A global review of COVID-19 policy and programmatic responses to child labour in agrifood systems
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The elimination of all forms of child labour is foreseen by 2025 in the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG 8.7 target of eliminating child labour in all its forms is around the corner and by no means on track: an additional four million children were drawn into child labour in agriculture over the period 2016–2020, before the pandemic’s consequences could be visible. The COVID-19 pandemic has also taken a socioeconomic toll on the drivers of child labour in agrifood systems, and without mitigation measures, the number of children in child labour could rise further.

With the publications The COVID–19 consequences on child labour in agrifood systems and A global review of COVID–19 policy and programmes responses to child labour in agrifood systems, FAO strives to generate knowledge on the impact of COVID–19 on child labour. The two papers have been developed in the framework of the FAO project The COVID–19 impact on child labour in agrifood systems, implemented with the financial support of BMZ and the technical support of GIZ. In accordance with the Durban Call to Action of the 5th Global Conference on Child Labour, these two publications aim at “improving data […] to jointly progress towards the elimination of child labour in agriculture, including in fisheries and aquaculture.” While evidence on child labour is traditionally collected by occupational sectors, and thus focused on agriculture, these two publications look beyond agriculture production and into agrifood systems to encompass more situations where children actually engage to help secure families’ livelihoods.

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-OSHA</td>
<td>European Union - Occupational Safety and Health Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAIN</td>
<td>Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>INE</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional de Estadística</td>
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<tr>
<td>NREGA</td>
<td>Nationwide Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>5GCCL</td>
<td>5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour</td>
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Part I
Understanding the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and child labour in agrifood systems

1. Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic that interact with drivers of child labour in agrifood systems

1.1. The socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

Globally, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered government emergency responses to curb its spread in early 2020. These include lockdowns, movement restrictions, closures of schools, markets and businesses, and physical distancing measures, among others. While studies across the globe confirm that containment measures follow much of the guidance issued by the World Health Organization, regional centres for disease control and other regional bodies (Thorsen et al., 2021), research in Africa, from Tsikata and Torvikey (2021) indicates that specific contexts and needs of different communities may have not been considered adequately, leading to different results.

Preventive measures were monitored and enforced to different degrees across space and time. The Plurinational State of Bolivia, Panama and Peru enacted long and strict lockdowns. The Plurinational State of Bolivia enacted one of the longest, strictest national lockdowns globally (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021).
Within a week of having decreed a partial lockdown, it was changed to a total lockdown. Only health- and food supply-related workers were allowed to work, and military was deployed for policing functions, and, to some extent, functions related to border security, logistics, medical care and crisis management. Peru decreed that all children and elderly over 65 years of age should remain home at all times and that only one member of the household was allowed out for an hour a day to make essential purchases (Parlamento Andino, 2022). In some countries such as Morocco, despite awareness campaigns and a high COVID-19 caseload, rural women had to break lockdown to do casual work on nearby farms (Bossenbroek and Ftouhi, 2021). In other countries there was also lack of continuous community awareness efforts, leading to many not taking the pandemic seriously because most cases of COVID-19 were in urban areas.

These measures have caused an unprecedented decline in economic activity all over the world, hitting agrifood systems and rural households hard, including through income and job losses (Bundervoet, Davalos and Garcia, 2022). The equivalent of about 125 million full-time jobs have been lost as a direct consequence of the pandemic (ILO, 2021a). As new waves of COVID-19 infections required additional measures to contain the virus in some countries, others focused on policy responses to the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, leading to increasing variation in the impact on agrifood systems and rural populations around the world (GAIN, 2021). According to a 2021 International Labour Organization (ILO) and FAO report, the pandemic could have plunged an additional 100 million people into poverty and 83 million to 132 million people into undernourishment in 2020 alone (FAO and ILO, 2021).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic comes on top of other crises and shocks (i.e. environmental and economic crises, conflicts). It exacerbates existing inequalities and is hitting developing and least developed countries the hardest. It has affected rural populations in multiple ways, disrupting livelihoods and everyday lives and increasing risks of extreme poverty and food insecurity. Agrifood systems have been affected by disruptions in input and labour supplies at the production level and interruptions in logistics and access to local, regional and global markets along the various value chains. In turn, these have affected the overall income of households engaged in related production, processing and services as well as in waged work (Bouët et al., 2021; Dixon et al., 2021; FAO, 2020c, 2020d, 2020i; Laborde et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020).

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2 These include a range of social and economic measures, such as food assistance, cash and input transfers, school feeding programmes, labour market interventions, and microfinance and credit schemes. A review of these policy responses is presented in Part III.
Box 1: Definition of agrifood systems

Agrifood systems (or food systems) encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.

1.2. Understanding the main drivers of child labour in agriculture and rural areas to assess the impact of COVID-19–related measures

Child labour in agriculture is driven by pull (demand side) and push (supply side) factors and is greatly determined by the features of agriculture as an economic sector and occupation (FAO, 2020b). Children are pushed into child labour by increased uncertainties, risks and negative shocks affecting households, which can reduce household incomes and cause children to drop out of school and work to contribute to the family income. Child labour typically represents one of the coping strategies for households whose decision-making is guided by short-term and critical considerations and the need to survive in adverse conditions. When shocks occur, child labour may be a response of some families in order to manage risk and support consumption where markets are incomplete. With this economic framework of interpretation, there are several known drivers of child labour in agriculture that the COVID–19 pandemic might have exacerbated. Additional drivers related to social norms, external factors and labour markets are compounding how the socioeconomic consequences of COVID–19 interact with the drivers of child labour in agrifood systems.
Box 2: Child labour – definition and associated terms

The main instruments which inform the legal definition of child labour are the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), which are only a few countries short of being universally ratified. Additional guidance is provided in the related Minimum Age Recommendation, 1973 (No. 146) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190). Protecting children from economic exploitation is also included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 32.

Child labour is commonly defined as work that is inappropriate for a child’s age, affects children’s education, or is likely to harm their health, safety or morals. It is work that impairs children’s well-being or hinders their education, development and future livelihoods.

The difference between child labour and child work is that child labour refers to work that is harmful to children. Not all work done by children under the age of 18 is child labour. Children between 12 and 14 years old may do some light work as long as it is not dangerous or interfering with their education.

The worst forms of child labour include, in addition to hazardous work, all forms of slavery (sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict) and the use, procurement or offering of a child for prostitution or pornographic materials or performances, as well as for illicit activities. These worst forms jeopardize the physical, mental and moral well-being of a child, either because of their nature or because of the conditions in which they are carried out.

Hazardous work is work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of a child (Article 3[d] of Convention No. 182). This work is dangerous or occurs under unhealthy conditions that could result in a child being killed, injured and/or made ill as a consequence of poor health and safety standards and working arrangements. Some injuries or ill health may result in permanent disability. Often, health problems caused by working as a children in child labour may not develop or appear until the child is an adult. Hazardous work should be identified at the national level.

The overlap group (14/15–17 years) belongs both to the child (0–17) and youth (15–24) age groups. The overlap group corresponds to a category in which children have reached legal working age (set at 14 years old in some developing countries, and 15 or 16 in most countries). They can be in child labour or in youth employment as younger workers. The determining factor is the danger of the tasks performed by those younger workers. A child of this age group spraying hazardous pesticides is a child in child labour. A child of this age group safely applying biocides is a younger worker.

The main drivers of child labour in rural areas are household poverty, economic vulnerability and food insecurity; poor awareness of hazards and alternatives; low productivity and the correlated need for a cheap and numerous workforce; lack of access to education and technical training, which lowers the value of education in the eyes of guardians; informal or unregulated arrangements and lack of decent work opportunities for young people above 15 years and adults; and the existence of crises and shocks (FAO, 2020b). Furthermore, lack of access to health care and social protection contribute in different ways to the transmission of poverty across generations and the perpetuation of child labour, in addition to social norms and practices ingrained in local contexts (FAO, 2020b, 2021e; ILO and UNICEF, 2020).

In addition to the specific features that agricultural work may present, such as seasonality, informality, its hazardousness and its under-regulation, the gender aspects and distribution of tasks within the household are also key determinants of why, how and under what conditions girls and boys engage in labour.

Economic crises and environmental and climate-related disasters can affect agriculture, creating large swings in income due to harvest losses, an adult member of the family losing a job [or their job], or health-related shocks that can drive children to work to support their families. Conflicts represent another push factor.

Finally, cultural, social and demographic factors in rural areas are powerful drivers of child labour in agriculture.

The combined effect of shrinking livelihood portfolios and loss of income from farming, fishing, forestry activities or livestock production generate increasing vulnerability of households to other shocks and higher risk of extreme poverty and child labour in agriculture. This is corroborated by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures to curb its spread, which led to severe job and income losses and a persistent effect on employment rates in some countries.
2. Increased risks of child labour after the onset of the pandemic and compounding crises

2.1. Where we stand

About 80 percent of the global population living in extreme poverty is in rural areas, and the vast majority depend on agrifood systems for their livelihoods. Rural populations living in poverty and which face higher risks of falling into extreme poverty and lack access to social support may resort to harmful coping strategies, including child labour.

The latest estimates on child labour released in 2021 show that, alarmingly, for the first time in the last two decades, global progress against child labour has stalled. Roughly 160 million (+5 percent compared to 2016) children are engaged in child labour, of whom 79 million (+7.6 percent compared to 2016) are performing hazardous work. In other words, almost 1 in 10 of all children worldwide are engaged in child labour. The largest share of child labour (70 percent) remains in agriculture (ILO and UNICEF, 2021).

