

**United Nations  
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)  
in collaboration with UNICEF  
Expert Group Meeting  
Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence  
against the girl child  
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre**

## **Introduction**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has “the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous 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” (Article 32). Also, the International Labour Organization has defined child labour that is negative to

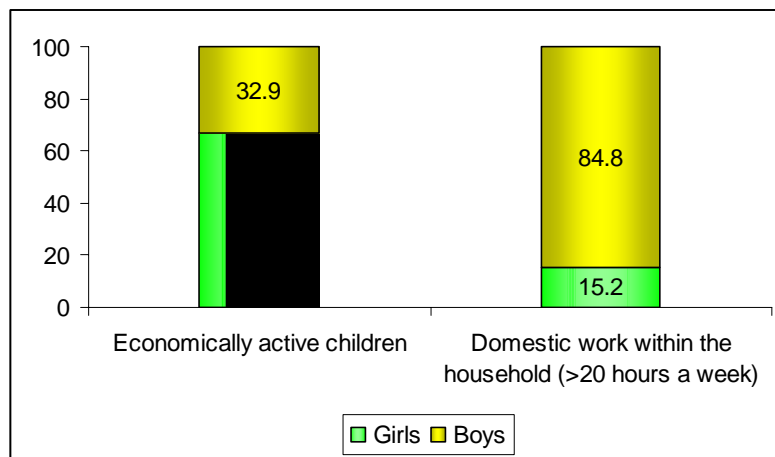
a. **Child labour**

It is generally accepted that not all work should be considered as negative for children, since it may be a way for developing one's personality, maturity and skills. Therefore, the following standards have been established to define negative child labour:

At least an hour of work if the child is younger than 12 years. Regular work (14-43 hours/week) performed by children under the minimum working age established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention<sup>1</sup>. This Convention

provide a clearer picture of the working conditions of the girl child and the real workload that boys and girls assume. The omission of household work from child labour statistics does not affect girls and boys equally, since usually girls undertake those activities. For instance in the case of Chile, Graphic 1 shows that 67% of economically active children are boys; however, if we analyze the percentage of children who spend more than 20 hours a week in domestic chores, we can see that 85% of them are girls.

**Graphic 1**  
**Sex composition of economically active children and child domestic workers within the household, Chile 2003**



Source: “Niñas, niños y adolescentes: Los riesgos de un trabajo invisible para el propio hogar”, María Jesús Silva, 2005.

Economically active children are the ones who work for at least an hour in economic activities. Children between 5 to 17 years old are included.

Furthermore, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) found that in 1997, between 15 and 25 percent of young urban women aged 15 to 19 years were exclusively dedicated to domestic work. In rural areas these percentages ranged from 25 to 50 percent of young women (ECLAC, 1999). Also, a study by the United States Department of Labour (2000) found that in Nepal and Turkey, if one ignores domestic work activities, boys are more likely to be working than girls; however, when domestic tasks are considered and included in the definition of work then the proportion of working girls is higher. In the case of Ghana Canagarajah and Coulombe (1997) find that by including domestic chores within the child labour definition the probability that girls between 7 to 14 years of age work is greater than the probability of boys.

### **What are we missing? An example**

Table 1 shows the percentage of boys and girls that are child labourers in Bolivia - according to different definitions of work. The first two columns show the percentage of boys and girls that are child labourers if we consider only the economic activities that they perform. The total percentage of child labourers among boys (24.1%) is higher than the percentage among girls (17.6%) and the difference seems to be higher as children get older, since when children are between 7 to 11 years of age 27.3% of boys and 20.4% of girls are child labourers, but among children that are between 15 to 17 years old 15.5% of boys and 8.2% of girls are labourers.

The fourth and fifth columns show the percentage of child labourers considering only

different definitions of child labour; notwithstanding it is an additional example of how boys and girls use their time to perform different economic and non-economic activities. In this case a child labourer is any child between 5 and 17 years of age who works in a market-oriented activity or in an activity oriented to produce goods for self-consumption. Children who are between 5 and 13 years old and worked 10 hours or more in household chores and children between 14 and 17 years of age who worked 15 hours or more in domestic tasks are also considered child labourers. In this case, Columns (7) and (8) also represent the percentage of children who were not considered as working because they exclusively worked in household tasks - that is: the work of 4% of boys between 5 to 17 years, plus the work of 8.4% of girls between 5 and 13 years of age and 18.9% of girls between 14 and 17 years would not have been visible under the traditional definition of child labour.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of working boys and girls, Argentina 2004**  
**(5 to 17 years of age)**

Child labour considering ....									
... only economic activities oriented to the market			...production for self-consumption				... only domestic work within their households		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	
			% Girls						% Girls
			-						-
	Boys	Girls	% Boys	Boys	Girls	% Boys	Boys	Girls	% Boys
5-13 years old	7.6	5.2	-2.4	4.8	3.3	-1.5	4.0	8.4	4.4
14-17 years old	23.8	16.3	-7.5	10.9	2.3	-8.6	4.0	18.9	14.9

Source: "Infancia Trabajo y otras actividades económicas", ILO, INDEC, Ministerio del Trabajo, 2006

A child labourer is any child between 5 and 17 years of age who works in a market oriented activity, in an activity oriented to produce goods for self-consumption. Those who are between 5 and 13 years old and worked 10 hours or more in household chores and children between 14 and 17 years of age who worked 15 hours or more in domestic tasks.

