Working children in Europe

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The categories generally used to study child labour in "developing countries" are not sufficient – in fact, not right – for studying the same phenomenon in industrialised countries. The point is that dividing lines between child working and child exploitation, schooling and work, socialization and exclusion by child working, become blurred when looking at the relations that exist between similar categories in African and Asian countries where child labour, sometimes in its most appalling form, is a visible fact that has long been studied, resulting in a large body of statistical and social research facts and figures.

In Europe, however – both in the EU and Eastern Europe – child labour is a signally under-researched and -reported issue. The popular view is that child labour has been rooted out of our Western societies. Not so, however, and it would be instructive to look more closely at the forms it takes in economically advanced countries. Understanding and identifying the similarities and differences between how the different regions approach the state of childhood and adolescence will help lay the foundations of future strategies, policies and action plans to stamp out social inequalities.

The ILO's updated estimates in 2002 pointed to a rise in child labour, suggesting that some 211 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 were affected worldwide (see tables).

Child labour in industrialised countries

Child labour is also a big issue across a very wide range of sectors in industrialised countries. In southern European countries, large numbers of children work for pay in seasonal jobs, street trading and domestic work, for instance. The transition from the planned to the market economy has also brought a resurgence of child labour in Central and Eastern Europe. The CGIL survey of Italy in 2000 estimated that 300 000 boys and girls aged under 15 were in some kind of employment. The NGO Mani Tese estimates that at least 15% of youngsters aged between 11 and 14 in the United Kingdom have some kind of paid job. In the United States, an estimated 5 and a half million young people – 27% of all minors – work, and violations of child labour regulations rose by 250% between 1983 and 1990. These figures are not including the number of 12 year-olds employed in different types of work, like big city garment sweatshops, street trading and seasonal jobs.

The growth of child labour in the United Kingdom was a result of Conservative policy in the 1980s and deregulation of child welfare policies. Children, mostly with immigrant backgrounds, work on market stalls, in restaurants, for cleaning firms, etc. The same trend is found in Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain and the United States. France has hundreds of children skipping school to work in a range of jobs.

In some cases, then, children work partly from their own choosing. As such, it provides personal satisfaction and a measure of independence. This offers some explanation of the rising number of children in seasonal and temporary jobs. They are working for money to buy consumer goods they want.

Some research has pointed to links between child work and parents' employment status: the share of working children is substantially higher among parents engaged in trade or a craft activity.

Far from disappearing, the worst forms of child labour unfortunately persist. Seemingly, they affect only a small proportion of the population living in marginal situations, which are the reason for the child to be working. Asking questions about child labour means having to consider a wider range of possibilities and understanding, as the context dictates, what kind of child working we are talking about.

Table 1 **Global estimates of child work – 2000**

Age	Total population (1000)	Working population (1000)	% of working population
5-9	600 200	73 100	12.2
10-14	599 200	137 700	23.0
Total	**1 199 400**	**210 800**	**17.6**
15-17	332 100	140 900	42.4
Total	**1 531 100**	**351 700**	**23.0**

Source: ILO/IPEC 2002

Table 2 **Estimates of child labour by geographical area – 2000**

Geographical area	Child Workers aged 5-14 (million)	% working
Developed countries	2.5	2
Transition economies	2.4	4
Asia and Oceania	127.3	19
Latin America and Caribbean	17.4	16
Sub-Saharan Africa	48.0	29
Middle East and North Africa	13.4	15
Total	**211**	**18**

Source: ILO/IPEC 2002

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Child working in Europe

Portugal

Child labour in Portugal is found mainly in the northern regions of the country (Braga, Porto, Aveiro). Children tend to work in street trading and in unskilled jobs on piece work rates, mostly in the building, tourism and textile industries, but also in agriculture, shops, domestic work and other street-based activities. Many children work punishing hours, up to between 10 and 14 hours a day, mostly illegally. The general labour inspectorate has also discovered children doing home-based work, which makes policing and enforcement of child labour legislation harder.

