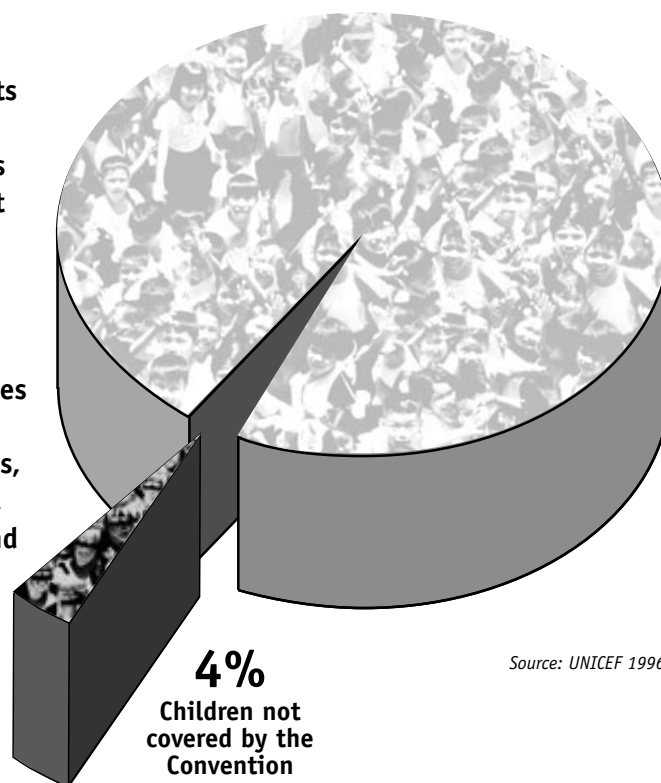


The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights convention in history. About 96 per cent of the world's children live in States that have recognized their rights and are legally obliged to fulfil them. Only six countries have still to ratify the Convention: the Cook Islands, Oman, Somalia, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.



Source: UNICEF 1996.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is helping to shape legal codes and school curricula, as well as public and official attitudes about children and their rights.

In Rwanda, conditions are improving for adolescents facing prosecution on charges stemming from the 1994 genocide and war. By October 1996, about 200 had been moved from overcrowded adult prisons to UNICEF-supported rehabilitation centres. Training on child rights is being provided to prison, judicial, police and military-police officials.

In Ecuador, a campaign headed by the First Lady is promoting awareness of every child's right to a name and a nationality. The goal is to register some 400,000 children under the age of 12 who have no identity documents.

In Mwanza, Tanzania's second largest city, an advocacy group called Kuleana has helped sensitize police, city magistrates and lawyers about children's rights. This has

led to less violence against children living on the street and to fewer of them receiving criminal convictions.

Romania has launched a pilot project in Bucharest to give juvenile offenders who would normally be sent to reform school the opportunity to remain with their families, receive counselling by social workers and carry out community service work in public institutions.

In San Ramón, Nicaragua, the Movimiento Infantil (Children's Movement) organized protests against physical punishment by teachers — and ran workshops sensitizing teachers about child rights. The group also successfully lobbied the municipal government to improve public sanitation.

Ending child labour: The next steps

Hazardous and exploitative child labour violates child rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Immediate action to eliminate such labour must be guided by the best interests of the child. Concern for the well-being of families whose survival may depend upon the earnings of their children must include efforts to expand job opportunities for adults.

Immediate elimination of hazardous and exploitative child labour — Hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour, including bonded labour, commercial sexual exploitation and work that hampers the child's physical, social, cognitive, emotional or moral development, must not be tolerated and governments must take immediate steps to end them.

Provision of free and compulsory education — Governments must fulfil their responsibility to make relevant primary education free and compulsory for all children (article 28 of the Convention) and ensure that all children attend primary school on a full-time basis until completion. Governments must budget the necessary resources for this purpose, with donors ensuring adequate resources from existing development aid budgets.

Data collection and monitoring — Data on child labour are scarce. National and international systems must be put in place to gather and analyse globally comparable data on child labour if the problem is to be addressed effectively. Special attention must be paid to the forgotten or 'invisible' areas of child labour, such as within the home, on the family farm or in domestic service. Monitoring by communities themselves is important, and working children should actively participate in assessing their situations and in proposing ways to improve their conditions.

