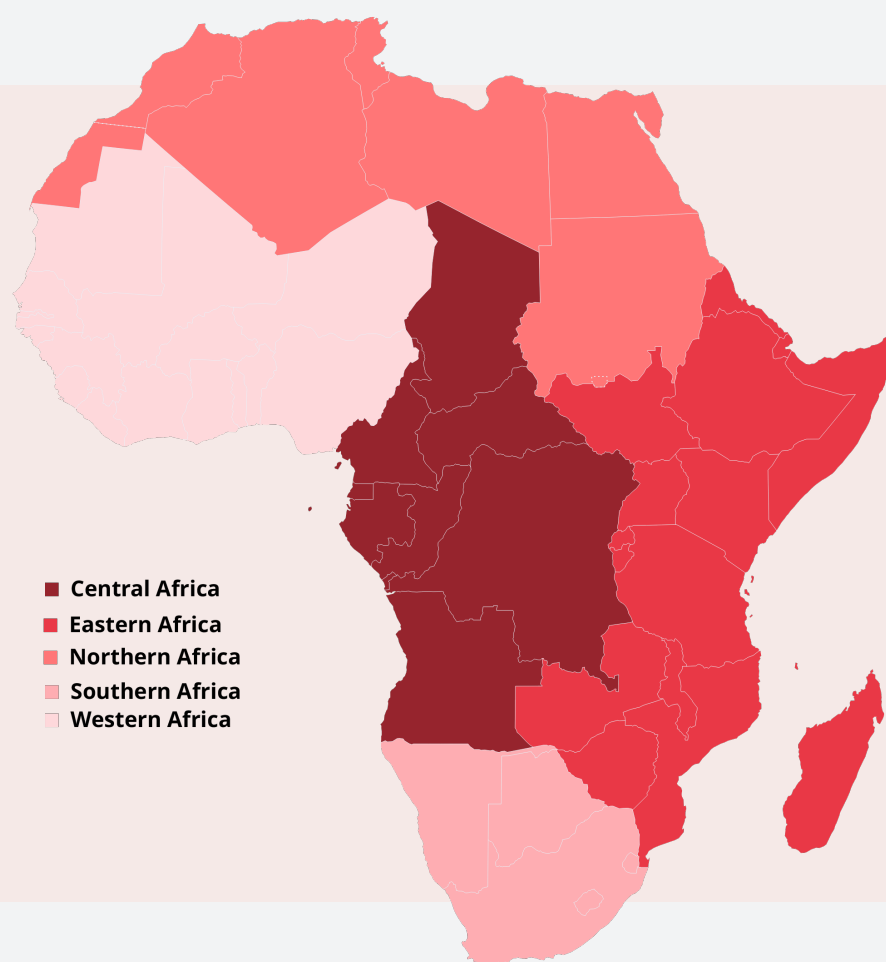


Child labour statistical profile: Africa

PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

This profile provides statistics on child labour prevalence and characteristics for the Africa region based on the ILO-UNICEF 2020 Global estimates of child labour.¹ The region is comprised of the 54 countries of continental Africa and associated islands. It is broken down into five sub-regions: Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Northern Africa, Southern Africa and Western Africa, defined in accordance with the regional groupings utilised by the ILO Department of Statistics.²



¹ All data and information in the ILO-UNICEF 2020 Global estimates of child labour report is based on figures predating the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. ILO and UNICEF. [Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](#), Geneva and New York, 2021.

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

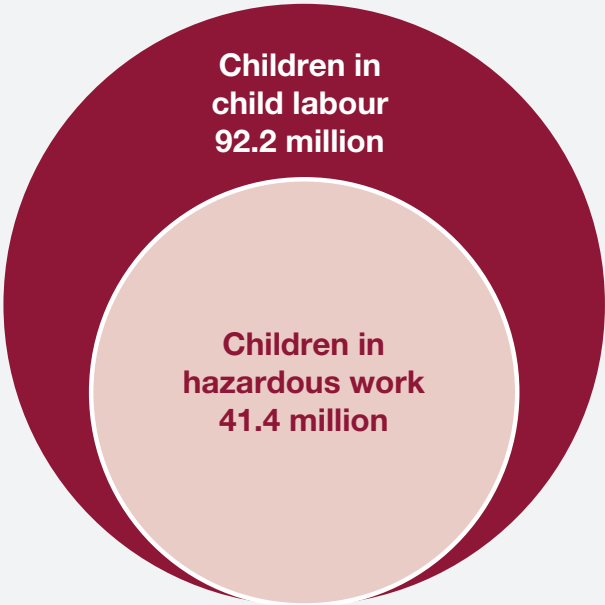
Child labour remains widespread in Africa. The 2020 ILO-UNICEF global estimates show that 92.2 million African children – 40.1 million girls and 52.1 million boys – were in child labour, accounting for 21.6% of all children in the region. About 45% of those in child labour – 41.4 million children in absolute terms – were in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development.

These figures place Africa highest among world regions in terms of the prevalence of child labour and hazardous work, and at more than twice the world averages.

It is worth underscoring that the child labour estimates for Africa region 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 Africa and elsewhere.