The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not reflected in these estimations, as they are extrapolated from nationally representative surveys, of which 80 percent were conducted between 2016 and 2020, i.e. before the outbreak of the pandemic (ILO-IPEC, 2013; ILO, 2017a; ILO and UNICEF, 2021). However, an ILO simulation model that seeks to predict possible poverty outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with earlier studies of the relationship between poverty and children in employment from ILO and UNICEF (2020) suggest that a 1 percentage rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7 percent increase in the number of children engaging in work.3

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3 It is important to note that although Edmonds and colleagues use the term child labour in multiple studies, they define child labour as employment for a wage, self-employment or work in the family farm or business (cf. Edmonds, 2005, 2010, Edmonds and Schady, 2012), corresponding to ILO’s definition of children in employment.
Without measures to mitigate the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, the number of children in child labour could rise to 168.9 million by the end of 2022. The actual impact will depend on policy responses:

- **206.2 million** children if **austerity measures** or other factors cause slippage in **social protection coverage**;

- **168.9 million** children due to an **increase in poverty** and in the **absence of additional mitigation measures**;

- **144.9 million** children if **social protection coverage is increased**

(UNICEF and ILO, 2021)

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4 Social protection measures include social assistance, social insurance and labour market measures that can shield the rural poor from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (FAO, 2020h)
In addition, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic intersect with other crises, which further increases labour shortages and uncertainty for rural populations.

Environmental or social uncertainty and vulnerability that include climate fluctuations (e.g. heat waves, droughts, floods), conflict and other emergencies, including disease outbreaks causing family deaths and break-ups, and displacement or migration (FAO, 2020b; ILO and UNICEF, 2020) can create mutually reinforcing adversities. These multiple and often intersecting factors can lead to deepening poverty, displacement, and loss of jobs, resources and assets, and as such are powerful drivers of child labour.

2.2. Objective of this review

This review aims to look into the consequences of (1) the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place to mitigate the spread of the pandemic and (2) the policies and programmatic responses to mitigate socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic and how they have potentially interacted with child labour drivers (i.e. increased poverty and economic vulnerability, lack of decent jobs, lack of access to education), especially in agrifood systems. Thus, this review aims to document and spell out how responses to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular social protection measures, have the potential to prevent or contain an increase of child labour in agriculture at large.

Apart from a few targeted studies covering specific communities or geographic areas), there is still little data available on how rural households have been organizing their work, what children have been doing since the onset of the pandemic (notably when out of school), how the composition of some households may have changed, or how livelihood portfolios may have been interrupted or changed. The approach and research design to develop this paper have therefore been devised to capture some of these aspects through studies that offer some insights on the known drivers of child labour.

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5 See for example: FAO. 2022. The COVID–19 consequences on child labour in agrifood systems. Rome, FAO.

FAO. 2022. The COVID–19 consequences on child labour in agrifood systems. Rome, FAO.
Although the spread of COVID-19 led to a global pandemic, it has not been equally prevalent or severe across or within all countries. Despite similarity in policy and programmatic responses, state capacity to effectively implement or track and measure their effects has differed across different national contexts. The unpredictable and ongoing nature of COVID-19 makes it challenging to measure, research or report on its impacts. This in turn presented particular difficulties for this global review that seeks to understand the specifics in relation to socioeconomic consequences on the drivers of child labour in agriculture and the related policy and programmatic responses.

In addition, although there is some monitoring of child labour in global value chains (ICI, 2021; ILO-FUNDAMENTALS, 2017, 2020), there is a paucity of detailed empirical data on child labour in agrifood systems more generally. Most studies addressing rural childhoods focus on schooling, enrolment and retention rates, without fully understanding how children in rural communities combine key livelihood activities and schooling, or the relative importance of work, socialization, training and education to households and communities (Bourdillon, 2006; Morrow and Boyden, 2018; Panelli et al., 2007; Punch, 2003). In addition, the available literature largely focuses on the dynamics in agricultural crop production compared to animal husbandry and fisheries. Studies of value chains tend to focus on global commodities, and in relation to child labour on crops such as cocoa, coffee and sugarcane, which have been scrutinized at the level of production but not along the value chain.
For the purpose of this paper, the design of the review of the socioeconomic consequences comprised three layered strands:

1. A first layer of information was collected through the general literature review of global reports, definitions, data and estimates.

2. Then, following a focus through the selection of specific countries, national examples were drawn from available reports, policy and programming information, and other research data.

3. Subsequently, a broader set of examples at country level was analysed to produce the review of policies and programmatic responses. Efforts from FAO and World Bank, among others, to document policy action during the COVID-19 pandemic formed the basis of this review.
1. General literature review (definitions, global reports, data)

To gain insights into the changes in rural childhoods and demands on children’s labour due to the pandemic, there is a need to make inferences from the consequences that can be observed at different levels: the household and community levels; the production level; and across the agrifood system.

Relevant international reports and existing policy papers provide insights on the linkages between the consequences of the pandemic (e.g. poverty, food insecurity, reduced incomes, and children out of school) and child labour. They also describe how social protection measures have the potential to prevent or mitigate the risk of increased child labour.

2. Focus on selected country examples

The limited national- and household-level data led to the decision to adopt a more country-specific focus and gather local-level qualitative data to grasp the extent of the socioeconomic consequences and their implications on the main drivers of child labour in agriculture.

The focus on eight representative low-income or middle-low-income countries for the review of the socioeconomic consequences provided the opportunity to engage with multiple sources and extract deeper and more relevant information about rural livelihoods during the pandemic, and to relate this information to policy and programming with specific reference to the effects on child labour.

In each country of focus, the situation at the national level was explored, surveying government and NGO policy and programming to mitigate the spread, along with the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. This included specific attention to the effects of the COVID-19 prevention and mitigation responses at the household level and the farm and household production level and across the agrifood system to gain a better understanding of how the pandemic and related measures have affected the agrifood system and shaped the work that rural people do, as well as household composition and income streams.

In each case, the implications for children and child labour have been inferred based on what is known of the common drivers of child labour in agriculture: information related to schooling; work within the family; and independent economic activities.
Additionally, the paper draws on pre-pandemic knowledge about gender- and age-appropriate work in order to make inferences about whether children would be more likely to engage in child labour as a result of the pandemic and government policy and programming.

The focus on the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic includes three countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana and Malawi), three countries in Latin America (the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Panama and Peru), and two countries in Asia (India and Viet Nam) that were chosen for detailed reviews of the potential impact of COVID-19 on child labour.

### Selection criteria for countries of focus

The following five criteria were used to select the countries of focus:

1. **COVID-19 incidence which required mitigation measures to be put in place** – based on the percentage of the population having had confirmed cases of COVID-19 by 14 December 2021;

2. **Rurality** – based on the percentage of the population living in rural areas in 2020;

3. **Prevalence of child labour** – based on pre-pandemic information made available by ILO;

4. **Prevalence of out-of-school children** – based on information made available by UNESCO;

5. **Length of school closures**.

See Annex 1 for information available on these criteria for each country

Based on data collected and country examples, the document makes inferences on the propensity of children to be involved in child labour, in particular in work that may be hazardous.
3. Review of policies and programmatic responses to the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic

Most measures adopted first emanated from high- or middle-income countries, as the number of responses from low-income countries was still low in April 2020 (FAO, 2020h). This may be due to the fact that low-income economies tend to have less developed social protection systems, with limited social insurance coverage, some patchy social assistance programmes in place, low institutional capacity, and financial constraints that limit universal coverage. With these limitations, some lower-middle-income countries nonetheless started taking appropriate measures after the onset of the pandemic.

In addition to the countries of focus used to gather data on the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, the global review sought to include information on additional country examples to better grasp the diversity of policy responses to the consequences of the pandemic across the globe. This was undertaken through a review of recent papers and policy briefs.

By adopting a broader scope, the dedicated parts of the paper focusing on policy and programmatic responses aim to better illustrate the diversity of contexts and measures that have been implemented to mitigate the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and related mitigation measures.
As the pandemic spread, the usual opportunities for work have diminished, and food loss and waste have increased, with an impact on household incomes, livelihoods, and food security. Measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular restrictions on transport and mobility, restrictions imposing physical distancing and limiting public gatherings, and lockdown, have to a certain extent contributed to such socioeconomic shocks, affecting agrifood systems the most.

This part will focus on three types of socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic that affect drivers of child labour, namely: lack of decent work opportunities for youth and adults, and related gender inequalities; increased economic vulnerability; and lack of access to quality education. Examples of policy and programmatic responses that can address these drivers are presented for each of those consequences. They emphasize the role of social protection as a key response from governments to alleviate the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.
1. Lack of decent work opportunities for young people and adults, and gender inequalities

1.1. Socioeconomic consequences

1.1.1. Restricted access to labour and loss of jobs

The lack of decent work opportunities in rural areas for adults and young people is recognized as one of the main drivers of child labour in agriculture. Without decent work opportunities, households, or the older children themselves, may question the relevance of continuing in school, especially given the greater opportunity costs of schooling for older adolescents. Girls can be more affected than boys in certain contexts, due to the gendered distribution of household chores, social norms, risks of early marriage and pregnancy, while in some areas, boys may be responsible for livestock and other farming activities.

Young and unqualified, these youth tend to work in informal jobs that are not regulated by labour standards, and may be allocated hazardous work, which they may be unable to avoid due to lack of bargaining power (FAO, 2020b).

The ability of large-scale agribusinesses to recover from the consequences of the pandemic will affect the availability of young people and adults to access waged work.

It is to be noted that, considering the gender distribution of workers in large-scale agribusinesses, with much of the employment created targeting young women (Bhalla and WUILBERG, 2020; Wossen and Ayele, 2018), a diminution or lack of jobs might greatly impact them.

