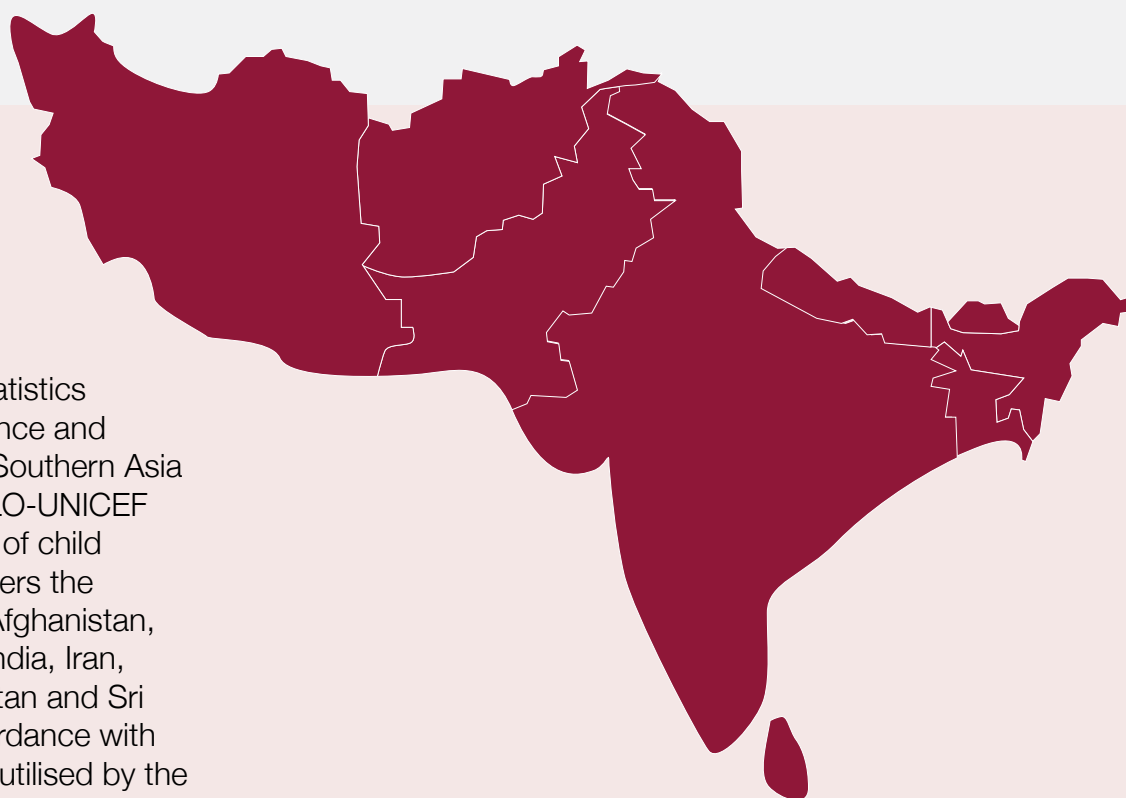


# Child labour statistical profile: Southern Asia

## PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS



This profile provides statistics on child labour prevalence and characteristics for the Southern Asia region, based on the ILO-UNICEF 2020 Global estimates of child labour.<sup>1</sup> The region covers the following 9 countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, defined in accordance with the regional groupings utilised by the ILO Department of Statistics.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ILO and UNICEF. [Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](#), Geneva and New York, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> ILO Department of Statistics: [Country groupings web page](#).

**Child labour remains widespread in Southern Asia.** The 2020 ILO-UNICEF global estimates show that 23.6 million children – 7.4 million girls and 16.2 million boys – were in child labour at the beginning of 2020, accounting for 5% of all children in the region. Close to half of all those in child labour – 11.5 million children in absolute terms – were in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development.

These figures place Southern Asia in the lower-range of world regions in terms of the prevalence of child labour and hazardous work, and at about half the global averages.

It is worth underscoring that the child labour estimates for Southern Asia and for the other world regions predate the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, which has substantially added to the situations of household vulnerability that drives much of the child labour phenomenon. The estimates, therefore, likely understate the actual prevalence of child labour in the Southern Asia and elsewhere.

