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Child labour in the primary production of sugarcane

May 2017





CHILD LABOUR IN THE PRIMARY PRODUCTION OF SUGARCANE

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Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch
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Executive summary

Introduction

This report provides an overview of key decent work deficits in the primary production of sugarcane, with a major focus on child labour. This research was commissioned in 2016 by the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch of the ILO for use with the Child Labour Platform (CLP) of the ILO/UN Global Compact. The purpose of this research is to produce evidence-based information and needs-based recommendations for the ILO to use as a tool to engage with businesses and other partners in the sugarcane sector, with child labour as a starting point. These recommendations will be used to make greater progress in the elimination of child labour and the realization of other fundamental rights at work.

The information contained in this report is based on publicly available primary and secondary sources, such as articles, academic research and online media reports, as well as telephone conversations with a small sample of industry actors who are members of the CLP. The research revealed data gaps on a range of topics related to working conditions in the sugarcane industry, leaving outstanding queries – these are picked up in the report's recommendations.

Industry overview

Sugar is the largest and one of the most complex agricultural commodities in the world. Intense competition, weather fluctuations and price volatility make it difficult for smallholders to cover their production costs, which may increase the likelihood of child labour and other decent work deficits and constrain investment in sustainable production practices.

Upstream, the supply chain is fragmented, with most of the key producers found at the country level. The multiplicity of actors involved in sugar production, and the extensive use of outgrowers and in some cases, labour subcontractors, poses an obstacle to collaboration between industry partners and impedes traceability.

However, the supply chain is more concentrated downstream, where traders and buyers wield most

of the power. Their integral role in the global commodity market and their influence on prices mean they have a key role to play in driving more sustainable purchasing and production practices.

Traders do more than commodity trading – they provide agricultural inputs, financial services, storage facilities and transportation. As such, they are the agents that link upstream and downstream operations. Food and beverage (F&B) manufacturers also hold a great deal of sway in the sugar industry, where they account for half of the revenues. Gaining traders' and F&B manufacturers' buy-in will be a key determinant of successful decent work interventions.

The sugarcane industry generates significant levels of rural employment, supporting some 100 million livelihoods. While some sugarcane has integration between cultivation and milling, much does not. In practice, this means the industry has a range of work settings, with formal employment, as well as a potentially substantial informal and seasonal labour force, across key producing countries. This poses challenges to the promotion of decent work, including the lack of a clear picture of the working conditions of agricultural labourers and low union density.

Decent work deficits in sugarcane production

There is a paucity of data on the exact incidence of child labour in sugarcane production, as most countries do not gather industry-specific data. However, there is evidence that it is a significant issue. Studies conducted in Asia, Latin America and Africa show that children between the ages of five and 17 are engaged in child labour on sugar plantations. Children may work as unpaid family helpers on their parents' farm or migrate with their parents to find work on commercial plantations during the harvest season. Many form part of disadvantaged social classes and ethnic minorities.

Children working in sugarcane cultivation are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, particularly hazardous work. The two main activities that may be classified as hazardous in sugarcane cultivation are the application of agro-chemicals and manual harvesting.



Drivers of child labour in sugarcane are the same as in other agricultural commodities; in particular, rural poverty and economic shocks are key determinants pushing families to rely on children's income.

Forced labour has been linked to sugarcane production in at least five countries, including two of the world's largest producers, Brazil and Pakistan.

Debt bondage appears to be the most common form of forced labour in the sugarcane sector. People from poorer areas, or disadvantaged groups such as migrants, nomads or certain ethnicities, are often lured into working the fields with financial advances or false promises. However, there is limited data available on this issue.

In addition, various forms of gender discrimination have been reported in the sector internationally. The industry is male-dominated and women who work in the sector are mostly found in specific, lower-paid, gendered roles. Discrimination also affects minority groups, such as indigenous peoples, migrants and members of scheduled castes in India. Sexual harassment has also been reported in the sector, whereby women are reportedly asked for sexual favours in exchange for job opportunities or in extreme cases, sexually assaulted and raped by landlords and middlemen.

Decent work deficits related to pay and working conditions remain an issue in many developing countries that produce sugarcane. The situation is at its most precarious among smallholders, or temporary and agency workers, who are contracted by, or produce for, larger entities. In many countries, seasonal or agency fieldworkers are paid on a piecework basis, or per tonne of cane they cut, which encourages long working hours and no breaks, only to gather enough to receive the low, basic wage. However, there are also plantations with established industrial relations, including comprehensive collective-bargaining agreements.

Workplace health and safety is one of the most recognized issues in sugarcane production. In many countries and regions, workers continue to harvest sugarcane manually; they often work for long hours in intense heat and are prone to machete-related injuries ranging from minor cuts to severed limbs, as well as health defects, snake bites, caustic soda burns and respiratory problems from burning cane.¹

¹ *Ethical Sugar, Sugarcane and Child Labour: Reality and Perspectives, 2011.*

Key actors in the sugar sector

There are a number of different actors that the ILO could engage with to promote decent work in the sugarcane industry, including governments, social partners, industry actors, development banks and NGOs.

Governments in sugarcane producing countries have made various efforts to combat child labour, with varying degrees of success. The most successful of these initiatives have not necessarily been targeted at the sugarcane sector. Rather, they focus more broadly on addressing supply-side and demand-side drivers of child labour, and aim to create an enabling environment to better identify and monitor the issue and prosecute offending employers.

Social partners play a key role in the eradication of child labour. However, there is a lack of information on their presence and activities within the sugarcane sector. The International Union of Food workers (IUF) covers workers in sugar production. Its sugar network conducts research and campaigning activities on employment and freedom-of-association issues in the global sugar sector. They will be a key partner for the ILO in its efforts to promote decent work in the sector.

A number of industry actors have demonstrated a degree of engagement on supply chain sustainability. The most active sectoral bodies and initiatives in the sugarcane sector are the relevant certification organizations (e.g. Bonsucro). Such certification is trusted in the industry, and many major players in sugarcane, including traders and buyers, use such standards as a tool for securing standards in their own supply chains.

While traders are not the most active of stakeholders in the push for decent work in the sugarcane industry, some of the most prominent traders have developed ties to relevant non-profit associations or certification bodies. Many also address decent work issues in their supplier policies and due diligence.

There has been a notable collaborative effort among buyers to ensure decent work and better standards in sugarcane. These include: human rights due diligence; risk assessments and supply-chain mapping, supporting smallholders and driving improvements in decent work through supplier codes of conduct and third-party monitoring.



Key challenges and opportunities in addressing child labour in primary sugarcane production

There is a paucity of data on the extent of child labour in the sugarcane industry at both global and country levels. There are no global estimates of the number of child labourers in sugarcane and most countries do not record sector-specific data. Many of the surveys on the sector are either outdated or only focus on a particular region. In addition, there are little or no data available on the issue for key producing countries, such as China and Thailand. This lack of information was identified as a central issue by sugar buyers, who stressed the importance of having **accurate intelligence** to engage with supply-chain partners.

While most producing countries have ratified ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, very few have identified cane-cutting as a hazardous activity. The ILO could provide **technical assistance** to sugar-producing countries in designing and conducting risk assessments of sugarcane production processes.

Another difficulty lies in the fact that children's work may be informal, sporadic or transient, and hence difficult to research and quantify. While some workers under the age of 18 may have contracts (e.g. in Central America), in many cases child labourers work as family helpers and have no formal employment relationship. In these circumstances, it is difficult to quantify the problem and determine exactly how many children are engaged in hazardous work. However, the **ILO has experience in designing surveys** capable of capturing such information – such as **community-based reporting and referral mechanisms**.

Supply-chain fragmentation, market competition and conflicting incentives among industry actors may pose a barrier to improvements in decent work. Some demand for sustainable sugar from some supply-chain actors is beginning to emerge, but is not matched by their willingness to pay a premium price. Companies may be unwilling to invest in supply-chain sustainability because of the perceived competitive disadvantage this would lead to in the short-term. This highlights the need for a **cost-benefit analysis of sustainable sugarcane production** to develop and disseminate the business case for change among industry actors.

A lack of traceability in the supply chain means that downstream actors and end-users do not have a clear picture of working conditions in primary production. This is compounded by the general lack of data on the sectoral prevalence of child labour in many producing countries. Sugar is fungible and can be substituted under commodity-trading contracts, regardless of its origin. Buyers whose supply chain is vertically integrated may know where their sugar comes from, but they often do not have visibility beyond the factory gates over working conditions on outgrower plots.

Reforms in trade policies and regulations may have a detrimental impact on smallholders in some producing countries. While market liberalization is ultimately seen as beneficial to the global sugar trade, it is likely to benefit large, efficient producers such as Brazil, to the detriment of smaller, more expensive producers. In the light of this, producers will probably require both **financial and technical support**, in order to be in a position to implement more sustainable production practices.

However, there appears to be an appetite for change in the industry. Many stakeholders are supporting more responsible production and procurement practices, and there are over 40 voluntary sustainability standards applicable to sugar. This denotes industry engagement and commitment to the issue, which will be invaluable in driving improvements in labour practices in global value chains.

Resource and capacity constraints prevent labour inspectorates from identifying and remedying incidences of child labour in sugarcane production. Leadership from government is essential to tackle child labour. Political will is required to develop a comprehensive policy framework, facilitate interagency collaboration and allocate sufficient resources to address the issue.

Social dialogue in the sugar sector is weak and fragmented. Union penetration tends to be concentrated at the mill level, with low levels of worker representation in primary production. While there are notable exceptions (such as Malawi and South Africa), agricultural workers may be self-employed, informal labourers or unpaid family helpers, and hence may fall outside collective-bargaining structures. This may constrain improvements in wages and other working conditions at the farm level.



There have been multiple efforts to address child labour in sugarcane production but these have been fragmented, with limited long-term impact. A systemic, rather than a programmatic, approach is needed to address supply and demand-side drivers of child labour. Short-term initiatives that focus on a single issue, such as education, do not have a demonstrable long-term impact on child labour.

Target groups are difficult to reach in many countries. Interventions will need to meet the specific needs of these target groups in order to have an impact in the long term. The sugarcane labour force is often transitory, with a high likelihood of informal labour. Workers may be migrants who do not speak the national language, further preventing them from benefitting from mainstream education systems.

The lack of decent work opportunities for adults and young people presents a key challenge for many sugar-producing countries. Many of these are developing countries, with high rates of unemployment, particularly in rural areas.

This presents an opportunity to partner with the private sector to create better labour-market opportunities for young people. Vocational training and apprenticeship programmes for school leavers could help prevent them from engaging in hazardous activities and provide better long-term prospects on the job market.



Acronyms

ACFTU	All China Federation of Trade Unions
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
CAO	Office of the Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman of the International Finance Corporation
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CKDu	Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Cause
CLP	Child Labour Platform
CMO	Common Market Organisation
EU CAP	EU Common Agricultural Policy
F&B	Food & Beverage
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILAB	US Bureau of International Labor Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO ACTEMP	ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities
ILO ACTRAV	ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities
ILO CEACR	ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations
ILO IPEC	ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
ILO TVET	ILO Technical and Vocational Education and Training
IOE	International Organisation of Employers
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations
LDC	Less Developed Countries
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TCCC	The Coca-Cola Company
UCW	Understanding Children's Work
UNICA	União da Indústria de Cana-de-Açúcar (Brazilian Sugarcane Industry Association)
USDOL	United States Department of Labor
USDOS	United States Department of State





Recommendations

We have identified five broad areas of intervention in which the ILO should begin engaging with industry actors and social partners to promote decent work in the sugarcane sector. The focus is on child labour,

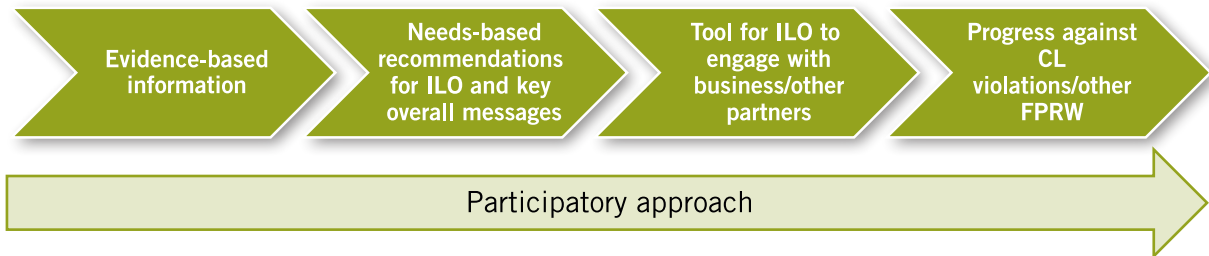
as requested in the scope of work for this research. We note that the ILO has a wealth of experience in combating child labour and is well placed to build on these suggestions by developing more integrated recommendations to address some of the root causes of discrimination and forced labour, and to promote freedom of association and collective bargaining.







1. Introduction



This report provides an overview of key decent work deficits in the primary production of sugarcane, with a focus on child labour. This research was commissioned by the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch of the ILO for use with the Child Labour Platform (CLP) of the ILO and UN Global Compact. The purpose of this research is to produce solid, evidence-based information and detailed, needs-based recommendations for the ILO to use as a tool to engage with businesses and other partners in the sugarcane sector, with child labour as a starting point. These recommendations will be used to make greater progress in the elimination of child labour and the realization of other fundamental rights at work (e.g. elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, freedom of association and effective recognition of the right of collective bargaining).

The information contained in this report is based on publicly available primary and secondary sources, such as articles, academic research and online media reports, as well as telephone conversations with a sample of industry actors who are members of the CLP. The research revealed data gaps on a range of topics related to working conditions in the sugar industry, leaving outstanding queries – these are highlighted in the report's recommendations.

This report is structured as follows:

- ▶ **Section 1:** this **introduction** section.
- ▶ **Section 2:** provides a **broad analysis of the global sugar industry** in order to set out the main actors, issues and emerging trends in the sector and how these may affect engagement on decent work.
- ▶ **Section 3:** gives an overview of the **main decent work deficits** that are reported in primary sugarcane production, with an emphasis on child and forced labour.
- ▶ **Section 4:** provides **information on key social and industry partners** for the ILO to engage with to promote decent work in the sector.
- ▶ **Section 5:** summarizes the **main challenges and opportunities** for addressing violations of child labour, forced labour and other decent work deficits reported in the industry.
- ▶ **Section 6:** provides **actionable recommendations** for the ILO to begin working with industry and non-industry actors to make progress towards the elimination of child labour and other fundamental rights at work in sugarcane growing.





2. Industry overview

2.1. Introduction

Sugar is the largest and one of the most complex agricultural commodities in the world. The global sugar market has been characterized as “one of the most highly distorted agricultural commodity markets”, due to regulatory interventions, competition and environmental factors that exacerbate price volatility.²

This section examines the global sugar industry and the challenges it presents for various actors in the supply chain, and the constraints this might place on driving decent work improvements.

Industry overview summary

Structures of the international market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Production: Sugar production is concentrated, with the top 10 countries producing 82 per cent of global output. Production fluctuates, as sugarcane is vulnerable to climatic changes, and this causes volatility in prices. Most sugarcane is produced in developing countries, where decent work deficits are likely to be a risk. ■ Consumption: Sugar consumption is on the rise and production is expected to increase to meet this increasing demand, particularly in developing economies, which account for over 70 per cent of global consumption. This presents opportunities for long-term engagement with industry actors in developing countries. ■ Prices: Sugar prices are volatile and sugar trades below production costs; prices are forecast to decrease in real terms by 2025. The least-developed countries are more exposed to price volatility, as it is accentuated by high inflation, poor infrastructure and weak financial systems. This has a direct impact on smallholders, whose income may be insufficient to provide for their family and pay for labour. Such resource constraints may increase the likelihood of child labour and discourage investment in sustainable production practices. ■ Market outlook: The outlook for the industry is uncertain, but it will remain vulnerable to economic shocks, and so will the livelihoods of smallholders, which is likely to have an impact on the incidence of child labour in the sector. ■ In spite of the growth in production and consumption, prices are projected to decrease in real terms over the next ten years. This will probably exert downward pressure on farmers' incomes, which may heighten the risk of decent work deficits.
Supply chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Production: Upstream, the supply chain is fragmented, which poses an obstacle to collaboration between industry partners and impedes traceability. ■ Smallholders account for 40 per cent of production, while 60 per cent of global output comes from vertically integrated operations, from cultivation to mill. The labour input required varies with the size and level of mechanization of the farm. ■ Mills may outsource cultivation to smallholders and there is no clear picture of working conditions at the farm level. Mills determine prices, and provide outgrowers with agricultural inputs and credit. Farmers' margins are squeezed, particularly in contract farming, which increases pressure to reduce labour costs and rely on unpaid family help. ■ Trade and retail: Traders and buyers wield power in the supply chain, as the quality of sugar is difficult to distinguish; hence, they can switch suppliers easily and push prices down. ■ Commodity traders are the agents that link upstream and downstream operations. Their power and international reach means their buy-in will be key in any decent work interventions. ■ F&B manufacturers account for half of the revenues in the sugar industry. A few large players, with whom the ILO has a history of collaboration, dominate the market. This should facilitate joint action on decent work. ■ A number of industry actors have demonstrated a degree of engagement on supply-chain sustainability. To date, over 40 sustainability standards are reportedly applicable to sugar. However, according to a recent study conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, incentives to adopt sustainable practices in sugar production and procurement remain too weak to drive significant improvements (Jenkins et al, 2015). ■ Sectoral bodies and initiatives: The most active sectoral bodies and initiatives in the sugarcane sector are the relevant certification organizations. Such certification is trusted in the industry, and many major players in sugarcane, including traders and buyers, use such standards as a tool for securing standards in their own supply chains. Key players include Bonsucro, Fairtrade International and the ProTerra Foundation.

² Nyberg, Jennifer, FAO, *Sugar International Market Profile*, No date.



Industry overview summary

Labour force characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is very little sector-specific information available on the workforce in key sugar-producing countries. However, the sugar industry generates significant levels of rural employment, supporting some 100 million livelihoods. ■ The workforce active in sugarcane cultivation in many of the key producing countries is largely seasonal, with a high likelihood of informality. Many cane-cutters also migrate to find employment during the harvest season. The transitory nature and high likelihood of informality of the workforce poses difficulties in monitoring and remedying child labour.
Labour relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is very little country-specific information on union representation in primary agricultural production. In some countries, there is a high level of trade union density in sugar plantations and comprehensive collective-bargaining agreements (CBAs) are in place, also representing contract and seasonal workers.³ These agreements typically relate to wages and allowances, though in some cases they also include childcare provision. However, given the level of seasonality and high likelihood of informality that characterize the workforce in sugarcane cultivation, union membership at the farm level is likely to be low in many producing countries. ■ Labour relations in the sugarcane industry present a complex picture with different forms and levels of representation at the farm level (see country examples in Section 2.4). While trade unions are more present in commercial plantations, smallholders tend to be represented by producers' organizations and agricultural cooperatives, rather than workers' organizations, since they are independent producers. There may also be cases of disguised employment relationships through cooperatives and small producer organizations.