**Table 3**  
**School enrollment rates of children who perform domestic work within their households vs. children who do not perform these activities. Bolivia, 2001**

	Non-Child Labourers		Child Labourers	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
7-11 years old	96.3	97.0	96.2	97.0
12-14 years old	97.0	92.9	97.0	87.9
15-17 years old	82.0	78.4	55.2	39.0
Total	89.7	87.8	89.8	91.6

Source: Author's own tabulations using Bolivia Household Survey, MECOVI 2001

Education is an end in itself and an individual right that has a social and economic connotation - thus becoming one of the most important tools to achieve gender equality and increasing not only the present but also the future welfare of the girl child and their families. Graphic 2 shows the average years of education of girl child labourers compared to non-working girls. It can be seen that from age 12 onwards that the child labourers attain consistently less years of education than their non-working counterparts independently of the fact whether a girl is classified as a child labourer considering only economic activities or only domestic ones. By the time they are 17 the educational gap in years between labourers and non-labourers is of more than two years.

**Graphic 2**  
**Average years of education, Bolivia 2001**  
**Girls between 7 and 17 years old**



clothes (22 hours/week). These activities should be considered as a worst form of child labour due to the hazardous activities they imply.

**Table 5**  
**Average hours a week that children use for domestic activities**

Domestic activity	Boys	Girls
Taking care of children or the elderly	13.9	15.7
Cook or clean the house	11.6	14.5
Buy groceries for the household	15.3	16.2
Wash or iron clothes.	14.9	22.0
Carrying wood or water	17.2	22.2

Source: Author's own tabulations using Bolivia Household Survey, MECOVI 2001

Table 6 shows the average years of education achieved for the girls in Brazil in the year 2001, using the same definition of child labour that was employed in respect of the Bolivia database. In this case, by the time girls are 17 years old those who are dedicated to domestic activities within their households have on average of one year less of education.

**Table 6**  
**Average years of education, Brazil 2001**  
**Girls between 10 and 17 years of age**

Age	Not child labourers	Child labourers (only w/ economic activities)	Child labourers (only household chores)
10	2.5	2.3	2.5
11	3.3	2.8	3.2
12	4.2	3.4	4.0
13	5.0	4.1	4.7
14	5.8	5.0	5.4
15	6.1	6.1	5.7



## **Rethinking the definition of child labour**

Most of the negative effects of child labour also apply to child labourers in domestic activities within their households. Excessive hours of domestic work can be harmful to a child's health as shown by the extended hours they dedicate to carrying wood and water or to cooking for family members; it also adversely affects school attendance since there is a negative correlation between this type of work and school attendance; it most likely is also prejudicial to the girl's capacity to benefit from the instruction received at school because girl domestic workers have less years of education on average than their non-working counterparts.

If domestic work within the household is invisible, public policies will not be targeted to reduce it and girls who carry on in this job will continue to find themselves in a disadvantaged position. Furthermore, statistics on activities of girls and boys will help to better design public policies. For instance, examples of traditional policy recommendations to reduce child labour are income transfers and mandatory school attendance, whereas an understanding that there is a high incidence of child domestic work might highlight the need for policies focused on improving the provision of public services. This type of complementary policies might be a more effective way to reduce child labour.

Moreover, having statistics that show the type of work that children perform (economic vs. non-economic) will help understand at what age the sexual division of labour starts and how this, in the future, will affect the participation of women in economic and non-economic work.

It is very important that child labour surveys include questions about the participation and the number of hours that children dedicate to household domestic work. The Statistical Information and Monitoring Program on Child Labour (SIMPOC) that is part of ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) provides technical assistance to countries to generate data on child labour. Since 1998, SIMPOC has included in its mandate the need for accurate quantitative and qualitative data on child labour that is gender-sensitive. Currently collecting this type of data is an institutional norm for all SIMPOC-supported surveys. As a result the child labour surveys of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua contain information both on the participation and the number of hours that children dedicate to domestic work within the household. In Panamá only information on the participation of children in these kinds of activities is available. Bolivia has information in respect of hours and participation based on its 2001 Household Survey. Many of these surveys do not collect information about the type of work that the child performs within the household, which is essential to build adequate child labour indicators, particularly to reflect the percentage of those who are engaged in activities dangerous to their health<sup>2</sup>; moreover the results of these surveys are not always comparable between countries because of differences in the number of questions asked, the age of respondents and the reference period. Nevertheless, they can very useful to undertake country case evaluations and general comparisons among countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of activities dangerous for the health of the child are carrying water or wood for many hours every day.

## Policy recommendations

Although it is essential to have sex-disaggregated information on child labour, it is fundamental to acknowledge that boys and girls do not carry out the same duties within and outside the household. Empirical evidence indicates that girls dedicate their time mainly to household work, while boys dedicate their's to market-oriented work. Therefore, it is important to conduct periodic child labour surveys that include domestic activities.

The instruments used to collect the information (surveys) must place the same emphasis and care on collecting information about non-economic activities children perform as on collecting information about their economic-activities.

After the data is collected, it is fundamental to use the generated data to built indicators that reflect the participation of boys and girls in economic and non-economic activities, as well as the total workload they have to endure. This information will help to write gender sensitive child labour reports. Specific examples of indicators that account for the intensity of domestic child labour within the household and of the total workload that children endure are:

- (i) Percentage of child labourers, considering economic and non-economic activities, by sex.
- (ii) Percentage of child labourers, considering only non-economic activities, by sex.

The first indicator will allow to truly asses the magnitude of the child labour problem among girls and boys, whereas the second indicator combined with the actual indicator on child labour (percentage of child labourers, considering only economic activities, by sex) will be useful to design public policies to address the problem.

- (iii) Number of hours dedicated to domestic work within the household.
- (iv) Number of hours dedicated to domestic work within the household, by type of activity.

These two indicators are essential to categorize domestic work into child labour or into worst forms of child labour, depending on the length of time dedicated to the work and on the type of activity that children perform.

- (v) Total numbers of hours dedicated to economic and non-economic activities.  
This indicator can show the real workload that girls and boys endure.

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