Across the countries of focus, a significant proportion of rural people experienced job and income loss even if it was to a lesser degree than urban populations (Aaron et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2021). Rural households are predominantly smallholder famers with diverse livelihood portfolios; hence, the impact of COVID–19 restrictions at farm and household levels are inextricably intertwined. In Ethiopia, for example, over half of the population lost some or all their income in the early weeks of the pandemic; although the job situation improved for some, income losses continued to affect 26 percent of households in October 2020. Female-headed households were more affected by the loss of income than male-headed households (World Bank, 2021e cited in FAO, 2021a).
Access to hired labour across the agricultural season was mostly hampered by travel restrictions, limitations on the size of social gatherings, and fear of contagion (Li and Manzano Chura, 2021). Nevertheless, the impact on production is not clear-cut. Not only did the hiring of labour vary tremendously across the spectrum of crops and animals, but the level of commercialization, the wealth of farmers, and the impact of the labour shortage also varied across crops. In Ghana, travel restrictions within the country affected the movement of casual farm labour at the beginning of the pandemic, increased the cost of hiring workers and delayed the planting of roots and tubers in the southern and central parts of the country, and made access to tilling services difficult in cereal-growing areas. The availability of hired labour changed with the lifting of restrictions, as can be seen in a study in south-western Ghana, where 43.6 percent of farmers had hired workers in June/July 2020, rising to 61.2 percent in February/March 2021. Despite the delays in planting and speculation about detrimental effects, the harvest of roots and tubers was not significantly reduced, and the overall production remained sufficient for national consumption (Agyei-Holmes, Ankrah and Boakye, 2021; de Groote et al., 2020; Hodey and Dzanku, 2021). It is possible to speculate that the temporary reliance on family labourers is likely to have included the labour of children, especially because they were not attending school (see III.3. Lack of access to quality education).

Key providers of jobs such as small and large enterprises operating within the agrifood systems have been affected by the pandemic in multifaceted ways entailing losses and gains (Laborde et al., 2020; Swinnen and Vos, 2021).

Large-scale agribusinesses were reportedly the least affected in the agriculture sector. Notably, increasing transport costs were counterbalanced by increased demand and high prices in the international market. Some value chain actors were able to navigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic without significant disruption by taking biosecurity measures, such as providing workers with protective gear, safer transport facilities and working conditions that reduced the risk of contagion (Van Hoyweghen et al., 2021). The export-oriented value chains notably recovered rapidly from the initial shock by 2021 (Brouziyne, 2021; EFE, 2021; FAO, 2020a; Hirvonen et al., 2021).

The ability of large-scale agribusinesses to rebound with secure employment for many young people, and young women in particular, is to be noted. However, while they may contribute to youth empowerment by enabling young people to distance themselves from family labour by taking up wage labour, agribusinesses may also involve working conditions that are exploitative, especially for girls (e.g. segregation into lower-paid, low-quality jobs, risk of gender-based violence).
Wage work affects drivers of child labour in contrasting ways. The income might contribute to a household’s well-being and to the ability to buffer shocks and increase resilience. It can thus contribute to decrease the risk of child labour. On the other hand, wage work can also imply that the adult worker will no longer have the time to look after the family plot of land, for instance, which is crucial to ensure food security of the family. In this case, children might be pulled into work to replace the adult benefiting from wage work.

Bearing in mind that global estimates on child labour suggested that around four out of ten children of legal working age, i.e. aged 15–17 years, engaged in waged work (38.9 percent of girls and 43.9 percent of boys), this age group is likely to have suffered more from the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions (school closures, lockdowns and movement restrictions) because their portfolio of economic activities is narrower. This sudden job loss could potentially lead this age cohort to accept hazardous work; in other words, child labour situations, given the lack of decent work alternatives.
A difference can be discerned between rural households relying more on wage work and those reliant on subsistence farming, of whom the latter were either not affected immediately or less severely by COVID-19–related measures. In fact, smallholders who were more integrated in commercial farming and relying on markets for inputs, labour and food found themselves in more vulnerable situations as a result of the restrictions decreed to manage the pandemic compared to subsistence–oriented farmers (Agyei-Holmes, Ankrah and Boakye, 2021). Market reliance can lead to more vulnerability if shortages, delays and disruption become protracted or drive up prices, pushing farmers into loan-taking to maintain productivity. On the other hand, market reliance can also result in faster recovery under favourable conditions. While seemingly unimportant in relation to child labour, these options and decisions contribute to household wealth, and thus to the determination of children eventually being involved in child labour.

The available evidence from Ghana and Malawi showed that quick recovery and delayed effects, respectively, softened the impact of income losses from farming even if farmers still had reduced incomes from the shrinking of other activities (Agyei-Holmes, Ankrah and Boakye, 2021). We can infer that households and individuals relying more on perishable commercial crops, own-account activities and wage work have been more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and related responses.

It can be noted that in some countries, income losses persisted despite measures being eased. Eighty-one percent of rural households in the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported loss of income in 2021, and employment rates continued to decrease despite restrictions having eased somewhat. (Escobar de Pabón and Hurtado, 2021). Farmers suffered reductions in their income due to higher production costs, post-harvest losses and low prices. In India, rice farmers were being paid 25 to 33 percent less than the Government-mandated minimum support price, and chili farmers received INR 3,000–4,000 less than normal per quintal (Subba Rao, 2021).

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic added hardship at a time when 48 percent of the rural municipalities were suffering the consequences of environmental shocks in the 2019–2020 season. Farming communities had been affected by floods (19 percent), frost (18 percent), drought (17 percent), hailstorms (17 percent) and disease (13 percent) and predicted a poor harvest, with reduced income as a result. Lacking this income exacerbated farmers’ difficulties in accessing hired labour (Mendoza et al., 2020). Similar trends were found in Peru and Panama, where the hiring of labour became less affordable, even at times when casual labourers were accepting lower wages. Some smallholders therefore preferred to turn to family labour (López-Ridaura et al., 2021; Salazar et al., 2020).
1.1.2. The double burden: women’s increased workload

Cultural and social norms have been identified as another key driver of child labour. Social norms and practices influence the distribution of roles and responsibilities between women and men, girls and boys, and affect the perceptions of households and communities about what is appropriate for girls and boys at different stages in their lives to do, and how to behave. This is compounded by gender-based differentiation in areas such as school education and health care, which often discriminate more against girls (Bourdillon and Carothers, 2019; ILO and UNICEF, 2020; Schmidt and Uyeda, 2020). Thus, gender aspects and distribution of tasks within the household are key determinants of why, how and under what conditions girls and boys engage in labour.

In Ethiopia, female-headed households were more affected by the loss of income than male-headed households (World Bank, 2021e cited in FAO, 2021a). In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in contrast to men’s employment rates, which declined from 81.8 percent in 2019 to 78.8 percent in 2020 and 74.9 percent in 2021, women’s employment rates dropped from 60.7 percent, to 55.9 percent and then 51.3 percent, thus widening the gender gap in income generation (Escobar de Pabón and Hurtado, 2021).

In countries such as the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Peru, some women worked harder to make up for men’s lost incomes, while others had to give up paid work to shoulder the increased burden of supporting their children’s homeschooling, caring for the sick, and feeding larger households as urban family members returned to rural areas (Machicado, 2020; Näslund-Hadley et al., 2020). In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 13 percent of households are headed by a single parent and, of these, 82 percent are headed by a woman (INE, 2021). In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, female-headed households are projected to be the most affected by the pandemic, as they have experienced significant reductions in employment and the largest increases in household burdens (Escalante Ochoa and Maisonnave, 2021). Girls are highly likely to undertake additional care work depending on household configurations, gender, age, sibling order, and generational composition (e.g. the presence of other adults, especially females) (Zapata et al., 2011). Pre-pandemic survey data indicated that almost half of all 5- to 17-year-olds, especially girls, cared for siblings, or older or sick family members within the household (INE, 2017).

Based on the information available for the countries of focus, it seems that female-headed households and households dependent on women’s incomes would recover more slowly than households relying mostly on men’s wages. The consequences
on child labour are highly gendered, leading to the reproduction of gender-based discrimination patterns in agriculture. It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women’s economic empowerment and increased the burden on women in agriculture and rural areas, which could in turn lead to increased gender discrimination.

1.2. Policy and programmatic responses

Responses to address lack of decent work opportunities have included labour market interventions and social insurance measures. Labour market interventions are a key component of COVID-19 policy and programmatic responses and can have a significant impact on the drivers of child labour in agrifood systems. In fact, these can positively impact farmers’ income security and livelihoods, thus reducing reliance on child labour and sustaining children’s enrolment in school. Labour market measures have been adopted by a wide range of countries from different regions during the pandemic to facilitate employment and promote livelihoods in agrifood systems, ensuring basic standards at work and extending labour rights, such as social insurance and skills development programmes. These components have the potential to mitigate the COVID-19–driven exacerbation of the root causes of child labour in agriculture.

Labour market interventions facilitate regulated and organized employment, and promote livelihoods, ensuring basic standards at work and extending labour rights, such as unemployment benefits and skills development programmes (FAO, 2017).
1.2.1. Employment facilitation through adapted contractual arrangements

A first example can be found in Australia, where the Government made temporary changes to visa arrangements to help farmers, including young ones, access the workforce they need to secure the country’s food security during COVID-19. The changes allow those within the Pacific Labour Scheme and the Seasonal Worker Programme to continue to work in agriculture and food processing until the crisis has passed (FAO, 2020g). Similar measures on extension of working visas to temporary and seasonal migrants were applied in other countries (i.e. Australia, Italy, and New Zealand) (FAO, 2020f).

The Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia simplified administrative procedures for signing up applicants and exempted programme participants from the requirement to provide labour, at the same time that it was scaling up both horizontally and vertically (Bundervoet and Finn, 2020). In parallel, Kenya’s Ministry of Labour and Social Protection indicated that regular migrant workers who lose their jobs as a result of COVID-19 shall not be regarded as irregular migrants and that their residence or work permits will remain valid for the time period stipulated previously (ILO, 2020).

In China, the Government issued a notice to ensure that the contracts of migrant workers were not terminated in case of illness or containment measures, while Germany announced that it would ease entry restrictions for seasonal farmworkers (FAO, 2020f). In Germany and France, although mechanisms for matching labour supply and demand in agriculture did not target migrants explicitly, with adequate support (e.g. providing information in relevant languages, reaching out to rural areas, supporting migrants with limited access to the internet), migrants living in those countries could also benefit from those platforms (FAO, 2020f).

