

DRAFT WORKING PAPER
PREPARED FOR
UNICEF CONFERENCE
EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
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Impact of the
Economic Crisis on
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WHAT THE ECONOMIC CRISIS MEANS FOR CHILD LABOUR

DR JUNE KANE AM, INDEPENDENT
EXPERT, CHILD EXPLOITATION AND
PROTECTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No.138) sets the age below which children should not be in work at 15 (or 14 if a country's economic status requires that in the short term). Two years before they reach this minimum legal age, children can do 'light work' -- non-hazardous work for no more than 14 hours a week, and that does not interfere with schooling. Children under the minimum working age who are engaged in more than light work are in child labour. UNICEF additionally considers a child to be in child labour if they do domestic work for 28 hours or more a week.

There is also agreement that some child labour is so dangerous that it must be eliminated as a matter of priority and children withdrawn from it immediately. This includes slavery, trafficking, prostitution and pornography, forced labour and recruitment into militia, as well as occupations that harm the child's safety, morals or health. These 'worst forms' are set out in detail in ILO Convention, 1999 (No.138) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Working children between the minimum age for work and 18, whose work does not fall into any of the categories of child labour or its worst forms, are regular (child) workers. It is important to note that, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in addition to their rights as workers under national and international labour laws, children in this group should also enjoy all their rights as children.

All the countries of East Asia, except Myanmar and Timor-Leste, have ratified ILO Conventions No.138 and 182. Of the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), Papua New Guinea ratified both in 2000 and Fiji in 2003.

Despite these international agreements and national efforts, though, the ILO estimates that in 2004 there were about 218 million children in the world who were in child labour or the worst forms of child labour. Three quarters of the children were between the ages of five and 15 and considered to be in child labour; 52 million children were between the ages of 15 and 18 and so legally able to work, but in hazardous or unacceptable occupations (worst forms of child labour). According to ILO estimates, some 1.2 million children had been trafficked domestically or across borders and were still in a situation of exploitation. Approximately 250,000 of these were in Asia and the Pacific.

Children in the region have long been exploited in agriculture, manufacturing and domestic services, as well as construction, fisheries, hawking and other street-based activities. The sexual exploitation of children, a worst form of child labour, also remains a problem in the region. Trafficking of children into various forms of exploitation has become widespread in the past decade and is inextricably linked to increased migratory flows and in recent years a regime of fear for national security that has seen controls on migration become tighter. The recruitment of children as soldiers

or in other roles allied to the militia is also of concern, as armed conflict in some countries of the region continues or has re-emerged. And despite efforts to tackle drug abuse, dealing and trafficking in Asia and the Pacific, the market for illicit drugs is thriving and children are regularly exploited as drug dealers or couriers. Very young children are also exploited in begging and children may be used in crime such as burglary or picking pockets.

By 2006, the service sector, which includes subsistence street trade activities, had overtaken agriculture as the main sector of employment in East Asia, although agriculture remains the major employer in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

Child labour at times of crisis

There is a growing but still embryonic body of literature on the links between economic crisis and child labour. Studies understandably focus on specific shocks at specific times on specific groups of children and so do not offer a model that can – or should – be applied across the board.

Additionally, there is widespread common wisdom that economic crisis will automatically result in increased child labour. This is based largely on the perception that child labour is a direct result of poverty, and some commentators argue that, since economic crises deepens poverty, child labour will inevitably increase.

The fact that not all poor families send their children into labour – even as their financial status deteriorates – shows, however, that this direct cause and effect model is over-simplified. In fact, while poverty is often a factor in household decisions relating to the allocation of children's time, it is rarely determinant. Many other factors come into play.

This paper argues that the key to understanding why child labour occurs is understanding the whole range of individual and cumulative vulnerability factors that underlie the decisions families (and sometimes children themselves) make on the allocation of the child's time – whether the child should be in school/training, remain idle or begin work (in the case of child labour, prematurely).

While shocks of various kinds may influence these decisions, there are generally factors already in place or that arise that make it likely that some families will consider the option of child labour while others will not. It is also true that there is an un-measurable and as yet undocumented 'human' factor that makes it likely that some parents are more likely to include child labour or work as an option in their decisions while others reject this outright.

Vulnerability factors

In relation to what can be measured and is well documented, it is known that ‘vulnerability factors’ occur not only at the level of the family but also at the level of the individual child, the community and the workplace. The paper outlines these and suggests that some are ‘universal’ and apply to all children in a certain category, while others occur in relation to contextual realities.

In relation to workplace factors, in particular, the paper points out that the sectors in which child labour is to be found are not random. They exhibit particular characteristics and/or function in a particular regulatory regime that makes them a factor in increasing the likelihood that they will draw in child labour.

The paper notes that most cases of child labour are to be found in the informal economy, often in the hidden and most hazardous forms of work. By considering the child labour market as an informal economy or an underground economy, the policy implications of what the crisis means to child labour will be different.

There are in fact many parallels between child labour issues and the underground economy. They both are designed to escape detection and therefore data are hard to come by. They both thrive in times of crisis. The onset of crisis results in the swelling of the underground economy to avoid taxes, promote illegal activities such as ‘moonlighting’, brokering deals at non-regulated prices, and a dependence on cash activities. One of the most revealing features of the child labour market is that it is neither a ‘residual’ nor a ‘disorganized’ market. It is a highly organized and fragile part of the modern economy.

The likely impact of economic crisis and food price rises is to drive people underground. To avoid high prices and the prospect of low wages, many workers are driven into informal sector employment. As a result, official data may not support the conclusion that a perceptible shift has occurred in the child labour market but the reality may be quite different. A rise in the informal sector may result in a steady flow of child labour to keep wage rates in the informal sector as low as possible.

Economic crisis in general leads to an informalization of labour markets, and informal sectors are more likely than formal sectors to seek out and employ child labour. If other risk factors relating to labour market regulation and policing are also present, then this produces a potentially high-risk situation.

Child, family, community and workplace risk factors may not individually result in a child entering child labour. As they accumulate, though, the risk increases. Many children live in a situation of high

risk and one trigger – for example a death in the family that reduces family income unexpectedly – may be enough to ‘push the child over the edge’ into child labour.

For any child labour elimination actions to be totally effective, they should be based on a thorough evaluation of vulnerability, ideally at the level of the individual child but at least at the level of the individual family. This does not preclude, of course, broader-brush actions that target behaviour or attitude change, community-level risk reduction or workplace prevention.

Movement and risk

Another important factor to consider in any discussion on child labour is the mobility of the family. There is scant research on the impact of crisis on family movement, however it is likely that families that have out-migrated (temporarily or permanently) may consider return to their family/place of origin as one way of coping with crisis. This can affect child labour in a number of ways, for example: families who move will of necessity remove children from their current school and, at times of crisis, may not enrol them in a new school after relocation but rather send them out to earn money.

Conversely families who have the means, particularly if they live in countries that border neighbours that are more affluent, may consider migrating if their circumstances take a negative turn or they fear that they may not be able to cope.

The paper stresses recent understanding that, in non-crisis times, it is generally not the ‘poorest of the poor’ who migrate but families who have enough money, hope and expectation to believe that relocation will bring them better returns or opportunities. To this extent, ‘enough’ in this case can in itself represent a vulnerability factor to movement and, for some groups of vulnerable children, movement is in itself a risk factor for trafficking. This is an important consideration when planning policies and programmes aimed at increasing family income.

It is also important to remember that the most mobile population is aged 15 to 24 and it not coincidence that increased migration in Asia has coincided with what has been called ‘the Asian Youth Bulge’ – a marked increase in the youth population from the 1980s onwards.

Family coping decisions

At times of crisis, in making decisions about the allocation of children’s time to child labour, parents are faced a number of choices. They may choose to do nothing at all and retain the *status quo*. This is

the 'default' option and will most likely be chosen when there are at least expectations of other variables changing – for example knowledge that the crisis is likely to be short-lived.

Alternatively, they may continue sending a child to school but additionally require her/him to bring in an income. The paper suggests that this is a very plausible option because it allows the parents to 'have their cake and eat it'. However it is risky because it might result in the child under-performing at school, dropping out of school or finding her/himself in hazardous labour or indeed the worst forms (girls, especially, may find that the 'easiest' source of income is prostitution).

Parents may choose to send an idle child (of appropriate age) to school. This may seem unlikely but, if a child is doing nothing to contribute to the family but is rather a cost, and a school feeding or grants programme is brought into operation, it may be more cost-effective for the family to send the child to school.

It is possible also that the family might choose to send an idle child (of appropriate age) to legitimate work. This is an optimal solution because it sees an unemployed minor of working age in employment. Unfortunately, one possible option may be to send an idle child into child labour. This is a very likely occurrence, since the child is a cost to the family.

Where a child of working age is still in school, parents may choose to remove her/him from school and send her/him into legitimate work. This is a real possibility for children in the final years of secondary education or for children one or two years below this age if paid apprenticeships or transition programmes are available.

Parents might also remove a child from school in order to send her/him into child labour. There are no clear indicators of how likely this is, however it becomes more likely as vulnerability factors accumulate and is accelerated if trigger factors come into play.

Parents might remove a child from school to become idle. Although this may seem unlikely, it is a possible response if the costs of the child's schooling become a burden and the parents do not wish, or are unable to send a child to work or into labour.

Parents might remove a child from school to replace an adult family member who moves into employment. This is a likely choice especially in families that run a family business or smallholding, or have young children who need care. While both girls and boys are at risk, girls especially are likely to be taken out of school to care for children and do housework if it is the mother who finds employment.

They might remove a child (of appropriate age – most likely primary or lower secondary) from child labour to return them to school. This may seem particularly unlikely, however it may be indicated if the returns from school feeding programmes or grants outweigh the returns from the child's labour.

They might remove a child from child labour to become idle. This is perhaps not very likely, although it may be that an employer would put pressure on a family to remove a child if the work s/he is doing becomes unsatisfactory; there are less costly alternatives; or the family is required to do so as a condition of receiving assistance. One concern is that children removed from child labour may, rather than remain idle, be sent into a worst form of child labour because demand exists (for example, girls especially into sexual exploitation, boys and girls into hazardous work, children of both sexes into the hands of traffickers).

Finally, they might seek out opportunities to send a child who is already in child labour (or not) to another place in the expectations of higher income/lower (medium-term) costs to the family. This is particularly likely if a child is already in child labour and there is a family or community tradition of movement for work.

