, they usually include arrangements for promoting compliance and enforcement. Examples of supply chains covered in Africa include cobalt, cocoa, coffee, cotton, gold, sugar cane, tea and tobacco.

Among the major African commodities, cocoa has received perhaps the most significant attention for supply chain interventions. A number of such interventions have been implemented in West Africa, with financial and technical support from European and US government agencies, companies along the cocoa and chocolate value chain (for example, through business foundations such as the International Cocoa Initiative and the World Cocoa Foundation), the ILO and the national authorities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, among others. As a key example, projects in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana funded by the International Cocoa Initiative and USDOL in about 125 cocoa-growing communities have assisted more than 400,000 children to attend school, along with "community empowerment" and livelihoods enhancement activities for cocoa farmers, as well as the implementation of community child labour monitoring systems (ICI 2021).

Many of the ideas, methods and materials for tackling child labour in supply chains have been developed through business-led cross-sectoral initiatives such as the Child Labour Platform (CLP)⁵⁰ and the Supply Chains Action Group of Alliance 8.7, the global partnership for the achievement of SDG 8.7.⁵¹ Established by the ILO with the UN Global Compact and co-chaired by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the CLP assists its member companies in addressing child labour in supply chains through activities such as support for due diligence processes and engagement with other stakeholders on measures dealing with the root causes within communities linked to their supply chains.

Supply chain programmes have had some positive impact on their immediate beneficiaries, resulting in reductions in child labour in the participating households and communities (NORC 2020a, 147-149; ICI 2021). For example, the ICI- and USDOL-funded interventions mentioned above are credited with helping to achieve reductions of 20 and 50 per cent in child labour and hazardous child labour, respectively, in the beneficiary communities (ICI 2021). However, given the scale of the child labour problem in many of the affected supply chains, much greater efforts are needed in order to reach a greater proportion of the affected households and communities (NORC 2020b). To maximize their impact on child labour, it is essential to scale up supply-chain interventions into area-wide

⁵⁰ <https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Action/CSR/clp/lang--en/index.htm>. Accessed December 2021.

⁵¹ <https://www.alliance87.org/action-groups/>. Accessed December 2021.

approaches, within an integrated framework that also includes enhanced legislation and enforcement, the promotion of industry compliance, as well as respect for fundamental rights at work (ILO 2018c).

Sensitization and social mobilization

As noted in **Section 3.6**, several social, cultural and traditional systems and practices, as well as a widespread lack of understanding about child labour and broader children's rights and welfare issues, contribute to the high and persistent prevalence of child labour on the continent. Many national programmes seek to address the problem through awareness and social mobilization interventions targeting various categories of stakeholders. In a number of countries, such interventions have been implemented in combination with community child labour monitoring systems. Industry data from cocoa-producing areas in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana indicate that such systems have been successful in preventing, identifying and remediating child labour in the communities covered (ICI 2021; NORC 2020b). However, they only cover about a quarter of the cocoa supply chain in the two countries (ICI 2021).

Given the high prevalence of child labour in many societies across the continent, sustained and well-targeted sensitization and community mobilization measures are essential for tackling its socio-cultural and traditional supports, and for building social and political support to address it effectively. With decision-making positions in many areas of society subject to frequent turnover, it is worth noting that the battle is never won to a point where such activities are no longer needed. This means communication on child labour needs to be well-targeted and effective, and to be sustained as a major topic of societal concern. However, in many countries communications on child labour tend to be largely limited to annual activities linked to the World Day Against Child Labour or occasional news items on particularly egregious abuses. A recent desk review of communication strategies around child labour covering a number of countries in Africa and Europe noted that such strategies "have not been that successful yet or have been largely absent" (FUNDAMENTALS 2021, 9).

Key programme implementation challenges

Child labour programmes have tended to receive low attention within national development priorities, resulting, for instance, in inadequate resourcing of the Child Labour Units and National Steering Committees charged with NAP implementation. With weak mandated institutions, many programmes have lacked the necessary leadership and commitment to drive implementation, and to ensure adequate engagement with various stakeholders, particularly private sector operators and other non-state actors such as civil society organizations, on policy and programme implementation issues. The weakness of the lead institutions also contributes to weak national ownership and commitment, inadequate coordination of key social sectors, and at times conflicts between institutions caused by overlapping mandates.

