

# Links between education and child labour

---

Anna Ormert

Future Seed

21 September 2018

## Question

*What does the evidence say about the links between education and child labour, both in terms of education as a tool to bring children out of child labour, and poor quality education pushing children out of the classroom and into child labour? Please focus on both attendance and learning outcome elements of education.*

## Contents

1. Overview
2. Links between education and child labour
3. Evidence on combining work and school
4. Education to reduce child labour
5. Poor quality education pushing children into work
6. Children from marginalised groups
7. References

---

*The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.*

*Helpdesk reports are commissioned by the UK Department for International Development and other Government departments, but the views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, the UK Government, K4D or any other contributing organisation. For further information, please contact [helpdesk@k4d.info](mailto:helpdesk@k4d.info).*

# 1. Overview

According to recent estimates, approximately 152 million children were engaged in child labour globally in 2016 (ILO 2017a: 5)<sup>1</sup>. There are many forms of children's work, involving different levels of demand and danger. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines **child labour** as work that is detrimental to children, by depriving them of their childhood, their potential and their dignity. Children's work is sometimes distinguished as being hazardous<sup>2</sup> or more benign (e.g., safe and does not undermine schooling), although this distinction is not relevant in all contexts. In some cases, children's work has the potential for both benefit and harm, and assessing harm and benefit in each context may be more useful than applying generalised standards. The worst forms of child labour (as defined by ILO Convention No. 182<sup>3</sup>) are out of scope for this review.

In many cases, work interferes with children's formal education by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; forcing them to drop out prematurely; or requiring them to balance the competing pressures of schooling and work. Since the launch of the global Education for All (EFA) movement<sup>4</sup>, **education** is often understood to mean formal schooling. However, this definition excludes non-traditional and informal spaces of learning, as well as significant forms of learning that happen in the workplace.

Many children's rights organisations and anti-child labour campaigns believe that **child labour and education are incompatible**, that children's work is an obstacle to EFA, that child labour should be abolished and that education is a key element in its prevention. With regards to hazardous child labour, this view is widely accepted. However, there is a counterview which argues that **not all children's work is bad, that children's labour can be compatible with education and learning and that work can actually enable education**.

This study examines evidence on the links between child labour and education, including the use of education as a tool to bring children out of child labour, poor quality education pushing children out of the classroom and into work, as well as on children who combine work and school. It is one of a two-part series of reports. The second report (Ornert 2018) examines the evidence on short- and long-term impacts of education interventions targeting working children.

Key findings of this review include:

---

<sup>1</sup> Of these, 73 million were in hazardous work. Nearly half (48%) were aged between 5-11 years and 42% were girls. The majority of children were working in the agricultural sector (nearly 71%), followed by services (just over 17%) and industry (nearly 12%) (ILO 2017a: 5). Most child labour in the agricultural sector is unpaid, taking place within the family (ibid: 34). There is geographic variation. For example, Bangladesh reports a higher level of child labour in manufacturing (in particular, the garment sector) than in agriculture (Quattri and Watkins 2016: 26).

<sup>2</sup> The definition can be found on the [ILO website](#).

<sup>3</sup> **Worst forms** of child labour according to [ILO Convention No. 182](#) include slavery or practices similar to slavery, child prostitution and pornography, involvement in drug trafficking or other illicit activities or children recruited into armed conflict.

<sup>4</sup> The [Education for All \(EFA\) movement](#) is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults

- There is a relatively large body of research on the links between child labour and education. Much of this focuses on whether child labour has a negative effect on educational outcomes. It does not necessarily account for the range of different work carried out by children across, and within, country contexts. The evidence on the causal relationship between child labour and education is mixed; causality can be difficult to establish (Brown 2012; Woldehanna and Gebremedhin 2015).
- Existing evidence is drawn primarily from four types of research<sup>5</sup>:
  - reviews of statistical survey data (e.g., Guarcello et al 2015, Rosati et al 2015, UNESCO 2015);
  - large-scale and/ or longitudinal studies, using both survey and qualitative data (e.g., the numerous papers based on data from the Young Lives Study, such as Chuta 2014, Boyden et al 2016, Crivello and van der Gaag 2016, Morrow and Boyden 2018; also Quattri and Watkins 2016 large-scale Child Work and Education Survey);
  - smaller-scale studies combining statistics and qualitative research (e.g., Kim 2009, Kraus 2016);
  - qualitative case study or ethnographic research (e.g., Aufseeser 2014, Arko-Achemfuor 2014, Balagopalan 2018, Bourdillon ND).
- Survey data tends to portray children as either in or out of school, but qualitative data illuminates more dynamic realities; the educational trajectories of working children are seldom continuous or linear.
- Many children combine working with schooling<sup>6</sup>. There is a body of research that suggests that rather than interrupting education, children's work can in some circumstances enable it. In other cases, children may have to work, alongside their education, to support household income.
- Some researchers argue that rather than trying to end all forms of children's work, interventions should support children in more 'benign' work to balance employment and schooling. There is widespread agreement, however, that all forms of harmful child labour<sup>7</sup> should be banned.
- Key interventions to get children out of work and into education include: improving access to education (by, for example, reducing direct and indirect costs), providing flexible schooling arrangements, offering alternatives to formal education (including vocational, transitional and non-formal learning) and improving the quality of education infrastructure and learning. Holistic interventions that rely on integrated approaches can be effective (see, for example, Quattri and Watkins's 2016: 9).
- Evidence also highlights the danger of unintended negative consequences of education interventions, and cautions against one-size-fits all solutions.