Since the causes of child labour are complex and include poverty, economic exploitation, social values and cultural circumstances, solutions must be comprehensive and must involve the widest possible range of partners in each society.

Some specific actions that are urgently needed are as follows:

Wider legal protection — Laws on child labour and education should be consistent in purpose and implemented in a mutually supportive way. National child labour laws must accord with both the spirit and letter of the Convention and with relevant International Labour Organization conventions. Such legislation must encompass the vast majority of child work in the informal sector of the economy, including work on the streets and farms, domestic work or work within the child's own household.

Birth registration of all children — All children should be registered at birth (article 7 of the Convention). Registration is essential to permit the exercise of the child's rights, such as access to education, health care and other services, as well as to provide employers and labour inspectors with evidence of every child's age.

Codes of conduct and procurement policies — National and international corporations are urged to adopt codes of conduct guaranteeing that neither they nor their sub-contractors will employ children in conditions that violate their rights. Procurement policies must be developed to take into account the best interests of the child and include measures to protect those interests. UNICEF reaffirms its commitment to its own procurement policy, through which it undertakes not to buy from any supplier that exploits children.

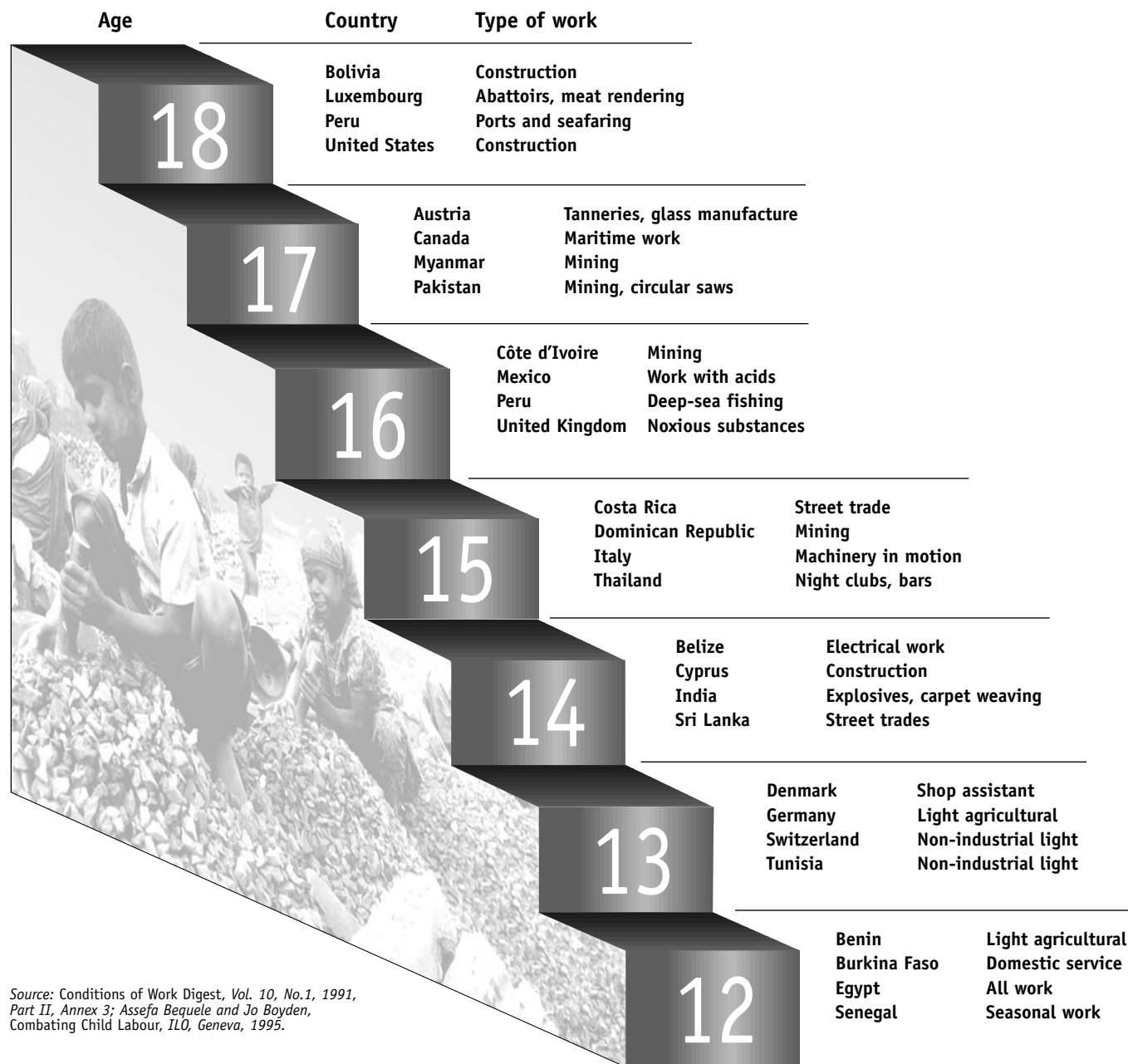


Child labour: At what age?

The world generally agrees that it is unacceptable for children under specific ages to do certain types of work. The ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138 sets the basic minimum age for admission to employment at 15 years and specifies that no child under 18 years of age is to do hazardous work. The same Convention

says that children between 13 and 15 may do light work. Few countries have ratified this Convention, however, and in addition, the Convention allows some exceptions. As a result, the minimum age at which children can do different types of work varies widely around the world, as shown in the chart below.

Legal minimum ages for different types of work, in selected countries



Source: Conditions of Work Digest, Vol. 10, No.1, 1991, Part II, Annex 3; Assefa Bequale and Jo Boyden, Combating Child Labour, ILO, Geneva, 1995.

Shadowy figures

Data on child workers is virtually non-existent. A recent survey by the International Labour Organization showed 73 million children aged 10 to 14 work. The survey, however, did not cover all countries — China and all industrialized nations were not included, for example. Also, not all categories of child workers were counted by the survey.

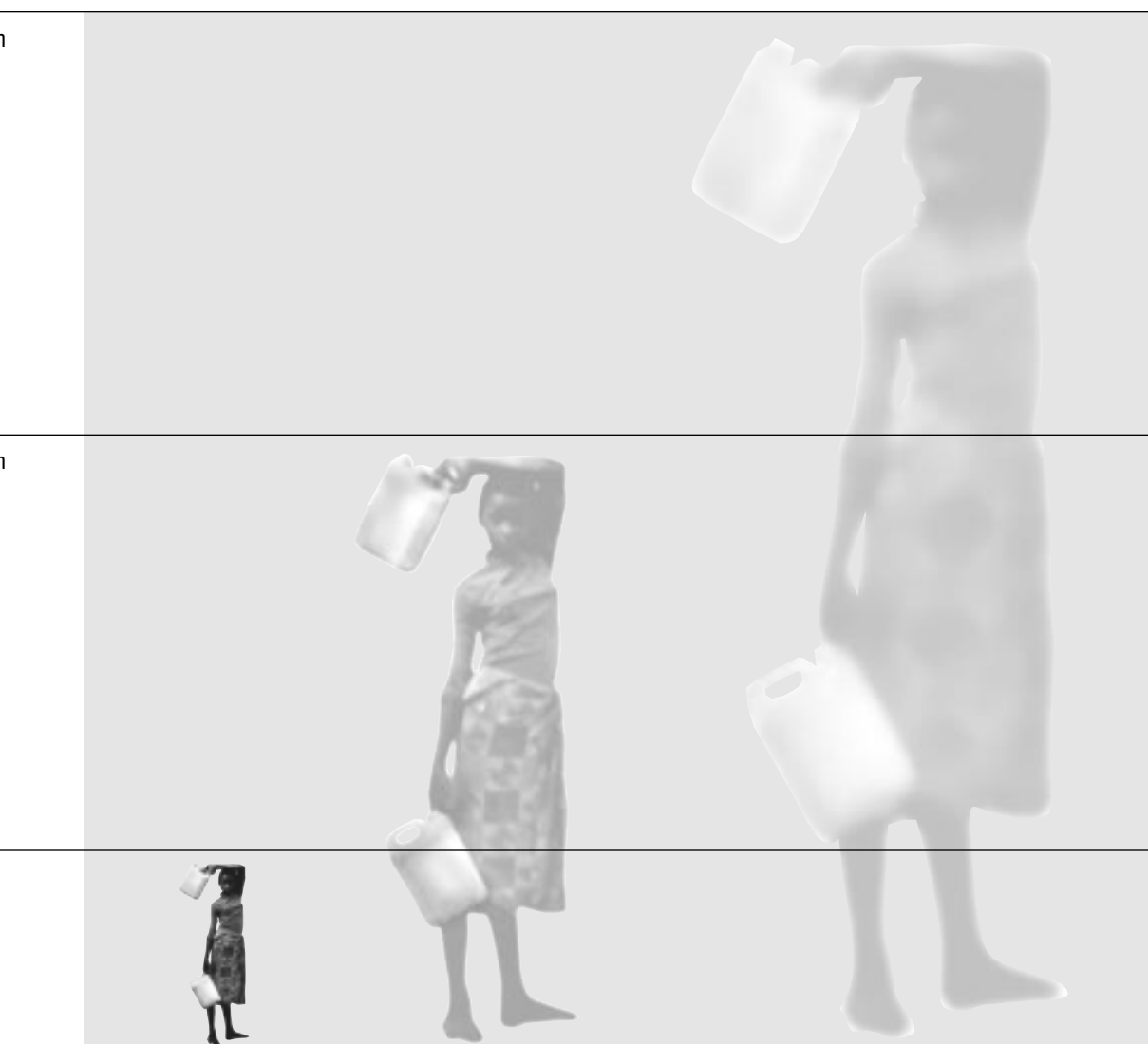
If all children under 14 who are economically active were included, the figure would rise to around 250 million. And if those who carry water for the family were counted, the total would jump to 400 million. Other child workers are hidden from the statistician's view, particularly girls doing domestic work; their numbers would push the total higher still.