Recommendations

The paper makes a number of recommendations:

1. There remains an overwhelming need for comprehensive, systematic national data on child labour, fully disaggregated by the child's age, sex, (dis)ability, educational profile family circumstances, and sector worked /risk factors observed.
2. Data and information must be shared transparently and in a form that allows researchers to analyse raw data, test hypotheses and draw conclusions; it is not enough to provide only synthesized data and summaries.
3. Investment in vulnerability profiling is money well spent. While it is acknowledged that all children have a right to protection and that ultimately the best protection is blanket protection with no 'holes' in it, it is also true that urgent action needs to be targeted at those children and families that are most at risk.
4. Safety nets are vital to cushion families against making decisions to send children out to work; countries that already have safety nets in place should respond to the current crises by scaling these up; where safety nets are not in place, these should be initiated for longer-term resilience to future shocks. Safety nets include: cash transfers – conditional/unconditional; food distribution;

price subsidies; agricultural inputs; family benefits; childcare support; public works; health, asset and life insurance; school-based food programmes; education scholarships; and micro-finance.

5. Responses should be targeted to newly vulnerable populations in the first instance – especially in urban areas and very young children.
6. Making cash transfers conditional on all school-aged children attending school is strongly indicated in efforts to stave off child labour; transfers in cash are preferable to transfers in kind because they allow the family freedom to use the funds according to their specific needs.
7. Food distribution proper is an option only where national supplies permit this. Cash transfers that allow families to vary their eating habits to adjust to available foodstuffs (ideally local produce) are preferable.
8. Commentators stress the importance of increasing agricultural inputs, in particular investment in small-scale agriculture (seeds, fertilizers, irrigation); however, it is important to note that this might also provide incentives for rural families, particularly those involved in agriculture, to exploit children as agricultural labourers.
9. Where families increase household income through female employment, it is vital that enhanced (even temporary) childcare services are available and accessible to women who have children below school age or any other children who need care (sick children, for example); where communities do not have government or private childcare places already, alternative schemes can quickly be put into place.
10. School-based programmes (also for children in vocational training or other educational venues for children) including school feeding programmes and take-home rations not only safeguard a child's nutrition but also provide an incentive for the child to attend school.
11. Children in secondary grades should be prioritized for fee waivers, scholarships and grants for clothes, books, transport etc because children in this group are generally a higher cost on the family and so are particularly at risk of being taken out of school to find work.
12. For other demand-side programmes in secondary schools, targeting should be done at the level of the student or household. In lower primary programmes, geographic targeting selecting schools in poor areas may suffice.
13. Vital to protecting children who are already studying and working, and those who begin some work while still in school, is thorough school-based monitoring. Teachers, school principals and other educational staff need rapid training on how to recognize signs of a child potentially having

started work or increasing workload. A system of alerts to protection or social services should be in place and used to report cases where children are at risk.

14. Community vigilance or equivalent systems are well placed to observe children and families at risk and recognize signs of potential child labour/risk to children. Where such schemes do not exist, they should be put in place if possible or alternative child-focused groupings be considered for an enhanced role in child protection.
15. Upgraded labour monitoring – both governmental and through workers’ organizations and employer groups – is also important at times of crisis to identify children moving into child labour (including the worst forms). Capacity building may be necessary.
16. Social monitoring is important and social services already in place to identify and protect children at risk should receive additional support where possible.
17. Policy and programmes should be regularly monitored and assessed to make sure they are working and not increasing risk or having negative effects.
18. Programmes that reinforce the family’s ability to earn an income or use available funds better are a longer-term necessity given that, at times of crisis, markets are likely to be less open and easy to penetrate. If they are initiated, and even where they already exist, there should be a check that any small enterprises set up are appropriate for the market in crisis conditions.
19. Youth employment schemes, including apprenticeships, subsidies to employers, accelerated school-to-work transition schemes, ‘work for dole’ schemes and subsidies for diversification training and NFE for those young people who need to upgrade their basic skills are all important in the medium- to long-term to reduce the likelihood of child labour and, in some instances may also be a short-term option.
20. Accompanying all the actions outlined above should be immediate and sustained ICE initiatives on the importance of education and the risks of child labour. These should be both general and targeted.

Where any of the responses outlined does not exist or is not possible in the short-term, they should nevertheless be considered as longer-term options. In the medium-term, it will be vital to regularly monitor both the impact on families of continuing economic crisis and of the programmes that have been put in place. The paper argues that vulnerability is not a static phenomenon but constantly shifting. In terms of family choices, also, there will be a progression that grows out of the family’s purchasing power. In economic terms, increased prices will lead to a decrease in real purchasing

power that, as a result of economic crisis, will also equate to reduced nominal purchasing power. Together these lead to income and substitution effects over many rounds.

The challenge is that it is impossible to identify or quantify how many 'rounds' a family will pass through before making a decision about the allocation of children's time, and that decision in itself may be reviewed through successive rounds.

In short, the vulnerability profile assigned to a family or an individual child as programme planning begins will shift and will need to be reassessed at regular intervals, as the family also goes through different stages of response to the challenges of crisis.

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I. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT CRISIS AND CHILD LABOUR

“Child labour increases as a result of the global food crisis”¹

“As food prices rise, many families have been forced to pull their children out of school and send them to work, simply to survive”

“Families are pulling girls out of school as they need to send them to work”

“Parents pull children from school and send them to work...we will start to see more incidences of child labour”.

These are just some of the many statements made since the beginning of 2008 reflecting a general concern that the impact of food price rises and latterly the worsening global economic crisis will impact most severely on children. NGOs, in particular, have been vocal in including in their statements concerns that parents will pull children out of school and put them prematurely into work, effectively resulting in an increase in child labour.

These concerns are based on reports of this already occurring in some countries, particularly in South Asia and Africa,² but the evidence remains largely anecdotal. So is the link between crisis (shock) and child labour demonstrable and is it inevitable?

The conclusion that economic crisis will automatically result in increased child labour is based largely on the perception that child labour is a result of poverty and that economic crises deepen poverty. This is to over-simplify the issue. There is no doubt that the food price rises and global economic crisis of 2008 will have a devastating effect on the world’s poor. By October 2008, it was estimated that the food price hike alone would push an extra 100 million people into poverty.³ That same month, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Director-General⁴ said that the global financial crisis could increase world unemployment by an estimated 20 million women and men, pushing many families below the poverty line and threatening family survival for many.

Poverty is of course a factor in household decisions relating to the allocation of children’s time (to education and training, work or ‘idleness’) and must be taken into account when considering the potential impact of economic crises on child labour. However, as this paper will attempt to show, poverty is important but not necessarily determinant in decisions taken by families to put a child to work.

1.1 The evidence to date

There is a growing but still embryonic body of literature on the links between economic crisis and child labour. This understandably focuses on specific shocks at specific times on specific groups of children and so does not offer a model that can – or should – be applied across the board. Moreover, the conclusions of studies carried out to date indicate a need for caution in making blanket conclusions about the impact of any individual occurrence on levels of child labour or school enrolment. For example, a 2008 in-depth study by the Understanding Children’s Work (UCW) project⁵ into the impact of different kinds of shocks – in this case drought, floods and crop failure – on child labour in Cambodian villages concluded that “household responses to shocks depend considerably on the specific type of shock encountered”. In this case, crop failure reduced school attendance and increased child labour; droughts were less relevant; and floods had no significant impact on child labour or school attendance at all.

The results vary considerably across the study samples. A 1997 study on rural India⁶ demonstrated that parents withdrew their children from school when facing a decline in crop income; in 2003 an analysis⁷ of Guatemalan families suggested that they adjusted ‘the activity status’ of children in response to idiosyncratic shocks and natural disasters, often by leaving children in school but requiring them additionally to take on work.

Macroeconomic shocks and political instability have also been demonstrated to play a role in determining child labour supply and school attendance. A 1999 study of 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries indicated that macroeconomic shock in that region had “played a crucial role in slowing down school attainment since the early 1980s”.⁸ The effect was particularly significant for girls, who are likely to replace their mothers in household duties as women enter the labour force to boost family income. A 2000 report⁹ on the East Asian crisis notes a drop in enrolment rates and a rise in child labour among 10-14 year-olds in the Philippines. The impact of the crisis was also noted as resulting in increased exploitation of girls in Indonesia and Thailand.

Although there is a growing body of evidence, then, that shocks of various kinds may impact negatively on both school enrolment and the level of child labour, it is clear that the links are far more complex than simple cause and effect. The 2008 UCW study rightly concludes that, “The existing literature...has not assessed the differential impact of the various shocks that can hit households. Instead, shocks have been treated as a general category of negative events affecting the household, while in reality they are of course different in nature and in their likely consequences. Better policy formulation and targeting would require the identification of the shocks that are most damaging to children’s welfare in terms of education and participation in child labour”.¹⁰ This

confirms but nuances the same authors' conclusion in an earlier report¹¹ that “there is no established evidence on the extent to which children’s labour supply is actually used as a risk coping strategy and/or as a buffer against shocks”.

1.2 Prioritizing child protection

What all the extant studies do, therefore, is underline the importance of taking a protection approach to the well-being of children at times when families may be making decisions about coping strategies, for whatever reason. Whether faced with ‘idiosyncratic shocks’ (unemployment, the death of a family member, for example – often called ‘trigger factors’), natural disasters (floods, droughts), or macroeconomic shocks, families may include children’s education and work in the mix of solutions they consider when they assess how they will cope with changed circumstances.

Not all families will do this, however, so it is vital to (i) pinpoint those households that are most likely to consider the child’s education or work as part of a coping strategy (so-called ‘at-risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ households), and (ii) fully understand the underlying context in which these decisions are taken and the range of factors at play. Much more research will be required before this can be mapped out adequately. Moreover this macro analysis can only truly be carried out at national or even local level and is not attempted in this paper.

1.3 A call for comprehensive data

Analysis has been hampered by the paucity of reliable data on child labour and this paper, like almost all reports on child labour, must begin with a call for improved data collection and comprehensive studies of child labour to be undertaken at national levels. The data that do exist are, at best, indicative because they are based on samples that do not and perhaps cannot take into account the complexity of child labour, which is not a homogenous problem. Studies generally focus on a particular location or target group and reproduce data selectively, so that it is almost impossible and indeed potentially misleading to build up a bigger picture from the information that is available.

Above all, if the impact of shocks as well as national policies and action programmes are to be accurately assessed, it is vital to collect data regularly over time and according to parameters that allow trends to be identified in detail.