Generally, rising unemployment is one reason for the increase in child labour. The official statistics have often underestimated the reality of child working in Portugal, leading to a long-running debate on the nature, extent and scale of a trend that affects key sectors of the economy, like the textile, clothing and footwear industries. In 1989, the official statistics reported 11 486 workers aged under 18 in all these three sectors. By 1991, there were 24 719, plus 3 834 aged between 12 and 14 "self-employed". In the same year, an ILO study reported 63 000 children aged between 12 and 14 in the labour force.

Table 3 **Economic activities involving children aged 6-15 in Portugal**

Sector	% of workforce aged 6-15	% working 5 days a week or more	% working 4 hours a day or more
Agriculture	55.7	57	34
Manufacturing	12	80	72
Catering	10.5		
Retail	9.9		
Construction	6.4	70	84
Other	5.5		

Source: Ministry for Employment and Solidarity. Anti-Child Labour Programme, 2000

The Portuguese labour inspectorate has unofficially acknowledged that 40 000 young people fit this profile, and another 160 000 children have a long experience of work. Trade unions, the Church and independent researchers claim that as many as 200 000 children are working, but employers are reluctant to disclose more detailed figures on the size of the problem. Inspectors have uncovered the odd breach of Labour Code provisions in the textile and clothing industry in the north of the country, involving child workers from poverty-stricken families.

The Portuguese Ministry for Employment and Solidarity's employment and vocational training statistics department surveyed 26 000 families to measure the scale of child employment below the legal working age of 16. It found that 4% of young people in this age bracket had worked in the survey week, and 7.1% had worked during the school year. In many cases, these were unpaid jobs, helping family members, relatives or other adults in selling activities. As there are over a million Portuguese children in this age bracket, it can be inferred from the survey that approximately 43 077 young people worked in the survey week, and 77 465 during the year, in breach of child labour laws. Whilst these figures are lower than those put forward by non-governmental organisations, it is clear that the Employment Ministry figures are still not to be lightly dismissed, since they reflect only the average for the different age brackets. Calculating the percentages for 15 year-olds gives figures between 3 and 4 times higher.

While no precise conclusions can be drawn from the survey figures, it can be said that many more schoolchildren are working than remain in education. The official analyses of the survey offer no explanation as to why, but it may be more to do with education's lack of appeal than a real need or desire to work. 56.2% of early school leavers give as their main reason for entering the world of work that they "don't like school", compared to just 13.4% who positively wanted to work. Low family incomes are another big reason for the decision to work. This shows that, in the case of Portugal, what is usually called the "child labour trap" and forsaking education in favour of early labour market entry may be linked to low household incomes.

Italy

Italy is the one European Union country to have studied child working most extensively, supported by CGIL, private researchers and, more recently, the National Statistical Institute (ISTAT). Many children with North-African, Filipino, Albanian and also Chinese immigrant backgrounds work. According to a survey of these families done from 1987 to 1991 by ISTAT, more than 500 000 children aged 6-13 were doing some kind of paid or unpaid work for a family concern. The CGIL survey done in Italy in 2000 found that something like 350 000 were working (G. Paone, A. Teselli, *Lavoro e lavori minorili*, Ediesse, 2000), 80 000 of whom were 11-14 year-olds being exploited (G. Paone, *Ad ovest di Iqbal*, Ediesse, 2004). Half these adolescents work in bars or restaurants, and about 10% on building sites. The studies show that a high percentage of youngsters of Chinese immigrant descent in southern Italy hold down paid jobs. Like their Portuguese counterparts, child workers in Italy tend to have failed educational backgrounds.

Over half the children work more than 8 hours a day for a pittance. A 2002 survey by ISTAT found 145 000 children in paid jobs, over 30 000 of them being exploited. ISTAT believes these figures underestimate the problem, not least because they do not include children whose origins lie in immigration. More about child labour in Italy can be found in the studies done for CGIL.

