



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

A photograph of two young girls sitting on a wooden bench outdoors, focused on cleaning or sorting a large pile of white, shell-like agricultural products. The girl in the foreground is wearing a red and white patterned shirt, while the girl in the background is wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and yellow pants. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# Accelerating action to help to end **child labour** **in agriculture** in Asia



Regional workshop on ending Child Labour in Agriculture  
28 September 2021

Regional report



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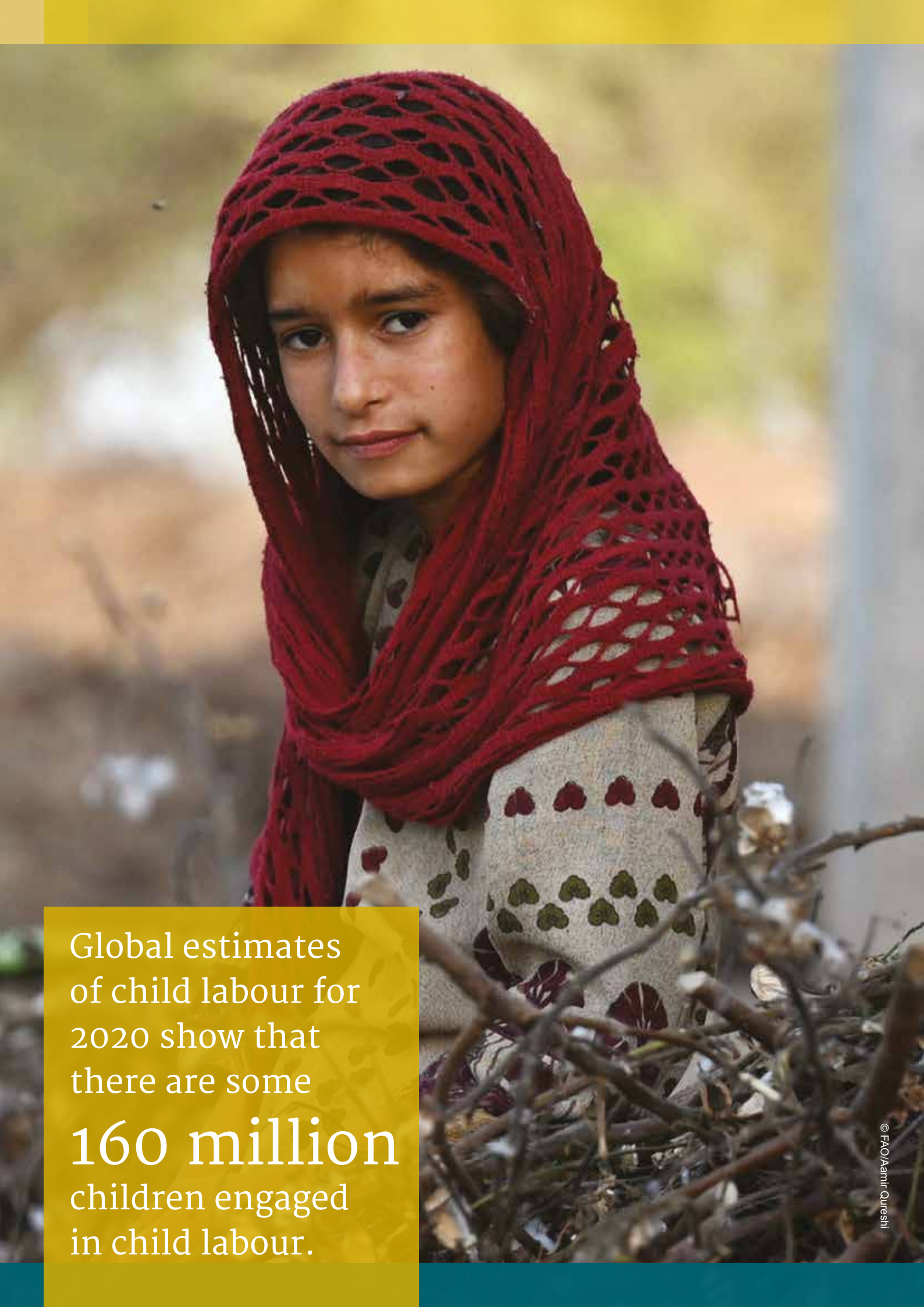
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Global estimates  
of child labour for  
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# 1. Introduction

The General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, inviting all United Nations organizations to raise awareness and share good practices on the importance of eradicating child labour.

Child labour continues to be a major concern in large parts of the world. Data available on global estimates of child labour for 2020 show that there are some 160 million children engaged in child labour, of which 79 million are performing hazardous work (International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2021). In other words, almost 1 in 10 of all children worldwide is engaged in child labour. The largest share of child labour (70 percent) remains in agriculture, with 112 million children in total. Some 48.1 million children (43 percent of all child labourers) are involved in hazardous work in agriculture. Most of the hazardous work in agriculture is performed by boys (30.7 million, or 63.8 percent). Without a breakthrough in the agriculture sector, achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 8.7, to end child labour in all its worst forms by 2025, remains elusive.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) works to help to end child labour in agriculture. Child labour undermines the efforts to eradicate hunger, malnutrition in all its forms and poverty of present and future generations. FAO

supports governments to integrate child labour issues into national agriculture and rural development policies and strategies, and supports the involvement of agriculture stakeholders in labour policy dialogue. In addition, FAO works to enhance the available knowledge on child labour in agriculture and its subsectors.