1.2.2. Services to improve ways to manage risk: public works, employment hiring facilitation and access to liquidity support for rural entrepreneurship

In Malawi, to empower women and youth to participate in economic activities, the Government has increased the loan allocation to the Malawi Enterprise Development Fund to MK 15 billion (USD 14.6 million). Out of this amount, MK 2 billion (USD 1.9 million) will be dedicated to women and youth who have been directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This Fund is aimed at economically empowering and uplifting the lives of Malawians by providing them with high-quality and sustainable microfinance services, thereby reducing levels of unemployment through the enhancement of entrepreneurship (FAO, 2022).
In **Peru**, to reactivate the rural economy, USD 42 million has been invested to perform extraordinary maintenance on irrigation infrastructure along and across the country, targeting the creation of 30 000 new temporary jobs (FAO, 2022).

**Some countries’ responses scaled up existing programmes.** In **Mexico**, the Government announced the expansion of several public infrastructure projects aimed at creating jobs in rural and semi-rural areas (Hogewoning, 2020). Another example combining social and environmental sustainability is the scaling up of water conservation and other environmental works in **Pakistan**, where the **Green Stimulus programme** has been tackling the impacts of COVID-19 by hiring unemployed youth, women and return city migrants to plant trees, revive protected areas and improve sanitation (Amin Aslam Khan, 2020).

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**Box 3: India’s Nationwide Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**

The **Nationwide Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA)** is a public employment programme that combines creation, scaling up and facilitation of labour market schemes. Since 2005, NREGA has been offering 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per year, on demand, to any rural household applying to the programme. Work must be provided within 15 days of registration, or else an allowance is paid if no work is available. The fact that NREGA is a statutory programme codified in national legislation, and that it imposes an enforceable obligation upon the State to provide employment at the legal minimum wage to anyone willing to take it, **sets the programme apart from most other social protection interventions around the world**.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme was providing temporary employment to about 138 million farmers, 70 percent of whom depend on rain-fed agriculture and have no reliable income during the lean season. Included among NREGA participants are India’s landless labourers as well as members of its tribal and scheduled castes. Women account for the bulk of the work provided by the scheme (55 percent of person-days generated).

As soon as the nationwide lockdown began, the programme saw an initial dip in applicants due to concerns over personal safety. NREGA responded immediately by distributing masks and imposing physical distance in its project sites, raising the average daily wage rate by 10 percent and selecting a menu of individual infrastructure works, such as constructing farm ponds, digging wells, and even practising horticulture, that could spare programme participants the need to work far from their home. NREGA also simplified the registration process for new applicants, who could now apply based on self-attestation, in a move intended to accommodate the growing demand for work, especially from return migrants from urban to rural areas, estimated at 80 million. The programme also placed heavy emphasis on ensuring on-time payment of wages and released the entire backlog of wage payments that were awaiting inspection and approval. 
After the initial dip in April, demand for wage work shot up in May, increasing by 43 percent over the previous month (from 12 million to 27 million person-days) and 27 percent compared to the same month in 2019. Importantly, demand was higher in states that are home to migrants, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Even in April 2020, NREGA had spent EUR 1.2 billion to generate 1.76 million person-days of work, which represented a massive infusion of capital for stabilizing India’s rural economy. Because of COVID-19, NREGA received an additional allocation of EUR 4.8 billion, for a total budget of EUR 12 billion for the year, with the target of generating 360 million person-days of work. States such as Uttar Pradesh complement the wage payments by providing free food rations to workers registered in the employment scheme. Apart from allowing programme participants to work on individual assets that require only four to five workers and allow for physical distancing, NREGA is placing great emphasis on the creation of durable livelihood infrastructure including irrigation canals, water conservation works and river rejuvenation to help cope with the impending drought in parts of India.

Sources:


1.2.3. Ensuring standards at work and extending labour rights

Skills development programmes have been another critical component of countries’ labour rights extension programmes. These employability measures are key for child labour in agriculture prevention, as they make the rural youth and adult workforce more resilient to socioeconomic shocks that could drive them to engage children in age-inappropriate and hazardous work.

In the framework of the CARES Obaatanta Programme, the Government of Ghana announced the establishment of a National Unemployment Insurance Scheme for workers, providing temporary income support for laid-off workers. In addition, as part of Phase 1, the CARES Obaatanta Programme, under the Coronavirus Alleviation Programme, announced a seed fund for a retraining programme to help laid-off workers upgrade or acquire new skills to improve their chances of finding new employment (FAO, 2022).
Regarding working conditions, Spain issued occupational safety and health guidelines, adapted to the workplace in the context of COVID-19, for the agriculture, fisheries and food industry (InfoMigrants, 2020). Other countries, including France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, issued specific occupational safety and health guidelines for seasonal workers in agriculture in the context of the pandemic (EU-OSHA, 2020).

1.2.4. Social insurance measures

Social insurance: contributory insurance programmes to mitigate the effects of shocks and protect the uninsured against adverse personal circumstances, lifecycle hazards and livelihood risks. These programmes include accidents, health and life insurances (FAO, 2017).

Social insurance schemes can help cushion against different types of shocks and limit the impact on households’ vulnerability and their reliance on child labour to ensure that basic needs are met. Social insurance is key to providing progressively higher levels of protection throughout the life cycle of populations.

Limited financial capacity combined with unstable incomes and informality hinder access to such social protection benefits, which are more common in formal economic sectors (FAO and ILO, 2021). Social insurance is usually contributory and often unaffordable for employers and workers in agriculture, including the self-employed and small-scale farmers; micro-enterprises in rural areas, and migrant workers, who often benefit from seasonal revenues.

Interesting country examples come from Latin America and the Caribbean, where Costa Rica gave formal workers access to severance benefits, Trinidad and Tobago expanded regulations regarding paid holidays and sick leave, Guatemala provided wage subsidies for formal workers in the private sector whose contracts were suspended, and Argentina introduced subsidies for companies with up to 100 employees (Gentilini et al., 2022).

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Republic of Moldova set the minimum unemployment benefit at MDL 2775 per month (USD 157), mostly for the benefit of returned migrant workers (Gentilini et al., 2020). Additionally, returning migrant workers were included in the list of beneficiaries who could apply for in-advance subsidies for start-up projects from the National Fund for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Environment.
2. Increased economic vulnerability

Children are pushed into child labour by uncertainties, risks and shocks affecting households’ incomes and livelihoods. This situation can cause children to drop out of school and work to contribute to the family income. Household poverty and economic vulnerability are the main determinants of child labour.

Following the measures to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, many rural households have suffered severe loss of household income from constrictions on diverse livelihood activities (Abouzzohour, 2020; Matita and Chimombo, 2021) and loss of remittances from migrants while also accommodating the return of migrants (CARE and UNWomen, 2020).

2.1. Socioeconomic consequences

2.1.1. Restricted access to inputs and increased production costs

Low agricultural productivity, combined with economic vulnerability, are contributory drivers of child labour, especially in the agrifood systems dominated by smallholders and enterprises operating in the informal economy.

Rural families may have less access to financial and insurance markets, limiting their potential to increase or maintain productivity, and therefore influencing their dependency on child labour. Containment measures affecting agriculture productivity, such as restricted access to inputs and to labour as well as disrupted pest surveillance, can potentially increase the intensity or occurrences of work that children engage in, which can result in child labour and increased absences from school, seasonally, or more generally (Vos and Takeshima, 2021).

Travel restrictions created logistical difficulties for traders, leading to delays and disruptions in supplies of farmers’ inputs, such as improved or certified seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as fodder and veterinary inputs, with potential negative consequences on both crop and animal productivity (Kalle et al., 2021 cited in FAO, 2021a; Hodey and Dzanku, 2021; Mendoza et al., 2020; Nandi et al., 2021; Quevedo Quispe, 2021; Salazar et al., 2020). In Ethiopia, the distribution of inputs revealed significant regional differences. The decentralized agricultural bureaus received between 27 and 80 percent of the seeds and between 33 and 90 percent of the fertilizers required by farmers in the regional state (FAO, 2021a). Consequently, the impact of preventive measures at the production level was extremely localized.
Intensive production of perishable crops, live animals and dairy products suffered from disruption to the value chain caused by transport restrictions and the closure of markets and processing industries. In Ethiopia, meat and dairy production was drastically affected by cumulative effects of the pandemic. In addition to reduced availability of livestock feed and veterinary drugs caused by restrictions on transport and movement, the temporary closure of feed factories led to price hikes of 220 percent for feed and 15 to 20 percent for veterinary drugs. Reduced consumer demand affected the viability of dairy operations as dairy prices dropped by 21 percent for milk and 16 percent for butter. Furthermore, livestock producers could not sell their animals due to lack of demand from restaurants and the temporary break in livestock exports to the Middle East (ILO, 2021b). In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the poultry industry suffered significantly, especially the smaller producers. Lockdown resulted in a drop in demand for broiler chickens of around 40 percent and caused a significant drop in income for small and medium-sized poultry farmers. Many were forced to cease operation, release workers and sell off their produce at low prices (Kollnig, 2020; Quevedo Quispe, 2021), thereby hampering their ability to rebuild following the consequences of the pandemic. High-value crops are clearly more susceptible to shortages, delays and disruption and carry more risk than less capital-intensive crops.
Shortages, delays and disruption affect the food production and revenues of farmers, fishers and herders, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on their ability to access and purchase inputs if and when available, and their resilience to interruptions in production. In addition, these economic impacts and related shortages may also have temporary effects at the farm level, e.g. increasing the proportion of children engaged in hazardous work and the need for labour due to lack of weed and pest control.

Notably, one of the consequences of the COVID-19 restrictions on productivity has been the disruption of pest surveillance. A striking example is the disruption of the desert locust control and technical assistance, with detrimental impact on the rural population. Almost one-third of rural households in certain parts of Ethiopia had locusts on their farm in the first invasion (January–May 2020), and 44 percent reported damage to crops, 38 percent to pastures and 23 percent to trees. In the second invasion (from late September and peaking in October–November 2020) locusts struck fewer farms (20 percent) but were more destructive, with 59 percent of households reporting damage to crops, 63 percent to pastures and 52 percent to trees. Chemical pest control was limited: only 8 percent of households reported aerial spraying, a measure initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture, and 10 percent had sprayed on their farms using backpack spraying equipment, whereas 83 percent had engaged in noise-making or smoke to prevent locusts from settling (Ilukor and Gourlay, 2021). The decrease in support to farmers compensated by an increased involvement of family members— including children— in managing pests might have created situations of child labour.