Capacity weaknesses in other key agencies responsible for different components of national programmes, including labour inspectorates, social welfare departments, and education departments dealing with school dropout and alternative education, the police, and the courts, also constrain programme performance. Although a few countries have made efforts to increase the number of labour inspectors over the last few years, very low ratios of inspectors per worker have been a persistent problem across the continent (USDOL 2021, 37; USDOL 2018, 51). This limited number of labour inspectors, coupled with the vastness of the informal rural and urban economies that need to be monitored, underscores the importance of strategies, including community monitoring, to extend the reach of inspectorates.

As noted above, lack of statistical data and administrative information for planning and implementation has also been a major constraint. As a result of these challenges, few national programmes have reached the stage of sustained large-scale implementation.

Public spending on key child-labour-related policies

As noted earlier, a number of key interventions needed to address the child labour problem, such as those falling within education and social protection programmes, are not usually funded as child labour interventions per se, but within other sectoral budgets. Consequently, government budgets dedicated explicitly to child labour interventions tend to be relatively small, often covering mainly staff and activities in Child Labour Units and coordination mechanisms at national and sub-national levels, along with activities such as meetings, awareness campaigns and community mobilization. Nevertheless, in many countries, these “child labour institutions” tend to face perennial funding problems from national budgets and are often dependent on donor funds to finance activities. This lack of adequate funding from domestic government sources often reflects the relatively low priority accorded to the elimination of child labour in many countries across the continent. Improved funding from domestic sources is essential for accelerating progress in eliminating child labour. This must, however, be accompanied by even bigger efforts in other key areas, including labour inspection and, especially, education and social protection, given their potential direct impact on the child labour situation.

To address the problems outlined in **Section 3.2** relating to access, equity and quality in the education sector and accelerate progress towards the SDG education goals, countries need to step up the provision of adequate infrastructure, provide sufficient numbers of sufficiently well-trained teachers, especially in rural and other deprived areas, improve the availability and quality of teaching and learning materials, and reform school curricula and other relevant systems to make them more effective and more relevant to the child’s local environment and the labour market. This, of course, calls for more funding, but also for reforms in how education budgets are distributed.

African countries spend significant proportions of their national budgets on education. Among 28 countries reporting data on education budgets to the UIS for 2018 (the latest year for which data for this many countries are available), the proportion of national budgets spent on education (all levels) ranged from 8 per cent in Liberia to 32 per cent in Sierra Leone, with three-quarters of the countries spending more than 15 per cent.⁵² The international benchmark (in relation to SDG Indicator 1.a.2) is for countries to allocate at least 15 – 20 per cent of public expenditure to education.⁵³ The average for Sub-Saharan Africa for 2014, the latest year for which estimates of averages for major world regions are available, was 16.6 per cent, compared to 15.4 per cent for East and Southeast Asia, 16.1 for Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15.3 per cent for South Asia (Bashir et al. 2018, 344). The average ratios of government expenditure on education to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014 were 4.4 per cent for Sub-Saharan Africa, 3.9 for East and Southeast Asia, 4.9 for Latin America and the Caribbean, and 3.8 for South Asia. Among the 28 countries mentioned above, the ratio of government expenditure on education to GDP in 2018 ranged from 2.1 per cent in Uganda to 7 per cent in Sierra Leone. Though figures for many African countries appear to compare favourably to the averages of the other world regions, the continent actually needs to spend more of its budget and its GDP on education because of its younger population, the large numbers of children who are out of school, and the less developed educational infrastructure. African households also spend considerable amounts on education, about one third of the costs by some estimates (Bashir et al. 2018, 350; Husson, 2018).