Given the gaps in national data available publicly, this paper does not attempt to give a country-by-country analysis or policy recommendations but to present general lines of argument that can be debated nationally and form a useful basis for policy discussion.

For these reasons, this paper remains to a certain extent speculative, although the hypotheses put forward are grounded in research and accumulated experience globally in this area. Because of this –

and also to ensure a child rights-based approach to possible solutions – the proposals for policy and programme responses at this time focus on prevention and protection of children at risk rather than eliminating the problem of child labour overall. That is a longer-term task that is under way in the region and that must be accelerated given current economic threats.

II: CHILD LABOUR IN EAST ASIA¹²

2. THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is a complex issue and any analysis must take account of this complexity if it is to lead to effective policy and programme responses. It is useful to begin, therefore, with clarification of the definitions of child labour, worst forms of child labour, light work and child work used in this paper and on the scope and nature of child labour in East Asia.

2.1 Definitions and concepts

Child labour and light work

The ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No.138) sets the age below which children should not be in work at 15 (or 14 if a country's economic status requires that in the short term).

Two years before they reach this minimum legal age for work (that is, when they are 12 or 13) children can do 'light work'. Some countries define 'light work' through consultations among government, workers' organizations and employers' associations, but generally the International Labour Organization (ILO) considers it to be non-hazardous work for no more than 14 hours a week, and that does not interfere with the child's schooling.

Children under the minimum working age who are engaged in more than light work are in child labour. UNICEF uses these same parameters but, additionally, considers a child to be in child labour if they do domestic work for 28 hours or more a week. This is an important consideration because many children, especially girls, even if they are enrolled in school, spend long hours working unpaid in family businesses (including in agriculture) or working around the house, doing housekeeping or looking after siblings. Although in moderation this can be a valuable way of learning and gaining self-esteem, children whose schooling suffers as a result, or whose health is compromised, must be considered to be effectively in a situation of child labour.

All the countries of East Asia, except Myanmar and Timor-Leste, have ratified ILO Convention No.138. Of the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), Papua New Guinea ratified in 2000 and Fiji in 2003.

Worst forms of child labour

The international community has agreed that child labour should be eliminated as soon as possible, and the International Labour Conference has set a target date of 2016 for this to be achieved. Additionally, though, there is agreement that some child labour is so dangerous that it must be eliminated as a matter of priority and that children must be withdrawn from it immediately. These

‘worst forms of child labour’ are defined in the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182) as:

- a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Individual countries decide which work or elements of work fall under category (d) and are ‘hazardous’ but categories (a) to (c) are considered ‘unconditional’ and are not open to negotiation.

All the countries of East Asia, except Myanmar and Timor-Leste, have ratified ILO Convention No.182. Papua New Guinea ratified in 2000 and Fiji in 2003.¹³

Child work

Working children between the minimum age for work and 18, whose work does not fall into any of the categories of child labour or its worst forms, are regular (child) workers. It is important to note that, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in addition to their rights as workers under national and international labour laws, children in this group should also enjoy all their rights as children.

2.2 The numbers involved

Despite international agreements and national efforts, the ILO estimates that in 2004¹⁴ there were about 218 million children in the world who were in child labour or the worst forms of child labour. Three quarters of the children were between the ages of five and 15 and considered to be in child labour; 52 million children were between the ages of 15 and 18 and so legally able to work, but in hazardous or unacceptable occupations (worst forms of child labour). According to ILO estimates,¹⁵ some 1.2 million children had been trafficked domestically or across borders and were still in a situation of exploitation. Approximately 250,000 of these were in Asia and the Pacific.

The ILO estimates¹⁶ that the number of children in labour globally fell by 11 per cent between 2000 and 2004, with the number of children in hazardous labour showing an even sharper decline – a 33 per cent fall in the 5-14 year age group and a 26 per cent fall in the number of 5-17 year-olds in this category.¹⁷ On the back of these statistics, and taking other indicators and trends into account, the ILO concluded that eliminating the worst forms of child labour could be achieved by 2016 if effort is sustained.

In Asia and the Pacific, however, progress has been less impressive. The number of 5-14 year-olds in child labour in the region fell by a little over 6 per cent, from 127.3 million in 2000 to 122.3 million in 2004. The ILO points to large numbers of children between the ages of 5 and 14 in the region in hazardous labour (6.2 million) and unconditional worst forms (6.6 million).

These absolute figures should be taken in the context of a declining child population in the region that contributed to an extremely small decrease (0.6 per cent) in the *rate* of children between the ages of 5 and 14 in economic activity,¹⁸ from 19.4 per cent to 18.8 per cent – the smallest decrease globally.

There are no sources available that investigate whether, or to what extent, this slower decline may be attributed to the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. A report on the impact of the crisis on child labour,¹⁹ focusing particularly on Thailand and Indonesia, was not conclusive but suggested that the impact was in fact as likely to be positive as it was negative. While the report pointed to increased poverty levels and a fall in school attendance augmenting the *potential supply* of child labour (ie the number of children at risk, not necessarily the number actually entering child labour) and the closure of formal sector businesses resulting in an informalization of the economy, growing the sectors where child labour is more likely to be used, it also noted that some analysts considered that economic sectors affected by the crisis were likely to let child labourers go; that because of the economic slow-down children would not have to work over-time; and that a lack of economic opportunities in urban areas would lead to reverse migration that might see children moving into ‘safer’ forms of rural work. The report points out, however, that there are little or no data to substantiate any of the theories and that reliable statistics – always difficult to find – are even more difficult to obtain when they relate to a process that needs to be measured over time.

The ILO statistics are the most reliable estimates available, since they are compiled by careful analysis of national census and survey exercises and processes of extrapolation based on observation and experience of child labour. However accurate figures are essentially impossible to ascertain: child labour and especially the worst forms are in most countries illegal and therefore clandestine. Children in labour are often ‘invisible’ and, even when they are ‘visible’, their situation is generally not reported and so not reflected in official statistics. This is especially true of children in the worst

forms of child labour, where not only labour laws but also other laws (such as abduction, trafficking, exploitation, rape, abuse, violence etc) may be broken. The data offered here, therefore, are largely indicative of the scope of child labour in the countries of East Asia and useful for identifying trends in comparable datasets over time. The table is incomplete as a result of gaps in the data.

Table 1: Children involved in child labour, 2005/6

	5 – 14 yrs Total %	5 – 14 yrs boys%	5 – 14 yrs girls%	Population under-15 2005 (thousands)	Estimated number of children in child labour
Cambodia	45	45	45	5,264	2,360,000
China	-	-	-	283,608	?
Fiji	-	-	-	263.2	?
Indonesia	4	5	4	64,212.4	2,560,000
DPR Korea	-	-	-	8,909.4	?
Lao PDR	25	24	26	2,268.6	560,000
Malaysia	-	-	-	8,069.8	?
Mongolia	18	19	17	751.4	130,000
Myanmar	-	-	-	13,104	?
Papua New Guinea	-	-	-	2,476.6	?
Philippines	12	13	11	30,625.2	3,670,000
Thailand	8	8	8	13,671	1,090,000
Timor Leste	4	4	4	495	19,000
Viet Nam	16	15	16	25,160	4,020,000

* Source: Columns 1-3: UNICEF MICS3 database (www.childinfo.org)

Population figures: UNDP: Human Development Report 2008. Please note that these relate to the total under-15 population, including 0-4 year-olds. The calculated estimates of child labour are therefore purely indicative because of incompatibility of available data. They have also been rounded down to the nearest 10,000.

2.3 The geography of child labour

Children in Asia and the Pacific have long been exploited in agriculture, manufacturing and domestic services, as well as construction, fisheries, hawking and other street-based activities. The sexual

exploitation of children, considered an unconditional worst form of child labour, also remains a problem in the region. Trafficking of children into various forms of exploitation has become widespread in the past decade and is inextricably linked to increased migratory flows and in recent years a regime of fear for national security that has seen controls on migration become tighter.²⁰ The recruitment of children as soldiers, couriers, servants or in other roles allied to the militia is also of concern, as armed conflict in some countries of the region continues or has re-emerged. And despite efforts to tackle drug abuse, dealing and trafficking in Asia and the Pacific, the market for illicit drugs is thriving and children are regularly exploited as drug dealers or couriers. Very young children are also exploited in begging and children may be used in petty crime such as burglary or picking pockets, as well as more serious crimes including, for girls especially, involvement in illegal prostitution. Although these activities may be against the law, the children forced to become involved in them by adult 'handlers' should be considered as victims of exploitation and not criminals.

While this general description of child labour in the region holds for all the countries under consideration, there are also specificities in each country in relation to the sectors in which child labour is to be found:

The **Cambodia** Child Labour Survey of 2001 indicated that 45 per cent of boys and 44.6 per cent of girls between the ages of 5 and 14 are in child labour; 8.6 per cent of these children participate in the labour force without attending school, especially in rural areas.²¹ The ILO reports that 76.5 per cent of child labourers aged 5-14 work in agriculture; 5.8 per cent in the industrial sector; and 17.7 per cent in services. Younger children below the age of 9 are more likely to work in agriculture than 10-14 year-olds. Boys are more likely to be employed in agriculture than girls are, and less in services. An overwhelming percentage of children in the 5-14 age group are unpaid family workers (89.9 per cent boys and 90.8 per cent girls). Among children aged 10 to 14, economically active children are slightly less likely to be attending school than children who are not economically active. Children from the poorest households are more likely to be engaged in the labour force without attending school.

Child domestic labour is recognized as a worst form of child labour in Cambodia. A 2003 Child Domestic Worker Survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics of Cambodia concluded that 27,950 children between the ages of 7 and 17 were in child domestic labour in Phnom Penh alone. This was almost 10 per cent of all children in that age group. Most of the children surveyed in 2004 had families living in Phnom Penh; some had come from other towns or provinces and a few had families in Viet Nam and Thailand. Some 40 per cent of the children came from families with more than four children.

The sexual exploitation of children remains a concern in Cambodia, differentiated into an irregular 'market' for young children of both sexes by foreign tourists and a local child prostitution market that is essentially an extension of the adult sex sector, drawing in mostly female adolescents. Girls in this age group may also risk being trafficked into Thailand for sexual purposes. Very young infants are 'rented out' to female traffickers who take them to beg on the streets of Bangkok. Cambodia is a member of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT).

Despite strong government commitment to address the problem of child labour in Cambodia, and strenuous efforts to put in place frameworks and tools to achieve this, Cambodia is at this time unlikely to reach child labour/worst form elimination goals by 2016.

