



## Policy brief 2020

# Child labour and the youth labour market in Ethiopia

*This policy brief provides a summary of the main quantitative and qualitative findings from a study on child labour and the youth labour market in Ethiopia. Based on these findings, together with a mapping of the country's policy response to child labour, a set of policy recommendations are provided.*

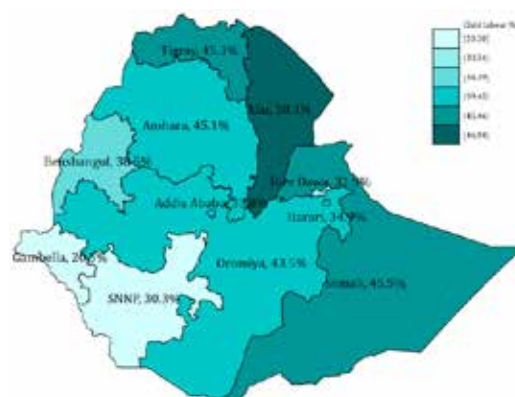


Figure 1. Child labour prevalence by region

## Background

Despite several initiatives by the Government and civil society to combat child labour, the incidence of the phenomenon remains high in Ethiopia. The latest national child labour survey in the country was conducted in 2015 and shows that 43 per cent of children aged 5-17 are engaged in the practice.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) and Central Statistical Agency (CSA) (2018). Ethiopia National Child Labour Survey 2015. Addis Ababa.

To enhance the level of knowledge about the causes and consequences of child labour and to inform policy makers, a mixed method study consisting of quantitative and qualitative components was conducted. The quantitative part makes use of data from the 2015 Child Labour Survey (CLS) and the 2013 Labour Force Survey (LFS) to further analyse child labour and the youth labour market in Ethiopia. The CLS focuses on children living in parental households and thereby overlooks some vulnerable hard-to-reach children who live on the street and are not part of traditional households. Therefore, to complement the quantitative analysis, qualitative interviews were conducted with hard-to-reach children engaged in child labour.

## Main quantitative findings

- School enrolment and employment increase together until children are 11 years old and thereafter enrolment drops (see Figure 2 below).
- The school life expectancy (number of years of education expected) is lower for child labourers and the age-grade distortion is more severe.
- Higher educational attainment of the household head is associated with a lower prevalence of child labour and higher school attendance for children.
- Most parents believe there is a value in education and that going to school is the best option for their children. This does not necessarily mean that their children are in fact attending school.
- The autonomy of children increases with age with older children more likely to decide whether to work. Nevertheless, this decision is taken by the family in almost 73% of child labour cases.
- Child labour decreases steadily as households get wealthier (as measured by a wealth index), but the pattern is less clear for household expenditures.
- Households with more land are more likely to have children engaged in child labour.
- On average, boys allocate more time to work, while girls spend more time on household chores. Overall boys spend more time on productive tasks. This gender gap increases as children get older (see Figure 3 below).
- Exposure to hazards in the workplace increases with age.
- Youth tend to combine school and work (40.6%), rather than only go to school (26.2%) or only work (26.3%).
- The vulnerable population of NEETs is larger among females (11.3% vs. 3.3% of males) and in urban areas (7.2% vs 6.9% in rural areas).
- Labour underutilization is more prevalent in urban areas (38.7% vs. 25.2%) and for females (32.5% vs. 22.8%).
- Youth workers are mostly employed in low skilled jobs.
- The majority of youth are employed as contributing family workers (90%).
- Agriculture is the main sector of employment (81%), although the service sector dominates in urban areas (63%).
- 57% of youth have some grade of primary school as their highest education. It is more common in rural areas and for females to have no education at all (41%).
- There is a positive correlation between education and youth earnings

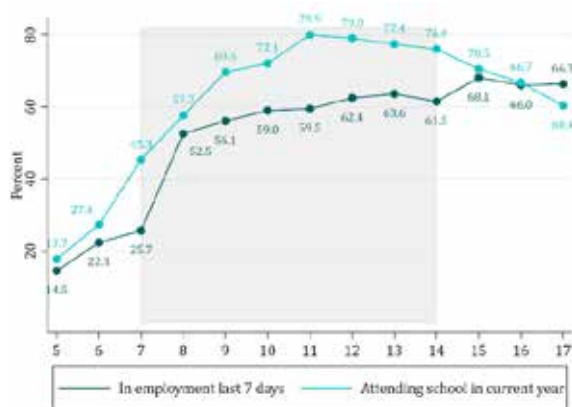


Figure 2. Employment and school attendance by age

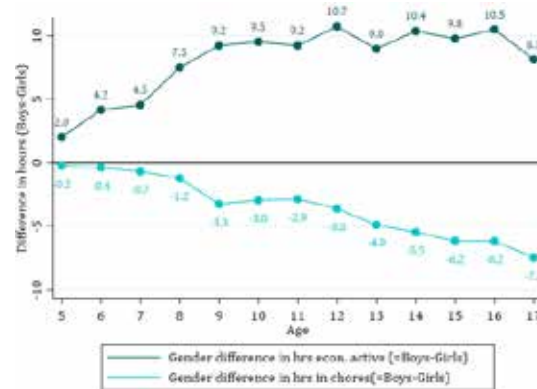


Figure 3. Gender gap of the hours of productive activities between girls and boys by age