---

<sup>5</sup> This review also includes a handful of interesting examples 'grey literature' as these may provide useful insights into interventions around education for working children.

<sup>6</sup> Although this does not hold true in all contexts. For example, in Bangladesh many of the working children surveyed in Dhaka slums by Quattri and Watkins (2016) did not have access to schools.

<sup>7</sup> This is understood to be paid or unpaid labour which affects the health and personal development of children, including – but not limited to – hazardous child labour.

This study identified a number of evidence gaps:

- There is a lack of evidence beyond the more general relationship between child labour and education. Additional research, (particularly, longitudinal studies) is needed to illuminate different kinds of work, number of working hours, impact of work on learning outcomes, as well as the variations in the way work affects schooling across countries.
- There is a need for more research on how poor quality education pushes children out of the classroom and into work, including the incentives, or lack thereof, of remaining in education when work can offer more viable routes to adult employment.
- There is a lack of research on the gender dimensions of child labour more generally (Dammert et al 2017: 3). Specifically, there is a need for studies on the gendered nature of new opportunities for paid employment among children, how these impact on conventional gender norms and practices as well as gendered time allocation between work and school (Singh and Khan 2016; Crivello and van der Gaag 2016; Dammert et al 2017).
- Despite the large number of children in both work and school, there is limited research on combining education and employment (Singh and Khan 2016).
- Whilst there is evidence that work can have a range of benefits for children, these are often ignored in discourses around child labour. More research is needed on how to maximise the benefits of children's work, and minimise the harm.
- There is a gap in up-to-date research, which examines the relationship between child labour and education as learning, rather than just formal education within the school system.
- There is a limited body of research on the long-term consequences of withdrawing children from family-based work to attend school (e.g., what knowledge or skills from this family based work become lost? Are there other social consequences?).

## 2. Links between education and child labour

There is a fairly sizeable literature on the links between child labour and education, much of which focuses on the negative effect that child labour has on children's school attendance and educational outcomes (UNICEF 2014; ILO 2015; Perezniето 2016). It is, however, difficult to establish precise relationships between the two (Brown 2012: 9; Woldehanna and Gebremedhin 2015: 1). Whilst, poverty is understood to push many poor children out of the classroom into work, child labour is a complex phenomenon, affected by many factors (Dammert et al 2017: 2):

- **inequality** (Perezniето et al 2016: 16);
- **economic uncertainty** (created, or intensified, by droughts, floods, rising food prices and/ or family illness or deaths) (Brown 2012: 10; Chuta 2014; Dammert et al 2017: 3); this can be a particular risk for girls (Perezniето 2016: 22);
- **limited accessibility** of education (Perezniето et al 2016: 26);
- considerations about **relative returns of children's work and education** (Kraus 2016; Perezniето et al 2016: 14; Dammert et al 2017: 2);
- **social and cultural norms** can also play a part; in many countries labour is seen as a productive, valuable and normal use of a child's time (Perezniето et al 2016: 13).

There are divergent views within the literature about the compatibility of children's work and formal education, as well as the impact of children's work on their schooling. On the one hand, child labour and education are often depicted as **mutually exclusive** activities (Rosati et al 2015: 32). According to this view, work has a negative impact on children's educational trajectories and education is key to eradicating child labour (e.g., ILO 2009; Brown 2012). Quattri and Watkins (2016: 9), in their large-scale study of the relationship between child labour and education in poor households in Dhaka's slums, find that parents are often compelled to send their children to work to meet minimum income requirements - what the authors term a 'distress choice'. This view is supported by other literature suggesting that unaffordable, inaccessible and/ or irrelevant education results in a lack of perceived returns to education in poor households, particularly in rural areas (Kraus 2016). This can make sending children to work seem a more useful option than sending them to school (Brown 2012; Perezniето et al 2016: 13). A smaller study by Kim (2009) disputes that poverty is the main determinant of child labour in the Cambodian context, arguing that diverse reasons children work need to be better understood in order to eradicate child labour and achieve universal basic primary education.

Another view – emerging notably from some recent papers from the longitudinal Young Lives Study<sup>8</sup> - challenges the notion that work and school are in direct opposition, and that the elimination of child labour – with the notable exception of hazardous child labour - should be an end in and of itself. Although children's work can negatively affect children's educational achievement (Woldehanna and Gebremedhin 2015), working can also enable children to pursue education (Aufseeser 2014: 114; Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 20; Bourdillon ND: 8). **Many children engage in both school and work**; in some cases this is not only necessary, but useful (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 4). Several studies highlight both benefits and risks related child labour (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015; Morrow 2015). In other contexts, education is regarded as an activity to fit around other aspects of life, especially work (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016: 19). In such cases, policy concern should be with supporting children who combine working and education, rather than with abolishing children's work (Bourdillon 2017; Morrow and Boyden 2018).

Moreover, Aufseeser (2014: 117), in her qualitative study of formal and informal learning experiences of working children in Peru, suggests that anti-child labour campaigns focusing on education have had negative effects on children's work experiences. These children's ability to 'learn and take pride in their work' is obstructed by 'the bombardment of messages that they should not be working'. In their case study on children combining school and work in Ethiopia, Tafere and Pankhurst (2015: 24) argue that whilst banning children's work 'may seem logical at face value', such initiatives may be unrealistic in some contexts; some children need to work, either to support their families or to be able to afford schooling.

The literature on combining work and school is examined in more detail in the following section of this review.

---

<sup>8</sup> This is an **international study of childhood poverty** following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam over 15 years.

