



► Child Labour in the Americas

Regional technical brief

December 2025

About this brief

- This technical brief on child labour in the Americas is the result of an extensive regional consultation process carried out throughout 2025, led by the **Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour** and the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- The process combined national dialogues with the 31 member countries, bilateral technical meetings, inputs from employers' and workers' organizations, as well as specialized sectoral contributions. These consultations made it possible to gather perceptions, priorities, and challenges from different levels —political, technical, and territorial— ensuring that the analysis reflects not only the available quantitative evidence but also the diversity of experiences, institutional frameworks, and socio-economic contexts across the region.
- The process reaffirmed the centrality of tripartite social dialogue, complemented by the engagement of civil society organizations and United Nations agencies, enabling the construction of a consensual agenda aimed at strengthening policies for the prevention and eradication of child labour in the Americas.
- Based on this process of dialogue and evidence, this brief presents the current panorama of child labour in the region, highlighting both the progress achieved and the persistent challenges that require urgent attention.



A group of children holding seedlings in a forest. Jocotán, Chiquimula, Guatemala, 2018. © Pexels/Walter Cordero.

► Summary

In the Americas, child labour continues to affect millions of children and adolescents, despite the progress made in the last decade. According to recent estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in 2024 around 7.6 million children were engaged in child labour, of whom 4.9 million were performing hazardous work that compromises their health and development. Although between 2016 and 2024 the regional prevalence fell from 5.3 per cent to 3.9 per cent, structural factors persist that perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion, which affect the situation of child labour among children and adolescents: territorial and socio-economic gaps, rural poverty, food insecurity, structural labour informality, insufficient social protection, educational deficiencies, climate vulnerability and migration.

Critical policy analysis shows a sustained political commitment reflected in the almost universal ratification of ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 and the adoption of national and subregional plans, with the support of the Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour. However, limitations remain that have prevented the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 8.7 by 2025, such as the lack of stable and sustained financing, institutional fragmentation between sectors and policy levels, the lack of up-to-date and disaggregated statistics, and weak labour inspection capacity, especially in the informal economy, agriculture and domestic work. Progress has been recognised in awareness-raising campaigns, the incorporation of tripartite dialogue, the implementation of childcare centres and training schools for young people in agricultural areas, and incipient experiences with due diligence in supply chains. However, these actions remain scattered, dependent on external cooperation and not fully coordinated with employment, education, gender and rural development policies. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks still allow legal exceptions that legitimise forms of child labour, and insufficient statistical production limits evidence-based decision-making and hinders the visibility of intersectional vulnerabilities.

Looking ahead to the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in 2026, the region is projecting a shared agenda that prioritises eight strategic areas:

1. **Quality inclusive education and school retention**, ensuring completion of secondary education and closing gaps between the minimum working age and compulsory schooling.
2. **Universal social protection and care services**, as a structural measure to alleviate the economic pressure on households and free adolescent girls and women from disproportionate burdens.
3. **Labour inspection and transition to formality**, through the strengthening of technical and human capacities, coordination with programmes that encourage formalisation and compliance with labour rights.
4. **Gender and intersectionality approach**, highlighting domestic and care work, and addressing the different situations of exclusion and violation of rights faced by girls, indigenous populations, afro-descendants, migrants and persons with disabilities.
5. **Comprehensive actions in agriculture and extractive activities**, bringing together priority strategies such as support for livelihoods and climate resilience of small producers, due diligence in supply chains, labour inspection, occupational health and safety, tripartite participation and formalisation policies.
6. **Continuous updating of statistics** through more frequent surveys and models such as the Child Labour Risk Identification Model (CLRISK), as well as the use of georeferenced data to highlight vulnerabilities and guide effective policies.
7. **Governance and tripartite dialogue**, with real mechanisms for coordination between social sectors and the integration of child labour prevention into economic, agricultural, social, environmental and labour policies.
8. **Renewed international cooperation**, aligned with national and regional commitments, complementing more robust state funding and greater alliances with employers' and workers' organizations.

The region agrees that the eradication of child labour requires comprehensive, intersectoral and sustainable responses, with robust national funding and renewed international cooperation. In the face of emerging challenges such as climate change, human mobility and the digital economy, there is a demand for innovation in regulatory frameworks and protection mechanisms, consolidating a cohesive regional voice in global forums that positions the Americas as a bloc committed to defending the rights of children and adolescents.

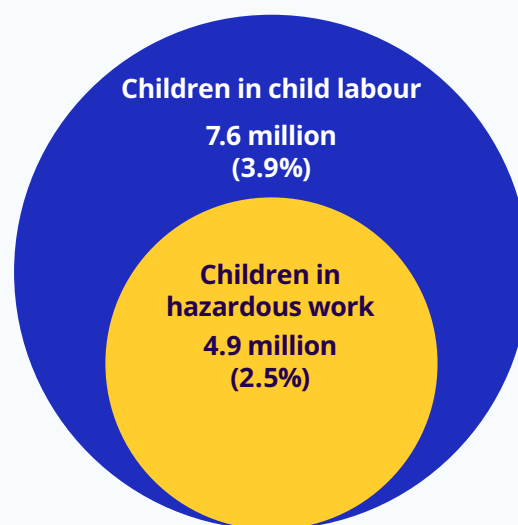
► **Child labour in the Americas**

Child labour continues to affect millions of children and adolescents in the Americas. According to the most recent global estimates¹ from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in 2024 there were 7.6 million children in child labour in the region, representing 3.9 per cent of the population aged 5 to 17. Of these, 4.9 million (2.5 per cent) were engaged in hazardous work that puts their health, safety and overall development at risk.

The countries in the region have made an international legal commitment that requires States to bring their legislation and public policies into line with common minimum standards: setting a minimum age for work in accordance with the completion of compulsory schooling and urgently eliminating the worst forms of child labour, through ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182, respectively. All member states in the region have ratified Convention No. 182, reflecting a broad political and social consensus on the urgent elimination of the worst forms of child labour. As for Convention No. 138, all countries in the Americas have ratified it with the sole exception of the United States of America, which consolidates an almost total regulatory commitment to setting minimum working ages. However, discrepancies remain, as in several countries the minimum age for adolescent labour is lower than the age at which compulsory education ends, which means that, in practice, there are adolescents who can enter the labour market before completing their schooling, increasing the risk of them dropping out of education and limiting their future opportunities.

Despite international commitment, the region, like others around the world, has failed to meet SDG Target 8.7, which called for the elimination of all forms of child labour by 2025. Its persistence is due to a combination of factors such as the social impact of external shocks and economic and political crises, crop losses due to climate change, migration flows, high levels of informal employment and gaps in social protection, as well as cultural and gender norms. It is also partly explained by elements related to the response to these factors, notably insufficient budgetary allocation to fulfil regulatory commitments. This situation reinforces the urgency of redoubling efforts, aligning strategies, increasing social investment, and strengthening regional and international coordination mechanisms to guarantee

► **Figure 1. Number and percentage of children aged 5–17 years in child labour and hazardous work, 2024**



Source: ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2024, Trends and the Road Forward*, 2025.

children's rights and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exclusion that perpetuates child labour, paying special attention to gender inequalities and historically excluded groups.

This regional brief aims to provide a concise, evidence-based analysis of the main challenges facing the Americas in eradicating child labour. It examines the structural factors that perpetuate this problem, critically reviews current policies and offers a forward-looking view of regional policy priorities. The document is intended to serve as technical input for preparatory discussions leading up to the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, scheduled for 2026, and seeks to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to align strategies and catalyse meaningful action.

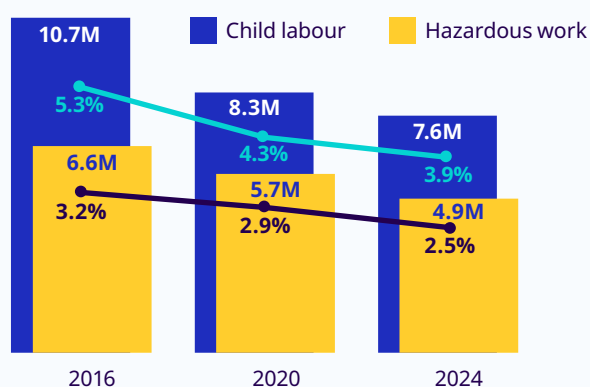
¹ To review the limitations and scope of global estimates, please refer to ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2024, Trends and the Road Forward*, 2025.

► Analysis of the main challenges to eliminating child labour in the Americas

Recent estimates show that the Americas have made steady, albeit moderate, progress in reducing child labour. Between 2020 and 2024, the prevalence fell from 4.3 per cent to 3.9 per cent, and the number of children affected fell from 8.3 to 7.6 million. This downward trend has continued since 2016, when more than 10.7 million children were in child labour (5.3 per cent).

Hazardous work has also declined, from 6.6 million in 2016 to 4.9 million in 2024. However, it continues to represent a significant proportion of total child labour, requiring urgent and targeted interventions to protect the most vulnerable children.

► **Figure 2. Regional trends: Number (in millions) and percentage of children aged 5-17 years in child labour and hazardous work, 2016–2024**



Source: ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2024, Trends and the Road Forward*, 2025.

The available child labour figures reveal large disparities between subregions. While the North of the Americas² has a very low prevalence (0.4 per cent) and only 200,000 children in child labour, Latin America and the Caribbean account for 96 per cent of regional cases, with 7.3 million children affected and a combined prevalence of 5.5 per cent. Within this subregion, the highest rates are found in the Caribbean (7.8 per cent) and Central America (7.4 per cent), although the highest absolute number of cases is in South America (3.6 million).

This shows that child labour remains a persistent and structural problem in Latin America and the Caribbean. For this reason, this report focuses on this subregion, where the greatest burden of the problem is concentrated in terms of both prevalence and absolute volume. This decision allows for a more in-depth examination of the causes, dynamics and particular challenges of the region, and guides more effective and contextualised intervention strategies to advance the eradication of child labour.

Socioeconomic, structural and demographic factors

Child labour in Latin America and the Caribbean is closely associated with situations of structural poverty and territorial inequalities

Evidence shows that the participation of children and adolescents in economic activities is often a survival strategy in the face of household precariousness, especially in contexts of multidimensional poverty where lack of income coincides with limited access to basic services, education, health and social protection.³ This relationship is particularly intense in rural areas, where economic opportunities are scarce and child labour is normalised as part of the productive and reproductive dynamics of the family.

Data show a progressive decline in the proportion of girls and boys in child labour, from 10 per cent in 2008 to 5.5 per cent in 2024. This trend has coincided with a slow but steady reduction in extreme poverty in the region. However, the rate of decline in both indicators suggests that poverty alone does not fully explain the persistence of child labour.

Poverty remains a structural risk factor, especially in rural areas and among populations excluded from the formal welfare system. Furthermore, other factors such as informality, low social protection coverage, educational quality and territorial dynamics also have an influence.

In addition, Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most unequal regions in the world, and this inequality is manifested not only in terms of income,

² Canada and the United States of America.