The resilience that farmers may have built to cope with shocks is critical in this context. Indeed, increasing production costs tended to drive the producers living in extreme poverty into debt in order to obtain the necessary inputs. In the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, 51 percent of farmers living in poverty took out loans to meet increasing prices of agricultural inputs, including seeds, fertilizers and hired labour, and 30 percent took out loans to support household consumption (Nandi et al., 2021). The necessity of loans was also evident in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where female farmers from low-income groups faced difficulties in accessing inputs and credit. This was further exacerbated by time poverty. They were unable to queue or search for inputs due to the additional time they had to spend on domestic chores, given the emphasis on hygienic prevention methods, care for the sick and care for children due to school closures (Berthelin, 2021; Machicado, 2020).

The reliance on loans increases the risk for households living in poverty of entering a debt cycle. It further increases inequalities between those who manage to benefit from a more capital-dependent mode of production and those who fall into a debt trap because they do not have the capacity to access this mode.
2.1.2. Lack of access to markets and loss of related incomes

Reduced trade and changing markets, locally or cross-border, affect different value chains that are essential to rural smallholders for selling their produce and buying inputs. With the disruption of these channels, smallholders are likely to experience the loss of the related incomes.

Local agrifood value chains were hit hard by the effects of COVID-19. Small-scale enterprises delivering to domestic markets were affected by mobility restrictions and the closure of shops and markets. In contrast to larger actors, they had less capacity and financial means to access transport and storage facilities, cover increasing costs, and innovate to reach potential customers (Dixon et al., 2021; Van Hoyweghen et al., 2021).

Regional exports were also hampered by continued land border closures. For example, the border between the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Chile only opened in January 2022 to allow exports (including food produce) from the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Due to COVID testing protocols (including quarantine following a positive test), export was marred by major delays, resulting in an estimated daily income loss of USD 10 million (El Pais, 2022). Likewise in West Africa, borders between Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries were closed from March 2020 until January 2022 (ECOWAS, 2022). While large-scale farmers were able to move commodities across borders in West Africa, the thriving cross-border trade of informal traders, of whom the majority are women, was disrupted (Darkwah, Thorsen and Wayack-Pambé, 2022).

The drive to formalize the economy to overcome these barriers implies that many female traders must reorganize to move their goods with the help of intermediaries and collaborative schemes of (female) traders, both of which are likely to increase the costs of transporting goods. While this reorganization may represent an opportunity for women to expand their network and market access, in the short-term women are more likely to experience a loss of income, or they may push the additional costs on to their customers or workers. Rural women, e.g. the women in Ghana, who had shifted their activities from farming to trade in the local markets are likely to be affected by changing prices and availability of goods; this situation in turn is likely to affect household income.
2.1.3. Losses of domestic and international remittances

A decline in remittances flows, as a result of economic downturns, restrictions in movement and challenges in sending transfers, is expected to heavily affect the livelihoods of households with migrant members that rely on these flows for food and other basic expenditures, such as health and education.

Loss of domestic and international remittances was significant in several of the countries. In 2020, the Plurinational State of Bolivia’s remittances decreased by 17.6 percent from 2019 (Kpodar et al., 2021). The fact that the Government cash transfers in 2019 only totalled half the amount that households collectively received in remittances for the same year (Escobar de Pabón and Hurtado, 2021) is an indication of the negative effect that such a drop and disruption in remittances are likely to have had on rural families whose other income sources had already been substantially reduced (CARE and UNWomen, 2020). The elderly population in Ghana, whose younger relatives had left to find work in urban areas well before the pandemic, were suffering loss of financial support in the form of food supplies or mobile money transfers (Asante et al., 2021).

Many migrants were forced to return to their place of origin at the beginning of the pandemic, for fear of contagion, lack of income, or because they were deported.
A reported 40 million internal migrants in India, most of whom had little choice but to return home, triggered the largest movement of people within the country since its partition in 1947. In Bihar alone, the Government estimated that around 320 000 migrants had returned by June 2020 (Dutta, Ghosh and Husain, 2021). In Peru, the pandemic triggered an exodus of migrant workers. Many of the informal workers who had migrated to the city over the years from the rural areas tried to walk back to their home villages, where they could at least feed themselves with subsistence farming (Schwalb and Seas, 2021).

In households relying on hired farm labour, the return migrants helped offset labour shortages caused by mobility restrictions, whereas other households felt the strain of increased numbers to feed and care for (Li and Manzano Chura, 2021).

In comparison to the somewhat balanced effect of migrants returning to their rural homes as can be seen above, the issue was different in Ethiopia, where the return of migrants due to COVID-19 added to a considerable group of internally displaced people fleeing conflict, drought and flooding. Initially, rural households became very stressed, but returnees were still assisted and sometimes given land or assets (such as livestock) to support subsistence farming and income generation. As about 65 percent of the rural population is young and has limited access to land and other means of agricultural production, additional labour power may not be needed in farming but may constitute competition for jobs and increase unemployment rates (FAO, 2021a). Just under one-third of households that lost income due to COVID-19 sold assets or reduced food or non-food expenditures to cope with their income loss. A similar proportion of households reported at least one example of adult family members going without food for an entire day due to a lack of resources (Ashwini et al., 2021, cited in FAO, 2021a)

Migration is often perceived as a contributory driver of child labour when children migrate with their parents or on their own, or when they do the work that absent migrants would have done. Across the countries of focus, the importance of migration to rural economies is multidimensional. The drop in migrant work, loss of remittances and reverse migration exacerbate existing inequalities and affects the households living in poverty – and in least resilient situations – the most (FAO, 2021d). If the loss of remittance income is protracted, it might eventually affect access to education by children whose household economic stability and school expenses were covered by migrant earnings. However, returning migrants can also boost the pool of family labour and release children from some of their work and chores. This calls for more research on the linkages between rural households and migrants and the consequences of the pandemic on migration.
2.2 Policy and programmatic responses

Responses to address the increased economic vulnerability of households most affected by the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic and its related restrictions have included social assistance interventions.

Social assistance: non-contributory transfers, such as cash or food transfers, school feeding programmes, fee waivers and public works programmes. Globally, these represent the largest share of programmes and are usually tax-financed and can focus on a particular group in vulnerable situations or include some degree of conditionality (FAO, 2017).

Social assistance interventions have the potential to reduce food insecurity, smooth income fluctuations, increase resilience and cushion against all sorts of shocks affecting rural households in particular, as well as simply increasing income of rural households in vulnerable situations. This increased economic resilience can potentially lower the family’s dependence on income from child labour to meet basic needs.

2.2.1. Food and cash transfers

In the context of the pandemic, several countries across the globe announced emergency food programmes targeting groups in vulnerable situations and living in poverty who were affected by the lockdown.

In India, the Government of Andhra Pradesh issued free food rations (i.e. rice and 1 kg of red gram dal) for rice cardholders (ration cards for people living in poverty). Also, INR 1000 (USD 13) was given to all rice cardholder families for other expenditures, at a total cost to the Government of INR 13 billion (USD 171 million). Nandi et al. (2021) reported that almost all the households in their study of 264 respondents in Ananthapuramu district had received foodstuffs (rice, wheat, sugar and dal) as part of the social safety net public distribution system during the pandemic.

In 2020, the Government of India announced the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, an INR 1.7 trillion (USD 21 billion) relief package to provide support to people living in poverty and in vulnerable situations and ensure that their basic needs are met (including though food and grain distribution). The package comprised both the implementation of new social protection interventions and the adaptation of pre-existing benefits. One of the initiatives to mitigate farmers’ income losses caused by the measures in response to COVID-19 included advanced benefit payments and a top-up of INR 2000 (USD 25) to beneficiaries of PM-Kisan, a cash transfer scheme ensuring a minimum income to all small and marginal farmers.
In **Panama**, food assistance in combination with a cash transfer was given to households living in poverty under the programme **Panamá Solidario**. The programme’s implementation faced some challenges due to the emergency context – for example, in terms of geographic coverage and distribution, and the increased difficulty for some communities (indigenous respondents) to get to distribution centres. The percentage of households receiving food assistance dropped heavily over time (49 percent to 41 percent, and then to 21 percent). Greater economic conditionality was introduced in 2021 to enhance the programme’s targeting and outreach (UNICEF, 2021b).

Other countries also provided food parcels to populations in vulnerable situations, e.g. the **Plurinational State of Bolivia** (Mendoza et al., 2020) and **Ethiopia** (Gedion and Messay, 2020, cited in FAO, 2021a). The latter started by targeting the urban people living in poverty in the capital with a plan of rolling out food banks to cities across the country. As part of the **urban and rural Productive Safety Net Programmes** in **Ethiopia**, USD 635 million was allocated for emergency food distribution to 15 million individuals, most of whom were in situations of vulnerability with regard to food insecurity and were not covered by the Productive Safety Net Programmes (FAPDA, 2022). In **Ghana**, the Government also dedicated funds for the distribution of hot meals and food packages through the **Coronavirus Alleviation Programme** (FAO, 2022).

Finally, in **Egypt**, the Ministry of Manpower, with the support of the World Food Programme, launched in April 2020 its **first monthly cash assistance** of EGP 500 (about USD 27), targeting about 52,000 registered casual workers, of whom 78 percent redeemed their assistance. The World Food Programme’s assistance ran as part of the Ministry of Manpower’s temporary cash assistance to casual labour workers provided via post offices and Agricultural Bank of Egypt branches benefiting over two million people (WFP, 2020).

While not a social protection measure per se, facilitating the flow of remittances to countries of origin during such a crisis is crucial for households that rely on them for food and other basic expenditures. Indeed, remittances are known to make significant contributions to food security, human capital, rural development and overall gross domestic product in areas of origin (FAO, 2020e). As an example of such facilitation, the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** amended its **COVID-19 Health Protection Regulations** to include remittance service providers as essential services, exempting them from lockdown restrictions (FAO, 2020e).

