



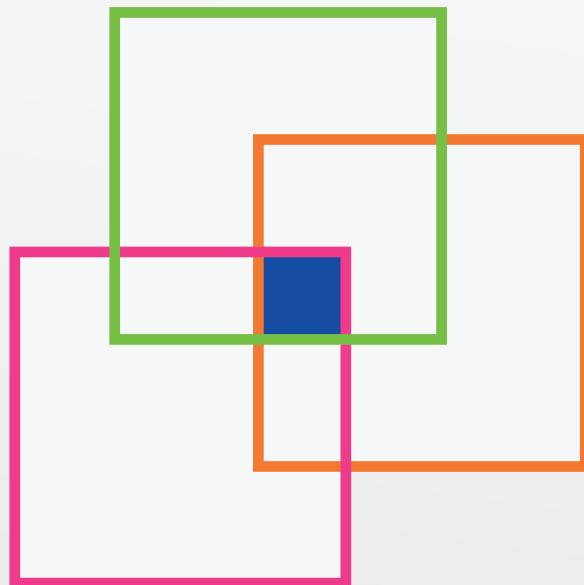
National Programme on
the Elimination of the Worst
Forms of Child Labour in Syria



unicef 



National Study on Worst Forms of Child Labour in Syria



National Study on Worst Forms of Child Labour in Syria

**ILO Regional Office for Arab States
and
UNICEF (Syria)**

March 2012

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Executive summary

This study of child labour in the Syrian Arab Republic (referred to as Syria throughout this volume) was carried out between April 2010 and February 2011 upon the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) and in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF (Syria). The need for such a study stemmed from the awareness of the danger of child labour and its violation of child rights as stipulated in the Syrian Constitution and the international agreements and conventions ratified by Syria. The lack of new and comprehensive studies tackling child labour has further intensified the need to conduct this research. In the past, child labour in Syria has been studied in a variety of manners, leading to short and insufficient abstracts limited to the identification of the size of the child-labour problem, but overlooking the details of its causes, characteristics and impacts.

This study has attempted to describe child labour and analyze its main reasons and factors, as well as explore its impact on children and society based on an analytical and participatory comparison, which includes different stakeholders and working children themselves. It should be mentioned that this study does not replace the urgent need for a comprehensive statistical survey, where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are needed to help provide better outcomes. The main goals of this study are:

- (1) To identify the main reasons for child labour in Syria.
- (2) To try to explore the relationship between child labour and school drop-out rates.
- (3) To identify the living conditions of working children according to social variables (male/female).
- (4) To shed light on the major effects of child labour on children and society.
- (5) To provide recommendations regarding child labour, which can then be transformed into action plans by relevant stakeholders.

The adopted methodology: The methodology for this study comprised an investigative analysis in the absence of statistical abstracts and a comprehensive national census on child labour. The analysis consists of two sections. The first section is made up of a desk review of available results and the identification and analysis of the judicial, legal, economic and social aspects of child labour. The second section consists of analytical qualitative research based on comprehensive field work comprising focus groups and in-depth interviews with major stakeholders in the field of education and child labour, including the children themselves. In addition, the results of the field work were analysed and compared with results of previous research and studies.

A total of 35 in-depth interviews were carried out, of which 11 were with parents, one with representatives of ministries and official parties, three with relevant international organizations, four with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and seven with heads of households and facilitators of child labour, most notably for domestic work purposes.

In addition, 27 focus groups were undertaken in different regions of the country, with at least two focus groups per region. The number of children who participated in the focus groups amounted to 173 from all Syrian regions. The selection process for this study differed from that of quantitative studies, since these results are meant to be indicative and not to be generalized. The targeted children were mostly working Syrian children aged 9 to 15 years, as well as Palestinian and Iraqi children of similar ages living in Syria. Attention was paid to gender distribution, geographic distribution, place of residence and job type, and care was taken to include children who have been in trouble with the law. In addition, some focus groups were undertaken with the parents of the Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi children.

The focus group participants were selected through a snowball effect, which is generally used in this type of research. The research team made contact with individuals in the local community and local civil society in each region in order to locate and meet working children and their parents. Through them, the research team was able to contact and meet other working children, and so on.

The main socioeconomic trends: The main socioeconomic trends in Syria have stood in the way of the country moving towards a social market economy. This is mainly due to the low growth rates during previous years, in addition to the nature of the realized growth, which was mainly focused in the financial, real estate and tourism sectors (services). In comparison, low growth rates were registered in productive sectors such as agriculture, construction, etc., which has thus limited the growth of new job opportunities as well as the redistribution of income.

The key challenges facing any response to this trend include the development of adequate social policies for the provision of job opportunities for new entrants to the labour market, as well as the improvement to the living conditions of a large proportion of the population, the acceleration of financial and fiscal reforms, the restraint of increasing poverty and unemployment rates, the integration of women in the labour force, and the alleviation of child labour incidence. This is in light of the results and findings of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 20062007- and labour market surveys conducted in recent years, which shed light on the exacerbation of child labour incidence and the 300,000 working children in Syria.

The legislative framework: This study shows that Syria has come a long way in adopting a legislative framework for the protection of children's rights in general, and working children in particular, and this through the ratification of various international agreements and conventions. In addition, Syria has issued several laws that regulate child labour and prevent their exploitation or their labour in dangerous professions that have not been approved by the law. However, there is still a pressing need for greater progress in this domain, specifically in terms of the issuance of a law specifically protecting children.

Field work: The results of the field work have shown similar results to those of previous studies on child labour in Syria, whether it be in terms of the causes leading to child labour, the characteristics

of this phenomenon, or even the effects and consequences of early integration into the labour market.

- Regarding the factors that have led these children to work, poverty and dropping out of school were seen as the two principal causes. These two factors are also positively correlated with one another in addition to family dissolution. The results confirmed that there is a positive correlation between child labour and mothers remaining outside the labour force: the majority of mothers of working children in the focus groups do not work.
- Some of the differences noted compared with previous studies were found in terms of the geographic distribution of child labour as well as the sectoral distribution. According to the results of the field work, a higher prevalence of child labour seems to be found in rural areas, and more specifically in the services sector, followed by industry, agriculture, begging on the streets, garbage collection, prostitution and, finally, art-and-craft jobs and construction. One reason for this is the decline in the role of agriculture in the economy – and thus a decline in the labour demand – due to years of drought in the country, as well as the effects of new economic policies.
- As for the main effects and consequences of child labour, violence in all its forms was found to be the main risk, especially in the work environment and particularly amongst girls working as housekeepers and maids (mostly sexual harassment). Other consequences were exploitation by gang members, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual deviation, as well as work-related accidents and injuries.
- Considering that children included in the research and focus groups did not exceed 15 years of age and that their jobs expose them to many dangers – such as violence, sexual harassment and exploitation – it is safe to say that these may be considered the worst forms of child labour (keeping in mind that a significant number of these children were begging on the streets or working as prostitutes from a very early age). Those begging on the streets were often working for either their parents or guardian, or for gangs who provided them with a place to sleep in exchange for the money they earned.
- The most important findings concerning the characteristics of working children are:
 - Child labour begins at an early age (between 9 and 10 years) and is more apparent amongst boys, for whom it becomes more prevalent with age. Girls' employment is concentrated in the younger age categories and decreases as they grow older.
 - Child labour for boys is concentrated in urban settings while it is the opposite for girls, who are more likely to work in rural areas.
 - Most working children are either illiterate or have dropped out of school. Those who are still enrolled in school are at risk of dropping out due to pressure and work-related stress.

- In general, girls begin working without pay at an earlier age in the family business, or they work for a salary in other families but their parents receive the wage. They also work as maids in households in the cities. Boys, on the other hand, are not sought after for this line of work just as girls are not desired for work on construction sites or in other jobs that require physical strength.
- The main constraints to combating child labour and which were made evident through this study are, firstly, admitting to the problem, its size and spread, and tackling it with the needed commitment. Further, it is difficult to engage organizations working in social care and protection to integrate them into a national social security system that addresses the risks posed to children, especially in cases of divorce, sickness or death of the parent. In addition, there is a lack of proper mechanisms to combat or prevent child delinquency. Current practices, despite their effectiveness and importance, may still only deal with the aftermath of or results of such a phenomenon rather than deal with the causes that lead to it. There are some weaknesses amongst the committees that address the school drop-out phenomenon. In addition to a lack of awareness regarding children's rights in society, there is a culture in certain regions that does not encourage the participation of women in the labour force.

This report offers a list of recommendations based on the results of the field work, which may be grouped at the following levels: legal, government agencies, education and the community. Some of the most important recommendations are:

- A public declaration by the highest political ranks of the country to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2016.
- Hasten the issuance of a specialized law for protecting children in Syria.
- Create a National Higher Commission, which would be in charge of all issues pertaining to children, among them the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.
- Create a supervisory commission in which representatives from governmental and non-governmental agencies would participate, and which would be in charge of monitoring and evaluating children's rights in the country.
- Revise the Labour Law, as well as the Social Security Law, to include children working in family establishments or in establishments that comprise less than four employees, as well as self-employed individuals, workers in agriculture or those working as housekeepers and maids.
- Undertake periodic child labour surveys in the country.
- Encourage the Government to abide by a pro-poor development policy by reconsidering the concept and role of a developmental state as well as adopting development projects

in the least developed regions.

- Adopt policies that encourage women's participation in the labour force, especially those who are heads of households.
- Revise the Social Insurance Law to include new provisions, such as insurance for the unemployed.
- Adopt policies that will decrease the population growth rate and forbid the practice of early marriage.
- Create supervisory committees to monitor the application of the Compulsory Education Law and to follow up on those who have dropped out of school.
- Promote remedial courses for children who have repeated the first few grades.
- Revise the education system, whereby it is possible to reintegrate those who had previously dropped out and to develop alternative school curricula for those returning to school.
- Constant training and capacity-building of teachers in all subject matters.
- Improve upon and promote vocational training.
- Create a consortium of national and international donors to implement the "one free meal a day" project in the least developed regions of the country, and to put in place financial aid to help the poorest students.
- Encourage the establishment of NGOs focusing on childhood issues and, particularly, combating child labour.
- Motivate organizations to create alternative places of care and shelter for children, and provide them with the necessary maintenance resources.

1•Theoretical and methodological framework

1.1 Background

Child labour remains one of the main challenges facing development efforts and human rights throughout the world. In 2008, child labour affected around 215 million children aged between 5 and 17 years, 115 million of whom were working in dangerous conditions, considered the “worst forms of child labour”¹. Around 13.6 per cent of all children are working children between the ages of 5 and 17 years, with a rate of 15.6 per cent for males and 11.4 per cent for females². Compared to 2004, the total number of working children decreased by 0.6 per cent, while the number of children facing the worst forms of child labour dropped by 0.5 per cent. Despite these improvements, not enough effort was made to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of the eradication of the “worst forms of child labour”, set by the ILO as a goal to be achieved by 2016.³ This vision was based on certain improvements achieved between 2000 and 2004; however, the various crises since 2007 (the food price crisis, the oil price crisis and its derivatives, and finally the financial and economic crisis) led to the exacerbation of poverty and marginalization at a global level, hence rendering these goals difficult to achieve within the set period of time.

Contrary to what many of those contributing to the phenomenon of child labour believe, the early integration of children in the labour market does not yield the desired return and is in fact a misplaced investment. On the one hand, the child lives a dangerous life and is deprived of his or her most basic rights and, on the other hand, the school drop-out rate and early labour market entry exacerbate poverty and ignorance, which necessarily aggravate child labour and throw the development process into a vicious cycle. According to a study carried out by the ILO in 2005, there are around 9,270,000 working children in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), while only US\$139 is needed per child in order to put an end to this phenomenon and provide these children with a decent education. Twenty years of implementing this strategy is estimated to increase economic growth by 23 per cent in the MENA region, knowing that every additional academic year will increase the child’s income by 11 per cent.

It is difficult in general to estimate the scope of child labour in developing countries for children below the age of 15. The case is no different for Syria, for two main reasons: firstly, statistics are scarce, since labour surveys in Syria only tackle information about individuals aged 15 years and above; secondly, there is difficulty in accessing this type of information, since child labour is illegal in Syria, thus discouraging the child, the family and the head of household from exposing working children.

1.2 Importance of the study and the overall objectives

This study of child labour in Syria was carried out upon the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) and in cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF (Syria). The need for such a study stems from the awareness of the danger of child labour and its violation to child rights as stipulated in the Syrian Constitution and the international agreements and conventions ratified by Syria.

¹ ILO: Accelerating action against child labour, Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Report of the Director-General, Report I(B), International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010, p. 5.