³ FAO and ILO. *Eradicating child labour in agriculture in Latin America: From declarative action to effective action*, 2022.

but also in access to services, opportunities and rights.⁴ Child labour is both a consequence and a factor that reproduces socio-economic, gender and intergenerational inequalities. Territorial gaps also have a significant influence. The highest levels of child labour are found in rural, peripheral and marginalised areas, where the State has less institutional presence.⁵

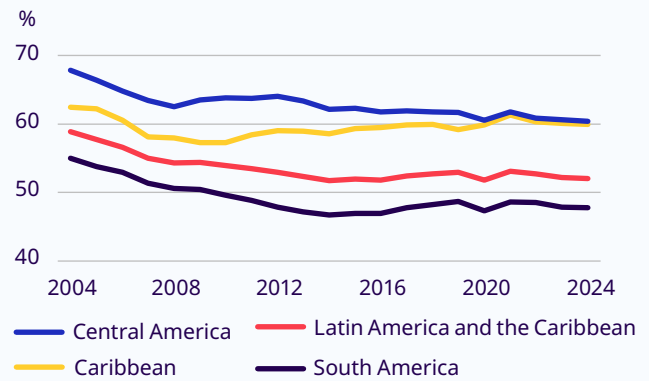
High levels of informal employment contribute to the persistence of child labour

Labour informality in Latin America and the Caribbean, which has fluctuated between 50 per cent and 60 per cent over the last 20 years, continues to be a structural feature of the labour market. Its persistence reflects institutional weaknesses and low social protection coverage. This type of work is often outside the scope of labour legislation and inspection mechanisms, creating an environment conducive to the persistence of child labour. Likewise, rurality is linked to forms of productive organisation such as family farming, where children participate from an early age in agricultural work without an adequate differentiation between what may be occasional family help and work that requires physical effort, the use of dangerous tools or instruments, and in conditions and environments that put their safety, health and morality at risk.

The effect of informality on child labour can be explained by two mutually reinforcing mechanisms. On the one hand, the precariousness and instability of parents' jobs—whether self-employed or wage-dependent—impose unfavourable living conditions on households and push children into employment as a means of subsistence. In line with the above, many women also opt for informal jobs in order to balance work and care responsibilities. The unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work leads to a higher degree of involuntary acceptance of part-time, informal, or precarious jobs⁶ and, consequently, lower economic returns.

On the other hand, the second mechanism refers to the fact that the lack of regulation, supervision and inspection of working conditions in the informal economy makes it difficult to detect the participation of children in the workplace.

► **Figure 3. People in informal employment^(a) as a percentage of total employment, by subregion**



Note: (a) Includes the total number of informal jobs, whether in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises, or households, in accordance with the latest recommendations of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

Source: ILOSTAT, accessed in August 2025.

Gender roles influence the types of work that girls and boys do

When using the System of National Accounts (SNA),⁷ child labour affects boys (5.1 per cent) more than girls (2.7 per cent) in the Americas, and this gender gap widens with age. The difference is modest at younger ages—only 0.7 percentage points between the ages of 5 and 11—but increases progressively to 6.3 percentage points between the ages of 15 and 17 (9.7 per cent for boys versus 3.4 per cent for girls). This pattern can be explained because of the sexual division of labour and gender roles assigned from childhood, which determine not only differential access to child labour, but also the sectors in which they participate.⁸

Agriculture remains the main sector for child labour in the Americas, accounting for 45 per cent of cases, especially in family subsistence activities or on small farms. This sector acts as a gateway to child labour for younger boys, with participation close to 55 per cent among those aged 5 to 11. As they grow older, children become more involved in industry (construction, manufacturing, mining), and their participation in agriculture drops to 37.9 per cent among male adolescents. In contrast, girls' participation remains more stable throughout childhood and adolescence,

⁴ ECLAC, *Horizons 2030: Equality at the heart of sustainable development*, 2016, cited in ILO and ECLAC, *Una trampa para la igualdad: El trabajo infantil en América Latina y el Caribe*, 2017.

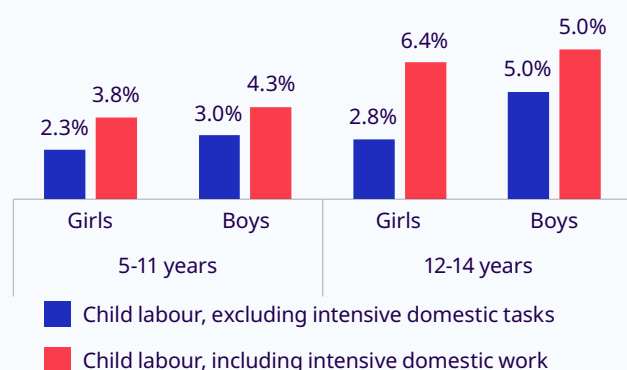
⁵ FAO and ILO, *Eradicating child labour in agriculture in Latin America: From declarative action to effective action*, 2022.

⁶ UN Women, *Recognising, redistributing and reducing care work: Inspiring practices in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2018.

⁷ The System of National Accounts (SNA) is an internationally accepted framework that provides guidelines for measuring economic activity based on accounting and economic principles. It defines a general production boundary that covers only productive activities (those that generate goods or services that can be exchanged) and excludes non-productive activities (such as education, recreation and rest). Domestic tasks are not included in this definition.

⁸ Aspiazu, E., and M. E. Labrunée, *Perspectiva de género en el trabajo infantil*, ILO, 2021. Executive Summary available in English: *Gender perspective on child labour: Executive Summary*, ILO, 2021.

► **Figure 4. Percentage of children in child labour (including and excluding domestic work performed for 21 hours or more per week), by sex and age group**



Source: ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2024, Trends and the Road Forward*, 2025.

concentrated mainly in the service sector, which accounts for 48.4 per cent of cases among working female adolescents aged 15 to 17.

These differences reflect the reproduction of gender stereotypes and norms that assign boys a productive role in physically demanding sectors such as agriculture or industry, while girls are channelled into service and care activities, which are more invisible, often unpaid, but equally dangerous and demanding.⁹

The above classification only considers economic activities within the general production boundary. However, when domestic work is included,¹⁰ the prevalence increases significantly, especially among girls. In the 5-11 age group, the rate rises from 2.3 per cent to 3.8 per cent for girls and from 3 per cent to 4.3 per cent for boys; among 12 to 14 years old, it rises from 2.8 per cent to 6.4 per cent for girls and from 5 per cent to 7 per cent for boys. This shows that girls take on a disproportionate share of domestic work.

This reality is associated with the intergenerational reproduction of gender roles in the domestic sphere. Adolescent women tend to replicate the patterns observed in their homes: the greater the gap in time spent on domestic work between the mother and

father, the greater the burden assumed by daughters. This transmission of norms and behaviours reinforces the feminisation of unpaid work and consolidates gender stereotypes from adolescence onwards, limiting women's economic autonomy in adulthood.¹¹

Unemployment, underemployment and non-participation in the labour market in households have an impact on child labour

In many cases, child labour is linked to household survival strategies in the face of unemployment, underemployment, or the withdrawal of adults from the labour market. Families resort to the labour of their sons and daughters to supplement their income, a practice that perpetuates vulnerability and reduces educational opportunities for the younger generation.¹² Family shocks resulting from situations such as illness or maternity—risks that are not covered for those without access to social protection—poor harvests, or other adverse events also push households to rely on child labour.

In other cases, the non-participation of adults in the labour market and the inability to generate income to support the household motivate girls and boys to enter child labour situations. Particularly when mothers are outside the paid labour market due to care-related obligations, the precarious income that girls and boys could earn is used to cover basic needs.

In 2022, just over half of women in Latin America and the Caribbean were linked to the labour market (53.5 per cent), compared to a rate of almost 75.9 per cent for men.¹³ Among those outside the labour force in the region, 56.3 per cent of women reported being exclusively engaged in unpaid domestic and care work, compared to 7.3 per cent of men.¹⁴

⁹ Aspiazú, E., and M. E. Labrunée, *Perspectiva de género en el trabajo infantil*, ILO, 2021. Executive Summary available in English: *Gender perspective on child labour: Executive Summary*, ILO, 2021.

¹⁰ Domestic work refers to services that children and adolescents perform without remuneration for their own households. These include caring for household members, cleaning and minor repairs, preparing and serving meals, washing and ironing clothes, and accompanying or transporting family members to and from work or school. For statistical purposes, when domestic work is included in the calculation of child labour, hazardous domestic work is considered to be that performed by children below the general minimum age for admission to employment for 21 hours or more per week.

¹¹ UNICEF, *Time use among adolescents in Latin America*, 2024.

¹² ILO, *Gender Strategy of the Regional Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour*, 2021.

¹³ ECLAC, *Institutional Frameworks for Social Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean: a Central Element in Advancing towards Inclusive Social Development*, 2023.

¹⁴ ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024: The challenges of non-contributory social protection in advancing towards inclusive social development*, 2024.

Demographic dynamics: growth, migration, urbanization

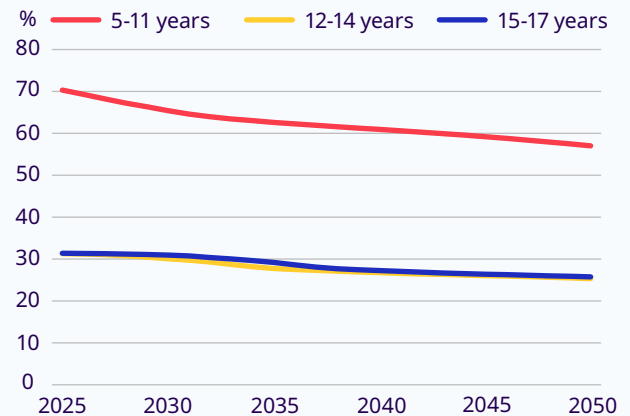
Demographic dynamics are key to understanding child labour trends in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region has experienced a sustained decline in the absolute number and proportion of children in child labour, in line with a broad demographic transition. The significant drop in fertility rates has gradually reduced the child population, especially in the 5-11 age group, where the risk of child labour is highest¹⁵ and where progress has been slower and more uneven between girls and boys.

The impact of this trend is twofold: on the one hand, it reduces the size of the population at risk, facilitating better targeting of public policies; and on the other hand, with fewer dependents, it alleviates economic pressure on households and reduces the need to resort to child labour as a survival strategy. This means that, compared to other regions, Latin America and the Caribbean faces a demographic window of opportunity to accelerate progress towards the eradication of child labour. Taking advantage of this transition will require intersectoral policies that strengthen universal access to quality education, social protection and childcare services, especially in areas where inequality gaps persist.