Part of the additional government resources needed should come from external development aid. Donor aid for education in Sub-Saharan Africa is small relative to the size of the school-age population, and is concentrated in a few countries; among 42 countries for which data was available in 2014, annual aid per child in primary school was no more than 10 US dollars in 23 countries, between 11 and 20 dollars in 12 others, and exceeded 20 dollars (\$21 – \$41) in only 7 countries, with

⁵² According to UIS data from the World Bank Education Statistics database (accessed October 2021).

⁵³ UIS, n.d., <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/proportion-total-government-spending-essential-services-education-health-and-social> (accessed April 2022).

an average of 8 dollars (Bashir et al., 349). In many countries, there may also be considerable scope in increasing funding from domestic sources, through new ways of generating more revenue (see **Box 4.1** below).

However, there is also a need to improve efficiency and equity in the use of education budgets. For example, according to Husson (2018), on average children from the richest wealth group receive 8.6 times more from public education resources than those from the poorest group. A redistribution of resources in favour of the most disadvantaged groups, including rural and other underserved areas and poor households, will help reduce inequalities and accelerate progress. Furthermore, disproportionate shares of government education budgets go to paying salaries, with little left for outlays such as textbooks, supplies and other inputs needed to ensure quality education. A typical country in Sub-Saharan Africa spends around 90 per cent of the pre-tertiary education budget on salaries and about 8 per cent on infrastructure, leaving little for textbooks and learning materials, teacher training and other necessary outlays (Bashir et al. 2018, 357 – 358). This, again, calls for reforms to allow for improvements in access, quality and equity.

To ensure that all children are able to attend school and that no child needs to work to survive instead of going to school, there is also a need to address the barriers to education imposed by monetary poverty at the household level. In this regard, a number of social protection interventions have been undertaken across the continent, such as removal or reduction of school fees, introduction of school-feeding programmes, and cash benefit schemes. However, as discussed in **Section 3.5**, coverage of social protection interventions targeting children or families have been very limited. It should not be impossible to generate the funds needed to expand coverage of social protection and social safety nets.

Data from the UNICEF-ILO study cited in **Section 3.5** indicate that African countries spend only 0.6 per cent of their Gross Domestic Products as public social protection expenditure, excluding health, on children (0.1 per cent in Northern Africa and 0.7 % in Sub-Saharan Africa), compared to a world average of 1.1 per cent. Moreover, as seen in **Section 3.5**, the proportion of these benefits going to the most vulnerable children – most of whom are in households in the rural and informal economies – is likely to be small. Given the scale of child poverty and child labour, much more needs to be done.

Where will the money come from? A joint study by ILO, UNICEF and UN Women (Ortiz et al. 2017) looked at funding options available to governments around the world for generating additional resources for the achievement of the SDGs. The authors identified eight funding options supported by policy statements of the UN and international financial institutions, and concluded that fiscal space for social protection and the SDGs exist in all countries, including even the poorest (see **Box 4.1**). According to the authors, examples of these options abound, having been applied in many countries for decades, including several from Africa.

Box 4.1: Fiscal space options for social protection and SDGs

1. Reallocating public expenditures, e.g., from military spending or energy subsidies, or opting for benefit schemes that have lower administrative costs, such as universal benefits instead of targeted conditional cash transfers;
2. Increasing tax revenues, e.g., through improved compliance or new taxes (such as on financial transactions, natural resource extraction or tourism);
3. Expanding social security coverage and contributions;
4. Lobbying for more aid and transfers;
5. Eliminating illicit financial flows, including tax evasion, money laundering and corruption;
6. Using fiscal reserves;
7. Managing or restructuring existing debt to generate savings; and
8. Adopting a more accommodative macro-economic framework.

Source: Ortiz et al. (2017), UNICEF and ILO (2019).

4.2 Contributions by the Social Partners

The significant leadership roles played by business and workers' organizations in supply chain interventions were highlighted above. It is one of several areas where the social partners have actively led or contributed to the fight against child labour throughout Africa, including important roles in the development and implementation of national, regional and international responses. At the national level, they have been prominent as tripartite partners with governments in work relating to legislation on child labour, as members of National Steering Committees, active participants in the formulation and implementation of action plans and projects, and as initiators and implementers of innovative models of intervention for eliminating child labour.⁵⁴ They also play important roles in monitoring and reporting major child labour issues and incidents at country and international levels (for examples, see CEACR comments: ILO 2020a, ILO 2019a and ILO 2018d).

