
Child labour (CL) in the primary production of sugarcane: summary of CL-related findings

Ergon



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Objectives of the study



Key findings (*child labour only* in this summary)

Labour issues findings ...

- Overall labour force characteristics
- Child labour:
 - Nature and extent of child labour
 - Worst forms of child labour
 - Causes of child labour
- Beyond child labour: industrial relations, forced labour, other decent work deficits (*covered in report but not this summary*)

... and progress

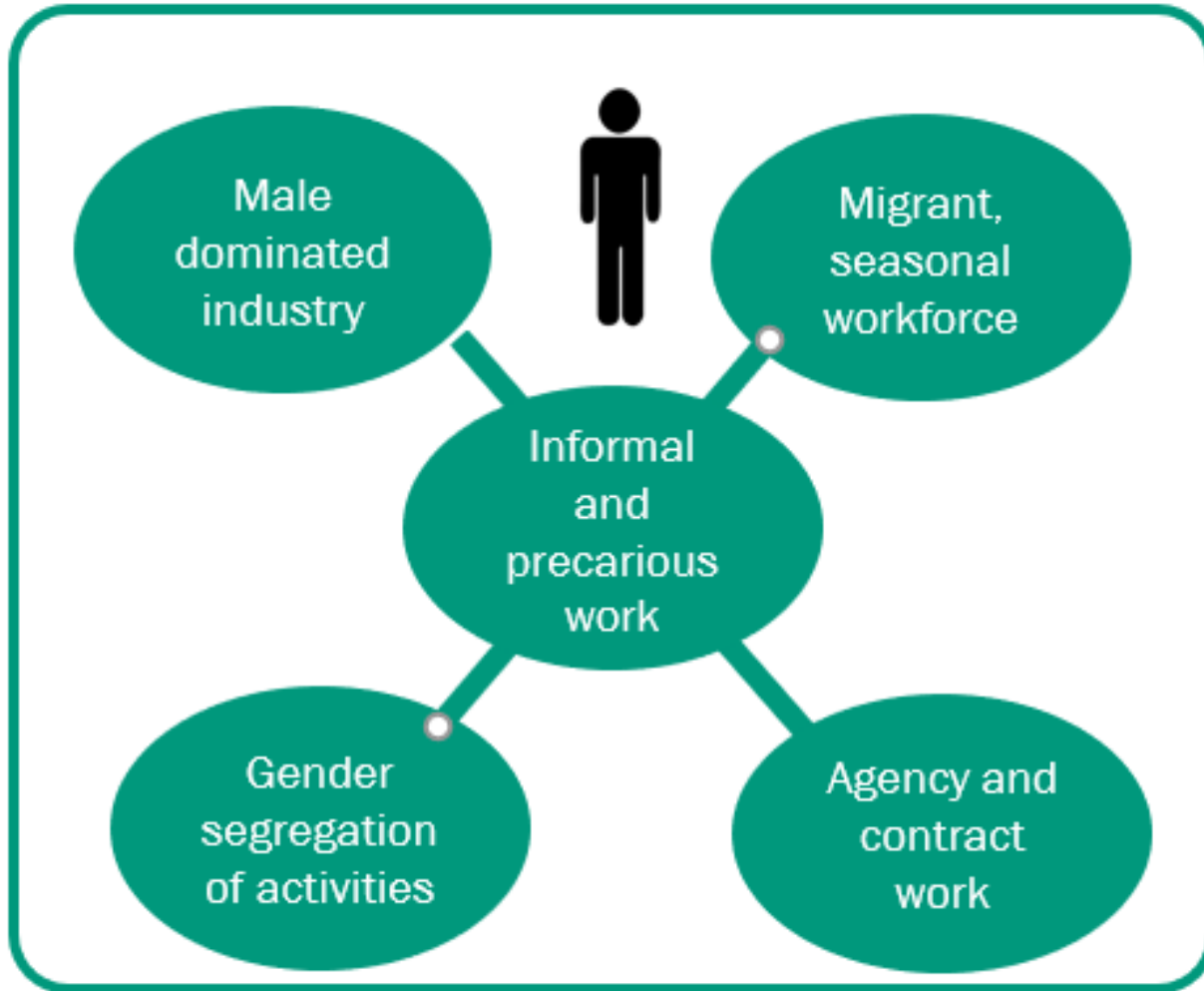
- Factors of success
- Sample initiatives to address CL (and other decent work issues)

