



## Child Labour in Jordan

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **When does children's work become child labour?**

All work performed by children under the age of 18 is not necessarily child labour. Millions of young people around the world undertake work, paid or unpaid, that is appropriate for their age and maturity. Unfortunately, many children undertake work which, far from having a positive effect on them and on their lives, actually impedes their growth and development and, in many cases, can do them harm – harm which is sometimes irreversible. This is what is known as child labour. Two core ILO Conventions focus on the elimination of child labour, and indicate the boundaries between child labour and child work: Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

#### **What are the Worst Forms of Child Labour?**

While the ILO is concerned with all forms of child labour, its priority is to eradicate the worst forms of child labour by 2016. These worst forms include practices such as the use of children in slavery, forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, prostitution, pornography, forced or compulsory recruitment for armed conflict, as well as all forms of work that are likely to harm the safety, health or morals of children, often referred to as “hazardous work”.

#### **What are the main causes of child labour?**

Some of the major contributing factors to child labour include:

##### *Poverty*

Children work for many reasons, although poverty emerges as the most compelling. Indeed, child labour is one of the most devastating consequences of persistent poverty. Governments do not always give priority to addressing areas that would help to alleviate the hardships endured by the poor, particularly the rural poor, such as health care, education, housing, sanitation, income-generation, skills training and social protection. Life for the poor consequently becomes a day-to-day struggle for survival, and children are forced to take on greater responsibilities, including working full time. Children commonly contribute around 20 to 25 per cent (one quarter) of family income in poor households. Since the bulk of family income is spent on food, it is clear that the contribution of working children is critical to their families' survival.

##### *Lack of access to or poor quality of education*

Why do some children not go to school? The reasons are multiple. First, basic education in many countries is not always “free” and is not always available to all children. It is often impossible for poor families to cover the hidden costs of education, such as uniforms, school books and materials, transport and food. Consequently, they either do not send their children to school or only send a few of them, with girls usually missing out. Where schools are available, the quality of education, in terms of teaching, systems, facilities or materials, can be poor and the content not relevant to the everyday realities of poor children and their families. In situations where education is not affordable or parents see no value in education, children may be sent out to work rather than to school. This particularly affects children in

poverty and those belonging to culturally and socially disadvantaged and excluded groups. As a result, they easily fall into situations of child labour.

#### *Traditional, social and cultural factors*

It can happen that children are obliged to support their parents' work, for example in the fields, in their jobs and/or in running the home. The last is especially true for girls, who are expected to look after their siblings and take on household duties, in some cases to the extent that it becomes their main and only activity in life, which is what differentiates it from just helping with household chores as many children do. In such cases, children take on the burden of responsibility at an early age, unquestioned from generation to generation, reinforcing acceptance of harmful social practices. In some cases, it is traditional for the children to follow in their parents' footsteps. For example, in some social settings, it may be seen as normal and acceptable for children to accompany their parents in their work as their parents and generations before them have done. Young, immature physically and mentally, and unaware of the dangers, children are more vulnerable to the effects of hazardous work.

#### *Specific vulnerabilities*

Child labour is especially prevalent in the most vulnerable families – families whose low income allows them little margin to cope with the injury or illness of an adult or the disruption resulting from abandonment or divorce. In addition, the impact of crises or natural disasters leading to large populations being displaced internally or externally, for example, those affected by the situation in Syria, can be a push factor for children into work, providing for themselves, their siblings and families.

Countries that have significantly reduced child labour have also tackled poverty in a decisive way. Governments can effectively tackle child labour by: (1) tackling family poverty and helping children; (2) ensuring that adults have decent jobs with a living wage to provide for their families; and (3) ensuring that all children receive free good quality public education.

#### **What is the impact of child labour on children?**

Childhood provides children with important opportunities to learn from the world around them. They acquire and develop skills that enable them to become socially aware and participate fully in family and community life. This early period of life is critical in determining their ongoing development as they grow up. Child labourers miss out on much of this precious time. Their work gets in the way of childhood activities and becomes an obstacle to their physical, emotional and social development. Because children differ from adults in their physiological and psychological make-up, they are more susceptible to and more adversely affected than adults by specific work hazards. In addition, because they have not yet matured mentally, they are less aware of the potential risks in the work place.

Child labourers are far more vulnerable in the work place than adults because their bodies are not yet fully formed. They experience poor physical health because the work they do exposes them to the risk of injury and illness. These effects can be immediate, such as a burn or a cut, or have lifelong consequences, such as permanent disability or contracting a respiratory disease or HIV/AIDS, leading in some cases to death. The effects of hazardous working conditions on children's health and development can be devastating. Physically strenuous work, such as carrying heavy loads or adopting unnatural positions, can permanently distort or disable growing bodies. There is evidence that children are more vulnerable than adults to chemical hazards and that they have much less resistance to disease. The hazards and risks to health may be compounded by poor access to health facilities and education, poor housing and sanitation, poor personal hygiene and a generally inadequate diet.