United Kingdom

A study by the TUC estimates that up to 2 million children work during the school year. School children holding jobs outside school hours remains common in Great Britain. Research over the past fifteen years has showed that child labour remains a fact of life in several sectors of the labour market. Countless studies over the past ten years have concluded that 40% of 13 to 15 year-olds were working in undeclared part-time jobs, and in most cases illegally. Between a third and a half of school children are carrying out paid work. In absolute figures, that means between 1.1 and 1.7 million school children have some form of employment. The conclusion is that working is the longest experience that children have, and that paid work is part and parcel of adolescent life. UNICEF believes that the growth of the service sector and the demand for labour flexibility have contributed to the increase in underage working in England. In 1997, the Council of Europe reported that 50% of UK children aged 13-15 had some form of employment, were often uninsured and exploited. The contribution of the child's income in poor families partly explains the situation. Previous studies show that up to 2 million school age children in the United Kingdom have some form of employment. Child labour is now a big part of the low-wage economy in Britain. Although legislation prohibits children under the age of 13 from working, a survey commissioned by the Trades Union Congress, called "Working Classes", found that nearly one-quarter of all 11 and 12 year olds were working illegally.

One in 4 under-16s works. More than a quarter of children who work during the school year report being too tired to do their homework. Many work

A paperboy in Britain

before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m. Some work throughout the week, and often over three hours a day. During the holidays a small number work a full-time working week (31 to 40 hours a week), with a further 3 per cent working over 40 hours. According to the Low Pay Unit, children are increasingly being exploited as cheap labour in the northeast of England. Its "Fair Play for Working Children" survey shows the scale of child labour and the conditions under which children work. While 10% of 10 year olds have a job, this rises to 35% among 15 year olds. Of those children working, 25% are under legal working age (13 years), and others are working up to 29 hours a week. Up to 44% of working children have suffered a work-related accident; in one in ten cases, a very serious one. In 1997-1998, the Health and Safety Executive reported that 46 school-age children had suffered serious injuries at work, but this is underreported because they were illegally employed. One factor common to under-age working in Britain and other European countries is the changes under way in the sectors that use child labour – chiefly the catering industry, shops and street trading. Children are also found to be doing jobs shunned by adult men and women: kitchen work, shop counter sales, home and shop cleaning.

Netherlands

A Social Affairs Ministry survey of 20 schools in 1987 found that three quarters of 13-17 year olds had a paid job, and that three-quarters of them were working illegally. On average, they were working 17.5 hours a week. The information on the extent of illegal work was supplied by the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions.

Germany

Youth employment in Germany is relatively low, although the number of children working who are not caught by the official statistics and census is not known. A study of 2 500 Thuringian secondary school pupils, for example, showed that 37% had some form of employment, and that 24% were employed below the legal working age. It is worth noting that this recent survey was done in the agricultural sector and in the former GDR, where little analysis has been done of the labour market. The recent Bundestag report claims that the figures on working children are unreliable, but gives no specific numbers. Four studies commissioned by the regional governments of Nordrhein-Westphalia, Hesse, Brandenburg and Berlin in 1989, 1993 and 1994, respectively, on a sample of 12-17 year-olds representative of the population in this age bracket (especially the 13-15 age group) found that a significant share of adolescents start working from the age of 12-14, mainly in order to earn money (66% to 72% of respondents, according to the survey) to buy what their parents refuse or cannot afford to buy them, or to put aside, not as "rainy day" savings, but for a specifically-priced purchase like a computer, music centre, mountain bike, etc.

Spain

Child workers are mainly employed in the footwear industry and family-run concerns (shops, bars, farmwork, street markets). More than half (51%) work to supplement the family income. In 14.4% of cases, they are prompted to work by family members. Many start working before the age of 10, and up to a third are between 11 and 14. Seasonal work is very widespread, and between 300 000 and 500 000 children under 14 are estimated to work in the informal economy.