On the other hand, the region has experienced accelerated processes of urbanization and internal mobility that influence the dynamics of child labour. In contexts of migration—whether for economic, climatic, or conflict reasons—children face greater risks of educational exclusion due to lack of documentation and barriers to accessing services, which can increase their exposure to child labour. In particular, migration flows from rural areas to informal urban settlements create conditions of high vulnerability for children.^{16 17}

Similarly, the socio-economic pressures that increase migration in search of livelihoods also increase vulnerability to forced labour and trafficking, especially when irregular routes or intermediaries are used. Once at their destination, migrants face additional risks due to language barriers, misinformation and exploitation, which perpetuates the cycle of poverty and violation of fundamental labour rights, including child labour and its worst forms, such as commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking and smuggling.¹⁸

► **Figure 5. Child population trends, by age group and year**



Source: ILOSTAT, accessed in August 2025.

Educational trends

Problems with educational coverage and quality increase the risk of child labour and perpetuate intergenerational poverty

Education is a key factor in preventing child labour. However, the region faces persistent challenges in terms of coverage, quality and school retention.

Despite progress, a significant proportion of children and adolescents remain outside the education system, mainly at the secondary level. This exclusion is often associated with child labour conditions, which interfere with school attendance and performance and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.¹⁹

In some countries, there is evidence of an unequal pattern among those excluded from the education system; girls are excluded from the education system earlier than boys because they take on domestic tasks, caregiving responsibilities or early motherhood. However, on average, at the regional level, the secondary education completion rate is higher among girls.

Significant gaps in secondary school completion rates persist, meaning that the opportunities offered by education are unevenly distributed. According to UNESCO,²⁰ around 63 per cent of young people

¹⁵ ILO, *Child labour statistical profile for the Americas* 2026.

¹⁶ FAO and ILO, *Eradicating child labour in agriculture in Latin America: From declarative action to effective action*, 2022.

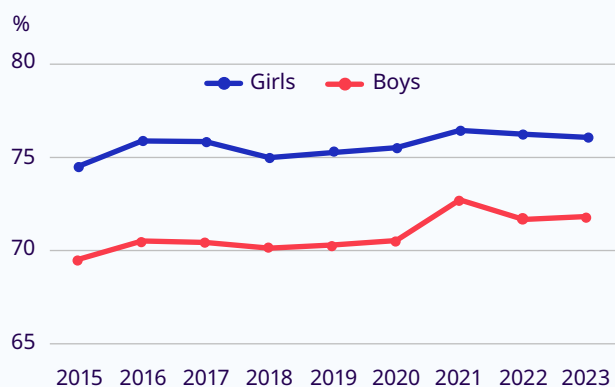
¹⁷ ILO, *Issue paper on child labour and climate change*, 2023.

¹⁸ ILO, OECD, IOM and UNICEF, *Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains*, 2019.

¹⁹ FAO and ILO, *Eradicating child labour in agriculture in Latin America: From declarative action to effective action*, 2022.

²⁰ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: Everyone without exception*, 2020.

► **Figure 6. Completion of secondary education: Low gross enrolment rate in the final year^(a) (general and pre-vocational), by year and sex**



Note: (a) Number of new entrants to the last grade of lower secondary education, regardless of age, divided by the population of age to enter that last grade.

Source: ILOSTAT, accessed in August 2025.

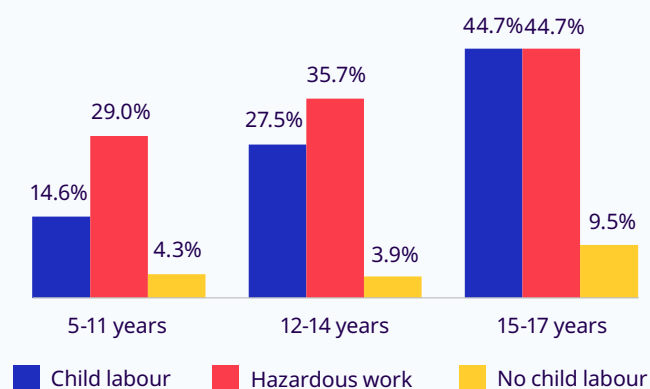
complete secondary school, but in 20 countries, the probability of doing so is five times higher for students in the richest 20 per cent than for those in the poorest 20 per cent. School attendance rates are lower for young people with disabilities, people of African descent and indigenous people. In Latin America, the secondary education completion rate in rural areas is, on average, 20 percentage points lower than in urban areas.²¹

Lack of access to adequate educational services, especially in rural and indigenous areas, translates into a higher probability of early entry into the labour market and greater exposure to the worst forms of child labour. Furthermore, education systems are not always designed to address the reality of working children, which contributes to educational exclusion.²² The earlier adolescents enter the world of work, the less likely they are to complete formal education cycles.

There is a gap between the minimum working age and the completion of compulsory education

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a regulatory inconsistency between the minimum age for admission to employment and the age at which compulsory education ends. In several countries, labour legislation allows young people to start working at 14 or 15, while education systems make education compulsory until 16 or even 17. This dissonance creates a legal loophole that facilitates the early entry of adolescents into the labour market before they have completed their basic education, which not only contradicts the spirit of ILO Convention No. 138, but also limits learning opportunities, perpetuates educational exclusion and restricts access to quality jobs in adulthood. The lack of harmonisation between the two regulatory frameworks weakens child labour prevention policies and raises the need for reforms that align the minimum working age with the effective completion of compulsory education, considering the legal, cultural and social circumstances and realities of each country.

► **Figure 7. Child labour and schooling: Children not in school, by child labour and hazardous work status**



Source: ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2024, Trends and the Road Forward*, 2025.

²¹ ILO, *Issue paper on child labour and climate change*, 2023.

²² ILO and ECLAC, *Una trampa para la igualdad: El trabajo infantil en América Latina y el Caribe*, 2017.

Protection gaps: Social protection and basic services

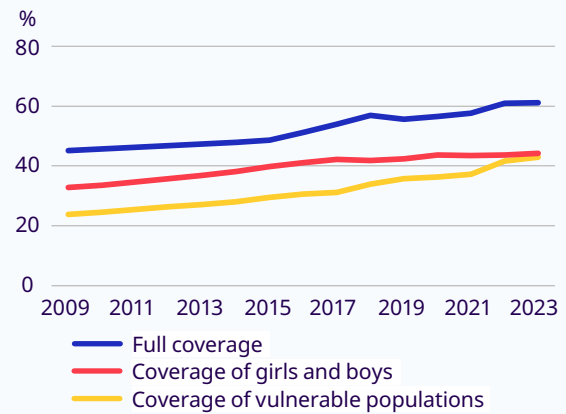
Weak social protection systems and limited access to basic services expose children to greater risks of child labour

Social protection systems remain insufficient to guarantee minimum welfare conditions for vulnerable households, as they have limitations in terms of coverage, quality and budgetary sustainability. In many cases, cash transfer programmes, educational grants, health services and food support fail to reach the households that need them most in a timely and comprehensive manner, particularly those living in extreme poverty, rural areas, indigenous territories or informal urban settlements. Added to this are institutional fragmentation, lack of intersectoral coordination and the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the real impact on reducing inequalities and preventing social risks. These structural gaps limit the capacity of States to guarantee the full exercise of children's rights and, in practice, perpetuate cycles of exclusion that increase the likelihood of child labour, school dropouts and other forms of rights violations.^{23 24} In some countries, there is high variability in social protection budgets, depending on changes in the political cycle.

In addition, the scarcity or lack of adequate public childcare services forces many families to resort to employing their own children or overburdening older daughters with caregiving tasks, preventing them from attending school. This situation is more acute in rural or marginalised contexts.^{25 26}

Gender gaps in time use are amplified by the socio-economic conditions of households. Adolescent girls from more vulnerable contexts have less access to basic services and educational opportunities and also take on a greater burden of unpaid work. This interaction between poverty and gender intensifies the social exclusion of girls, deepens intergenerational inequalities and limits their comprehensive development. A particularly critical situation arises in households where adolescent girls live with children under the age of five: in the absence of accessible childcare services, adolescent girls are often turned into

► Figure 8. Social protection coverage: Population covered by at least one social protection benefit^(a)



Note: (a) Total coverage is the proportion of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit. Coverage of vulnerable populations refers to the proportion of the vulnerable population receiving cash social assistance benefits. Coverage of children is the proportion of households receiving cash benefits for children or families.

Source: ILOSTAT, accessed in August 2025.

caregivers, assuming responsibilities that should fall to adults or the State. This restricts the time available for their education and recreation and imposes an unrecognised workload from an early age, which constitutes a hidden form of child labour.²⁷

Although not all studies on child labour directly address access to basic services, it is recognised that the deprivation of these rights contributes to reinforcing conditions of multidimensional poverty. Households without access to drinking water, electricity or medical care are often less able to guarantee stable educational trajectories for children, which increases the likelihood of child labour as a way of compensating for these shortcomings.²⁸ In other cases, it has been found that the task of fetching water or firewood in households without access to water, gas or electricity falls to children.^{29 30 31}

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had severe effects on the socio-economic conditions of millions of households, increasing the risk of child labour. School closures, loss of income and the interruption of social

²³ ILO, *Gender Strategy of the Regional Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour*, 2021.

²⁴ ILO, *Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour*, document adopted at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, Durban, South Africa, 15–20 May 2022.

²⁵ ILO, *Gender Strategy of the Regional Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour*, 2021.

²⁶ ILO, *Issue paper on child labour and climate change*, 2023.

²⁷ UNICEF, *Time use among adolescents in Latin America*, 2024.

²⁸ FAO and ILO, *Eradicating child labour in agriculture in Latin America: From declarative action to effective action*, 2022.

²⁹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) de Honduras and World Vision, *Encuesta Nacional de Trabajo Infantil de Honduras - Resultados generales*, 2024.

³⁰ ILO, *Acceso al agua para reducir el trabajo infantil en zonas rurales - Un aporte de la innovación tecnológica en la agricultura familiar*, 2021.

³¹ Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social (MINTRAB) de Guatemala, *Trabajo infantil en Guatemala: A partir de la Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida de 2023*, 2025.

programmes exacerbated the structural conditions that push children and adolescents into work. The lessons from this crisis reveal the need for integrated responses across education, health and social protection to prevent setbacks.³²

Intersectional vulnerabilities

In Latin America and the Caribbean, although there are periodic efforts to measure child labour, statistics do not always fully comply with the operational definition of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, making it difficult to highlight specific situations. This limitation is particularly critical for understanding intersectional vulnerabilities, where children and adolescents face multiple forms of exclusion that increase their risk of child labour and reduce the effectiveness of prevention and eradication policies.