² *ibid*

³ *ibid.* p. 2.

Further than this, there is a lack of new and comprehensive studies tackling child labour, especially since statistical surveys undertaken by specialized public agencies have not considered child labour as a primary subject in and of itself. Instead, child labour is studied through a variety of areas leading to short and insufficient abstracts, limited to the identification of the size of the child-labour problem, but overlooking the details of its causes, characteristics and impacts.

Apart from minor exceptions, the few analytical studies on the subject were limited to one specific city, governorate or district, without any benchmarking at the national level or at the level of the different regions of the country. This study attempts to describe child labour and analyse its main reasons and factors, as well as explore its impact on children and society, based on an analytical and participatory comparison, including different stakeholders and working children themselves. It should be mentioned that this study does not replace the urgent need for a comprehensive child labour survey, where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are needed to help provide better outcomes.

The overall objectives of the study were identified based on the contract between the ILO and the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI) and are as follows:

- (1) To identify the main reasons for child labour in Syria.
- (2) To try to explore the relationship between child labour and school drop-out rates.
- (3) To identify the living conditions of working children according to social variables (male/female).
- (4) To shed light on the major effects of child labour on children and society.
- (5) To provide recommendations regarding child labour, which can then be transformed into action plans by relevant stakeholders.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology used in the study comprises an investigative analysis in the absence of statistics and a comprehensive national child labour survey. The analysis consists of two sections. The first section is made up of a desk review of available results and the identification and analysis of the judicial, legal, economic and social aspects of child labour. The second section consists of an analytical qualitative research based on comprehensive field work comprising focus groups and in-depth interviews with major stakeholders in the field of education and child labour, including the children themselves. In addition, the results of the field work were analysed and compared with results of previous research and studies.

1.3.1 Desk review

The study team carried out the identification and analysis of available studies regarding child labour (judicial and legal studies, economic and statistical studies and social research, etc.). The available statistical data have been collected from different sources and references, for the analysis of child labour at both the Syrian and the international levels (whenever possible).

The major references and research are listed as follows:

- Central Bureau of Statistics; FAFO; UNICEF. 2002: Child labour in Syria (August). This study relies on the results of the Internal Migration Census of 2000, which provided extensive background information on household members and characteristics of the labour force for those aged 10 years and above. The study estimates the number of working children at around 261,000, or 17.8 per cent of all children between the ages of 10 and 17 years, which drops to 10 per cent when excluding children working for their families.
- Abdullah Atouz. 2005. “Causes and consequences of child labour in Syria” (field work for a Master’s degree in Statistics). This study sheds light on the scope of child labour in Syria based on a study sample of working children aged between 8 and 14 years. According to the study, “child labour entails serious violations of children’s rights and obstacles to sustainable human development”. Child labour has become a familiar aspect of society where medium-income households start to encourage their children to work, notably during summer breaks. Also, child labour now reaches other informal and unregulated sectors – which are void of any form of child protection – while it used to be limited to rural areas and arts-and-crafts workshops in urban areas.
- Field work executed by the centre of the governorate of Homs, 2006, comprises a statistical analysis of the number of children who have entered the centre during the period 2004–2005, where the percentage of children arrested for smuggling (including selling foreign cigarettes) was estimated at around 10.8 per cent of children in 2004, and 7 per cent in 2005. The study links the restrictions on the import of certain goods to the increase of their smuggling by children and youth.
- Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF. 2006. Syria multiple indicator cluster survey, 2006. This survey indicates that 4 per cent of children between the ages of 5 and 14 years are working, reaching up to 5 per cent for males, and 3 per cent for females. Child labour is high among children who have dropped out of school, children living in rural areas and children from poor households.
- Shaza Qadamani. 2008. “Statistical analysis of the condition of working children in the city of Aleppo” (field work for a Master’s degree in Population Studies). This study indicates the increase of child labour in the higher age ranges. In addition, the percentage of working children who are originally from rural areas and who work in the city is higher than working children living in urban areas. Around 90 per cent of working children work on a full-time basis.

1.3.2 Participatory field work

The study team carried out 35 in-depth interviews, which were open-ended and based on checklists, of which 11 were with parents, one with representatives of ministries and official parties, three with relevant international organizations, four with non-governmental organizations and seven with heads of households and facilitators of child labour, most notably for housework purposes.

The study team also organized 27 focus groups in different regions of the country, with at least two focus groups per region. The selected regions (or rather cities) were: Damascus, Rif Damascus, Dar'a, Homs, Lattakia, Tartous, Aleppo, Idleb, Deir Al Zour and Alhasskeh. The focus groups mainly targeted:

- Working Syrian children between the ages of 10 and 15, as well as Palestinian and Iraqi children (two focus groups for Palestinians – rural and urban areas – and one focus group for Iraqis). Children in conflict with the law were also targeted. This participatory field work has taken into account, as much as possible, the representation of children according to gender, geographic distribution, place of residence (rural-urban) and occupation.
- Parents of working children in three separate focus groups for Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi parents.

The number of children who participated in the focus groups amounted to 173 from all Syrian regions. The selection process for this study differed from that of quantitative studies, since these results are meant to be indicative and not to be generalized.

The focus group participants were selected through a snowball effect, which is generally used in this type of research. The research team made contact with individuals in the local community and local civil society in each region in order to locate and meet working children and their parents. Through them, the research team was able to contact and meet other working children, and so on.

The reason for using this approach was that it is illegal for children under the age of 15 years to work in Syria and, as such, the parents and/or employers of these children could be arrested if caught. Fear was a major constraint in reaching these children and parents as many of them refused to take part in the focus groups even after they were reassured.

The final sample of children was distributed as follow:

- The gender distribution was 61 per cent boys and 39 per cent girls.
- The majority of the children were from urban areas (62 per cent), while 38 per cent were from rural areas.
- The majority of the children were aged 1415- years (66 per cent). The remainder of the children were aged 910- years (5.8 per cent) and 1113- years (28.3 per cent).

1.4 Definitions and concepts

The factors behind the evolution of and the position towards the practice of child labour remain highly controversial. This debate goes hand in hand with the controversial concepts and definitions of the different aspects of child labour, and is reflected in published child labour statistics. In this context, it is important to define what is entailed by “child” and “child labour” and to determine the worst forms of child labour. More importantly, it is essential to consider the extent to which these terms and definitions can be applied to different societies and within the different situations

of child labour.

In order to avoid any confusion and misunderstanding, the comprehensive framework of the study is in line with the following internationally recognized concepts:

(1) Child: A human being below the age of 18 years, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

(2) Age: This study has adopted the age group 10-15 years, in line with the Syrian Labour Law, which allows the employment of children aged 15 years and over for certain types of work. Moreover, according to the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), “the minimum age [of work] shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years”.

(3) Child labour: According to the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the term “child labour” refers to “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children;
- depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
- obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
- requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work”.⁴

(4) Worst forms of child labour: The types of work referred to under Article 3(d) of Convention No. 182 comprise, according to Recommendation No. 190, “(a) work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse; (b) work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces; (c) work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; (d) work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health; (e) work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer”.⁵

(5) Working child: For the purpose of this study, working children are those individuals aged between 9 and 15 years, either male or female, who work either full time (such as those who have dropped out of school), or part time (such as children who work after school hours and during vacations).

(6) Geographic and sectoral distribution of child labour: The distribution of working children according to regions and centres of economic activities that include the worst forms of child labour based on available information.

⁴ A definition of IPEC is available online at: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 19

- Wage level: The study considers a wage to be cash or in-kind, regardless of whether it is assigned directly to the child or through his or her parents. The wage level is determined based on the national minimum wage common to all economic sectors.
- Parents' level of education: This falls under four categories:
 - (a) Illiterate: Unable to read or write.
 - (b) Low level: Includes those who have completed primary school.
 - (c) Medium level: Includes those who have completed intermediate and secondary school.
 - (d) High level: Includes those who have completed complementary or university education, or more.
- Children's level of education: This falls under three categories:
 - (a) Illiterate: A child that has never enrolled in school.
 - (b) Drop-out: A child that stopped going to school and did not return during the same academic year.
 - (c) Enrolled: A child attending school at the moment the study is undertaken, regardless of whether or not he or she wishes to continue studying.
- Working day: Consists of six hours of work, excluding a break. There are three categories of working hours:
 - (a) Six hours or less: One, or less than one, working day.
 - (b) From six to nine hours: It ranges between one and one-and-a-half working days.
 - (c) Nine hours or more: More than one-and-a-half working days.
- Family disintegration: Consists of the absence of one or both parents due to death, separation, divorce or travel for more than six months.

1.5 Structure of the report

The sections of the report cover the following issues:

- Section two deals with the socio-economic context surrounding child labour in Syria, including the guidelines of the tenth five-year plan (FYP) regarding child labour.
- Section three presents and analyses the legislative framework and the laws directly or indirectly targeting child labour. It comprises a comparison between international conventions ratified by Syria and the internal rules and regulations in place.
- Section four presents the characteristics of child labour in Syria based on the few available studies and statistics.
- Section five fills the considerable gap in terms of statistical data based on the results of the qualitative field work, consisting of in-depth interviews and focus groups undertaken in the different regions of the country

- Section six consists of a set of suggestions and recommendations that could develop into action plans aimed at reducing child labour and hindering its expansion

2 • Main characteristics of socio-economic development in Syria

This section comprises an analysis of the socio-economic situation of Syria and the relevant aspects affecting the incidence of child labour. According to studies and research, child labour is linked to high population growth and large household sizes. There is also a correlation between child labour and the level of economic development and production, whether on the national or governorate level. Studies have also shown the direct and considerable impact of household poverty on child labour, whose incidence and expansion vary according to the presence or absence of adequate social programmes and policies.

This section presents and analyses the actual socio-economic situation of Syria in recent years in order to identify the factors increasing the incidence of child labour and to estimate the size and the geographical and sectoral distribution of this practice. Section 2.2 deals with the characteristics and rates of population growth, geographic and age distribution of the population, and labour force distribution according to education level and economic activity. Section 2.3 presents the characteristics of economic development, production and investment, and their impact on poverty.

2.1 Demographic characteristics

In 2009, the population of Syria was estimated at around 20.125 million⁶ with an annual population growth rate of 2.3 per cent for the period 2004–2009 – based on 2004 population estimates of 17.921 million. The population growth rate for the period 2000–2005 declined to 2.45 per cent, although this is still considered high compared to neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, population growth rates in Syrian have been on a steady decrease from 3.3 per cent between 1981 and 1994⁷ to around 2.7 per cent between 1995 and 2000.⁸ The decline in population growth rates is due to certain factors in the 1980s and 1990s affecting overall fertility rates (such as the rise of the minimum age for marriage); these lower growth rates make domestic living conditions more difficult and have led to increased migration rates (from 5.6 per cent of the total population in 2000, to 6.9 per cent in 2005, and 9.8 per cent in 2010).⁹

While the decline in population growth rates reflects substantial demographic changes in Syria (as well as other countries), it nevertheless remains insufficient in comparison with other countries. However, this decline seems to be faster than the rise of reproduction awareness and level of education, specifically for females, since both these factors play a major role in diminishing fertility and birth rates. The decline of population growth has led to the alteration of the demographic composition of the Syrian population, whereby the share of children below the age of 15 years constituted around 37.5 per cent of the total population in 2009, while it was 39.5 per cent in 2004, and 48.4 per cent in 1981. On the other hand, the share of age category 65 and above remained the same (3.3 per cent) in 2004 and 1981. Therefore, the age-dependency rate has dropped from 107 per cent in 1981, to 91 per cent in 1994, and to 75 per cent in 2004 due to the increase of the working age-population from 48 per cent in 1981 to 57 per cent in 2004¹⁰. In 2009, the working-age population consisted of 60 per cent of total in urban areas, compared with 56 per cent¹¹ in rural areas.

⁶ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2009 (Damascus, 2009), tables 52/6, 2/ and 102/.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division: Trends in international migrant stock: The 2008 revision (United Nations Database, Pop/db/mig/stock/rev.2008) (2009).

¹⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 1981, 1994 and 2004 (Damascus).

¹¹ Commission of Household Affairs: Population according to age and gender (rural and urban) in 2009, according to urbanism statistics, Second report (ongoing), 2010.

