

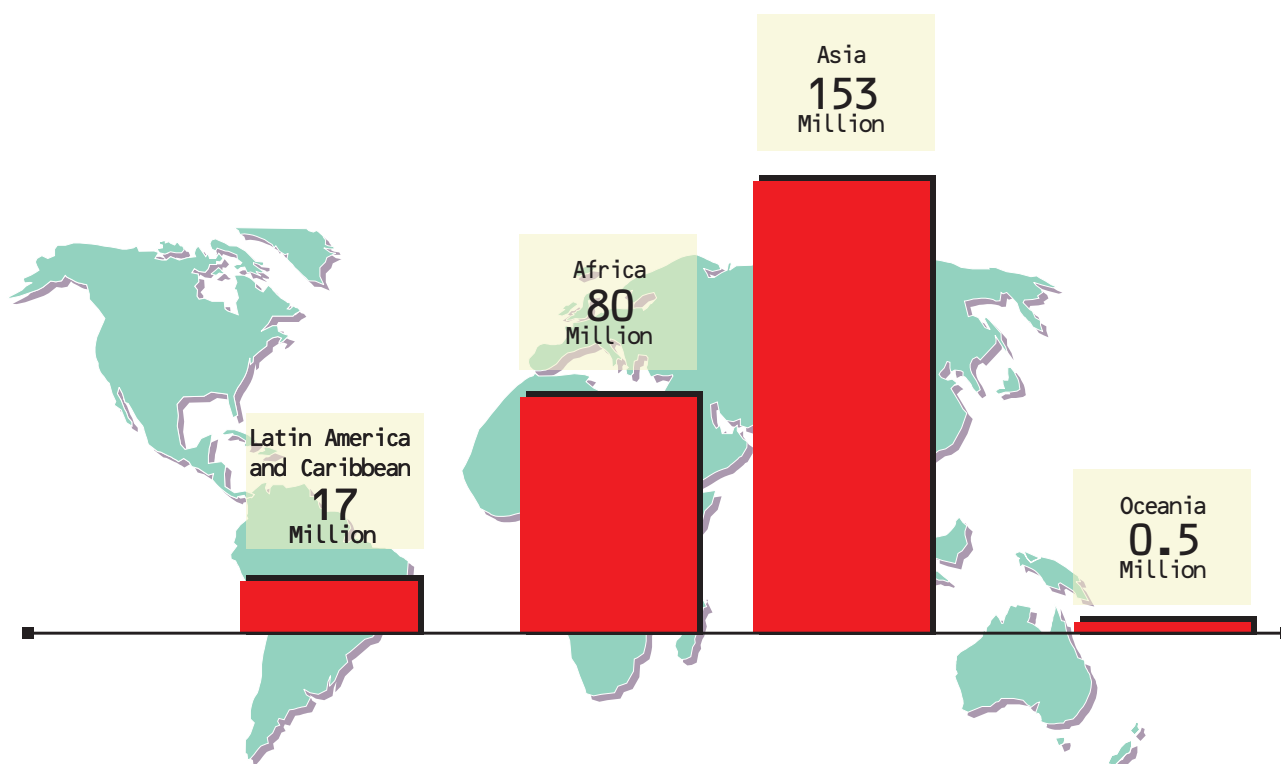
# Facts and figures on child labour



Targeting the intolerable A new international convention to eliminate the worst forms of child labour

# Facts and figures on child labour

The economic exploitation of children is an insult to humanity. All over the world children continue to work, putting at stake their education, their health, their normal development to adulthood, and even their lives. Millions of them work under hazardous conditions which present dangers to their health, safety and welfare. They toil in mines and quarries, are exposed to agrochemicals in agriculture, squat in crippling positions to weave rugs and carpets, and scavenge in rubbish tips. Too many are enslaved in bonded labour, isolated in domestic service, and traumatized and abused in the commercial sex trade.



