



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

A photograph of two young girls standing in a field of green plants. The girl on the left is wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, holding a bunch of green herbs. The girl on the right is wearing a blue puffer jacket and blue jeans, also holding a bunch of green herbs. A green bucket is on the ground in front of them. The background is a dense field of green plants.

ELIMINATING HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOUR THROUGH SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

INFORMATION NOTE AND
CALL FOR ACTION

KEY

MESSAGES

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Globally, **agriculture is one of the three most dangerous employment sectors** for any age group in terms of work-related illness, accidents and fatalities.^a



Children below 18 years of age are among those particularly vulnerable to hazardous work.^b



The agriculture sector accounts for 71 percent of all child labour that is 108 million boys and girls in crop production, fishing, livestock and forestry.^c



^a **FAO. 2020.** Working conditions. In *Decent Rural Employment* [online]. Rome. [Cited 5 November 2020]. <http://www.fao.org/rural-employment/work-areas/working-conditions>

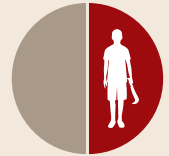
^b **ILO. 2017.** *Global estimates of child labour: results and trends, 2012-2016*. Geneva. (also available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575499.pdf).

^c **ILO. 2018.** *Towards the urgent elimination of hazardous child labour* [online]. Geneva. [Cited 5 November 2020]. https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_30315/lang--en/index.htm

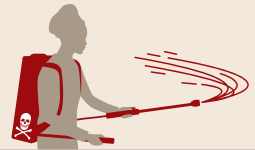


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Nearly half of all those in child labour – 73 million children in absolute terms – **are engaged in hazardous work.**^c



Agricultural pesticides and agrochemicals pose serious risks to the health of rural workers and communities, especially children.



Given that agriculture accounts for the largest portion of child labour and is one of the most dangerous sectors **a special focus is needed on hazardous child labour.**



It will not be possible to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and protect human health, livelihoods and environment **if hazardous child labour is not eliminated.**



HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOUR AND PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

Pesticides represent a serious health risk for rural workers and communities. Given that child labour is predominantly found in the agriculture sector, addressing children's exposure to pesticides and agrochemicals should be made top priority.

CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO PESTICIDES

AT HOME

If pesticides are **unsafely stored** at home, or if empty containers are used to store food or carry drinking water.

When **performing tasks that may seem harmless** such as washing clothes that have been in contact with pesticides.



AT PLAY

When they **play in fields where pesticides have been applied** or through **pesticide drift**.

Touching the plants or **just breathing the air where pesticides were used** exposes them to dangers.



AT WORK

Children are exposed to pesticides when **involved in the mixing and preparation phase**.

Children are also exposed **when applying pesticides**. This includes spreading pesticides by hand or by using a back-sprayer.





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WHY ARE CHILDREN MORE AT RISK?

BIOLOGICAL REASONS

Children's **minds and bodies are still developing**.

The lower body weight and smaller size of children combined with their faster rate of breathing and higher surface-area-to-volume ratio, result in **greater exposure to pesticides**.

Children's organs are **less able to eliminate pesticides**.

The **high growth rate of children amplifies the toxic effects on developing cells and organs**, which may only manifest years later.



BEHAVIOURAL REASONS

Children are more likely to ingest pesticides due to **greater "hand-to-mouth" behaviour**.

Children **lack the capacity and skills to assess risks** when working with or close to pesticides.



SOCIOECONOMIC REASONS

Poverty is a cause and a consequence of child labour and vulnerable groups may be forced to choose between health and income.

In rural areas, workers are often **poorly covered** by labour law and have **limited access** to social protection, personal protective equipment, healthcare and information.



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FAO IN ADDRESSING CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO PESTICIDES?

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Identify

high-risk and hazardous scenarios as well as vulnerable groups.

Raise awareness

among vulnerable groups including children in many regional contexts.

Collaborate

with various stakeholders to detect and reduce the risks posed by hazardous pesticides.

Change

situations of child labour into decent youth employment for the age cohort 14/15–17 by eliminating work-related hazards.

Contributing towards the achievement of SDGs



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Who we are

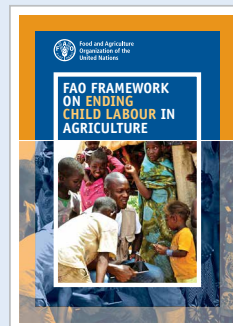
The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade

is a legally binding, multilateral environmental agreement. The Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention is jointly hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with FAO having primarily responsibility for all technical matters related to pesticides and severely hazardous pesticide formulations and UNEP for other chemicals. The Secretariat provides technical assistance for countries to increase their capacity in managing the risk of chemicals and pesticides.