It should be noted that the demographic changes taking place are not regionally balanced; there are great discrepancies in the characteristics of the socio-economic structure of the different regions. The decline in growth and fertility rates was not similar in urban and rural areas. In 2009, children aged below 15 years were estimated to constitute 40 per cent of total residents in rural areas, compared with 36 per cent in urban areas. According to the 2004 population census, the total fertility rate was 4.1 per cent in rural areas and 3.19 per cent in urban areas¹². In this context, rural and urban areas have registered different population growth rates. High population growth rates were registered in governorates with a majority of rural areas, whereas lower population growth rates were registered in governorates with a majority of urban areas. This was reflected in the share of total population of each governorate. The share of the population of Damascus, Soueida, Tartous and Lattakia decreased, as opposed to Rif Damascus, Aleppo, Deir Al Zour and Al-Rakka, where the population increased. Population growth rates had a greater effect on the population than did internal and external migration flows, which have remained steady over the years.

Table 1: Population growth rates per governorate: 1981–1994, 1995–2000 and 2000–2005

Governorate	Population growth rate per thousand		
	1981–1994	1995–2000	2000–2005
Damascus	18	14.7	13.3
Rif Damascus	45.9	37.6	34.1
Aleppo	36.1	29.5	26.8
Homs	31.6	25.9	23.5
Hama	31.1	25.4	23
Lattakia	23.6	19.3	17.5
Deir Al Zour	43.6	35.7	32.4
Idleb	34.8	28.5	25.9
Alhasskeh	33.1	27.1	24.6
Al-Rakka	35.9	29.4	26.7
Al-Soueida	23	18.8	17.1
Dar'a	40.3	33	29.9
Tartous	21.9	17.9	16.2
Quneitra	48.8	39.9	36.2
Total	33	27	24.5

¹² *ibid.*, table 28/, p. 42.

2.1.1 Internal and external migration

The governorate of Rif Damascus has witnessed continuous and considerable growth between 1981 and 2004 due to migration inflows from Damascus and other governorates (around 29 per cent of internal migration in 1994–2004)¹³. In contrast, Deir Al Zour and Dar'a had high migration outflows¹⁴ despite population growth rates superior to the national average (Deir Al Zour at 32.3 per thousand and Dar'a at 29.9 per thousand). The share of the population of Damascus compared to the total population of Syria declined from 12.3 per cent in 1981, to 10.1 per cent in 1994, and to 8.7 per cent in 2004¹⁵, as opposed to Rif Damascus respectively increasing from 10.1 per cent, to 11.9 per cent, and to 12.7 per cent. The share of Aleppo's population also increased from 21.6 per cent in 1993 to 22.6 per cent in 2004; and a similar picture emerges for Deir Al Zour, where its share of the population increased from 5.2 per cent in 1994 to 5.6 per cent in 2004¹⁶. Although the population share of all governorates has changed over the years, the most drastic changes have occurred in Rif Damascus, Aleppo, Lattakia, Tartous and Al-Soueida, where population shares have decreased, with the exception of Rif Damascus and Aleppo.

Internal migration has affected population growth rates in different areas of Syria, keeping in mind that most migrants belong to the youth category. Internal migration is characterized by household migration instead of individual migration. Although the demographic characteristics of migrants and recipient regions are similar, the number of young migrants has increased the population growth rates of recipient regions. Internal migration slowed down during the period 1994–2004 compared with previous years¹⁷. Approximately 231,000 residents migrated during 1994–2004 (1.8 per cent of the total population) compared to 354,000 in 1984–1994 (2.6 per cent of total population)¹⁸. In addition to its slowdown, migration has registered a new trend, where residents of governorate centres are leaving towards other urban areas in response to the saturation of the governorate centres and the lack of job opportunities. Thus, the trend of new economic urban centres has been set, where total migration towards peripheral urban areas increased by 44 per cent in 2004 compared with 1994¹⁹. Regardless of migrants' destination, migration from urban and rural areas has increased in general.²⁰

The economy is a key reason for migration, where high economic growth rates are usually accompanied by intensive population movements and high internal migration rates. According to migration statistics (2004), the problem of housing availability and high unemployment in city centres, due to the slowdown of economic growth in the second half of the 1990s, was exacerbated by a decrease in internal migration and a change of migration destination from city centres to urban agglomerations, whether far or close to the city centres. In addition, migration from rural to urban areas increased, not due to economic growth but due to the continuous degradation of socio-economic conditions in rural areas. Poverty and unemployment surveys have confirmed the common conditions of rural areas in Syria, especially in north-eastern and southern rural areas (they also confirm the substantial migration taking place from the rural parts of the north-eastern region due to drought in 2008 and 2009). It can be said that the development process in Syria in the past two decades was not all-inclusive and did not address the gaps between social categories

¹³ Central Bureau of Statistics: Internal migration in Syria (Damascus, no date).

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 9

¹⁵ Statistical Abstract, 2009, table 62/, p. 40.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Central Bureau of Statistics: Internal migration in Syria (Damascus, no date).

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

or different regions of the country. According to the poverty report of 2004, disparities in income distribution in Syria have become more acute compared to previous years (1996–1997).

2.1.2 Household size

According to the 1994 and 2004 censuses, the average household size in Syria decreased from 6.25 members to 5.55²¹. Despite this decline, households are still considered to be large in many regions of the country, where the average household size reaches up to eight members in Deir Al Zour, Alhasskeh and Alrika. Households are even larger in most of the remaining rural areas of Syria. Conversely, the average household size has declined in cities such as Damascus, Tartous and Soueida, to around six members.²² Despite the general decline, the average household size remains relatively high, which implies a certain direct or indirect relationship between the size of the household and poverty, child labour, malnutrition and school drop-outs. The 2004 household income surveys shed light on the strong correlation between household size and poverty. In other words, poverty is exacerbated by the size of the household, as poverty increases by 3 per cent with every additional household member.²³ According to recent surveys, poverty (around 7 per cent in 2006–2007²⁴ compared to 2004) and unemployment rates increased in 2009 compared to previous years, which implies the insufficiency of economic growth and the continuous disparities in the social and geographic distribution of economic growth. It goes without saying that relatively high population growth requires higher and more stable and sustainable economic growth. In other words, disparities of growth rates from one year to another, as well as income fluctuations, exacerbate the poverty of vulnerable households, which constitute a main cause for child labour and school drop-outs.

2.1.3 Education characteristics

According to modern development theories, human capital is the most important factor for the achievement of sustainable development. Syria has made a considerable effort to provide public and free education and has issued a compulsory education law. In 2002, basic education was extended from primary education to the end of the intermediate level. Therefore, the illiteracy rate for the age group 15 years and above dropped from 27 per cent in 1994²⁵ to around 19 per cent in 2004²⁶. In 2005, illiteracy rates declined to 16 per cent, but increased again to 16.8 per cent in 2008²⁷. In this context, considerable disparity resides between males and females, with an illiteracy rate of 9.9 per cent for males and 24 per cent for females in 2008²⁸. Similarly, illiteracy rates vary between governorates, with the lowest rates registered in Damascus, Al-Soueida and the highest in Alrika and Deir Al Zour.

²¹ Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (SCFA); UNICEF: Situation analysis of early childhood development in Syria (Damascus, 2008), p. 35.

²² Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 2004 (Damascus).

²³ Syrian Commission for Family Affairs; UNFPA: The state of Syrian population (the first national report) (Damascus, 2008), p. 208

²⁴ Hiba Leithy and Khaled Abou Ismail: Poverty, growth and distribution of income in Syria, 2004–2008-, Executive abstract, unofficial document (UNDP, June 2008).

²⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 1994 (Damascus)

²⁶ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 2004 (Damascus)

²⁷ Department of Human Development of the National Planning Committee (2010).

²⁸ *ibid.*

Table 2: Illiteracy rate for residents aged 15 years and above according to governorates and gender (2008)²⁹

Governorate	Male	Female	Total
Damascus	4.6	10.4	7.5
Aleppo	15.5	32.6	23.9
Rif	5.5	16.3	9.3
Damascus	5.1	17.3	11.1
Homs	6.9	20	13.3
Lattakia	6	16.5	11.2
Idleb	10.6	25.5	17.9
Alhassekeh	17.3	39.4	28.3
Deir Al Zour	19.1	44.2	31.6
Tartous	5.5	17.4	11.4
Al-Rakka	18.6	48.6	32.8
Dar'a	5.3	16.4	10.8
Al-Soueida	2.8	13.9	8.6
Quneitra	8.6	20.7	14.5
Total	9.9	24	16.8

Disparities in illiteracy rates and education levels are similar. In 2007, 4.2 per cent of residents aged 15 years and above were university graduates (2.4 per cent in rural areas and 5.8 per cent in urban areas). In Damascus, 10.2 per cent of the population are university graduates, 10.9 per cent in Lattakia, 9.5 per cent in Tartous, as opposed to 3.9 per cent in Alrika (which is a rural area), around 3.4 per cent in urban Deir Al Zour, and 2.8 per cent in urban Alhassekeh³⁰, while this rate halves in the rural parts of these areas. As for gender, 5.4 per cent of males are university graduates as opposed to around 3 per cent of females, which is inversely compatible with illiteracy rates.³¹ Education levels are, however, in line with the poverty map. Poverty is concentrated in the north-eastern part of the country, which registered the lowest education levels according to the available data. Theoretically, child labour is one of the most painful consequences of illiteracy, poverty and school drop-outs.

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Market Census, 2007 (Damascus), table 2.

³¹ *ibid*

2.1.4 Poverty

Poverty reports in Syria were not considered to be important until the 2004 report, which undertook the poverty mapping of the country in collaboration with the National Planning Committee, the Central Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). According to the 2004 poverty report, 11.4 per cent of total population in Syria – around 2 million people – fell below the extreme poverty line, as they were unable to meet their basic needs during the period 2003–04. Thirty per cent of the population live below the upper poverty line, which at least provides for more than food needs (total poverty). It should be noted that poverty is concentrated in rural areas as opposed to urban areas. Since the resident population of rural areas constitutes at least 50 per cent of total population, it is worth knowing that 62 per cent of poor residents are based in these rural areas. Poverty rates in the rural north-eastern part of the country (Idleb, Aleppo, Alrika, Deir Al Zour and Alhasskeh) have reached 17.9 per cent, with an upper poverty rate of 35.8 per cent in the north-eastern region,³² the poorest region of Syria.

Table 3: Poverty rate per governorates according to the poverty map 2004³³

Governorate	Poverty rate
Damascus	47.5
Rif Damascus	5.44
Aleppo	19.88
Homs	9.02
Hama	11.57
Lattakia	11.55
Deir Al Zour	4.7
Idleb	9.81
Alhasskeh	10.09
Al-Rakka	17.59
Al-Soueida	17.72
Dar'a	15.43
Tartous	6.94
Quneitra	14.85
Total	11.4

The analysis of the findings shows the relationship between poverty and large households, and between poverty and education, whereby 81.3 per cent of the poor did not receive the minimum (primary) education. In addition, the study concludes that the poverty of a proportion of salaried employees is due to low wages, especially in the informal sector. As such, there is no clear association between unemployment and poverty, since the poor in Syria cannot cope with unemployment due to the absence of unemployment indemnities and the weak safety nets in place. However, low wages and informal sector employment are clearly linked. Gender and poverty also seem to be linked, whereby female-headed households are more subject to poverty than those headed by males.

³² UNDP: Poverty in Syria: 1996- 2004: Diagnosis and pro-poor policy considerations (Damascus, June 2005), p. 10.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 45.