According to ILO estimates, there are some **250 million children** between the ages of 5 and 14 years who are in economic activity in developing countries alone. For 120 million of them, work is a full-time activity. The remainder combine work with schooling or other non-economic activities.

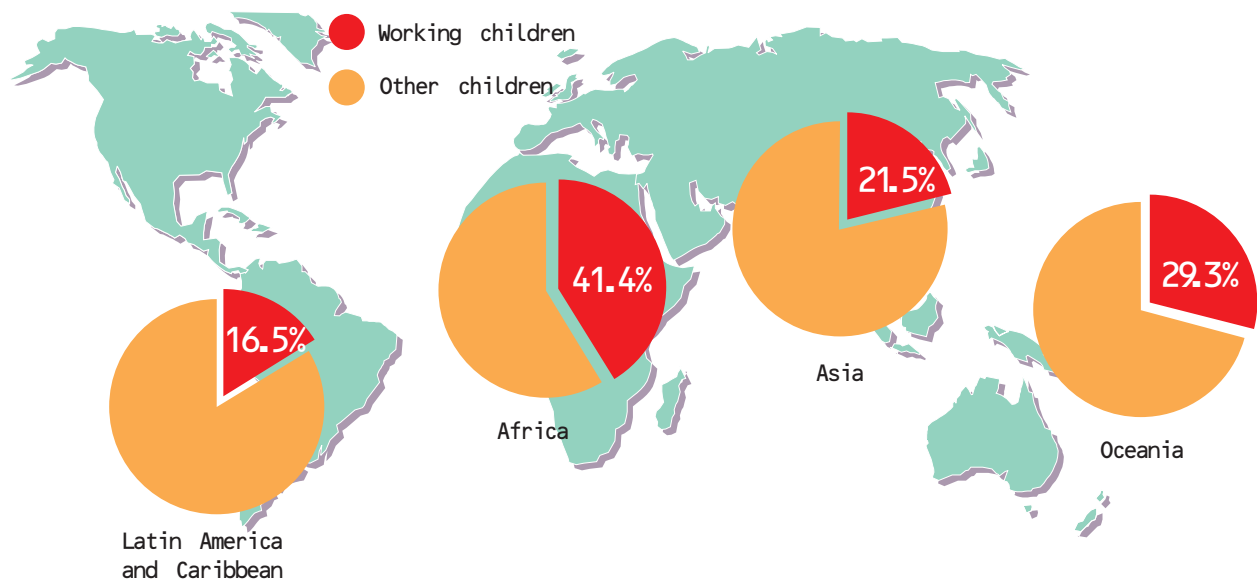
While most child labour is found in the developing regions of the world, industrialized countries are not entirely free of it either. In Eastern and Central Europe, for example, child labour has been reappearing in the wake of social and economic dislocation caused by the transition to a market economy.

In absolute terms, Asia, being the most densely populated region of the world, has the largest number of child workers. 61 per cent are found in Asia, 32 per cent in Africa and 7 per cent in Latin America.

Distribution of economically active children 5-14 years of age in developing countries, by regions and sex, 1995

Region	Both sexes	Boys	Girls
World (estimates in millions)	250	140	110
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Africa	32	56	44
Asia (excluding Japan)	61	54	46
Latin America & Caribbean	7	67	33
Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand)	0.2	57	43
Sex ratio (World)	100	56	44

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva, 1996)



In relative terms, however, Africa comes first in the proportion of children participating in economic activity, with an estimated 41 per cent of the total number of children aged between five and 14 compared to 22 per cent in Asia and 17 per cent in Latin America.