### 2.2.2. Leveraging on national safety net programmes

To counteract the negative economic impact of lockdowns in the informal sector, several countries announced social protection measures and often piggybacked on existing safety net programmes.
Morocco introduced a new cash transfer scheme for the informal sector workers who lost their income during the lockdown, targeting three million workers (about half of the informal workforce) (Abouzzohour, 2020).

In Peru, the Bono Rural programme aimed at reaching 830,000 households. However, reaching out to households living in poverty involved in agriculture and fisheries was a challenge (IPCIG, 2022). By June 2020, only 40 percent of eligible families had benefited from the programme. The national Ombudsman’s office reported that even those households that were considered eligible had immense difficulties accessing the payments. This may be due to the fact that payments were being made primarily through banks, or via the internet, with limited access for rural populations for both due to the distance or lack of services.

Ethiopia leveraged an existing social protection programme, the Productive Safety Net Programme, which is one of the largest safety net programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, supported by the Government and development partners, with a budget of USD 900 million. Prior to the pandemic, urban and rural beneficiaries were accustomed to work requirements being part of the programme’s conditions. However, following the start of the pandemic, work requirements were suspended and payments were delivered unconditionally as lump sums. With development partners, the Government of Ethiopia provided additional cash and in-kind support to 42 percent of existing rural and 18 percent of existing urban beneficiaries and additional support to those most affected (FAO, 2021a). For example, humanitarian agencies provided additional assistance in food or cash to 15 million food-insecure people and supported 1.87 million people with emergency crops and fodder seeds to protect their agriculture livelihoods. This emergency intervention included people also affected by desert locusts, and pastoralists and agropastoralists in vulnerable situations.

In Ghana, the existing Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty social security programme was used as a ramp to reach groups in vulnerable situations quickly. Hardship among the programme beneficiaries was addressed by allocating an additional sum of money and shifting payment (making payments in advance) to allow them to purchase personal protective equipment and offset the rising costs of food and other items. Additionally, they were offered a transportation subsidy (Darkwah, 2021).

In 2020, Lebanon’s Parliament ratified an LBP 1.2 trillion (USD 300 million) aid package for low-income families and vital sectors including agriculture. Half of this package went to the Emergency National Social Solidarity Programme, providing monthly cash assistance of LBP 400,000 (about USD 100) to about 200,000 families for seven months until December 2020 (United Nations, 2020).
3. Lack of access to quality education

Given the centrality of age to definitions of child labour, schooling has emerged as a key indicator in gauging the extent and variation of children’s labour. This nexus between child labour and access to education is important and yet children and young people have suffered loss of educational opportunity induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and government policy and programming to mitigate its effects (Chiwaula et al., 2021; Tsikata and Torvikey, 2021). This in turns decreases their chances to acquire higher-level skills and to access decent employment as youth and adults.

For children below the minimum age of employment, ensuring that alternatives to child labour are in place is essential. This includes first and foremost ensuring that all children, including children in remote rural areas and children on the move, are protected from hazardous work and have access to free, good-quality compulsory education (FAO, 2021e).

For these reasons, tracing patterns of school access is an important part of the picture on child labour. It also provides a basis for observation and analysis of how policy and programming around COVID-19 has affected the relationship between education and work, and the incidence of child labour in agrifood systems.

After the onset of the pandemic, school closures were among the key strategies globally to reduce disease spread. Data are available on the duration of school closures as well as on measures to mitigate the loss of learning for all children and the impact on the families living in poverty of loss of school meals for their children. Similarly, there are emerging data that offer insights into inequalities in access to remote learning and in the reopening of schools.
Box 4: Rural schooling and quality of education

Child labour is commonly defined as work that is inappropriate for a child’s age, affects children’s education, or is likely to harm their health, safety or morals. It is work that impairs children’s well-being or hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. FAO strives for a world where children are not exposed to hazardous work and have access to quality education and vocational training in rural areas, and sufficient and nutritious food, giving them the resources to grow and to become healthy, productive and skilled producers or workers of tomorrow.

However, the lack of access to basic and meaningful quality education and skills training or limited employment opportunities in rural areas can create little incentive for households to send their children to school. The non-availability, direct and indirect costs and poor quality of rural schooling are a crucial “push” factor for child labour in agriculture.

Thus, a key factor in the nexus between child labour and education is access to free and quality schooling and education. Education is integral to children’s rights and enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Education is championed for its impacts on equality and on the development of human capital to support individual and national economic development. Beyond this, for girls, schooling is also often argued in the instrumental terms of reducing fertility and improving maternal health and family welfare. At the same time, the presumed economic and social benefits accruing from formal education are seen as central to eradicating child labour.

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the value of schooling, the decision to attend school, go to work or do both in part revolves around the conditions and outcomes of rural schools. These are very briefly presented below as they are influential on household decisions to send children to school and on children’s own individual decisions to attend.

The most significant drivers of school attendance include: the distance of the school to the household; the quality of resources and physical infrastructure; the relevance of curricula, and the level of teachers’ qualifications (as well as their presence or absence) and pupil learning outcomes. In addition, there is the prevalence of violence, characterized by excessive corporal punishment and bullying. In rural areas in particular, ill-health and hunger are also reasons for children’s absence from school. These factors are not gender-neutral. For example, school environment can be perceived as unsafe for girls (e.g. due to lack of toilet facilities for girls), commuting to school can be perceived as dangerous for girls (risk of gender-based violence). In addition, poor families may be inclined not to invest in girls’ education because of expected lower returns from employment in later life compared to boys.

There are also economic costs associated with schooling, even where education is theoretically free. Attending school involves the opportunity costs of not working and earning an income, as well as the direct costs of uniforms and learning materials, parent–teacher–association fees and other school contributions, which often result in some children having to work in order to cover these expenses.

Finally, schools continue to have extreme difficulties in accommodating the changing daily and seasonal rhythms, migrations and mobilities of rural populations dependent on agriculture.
Thus, when children miss school for agricultural activities, they may be punished for arriving late or missing school, and when they migrate mid-year, they may be forced to restart or repeat the year. All such cases increase the likelihood of children dropping out of school.\(^k\)

Taken together, these caveats produced a pre-pandemic scenario in which a sixth of all young people of school-going age (ages 6–17) globally were already out of school. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the largest number of out-of-school children, the situation was far worse, with almost a third (31.2 percent, with 28.9 percent male and 33.6 percent female) of this age group not in school.\(^l\)

Unless governments increase educational budgets and resources and implement policies that will improve the quality of rural education, more children will drop out to work, especially older children for whom the opportunity costs of schooling are greater.

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[https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000129053](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000129053)


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3.1 Socioeconomic consequences

3.1.1. School closures and distance learning

Across the world, schools were closed as a precautionary measure to protect school children from infection from COVID-19. School closures varied from a few months (in Ethiopia and Malawi) to two whole school years (in many parts of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Panama and Peru). The closures were also accompanied by grim predictions about loss of learning and vast increases in school dropouts, child marriage and child labour (World Bank, 2020).

However, while the negative impacts on children’s schooling are undeniable, especially in rural areas, the scale and nature of the impacts have varied across contexts, and sometimes defied projections. For example, World Bank modelling projections for Panama estimated a 20 percent dropout rate from school due to the pandemic – one of the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (World Bank, 2022); however, reported registration numbers in March 2022 in the country totalled almost 100 000 learners (Rodríguez P., 2022), which is similar to pre-pandemic figures. The generous scholarship incentives for school enrolment (conditional on attendance\(^6\)), paid to 680 000 learners, are likely to have been a major factor in high re-enrolments considering a daily labourer’s wage of USD 10–12.80 per day. Similarly, despite predicted high numbers of dropout in Ghana, phone survey data in 2021 in the country found that school dropouts, at 2 percent, were much the same rate as pre-pandemic, although repetition rates had increased (Abreh et al., 2021).

Conversely in Malawi (Edzamira et al., 2021), school dropout rates had tripled, as expected, whereas repetition rates had dropped, probably due to learners having been given automatic promotion. Concomitantly, spikes in teenage pregnancies and marriages (some forced) have been reported e.g. in Ethiopia (Jones et al., 2021) and in Malawi (UKAID, 2022). A report in Malawi announced that 40 000 pregnancies and a further 12 995 child marriages had taken place during the first period of school closures (UKAID, 2022).

In order to provide decongested classes (to comply with COVID-19 biosecurity protocols) in Malawi, as with other countries, classes were staggered and more school shifts were implemented, resulting in classes for children only

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\(^6\) USD 90 per child per term in primary school, USD 120 for lower secondary and USD 150 at senior secondary to spend on food, learning materials, medicines and other items for personal use.
every other day. In addition to more learning time being lost, this is likely to increase the available time for children to be working, and the likelihood of them being involved in child labour (World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021).

**Greater free time for children could have led to increased child labour**, even more so at a time when rural household livelihood portfolios were reduced, thus potentially requiring all family members to work wherever possible.

Whether countries continue (or not) to implement biosecurity protocols which reduce class sizes and contact time with learners will have a bearing on the amount of “free” time children have to engage in other activities, including child labour, as well as on the amount of learning opportunities they receive from school.

### 3.1.2. Distance learning and the digital divide

**School closures and the move to distance learning** have exacerbated existing inequalities, with immediate and long-term consequences for children. Although some adaptations have been made to the tools of distance learning, the mitigation programming did not take rural realities sufficiently into consideration. As a consequence, children already disadvantaged by family poverty, regional poverty, and lack of adequate schooling have become even more disadvantaged due to gaps in their education whether they return to school or not.

In all of the countries of focus, rural children, and especially those in remote areas, living in multidimensional poverty, were particularly disadvantaged, and lacked adequate resources to benefit from distance learning (Hossain, 2021). Most obviously, many households lacked electricity, a prerequisite for most distance learning: only one in ten rural households have electricity in Ethiopia, one in five have a radio and although over half have a mobile phone, it does not mean there is a reliable signal (Jones *et al.*, 2021), and in households with several children, cell phones had to be shared.

