

## CHILD LABOUR:

### Eradicating Child Labour in Egypt

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The latest national estimates from the 2021 Egypt Family Health Survey (EFHS) indicate that 1.3 million children (4.9%) are engaged in child labour activities, with about 900,000 children exposed to hazardous work environments.
- Children in rural areas, especially rural Upper Egypt, are twice as likely to be engaged in child labour compared to those in urban areas.
- Child labour is associated with school attendance, where 10% of children not attending school are engaged in child labour activities.
- The lowest reported rates of child labour are among children whose parents have had a secondary education or higher.
- Children living in poor families are more likely to be engaged in child labour (10%), compared to those living in less poor and non-poor families.

The impact of child labour on the health, development, and school attendance of children is thus of significant concern.

## WHY SHOULD WE FOCUS ON CHILD LABOUR?

Over the past decade, Egypt has made progress in reducing child labour practices through a well-established legal framework, iterative reforms to the law to address ratified international conventions, as well as diversified national policies. Despite the progress achieved, child labour continues to affect 1.3 million children (4.9%) aged 5-17 years,<sup>1</sup> with about 467,825 falling in the younger age cohort

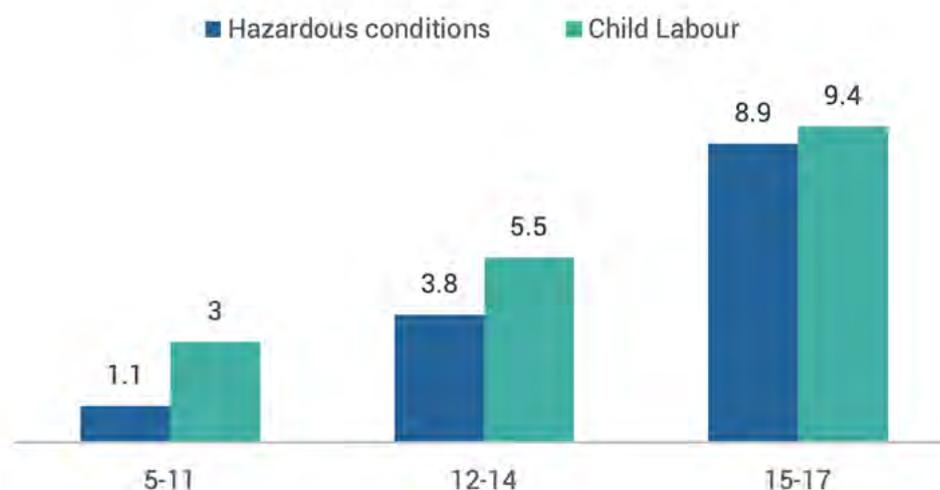
of 5-11 years old. The impact of child labour on the health, development, and school attendance of children is thus of significant concern. Other staggering consequences of child labour include a number of adverse physical and mental health outcomes, such as poor growth, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and anaemia, physical injuries, mental and behavioural disorders.

## UNICEF EGYPT DATA SNAPSHOT SERIES

The UNICEF Egypt Data Snapshot Series aims at encouraging evidence-based discussion on critical child-related issues. This data brief is produced by UNICEF Egypt using recent evidence and integrating data from multiple sources.

<sup>1</sup> Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) (2022), Egypt Family Health Survey 2021; and Statistical Yearbook 2014.

**Figure 1: Children age 5-17 years engaged in child Labour and working under hazardous conditions by age, EFHS-2021**



## WHAT IS THE SITUATION OF CHILD LABOUR IN EGYPT?

The 2010 National Child Labour Survey indicated that 1.8 million children (10.5%) in Egypt are engaged in child labour and 1.6 million (8.3%) are engaged in hazardous or illegal forms of work. According to the 2014 EDHS, 7% of children 5-17 years (about 1.6 million children) were considered involved in child labour, while in the 2021 EFHS, this percentage dropped to 5% (roughly 1.3 million children), reflecting the continuous government commitment and partners' support to combat child labour. Those figures are based on household surveys, which are likely to be an underestimation as they do not include street children/homeless children and children engaged in illegal activities related to drug trading, trafficking, or sexual exploitation.