2.2. Structure of the international market

2.2.1. Key market players

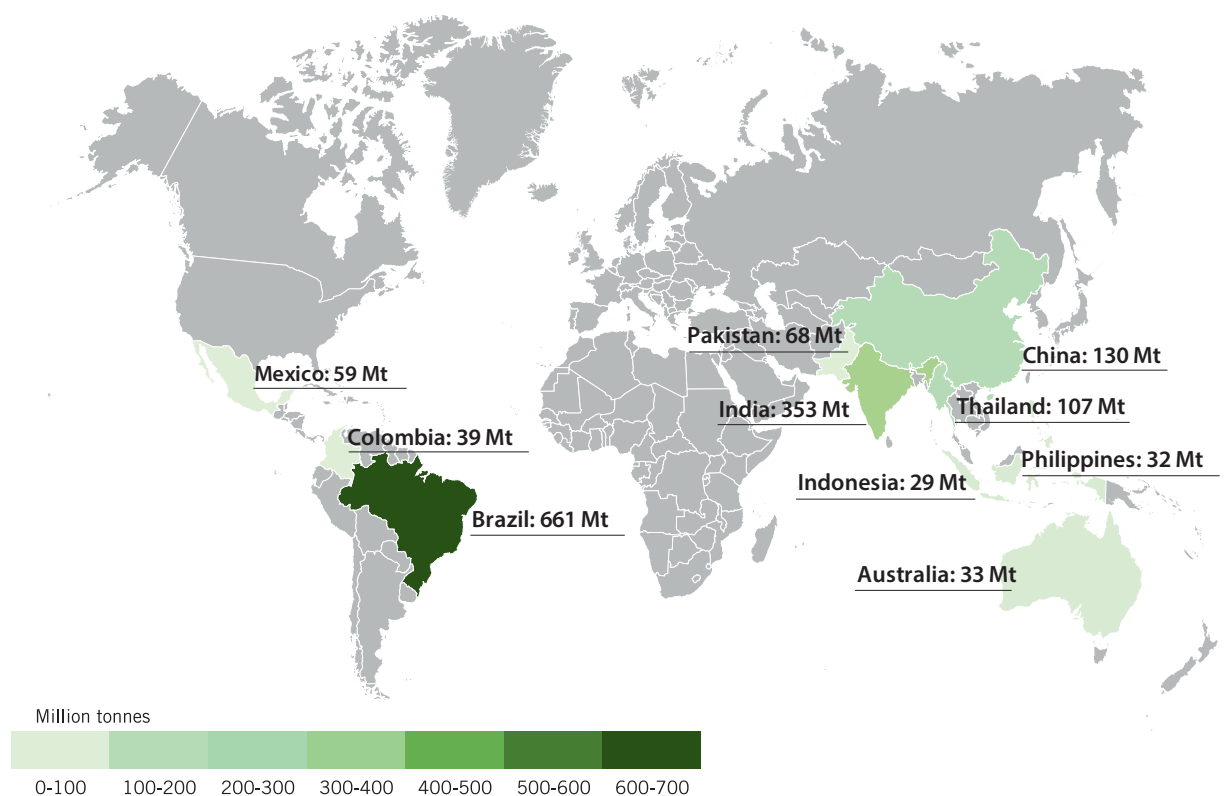
Top 5 producers (sugarcane)	Million tonnes produced	Top 5 exporters (sugar)	Million tonnes exported
Brazil	661,069	Brazil	23,000
India	353,198	Thailand	8,975
China	130,243	Australia	3,915
Thailand	106,807	India	2,900
Pakistan	67,962	Mexico	1,685
Top 5 consumers (sugarcane)	Million tonnes consumed	Top 5 importers (sugar)	Million tonnes imported
India	25,500	China	4,700
China	15,640	Indonesia	3,900
Brazil	11,875	United States	3,000
United States	10,180	Bangladesh	2,089
Indonesia	6,520	Malaysia	1,747

³ See, for example, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) Sugar Workers Network <http://www.iuf.org/sugarworkers>.



2.2.2. Production

Top 10 producers



Source: OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook Database (2015).

Sugar production is highly concentrated, with the top 10 producing countries responsible for 82 per cent of total production.⁴ Sugar is produced in over 123 countries worldwide and derives from two different sources: sugarcane and sugar beet. Around 80 per cent of sugar comes from sugarcane, which is grown in tropical climates.⁵ Brazil is the world's largest producer of sugarcane and exporter of raw sugar, accounting for 41 per cent of global trade.⁶

Developing countries currently account for 96 per cent of global sugarcane output.⁷ The top ten producers include countries where non-compliance with core labour standards is likely to be a risk, including Brazil, India, China, Thailand, Pakistan, Mexico, Colombia, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Global sugar production in 2015 reached 168 million tonnes and is expected to grow by 2 per cent

per year, reaching 201 million tonnes by 2025.⁸ This increase will be driven mainly by sugarcane-producing countries in Asia and the Pacific, and in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁹

2.2.3. Consumption

Developing countries currently account for over 70 per cent of global sugar consumption. The top three consumers are India, China and Brazil.¹⁰

Global sugar consumption is on the rise and will continue to increase by a projected 2 per cent per year for the next ten years. In 2015, sugar consumption outstripped production for the first time since 2010, reaching an estimated 170 million tonnes.¹¹ Demand has been met by drawing on existing stocks from previous years, but production is projected to increase in the coming years, as consumption increases and inventories dwindle.

⁴ OECD/FAO, *Agricultural Outlook 2015-2025 database*, 2016.

⁵ Fairtrade Foundation, *Fairtrade and Sugar, Commodity Briefing*, 2013.

⁶ OECD/FAO, *Agricultural Outlook 2015-2025 database*, 2016.

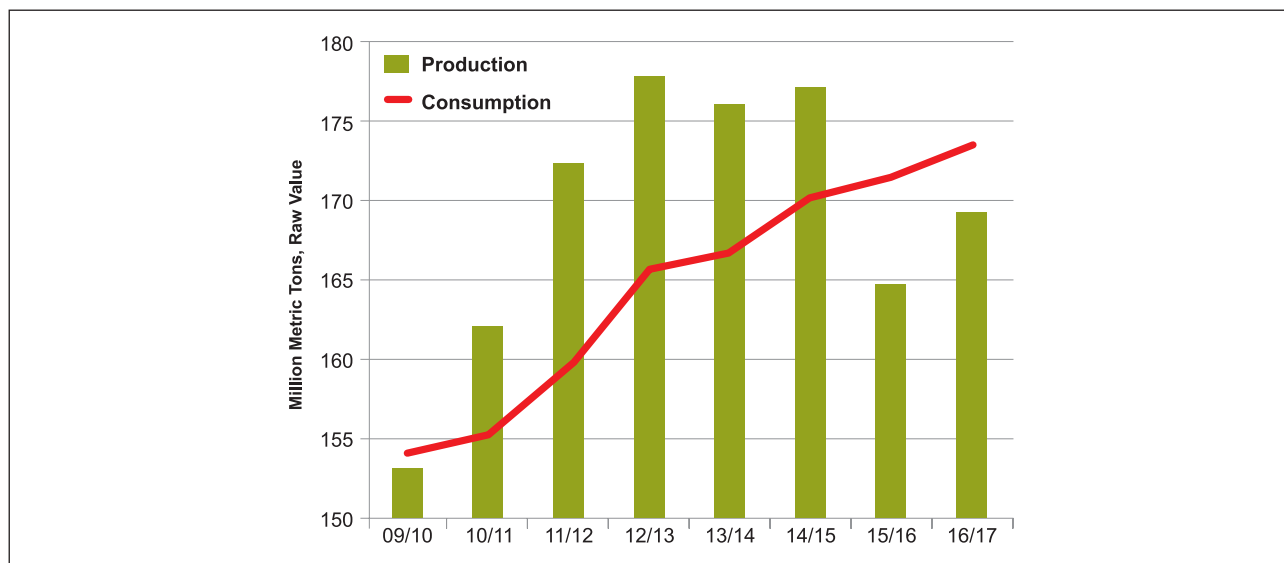
⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.



Source: United States Department of Agriculture (2016).

Consumption per capita is expected to grow at a faster rate in developing economies, particularly in Asia and Africa. This is reportedly attributable to higher incomes, urbanization and demographic growth.¹² Demand in developed countries is expected to decrease due to health concerns surrounding sugar consumption and slowing population growth.¹³ Nevertheless, the anticipated growth trajectory of the sector in developing countries presents opportunities for long-term engagement on sustainable agricultural practices.

2.2.4. International trade

Only 30 per cent of the world's sugar production is exported, with most of it consumed in the country where it is produced.¹⁴ This is due to market interventions and trade barriers aimed at protecting domestic production, which prevent foreign competition. However, there is a move towards increased market liberalization in the EU and India, two major producers.

The international sugar trade is governed by several preferential agreements whereby producing countries are given access to higher-priced markets in developed countries. Preferential trade accounts for around 4.5 million tonnes of sugar.¹⁵

Two thirds of sugar exports (\$22 out of \$32 billion) are from developing economies.¹⁶ Consequently, developing countries are highly dependent on the trade policies of the EU, the USA¹⁷ and – to a lesser extent – China. Anticipated regulatory reforms are expected to have detrimental economic impacts on ACP countries (see left textbox), which will no longer be able to compete with cost-effective producers such as Brazil. This will probably reduce the size of the industry in those countries and may impact GDP. It is also likely to exert economic pressure on smallholders and reduce decent work opportunities in the sector.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

¹⁵ Nyberg, Jennifer, *FAO, Sugar International Market Profile*, No date.

¹⁶ UNCTAD STAT, 2016.

¹⁷ The main trade agreement for raw sugar is the United States Tariff Rate Import Quota (TRQ). Under this agreement, the US imports around 1.7 million tonnes of raw sugar duty free from 40 developing countries. Additional quotas are allocated to Mexico under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua under the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).



Reforms to the EU Sugar Regime

Until recently, the EU imported around 1.3 million tonnes of sugar per year from 19 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries at a preferential tariff agreed under the 1975 Sugar Protocol. However, the EU sugar regime – known as the Common Market Organisation (CMO) – has undergone significant reform since 2006, aimed at liberalising the sugar market. The EU has stopped export subsidies and phased out preferential tariffs for domestic production and ACP raw sugar imports. These measures are expected to correct inefficiencies in the EU and international markets by removing trade barriers and allowing prices to be determined by the market. However, they have been criticized for their negative developmental impacts on ACP countries, where sugar production is expected to decline, leading to a loss of € 500 million of income per year. Producers from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) will continue to benefit from duty-free access to the EU market under the “Everything-But-Arms” initiative. It is expected that EU sugar production will decrease, allowing low-cost producers such as Brazil and South Africa to increase their market share.

2.2.5. Prices¹⁸

Sugar prices are highly volatile and sugar generally trades below production costs.¹⁹ This is due to several factors, including:

- ▶ Inelasticity in supply and demand, whereby producers cannot react rapidly to changes in the market (because production takes time) and demand for agricultural commodities does not vary greatly in response to price increases;
- ▶ Market interventions, such as the EU Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP), which may reduce variations in domestic markets but increases price volatility on the international market;

- ▶ Currency fluctuations and investor speculation;
- ▶ Adverse weather conditions, particularly in the light of climate change, which has increased unpredictability in terms of pricing.²⁰

Price volatility in agricultural commodities has the largest impact on the least-developed countries that export cash crops (such as sugar), as it is accentuated by high inflation, poor infrastructure and weak financial systems.²¹ If sugar prices are

low, rural producers' incomes may be insufficient to provide for their families and pay for labour and other operational costs. Such resource constraints may increase the likelihood of child labour and discourage investment in sustainable agricultural practices.

2.2.6. Industry outlook

The outlook for the sugar industry is uncertain, but it will remain vulnerable to economic shocks, and so will the livelihoods of sugarcane farmers, which is likely to have a direct impact on the incidence of child labour in the sector. As with

most commodities, the sugar market outlook is dependent on fluctuations in oil prices and weather patterns, among other factors. Although production and consumption are expected to rise steadily over the next 10 years, prices are expected to be lower in real terms by 2025. Low prices combined with market volatility are likely to exert downward pressure on farmers' incomes, and by extension, the wages of agricultural labourers. Poverty and economic shocks are key drivers of child labour. The incidence of child labour in the sugarcane industry is therefore likely to be intimately linked with the performance of the commodity market.

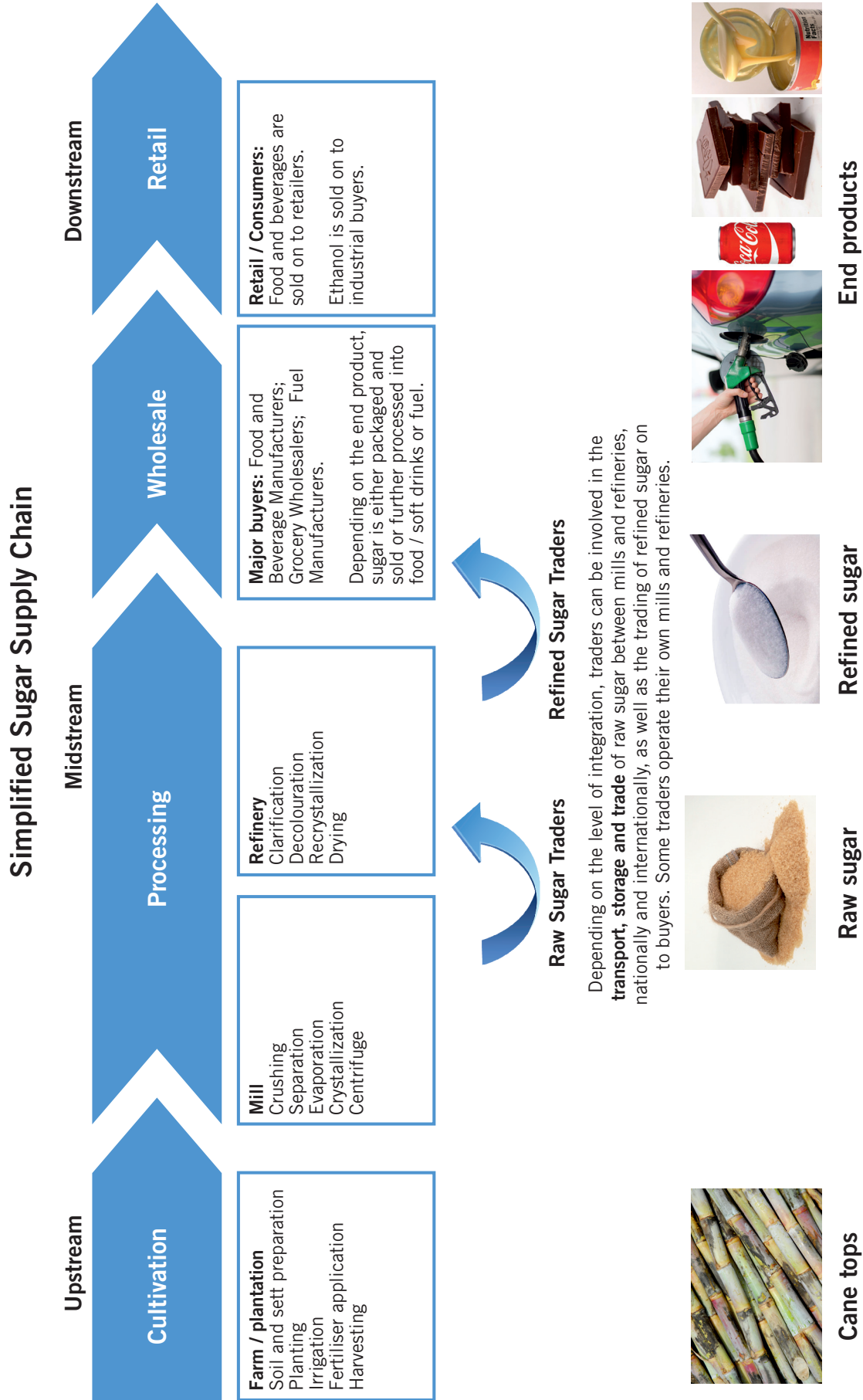
¹⁸ The current price of raw sugar (the ICE Sugar No.11 futures contract) is \$22.9 cts per pound. This represents a marked improvement in comparison to previous years, which can be explained by the current deficit. However, prices are not expected to grow significantly, due to stock availability and low oil prices. The price of white sugar is expected to decrease in 2017 in response to the decline in EU imports following the abolition of export quotas (OECD/FAO, *Agricultural Outlook 2015-2025*, 2016).

¹⁹ Nyberg, Jennifer, *FAO, Sugar International Market Profile*, No date.

²⁰ ODI, *Impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on Food Price Volatility for Developing Countries*, 2012.

²¹ Ibid.