Estimates of child workers worldwide

400 million

250 million

73 million

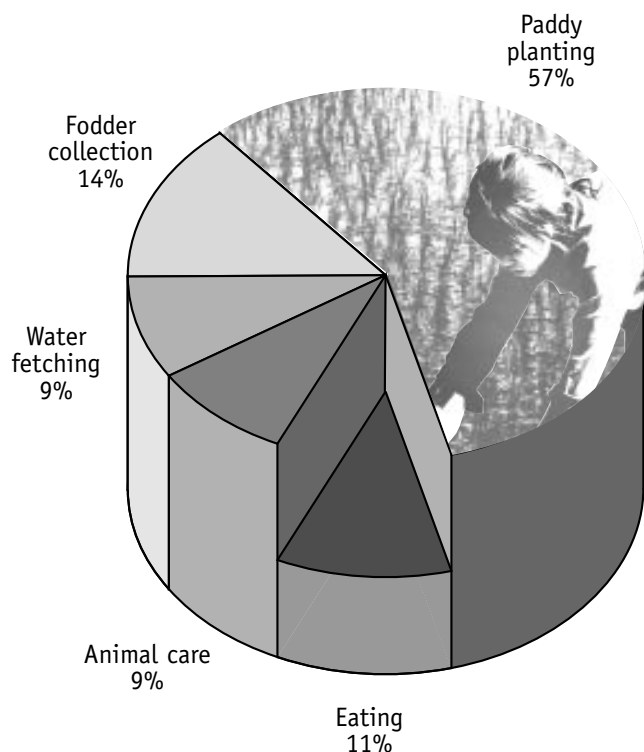


Source: Based on 1996 ILO data.

A working day in the life of a 10-year-old girl in Nepal

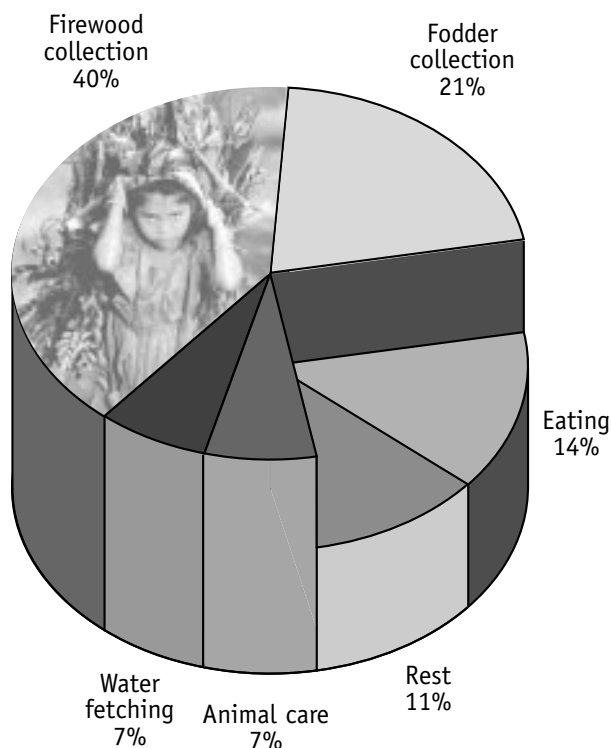
In the peak season...