Besides their role at the upstream level, employers' and workers' organizations are contributing significantly to interventions at the sectoral level, as noted above with regard to supply chains, particularly in agriculture. For example, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), with their regional and national affiliates, are key partners in the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture (IPCCLA), alongside the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the ILO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The IPCCLA aims at fostering the participation of agricultural organizations in the fight against child labour in agriculture at global and national levels, through advocacy, awareness-raising, capacity building and other relevant activities to enable key agricultural sector actors address child labour issues in national policies and programmes, extension services and monitoring activities (FAO n.d.).

4.3 Contributions by civil society organizations

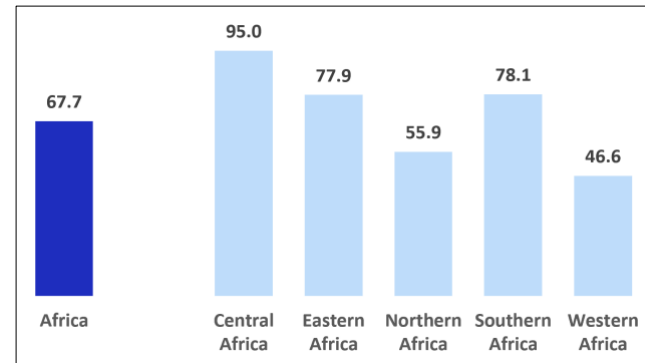
Civil society and faith-based organizations constitute another set of key partners in the fight against child labour in Africa. In most countries, their contributions have spanned the whole range of actions, from research and policy analysis, awareness raising and advocacy, to active participation in the formulation of national policies and programmes, programme implementation, and policy monitoring. Many play major roles in the delivery of crucial services to the vulnerable, in areas such as poverty reduction, education, health care, human rights, gender equity and women's rights issues, and child protection and children's rights. Besides their active contributions to upstream policy and programme issues, in many countries CSOs have served as the main actors in direct actions for the identification, withdrawal, rehabilitation and reintegration of children from WFCL, often as implementing partners of government and of donor-funded projects.

⁵⁴ For example, several trade union organizations contributed, alongside civil society organizations, to the development of the concept of "child labour free zones" (Stop Child Labour 2015).

4.4 Child labour data and research

Many national statistics agencies collaborate with bilateral aid agencies and international organizations such as the ILO and UNICEF to collect data on children’s economic activity and child labour through periodic household surveys. The main sources of data are national Child Labour Surveys, Labour Force Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and Demographic and Health Surveys. Data availability is, however, quite limited, with few countries having enough comparable data for more than a few years. This hampers the analysis of trends and the monitoring of progress over time. For the 2016 – 2020 period, for example, representative data are available for only about two-thirds of the total child population in Africa, with considerable differences in coverage between the AU regions (Fig. 4.1). The lack of data also means that inter-country comparability and possibilities for aggregation for groups of countries are also often limited.

Fig. 4.1: Percentage of child population for which representative data are available for the 2016 - 2020 period



Source: ILO (2021d).

Data availability is even more limited with regard to the WFCL. Although the ILO-UNICEF Global Estimates include data on children in hazardous work, detailed information such as the kinds of hazardous work done by children in the different age groups are lacking, including in the agricultural sector where most children in child labour are found. Also lacking are data on child labour in artisanal and small-scale mining. Moreover, very little data exist in relation to WFCL other than hazardous work.

Another area of data need that has often been flagged is the availability of various kinds of administrative information essential for strengthening national responses. For instance, as regularly observed by the CEACR, the vast majority of countries lack information for monitoring and assessing progress in implementing the different elements of the child labour Conventions (e.g., numbers of and trends in detections, investigations, prosecutions, convictions and sentencing regarding the different WFCL).