Child labour figures presented here utilize UNICEF's definition of child labour as used in the UNICEF's MICS programme.<sup>2</sup> Cut-offs are based on the child's age and the number of hours a child works during the week. A child is considered engaged in child labour economic activities if s/he works for:

- 1 hour or more per week among children in the age group 5-11
- 14 hours or more per week among children in the among age group 12-14
- 43 hours or more per week among children in the among age group 15-17

Or is engaged in child labour through domestic work if s/he does chores/housework for:

- 28 hours or more per week among children in the age group 5-14
- 43 hours or more per week among children in the age group 15-17

According to the EFHS-2021, overall, 5% of children 5-17 (1.3 million children) are engaged in child labour: 2% (roughly 575,674 children) were engaged in economic activities at or above the threshold for their age, 1% (about 246,717

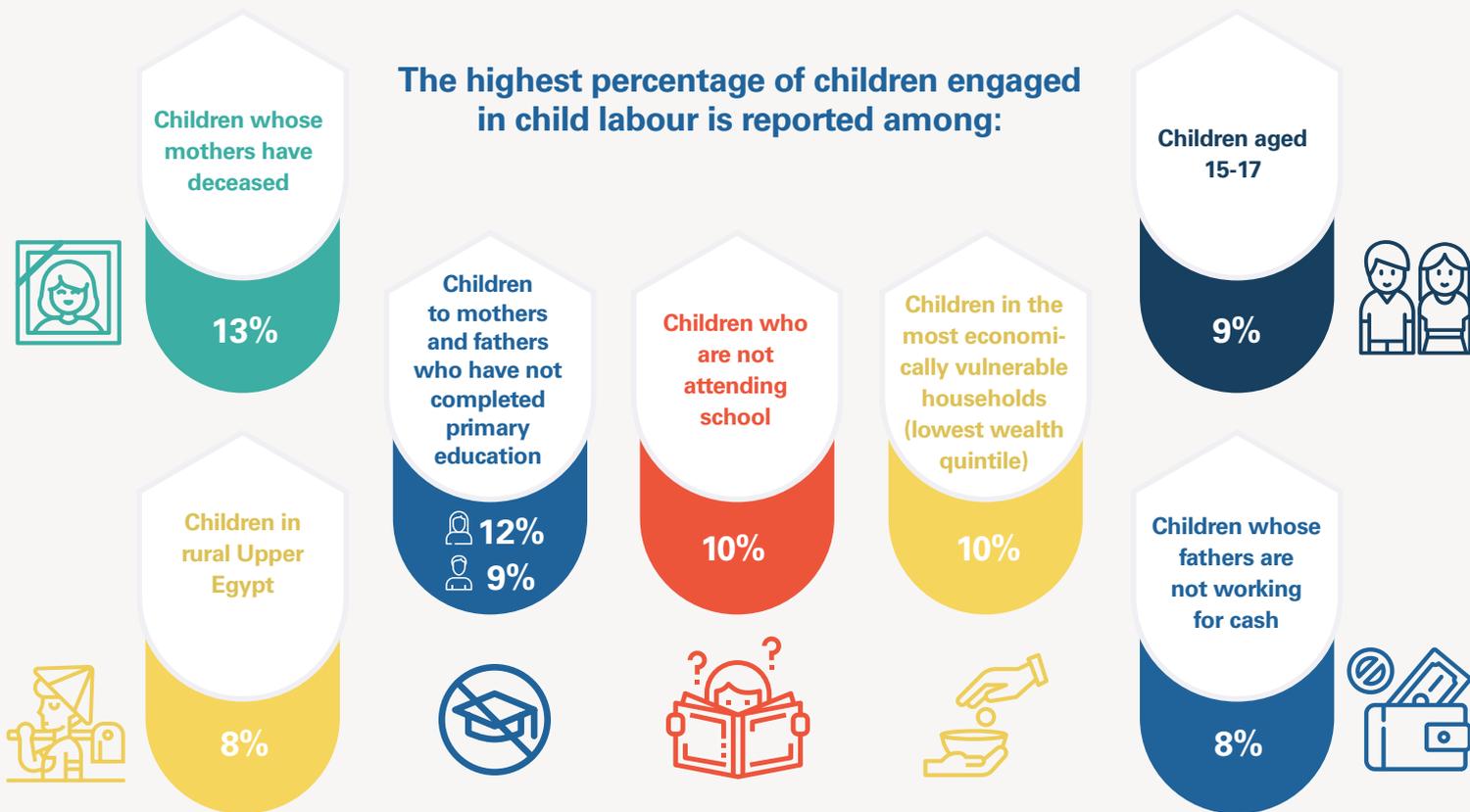
children) were engaged in household chores at or above the age-specific limit, and 3% are subject to hazardous work environments (about 904,630 children).

