



## Measuring child labour through household surveys in Lebanon

Photo: Plan International / Sima Diab

*This case study describes how measuring child labour has been integrated into national household surveys in Lebanon. It describes both common and specific challenges to each survey, as well as key lessons learned.*

**Aim:** Baseline data collection during the refugee crisis, to provide an overview of the situation for children and women in Lebanon. Data was intended to be used by UNICEF and other stakeholders to help shape policy and practice.

**For:** All population cohorts, including Lebanese, Syrian refugees, Palestinians from Syria and from Lebanon, and other nationalities.

**Methodology:** Adopted Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)  
[www.mics.unicef.org](http://www.mics.unicef.org)

**Period:** 2016 (onwards)

**How it measured child labour:** Child labour measured among children between 5 and 17 years, including economic activities and household chores performed by a child during the past week for more than the age-specific maximum\* number of hours, and whether they were exposed to specific hazardous conditions.

\*Maximum number of hours that children in Lebanon are allowed to engage in economic activity: 5–11 years: 1 hour/week; 12–14 years: 14 hrs/week; 15–17 years: 43 hrs/week.

**Aim:** Annual inter-agency data collection to help enhance eligibility and targeting of families and to track vulnerability among refugees over time.

**For:** Syrian refugees

**Tool:** Multi-sectoral survey originally developed between WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF.

**Period:** Annually from 2013 onwards.

**How it measured child labour:** Child labour measured among children aged 6 to 15 years, including school enrolment and attendance, main sources of income in the family, and sector(s) of employment. From 2018 onwards, it also measured prevalence of (worst forms of) child labour through assessing the economic activities for children aged 15 years and older, including the time spent on work; regularity; how long they've been working; whether they are a main breadwinner; sector; whether the work was in school hours; and the number of unpaid household chores, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators of child labour.

## Common challenges

As child labour increased in Lebanon during the Syria crisis, there was a need for better data and tracking of child labour prevalence and trends. In both data collection efforts described in this case study, data was collected in line with the legal framework in terms of hours, type(s) of work and school attendance. Common challenges included:

- As child labour increased in Lebanon during the Syria crisis, there was a need for better data and tracking of child labour prevalence and trends. In both data collection efforts described in this case study, data was collected in line with the legal framework in terms of hours, type(s) of work and school attendance. Common challenges included:
- Basic questions related to child labour, such as a child's age, school attendance, working hours and sector of employment, may not always provide the detailed level of information that is required to determine whether the work undertaken is in fact legal work, child labour, or a worst form of child labour. To determine this, more information is needed on the type of activities performed by children, the time of the day as well as the specific conditions in which children work.
- Of the estimated total number of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, a significant number remains unaccounted for in either work or school – inter-agency coordination groups estimate that many of these children are working in some capacity. Yet, the surveys presented relatively low levels of child labour among Syrian children (child labour levels were only respectively 5 per cent and 6.7 per cent in the household survey and the VASyR) as well as likely under-reported levels of out-of-school Syrian children (40 per cent and 50 per cent in the respective surveys).
- Responses of families who were reliant on humanitarian aid may have been influenced by a hope or fear that the survey would affect their assistance.
- Data collection didn't capture unregulated sectors and more "invisible" forms of labour including domestic labour, illicit activities or sexual exploitation.
- Data collection through surveys was based on self-reports, with limited verification and triangulation

## Specific challenges related to the household survey

- In 2016, the survey measured hours worked, and other essential data such as education attendance. School attendance was taken out of the child labour calculations as a significant proportion of the fieldwork was conducted during the break between school years, and the results would have been biased.
- The last MICS prior to the Syrian war was conducted in 2009. During the Syria crisis, the age range was broadened from a range of 5–14 years to 5–17 years. As a result, child labour statistics were not comparable for the group of older adolescents aged 15–17 years.
- An upper limit of 43 hours a week of work for adolescents aged 15 to 17 was initially used, but it quickly became clear that this was too high for a child of 15 years. In order to account for a statutory day off and ensure standardisation across countries, to ensure systematic measurement against SDG indicators, the upper limit of hours worked by a child in any one week should have been calculated at 36 hours a week or six hours per day for children aged 15 years.

## Specific challenges related to the VASyR

- The definition used up to 2017 looked more at child work (legal and illegal forms of work) rather than child labour. Furthermore, different organisations used different definitions of child labour when conducting the survey. The VASyR was managed independently by each sector without cross-sectoral common points of data collection.
- Defining child labour as children aged 5–17 years who worked at least one day in the previous 30 days gave no indication of the number of days or hours they actually work, the type of work they do, or the conditions they work in – e.g. severity, extent of harm, category of worst forms of child labour, and whether the type of labour is high or low risk.
- Data was collected in springtime, which is peak time in agriculture. This affected participation of agricultural workers and led to an under-representation of child labourers in agriculture.

## Lessons Learned

- Get definitions, indicators and parameters for child labour, such as education enrolment/attendance, times of day, and hazardous working conditions, correct and agreed in the beginning through inter-agency coordination. Use existing national and international standards as a guide for what an assessment should cover. Integrate context-specific child labour definitions and indicators into survey tools which align with measurement across countries in support of SDG indicators.
- Involve relevant actors, including the child protection sector/actors, in developing the child labour assessment framework.
- If possible, undertake qualitative data collection on the context-specific drivers and decisions underpinning (the worst forms of) child labour, in order to set effective criteria and indicators for quantitative data collection. UNICEF's 2020 report *Underneath the Surface* is one example of this.
- Collecting data on the hours per week that children engage in a 'productive activity' or 'household chore' does not offer sufficient information to determine whether this is a productive activity or child labour. To determine (worst forms of) child labour, additional information should be collected including school attendance, types of activity, condition, whether a child works at day or night, type of payment and amount.

- Similarly, surveying the type of work/sector may indicate hazardous conditions but doesn't always give enough information about what children are exposed to. It is essential to ask about the conditions in which work is undertaken, such as through a MICS, in order to determine if the work is hazardous.
- There are several issues to consider around whom to interview. When surveying a parent/caregiver or other household member about child labour, information may be subjective and therefore may not be fully accurate. Surveying children directly may yield more objective data but should only be done under strict ethical protocols. In addition, surveying children may mean that young children, such as those aged under 10 years, are missed, therefore, proxy respondents can be a stronger means for these children. Different options should be discussed and agreed locally, maintaining children's protection at all times. Data collection with children should only be done very carefully by experienced agencies and trained enumerators.
- Data was effectively verified through data cross-tabulation with other databases to identify inconsistencies.
- The household surveys revealed that there are data gaps on positive coping mechanisms of families and the factors that help to prevent child labour.

## Resources

- UNICEF (2016). **Baseline Survey for Women and Children – Preliminary Findings**
- UNICEF (2020). **Underneath the Surface: Understanding the Root Causes of Violence against Children and Women in Lebanon**

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>