

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and hazardous work of children in agriculture

Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors in terms of occupational safety and health, irrespective of the age of the worker. Although some agricultural tasks are suitable, it is important to bear in mind that those below 18 years require special protection. Until the late teens, children's minds and bodies are still developing and therefore they absorb toxic substances more easily, retaining them longer. Their growth and functioning of their nervous system can be impaired by certain agricultural chemicals. Children also have higher energy and fluid requirements and are more susceptible to dehydration. Some of the effects may not become evident until adulthood. The physical strain and repetitive movements associated with many agricultural tasks can deform bones and injure ligaments and muscles, especially in the back, causing life-long disabilities.

These special vulnerabilities of children and youth must be taken into account in all types of agricultural work: subsistence farming and fishing, industrial operations, contract growing for the international market, etc. Migrant workers are especially at risk. The line between what is acceptable work for children and what is hazardous can easily be crossed.

[ILO Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health \(OSH\), Convention No. 187](#), [ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention No. 155](#), and [ILO Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention No. 184](#) provide guidance on OSH and on national policies and systems to promote better OSH. Article 16 of the Convention No.184 addresses young workers and hazardous work, and the [ILO Safety and Health in Agriculture Recommendation No. 192](#) calls for prevention of children from engaging in hazardous activities and for health surveillance measures for young workers, where appropriate.

Increased use of agricultural chemicals and motorized agricultural machinery in recent years, especially by farmers in developing countries, has resulted in increased rates of injury and poisoning among child workers. Countries lacking adequate infrastructure to monitor the import and use of these chemicals are particularly vulnerable. In 1998, after three decades of negotiations supported by FAO and UNEP, the [Rotterdam Convention](#) was finally adopted with the aim of protecting human health and the environment from the risks posed by pesticides and industrial chemicals. The Convention establishes that workers have a right to know about the chemicals they use, and encourages policies based on information about exposure effects. The Rotterdam Convention in conjunction with [ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182](#) together provide a strong platform for advocacy and action to protect the health and safety of young people in agriculture.

Additional information

[IPEC: Steps toward determining hazardous child labour - toolkit](#) (ILO, 2006)

This toolkit has been prepared upon the request of ILO member countries to assist them in determining hazardous activities for the first time or in revising their existing lists.

[ILO, IUF: Health, safety and environment: A series of trade union education manuals for agricultural workers](#) (ILO, 2004)

This publication includes discussion of child labour throughout, and a section specifically dedicated to hazardous work for children.

[ILO Safety and Health at Work and the Environment \(SAFEWORK\) Programme](#)

[ILO Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development \(WIND\) Programme](#)

A participatory and action-oriented training programme which empowers those working in agriculture to undertake simple and low-cost actions to improve their working and living environment.

[ILO Work Improvement in Small Enterprises \(WISE\) Programme](#)

A programme designed to promote practical, voluntary action to improve working conditions by owners and managers of small and medium enterprises.

Additional publications on OSH and child labour in agriculture include:

[IPEC: Children in hazardous work - What we know, what we need to do](#) (ILO, 2011)

Reviews the current state of knowledge concerning children in hazardous work and presents the case for a new focus on the issue as part of the wider global effort to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. It highlights recent global trends while summarizing the scientific evidence base related to health and well-being of working children.

[IPEC: Towards the elimination of hazardous work by children: Practices with Good Potential](#) (ILO, 2012)

Presents and assesses key themes related to the elimination of hazardous work for children and the provision of safe work for youth above working age, including protection through workplace improvement, prevention through school-based preparation for work, rehabilitation through counselling, and monitoring through community vigilance. Describes good practices in each of these areas which show potential in reducing the numbers of children in hazardous work.

[IPEC: Tackling hazardous child labour in agriculture. Guidance on policy and practice](#) (ILO, 2006)

Provides with information and ideas to plan, formulate and implement policies and programmes to tackle hazardous child labour in agriculture. It is targeted at policy-makers in child labour departments, agricultural ministries and other government departments, employers' and workers' organizations, agricultural extension workers, occupational safety and health agencies/institutions and other stakeholder organizations.

[SECTOR: Code of practice on safety and health in agriculture](#) (ILO, 2010)

Complements the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention 2001 (No. 184), and its Recommendation (No. 192). It provides guidance on appropriate strategies to address the range of OSH risks encountered in agriculture in order to prevent accidents and diseases for all those engaged in this sector.

[ACTRAV: Top on the agenda: Health and safety in agriculture](#) (ILO, 2000)

A series of articles on health and safety in agriculture to inform the June 2000 Session of the International Labour Conference. .

[Forastieri, V.: Children at work – Health and safety risks](#) (ILO, 2002)

Shows how damaging exposure to hazards is for the health of children at work. It demonstrates that children should not be in such workplaces, and where exposure to those hazards cannot be controlled and reduced drastically, urgent action has to be taken to withdraw children from such work, and to rehabilitate them.