While the overall percentage of children engaged in child labour is approximately 5%, the percentage increases to 10% for children living in families in the lowest wealth quintile and drops to 1.5% for children living in families in the highest wealth quintile. Children living in poor families are more likely to be engaged in child labour, compared to those living in less poor and non-poor families.

The percentage of children considered in child labour increases by age; however, in numbers, more young children in the age group 5-11 are engaged in child labour than children in the age group 12-14 (about 467,825 and 313,186 children, respectively). It is also important to note that the percentage of male children who are considered to be involved in child labour is higher than that of females (7% to 3%, respectively).

Exposure to hazardous work conditions increases with age to reach nearly 9% among children 15-17. This indicates that almost all children between 15-17 who are engaged in child labour work in hazardous environments.

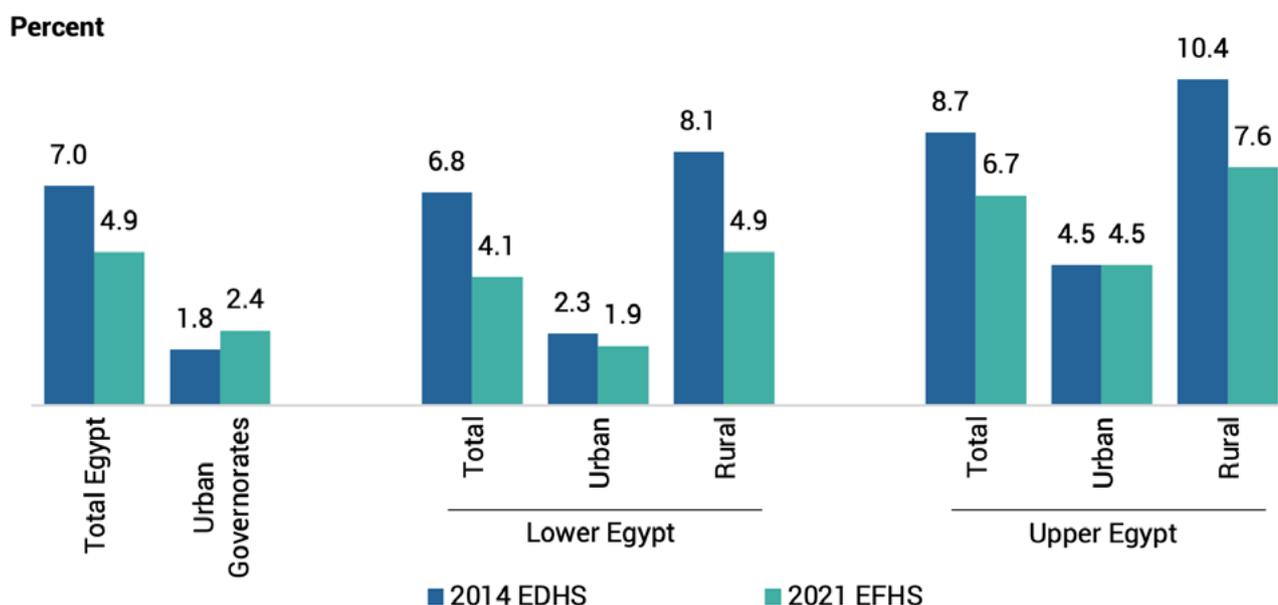
<sup>2</sup> MICS: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey