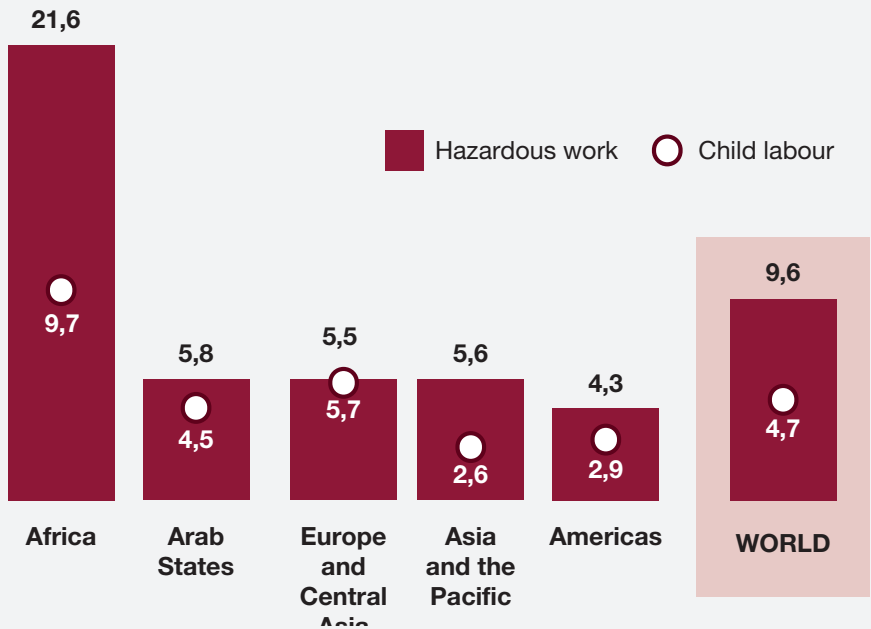
Involvement in child labour and hazardous work. Africa

Figure 1 Percentage and 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)



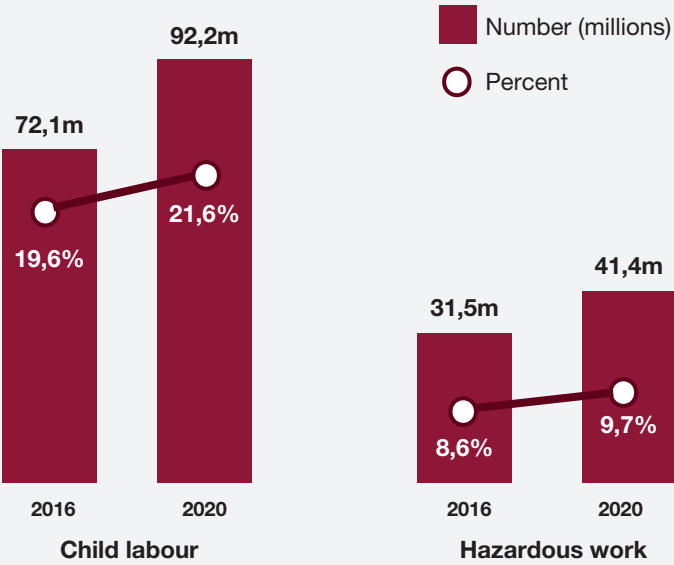
92.2 million African children were in child labour



Child labour and hazardous work in Africa rose in absolute and percentage terms between 2016 and 2020. While child labour in both the Asia and the Pacific region and the Latin America and the Caribbean region trended downward over the last four years, similar progress in Africa proved elusive. The number of children in child labour in Africa rose by 20.1 million from 2016 to 2020, while the child labour prevalence increased by two percentage points over the same period. The number and prevalence of African children in hazardous work followed a similar pattern. There are now more children in child labour in Africa than in the rest of the world combined. Global child labour goals will not be achieved without a breakthrough in Africa.

Regional child labour trends

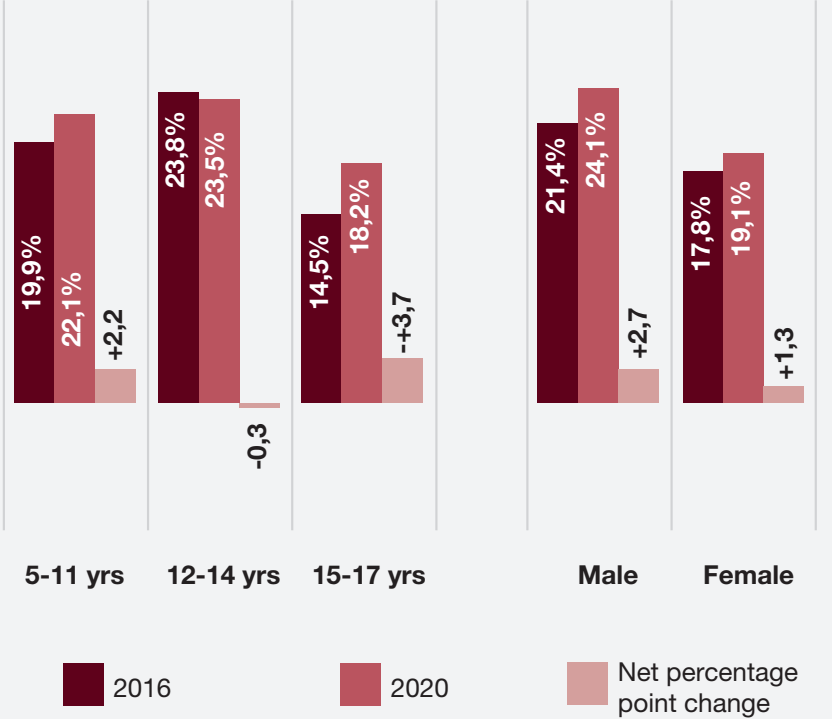
Figure 3 Number and percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, 2016 and 2020, Africa



The increase in child labour was limited to children in the 5 to 11 and the 15 to 17 age ranges; child labour remained nearly constant among 12 to 14 year-olds. The increase extended to both boys and girls, but was more pronounced among the former.