The absence of studies on poverty in previous periods has not allowed a historical description of poverty trends in Syria. However, poverty, illiteracy and low educational levels seem to be intertwined, which sheds light on certain aspects of the vicious circle created by poverty and illiteracy. According to the study, extreme poverty in Syria is not widespread and can be treated at limited cost by a set of targeted programmes in the poverty pockets of the country. Nevertheless, 20 per cent of the population live directly above the lower poverty line, and could drop below it in the event of any economic crisis or significant price increase. In this context, one must take into account the impact of certain adopted economic policies in the previous years, the effects of the drought, the migration of tens of thousands of families from the north-eastern part of the country to large cities or to urban southern areas or to other countries. According to the preliminary findings of the household expenditures study in 2007, poverty rates had increased to 12.2 per cent, and a relationship between child poverty, illiteracy and school drop-out was identified. Household poverty is an important factor in determining child labour, especially in urban areas. The increase in poverty was accompanied with increased inequality of income distribution, from 0.33 per cent in 1997 to 0.37 per cent in 2004. The poorest 20 per cent of the population, living directly above the lower poverty line, covers 7 per cent of total household expenditures, while the richest 20 per cent of the population stands for 45 per cent of total expenditures.³⁴

2.1.5 School drop-outs and child labour

The school drop-out rate is an important indicator and cause of child labour. The identification of the extent of school drop-outs facilitates the identification of the extent of child labour and the number of working children. However, the statistical abstracts published by the Ministry of Education show discrepancies in school drop-out rates between regions and classes of basic education. The statistical data of school drop-outs sometimes reveal a lack of reliability of official data. The school drop-out rate is linked to two main factors: poverty and poor quality of education, which can be due to the school environment (including violence against children) and a weak educational process, in addition to other factors such as school accessibility and the tendency of not sending girls to school. However, poverty remains the main reason behind school drop-outs and entering the labour market, especially for males. Therefore, it is logically assumed that children of poor areas are more at risk of dropping out in order to financially support their families, as they are sometimes the only income earners of the household. This logical conclusion, however, comes in conflict with the official statistics concerning school drop-outs, as they show an inverse relationship with poverty (24.5)³⁵ where the increase of poverty leads to a decrease of school drop-out. Thus, there is some doubt regarding the reliability of the official statistical abstracts.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6

³⁵ The Central Bureau of Statistics cooperates with the National Planning Commission and the FAFO in the preparation of a new report for 2008- 2009

Table 4: Drop-outs from basic education 2009 /2010³⁶

Governorate	Education	Male	Female	Total	Poverty rate according to the lower poverty line 2004
Damascus	Total	7.8	5	6.4	4.75
Rif	Urban	5.4	4.1	4.8	5.44
	Rural	10.5	5.9	8.2	
Damascus	Total	7.9	5.4	6.6	
Aleppo	Urban	2.9	2	2.5	19.88
	Rural	2.6	2.8	2.7	
	Total	2.7	2.6	2.6	
Homs	Urban	3.8	2	2.9	9.02
	Rural	1.8	1.4	1.6	
	Total	2.5	1.9	2.2	
Hama	Urban	2.5	2.4	2.4	11.75
	Rural	1	1.2	1.1	
	Total	1.5	1.5	1.5	
Lattakia	Urban	1.1	0.8	0.9	11.55
	Rural	2.2	1.2	1.7	
	Total	2.7	1.1	1.9	
Deir Al Zour	Urban	3.5	2.7	3.1	4.7
	Rural	3.4	3.3	3.4	
	Total	3.3	3	3.2	
Idleb	Urban	5.2	4.2	4.7	9.81
	Rural	4	4.5	4.2	
	Total	4.3	4.4	4.3	
Alhasskeh	Urban	4.3	3.3	3.8	10.09
	Rural	3	3	3	
	Total	3.4	3.1	3.3	
Al-Rakka	Urban	2.6	1.5	2.1	17.59
	Rural	1.5	1.6	1.5	
	Total	1.8	1.8	1.8	
Al-Soueida	Urban	8	3.6	5.9	17.72
	Rural	4.9	2.4	3.7	
	Total	5.2	2.3	3.8	
Dar'a	Urban	2.8	2	2.4	15.43
	Rural	2.8	2.1	2.5	
	Total	2.8	2	2.4	

³⁶ Statistical abstracts provided by the Ministry of Education to the study team, July 2010

Tartous	Urban	2.4	1.3	1.9	6.94
	Rural	2.3	0.8	1.6	
	Total	2.2	0.9	1.5	
Quneitra	Urban	7.7	6.4	7	14.85
	Rural	8	7.6	7.8	
	Total	7.9	7.1	7.5	
Total	Urban	3.8	2.9	3.3	11.4
	Rural	3.5	3	3.2	
	Total	3.8	3.1	3.4	

According to the Ministry of Education, the drop-out rate decreased in 2007 and increased again between 2008 and 2010.

Table 5: Drop-out rate from basic education³⁷

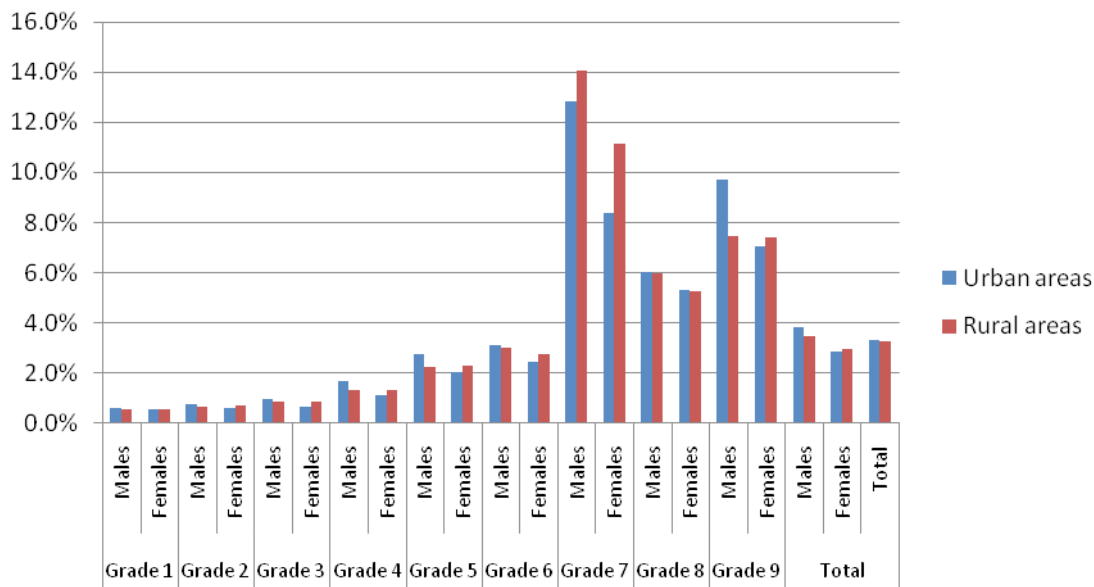
2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
4.4	2.5	2.75	3	3.6

The drop-out rate for males is higher than that for females in all basic education classes and all governorates, except for the Rif of Aleppo, Hama, Idlib and Al-Rakka. School drop-outs in those areas are accompanied by extreme poverty and conservative traditions. Moreover, drop-out rates increase in the first grade of basic education and keep growing with grades and with higher age groups.³⁸

³⁷ Ministry of Education: Development indicators (July 2010).

³⁸ Statistical abstracts provided by the Ministry of Education to the study team, July 2010

Figure 1: School drop-out rates by gender and class, 2009–2010

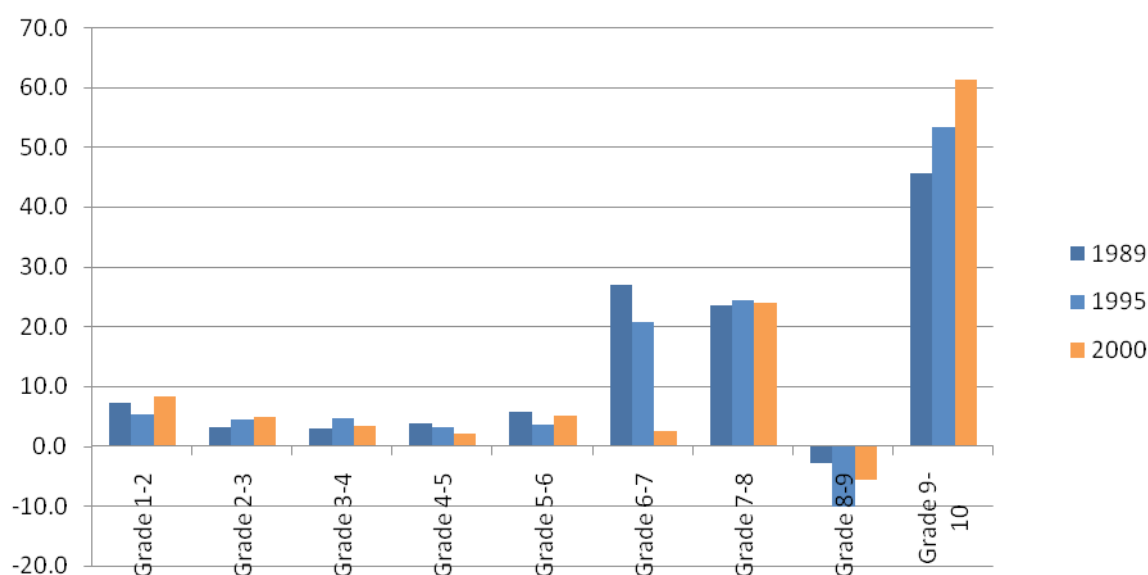


The drop-out rates of urban and rural areas are generally similar. However, some discrepancies appear in the seventh grade and between males and females. Female drop-out rates appear to be higher in rural areas than males in urban areas. Also, male drop-out rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Female drop-out rates are usually lower than males and equal in both urban and rural areas. This is in part due to the continuation and proliferation of certain traditions and customs in rural areas, which view that it is “dangerous” for girls to attend school after the age of 12- 13 years as they would be part of mixed classes. In fact, there are not enough students to open separate schools for girls and boys, particularly in rural areas. In addition, due to the small population size of rural areas, many complementary schools are based between villages rather than one in each. As such, many children – especially girls – find it difficult to go to school, as they lack proper transportation systems.

According to the statistical abstracts of several years, the cohorts entering the basic education level in private, public and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools (all children), have higher drop-out rates than those rates provided by the Ministry of Education³⁹. Drop-out rates increase from grade six to grade seven, or at the ages of 11, 12, 13 and 14 years, taking into account the students who repeat grades during this period.⁴⁰

³⁹ Whilst following up on the different cohorts and the promotion of students from one class to another, it was assumed that the rate of repetition in a class in a particular year is the same for the current class and the one that precedes it. This is in line with the decisions of the Ministry of Education, which stipulate that a student who fails the same class twice should be expelled, and students who fail three times within their primary education should also be expelled. As such, those students who belong to a previous cohort and who have repeated the class are included in the current cohort, and those students who have failed in the current cohort are now included in the following cohort in the same proportion.

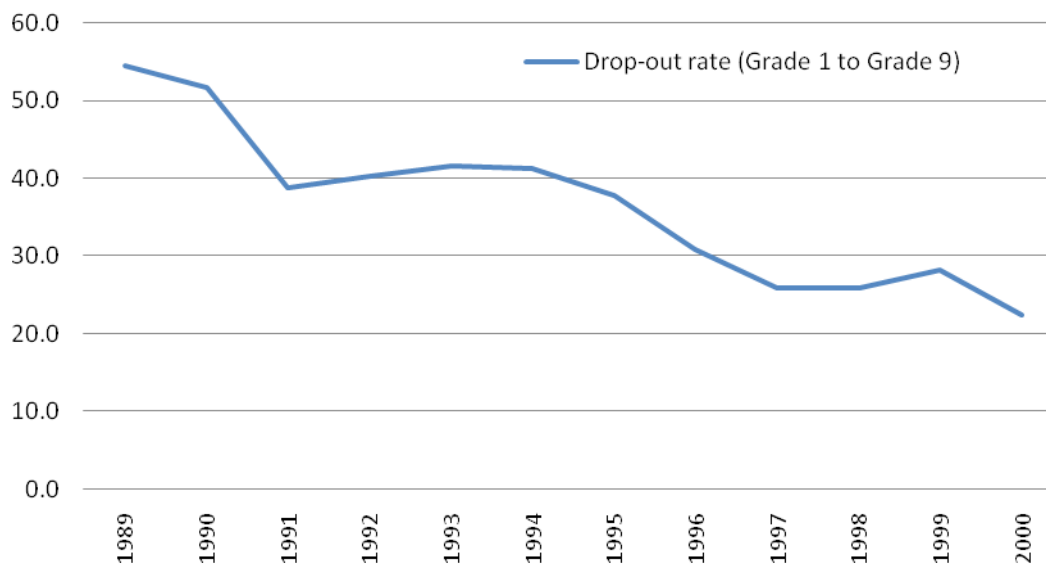
⁴⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics: Education Statistics, tables 3 /11 and 3/ 11 (Damascus).

Figure 2: Drop-out rate of cohorts by grade, 1989, 1995 and 2000

According to the statistical abstracts, drop-outs from earlier years enrol again in the ninth grade in order to obtain the degree of basic education, which explains the increase of enrolled students in the ninth grade in comparison with the number of students in the eighth. The observation of 12 cohorts during the period 1989–2000 shows an increase of the share of students reaching the ninth grade. Out of the cohort enrolled in the first grade in 1989, 45.5 per cent reached the ninth grade. The share of students reaching the ninth grade increased to 64 per cent for the 1997 cohort, and reached 61 per cent for those who enrolled in 2000. Drop-out rates of all the cohorts decrease when moving from grade six to grade seven. However, drop-out rates remain high when moving from grade seven to grade eight. Drop-out rates decreased considerably for students who were enrolled in the first grade in the 1989 to 2000 cohorts.⁴¹

⁴¹ *ibid.*

Figure 3: Drop-out rate (grade 1 to 9) very old statistics- take out and replace with data for the period 2000–2010



a- Reasons behind school drop-outs

School drop-out rates have several intertwined reasons, such as poverty, household needs, low parental income or education level, and family disintegration. In addition, violence in schools appears to be another major reason of school drop-outs – as will be made evident later on in this study, based on the results of the focus groups – despite decisions and instructions given by the Ministry of Education forbidding violent physical or verbal instructive methods. However, certain teachers still use violent methods of education or punishment as shall be shown in the results of the field work (Chapter 5).