### 3. Evidence on combining work and school

Whilst survey data tends to portray children as either in or out of school, evidence indicates that many children combine work with schooling (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 21; UNESCO 2015: 65). There is some evidence that children who combine work and formal education are more likely to work within their own families, while those working but out of school are more likely to be in paid employment (Guarcello et al 2015: 15). Unpaid family work may be more likely than work outside the home to correlate with low school enrolment (Bourdillon 2017).

Combining work and school does not mean that children are in regular school attendance (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 21). In many cases, schooling has not lessened children's labour responsibilities; instead, it has created competing pressures of work and formal education (Morrow 2015: 2; Brown 2012: 35; Pereznieta et al 2016: 8). For many children, 'the choice is not between school and work but rather how much time and effort should be given to each activity' (Boyden et al 2016: 11). The evidence on children's time use is mixed. Crivello and van der Gaag (2016: 19), in their study of how poverty and gender shape paths to adulthood in Ethiopia, suggest that education is often fitted around household or external, paid work. Boyden et al (2016: 24) note that 'depending on the kind of work on offer and the perceived returns to education, many children attend as and when possible, balancing education with their productive and reproductive responsibilities.' Other research indicates that children's time for work is taken from children's leisure, rather than school, time (Bourdillon et al 2015: 9)

Studies from the Young Lives project also highlight numerous challenges faced by children struggling to balance the demands of school with their family and work commitments (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015; Crivello and van der Gaag 2016: 20). There is wider evidence that working children lag behind their non-working peers in terms of educational outcomes and progression (Guarcello et al. 2015: 18; UNESCO 2015: 65; Quattri and Watkins 2016: 16). The hard physical labour that often characterises children's work alongside the high costs and inflexibility displayed by the school system combine to create difficulties for working children who also wish to attend school (Morrow 2015: 17). Exhaustion resulting from long working hours can hamper children's concentration in the classroom and subsequent learning (UNESCO 2015: 65). Many poor children faced difficulties when trying to re-enrol in school, even after short periods of absence (Boyden et al 2016: 22). Children trying to balance both work and schooling often have inadequate support to do so (Aufseeser 2014: 114). Additionally, some children report feeling ostracised, and discriminated against, in school because of their poor financial status and need to work (ibid).

Some of the literature highlights that external 'shocks' (such as drought, family illness or death) or having to care for ill or elderly family members can exacerbate the pressures of combining work and school and disrupt educational trajectories (Chuta 2014; Crivello and van der Gaag 2016). The detrimental effect of such shocks are often most acutely felt by poorer children and their families, and rural children are more vulnerable than their urban peers (Chuta 2014: 10). The notion of educational linear progression may be irrelevant for working children in many contexts. For example, Boyden et al (2016: 24) found in that in rural Ethiopia, children did not attend school continuously; instead, they attended school when possible, balancing this with their economic and household responsibilities.

There is wide agreement on the need to prevent dangerous and exploitative work. Some researchers advocate, however, that rather than banning child labour across the board, governments should support children to engage in light, safe or beneficial work whilst also

attending school (see for example, Morrow and Boyden 2018: 39). The relationship between children's work and education can be complex and prohibiting children's work may not always be realistic (Taferre and Pankhurst 2015). In some cases, children's work can enable their participation in education by providing the financial means to do so (Bourdillon ND). It can also enable children to help their families financially (for example, by paying siblings' school fees) as well as earn their own money, which can positively affect their self-esteem and teach them important social and technical (Bourdillon 2017) and life skills (Aufseeser 2014: 117). Because abolishing labour in family enterprises can disempower the children, and their families, Bourdillon (2017) encourages the identification of ways in which family work can be encouraged without interrupting schooling.

## 4. Education to reduce child labour

In the literature on education as a tool to reduce child labour or to support those children combining work and school, a number of themes emerge. A related K4D report (Ornert 2018) examines the evidence on short- and long-term impacts of education interventions for working children.

### Access to education

Increasing access to education is widely cited within the literature as key to getting children out of work (see, for example, UNICEF 2014: 7; ILO 2017a: 52). Education can break inter-generational cycles of poverty and provide a viable alternative for working children (ILO 2017a: 52). In the long-term, there is evidence that a child who has benefitted from education is more likely to invest in their own children's education (ibid). In the short term, education removes children from child labour (for at least part of the day) and, at least in theory, provides them with the skills and knowledge needed for future work. Empirical research indicates, however, that this is not always the case (see section 5 of this review). Moreover, decent work is not always available upon completion of education (Bourdillon ND).

Obstacles to school attendance can include school fees and other costs (Singh and Khan 2016: 11). Cost considerations can also include the availability of a household's resources to meet 'immediate economic and social care requirements' (Boyden et al 2016: 10-11). Credit-constrained households may struggle to cover school-related expenses. Moreover, even where parents and children value schooling, investment in education may not be prioritised when sending children to work enables meeting immediate subsistence needs (Dammert et al 2017: 6). In some cultures, labour is seen as a normal and valuable way for children to spend their time (Perezniето et al 2016: 13), although types of work can differ between boys and girls (for example, paid economic activity for boys and household work for girls). Notably, households' opportunities and constraints, as well as available resources, and work and education opportunities often change and fluctuate (Boyden et al 2016: 11).

Abolishing school fees and providing support for additional costs, such as books, school uniforms and transport can encourage working children to attend school (ILO 2017a: 52). UNICEF (2014: 5) highlights that these interventions can be particularly beneficial for children who belong to marginalised groups (girls, indigenous children, children with disabilities, child refugees and migrants, unaccompanied and separated children, or children associated with armed forces and armed groups). There are no one-size-fits-all solutions, however, and interventions need to be tailored to each particular group and the specific risks they face (ibid).