## Main qualitative findings

- Poverty is the underlying factor pushing children into child labour.
- Other factors that might worsen the effects of poverty include: costs associated with education, a high number of siblings, orphanhood, parents' inability to work, family disputes or abusive situations in the home causing children to run away, and empty promises of school enrolment from employers making children move to the cities.
- Many children in rural areas view the city as an attractive destination, and this is one of the reasons why they decide to move from their homes to seek employment in the cities.
- The influence of peers returning from the cities is another push factor, together with aspirations of self-improvement.
- When arriving in the cities, children often face a different reality than expected and are forced to take on exploitative jobs in order to survive.
- Boys often work as shoe shiners, porters or fishermen and girls are more frequently employed as domestic workers or in sex work, making them susceptible to different types of workplace hazards.
- Children with disabilities are reportedly forced to work in begging.
- Working children in urban areas use various strategies to cope with the difficult situations they are facing, such as mutually sharing resources with other children in similar situations.

## National policy response

Child labour is a complex issue and eliminating it requires a coordinated response by several actors. In Ethiopia, some of the key actors include: the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; the regional bureau of labour and social affairs; the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Justice; the Central Statistical Agency; the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission; and the police.

## Ratified conventions and national legislation

Ethiopia has ratified several international conventions and implemented national legislation to address the issue of child labour. These conventions and laws are listed below with their respective year of ratification or implementation. The legal framework prohibits work for children below the age of 15 and regulates the working conditions for young workers in terms of working hours and time of the day and week when working is allowed.

Convention	Year of ratification
ILO Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138)	1991
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	1999
ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182)	2003
UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	2014
UNCRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	2014

Legislation	Year of implementation
Civil Code	1960
Ethiopian Constitution	1995
Family Code	2000
Criminal Code	2005
Anti-Trafficking Proclamation	2015
Overseas Employment Proclamation	2015
Labour Proclamation	2019

## National action plans, policies and programmes

Two especially important action plans for the protection of children and prevention of child labour are the *National Children's Policy* and the *National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour*. These action plans focus directly on children's rights, preventing child labour and giving support to children engaged in the worst forms of child labour. Other action plans focus on children or youth as sub-target groups, such as the *National Occupational Safety and Health Policy* aiming to protect young workers from hazardous jobs.

While some action plans are related directly to child labour, others are indirectly linked through causes and consequences. Two examples include the *Education and Training Policy* and the *National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Ethiopia*.

In addition, there are several programmes and projects related to child labour. The *Productive Safety Net Programme* focuses on increasing access to safety net and disaster risk management systems and aims to make households more resilient to natural shocks. Several projects are related to education, such as the *Engaged, Educated, Empowered, Ethiopian Youth Project*, *Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Project II* and *Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Programme for Equity*. These aim to tackle child labour by promoting education opportunities, improving the quality of education, and ensuring equitable access.

## Policy recommendations

Based on the results from the quantitative and qualitative studies, this section provides policy recommendations and essential steps to take to improve the current policy response and ultimately eliminate child labour.

- Given that poverty is one of the main reasons for children to engage in child labour, one crucial step is to **provide support to families** to meet their basic needs and thereby reduce the need for children to engage in work.
- A priority among policymakers should be to **create social awareness** regarding the many negative aspects and consequences of child labour that have been demonstrated in this policy brief. Unless societal attitudes towards child labour change, it will be difficult to realize the full effects of other policies addressing child labour.
- Helping women in households play a more important role in decision making could help reduce child labour. Incorporating **female empowerment** within other projects has a role to play.
- Several steps should be taken to **improve school retention**, such as a strong focus on **school quality** and **equal access** to education. Children should further be encouraged to start school at the age of 7 in order to reduce the number of dropouts at a later stage. This could be accomplished by **making school attendance mandatory** between the ages of 7 and 14, as the legal working age in Ethiopia is set at 15.
- A focus on **job creation** in urban areas could absorb the more educated population of youth and minimize skill mismatches.
- The alleviation of economic shocks experienced by households can be improved by ensuring that **social protection programmes** are widely available to those who are vulnerable to economic hardship in the face of shocks and may otherwise send children to work as a coping mechanism.
- While the Government of Ethiopia already has many important policies and programmes in place, these do not always translate into the desired results without proper **implementation**. Therefore, the focus should also be on **law enforcement, coordination, integration and capacity building** among stakeholders to strengthen the positive effects of the commitments and ensure they reach their full potential.
- **Tailored approaches** are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of policies, as there are many variations in the circumstances between, for instance, rural and urban areas and males and females.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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