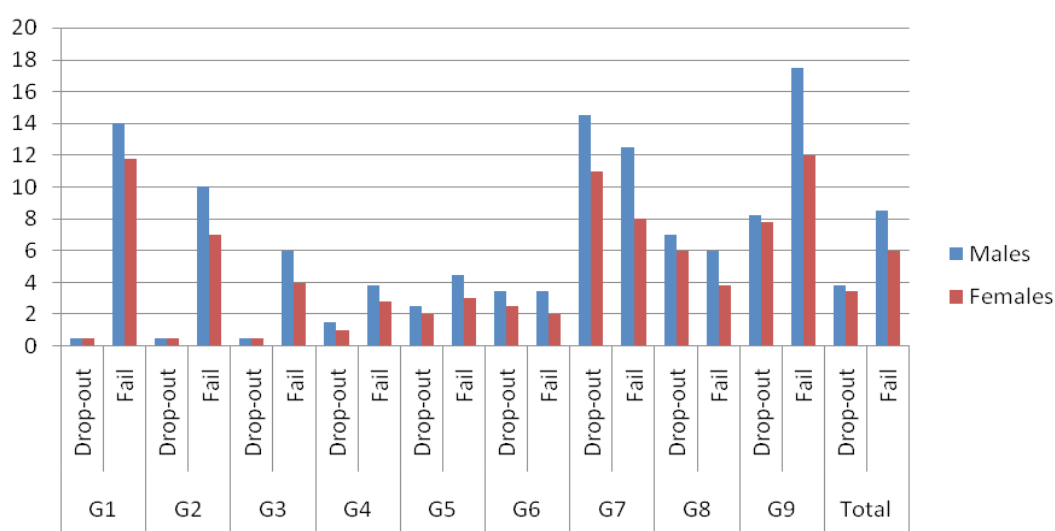
The incidence of violence in schools sheds light on the weak training and preparation of some of the teachers affecting the internal return of education. Even though some observations have identified the existence of almost illiterate children in grade five and six, statistical data do not include indicators for the internal return of education, which can measure the knowledge and skills of students in the different grades. The absence of such indicators deprives the educational assessment of the measurement of the efficiency of the educational process and its success. Although it is true that children have dissimilar capacities in terms of financial, cultural, social and health conditions within households, the educational process of the school must develop the comprehension capacity and skills of the child. Therefore, the failing of a student is not necessarily due to the student himself (except in specific cases) but may be an indicator of the failure of the teaching staff for being unable to develop the capacities of those students. Other factors can intervene, such as the part-time schedule of schools, noting that more than 19 per cent of schools in 2001 were on part-time schedules, and with around 36 per cent of total students in primary school.⁴²

⁴² Ministry of Education: Statistical Abstracts (July 2010)

The capacity of teachers is still considerably below the required level, where only 24.5 per cent of all basic education teachers held university degrees in 2010, while the others had attained intermediate education levels or different branches of secondary school.⁴³ Those factors – in addition to others, such as the lack of control, follow-up and accountability – have weakened the quality of the educational process and the quality of the internal return of education.⁴⁴

Failing and repeating classes are primary indicators of the internal educational return. According to the data, there is a high percentage of class failure at the beginning of basic education in addition to relatively high drop-out rates in grades one and two. This clearly implies the absence of a friendly environment for children who enrol for the first time in a regulated social context based on standards and rules of which they ignore the purpose. As a result, teachers came up with the slogan “The school is the child’s friend”. The indicator of class failure is not relevant to specific governorates, but is nationwide. Therefore, class failure is not specific to urban or rural areas, but is a national problem affecting the core of the educational process and the quality of the educational system in place. Class failure percentages registered in transitory grades, such as grade nine (official exams are taken to pass to the secondary-education level), shed light on the problems affecting the educational process in Syria. Failure and drop-out rates are comparable in most of the governorates, which implies that the weakness of educational performance is a main reason for school drop-outs.

Figure 4: Drop-out and failure rates in basic education, per gender, 2009- 2010



⁴³ *ibid.*, Distribution of workers per educational attainment

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, Distribution of students per registration

b- Estimation of the extent of school drop-out and child labour

According to the Ministry of Education, enrolment rates in basic and secondary education have increased during the last decade. The figures of enrolment in the first grade of primary education show an almost perfect enrolment rate of children in the relevant age category (99 per cent in 2006, and 99.5 per cent in 2009 and 2010).⁴⁵ Therefore, only 0.5 per cent of children did not enrol in school during 2009 and 2010. The registration in primary education increased from 92 per cent in 2006 to 93 per cent in 2008, then to 97 per cent in 2009 and 2010. This increase is due to the registration of males and females, with a 3 percentage-point higher rate for males in 2008⁴⁶ (95 per cent for males and 92 per cent for females). At the same time, the number of children outside school in the age category of 615- years has declined, and was 3 per cent in 2010. Observation of students in the cohorts enrolling during the period 1989–2000 (those who enrolled in 1989 reached the ninth grade in 1998, and those who enrolled in 2000 reached the ninth grade in 2009) has shown the following drop-out rates:

Table 6: Annual drop-out rates per year of enrolment

YEARS	GRADES 1 & 2	GRADES 2 & 3	GRADES 3 & 4	GRADES 4 & 5	GRADES 5 & 6	GRADES 6 & 7	GRADES 7 & 8	GRADES 8 & 9
1988–89	3.87							
1989–90	7.13	4.40						
1990–91	3.80	3.15	1.26					
1991–92	3.06	3.59	2.93	4.48				
1992–93	5.49	4.83	3.77	3.89	4.61			
1993–94	5.51	4.21	3.68	3.95	5.75	26.03		
1994–95	5.35	5.06	5.07	4.11	5.38	26.83	24.23	
1995–96	5.38	4.89	4.03	4.73	5.91	25.74	23.53	-4.92
1996–97	5.53	4.41	3.73	3.15	4.50	24.77	24.36	-2.93
1997–98	7.11	5.25	4.65	4.09	4.84	24.99	24.91	-6.26
1998–99	9.14	1.72	3.63	3.24	3.73	22.99	23.95	-7.63
1999–2000	7.31	5.62	2.91	3.36	3.54	22.56	24.65	-7.55
2000–01	8.37	4.95	3.73	2.19	3.02	20.74	22.19	-5.49
2001–02	6.85	4.89	4.04	4.69	3.20	19.11	24.38	-3.75
2002–03	8.22	5.72	3.43	2.36	1.42	15.02	19.59	-10.24
2003–04	8.63	5.58	3.61	2.00	5.04	8.73	17.61	-10.77
2004–05	7.45	3.95	2.15	1.13	5.15	3.41	15.73	-9.70
2005–06	8.51	4.68	3.10	1.32	4.60	2.51	24.47	-4.42
2006–07	6.76	4.71	2.93	1.30	4.99	3.72	23.99	-5.98
2007–08	6.51	4.58	2.58	0.95	4.87	4.53	22.74	-5.54
2008–09	7.73	5.48	3.84	1.99	5.96	6.17	23.56	-3.24

⁴⁵ Ministry of Education: Development Indicators (July 2010)

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

While 51.4 per cent of the 1988 cohort did not complete basic education, only 38.7 per cent of the 2001 cohort did not complete it. Following up on the evolution of the cohorts in terms of the drop-out rates reveals a contradiction between the cohorts. The number of drop-outs increases due to the increase in the number of enrolled students.

Table 7: Number of drop-outs per cohort

COHORTS	NUMBER OF DROP-OUTS FROM THE COHORT
1988-96	217,250
1989-97	251,089
1990-98	240,729
1991-99	247,037
1992-2000	260,830
1993-2001	257,990
1994-2002	251,673
1995-2003	236,088
1996-2004	214,352
1997-2005	178,448
1998-2006	195,222
1999-2007	207,070
2000-08	219,210
2001-09	223,111

There is an obvious general trend in the decline of drop-out rates, regardless of the cohorts, during the period 1996-2009 relative to the total number of students in basic education during these years. The decline in drop-out rates was obvious up until 2005, after which it increased again and reached 6 per cent in 2009.

Table 8: Average number of annual school drop-outs from primary education

Year	Total drop-outs	Average drop-out rate
1996	263,798	7.8
1997	256,625	7.5
1998	277,503	8.1
1999	247,044	7.1
2000	257,627	7.2
2001	251,403	6.9
2002	266,152	7.1
2003	217,504	5.6
2004	202,686	5
2005	151,844	3.6
2006	220,989	5.1
2007	220,506	5
2008	217,445	4.8
2009	274,021	6

According to these estimations, around 200,000 children aged between 6 and 15 years drop out of school annually, or around 1.2 million children in the age category of 6- 15 are outside school. In addition, 0.5 per cent of 6-year-olds have never enrolled in school. The distribution of children aged below 10 years by governorate and sex can give accurate results regarding the number of children outside school due to non-enrolment or drop-out.

The aforementioned results do not imply that children outside school are working children. A share of girls, for example, has dropped out of school due to early marriage, to care for siblings or to assist parents or the elderly of the household. It also partially applies to boys who help with housework or assist other members of the household. With the exception of agricultural work in rural areas, a share of school drop-outs are left without work due to the lack of opportunities, which exacerbates their vulnerable conditions and poverty.

2.2 Characteristics of the labour market

During the past three decades, high population growth rates have led to the increase of the labour force. In 1994, the labour force was estimated at 3.527 million workers, of which 12.5 per cent were females. Between 1994 and 2004, the labour force increased by an annual average of 2.2 per cent,⁴⁷ keeping in mind that population growth rates were much higher in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, this difference is due to the decline of the economic activity rate of certain age categories. In 2001, the total economic activity rate in Syria was 31.5 per cent⁴⁸ and has since declined to 27.7 per cent⁴⁹ in 2005 and to 27.5 per cent⁵⁰ in 2008. Between 2001 and 2008, the economic activity rate of age categories 15- 19, 20- 24 and 25- 29 dropped,

⁴⁷ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 1994 and 2004 (Damascus)

⁴⁸ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2001 (Damascus, 2002), table 32/.

⁴⁹ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2005 (Damascus, 2002), table 32/.

⁵⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus, 2002), table 32/.

respectively, from 39.2 per cent to 23 per cent, from 58.1 per cent to 43.1 per cent, and from 60.4 per cent to 54.6 per cent. The economic activity rate of females also dropped despite the improved education of women in the past years, the increase in the average age of the first marriage, the increase in female school and university enrolment (although the enrolment rate of females has remained low for age categories 15 -19 and 20 -24). The participation of females was 21 per cent for age group 15 -19 and 28.7 per cent for age group 20- 24 in 2001, and declined to 4.8 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively, in 2008. The net participation of females has decreased from 12.7 per cent in 2001 to 9.2 per cent in 2008,⁵¹ which might be due to the omission of those who have given up looking for a job, especially females, due to the lack of opportunities and have been counted in different categories such as “other” and “inactive”. However, the participation of females increased to 14.5 per cent of the total labour force in 2004, and 16.3 per cent in 2008, along with the increase of the total labour force to 5.442 million workers. According to labour market surveys, the labour force increased by 1.64 per cent⁵² annually between 2003 and 2008, which is less than the total population and active population growth rates of the previous years.

2.2.1 Age composition of the labour force

According to labour market surveys, the labour force in Syria is now younger due to the changes in the composition of the population in the past two decades. The participation of the age group 15- 24 has increased slightly from 23.1 per cent to 23.37 per cent of the total labour force between 1994 and 2008, which was a period when this age category was supposed to be studying (secondary education and university)⁵³. In addition, the participation of age categories 35- 44 and 45 and above decreased by 1.4 per cent during the same period⁵⁴. These findings raise questions regarding the educational characteristics of the labour force and about the possible impact of external migration on age category 35 and above, which might explain its relatively low participation in the Syrian labour market.