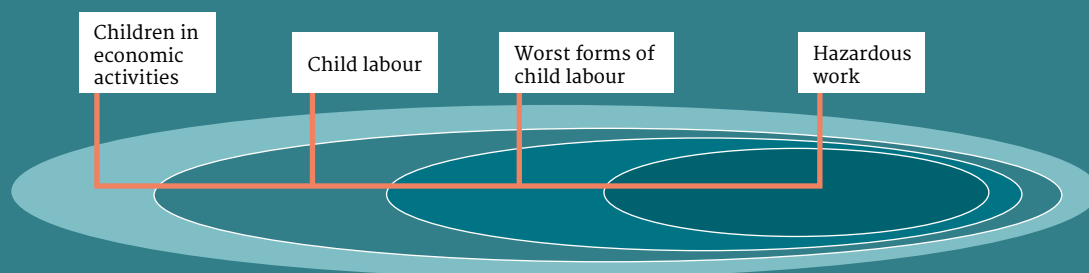
FAO recognizes the centrality of engaging in a multisectoral approach to eliminate child labour in agriculture with the overarching goal to complement efficiently the actions of other organizations and sectors to address child labour at the global, regional and local levels.

Child labour in agriculture is deeply rooted in poverty and food insecurity.

In many countries child labour is mainly an agricultural issue that is harming children, damaging the agriculture sector and perpetuating rural poverty from generation to generation. For instance, when children are forced to work long hours, their opportunity to attend school and develop their skills is limited and this can interfere with their ability to access decent and productive employment opportunities later in life. Natural resources management promotes sustainable food systems and it is key to ensuring and improving the availability, accessibility and affordability of safe and nutritious food, to promoting healthy and sustainable diets and to addressing some of the root causes of child labour.

## BOX 1. DEFINING CHILD LABOUR

Not all work done by children should be classified as child labour to be targeted for elimination. The participation of children or adolescents in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling is generally regarded as being something positive. Age-appropriate tasks that are of lower risk and do not interfere with a child's schooling and leisure time can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment. Especially in the context of family farming, small-scale fisheries and livestock husbandry, some participation of children in non-hazardous activities, outside school hours and school holidays, can be positive, as it contributes to the intergenerational transfer of technical and social skills and children's food security. Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and work skills are attributes often detected in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work.



The term “child labour” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- ▶ is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and
- ▶ interferes with their schooling:
  - by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
  - by obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
  - by requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses, and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of “work” can be called “child labour” depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as between sectors within countries.

Partnerships remain critical to eliminate child labour and FAO cooperates with a range of organizations on this matter. Particularly relevant are the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture and Alliance 8.7.

FAO and its partners are working to end the dependence of smallholder farms on child labour by improving the skills of farmers,

especially smallholder farmers, improving the management of natural resources to secure sustainable livelihood opportunities, providing access to inputs and credit, especially for women, and promoting the adoption of sustainable and safe agricultural practices in order to improve productivity and make smallholder farms viable enough to employ adults in decent work.



## 2. Child labour, agriculture, food security and nutrition nexus

Asia is diverse, vast and complex – ethnically, culturally, religiously and economically. The region’s rapid economic growth has led to a significant reduction in extreme poverty, but this has been accompanied by rising inequalities (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 2018). The region has seen some of the most remarkable economic transformations and it includes several of the wealthiest countries in the world, as well as the world’s poorest.

The region is progressing towards achieving no poverty (SDG 1)<sup>1</sup> and zero hunger (SDG 2);<sup>2</sup> however, progress has paused in recent years due to challenges that have seriously tested its socioeconomic

infrastructure, including natural disasters, economic crises, conflicts and the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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- <sup>1</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. The first Sustainable Development Goal aims to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”. Its seven associated targets aim, among others, to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty, and implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.
  - <sup>2</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 2 is to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.



More must be done to overcome the obstacles that impede progress towards the achievement of those goals. For example, to achieve no poverty (SDG 1) more action is needed to improve resilience to natural disasters, enhance adequate access to social protection, increase investment in basic services for the poor and vulnerable, and invest in poverty eradication given the widening of existing inequalities in the region (ESCAP, 2018). To achieve zero hunger (SDG 2), more efforts need to be directed to reducing food insecurity and malnutrition (FAO *et al.*, 2020). Creating a sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food system is essential to produce diverse and nutritious foods for a healthy diet (ESCAP, 2021). The region must accelerate progress on zero hunger, since the progress made so far has been too slow for success to be achieved by 2030 (ESCAP, 2021).

The elimination of child labour in agriculture is key to making progress towards achieving SDG 1 and SDG 2 in Asia.