Globally, primary-level education enrolment is nearing universal; secondary enrolment is also rising. School attendance on its own, however, is an inadequate indicator of the success of interventions to get children into education (ILO 2017a: 48). Universal enrolment does not mean that children do not work (Morrow and Boyden 2018: 9). Despite the growth of universal education, retention remains a challenge in many contexts (UNICEF 2014: 8; Quattri and Watkins 2016: 21). Children who have missed school or dropped out also need better support, including extra tuition and better facilities for re-enrolment (Morrow and Boyden 2018: 41).

## Flexible schooling

Flexible schooling arrangements, and accommodating employers, can support the education of working children who are balancing diverse time pressures (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 13; Bourdillon 2017). These include schools operating with flexible hours and allowing pupils to work before or after school, or during school holidays. Morrow and Boyden (2018: 38) note that schools that have adjusted the school timetable to the subsistence cycle (giving children a two-week break to help with harvesting or dividing the school day into morning and afternoon shifts to fit around children's employment commitments) have helped prevent working children from dropping out of formal education.

Flexible schedules or half-time schooling can be particularly beneficial for rural pupils working on family farms. Permissive school regimes that allow children to work during school hours and compliant employers who accommodate school schedules, can support children combining employment with studies (Boyden et al 2016: 24). They do not always do this however; Bourdillon et al (2015: 8) note that in practice, schools providing flexible schedules in Ethiopia were not flexible enough in accommodating working children. The authors note that, 'rather it is the working children who are required to be flexible to fit in with the school system and bear the burden of trying to combine their various responsibilities'.

## Transitional, vocational and non-formal education

Transitional education programmes, sometimes referred to as 'bridge schools',<sup>9</sup> have been set up in several countries, including India, Mongolia and Nepal, to bridge the education gap between the day-to-day realities of working children and the formal education system (ILO ND: 80). These aim to help (former) working children who have missed out on school 'catch up' with their non-working peers (ibid) and provide the foundation to help them adapt to formal school or vocational training (UNESCO 2015: 69). The formal education system does not often take into account the specific circumstances of (formerly) working children – for example, having missed years of schooling, having low literacy and learning levels, being more mature than their age, or trying to balance parental expectations to continue working (ILO ND: 80). In this context, bridge schools support children's adjustment to formal schooling. The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)<sup>10</sup> emphasises informal and transitional programmes are not an alternative to the state-run formal education system, but rather a mechanism for getting working children into the mainstream system.

---

<sup>9</sup> See <https://educationinnovations.org/program/mamidipudi-venkatarangaiya-foundation-elimination-child-labor-program> and [https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india\\_56635.html](https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_56635.html)

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/programme/lang--en/index.htm>



Morrow and Boyden (2018: 40) emphasise the importance of learning which prepares children with relevant skills for the local labour market. This can comprise vocational training and employment programmes catered to the educational and skill-levels of young people who have dropped out of school (Tafere and Chuta 2016: 23). A detailed case study by Bourdillon (ND) describes an 'earn-and-learn' school in Zimbabwe where (primarily, but not exclusively, poor) children work on a tea plantation in return for receiving an education. Although dated<sup>11</sup>, the study provides useful insights into the experiences of children combining work and schooling through an 'education with production' approach (see also Arko-Achemfuor 2014). Although working conditions were at times, described as harsh, employment enabled the children to pay for their own, and siblings', schooling, help their families financially, and earn their own spending money. Importantly, they also received a practical education, intended to prepare them for adult employment – though as Bourdillon states, unrealistic hopes were often raised about work prospects. Although tensions were noted between balancing work and school, the initiative enabled children to access education who might otherwise be excluded . Arko-Achemfuor (2014: 607) also outlines an 'education with production' initiative in South Africa where adults and young people can learn academic, vocational and practical subjects, such as plumbing, carpentry, bricklaying, growing vegetables and rearing cattle. The author suggests that similar examples of teaching and learning could be usefully replicated, particularly in rural communities (Arko-Achemfuor 2014: 612).

Education is frequently understood to mean formal schooling. Yet, as Aufseeser (2014: 113) notes, this 'actively devalues' other spaces of learning; moreover, it can exclude children trying to balance both work and school. 'Second-chance and non-formal learning opportunities' can support young people who are unable to continue with formal schooling (UNESCO 2015: 68-69; Rosati et al 2015: 38). Informal learning spaces can be particularly important for children and young people who have experienced 'feelings of failure and alienation' in more formal school settings (Aufseeser 2014: 118).

Non-formal learning projects can also support 'street-connected children', who are often engaged in child labour; many are unable to access education due to barriers, including lack of identity documents, precarious families, challenges of daily survival, experiences of 'failure' in formal schooling; stigma and prejudice, substance abuse and involvement in juvenile crime (Corcoram and Lewis 2017: 4). Innovative education interventions can help to navigate these barriers. In some cases, education is intended to prepare children to engage in more formal education. Where formal education systems may not be accessible to street-connected children, alternative schools can provide important learning and support (ibid: 5). Other examples of non-formal education are highlighted in the literature. For example, the Basic Education for Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children project in Bangladesh<sup>12</sup> provides 'life skills-based, non-formal basic education' for 10-14-year olds who have never been in school or who have dropped out (UNESCO 2015: 68-69)..

Debates about child labour do not always acknowledge the workplace learning that can occur: children can, and do, learn social and technical skills through working (Aufseeser 2014: 117; Crivello and van der Gaag 2016: 19; Morrow 2015: 13). Family enterprises provide opportunities

---

<sup>11</sup> The field research was carried out in 1998.

