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About us

The Understanding Children's Work (UCW) programme is an inter-agency research cooperation initiative involving the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNICEF and the World Bank.

The Programme is guided by the Agenda for Action adopted at the 1997 Oslo International Conference on Child Labour. The Oslo Agenda identified the need to improve data and information on child labour, and called for stronger international co-operation in efforts towards child labour elimination.

UCW research activities are designed to inform policies that impact upon the lives of child labourers in countries where they are prominent. Research efforts help provide a common understanding of child labour in specific national contexts, and a common basis for action against it. For further information, see the Programme website at www.ucw-project.org.

Featured research

1. Assessing the cost of child labour elimination in Zambia. Work has begun with Zambian counterparts on Volume II of the Inter-Agency Report on child labour in the country. The Volume II report will assess the resource implications of meeting the national commitment to eliminating child labour. Specifically, the study will assess the economic costs over a nine-year period of ensuring three key preconditions to child labour elimination: that poor families are provided a minimum degree of social protection; that poor families receive some form of compensation for the direct and indirect costs associated with schooling; and that education of sufficient quality is available as an alternative to child labour. The study will also assess the economic costs associated with a package of special, targeted measures aimed at removing children from worst forms of child labour.

The Volume II report will consist of five distinct components. Component 1 will review the policy and macro-economic outlook over the coming years. Component 2 will assess the size and evolution of the target populations of children under different economic growth and policy assumptions. Component 3 will simulate the cost and impact of providing one element of a needed comprehensive social protection strategy - child cash transfers. The rationale for transfers as a tool for promoting schooling as an alternative to child labour is clear: not only do they provide families with a cushion against shocks, but they also help families overcome the economic costs associated with school attendance, both direct (fees, uniforms, etc.) and indirect (foregone wages and production). Component 4 will assess the additional costs associated with universalizing access to and improving the quality of schooling at the primary level. Finally, Component 5 will estimate costs associated with a package of interventions aimed at the urgent elimination of worst forms of child labour over a nine-year time period.

The Volume II report fits within broader efforts to accelerate progress against child labour in the period leading up to the 2016 target date set by the Global Action Plan, endorsed by the ILO, to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

2. Internal migration, youth employment and child labour in West Africa.

Work is nearing completion on a study of the consequences of internal migration in West Africa. While the problem of internal migration – prompted by climate change and other factors – is increasingly capturing the attention of policy makers, there is little systematic evidence on its social impact and the policy interventions it calls for. This is especially true for the impact of internal migration on children and youth.

The study is aimed helping to address this evidence gap. Using household survey datasets and other information sources from three countries – Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal – the study looks in particular at the impact of migration on the social circumstances of affected children and young people.

The study presents a statistical profile of the young migrant population (5-24 years age group) and assesses migration as a determinant of social marginalization among children and young persons in cities and towns. Indicators of marginalization utilized in the study include child labour and early school drop-out, youth unemployment and wage differentials.

The identification of the main determinants of young migrants' vulnerability allows the study to assess whether migrants need targeted interventions and, and if so, the nature of these interventions. The study also identifies and prioritises key information gaps, so that feasible strategies of dealing with them can be developed.

Research results will be used to raise awareness of the social consequences of migration for young people, and to provide policy guidance to national counterparts in responding to the social challenges posed by the migration of young people.

3. Understanding children's work in Bangladesh.

A draft inter-agency report (UCW, 2010) looks at the child labour phenomenon in the specific context of Bangladesh. Empirical results based on the Bangladesh Annual Labour Force Survey, conducted in 2005-2006 indicate that children's involvement in employment is not uncommon in Bangladesh. An estimated 3.55 million children aged 7-14 years and 2.8 million children aged 15-17 years were in employment in 2005/06. An even larger number of Bangladeshi children in both age groups worked in "other productive activities", and specifically household chores.

Children's involvement in employment was somewhat higher in rural than in urban areas, and higher in Rajshahi and Barisal compared to other divisions, underscoring the importance of scaling up services in line with the needs of low performing divisions and hard to reach areas.

Another way of viewing children's involvement in employment and schooling is by disaggregating the child population into four non-overlapping activity groups – children only in employment, children only attending school, children combining schooling and employment and children doing neither. This disaggregation shows that in 2005/06, seven percent of all 7-14 year-olds worked in employment and attended school at the same time, and five percent worked in employment without also going to school. A further 78 percent of all children aged 7-14 attended school exclusively, while the remaining 10 percent of 7-14 year-olds were not involved in employment or in schooling (but likely involved in other productive activities).