China has set the minimum legal working age at 16 and additionally considers adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 to be 'juvenile workers', with restricted access to hazardous sectors or activities. Although the numbers of children not enrolled in school in 2006 were high, the *rate* of children out of school was only 1 per cent between 2000 and 2005.²² The ILO estimated in December 2007 that China was making promising progress in moving towards the 2016 elimination goal.

Nevertheless, the (non-governmental) China Labour Bulletin reports instances of child labour in China in a number of areas.²³ Children under the age of 16 can be found in small enterprises in towns and villages, including coalmines, brick factories, weaving and clothing factories. These are potentially hazardous and may constitute worst forms of child labour. Children who drop out of school early may be taken to irregular paid work away from home, for example in itinerant construction crews, in child domestic labour, doing odd jobs in restaurants, hairdressing salons or shops.

The majority of rural children are engaged in family businesses: household chores, farming and animal husbandry especially. Some accompany adult family members into cities and towns to engage in trade or commerce. Although China's labour laws do not permit the hiring of under-16s as apprentices, this category of child labourers does exist. There are also reports of 'work-study' programmes organized by schools that raise income by sending children into work seasonally, for example 11-15 year-olds from the mountainous areas of Hunan, Guangxi and Guangdong provinces are sent to work in toy and handicrafts factories to earn money for their school fees.

The US Department of Labour has reported that, "The American Embassy in Beijing notes that most independent observers agree with the assessment of Chinese officials that China's industrial child labour problem is relatively minor. On the other hand, some China-watchers infer growing child labour problems in China, particularly in areas around Hong Kong, based on a high drop-out

rate from school and the rapid expansion of foreign investment in export-oriented enterprises. Meanwhile, an official from the Chinese Ministry of Labour admitted that the employment of children was ‘very serious’ in China...News reports alluding to possible child labour problems in China are anecdotal in nature, providing details on specific investigations of factory fires and other disasters where children were present. These involve a range of export industries including garments/textiles, fireworks and toys. There is some anecdotal information on child labour in the footwear, electronics, handicrafts (including artificial flowers), and gun industries, but supporting evidence is not available.”²⁴

There is documented child trafficking into sexual exploitation from Yunnan Province in the south into Thailand. China is also a member of COMMIT.

Across the PICs, children are to be found in child labour in agriculture, family businesses, street-based work and the informal sector. In **Fiji**, additionally, there are reports of children being exploited in the sex sector.²⁵

UNICEF estimates that there are nearly 3 million children in the labour force in **Indonesia**, many in dangerous occupations.²⁶ Despite this substantial absolute number, a very small percentage (6 per cent between 2000 and 2005) of school-aged children are not in school. Child labour has been reported in the garment and the wood and rattan furniture industries with anecdotal reports of children labouring in other sectors, including food processing, chocolate, shrimp and seafood processing, and the export-oriented pumice stone industry.²⁷

The country has a developed framework to eliminate child labour and the worst forms of child labour, and is deemed to be making promising progress in this regard.²⁸ Human trafficking, however, remains a serious problem and each year thousands of women and children fall victim to traffickers, including into the commercial sex trade. Much of the trafficking is internal but there are also reports of human trafficking into Malaysia.

DPR Korea has strict labour laws governing child labour as well as a comprehensive child protection framework. Under the revised Youth Protection Law, owners of entertainment establishments who hire minors under the age of 19 face prison terms of up to 10 years and a fine for each minor hired. The definition of ‘entertainment establishment’ also includes facilities such as restaurants and cafes, where children (especially girls) sometimes are hired illegally as prostitutes. As part of a campaign to eradicate child prostitution and sexual offences against minors, in 2000 the government enacted the Child Protection against Sexual Offences Law. This established a maximum sentence of 20 years’ imprisonment for the sale of the sexual services of people less than 19 years of age.

There are few reports of child labour, with the exception of sexual exploitation.²⁹ Children under the age of 18 must have written permission from their parent or guardian to work. Children under the age of 15 should not be employed at all; exceptions may be made if they have first obtained a special employment certificate from the labour ministry although, since education is compulsory to age 15, few are issued. A child worker between the ages of 15 and 18 may work a maximum of seven hours a day and 42 hours a week, with no night-time work.

DPR Korea is a country of origin for human trafficking, mostly girls and young women domestically and to the United States, but also to other Western countries and Japan. It is also a destination country for women from China, Mongolia, Russia and some Central Asian countries, and from South-East Asia including the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia. Most of the trafficking victims are girls and young women exploited in domestic service and sexual services.³⁰

Around one in 10 children aged 5–11 in **Lao PDR** is involved in child labour, mostly agricultural work, in urban shops or private households, despite labour laws fixing the minimum working age at 15 (except in certain conditions in family businesses).³¹ Commercial sexual exploitation of children continues to be reported; additionally, Lao PDR is a country of origin and transit for victims of human trafficking.

Much of the trafficking takes place within the context of long-established seasonal labour migration to Thailand. This is grounded in a long history of cross-border movement and cultural similarities. Tens of thousands of young people migrate to Thailand for seasonal work. Despite similarities in language and culture, the irregular nature of this migration, and the lack of protection for migrant workers in many sectors, contributes to making young Lao people vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many young people start their journey as voluntary migrants, only to be tricked, cheated or forced into trafficking situations. According to the first national survey on human trafficking from October 2004, the typical profile of a trafficking victim in Lao PDR is a girl between 12 and 18 years of age, originating from rural areas but not the most remote areas or situations of severe poverty, and vulnerable because of poverty, lack of education and awareness, and poor employment opportunities.³² Lao PDR is a member of COMMIT.

Child labour in **Malaysia** occurs primarily in agriculture and the informal sector. Children are to be found in plantations, often alongside their parents, but are not paid. In urban areas, children labour in family food businesses, night markets and small-scale industries. Girls are trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation.³³

The Children and Young Person's (Employment) Act prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 but makes exceptions for light work in a family enterprise, work in public

entertainment, apprenticeships and work undertaken in vocational training institutes. If children are still attending school, the combined hours of school and work may not exceed seven hours a day (eight hours between the ages of 14 and 16). Universal primary education was achieved in Malaysia in 1990.

Twenty-two per cent of 5-17 year olds in **Mongolia** are in child labour. The major sectors covered are herding, livestock, gold mining and selling small goods. Child labour in the form of unpaid family work and business is much higher in rural areas (17 per cent compared to 2 per cent urban). The percentage of 5-17 year-olds in child labour varies significantly from region to region. Among the regions, the Khangai region shows the highest incidence at 23 per cent while Ulaanbaatar is lowest at 11 per cent. Household wealth is often associated with child labour; in one in three poor households and one in ten of the wealthiest, there is one child involved in child labour.³⁴

The percentage of children in labour and also attending school is 21 per cent, highest in rural areas. The ILO estimates that Mongolia is on track to reach 2016 elimination goals.

Despite national legislation prohibiting the recruitment of children under 18 into armed forces or groups, children in **Myanmar** continue to be recruited into the armed forces of all parties including non-state groups. With few or no skills, increasing numbers of children are in child labour in the informal economy or on the streets, where they are exposed to crime, risk of arrest, abuse and exploitation.³⁵

School enrolment is high but fewer than 55 per cent of enrolled children complete the primary cycle. Myanmar is a country of origin for the trafficking of children (mostly girls) and women into Thailand and Malaysia. Myanmar is a member of COMMIT.

Papua New Guinea, like other countries in the PICs subregion, has generally low school enrolment and is struggling to achieve child labour elimination goals by 2016. The country has experienced rapid growth in the youth population and concomitant youth unemployment. Children are to be found in labour in subsistence agriculture, family businesses, street-based activities, markets and hotels. There are also reports of girls being trafficked internally into child domestic labour or to work as nannies. Sexual exploitation of children is documented.³⁶

The most recent **Philippines** Child Labour Survey indicated that 13.4 per cent of boys and 8.4 per cent of girls between the ages of 5 and 14 are in economic activity. Some 1.6 per cent of children in this group participate in the labour force without attending school and boys are three times more likely to be involved in labour than girls. Children in rural areas are more likely to work without attending school than those in urban areas.³⁷

Of children aged 5 to 14 in child labour, 65.4 per cent are employed in agriculture; 5.3 per cent in the industrial sector and 29.4 per cent in services.³⁸ The patterns are similar between 5-9 and 10-14 year-olds. Girls are more likely to be employed in services and less in agriculture. A large percentage of the children are unpaid family workers (70.9 per cent boys and 75.4 per cent girls). There is documented trafficking of children for sexual and labour purposes within Indonesia. Outbreaks of conflict in some islands have resulted in child recruitment into armed groups – a worst form of child labour.

The Government of the Philippines has, however, put in place a comprehensive framework to address child labour and the worst forms of child labour and the ILO reports promising progress.

Estimates on the number of children in labour in **Thailand** vary greatly. The ILO puts the number at four million, with 600,000 between the ages of 13 and 14. The US Department of Labour³⁹ in 2008 quoted literature reviews and site visits suggesting that child labour exists in export industries, including garments, gems, leather bags, shrimp and seafood processing, and wood and rattan furniture. Children are also to be found in child labour in domestic service, agriculture and services, begging, street-based activities and commercial sexual exploitation.

UNICEF reports that Thailand has increased access to basic education. However, the drop-out rate is as high as 50 percent in some of the poorest regions. Only about 30 percent of eligible Thai children enter secondary school. UNICEF estimates that 15 per cent of students drop out before completing primary school, the majority from ethnic minorities and the poor.⁴⁰

Thailand is a destination country for children trafficked into labour and sexual exploitation from a number of countries and in particular neighbouring Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. This is grounded in long-established patterns of movement across the borders for temporary (sometimes daily) and seasonal work and it is not uncommon for minors, especially, to penetrate deeper into the country rather than return. As of 31 May 2005, the ILO reported that 93,082 migrant children under the age of 15 had registered in the national household registration system. The ILO suggests, however, that there are some 250,000 unregistered foreign children under 18 in Thailand “as a low estimate” and that, on this basis, “an estimate of 100,000 working may be realistic”.⁴¹

Timor-Leste is still emerging from occupation and conflict and is considered unlikely to achieve child labour elimination goals by 2016. Child labour is to be found in agriculture, the informal sector, family businesses and street-based activities. There are reports of domestic trafficking (rural to the capital, Dili) for sexual purposes. Timor-Leste has a significant problem of youth unemployment.⁴²

Although the law in **Viet Nam** prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15, children generally still share the workload and household responsibilities of the family, in both rural and urban

environments. Child labour is also exploited in construction, gold mines, timber operations, cargo transport and other hazardous occupations. In urban areas, many children are employed as domestic servants, in restaurants or shops, as street vendors, shoe shiners, sweepers and scavengers.⁴³

Children are trafficked into sexual and labour exploitation, particularly into neighbouring Thailand. Viet Nam is a member of COMMIT.