Age - and gender-specific child labour trends

Figure 4 Percentage of children in child labour, by age range and sex, 2016 and 2020



Region-wide estimates disguise substantial differences in child labour prevalence and numbers within the Africa region. Eastern and Western Africa stand out as having by far the highest prevalence and number of children in child labour. There are 44.5 million children in child labour in Eastern Africa, accounting for nearly one in three (30%) of all children in the sub-region. In Western Africa, the number and prevalence of children in child labour stand at 30.5 million and 23%, respectively. Central Africa ranks third in number and prevalence, followed by Northern Africa and finally Southern Africa. These sub-regional child labour patterns hold across the 5 to 17 years age range.

Intra-regional differences in child labour

Figure 5 (a) Percentage and number of children in child labour and hazardous work, by sub-region

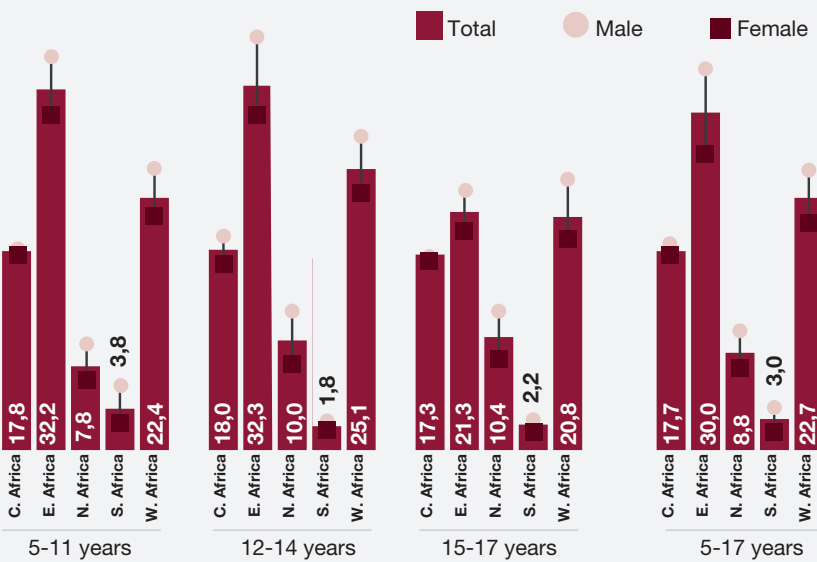
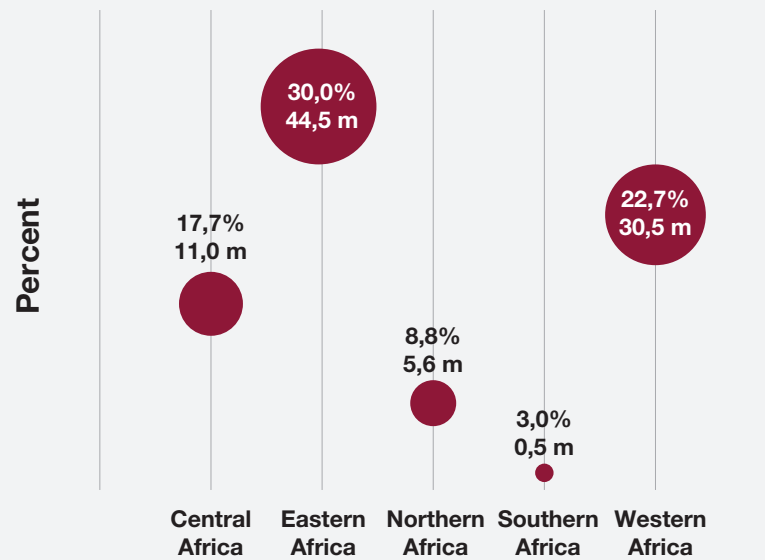


Figure 5 (b) Percentage of children in child labour, by sub-region, age and sex

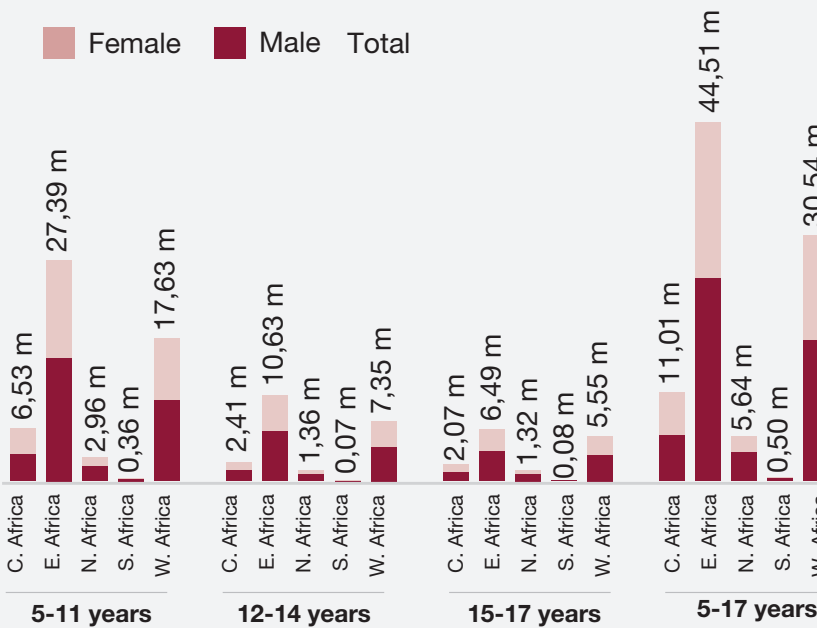


Figure 5 (c) Number (millions) of children in child labour, by sub-region, age and sex

Child labour prevalence is higher for boys than for girls in Africa, but is common for children of both sexes.