A comparison with previous survey results indicated a decline in children's employment from 17 percent to 12 percent during the period from 2002/03 to 2005/06 but no accompanying gain in children's school attendance. This highlights the fact that school attendance and work are not always substitutes – a change in one of the variables is not necessarily accompanied by the opposing change in the other – and that focusing on schooling alone is not likely to succeed in eliminating child labour.

The apparent progress in reducing children's employment during this period extended to both boys and girls, and to both urban and rural places of residence. But the decline did not extend across the whole 7-14 years age range. Indeed, progress was actually negative among young children up to the age of 11 years, the very group most vulnerable to the harmful effects of employment. Involvement in employment declined only among older, 12-14 year-old, children.

Econometric evidence from the report points to a number of factors influencing child labour of relevance for policy: holding other factors constant, the probability of involvement in child labour was lower in households where the head is more educated, in households owning land, and in villages where there is a school in close proximity. The final result underscores that school distance can constitute an important barrier to school attendance in Bangladesh, particular in rural areas.

Programme news and events

1. *Mission to Rwanda* (Kigali, June 2010). UCW activities in Rwanda were initiated by the UCW Programme Coordination through meetings with the UNICEF, ILO, World Bank country offices and the Ministry of Labour. These activities will include the development of an inter-agency report on children's work and youth employment, and a training workshop in conjunction with Government counterparts. Field visits to stone quarries in the area of Rulindo, to tea plantation in Gicumbi districts and to the refugee camps of Gicumbi concluded the mission.

2. *Statistical tools for the analysis of child labour data* (Turin, June 2010). The training course aimed at raising the capacity of national stakeholders, social partners, and staff from international organizations to analyze survey data on child labour. The training programme was a joint initiative of UCW, ILO's International Training Centre (ITC) and the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

3. *Mission to Zambia* (Lusaka, July 2010). The mission aimed at discussing the development of the volume II of the inter-agency report (see featured research above) with national stakeholders, including UNICEF, ILO, World Bank country offices and Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development and Ministry of Community Development and Social Services. Building on a similar exercise conducted for Cambodia, the study will assess the resource implications of meeting the national commitment to eliminate child labour within a fixed timeframe.

4. *World Day Against Child Labour - Press conference at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (June 2010). UCW participated in the press conference, jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian NGO CESVI. The event aimed at drawing the attention of civil society to the issue of child labour. A photo-exhibition (*Workers. Storie di infanzia negate*, by Cristina Francesconi) was organized in the framework of the stop Child Labour Campaign and in collaboration with the European Union.

5. *Global initiative on out-of-school children* (Istanbul, June 2010). Education experts and regional and international representatives met in Istanbul to launch a new Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children. The initiative is a joint project of the UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UCW will participate in identifying and helping to fill information gaps relating to out-of-school children that impede policy development.

Recently posted

1. Child labour: trends, challenges and policy responses. *Joining forces against child labour* (UCW, 2010). As reported in Newsletter No. 11, the Inter-Agency Report makes use of advances in research achieved through UCW and other efforts to take stock of the global child labour situation, assess key remaining obstacles to the elimination of child labour and identify strategies for addressing them. The Inter-agency report is also available in French *Tous unis dans la lutte contre le travail des enfants* and in Spanish *Unidos en la lucha contra el trabajo infantil*.

2. Child labour in Bangladesh and India: a preliminary gender-based analysis (Koseleci, N., and Kovrova, I. 2009). As reported in Newsletter No. 8, the study looks at differences by sex in key dimensions of the child labour phenomenon in Bangladesh and India. It addresses what types of activity are more common among girls, and the extent to which girls' work experience differs from that of boys.

3. Towards consistency in child labour measurement: Assessing the comparability of estimates generated by different survey instruments (Guarcello et al, 2010). The study addresses the comparability of child labour estimates produced by different common household survey instruments.

4. Towards the effective measurement of child domestic workers: building estimates using standard household survey instruments (Lyon, S. and Valdivia, C. 2010). The paper looks at how standard household surveys for child labour measurement could be used to help fill the information gaps on the child domestic workers phenomenon.

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