Comparing EFHS-2021 results with the EDHS-2014 results, highlights the overall decline in child labour in all regions except for urban governorates and urban areas in Upper Egypt. Remarkably, child labour has increased in urban governorates from 1.8% in 2014 to 2.4% in 2021. On the other hand, the greatest decline was documented in rural areas in Lower Egypt, followed by rural areas in Upper Egypt.

Data on children’s exposure to the worst forms of child labour, such as drug trafficking, forced beggary, and commercial sexual exploitation, was not collected through the EFHS-2021. The government did not publish data or estimates on the number of children exposed to those forms of child labour.

**Figure 2: Trends in child labor by residence, Egypt 2014-2021**



<sup>3</sup> Figures for overweight include both children and adults who are overweight or obese.



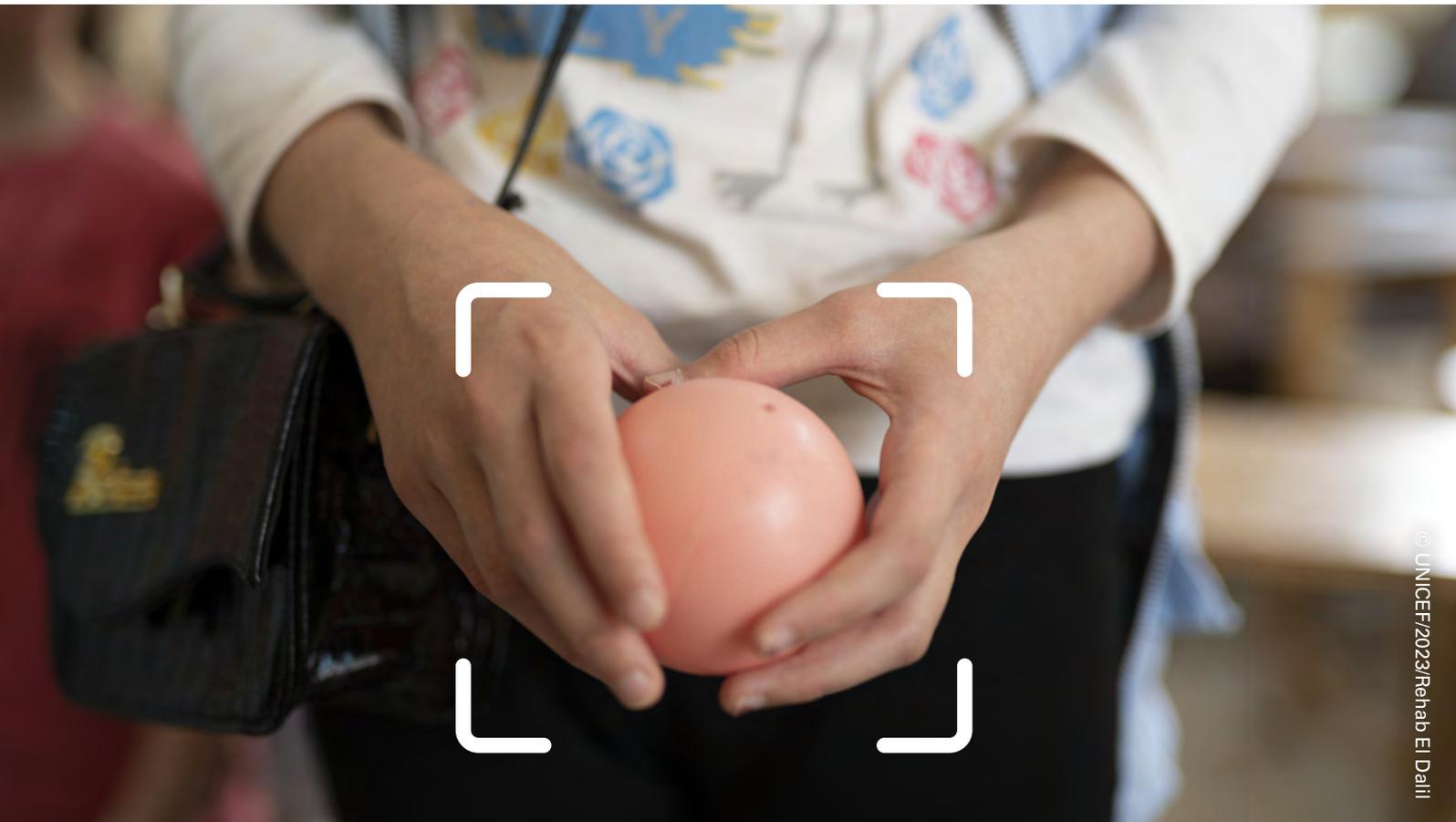
## EGYPT'S POLICIES ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR