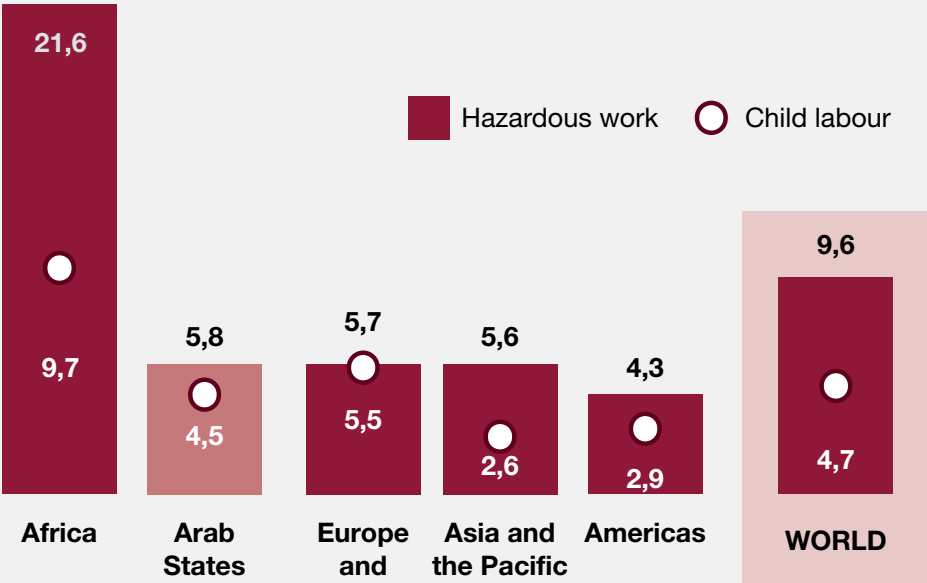
**Involvement in child labour and hazardous work.**

Figure 1 Number of children in child labour and hazardous work (5-17 years)



**Child labour and hazardous work in world regions**

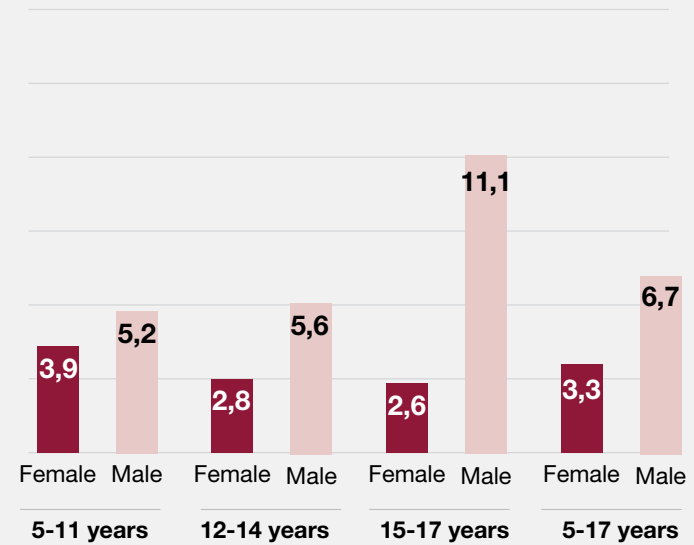
Figure 2 Percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, by world region (5-17 years)



**Child labour is significantly more common among boys than girls, underscoring the important gender dimension in the child labour phenomenon in Southern Asia.** For the overall 5-17 years age group, the percentage of boys in child labour is roughly twice that of girls. The gender gaps grows more pronounced with age – child labour prevalence is four times higher for boys compared to girls among 15-17 year-olds. It is worth recalling in interpreting these numbers, however, that they do not reflect children’s involvement in household chores in their own homes, a category of work for which girls shoulder a disproportionate burden (see below). Girls are also more present in domestic work outside their own homes, a form of child labour that is hidden from public view and often not fully captured in child labour estimates. .