France

There are no figures on under-15s who work. Adult unemployment has been accompanied by a sharp rise in child labour in the informal economy, street trading, distributing advertising leaflets. The CFDT reports that domestic work is unregulated, and that children can work on farms under parental supervision from the age of 12. Official statistics are produced by the national institute of statistics and economic research (INSEE). In 1998, there were 129 155 under-18s in paid employment, equal to 0.65% of the entire labour force. This figure seems well below the real economic activity rate, but a clearer picture can be gained from the distribution by sector.

Table 4 **Share of working children under 18 in the total French labour force**

Sector	Relative share (%)
Agrifood	4.3
Construction	2.8
Car sales and repairs	4.3
Hospitality industry	3.6

Source: Ministry for Employment and Solidarity, France, 1998

INSEE also reports 120 000 children, mostly between the ages of 15 and 16, in apprenticeships and something like 11 000 in pre-apprenticeships. Up to 10 000 young people worked for between a few days and over a month in agriculture over summer 1997. One interesting feature of the INSEE report is the information given on work permits issued to young people working in the entertainment and fashion industries. Such jobs exist everywhere in the world, but few countries apart from France record and quantify them. In 1998, Paris had 15 booking agencies for adolescents in search of a modelling career. Up to 13 500 young people were employed in the field, but only 20% legally. In 1998, 5 268 work permits for the entertainment industry were issued to young people living in the Paris region, and several hundred to youngsters from other French regions. These data uniquely published by France make it a valuable observatory for any future research on the situation of young people in particular working in the sector.

Scandinavia

Denmark tops the OECD list for working children. A study done in 1993 by the Danish national institute

for social research reports a high level of under-age labour.

The total participation rate of 40% is for all 10-17 year-olds. As in Great Britain and the United States, most young people start working from age 15; 35% of the sample of young people questioned for the survey had a steady job. Most work between 1 and 10 hours a week. But over a third of 15-17 year-olds have already experienced long working weeks. Conversely, figures published in 1999 for Norway show that 49% of 16-19 year-olds questioned in the last survey (1998) were listed in the labour force statistics.

Table 5 **Children as a proportion of the total labour force in Denmark, 1993**

Age bracket	% working
10	7
12	18
14	43
15	59
16-17 (vocational training)	44
16-17 (lower secondary school)	64
16-17 (upper secondary school)	70
Total	**40**

Source: Frederiksen, 1999

Greece

Child labour legislation is widely flouted. The 1991 census reported only 1.3% of children aged 10 to 14 having a paid job. It is likely that in Greece, as elsewhere, most children work illegally. The sectoral distribution of under-age working in Greece is similar to that recorded in developing countries.

Agriculture and manufacturing industry are the main child work sectors, while the building industry employs a large share of older children. A 1996 study by the Greek National Foundation for Social Security found that on average, children employed in building trades worked between 40 (13 year-olds) and 70 (17 year-olds) days a year. Like Portugal, this early labour market attachment reflected unsuccessful secondary school completion. Another study found that a quarter of the total school population was not completing compulsory schooling because they would rather work, whether paid or not.

The new EU Member States

There are no figures on child labour in the new EU Member States. Few children work in Hungary's formal economy; begging and urban prostitution are more common. Child prostitution is a big concern for these countries. In Latvia, for instance, it is estimated that more than 15% of sex workers are between 8 and 18 years of age.

Romania

Romania has compulsory education, but not all children attend school. Primary school enrolments fell from 97.3% in 1989 to 94.4% in 1998, while secondary school attendance rates dropped from 91.1% in 1989 to 61.6% in 1998. Street children have particularly harsh lives. A NACPA (National Agency for Child Protection and Adoption) study estimated that there were 2 500 to 3 000 street children in 2000, 62.7% of whom were failed school completers. The National Study on the Situation of Street Children in 1999 pointed to a causal link between street work (60% of children) and poverty, disputes, violence and family breakdown.

Bulgaria

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 14% of children aged 5-15 had paid employment outside the home, in the retail or service sectors, transport, communications, building or agriculture. Some children also work unpaid in family concerns, while others perform heavy and health-damaging work. 10% of prostitutes are children.