A fourth major area of need is to foster more research on child labour issues, for instance for purposes of improving policy design, implementation and the effective targeting of interventions. In the light of the characteristics of child labour outlined in Section 2, some priority themes for research are: the nature of children’s work in agriculture, including tasks undertaken, hazardous activities and the extent to which work interferes with schooling; various topics needed for strengthening the evidence base on WFCL other than hazardous work; policy impacts of specific interventions and their potential for replication on a broader scale; and other topics of importance in specific national contexts. More data and research are also needed on the linkages between climate change and child labour.

4.5 Responses by Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

Regional Economic Communities have played significant roles in promoting and supporting legislative and policy responses to child labour, particularly the WFCL, among their Member States. Available information, mainly from the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), show several examples involving the development of legal instruments, regional policies, strategies and action plans, as well as tools and mechanisms to facilitate policy development and monitoring, reporting and evaluation among their Member States.

A major area of work has been the formulation of regional policies and the provision of guidance for national actions. Examples include the *EAC Child Policy* (EAC 2016), the *SADC Code of Conduct on Child Labour* (SADC n.d.), and, in West Africa, the *ECOWAS Child Policy* (see ECOWAS 2019), the *ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour, especially the Worst Forms* (ECOWAS and ILO, 2013), and the *ECOWAS Strategic Framework for strengthening National Child Protection Systems to prevent and respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa* (ECOWAS n.d.). Other key actions by the RECs can be categorized as follows:

- Harmonization of laws and policies among members to ensure greater internal coherence and convergence of standards (e.g., rights, procedures and services);
- Enactment of community instruments to provide legal frameworks for community-wide measures against particular problems, especially human trafficking (e.g., *EAC Anti-Trafficking in Persons Bill* enacted in 2016 by the East African Legislative Assembly; human trafficking action plans in ECOWAS and SADC);
- Facilitation of cooperation and coordination on cross-border issues;
- Development of community tools and mechanisms – including common indicators and specifications on data collection – to aid policy monitoring and reporting (e.g., *SADC Monitoring and Evaluation Tool on Child Labour*); and
- Organization of multi-country studies on relevant issues (e.g., SADC 2016).

Arguably, these examples demonstrate the comparative advantages and broad scope that RECs have, as regional bodies, to energize and facilitate the fight against child labour across their respective regions.

4.6 Responses at continental (African Union) level

In fulfilment of a pledge made at the IV Global Child Labour Conference in Buenos Aires, the AU Commission formulated a *Ten-Year Action Plan on Eradication of Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in Africa (2020-2030)*, which was adopted by the continent's Heads of State in February 2020. This Action Plan provides a continental framework for mobilizing AU institutions, Member States, RECs and other partners and stakeholders to scale up efforts in order to accelerate the realization of SDG Target 8.7 and the corresponding AU targets under Agenda 2063. The Action Plan focuses on the following as priority areas (AU unpublished):

- Mobilization of AU institutions and RECs for advocacy, policy setting and policy monitoring;
- Strengthening legislation and enforcement;
- Education and skills training;
- Awareness campaigns on issues relating to child labour, forced labour, human trafficking and modern slavery;
- A wide range of measures to address these exploitative practices in agriculture, the rural and urban informal sectors, extractive industries, and other priority sectors;
- Measures against these exploitative practices in conflict and emergency situations;
- Promotion and support for multi-stakeholder partnerships;
- Statistics and knowledge management; and
- Capacity building and mobilization of resources in support of national programmes.

In addition to this Action Plan, several other AU programmes on education, employment, agriculture, the informal economy, families and children, migration, human trafficking, among others, are relevant to the fight against child labour.

5. Policy priorities in the lead-up to 2025

The SDG target is to eliminate child labour in all its forms by 2025. The year 2025 is, of course, now very close. Stakeholders at national, REC, continental and global levels need to rapidly mobilize and concentrate efforts to create the necessary momentum for substantial progress. The selection of policy priorities for this period and the medium term should be informed by the salient features of child labour on the continent, outlined in Section 2, and their interactions with the key development challenges discussed in Section 3, with variations for relevance within each country and the specificities of the national situation.