### Age and gender profile of child labour

**Figure 3** Percentage of children in child labour by age group and sex



# 23,6 million

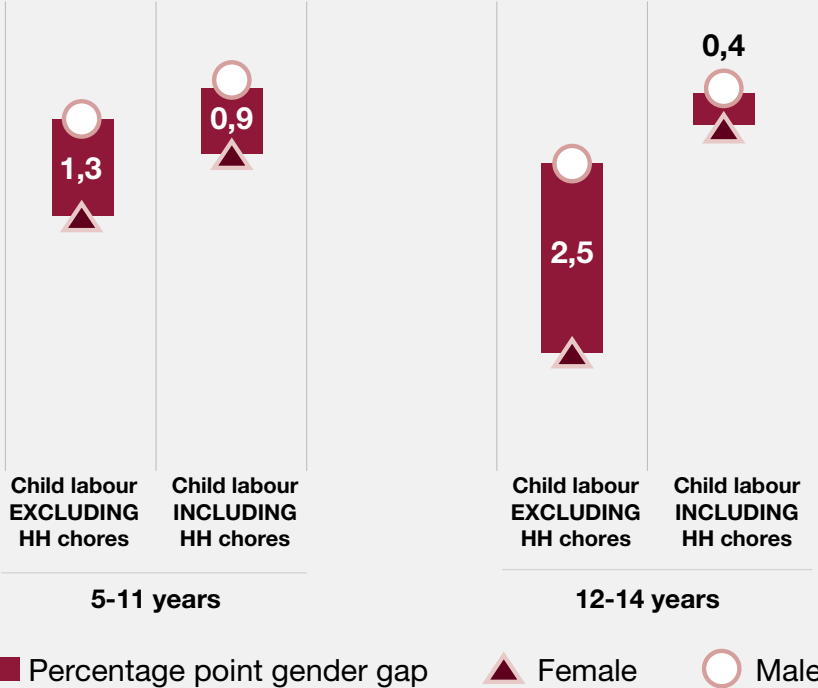
children in the  
Southern Asia  
are in child labour



**When household chores are taken into account, the gender gap in child labour prevalence narrows considerably.** Expanding the definition of child labour to include involvement in household chores for 21 hours or more per week, the hours threshold adopted for international reporting on Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>3</sup> child labour prevalence increases for both sexes, but the rise in female child labour is much larger. As a result, the gender gap in child labour prevalence decreases. The reduction is especially pronounced for 12 to 14 years-olds, falling from 2.5 percentage points when household chores are excluded to 0.4 percentage points when this form of child labour is included. For 5 to 11 year-olds, the gender gap declines from 1.3 percentage points to 0.9 percentage points. These results underscore the importance of systematically collecting data on household chores as part of national statistical programmes on child labour.<sup>4</sup>

### Child labour and household chores

**Figure 4** Percentage of children in child labour (including and excluding household chores performed for 21 hours or more per week), by sex and age range



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

3 Two indicators are used for measuring child labour for the purpose of reporting on Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the first based on the SNA production boundary (Indicator 8.7.1) and the second on the general production boundary (Indicator 8.7.2). The weekly hours threshold for household chores of 21 hours is consistent with that used for Indicator 8.7.2.

4 Resolution IV of the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (paras. 36 and 37), provides guidance on defining and measuring household chores.

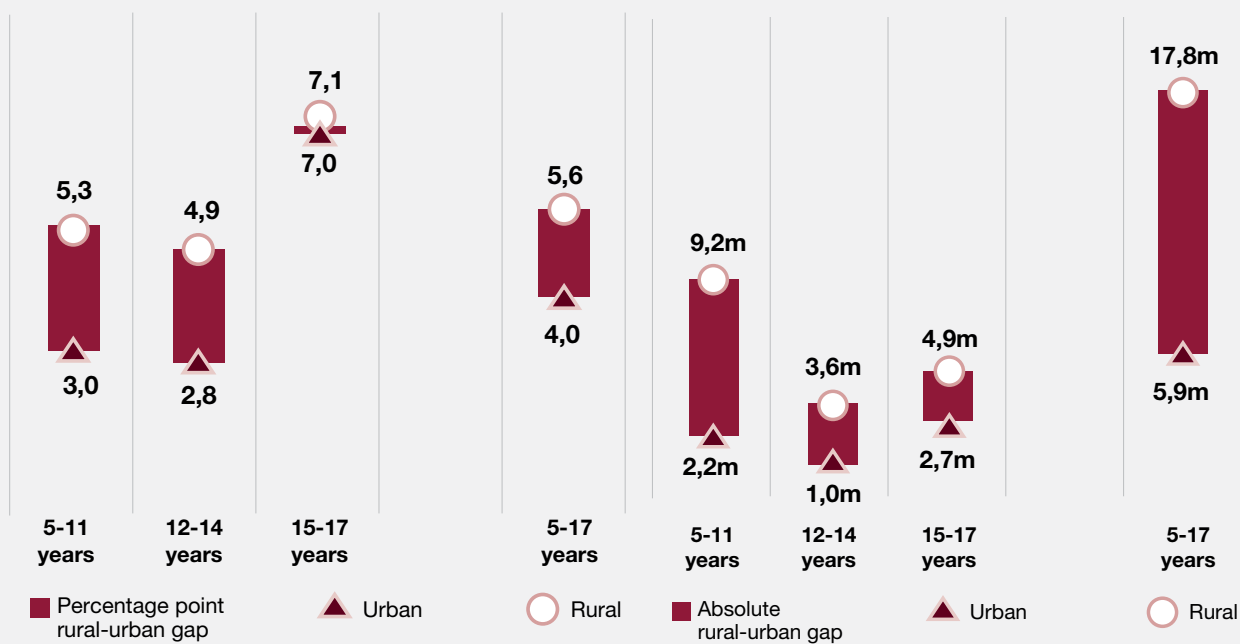
**Child labour is more common among, but by no means limited to, children living in rural areas.**