Girl child labour in the domestic and care sectors remains invisible

Child labour involving girls remains largely invisible, as much of this work is carried out in the domestic sphere and in care tasks. When these tasks are not counted as economic activities, they remain hidden even though they constitute hazardous work, as they can put girls' health, safety and morality at risk, while also interfering with their right to education, leisure and a childhood free from exploitation. The gender focus in policies to eradicate child labour remains limited due to the lack of specific measurement and quantification of this phenomenon, which contributes to its persistence.^{33 34}

Indigenous, afro-descendant and disabled children face greater vulnerability

The prevalence rate of child labour among indigenous and afro-descendant children is higher than average. These populations face multiple forms of exclusion that exacerbate their vulnerability: poverty, discrimination, limited access to public services, low social protection coverage, and linguistic and cultural barriers to education.^{35 36}

Furthermore, although there are significant gaps in information on the relationship between disability and child labour in the region, it is recognised that children

with disabilities face multiple forms of exclusion, and when children with disabilities do access work, it is often marked by greater precariousness and lack of protection. The lack of disaggregated data prevents this problem from being adequately highlighted, which represents a challenge to effectively address it.^{37 38}

New and emerging challenges

Forced human mobility increases exposure to the risk of child labour

Armed conflict, widespread violence, forced displacement, humanitarian crises and natural disasters are interrelated phenomena that directly or indirectly affect human mobility. Armed conflict, socio-political tensions and persecution on ethnic, religious or political grounds or because of membership of certain social groups create conditions of insecurity that force individuals and communities to leave their homes in search of protection. Similarly, floods, storms, droughts and other catastrophic events can cause severe damage to infrastructure, loss of livelihoods and deterioration of basic living conditions, constituting factors of expulsion that drive internal or cross-border displacement.

These processes particularly affect migrant and refugee families, who face legal, economic and social barriers to accessing basic services.³⁹ Although not always widely documented, in recent years Latin America and the Caribbean have been characterised by high migration flows, driven mainly by economic instability and the search for better living conditions. The mobility of people to a new place, forces them to urgently generate livelihoods that involve the whole family, which increases the incorporation of children and adolescents into child labour.

Children and adolescents are disproportionately affected by violence, forcing them to flee their communities and countries. For example, a report⁴⁰ by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicates that migration flows from Central America are far more likely to include unaccompanied children and families with children.

³² ILO, *Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour*, 2022.

³³ ILO, *Gender Strategy of the Regional Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour*, 2021.

³⁴ ILO, *Gender analysis of child labour policy frameworks in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2022.

³⁵ ILO and ECLAC, *Una trampa para la igualdad: El trabajo infantil en América Latina y el Caribe*, 2017.

³⁶ ILO, *Gender Strategy of the Regional Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour*, 2021.

³⁷ ILO, *Gender Strategy of the Regional Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour*, 2021.

³⁸ ILO, *Child labour statistical profile: Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2021.

³⁹ ILO, *Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour*, document adopted at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, Durban, South Africa, 15–20 May 2022.

⁴⁰ UNDP and UNHCR, *Facing the Challenges of Forced Displacement in Central America and Mexico*, 2021.

In contexts of crisis and displacement, child labour intensifies when there are no adequate social protection mechanisms, access to basic services or safe income-generating alternatives for adults.

The worst forms of child labour continue to affect millions of children and adolescents in the Americas

In the Americas, the worst forms of child labour persist despite regulatory advances and high ratification of ILO international conventions. The region still faces the presence of children and adolescents in hazardous working conditions, forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking for labour exploitation, begging, servitude and servile marriage, and illicit activities. The persistence of practices similar to slavery has also been identified, such as debt bondage in rural areas or in informal links in agricultural production chains, which constitute serious violations of children's fundamental rights. Although it has declined, hazardous work still affects 4.9 million children and adolescents in the region, according to the most recent estimates from 2024, as detailed in a previous section.

A particularly critical area is the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, which is recognised as one of the most widespread manifestations of the worst forms of child labour in the region. This phenomenon is closely linked to the dynamics of trafficking, gender-based violence, socio-economic inequality and migration, and disproportionately affects girls and adolescent women. According to the global report⁴¹ of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in 2022, 52 per cent of victims of human trafficking in Central America and the Caribbean were girls and 19 per cent were boys. In South America, girls accounted for 17 per cent and boys for 4 per cent, while in North America, 25 per cent were girls and 4 per cent were boys. In addition, between 2019 and 2022, there was a sharp increase in the number of girl victims (per 100,000 inhabitants) detected in North America, largely attributable to internal trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation. In the case of boys, cases per 100,000 inhabitants tripled during the same period. This pattern particularly affects unaccompanied children and adolescents, many of them from Central America and the Caribbean, who face a high risk of trafficking and exploitation.

Furthermore, the use of children and young people in drug trafficking, gangs and other illicit activities poses

a serious risk in urban contexts marked by violence and insecurity, where children are exploited by organised crime.⁴² Similarly, children and adolescents are forced to work in agriculture, domestic work, begging and commercial sexual exploitation, in conditions of violence, coercion or deception.⁴³ The combination of structural poverty, inequality, forced mobility, criminal violence, widespread informality and low institutional capacity to regulate informal sectors creates conditions conducive to the reproduction of these practices.

Child marriage and forced early unions persist in the region and are recognised by international organisations as practices analogous to slavery. These unions often involve sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, excessive care burdens and school dropout, and in this sense, can constitute child labour. Underage girls forced into marriage are victims of violence and are exposed to a greater risk of violence and exploitation within their own homes, which limits the full exercise of their rights, such as education, health and, in general, the realisation of their own life plans. The convergence of poverty, ethnic discrimination, gender inequality and lack of social protection explains the reproduction of these extreme forms of exploitation, which requires comprehensive, coordinated and urgent responses to guarantee the right of children and adolescents to a life free from violence.

Climate change is a global threat that exacerbates conditions of socio-economic vulnerability and increases the risk of child labour

Climate change and extreme weather events (hurricanes, droughts, floods) disproportionately affect rural and agricultural populations, where child labour is most prevalent. The loss of rural livelihoods due to environmental factors can push families to employ their children in precarious economic activities to survive. This phenomenon needs to be integrated into child labour risk analyses.^{44 45}

Several studies consistently support the view that poverty drives households to resort to child labour, especially as a response mechanism in crisis situations. It has been found that households tend to employ children when faced with agriculture-related shocks such as droughts, floods or crop failures, phenomena that are intensified by climate change. Similarly, increases in food prices—increasingly linked to

⁴¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*, 2024.

⁴² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Violence, children and organized crime*, 2015.

⁴³ ILO, Walk Free, and IOM, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, 2022.

⁴⁴ FAO and ILO, *Eradicating child labour in agriculture in Latin America: From declarative action to effective action*, 2022.

⁴⁵ Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour, *Principales hitos en la lucha contra el trabajo infantil en América Latina y el Caribe*, 2023.

climatic events—are also associated with an increase in the likelihood and intensity of child labour, even in non-agricultural households.⁴⁶ As mentioned above, the weakness of social protection systems in the face of these and other risks, and barriers to accessing public services in some contexts, expose households to situations that are critical for sustained income generation.

In addition, climate change is leading to an increase in agricultural pests and diseases, which in turn leads to greater use of pesticides and chemicals. This significantly increases the risk of exposure for children involved in agricultural work, especially in family and subsistence farming contexts where protective measures are often insufficient. Exposure to pesticides and agrochemicals is recognised as one of the most dangerous forms of child labour in agriculture, due to the negative impacts on the health and physical development of children and adolescents.⁴⁷

Forms of child labour linked to the digital environment pose emerging protection challenges

Although empirical evidence is still in its infancy, the emergence of new forms of child labour in the digital economy, associated with the use of platforms, social networks and online commerce, has been documented. In some cases, children and adolescents generate income through virtual activities that are not regulated by traditional labour legislation, posing regulatory and protection challenges.

In the platform economy, child labour presents a high risk due to the lack of supervision, especially when it is carried out from home or through adult accounts. Cases have been identified of children working online for money, video game credits or as influencers, activities that often fall outside traditional regulation. In some digital contexts, there is also commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.^{48 49} Although most countries prohibit child labour in general, specific protections for children on digital platforms are limited.⁵⁰ The lack of statistics on these new phenomena highlights the importance of including them in each country's analyses.



Smiling girl in shawl. Chachapoyas, Amazonas, Peru. © Pexels/José Miguel Caycho Miranda.

⁴⁶ ILO, *Issue paper on child labour and climate change*, 2023.

⁴⁷ FAO, *Addressing hazardous child labour and reducing risks posed by hazardous pesticides - Technical note for agricultural stakeholders*, 2021.

⁴⁸ Clark, D. R., and Jno-Charles, A. B. (2025). "Child labour in social media: Kidfluencers, ethics of care, and exploitation", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1–28.

⁴⁹ Kusuma, A. A., *Exploitation of children through social media in a legal perspective of child protection*. In *Proceeding of The International Conference of Innovation, Science, Technology, Education, Children, and Health*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 93–99, 2021.

⁵⁰ ILO, *Realizing decent work in the platform economy*, ILC.113/Report V(1), 2025.

► **Critical analysis of current policies on child labour**

Over the last two decades, the Latin American and Caribbean region has consolidated a framework of public policies aimed at preventing and eradicating child labour. The Regional Initiative, whose technical secretariat was entrusted to the ILO and supported by its 31 member countries and workers' and employers' organizations, has played a key role in translating these commitments into national and subregional agendas. The Regional Initiative has promoted the adoption of roadmaps, action plans and other planning instruments, while also fostering opportunities for tripartite social dialogue and inter-institutional cooperation.

Although this Regional Report presents an overview of child labour in the Americas, the focus of the analysis and systematisation of experiences presented here corresponds mainly to the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, within the framework of the Regional Initiative, for the reasons already explained in the previous section.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established, through target 8.7, the commitment of States to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end the worst forms of child labour and eliminate child labour in all its forms by 2025 at the latest. Based on this global mandate, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean adopted initiatives that continued efforts that began more than three decades ago. Even so, by 2022 it was clear that, despite the regulatory and programmatic advances achieved, the pace of reduction was not sufficient to meet the established target. In this context, the Fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, held in Durban, launched a Call to Action aimed at redoubling efforts, establishing verifiable commitments and accelerating the global and regional response to child labour and its worst forms.

However, the goal of eradicating child labour by 2025 was not met. Structural challenges remain, including insufficient budgetary coverage to implement the commitments made; weak multisectoral coordination mechanisms; the limited capacity of agricultural and supply chain policies to address the factors that reproduce child labour in rural areas; and the lack of systematic integration of gender and care perspectives in policy design and implementation.

Below is a critical review of current policies, highlighting some promising practices that have been identified and pointing out persistent gaps that limit the effectiveness of the frameworks adopted.

National policies or plans require coordination with other strategic objectives

The Latin American and Caribbean region has developed various planning and policy instruments, such as roadmaps, action plans and national programmes, aimed at preventing and eradicating child labour. These instruments reflect a sustained political commitment, and some have even been developed on a tripartite basis.

Likewise, various integration mechanisms, such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS), have included the issue of child labour in their social and labour agendas. Although their impact varies depending on the institutional framework of each bloc, these spaces have favoured the adoption of regional roadmaps, joint campaigns and shared political positions in international forums. Their role has been key in sustaining the focus on decent work and tripartite social dialogue in national responses.

However, although most countries have formulated frameworks for action at some point, many of them lack cross-cutting integration with employment, education, social protection, gender and rural development policies. Child labour is often addressed as an isolated issue, rather than being organically integrated into national and sectoral development agendas.

A critical issue is the fragmentation between policy levels: the coexistence of different planning instruments does not always ensure coherence, leading to duplication of efforts and institutional dispersion.