The Government of Egypt (GoE) has ratified international conventions tackling child labour. In 1990, Egypt ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) (1989)**. Article 32 of the Convention states that “the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be dangerous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.” In 1999, Egypt ratified the **International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138** concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973), which requires states to set a minimum age for admission to employment and to develop relevant national policies accordingly. Then in 2002, the GoE ratified the **ILO Convention No. 182** concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Additionally, the government ratified the UN CRC Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the UN CRC Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, and finally ratified Palermo Protocol on trafficking in persons.

The **Egyptian Constitution of 2014**, Article 80 specifies the rights of children under the age of 18, including the right to education, care, and cognitive development. The article clearly prohibits employing children before they reach the age of having completed their primary education and

prohibits their employment in jobs that expose them to risk. The GoE launched the **Strategic Framework and National Strategy for Childhood and Motherhood (2018-2030)**, which was developed by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM). This strategy seeks to foster policy discussions and make amendments to the current child labour legislation, build the capacity of government stakeholders, develop programs to address child labour, and expand educational and vocational training.

In addition, as part of Egypt’s Vision 2030, which is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Government, in collaboration with the ILO and supported by UNICEF, has developed “**The National Action Plan for Combating the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Supporting Family (2018-2025 NAP)**”. This strategy lays out an effective agenda to eliminate child labour by 2025 and spells out responsibilities between government entities and UN institutions. Additionally, in an attempt to eliminate trafficking of street children, the Government developed the **National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Persons (2016–2021)**. Furthermore, the Government has expanded the social protection programs through Takafal and Karama conditional cash transfer (CCT), which provides financial support for families to avoid children’s engagement in economic activities in addition to encouraging school attendance and health monitoring.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN EGYPT

In compliance with international conventions, Egypt took initiative and made amendments to ensure the Egyptian law fulfils the conventions' requirements. **Egyptian Child Law No. 12 of 1996, as amended by Law 126 of 2008**, stipulates in part 5–chapter 1 certain restrictions and conditions of child labour. Article 64 prohibits employing children before their 15th birthday and restricts participating in training before the age of 13. The law requires children 12-14 years to obtain a license for seasonal employment given that it does not impose harm to the child's health or growth nor impact their school attendance. Articles 65, 65-bis and 66 of the law also set specific guidelines, including prohibiting children from working in environments that are likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children, as set by the ILO Convention No. 182. They additionally set working hours to be a maximum of 6 hours per day with 1-2 rest periods. In accordance with the Child Law, **the Labour Law (No. 12 of 2003)** sets the same working hour limit as the Child Law and prohibits employing a child between eight in the evening and seven in the morning. Currently, a draft of the new labour law has been passed through the Egyptian Senate, which modified the eligible age for training to be 14 instead of 12 in the previous law, and also proposed fines for business owners who violate the law (1000-2000 EGP).