In this regard, continental priorities include mitigating child poverty and vulnerability to reduce or eliminate the need for families/households to send children to work as a coping mechanism, ensuring universal access to quality education up to at least the minimum working age, expanding opportunities for skills training and decent work for young people, and extending labour and social protections to workers in the informal economy. Other priority actions include strengthening legislation and enforcement, scaling up measures for the identification, withdrawal, rehabilitation and reintegration of children in WFCL, and improving the availability of child labour data and research to support the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

Measures for these objectives will need to be tailored to the variety of contexts in which child labour persists on the continent, which include widespread economic informality, rapid urbanization, integration into global supply chains, state fragility and armed conflict, and climate-related natural disasters. Each context presents special challenges with regard to the protection of children from child labour. As different contexts coexist in most countries, it is important that child labour issues receive recognition as key elements of social and economic policy and are well integrated into national development strategies. This calls for an overall strategy involving the adoption of a comprehensive, integrated and contextualized approach to ending child labour. The present section proposes a number of priority interventions for accelerating progress towards the realization of the SDG target. In a sense, these are “generic” interventions, to be contextualized, as relevant, at national and local levels.

1. *Expanding decent work for adults and young people above the minimum age for employment*

- 1.1 Address structural issues that constrain the growth of decent formal sector employment, such as gaps in infrastructure (e.g., energy availability and pricing, transportation networks), access to markets, availability of technology, affordable credit and financial services for small enterprises, job-growth-supporting policy and regulatory environments (e.g., remediation measures for high transaction costs and risk levels for businesses and households, lack of property security – including land tenure – and inadequate protection of core labour standards), and extend these to benefit informal economy enterprises.
- 1.2 Promote integrated rural development policies and programmes, with components covering expanded access to quality education and health care, improved productivity, access to knowledge and affordable financial services (e.g., savings, credit and insurance), improved agricultural practices with less hazardous work, extension services and markets, drawing, for example, on knowledge resources available from the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture and other available good practices.

- 1.3 Introduce and/or strengthen active labour market interventions to assist young people in finding or creating decent jobs, including skills training and regulated apprenticeship schemes, job search and entrepreneurship support, employment subsidies and other appropriate measures to smoothen the transition from school to work.
- 1.4 Implement measures aimed at expanding labour and social protections for all workers in the rural and urban informal economies (e.g., formation of cooperatives and other trade associations, and social dialogue, with effective application of fundamental rights at work, including freedom of association and collective bargaining arrangements).

2. *Ensuring universal pre-tertiary education for all children and enhancing learning outcomes*

2.1 Governments need to redouble efforts to accelerate progress towards the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality education), through the national-scale implementation of effective and gender-responsive measures for:

- Free universal education for all boys and girls at pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary levels;
- Improving access and quality of education in underserved rural areas and other poor localities (especially infrastructure, qualified teachers and teaching/learning materials; reduction in distance to school at pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels (or provision of secure transport services); elimination of direct costs; and reduction of indirect costs for children from poor households, for example through cash transfer schemes);
- Improving teaching quality and outcomes, including policies for enhancing teacher education and the availability of qualified teachers in underserved areas;
- Reducing repetition and dropout rates; and
- Providing schooling for out-of-school children, including children in child labour.

3. *Towards universal social protection*

3.1 Introduce and/or rapidly expand social protection measures suitable for the rural and informal economies (including universal child or family cash benefits, school feeding, subsidies for direct education costs, and health care coverage), reaching children from poor households, with a view to increasing access to education while reducing the need to combine school with work among children below the minimum working age. National social protection programmes or pilots that have proved successful in supporting families, allowing them to send children to school and to stay out of work, and facilitating access to health care, need to be taken to scale through systemic and rights-based approaches to achieve universal coverage within the shortest possible time.