2.2.2 Educational structure of the labour force

The illiteracy rate of the Syrian labour force has considerably decreased in recent years. In 1994, 42.6 per cent of the total labour force was illiterate, while 57.4 per cent of the labour force had different levels of education⁵⁵. By 2008, illiteracy had decreased, with 24.7 per cent of the labour force being illiterate and 75.3 per cent educated⁵⁶. Despite this improvement, the illiteracy rate of the labour force remains relatively high, reflecting the fact that children either drop out or never go to school. In terms of the educated workers, secondary education attainment decreased by 1.37 per cent between 1994 and 2006,⁵⁷ while complementary education increased by 4 per cent, and university graduation by 1 per cent. Moreover, the participation of younger age groups has been noted along with a relatively high illiteracy rate and low educational attainment, which encourages children to drop out of school and enter the labour market.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus, 2009), table 37/

⁵³ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 and Population Census, 1994 (Damascus).

⁵⁴ Table 1, statistical annex.

⁵⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 1994 (Damascus), table 31.

⁵⁶ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus, 2009), table 8.

⁵⁷ Table 2, statistical annex

2.2.3 Distribution of the labour force between the formal and informal sectors of the economy

During the 1970s and 1980s, the public sector attracted a large number of workers. In 2004, the public sector comprised around 35 per cent of the total labour force. However, the economic reforms launched in the mid-1980s ultimately led to the downsizing of the public sector, which stood at 28.6 per cent of the labour force in 2008. Nevertheless, the female labour force is still attracted by public sector employment, which is perceived as more respectful of rights than the private sector. In 2008, females constituted 26.5 per cent of total workers in the public sector.

On the other hand, the private sector in 2008 comprised 71 per cent of total workers, of which 48.6 per cent were employed in the formal sector, 22.2 per cent in the informal sector and around 0.6 per cent in the civil and cooperative sector. In 1994, 63.3 per cent of the total labour force worked in the formal and informal sector and 1.7 per cent in the civil and cooperative sector.

2.2.4 Distribution of the labour force by working status

The distribution of the labour force shows the increase of salaried workers to 61 per cent of the total labour force in 2008,⁵⁸ compared to 55.24 per cent in 2006 and 59.58 per cent in 1994. At the same time, the share of employers decreased by 1.6 per cent⁵⁹ between 1994 and 2008, while the share of self-employment increased by 3 per cent. These changes are linked to the expansion of the informal sector and the decline of wages in the formal sector in general. The share of workers without wage declined from 9.15 per cent of total workers in 1994⁶⁰ to 6.4 per cent in 2008. Working without a wage is linked to agricultural family helpers (which usually includes working children below the age of 15 years, as well as women). Therefore, the decrease of unsalaried workers might be due to the decrease in the labour force in agriculture. However, working without a wage is still present and accounts for more than 300,000 workers, excluding women and children outside the labour force who work for family businesses.

2.2.5 Distribution of workers by type of activity

The changes in the labour force comprise some positive aspects, however slow and limited they may be, despite a continuous rate of school drop-outs and early entry to the labour market. The distribution of workers by economic sector shows the growth of the services sector, especially for hotels, restaurants, finance and real estate. The sector accounts for 16.4 per cent of total workers (aged 15 years and above) of the Syrian economy in 2008⁶¹. However, this expansion affects services offered to individuals rather than services offered to production, which does not necessarily reflect an improvement of labour productivity, education structure and professional characteristics of the labour force (especially as these sectors attract working children, males and females, without any qualifications or skills). The proportion of workers in production decreased from 54.2 per cent of the total labour force in 1994 to 47.12 per cent in 2008⁶². This fast decline of the production sector did not gradually relocate workers towards more productive sectors. The most recent Labour Force Survey (2008) showed the decrease of the share of workers in the agriculture sector due to the drought rather than structural factors related to the productivity of

⁵⁸ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus), table 4

⁵⁹ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus), table 4; and Population Census, 1994, table 14a.

⁶⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 1994 (Damascus), table 14a.

⁶¹ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus), table 3/ 9

⁶² Table 3, statistical annex

agricultural work. Nevertheless, agriculture remains a key sector of the Syrian economy despite the decline of workers from 23.7 per cent of the total labour force in 1994⁶³ to 16.8 per cent in 2008.

2.2.6 Unemployment and child labour

The relatively high supply of labour during the 1980s and 1990s, and low economic growth rates, resulted in an excess labour supply in those decades. The unemployment rate increased from 4.8 per cent in 1981, to 8.5 per cent in 1994,⁶⁴ and to 10.9 per cent in 2008,⁶⁵ while the female unemployment rate reached 24.2 per cent in that same year.⁶⁶ Unemployment was exacerbated by a weak demand for labour, low growth of major productive sectors and ceilings imposed on public sector employment, which increased female unemployment knowing that females tend to prefer the public sector and perceive the private sector to be biased against them.

According to studies and field research, unemployment and child labour are strongly linked. The child labour rate increases with the increase of unemployment due to the easy access of children to the informal sector where tasks do not require skills or physical capacities. Moreover, unlike adults, children agree to very small wages. In addition, some studies have shown the relationship between child labour, wages and household income, especially the wages and income of female workers. Unemployment and low income – especially for females – constitute an incentive for children to work as they often try to compensate for the loss of the mother's wage. The income of working children is sometimes the only income of the household in cases of sickness or unemployment of the head of household. According to a study about child labour in Egypt, the wage level of the working mother and working children are inversely linked.⁶⁷ The Syrian statistical database does not include information about working children below the age of 15 years, nor an indicator for income; therefore, it becomes necessary to include, in future surveys undertaken by the Central Bureau for Statistics, indicators for wage, income and child labour.

2.3 Economic growth and its major trends

The economic policies in place between 1963 and 1985 consecrated the role of the Government and the public sector within the economic activity of the country. This has hindered the development potential of the private sector as well as the institutional regulations, legislation and rules of the market. Since the beginning of the 1980s, Syria has launched a gradual and measured economic reform process that consisted of increasing the role of the private sector in the economic activity of the country, the liberalization of markets and the downsizing of the productive and direct investment role of the Government. However, the response of the private sector was slow and hesitant, which has created an investment gap leading to a decline in the economic growth and labour demand. This even led to a negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth at the end of the 1990s, and the exacerbation of unemployment to 11.7 per cent of the labour force in 2003.⁶⁸ Despite the efforts of the successive governments for the elaboration of regulations and procedures aimed at strengthening the liberalization of the markets, considerable gaps remained – according

⁶³ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008, table 5; Labour Force Census 2006, table 19; and Population Census, 1994, table 9 (Damascus).

⁶⁴ Central Bureau of Statistics: Population Census, 1994 (Damascus), table 23

⁶⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus), table 8.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ R. Assad: "The effects of public sector hiring and compensation policies on the Egyptian labor market", in *The World Bank Economic Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1997)

⁶⁸ Central Bureau of Statistics; Unemployment Committee: Unemployment map of Syria (Damascus, 2004).

to investors and government stakeholders – in terms of legal, administrative, organizational and institutional frameworks in addition to providing the necessary flexibility and total transparency of the markets. In 2000, the reform process was accelerated – especially after 2005 when, at the 10th Conference of the Baath Party, it was decided to move to a social market economy – in order to deal with the identified gaps and to complete the legal and organizational structure of the economy of the social market. The reform and issuance of laws and regulations were accompanied by economic policies stipulating the downsizing of the direct role of the State in production activities through the following:

- Decrease investments in direct productive sectors.
- Decrease the role of the State in exports and imports.
- Decrease the support of the State to public institutions.
- Regulate and rethink all kinds of subsidies, such as health.

The private sector has responded to these reforms with slow or prompt reactions depending on the types of economic sectors. Although the reform process has led to an increase in foreign direct investment, it is the oil and gas sectors that have benefited the most, while the confidence in productive sectors – such as industry and agriculture – remains weak.

2.3.1 Economic growth

Between 1980 and 2008, the Syrian economy registered an average yearly growth of 3.87 per cent, alongside a population growth of 2.94 per cent, which implies the decline of the average growth of GDP per capita. Therefore, the living conditions of certain categories of the population did not witness any improvement, but have instead remained on the margin of the economic “growth” registered in certain economic sectors of the economy. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the equity of the distribution of the national income declined during the periods 1996–1997 and 2003–2004.⁶⁹ The Gini coefficient has increased from 0.33 to 0.37,⁷⁰ which implies the drop of certain population categories to the poverty line or below it.

Table 9: Average annual growth rate of real GDP (at factor prices of 2000)⁷¹

1980–85	1985–90	1990–95	1995–2000	2000–05	2005–08
1.08	-1.81	6.4	5.04	6.07	8.65

Annual economic growth rate was not stable or constant during the previous years and ranged from 1.8 per cent during the period 1985–90 to 8.65 per cent during the period 2005–08. Job creation is stimulated by productive sectors, which leads to the improvement of income; nevertheless, its growth has varied over the years. Economic growth during the first three years of the tenth five-year plan (2006–08) did not provide pro-poor growth and did not stimulate job creation, which was reflected by a high unemployment rate in 2008 (10.9 per cent).⁷²

⁶⁹ Jointly prepared by the Syrian Planning Commission, the Central Bureau of Statistics and UNDP in 2004

⁷⁰ Hiba El Laithy and Khaled Abou Ismail: Poverty in Syria, 19962004- (UNDP, June 2005), p. 6.61 Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Census, 2008 (Damascus), table 3/ 9

⁷¹ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2009 (Damascus), table 115/, p. 441.

⁷² Central Bureau of Statistics: Labour Market Census, 2008 (Damascus, 2009).

Table 10: Average GDP growth rate by sector (at factor prices of 2000)

Sector	1980–85	1985–90	1990–95	1995–2000	2000–05	2005–08
Agriculture	-1.23	0.55	6.7	4.98	4.16	-4.81
Manufacturing & metallurgy	-3.52	3.65	6	6.49	3.36	1.12
Construction	5.23	-16.37	9.3	2.2	10.31	0.82
Wholesale and retail	5.79	-9.55	4.8	1.05	18.43	26.46
Transportation and warehousing	6.34	3.68	10.3	6.35	0.78	8.84
Finance, insurance and real estate	-6.38	3.14	12.1	3.09	8.95	14.97
Social and public services	4.83	-9.65	5.4	12.17	8.12	15.6
Governmental services	5.27	-3.4	2.4	4.18	9.63	11.52
Non-profit organizations	9	6.58	8.4	12.44	7.59	8.48
Custom fees	0	0	0	0	0	0
Financial services	0	0	0	0	0	-12.93
Total	1.08	-1.81	6.4	5.04	6.07	8.65

During the 1990s, crude oil constituted an important lever to industrial production, and GDP in general, and was an important resource for the public budget. Oil production, which stood at 33.3 million m³ in 1999,⁷³ dropped to 21.6 million m³ in 2008. Therefore, the industrial sector mainly relied on transformative industries, which were also in decline by 0.5 per cent annually during the period 2005–2008⁷⁴ (2002 being the base year, the sector grew annually by 4.2 per cent between 2002 and 2008). In addition to the decline in oil production, the agricultural sector also faced substantial difficulties and changes. Even though agriculture has registered considerable growth throughout the 1990s, and has exceeded 4 per cent average yearly growth during 2000–2005, the sector witnessed a yearly decrease of 5 per cent in the past few years (4.8 per cent during 2005–2008), due to weather conditions and the changes affecting agricultural policies, especially the abandonment of fuel and chemical fertilizer subsidies. This has driven small farmers to stop cultivating their land and to move towards other informal activities of small added value. The aforementioned weakening applies to the industrial and construction sectors. On the other hand, legislation and liberalization policies led to constant growth of the services sector, including trade, finance, real estate and tourism. The share of the services sector as a proportion of GDP increased from 38.6 per cent in 1980 to 58.9 per cent in 2008, which shows the substantial contribution of the sector in the increase of the economic growth rates of the country.

⁷³ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2002 (Damascus), table 5 / 5.

⁷⁴ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2006 to 2009 (Damascus), table 513/ (production and net GDP in the industrial sector at factor cost in millions of current Syrian Lira)

2.3.2 Consumption

The average consumption of the country was 78.9 per cent between 2000 and 2008,⁷⁵ peaking at 83.6 per cent in 2005. This consumption was not uniform across the various income groups. It seems that a large proportion of the population did not benefit from the achieved economic growth during the period 2000–2008, but instead witnessed a relative decrease of consumption due to the type of growth and the sectors benefiting from it. The decline of private consumption is linked to the shrinking of the demand on local production, which leads to the decrease of GDP and investment growth. GDP per capita reached 65,638 Syrian pounds (S.P.) in 2008, with a yearly average growth of 1.9 per cent between 2005 and 2008,⁷⁶ or 2.4 per cent between 2000 and 2008. Few have benefited from income distribution due to the registered discrepancies, knowing that private consumption reflects the actual wage increases. According to the poverty report of 2004, 20 per cent of the poorest category of the population covers 7 per cent of total consumption, while 20 per cent of the richest stand for 45 per cent of total expenditure.⁷⁷ The average consumption per capita increased by 0.5 per cent from 2005 to 2006, and decreased by 1.4 per cent in 2007, and by 0.2 per cent in 2008.⁷⁸ According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey for 2006–2007, poverty of households increased by 0.8 per cent from 2004.