Labour force characteristics

- **Major rural employer:** \approx 100 million rural livelihoods
- **Cultivation is fragmented**
 - Different systems in different countries
 - Seasonal workforce with likelihood of high informality
 - Including migrants, resulting in limited traceability
- **Labour arrangements depend on degree of mechanisation**
 - Mechanisation shaped by geography/development

Sugarcane production systems and labour force characteristics for top five producers				
	Prevalent production system	Average farm size	Employment in sugar sector (million)	Labour characteristics
Brazil	Large mechanised farms (60-70%)	13,110 ha	1.1	Contract labour
China	Small-medium farms	0.27 ha	40	Seasonal labour Migrant labour (foreign)
India	Small-medium farms	1-4 ha	50+	Seasonal and casual labour Migrant labour (domestic) Family labour
Thailand	Small-medium farms	9 ha	1	-
Pakistan	Small-medium farms	-	4.2	Seasonal labour

Labour force characteristics



- **Risk depends on production context**
 - non-mechanised + small-medium primary producers
 - mostly unpaid family work but also on commercial plantations
- **Paucity of data on nature and extent of CL globally**
 - few sugarcane CL surveys in producing countries
 - recent surveys in Cambodia + India do not capture scale of issue
 - insufficient gender disaggregation of data
- **CL reported in 17 sugar-producing countries (US DoL 2017)**
 - including major exporters (Thailand, India, Mexico, Colombia, Philippines, Paraguay, Vietnam, Cambodia)

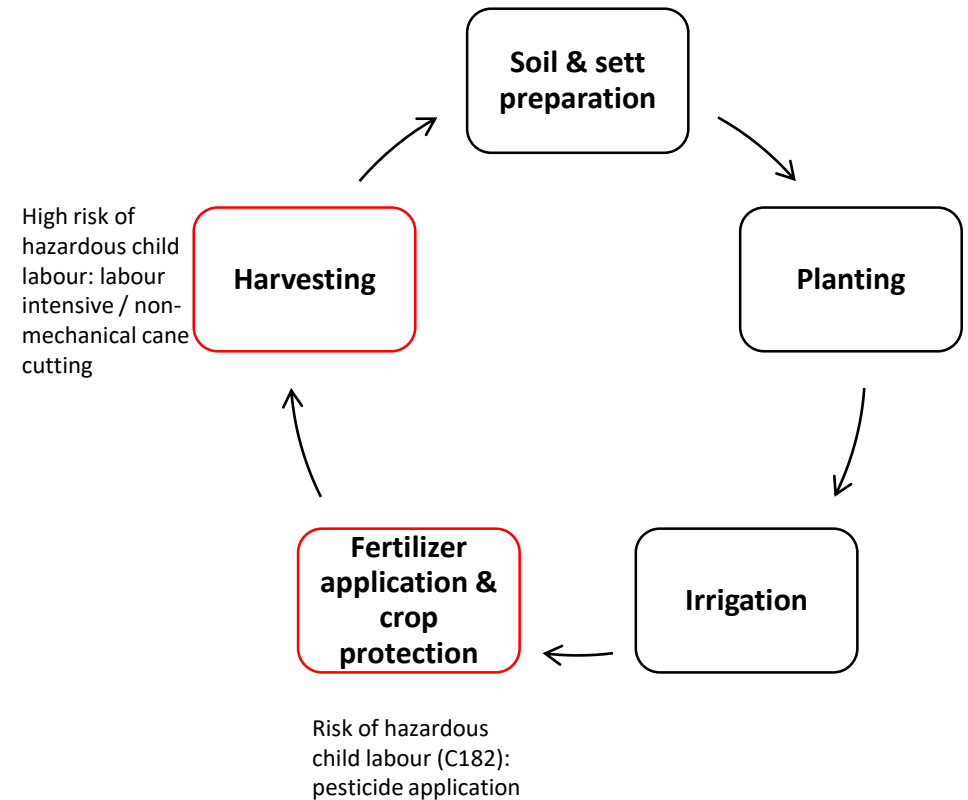


- **Common characteristics**
 - Age:** 10+ (5-17; cane cutters at older end of scale)
 - Family background:** landless migrants or small farm owners, members of ethnic minority and / or socially disadvantaged group
 - Sex:** typically more boys especially in harvesting, gender segregation of activities
 - Place of work:** family farm or commercial plantation
 - Employment type:** informal and seasonal