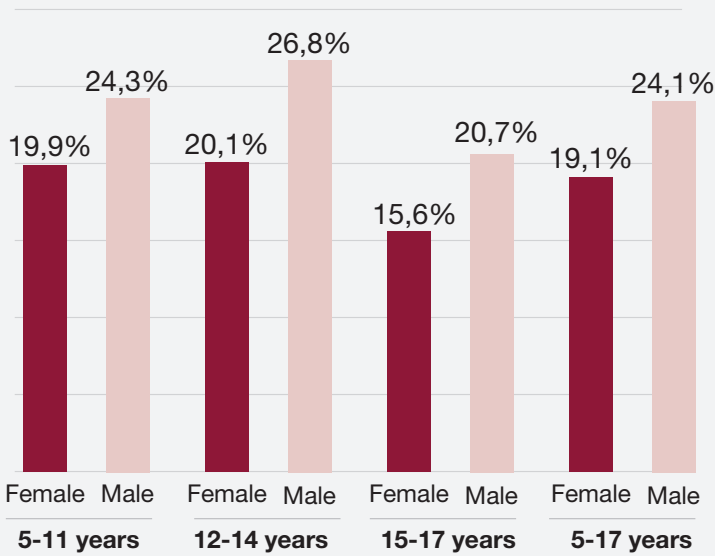
For the overall 5-17 years age group, the 24% of all boys are in child labour against 19% of all girls. This pattern persists across all age ranges. The size of the gender gap in child labour prevalence varies considerably across sub-regions. There is a substantial gender gap in Eastern Africa and Western Africa, whereas in Central Africa, and among older children in Southern Africa, there is little difference between boys' and girls' involvement in child labour. It is worth recalling in interpreting these numbers 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 also 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.

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,³ 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 year-olds, falling from 6.2 percentage points when household chores are excluded to 0.8 percentage points when this form of child labour is included. These results underscore the importance of systematically collecting data on household chores as part of national statistical programmes on child labour.⁴

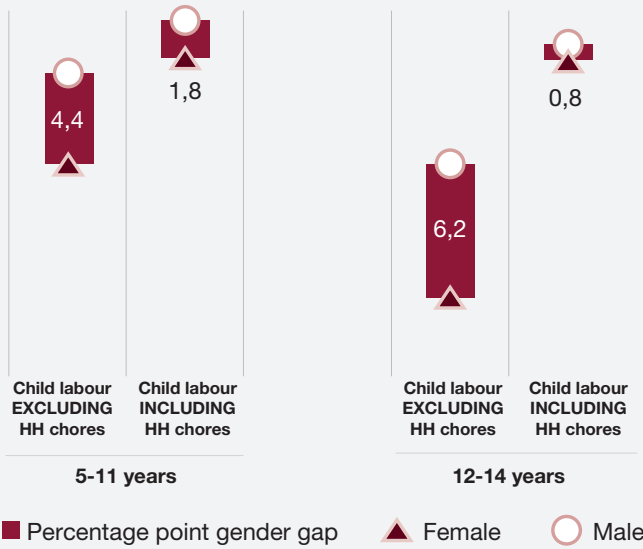
Age and gender profile of child labour

Figure 6 Percentage of children in child labour by age group and sex



Child labour and household chores

Figure 7 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 much more common among children living in rural areas. For the 5-17 years age group as a whole, the prevalence of child labour in rural areas is nearly three times that of urban areas. This rural-urban gap persists across all age ranges, but is significantly less pronounced among older, 15 to 17 year-old children in child labour. This a reflection of the diminishing importance of child labour in agriculture as children move across the 5 to 17 years age spectrum (see below).

There are many more children living in rural than in urban areas in Africa, and the rural-urban gap in child labour is therefore even more pronounced when expressed in absolute terms. Among 5 to 17 year-olds, the number of children in child labour in rural areas (75.6 million) is four and half times that of children in child labour in urban areas (16.6 million).

Child labour and residence

Figure 8(a) Percentage of children in child labour, by residence

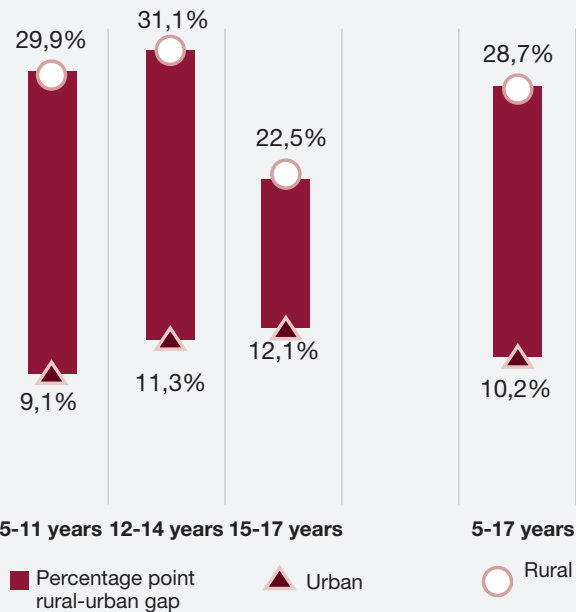
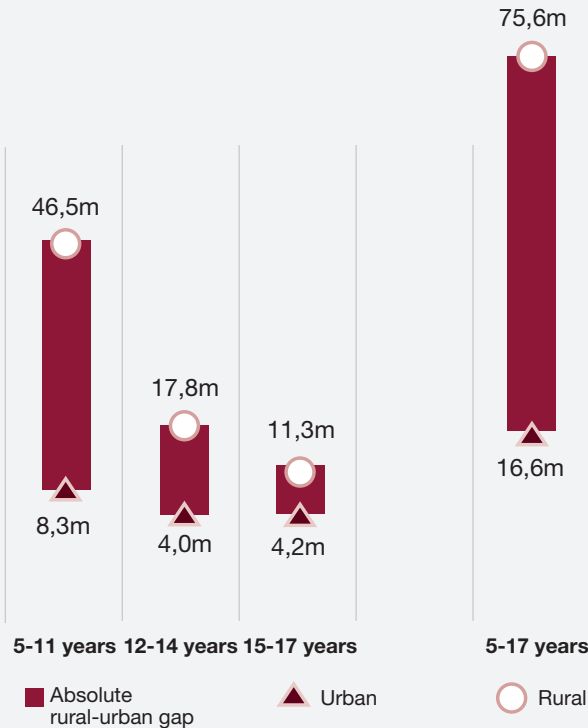


