



Measuring child labour in agriculture: Comparing approaches to in-depth assessment

Photo: FAO

This case study compares two approaches to in-depth child labour assessment in Lebanon and describes the main lessons learned.

In-depth research on child labour in agriculture

Background: This was an in-depth study addressing child labour in the agricultural sector from the supply side undertaken in 2018 by the Ministry of Labour, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with the American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon

Aim: The aim was to (i) better understand the incidence, living and working conditions of Syrian refugee child labourers living in informal tented settlements in the agricultural sector of Lebanon's Beqaa Valley; and (ii) identify the social capital and food security situation of working children and their families and the effects of child labour on educational attainment and wellbeing to better support social protection and child labour elimination activities during the refugee response.

Methodology included a survey with 1902 households comprising 12708 refugees. It used a household questionnaire and a child questionnaire (for children between 8 and 18 years). For children under eight years old, proxy respondents were used. Enumerators employed were trained social workers. Everything in the methodology went through multiple rounds of ethical clearance from an Institutional Review Board of the AUB, taking 24 months to get the required clearances and roll-out training for enumerators.

Timeline: The study took three years to complete.

Rapid assessment on child labour in agriculture

Background: This was a joint study addressing child labour in agriculture from the demand side, including supply chains undertaken in 2017 by FAO and UNICEF in collaboration with the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI), a business consulting firm in Lebanon and the region.

Aim: The aim was to (i) better understand the practices of farmers and their rationale for employing children; (ii) help to identify main challenges faced by the agriculture sector since the Syrian crisis; (iii) collect detailed information on the working conditions and influences over the extent and severity of child labour on farms; and (iv) offer to the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) recommendations that feed into the implementation of the Government of Lebanon's National Action Plan.

Methodology included a survey using the ILO's Rapid Assessment tool with 422 farmers who employed children for agricultural work on small, medium-sized and large farms and greenhouses. In addition to the survey, stakeholder discussions were held and field visits conducted with 30 working children and 30 local landowners (*shaweesh*) of tented settlements. FAO and UNICEF approved the questionnaires and methodology, noting that the assessment took into consideration the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis to address the ethical dimensions pertaining to: informed consent; privacy and confidentiality; harms and benefits; and risk management. Enumerators gained consent from the participants directly and then proceeded with the questionnaire. Enumerators employed were technical data-gatherers.

Timeline: The study took 18 months to complete.

Partner: AUB is a reputable university and has high ethical academic standards, especially in relation to the participants of the survey who had multiple vulnerabilities including refugee status, being sometimes very young, being marginalised, being in child labour, and living in tented settlements.

Quality of findings: The data produced was of excellent quality, reliable, informative and very detailed, which was very helpful for planning by the Government of Lebanon and within FAO, the ILO and UNICEF for service delivery and preventative actions.

Partner: The consultancy firm had fewer formal structures to consider when undertaking the assessment and was more flexible in targeting participants since they didn't have a long clearance period through an ethical review board.

Quality of findings: Data gathered from this assessment, although much smaller in sample size, led to similar findings as those identified through the in-depth academic research. This included findings around child labour tasks, age groups, poverty levels and coping strategies.

Lessons Learned

- Select the appropriate research methodology: consider the resource requirements of various types of methodologies vis-à-vis the available time and financial, human and technical resources in the crisis setting.
- The data gathered in both studies was similar, including findings around child labour tasks and conditions, the number of hours worked and the wage earned, age groups, poverty and education levels, and coping strategies. Given the complexity of the issue, the government and regional bodies required a detailed academic study to measure the extent and severity of child labour to set policy and programme strategies. However, the humanitarian and UN agencies felt that in hindsight the rapid assessment was faster and more suitable to the operating context than the research.
- When planning for in-depth research, consider the (long) timelines required for ethical and institutional review boards prior to data collection.
- Always balance the need to examine the complex realities of child labour in context with obtaining the minimum information required for humanitarian response. In emergencies and rapidly evolving contexts, in-depth research may not be the most suitable approach.
- Ensure enumerators have the professional skills – and levels of experience – to undertake child labour data collection. Whether undertaking in-depth research or rapid assessments, enumerators should have the specific skills to interview children and at-risk families in a sensitive manner.
- Combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies. FAO and UNICEF rapid assessments were complemented with in-depth surveys and experimental, real-time learning from practitioners at the field level. Key programme stakeholders such as child protection and occupational safety and health with Agricultural Extension Officers, farmers and child protection actors provided FAO with information and knowledge on child labour that proved to be crucial in shaping programmatic actions to eradicate child labour in agriculture.
- When time and resources allow, monitoring and verification of the survey results and recommendations can be useful to ensure that information is complete and accurate.

Resources

- Rima R. Habib (2019). **Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees.** Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut Press: AUB, Government of Lebanon, ILO, UNICEF, FAO and IDRC.
- UNICEF, ILO (2019). **Child Labour in Agriculture: The Demand Side.**

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

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