For the 5 to 17 years age group as a whole, the prevalence of child labour in rural areas stands at 5.6% and in urban areas at 4.0%. Many more children, however, live in rural areas in Southern Asia, and thus the rural-urban gap in child labour is much greater when expressed in absolute terms. Indeed, again for the overall 5 to 17 age group, the number of children in child labour is three times higher in rural areas. The rural-urban gap becomes less pronounced as children grow older, a reflection of the diminishing importance of child labour in agriculture as children move across the 5 to 17 years age spectrum (see below).

**Child labour and residence**

**Figure 5(a)** Percentage of children in child labour, by residence

**Figure 5(b)** Number of children in child labour, by residence



**5,6%**

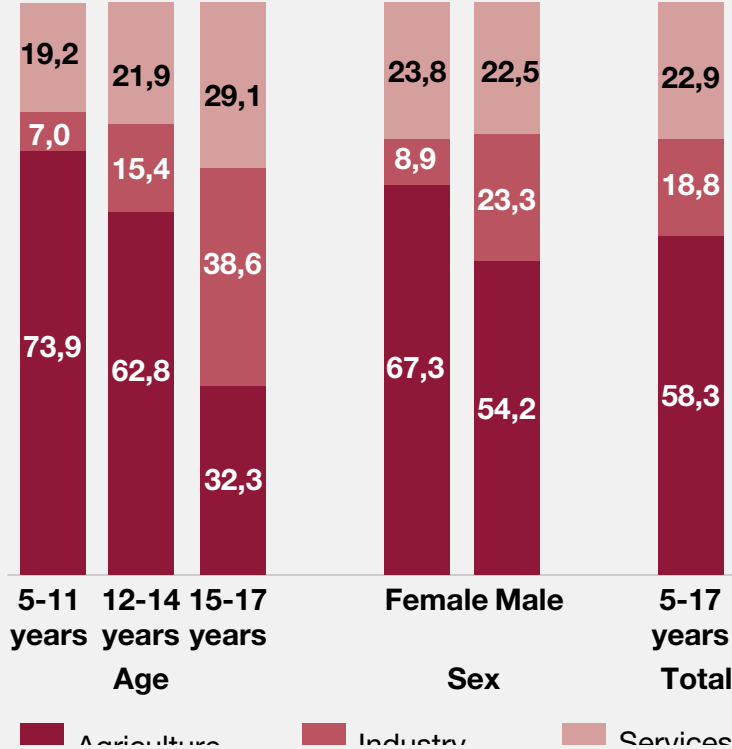
For the 5-17 years age group the prevalence of child labour is in rural areas

**Agriculture accounts for the largest share of children in child labour.** For the 5 to 17 age group as a whole, 58% of children in child labour are found in agriculture, which consists primarily of family subsistence and smallholder farming, but also includes commercial plantations, capture fisheries, aquaculture, fish processing and forestry. Roughly one-quarter (23%) work in services and the remaining 19% in industry.

These aggregate figures mask important differences in the composition of child labour by age and sex. Agricultural child labour predominates for younger children in child labour, underscoring the role of agricultural work as entry point into child labour. The relative importance of child labour in agriculture declines sharply, and the relative importance of industry and services rises, as children grow older. This shift is particularly pronounced in moving from the 12 to 14 to the 15 to 17 years age group. Gender considerations also appear important in determining the kind of child labour performed: girls are relatively more likely than boys to work in agriculture while the opposite pattern prevails for child labour in industry.