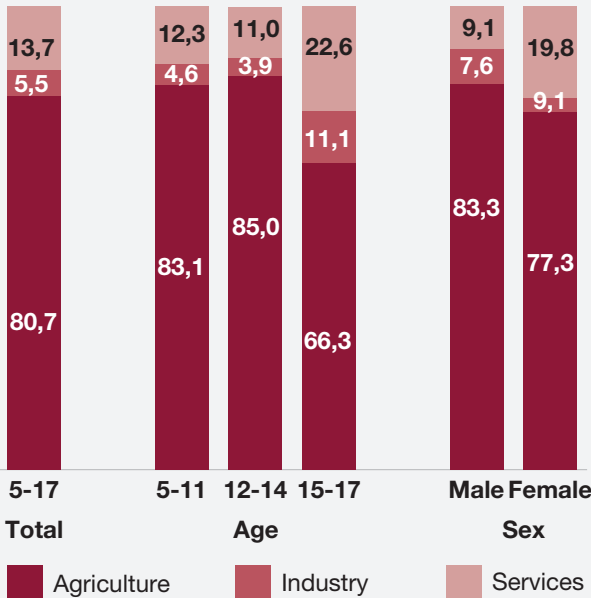
Figure 8(b) No. of children in chld labour, by residence



Agriculture accounts for the largest share of children in child labour. For the 5-17 age group as a whole, nearly 81% 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 and fish processing. Fourteen percent work in services and the remaining 6% 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, and the relative importance of industry and services rises, as children move into the 15 to 17 age range. Gender considerations appear relevant in determining the kind of child labour performed: girls are relatively less likely than boys to work in agriculture and industry, while the opposite pattern prevails for child labour in services.

Child labour and branch of economic activity

Figure 9 Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by branch of economic activity, age range and sex



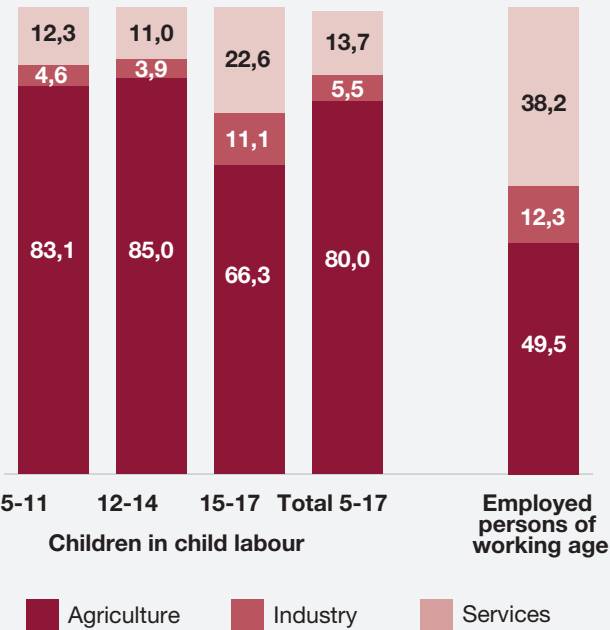
The sectoral breakdown of child labour differs considerably from that of working-aged employed persons. In other words, the sectoral breakdown of child labour is not merely a reflection of broader employment patterns. Overall, children in child labour are significantly over-represented in agriculture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



A significant share of child labour is hazardous in nature. Nearly one third of all 5 to 11 year-olds in child labour, and 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. This is especially the case for 12 to 14 year-olds, for whom child labour in industry and services is more likely to be hazardous than child labour in agriculture, although the degree hazardousness is high even in the last.

Sectoral composition of child labour and working-aged employment

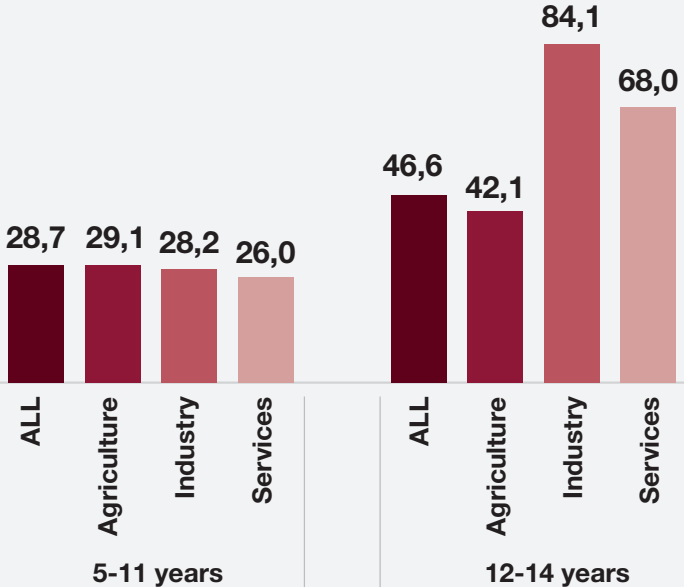
Figure 10 Percentage distribution of children in child labour and employed persons of working age, by branch of economic activity and age range



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.