2.3.3 Savings and investments

The average saving rate gradually increased from 11.89 per cent of GDP in 2000 to around 20.77 per cent in 2006, and decreased again to 13.1 per cent in 2007 and 2008. This implies a limited accumulation of resources that are necessary for the development process.⁷⁹ It is to be noted that the Government tried in the 1990s to enhance the investment environment by issuing Law 10 of 1991, which intends to encourage local and foreign private investment. Between 1980 and 2008, the fixed average investment growth was stable and leaning towards decline. Various obstacles inhibited the improvement of the investment environment, which implies the need for increasing growth rates, drastic reforms of the legislative, organizational and judicial frameworks, etc.

2.3.4 Foreign trade

Foreign trade increased from 48 per cent of total GDP in 2000 to 62 per cent in 2008,⁸⁰ which demonstrates the growing openness of the Syrian economy as a result of the agreement for an Arab Free Trade Zone and the signature of Trade Exchange Agreements with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. However, the substantial increase of imports has exceeded the growth of exports and has led to a growing balance of trade deficit since 2004. In other words, exports covered up to 84 per cent of imports in 2008, in comparison to 115 per cent in 2000. The deficit of the balance of trade was accompanied by a balance of payment deficit of around S.L. 46,172 million in 2008.

⁷⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2009 (Damascus), table 12/ 15, p. 451

⁷⁶ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2009 (Damascus), table 15/ 21, p. 461 (net GDP in market prices).

⁷⁷ Hiba El Laithy and Khaled Abou Ismail: Poverty in Syria, 19962004- (UNDP, June 2005), p. 6

⁷⁸ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2003 (Damascus), table 15/ 43, p. 485 (available and consumed goods and services, 1963, 1970, 2001 in real 2000 prices in million Syrian Lira).

⁷⁹ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2003 (Damascus), table 15/ 43, p. 490 (discretionary national income and its allocation, 1963, 1970, 2008, in current prices, millions of Syrian Lira).

⁸⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 (Damascus), tables 221/9 ,15/

2.3.5 Public finance and public spending

Public spending plays an important role in the Syrian economy. Historically, the role of the State in Syria goes beyond the provision of infrastructure, education and health services, and comprises production and development projects in the different economic sectors. However, the State did not invest sufficiently in the efficient development of its resources in order to secure the sustainability of its role. The budget funds have increased, in both investment and trade from 42.5 per cent in 2003 and dropped off to 24 per cent in 2008. As a result, the role of the State in the development process has diminished. Consequently, this has led to the decline in social spending. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2007, extreme poverty increased from 11.4 per cent in 2004 to 12.2 per cent in 2007.⁸¹ The extreme poverty rate encompasses indicators of education, health, and access to drinking water and sanitation, all of which rely on public spending. It must be pointed out that tax revenues in Syria are limited and are insufficient to finance growing public spending. Total tax revenues and fees, including custom fees, amounted to 43.4 per cent of total budget revenues in 2008, which stood at S.L. 600 billion, or 10.4 per cent of GDP.

In general, the social market economy is facing substantial challenges despite the positive impact registered in different economic activities. Among the key challenges facing this trend are the development of adequate social policies, the acceleration of financial and fiscal reforms, the restraint of increasing poverty and unemployment rates, and the alleviation of child labour incidence. In this context, the results and findings of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2007, and labour market survey of 2008, shed light on the exacerbation of child labour incidence and the 300,000 working children in Syria.⁸² Section 4 of this study portray the characteristics of working children and their distribution by occupation, age and location.

⁸¹ Hiba El Laithy and Khaled Abou Ismail: Poverty, growth and distribution of income in Syria, 2004- 2008 (UNDP, 2008)

⁸² Employment and labour law in the Arab Mediterranean countries and the Euromediterranean partnership countries, pp. 25- 26

3 • Legal framework

The right to work is guaranteed by the Syrian Constitution and falls under the protection of the State. Article 36 of the Syrian Constitution stipulates the following: “Work is a right and duty of every citizen” and “the state undertakes to provide work for all citizens. Every citizen has the right to earn his wage according to the nature and yield of the work. The state must guarantee this. The state fixes working hours, guarantees social security, and regulates rest and leave rights and various compensations and rewards for workers”. In addition, according to article 44: “the family is the basic unit of society and is protected by the state. The state protects and encourages marriage and eliminates the material and social obstacles hindering it. The state protects mothers and infants and extends care to adolescents and youths and provides them with the suitable circumstances to develop their faculties”. The Constitution guarantees the right to free education, linking it to the needs of society as mentioned in article 37: “Education is a right guaranteed by the state. Elementary education is compulsory and all education is free. The state undertakes to extend compulsory education to other levels and to supervise and guide education in a manner consistent with the requirements of society and of production.”

Most agreements and conventions regarding children’s rights consider the right to work as one of the basic rights of the child. Syria ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 (Law No. 8), and has joined, by Decree No. 379 (26 October 2002), the two annexed optional protocols: Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Syria also ratified the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), on 18 September 2001, and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), on 22 May 2003, which is one of the most important international conventions promoting the prohibition and elimination of child labour and the national policies and strategies for fighting child labour. Syria issued a new Labour Law No. 17 (2010) with a section about child labour from Article 113 to Article 118. Various laws in Syria deal with child labour, such as the Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 (2004), and the Fundamental Law of Public Sector Employees No. 50 (2004).

3.1 Definition of “child”

According to international law, a child is a human being below the age of 18 years as indicated in the first Article of the Convention of the Rights of the Child: “For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. According to Article 2 of Convention No. 182: “for the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘child’ shall apply to all persons under the age of 18”. However, Syria did not state in the laws pertaining to labour relations (such as the Labour Law, Agricultural Relations Law and Fundamental Law of Public Sector Employees) a definition for children and youth, but rather defined a minimum age for working children and youth along with a set of rules and regulations ensuring their safety and protection. Certain laws have given the relevant ministers the prerogative of defining children and youth within the executive instructions related to these laws.

3.2 Children's work

Most international conventions identify two types of work carried out by children: on the one hand, they undertake tasks enhancing their skills and capacities that do not lead to their material and economic exploitation and which are regulated by a set of rules on child safety and protection; on the other hand, they also engage in hazardous work that may lead to exploitation and adverse effects on their safety, health (physical or mental) and moral development. According to the *Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*,⁸³ “the term ‘child labour’, to the international community, does not encompass all work performed by children under the age of 18 years. The consensus view is that work that falls within the legal limits and does not interfere with children’s health and development or prejudice their schooling can be a positive experience”.⁸⁴

Article 3 of Convention No. 138 sets the boundaries of the types of work that are unacceptable under international standards, which – by their nature or the circumstances in which they are carried out – are likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons.

3.3 Categories and professions not included in the Labour Law

3.3.1 Persons not included in the Labour Law

Article 5 of Labour Law No. 17 stipulates that: “the regulations of Labour Law 17 do not cover household members of the income earner”. In addition, Article 118 indicates that children and youth working in a family establishment under the supervision of the father, the mother, the brother, the aunt or the uncle are not covered by the Labour Law. Article 164 of Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 stipulates that: “the exclusion of establishments managed by the same family which are agricultural parcels where the owner works with members of his family. The family comprises: the husband, wife, brothers, sisters, their children and in-laws”.

Not enough attention was paid to the incidence of child labour within the household in agricultural and industrial tasks. According to the *Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, “the ‘family farm’ element in agriculture, which is universal and bound up with culture and tradition, often makes it difficult to acknowledge that children can be systematically exploited in such a setting”. Child labour on these family farms is explained by family solidarity. Despite this, it is important to study the conditions of work (which more often than not are dangerous) as well as estimate the time consecrated to work and that is thus lost as study time, especially for girls. As a result, national legislation must be reformed in order to exclude working children in family establishments and set laws imposing regulations on the work of children within these establishments.

3.3.2 Professions not included by the Labour Law

Article 6 of Convention No. 138 mentions that: “This Convention does not apply to work done by children and young persons in schools for general, vocational or technical education or in other training institutions, ...”.

⁸³ ILO: The end of child labour: Within reach, *Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, Report of the Director-General, Report I(B), International Labour Conference, 95th Session, Geneva, 2006.

⁸⁴ ILO: The end of child labour: Within reach, *Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, Report of the Director-General, Report I(B), International Labour Conference, 95th Session, Geneva, 2006, p. 23.

Decision No. 183 (28 November 2001) identifies the industries where children are forbidden to work and where they are exempt. Exemptions include (Article 4: industrial school and all vocational and technical education institutes; and Article 1: in case it guarantees the supervision and protection of working children and their provision with health certificates issued by the Health Office proving their physical and health conditions and their capacity to carry out their tasks.

According to Article 39 of Labour Law No. 17: “the minister decides, in consultation with relevant ministries and stakeholders, the profession which necessitates training and indicates the beneficiaries of the training, the duration, the phases and the wages, which should not fall below the average wage of the worker within the same occupation”.

Article 37 of Labour Law No. 17 indicates that “trainees aged 18 or above are contracted by themselves while children are represented by parents or guardians”.

Training and education play an important role and must be paid special attention in Syrian labour legislation. The training and education of the child must be secured before carrying out any tasks, as these sessions determine the condition of the child as well as his or her health, skills and capacities to undertake the assigned tasks.

3.4 The minimum working age

Article 2 of Convention No. 138 stipulates the following:

- (1) Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall specify, in a declaration appended to its ratification, a minimum age for admission to employment or work within its territory and on means of transport registered in its territory; subject to Articles 4 to 8 of this Convention, no one under that age shall be admitted to employment or work in any occupation.

- (3) The minimum age specified in pursuance of paragraph 1 of this Article shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years.

Syrian law is in accordance with Convention No. 138 and, according to Article 113 of Labour Law No. 17: “it is prohibited to employ children, males or females, prior to their completion of basic education or before the age of 15”.

Article 16 of the Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 “prohibits the employment of children in agricultural work prior to the age of 15 and they are also not allowed to access work premises”.

Article 3 of Convention No. 138:

“The minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years”.

Employment or work from the age of 16 years is authorized on the condition that the health, safety and morals of the young people concerned are fully protected and that they have received adequate specific instruction or vocational training in the relevant branch of activity.

In this context, Article 123 of Labour Law No. 17 states that the regulations of children’s work, work conditions and the type of professions and industries prohibited according to age categories are determined by a decision issued by the Minister.

It is noted that various issues are assigned by the legislator to the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour for clarification as stated by the previous Article. The problem in general (which is the case for laws requiring ministerial decisions, including instructions of implementation) resides in the delay of issuing those executive decisions, which leads to the paralysis of the government, the commissions and the stakeholders.

Therefore, it is positive that the legislator has forced the Ministry to issue executive decisions for the laws during the three following months or by 12 July 2010 at the latest.

In the previous Labour Law No. 92 (1959), various issued decisions defined the industries and work prohibited for children. However, with the new Labour Law No. 17, these decisions are now void. **Therefore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour should extend the rights of children and carefully identify the types of work allowed to be undertaken. The aforementioned Articles 182 and 183 allowed children to execute a considerable variety of work, although it falls into the category of hazardous work affecting their health – such as the carving of wood and stones, construction and work in the metal industry.**

3.5 Light work

Article 7 of Convention No. 138 states the following:

“National laws or regulations may also permit the employment or work of persons who are at least 15 years of age but have not yet completed their compulsory schooling on work which:

- (1) is not likely to be harmful to their health or development; and
- (2) is not such as to prejudice their attendance at school, their participation in vocational orientation or training programmes approved by the competent authority or their capacity to benefit from the instruction received”.

In addition, Decision No. 972 (7 May 2006) prohibits the work of children except for light agricultural tasks. Decision No. 297 (14 February 2007) lists the light agricultural work.

From the legal perspective, the Labour Law and Agricultural Relations Law do not state the exception or mention the concept of light work. However, the ministerial decisions cannot stipulate exceptions in contradiction with the laws in place. In addition, certain aforementioned decisions are not in line with Convention No. 138, especially given that they were issued after the Convention's ratification by Syria. Although it allows the work of children, Convention No. 138 stipulates strong regulation in terms of the type of work, the number of working hours, work conditions, etc., which are not mentioned in ministerial decisions. Accordingly, the previous decisions must be cancelled as they contradict the Labour Law, the Agricultural Relations Law and include types of non-light work (such as working in tobacco plantations, which harms the health and risks the safety of children) or do not respect the number of daily or weekly working hours allowed, vacation days, wages, break hours and social security coverage. In addition, such types of work are not strictly controlled and might affect the education and schooling of the child.