<sup>12</sup> More information about the Basic Education for Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children project can be found [here](#).

for children to acquire a variety of social and other relevant skills in a protected environment (Bourdillon 2017). This learning can further enable children to ‘become collaborative contributors, establishing sound social relations and developing social responsibility’ (ibid)<sup>13</sup>.

Morrow (2015: 23) suggests that discussion on child labour and education must take into account both positive (learning, integration, interdependence) and negative aspects of work (risk of injury, exhaustion, interference with schooling). Importantly, young people’s ability to learn from work is dependent on the specific space and context in which they work (Aufseeser 2014: 116). However, policy responses often overlook the diverse range of experiences in child labour (ibid).

## Integrated approaches

Because of the complex causes of child labour, education interventions alone may not be enough to get working children into the classroom. There is evidence that education interventions are strengthened if delivered through integrated approaches, which also include social protection and legal components (Quattri and Watkins’s 2016: 18). Social protection programmes - including those that provide access to credit to help households deal with ‘shocks’ (Woldehanna and Gebremedhin 2015: 21) - may reduce the negative impacts of poverty by improving the financial state of the household and, consequently, lessening, the financial burdens related to sending children to school. The impact of these on the whole is undetermined, however, as the evidence shows mixed results (Dammert et al 2017). While labour-market oriented interventions may provide additional income to families, they may also increase the demands for children to perform household chores or work in the family business to compensate for adult time spent outside the household (Dammert et al 2017: 9).

Providing cash transfers or non-means-tested benefits (ILO 2017a: 52-53) can improve the labour market position of the poorest households and offset the indirect cost of children’s education, encouraging school enrolment (Quattri and Watkins 2016: 16). Making these conditional upon school attendance may strengthen their impact (Woldehanna and Gebremedhin 2015: 21), although there is evidence that interventions based on both conditional and unconditional cash transfers reduce child labour (Dammert et al 2017: 3). Additional incentive programmes, including school feeding programmes (Dammert et al 2017: 19), provision of educational materials and other subsidies can also enable working children to regularly attend schools (Tafere and Chuta 2016: 22). Impact may increase where cash benefits are integrated with these additional programme elements (Dammert et al 2017: 3).

Getting children out of work and into school may require wider changes to public policy to allow families to choose education over child labour (UNICEF 2014: 9). Integrated approaches can involve laws and regulation related to labour and compulsory schooling. Such legislation is used by many countries to target paid child employment outside of families<sup>14</sup>. However, findings from Edmonds and Shrestha’s (2012) study of 59 countries indicate that minimum age of employment regulation merely shifts child labour from outside to inside the household without significantly changing the time allocation of children between work and schooling (Edmonds and Shrestha 2012: 25). This study suggests that the importance of minimum age of employment regulation in

---

<sup>13</sup> As Bourdillon (2017) points out, children working in family enterprises may also experience exploitation.

<sup>14</sup> Edmonds and Shrestha (2012: 1) note that most countries legally prohibit economic activity of children under the age of 12 and regulate employment through age 17.

shaping children's educational pathways is overstated, although it notes that these laws may generate other benefits – for example, they might 'help establish norms over very long time horizons' (ibid: 26).

Quattri and Watkins (2016: 18) highlight the 'transformative potential of integrated interventions' to eliminate child labour, improve the quality of schooling and reduce household poverty. Specifically, the authors argue that it is the absence of an integrated strategy that currently hampers the effectiveness of existing policies. Additionally, they suggest that a process of dialogue is necessary to change prevailing attitudes about child labour.

Brown (2012: 11) notes that in Brazil, efforts to combat child labour have been successful because of an integrated framework: the national strategy strengthens legal codes, enhances monitoring and enforcement, enforces punitive measures against companies responsible for employing children, and provides cash transfers to poor households conditional on children attending school.

## **Unintended negative consequences of interventions**

In some instances, education interventions, which are contingent on reducing or banning child labour, can have unintended negative consequences for children and their families (Morrow and Boyden 2018: 38). For example, enforcement of compulsory education in India and Ethiopia means families have lost vital help with subsistence farming and household chores (Morrow and Boyden 2018: 38). Similarly, Bourdillon (2017) notes that schooling can disrupt the role of children as collaborative contributors to their households, damaging social relations and the social fabric of their communities. In Peru, anti-child labour legislation had a negative impact on 'the ability of educators to reach children outside of the classroom' (Aufseeser's 2014: 118). This was due to both budget cuts and eligibility requirements, which required participating children to quit working in order to participate in the learning opportunities.

In some cases, Dammert et al (2017: 3) warn, education interventions may even increase child labour. In order to avoid unintended negative consequences, interventions must be designed within context-specific constraints.

## **5. Poor quality education pushing children into work**

In its Meta-analysis of ILO Child Labour Programmes Projects in Africa, 2009-2014, the ILO (2017b: 17) identifies poor quality education as a key contributory factor to child labour (others include poverty and cultural effects). This view is also taken in the wider literature (UNICEF 2014: 9; Morrow 2015; ILO 2015: 4; Singh and Khan 2016: 11; Quattri and Watkins 2016: 19). For example, Boyden et al (2016: 22) find that in Ethiopia poor quality education was a stronger determinant of the interruption of children's schooling than work. UNESCO (2015: 68-69) suggest that approaches should be developed which improve not only access to education but also 'quality and relevance, so that families not only have the opportunity to invest in their children's education as an alternative to child labour but also that the returns to schooling make their investment worthwhile.' Indeed, Morrow and Boyden (2018: 36) find that 'children and their families might lose confidence in education as a means to escape poverty if education was perceived to not lead to better jobs'.