Turkey

The child labour problem is directly related to the country's demographic structure, education system, and level of economic and social development. In 2000, the ILO reported that 7.8% of children in the 10 to 14 age group were working in agriculture, car repair garages, carpentry, the textile industry, tanneries and domestic services. According to a 1999 study, 4.2% of children (511 000) between the ages of 6 and 14 are economically active, while 27.6% (3 329 000) are home workers. About 80% of working children are still in school. Street children also remain an issue for Turkey, which is a centre of the child sex trade.

Table 6 **Child labour in Greece by sector (all child work, %)**

	Females age 14	Males age 14	Females age 15-19	Males age 15-19	Total age 14	Total age 15-19
Agriculture	81.7	39.4	26.7	27.1	48.0	27
Manufacturing industry	10.2	26.2	15.7	15.9	23.0	15.8
Construction	0.0	7.2	0.7	15.8	5.7	9.7
Retail	0.0	17.6	25.1	22.4	14.1	23.5
Hospitality industry	0.0	6.2	9.8	9.6	5.0	9.6
Total	**91.9**	**96.6**	**78**	**90.8**	**95.8**	**85**

Source: National statistical institute, Greece, 1998

Child labour and schools

Working children tend to be anti-school. In many cases, the rejection can be traced back to the family's disregard for earning formal qualifications. Knowledge learning is seen as unnecessary, paper qualifications as pointless, while growing up too soon makes it hard for children to relate to their peers, with whom all they ultimately have in common is their birth year. These children go through their own school lives with little or no awareness of the relationship between learning and socialization. If socialization is the product of learning, language acquisition, exposure to the new and speculative, the school is the enabling environment for the experience. But the two functions are seen or presented as completely separate: on one hand, the unpalatable grind of learning, and on other, the school as a poor place for socialization running a poor second to out-of-school activities. This is a destabilizing experience for children. Just at the age when they need to forge an identity, a complete disengagement occurs between the three environments in which they interact – work and the neighbourhood, family, school – which are meant to provide constant bearings for development in their teenage years. The danger then is that children will construct their own reality around substitute values – a football team, a pop star, the local "crew", etc. – lose touch with the core values, and be drawn into a worrying process of exclusion.

Child labour: possible ways forward

Child labour fills the interstices of a fragmented labour market, and is especially prevalent in various sectors of the informal economy. Less than employment proper, it tends to take the form of odd jobs, disparate tasks that can be performed by children prompted for a variety of reasons to enter the labour market at a very early age.

But it would be wrong as some do to see every situation where a child works independently or with adult assistance as exploitation. Not all work situations are exploitative per se, but then nor is all work either useful or instructive. If we place child labour on an axis, bounded on one side by exploitative work and on the other work that does not necessarily stunt the child's development or interfere with their education, a vast intermediate area is revealed of many jobs that combine good and bad points lying between the two extremes: not all work done in family businesses is necessarily good, any more than that done for non-family employers is bad by definition. Child labour raises issues about the condition of children and pre-teens, but also about the hypocrisy of some governments which may fund child and adolescent welfare campaigns, yet fail to introduce any serious prevention policies or effective action plans. As recent analyses have shown, child working cannot be taken out of its social context: school, family, the labour market, low incomes, the new issues raised by a complex environment, growth, training needs, the work "culture", the community and quality of life. Changes in training provision, labour and consumer markets, cultural models that lead to social and area stratification, necessarily shape patterns of under-age labour and the prospect of a development at odds with itself in an advanced industrial society containing both old and new forms of poverty, old and new needs, needing to be addressed in different ways (Patrizia Fulcinetti, *La fiaba non c'è, Valore scuola*, No. 8, May 2004). It is clear that in such a context, we are set to see a rise in children being turned off by school, absenteeism and failed school completion. If competition and "family choice" become the be-all and end-all of the school experience, the fate of thousands of children and adolescents looks already sealed. ■