Ending child labour in agriculture is crucial for future decent youth employment

opportunities, poverty eradication and the achievement of zero hunger. Most people rely on agriculture for their employment, income and livelihoods. Agricultural development is one of the most powerful tools for ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. Growth in the agriculture sector is two to four times more effective in raising incomes among the poorest people compared to growth in other sectors (World Bank Group, 2015). Analyses carried out in 2016 (World Bank Group, 2016) found that 65 percent of poor working adults made a living through agriculture. Poorly nourished people tend to lack the physical capacity to expand agriculture production, and poor households lack sufficient income and access to an adequate quantity and quality of diversified food to meet nutritional requirements. Furthermore, environmental degradation is one of the leading challenges for sustainable development, decent work, social equity and biodiversity conservation. This degradation leads to a reduction or loss of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of agricultural production

## BOX 2. OVERVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

- ▶ Asia and the Pacific is still home to 351 million undernourished people, more than half of the global total (688 million).
  - Southern Asia has the highest number of undernourished people (257.3 million).
  - There are 64.7 million undernourished people in South-Eastern Asia.
- ▶ An estimated 74.5 million children under 5 years of age are stunted in Asia, or over half of the 144 million stunted children globally.
  - Southern Asia has more stunted children than any other subregion in the world, with 55.9 million stunted children, or over one in three stunted children globally.

Notes: Figures are for 2019. Asia and the Pacific refers to States that are members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Source: FAO *et al.*, 2021.



(United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016). If climate change and environmental degradation are mitigated through the adoption of technology, and if children are not exposed to hazardous work and have access to free, quality compulsory education and vocational training in rural areas and sufficient and nutritious food, children will have the resources to grow and become the healthy, productive and skilled producers or workers of tomorrow.

To achieve the overarching goal of reducing hunger and malnutrition and eradicating poverty, it is necessary to coordinate and integrate actions to maximize their impact and to support sustainable food

production and agriculture. Child labour harms children, damages the agriculture sector and perpetuates rural poverty from generation to generation.

FAO has made efforts to respond to the challenges and to address the priorities in Asia in a coherent, consistent and coordinated manner to achieve significant results at the country level. These efforts have helped to enhance the relevance and coherence of the global commitments to regional priorities and have facilitated an integrated, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach in terms of delivery at the country level.



## 3. Child labour in agriculture: challenges in Asia

### BOX 3. CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE: KEY FACTS

- ▶ Globally, 160 million children are engaged in child labour. Some 70 percent of them – nearly 112 million boys and girls – work in agriculture (+4 million since 2016), of which 67.8 million are boys (60.5 percent) and 44.3 million are girls (39.5 percent). While the numbers have increased significantly among boys (+8.3 percent) since 2016, they have decreased only marginally for girls (–1.7 percent).
- ▶ Agriculture has roughly equal shares of boys and girls in child labour. However, when household chores are considered, such as water collection, the gender gap in prevalence among boys and girls aged 5 to 14 years is reduced by almost half.
- ▶ Over three-quarters of all children aged 5 to 11 years in child labour work in agriculture. This underscores agriculture as the main entry point to child labour for the youngest group of children. Since 2016, the numbers for this age group have increased substantially, from 60 million to 68 million children (+13.3 percent), a group for whom the physical demands and hazards of farm work can be particularly damaging.
- ▶ Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors, together with mining and construction. Globally, 48.1 million children (43 percent of all child labourers) are involved in hazardous work in agriculture.
- ▶ Most of the hazardous work in agriculture is performed by boys (30.7 million, or 63.8 percent).
- ▶ Nearly half of all child labour in the world takes place in Africa, where 72 million children – or one in five – are in child labour, and the vast majority are engaged in agriculture. It is followed by Asia, with 62 million.
- ▶ Across sectors, family work accounts for the greatest portion of child labour across regions (115.3 million, or 72.1 percent) and has grown in relative importance over the last four years (+8.7 percent). Hazardous work accounts for a substantial portion of family work (28.6 percent for ages 5–11 years, and 47.2 percent for ages 12–14 years), counter to the common perception of the family as a safer working environment.
- ▶ The agriculture sector diminishes in importance as children grow older. However, agriculture remains the main employer of child labourers for children aged 12–14 years and children aged 15–17 years, that is, of legal working age.

Source: ILO and UNICEF, 2021.

Child labour in Asia has trended downward over the last four years in percentage and absolute terms. The 2020 global estimates (ILO and UNICEF, 2021) show that the prevalence and the number of children in child labour in Central and Southern Asia (5.5 percent and 26.3 million) and in Eastern and South–Eastern Asia (6.2 percent and 24.3 million) have declined consistently since 2008.<sup>3</sup> While there are nearly 50 million fewer children in child labour in the region now than in 2008, recent trends suggest we are falling far behind on the collective commitment to end child labour in all its forms by 2025. As in other regions, the majority of child labour is found in agriculture in Asia (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Agriculture accounts for 58.7 percent of all child labour in Central and Southern Asia and for 56.6 percent in Eastern and South–Eastern Asia.

Globally, the proportion of child labourers in agriculture has increased to 112 million boys and girls (+4 million since 2016).

Hazardous work constitutes a sizeable share of child labour in agriculture among children aged 5 to 14 years, with 32.9 percent (31.4 million) of children exposed to hazardous work. Child labour distribution by age range shows that the share of children aged 5–11 years constitutes 50.7 percent of the total number of children in child labour in Central and Southern Asia; the figure for Eastern and South–Eastern Asia is 54.7 percent for that age group.