Regulatory and public policy frameworks lack adequate, sustained government funding aligned with strategic priorities

One of the main challenges identified in the region is the gap between policy design and effective financing. Although most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have developed action plans or equivalent strategies for the prevention and eradication of child labour, only some of them have accompanied these policies with clear and sustainable budgets, and the vast majority of national plans lack specific budget allocations.

In many cases, actions against child labour depend on general resources from ministries of labour, education or social development, without a budgetary trail that allows for identifying how much is actually invested in this priority. This hinders both accountability and the sustainability of programmes. Among the countries that did report specific allocations, the trend is for budgets to be modest in relation to the magnitude of the problem. Investments are concentrated in specific interventions, such as awareness campaigns, training of labour inspectors or pilot projects, but are rarely linked to national programmes with the structural capacity to address the root causes of child labour, such as household poverty, the expansion of social protection coverage and labour informality, or educational gaps.⁵¹

In recent years, funding has been supported by international cooperation. Various projects supported by United Nations agencies, international financial organisations and bilateral cooperation have provided technical assistance to increase institutional capacities. However, this type of external funding is often temporary and subject to changing donor priorities, which does not ensure the continuity and sustainability of actions once projects are completed.

A particularly critical finding is the absence of budget monitoring mechanisms with a rights-based and gender-based approach. The lack of indicators disaggregated by sex, age, territory, and socioeconomic status makes it difficult to assess whether the allocated resources effectively benefit adolescent girls and women, who face specific forms of exploitation linked to both domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation.

Finally, there is incipient participation by social actors and the private sector in financing. Although there are examples of responsible business conduct and public-private partnerships, these remain exceptional and fragmented. Consolidating sustainable financing requires not only increasing the public budget, but also

strengthening mechanisms for social and tripartite co-responsibility, in line with the decent work approach promoted by the ILO.

High ratification of ILO conventions, but with legal loopholes that limit their application

In general terms, the countries of the Americas have achieved almost universal ratification of the ILO's international conventions on child labour (Nos. 138 and 182). The only exception is the non-ratification of Convention No. 138 by the United States of America. However, full legislative implementation still faces gaps. Legal exceptions allowing child labour in family, agricultural or small-scale activities persist in several countries, weakening effective protection.

The observations of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) highlight recurring problems in three areas:

- **Minimum age and hazardous work:** deficiencies in the definition and updating of lists of hazardous work, as well as in enforcement in high-incidence sectors (agriculture, artisanal mining, domestic work).
- **Commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking:** gaps in regulatory frameworks and limitations in the capacity for criminal prosecution and protection of victims, especially girls and adolescents.
- **Family work and work in rural economies:** broad exceptions which, while recognising cultural and subsistence practices, ultimately legitimise situations of child exploitation.
- **Child domestic labour:** Legislation needs to be harmonised to avoid exceptions that allow this type of employment, understanding that child domestic labour is dangerous and should therefore be prohibited for children under the age of 18.

Added to this is limited labour inspection capacity, with inspector-to-worker ratios below recommended standards. Economic informality and territorial dispersion further hinder compliance with regulations, leaving large segments of the child population without effective protection.

⁵¹ Delgado, F. *Budget allocation for the prevention and eradication of child labour in the countries participating in the Regional Initiative 2022-2024*, unpublished Regional Initiative document.

The sustainability of tripartite mechanisms for intersectoral coordination depends on a more solid legal and institutional foundation

A positive feature in the region has been the consolidation of national commissions, interministerial committees or tripartite round tables for the eradication of child labour. Beyond their specific names, these mechanisms are configured as spaces for social dialogue that constitute good practice, insofar as they offer opportunities for participation and policy promotion. These mechanisms reflect a recognition of the multidimensional nature of the problem, which requires the coordination of labour, education, social and productive policies. For example, they have been key to advancing the approval of lists of hazardous jobs, regulatory frameworks on hazardous child labour and the definition of public policies in this area.

However, the actual functionality of these spaces varies considerably. In several countries, the committees lack their own resources, operate on an ad hoc basis and depend on the political will of the moment. The lack of institutionalisation leads to discontinuity, especially in the event of changes of government. The effectiveness of coordination mechanisms is also conditioned by the structural limitations of some social actors. In several countries, workers' organizations face a lack of training, scarce technical and financial resources, and internal fragmentation, which limits their ability to have a sustained impact in consultation forums. In addition, in contexts of political polarisation, there is less willingness to engage in tripartite dialogue, generating tensions that weaken the search for consensus and the definition of shared strategies to combat child labour.

The experience of the Regional Initiative has been key to strengthening national and regional coordination, offering common methodological frameworks, opportunities for the exchange of good practices and technical support to countries. Thanks to this tripartite impetus, information systems have been strengthened, national plans have been developed, and networks of responsible companies have been formed. However, the sustainability of these national bodies still depends on greater legal and institutional anchoring to ensure their permanence beyond political circumstances.

Labour inspection specializing in child labour is not widespread in the region and has gaps in addressing informality and domestic work

Over the last decade, labour inspection has become established as a key mechanism in the region for the prevention and eradication of child labour, with notable progress in some countries that have created specialised units with staff dedicated exclusively to child labour, adapted procedures and specific technical tools. These experiences, although limited to a quarter of the States of Latin America and the Caribbean, show the potential of a more strategic and modern model of inspection: one that incorporates evidence-based diagnoses, interconnected information systems and proactive methodologies. When inspection is combined with social dialogue, comprehensive planning and technical support for businesses and communities, it can generate sustainable and long-term solutions to child labour. In some cases, general national inspection teams that cover all types of labour rights violations also have specialised training in addressing child labour and hazardous child labour.

In most cases, inspection faces shortages of human and financial resources, low territorial coverage and poorly differentiated procedures. These weaknesses are exacerbated in the informal economy, family farming and domestic work, where the lack of regulation, adapted methodologies and access to workplaces makes the participation of children and adolescents invisible. In this context, labour inspection not only faces difficulties in detecting and punishing violations, but is also disconnected from productive formalisation and social protection programmes. This limits its potential as a prevention tool and as a bridge to decent work.

► **Table 1. Summary of political and regulatory commitments and coordination mechanisms for the prevention and elimination of child labour**

Country	Regulations ^(a)	ILO C138 ^(b)	Minimum age ^(c)	ILO C182 ^(d)	Public policy ^(e)	Social dialogue ^(f)	Strengthened inspection ^(g)
Antigua and Barbuda	✓	1983	14	2002	-	-	-
Argentina	✓	1996	16	2001	✓	✓	✓
Bahamas	✓	2001	14	2001	-	✓	-
Barbados	✓	2000	16	2000	-	✓	-
Belize	✓	2000	14	2000	-	✓	-
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	✓	1997	14	2003	-	-	✓
Brazil	✓	2001	16	2000	✓	✓	✓
Canada	✓	2016	16	2000	✓	-	✓
Chile	✓	1999	15	2000	✓	✓	-
Colombia	✓	2001	15	2005	✓	✓	✓
Costa Rica	✓	1976	15	2001	✓	✓	-
Cuba	✓	1975	17	2015	-	✓	-
Dominican Republic	✓	1999	14	2000	✓	✓	-
Ecuador	✓	2000	15	2000	-	-	-
El Salvador	✓	1996	14	2000	✓	✓	-
Grenada	✓	2003	16	2003	-	-	-
Guatemala	✓	1990	15	2001	✓	✓	-
Guyana	✓	1998	15	2001	-	✓	-
Haiti	-	2009	14	2007	-	✓	-
Honduras	✓	1980	14	2001	✓	✓	-
Jamaica	✓	2003	15	2003	✓	✓	-
Mexico	✓	2015	15	2000	✓	✓	-
Nicaragua	✓	1981	14	2000	-	✓	-
Panama	✓	2000	14	2000	✓	✓	✓
Paraguay	✓	2004	14	2001	✓	✓	-
Peru	✓	2002	14	2002	✓	✓	✓
Saint Kitts and Nevis	✓	2005	16	2000	-	✓	-
Saint Lucia	✓	2025	16	2000	-	✓	-
Suriname	✓	2018	16	2006	-	✓	-
Trinidad and Tobago	✓	2004	16	2003	-	✓	✓
United States of America	✓	-	14	1999	-	-	-
Uruguay	✓	1977	15	2001	-	✓	✓
Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	✓	1987	14	2005	-	-	-

Note: (a) Specific internal regulations prohibiting child labour, protecting children and regulating adolescent labour. (b) Year of ratification of ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for employment. In the case of Saint Lucia, it was ratified in 2025 and will come into force in 2026. (c) Minimum age established in each country's legislation for adolescent labour. In some countries, exceptions are made for work in non-hazardous activities or light work. (d) Year of ratification of ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour. (e) Current public policies on child labour (national policies, plans, strategies, roadmaps). (f) There is a national commission for the prevention and eradication of child labour. (g) There is a labour inspection unit dedicated exclusively to addressing child labour, or the general labour inspectorate has specialised training to deal with cases of child labour.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on NORMLEX-ILO, Regional Observatory on Child Labour and Technical Secretariat of the Regional Initiative.

There is growing interest in mapping and addressing the various links in supply chains

In recent years, thanks to the impetus of the Regional Initiative and the technical cooperation of the ILO, important steps have been taken to raise awareness of the issue in supply chains. Examples can be found in the documented experiences in coffee, sugar cane, blueberries and cocoa, where due diligence models and commitments to responsible business conduct have been introduced.^{52 53} These good practices show that it is possible to articulate productive policies with the objectives of eradicating child labour, but these are still targeted experiences with limited impact on the sector as a whole.^{54 55 56}

Childcare centers in agricultural areas have proven to be an effective strategy for preventing child labour

In rural and peri-urban economies, where informal and subsistence employment predominates, the capacity of public policies to reach the child labour population is more limited. Labour inspection fails to cover these areas, and social programmes are not always designed to respond to the specific needs of families that rely on child labour as one of their survival strategies.

The impact is particularly noticeable in unpaid family work, which remains largely invisible in regulatory frameworks and statistical records. The lack of recognition of these dynamics limits the design of specific responses and makes it difficult to align agricultural, social protection and education policies with the realities of rural life.

One of the most prominent strategies for preventing child labour in rural areas has been the opening of childcare centres linked to agricultural activities. These spaces offer comprehensive and safe care for children during their families' working hours, reducing the pressure to involve them in productive work at an early age. The relevance of these centres is increased in contexts of high agricultural seasonality, where crops such as coffee, sugar cane, cotton, fruits and vegetables experience peaks in labour demand. During these seasons, the risk of children entering the

workforce is greater, and childcare centres offer a safe alternative to mitigate this pressure.