2.2.7. The supply chain





2.2.8. Production

Upstream, the supply chain is highly fragmented; the key actors tend to be at country rather than global level. Multiple actors and tiers in the supply chain may pose an obstacle to collaboration between industry partners. There are over 1,600 enterprises operating more than 2,500 mills and refineries in over 100 countries.²² Most sugar is traded in its raw form (55 per cent). Cultivation and processing are sometimes vertically integrated but refining usually occurs in a different location. Increasingly, refineries are opening in non-producing countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.²³

Supply chain fragmentation is a significant barrier to traceability and makes it difficult to have a clear picture of working conditions at the farm-level. The quality and taste of sugar does not vary greatly, regardless of its origin, which is why raw sugar from different sources is often mixed along the value chain. Commodity trading contracts allow for substitution and do not require

goods inspections, in order to make trading more efficient.²⁴

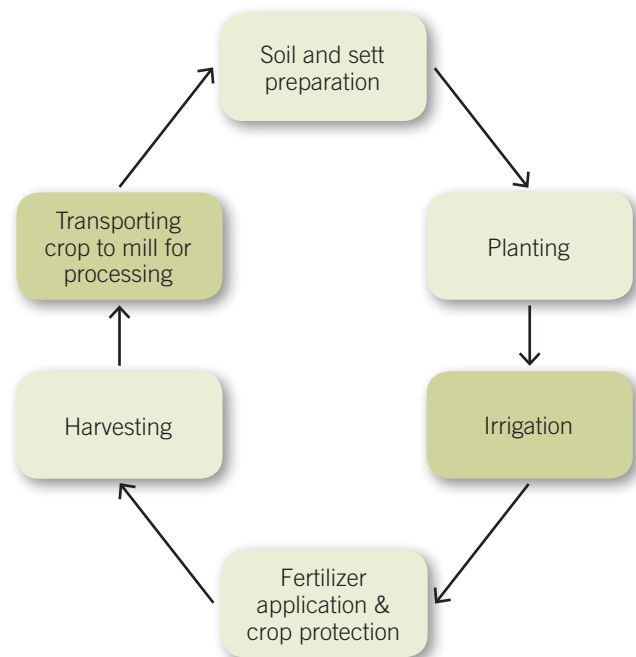
Cultivation

It is estimated that 60 million small-scale farmers account for around 40 per cent of global production.²⁵ The remaining 60 per cent of global output is produced on large estates, where growing and processing are vertically integrated. The level of labour input required in sugarcane cultivation depends largely on the level of mechanization and size of the farm. The size of sugarcane farms ranges widely, from smallholdings of 1-2 hectares up to large estates of 3-4,000 hectares. Small-scale farming dominates the production landscape in most developing countries, where farmers sell to mills on an outgrower contracting basis.²⁶ The most labour-intensive tasks in the cultivation cycle are soil preparation, planting, pesticide application, weeding and harvesting. Efforts to mechanize the sector have therefore focused on reducing the need for labour in these activities.

Key facts about sugarcane

“Sugarcane is a perennial crop that is cultivated in tropical and sub-tropical regions. Its thick stalks reach three to four metres in height, forming a dense canopy. The cane is harvested for its sap, from which sugar is processed. By-products include molasses and bagasse. Molasses is used in the production of rum and other alcohols, as well as livestock feed. Bagasse, the waste fibrous residue, is used principally in paper and wallboard production, and as a heating fuel source. It is used to a lesser extent in the production of chemicals, plastics, paints, synthetics, fibre, insecticides and detergents. Sugarcane growing includes preparing the land for planting, planting new cane setts (pieces of cane, 45 centimetres long), applying fertilizer and pesticides, irrigation, weeding and harvesting. Fields are often burnt prior to harvest (without destroying the cane) to eliminate weeds and destroy snakes and other pests. The cane is usually cut by hand using machetes, though machine harvesters are also used. The cane, which is heavy to carry, is then stacked at the edge of the field awaiting transport by vehicle to the sugar mill for processing” (ILO/IPEC,2004).

Sugarcane cultivation cycle: labour-intensive tasks



²² Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

²³ International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Proforest, and Rabobank, *Better Management Practices and Agribusiness Commodities Phase II Report: Commodity Guides*, 2004.

²⁴ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

²⁵ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

²⁶ Verheye, Willy, *Soils, Plant Growth and Crop Production, Vol. II, "Growth and Production of Sugarcane"*, 2010.



Processing

While many processing operations are vertically integrated, mills also outsource cultivation to smallholders on an outgrower contract basis. This presents a key risk in terms of decent work, as buyers often do not have a clear idea of the provenance of the cane or the conditions in which it was harvested.

In addition, mills have a great deal of bargaining power over farmers (monopsony). They determine the price of cane, provide access to agricultural inputs and credit, and in some contexts, deduct a processing fee upon purchase. Farmers' margins are often squeezed, which increases pressure to reduce labour costs and rely on unpaid family help.

Cut sugarcane must be processed rapidly before it deteriorates and farms have no choice but to send their cane to the nearest mill. Since farmers have little bargaining power with regard to the price at which they sell their sugar, they tend to bear the consequences of any price fluctuations on the global market.²⁷ When purchasing from outgrowers, mills may also charge high milling fees (in some cases more than 40 per cent of total projected returns) for processing the sugar and retain any profits made from the sale of sugar by-products.²⁸ In some contexts, contract farming has been reported to cause widespread indebtedness among small farmers, who have struggled to pay back their set-up costs, the funds having been provided by mills (Oxfam, 2017; Phoumanivong & Ayuwat, 2013).

2.2.9. Trade and retail

Downstream, traders and buyers wield most of the power in the value chain. This is because sugar is an internationally traded commodity and is barely differentiated in terms of quality. Sugar buyers can therefore easily switch suppliers and negotiate lower prices, with the result that producers' margins are often low.

Commodity traders play a fundamental role in the value chain: they act as the agents that link upstream and downstream operations. Their power and international reach means their buy-in will be key in any decent work interventions. At the international trade

level, the market is highly concentrated, with two thirds of world trade managed by just six traders: Czarnikow, Sucden, Louis Dreyfus, Cargill, ED&F Man and Bunge.²⁹ Commodity traders are engaged in a variety of transformation activities along the value chain, including transporting, storing and processing commodities from end to end. The largest companies have worldwide operations and engage in trade at the national and international levels. Many own their own refineries and may be involved in the wholesaling of their own brand of sugar, such as Imperial Sugar, owned by Louis Dreyfus.

70-80 per cent of sugar is processed into food and drinks, and F&B manufacturers account for half of revenues in the sugar industry.³⁰ The market is

dominated by a few large players, with which the ILO has a history of collaboration; this should facilitate joint action on decent work. Major multinational corporations include Nestlé, The Coca-Cola Company and Mars, which are members of the Child Labour Platform and have made commitments to eliminate child labour in their supply chains (see Section 4).

2.3. Labour force characteristics

There is very little sector-specific information available on the workforce in key sugar-producing countries. However, the sugar industry generates significant levels of rural employment, supporting some 100 million livelihoods (no gender disaggregated data on the sugar workforce was found in this research).³¹ The characteristics of the workforce on sugarcane farms depend on whether we refer to family / smallholder farming or commercial plantations. Smallholders may employ unpaid family helpers and contract workers, whereas commercial plantations rely on salaried workers (on either a permanent or a contract basis). Both may use migrant labour, especially in primary production during harvest time (see individual references below). Given the nature of the crop, which is only harvested once a year, much employment tends to be seasonal. From the available data, it is hard to quantify how much is informal labour, but reasonable to deduce that much of it will be informal (from research implications and experience of other seasonal agricultural industries in similar producing countries).

²⁹ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

³⁰ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

³¹ Ibid.

²⁷ Abdulsamad, Ajmal, *Pro-Poor Development and Power Asymmetries in Global Value Chains*, 2015.

²⁸ Cisanet, *Sugarcane Value Chain Analysis: A Case Study of Nkhotatakota (Malawi)*, 2013.



Sugarcane production systems and labour force characteristics for top five producers

	Prevalent production system	Average farm size	Employment in sugar sector (million)	Labour characteristics
Brazil	Large mechanized farms (60-70 per cent)	13,110 ha	1.1	Contract labour
China	Small-medium farms	0.27 ha ³²	40	Seasonal labour Migrant labour (foreign)
India	Small-medium farms	1-4 ha ³³	50+	Seasonal and casual labour Migrant labour (domestic) Family labour
Thailand	Small-medium farms	9 ha ³⁴	1	-
Pakistan	Small-medium farms	-	4.2	Seasonal labour

2.4. Labour relations

There is very little country-specific information on union representation in primary sugarcane production beyond some key countries with a union presence in the industry. However, given the level of seasonality and potential for informal labour that characterize the workforce in sugarcane cultivation, union membership at the farm level is likely to be low in many producing countries. In some countries, there is a high level of trade union density in sugar plantations and comprehensive collective-bargaining agreements (CBAs) are in place, also covering contract and seasonal workers. These agreements typically relate to wages and allowances, though in some cases they also include childcare provision. At the global level, the IUF is the global union federation representing workers in sugar production. The IUF's sugar workers' network conducts research and campaigning activities on employment and freedom-of-association issues in the global sugar sector (see Section 4 for further information on country-level actors), including a specific work-stream focused on improving working conditions for women sugar workers. This network demonstrates that there are opportunities for improving freedom of association and collective bargaining in formal workplaces such as commercial plantations.

Labour relations in the sugar sector present a complex picture, with different forms and levels of representation (see country examples below). At the farm level, trade unions are present in commercial plantations **smallholders tend to be represented by producers' organizations and agricultural cooperatives** There may also be cases of disguised employment relationships in cooperatives and small producer organizations preventing workers to enjoy the full extent of their labour rights. In this complex context, it is worth noting that the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) emphasizes that the relevant ILO instruments apply to all rural workers' organizations, including trade unions, cooperatives, and organizations of farmers, peasants and self-employed workers, irrespective of legal status.

In most of the key producing countries, workers' organizations tend to focus on workers employed by sugar mills, rather than outgrowers or hired farm workers. Only a handful of countries, such as Brazil, have workers' organizations that represent workers in the whole sector, including producers, and farm and factory workers. However, mills often own or operate farms. In addition, they may provide independent outgrowers with agricultural inputs and, sometimes, farm labour. They therefore represent an important link in the supply chain for accessing sugarcane growers.

³² Rukai, Chen and Yuan, Zhaonian, *Sugarcane Production and Research in China*, 2010.

³³ KPMG, *The Indian Sugar Industry Sector Roadmap 2017*, 2007.

³⁴ Zeddies, Jurgen, Dr, *The Competitiveness of the Sugar Industry in Thailand*, 2006.



Overview of the labour-relations context in key producing countries

Brazil

- 38 per cent of workers in the sugarcane sector are unionized (Amezcuca, 2012).
- Mechanization in the sector has reportedly reduced unions' bargaining power, and the level of unionization in the sector is likely to decrease in due to mass restructuring (DIEESE 2007).
- According to UNICA, the sugar industry association, 99 per cent of agricultural workers in Brazil are covered by collective-bargaining agreements (UNICA, 2016).

India

- The trade union movement is weakened by its fragmentation and politicization. There are 13 trade union confederations at the national level (5 main ones) and a plethora of state-level unions in different sectors.
- Collective-bargaining coverage is low (between 3 and 5 per cent) and does not reach contract workers or informal labourers, who represent a large proportion of sugarcane workers.
- There are no data available on unionization levels in the sugar sector.

China

- By law, workers only have the right to join and participate in unions that are affiliated to the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), an adjunct of the Chinese Communist Party, which, owing to its lack of independence, is considered ineffective in fairly representing workers.
- Workers are not able to form or join organizations of their choice, and independent trade unions are illegal. Collective bargaining and the right to strike are also not protected in law.
- There are no data available on unionization levels in the sugar sector. However, unionization is generally high across China, owing to its central structure.
- The Government reported that there were 980,000 specialized farmers' cooperatives in the country at the end of 2013.



Thailand

- Trade unions are formed primarily at the enterprise level.
- The Thai labour force is largely non-unionized, with 1-4 per cent of workers belonging to a union. This is thought to be particularly the case in agricultural sectors and outside of Bangkok, where unions are rare (2016).
- The IUF has no affiliate unions in Thailand linked to sugar or agriculture.
- The right of agricultural and informal sector workers to organize is not supported in law. Informal organizations for these workers do exist, however, but have little power.

Pakistan

- Approximately one per cent of the workforce is thought to be unionized (ITUC, 2014) and only a small proportion benefit from collective agreements.
- Trade unions generally function at the enterprise level.
- In practice, trade-union rights are often violated. According to ITUC, several union activists were harassed, attacked or dismissed in 2014 (ITUC, 2014). Moreover, employers in the private sector are reportedly reluctant to recognize or engage with trade unions.
- Agricultural workers, independent producers, sharecroppers and smallholders are legally denied the right to organize.





3. Decent work deficits in sugarcane production

3.1. Introduction

This section provides an overview of decent work deficits in sugarcane based on data gathered from key

producing countries, with a more in-depth focus on child and forced labour.

Decent work deficits summary

Child labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nature and prevalence: There is a paucity of data on the exact incidence of child labour in sugarcane production, as most countries do not gather industry-specific data. However, there is evidence that it is a significant issue. ■ Studies conducted in Asia, Latin America and Africa show that children between the ages of five and 17 are engaged in child labour on sugar plantations. Children may work as unpaid family helpers on their parents' farm or migrate with their parents to find work on commercial plantations during the harvest season. Many form part of disadvantaged social classes and ethnic minorities. ■ Activities: children take part in land and soil preparation, planting and weeding, crop protection, manual harvesting and ancillary work (e.g. household chores). The type of work performed depends on the child's age and gender – older boys tend to be cane cutters while girls are more likely to perform ancillary work. ■ Worst forms of child labour: Children working in sugarcane cultivation are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, particularly hazardous work. There is anecdotal evidence that child labour in sugarcane may be linked to debt bondage in India, but very little is known about the issue. The two main activities that may be classified as hazardous in sugarcane cultivation are the application of agro-chemicals and manual harvesting. ■ Working conditions: Children working in sugarcane are exposed to poor working and living conditions, which can lead to health issues. They also work long hours, which interferes with their education. Many children are unpaid; those that are paid receive lower wages than adults performing similar work. ■ Drivers: Determinants of child labour in sugarcane are the same as in other agricultural commodities: rural poverty and economic shocks may drive families to rely on children's income. Families may face discrimination as they try to access other jobs. Lack of availability or poor quality of education may dissuade parents from sending their children to school. Children's employment may also be due to a lack of awareness of the value of education or societal attitudes towards children's work. Finally, the lack of decent work opportunities for adults and other socio-economic factors, such as threatened family structures, may also drive children into work. ■ Demand for child labour is mostly explained by economic factors, such as the need for high numbers of unskilled workers and cost-efficiency. Outsourcing and seasonal employment may increase the likelihood of children's exploitation, while weak regulatory and enforcement frameworks exacerbate the issue by creating a climate of impunity.
Forced labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nature and prevalence: In 2016, the USDOL found links between forced labour and sugarcane production in five countries, including two of the world's largest producers: Brazil and Pakistan. Debt bondage appears to be the most common form of forced labour in the sugarcane sector. People from poorer areas, or disadvantaged groups such as migrants, nomads or certain ethnicities, are often lured into working the fields with financial advances or false promises. ■ There is a notable absence of data on forced labour in sugarcane. The few studies that we identified show that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, victims are most commonly male migrants from poorer areas who are hired by subcontractors and subsequently entrapped through debt and constraints on their freedom of movement. In Asia, entire families of agricultural workers are in debt bondage in India and Pakistan, while in Myanmar, forced labour is reportedly imposed by the state, particularly on minority groups, such as the Rohingya Muslims.



Decent work deficits summary

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining

■ Freedom of association and collective bargaining: In some countries, there is a high level of trade-union density in sugar plantations and comprehensive collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are concluded. While freedom of association and collective bargaining are often secured in theory, in many sugar-producing countries in the developing world it appears that workers face difficulty in enjoying such rights in practice. Although sector-specific unionization statistics are scarce, owing to the seasonal and ultimately insecure nature of work for sugarcane labourers and smallholders, and the high likelihood of informal labour, we anticipate that in most contexts, the rate of unionization is very low.

Discrimination

■ Various forms of gender discrimination have been reported in the sector internationally, though there are insufficient data on this topic. The industry is male-dominated and women who work in the sector are mostly found in specific gendered roles and are at greater risk of precarious, lower-paid work. Typically, women in male-dominated workplaces may also experience a hostile working environment.³⁵ Discrimination also affects minority groups, such as indigenous peoples, migrants and members of scheduled castes in India, in terms of unequal treatment at work. Sexual harassment has also been reported in the sector, whereby women are reportedly asked for sexual favours in exchange for job opportunities or, in extreme cases, experience gender-based violence at work, such as being sexually assaulted and raped by landlords and middlemen.

Other decent work deficits

- **Informal and precarious work:** Decent work deficits related to pay and working conditions (also linked to discrimination against certain groups of workers in some contexts) remain an issue among producers in many developing countries. The situation is at its most precarious among smallholders, or temporary and agency workers, who are contracted by, or produce for, larger entities.
- **Wages and hours:** In many countries, seasonal or agency fieldworkers are paid on a piecework basis, i.e. per tonne of cane that they cut, which encourages long working hours and no breaks, only to harvest enough to receive the low, basic wage.
- **Health and safety:** Workplace health and safety is one of the most recognized issues in sugarcane production.³⁶ In many countries and regions, workers continue to harvest sugarcane manually; they often work for long hours in intense heat and are prone to machete-related injuries ranging from minor cuts to severed limbs, as well as health defects, snake bites, caustic soda burns and respiratory problems from burning cane.

³⁵ See for example *Declaration Of Participants In IUF Sugar/KUSPW Workshops On Sexual Harassment* (September 2016).

³⁶ Concerns have also been reported at more industrial points in the process, relating to issues such as excessive noise, poor lighting and ventilation, and unsafe exposed machinery in mills. A study in Pakistan found that around a quarter of mill workers had received no health and safety training in relation to their role. Subsequently, accidents were particularly common among new, young and uninformed workers at mills.



3.2. Child and forced labour in key producing countries

Child and forced labour in sugarcane producing countries

Source	Country	Decent work deficits
USDOL List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labour (2016)	Belize	Child labour
	Bolivia	Child labour, forced labour
	Cambodia	Child labour
	Colombia	Child labour
	Dominican Republic	Child labour, forced labour
	El Salvador	Child labour
	Guatemala	Child labour
	India	Child labour
	Kenya	Child labour
	Mexico	Child labour
	Myanmar	Child labour, forced labour
	Pakistan	Forced labour
	Panama	Child labour
	Paraguay	Child labour
	Philippines	Child labour
	Thailand	Child labour
	Uganda	Child labour
	Viet Nam	Child labour
Schwarzbach and Richardson	Costa Rica	Child labour
	Fiji	Child labour
	Honduras	Child labour
	Nepal	Child labour

Ratifications of ILO Core Conventions in key producing countries

Country	Forced labour		Freedom of association and collective bargaining		Discrimination		Child labour	
	C029	C105	C098	C087	C100	C111	C138	C182
Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Brazil	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
China	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colombia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
India	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Indonesia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mexico	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pakistan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philippines	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thailand	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓

3.3. Child labour

3.3.1. Nature and prevalence of child labour in sugarcane production

Overview

There is a scarcity of data on the exact incidence of child labour in sugarcane production in most countries, as most country studies do not gather industry-specific data. However, there is evidence that this is a significant issue in several sugarcane-producing countries. Schwarzbach and Richardson contend that the total number of children working in sugar is “best measured in tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands.”³⁷ The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) links sugarcane production to child labour in 17 countries (see Child and forced labour in sugarcane producing countries).³⁸ Six of these were in the top 25 largest exporters of sugar in 2014/15, including Thailand, India, Mexico, Colombia, the Philippines and Paraguay. Additionally, there are reports of child labour in several producing countries that are not on the USDOL List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labour, notably Cambodia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Fiji and Nepal.³⁹

Profile of a typical child working as a cane-cutter



Age: 10+

Family background: landless migrants or small farm owners, members of an ethnic minority and / or socially disadvantaged group

Sex: male

Place of work: family farm or commercial plantation

Employment type: informal and seasonal

The incidence of child labour is largely dependent on the way that sugarcane is produced in different countries. In countries where sugarcane is produced on large-scale mechanized plantations, such as Australia and the USA, child labour is not reported to be an issue – due to the more favourable economic context and because there is no need for cheap manual labour. In many emerging economies, however, sugarcane is produced on small and medium-sized family farms, where child labour is more likely to occur. Children may be employed as unpaid helpers on their family’s farm or contract their labour to larger commercial plantations.