The decree of the Ministry of Manpower (Ministerial Resolution No. 118 of 2003) additionally specifies conditions, terms and cases in which children shall be employed, as well as works, vocations and industries in which it is prohibited to employ children. Under this ministerial decree, certain jobs,

professions and industries in which children under the age of seventeen may not be employed are specified. However, it is worth noting that certain hazardous work, such as brickmaking are not included in these prohibited jobs/industries, and thus further revision is needed. Additionally, **Law No. 64 of 2010 on Combating Human Trafficking** stipulates in article 2 all forms of exploitation that are considered a crime of human trafficking, including beggary.

## Legal Framework Shortcomings

1

Does not address domestic child labour and other prevalent worst forms of child labour.

2

Sanctions on offenders/ employers are not adequate.

3

Hazardous work conditions included under the Ministerial Resolution No. (118) do not cover brickmaking.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

In Egypt, five governmental agencies are responsible for the law enforcement that addresses child labour phenomena: 1) Ministry of Manpower, 3) Ministry of Justice, 3) Ministry of Interior, 4) Ministry of Local Development and 5) Administrative Control Authority. The Ministry of Manpower, through its Child Labour Inspection Unit and the Ministry of Local Development, are involved in enforcing the Child Law while the other agencies are involved in enforcing criminal law, including violations of laws related to the worst forms of child labour and human trafficking.

Although there are no available data on the number of labour inspectors within the Ministry of Manpower, the “2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour: Egypt” report suggests that they are not adequate and that the Ministry of Manpower needs to recruit about 1,896 inspectors to monitor violations in relation to the Labour Law. The Ministry and ILO provided training sessions for inspectors in the past (the Ministry trained 527 labour inspectors in 2020, and the ILO trained 140 inspectors). In 2020, the ILO-led Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa (ACCEL AFRICA) project delivered a training program for 240 Labour inspectors.

In making efforts to eliminate child exploitation and human trafficking, the Office of Public Prosecutor announced in 2021 the establishment of eight specialized prosecution offices to manage trafficking and irregular migration cases.

In addition to law enforcement agencies, the Government has other bodies that coordinate and support law enforcement. The national child protection system supports the identification and response of child labour cases in different capacities and enables law enforcement. The Child Protection Committees (CPCs), which were established in 2008, are concerned with coordinating child protection efforts at the governorate level in 27 governorates with concerned stakeholders, including social services and law enforcement. The Ministry of Social Solidarity case management units are also concerned with identifying and responding to cases of children at risk, including cases of child labour, and linking them with services and law enforcement. Moreover, the national Child Helpline 16000 is a reporting tool to receive reports on cases of violations against children, including child labour and trafficking in persons. Reported cases are accordingly referred to services and law enforcement as needed. In addition, the National Council for Human Rights has an operating helpline (15508) where cases can also be reported. The NCCM also provides training for labour inspectors and monitors vulnerable children. The Government has also established a multilateral National Steering Committee to coordinate efforts to implement the NAP for Combatting the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Supporting Family. It has also established the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons in 2016, according to the law No. 82/2016, to lead governmental efforts to prevent and combat irregular migration in Egypt.

## Issues in Law Enforcement

1

To monitor NAP progress, data needs to be available on number of inspectors and cases managed.

2

No clear mechanism for monitoring child labour, especially in the informal sector.

3

National hotlines should be linked with local police units for immediate action.

4

Strengthening coordination mechanisms and multi-sector referral pathways across various stakeholders is needed to enhance effectiveness and responsiveness.

5

Enforcing minimum wages for children legally in training and seasonal work and those who work.