In 2000-2005, only 6 per cent of Vietnamese children were not in school, and the ILO reports that Viet Nam is making promising progress towards achieving elimination goals by 2016.

2.4 A note on the informal economy

While most workers in developed economies are in waged and salaried employment, the overwhelming majority in the developing economies of the region work in the informal economy or as contributing family workers. This leaves them more vulnerable to economic risk and gives them little access to social or labour protections to mitigate this risk.

Women are particularly likely to be working in the informal sector or in family-based business, and this is in itself a vulnerability factor for child labour, since out-of-school children are likely to accompany their mother – for example while she sells smallgoods on the street or performs cleaning duties – and then ‘join in’ the work. Girls in particular are likely to be taken out of school to replace a working mother at home, doing household tasks and looking after siblings.

By 2006, the service sector, which includes subsistence street trade activities, had overtaken agriculture as the main sector of employment in East Asia, although agriculture remains the major employer in South-East Asia and the Pacific. Most of the PICs are characterized by large informal and subsistence sectors that are resistant to commercialization and productivity growth. The disempowerment of informal sector workers because land, infrastructure, finance and, importantly, business skills and learning remain in the hands of employers, inevitably contributes to a cycle of poverty, low education and dependency.

The informal economy remains not only an area which is particularly open to exploitation and child labour but which also is difficult to document, regulate and police.

3. VULNERABILITY TO CHILD LABOUR

The key to understanding why child labour occurs is understanding the individual and cumulative vulnerability factors that underlie the decisions families (and sometimes children themselves) make

on the allocation of the child's time – whether the child should be in school/training, remain idle or begin work (in the case of child labour, prematurely).

While shocks of various kinds may influence these decisions, there are generally factors already in place or that arise that make it likely that some families will choose the option of child labour. If this were not true, then all families would send their children into labour when shocks occur. It is also true, however, that there is an unmeasurable and as yet undocumented 'human' factor that makes it likely that some parents are more likely to include child labour or work as an option in their decisions while others reject this outright.

In relation to what can be measured and is well documented, it is known that 'vulnerability factors' occur not only at the level of the family but also at the level of the individual child, the community and the workplace.

3.1 Vulnerability factors at the level of the child

Some children are more vulnerable to entering child labour than others. Some of the vulnerability factors are universally true but most depend also on the interface of the child's individual vulnerability profile and the labour market/sector in which the child will work. This is illustrated in tabular form below:⁴⁴

<i>Vulnerability factor</i>	<i>Examples of interface with labour market/sector</i>
Age of the child	Demand for children of pre-school age for begging Demand for 13-15 year-olds in commercial sex sector Demand for boys aged above 12 in mining Demand for boys and girls below the age of 10 for domestic service
Sex of the child	Demand for girls in commercial sex sector Demand for boys in automotive mechanics Demand for boys and girls in street vending
Ethnic minority origin	Universally true Particularly high risk if ethnic minority status is coupled with lack of citizenship, as below:
No birth registration/lack of citizenship	Universally true
Family pressure to earn income	Universally true but to some extent varies with the age of the child
Peer pressure to have disposable income	Older children in general
Lack of education/skills	Universally true
Poor performance at school/dropping out	Universally true

It is clear that some of these vulnerability factors will be more susceptible to economic shocks than others. The age of the child, for example, will be relevant in countries – like many of those in East Asia – where children of secondary school age are likely to be at threat of leaving school early in times of hardship because of the higher costs involved. In the industrialized countries of East Asia, additionally, where young people are generally used to enjoying a relatively high level of consumer power, these children may be particularly at risk if they suddenly have less disposable income than some of their peers and are under pressure to find a way to get more money.

3.2 Vulnerability factors at the level of the family

Since it is most often the family – not only parents but also potentially older siblings, grandparents or other carers – who make the decisions about how the child’s time will be allocated, vulnerability factors within the family are of crucial importance. Very often several of these co-exist:

Table 3: Vulnerability factors at the level of the family

<i>Vulnerability factor</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Family income	Negative changes may be a trigger factor for family decision-making relating to the allocation of children's time.
Family poverty	This is a vulnerability factor when there is no margin to absorb shocks/changes in income/increase in demands
Adult unemployment in the family	As a result of lack of skills, inappropriate skills for available jobs, illness etc.
Ethnic group or subservient caste origin	
Single-parent head of household	
Large family size	
Serious illness (eg HIV/AIDS) or death in the family	
Power relations within the household (especially patriarchal family structures)	This is a particular risk factor for girl children
Alcohol and/or drug abuse in the family	
Past debt/bondage relations in the family	
Traditional attitudes and practices	Especially if parents were also child labourers or if there are already children in labour in the family
History of migration and access to migration networks	A risk factor in trafficking but also child labour generally
Negative attitudes towards schooling/training	Especially if one or both parents did not attend/complete school, or If schooling is seen to be of poor quality or irrelevant to available jobs, or If school is not seen to be a safe place, or If there is serious youth unemployment in the area

Family poverty remains a pervasive underlying vulnerability factor in relation to child labour. Studies have shown that child labour may be a strategy to reduce risk where adult labour is uncertain, casual or seasonal⁴⁵ and that, at times of crisis, uncertainty about the future also comes into play, especially for families living on or below the poverty line. Other commentators downplay this possibility but it seems clear that family poverty is an important factor in overall risk to child labour, even if it is not a sole determinant.

3.3 Vulnerability factors at the level of the community/society

Some vulnerability factors relate to the broader community in which the child and family live. These are also sometimes known as ‘external’ or ‘institutional’ risk factors. They relate to the social and physical environment, governance and history and social factors affecting society quite generally.

Table 4: Vulnerability factors at the level of the community (external or institutional risk)

<i>Vulnerability factor</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Youth unemployment	Deterrent to parents to keep a child in school in order to prepare her/him for Decent Work Possible unemployed older siblings posing a burden on family income
Location	Bordering a more prosperous country or region Rural in times of crop failure/drought/other threats Urban in times of recession or growing unemployment Proximity to an unregulated labour market known to employ children
Distance to schools or training centres	Especially true of secondary schools, which generally require a larger family investment
Transport connections and availability	Especially if there is good, cheap transport between the family home and labour market
Lack of policing, community vigilance or other ‘social monitoring’ mechanisms	These are an important early warning when family/child vulnerability increases and if they are not in place increase vulnerability
History of migration for work	
War/armed conflict	Impacts on family functioning/ability to earn an income Potentially takes away (temporarily or permanently) male household members May absorb children in worst forms of child labour
Natural disasters	See earlier comments on the differential impacts of different kinds of disaster
Absence of adult employment opportunities	
Policies restricting access to labour markets for various groups of adults	
Gender discrimination in labour market	
Public tolerance/social acceptance of child	Particularly true, for example, in relation to social

labour	perceptions that child domestic labour prepares a girl for married/family life
Shifting social mores resulting in ambiguity in the role of older children/adolescents	Particularly relevant to involvement in commercial sex

Most of these factors are relevant, to varying degrees, in the countries of East Asia in 2008. Youth unemployment and migration for work are of great consequence in the region even in less worrying economic times, and in recent years a tightening of migration restrictions as a result of the worsened global security climate since 9/11 has exacerbated the regulatory pressure on people seeking to migrate for work.

3.4 Vulnerability factors at the level of the workplace

Finally, the sectors in which child labour is to be found are not random. They exhibit particular characteristics and/or function in a particular regulatory regime that makes them a factor in increasing the likelihood that they will draw in child labour. To this extent, they are also considered to be vulnerability factors:

Table 5: Vulnerability factors at the level of the workplace	
<i>Vulnerability factor</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Unsupervised hiring of workers	
Limited reach of labour laws	
Poor labour inspection and enforcement	
Poor/non-organized labour protection	Although trade unions do not recruit child labourers as members, they monitor workplace conditions
Unregulated informal economy	
Undercover or clandestine operations	
Unscrupulous employer	
Specific demand for children	Young girls in sexual exploitation ‘Small hands’ to do intricate work Small bodies to go into narrow spaces

In relation to workplace vulnerability factors, it is of particular concern that economic crisis in general leads to an informalization of labour markets, and that informal sectors are more likely than formal sectors to seek out and employ child labour. If other risk factors listed, relating to labour market regulation and policing, are also present, then this produces a potentially high-risk situation.

Individually, these risk factors may not result in a child entering child labour however, as they accumulate, the risk increases. Many children live in a situation of high risk and one trigger – for example a death in the family that reduces family income unexpectedly – may be enough to ‘push the child over the edge’ into child labour.

In many instances, the child may take only the first step into child labour: some children will not be pulled out of school but will be expected to combine school and labour (this is what happened in Cambodia as a result of crop failure in the early 2000s). This is itself a negative factor for children because (i) children who are engaged in labour in non-school hours are less likely to perform well in school (increasing the possibility that they will drop out); (ii) children have a right – and a need – to play and enjoy leisure; and (iii) children frequently cope with this extra demand by ‘temporarily’ dropping out of school, but do not then return – this is particularly likely for children of secondary-school age. Other factors that need to be taken into account, of course, are the nature and duration of the work.

For any child labour elimination actions to be totally effective, they should be based on a thorough evaluation of vulnerability, ideally at the level of the individual child but at least at the level of the individual family. This does not preclude, of course, broader-brush actions that target behaviour or attitude change, community-level risk reduction or workplace prevention.

3.5 Pre-crisis predictions of vulnerability in the region

2007 projections⁴⁶ (ie pre-crisis) of the numbers of children potentially vulnerable to entering or already being in child labour in East Asia and South-East Asia/Pacific, using the proxy of non-enrolment in primary and lower secondary school, suggested that, although there would be fewer children vulnerable to child labour by 2016, almost 22 million children would still be out of school and therefore at risk. Of these:

East Asia	9,120,000
South-East Asia/Pacific	12,707,000

The table below shows the (pre-crisis) predicted vulnerable child population for individual countries in 2016, based on school non-enrolment, estimated in December 2007.⁴⁷ On the basis of these

figures, Timor-Leste was the only country where the vulnerable child population was projected to increase. Papua New Guinea remained on the borderline.