Besides location and wealth differences, gender differences were also apparent. In Ghana, 16.3 percent of the female-headed households living in extreme poverty had televisions, compared to 23.9 percent of the male-headed households living in extreme poverty (Darkwah, 2021).

Even those households that had access to some of the necessary technology struggled to pay the extra costs, especially given the reductions in household income associated with the pandemic. Telephone survey interviews in several countries (e.g. in the Plurinational State of Bolivia (UNICEF, 2020) and in Peru (Miranda, Bazán and Nureña, 2021) highlighted the high costs of electricity and cell phone credit because of virtual learning, and photocopying costs, where learners had to
photocopy textbook material. In addition, as some governments (e.g. Panama) intend to integrate more online learning into regular teaching going forward, the education gaps between urban and rural families, and between richer households and households living in poverty, are likely to increase unless the digital divide and other inequalities are addressed. Other issues hampering remote learning included teachers’ lack of training and experience in delivering distance education, and lack of cohesion between teaching material across the different media (Miranda, Bazán and Nureña, 2021).

Given the challenges, it is unsurprising that very little meaningful distance learning took place in many rural households living in poverty. During the 2020 school closures in Ghana, 35 percent of primary school students and 28 percent of secondary school students had no form of education (GSS, 2020). In Ethiopia, the majority of rural children and adolescents were unable to access schooling during school closures. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, even by July 2021, in 6 percent of rural schools there was no kind of teaching and learning taking place (Escobar de Pabón and Hurtado, 2021).
3.1.3. Closure of school feeding programmes

School closures also meant suspension of school feeding programmes, which are vital to many rural households living in poverty in terms of assuring children’s health and nutritional status, but also given the known link between improved nutrition and enhanced ability to concentrate when studying. As highlighted earlier, ill-health and hunger are well-established drivers of learners’ non-attendance and eventual school dropout (World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021).

Hunger is a strong factor pushing families to send their children to work. Suspension of school feeding programmes meant the impossibility for children to access a meal. This not only affected the children, but threatened household food security, as it meant more family members to feed in households that were already stressed. Furthermore, school feeding programmes provide vital income to local farmers who supply the produce; the suspension of their provisions potentially implied losses of the related incomes they generate. In some countries, governments compensated by providing take-home rations. In some cases, NGOs continued to provide food, although coverage was inevitably more limited. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Bono Familiar cash transfer was intended to offset this loss (see III.2.2.2 National safety net programmes).
3.1.4. The double burden: women’s increased time poverty

The burden of assisting with home-schooling fell predominantly on mothers and female adult carers, who, in many of the rural households living in extreme poverty, were unable to assist if they had little or no formal schooling themselves, thus exacerbating the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage (Machicado, 2020; Miranda, Bazán and Nureña, 2021; Thorsen, Darkwah, and Wayack-Pambè, 2021; UNICEF 2021a). Indeed, there is evidence that when women are economically empowered and have a greater say in household decisions, their daughters are more likely to remain in school and away from child labour (FAO, 2021h).

It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic is increasing the burden on women in agriculture and rural areas, which could in turn increase and perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

This educational burden added to the already increased care and domestic responsibility in some households that had grown because of returning migrants (see III.2.1.3 Losses of domestic and international remittances) and others that were dealing with household members ill from COVID-19. It is also worth noting that the many female teachers were having to deal with their own increased domestic burdens, as well as trying to deliver remote classes.

3.2 Policy and programmatic responses

3.2.1. School feeding programmes

School feeding programmes are an essential social assistance intervention with high potential to improve school children's food security and nutrition and promote school attendance, while preventing child labour. A global review of Gentilini et al. (2022) indicates that due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, most school feeding programmes were converted into other forms of social assistance such as: take-home ration meals in the form of dry or raw food rations and cooked meals; food vouchers and food stamps; and cash or top-up or special allowance. For example, in the Indian state of Bihar cash transfers were disbursed instead of midday meals to children (from grades one through eight) on the basis of each day of school closure.
3.2.2. Additional measures to compensate for school closures

In Benin, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Social Affairs and CARE Benin-Togo to implement a cash-based intervention for families and children in vulnerable situations that is focusing on preventing school drop-out of adolescent girls affected by school closures and at risk of child marriage. The cash transfer programme, called Faaba-COVID and funded by the Netherlands, was officially launched by the Minister of Social Affairs on 19 November 2020. A total of 26,000 girls (equivalent to 20,000 households) in eight targeted communes received cash transfers by the end of 2020 (UNICEF, 2021a).

Other strategies to mitigate the impact of school closures across the globe commonly included the implementation of distance learning interventions via radio and television, social media (WhatsApp and Telegram), e-learning platforms and, in some places, printed material. However, the crisis also highlighted the digital gap between urban and rural areas, and the need to adapt solutions to different groups and areas. As an example, in Ethiopia, the USAID programme noted that children participating in reading camps from the USAID Read II project prior to the COVID-19 outbreak carried on reading groups in several regions even once schools were suspended. Some villages tried to copy the idea, while in other villages children gathered around radios to listen to subject-specific programmes. In Ghana, the Welfare of Children and Youth Association ran a project in two villages. Children could gather in a community hall that had been equipped with a television, projector and whiteboard, as well as masks, soap and sanitizer to enable children to engage safely. Volunteer teachers and community leaders were present and facilitated learning (AMWCY, 2022).

Strategies and measures for returning to school have included automatic promotions and remedial classes (Malawi) and an accelerated learning course (Panama) (Panama America, 2021; UNICEF, 2021a). However, the remedial classes in Malawi have had low take-up – perhaps because children wanted or had to spend more time working.
Strategies to minimize the health and socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic across the countries of focus seem to have been designed in and for populations in urban contexts (particularly in capital cities), which have been hardest hit by the pandemic in terms of infections and fatalities. However, the effects in rural areas are manifold, and rural agricultural communities’ interests have not always been best served by some measures and strategies. Specifically, many rural households have suffered severe loss of household income from constrictions on diverse livelihood activities (Abouzzohour, 2020; Matita and Chimombo, 2021) and loss of remittances from migrants while at the same time accommodating the return of migrants (CARE and UNWomen, 2020). Children and young people have suffered loss of educational opportunities (Chiwaula, Kadzamira and Meke, 2021; Tsikata and Torvikey, 2021).

In a world facing multiple overlapping crises in addition to the COVID-10 pandemic, the ability of the rural populations living in poverty to withstand shocks is reduced and likely to have consequences on the level and type of children’s work and the likelihood of children becoming involved in child labour.

In 2021, the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, FAO intensified its work to address child labour in agriculture. Throughout the year, FAO organized a series of regional consultations among agricultural actors, which culminated in the high-level Global Solutions Forum: Acting Together to End Child Labour in Agriculture.
held in November 2021. The objective of this forum was to increase awareness of the many existing good practices and scale up joint efforts taking into consideration the new challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the week of 15 to 20 May 2022, the Government of South Africa and ILO hosted the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour (5GCCL). The conference was timely, providing a space to share insights on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related rise in child labour. In addition, the conference marked a breakthrough for agriculture. For the first time, the 5GCCL placed the elimination of child labour in agriculture high on the agenda and in its outcome document. The Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour ranks Ending Child Labour in Agriculture as the second top priority to accelerate progress towards SDG target 8.7 on the elimination of child labour in all of its forms. It calls on all agricultural actors to urgently do more to reverse the upward trend provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic.
In line with the elements compiled in this review, some of the key recommendations from the Durban Call to Action related to agriculture and rural areas are given below (ILO, 2022).

▶ Ensuring quality data and analysis to inform policy and programmatic responses to the consequences of the pandemic

To allow evidence-based decision-making and actions, it will be essential to generate more detailed and granular evidence on the causality between the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on diverse dimensions of livelihoods and poverty in agrifood systems. Generating comparative analyses of qualitative data on pre-pandemic and pandemic child labour would allow the inferences and causality links used in this review to be confirmed, based on a classic conceptual framework to understand child labour dynamics in rural areas.

“Improving data collection and collaborating with relevant United Nations Agencies such as UNICEF and FAO, to jointly progress towards the elimination of child labour in agriculture, including in fisheries and aquaculture and supporting the 2020 FAO Framework on Ending Child Labour in Agriculture and the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture.” (Point 18)
Creating decent work opportunities for adults and youth above the minimum age for employment

Most workers in agrifood systems are located in rural areas, are either self-employed or waged workers, and belong to the informal sector. These workers cannot access the protection granted by labour law coverage, and rarely have regular and secure income or social protection. Rural youth have encountered further difficulties in accessing the labour market. Making decent work a reality in agrifood systems will require policy responses oriented towards a better organization of the labour market in agrifood systems in order to respond quickly and efficiently to peaks in demand, and geared towards easing the rural young women and men’s productive participation in the labour force. Protecting fundamental rights is critical: Enhancing freedom of association and expression in particular in a system characterized by the lack of workers’ organizations will be key, especially to attract youth and have them contribute with their ideas. Promoting occupational safety and health will also be critical, since many types of hazards – from biological to mechanical or physical hazards – are jeopardizing the safety and health of those working in agrifood systems, putting certain cohorts at particular risk, such as younger workers who have not reached full growth.

“Strengthening agricultural labour markets and creating decent work opportunities for youth, women and men and supporting innovative vocational education and training in agrifood production and processing services.” (Point 17)

“Providing adequate and relevant training, skills development and vocational education for girls and boys above the minimum age for employment, including quality apprenticeships, particularly in rural areas (...)” (Point 32)

“Accelerating multistakeholder efforts to prevent and eliminate child labour, with priority given to the worst forms of child labour, by making decent work a reality for adults and youth above the minimum age for work.” (Point 1); “Increasing efforts to formalize the informal economy, and to extend the coverage of labour laws, particularly in agriculture, where most child labour occurs.” (Point 5)
Part IV – Concluding remarks

Addressing lack of access to quality education for all children

It is worth reiterating that out of all the consequences of the pandemic, the aspect of school closures as a push factor for child labour has been one of the most significant, with important gendered implications. Past crises have shown that school dropout rates for girls are likely to go up in post-crisis situations, due to such factors as disruption of education, losses of adult jobs and lack of social protection (ILO, 2020). This suggests that the demand for girls’ labour may further increase after the COVID-19 crisis has been brought under control (FAO, 2021h). It is still too early to know the long-term impact of the pandemic and school closures on children’s retention in school, and child labour. In part, this is because in many countries, official statistics for 2022 school enrolments have not yet been processed, but also because the pandemic is still ongoing. However, the socioeconomic effects, especially for the households living in extreme poverty, are still being felt, and in many cases are worsening. Lack of access to quality education, one of the main drivers of child labour, is arguably more acute than ever.