Please see: www.pic.int

The FAO Child Labour in Agriculture Prevention team

works at the global, regional and country levels to address the root causes of child labour in agriculture, including within crop production, fisheries, forestry and livestock. The team works in close collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), especially in the context of the **International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture** as well as **Alliance 8.7**.



Please see: **FAO framework on ending child labour in agriculture**

FAO'S GLOBAL MOMENTUM AND CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH

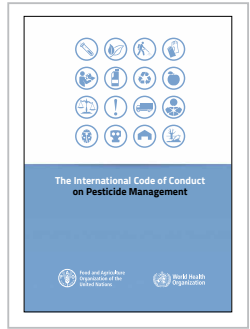


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FAO is raising awareness, strengthening knowledge and building capacity across the globe to reduce and prevent children's exposure to pesticides. FAO has country and regional offices around the world and thus the distinctive capacity to reach and support rural and more vulnerable populations, including smallholder producers.

Addressing child labour concerns in global mechanisms on pesticide management

In 2013, a revised **International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management** was approved at the thirty-eight 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 well-being of children, encouraging governments and the pesticide industry to take specific actions to reduce children's vulnerability to exposure.



Supporting policymakers in the phasing out of hazardous pesticides

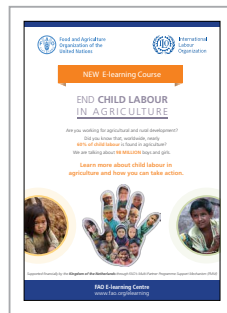
The **Severely Hazardous Pesticide Formulation (SHPF) toolkit** developed by the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat provides guidance on setting up a national system to record and submit details on pesticide poisonings and incidents, and on strengthening decision-making, improving pesticide risk reduction and phasing out hazardous pesticides at the national level.



Raising awareness on children's exposure to pesticides

In 2018, FAO presented the topic of pesticide management and hazardous child labour during the thirty-second International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH). In 2019, FAO contributed to the occupational safety and health (OSH) Africa Conference – the first event in Africa aiming to bring together stakeholders from across the region and beyond to discuss the existing OSH challenges in Africa.

The FAO–ILO e-learning series **End Child Labour in Agriculture** includes a special course on **Pesticide management and child labour prevention** designed to build capacity to reduce hazardous child labour through improved pesticide management.

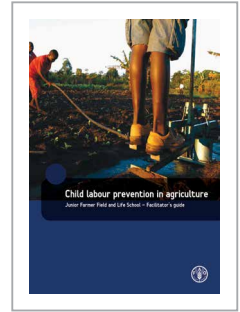


The widely used FAO–ILO visual tool **Protect children from pesticides!** helps agricultural extension workers, rural educators, labour inspectors, producer organizations and others to teach farmers and their families how to identify and minimize risks related to pesticides at home and on the farm. The guide is available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish and has been adapted to six regions around the globe.



Engaging youth in alternatives to pesticides

FAO's junior farmer field and life schools (JFFLSs) approach raises awareness on child labour through the module on **Child labour prevention in agriculture**, and includes good agricultural practices that can minimize the use of pesticides and make working in agriculture safer for youth.



Strengthening collaboration for capacity development

FAO delivers capacity building activities at national, sub-regional and regional level, bringing together different stakeholders and building fruitful collaboration. This includes an annual presentation to the Vula Pesticide Discussion Forum of the University of Cape Town's postgraduate programme on Pesticide Risk Management.



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REGIONAL AND COUNTRY LEVEL ACTION

GUINEA-BISSAU

Survey carried out in rural communities to detect pesticide poisoning cases.

Awareness-raising accomplished among farmers.

Awareness-raising campaign conducted on local community radio.

GHANA

Technical working committee formed.

Capacity development programme implemented.

2 000 copies of *Protect children from pesticides!* distributed nationwide.

MALI

The idea and first pilot version of the facilitator's guide on protecting children from pesticides was born.

A farmer field school (FFS) module on child labour, in the context of Integrated Pest Management learning, piloted.

NIGER

A manual for plant protection officers on hazardous child labour realized.

LEBANON

Storybook for younger and illiterate children developed on eliminating children's exposure to pesticide in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

OSH in agriculture APP developed for youth.

PAKISTAN

FFS module currently under development on addressing child labour and hazardous work and improving human health.

UGANDA

Capacity development training carried out nationwide.