Asia

Child labour in the sugarcane sector is evidenced in three key sectoral studies conducted in the Philippines, India, and Cambodia. The USDOL also reports the issue in Myanmar, Pakistan and Thailand (USDOL, 2016). The evidence from Asia shows that children working in sugarcane are employed both on smallholder farms as family helpers and on larger commercial plantations. A survey conducted by the ILO in two sugar-growing regions in Cambodia in 2015 found that the incidence of child labour was more prevalent on smallholder farms than on commercial plantations (64 per cent compared to 26 per cent) and that children on smallholder farms tend to be younger (12 compared to 15 years old on average) (ILO, 2015a). In the Philippines, it is estimated that over 13,500 children work in the sugarcane sector, or 2.5 per cent of children working in the agricultural sector (UCW, 2015). Most are thought to be unpaid family workers.

POVERTY, MIGRATION AND CHILD LABOUR IN THE INDIAN SUGARCANE INDUSTRY

The state of Maharashtra accounts for 70 per cent of India’s total sugar production, which is an important source of rural employment. Each year, 200,000 children migrate with their families to western Maharashtra to cut sugarcane. In order to find employment, these families rely on labour brokers (Mukadams), who negotiate their terms and conditions of employment. The labour brokers usually provide an advance payment to the workers, then tell them where to find employment. Workers are often unaware of their conditions of work before agreeing to the contract. Many must migrate far from their village of origin, making it difficult for them to return and for their children to attend school. Workers usually leave their village in October-November and spend 6-8 months working on the plantations, returning to their village only the following June-September. They reportedly live in temporary settlements in very poor conditions, without access to water, sanitary facilities or electricity. The entire family is involved in the harvest, with adolescent boys cutting the cane and younger children piling it up. Men and women (and sometimes children) then carry the cane to the cart to be transported to the factory. Girls are also engaged in chores and ancillary work (see 3.3.2; Save the Children, 2012).

³⁷ Schwarzbach, Natasha and Richardson, Ben, *A Bitter Harvest: Child Labour in Sugarcane Agriculture and the Role of Certification Systems*, 2014.

³⁸ USDOL, *List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labour*, 2016.

³⁹ Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.



Latin America

In Latin America, child labour in sugarcane cultivation is thought to be widespread, though the extent of it is unclear. The USDOL reports the issue in Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay (USDOL, 2016). Child labour occurs predominately among migrant families or smallholder families based near mills, rather than in large agroindustry. In addition, child labourers in the sector are predominantly male (70-80 per cent), adolescents, and are likely to be from ethnic minorities, such as indigenous peoples or the Afro-Colombian community. This racial component has been particularly noted in countries such as Mexico, Bolivia, and Colombia (IPEC, Mexico, 2014; Antislavery, 2006; Danish Institute of Human Rights, 2016).

In Mexico, children often work for their families, who are either smallholder sugarcane producers or migrant workers, and are rarely found on larger plantations. In 2013, the Mexican industry estimated that 6,000 sugarcane cutters migrate for work annually, often bringing two or three children (IPEC, Mexico, 2009). Similarly in Colombia, child labour is reportedly not present in sugar agroindustry, but children are thought to be involved in the collection of waste products, while their families are working in areas surrounding mills, or in transporting the cane in horse carts, known as *carretileros* (USDOL, 2013). Although Paraguay is not a major producer, the USDOL also reported that around 28 per cent of the sugarcane workforce there was under the age of 18 (54,000 children), the majority of whom work for or alongside their families (USDOL, 2012).

Africa

In 2016, the USDOL listed Kenya and Uganda as the two African countries where child labour is prevalent in sugarcane production (USDOL, 2016). In both countries, over 30 per cent of under 14s work, notably at home, in subsistence farming or in commercial agricultural production. Nevertheless, sugar-sector specific data on child labour is limited in both cases. In Kenya, it has been reported that boys over the age of 10 most commonly work in the sugarcane fields to support their families or simply because they cannot finance their high-school studies (IUF, 2012). Commercial sugarcane work as a form of child labour appears particularly common in certain areas of Uganda. In an NGO study of Jinja District, a producing area in Eastern Uganda, up to 79 per cent of working children were active in the sector, often driven by family poverty or to support themselves after being orphaned. In both Kenya and Uganda, the subcontracting of the workforce via intermediaries has been flagged as one of the key facilitators of child labour in commercial sugarcane production. In the course of this research, we also became aware of isolated media references to evidence of child labour, particularly among adolescent boys, in sugarcane production in other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Angola.

3.3.2. Activities engaged in by children

Children under the age of 18 employed in the sugarcane industry are reported to perform the following tasks:

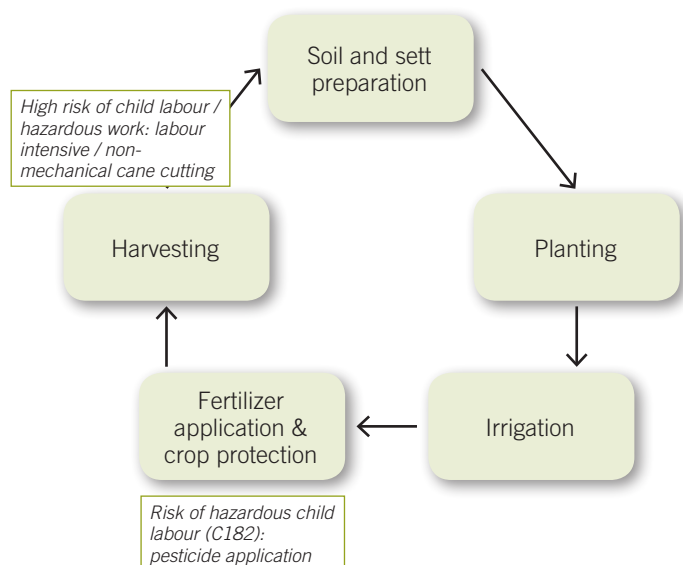
- ▶ **Land and soil preparation:** under 18s reportedly assist in clearing the fields, cutting grass and manually ploughing the land in Cambodia.⁴⁰
- ▶ **Planting and weeding:** under 18s are reportedly involved in planting sugarcane and weeding the soil.⁴¹ Human Rights Watch reported that younger girls and boys are used for planting in El Salvador, while older boys are employed in the later processes.⁴²

⁴⁰ ILO, *Rapid assessment of child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: A comparative analysis*, 2015.

⁴¹ Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.

⁴² Human Rights Watch, *Turning a Blind Eye: Hazardous Child Labour in El Salvador's Sugarcane Cultivation*, 2004.

Overview of tasks in sugarcane cultivation





- ▶ **Crop protection:** pesticides and herbicides are often applied by under 18s without using personal protective equipment.
- ▶ **Manual harvesting:** the most common task performed by under 18s is the non-mechanical harvesting of sugarcane. There is evidence of this practice in a number of countries, including Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay, India, Kenya, the Philippines and Cambodia. A survey in Mexico found that 80 per cent of under 18s in the sector cut cane.⁴³ A survey conducted by Save the Children in Maharashtra found that 60 per cent of children working in sugarcane cultivation were cane-cutters. Their work involves cutting thick stalks of cane with a sharp instrument (a cane knife or machete) and carrying them in heavy bundles to be transported to the mill. Around half of the children surveyed in the Save the Children study reported carrying heavy loads, sometimes up to 25kg.⁴⁴ The physical demands of this type of work mean that it is most often performed by adolescents, while younger children may be responsible for piling up the canes into bundles. Younger children reportedly assist by cleaning the cane and binding the pieces together.⁴⁵

- ▶ **Ancillary work:** younger children and girls are reported to perform work that is ancillary to sugarcane cultivation, particularly on family farms. This includes performing household chores, cleaning fields and rendering various services to workers, such as fetching wood and water and cooking in the labour camps. Children also tend to small vegetable plots for subsistence.⁴⁶

Tasks performed by under 18s may depend on their age and sex. This segregation of activities is illustrated in the table below, based on a survey conducted by Save the Children in Maharashtra in 2012, which studied 773 children under the age of 18 involved in harvesting sugarcane.

3.3.3. Worst forms of child labour

Children working in sugarcane are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, particularly hazardous work. There is anecdotal evidence that child labour may be linked to debt bondage in India, but very little is known about the issue.

Distribution of tasks by age and sex

Age	Type of work	
	Boys	Girls
6-10 years	Livestock rearing and sometimes fetching water and cleaning	Cleaning, fetching water and looking after younger siblings
11-14 years	Sometimes cutting, tying bundles of sugarcane, piling it up on the cart, transporting it to the factory and unloading	Cooking, livestock rearing, looking after younger siblings, cleaning, grinding millet, fetching water
15-18 years	Cutting sugarcane, tying bundles of sugarcane, piling it up on the cart, transporting it to the factory and unloading	Sometimes cutting sugarcane (when there are no boys), loading and unloading sugarcane from the cart, cooking, fetching water and distributing it at worksites

Source: Save the Children (2012).

⁴³ IPEC, *Caracterización del trabajo infantil agrícola en municipios seleccionados de los Estados de Sinaloa, Oaxaca y Veracruz*, 2014.

⁴⁴ Save the Children, *Child Rights Situation Analysis – Children of Families Engaged in Sugarcane Farming in Maharashtra*, 2012.

⁴⁵ ILO, *Rapid assessment on child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: a comparative analysis*, 2015.

⁴⁶ Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.



Hazardous work

The two main activities that may be classified as hazardous in sugarcane cultivation are the application of agro-chemicals for crop protection and manual harvesting, which involves the use of sharp tools. Crop protection exposes children to harmful agro-chemicals, especially pesticides, which can cause respiratory diseases and irritation of the skin or eyes and have long-term consequences such as cancer and neurological damage.⁴⁷

Manual harvesting involves many health and safety risks, including injury (due to use of dangerous tools, and insect and snake bites), musculoskeletal disorders (repetitive movements and transportation

of heavy loads), and exposure to sunlight, high temperatures and hazardous chemicals.⁴⁸ Personal protective equipment (PPE) is reportedly not used, as it is designed for adults and does not fit.⁴⁹ Additional hazards faced by children are exposure to fumes and dust from the burning of cane.⁵⁰

Most of the top 10 sugarcane-producing countries have ratified C182, transposed it into their national law, and prohibited the application of agro-chemicals as a hazardous activity for under 18 year olds. Brazil and Colombia are the only countries that have explicitly prohibited sugarcane production as a hazardous activity for under 18s, while Mexico has banned all agricultural work for persons under 18.

Hazardous work definitions in national law for top producers (excl. Australia)

Country	C182 ratification	Minimum age for hazardous work	Definition of hazardous work	Use of agro-chemicals specified as hazardous work	Sugarcane cultivation specified as hazardous work
Brazil	✓	18	Decree 6.481 (2008)	✓	✓
China	✓	18	Factory Law (1929); Circular of the Ministry of Labour issuing Provisions on Special Protection for Juvenile Workers (1994); Labour Act (1994)	✗	✗
Colombia	✓	18	Code on Childhood and Adolescence (2006); Resolution 01677 (2008); Resolution 3597 (2013)	✓	✓
India	✗	18	First Schedule of the Factories Act (1948); Child Labour (Amendment) Act 2016	✓	✗
Indonesia	✓	18	Manpower Act (2003); Chapter 1 of Presidential Decree No. 59 (2002)	✓	✗
Mexico	✓	18	Labour Code (1970)	Agricultural work prohibited	
Pakistan	✓	15	Employment of Children Act (1991); Draft Bill to Prohibit the Employment of Children and Regulate Employment of Adolescents in Certain Occupations and Processes*	✓	✗
Philippines	✓	18	Labour Code (1974); Department Order 4 (1999); Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act (2003)	✓	✗
Thailand	✓	18	Labour Protection Act (1998)	✗	✗

* Not officially adopted.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.

⁵⁰ ILO, *Rapid Assessment on child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: A comparative analysis*, 2015.

⁴⁷ Ibid.



Involuntary child labour

Data on forced or bonded child labour is difficult to obtain, as this is largely a hidden problem. However, sugarcane has been linked to debt bondage in India, whereby families (including children) borrow money from labour recruiters (*mukaddams*) and repay it by working in sugarcane fields during the harvest season.⁵¹

3.3.4. Working conditions of children in the sugarcane sector

► **Health and safety:** as indicated above, the key issue for children working in sugarcane is hazardous work. Issues experienced by children include dehydration, dizziness, headaches, respiratory problems, cuts, insect bites and skin infections.⁵² In the survey conducted by the ILO in Cambodia, 65 per cent of a sample of 122 children reported suffering from skin infections caused by insect bites.⁵³ In Paraguay, 26 per cent of children reported being injured during sugarcane work in the last 12 months, most commonly suffering cuts or lacerations during harvest.

► **Poor living conditions:** living conditions in the camps that house migrants working in sugarcane are reportedly poor. Save the Children reported that migrant sugarcane workers in Maharashtra live in small temporary huts (*kopis*) without potable water, sanitary facilities or electricity. Forty-two per cent of the 773 children surveyed reportedly fell ill after migrating owing to poor standards of accommodation.⁵⁴ In several Latin American countries, such as Mexico and Bolivia, migrant workers in the sugarcane sector often live in poor, temporary conditions.⁵⁵

► **Long working hours:** children in the sugarcane sector work long hours. Sixty per cent of the 773 children surveyed by Save the Children in India reported working more than eight hours per day, and 20 per cent reported working more than 10 hours per day.⁵⁶ The ILO study in Cambodia found that more than half of the children surveyed exceeded the maximum working hour limits for their age group and worked on average 23.5 hours per week in the fields. The study also noted differences in hours between sexes, with boys working much longer hours than girls on commercial plantations.⁵⁷ In addition, working hours tended to increase with age.⁵⁸ Similarly, a survey in Veracruz, Mexico, reported that children active in the agricultural sector, predominately sugarcane, worked on average six days a week and over 35 hours.⁵⁹ In Paraguay, children were found to work on average five hours more per week in sugarcane than in other sectors. This may be due to the intensity of the work during harvesting periods.⁶⁰

► **Wages:** earnings for children working in the sugarcane sector vary depending on their age, the type of work they do and the kind of farm they work on. However, they tend to earn less than adults, due to their lower productivity and level of experience. Children working on commercial plantations are paid on a piecework or daily-rate basis. In Cambodia, children working as casual labourers earned around \$3.50 per day in 2015, whereas stronger adults and foremen earned between \$6 and \$10 per day.⁶¹ Children on smallholder farms are paid little if at all. Schwarzbach notes that, in Bolivia, children working as family helpers were not aware of the amount they would earn, as there is a perception that this type of work

⁵¹ See Save the Children, 2012 and Schwarzbach, 2014.

⁵² Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.

⁵³ ILO, *Rapid Assessment on child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: A comparative analysis*, 2015.

⁵⁴ Save the Children, *Child Rights Situation Analysis – Children of Families Engaged in Sugarcane Farming in Maharashtra*, Save the Children, 2012.

⁵⁵ Antislavery International, *Contemporary Forms of Slavery in Bolivia*, 2006; Secretariat of Social Development, *Diagnóstico del Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas*, 2010.

⁵⁶ Save the Children, 2012, p.40.

⁵⁷ ILO, *Rapid Assessment on child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: A comparative analysis*, 2015.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ IPEC, *México: Caracterización del trabajo infantil agrícola en municipios seleccionados de los Estados de Sinaloa, Oaxaca y Veracruz*, 2014.

⁶⁰ USDOL, *Child Labour in the Sugarcane Industry in Paraguay*, 2012.