In some cases, observed limitations on learning reflect the poor quality of education. Quattri and Watkins (2016: 62) find, for example that 'many working children learned very little while

attending school– and [...] the basic literacy skills they did acquire erode very quickly’ (ibid: 62). UNICEF (2014: 9) finds that a staggering proportion of children in primary school globally are not learning to read or write. Vennam et al’s (2016) study in India found that while enrolment rates had improved, school performance had declined (ibid: 6). Indeed, Crivello and van der Gaag (2016: 23) suggest that ‘being enrolled in school at age 10 might be an indication of perseverance rather than good progress, or good quality schooling’. Education may be deemed less attractive if it is perceived to be of low quality, or schools are unwelcoming or have poor infrastructure and that this can impact on decisions made by children and their families weighing the relative returns to children’s education and employment (Morrow and Boyden 2018: 36).

Aufseeser (2014: 115) finds that the school curriculum is often ‘disconnected from the context of children’s lives’, and reliant on ‘old-fashioned methods of rote memorisation and physical punishment, verbal humiliation for children who do not learn well or conform to the school environment’. Government teachers at the primary level receive minimal training in approaches to cognitive development. The training they do receive places emphasis on rote learning and memory recall. For children who have no experience of pre-school, come from home marked by limited literacy and enter school with low expectations, these are ‘particularly damaging teaching models’ (Quattri and Watkins 2016: 25).

While the quality of education may not be the only reason that children and young people drop out of school, it can exacerbate this tendency in situations where other factors - for example, economic, environmental and/ or family-related ‘shocks’ – persist. A wide range of quality issues have been identified as discouraging children from taking up, or continuing, education. These include:

- **poor infrastructure** (Quattri and Watkins 2016: 25; ILO 2017b: 36);
- **poorly-qualified teachers** (Quattri and Watkins 2016: 25; Singh and Khan 2016: 11; Balagopalan 2018) and **teacher absenteeism** (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 16-17; Morrow and Boyden 2018: 34);
- **overcrowded and poorly resourced classrooms and schools** (Quattri and Watkins 2016: 25; Singh and Khan 2016: 11);
- **violence in schools and concerns for student safety** (UNICEF 2014: 8; Aufseeser 2014: 115; Morrow and Boyden 2018: 34);
- **corporal punishment** (UNICEF 2014: 8; Aufseeser 2014: 115; Morrow and Boyden 2018: 34), **discrimination or humiliating treatment** (UNICEF 2014: 8; Aufseeser 2014: 115; Singh and Khan 2016: 11).

## 6. Children from marginalised groups

Numerous studies note the ways in which **poorer children** are disadvantaged and how these disadvantages can make them more likely to engage in child labour and miss out on schooling. For example, Balagopalan (2018: 5) in her ethnographic research on street children and child labourers in Kolkata finds that compulsory schooling is characterised by class divisions as child labourers are often forced out of government schools and into poorer quality alternative ‘schools’, staffed by teachers with minimal qualifications (ibid). These schools reinforce the exclusionary politics for labouring, lower caste children (Balagopalan, 2018: 5). The importance of wage labour for these children and their families must be seen in the context of the practical skills that

children can gain in waged labour as well as the context of their earlier exclusion from schooling and the more recent provision of poor quality education (Balagopalan, 2018: 13).

Quattri and Watkins (2016: 25) also highlight that poor quality education impacts most starkly on poorer children in their study in Dhaka. For instance, the poorest quintile of students also had the highest student-to-teacher ratios and were taught by teachers with fewest qualifications and frequently took the brunt of other infrastructure deficits.

In some cases, when poorer families, who are unable to afford school fees and other costs of schooling, have to make decisions about sending children to school, **girls** can be excluded from education (ILO 2009: 53). In such cases, conditional cash transfers can have a particularly positive effect on getting girls into education (ibid). In Mexico, for example, higher stipends have been paid for girls to attend school than boys, whilst in Cambodia and Pakistan, scholarship programmes have transferred cash to families whose daughters enrol in secondary school (ibid: 54).

In other contexts, however, girls and young women are more likely to attend school. This phenomenon has been noted in studies based on Young Lives data in Ethiopia (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016; Boyden et al 2016; Morrow and Boyden 2018: 39) and India (Singh and Khan 2016: 9). Boyden et al (2016: 24) emphasise that gender 'is not simply a cultural artefact'; rather, it interacts in specific locations (for example rural or urban), with specific economic conditions to become 'a source of disparity among children' (ibid). Moreover, they note that gender advantage in the labour market can be detrimental to education. In Ethiopia, for example, boys seem more influenced than girls by low-quality education due to perceived low returns to education. Gendered disadvantages for girls are often 'subtle and complex' (ibid). Because of fewer opportunities for fulltime employment, girls may have greater freedom to continue with their education. Despite this, 'gender norms limit their economic advancement' (ibid). These findings are also reflected by Crivello and van der Gaag (2016), who highlights that gender is not the only factor which shapes young people's transitions to adulthood, including their experiences of work and education and decisions about time-use between the two; it is crucial to understand the ways in which poverty and gender also interact with location (rural or urban), class, age and birth order. Singh and Khan (2016: 9) in their research for the Young Lives study in Andhra Pradesh, found that while children up to the age of eight went to school (regardless of gender, caste and household wealth) significant gender and urban-rural gaps appeared by age 12; gender-based discrimination continued to result in declining enrolment over time.