The percentage and number of children aged 5–17 years in hazardous work in Asia fell from 3.4 percent in 2016 to 2.6 percent in 2020. Boys (3.5 percent) were two times more likely to be found in hazardous work than girls (1.6 percent).

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the present paper, the regional groupings are those used for reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals. See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/regional-groups/>.

#### BOX 4. FEATURES OF AGRICULTURAL WORK

Agricultural work may be:

- ▶ seasonal – agricultural labour demand depends on production cycles and the seasonal movements of animals.
- ▶ informal – many economic activities in agriculture are, by law or practice, not registered or insufficiently covered by formal regulations.
- ▶ hazardous – agricultural work often involves the use of hazardous tools or equipment and toxic substances such as pesticides. Agricultural workers can also be exposed to extreme weather conditions, rough seas, biological hazards, long/irregular working hours or carrying heavy loads.
- ▶ underregulated – workplaces can be in remote locations, fragmented or concealed for illegal purposes, making law enforcement difficult.

Child labour in agriculture is often invisible, with most children working as unpaid family workers on dispersed small-scale farms or in rural enterprises.

Source: FAO, 2020a.



Just as ending poverty and achieving food security are global priorities, eliminating child labour is as well, and it is embedded in SDG target 8.7. The world will not be able to achieve this goal without eliminating child labour in the agriculture sector. Child labour is considered a cause and an effect of rural poverty and hunger, with its nexus cutting across many social, economic, political and human rights divides.

There cannot be “zero hunger” without “zero child labour”.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis, as well as economic, agricultural, environmental, climate-related and human-caused disasters, together with fragile contexts, is exacerbating rural poverty and leading to an increase in household poverty, school dropout and food insecurity. Children are being increasingly involved in working activities to compensate for labour gaps and income losses in food and agriculture production, while vulnerability at community and household levels is increased.

Child labour in agriculture is driven by factors from both the demand side and the supply side and is determined by the features of agriculture as an economic sector and occupation. Child labour in agriculture takes place in subsistence farming, fisheries and aquaculture, livestock and forestry, as well as in domestic, regional and global value chains. Agriculture, including fisheries and aquaculture, forestry and livestock, is a sector with a high incidence of work hazards and risks, which have a severe impact on children’s developing bodies and minds.

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## There cannot be “zero hunger” without “zero child labour”.

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By endangering the health and education of young people, child labour perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty and hampers the sustainable development of rural communities and individuals. Especially in cases where school dropout rates can be high and work hazards severe, child labour interferes with the accumulation of human capital as it substitutes schooling. In the longer term, stunted skills lead to low productivity and incomes in rural populations. If children are working in harsh conditions instead of benefiting from education, it will not be possible to achieve sustainable agriculture and food systems that will feed the world, protect the planet and guarantee good livelihoods for farmers.

The efforts of agriculture stakeholders must continue to be focused on tackling poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, increasing access to free, quality and compulsory education, empowering women and youth in rural areas, and partnering with other actors, including rural communities, cooperatives, the private sector and all value chain actors. For this to happen, there needs to be a multi-pronged approach to addressing all aspects of child labour that promotes inclusive rural transformation and rural development.

## 3.1 Fisheries and aquaculture

Information on child labour in fisheries and aquaculture is limited, and data on child labour in agriculture are not generally disaggregated by subsector. Nevertheless, research indicates that the numbers are important and child labour is particularly common in the small-scale informal sector. Children engage in a wide variety of activities, both in capture fisheries and aquaculture and in all associated down- and upstream operations, such as processing, marketing, net making and boatbuilding, and guarding fish-pond facilities as part of family enterprises, as unpaid family workers or employed by others (FAO and ILO, 2013). Work in fisheries and aquaculture is a high-risk activity and is considered – along with sectors such as mining and logging – to be among the most hazardous industries in which to work (The Asia Foundation and ILO, 2015). Fatality and injury rates of fishers are much higher than the national averages for workers in many countries. Globally, fishing is ranked as one of the four most dangerous occupations in which to work, in terms of

loss of life, serious injuries and occupational diseases (ILO, 2013).

Fisheries and aquaculture make important contributions to meeting the SDGs on ending poverty and achieving food security, are a potential source of wealth creation and provide essential nutritional benefits, especially for small-scale communities who rely on fish as their essential source of income (FAO, 2020b). When child labour is used as cheap labour to cut fishing costs, it may not only be harmful to children’s development, but it can also have a negative effect on the sustainability of the fishery activity and on the economy. To realize SDG 14<sup>4</sup> and make fishing and aquaculture sustainable systems, it will be necessary to step up efforts to eliminate child labour, protect young workers against the worst forms of child labour and invest in a healthy,

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<sup>4</sup> SDG 14 is to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.



well-educated seafood workforce for the future. This too is necessary to achieve SDG 8 and ensure that the millions of people who derive their livelihoods from fishing and aquaculture work under decent conditions.