3.2 Poverty alleviation programmes should target the poor, and can be coupled with targeted interventions for families with children, in order not to leave anyone behind.

3.3 Poverty-alleviating social protection schemes should be coordinated with measures for achieving national education objectives, and complemented with awareness campaigns on child labour and its effects on the development of children, including performance at school.

4. *Addressing gaps in child labour-relevant legislation and enhancing enforcement*

- 4.1 Accelerate action by national authorities towards the remediation of gaps in legislation and enforcement, notably in the following areas:
- Adoption and enforcement of legislation for free and compulsory education, at least up to the minimum age for employment.
 - Harmonization of legal provisions for minimum age for employment and age of compulsory education.
 - Harmonization or consolidation and strengthening of laws on WFCL (notably, forced labour, child trafficking, CSEC, exploitation of children in pornography or other illicit activities, and forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict).
 - Updating of statutes and processes to facilitate detection, investigation, prosecution, conviction and adequate sanctioning of offenders, and provision of effective protections and remedies for victims.
 - Application and enforcement of labour legislation and labour protections with regard to child labour and other fundamental rights at work, including freedom from discrimination, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, as well as labour inspections, in the informal sectors and to informal employment relationships.
- 4.2 Accelerate action to establish or update official lists of hazardous child labour in consonance with the provisions of Article 4 of C. 182 and Article 3 of C. 138.
- 4.3 Strengthen the capacity of labour inspectorates and other enforcement agencies to adequately detect and address child labour and forced labour violations in all economic sectors and all types of employment relationships, and to assist victims and ensure compliance with the relevant legislation. Develop strategies such as community child labour monitoring to complement, or extend the reach of, labour inspectorates within the rural and urban informal economies.
- 4.4 Implement sensitization and educational activities to publicise laws on child labour to promote compliance, including engagement of employers' and workers' organizations and other stakeholders (e.g., CSOs, informal sector trade associations and community leaders) in the most affected industries.
- 4.5 Strengthen child protection systems, with mandated collaboration and coordination of different institutions working on child welfare issues, to ensure effective prevention and response measures against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation, including child labour. Measures should include universal birth registration to guarantee every child their rights, including access to social protection and social services.
- 4.6 Update education, labour, social protection and child labour laws to ensure that child migrants, whether in regular or irregular migration, receive protections from all forms of abuse and exploitation, including child labour, and have easy access to education and other social services.

5. Tackling child labour in agriculture and the informal economy

- 5.1 Develop and implement appropriate strategies that enable and incentivize informal economy enterprises, including family and own-account production units, to comply with the provisions of national hazardous child labour regulations, for example through extensive demonstrations, coaching and other educational activities, and inspections.

- 5.2 Introduce/strengthen schemes that reduce the dependence of small-scale farmers on children's labour, such as agricultural co-operatives, and promotion of locally-appropriate labour-saving technologies and practices in small-scale agriculture.
- 5.3 Organize sensitization programmes for farmers associations, trade groups, etc., about what constitutes child labour, including hazardous work for children, its effects, and alternatives to child labour.
- 5.4 Building on knowledge and experience from programmes addressing child labour in global supply chains, improve stakeholder engagement and scale up existing interventions to create area-wide child-labour-free zones, and expand into other supply chains where child labour is a problem, including mining.
- 5.5 Establish and/or enhance institutional arrangements and capacity to effectively deal with WFCL other than hazardous child labour.

6. Addressing child labour in contexts of fragility, armed conflict and climate-related disasters

- 6.1 Integrate child labour concerns into all phases of humanitarian actions (i.e., crisis preparation contingency plans, humanitarian responses, and post-crisis reconstruction and recovery). This should include measures for ensuring that children can continue to safely attend school and do not fall into child labour in periods of fragility and crisis.
- 6.2 Develop policies, measures and institutional arrangements that can be activated promptly, to prevent and address sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced labour, recruitment and use of children in armed forces or groups, and other WFCL during situations of fragility or crisis.
- 6.3 Identify climate change adaptation strategies appropriate for local contexts, especially with regard to subsistence farming, and integrate relevant measures into existing national development strategies and programmes.