Once in formal education, girls and young women have been found to encounter specifically gendered problems, which can discourage them from attending, including lack of adequate or private toilets (Morrow and Boyden 2018: 34) or sexual abuse (Aufeseeser 2014: 115). ILO (2017b: 21) evaluation of an education and vocational training intervention in Kenya, found that inadequate support and attention to their specific situations heightened the risk of teen mothers dropping out.

Other groups of children are also acknowledged to face specific disadvantages, although these receive scant attention in the wider literature. The ILO (2017a: 52) highlight the importance of acknowledging **children with disabilities** in the context of providing safe and quality education, keeping children in school and ensuring good education outcomes. Wu (2017: 28-29), in her case study of children with communication difficulties, highlights that school (re)integration programmes that focus on (re-) enrolment, with little to no consideration for children's specific learning needs, may contribute to high drop-out rates. She notes that training and deploying

learning-support-assistants to work with children with disabilities can have a number of benefits, including positive learning experiences and social impact for children with special educational needs. The benefits can extend beyond disabled children, for example improving all children's learning and reducing stigma.

Morrow and Boyden (2018: 34) highlight that **ethnic minority children** in Vietnam were teased by classmates and often felt unwelcome in school. Additionally, they experienced negative impact resulting from language of instruction in Vietnamese schools as they did not have the language of instruction as a first language (ibid).

## 7. References

- Arko-Achemfuor, A. (2014) *Teaching the youth and adults through education with production: The case study of the Tiger Kloof Educational Institution*. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences 5(1): 607-612. <http://www.mcser.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/viewFile/1940/1939>
- Aufseeser, D. (2014) *Limiting spaces of informal learning among street children in Peru* in Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl (ed.), *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices*, Publisher: Palgrave, Editors: pp.112-123, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 112–23.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dena\\_Aufseeser/publication/277557938\\_The\\_problems\\_of\\_child\\_labor\\_and\\_education\\_in\\_Peru\\_A\\_critical\\_analysis\\_of\\_%27universal%27\\_approaches\\_to\\_youth\\_development/links/59c06f0b458515e9cfd55446/The-problems-of-child-labor-and-education-in-Peru-A-critical-analysis-of-universal-approaches-to-youth-development.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dena_Aufseeser/publication/277557938_The_problems_of_child_labor_and_education_in_Peru_A_critical_analysis_of_%27universal%27_approaches_to_youth_development/links/59c06f0b458515e9cfd55446/The-problems-of-child-labor-and-education-in-Peru-A-critical-analysis-of-universal-approaches-to-youth-development.pdf)
- Balagopalan, S. (2018) *'Afterschool and during vacations': on labour and schooling in the postcolony*. Children's Geographies.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14733285.2018.1490008>
- Bourdillon, M. (2017) *Ignoring the benefits of children's work: Beyond Trafficking and slavery*. Open Democracy. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/michael-bourdillon/ignoring-benefits-of-children-s-work>
- Bourdillon, M. (ND) *Earn-and-learn: Work for education in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe*. Unpublished paper, Department of Sociology, University of Zimbabwe.
- Bourdillon, M. et al (2015) *Introduction: Children's work and current debates* in Pankhurst, A., M. et al (eds.) *Children's Work and Labour in East Africa*. Addis Ababa: OSSREA.  
[https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/Child-Work-in-East-Africa\\_Introduction.pdf](https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/Child-Work-in-East-Africa_Introduction.pdf)
- Boyden, J. et al (2016) *Balancing school and work with new opportunities: Changes in children's gendered time use in Ethiopia (2006-2013)*. Working Paper 161, Oxford: Young Lives.  
[http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP161-Boyden%20%282%29\\_0.pdf](http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP161-Boyden%20%282%29_0.pdf)
- Brown, G. (2012) *Child labour and educational disadvantage: Breaking the link, building opportunity*. London: The Office of the UN Special Envoy for Global Education.  
[http://www.ungei.org/child\\_labor\\_and\\_education\\_US.pdf](http://www.ungei.org/child_labor_and_education_US.pdf)

- Chuta, N. (2014) *Children's agency in responding to shocks*. Working Paper 128, Oxford: Young Lives. [http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP128\\_Chuta\\_Childrens%20Agency%20and%20Shocks.pdf](http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP128_Chuta_Childrens%20Agency%20and%20Shocks.pdf)
- Corcoran, S. and Lewis, I. (eds) (2017) *Special issue on street-connected young people and inclusive education*. Enabling Education Review, Issue 6. [https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/EER6\\_SCC\\_final.pdf](https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/EER6_SCC_final.pdf)
- Crivello, G. and N. Van der Gaag (2016) *Between hope and a hard place: Boys and young men negotiating gender, poverty and social worth in Ethiopia*. Working Paper 160, Oxford: Young Lives. <http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP160-Boys-and-Young-Men-Negotiating-Gender-in-Ethiopia.pdf>
- Dammert, A. et al (2017) *Effects of public policy on child labour: Current knowledge, gaps, and implications for program design*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/108841488913017526/pdf/WPS7999.pdf>
- Edmonds, E.V. and Shreshtra, M. (2012) *The impact of minimum age of employment regulation on child labour and schooling*. IZA Journal of Labour Policy 1(14): 1-28.
- Kim, C. (2009) *Is combining child labour and school education the right approach? Investigating the Cambodian case*. International Journal of Education Development, 29: 30-38. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3a0c/6d3f6f0922095c0d17045b96b653bbbf4a25.pdf>
- Guarcello, L. et al (2015) *Evolution of the relationship between child labour and education since 2000: Evidence from 19 developing countries*. Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015. Rome: UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002324/232455e.pdf>
- ILO (2009) *Give girls a chance: Tackling child labour, a key to the future*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation. [https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_107913/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_107913/lang--en/index.htm)
- ILO (2015) *Child labour and education: Progress, challenges and future directions*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation. [https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_IPEC\\_PUB\\_26435/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_26435/lang--en/index.htm)
- ILO (2017a) *Global estimates of child labour: Rights and trends 2012–2016*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575499.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575499.pdf)
- ILO (2017b) *Meta-analysis of evaluations on ILO child labour programmes and projects in Africa 2009-2014*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation. [https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_IPEC\\_PUB\\_30355/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_30355/lang--en/index.htm)
- Kraus, A. (2016) *Understanding child labour beyond the standard economic assumption of monetary poverty*. Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1-30. <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/kraussa/Understanding%20child%20labour%20beyond%20the%20standard%20economic%20assumption%20of%20monetary%20poverty.pdf>
- Morrow, V. and Boyden, J. (2018) *Responding to children's work: Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam*. Summative Report. Oxford: Young Lives.