## CONSEQUENCES AND COSTS

Child labour is a multifaceted issue. Literature indicates that child labour impacts children, families, society, and the overall country's prosperity and economic growth. Child labour usually deprives children of their rights to education and recreational activities and exposes them to risks of exploitation and abuse. Children are physically and psychologically at risk when they are engaged in economic activities or long hours of domestic work, especially when they work in hazardous work conditions. Cuts, burns, and respiratory illnesses are among the commonly reported health consequences of child labour. Furthermore, exposure to violent or oppressing work environments, including drug trading, human trafficking and sexual exploitation damage children psychologically. Moreover, long working hours for children are usually associated with dropping out of school and/or low attendance rates. In general, this phenomenon harms the country's overall economic development.



## ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR MOVING FORWARD

Global evidence suggests that, due to the complexity of child labour's underlying causes and the possible adverse effects of certain policies if implemented in isolation, reducing child labour requires integrated packages of policies and programs to realize and sustain the desired change. Additionally, realizing more advancements to eliminate child labour requires strong and effective coordination across various sectors, engagement of stakeholders and collaboration initiatives.

The Legal Framework should provide a clear legislative distinction between the cross-definitions of trafficking in persons and child labour that empower prosecution as well as preserve rights and recourse to services. As well, sanctions on offenders/employers need to be revised to be more adequate.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOUR?

- The role of social protection in eliminating child labour:** The highest percentage of child labour is reported among families living in poverty. Social protection programs that provide cash incomes to vulnerable families with children are crucial to lower child labour rates. Accordingly, and to mitigate the impact of the current economic crisis, there is a need to expand social protection programs or design other programs to support families with children at risk of being involved in child labour. Providing cash stipends based on children's school attendance (i.e., number of days attended per month) could be an effective way to stop foreseen child labour activities. If proper monitoring mechanisms are available, cash transfers could be conditional based on verifying that children aged 5-17 are not in child labour.
- Labour-oriented programs for youth and adults:** Creating work opportunities for youth and adults especially through access to technical and vocational training and work opportunities. Some literature suggests that labour-oriented programs might not be effective because these programs may result in an increase in household chores performed by children and/or their involvement in the family business. However, if labour-oriented programs are integrated with other interventions/programs discussed here, it is expected to avoid any adverse effects on child labour.
- Strengthening the Inspection Mechanism and Law Enforcement:** Law enforcement and monitoring require the involvement of various stakeholders and community members, such as schools, trade unions, business associations, and community organizations. For instance, inspecting for domestic labour could be done via schools. School social workers could play a vital role to identify and monitor children at risk based on their school attendance rate, level of fatigue, and signs of serious injuries or illness. A monitoring system is necessary to identify and refer child labour cases, with an adequate number of law enforcement personnel and capacity building for inspectors. In this process, data on inspection mechanisms and disaggregated information on child labour are crucial.
- Raising awareness:** A widespread education initiative is key to combatting child labour. Initiatives should be designed and implemented to raise public awareness about child labour, including amongst parents, employers, children, and policy makers. The campaign should raise awareness on the types of child labour, in particular, the worst forms of child labour, and potential adverse effects on children and society. Furthermore, awareness should aim to sensitize eligible children on their work rights, including vacations, rest periods and minimum wage.
- Expanding school/education opportunities to out-of-school children aged 5-17** to enrol them in community schools. The "Combating Worst Forms of Child Labour by Reinforcing Policy Response and Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods and Educational Opportunities" (CWCLP) program implemented in 2011-2014 had successful results. It could be used as a model to build on and roll out at the national level. In addition, support for children at risk of school dropout should be improved. This can be facilitated by supporting national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in protection and rehabilitation interventions.
- Delivering child-friendly protection services to prevent and respond to child labour.** This can be achieved by strengthening the capacity of social workers, enhancing referral systems, mainstreaming child protection across sectors, strengthening community-based structures, and improving data collection mechanisms.