### Child labour and branch of economic activity

**Figure 6** Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by branch of economic activity, age range and sex



**58%**  
are in  
**agriculture**

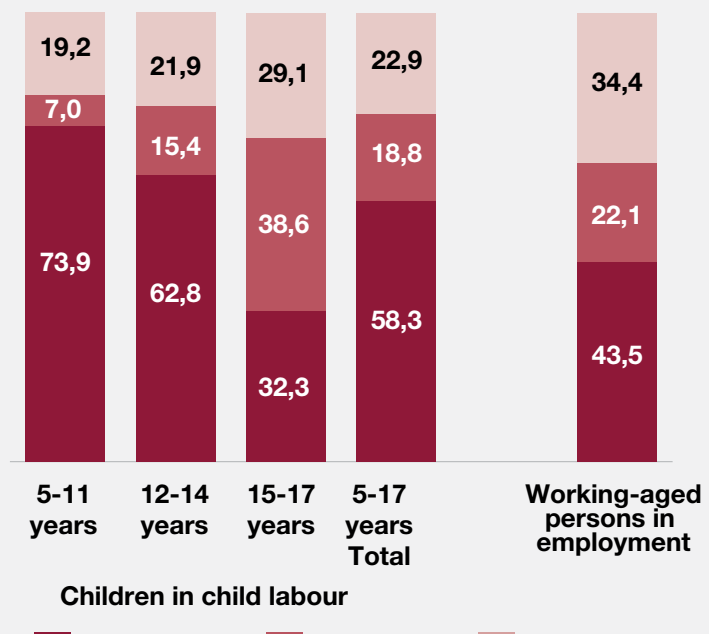
**23%**  
work in  
**services**

**19%**  
work in  
**industry**

**The sectoral breakdown of child labour differs considerably from that the adult labour force.** In other words, the sectoral breakdown of child labour is not merely a reflection of the structure of the broader labour force. This is especially true for younger, 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds in child labour, who are significantly over-represented in the agriculture sector, and under-represented in services and industry, in comparison to working-aged employed persons. The relatively greater importance of agriculture in child labour is not surprising, as the informal, low-skill and low-technology production that characterises much of the agriculture sector is more conducive to the involvement of children, providing them with an entry point into the labour force.

## Sectoral composition of child labour and the adult labour force

**Figure 7** Percentage distribution of children in child labour and adult labour force, by branch of economic activity and age range



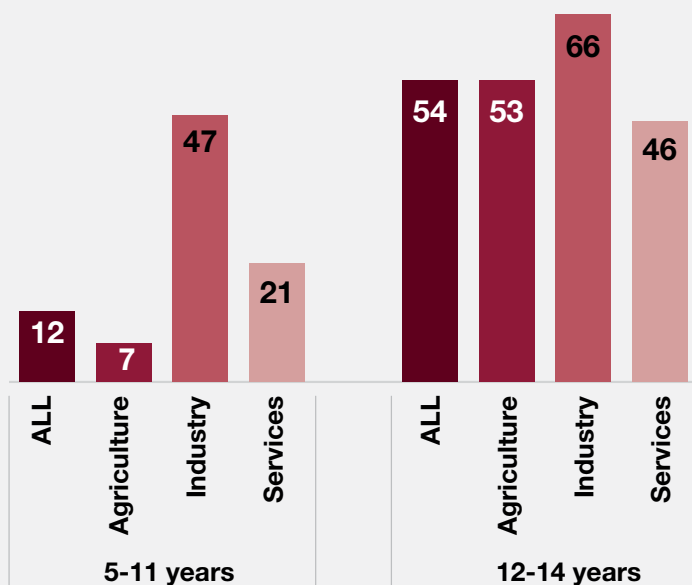
Note: Data for employed persons of working age from International Labour Organization, "Employment by sex and economic activity – ILO modelled estimates," ILOSTAT, Accessed 20-10-2021.

**A significant share of child labour is hazardous in nature.** Twelve percent of 5 to 11 year-olds in child labour, and over half of all 12 to 14 year-olds in child labour, are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development. While there are no possible exceptions for hazardous work – all children must be protected from hazardous child labour – the group of young children facing hazardous work conditions directly endangering their health, safety, and moral development is of special concern.

Not surprisingly, the degree of hazardousness is not uniform across child labour in different branches of economic activity. For both 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds, child labour in industry is much more likely to be hazardous than child labour in other sectors. Industry comprises work in construction, mining and manufacturing. It is more concentrated in urban areas and, as noted above, more likely to be undertaken by boys. However, the degree hazardousness is also high in other sectors, especially for 12 to 14 year-olds.