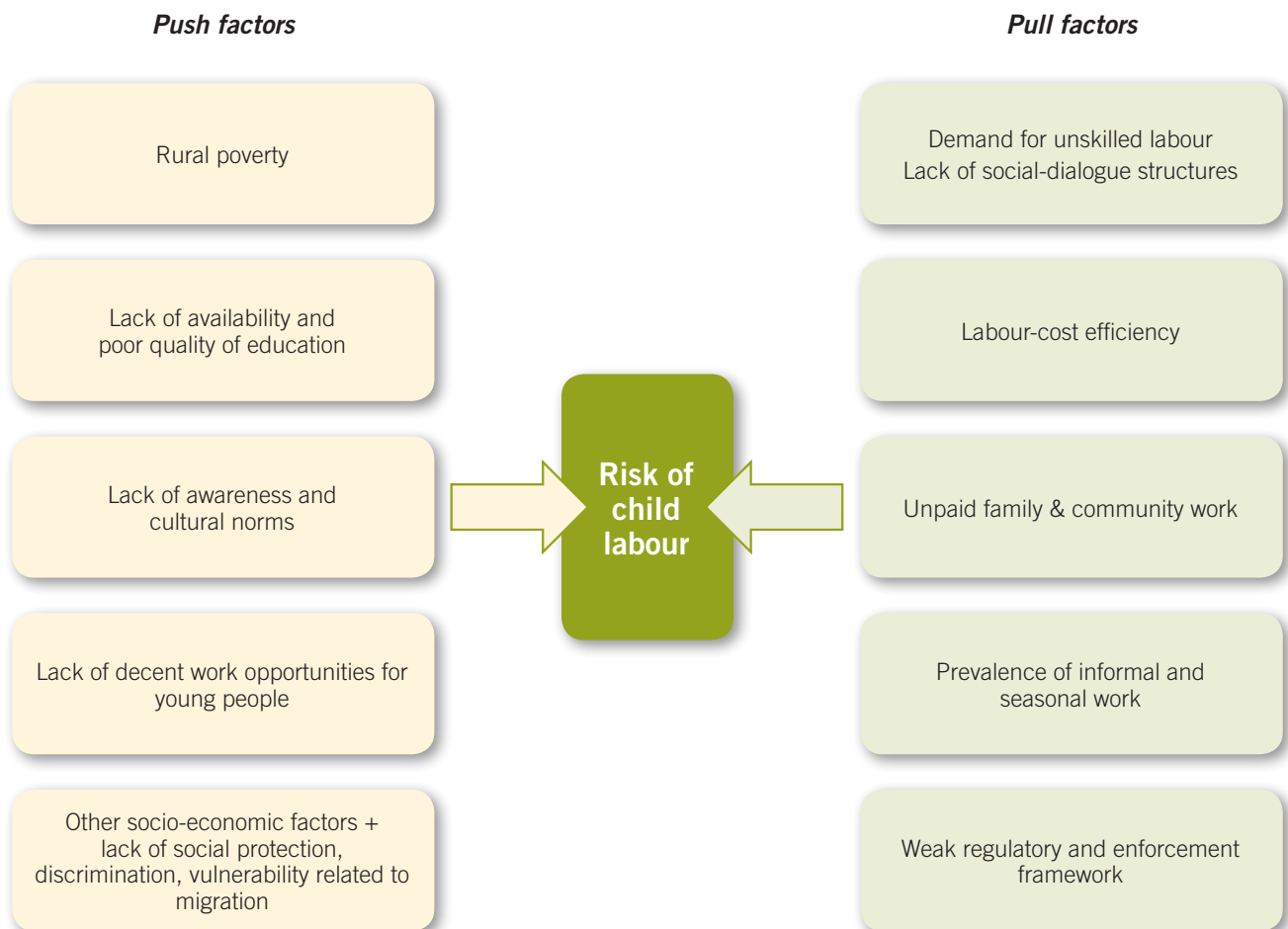
⁶¹ ILO, *Rapid Assessment on child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: A comparative analysis*, 2015.



does not need to be remunerated.⁶² The situation is similar in other migrant family contexts, for instance in Mexico, where most children work during harvest time to help their parents and are largely unpaid, according to the IPEC.⁶³ In contrast, among adolescent

males, or in areas where sugarcane labour is recruited in the local community, such as Paraguay, children seem more likely to be paid. In a recent study from Paraguay, 80 per cent of children claimed to receive payment directly.⁶⁴

3.3.5. Drivers of child labour



⁶² Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.

⁶³ IPEC, *Condiciones y Medio Ambiente del Trabajo Infantil Peligroso en el Cultivo de la Caña de Azúcar, con Énfasis en la Etapa de la Cosecha*, 2014.

⁶⁴ USDOL, *Child Labour in the Sugarcane Industry in Paraguay*, 2012.



Push factors

► **Rural poverty:** poorer households are more likely to send their children to work to supplement the family income. Children may work as unpaid helpers on their family's farm or contract their labour to other landowners. A number of sugarcane-producing countries have high levels of rural poverty. In India, less than 5 per cent of the rural population earn enough to pay taxes and less than 10 per cent have salaried jobs.⁶⁵ A study conducted in India by Save the Children found that rural communities in Maharashtra rely on advances from labour brokers to sustain farming activities and cover personal expenditure during the monsoon period. In exchange, families collectively contract their labour for the sugarcane harvest, which takes place far from their village of origin, in the western part of the state.⁶⁶ Many parts of Latin America also suffer from disproportionately high levels of rural poverty. For example, poverty affects 47 per cent⁶⁷ of the rural inhabitants of El Salvador, where financial necessity, combined with poor schooling and job opportunities, fuels child labour in the local sugarcane sector.⁶⁸ An IPEC survey of child workers in Mexico found that economic need was the major driver of child labour in sugar in the state of Veracruz.⁶⁹

► **There is also evidence that economic shocks, such as adult unemployment or natural events affecting agricultural crops, are key determinants of children's employment.** Studies conducted in Cambodia and Tanzania found that higher proportions of children worked in villages that had been exposed to drought, flood and crop failure.⁷⁰ Many sugarcane-producing countries are experiencing erratic weather conditions due to climate change, which may lead to crop failure and loss of income for the rural communities that grow sugarcane or other crops. Adverse weather conditions and the price fluctuations of agricultural commodities increase the likelihood of

smallholders in sugarcane-growing communities having to rely on their children's work. A lack of social protection, as well as endemic discrimination against vulnerable groups, including migrant workers, for example in adult access to employment and in pay, are also push factors.

► **Lack of availability and poor quality of education:** children in rural areas may not have access to education. The cost and time required to travel to the nearest school may act as a deterrent to children's attendance and make it more likely that they will work. School fees and associated costs may also impose too heavy a financial burden on rural households. In addition, the quality of the education on offer is an important factor in families' perceptions of its value, compared to the benefits of their participation in income-generating or household activities. Schooling is particularly problematic among children of migrant communities. In Mexico, children's access to schools is rendered more difficult by their families' migration; additionally, many indigenous children do not speak Spanish, which excludes them from the public school system.⁷¹

► **Lack of awareness and cultural norms:** parents of child labourers may not have had any educational opportunities themselves and, hence, may not be aware of the value of educating their children. A lack of awareness of the relationship between educational attainment and income levels may explain why families underestimate the value of sending children to school.⁷² This may be exacerbated by the poor quality of the education available and limited employment opportunities for young people. In addition, child labour may be considered culturally acceptable in certain contexts, for instance among families of migrant workers (*jornaleros*) in Mexico and Bolivia.⁷³

► **Lack of decent work opportunities for young people and adults:** poor employment prospects for young people and long or difficult transitions from school to work may deter families from investing in children's education, due to the perceived lack of opportunities. Young people under the age of 18 may be pushed into hazardous agricultural work

⁶⁵ CNN, *India census exposes extent of poverty*, 2015.

⁶⁶ Save the Children, *Child Rights Situation Analysis – Children of Families Engaged in Sugarcane Farming in Maharashtra*, 2012.

⁶⁷ ILO/UCW, *Entendiendo los resultados del trabajo infantil y el empleo juvenil en El Salvador*, 2013.

⁶⁸ TCCC, *Review on Child and Forced Labour and Land Rights in El Salvador's Sugar Industry*, 2015.

⁶⁹ IPEC, *México: Caracterización del trabajo infantil agrícola en municipios seleccionados de los Estados de Sinaloa, Oaxaca y Veracruz*, 2014.

⁷⁰ ILO, *World Report on Child Labour – Economic vulnerability, social protection, and the fight against child labour*, 2013.

⁷¹ UCW, *The Mexican Experience in Reducing Child Labour*, 2012.

⁷² ILO/IPEC-SIMPOC, *Explaining the demand and supply of child labour: A review of the underlying theories*, 2007.

⁷³ IPEC, *Condiciones y Medio Ambiente del Trabajo Infantil Peligroso en el Cultivo de la Caña de Azúcar, con Énfasis en la Etapa de la Cosecha*, 2014.



due to a lack of alternatives in the rural labour market.

- **Other socio-economic factors** in transition economies shed light on the circumstances in which under 18s may be driven into the hazardous agricultural work. These include threatened family structures, such as absent parents or adolescent-headed households; violence and organized crime; and economic migration. In countries with high levels of gang-related violence, such as Mexico and El Salvador (which has one of the highest homicide rates in the world for young people under the age of 19), children's work is seen as a preferable alternative to idleness, which may put them at risk of being recruited by criminal gangs.⁷⁴ In Mexico, this is reportedly one of the key reasons for children's employment in sugarcane cultivation: parents migrate for the harvest and take their children with them to protect them from violence and teach them the value of "honest" work.⁷⁵

Pull factors

- **Demand for unskilled labour:** the need for unskilled labour in countries that have low levels of mechanization may increase the likelihood of child labour. There is evidence that the incidence of child labour is inversely correlated with technological progress. This is because mechanization reduces the need for the unskilled labour pool that children represent. In addition, mechanization is associated with economic growth and higher wages for adults, which may have the effect of decreasing child labour. The harvesting of sugarcane is a labour-intensive activity, which is why a high incidence of child labour is found in this sector in economies with low levels of mechanization. A good example of this is Brazil, where increasing mechanization and formalization of the sugarcane sector since the 1990s has been associated with a widely-reported low level of child labour in the sector.⁷⁶ It is worth noting, however, that certain types of land (e.g. uneven, hilly landscapes in the North of Brazil) cannot be easily mechanized, therefore the extent of mechanization is not always linked to the level of economic development of a particular country.

⁷⁴ UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2013.

⁷⁵ Al Jazeera, *Mexico: Child labour and the perils of a lost education*, 2016.

⁷⁶ TCCC, *Child labour, forced labour and land use in Brazil's sugar industry*, 2015.

- **Cost-efficiency:** employers who wish to reduce their labour costs may recruit children as a cost-effective alternative to adults. Children are generally less productive than adults and not as likely to demand higher wages or other legal entitlements, hence they are more vulnerable to exploitation in the labour market. A study conducted in Guatemala found that children who were cutting cane earned less than half the minimum wage paid to adult workers. The gap between adults' and children's wages was not based solely on differences in productivity; it was linked to the workers' age. For instance, children planting cane were paid 0.25 quetzals per packet of cane whereas adults were paid 0.40 quetzals.⁷⁷
- **Unpaid family work:** children often work for their parents; those born in households that own agricultural land are likely to be employed as unpaid family helpers, as this is more cost-effective than hiring non-family members.⁷⁸ In Cambodia, families reportedly "lend" their children to other family members for the harvest.⁷⁹

- **Informal and seasonal employment:** the harvesting of sugarcane is associated with seasonal labour migration in many producer countries, including Mexico, Bolivia, India and Kenya. Widespread outsourcing and a high likelihood of informality make it difficult to get a clear picture of working conditions and may pave the way for children's exploitation. Additionally, families tend to travel together and stay at the labour camp, which makes it difficult for children to attend school regularly.⁸⁰ According to data collected by Save the Children on child labour in the sugarcane industry in Maharashtra, more than half of the 700 children surveyed did not attend school during the six-month harvest period.⁸¹ Another study found that 85 per cent of children aged 0-5 accompany their parents to the migrant camps; pregnancy and child birth in migrant camps are also common.⁸²

⁷⁷ Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.

⁷⁸ ILO/IPEC-SIMPOC, *Explaining the demand and supply of child labour: A review of the underlying theories*, 2007.

⁷⁹ ILO, *Rapid assessment on child labour in the sugarcane sector in selected areas in Cambodia: A comparative analysis*, 2015.

⁸⁰ Schwarzbach, Natasha and Richardson, 2014.

⁸¹ Save the Children, *Child Rights Situation Analysis – Children of Families Engaged in Sugarcane Farming in Maharashtra*, 2012.

⁸² Schwarzbach, Natasha and Richardson, 2014.



► **Weak regulatory and enforcement framework:** weak labour law and ineffective regulatory enforcement may create a climate of impunity for employers who exploit children’s labour. Labour inspection departments in sugar-producing countries may face challenges in enforcing child labour laws, including difficulties in accessing remote rural areas and limited resources.

Forced labour is used primarily in planting and harvesting, which often takes place on isolated plantations, facilitating the abuse. While forced labour appears to be more prominent in small to medium-sized operations, subcontracting and the use of labour intermediaries by larger companies exacerbate the problem in some contexts. Other key enablers of forced labour in the rural setting include extreme poverty, landlessness and discrimination.

3.4. Forced labour

3.4.1. *The nature and prevalence of forced labour in sugarcane production*⁸³

In 2016, the USDOL linked forced labour to sugarcane production in five countries,⁸⁴ including two of the world’s largest producers: Brazil and Pakistan. The other three producing countries named were Bolivia, Myanmar and the Dominican Republic. While this study has focused on these five named countries, it is worth noting that other sources have flagged up forced labour, or its indicators,⁸⁵ in sugarcane production in other countries, some of which have also been noted throughout. Furthermore, owing to the concealed nature of forced labour, there is an overall lack of information on its prevalence in sugarcane production,⁸⁶ and this is particularly true of Asian countries.

Debt bondage appears to be the most common form of forced labour in the sugarcane sector. People from poorer areas, or disadvantaged groups such as migrants, nomads or certain ethnicities, are often lured into working the fields with financial advances or false promises. Once on farms, victims are told they have an increasing debt to their keepers, who often inflate and fabricate debt to maintain the workforce.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Sugarcane has historical ties with forced labour in Latin America and the Caribbean, with modern slavery often taking the form of debt bondage in the region. This has been identified as a common tactic in Brazil, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic.

Victims in Brazil are predominately male migrants from the poorer northeast of the country, who are lured by landowner-hired subcontractors to incredibly remote plantations with the promise of high wages. Once on site, their identification documents are often confiscated and they are told they owe money for their transportation, food and other services. This “debt” increases during their time on the estate, as the perpetrators claims costs for food and keep (ILO, 2009). Violence is also thought to be a common feature of debt bondage in Brazil’s sugar sector, where labourers work under the supervision of armed guards and deaths are often simply reported as farming accidents. In 2014, NGO Reporter Brasil identified 25 sugarcane producing entities that had been involved in forced-labour practices in the country (TCCC, 2015).

The picture is similar in Bolivia, where most forced labourers in the sector are also migrants hired by subcontractors, which serves to dilute the end-companies’ responsibility for worker conditions. Subcontractors often travel to cities such as Chuquisaca and Potosi, as well as the Bolivian highlands, where they can find large populations of poor, indigenous Quechua people. The subcontractors then provide cash advances to recruit potential workers, leaving them obligated to work for that contractor. High interest and forced deductions labelled “savings” result in at least 60 per cent of workers’ wages being retained. As a result, workers accumulate increasing levels of debt, which is then used to retain them for further seasons. It is common for whole families to end up in this debt-bondage cycle on plantations. The work of women and children is rarely recognized but, if a worker dies, their children can inherit the debt (Antislavery, 2006).

⁸³ In this report we have tried to combine data from different sources, but in some areas up-to-date information is lacking. In such instances, we have nevertheless quoted from reports dating from 2000 onwards, where there is reason to believe that labour conditions have not changed substantially.

⁸⁴ USDOL, *List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labour*, 2016.

⁸⁵ TCCC, *Review of Child and Forced Labour and Land Rights in Guatemala’s Sugar Sector*, 2015.

⁸⁶ In October 2016, the ITUC published a report on sugarcane production in Swaziland, Africa’s fourth largest producer. Citing the US Department of State, it reported that children were sometimes forced into labour in commercial agriculture, which is largely controlled by the country’s monarch. Sugarcane was not specifically mentioned as a forced labour sector: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/king_mswatis_gold.pdf.



Asia

Although there is a remarkable absence of recent or reliable information, bonded labour is widely accepted as being highly prevalent in the Pakistani agricultural sector. While debt remains a key driver, bonded labour in Pakistan is also deeply rooted in socio-cultural discrimination and the exclusion of certain castes and non-Muslims. The ILO reported in 2004 that forced labour in Pakistani agriculture included long-term and heavy indebtedness; dependence on the landowner for basic needs; restrictions on movement; violence and threats; non-payment or excessively low wages; and obligatory labour of family members (ILO, 2004). Bonded labour is most prevalent in the Sind and Punjab provinces of Pakistan, where small and medium-sized farmers are responsible for 90 per cent of Pakistan's sugarcane production. However, no sector-specific statistics exist (USDA, 2016). In 2000, the ILO estimated conservatively that 1.8 million "sharecroppers", or tenant farmers, were in bonded labour across Pakistani agriculture. Most tenant farmers and their families accrue debt to their landowner through unfair returns from produce and dishonest manipulation of dues, resulting in a chronic state of indebtedness. This debt can be inherited by the next generation and those who are indebted are often sold on to other landowners without their consent. These sharecropping families are often extremely poor, uneducated and landless, and the most vulnerable are those who are nomadic and therefore need to borrow funds from landowners to meet their initial production costs (ILO, 2001). In Pakistan, bonded labour is fuelled by a lack of institutionalized agricultural credit, landlessness, extreme poverty and a lack of other opportunities in rural areas. Furthermore, owing largely to a degree of cultural acceptance and institutional denial, forced labour is generally not addressed in Pakistan, with impunity rife among perpetrators and even intimidation of victims by police (ILO, 2004). Lastly, in 2016, Action Aid claimed that low-caste, migrant couples experience debt bondage in the sugarcane harvest in Maharashtra, India. They reportedly receive advances from middlemen, or brokers, who claim at the end of a season that the debt is not paid off and use intimidation to ensure they return for the following harvest (Reuters, 2016). The USDOL does not list Indian sugar as a product of forced labour and the situation is open to debate. Large numbers of Indian sugar workers reportedly change brokers, which some argue illustrates that their situation is not permanent (Verité, 2016). This, like forced labour in sugarcane in other Asian countries, is an area deserving of further research.

STATE FORCED LABOUR IN MYANMAR

Rather than debt bondage, forced labour organized by the State has been flagged up by the USDOL in sugarcane production in Myanmar (USDOL, 2016). There is, however, a notable absence of detail or reporting on its prevalence. Such labour has traditionally been enforced through violence and threats. (HRW, 2000) The Burmese military government has routinely forced civilians, particularly from minority groups such as Rohingya Muslims, into hard labour across a variety of sectors, including sugar production, which has been traditionally dominated by state-owned entities. Following the installation of a civilian government in 2011, rates of forced labour are thought to have declined (IDE, 2008). However, there is an absence of sector-specific statistics and, according to the Global Slavery Index, 500,000 people remained in conditions of modern slavery in Myanmar in 2016.



3.5. Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining

In some countries, there is a high level of trade-union density in sugar plantations and comprehensive collective-bargaining agreements (CBAs) are common (e.g. in Malawi and South Africa). Workers in the sector who are unionized are generally more permanent staff employed at mills and by larger producers.

Some key producing countries have failed to ratify the relevant ILO Conventions (see Section 3.2, *Ratifications of Core Conventions in key producing countries*), or introduce legal protection of the rights provided by these Conventions at national level.

Furthermore, in many sugar-producing developing countries, even though freedom of association and collective bargaining are secure in theory, it appears that workers face obstacles to enjoying such rights in practice. Sector-specific unionization statistics are scarce but, owing to the seasonal and ultimately insecure nature of work for sugarcane labourers and smallholders, and the high levels of informality, we would surmise that, in most contexts, their rate of unionization is very low.