Table 7: Vulnerable child population ('000s), 2006 – 2016 estimated end-2007

	2006	2016	Projected change (%) (2006-2016)
Cambodia	797	573	-28.1
China	19,946	8,979	-55.0
DPR Korea	146	58	-60.6
Fiji	15	11	-30.1
Hong Kong (China)	74	40	-46.3
Indonesia	6,121	3,873	-36.7
Lao PDR	385	242	-37.3
Macao (China)	7	2	-72.5
Malaysia	501	346	-30.9
Mongolia	75	41	-44.8
Myanmar	3,044	1,667	-45.2
Papua New Guinea	776	773	-0.4
Philippines	2,833	1,961	-30.8
Thailand	1,886	1,394	-26.1
Timor-Leste	99	126	26.5
Vietnam	3,101	1,682	-45.7

3.6 People on the move

Another important factor to consider in any discussion on child labour is the mobility of the family. There is scant research on the impact of crisis on family movement, however it is likely that families that have out-migrated (temporarily or permanently) may consider return to their family/place of origin as one way of coping with crisis – for example to return to the safety net of extended family, or in fear of being excluded from job markets because they are not indigenous workers.

This can affect child labour in a number of ways: families who move will of necessity remove children from their current school and, at times of crisis, may not enrol them in a new school after relocation but rather send them out to earn money (or just remain idle). Children may be sent into child labour temporarily in order to help the family raise enough money to relocate.

Conversely families who have the means, particularly if they live in countries that border neighbours that are more affluent – or are perceived to be more affluent – may consider migrating if their circumstances take a negative turn or they fear that they may not be able to cope.

It is worth noting here that in non-crisis times, it is generally not the ‘poorest of the poor’ who migrate but families who have enough money, hope and expectation to believe that relocation will bring them better returns or opportunities. To this extent, ‘enough’ in this case can in itself represent a vulnerability factor to movement. It is also worth noting that for some groups of vulnerable children, movement is in itself a risk factor for trafficking.

Migration for labour in Asia and the Pacific is reported to have “acquired an unprecedented scale, diversity and significance”⁴⁸ in recent years. Between 1995 and 2005, there was an exponential increase in the movement of Asians out of the region but also between Asian countries. The UN estimated in 2002 that 50 million of the 175 million people worldwide living outside the country in which they were born are in Asia. However, this does not take account of undocumented or otherwise irregular migrants. The report notes also that a major cause of increased migration is not, as many would consider, poverty and desperation pushing people to move but rather the fact that many people in the region have been lifted out of extreme poverty and, as education levels have also increased, have had reason to aspire to better work and life chances. This is an important consideration when planning policies and programmes aimed to increase family income.

It is also important to remember that the most mobile population is aged 15 to 24 and it not coincidence that increased migration in Asia has coincided with what has been called ‘the Asian Youth Bulge’ – a marked increase in the youth population from the 1980s onwards. By 2020 the youth population is projected to have continued to grow, although at a slower rate, and to comprise just under 16 per cent of the population.

This is of considerable importance in considerations of child labour. Those seeking to exploit cheap labour in a situation of increasing costs are likely to look to the younger end of the youth spectrum and choose 15 year olds on the move, effectively transforming their migration into trafficking.

III: THE INTERSECTION OF CHILD LABOUR AND SHOCK

Given all that we know about child labour in East Asia, then, what can we say about the potential impact – positive or negative – of food price rises and economic crisis?

Impact assessment and effectiveness analysis of crisis largely depends on how child labour markets are perceived. Most economic studies adopt a poverty framework for evaluating the link between food price rises and economic crisis to child labour and focus on the vulnerability of the poor. It is clear from the preceding sections, however, that this is a simplistic approach to take both to vulnerability profiling and to perceived cause and effect of crisis and child labour.

The conditions of the poor persist and will indeed worsen with economic and food crisis to such an extent that poor children in this category are most adversely affected directly and indirectly by reduced purchasing power. It has been noted that every percentage point increase in the price of staple foodstuffs can send an additional 16 million people into hunger.⁴⁹ The links between crisis and poverty have been demonstrated and the effects on nutrition, health and other aspects of child welfare where causality can be demonstrated are not in dispute. However the relationship between crisis and child labour is much more complex and dynamic.

There have been concerted attempts by policy makers at the local, national, regional and international levels and by a range of agencies to address the vulnerability of the poor and the problem of child labour, so the problems of economic crisis and child labour are rich in experiences. There has been ongoing crisis confronting some parts of East Asia. It is vital to learn from what has happened in the past and move towards a new model that maps out clearly the links between child labour and external factors in labour markets, family and community vulnerabilities and economic conditions overall.

4.1 Lessons from the past

The Asian financial crisis of the mid-1990s provides some lessons. An August 1999 report for the Australian overseas development arm, AusAID,⁵⁰ for example, suggests the following lessons: (1) It is important to equip families with adequate resources to provide a key safety net for children; (2) General economic recovery is an essential ingredient in maintaining these support systems; (3) Labour market policies and competitive practices must be strengthened; (4) Governments play a central role in many ways: for example, in guaranteeing access to key elements in child development as well as providing additional safety nets for protection of the most vulnerable children. To do this effectively they need to work with communities, as they are central in providing social safety networks to families and children. They need to work to build community, NGO and local

government capacity for promoting and supporting information systems to achieve government commitments and plans for moving away from crisis reactions to long-term strategies.

With the prevalence of improved information systems and indicators, communication flows and networks operating in the East Asian region, the impact of these crises will not be felt immediately. However there is a general consensus that there will be a rise of the informal sector of the economy. In particular there is a general feeling that short-term supply shocks produce heightened speculation resulting in increasing trade in the underground market. There is also evidence to suggest that tightening of policies may add to increases in costs of labour and goods and services resulting in a swelling of the underground economy. The incentives for increased participation in the child labour market are higher, the bigger the difference in the costs for conducting businesses in the formal and informal sectors. There are push factors (supply of child labour) and pull factors (demand for child labour) that are responsible for increases in child labour that arise due to policies to combat crisis.

4.2 Child labour market: An informal sector

The International Labour Conference of 2002 noted that, “most cases of child labour are to be found in the informal economy, often in the hidden and most hazardous forms of work, including forced labour and slavery”.⁵¹ By considering the child labour market as an informal economy or an underground economy, the policy implications of what the crisis means to child labour will be different.

There are many parallels between child labour issues and the underground economy. They both are designed to escape detection and therefore data are hard to come by. They both thrive in times of crisis. The onset of crisis results in the swelling of the underground economy to avoid taxes, promote illegal activities such as ‘moonlighting’ (holding a second/third job), brokering deals at non-regulated prices, and a dependence on cash activities. One of the most revealing features of the child labour market is that it is neither a ‘residual’ nor a ‘disorganized’ market. It is a highly organized and fragile part of the modern economy.

Neither child labour nor economic and financial crisis is new to this region. But what is needed is a dynamic and interactive analysis of child labour and crisis, a link between the dynamics of child labour and economic crisis.

4.3 Dynamics of the child labour market

Child labour is heterogeneous in nature and there is consequently a need to understand such realities as the behavioural aspects involved in the formation, continuation and proliferation of child labour in East Asia. Guarcello et al (2002) note that recent research has shown that family income has a

relatively small effect on the supply of child work and that different groups of households have very different propensities to invest in children's education, even if they have very similar sets of observable characteristics. As has been shown in the vulnerability analysis outlined earlier, there is clearly more at play in child labour than family finances. Static analysis is therefore insufficient; it is vital to begin looking at micro-, macro- and mega-economic levels as well as socio-cultural variables, and to shift models accordingly.

4.4 Dynamism of crisis and responses

The likely impact of economic crisis and food price rises is to drive people underground. To avoid high prices and the prospect of low wages, many workers are driven into informal sector employment.

As a result of the rise in informal sector activities, the official data may not support the conclusion that a perceptible shift has occurred in the child labour market due to economic crisis. However the reality may be quite different. A rise in the informal sector may result in a steady flow of child labour to keep wage rates in the informal sector as low as possible. The underground market employs simple techniques of using institutional arrangements seeped in cultural mores and norms to exclude and marginalize children into situations of vulnerability. There is a need to redefine the influences of variables of impact that lead to vulnerable economic participants. The fundamental root cause of vulnerability of the informal sector is a lack of social safety nets. Policies are needed that can address how children can be supported by strengthening social safety nets.

IV: POLICY AND PROGRAMMING RESPONSE OPTIONS

This section does not look at the macro-economic policies and programmes⁵² that need to be put in place to counter the effects of the current crises but rather focuses on the responses that are possible or necessary to specifically reduce the likelihood that children will enter into child labour as a result of the shocks.

Although there is – especially for older children – sometimes an element of ‘child agency’ in a child entering child labour (for example if an adolescent succumbs to peer pressures to increase her/his disposable income), in general the decision to send a child into child labour is a family/parental decision.⁵³

It is useful to first look at the options that vulnerable families may consider when faced with an economic shock (including a rise in food prices):

5.1 Family choices

At times of crisis, in making decisions about the allocation of children’s time to child labour,⁵⁴ parents are essentially faced with these choices:

- **Do nothing at all** – retain the *status quo*, regardless of whether the child is currently at school, in labour, in legitimate work or idle.⁵⁵

This is the ‘default’ option and will most likely be chosen when there are at least expectations of other variables changing – for example knowledge that the crisis is likely to be short-lived, or that mitigating measures are going to be made available promptly. This underlines the importance of **communication** efforts to make available to families information that they need to inform their decisions.

- **Continue sending a child to school but additionally require her/him to bring in an income** – depending on the age of the child, the nature of the work and the hours worked, this might be acceptable ‘light work’, or result in the child being in a situation of child labour (including worst forms).

This is a very plausible option because it allows the parents to ‘have their cake and eat it’. However it is risky because it might result in the child under-performing at school, dropping out of school or finding her/himself in hazardous labour or indeed the worst forms (girls, especially, may find that the ‘easiest’ source of income is prostitution). It will require close **monitoring by school personnel** to ensure that the child is not in a situation of child labour and that even light work is not impacting on the child’s school performance or health. Since many children in the

region already combine school and work, it is also vital to monitor for signs that the hours of work have been increased or that the child has moved from labour into a worst form of child labour.