## Hazardous work and branch of economic activity

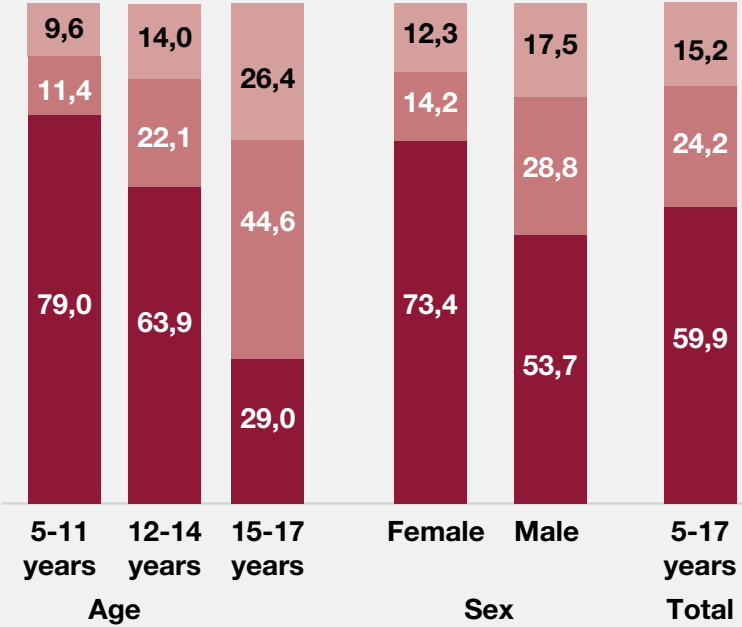
**Figure 8** Percentage of child labour constituting hazardous work, by age group and branch of economic activity



**Work within children’s own family accounts for the largest share of child labour.** Overall, three out of every five children in child labour work for their own families, while 24% work in paid employment as employees and the remaining 16% for work for their own account in self-employment. Again, however, aggregate figures mask important differences by age and sex. Seventy nine percent of 5 to 11 year-olds work for their own families, but the relative importance of family work declines sharply with age, while work as employees and own account work gain in relative importance. The breakdown by sex provides further evidence of the importance of gender considerations in types of work assigned to children. Girls in child labour are much more likely than boys to work for their own families, while the opposite pattern prevails for the other status categories.

**Child labour and status in employment**

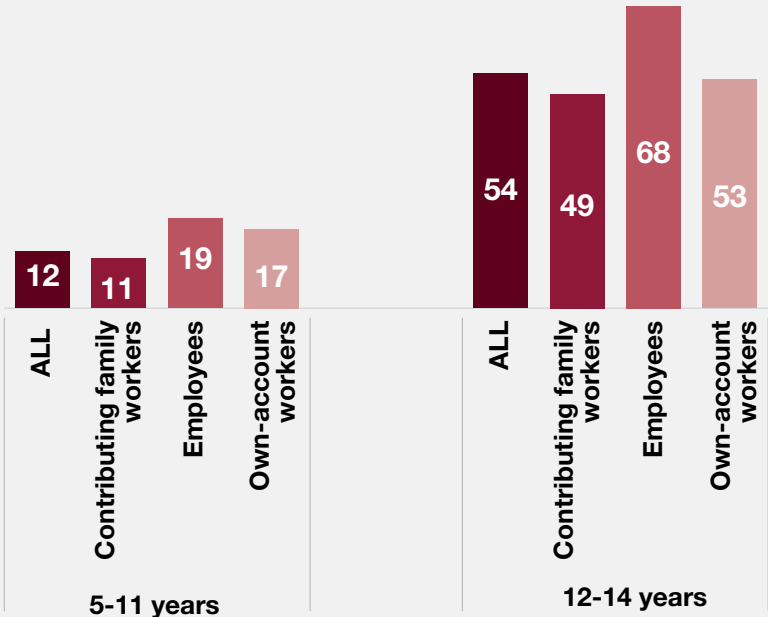
**Figure 9** Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by status at work, age range and sex



**The degree of hazardousness also varies somewhat across different status in employment categories.** This is especially the case for 12 to 14 year-olds, for whom child labour as employees is significantly more likely to be hazardous than child labour in other categories – over two-thirds (68%) of all 12 to 14 year-olds working as employees are in hazardous work. However, this disaggregation again illustrates that the degree of hazardousness is high across all forms of child labour performed by children, including work undertaken within the family unit.

