

Hazardous child labour: FAO's contribution to protecting children from pesticide exposure

The issue at stake: Exposure to pesticides and child labour

Improving pesticide management has become a global priority to protect the human health and the environment. Pesticides are heavily used particularly in agriculture (and also in public health for pest control), where children are exposed to these pesticides as workers, bystanders, and consumers. They are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposure for various biological and behavioural reasons, for example:

- Children's minds and bodies are still developing;
- Their lower body weight and size combined with greater rates of breathing and higher surface area to volume ratio, result in a greater exposure to pesticides for their size;
- Children's organs are less able to detoxify pesticides;
- The high growth rate of children amplifies toxic effects on the cells and organs, which may only be manifested years later;
- Children's likelihood of ingesting pesticides is higher due to greater 'hand-to-mouth' behavior; and
- Children have lower capacity and skills to assess risks when working with or close to pesticides.

Exposure to pesticides can result in acute poisoning and/or longer-term chronic health problems. When children's health is likely to be harmed from work, they are engaged in hazardous child labour, as established by Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Worldwide, 168 million girls and boys are in child labour, of which 60 percent takes place in agriculture. Some 85 million of all child labourers are reported to be in hazardous work, including those exposed to toxic chemicals (ILO, 2012. [Marking progress against child labour, global estimates](#)).



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FAO's Decent Rural Employment Team is joining forces with FAO's Pesticide Risk Reduction group, UN partners and producers' organizations to minimize children's exposure to pesticides, and in turn, reduce hazardous child labour in agriculture. Action to address the issue is taking place, in various ways, at global, regional and country levels.

Global momentum

FAO is raising awareness, strengthening knowledge and building capacity, across the globe, to reduce and prevent children's exposure to pesticides.

Child labour concerns addressed in global mechanisms on pesticide management

A revised [International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management](#) was approved in 2013 at the 38th Session of the FAO Conference and subsequently also by the Governing Council of the World Health Organization (WHO). The revised code pays specific attention to the health and wellbeing of children, encouraging governments and the pesticide industry to take special actions to reduce children's vulnerability to exposure.

Awareness raised on the exposure of child labourers to pesticides

During the Fifth Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention in June 2011 in Geneva (Switzerland), FAO and the ILO organized a side event on ["Vulnerable groups and pesticides exposure: Joining forces to reduce hazardous child labour in agriculture"](#).

The event highlighted the impact of pesticide exposure on children, specifically on child labourers. Concluding discussions emphasized the urgent need to strengthen data collection at country level on the use of pesticides and related poisoning incidents, with a particular focus on data related to children.

E-learning on child labour and pesticides

The FAO-ILO E-learning course [“End Child Labour in Agriculture”](#) (available in 2015) includes a special lesson on “Pesticide management and child labour prevention” to build capacity on reduction of hazardous child labour through improved pesticides management.

Visual facilitation tool



FAO and ILO have developed a visual facilitation tool: [“Protect children from pesticides!”](#) now available in French, and shortly in English, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish to be used in other geographical regions. The visual tool is used to raise awareness and build knowledge at local level on the issue of child labour and exposure to pesticides.

Collaboration strengthened for capacity development

FAO engages with the University of Cape Town's [Postgraduate programme on Pesticide Risk Management](#) to strengthen the capacities of pesticides registrars and other risk managers, presenting on a range of topics, including child labour and pesticides exposure.

Youth engaged in alternatives to pesticide use

FAO's Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) approach raises awareness on child labour through the [module on child labour prevention](#), and includes good agricultural practices that can minimize the use of pesticides and make working in agriculture safer for youth.

Regional and country level action

FAO and partners are also increasing action at regional and country level to address this matter. In **Former Soviet Union countries**, the European Commission and FAO have initiated a regional project on life-cycle management of pesticides. The project is being implemented by FAO's Pesticide Risk Reduction group in close collaboration with civil society organizations. One of the components of this project addresses the social dimensions of pesticide use with special focus on vulnerable groups, contributing to a better protection of public health by reducing the risk posed by hazardous pesticides in the region. This component is implemented in partnership with the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat, Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) and national NGOs.

FAO and the ILO are supporting the ASEAN Roadmap for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the FAO and ILO regional offices have developed a road map for collaboration on decent work issues in **Asia and the Pacific**. Both include reducing hazardous child labour and children's exposure to pesticides.

In **Malawi**, FAO and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) are initiating a project on Pesticide Risk Reduction to reduce economic, environmental and social risks associated with the use of pesticides and promote sustainable intensification of agriculture. Child labour will be addressed within the Farmer Field Schools on Integrated Production and Pest Management. Also, in Malawi, the Ministry of Agriculture, with the technical support of FAO, is developing communication and capacity building material regarding the hazardousness of children's exposure to pesticides, which extension officers will disseminate amongst farmers.

In **Niger**, the Regional Chamber of Commerce is using the FAO-ILO visual tool to protect children from hazards in agriculture. Furthermore, the visual tool will be used by other partner organizations, such as IFAD and World Bank for an irrigation and pesticides project and for mobile agricultural schools, respectively.

In **Mali**, a training module for introducing child labour and pesticides in Farmer Field Schools was developed and used, along with the FAO-ILO visual tool, in training field school facilitators and agricultural extension officers.

The way forward

Combine knowledge and expertise on pesticide risk reduction and child labour in agriculture prevention to upscale and strengthen the implementation of joint initiatives. FAO aims to strengthen action to protect the rights of children, ensuring food security for all and reducing rural poverty, while also protecting human health.

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Visit FAO's webpage: www.fao.org/childlabouragriculture/en/