- **Send an idle child (of appropriate age) to school.**

This may seem unlikely but, in fact, if a child is doing nothing to contribute to the family but is rather a cost to the family (food, clothing etc), and a school feeding or grants programme is brought into operation, it may be more cost-effective for the family to send the child to school.⁵⁶ This is a strong argument for **school-based feeding programmes** and **education subsidies**.

- **Send an idle child (of appropriate age) to legitimate work.**

This is an optimal solution because it sees an unemployed minor of working age in employment. This presumes, of course, that the employment is non-hazardous and conforms to Decent Work standards. It is a strong argument for **launching or accelerating youth employment schemes**.

- **Send an idle child into child labour.**

A very likely occurrence, since the child is a cost to the family with no immediate (income) or longer-term (education/work) contribution. This might include putting a child into begging (a form of child labour) or allowing/encouraging/turning a blind eye to a child becoming involved in petty crime (stealing, picking pockets). This is a challenge for programming because these children may not be on the radar screen if they are not involved in some form of organized group or activity outside the home. It requires a range of **child labour elimination policy and programme responses**, including awareness raising, monitoring at a number of levels, cooperation with workers' organizations and employers, labour inspection, family support programmes, prosecution of exploitative employers etc.

- **Remove a child (of appropriate age) from school in order to send her/him into legitimate work.**

This is a real possibility for children in the final years of secondary education (ie above the minimum age for work) or for children one or two years below this age if paid apprenticeships or transition programmes are available. It is a strong argument for **scholarships or grants** to keep children in this category in school. It is also, however, a strong argument for putting **part-time apprenticeship or transition programmes** (conditional on completion of schooling or specifically designed to complement schooling – so-called 'sandwich courses') in place to then help these children to transit more easily to work when they are ready to do so.

- **Remove a child from school in order to send her/him into child labour.**

There are no clear indicators of how likely this is, however it becomes more likely as vulnerability factors accumulate and is accelerated if trigger factors come into play. It is a strong argument for a range of **school-based programmes** that include **school feeding**, **education subsidies** (uniforms, books, stationery, transport) and other **safety net** programmes.

- **Remove a child from school to become idle.**

This may seem unlikely but it is a possible response if the costs of the child's schooling become a burden and the parents do not wish, or are unable to send a child to work or into labour. As above, it is a strong argument for **school-based** and general **safety net** programmes.

- **Remove a child from school to replace an adult family member who moves into employment.**

This is a likely choice especially in families that run a family business or smallholding, or have young children who need care. While both girls and boys are at risk, girls especially are likely to be taken out of school to care for children and do housework if it is the mother who finds employment. As above, it is an argument for **school-based** and general **safety net** programmes and additionally requires that changes in adult employment patterns be accompanied by **improved and affordable child care services** and **monitoring of vulnerable children** in schools.

- **Remove a child (of appropriate age – most likely primary or lower secondary) from child labour to return them to school.**

This may seem particularly unlikely, however it may be indicated if the returns from **school feeding** programmes or **grants** outweigh the returns from the child's labour. This is a strong argument for these programmes to be put in place. Additionally there may be a need for **bridging education** programmes for children returning or entering school after child labour, especially for those entering higher grades.

- **Remove a child from child labour to become idle.**

Unlikely, although it may be that an employer would put pressure on a family to remove a child if the work s/he is doing becomes unsatisfactory (for example because the child is malnourished and cannot perform); there are less costly alternatives (for example government subsidies for youth employment); or the family is required to do so as a condition of receiving assistance. One concern is that children removed from child labour may, rather than remain idle, be sent into a worst form of child labour because demand exists (for example, girls especially into sexual exploitation, boys and girls into hazardous work, children of both sexes into the hands of

traffickers). The programming options here are those that are usually implemented to shore up **family understanding** of the impact of child labour; and to **identify and remove children from situations of labour** and provide **rehabilitation and reintegration** avenues.

- **Seek out opportunities to send a child who is already in child labour (or not) to another place** in the expectations of higher income/lower (medium-term) costs to the family.

This is particularly likely if a child is already in child labour and there is a family or community tradition of movement for work (for example in border areas or between countries that have a shared history of labour migration, or where a nearby area of neighbouring country is perceived to be more affluent or more resistant to the crisis). This requires specific attention to the full range of **anti-trafficking policy and programme responses**, including but not limited to: awareness raising among families at risk, family safety net programmes to boost income accompanied by education on the risks of trafficking and safe avenues for migration, ‘safe work’ programming at destination, monitoring at a number of levels including at border crossings, labour inspection and enhanced surveying of known child labour sectors (focusing on new arrivals and children from other regions/areas/countries) – cooperation with workers’ organizations and employers’ associations is vital here; identification and stringent prosecution of traffickers and those who contribute to their activities (intermediaries); removal and return or rehabilitation of exploited children; ongoing monitoring of returnees to ensure they do not fall victim again.

5.2 Proposed actions

Data and profiling

It is clear from this paper – and almost all papers on the subject of child labour – that an overwhelming imperative remains the need for comprehensive, systematic national data on child labour, fully disaggregated by the child’s age, sex, (dis)ability, educational profile family circumstances, and sector worked /risk factors observed. Although there has been much work done on this by the ILO’s SIMPOC programme and through UNICEF’s MICs system, there remain substantial gaps in data in all regions that continue to hamper research and planning.

Moreover, we urgently need data and information to be shared transparently and in a form that allows researchers to analyse raw data, test hypotheses and draw conclusions. It is not enough to provide only synthesized data and summaries.

It may seem that a time of crisis is not the most opportune moment to devote resources and energies to data collection. However times of likely/potential change are precisely when researchers and planners need to be able to map changes. Data collection, analysis, storing and sharing, however, are expensive undertakings and require not only labour-intensive processes and investment in appropriate technologies but also training and supervision. This is an area where donors, however, should have an interest in seeing progress; they would be among the major users of the data generated and should acknowledge that better data would transform reporting to them and their own ability to analyze and plan.

Vulnerability profiling

Similarly, investment in vulnerability profiling is money well spent. While it is acknowledged that all children have a right to protection and that ultimately the best protection is blanket protection with no 'holes' in it, it is also true that urgent action needs to be targeted at those children and families that are most at risk.

Vulnerability profiling is an obvious by-product of comprehensive data collection and provides another reason why governments should consider this as a matter of urgency and donors should provide support to quickly build up a better platform of reliable information.

Safety nets

All commentators underline the importance of safety nets in cushioning families against making decisions to send children out to work.⁵⁷ The World Bank stresses that countries that already have safety nets in place should respond to the current crises by scaling these up; where safety nets are not in place, these should be initiated for longer-term resilience to future shocks.

Safety nets include: cash transfers – conditional/unconditional; food distribution; price subsidies; agricultural inputs; family benefits; childcare support; public works; health, asset and life insurance; school-based food programmes; education scholarships; and micro-finance.

These should be targeted to newly vulnerable populations in the first instance – especially in urban areas (since rural areas produce some of their own food whereas urban areas are dependent on food purchases) and very young children.⁵⁸ Guarcello et al (2002) stress the importance of targeting children at risk, however note that risk is not based solely on family income/economic status but that other vulnerability factors must be taken into account.

The World Bank emphasizes that safety nets should be 'well designed and implemented' and that spending should be at least temporarily increased in this area.

Cash transfers – conditional/unconditional

Both conditional and unconditional cash transfers are recommended in the literature. However it is clear that making cash transfers conditional on all school-aged children attending school is strongly indicated in efforts to stave off child labour. Most commentators argue that transfers in cash are preferable to transfers in kind because they allow the family freedom to use the funds according to their specific needs.

The World Bank also recommends income transfers, cash or in-kind, such as family benefits, food vouchers, disability allowances, child benefits or food assistance. These must be targeted and aim to boost the incomes of beneficiaries by some 20 – 25 per cent. The Bank's Human Development Programme calls targeted cash transfers "of adequate coverage, generosity and quality" the best option, preferable to transfers in-kind because they allow consumer sovereignty. However, if local markets are not functioning and food is not available, in-kind is preferable. 'Near cash' instruments such as food stamps have higher administrative costs but may be politically preferred. Cash transfers should be made conditional if schemes are already in place, however, if they are not, preliminary transfers at least may have to be unconditional so that the neediest are not left waiting.

A word of warning is in order: cash transfers should be adequate and periodic (for a limited period, made clear at the outset) and not be made as an up-front payment which might prompt a poor family to consider moving for work, thus increasing the vulnerability of both the child and the family in general.

Food distribution

A number of countries in the region have introduced price subsidies or price controls in response to crisis in the past (Philippines, Indonesia), and Thailand subsidized 10 per cent of the retail price of rice between April and June 2008. However the World Bank argues that general subsidies are more expensive at times of economic crisis, fiscally unsustainable and that they undermine optimal adjustment. They are also untargeted so distort prices to producers (including smallholder farmers) and may disrupt food supply chains.

Food distribution proper is an option only where national supplies permit this. Although some countries have chosen to do this, paying high prices for additional imports at the beginning of the 2008 crisis, it is generally not sustainable. Cash transfers that allow families to vary their eating habits to adjust to available foodstuffs (ideally local produce) are preferable.

Boosting agriculture

The UN Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the food crisis, UNICEF, ILO-EMP and the World Bank have all stressed the importance of increasing agricultural inputs, in particular investment in small-scale agriculture (seeds, fertilizers, irrigation). They note that, in both the short and longer term, boosting smallholder farmer food production will both make food available and support rural families and economies.

However, it is important to note that this might also provide incentives for rural families, particularly those involved in agriculture, to exploit children as agricultural labourers. Many children of rural families help out on family smallholdings and so already have some of the required skills; however it is vital that this 'helping hand' does not become full-fledged child labour. All the programmes outlined here to keep children in school and protect them from entering child labour are important. Additionally, roving social service/family inspectors may be needed to increase monitoring of rural families. Additional transport to and from school may also be important, as well as school monitoring programmes. Finally, providing rural producers with young workers through subsidized employment schemes may mitigate the likelihood of under-age children being employed. In this case, the young workers will need appropriate training and safety equipment to ensure that they can handle farm equipment and that there are no threats to their health or safety.

Childcare support

Where families increase household income through female employment, it is vital that enhanced (even temporary) childcare services are available and accessible to women who have children below school age or any other children who need care (sick children, for example). This is not only important to ensure that these children are looked after but also to obviate the possibility that girl children in particular will have to replace the mother in household and child-rearing duties.