#### Economic activity participation rate of children five to 14 years of age, by region and sex, 1995

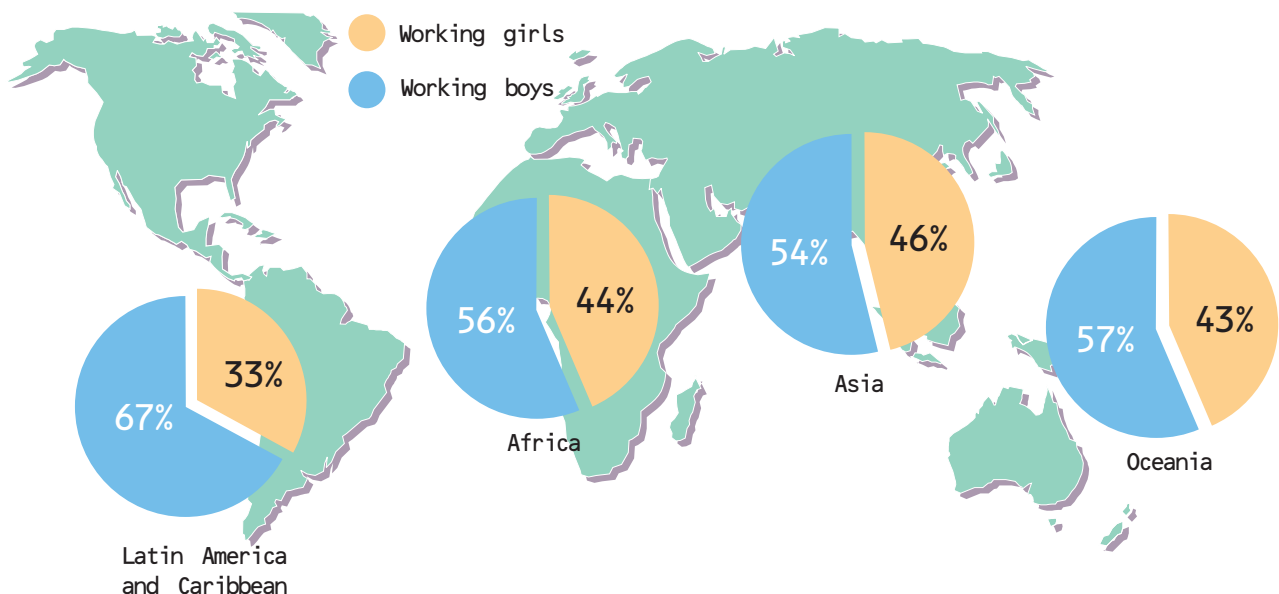
Region	Both sexes (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
World (estimates in millions)	24.7	27.0	22.3
Africa	41.4	46.0	36.7
Asia (excluding Japan)	21.5	22.5	20.4
Latin America & Caribbean	16.5	21.8	11.1
Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand)	29.3	32.7	25.8

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva, 1996)

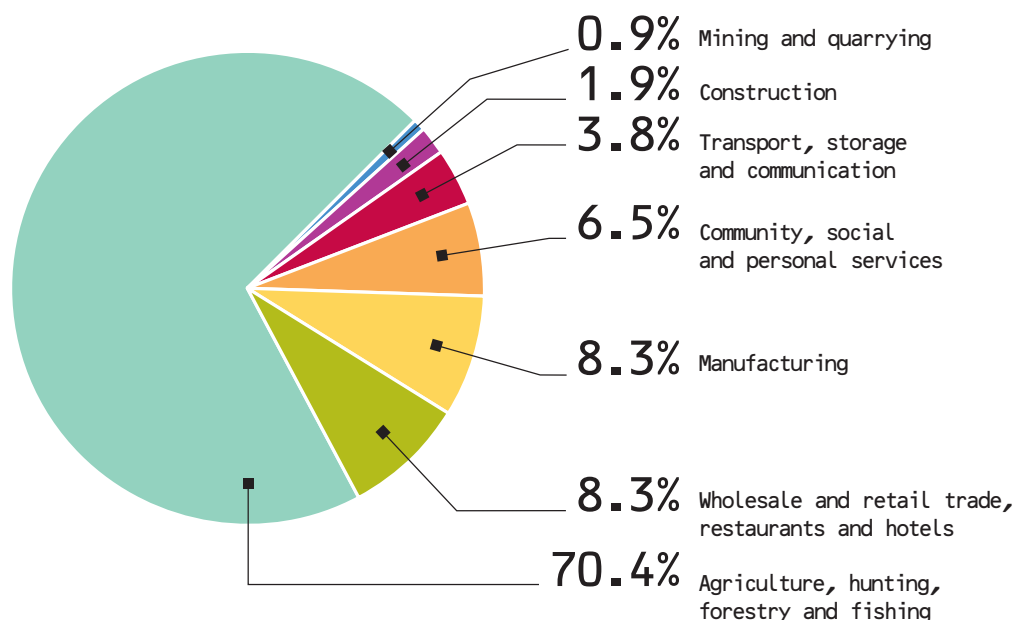
More boys than girls work, close to an average ratio of three boys to two girls. With 37 per cent, Africa has