There are many tasks in fisheries and aquaculture that children should not do, and it is important to address the root causes of the problem and ensure viable alternatives for children and their families. Likewise, it is important to address the demand for child labour; otherwise, children removed from child labour will be replaced by other children. Furthermore, if hazardous working conditions are addressed, it is possible to turn child labour into decent employment for rural youth,<sup>5</sup> including those 15–17 years of age. In addition, as most child labour is a result of economic dependency, it is important to consider improving economic opportunities for youth and adults. Programmes to reduce poverty and improve fishing technologies and practices will take away the need for child labour. This could be achieved through, for example, improved value addition, reduced loss and waste along the fish value chain, and additional or diversified livelihood opportunities outside of current fishing activities.

<sup>5</sup> In 2014, the FAO Committee on Fisheries endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. This is the first internationally agreed instrument dedicated to the small-scale fisheries sector, and includes a chapter on social development, employment and decent work with explicit reference to child labour eradication. It is important to note that reducing reliance on child labour could create opportunities for youth employment.

## 3.2 Crop farming: rice

Action on child labour is often focused on international markets and value chains for export, but the majority of child labourers in agriculture work in small-scale, family-based agriculture, including food crop production.

Rice is the staple food in Asia. Over 90 percent of the world's rice is produced and consumed in Asia (FAO, 2000). For example, in the Philippines, rice is the major contributor to the country's annual agricultural output, providing about 20 percent of the gross value added of agriculture and employing some 2.5 million households (FAO, 2018). Its crucial production depends on countless smallholder farmers, who often manage less than 1 hectare of paddy fields. A large proportion of the production is consumed at the farming household level and the surplus ends up in local and domestic markets.

Small-scale rice producers play a significant role in providing food security, jobs and income across the region. Rice is a highly labour-intensive crop and the share of family labour to total labour cost increases over time. The main driving forces behind child labour are household poverty and the unaddressed challenges related to sustainable farming faced by smallholder farmers, with low crop prices and the overall informality in the sector common across different regions. In rice production, the demand for manual labour is high and children participate in many tasks. Children in fact perform non-age appropriate and hazardous tasks, which may have detrimental impacts on their





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health, safety and morals and interfere with their education. Children may be involved in the use of agrochemicals and work barefoot in paddy fields, which exposes them to cuts and bruises. In some cases, children work in rice milling plants, exposing them to respiratory risks.

There are no possible exceptions for children to perform hazardous work and all children must be protected from hazardous child labour. Children facing hazardous work conditions in rice production or other crop farming that directly endangers their health, safety or moral development require special attention. To address these challenges, proactive efforts are needed in order to modernize production lines (especially on small-scale rice farms) and adopt safe practices and labour-saving technologies and approaches to decrease children's involvement in hazardous tasks. For

example, the System of Rice Intensification can increase rice productivity when there are smaller quantities of inputs. But while this system reduces the time spent on pesticide application and transplanting, it can increase the time spent on weeding. This can affect the demand for child labour, as weeding is often done by children. Therefore, combining the System of Rice Intensification with alternative practices or technologies, such as simple mechanical weeders, can reduce the time needed for weeding and ensure maximum benefits for the household. Various weed control methods, including complementary practices, mechanical weeding, chemical weeding, biological control, integrated crop management (prescription farming) and fine-tuned knowledge, need to be upscaled in specific regions and in cropping systems. Proper technology backed by policy support is required to address these issues.

## 4. Addressing child labour in agriculture: opportunities in Asia

Several initiatives are taking place at national and regional levels to achieve SDG target 8.7. They involve, among other things, multi-stakeholder dialogues on developing policies to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

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FAO work will promote regional knowledge-sharing actions and capacity development trainings to respond to the ASEAN priorities on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

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8.9 million  
more children would be  
in child labour by 2022  
as result of the **poverty**  
caused by the  
**COVID-19 pandemic.**