Where communities do not have government or private childcare places already, alternative schemes can quickly be put into place. For example, in the smallest villages a group of elderly women might be trained (and monitored) as short-term child minders – this has the advantage of boosting their incomes also.

School-based programmes

These also apply to children in vocational training or other educational venues for children. They include school feeding programmes and take-home rations that not only safeguard a child's nutrition but also provide an incentive for the child to attend school.

The World Bank and UNICEF both suggest prioritizing secondary grades for fee waivers, scholarships and grants for clothes, books, transport etc since children in this group are generally a higher cost on the family because of the distance travelled to school and higher expenses related to schooling, and so are particularly at risk of being taken out of school to find work. It is important to note, however, that some commentators believe that such targeting (although not the concept of financial incentives) is not fully proven because it often benefits the higher grades of secondary school, by which time many poor children will already have dropped out. This will need to be judged on a country-by-country basis.

Note also that the World Bank's Human Development Network points out that the same economic conditions that increase poverty sometimes decrease wages, reducing the opportunity cost of children staying in school, so the impact on secondary schooling depends very much on the balance of these effects – in general the poorer the country, the more likely an economic shock will lead to adverse school impacts.

For other demand-side programmes in secondary schools, targeting should be done at the level of the student or household. In lower primary programmes, geographic targeting selecting schools in poor areas may suffice.

Multi-level monitoring

It is important to remember that keeping children in school is not the same as keeping them out of work/labour. Many children in East Asia go to school and also work, and this will continue to be an option that many parents choose. Vital to protecting children who are already studying and working, and those who begin some work while still in school, is **school-based monitoring**. Teachers, school principals and other educational staff need rapid training on how to recognize signs of a child potentially having started work or increasing workload: fatigue, sudden absences, lack of concentration, physical injuries etc. A system of alerts to protection or social services should be in place and used to report cases where children are at risk.

The same checks can be made at other levels: **community vigilance** teams are in place in many of the poorest communities in countries like Cambodia and Lao PDR, and the *barangay*-based system of

child protection teams in the Philippines is similarly well placed to observe children and families at risk and recognize signs of potential child labour/risk to children. Where such schemes do not exist, they should be put in place if possible or alternative child-focused groupings – scouts, guides, youth clubs, play centres, sports clubs – be considered for an enhanced role in child protection.

Upgraded **labour monitoring** – both governmental and through workers’ organizations and employer groups – is also important at times of crisis to identify children moving into child labour (including the worst forms). Capacity building may be necessary and may seem like a long-term option only, however there are many training resources available and in most countries an ILO presence that can provide information on these.

Social monitoring is also important, of course, and social services already in place to identify and protect children at risk should receive additional support where possible. These include, for example, visits by family social workers; mother and baby clinics and post-natal visits (in both cases, staff can also check on other children in the family); facilitated mothers’ groups or meetings at which information can be shared; crisis hotlines or other reporting mechanisms; and referral services.

The UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Task Force has also stressed the importance of **policy and programme monitoring and assessment** to make sure policies and programmes are working and not increasing risk or having negative effects.

Micro-finance/income generation

Programmes that reinforce the family’s ability to earn an income or use available funds better are a longer-term necessity given that, at times of crisis, markets are likely to be less open and easy to penetrate. If they are initiated and even where they already exist, there should be a check that any small enterprises set up are appropriate for the market in crisis conditions. Again, it is important to remember that expectations are often raised along with income and may prompt migration (a risk for children when it is not legal, prepared and informed). Such programmes should always be accompanied by trafficking prevention measures such as information and awareness raising, especially in communities with a history of labour migration.

Youth employment schemes

Youth unemployment is a global problem and serious in East Asia and especially the PICs. Getting young people of working age into Decent Work must be a priority and is an important step in reducing the vulnerability of younger children to entering labour prematurely. It is a frustrating fact

that all countries that have a serious child labour problem also have significant youth unemployment challenges and the two go hand-in-hand (many unemployed young people are former child labourers sent packing once they reach an age where they are no longer easily exploitable; unscrupulous employers will take on under-age children they can exploit rather than engage young workers; young workers may become child labourers because of the conditions to which they are subjected).

Youth employment schemes, including apprenticeships, subsidies to employers, accelerated school-to-work transition schemes, 'work for dole' schemes and subsidies for diversification training and NFE for those young people who need to upgrade their basic skills – these are all important in the medium- to long-term to reduce the likelihood of child labour and, in some instances may also be a short-term option.

Information, communication and education (ICE) initiatives

Accompanying all the actions outlined above, should be immediate and sustained ICE initiatives on the importance of education and the risks of child labour. These should be both general and targeted: families might receive educational briefings during parents' meetings in schools, at health clinics, mother and baby clinics and other places that parents and families frequent. The aim of these should be to influence family decision making in a context where options are being made available, so it is important that briefings include information about available programmes.

Broad public education should also include these elements: the importance of education, the risks/costs of child labour, the availability of crisis hotlines and other reporting mechanisms, and the availability of mitigating services and programmes. These messages should be designed to reach the maximum number of people possible and therefore to be carried via the vehicles they use as an information source (TV, radio, newspapers, local meetings, home visitors etc).

Targeted education on these same issues should be put in place for those groups who are specifically in a position to take on a monitoring or protection role: teachers and other educational staff, social workers and child protection officers, workers and employer groups, others who take on a duty of care for children (police, government employees, NGOs). Media should also be provided with the information so that they can disseminate it further.

5.3 A final word

Where any of these programmes does not exist or is not possible in the short-term, they should nevertheless be considered as longer-term options. All commentators have underlined the importance of preparedness programmes to prevent children from entering child labour and to keep

them in school. Other longer-term actions will also be necessary, of course,⁵⁹ within the frameworks of National Action Plans against Child Labour and Time-Bound Programmes against the Worst Forms of Child Labour, as well as other frameworks for child protection and welfare.

In the medium-term, it will be vital to regularly monitor both the impact on families of continuing economic crisis and of the programmes that have been put in place. Vulnerability is not a static phenomenon but constantly shifting – poverty deepens, income may rise as a result of participation in programmes, children grow and their demands on family finances change, family earners may become unemployed or conversely find work, people get sick or die. At community level, also, there may be in- or out-migration, communities may find common resources that can be used to support at-risk families, and negative economic factors may see protection mechanisms close down or others grow. In the workplace, some sectors may thrive and others fail, demand for labour will increase in those areas where investment props up some markets and fall in those that are deemed non-crucial and left unsupported.

In terms of family choices, also, there will be a progression that grows out of the family's purchasing power. In economic terms, increased prices will lead to a decrease in real purchasing power that, as a result of economic crisis, will also equate to reduced nominal purchasing power. Together these lead to income and substitution effects over many rounds. It may be that in Round 1, for example, families will deal with reduced purchasing power by simply reducing family expenditure on marginal goods or, if they are already in poverty, on food (income effect). Round 2 may see them replacing their normal (now reduced) diet with less expensive or poorer quality food (substitution effect). If over time this response is not adequate, families in a position to do so may in Round 3 try to increase family food production (for example by planting vegetables), this might lead to increased pressure on water for irrigation and less for personal hygiene, leading to another round of decisions if health begins to be affected...

The challenge is that it is impossible to identify or quantify how many 'rounds' a family will pass through before making a decision about the allocation of children's time, and that decision in itself may be reviewed through successive rounds.

In short, the vulnerability profile assigned to a family or an individual child as programme planning begins will shift and will need to be reassessed at regular intervals, as the family also goes through different stages of response to the challenges of crisis.

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¹² 'East Asia' is used in this paper to denote: Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam

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16 *Idem.*

17 *Idem.* The Global Report provides an overview of the wide range of actions that have contributed to this decline, but highlights: political mobilization by the ILO's tripartite constituency following almost universal ratification of ILO Convention No.182 (1999); linking the fight against child labour with international efforts to achieve Education for All; and a sea change in awareness of child labour and a broad consensus on ending it.

18 The categories used in this paper are the same as those used in the ILO Global Reports: 'economic activity' is a broad concept encompassing most productive activities undertaken by children, whether for the market or not, paid or unpaid, for a few hours or full-time, on a casual or regular basis, legal or illegal. It does not include chores in the child's own household or school-based activities.

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⁵³ Note, however, that international child rights instruments reject the notion that a person below the age of 18 years can ‘consent’ to her/his own exploitation.

⁵⁴ Again, it is not certain that every family will include the allocation of children’s time in the package of options they consider when devising their coping strategies. The ‘human’ factor that differentiates those that do from those that do not, however, has not been studied and so has to be discounted here. The default position must remain protecting all children from the possible child labour consequences of crisis.

⁵⁵ ‘Idle’ in this sense means ‘neither in school nor in work’ and is not a reflection on the child’s willingness or ability.

⁵⁶ This option has also been noted by Halsey Rogers of the World Bank in a 2008 paper entitled: *Aid effectiveness in education: Setting priorities in a time of crisis*: “evidence from past crises suggests that there could actually be an increase in enrollments at the secondary level, as students who would otherwise leave decide to forgo the weak labor market and instead remain in school (Ferreira, Francisco H. G. and Norbert Schady: *Aggregate Economic Shocks, Child Schooling, and Child Health*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4701, 2008). Rogers also notes that, “slower growth will likely mean a rise in education needs in the developing countries. Even if these countries do not undergo financial-sector crises of their own, but merely economic slowdowns, there will be numerous pressures on education budgets. First, slower growth overall will translate into fiscal pressures on the government, and perhaps into expenditure cuts if the government is not able to arrange additional financing. Second, slower growth in household incomes will reduce the ability of households to contribute to their children’s educations, so that education budgets may need to take up the slack”.

⁵⁷ For example: Guarcello et al (2002): “access to credit markets and to safety nets, especially for poorer households, appear to be among the most powerful instruments for promoting school attendance and reducing child labour. Moreover, the income equivalent needed to compensate for the effects of credit

rationing and shocks also indicates that policies aimed at reducing risk are not only effective but may prove to be also cost efficient in terms of use of resources”.

⁵⁸ Save the Children.

⁵⁹ These are many and are not detailed here. However some that have been specifically highlighted in literature relating to crisis situations are: restructuring sectors that employ child labour; legal review relating to hazardous sectors and labour inspection reinforcement; behavioural change programming in communities that have a tradition of child labour; increased regulation and inspection of informal sectors; programmes reinforcing education enrolment/completion/quality; promotion of off-farm employment; and promoting social dialogue.