Research generated on hazardous work in the dairy and maize value chain.

Tool developed on protecting young workers from hazardous work.

MALAWI

Pesticides control boards engaged to integrate child labour concerns into extension materials.



Testimonial from Uganda

Partnering with farmers, schools and Government to protect children and young workers from pesticides in Uganda

In 2017, over 1 700 copies of the visual guide *Protect children from pesticides!* were distributed across Uganda to raise awareness in farming communities. In August 2017, FAO Uganda met Ms Gertrude Badaru, the district agricultural officer in Arua District (home to 252 250 South Sudanese refugees, 61 percent of whom below 18 years of age). She confirmed that unsafe use of pesticides was a major problem in farming communities in Arua and people were unaware of the dangers.

Following her participation in an FAO/ILO training programme, Ms Badaru went on a radio talk show to sensitize the public about

the dangers of pesticides. The feedback was overwhelming, with listeners shocked at the potential dangers of pesticides, especially to children. Consequently, the Agriculture Department conducted more radio talk shows to sensitize the public about the visual guide and the dangers of pesticides to children, targeting schools and farming communities.

Ms Badaru pledged to use her technical expertise to train her fellow extension workers in Arua District and to continue with public sensitization programmes on occupational safety and health for young workers and child labour.

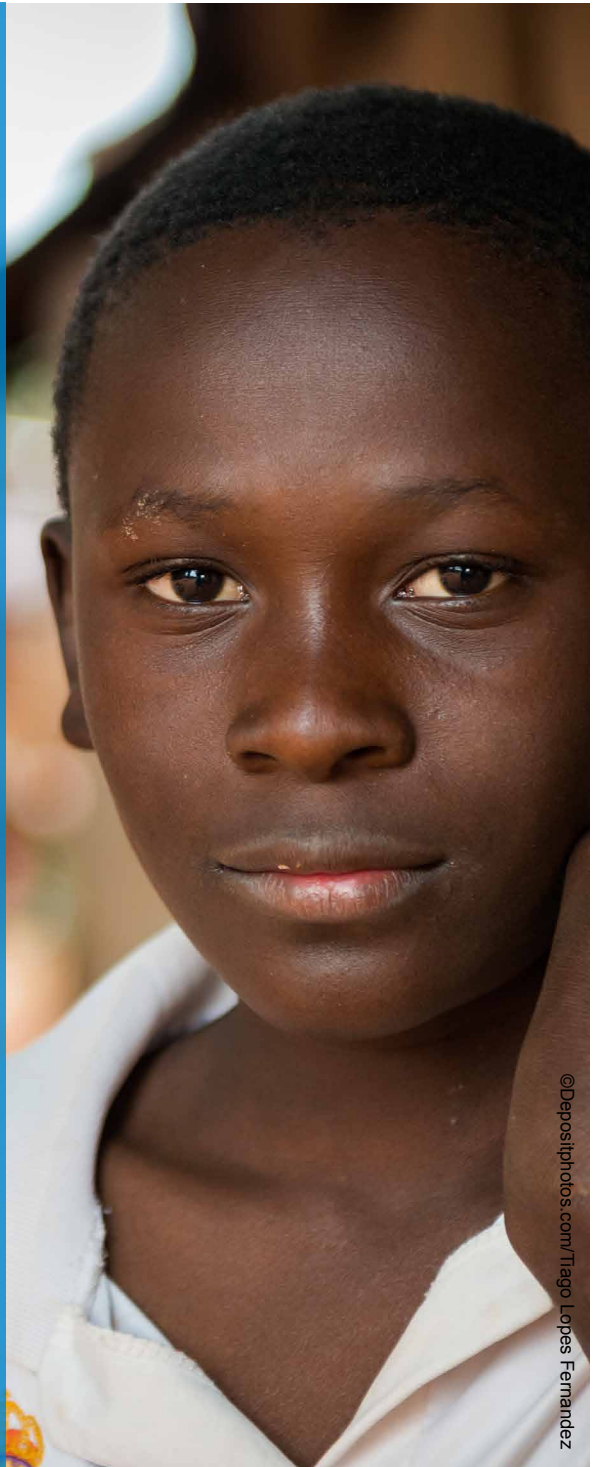
WHAT NEXT?

Train agriculture and labour stakeholders and disseminate the right tools to address child labour and pesticide management at the national level.

Foster collaboration and regional partnerships.

Raise awareness and disseminate capacity development tools at the global level through international and regional events, webinars and other discussion platforms.

Promote OSH culture and content in the curricula of agricultural schools and Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET).





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