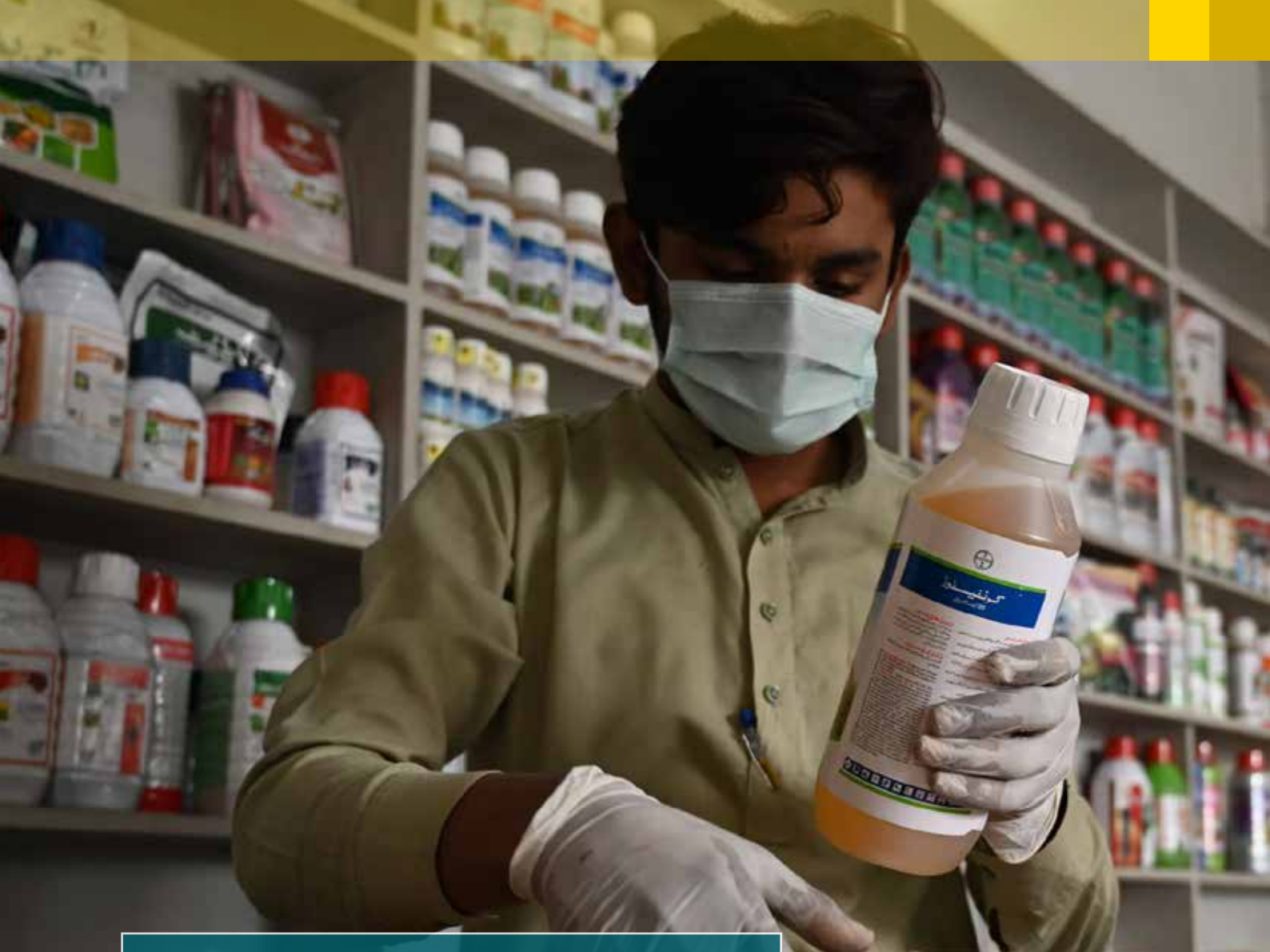
## 4.1 Regional child labour initiatives: ASEAN Roadmap on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2025

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Roadmap for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2025 provides a region-wide, intersectoral framework for cooperation that reinforces ongoing national-level efforts and global commitments of ASEAN member States to actively support and work towards the realization of the SDGs, notably SDG target 8.7 on the elimination of forced labour by 2030 and the elimination of child labour by 2025. Building on the efforts to implement the ASEAN Roadmap for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016, the renewed ASEAN Roadmap has a strong focus on ensuring access to free, quality and compulsory education, especially in rural and remote areas, on promoting rural development and poverty reduction policies, on enhancing national legal frameworks on child labour, and on promoting social protection and labour market policies that lead to the formalization of and decent work for young workers. In addition to these policy priorities, the ASEAN road map emphasizes researching and understanding child labour, strengthening partnerships and

coordinating efforts in the region and at the national level. It contributes to the expansion of multisectoral networks and seeks to stimulate debate and actions on intersecting issues affecting child labour in agriculture. The ASEAN road map was endorsed by Senior Labour Officials at their meeting on 25 August 2020, and it is expected to be endorsed by other sectoral bodies, including during the Senior Official Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, and implemented in other sectors.

The ASEAN priorities on child labour are also reflected in national action plans, and several ASEAN member States have adopted and implemented national road maps, action plans or other similar policy initiatives aimed at speeding up their national-level action against child labour, promoting a coherent and integrated approach at national and regional levels. There are opportunities for future cooperation between FAO and other regional partners within the context of the implementation of the ASEAN road map. The efforts of FAO will support and promote the role and participation of agriculture stakeholders in the prevention of child labour in ASEAN countries and develop practical lessons on effective initiatives and models to improve the effectiveness of child labour prevention in South-East Asia. FAO work will promote regional knowledge-sharing actions and capacity development trainings to respond to the ASEAN priorities on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.





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The largest share of child labour remains in agriculture, which accounts for

**58.7 percent**

of all child labour in Central and Southern Asia and for

**56.6 percent**

in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

A young girl with dark hair in a braid, wearing a yellow and white striped long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is sitting on the ground in a rural, agricultural setting. She is looking down and working with a tool, possibly a hoe or similar implement, on the ground. The background shows a wooden structure, likely a barn or shed, with a thatched roof. The overall scene is one of a child engaged in manual labor in an agricultural environment.

Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors. Globally

**48.1 million** children are involved in hazardous work in agriculture.



## 4.2 Alliance 8.7: “pathfinder countries” in Asia

In Asia, three countries, namely Nepal, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, have volunteered to become an Alliance 8.7 pathfinder country to go further and faster to achieve SDG target 8.7. Alliance 8.7 is a global partnership fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation to support governments to achieve target 8.7. It promotes: (a) accelerated action to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour; (b) research, data collection and knowledge-sharing on prevalence and “what works”; and (c) driving innovation and leveraging resources. The Alliance supports the national efforts of an initial group of 15 pathfinder countries that have committed to accelerating action, organizing national multi-stakeholder consultations and setting up respective time-bound action plans with measurable targets.