## WHAT IS UNICEF DOING ABOUT IT?

One of the main pillars of UNICEF's programme in Egypt is child protection and supporting child rights against violence, abuse, and exploitation, including child labour. UNICEF is working with multiple partners and stakeholders to strengthen preventive and responsive services to children engaged in child labour activities or at risk of exploitative child labour activities. UNICEF and ILO have supported efforts of the National Committee on Eradication of Child Labour and the Ministry of Manpower in developing the National Actional plan (NAP) 2018-2025 on Combatting the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Egypt.

01

**Working with the CAPMAS, NCCM, and ILO to enhance knowledge on the child labour situation in Egypt:** Realizing the importance of data to support the implementation of the NAP, monitor progress achieved and make informed decisions, UNICEF is working with NCCM, CAPMAS and ILO to implement another round of the National Child Labour Survey for an updated situation of child labour practices in Egypt. The National Child Labour Survey report is expected to be issued by the end of this quarter. Additionally, UNICEF is working on issuing regular progress reports to monitor and evaluate the NAP implementation. A mid-term evaluation was conducted in the second quarter of 2023 to enhance the knowledge of NCCM and other partners on what was achieved in the NAP.

02

**Supporting legislation and institutional coordination and capacity to combat child labour:** UNICEF has continuously supported amendments to the Child Law and Labour code to ensure alignment with international conventions and labour standards, as well as to fill any legislative gaps that can hinder efforts to combat child labour. UNICEF supported a legal study to review the Child Law and proposed amendments to the Child Law that were discussed with NAP National Steering Committee to validate and approve. Thus, an updated Child Law was drafted taking into consideration the minimum age for apprenticeship and employment. Additionally, UNICEF worked with various partners to update the list of hazardous work types in relevant policies and legislation to ensure all forms of child labour are addressed.

03

**Strengthening the prevention and response to child labour:** Creating and improving prevention and response is a key focus area for UNICEF. Through adopting a comprehensive approach, UNICEF aims to tackle child labour and respond effectively to cases of children engaged in or at-risk of child labour and their families. To this end, UNICEF is working with ILO to support the economic empowerment and income generating activities for parents, especially women through ILO GET Ahead training packages. Also, UNICEF in partnership with the ILO supports the implementation of SCREAM programme which aims to empower children and educate schoolteachers and management on child rights and the social costs of child labour. UNICEF supports efforts to develop the national Child Protection Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) and provides capacity building to Child Helpline (CHL) staff to receive and refer child labour cases. Thus, rolling out the national referral pathways for managing child labour cases. Additionally, UNICEF is working on capacitating child protection mechanisms, including the Child Helpline and the Child Protection Committees (CPCs). Furthermore, UNICEF supports activating and piloting the trial referral mechanism to report incidences of child labour identified by the national labour inspectors at the Ministry of Manpower to the Child Helpline.

In order to improve coordination mechanisms, UNICEF Egypt is also working with relevant partners to integrate child labour indicators into the Information Management System for case management (IMS), then pilot it. This system aims to connect all stakeholders and partners working with children and enables them to report identified cases and refer them to services.

04

**Promoting access to quality education awareness and social mobilization to fight child labour:** UNICEF works with the Ministry of Education to improve access and quality of education to ensure that children remain in school and learn the necessary skills needed to access decent employment. In collaboration with the ILO and NCCM, awareness materials were jointly developed in 2020 which can be updated and used during the coming years to launch an awareness campaign on combating child labour. Partners will review the materials at hand, make edits and develop new additional ones if needed. Additionally, this collaboration with ILO and NCCM aims to produce advocacy briefs to tackle child labour. UNICEF, NCCM and ILO also work on putting community initiatives into action that encourage children's participation in dialogue to end child labour. Finally, and building on the successful models piloted by UNICEF and ILO, there is ongoing support to develop community-based platforms to prevent and identify children engaged or at risk of child labour; this support involves building capacities of NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs).

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