Waking at sunrise, a girl in rural Nepal begins her 14-hour day by taking care of the animals and fetching water. After a half-hour for breakfast, she then spends at least two hours gathering fodder. She eats an early lunch before beginning work planting in the paddy, where she will spend at least six hours. In the evening, she again tends the animals, fetches water, takes her dinner and goes to bed at about 7:30 pm. **She has spent 12 ½ out of 14 waking hours labouring at her chores.**



In the slack season...

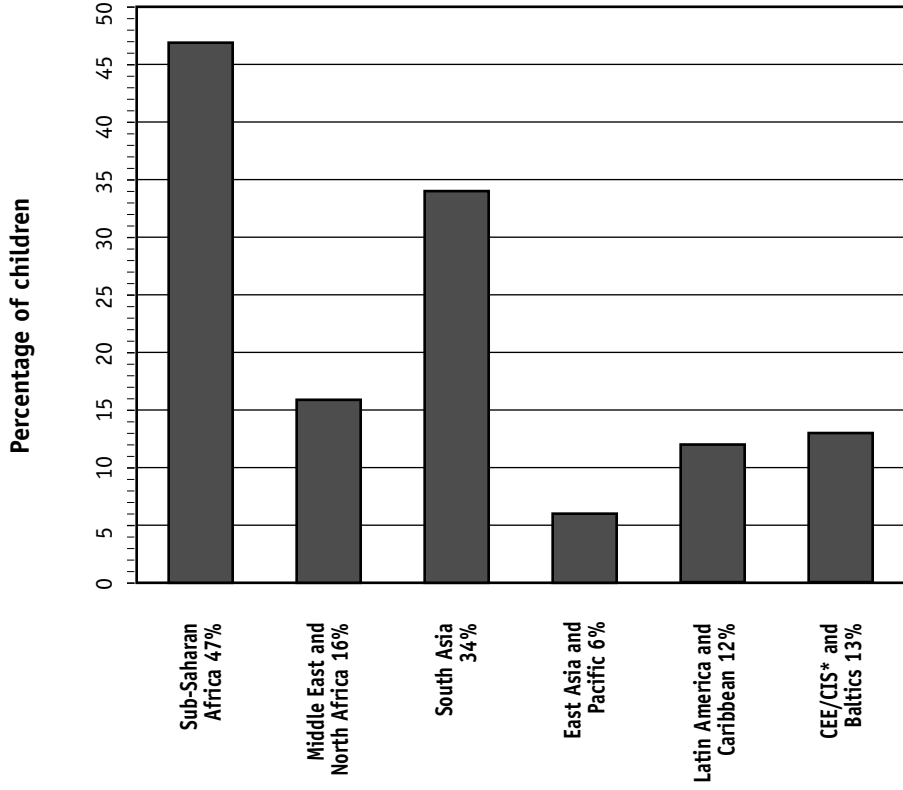
A girl in rural Nepal, rising with the sun, begins her day by taking care of the animals and fetching water. She takes breakfast and then spends at least two hours gathering fodder. The slack season differs from the peak in that, after lunch, she has time for a short rest. Then she goes to collect firewood, a chore that will take five or six hours. In the evening, she again looks after the animals, fetches water, eats dinner and has time for another short rest before going to bed at about 8:00 pm. **Her slack-season chores take 10 ½ out of 14 waking hours.**



Source: Victoria Johnson, Joanna Hill and Edda Ivan-Smith, *Listening to smaller voices*, ACTIONAID, London, 1995.

Children out of school: A cost and cause of child labour

Children of primary school age not attending school (%)



*Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States.



Photo: UNICEF/4621/Lemoyne