the highest participation rate of girls among the developing regions of the world. However, surveys do not take into account domestic work in one's own household or caring for sick or disabled family members. More girls than boys perform this type of work – many of them between the ages of eight and 12. If such work were taken into account there would be little or no variation between the sexes in the total number of working children, and the number of girls might even exceed that of boys. This type of work can be as detrimental to children as that done outside the home since it is reported to be the main reason for about one-third of youngsters not attending school. Household work also represents hazards, such as danger from unsupervised cooking and caring for siblings which can be far too great a responsibility for a young child.

The relative level of the child workforce in any one economic activity can vary widely from one country to another. However, on the basis of data collected from a number of countries, average levels can be estimated for children working in different branches of economic activity and in various occupations.



Economically active children in 26 developing countries, by industry and gender (averages)



Industry	Both sexes (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	70.4	68.9	75.3
Manufacturing	8.3	9.4	7.9
Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels	8.3	10.4	5.0
Community, social and personal services	6.5	4.7	8.9
Transport, storage and communication	3.8	3.8	-
Construction	1.9	2.0	1.9
Mining and quarrying	0.9	1.0	0.9

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva, 1996)

The largest proportion of child workers is in economic activities and occupations related to agriculture. Although the average proportion of children in agricultural activities and occupations is 70 to 74 per cent, it can be as high as 90 to 95 per cent in some countries. The percentage of girls in such activities is higher than that of boys.

A large number of children suffer injuries or illnesses from their work – representing more than 20 per cent according to one recent large national survey. Some stop work altogether due to work-related injuries and/or illnesses or stop work temporarily, while a large number continue to work in spite of their injuries or illnesses, thus jeopardizing their development and future ability to study or work.

Many children work long hours every day of the week. Some survey results show that more than half the working children toil for nine hours or more per day. The majority of children report that their work is

stressful and that they are exhausted when they come home from work. There are cases where up to four-fifths of them work seven days a week including public holidays, especially in rural communities; thus they have no day off or free time. On average, girls work longer hours than boys and are paid less than their working brothers doing the same type of work.

Participation rates of children in economic activity are on average twice as high in rural communities than in urban centres. In addition, rural children, particularly girls, tend to begin economic activity at an early age. Survey results show that in some countries up to 20 per cent of economically active children in the rural areas and around five per cent in urban areas are under the age of 10 years.

A large majority, around 70 per cent, of child workers are unpaid family workers, especially in rural areas where working girls outnumber working boys. They are engaged in domestic service, agriculture, home work and small family enterprises, whether in rural or urban areas.

More than four in five children work without pay. Most of those working as paid employees are paid much less than the prevailing rates in their localities, even when compared with the legal minimum wages. One survey found children receiving only one-sixth of the minimum rate. Also, the younger the working child, the lower is the wage payment. Generally, children are not paid for overtime work although many of them work additional hours and often are required to do so when demand for various services reaches its peak and/or when there are labour shortages.