8 Worst forms of child labour

- **Children are involved in hazardous activities**
 - type of work undertaken (crop protection, manual harvesting – typically older boys)
 - conditions in which it is performed
- **Children's living and working conditions are poor**
 - health and safety
 - migrant camps
 - long hours (8-10 hrs per day / up to 35 hrs / week)
- **Anecdotal evidence of forced labour**
 - little information on involuntary child labour but anecdotal evidence of debt bondage in India / Pakistan

Sugarcane cultivation cycle tasks and risks of hazardous work



Causes of child labour in sugar

Push factors

Rural poverty

Lack of availability and quality of education

Low awareness and cultural norms

Lack of decent work opportunities for young people

Other socio-economic factors

Rural poverty = most significant driver. Industry often requires unskilled workers, informally employed through labour intermediaries, increasing the likelihood of children's exploitation.



Context specific drivers also exist – eg in Mexico/El Salvador, minors' sugarcane work considered preferable to idleness + risk of recruitment by gangs

Pull factors

Demand for unskilled labour

Labour cost-efficiency

Unpaid family work

Informal and seasonal work

Weak regulatory and enforcement framework

Factors in successful child labour reduction



Producer networks – eg Fundazucar



- Charitable arm El Salvador’s sugarcane industry association
- Internationally recognised for efforts in cutting child labour in the sector
- Fallen by 93% since 2004

Fundazucar efforts include:

- zero tolerance policy on child labour
- advocacy and awareness raising
- community education programmes
- training producers and mill staff
- providing external monitoring + best practice guide.

Buyers – eg The Coca Cola Company (TCCC)



- A member of Bonsucro and Child Labour Platform.
- Commissioned 28 in-depth country studies re child labour in sugar supply chain – publicly available.

Number of social programmes to combat child labour in around 20 countries worldwide:

- El Salvador, Mexico, Philippines, Honduras
- education initiatives
- training manuals
- good practice guidelines.

Traders – eg Olam



- Trader proactive in addressing decent work
- Member of Fair Labour Association since 2012
- Currently assesses some of its supply chains other than sugarcane.

It tackles child labour through:

- training farmers on good labour practices
- working to establish schools with local governments
- collaborating with local NGOs
- providing adult literacy courses to demonstrate value of education to workers.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives - Bonsucro



- Launched 2007, Bonsucro = global multi-stakeholder initiative aiming to ensure responsible sugarcane production
- Most prominent sectoral initiative - over 450 members
- Includes sugar’s major producers, traders and buyers

Central mechanism:

- mill certification system evaluating sustainability, social impact and product traceability
- has incentivized member commitments to work towards producers to commit to buying 100% ‘sustainable’ sugar.



Brazil

- Comprehensive, multi-pronged, and long-term approach
- Tackled supply and demand sides of child labour
- Social programmes – PETI; Bolsa Familia
- Increased inspection and enforcement – mobile inspection units
- Government-led; strong political will.



El Salvador

- ILO IPEC Time-Bound Programme
- Collaboration: IPEC, government, sugar industry
- Government capacity building, improved monitoring & evaluation, awareness-raising
- Education & vocational training; teacher training
- Community-led monitoring
- Political will and industry buy-in.



Mexico – PAJA Programme

- PAJA – Social Protection Programme for Migrant Agricultural Workers (*Jornaleros*)
- *Jornaleros* – highest rate of child labour
- Special education services for migrants during harvest
- Cash incentives for children's school attendance
- Targeted initiative for hard-to-reach groups.

Summary of recommendations to ILO-hosted Child Labour Platform

Do not replicate, collaborate: eg map where sugarcane production overlaps with other crops

Build local buy-in, including into existing activity: eg with local mills and outgrower communities

Leverage the position of traders: identify which are active on decent work in sugarcane

Aim to reach high-risk areas currently receiving insufficient attention

Share/produce tools on decent work: workshops, awareness campaigns, training manuals

Commission/support public or shared research on decent work deficits in highest risk sugarcane producing areas.

Further information and full findings

The full report can be found at [Child Labour in the Primary Production of Sugarcane](#) and includes:

- **Industry and supply chain overview** (including smallholder and cooperative levels)
- **Full decent work deficits** (forced labour, discrimination and gender-based workplace violence, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining)
- **Key actors in the sector**
- **Challenges and opportunities** in addressing child labour
- **Summary recommendations** for the ILO, industry actors and social partners

For further information on this or other Ergon work in agriculture, please contact Pins Brown on pins.brown@ergonassociates.net