**Hazardous work and status in employment**

**Figure 10** Percentage of child labour constituting hazardous work, by status in employment (5-14 years)





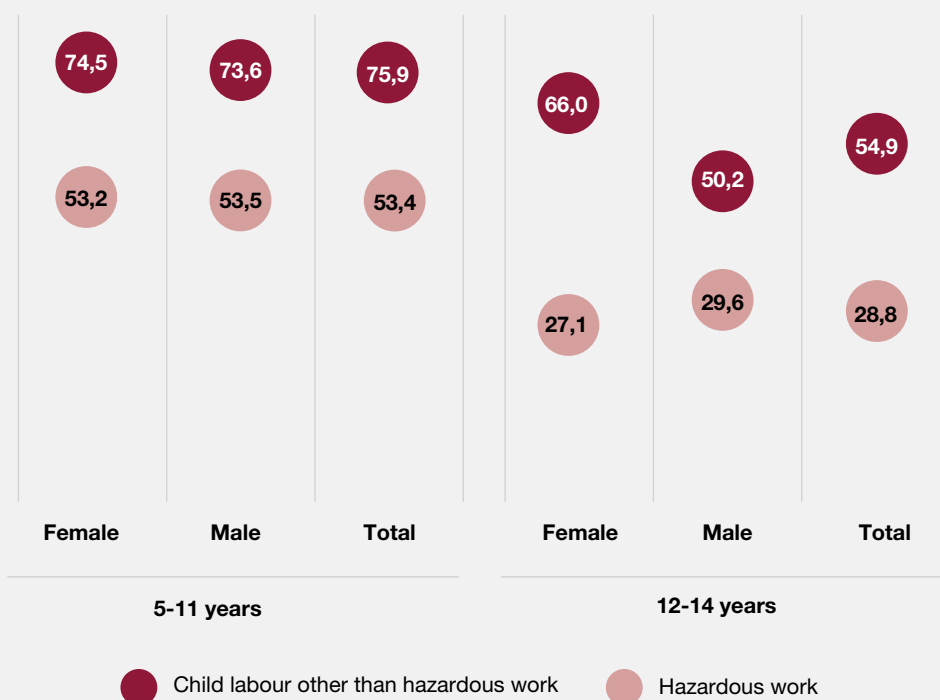
**School attendance is especially low for children in hazardous work.** While all children in child labour are disadvantaged in terms of their ability to attend school, this is particularly the case for children in hazardous work. Among children in the age ranges most closely aligned with compulsory schooling, i.e., 5 to 11 and 12 to 14, just 53% and 29%, respectively, of children hazardous work attend school, far below the attendance rates of children in non-hazardous child labour, who in turn lag behind the attendance rates of children not in child labour. Differences in the attendance rates of boys and girls in child

labour are negligible for 5 to 11 year-olds, but the attendance rates of girls in child labour exceeds that of boys by 16 percentage points for children in the 12 to 14 age group.

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

### Child labour and school attendance

**Figure 11** School attendance rates, by involvement in child labour and hazardous work, age range and sex



# Children

in child labour are disadvantaged in terms of their ability to attend school



# Statistical tables

			TOTAL								
			5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		
			%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	
CHILD LABOUR	<b>Total</b>	<b>2020</b>	4.6	11,408	4.2	4,601	7.1	7,608	5.1	23,617	
		<b>2016</b>									
	Residence	Urban		3.0	2,224	2.8	956	7.0	2,686	4.0	5,865
		Rural		5.3	9,184	4.9	3,645	7.1	4,923	5.6	17,752
	School attendance	Child labour other than hazardous work		73.9	7,388	54.9	1,169	-	-	70.6	8,558
	Children in child labour by sector of economic activity	Agriculture		73.9	8,426	62.8	2,887	32.3	2,454	58.3	13,767
		Industry		7.0	794	15.4	707	38.6	2,940	18.8	4,441
		Services		19.2	2,188	21.9	1,006	29.1	2,215	22.9	5,409
	Children in child labour by status in employment	Employees		11.4	1,304	22.1	1,015	44.6	3,395	24.2	5,714
		Own-account workers		9.6	1,096	14.0	646	26.4	2,010	15.9	3,752
Contributing family workers			79.0	9,008	63.9	2,940	29.0	2,203	59.9	14,151	
SDG child labour indicators	SDG 8.7.1.1		4.6	11,408	3.5	3,805	5.1	5,463	4.5	20,676	
	SDG 8.7.1.2		5.3	13,038	5.4	5,891	5.1	5,463	5.3	24,393	
				246,912		108,962		107,788		463,663	
HAZARDOUS WORK	<b>Total</b>	<b>2020</b>	0.6	1,414	2.3	2,471	7.1	7,608	2.5	11,494	
		<b>2016</b>									
	Residence	Urban		0.4	306	1.5	503	7.0	2,686	2.4	3,494
		Rural		0.6	1,109	2.6	1,968	7.1	4,923	2.5	8,000
	School attendance	Children in hazardous work		53.4	755	28.8	711	17.9	1,365	24.6	2,831
	Children in hazardous work by sector of economic activity	Agriculture		41.2	582	62.4	1,543	32.3	2,454	39.8	4,579
		Industry		26.6	377	18.8	464	38.6	2,940	32.9	3,781
		Services		32.2	456	18.8	464	29.1	2,215	27.3	3,134
	Children in hazardous work by status in employment	Employees		17.9	254	28.1	694	44.6	3,395	37.8	4,343
		Own-account workers		13.4	190	13.7	339	26.4	2,010	22.1	2,540
Contributing family workers			68.6	971	58.2	1,437	29.0	2,203	40.1	4,611	