Regional experience shows that such initiatives have been implemented through joint responsibility schemes involving public institutions, local governments, community organisations and, in some cases, agricultural companies. Childcare centres have operated both permanently and on a temporary basis during harvest seasons and have shown positive results in facilitating school continuity and child protection.^{57 58}

There is clear recognition of education and social protection as pillars in the prevention and eradication of child labour

Education and social protection policies are recognised as central pillars in strategies to prevent and eradicate child labour in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region has consolidated a regulatory framework that guarantees compulsory and free primary education, and in many countries also secondary education, which has helped to strengthen an environment conducive to the sustained reduction of child labour over the last two decades. However, significant gaps remain in terms of educational quality, early school exclusion and insufficient coverage in rural areas and vulnerable communities.

In this regard, conditional cash transfer programmes have proven to be an efficient way to keep children and adolescents in school, as they are designed to encourage school retention, especially in rural areas. Linked to other forms of social protection, these programmes have proven to be an effective strategy for reducing the incidence of child labour by helping to alleviate economic pressures on households. In particular, regional experiences confirm that schemes that combine financial support with complementary services—such as school meals, transport, childcare, or extracurricular tutoring—have a more sustained impact on the school retention of children and adolescents.⁵⁹

These actions become even more important when complemented by efforts to reduce gaps in social protection programme coverage, especially in rural areas. However, the impact of these measures on children and adolescents is not always clearly

⁵² Delgado, F., *Status and proposals for eradicating child labour in supply chains in Latin America and the Caribbean*, unpublished Regional Initiative document.

⁵³ Delgado, F., *Due diligence in the prevention and elimination of child labour: Promising practices of companies in priority supply chains in Latin America and the Caribbean*, unpublished Regional Initiative document.

⁵⁴ Azucareros del Istmo Centroamericano (AICA), *Buenas prácticas de prevención y erradicación del trabajo infantil en el sector azucarero Centroamericano: Guatemala*, 2018.

⁵⁵ Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social (MTSS) de Costa Rica, *Conducta Empresarial Responsable frente al trabajo infantil y adolescente. Guía para orientar la acción - Costa Rica*, 2021.

⁵⁶ ILO, *Promoting Decent Work in Global Supply Chains in Latin America and the Caribbean*. key issues, good practices, lessons learned and policy insights, 2016.

⁵⁷ Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género (ELA) y UNICEF, *Acá ganan todos - Experiencias de centros de educación y cuidado infantil para empresas*, 2023.

⁵⁸ Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social (IMAS) y UNICEF, *Sistematización del Modelo de Atención de Cuido y Desarrollo Infantil - Casas de la Alegría 2014-2018*, 2019.

⁵⁹ ILO and UNICEF Office of Research, *The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour: Evidence review and policy implications*, 2022.

differentiated, as the information reported by the programmes does not adequately disaggregate the results. Thus, while children and adolescents with better access to education and basic services are less likely to engage in child labour, the lack of disaggregated indicators limits the ability to accurately identify the most vulnerable groups.

In particular, it is difficult to differentiate the impact on the reduction of child labour in certain areas, such as domestic work, which is often not perceived as such, but rather as an activity that helps the family. This is because these tasks, performed mainly by girls, are not always recognised as a form of child labour, but rather as a social norm or an extension of the gender roles assigned to women. This contributes to obscuring its negative impact on girls' school performance and retention in the education system.

Gaps persist in statistical information on child labour

The availability and quality of information is a decisive factor in guiding effective public policies against child labour. In Latin America and the Caribbean, information systems have advanced significantly in the last two decades, with efforts by national statistical institutes, ministries of labour and specialised observatories. With the support of the ILO, several countries have incorporated child labour indicators into their national statistical systems, including specific modules in household and employment surveys. This has helped to highlight the magnitude of the problem, its geographical distribution and its links to structural factors such as poverty, informality and gender inequalities. However, the region still faces significant gaps in coverage, periodicity, disaggregation and effective use of data.⁶⁰

In many countries, data on child labour come from surveys conducted at intervals of more than five years, which makes it difficult to monitor trends in a timely manner. In addition, the lack of disaggregation by area, productive sector, sex, age, ethnicity and migratory status limits the analysis of intersectionality and the identification of the most vulnerable groups, and establishment of priorities.

A particularly critical issue is the measurement of unpaid domestic work performed mainly by girls and adolescent women, which is often invisible in household surveys. Many national measurements do not include sufficient variables to capture this form of work, even though the 20th International

Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) established guidelines for recognising it in within a broader of child labour. This omission limits full understanding of the disproportionate burdens placed on girls; obscures risks associated with their well-being and education and restricts the ability of States to design effective responses with a gender perspective.

Information systems also face the challenge of capturing data about children and adolescents in phenomena associated with child labour in contexts of conflict, forced displacement, migration crises and extreme weather events, which tend to be underreported in traditional surveys. The lack of integration of these dimensions limits the capacity of States to anticipate risks and design preventive policies in highly vulnerable territories.

Furthermore, the potential of digital technologies, administrative records and interoperability between databases remains largely untapped. Strengthening these mechanisms would enable progress towards a more dynamic system, capable of generating early warnings and sustaining processes for the continuous evaluation of the policies implemented.⁶¹

Given the lack of updates to specialised surveys on child labour, which tend to be infrequent due to their high costs, the Regional Initiative has promoted the adoption of the CLRISK, which uses administrative records and periodic statistics to generate up-to-date information on territories and sectors with the highest probability of child labour.⁶²

CLRISK has strengthened institutional capacities to guide evidence-based public policies. Its implementation has provided several countries in the region with analytical tools that identify territories and sectors with a high probability of child labour, and has improved coordination between ministries of labour, education and social development, facilitating responses that focus on the most vulnerable populations. However, the technical and budgetary capacity to ensure their sustainability remains uneven across countries.

⁶⁰ Cheng, R., *Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour: Achievements, challenges and lessons learned*, unpublished Regional Initiative document.

⁶¹ Delgado, F., *Report on regional gaps in meeting the 2030 Agenda goals on the eradication of child labour*, unpublished Regional Initiative document

⁶² ECLAC and ILO, *Child Labour Risk Identification Model: Methodology for Designing Preventive Strategies at Local Level*, 2022.

Some progress has been made in preventing hazardous child labour

In Latin America and the Caribbean, significant progress has been made in updating the lists of hazardous work, harmonising them with ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182. In recent years, national regulatory frameworks have been strengthened with reforms that raise the minimum age for certain activities, extend the prohibition of hazardous work and establish more detailed lists that seek to provide comprehensive protection for children and adolescents. These efforts reflect a regional commitment to more precise regulatory instruments that serve as a guide for the prevention and eradication of the most hazardous forms of child labour.

However, this contrasts with the reality in another group of countries where updated lists are still lacking or regulatory gaps remain, limiting the effectiveness of labour inspections and making it difficult to identify hazardous activities. There is also a lack of clear definitions of minimum ages in technical training programmes, as well as insufficient consideration of emerging risks in modern productive sectors.⁶³

Awareness-raising and training initiatives have led to an almost universal cultural change

In Latin American and Caribbean countries, awareness-raising and social mobilisation actions have sought to transform not only practices but also the cultural imaginaries that have historically normalised child labour. Through public campaigns, reflection days and training programmes, efforts have been made to dismantle deep-rooted beliefs that validated the participation of children and adolescents in productive work as part of their “training” or “contribution to the household”. These initiatives recognise that in many communities, child labour has been perceived as positive or necessary due to tradition or custom, and that cultural change requires explaining its risks, showing educational alternatives and emphasising that child labour is not a mechanism for social advancement, but a violation of rights with long-term consequences. In this regard, training aimed at families, community leaders, businesses and teaching staff is key to redefining childhood as a stage dedicated to learning, play and comprehensive development, rather than work.

Comprehensive strategies are needed that link labour formalization, agricultural policies and the prevention of child labour

Despite the recognition that informality is one of the structural factors that perpetuate child labour, most countries in the region lack comprehensive and sustained strategies to address this challenge. Labour formalisation programmes tend to focus on business competitiveness and productivity, without establishing clear links to child labour prevention or child protection frameworks.

Furthermore, although the agricultural sector continues to be the main area of concentration of child labour in the region, agricultural policy frameworks rarely incorporate explicit objectives or measures for the prevention and eradication of child labour. In many countries, policies to support the sector—such as subsidies, productive reconversion programmes, or competitiveness initiatives—have prioritised increasing productivity without integrating decent work criteria. It is essential that agricultural programmes and investments include social safeguards to ensure that improvements in productivity and competitiveness do not translate into greater dependence on child labour, but rather into decent employment opportunities for adults and young people of legal working age.

This translates into weak inter-institutional coordination: economic and fiscal policies move forward in a separate lane from social, childhood and gender equality policies, which reduces their effectiveness in contexts where the vulnerability of households depends both on job insecurity and the absence of safety nets. In turn, the persistent lack of oversight in sectors with high concentrations of child labour shows that state regulatory mechanisms remain insufficient to change patterns of exploitation that persist over time. For example, the Regional Observatory on Child Labour finds that only eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have inspection teams specialising in child labour.

⁶³ Cheng, R., *Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour: Achievements, challenges and lessons learned*, unpublished Regional Initiative document.

► **Table 2. Good practices on the prevention and elimination of child labour**

Topic	Good practice	Summary	Implementing actor	Country
Migration	Coffee Camp Centres	Coffee Camp Centres are an initiative of the Guatemalan coffee sector promoted by the Coffee Foundation for Rural Development (Funcafé), aimed at preventing child labour in the country's coffee-producing areas. These centres are aimed at children aged 7 to 13 who live in coffee-growing communities, especially during the harvest season. They operate in the mornings (for example, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.) with the aim of keeping children away from agricultural or harvesting work during the coffee season, ensuring their participation in educational, safe and comprehensive learning spaces.	Employer	Guatemala
Migration	Labour Migration Programme (PML)	The PML promotes regular and safe labour migration through the temporary hiring of Salvadoran workers abroad. By generating stable income for families, it indirectly contributes to reducing economic vulnerability and preventing child labour in beneficiary households.	Government	El Salvador
Decent work/ social protection	Childcare centres	The Childcare Centres promoted by the Argentine Brickmakers' Union (UOLRA) developed in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MTEySS) are part of the National Decent Work Plan for the brickmaking sector in Argentina. They provide educational and protective spaces for workers' children during the working day, helping to prevent child labour and strengthen family and community co-responsibility.	Workers	Argentina
Supply chain	Child Labour Free Seal (SELT)	The "Sello Libre de Trabajo Infantil" (SELT) is a recognition awarded by the Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion of Peru to legal entities (companies, cooperatives, associations) that demonstrate that their production chain or production processes are free of child labour. It was created by Ministerial Resolution No. 204-2019-TR, which establishes the guidelines and standards for its award. SELT seeks to encourage and recognise companies that integrate sustainable policies and practices to prevent and eradicate child labour, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG target 8.7.	Government	Peru
Children/adolescents protection	FUNCAFE School for Parents	The School for Parents is a training space designed for mothers, fathers, or caregivers in coffee-growing communities with the aim of strengthening their capacities in issues related to the education, care, and well-being of children and adolescents; promoting parenting practices that support educational development and protect children from the risk of child labour. It links family action with other FUNCAFE programmes: Coffee Camp and Coffee Kindergarten Centres, to create a comprehensive protective environment.	Employer	Guatemala
Supply chain	Mechanism to restrict the importation of goods produced with forced or compulsory labour, including child labour	The mechanism was established by a joint resolution of Mexico's Ministry of Economy (SE) and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (STPS), published on 17 February 2023, which came into force on 18 May 2023. The Mechanism allows the Mexican Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (STPS) to investigate and determine cases, publishing resolutions that restrict the entry of such goods into the country. It complies with the commitments of the USMCA (Art. 23.6) and reinforces corporate due diligence in supply chains.	Government	Mexico
Decent work/ education	High School Diploma with Certificate in Coffee Farming	The "Bachelor's Degree in Science and Arts with Diploma in Coffee Farming" programme is an educational programme aimed at young people from coffee-growing communities. It is accredited by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education (DIGEACE) and also certified by the National Coffee Association (Anacafé). It combines a general baccalaureate (Science and Arts) with a specific diploma in coffee farming, aimed at providing young people with technical, productive and entrepreneurial knowledge related to coffee.	Employer	Guatemala