Hazardous work and branch of economic activity

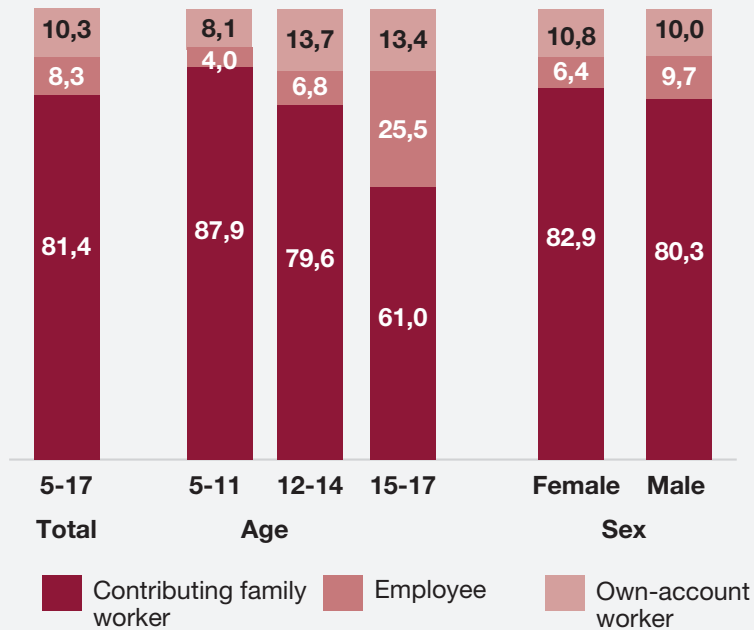
Figure 11 Percentage of child labour constituting hazardous work, 5-14 years age group, by branch of economic activity



Child labour consists in large part in unpaid work within the family unit. Overall, more than 81% of children in child labour work for their own families, while 8% work as employees for third parties and the remaining 10% for work for their own account. Again, however, aggregate figures mask important differences by age and sex. The relative importance of family work declines sharply with age while the relative importance of work as employees moves in the opposite direction. This reflects broader patterns that see children moving out of informal (primarily family-based) agriculture and into more formal work arrangements as employees as they grow older. The breakdown by sex provides further evidence of gender considerations in types of work assigned to children. Girls in child labour are more likely than boys to work for their own families, while the opposite pattern prevails for work as employees.

Child labour and status in employment

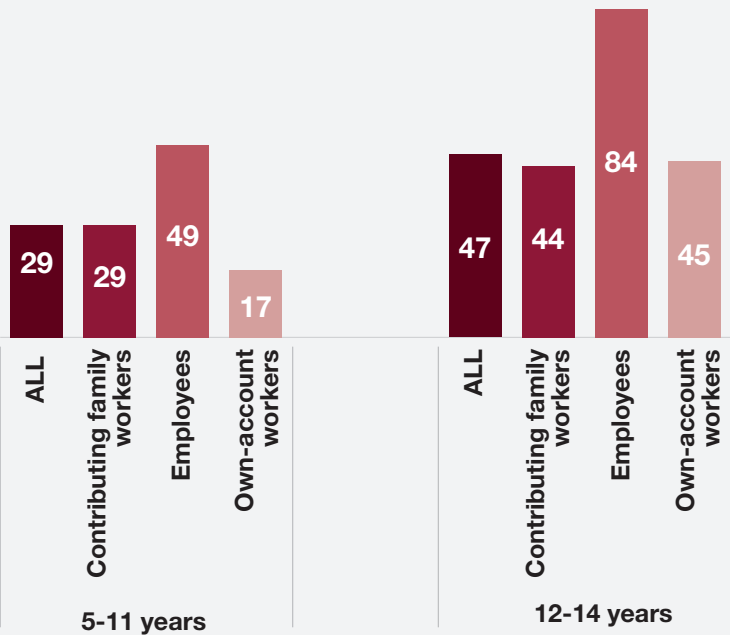
Figure 12 Percentage distribution of children in child labour, by status at work, age range and sex



The degree of hazardousness also varies somewhat across different status in employment categories. For both 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 year-olds, child labour as employees is significantly more likely to be hazardous than child labour in other categories – half of all 5 to 11 year-olds and 84% 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 13 Percentage of child labour constituting hazardous work, 5-14 years age group, by status in employment



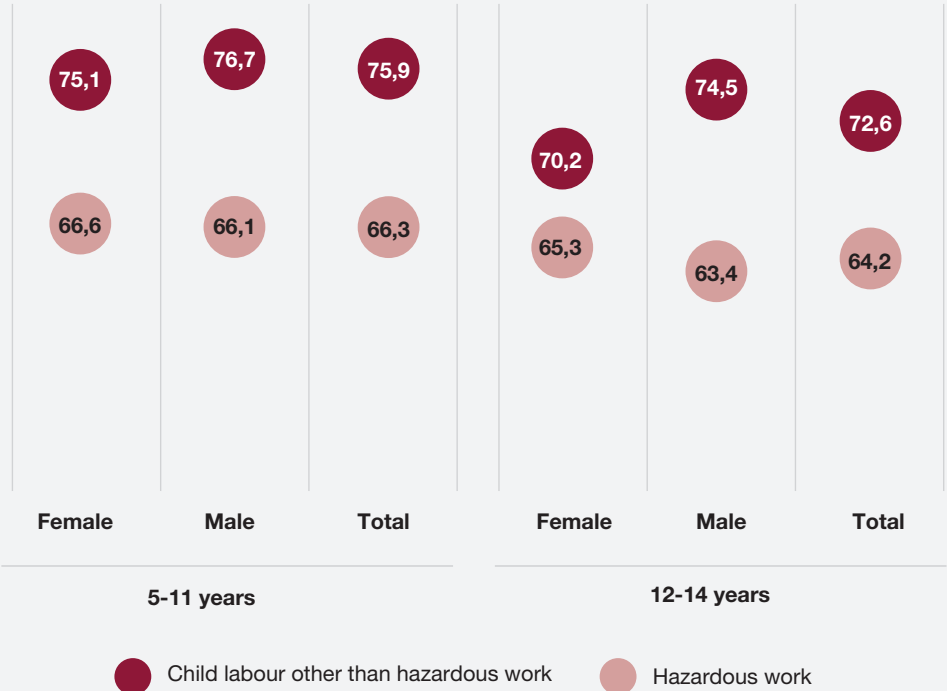
Children
in hazardous work are much less likely to attend school



