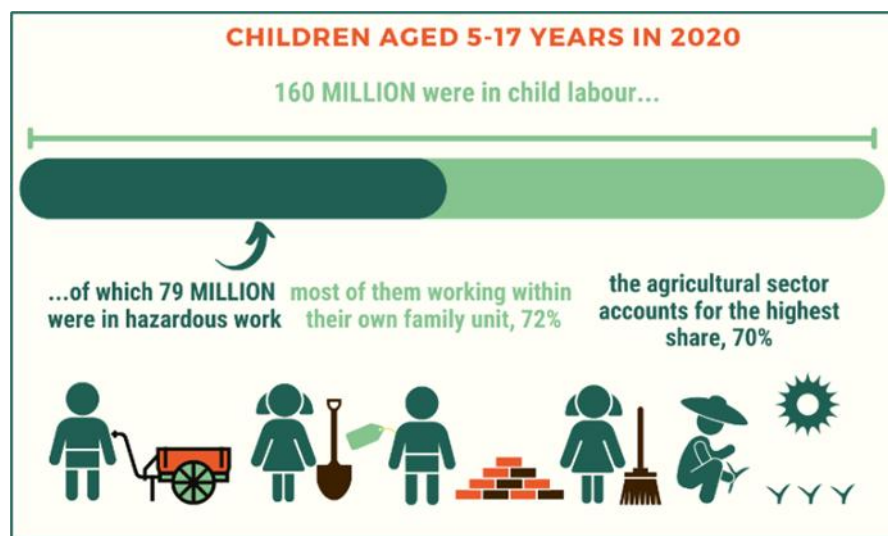


Factsheet Protecting Children's Rights: Definitions

Child labour is strictly prohibited in the 4C System. It's important to distinguish it from child work and youth employment, which may be acceptable under specific conditions. According to the ILO, not all work done by children is harmful like helping at home or in a family business can support their development, as long as their well-being and education are not affected.¹

Protecting children's rights and shielding them from child labour is crucial because it ensures their safety, health and access to education. Safeguarding children from exploitation helps promote their physical, emotional and social development, breaks cycles of poverty and upholds international legal and ethical standards. It's a fundamental step toward building fair, inclusive and sustainable societies.



Source: ILO and UNICEF, Child Labour: global estimates 2020, trends and road forward, ILO and UNICEF, 2020 & US Department of Labour, 2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labour or Forced Labour, 2020

This factsheet provides definitions of key concepts related to the protection of children's rights:

- Child Labour
- Child Work
- Youth Employment

¹ Sabates-Wheeler, R. and Sumberg, J, Understanding Children's Harmful Work in African Agriculture: Points of Departure, ACHA Working Paper 1, 2020.

Child Labour

“Child labour is defined as work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school.”²

Child labour entails two concepts:

a) Work undertaken by children below the legal minimum age:

- According to ILO the minimum age for full-time employment is 15, but may vary by national law
- National laws must set a minimum age that is not below the age of completing compulsory schooling (ILO Convention 138)
- Children below the minimum age are not allowed to be employed on a full-time basis. However, they can perform age-appropriate light work under certain conditions

The 4C System requires compliance with all relevant national and regional laws—as long as they don't conflict with 4C standards. If national law and ILO standards differ, the stricter rule must be followed. The concrete requirements are:

- Children under the age of 15 (or of local legal school age) are not part of the regular workforce
- Local legal school age is the age defined by national law, until which children are obliged to go to school
- The minimum age for permitting light work is defined by the local legislation
- In case no applicable laws are available, child work is allowed from the age of 13 years
- Weekly light working hours must not exceed 14 hours
- Children are not allowed to work during school time or at night

b) Worst forms of child labour:

- According to the ILO Convention No 182, the worst forms of child labour include all forms of slavery, commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for illegal activities and hazardous work
- Children must never be involved in hazardous work, which includes tasks that could harm their health, safety, or morals—such as working at night or for long hours

² <https://www.ilo.org/topics/child-labour/what-child-labour> (Retrieved on October 2025)

The 4C System, hazardous work must only be performed by adults and must strictly follow all safety and protection requirements. Hazardous work is never acceptable to be carried out by children.

Child Work

Child work is legally permitted when it:

- does not affect the health and development of the child
- does not interfere with schooling or vocational training programs approved by the national authority
- does not limit children's capacity to benefit from their education/vocational training

Youth employment

- Youth employment refers to the participation of young people in the workforce, which can support their development when combined with education
- While the UN defines youth as individuals aged 15–24, employment conditions differ for those aged 15–18 compared to those over 18
- The rules governing youth employment are set by national laws, which typically allow light work for young person under specific conditions—such as limits on working hours, required rest periods and restrictions on night shifts

The 4C System requires compliance with all relevant national and regional laws—as long as they don't conflict with 4C standards. If national law and ILO standards differ, the stricter rule must be followed. The concrete requirements are:

- Young workers under the age of 18 do not perform hazardous/harmful work
- If a national list on the definition of hazardous work is not available check if the ME/BP has defined their own list to define the hazardous work that young workers under the age of 18 are not allowed to perform

	Child Work	Child Labour
What is it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not harm a child's health or education Generally seen as positive, as it supports their socialization and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harmful to children's health and their physical and mental development Deprives children of education
When is it allowed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light or non-hazardous work Conducted for a limited amount of time Does not affect schooling Under adult supervision 	It is never allowed
Examples	Child of 13 years: sorting green beans together with their parents after school (no longer than 14 hours a week)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child of 14 years: carrying heavy coffee cherry bags Child of 15 years: spraying herbicides

Examples

Physical presence of children on farms (=not classified as child work or child labour)	Child Work	Youth Employment	Child Labour
6-year-old playing at coffee plantation while grandmother is picking cherries	6-year-old assisting in coffee cherry picking one hour after school, supervised by parents, in a plantation where there is no risk of falling or tripping, and activities do not affect the child's health	n/a (below local youth employment age)	6-year-old assisting in coffee cherry picking 3 hours after school (on the weekend) in a farm area that is very steep (danger of slipping)
7-year-old playing at coffee plantation while grandmother is picking cherries	7 year old helping his mother with household chores for 2 hours on Saturday	n/a (below local youth employment age)	7 year old picking coffee cherries, 5 hours on Saturday and 5 hours on Sunday → probably affects health, so this qualifies as child labour since the child's free time and school work is probably affected

Physical presence of children on farms (=not classified as child work or child labour)	Child Work	Youth Employment	Child Labour
13-year-old doing homework at coffee farm while grandmother is picking cherries	A child of 13 years sorting green beans together with parents after school, not longer than 14 hours a week	n/a (below local youth employment age)	Child of 13 years: spraying herbicides
14-year-old is doing homework at a coffee farm while grandmother is picking cherries	A child of 14 years assisting with packing coffee under parents' supervision under safe conditions after school, not longer than 14 hours a week.	n/a (below local youth employment age)	A 14-year-old doing pruning activities with sharp tools
17-year-old doing homework at coffee farm while grandmother is picking cherries	n/a	A youth of 17 years manages water flow and cleans beans at the washing station	Youth of 17 years spraying herbicides (=hazardous work)
16-year-old doing homework at coffee farm while grandmother is picking cherries	n/a	A 16-year-old assists with packaging under safe conditions without interfering with schooling	16-year-old carrying heavy backs of coffee cherries (=hazardous work)