It is also worth reiterating that the issue of quality of education that has deterred rural students from entering or continuing in school pre-pandemic remains and may worsen given governments’ increasingly stretched budgets, and the unlikely increased investment in rural schooling which is so desperately needed. School curricula with greater content on agricultural ways of life may be an incentive for parents to enrol (or re-enrol) their children in school, alongside school meals. However, such flexibility and innovative learning systems should look carefully into the pros and cons of new practices in the context of rural areas. As a response to school closures, a range of distance learning and digital solutions were implemented.

The effectiveness and inclusiveness of those solutions need to be assessed with a gender lens in light of the existing digital divide in rural areas, and the teachers’ capacity and resources. It will be important to take stock of which solutions worked best and where, and the challenges (e.g. access to internet, electricity, teachers’ capacity). The digital divide should also be considered at all times in the context of rural areas when contemplating digital technologies for the delivery of social protection services.

“Expanding education infrastructure for schools and safe commuting solutions, particularly in rural and remote areas; ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene in schools as well as equitable access to digital education, reinforcing national and international efforts to close the digital divide, and supporting educational curriculum development in primary and secondary schools by including subjects related to food and agriculture.” (Point 29)
Addressing economic vulnerability

It would be crucial to gather more information on whether the use and adaptation of existing social protection systems was more effective than the establishment of new social protection schemes during and after the onset of the pandemic. It would also be essential to assess the extent to which specific groups in situations of vulnerability (such as indigenous and migrant communities) and agricultural subsectors might have been excluded from such measures due to their pre-existing lack of access. This would be particularly relevant in the case where social protection coverage remains limited and cash payments and other types of support to subsistence farmers, forest communities and pastoral communities and commercial and artisanal fishers are often scarce or irregular. Finally, there is a need to understand how gender dimensions have been taken into account in the responses to the consequences of the pandemic. Dimensions to be documented include the extent to which women’s and girls’ increased workload (caring responsibilities, household chores and economic activities outside the home) after the onset of the pandemic was addressed (or not) by social protection measures and whether gender aspects played a role during their design and adaptation in general. Additional research would also need to pay attention to what happens when schools reopen. Indeed, past crises have shown that school dropout rates for girls are likely to go up in post-crisis situations, due to such factors as disruption of education, losses of adult jobs and lack of social protection (ILO, 2020).

Achieving universal access to social protection (Point V), notably by “improving access of communities depending on agriculture for their livelihoods to social and agricultural insurances.” (Point 37)

This review highlighted how the pandemic intensified the major drivers of child labour in agriculture and the subsequent challenges to eliminate child labour. It brings the basis for learning about how crises affect households’ livelihoods and consequently child labour and how well-targeted and tailored measures need to be in place to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience against future shocks. This is particularly important in the context of the uneven economic recovery, alongside other crises such as climate change and armed conflicts that weaken and continue to disrupt agrifood systems, with disastrous consequences on food security, nutrition, health and livelihoods, in particular for low-income families. According to FAO’s 2022 The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, hunger affected 46 million more people in 2021 compared to 2020, and a total of 150 million more people since 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic (FAO et al., 2022). This situation of fragile economic existence and food insecurity contributes to household and children’s vulnerability and their dependency on child labour.
With three years to go before the 2025 SDG target 8.7 of ending child labour in all its forms, this review emphasizes the urgency to act and the need for profound change. As mentioned in the Durban Call to Action, “meeting target 8.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to end child labour in all its forms by 2025, requires immediate, intensified, gender-responsive, well-coordinated, multisectoral, multistakeholder, rights-based action to scale up efforts to eliminate child labour and forced labour”.

As acknowledged in its framework on ending child labour in agriculture, FAO recognizes that child labour in agriculture undermines efforts to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and poverty of present and future generations (SDG 1 and SDG 2) (FAO, 2020b). If children are still overwhelmingly found working in harsh conditions instead of benefiting from education, it is not possible to achieve sustainable agriculture and food systems to feed the world, protect the planet and guarantee good livelihoods for farmers. FAO hopes that this review will provide useful insights to decision-makers, governments, agricultural stakeholders, development organizations, and others committed to ending child labour in agriculture.
References


References


A global review of COVID-19 policy and programmatic responses to child labour in agrifood systems


# Annex 1

## Selection criteria for national case studies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>COVID-19 incidence</th>
<th>Rural population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AFRICA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Moderate COVID-19 incidence for East Africa (0.32% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Large rural population in populous country (78%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Moderate COVID-19 incidence for West Africa (0.42% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Moderate rural population (43%) but with high poverty levels among the rural population</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Low COVID-19 incidence for southern Africa (0.33% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Large rural population (83%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LATIN AMERICA &amp; THE CARIBBEAN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>High COVID-19 incidence (6.84% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021) and high mortality rates</td>
<td>Moderate rural population (22%) but large indigenous population (Andean and Amazonian) and rural–urban mobility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolivia (Plurinational State of)</td>
<td>High COVID-19 incidence (4.77% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Moderate rural population (30%) but high levels of rural poverty and large indigenous population</td>
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<td>Panama</td>
<td>One of the highest COVID-19 incidences in Central America (11.16% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Moderate rural population (32%) but large indigenous population and reliance on labour migration</td>
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<td><strong>ASIA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Moderate COVID-19 incidence (1.50% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Large rural population in populous country (63%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>India¹</td>
<td>Highest COVID incidence in South Asia (2.52% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>Large rural population in populous country (65%)</td>
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¹ Focus on Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh
### Annex 1. Selection criteria for national case studies

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<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Moderate COVID-19 incidence for East Africa (0.32% of the population had had</td>
<td>Large rural</td>
<td>High prevalence of child</td>
<td>Moderate prevalence of out-of-school</td>
<td>Long school closure (62</td>
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<td>confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>population (78%)</td>
<td>labour (41.7% of children</td>
<td>children (14.4% pf primary school-aged children)</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>aged 5–11 years, 56.8%</td>
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<td>aged 12–14, and 23.8% aged</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15–17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Moderate COVID-19 incidence for West Africa (0.42% of the population had had</td>
<td>Moderate rural</td>
<td>High prevalence of child</td>
<td>Low prevalence of out-of-school</td>
<td>Moderate school closure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(43%) but with</td>
<td>labour (21.8% of the 5-</td>
<td>children (0.8% pf primary school-aged children)</td>
<td>(39 weeks)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>high poverty</td>
<td>to 11-year-olds)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>levels among the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rural population</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Low COVID-19 incidence for southern Africa (0.33% of the population had had</td>
<td>Large rural</td>
<td>High prevalence of child</td>
<td>No information on children out of</td>
<td>Short school closure (26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(83%)</td>
<td>labour (36.3% of children</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aged 5–11 years, 51.5%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>aged 12–14, and 56.7% aged</td>
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<td>15–17)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LATIN AMERICA &amp; THE CARIBBEAN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>High COVID-19 incidence (6.84% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by</td>
<td>Moderate rural</td>
<td>Limited information on</td>
<td>Low prevalence of out-of-school</td>
<td>Long school closure (75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(22%) but large</td>
<td>child labour</td>
<td>children (1.4% pf primary school-aged children)</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>indigenous</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>population and</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rural–urban</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>High COVID-19 incidence (4.77% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19 by</td>
<td>Moderate rural</td>
<td>Moderate prevalence of</td>
<td>Moderate prevalence of out-of-school</td>
<td>Long school closure (82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(30%) but high</td>
<td>child labour (for South</td>
<td>children (6.8% of primary school-aged children)</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>levels of rural</td>
<td>America (30.6% of rural</td>
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<td>poverty and large</td>
<td>children aged 12–14 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>indigenous</td>
<td>and 9.3% aged 15–17)</td>
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<td>Panama</td>
<td>One of the highest COVID-19 incidences in Central America (11.16% of the</td>
<td>Moderate rural</td>
<td>Low prevalence of child</td>
<td>High prevalence of out-of-school</td>
<td>Long school closure (81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>population had had confirmed COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(32%) but large</td>
<td>labour (7.4% of rural</td>
<td>children for Central America (13.2%</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>indigenous and</td>
<td>children aged 12–14 years and 10.0% aged 15–17)</td>
<td>of primary school-aged children)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>reliance on</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>labour migration</td>
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<td><strong>ASIA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Moderate COVID-19 incidence (1.50% of the population had had confirmed COVID-19</td>
<td>Large rural</td>
<td>Low prevalence of child</td>
<td>No out-of-school children of primary</td>
<td>Long school closure (62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(63%)</td>
<td>labour (1.5% of children</td>
<td>school age</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<td>aged 5–11 years, 5.6%</td>
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<td>aged 12–14, and 10.0% aged</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15–17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Highest COVID incidence in South Asia (2.52% of the population had had confirmed</td>
<td>Large rural</td>
<td>Low prevalence of child</td>
<td>High prevalence of out-of-school</td>
<td>Long school closure (82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COVID-19 by 14 December 2021)</td>
<td>(65%)</td>
<td>labour (0.1% of children</td>
<td>children (22.9% pf primary school-aged children)</td>
<td>weeks)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>aged 5–11 years, 1.0%</td>
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<td>aged 12–14 and 4.1% aged 15–17)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A global review of COVID–19 policy and programmatic responses to child labour in agrifood systems
Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality (ESP) Division
Economic and Social Development
End-Child-Labour@fao.org
www.fao.org/rural-employment
www.fao.org/childlabouragriculture

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

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