Additionally, while waged workers may be represented by formal worker organizations, other workers are represented by cooperatives and producer organizations (notably in Brazil and China).⁸⁷

In several cases, sugarcane workers, particularly those on temporary contracts, have reported that engaging in union activity poses a significant risk to their job security. In Malawi, it was found that, while the relevant workers' union was well publicized, even permanent workers felt too scared to voice their grievances and reported the intimidation and tactical firing of those who had been involved in union strike action in 2011. Similarly in Colombia, when an IUF-affiliated trade union was founded in 2013, over 100 unionized workers were fired from a sugarcane plantation, and a further 500 were ordered to disaffiliate from the union.⁸⁸ A further issue in the Colombian sugarcane industry is the tactical subcontracting of workers through Associated Work Cooperatives (CTAs) (WOLA, 2011). These entities

make workers ineligible for labour law protection, including rights to collective bargaining, and have thus been flagged up by local trade unions as a significant barrier to workers' organization (IUF; 2008; ILO, 2015b).

3.6. Discrimination and gender-based workplace violence

Various forms of gender discrimination have been reported in the sugarcane sector internationally. Independent of country context, sugarcane production appears undeniably male dominated, and women who work in sugarcane are mostly found in specific, gendered roles. For example, in a study of commercial sugarcane production in Malawi, researchers observed that there were very few female employees, and those there were occupied light or administrative posts. The study found that many female workers voiced their interest in heavier fieldwork, but claimed they could not secure such positions. Contrastingly, the employer believed women did not want more strenuous roles, suggesting that issues of gender stereotyping were at play.⁸⁹

A recent study of major producers in Brazil found a similar gendered division of labour. Women made up only 11 per cent of the workforce, were reported as being side-lined to the poorest-paid cleaning and maintenance roles, and faced great difficulty in pursuing mechanized opportunities.⁹⁰ Other country-study findings indicate that women are almost entirely concentrated in the lowest paid or unpaid support tasks, such as cane-peeling in Pakistan⁹¹ and Bolivia,⁹² or experience disproportionate vulnerability to informal sugarcane fieldwork, as in Mexico.⁹³ It is noteworthy that while women do not generally occupy the same roles as men, reports indicate that, when they do, for example as cutters, they earn less, owing to the piece-rate nature of the work.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ SOMO, *Bittersweet: Sustainability Issues in the Sugarcane Supply Chain*, 2015.

⁹⁰ Instituto Observatorio Social, *O comportamento sociotrabalhista da Raízen*, 2014.

⁹¹ Pakistan Journal of Agriculture, *Women in Agriculture: Results from a Survey in of Okara District of Pakistani Punjab*, 2010.

⁹² Antislavery International, *Contemporary Forms of Slavery in Bolivia*, 2006.

⁹³ SIPSE, *La industria cañera discrimina a sus trabajadoras*, 2016.

⁹⁴ Caran et al, *A história vida e trabalho das mulheres do corte da cana-de-açúcar*. 2012.

⁸⁷ ILO, *Giving a voice to rural workers*, 2015.

⁸⁸ Solidarity Centre, *Colombia: Sugarcane Workers Fired After Forming Union*, 2013.



Discrimination in sugarcane production is targeted at certain races, nationalities or migrant groups.

In a study of the sector in Guatemala, for example, discrimination against indigenous cane-cutters was reported as common.⁹⁵ Research on the sector in the Dominican Republic identified widespread discrimination against Haitian workers and Dominicans of Haitian descent, who were routinely given the lowest-paid roles, such as cutters or drivers, rather than the higher-paid positions, such as managers or weighmen. Haitians are also reported to be used year after year as temporary workers by plantations, strategically denying them rights to which they are entitled.⁹⁶ A further group allegedly exploited and abused in sugarcane production are the Dalits of India, a low-caste group and one of the most vulnerable to forced labour.⁹⁷

Although there is not much information on the subject, studies have flagged up sexual harassment as an issue for women on sugarcane plantations.

In Malawi, for example, several female agency workers reported sexual harassment from employment agency intermediaries, who requested sexual favours in exchange for job opportunities or lighter work.⁹⁸ In 2016, Action Aid claimed that female migrants working in sugarcane in Maharashtra, India, routinely face gender-based violence in the workplace, such as sexual assault and rape by landlords and middlemen. The charity reported that the cases were so extreme that some women had been sterilized to avoid pregnancy from the continued abuse. A local mill association denied the claims.⁹⁹

3.7. Other Decent Work Deficits

3.7.1. Informal and precarious work

Decent work deficits related to pay and working conditions remain an issue in many developing producing countries. The situation is at its most precarious among smallholders, or temporary and agency workers, who are contracted by, or produce for, larger entities. To a degree, this is driven by the seasonal nature of sugarcane production, which requires significantly more workers during intense harvest periods. This gives rise to the use of temporary workers, who are often hired through intermediaries an arrangement which has been seen to significantly dilute responsibility for working conditions. Although this outsourcing of agricultural workers may be illegal in certain contexts, the informal hiring of local people or migrant groups during certain seasons is common throughout the sugarcane industry. Workers may remain “temporarily” employed by the same company for several years, suffering several months of unemployment outside of peak seasons.¹⁰⁰ This was found to be the case at commercial mills in Malawi, where almost all fieldwork was carried out by temporary or agency workers, many of whom worked there year after year, for roughly eight months at a time. Agency workers were found to suffer even more precarious conditions, without written contracts, benefits or access to free on-site healthcare, and most were not unionized.¹⁰¹

Migrant Workers

As detailed throughout the report, in several producer countries, such as Mexico, Bolivia and India, sugarcane fieldwork is undertaken by migrant workers, be they single men, couples or whole families. It is not uncommon for migrant workers to be provided with unsafe or unsanitary housing. In India, for example, migrant worker families often sleep in makeshift bamboo shelters, or in the open air, without clean water, sanitary facilities or waste disposal (IJBAR, 2012). In a study of male migrant workers employed in Mozambique, men were found to live in overcrowded accommodation, with poor-quality water that had caused three cholera-related deaths (Ethical Sugar, 2010).

⁹⁵ Fairfood International, *Condiciones socio-laborales en la industria de azúcar en Guatemala*, 2015.

⁹⁶ Verité, *Research on indicators of forced labour in the Supply Chain of Sugar in the Dominican Republic*, 2013.

⁹⁷ New Indian Express, *Dalit couple attacked for refusing to work in fields in Muzaffarnagar*, 2016.

⁹⁸ SOMO, *Bittersweet: Sustainability Issues in the Sugarcane Supply Chain*, 2015.

⁹⁹ Reuters, *Sexual abuse plagues female workers on India's sugarcane fields*, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Fairtrade Foundation, *Fairtrade and Sugar*, 2013.

¹⁰¹ SOMO, *Bittersweet: Sustainability issues in the sugar cane supply chain*, 2015.



3.7.2. Wages and hours

In many countries, seasonal or agency fieldworkers are paid piece rates, or per tonne of cane that they cut, which encourages long working hours and no breaks, only to harvest enough to receive the low, basic wage. It was found that, under this system in Nicaragua, workers may take home only a quarter of the living wage.¹⁰² In other contexts, such as Malawi, temporary agency workers receive a daily rate for which they must harvest a certain weight of cane per day or face wage cuts and dismissals; this means that labourers often work much longer than an eight-hour day.

3.7.3. Health and Safety

Workplace health and safety is one of the most recognized issues in sugarcane production.¹⁰³ In many countries and regions, sugarcane continues to be harvested manually. Labourers often work for long hours in intense heat and are prone to machete-related injuries, ranging from minor cuts to severed limbs, as well as health problems, snake bites, caustic soda burns, and respiratory disorders caused by burning cane.¹⁰⁴ Piecework exacerbates these issues, increasing working hours, exhaustion and the risk of heat stress.¹⁰⁵ Another less discernible but well-recognized issue among manual cane-cutters is repetitive strain injury, with workers striking at the cane thousands of times per day.¹⁰⁶

In emerging economies, adequate safety equipment and training is often not provided by plantation owners or other employer intermediaries. In Malawi, the 2013 study found that both field and factory workers hired directly by the mill claimed to receive only one set of personal protective equipment (PPE) annually, and that this would often not last, leaving labourers to work without protection. Meanwhile, subcontracted agency workers would often receive no PPE whatsoever. The mill-hired workers also claimed that those who were

injured had been subjected to intimidation from the mill to prevent them from seeking compensation. Several workers who had pursued such claims had allegedly lost their jobs.¹⁰⁷

Access to clean water is a further issue for workers on plantations, who regularly suffer dehydration. A study commissioned by The Coca-Cola Company in Brazil identified several producer farms that did not provide workers with water.¹⁰⁸ In Nicaragua, it was reported that workers drank on average 5.4 litres of water a day, roughly half of what was required when working such long hours in the heat. Furthermore, around half of the workers reported that they were required to bring water from home, rather than the employer providing it. Given the tropical climates in which sugarcane grows, heat exhaustion and sunstroke are commonplace. Fifty-seven per cent of workers reported suffering heat-related illnesses in Nicaragua, and it was found that, while mills did offer training on preventing such conditions, many fieldworkers had not received any training because most of them were subcontracted.¹⁰⁹ These issues are exacerbated by the customarily long working hours and insufficient breaks. In Nicaragua, for example, 26 per cent of fieldworkers were found not to take breaks in the course of the day, working continuously for between 10 and 12 hours.¹¹⁰

¹⁰² Fairfood International, *Treat them Sweet*, 2014.

¹⁰³ Concerns have also been reported at more industrial points in the process, relating to issues such as excessive noise, poor lighting and ventilation and unsafe, unguarded machinery in mills. A study in Pakistan found that around a quarter of mill workers had received no health and safety training in relation to their role. Accidents were particularly common among new, young and uninformed mill workers.

¹⁰⁴ Fairtrade Foundation, *Fairtrade and Sugar*, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ ILO, *Sectoral Activities Programme - Code of practice on safety and health in agriculture*, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ IUF, *Cane Cutting – Repetitive Strain Injury*, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ SOMO, *Bittersweet: Sustainability issues in the sugar cane supply chain*, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ TCCC, *Child Labour, Forced Labour and Land Use in Brazil's Sugar Industry*, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Fairfood International, *Treat them Sweet*, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.



Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Cause (CKDu)

While no link has been confirmed between the disease and sugarcane production, media attention in recent years has been brought to bear on the prevalence of CKDu, a chronic disease resulting in the loss of kidney function, among sugarcane workers. The exact cause of CKDu remains unknown and there is no evidence that CKDu is specifically caused by sugarcane cultivation. Nevertheless, between 2002 and 2012 the disease is estimated to have killed 20,000 individuals in Central America, mostly men working in the sugarcane industry. Many medical professionals agree that the disease is at least in part caused by the harsh working conditions experienced by these plantation workers, including heavy labour, heat stress, dehydration, and exposure to agro-chemicals (Fairfood, 2014).

In 2008, a neighbouring community of Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited (NSE) filed a complaint with the compliancy body of the IFC, which funds NSE, relating to the high incidence of CKDu among workers. A subsequent study found no direct link between sugarcane production and CKDu. However, the IFC reached a remediation agreement with the community (CAO, 2008).

Sources: CAO, Nicaragua / Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited-01/León and Chinandega; Fairfood International; Aljazeera.





4. Key actors in the sugarcane sector

This section provides an overview of key actors in the sugarcane sector with which the ILO might engage to

promote decent work, including social partners and industry partners.

Key actors in the sugarcane sector – Summary

Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Governments: Sugarcane-producing countries have made various efforts to combat child labour, with varying degrees of success. The most successful of these initiatives have not necessarily targeted the sugarcane sector. Rather, they focus more broadly on addressing supply-side and demand-side drivers of child labour, and aim to create an enabling environment to better identify and monitor the issue and prosecute offending employers.
Social partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Producers' organizations: Producers' organizations have played a key role in efforts to reduce child labour, particularly in Latin America. They tend to be concentrated at the national level, although a regional producers' organization has recently been created in Asia. ■ Trade unions: At the global level, the IUF covers workers in sugar production. At the country level, the picture is complex, ranging from a virtual absence of actors in the sector (e.g. in China) to a multiplicity of enterprise-level unions (e.g. India). The latter tend to represent mill workers rather than farm labour, but many mills are vertically integrated or purchase from outgrowers, so these organizations are important for the purposes of the ILO. ■ Employers' organizations: Member entities of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) in major producing countries have been active in a variety of high-level initiatives concerned with child labour and other decent-work issues. However, no recent activities relating specifically to tackling child labour in sugarcane were identified.
Industry partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A number of industry actors have demonstrated a degree of engagement on supply-chain sustainability. Over 40 sustainability standards are reportedly applicable to sugar. However, according to a recent study conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, incentives to adopt sustainable practices in sugar production and procurement remain too weak to drive significant improvements (Jenkins et al, 2015). ■ Sectoral bodies and initiatives: The most active agencies in the sugarcane sector are the relevant certification bodies. The certification they provide is trusted in the industry, and many major players in sugarcane, including traders and buyers, use such standards as a tool for securing standards in their own supply chains. Key players include Bonsucro, Fairtrade International and the ProTerra Foundation. ■ Traders: While traders are not the most active of stakeholders in the push for decent work in the sugarcane industry, some of the more prominent have developed ties to relevant non-profit associations or certification bodies. Some also address decent work issues via supplier policies and due diligence. ■ Buyers: There has been a notable collaborative effort among buyers to ensure decent work and better standards in sugarcane. These include due diligence in relation to human rights, risk assessments and supply-chain mapping, supporting smallholders and driving improvements in decent work through supplier codes of conduct, and third-party monitoring.



4.1. Overview of actors and initiatives





4.2. Governments

Governments in sugarcane producing countries have made various efforts to combat child labour, with varying degrees of success. The most successful of these initiatives have not necessarily targeted the sugarcane sector. Rather, they focus more broadly on addressing supply-side and demand-side drivers of child labour, and aim to create an enabling environment to better identify and monitor the issue and prosecute offending employers. Below are some examples of efforts made by different countries, with a brief analysis of their success factors and limitations.

Brazil

Brazil's efforts to reduce child labour are often hailed as a success story: between 1992 and 2009, economic activity among 7-15 year olds decreased by more than half, from 18 per cent to less than seven per cent, and school attendance increased from 85 per cent to 97 per cent.¹¹¹

As part of its national strategy for reducing child labour, the Brazilian government implemented a number of policies and programmes to address the issue, focusing on improving access and quality in education, poverty alleviation and social protection (e.g. cash transfer programmes), and monitoring and enforcement.¹¹² The government's comprehensive and integrated response to child labour, which sought to address both supply-side and demand-side drivers, has been central to its success. However, the single most important determinant in the reduction of child labour has reportedly been an improvement in families' incomes and standards of living.¹¹³ This is partly as a result of poverty-alleviation programmes, such as the Bolsa Familia (see table below), but also broader economic development in the country. In the sugar sector more specifically, increased levels of mechanization are likely to have had an impact on child labour by reducing the need for unskilled workers.

Sample initiatives

Type	Initiative	Outcomes
Poverty alleviation	<p>Bolsa Familia (1996-2006) [formerly national Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour – PETI]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative first piloted in the sugarcane sector (as part of PETI) • Targeted moderately poor and extremely poor families • Conditional cash transfers – families required to fulfil educational (Bolsa Escola) and health (Bolsa Alimentação) conditions • Conditional on 85 per cent school attendance • Included after-school clubs, family tracking programmes, and financial advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PETI led to a reduction in child labour of up to 26 per cent in certain municipalities; the greatest impact was on reducing part-time child labour and hazardous work • Bolsa Familia had 50 million beneficiaries by 2015; 36 million were removed from “extreme poverty” • Lower school drop-out rate among beneficiaries
Monitoring and law enforcement	<p>Special Mobile Inspection Group (GEFM) (2014):</p> <p>Originally developed to combat forced labour – extended to child labour in 2014</p> <p>Specially trained labour inspectors</p> <p>Focus on WFCL</p> <p>Operations supported by multiple govt. agencies, incl. Labour Prosecution Office, Federal Police & Federal Prosecutions Office</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,263 child labour inspections conducted in 2014/15 • 7,200 violations identified • However, only 53 of the 7,200 violations resulted in penalties • Majority of violations found in urban areas, suggesting reach to rural areas may be limited as agriculture accounts for 55 per cent of child labour

¹¹¹ UCW, *Understanding the Brazilian success in reducing child labour: empirical evidence and policy lessons*, 2011.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.



Mexico

The Mexican government has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing child labour, and has launched a number of programmes in the past 15 years. The main areas of intervention have been advocacy and awareness-raising, education, poverty alleviation and social policy development.¹¹⁴ Additionally, there have been several sector-specific responses to child labour, including efforts to modernize the sugarcane sector that incorporate decent-work principles (see table below). Children’s employment in the agricultural sector in Mexico dropped by four per cent for 12-17 year olds between

2000 and 2010.¹¹⁵ This is primarily attributable to improvements in the educational level and living standards of households.¹¹⁶ In particular, the government’s focus on education in the 1970s and 1980s “helped create a new generation of more educated parents less inclined to send their children to work.”¹¹⁷ The Oportunidades conditional cash-transfer programme, which sought to incentivize school attendance for children from poor households, is thought to have played a significant role in this reduction.¹¹⁸ There was also a decrease in the demand for child labour in agriculture due to broader economic development, which reduced the employment rate of boys in the sector.¹¹⁹

Sample initiatives

Type	Initiative	Outcomes
Poverty alleviation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oportunidades 1997 Conditional cash-transfer programme started in rural communities • Aimed at breaking intergenerational extreme poverty, improving healthcare and education • Conditional on children’s health and school attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowered child labour by eight per cent and increased school enrolment by 23 per cent (prior to 2001) • Particularly effective in rural areas and in reducing agricultural work • Almost six million beneficiary households by 2020
Education and vocational training	<p>National Programme of Education for Children of Dayworker Families (PRONIM) 1997</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government programme aimed to reduce child labour and improve access to education for migrant family children • Providing tailored education to primary-age migrant children during harvest season through classes and temporary schools. Also in indigenous languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reached 54,000-60,000 children annually 2010-2012 • Developed secondary education in 13 states • Slow-growing programme with increased funding post 2010 • However, the coverage was limited (500,000 target)
Decent work and sustainable agricultural practices	<p>Integrated System for Measurement and Improvement of Productivity (SIMAPRO) 1995</p> <p>ILO programme to modernize various industries, increase productivity and improve working conditions through dialogue and training with workers and industry</p> <p>Implemented in sugarcane. Informed workers of dangers of child labour through decent work training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted decent-work culture, but there is little empirical evidence on the decent-work outcomes of the programme • Reached 18 sugarcane producers and 8,000 workers by 2008 • Educated workers and producers on dangers of child labour through good practice guide funded by The Coca-Cola Company • Provided technical support in creation of “zero tolerance” policy for sugarcane sector in 2013

¹¹⁴ UCW, *The Mexican experience in reducing child labour: empirical evidence and policy lessons*, 2012.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.