Children are much more vulnerable than adults to physical, emotional and sexual abuse and suffer more devastating psychological damage from living and working in an environment in

which they are denigrated, humiliated or oppressed. Child labourers frequently work in environments that are exploitative, dangerous, degrading and isolating. They often suffer ill-treatment, abuse and neglect at the hands of their employers. As a consequence, children may find it difficult to form attachments and feelings for others. They may also have problems interacting and cooperating with others and attaining a real sense of identity and belonging. As a result, they may lack confidence and experience feelings of low self-esteem. These vulnerabilities are particularly acute in very young children and girls.

Children who work do not have the opportunity to participate in activities that are a crucial part of growing up, such as playing games and sport, going to school and socializing with their peers. They do not obtain the basic level of education and life skills that are needed to cope and prosper in life, nor do they benefit from opportunities to interact with others and actively participate in and enjoy life. These activities are abandoned in favour of work, and children are consequently pushed into adulthood long before they are ready, doing work that requires an adult level of physical, mental and emotional maturity.

Child labour, therefore, is an obstacle to children's development and future prospects. All children, regardless of race, gender, or social or economic status, are entitled to a full and natural childhood. They all have the right to love, education and protection. Knowing and understanding these fundamental children's rights are among the first steps in preventing child labour and ensuring children have access to free and good quality education.

### **How can employers' and workers' organisations help?**

If children work, someone is employing them. Employers may prefer to hire children because they are "cheaper" than their adult counterparts and also form a largely docile workforce that will not seek to organize itself for protection and support as adult workers do through trade unions. A major reason for hiring children seems to be non-economic in that children may be considered easier to manage because they are less aware of their rights, less troublesome, more compliant, more trustworthy and less likely to absent themselves from work. Employers' organisations, therefore, have an important role to play in raising the awareness of their members of legislation relating to employment to ensure that laws are applied and the dangers of child labour and its detrimental impact on children.

It is widely accepted that to combat child labour, a broad alliance needs to be mobilized across all organizations and social actors committed to its prevention and elimination. A key partner in this alliance is the trade union movement which, from its very origins, has fought to prevent children from working at too young an age by lobbying for minimum ages of employment to be established. Trade unions are natural allies of the progressive forces seeking to combat child labour. It is also noted that where trade unions are strong and well organized, child labour cannot exist. Where trade unions are weak or completely absent, the exploitation of children may well arise and persist. Indeed, the factors that lead to the absence of trade unions and the existence of child labour are linked. For example, in the informal sector, a growing phenomenon in many economies, it is a challenge for trade unions to organize and maintain membership owing to the absence of formal employment contracts and the vague nature of the employment relationship, often with no legally constituted employers. The same factors contribute to child labour, although they are by no means the only ones.

### **What is the nature and extent of child labour in Jordan?**

A national household survey was carried out in 2007-08 by the Department of Statistics and SIMPOC (the ILO's child labour statistical unit) and published in March 2009. The survey estimated that 37,760 children (2.1%) of the 1,785,596 children in Jordan between the ages of 5-17 were economically active and that 58% of them were above 15 years of age. 36.3% of them were involved in wholesale and retail trade, 27.3% in agriculture and 15.8% in

manufacturing. Economic activity is very low among younger children aged 5-11 (0.3%) and 12-14 (1.9%) and among girls of all ages. Boys constitute nearly 90% of children at work.

Child labourers made up as much as 88.1% of economically active children and girls constituted only 9.3% of child labourers. There was no significant difference between the prevalence of child labour in urban and rural areas. The survey showed that children from poorer households and those with less educated parents are more likely to be child labourers than other children and are more likely to drop out of school.

Other push factors causing drop-out from school are overcrowding of classrooms and uninteresting rote learning as well as the direct costs of formal schooling that include school donations, cost of books, uniforms and learning materials. Failure in school, fear of harsh punishment and bullying is a common cause of drop-out and entry into the labour market. In rural areas, school vacations do not correspond with periods of intense agricultural activity causing absence from school among children of farmers that can lead to failure and drop-out. Cultural norms and social attitudes play an important role. Many poor families depend on the income and labour of several family members for survival. Although Jordan has achieved parity among girls and boys in school enrolment, in rural areas, girls are sometimes made to abandon school in order to marry early or to assist their mothers in household chores or to work on family farms. The distance from school discourages them to continue as parents deem it unsafe for them to walk to school in situations where transport is unavailable. This, together with the lack of parental awareness about the consequences of child labour, is a deeply ingrained cause of the phenomenon.

Hazardous work is a major issue facing young workers. A study by the Ministry of Labour in auto repair and carpentry workshops in East Amman has gone deeper into the hazards that noise and the presence of high levels of carbon monoxide and dioxide in poorly ventilated workshops entail. Health check-ups of these working children found respiratory diseases and skin lesions to be common. The lack of organisation in the workshops often causes them to trip on wires sometimes causing fractures. There is also a risk of amputation due to rotating machinery. As these tools are not designed for use by children and no safety procedures or equipment are in place, it was found that child workers had five times the injury rate of adult workers. In addition, they develop harmful habits like smoking, eat in unhygienic conditions and are treated in a demeaning manner, suffering insults, beating and other forms of discrimination.