Children in hazardous work are much less likely to attend school. 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 year-olds, only about two-thirds of children in hazardous work attend school, well 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 (not shown).

Child labour and school attendance

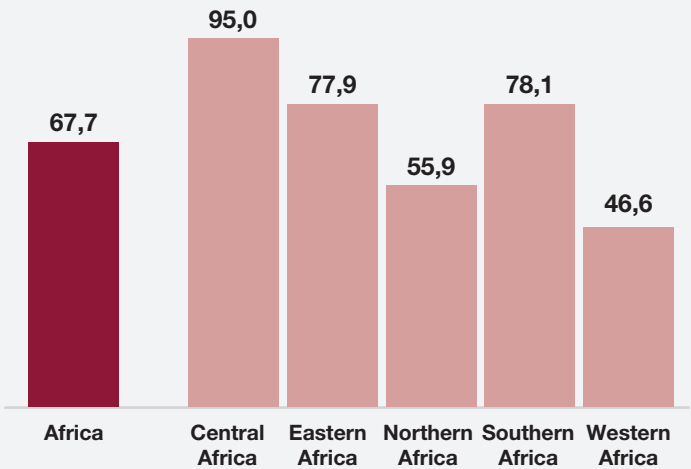
Figure 14 School attendance rates, children aged 5-17 years, by involvement in child labour and hazardous work



The timely collection of child labour data remains an important challenge in Africa. Representative data for the period from 2016 to 2020 is available for only about two-thirds of the total child population in the Africa region. Child labour data coverage, however, varies considerably by sub-region, from 95% in Central Africa to only 47% in Western Africa. Limited data on child labour hampers the development and targeting of child labour policies and constitutes a major obstacle to monitoring progress against child labour. Greater investment in child labour data collection therefore constitutes an important priority

Coverage of child labour data

Figure 15 Percentage of child population for which representative data are available for the 2016 to 2020 period, by sub-region



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.