Topic	Good practice	Summary	Implementing actor	Country
		The methodology includes face-to-face classes two days a week and supervised practical training in coffee production units, so that students can link theory and real experience in the field. It contributes to the development of the coffee value chain in Guatemala and strengthens educational opportunities for young people in rural coffee-producing areas, protecting them from dangerous work.		
Decent work/ Productive development	Opportunities Programme	National legislation in the Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador, in Articles 34 and 35, stipulates guaranteeing the comprehensive development, health and education of children and adolescents. Likewise, there is a List of Hazardous Activities and Work for Children and Adolescents describing jobs that are dangerous and harmful to the growth and full development of children and adolescents.	Government	El Salvador
Decent work/ Productive development	Eradication of child labour in the sugar cane sector	El Salvador succeeded in eliminating child labour in the sugar cane harvest thanks to a cooperation agreement between the MTPS, the ILO and the sugar sector, which established a zero-tolerance policy throughout the production chain. The initiative included audits, monitoring, community awareness-raising and contractual clauses prohibiting the hiring of minors. After two decades of sustained implementation, in 2022 the Government verified the eradication of child labour in this sector, making the experience a regional benchmark for social responsibility and labour compliance.	Government Employer	El Salvador
Domestic work/ Child labour	Buena Cosecha Programme (PBC)	The Buena Cosecha Programme is an initiative of the Argentine Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MTEySS) that aims to eradicate child labour and protect adolescent labour in rural areas of Argentina. Within the framework of the programme, multiple care centres, known as “Buena Cosecha Centres”, have been created or strengthened in different municipalities in several Argentine provinces.	Government	Argentina
Decent work/ Social protection	Care spaces promoted and developed by the Autonomous Argentine Workers’ Central Union (CTA-A)	The CTA-A develops community care and support spaces in various Argentine provinces (Mendoza, Misiones, Buenos Aires and San Juan) to prevent child and adolescent labour. These initiatives provide comprehensive assistance to more than 800 families, combining early childhood care, school support, vocational training and psychosocial support. The spaces coordinate with state agencies, COPRETIs and local organisations, strengthening shared responsibility for care and educational inclusion. Through participatory and sustainable strategies, they promote the protection of rights, gender equality and development opportunities in contexts of labour and social vulnerability.	Workers	Argentina
OSH/ hazardous work	Tripartite health and safety training	The Tripartite Training on Occupational Safety and Health, promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Uruguay, strengthens the culture of prevention and the effective application of labour regulations through social dialogue between the State, employers and workers. Agreements were signed with several tripartite bodies focusing on prevention, within the framework of a government initiative on occupational safety and health entitled “National Commitment to Life, Health and Safety”. Training was provided to inspectors and specific content on the subject was mainstreamed in training courses provided by the National Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (INEFOP). A survey on children and adolescents’ activities (ENSNA-2024) was conducted, providing up-to-date data that can be combined with qualitative information to propose and redesign public policies in this area. A binational Uruguay-Brazil roundtable was established to join forces in the prevention and eradication of child labour. These actions promote safe and responsible working environments and help to prevent child labour and protect adolescent workers, ensuring that their entry into the labour market takes place only under safe and regulated conditions in accordance with ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.	Government	Uruguay
Labour inspection	Training of public servants in the defence of children’s human rights in relation to human trafficking	Contribution aimed primarily at prevention and early detection. The tools acquired and inter-institutional coordination make it possible to detect, identify and refer cases of suspected human trafficking to the competent authorities, observed through daily contact in workplaces and through relationships with adolescent workers.	Government	Venezuela

Topic	Good practice	Summary	Implementing actor	Country
Inspection	Strategic action model for the prevention and eradication of child labour through inspection	The Strategic Action Model for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour is implemented by Brazil's Ministry of Labour and Employment (MTE) through its Labour Inspection Department (Auditoria Fiscal do Trabalho – AFT). The objective is to strengthen the labour inspection function through specialised teams, territorial planning and inter-institutional coordination. It allows for the identification, prevention and punishment of cases of child labour, coordinating actions with social and educational services. It is a regional benchmark for its comprehensive, preventive and rights protection approach.	Government	Brazil
Labour inspection	Creation of a specialised group of inspection officials to monitor child labour	Through Intendence Resolution No. 05-2018-SUNAFIL, the Specialised Group of Labour Inspectors on Forced Labour and Child Labour of the National Labour Inspection Superintendency (GEIT – TFI SUNAFIL) was created in order to have specialised personnel to prevent and eradicate child and forced labour.	Government	Peru
Labour inspection	Creation of a directive regulating labour inspection in the area of forced labour and child labour	Superintendency Resolution No. 236-2023-SUNAFIL updated the Directive regulating labour inspection in relation to forced labour and child labour at SUNAFIL, which establishes technical aspects and criteria that contribute to inspection, as well as the actions of the Specialised Group of Labour Inspectors on Forced Labour and Child Labour.	Government	Peru
Education/ Training	Child Labour Campaign	In July 2022, the Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government launched the National Child Labour Policy and Strategy for 2022 to 2025, which has now been adopted and implemented. The Government of Belize became a member of the ILO Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour in July 2023.	Government	Belize
Education/ Social protection	Study Opportunities Programme	The Opportunities Programme is a social policy of the Government of El Salvador implemented by the Ministry of Education (MINED) and coordinated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MTPS) and other institutions, aimed at guaranteeing access, retention and completion of education for children and adolescents in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability. The Programme promotes access to and retention in school for children and adolescents in vulnerable situations in El Salvador. By strengthening education and alleviating economic pressures on families, it helps to prevent child labour and break the cycle of poverty.	Government	Guatemala
Child labour/ Worst forms	CLRISK implementation	The Government of Ecuador, through the Ministry of Labour and specifically its Department of Labour Studies, is implementing the Child Labour Risk Identification Model (CLRISK) on its own initiative, taking a step forward in its application and strengthening the leadership of its national technical teams. Likewise, following the dissemination of the results obtained in Phase I of CLRISK (June 2024), which focused on the collection and analysis of statistical information on this issue at the national level, the Ministry of Labour is currently developing Phase II of the model, aimed at designing strategies, policies and other instruments that contribute to the prevention and eradication of child labour in accordance with the particularities of each territory. This stage also includes the coordination and active participation of decentralised autonomous governments.	Government	Ecuador
Child labour/ Worst forms	Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of Adolescent Workers Inter-institutional Cooperation Agreement Ministry of Labour and Social Security - Joint Social Welfare Institute	This programme coordinates actions between the MTSS, IMAS and MEP aimed exclusively at working minors, as part of the commitments made in the National Strategic Plan entitled “Roadmap to make Costa Rica a country free of child labour”, led by the MTSS.	Government	Costa Rica

Topic	Good practice	Summary	Implementing actor	Country
Child labour/ Worst forms	The Departmental Commissions for the Eradication of Child Labour and the Protection of Adolescent Workers (CODETI) in Paraguay	The Departmental Commissions for the Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of Adolescent Labour are a decentralised means of implementing actions for the prevention and eradication of child labour.	Government	Paraguay
Due diligence	Network of Companies against Child Labour - Costa Rica: Guide to Responsible Business Conduct regarding Child and Adolescent Labour, Costa Rica	The contribution lies in offering companies a Due Diligence Guide for addressing the issue of underage workers in their value chains/supply chains and the effects linked to their operations, products or services through their commercial relationships.	Employer	Costa Rica
CLRISK/ Risk Vulnerability Index	Implementation of CLRISK Phase II in brick-making areas (UOLRA)	Implementation of CLRISK Phase II in partnership between the Argentine Brickmakers' Union (UOLRA) and the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security. The results made it possible to identify areas at high risk of child labour and to target interventions within the framework of the "Los Únicos Privilegiados son los Niños" (Only children are privileged) programme, coordinated with the Buena Cosecha programme. Childcare centres were created in brick-making communities, integrating social protection, education and family awareness in Mendoza, Entre Ríos and Córdoba.	Government	Argentina
CLRISK/ Risk Vulnerability Index	Implementation of the Risk Vulnerability Index in Valle La Estrella (Limón)	The Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS) applied the Risk Vulnerability Index with support from the Regional Initiative. Risk factors were identified in communities in the Tainí indigenous territory. Based on the results, a community collection centre was created through the MTSS Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Programme to improve family income and reduce children's exposure to work.	Government	Costa Rica
CLRISK/ Risk Vulnerability Index	Municipal Model for the Detection and Eradication of Child Labour (Municipal Model)	Approved by Ministerial Resolution No. 240-2022-TR, this model from the Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion incorporates a child labour prevention approach into local enforcement. It allows cases to be identified and referred to the Offices for the Defence of Women, Children and Adolescents (DEMUNA) and coordinates social services at the municipal level. Its replicability is based on empowering local governments to act with a multi-sectoral and intergovernmental approach, and in this sense, the use of MIR-TI as a targeting tool contributes to territorial prioritisation.	Government	Peru
CLRISK/ Risk Vulnerability Index	Characterisation and pre-vention of child labour in Chiapas (Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Tapachula)	In Chiapas, the application of MIRT made it possible to diagnose and target the territories most vulnerable to child labour, identifying micro-regions at risk and facilitating inter-institutional coordination between SIPINNA, the Ministry of Labour and local governments. This process strengthened territorial management and the implementation of comprehensive, evidence-based strategies for the prevention and eradication of child labour.	Government	Mexico

► **Towards a regional agenda for the elimination of child labour in the Americas**

The commitments adopted in the 2024 Brasilia Declaration and evidence from national consultations carried out in 2025 make it possible to identify shared strategic axes that transcend country-specific contexts and shape a regional vision. These interconnected pillars require tripartite social dialogue to generate greater impact and reflect substantive similarities in priority areas for action and challenges limiting current policy effectiveness. On this basis, a coordinated regional agenda can serve as a common platform for the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in 2026.