7. Improving financing and implementation of policies for eliminating child labour

- 7.1 Adopt comprehensive and integrated multisectoral approaches, with the objective of eliminating child labour effectively mainstreamed into broad national policy frameworks such as development plans and medium- and long-term budget frameworks, and with harmonized and coordinated measures in relevant policy sectors.
- 7.2 Improve and increase funding for social protection, education, child labour and other relevant social services that benefit vulnerable children and households by:
 - i. Reviewing public expenditures with a view to reallocating more funding towards programmes for reducing poverty and vulnerability, e.g., through universal child and family cash benefit schemes and social safety nets, education and other social services for the poor;
 - ii. Ensuring equity in the allocation public expenditures to reverse the current situation of public spending (e.g. on education) benefiting the rich multiple times more than they do the poor;
 - iii. Implementing measures for generating additional public resources (e.g., as outlined in **Box 4.1 in Section 4.1**) for social protection, education and other social services, including child labour interventions; and
 - iv. Lobbying for more donor funding for social interventions and channelling it effectively to benefit groups that need help the most.
- 7.3 Capacity building for key stakeholders in the implementation of child labour and related interventions, including government departments at central, provincial and local levels,

employers' and workers' organizations, civil society organizations, local communities and business entities.

- 7.4 Design and implement actions for mobilizing political, economic, civil, religious, traditional and other leaders to give visible backing for the fight against child labour, as a way of strengthening political and social support.

8. Improving the availability of quality child labour data and research

- 8.1 To ameliorate the lack of data on child labour and related issues across much of the continent, national authorities and international partners need to increase resources for the organization of specialized child labour surveys, including improved coverage of hazardous work, as well as the integration of child labour issues into other relevant surveys (labour force, demographic and health surveys, MICS, living standards measurement,...), all using harmonized definitions based on the latest recommendations of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ILO, 2018a) to facilitate comparisons between countries and over time. In general, child labour statistics should be mainstreamed into national statistical systems to make data collection and analysis more sustainable.
- 8.2 Arrangements for the systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of information relevant for monitoring and assessing progress on the implementation of national child labour legislation and the relevant international conventions, for example data on investigations, prosecutions and convictions, and rehabilitation of victims, should be established and made functional.
- 8.3 Promote and facilitate research on child labour and related issues, making greater use of the available data, to help inform and improve policy responses. Areas of urgent need for research currently include children's work in agriculture and how it affects their health and schooling, the nature and extent of hazardous work in various economic sectors, the evidence base regarding WFCL other than hazardous work, linkages between climate change and child labour within various local contexts, and the effectiveness of various interventions and their potential for broader scale replication.

9. Priorities for AU and Regional Economic Communities

The AU and RECs have major roles to play in accelerating action against child labour in their respective regions, including:

- 9.1 Mobilizing social and political support to build momentum for accelerated action;
- 9.2 Channelling their moral, political, technical and, to the extent possible, financial support into assisting their Member States in the areas outlined above, while consolidating actions related to their regional and continental mandates, such as harmonization and standardization of responses, establishment of frameworks for dealing with cross-border issues, provision of models and guidelines, and knowledge and experience sharing.
- 9.3 Taking steps to accelerate implementation of the AU Ten-Year Action Plan, REC policies and action plans on child labour, and other programmes that have a direct bearing on the child labour situation on the continent.
- 9.4 Working with humanitarian agencies and, wherever possible, national and local authorities to provide access to education for children in crisis situations, including those in refugee and internally displaced persons camps, and establishing other appropriate measures to minimize disruptions to schooling in crisis contexts.

- 9.5 Establishing preventive measures to counter human trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of forced labour in crisis contexts.
- 9.6 Creating a resource centre within the AU Commission, as part of the AU's Ten-Year Action Plan on Eradication of Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in Africa, to support efforts aimed at improving the evidence base on child labour. The centre should, among other functions, coordinate with RECs and countries in identifying sectors or subjects where studies/surveys need to be conducted.

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