Statistical tables

			TOTAL								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		5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		5-17 years	
			%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
CHILD LABOUR	Total	2020	22.1	54,874	23.5	21,820	18.2	15,502	21.6	92,196	24.3	30,561	26.8	12,608	20.7	8,927	24.1	52,095	19.9	24,313	20.1	9,212	15.6	6,575	19.1	40,101
	Residence	Urban	9.1	8,333	11.3	4,046	12.1	4,226	10.2	16,604	9.6	4,446	12.4	2,205	13.2	2,308	11.0	8,959	8.5	3,887	10.2	1,841	10.9	1,918	9.4	7,645
		Rural	29.9	46,541	31.1	17,774	22.5	11,277	28.7	75,592	32.9	26,115	35.6	10,403	25.9	6,619	32.2	43,136	26.7	20,426	26.4	7,372	18.9	4,658	25.2	32,455
	Sub-region	Central Africa	19.4	6,237	19.7	2,319	18.4	1,941	19.3	10,497	19.8	3,215	21.3	1,259	19.2	1,013	20.0	5,487	18.9	3,022	18.1	1,060	17.7	928	18.5	5,010
		Eastern Africa	32.6	24,076	32.2	9,251	19.7	5,284	29.8	38,611	36.0	13,442	37.4	5,422	22.8	3,072	33.6	21,936	29.1	10,634	26.9	3,829	16.7	2,212	26.0	16,675
		Northern Africa	4.8	1,479	7.4	794	8.6	865	6.1	3,138	6.1	957	9.8	544	12.1	620	8.0	2,120	3.5	523	4.8	250	5.0	245	4.1	1,018
		Southern Africa	16.8	5,571	16.9	2,141	16.4	1,892	16.7	9,604	18.4	3,060	18.4	1,172	17.5	1,009	18.2	5,241	15.3	2,511	15.3	968	15.3	883	15.3	4,362
		Western Africa	22.5	17,510	25.3	7,316	20.9	5,520	22.8	30,346	24.9	9,887	28.6	4,211	24.0	3,213	25.5	17,311	19.9	7,623	21.8	3,105	17.8	2,307	19.9	13,035
	School attendance	Child labour other than hazardous work	75.9	29,719	72.6	8,464	-	-	75.2	38,183	76.7	16,359	74.5	4,891	-	-	76.2	21,250	75.1	13,360	70.2	3,573	-	-	74.0	16,933
	Children in child labour by sector of economic activity	Agriculture	83.1	45,604	85.0	18,553	66.3	10,273	80.7	74,431	84.8	25,914	87.9	11,087	71.9	6,414	83.3	43,415	81.0	19,690	81.0	7,466	58.7	3,859	77.3	31,016
		Industry	4.6	2,512	3.9	862	11.1	1,721	5.5	5,094	7.0	2,132	4.3	539	14.2	1,272	7.6	3,942	1.6	380	3.5	323	6.8	449	2.9	1,152
		Services	12.3	6,758	11.0	2,405	22.6	3,508	13.7	12,671	8.2	2,515	7.8	982	13.9	1,241	9.1	4,738	17.4	4,242	15.4	1,423	34.5	2,267	19.8	7,933
	Children in child labour by status in employment	Employees	4.0	2,173	6.8	1,481	25.5	3,957	8.3	7,611	5.8	1,784	9.2	1,161	23.6	2,111	9.7	5,056	1.6	390	3.5	319	28.1	1,847	6.4	2,556
		Own-account workers	8.1	4,454	13.7	2,981	13.4	2,083	10.3	9,518	7.4	2,251	13.3	1,678	14.2	1,271	10.0	5,200	9.1	2,203	14.1	1,303	12.4	812	10.8	4,318
		Contributing family workers	87.9	48,246	79.6	17,358	61.0	9,462	81.4	75,067	86.8	26,526	77.5	9,769	62.1	5,546	80.3	41,840	89.3	21,720	82.4	7,590	59.6	3,917	82.9	33,227
	SDG child labour indicators	SDG 8.7.1.1	22.1	54,874	17.0	15,798	6.8	5,803	18.0	76,474	24.3	30,561	20.1	9,434	8.7	3,747	20.3	43,742	19.9	24,313	13.9	6,364	4.9	2,055	15.6	32,733
		SDG 8.7.1.2	26.0	64,478	25.4	23,605	6.8	5,803	22.0	93,886	26.9	33,853	25.8	12,127	8.7	3,747	23.0	49,727	25.1	30,626	25.0	11,478	4.9	2,055	21.0	44,159
HAZARDOUS WORK	Total	2020	6.4	15,742	10.9	10,165	18.2	15,502	9.7	41,410	7.3	9,222	12.8	6,042	20.7	8,927	11.2	24,190	5.3	6,521	9.0	4,123	15.6	6,575	8.2	17,219
	Residence	Urban	2.7	2,471	5.7	2,050	12.1	4,226	5.4	8,746	2.9	1,333	6.2	1,112	13.2	2,308	5.8	4,753	2.5	1,138	5.2	938	10.9	1,918	4.9	3,994
		Rural	8.5	13,272	14.2	8,115	22.5	11,277	12.4	32,664	9.9	7,889	16.9	4,930	25.9	6,619	14.5	19,438	7.0	5,383	11.4	3,185	18.9	4,658	10.3	13,226
	Sub-region	Central Africa	5.3	1,700	9.7	1,145	18.4	1,941	8.8	4,787	5.7	927	10.8	641	19.2	1,013	9.4	2,582	4.8	773	8.6	504	17.7	928	8.1	2,205
		Eastern Africa	9.3	6,849	12.4	3,572	19.7	5,284	12.1	15,705	10.8	4,040	14.8	2,141	22.8	3,072	14.2	9,254	7.7	2,808	10.0	1,430	16.7	2,212	10.1	6,451
		Northern Africa	1.3	397	3.7	396	8.6	865	3.2	1,658	1.7	268	5.0	277	12.1	620	4.4	1,164	0.9	129	2.3	119	5.0	245	2.0	493
		Southern Africa	5.8	1,921	11.1	1,411	16.4	1,892	9.1	5,225	6.6	1,095	12.3	785	17.5	1,009	10.0	2,889	5.0	826	9.9	626	15.3	883	8.2	2,335
		Western Africa	6.3	4,875	12.6	3,641	20.9	5,520	10.5	14,036	7.3	2,891	14.9	2,198	24.0	3,213	12.2	8,301	5.2	1,984	10.1	1,443	17.8	2,307	8.8	5,734
	School attendance	Children in hazardous work	66.3	10,440	64.2	6,523	54.3	8,425	61.3	25,389	66.1	6,098	63.4	3,831	54.9	4,900	61.3	14,828	66.6	4,343	65.3	2,692	53.6	3,526	61.3	10,561
	Children in hazardous work by sector of economic activity	Agriculture	84.3	13,275	76.8	7,806	66.3	10,273	75.7	31,354	92.3	8,514	82.4	4,981	71.9	6,414	82.3	19,909	73.0	4,761	68.5	2,825	58.7	3,859	66.5	11,445
		Industry	4.5	708	7.1	725	11.1	1,721	7.6	3,154	5.3	487	7.5	456	14.2	1,272	9.2	2,214	3.4	222	6.5	269	6.8	449	5.5	940
		Services	11.2	1,759	16.1	1,635	22.6	3,508	16.7	6,902	2.4	221	10.0	605	13.9	1,241	8.5	2,067	23.6	1,538	25.0	1,029	34.5	2,267	28.1	4,835
	Children in hazardous work by status in employment	Employees	6.8	1,067	12.2	1,238	25.5	3,957	15.1	6,262	10.9	1,001	16.6	1,005	23.6	2,111	17.0	4,117	1.0	66	5.6	233	28.1	1,847	12.5	2,145
		Own-account workers	4.9	777	13.1	1,329	13.4	2,083	10.1	4,189	6.0	552	14.9	901	14.2	1,271	11.3	2,723	3.5	226	10.4	428	12.4	812	8.5	1,466
		Contributing family workers	88.3	13,898	74.8	7,599	61.0	9,462	74.8	30,959	83.2	7,669	68.5	4,136	62.1	5,546	71.7	17,351	95.5	6,229	84.0	3,463	59.6	3,917	79.0	13,609

ilo.org/childlabour