Philippines

The government of the Philippines has developed multiple policies and programmes to reduce child labour, including efforts to improve education, social protection and youth employment. However, there are still over two million children aged 5-17 working in the Philippines, most of whom are employed in agriculture.¹²⁰ This is reportedly due to ineffective

implementation and a lack of overall integration. Child labour has not historically been seen as a cross-cutting issue, and there has been a lack of coordination among different government agencies in trying to address it.¹²¹ However, the government has recently undertaken efforts to address the issue in a more systemic manner.

Sample initiatives

Type	Initiative	Outcomes
Technical and vocational training	Strengthened Technical-Vocational Education Programmes (STVEP) 2012 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competency-based curriculum aligned to industry requirements in local communities Aimed at public secondary schools Focus on better linkages between educational system and labour market, to promote youth employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reached 378,150 pupils, 7 per cent of the total enrolled in public secondary schools Increase in number of TVET enrollees from 1.6 to 1.9 million between 2011 and 2013. Graduate figures rose from 1.3 to 1.8 million. Improvements in employment rates among TVET graduates from 48.5 per cent in 2005 to 65.3 per cent in 2013
Community-based programme	Convergence programme against child labour (HELP ME) 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-based programme targeting child labourers known to authorities Focus on education, livelihoods, prevention, protection, monitoring and evaluation Focused and coordinated strategy, involving government departments, unions, employers' groups, the ILO, NGOs and private partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results not yet available as programme due to end in December 2016. Aims to move 893,000 children from the worst forms of child labour across 15,568 target barangays

4.3. Workers' and employers' organizations (including producers and cooperatives)

4.3.1. Workers' organizations

As noted previously, there is a lack of data on workers' organizations in the sugar industry, and very few organizations representing the interests of workers in primary production. At the global level, the IUF covers workers in sugar production.

The IUF's Sugar Workers' Network conducts research and campaigning activities on employment and freedom-of-association issues in the global sugar sector (as indicated in Section 2.4 on Labour Relations above). At the country level, the picture is complex, ranging from a virtual absence of actors in the sector (e.g. China) to a multiplicity of enterprise-level unions (e.g. India). The latter tend to represent mill workers rather than farm labour, but many mills are vertically integrated or purchase from outgrowers, so these organisations are important for the purposes of the ILO.

¹²⁰ UCW, *Understanding child labour and youth employment outcomes in the Philippines*, 2015.

¹²¹ Ibid.



Overview of workers' organizations in key producing countries

<p>Brazil</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37.6 per cent of workers in the sugarcane sector are unionized.¹²² Mechanization has reportedly reduced unions' bargaining power and the level of unionization in the sector is likely to decrease as a result of mass restructuring.¹²³ • According to UNICA, the sugar-industry association, 99 per cent of agricultural workers in Brazil are covered by collective bargaining agreements. • At the national level, the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores Na Agricultura (CONTAG) is the world's largest national organization representing agricultural workers and independent producers. CONTAG represents nine million workers, three million of whom are waged workers and six million of whom are smallholders. • Of the regional unions representing sugarcane workers, only the Federação dos Empregados Rurais Assalariados do Estado de São Paulo is affiliated to the IUF. Others include the Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura do Estado de Goiás and the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias do Açúcar, da Alimentação e Afins de Sertãozinho e Região.
<p>China</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ACFTU has 31 regional and ten associated industry associations, including the National Committee of Agricultural, Forestry and Water Conservancy Workers' Union. • The Government reported that there were 980,000 specialized farmers' cooperatives in the country at the end of 2013.
<p>India</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 5 major confederations are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bhartiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS), - Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), - Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), - Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS), and - All Indian Trade Union Congress (AITUC). • ITUC-affiliated unions include the INTUC and HMS. • Sectoral federations relevant to the sugar sector include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All India Plantation Workers' Federation - Sugar Workers' Federation of India (focused on mill workers) • Additionally, the IUF counts the following regional workers' organizations among its affiliates, which focus on rural workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union - Gujarat Agricultural Labour Union • Karnataka Sugar Workers' Federation (represents workers in state-owned mills)
<p>Pakistan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ITUC is affiliated to two unions in Pakistan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pakistan Workers' Federation (PWF) – Pakistan's largest trade union organization. - All Pakistan Trade Union Congress (APTUC). • The IUF has two relevant affiliated unions in Pakistan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pakistan Food Workers' Federation (PFWF) - Sindh Sugar Mills Workers' Federation (SSMWF) • The SSMWF, which represents sugar workers across the province of Sindh, appears to be the most active trade union in the sugar sector. • Workers' unions also exist in Pakistan among employees of some of the world's biggest sugar buyers, including PepsiCo and Mondelez.
<p>Thailand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITUC-affiliated national federations in Thailand are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT) - National Congress of Private Industrial Employees (NCPE) - State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation (SERC) - Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC). • A Thai labour database identifies the following unions in the country's sugar sector, all of which have negligible public profiles: Nong Sak Sugar Workers' Union; Angwieng Sugar Workers' Union; Eastern Sugar Workers' Union; Thai Sugar Terminal Workers' Union; and Kumpawapi Sugar Workers' Union.

¹²² Guerrero Amezcua, Cinthya Larissa, *Labour market perspectives of the Brazilian sugarcane agro-industry: prospects and challenges*, 2012.

¹²³ Ibid.



4.3.2. *Producer organizations*

Producer organizations have played a key role in efforts to reduce child labour, particularly in Latin America. Fundazucar, the charitable arm of the industry association, Azucar de El Salvador, has been particularly active (see below). Other examples include:

- ▶ In Mexico, two producer organizations collaborated with the national sugar industry association on an “Action Plan for a Sugarcane Sector free from Child Labour” 2013-2014, which involved a zero-tolerance pact and an awareness campaign.¹²⁴
- ▶ In Colombia, Asocaña, a producer organization, ran an awareness and education campaign among partner mills to combat child labour in the sector. The project was supported by the ILO.¹²⁵
- ▶ In Guatemala¹²⁶ and Honduras,¹²⁷ producer organizations made up of the various mills that dominate their producer landscape, have developed educational initiatives for the benefit of children in local communities, including funding teacher training and providing better equipment and materials.

Fundazucar

Fundazucar, the charitable arm of El Salvador’s sugarcane industry association, Azucar de El Salvador, has been internationally recognized for its efforts in cutting child labour in the sector. El Salvador boasts a 93 per cent reduction rate in child labour in the sugarcane sector between 2004 and 2015. Fundazucar operates a “zero tolerance” policy on child labour. Subsequently, since 2007, this has included a clause prohibiting work performed by under 18s in all supplier contracts. This policy has been combined with an array of additional efforts to combat child labour, including advocacy and awareness-raising work; educational programmes that reach 10,000 children annually; training on child labour for producers and mill staff; external monitoring of producers; and the production of a best-practice guide (Fundazucar, 2016).

Producer organizations tend to be concentrated at the national level. However, a regional producer organization has recently been created representing seven sugar-producing countries in Asia: the ASEAN Sugar Alliance (ASA). Members include Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar and Viet Nam.¹²⁸

4.3.3. *Employers’ organizations*

Member entities of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) in major producing countries have been active in a variety of high level initiatives to combat child labour and promote other decent-work issues. However, no recent activities on the part of these organizations specifically relating to tackling child labour in sugarcane were identified. Since 2012, the IOE has co-chaired the Child Labour Platform (CLP), a business-led forum, and a number of sugar buyers are members of the CLP. In addition, many buyers are Bonsucro members (see Section 4.4.2 for further information on industry initiatives). The IOE is active in policy debate on the topic of child labour and, in 2015, produced the *ILO-IOE Child Labour Guidance Tool for Business*, a practical resource which aims to help businesses tackle child labour in supply chains.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Cámara Nacional de la Industria Azucarera y Alcohólera, *Plan de Acción para hacer de la agroindustria de la caña de azúcar en México un sector libre de trabajo infantil*, 2013.

¹²⁵ Asocaña, *Cartilla Campaña Contra El Trabajo Infantil por El Bienestar de la Niñez*, 2011.

¹²⁶ Fundazucar, *Educación*, 2016.

¹²⁷ Fundazucar, *Escuelas de Corazon*, 2016.

¹²⁸ Sugar Regulatory Administration, Philippines, *Philippine Sugar Millers Forge Alliance with ASEAN Counterparts*, 2016.

¹²⁹ ILO-IOE, *Child Labour*, 2016.



Overview of employers' organizations in key producing countries

Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Confederação Nacional da Indústria (CNI) is an IOE member. The CNI is a member of the National Forum and the National Commission on Child Labour Eradication (FN Peti and CONAETI). In 1995, one of the first projects the FN Peti piloted was to combat child labour in sugarcane production in north-east Brazil.
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) is the sole IOE member and representative organization of employers in China. The CEC has worked with the ILO on several decent work issues. However, no specific activities relating to child labour were identified.
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India has four IOE members: the All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE); the Employers' Federation of India (EFI); the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE); and the Council of Indian Employers. The latter is the umbrella organization that represents the preceding three to the ILO and the Indian government. The AIOE has been involved in recent IPEC events on child labour, while the CIE is active in government policy discussion on the subject. Historically, the AIOE and the CIE helped the IPEC to forge alliances with employers in India, helping to create dialogue with employers who employ children and to undertake further research. More recently, the AIOE, the SCOPE and the CIE were partners in the ILO-led Convergence Project to tackle child labour in India.
Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP) is the sole IOE member. The EFP has organized events on child labour and promotes a member policy and code of conduct to combat the practice. It claims that child labour does not exist within its member companies.
Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Employers' Confederation of Thailand (ECOT) is an IOE member. ECOT has organized awareness-raising and training events on child labour and was recently a partner in an ILO project to combat the worst forms of child labour in other sectors.

4.4. Industry partners

A number of industry actors have demonstrated a degree of engagement on supply-chain sustainability. Over 40 sustainability standards are reportedly applicable to sugar. However, according to a recent study conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, incentives to adopt sustainable practices in sugar production and procurement remain too weak to drive significant improvements.¹³⁰ This is reportedly due to the fact that demand for sustainable sugar is relatively new, end-consumers are not prepared to pay a higher price for it, and supply-chain enterprises are typically reluctant to pay higher prices they cannot recover. Additionally, evidence of the business case for sustainable production practices is minimal, with only a few case studies currently available. Companies' concerns about revenue margins and competitiveness therefore act as an obstacle to improvements in this area.

¹³⁰ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

4.4.1. Sectoral bodies and initiatives

The most active sectoral bodies in the sugarcane sector are the relevant certification organizations.

The certification they provide is trusted in the industry, and many major players in sugarcane, including traders and buyers, use such standards as a tool for securing standards in their own supply chains.

► **Bonsucro** is undoubtedly the most prominent sectoral player, with over 450 members,¹³¹ including major producers, traders and buyers. Launched in 2007, Bonsucro is a global multi-stakeholder initiative and non-profit organization with the overarching aim of ensuring responsible sugarcane production. Its central mechanism is its mill certification system, which evaluates aspects relating to sustainability, social impact and product traceability.

► Bonsucro has also incentivized many members to make long-term commitments to work towards producing or buying 100 per cent 'sustainable' sugar.

¹³¹ Bonsucro, *Members*: <https://www.bonsucro.com/en/bonsucro-members>.



► **Fairtrade International**, an international commodities' certification body with national branches, has certified sugarcane since the 1990s. Currently, 99 farmers' organizations representing 62,700 sugarcane smallholders are Fairtrade certified. While fair minimum pricing is its predominant concern, Fairtrade is a proponent of decent work and publishes extensive guidelines on child labour for its producer organizations.¹³²

► In 2014, Fairtrade had to suspend the Belize Sugarcane Farmers' Association (BSCFA),

representing 5,000 farmers, from the Fairtrade sugar programme after auditors discovered evidence of child labour. This was followed by a full monitoring and remediation programme to bring the association back up to standard.¹³³

An additional sectoral body of note is Ethical Sugar, a research organization focusing on the sugar industry, which has produced several relevant reports on child labour and decent work in the industry.

Child labour standards in key sectoral certification systems

Initiative	Standard on child labour	Observations
Bonsucro	Production standards, Criterion 2.1. Mills and farms belonging to the certified unit must be found to comply with the ILO conventions governing child labour. This includes non-hazardous work for under 18s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The members' code of conduct contains no specific reference to child labour. However, it requires members to report annually on their social initiatives and emphasizes the importance of promoting and purchasing Bonsucro products.
Fairtrade International	Fairtrade has certification standards for different actors. However, ILO and UNGC commitments against child labour are enshrined in all these standards. Workers must therefore be aged 15 or over (18 for hazardous work).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In its Child Labour and Forced Labour guidelines, Fairtrade also prohibits its producers from contracting the services of under 15s. Fairtrade provides specific details in its guidelines on what constitutes hazardous labour in agricultural production.
ProTerra Foundation	ProTerra Standard, Principle 2. Prohibits child labour in line with ILO recommendations and national law. Standards especially advise against labour by those under 15 years of age.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Standard permits child labour in family agriculture if not abusive, dangerous or damaging to health, education and school attendance. Although a smaller initiative than the above, major sugarcane producer in Southern Africa, Tongaat Hulett, is a member.

4.4.2. Traders

While traders are not the most active of stakeholders in the push for decent work in the sugarcane industry, some of the most prominent have developed ties to relevant non-profit associations or certification bodies. Many also address decent-work issues in their supplier policies and due diligence.

Olam

A trader that has been proactive in defence of decent work, rather than broader sustainability certification, is Olam. It reportedly tackles child labour through a variety of efforts, such as training farmers in good labour practices; working with local governments to establish schools in producer areas; collaborating with local NGOs; and organizing adult literacy courses to demonstrate the value of education to workers. Since 2012, Olam has been a **member of the Fair Labour Association**, which currently assesses some of its supply chains in other commodities (Olam, 2016).

¹³² Fairtrade International, *Child and Forced Labour Guidelines*, 2015.

¹³³ Fairtrade International, *Belize sugar cane farmers aim to be "best in class" for protecting children and young people*, 2016.



Most of the sugar trade appears to be linked to several key traders headquartered in Western Europe, the US or Australia. These include: Olam, Sucre & Denrées (Sucden), Czarnikow, Louis Dreyfus Company (LDC), ED&F Man, Cargill, Wilmar Sugar Mills, CSC, and Bunge.

The most popular certification body among traders is Bonsucro. Both ED&F Man and Cargill were founder members of Bonsucro, while Bunge, Wilmar Sugar Mills and CSC are also members. Other traders have chosen to ally with different certification programmes. For example, CSC is also a proponent of Fairtrade and reportedly promotes the initiative among its sugarcane millers and growers.

Furthermore, traders such as Olam, Noble Group and ED&F Man address the topic of child labour directly in their guidelines and/or CSR policy. ED&F Man, for example, sets benchmarks for farmers regarding labour rights and highlights the elimination of child labour in its supply chain as a priority in its CSR agenda. It aims to do this by promoting its code of conduct among suppliers and evaluating these issues when contracting new suppliers. Olam has conducted training on labour practices with farmers in Madhya Pradesh, India.¹³⁴

4.4.3 Buyers

There has been a notable collaborative effort among buyers to ensure decent work and better standards in sugarcane. These include due diligence in respect of human rights, risk assessments and supply chain mapping, supporting smallholders, and driving improvements in decent work through supplier codes of conduct and third-party monitoring.

In addition, several major F&B manufacturers are members of Bonsucro. These include Pepsi Co, Mars, Mondelez International, The Coca-Cola Company (TCCC), General Mills Inc, Unilever, Nestlé, and SAB Miller. As part of Bonsucro, several buyers, such as TCCC, Bacardi and Ferrero, have made long-term commitments to work towards producing or buying 100 per cent “sustainable” sugar. Furthermore, a number of Bonsucro members are also members of the CLP, a business-led forum set up to tackle child labour in supply chains, founded in 2010. These include TCCC, Mars and Nestlé.

Sample child labour initiatives by major sugar buyers

Buyer	Main efforts
The Coca-Cola Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TCCC plans to conduct a total of 28 country studies of child labour in its sugar supply chain, five of which are already completed. TCCC has engaged in a number of social programmes to combat child labour in around 20 countries worldwide, such as El Salvador, Mexico, the Philippines and Honduras. These include educational initiatives, training manuals and guidelines (TCCC, 2015).
General Mills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Mills has been working with Bonsucro since 2013 to strengthen its sugar supply chain in the Americas. General Mills conducts Bonsucro-standard gap-analysis with producers and is working with mills in Central America to identify best-practice producers. The company aims to source all sugar from Bonsucro-approved or similar standard farms by 2020. In 2015, it achieved 59 per cent of its goal (General Mills, 2016).
Nestlé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nestlé has subscribed to a specific Commitment on Child Labour in Agricultural Supply Chains and has a Child Labour Action Group within the company to oversee its efforts. Nestlé aims to conduct targeted risk assessments of several high-risk products, including sugarcane, by 2018. For necessary products, it is implementing a Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System. The company is in the process of rolling out human-rights-focused training for employees across sectors worldwide, prioritizing those working in commodities (Nestlé, 2016).

¹³⁴ Olam, *Livelihood Charter Sugar*, 2016.



In addition to the above, other major buyers have made broader efforts to raise overall decent-work standards in sugarcane through **producer-targeted training and education**, such as the *Sustainable Sourcing Programme* at Pepsi Co or the *Learn to Grow Programme* at Hershey's.

4.4.4. Cooperatives

The activities of most sugarcane cooperatives are restricted to primary production, as many lack the financing to develop processing facilities. The prominence of these cooperatives varies from country to country, depending on the production landscape and business environment.¹³⁵ For example, over half of El Salvador's 7,000 sugarcane producers belong to cooperatives.¹³⁶ In India, state-founded cooperative sugar mills, in which smallholders are shareholders, have an established history.¹³⁷ However, it has been widely reported that many "cooperatives" in states such as Maharashtra no longer exist in their intended autonomous form. Instead, they have been privatized or co-opted by political elites or powerful families through corruption, opacity, and mismanagement, no longer prioritizing the welfare of farmer members.¹³⁸ In Brazil, smallholder cooperatives are rare. The most prominent cooperatives represent regional groups of medium-sized or larger producers, many with processing capacities, with the aim of securing better deals at trading level. These include the Agribusiness Cooperative for Sugarcane Producers in Pernambuco (COAF); and the São Paulo State Cooperative of Producers of Sugarcane, Sugar, and Alcohol (COPACESP).

Regardless of their composition, cooperatives have generally not been at the forefront of decent-work initiatives, including those to tackle child labour.