On average, children earn an estimated JD85.75 (USD120) per month, approximately one-quarter of the total household income in cases where one adult and one child in the household are employed. Most children (52.7%) reported giving their earnings to their parents/guardians. Significant proportions also reported buying things for themselves (23.8%) or their household (12.5%). Only 5.1% said they used their earnings to pay the school fees or materials.

### **What is the Jordanian government doing to address child labour?**

The elimination of child labour is considered a national priority as demonstrated by the government's amendments to the labour law as well as the ratification of international conventions on child rights. Jordan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and in 1996 adopted the law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, increased compulsory schooling to ten years to cover children aged 6 to 16 and raised the minimum age for admission to employment from 13 to 16 years.

Jordan ratified ILO Convention No. 138 in 1998 and Convention No. 182 in 2000. Labour legislation prohibits the employment of children under 16 and fines contravening employers, fines that are increased in case of recidivism. A list of 29 hazardous occupations in which children under-18 cannot work was adopted in 1997 and this list has since been revised in

April 2011. In addition, Jordan adopted a National Framework on Child Labour in August 2011, its national plan of action to tackle child labour throughout the kingdom.

Other policy frameworks that address the causes and consequences of child labour include: the National Strategy for Poverty Alleviation, the National Employment Strategy, the National Plan of Action for Children, the National Aid Fund, the National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and the Child Friendly City Initiative of the Greater Amman Municipality.

### **What is the ILO doing to support national efforts to combat child labour in Jordan?**

Jordan has been a leader in the region on tackling child labour. Through generous funding by the US Department of Labour, the ILO supported the Country Programme on Child Labour from 2002 to 2007 which prepared the ground through awareness-raising and building capacities of all key partners, including government particularly the Ministry of Labour and its Child Labour Unit, social partners and civil society. It also supported the development of the National Strategy on Child Labour which provided basis for the new National Framework and the national survey on child labour.

There are currently three child labour projects operating in Jordan, all supported through funding by the US Department of Labour. The new ILO project, entitled “Moving towards a child labour free Jordan”, is integral to the upcoming Decent Work Country Programme for Jordan, 2013-2017, and ensures access to services, expertise and experience available through the ILO’s Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS) based in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as ILO’s headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The project will focus its activities and support at the policy and institutional level, building on the previous Country Programme and also the outcomes of the CHF International project “Combating Exploitive Child Labour through Education” (CECLE), 2008-2012. The CECLE project supported the establishment of the National Child Labour Committee (NCLC) to strengthen national ownership and institutions in addressing child labour and to oversee the formulation of the national plan of action – the National Framework on Child Labour. The third project is coordinated by Save the Children International, entitled “Promising Futures: Reducing Child Labour in Jordan through Education and Sustainable Livelihoods”. It will focus on direct activities with children and their families to provide education and livelihoods training, build community child protection systems, conduct further research and contribute to policy-level activities.

The ILO will support national partners in implementing the new National Framework, including through reinforcing integration and coherence between the monitoring systems of various stakeholders, such as those of the Labour Inspectorate, the Ministries of Education and of Social Development, the Social Support Centre-Marka, the National Council of Family Affairs and the Jordan River Foundation. This will help in reducing duplication of effort and resources and strengthen monitoring systems designed to support child and family protection in Jordan. Other activities related to the implementation of the National Framework include capacity-building, advocacy and awareness-raising and building the knowledge base.

Developing and strengthening partnerships and networks among stakeholders, from community to international levels, are also crucial elements of the ILO’s work. This will also involve the UN and international agencies operating in Jordan. Child labour cuts across a broad range of sectors and its causes and consequences are multiple, demanding a multi-sectoral and coordinated response. The NCLC embodies this cross-cutting response by including relevant government ministries, the social partners and civil society. A Technical Committee on Child Labour was also established under the NCLC in January 2012 to further reinforce national capacities to address the issue in a sustainable manner, also involving relevant UN agencies to ensure coherence between their programmes and activities.

Support for the implementation of the National Framework has been included in the upcoming United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2013-2017.

The three child labour projects work in close coordination to offer significant support to Jordan to fulfil its commitment to protecting children from the dangers of child labour. A key objective is to ensure that systems, structures and capacities are sustainable within the broader context of child and family protection.

### **What is the World Day against Child Labour?**

Launched in 2002, the World Day Against Child Labour focuses attention on the global extent of child labour and the action and efforts needed to eliminate it. Each year on 12 June, the World Day Against Child Labour brings together governments, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society, as well as millions of people from around the world to highlight the plight of child labourers and what can and must be done to help them. On 12 June 2012, the theme will be "Human Rights and Social Justice", calling for:

- Universal ratification of the ILO's Conventions on child labour;
- National policies and programmes to ensure effective progress in the elimination of child labour;
- Action to build the worldwide movement against child labour.