Inclusive education and school retention

The strongest regional consensus focuses on education as the main barrier to child labour. The need to guarantee compulsory schooling through secondary level, reduce educational exclusion in adolescence and improve teaching quality and relevance is emphasised. School must be not only universally accessible but also an environment that retains, motivates and supports children in contexts of poverty, migration and inequality. This requires relevant education that considers ethnic, territorial, cultural and social particularities, expanding coverage, strengthening school feeding and transport programmes, offering flexible arrangements for working adolescents of legal age, and harmonising educational transition with the minimum age for admission to employment, closing regulatory gaps that persist in several countries.

Social protection and poverty reduction

A second shared focus is strengthening social protection systems as a structural prevention strategy. There is regional consensus that eradicating child labour requires alleviating household economic pressures through cash transfers, food support, childcare services and programmes for vulnerable families. Emphasis is placed on ensuring these policies effectively reach households dependent on child income, with financial sustainability and territorial coverage. Coordinating social protection with education, health and care services is essential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exploitation. The regional response proposes reinforcing the cross-sectoral approach of social policies, guaranteeing access to basic services in rural and excluded areas, and establishing measures to protect against crises and external shocks (pandemics, climate disasters, income loss) to avoid setbacks in reducing child labour.

Countries remain committed to ensuring access to social benefits and income transfer programmes for families and individuals in situations of vulnerability, personal and social risk, and rights violations. The existence, continuity and budgetary sustainability of public income transfer policies are key factors contributing to progress in eradicating child labour.

Labour inspection and compliance with labour and human rights legislation

Effective enforcement of labour regulations is another regional priority. The region recognizes that without robust labour inspection, it is impossible to guarantee protection of children and adolescents from exploitation. This requires overcoming the current situation, in which only a quarter of countries have specialised child labour groups, and moving towards a modern, strategic and comprehensive model.

This model must combine sufficient technical and human capacities, interconnected information systems and differentiated protocols to address highly vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, domestic work and the informal economy. Labour inspection should also function as an instrument of transition towards formality, articulated with productive support policies, social protection services and access to credit, so sanctions are complemented by prevention and sustainability measures.

Labour inspection must adapt to new forms of work, including digital platforms, artificial intelligence and the work of children and adolescents in sectors such as agriculture. Each country must ensure a sufficient number of inspectors, with groups specialising in child labour and forced labour, supported by adequate budgets and training processes that strengthen preventive—not just reactive—capacity. It is essential to establish cross-sector protocols and produce annual reports on child labour. Transparency and accountability are consolidated through regular publication of inspection reports, lists of sanctioned companies and impact assessment mechanisms for monitoring corrective actions.

Consensus actions also include strengthening cooperation between neighbouring countries in migratory transit areas, harmonising lists of hazardous work and establishing effective coordination with the judiciary, particularly to address the worst forms of child labour and ensure effective sanctions. In this way, labour inspection becomes a central pillar in eliminating child labour, addressing structural causes and ensuring the effective application of fundamental rights at work.

Gender and intersectional approach

The regional agenda prioritizes mainstreaming a gender approach and highlighting specific forms of child labour affecting girls, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, migrants and persons with disabilities. Eradicating child labour in the Americas is not possible without addressing gender inequalities in households and labour markets. Regional evidence shows that girls and adolescents are often more exposed to unpaid domestic and care work, rendering their contribution invisible and limiting access to education and comprehensive development. Boys, on the other hand, are concentrated in agricultural, commercial or physically high-risk activities, reinforcing stereotypes and reproducing patterns of labour segmentation.

It is proposed to strengthen the production and use of data disaggregated by sex and age, develop analytical methodologies that highlight the double burden faced by girls and adolescent women in rural and urban contexts, and ensure prevention strategies include specific measures for their protection.

The gender approach also requires integrating affirmative action into educational, social protection and labour inspection programmes. This involves promoting accessible, quality care services to reinforce school retention and success, and awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes associating women with the domestic sphere and men with dangerous productive activities.

Similarly, an intersectional perspective is imperative to address exclusion faced by girls and boys at greater risk—indigenous and Afro-descendant children and migrants—who require differentiated, culturally relevant policies that recognise their specificities and collective rights.

Comprehensive actions against child labour in agriculture and extractive activities

The informal agricultural sector accounts for the highest proportion of children and adolescents in child labour in the Americas, especially in family subsistence activities, reflecting rural poverty, informal employment, seasonal harvesting, and poor coverage of childcare services in agricultural areas.

Implementing comprehensive actions in agriculture reflects prioritised strategic lines: addressing multidimensional causes of child labour—including poverty, rural livelihood insecurity, and climate change impacts—through due diligence and traceability mechanisms in supply chains, so child labour can be identified and prevented at all production stages, ensuring transparency for consumers and international markets. At the same time, labour inspection in rural areas must be strengthened, adapting methodologies to agricultural dynamics and coordinating with programmes for labour formalisation, social protection and sustainable livelihoods. This includes reinforcing agricultural extension services, which train smallholder families in safe working practices, promote child labour-free productive alternatives and facilitate access to social protection programmes, reducing household vulnerability to incorporating children into labour activities.

In some countries, artisanal and low-productivity mining is also a sector where child labour, particularly hazardous child labour, is prevalent. Thus, a comprehensive, multidimensional approach must be taken for the entire primary sector or extractive activities.

These actions must be complemented by the active participation of employers' and workers' organizations, as well as rural communities, fostering environments of shared responsibility and social vigilance against the exploitation of children. Finally, implementing policies to formalize the primary sectors will help ensure decent working conditions for adult workers, reduce reliance on child labour, and strengthen families' resilience to economic and climate shocks, while aligning social protection programmes with efforts to prevent child labour.

Production and ongoing updating of statistics on child labour

Countries in the region prioritise increasing the frequency and coverage of specialised child labour surveys, incorporating modules on domestic and care work, and expanding the use of innovative models such as CLRISK, which uses administrative records, database interoperability and digital technologies to generate early warnings and risk maps.

It is also essential to advance systematic data disaggregation by age, sex, territory, ethnicity, disability and migratory status to make vulnerable groups visible and guide differentiated policies. Continuous statistical updating is not only a technical requirement but also a political act of visibility, crucial for monitoring international commitments and ensuring no child is left outside protection policies.

Governance and tripartite dialogue

The effectiveness of public policies depends largely on strong governance mechanisms. Although tripartite spaces have proven useful, challenges remain regarding institutionalisation and financing. Strengthening interministerial mechanisms and accountability structures at national and subnational levels is essential to ensure continuity beyond political cycles.

Employers' and workers' organizations have played a key role in consolidating the regional response to child labour, contributing experience, resources and legitimacy to tripartite governance spaces. Within a consensus agenda, these sectors reaffirm their active participation and commitment to the Regional Initiative, joint development of public policies, and preparation and implementation of National Action Plans integrating prevention and eradication into productive and labour strategies. Through social dialogue forums, both sectors have expressed interest in strengthening tripartite governance models and promoting innovative tools such as CLRISK and specialised observatories.

Eliminating child labour requires overcoming fragmented approaches and moving towards intersectoral strategies that coherently articulate economic, social, environmental and labour dimensions. A critical review of policies reveals three key areas of integration:

- **First**, incorporating prevention and eradication into agricultural, industrial, trade and economic

development policies, ensuring productivity and competitiveness strategies include decent work and child protection criteria.

- **Second**, linking these policies to climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, as extreme events affect rural households and increase the likelihood of children's early entry into labour markets.
- **Finally**, regulating emerging forms of child labour in the digital and platform economy, which require innovative legislative and protection responses.

A renewed international cooperation agenda

The region has a significant body of political and regulatory commitments forming the basis for a shared agenda, including the Strategic Plan of the Regional Initiative (2022–2025), the Brasilia Declaration of the 10th Annual Meeting of the Network of Focal Points (2024), and the Durban Call to Action (2022), which reinforce the obligation to accelerate concrete, verifiable measures towards eliminating child labour. These frameworks offer opportunities to align national efforts with regional and global commitments, strengthening the collective voice of the Americas in international forums.

National consultations reflect a shared conviction that combating child labour requires responses that transcend borders. Strengthening subregional initiatives such as MERCOSUR, SICA and CARICOM, and coordinating with the Regional Initiative and Alliance 8.7, are identified as key spaces for joint action. The need to share good practices, harmonise data, coordinate efforts on migratory phenomena and build regional platforms for awareness-raising and social mobilisation is recognised. Cooperation is conceived as a mechanism to amplify national capacities and position the Americas as a cohesive bloc globally.

The role of the Regional Initiative

The Regional Initiative has become the main mechanism for regional coordination, recognised by countries for three dimensions:

- **Methodological**, by providing common tools such as CLRISK, gender guidelines and shared frameworks for action.
- **Policy**, by facilitating tripartite consensus and joint positions in multilateral spaces, as evidenced by the 2024 Brasilia Declaration and the national roadmaps linked to the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan.
- **Operational**, by serving as a platform for horizontal cooperation and exchange of good practices, including joint initiatives in supply chains, labour inspection and awareness campaigns.

Through the Regional Initiative, the region has built a common language and shared strategic vision, presenting child labour elimination not only as a national commitment but as a regional objective with its own identity within the 2030 Agenda.

The weakening of international cooperation

Budget cuts by major donors have weakened international cooperation for development in Latin America and the Caribbean. For years, many innovative programmes depended on external funding from multilateral and bilateral cooperation, enabling pilot projects, technical capacity-building and new approaches. However, reduced funds have led to limitations and discontinuities in the sustainability of actions, especially in countries with lower fiscal capacity.

This context forces the region to rethink financing mechanisms, expanding state co-responsibility through national budgets with clear allocations and promoting private sector involvement through responsible business conduct partnerships. International cooperation remains key but must adopt sustainable schemes, with complementarity and institutional strengthening to ensure continuity beyond external financing cycles.

New shared challenges

Finally, emerging common challenges require joint responses: migration and human mobility, which place children and adolescents at extreme risk; invisible child labour in households and caregiving tasks, disproportionately affecting girls; climate change impacts on rural economies, increasing vulnerability of farming families; and emerging forms of child labour linked to the digital and platform economy. These phenomena demand innovation in regulatory frameworks, protection instruments and intervention methodologies, based on rights, gender and inclusion approaches.

► Final considerations

The elimination of child labour in the Americas is essential to advancing social justice and building more inclusive, sustainable and equitable societies. The regional assessment shows that, despite regulatory and programmatic progress in recent decades, structural inequalities persist that keep millions of children and adolescents in situations of exploitation and exclusion.

Against this backdrop, and in preparation for the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, the region has clearly identified its strategic priorities, projecting not only the remaining challenges but also

the political will and technical capacity to address them. This shared vision reflects the commitment of governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and civil society to act in a jointly responsible and sustained manner to ensure that every child fully enjoys their rights.

The unified message is clear: the elimination of child labour cannot be delayed. The region should use this historic moment to reaffirm its global leadership, consolidate a cohesive regional strategy and demonstrate in international forums that a continent free of child labour is possible, urgent and achievable.

Contact details

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

T: +41 22 799 7239
E: childlabour@ilo.org
W: ilo.org/childlabour