BOYS								GIRLS							
5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
5.2	6,745	5.6	3,159	11.1	6,299	6.7	16,203	3.9	4,663	2.8	1,442	2.6	1,309	3.3	7,414
3.6	1,411	4.0	717	11.1	2,222	5.7	4,350	2.3	813	1.5	239	2.5	463	2.1	1,515
5.9	5,335	6.3	2,442	11.2	4,077	7.2	11,853	4.7	3,850	3.4	1,203	2.6	846	3.9	5,899
73.6	4,325	50.2	751	-	-	68.8	5,076	74.5	3,063	66.0	418	-	-	73.3	3,482
75.4	5,085	58.3	1,843	29.3	1,847	54.2	8,774	71.7	3,341	72.4	1,045	46.4	607	67.3	4,993
10.3	696	17.4	549	40.3	2,538	23.3	3,782	2.1	98	11.0	158	30.7	402	8.9	659
14.3	964	24.3	767	30.4	1,915	22.5	3,646	26.2	1,223	16.6	239	22.9	300	23.8	1,763
15.2	1,028	25.8	815	44.7	2,816	28.8	4,659	5.9	276	13.8	200	44.2	579	14.2	1,055
8.8	594	16.5	522	27.3	1,722	17.5	2,838	10.8	502	8.6	124	22.0	288	12.3	914
76.0	5,124	57.7	1,822	28.0	1,761	53.7	8,706	83.3	3,884	77.5	1,118	33.8	442	73.4	5,445
5.2	6,745	4.7	2,658	8.4	4,760	5.8	14,163	3.9	4,663	2.2	1,147	1.4	704	2.9	6,513
5.7	7,355	5.6	3,188	8.4	4,760	6.3	15,302	4.8	5,683	5.2	2,703	1.4	704	4.1	9,090
	128,697		56,909		56,541		242,147		118,215		52,053		51,247		221,516
0.7	866	2.9	1,662	11.1	6,299	3.6	8,827	0.5	549	1.6	808	2.6	1,309	1.2	2,667
0.5	201	2.2	390	11.1	2,222	3.7	2,813	0.3	105	0.7	113	2.5	463	1.0	681
0.7	665	3.3	1,272	11.2	4,077	3.6	6,014	0.5	443	2.0	696	2.6	846	1.3	1,985
53.5	463	29.6	492	14.9	941	21.5	1,896	53.2	292	27.1	219	32.4	424	35.1	935
31.0	268	53.5	889	29.3	1,847	34.0	3,004	57.2	314	80.9	654	46.4	607	59.1	1,575
33.2	287	23.8	395	40.3	2,538	36.5	3,220	16.3	90	8.5	69	30.7	402	21.0	560
35.9	311	22.7	378	30.4	1,915	29.5	2,603	26.4	145	10.6	86	22.9	300	19.9	531
18.5	160	33.8	561	44.7	2,816	40.1	3,538	17.0	93	16.4	133	44.2	579	30.2	805
21.6	187	17.7	294	27.3	1,722	25.0	2,203	0.6	3	5.6	45	22.0	288	12.6	336
59.9	519	48.5	807	28.0	1,761	35.0	3,086	82.4	452	78.0	631	33.8	442	57.2	1,525

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