[https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-RespondingToChildrensWork-A4-Jan18\\_0.pdf](https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-RespondingToChildrensWork-A4-Jan18_0.pdf)

Morrow, V. (2015) *The intersections of school, work and learning: Children in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh, India, Peru and Vietnam* in: Abebe, T. et al (eds) *Labouring and Learning. Geographies of Children and Young People*, vol 10. Springer, Singapore.

[https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-4585-97-2\\_8-1#citeas](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-4585-97-2_8-1#citeas)

Ornert, A. (2018). *Impact of education interventions for working children*. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

Pereznieto, P. et al (2016) *Eliminating child labour, achieving economic growth*. Policy paper, London: World Vision and ODI.

[http://cdn.worldvision.org.uk/files/2214/7801/5728/Child\\_labour\\_-\\_Economic\\_Growth\\_report\\_-\\_Oct\\_2016.pdf](http://cdn.worldvision.org.uk/files/2214/7801/5728/Child_labour_-_Economic_Growth_report_-_Oct_2016.pdf)

Rosati et al (2015) *The twin challenges of child labour and educational marginalisation in the ECOWAS region*. Rome: Understanding Children's Work Programme. International Labour Organisation. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/424061467993168177/pdf/103602-WP-PUBLIC-ECOWAS-child-labour-educational-marginalisation20140709-130339.pdf>

Quattri, M. and Watkins, K. (2016) *Child labour and education: A survey of slum settlements in Dhaka*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11145.pdf>

Singh, R. and Khan, S. (2016) *Perspectives on children's work and schooling: Evidence from a longitudinal study in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India*, ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series, International Labour Organisation.

Tafere, Y. and Chuta, N. (2016) *Gendered trajectories of young people through school, work and marriage in Ethiopia*. Working Paper 155. Oxford: Young Lives.

<http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP155-Gendered-Trajectories-in-Ethiopia.pdf>

Tafere, Y. and Pankhurst, A. (2015) *Can children in Ethiopian communities combine schooling with work?* Working Paper 141. Oxford: Young Lives.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0896aed915d622c0001ef/YL-WP141\\_Combining-schooling-and-work-in-Ethiopia.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0896aed915d622c0001ef/YL-WP141_Combining-schooling-and-work-in-Ethiopia.pdf)

Woldehanna, T. and Gebremedhin, A. (2015) *Is child work detrimental to the educational achievements of children?* Oxford: Young Lives.

[https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP140\\_Child%20work%20and%20education.pdf](https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP140_Child%20work%20and%20education.pdf)

Wu, C. (2017) *Supporting street-connected children's special educational needs through learning support assistants in western Kenya* in S. Corcoram and I. Lewis (eds) *Special issue on street-connected young people and inclusive education*, *Enabling Education Review*, Issue 6.

[https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/EER6\\_SCC\\_final.pdf](https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/EER6_SCC_final.pdf)

UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF (2015) *Fixing the broken promise of education for all: Findings from the global initiative on out-of-school children*. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED560017.pdf>



UNICEF (2014) *Child labour and UNICEF in action: Children at the centre*. New York: UNICEF.  
[https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Child\\_Labour\\_and\\_UNICEF\\_in\\_Action.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Child_Labour_and_UNICEF_in_Action.pdf)

Vennam, U. et al (2016) *Gendered trajectories through school, work and marriage in India*. Working Paper 156. Oxford: Young Lives.  
<http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-WP156-Vennam%20et%20al.pdf>

## Acknowledgements

We thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

- Sarada Balagopalan (Rutgers University)
- Michael Bourdillon (University of Zimbabwe)
- Jo Boyden (University of Oxford)
- Su Corcoran (Manchester Metropolitan University)
- Susie Miles (University of Manchester)
- Virginia Morrow (University of Oxford)
- Bill Myers
- Paola Perezniето (Overseas Development Institute)
- Maria Quattri (Overseas Development Institute)

## Suggested citation

Ornert, A. (2018). *Evidence on links between child labour and education*. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

## About this report

*This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact [helpdesk@k4d.info](mailto:helpdesk@k4d.info).*

*K4D services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations working in international development, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with Education Development Trust, Itad, University of Leeds Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Birmingham International Development Department (IDD) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI).*

*This report was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes. It is licensed for non-commercial purposes only. K4D cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this report. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, K4D or any other contributing organisation. © DFID - Crown copyright 2018.*