The cooperatives that have been active tend to be smallholder cooperatives, bolstered by certification bodies (see box below). Indeed, smallholder cooperatives are often considered to present greater risks of decent-work deficits¹³⁹ and, in certain contexts, the larger sugar producers have blamed

the cooperatives' community culture for fuelling child labour.¹⁴⁰

The certification body Fairtrade International works with sugarcane cooperatives worldwide, in particular in the Philippines, India, Mauritius, Paraguay, Malawi, Costa Rica and Guyana. It has supported the child-labour eradication efforts of several of its certified cooperatives through project financing and workshops, as well as broader certification and the additional income generated through it.

Cooperative Initiatives

The most significant efforts by cooperatives in relation to child labour have been made by smallholders, focusing on awareness-raising and child education. In Paraguay, for example, the Fairtrade-certified **Manduvirá Cooperative** has invested in school uniforms, materials, and educational courses for the community's children under the age of 16. In southern Malawi, the **Kasinthula Cane Growers' Association** has built a primary school so that their children can enter education earlier, donates equipment to other local schools, and pays the schools fees of members' children. Lastly, **Coopecañera in Costa Rica** has held child-labour awareness workshops, and disseminates materials on the issue to producers. All three of these cooperatives are Fairtrade certified.

Sources: Fairtrade Foundation, 2016; Coopecañera, 2016.

In response to other decent-work deficits, sugarcane cooperatives have been notably active in gender-related initiatives, and have reported an increase in female participation. For example, the number of women in leadership roles at the Manduvirá Cooperative in Paraguay is considered one of the keys to its stability and success.¹⁴¹ In Maharashtra, India, Indira Gandhi Bharatiya Mahila Vikas Sahakari Sakhar Kharkhana Ltd, an all-women's sugarcane producer and mill, has been established since the mid-1990s.¹⁴²

4.4.5. Donors and development organizations

The efforts of the US government to tackle child labour, particularly those of the US Department of Labor (USDOL), are well known. For example, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs' (ILAB) publishes

¹³⁵ Fairtrade USA, *Sugar Review*, 2011.

¹³⁶ IPS News, *Taking Child Workers Out of El Salvador's Sugar Cane Fields*, 2015.

¹³⁷ Singh, Saroj Kumar, *Problems, and Prospects of the Cooperative Movement in India under the Globalization Regime*, 2016.

¹³⁸ DNA India, *Graft, opacity, political meddling bleeding Maharashtra sugar industry white*, 2015.

¹³⁹ TCCC, *Our stance on child labour*, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ HRW, *El Salvador: Turning a Blind Eye: Hazardous Child Labour in El Salvador's Sugarcane Cultivation*, 2004.

¹⁴¹ Copac, *Cooperatives, Women, & Gender Equality*, 2015.

¹⁴² Indira Gandhi Bharatiya Mahila Vikas Sahakari Sakhar Kharkhana Ltd, 2016.



an annual “List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labour” – an essential resource for identifying these issues in sugarcane production worldwide.

In addition to carrying out research, the USDOL has recently been engaged in several initiatives to combat child labour and promote other decent-work issues in the sugarcane industry and sugarcane producer countries, particularly those in Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, the Department has published studies of decent-work issues in sugarcane production in Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, and, between 2010 and 2014, the USDOL led “Stop Child Labour in Agriculture”, an educational and income-support programme in Mexico, a major producer country.

In this work, the USDOL actively involves other stakeholders, such as NGOs and local government agencies. A good example is ABK3 LEAP, an educational and family-finance project set up to tackle child labour in the sugarcane sector in the Philippines, which the Department carried out in conjunction with the international children’s charity World Vision and local government authorities.

4.4.6. INGOS

International NGOs have also developed initiatives to address decent-work and sustainability issues in sugarcane production. Perhaps the most widely recognized is Solidaridad Network, a Bonsucro member, which through its Farmer Support Programme works to raise the productivity, incomes and environmental awareness of sugarcane farmers in India and Pakistan.

Both the WWF and Oxfam have been involved in campaigns to lobby buyers to act responsibly in sourcing commodities, including sugarcane. Oxfam, as part of its “Behind the Brands” campaign, focused on land-rights issues in sugarcane, while the WWF has collaborated with Solidaridad Network on the Pakistan Sugarcane Improvement Programme, which involves promoting Bonsucro decent-work standards.





5. Key challenges and opportunities in addressing child labour in primary sugarcane production

5.1. Overview

There are a range of challenges and opportunities in addressing child labour, which are summarized below and set forth in full in Sections 5.2 -5.7. The ILO has a wealth of experience in combating child labour and

would be well placed to build on the suggestions of this report (focused on child labour) by developing a more integrated strategy, working across the issues of discrimination, forced labour, freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

Summary of challenges and opportunities for the ILO in addressing CL in primary sugar production

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities
Knowledge and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paucity of data on the extent of child labour in sugarcane at global and country level • No hazardous-work framework for sugarcane • Informality and hidden nature of children's work • No value-chain analysis • Very little gender-disaggregated data, or information on women and girls in sugarcane production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILO well placed to undertake research in key producing countries • ILO can provide technical assistance to producing nations on strengthening their hazardous-work frameworks for sugarcane (compare with Cocoa in Ghana) • ILO has experience in designing community-based monitoring mechanisms and referral systems • ILO could conduct analysis of sustainable cost of production
Industry engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry fragmentation and competing incentives for different actors • Lack of supply-chain traceability • Uncertain market and pressure on smallholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILO could use convening power to bring together industry leaders at country and / or regional level • ILO can support smallholders in sustainable agricultural practices and decent work (e.g. through initiatives such as SIMAPRO)
Government capacity and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource and capacity constraints • Lack of political will • Lack of integration into national development plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILO's primary area of expertise is to provide technical assistance / capacity building to governments • ILO can share good practices / lessons learned from interventions in other producer countries (e.g. Brazil, El Salvador) to make the business case for change • ILO can assist governments to integrate initiatives into national development agendas with cross-departmental support • ILO could encourage race-to-the-top through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Social dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak social dialogue in the sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILO has links with the IUF and can begin dialogue on decent work in sugar • ILO / ACTRAV can facilitate engagement with organizations representing sugar workers • ILO can promote tripartism to assist in promoting and enforcing decent work in the sector



Summary of challenges and opportunities for the ILO in addressing CL in primary sugar production

Topic	Challenges	Opportunities
Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplicity and duplication of efforts • No available evidence of impact of activities • Child labourers switching sector shows need for cross-sector cooperation/area-based approaches. Difficulties in reaching target groups • Lack of worker involvement (through TUs, cooperatives and small producers' organizations) in design and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILO can help build trust among different actors and encourage dissemination of efforts and impacts among industry actors • ILO can use its experience to replicate successful models of intervention • ILO can lead on need to use area-based, cross-sectoral approaches to prevent children simply switching sectors • ILO can spearhead need for increased worker involvement in effective design and implementation of different initiatives
Decent work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of decent work opportunities for young people and adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILO could explore opportunities for partnership with industry and government actors to develop technical and vocational training and education in rural areas

5.2. Knowledge and information

There is a paucity of data on the extent of child labour in the sugarcane industry at the global and country levels. There are no global estimates of the number of child labourers in sugarcane and most countries do not record sector-specific data. Many of the surveys on the sector are either outdated or focus on only one region, such as the studies conducted in Cambodia and India.¹⁴³ In addition, there is little or no relevant data available for key producing countries, such as China and Thailand. This lack of information was identified as a key issue by sugar buyers, who stressed the importance of having **accurate intelligence** to engage with supply-chain partners.

While most producing countries have ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, very few have identified cane-cutting as a hazardous activity. We did not find any recent studies that identify hazardous tasks in sugarcane cultivation, although we noted a 2007 ILO study from El Salvador on the subject, and understand that a similar study is now under way in Mexico.¹⁴⁴ A few countries, such as Brazil, Mexico and Colombia, have adopted a blanket ban on the employment of under 18s in sugarcane (or in agriculture generally

in the case of Mexico). This approach is problematic because agriculture is an important rural employer. In addition, banning children from working in the production of one particular crop may simply result in them working in another, and it will not help address their hazardous working conditions. The ILO has previously stressed the importance of agricultural work in providing valuable technical skills to young people, and has warned against making the whole industry off limits to under 18s.¹⁴⁵ An alternative approach might be to undertake a review of activities in the sugarcane cultivation cycle to determine which ones are hazardous and which ones are not. The ILO could provide **technical assistance** to sugar producing countries in designing and conducting risk assessments of sugarcane production processes.

Another difficulty lies in the fact that children's work is often informal, sporadic or transient, and hence difficult to research and quantify. The majority of child labourers work as family helpers and have no formal employment relationship. The seasonal nature of work in the sugarcane sector means that many children are likely to work only during the harvest season or the school holidays. Others work full time but may have more than one occupation, combining employment in sugarcane with household chores, helping with the family farm or other ancillary tasks. In these circumstances, it is difficult to quantify the problem and know exactly how many children are engaged in hazardous work. However, the **ILO has experience in designing surveys** capable of capturing

¹⁴³ See ILO, *Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in the Sugarcane Sector in Selected Areas in Cambodia: A Comparative Analysis*, 2015, and Save the Children, *Child Rights Situation Analysis, Children of Families Engaged in Sugarcane Farming in Maharashtra*, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ ILO, *Condiciones y medio ambiente del trabajo infantil en el cultivo de la Caña de Azúcar en El Salvador*, 2007; and Innovation Forum, Webinar, *How the sugarcane industry addresses child labour*, October 2016.

¹⁴⁵ ILO, *Children in Hazardous Work, What we know, What we need to do*, 2011.



such information, such as **community-based reporting and referral mechanisms**.¹⁴⁶

5.3. Industry engagement

Supply-chain fragmentation, market competition and conflicting incentives among industry actors pose a barrier to improvements in decent work.

Demand for sustainable sugar is beginning to emerge, but is not yet matched by a willingness to pay a premium price. There is little industry-specific evidence of the cost and/or productivity benefits of more sustainable agricultural practices. Companies might be unwilling to invest in supply-chain sustainability because of the perceived competitive disadvantage this would lead to in the short term.¹⁴⁷ This highlights the need for a **cost-benefit analysis of sustainable sugarcane production**, in order to develop and disseminate the business case for change among industry actors. The ILO could draw on the work being done in the Mexican sugarcane industry under the System for Integrated Measurement and Improvement of Productivity (SIMAPRO) project, which aims to boost productivity in the sector through better workplace dialogue. This is achieved through training on productivity, health and safety at work and worker well-being. Additionally, the ILO has developed a health and safety self-assessment tool for employers in sugar mills; this could be adapted and simplified for use by smallholders.

A lack of traceability in the supply chain means that downstream actors and end-users have no clear idea of working conditions in primary production.

This is compounded by a general lack of data on the sectoral prevalence of child labour in many producing countries. Sugar is fungible and can be substituted under commodity trading contracts, regardless of its origin. Buyers whose supply chain is vertically integrated may know where their sugar comes from but, beyond the factory gates, they often have no clear idea of working conditions on outgrower plots. While some companies, such as The Coca-Cola Company (TCCC), are mapping their supply chains end-to-end and conducting their own in-country research, such efforts remain exceptional.

Reforms in trade policies and regulations may have a detrimental impact on smallholders in some producing countries.

While market liberalization is ultimately seen as beneficial to the global sugar trade, it is likely to benefit large, efficient producers, such as Brazil, to the detriment of smaller, less cost-efficient producers. Smallholders in developing countries may face reduced margins, which limit the resources available for improving production practices from a decent-work and sustainability perspective. In the light of this, producers will most likely require both **financial and technical support**, if they are to be in a position to implement more sustainable production practices.

There nevertheless appears to be an appetite for change in the industry. Many stakeholders are supporting more responsible production and procurement practices, and there are over 40 voluntary sustainability standards applicable to sugar. This denotes industry engagement and commitment to the issue, which will be invaluable in driving improvements in labour practices in global value chains.

5.4. Government capacity and leadership

Resource and capacity constraints prevent labour inspectorates from identifying and remedying incidences of child labour in sugarcane production.

In many countries, labour inspectorates do not have the staff numbers or means of transportation to conduct inspections in rural areas. In Bolivia, there are only 10 labour inspectors devoted to enforcing child-labour laws.¹⁴⁸ Inspectors working in the sugar-producing districts of Santa Cruz and Bermejo are reportedly forced to rely on taxis to access sugarcane plantations, because they do not have their own vehicles.¹⁴⁹ The Brazilian government recognized the challenges of enforcing labour laws over a vast territory and responded by setting up special mobile inspection units. These have played an important role in identifying child labour, measuring progress and informing policy development.

¹⁴⁶ ILO, *Looking for Answers: Researching Hazardous Work of Children*, 2014.

¹⁴⁷ Jenkins, Beth, Baptista, Priya and Porth, Marli, Harvard Kennedy School, *Collaborating for Change in Sugar Production: Building Blocks for Sustainability at Scale*, 2015.

¹⁴⁸ USDOL, *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour*, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Baas, Laura, *Child Labour on Sugar Cane Plantations in Bolivia: A Worst Form of Child Labour*, 2009.



Leadership from the government is essential in tackling child labour. Political will is required to develop a comprehensive policy framework, facilitate interagency collaboration and allocate sufficient resources to address the issue. It is widely acknowledged that the Brazilian government's integrated policy response to child labour played a key role in reducing its incidence. Between 1992 and 2008, the number of children aged between seven and 15 engaged in economic activity dropped by 18 per cent and school attendance rose from 85 per cent to 97 per cent.¹⁵⁰ The UCW notes that the government's approach was founded on "three complementary pillars: improvements in the availability and quality of the school system, conditional income transfers to families aimed at giving them effective conditions and incentives to maintain their children's attendance in school, and a number of national and local policies and programmes implemented to eliminate child labour."¹⁵¹ This approach to the problem is likely to yield more sustainable results because it recognizes that child labour is not a discrete issue; rather, it is a consequence of an array of socio-economic issues that must be addressed at a national level.

Initiatives need to be integrated into different governments' national development agendas and also require inter-departmental collaboration (see example from Philippines under Section 5.6 below).

5.5. Social dialogue

Social dialogue in the sugar sector is weak and fragmented. Union penetration tends to be concentrated at the mill level, with low levels of worker representation in primary production. Agricultural workers may be self-employed, informal labourers or unpaid family helpers, and hence may not be covered by collective-bargaining structures. This may militate against improvements in wages and other working conditions at the farm level. However, many mills are vertically integrated or have long-term relationships with outgrowers, which provides an opportunity for existing unions to reach agricultural labourers. A good example of effective social dialogue is the active role played by unions in parts of Brazil, such as São Paulo state, where there

is an established culture of collective bargaining.¹⁵² The role that Brazilian workers' organizations played in the development of the 2009 tripartite "National Commitment" to improve conditions in the sugarcane sector also demonstrates the advances in decent work that can be made through such dialogue.¹⁵³

5.6. Lessons learned regarding child-labour initiatives

Many efforts have been made to address child labour in sugarcane production, but these have been fragmented and of limited long-term impact. In the Philippines, such efforts have included an ILO-IPEC Timebound Programme on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; a USDOL-funded project led by World Vision to remove children from work in the sugarcane fields and enrol them in school; a Coca-Cola-funded programme to build schools in rural areas; and a voluntary code of conduct on child labour signed by the government and the Sugar Industry Foundation.¹⁵⁴

Child labourers switching sector highlights the need for cross-sector cooperation/area-based approaches. One very significant lesson learned from analysing different initiatives is that the impact of these programmes has been limited: an IPEC review found that there had been a 30 per cent reduction in child labour in the sugarcane industry, but roughly the same proportion of children (26 per cent) had simply switched sectors and were now working in service industries.¹⁵⁵ This shows that sustainable results can only be achieved by adopting a cross-sectoral, landscape-style approach taking in children working in different industries, rather than an individual industry approach.

A systemic, rather than a programmatic, approach is needed to address the supply and demand-side drivers of child labour. Short-term initiatives that focus on a single issue, such as education, do not have a demonstrable long-term impact on child labour. As noted above, several initiatives were implemented in the Philippines to incentivize children working in sugarcane to attend school, by offering

¹⁵⁰ UCW, *Understanding the Brazilian success in reducing child labour: empirical evidence and policy lessons*, 2011.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Moraes, M, *Análise do mercado de trabalho formal do setor sucroalcooleiro no Brasil*, 2007.

¹⁵³ DIEESE, *Nota técnica sobre importância da organização sindical dos trabalhadores*, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Schwarzbach and Richardson, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ ILO, *Tracer Study: Measuring Longer Term Impact on Children and Families of Interventions Against Child Labour*, 2012.



school supplies and free meals. Improvements in school attendance lasted only for as long as the initiatives were in place; in fact, by the end of the programme, school attendance was lower than it had been at the start.¹⁵⁶ Children reported that the reason they did not attend was because the schools were too remote and their families could not afford the costs.

Target groups are difficult to reach in many countries. Interventions will need to meet the specific needs of these target groups if they are to have an impact in the long term. The sugarcane labour force is often transitory and informal. Many of the workers are migrants who do not speak the national language, which prevents them from benefitting from mainstream education systems. Mobile schools, such as those set up in Maharashtra by UNICEF to teach migrant children, could bridge this gap.

The design and implementation of initiatives often lacks clear worker involvement, despite the existence of trade unions, cooperatives and small producers' organizations which could facilitate their participation. To be more effective, future initiatives should aim to involve these agencies from the outset.

5.7. Decent work

The lack of decent work opportunities for adults and young people presents a key challenge for many sugar producing countries. Many are developing countries with high rates of unemployment, particularly in rural areas. The national unemployment rate in India, for instance, is 8.4 per cent, but it is higher among 15-24 year olds, at 10.4 per cent. This has a direct impact on the incidence of hazardous child labour.

Partnerships with the private sector would be helpful in creating better labour-market opportunities for young people. Vocational training and apprenticeship programmes for school leavers could help prevent them from engaging in hazardous work activities and provide better long-term employment prospects.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.





6. Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, we have identified five broad areas of intervention in which ILO should begin engaging with industry actors and social partners to promote decent work in the sugarcane sector. The focus is on child labour (as requested in the scope of work for this research). We note that the ILO has a

wealth of experience in combating child labour and would be well placed to build on these suggestions by developing more integrated recommendations which address some of the root causes of discrimination and forced labour, and promote freedom of association and collective bargaining.







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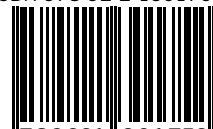
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