The Government of Viet Nam, for example, indicated that child labour in the agriculture sector was one of its priority areas for engagement. National efforts are converging on three focus areas:

- ▶ Review and revise, and update or complete the legal framework and provide greater clarity regarding work that is prohibited for children in agriculture among different age groups, as well as the allowed working hours for each age group.

- ▶ Intensify the implementation of poverty reduction and income-generation programmes, including those implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture.
- ▶ Increase awareness-raising and communications regarding child labour with a particular focus on the legal framework, the negative effects of child labour on children’s well-being and poverty reduction.

The Government of Viet Nam has carried out several initiatives that deserve to be highlighted as good practices and has made important progress in the formulation and implementation of national policies and actions aimed at protecting children from child labour in agriculture. FAO works in Viet Nam to support farmers’ livelihoods through several integrated approaches (FAO, 2020a). These include promoting the adoption of safe practices in agriculture, fostering sustainable labour-saving technologies and practices, incorporating agriculture, food and nutrition in school curricula in rural areas, empowering youth aged 15–17 years and building their skills, enhancing economic capacity and building the resilience of livelihoods through social protection, promoting socially sustainable agriculture value chains and raising awareness about child labour.



## 4.3 Zoom in: country experiences

Cotton crop production is important for the economy of Pakistan. Cotton production is heavily demanding in terms of labour, natural resources and chemicals. It is also a crop vulnerable to pests and climate change. Over the years, labour shortages and a lack of eco-friendly seed variety have emerged as key challenges in both production and value chain processes of cotton.

Pakistan is predominantly characterized by small agricultural landholdings, where farmers are dependent on hired or pooling labour. Often, small farm operations are carried out with the help of the family unit instead of hired agriculture labour from outside. Thus, the smallholder or landless farmer (sharecropper/tenant) depends mostly on his or her family to save labour costs and increase profits. The whole family, including children, contribute to this enterprise for their livelihood and income. Child labour is prevalent in identified cotton districts, where children work in fields as part of their family activity. However, children are at risk physically (fatigue and pesticide exposure) and mentally (less leisure time) and their school outcomes may also be affected at harvest time. Pesticide use is substantially higher in cotton than with other crops. Cotton growers use pesticides by increasing the quantity/dosage, as they believe it increases production. Unfortunately, these poor preventive measures not only damage the crops but also put farming communities, including children, at

high risk. Children under the age of 18 years should not be exposed to or handle pesticides – and this should be included in national lists of hazardous work prohibited for children.

In Pakistan, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research has proactively raised awareness on child labour issues and it works to make agriculture policies and regulations sensitive to health and safety in the interest of children and youth. The Ministry supports actions aimed at reducing the dependency of farmers on pesticides, reducing production costs and creating opportunities to adopt strategies such as the National Integrated Pest Management Programme. For example, in 2019, the Ministry organized an event to commemorate World Cotton Day with the underlying theme of “Promoting rational and safe use of pesticides”. The event aimed to raise awareness among farming communities and the private sector about the need for rational and regulated use of pesticides and the adoption of safe techniques in their handling, application and disposal.

At the community level the Government of Pakistan, together with FAO, supports interventions aimed at building the capacity of farming communities for more effective and safe use of pesticides while improving the quality of the cotton being grown. In fact, farmers’ field schools and women’s open schools have proven to be a successful approach to increase farmers’ knowledge and decision-making skills and their integrated pest management practices related to cotton crop cultivation. The farmers’ field schools are building technical capacity towards achieving increased

productivity and better returns while providing training and technical assistance on the rational and safe use of pesticides. Safe agriculture practices and technologies reduce the economic and functional dependency of households on forms of non-decent work and help to provide options for better livelihoods. Furthermore, the women's open schools are helping rural women to understand the importance of alternative and safe agriculture practices for their health and safety and that of their children. FAO advocates for safer farming practices in the country. Great attention is given to raising awareness about child labour and to promoting decent work conditions and occupational safety and health measures in agriculture, while simultaneously encouraging the implementation of safe and sustainable practices in agriculture.

To address the root causes of child labour, FAO is also increasing knowledge about the linkages between gender roles, the household division of labour and child labour. FAO is working to strengthen women's economic empowerment in the province of Punjab by building life and technical skills of rural women and piloting income-generating activities.

In Cambodia, fisheries and aquaculture are critical to the livelihoods and nutrition of the rural population. Countless families must use their children as a workforce to survive. Youth aged 15–17 years are a particularly vulnerable group. FAO has been working with the Government of Cambodia to address child labour concerns, and the results achieved by the Government of Cambodia and agriculture stakeholders represent a success story.

Such achievements have been the result of a continuous multi-stakeholder approach, which started in 2010.

In particular, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Cambodia has proactively integrated child labour concerns into existing policies and legal frameworks. These efforts to mainstream child labour concerns into national programmes have led to the drafting of the Ministry's first child development strategy, which includes a component on child labour prevention. Moreover, the Ministry adopted the Action Plan for Gender Equality Promotion and Child Labour Elimination in the Fisheries Sector 2016–2020 and later updated it to 2015–2024, as well as the Policy and Strategic Framework on Childhood Development and Protection in the Agriculture Sector 2016–2020. The strategic framework seeks to prevent and reduce child labour, especially in hazardous work, and to improve vocational training in agriculture for youth aged 15–17 years.

The work done so far by the Government of Cambodia has set a solid foundation to further address child labour issues in a systematic and sustainable manner in the country. FAO will continue to cooperate with the Government to translate policy into action with the objective of reducing and preventing child labour in the fisheries and aquaculture sector and in agriculture in general.

FAO is a key partner in supporting the implementation of gender and child labour policies in the fisheries and aquaculture sector through cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and other stakeholders.



**We need to act now** and with urgency to address the root causes of child labour, including but not limited to poverty and hunger.



# 5. The way forward: opportunities to support the prevention of child labour in agriculture in Asia

The global estimates on child labour for 2020 illustrate a rural–urban divide in child labour prevalence, reflecting the persistence of poverty in rural areas.

Tackling child labour is a complex task; child labour is entwined in poverty, social injustices and inequalities and it cannot be addressed in isolation. Exposure to shocks such as COVID–19 crisis and natural disasters increases the vulnerability of households and exacerbates the factors leading to child labour.

In rural areas, child labour is triggered mostly by low family incomes, unemployment, poor infrastructure, inadequate or a lack of social protection systems, insufficient alternative livelihood options, poor access to free, quality and compulsory education, inadequate labour law enforcement, labour–intensive agricultural work, poor access to extension services, inadequate management of natural resources, environmental degradation, weak empowerment of women and traditional attitudes towards children’s full time participation in agricultural activities.

Recommendations are listed below for inclusion in cross–sectoral policies and programmes to support the prevention of child labour in agriculture, in order to break the vicious cycle between poverty and child labour. There are four main areas of policy intervention opportunities: social protection for rural households, sustainable agriculture, livelihood improvement and cross–sectoral policies and strategies.

## Social protection for rural households

- ▶ Support well–designed social protection strategies that can protect rural populations against risks and contingencies specific to rural areas, including by increasing school–feeding programmes and conditional cash–transfers.
- ▶ Scale up social protection programmes when a disaster strikes. Transfer value that includes a focus on the specific needs of children in emergencies and avoid negative coping strategies including child labour.

## Sustainable agriculture

- ▶ Address the root causes of child labour in agriculture by supporting smallholder farmers to secure a fair price, increase productivity levels and build more diversified economies for rural households.
- ▶ Provide parents working on commercial farms with school facilities as a worthwhile alternative to bringing their children to the fields.
- ▶ Promote labour-saving technologies and practices. Agricultural programmes can reduce the need for human power to carry out agricultural tasks and, as a consequence, lower the demand for child labour.
- ▶ Reduce hazards for children by promoting integrated pest management programmes and alternatives to hazardous pesticides for rural households.
- ▶ Promote the sustainable management of fisheries resources, improve safety and health along the whole aquatic foods value chain, and raise awareness about the drivers and trade off of child labour in the sector.
- ▶ Address child labour in the context of climate change and environmental degradation.
- ▶ Promote free, quality and compulsory education, including for boys and girls living in rural areas.

## Livelihood improvement

- ▶ Address the root causes of child labour in agriculture by improving rural household livelihoods.
- ▶ Develop policies to promote safe agriculture practices and technologies to reduce economic and functional dependencies of households on child labour in crop production, fisheries and aquaculture, forestry and livestock, especially for smallholder farmers.
- ▶ Invest in youth and younger youth through skills development. Integrate policies and actions to promote decent work for rural youth above the minimum age for employment and below 18 years of age (15–17 years).
- ▶ Address gender norms and discrimination that increase child labour risks, particularly for girls, related to domestic work and unpaid household chores.





## Cross-sectoral policies and strategies

- ▶ Strengthen capacities of agriculture stakeholders on how to be child-labour responsive. Mainstream child labour prevention in their areas of work and cooperate in an integrated way with other sectoral actors at all levels.
  - ▶ Raise awareness and knowledge about the drivers, magnitude and root causes of child labour in agriculture at all levels.
  - ▶ Generate knowledge about child labour in agriculture and support data collection on child labour in the various subsectors of agriculture to inform policies and programmes.
  - ▶ Adopt, design and implement agriculture policies and programmes to accelerate action against child labour in agriculture.
- ▶ Enhance policy coherence among relevant policy areas, such as education and training, social protection, decent work for youth and adults, and sustainable agriculture and rural development.
  - ▶ Align national legislation on the minimum working age and the end of compulsory schooling, while ensuring free quality schooling up to at least the minimum age for entering employment.
  - ▶ Address the inclusion of agriculture tasks in national hazardous work lists.
  - ▶ Support the implementation of the ASEAN Roadmap on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and promote the role and participation of agriculture stakeholders in the prevention of child labour in ASEAN countries.



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# ACTING TOGETHER TO END **CHILD LABOUR** IN **AGRICULTURE**

FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

End-Child-Labour@fao.org  
[www.fao.org/asiapacific/en/](http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/en/)  
[www.fao.org/rural-employment](http://www.fao.org/rural-employment)  
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