3.6 Night work

Most international conventions and labour laws give special attention to night child labour outside the official working hours. The Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 6), was one of the first ILO Conventions, and was revised as Convention No. 90 in 1948, shortly after the adoption of the Night Work of Young Persons (Non-Industrial Occupations) Convention, 1946 (No. 79). According to Article 2 of Convention No. 90, "For the purpose of this Convention the term 'night' signifies a period of at least twelve consecutive hours. In the case of young persons under sixteen years of age, this period shall include the interval between ten o'clock in the evening and six o'clock in the morning. In the case of young persons who have attained the age of sixteen years but are under the age of eighteen years, this period shall include an interval prescribed by the competent authority of at least seven consecutive hours falling between ten o'clock in the evening and seven o'clock in the morning; the competent authority may prescribe different intervals for different areas, industries, undertakings or branches of industries or undertakings, but shall consult the employers' and workers' organizations concerned before prescribing an interval beginning after eleven o'clock in the evening." The Syrian Labour Law (2010) defines night work as "the work which takes place from seven in the evening until seven in the morning". Article 114 of the same law "prohibited the night work of young persons". Also, Article 18 of the Agricultural Relations Law (2004) "prohibits the night work of young persons and tiring tasks inadequate to their age which are specified by a decision issued by the Minister in consultation with the Union". Accordingly, Syrian laws strictly prohibit the night work of young persons across the different age categories and under all circumstances without details, specifications or exceptions.

3.4 Medical examination of young persons

The health and safety of young persons is the key objective of most international conventions dealing with the work of young people, which reflects the need of special regulations for the work of young persons in labour laws. The ILO has adopted a set of Conventions for the health and safety of children, including the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Sea) Convention, 1921 (No. 16); the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1946 (No. 776); the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Non-Industrial Occupations) Convention, 1946 (No.

78); and the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Underground Work) Convention, 1965 (No. 124).

The Labour Law (2010) has included a new article (Article 116) which “prohibits the employer from employing young people without the submission by the parents or guardians of a health certificate issued by a specialized doctor proving his/her health capacities for undertaking the assigned tasks”. However, Article 116 is not adequately implemented, taking into account the incidence of false health certificates. Article 4 of Decision No. 1736 (30 December 2004) comprises the work regulations of young people issued on the basis of the Fundamental Law of Public Sector Employees, and dictates the “necessity of the medical examination of young persons right before starting work in order to be sure of their physical capacity to undertake the eventual assigned tasks. Young persons must retake the medical examination every year until the age of 18.” In addition, Article 2 of Decision 182 (28 November 2004) (pertaining to the identification of work and industries prohibited for young persons below the age of 16) stipulates the need for a health certificate that proves the physical and health capacities to carry out the assigned tasks.

The comparison between international conventions on the medical examination of young people and the national labour laws, decisions and regulations demonstrates the comprehensiveness of the conventions and thus the necessity of inserting vital convention articles in Syrian labour laws.

The ILO recommends (on the official website of the organization) the ratification by the Syrian Government of these Conventions, especially the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1946 (No. 77); the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Non-Industrial Occupations) Convention, 1946 (No. 78); and the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Underground Work) Convention, 1965 (No. 124).

3.8 Remuneration of young persons

The protection of young people from economic exploitation implies the right to fair remuneration. Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child dictates to States Parties to “recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation”. ILO Recommendation No. 146 stipulates “the provision of fair remuneration and its protection, bearing in mind the principle of equal pay for equal work”.

Article 1 of Labour Law No. 17 (2010) states that remuneration consists of “compensation made to the worker in return for their work, whether in cash or in-kind, in addition to the increases based on the individual contracts, collective agreements or work regulations, on a daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal or annual basis. Remuneration excludes transportation fees and daily expenses of the worker”.

Article 81 of Labour Law 17 (2010) states that “employer must hand in person the remunerations and other compensations owed to young individuals below the age of 16”.

Based on the aforementioned Articles, it would have been preferable had the new Labour Law stipulated clear mechanisms ensuring the remuneration of young people and the control of contracts signed by young people under the supervision of the Labour Directorate for protection against the exploitation of employers, and consider these contracts as executive documents directly implemented by the Executive Department in case the employer decides not to remunerate young persons under any circumstances.

3.9 Days of rest and vacation, and daily working hours

Most international conventions and national laws stipulate specific regulations for young persons, ensuring the prohibition of their work for long hours and the provision of adequate days of rest as well as an annual leave similar to that of a regular worker. Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that State Parties shall, in particular, “provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment”. The ILO’s Minimum Age Recommendation, 1973 (No. 146), states that special attention should be given to “... (b) the strict limitation of the hours spent at work in a day and in a week, and the prohibition of overtime, so as to allow enough time for education and training (including the time needed for homework related thereto), for rest during the day and for leisure activities ... (d) the granting of an annual holiday with pay of at least four weeks and, in any case, not shorter than that granted to adults”.

Article 114 of Labour Law No. 17 (2010) determines the working hours of young people to be of six hours.

Article 117 of Labour Law No. 17 (2010) states that a young person “deserves a paid annual leave of thirty days”. Article 160 states that “the employer must allow the worker to take at least six successive days of annual leave per year while the rest of the days can be granted discontinuously depending on work interests”. Article 160 does not apply to the annual leave of young working persons.

Decision No. 1736 (30 December 2004) regarding work regulations of young persons based on the Fundamental Law of Public Sector Employees states, in Article 3:

- (1) “The daily working hours of young persons are determined in accordance with Article 2 and the stipulated six hours including a one hour lunch break and rest – which are not included within the working hours. Young persons must not work more than four consecutive hours or extra hours.
- (2) It is prohibited to employ young persons between 22h and 07h or during the weekend or official holidays.”

According to Article 48 of the Agricultural Relations Law:

- (1) “The worker is entitled to paid annual leave of three weeks ...
- (2) The employer should allow the worker to take at least six successive days of annual leave per year while the rest of the days can be granted by the employer discontinuously. This article does not apply to the annual leave of young working persons.”

Based on the aforementioned articles, the legislator has tried to set strict regulations on child labour where working hours do not exceed six hours per day, with at least one hour of rest while ensuring the respect of these regulations under any circumstances. The health and safety of the young person is the priority to the work interest and the urgent or non-urgent occurring situations.

Most importantly, the Syrian judiciary considers, in some of the article decisions on the work of young persons, that the responsible parties must agree on the respect of the principal articles.

More importantly, some Syrian court decisions have considered the Articles pertaining to child labour as fundamental laws, i.e. Articles that the concerned parties cannot agree to violate and, on the basis of which, courts may decide to prosecute. A Court of Cassation decision states that “Although a violation of the law that prohibits overtime work for adolescents – part of a fundamental law – does not give the right stipulated in article 115 of the labour law (which requires the employer to pay a certain remuneration for overtime work), it does not prohibit working children from requesting indemnities for the hours worked over the minimum working hours as set by Labour Law 17, article 98, which stipulates that no person may illegitimately acquire wealth at the expense of another” (Decision No. 1149 date 5/ 11/ 1955, p 91-104).

3.10 Duties and responsibilities of employers

The employer holds the responsibility of the implementation of the Labour Law. Employers are the ones concerned with the employment of young persons, the provision of working conditions adequate to their capacities and ensuring the protection of their health and safety. In addition to the minimum working age, night work, medical examinations, remuneration and vacations, international conventions and national regulations have imposed on the employer an additional set of commitments.

In terms of national regulations, Article 93 of Labour Law No. 17 (2010) dictates:

- (a) The provision of healthcare according to the conditions stated by the Law.
- (b) The registration of all workers for social security.

Article 115 states that employers who provide work for young persons must:

- (a) Announce the articles of this section of the Law in the workplace.
- (b) Declare the names of the working young persons with their age and date of hiring.
- (c) Declare the working hours and hours of rest.

According to Article 116:

- (a) “The employer is prohibited from offering work to a young person prior to the receipt of the following documents: a) civil status; b) health certificate from a specialized doctor ensuring the health capacity necessary to undertake the assigned tasks; c) the parents’ or guardian’s written approval.

- (b) The documents must be saved in the file of the young person and shall include the necessary information about his or her place of residency, date of hiring, type of work, remuneration and annual leave.”

Article 15 of Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 (2004) dictates that:

- (a) “The employer has to treat well the workers and to respect the work contract.
- (b) The employer is responsible of the behavioural protection of workers especially young persons and women.”

Article 19 of Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 (2004) stipulates that “employers are responsible for the verification of the age of the working children and the written approval of their parents”.

Most labour laws stipulate different sanctions and penalties in case of violation of the Law and its Articles.

3.11 Penalties on violations of the tenets concerning child labour

Regulations and strict sanctions are necessary for the proper implementation of laws. Almost all child labour conventions recommend that States set up mechanisms and regulations ensuring the proper implementation of conventions and laws. These regulations comprise supervision, control and sanctions upon law violations. Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates the provision “for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article”.

Moreover, Article 6 of Convention No. 79 and Article 9 of Convention No. 138 state that all necessary measures, including the provision of appropriate penalties, shall be taken by the competent authority to ensure the effective enforcement of the Conventions.

In this context, Article 264 of Labour Law No. 17 (2010) stipulates the sanction of every employer violating Articles 113, 114, 115, 116 and 117 with a penalty ranging between S.L. 25,000 and S.L. 50,000. According to Article 275 of the same Law, penalties placed on the employers or managing directors are a function of the number of workers subject to the violation stated in this section of the Law. The employer, managing director or their representatives are responsible of the violations. The penalty is doubled in case the employer commits the same violation again.

Article 24 of Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 (2004) indicates that “criminal responsibility in case of infringement of the articles of this chapter is on: (1) the parents of young persons defined by Article 17 who are offered work despite the articles of this law; and (2) the employer or his representative as he offered work to young persons or women in violation of the articles of this law”.

Article 154 of Agricultural Relations Law No. 56 (2004) states that the penalty in case of violation of the Articles of Chapters 1, 2 and 4 of Section 2 and Articles of Section 3 of this law ranges

between S.L. 2,000 and S.L. 7,000, and doubles in case violation reoccurs.

The penalties allowed by the aforementioned laws are not sufficient to prevent employers from law violations. The profits of the employers of working children exceed the imposed penalties by a factor of ten.

3.12 Worst forms of child labour

The incidence of child labour is one of the most important and dangerous challenges facing the world at the end of the twenty-first century. Child labour is not confined to one country, but affects the world without exception. Within the rise of the movement of goods and persons between countries, and the exacerbation of poverty in developing countries, child labour has expanded enormously throughout the world. As a result, States Parties adopted a set of international conventions and protocols for the prohibition and elimination of child labour, of which the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) (ratified by Syria on 22 May 2003), and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children annexed to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime (2000). At the national level, Syria issued Law-Decree No. 3 (2010) against the trafficking in persons, which is in line with the conventions and protocols ratified by Syria. According to Article 1 of Law-Decree No. 3, a "child" is every male and female below 18 years of age, in accordance with Convention No. 182.

According to Article 3 of Convention No. 182, the term "the worst forms of child labour" comprises:

- (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.

Therefore, the worst forms of child labour comprise offering work to children for illicit activities or hazardous works affecting the health, safety and morals of children.

According to Article 4 of Law-Decree No. 3 (2010), the trafficking of people is to "transport, kidnap, deport, shelter or host persons in order to be employed for illicit activities in return for material or moral compensation or a pledge of compensation or other". In addition, Article 5 of Law-Decree No. 3 (2010) states that trafficking of people comprises the use of a child for any kind of prostitution or the production of pornography in return for direct or indirect remuneration. The sentence is similar to that of Article 7 and 8 of Law-Decree No. 3 (2010).

Convention No. 182 stipulates a set of commitments of States Parties:

“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, shall be determined by national laws or regulations or by the competent authority, after consultation with the organizations of employers and workers concerned.”

Therefore, the Syrian Government can adopt a set of executive decisions for the creation of a continuous control and follow-up mechanism. Those executive decisions are to be regularly updated.

“Each Member shall design and implement programmes of action to eliminate as a priority the worst forms of child labour. Such programmes of action shall be designed and implemented in consultation with relevant government institutions and employers’ and workers’ organizations, taking into consideration the views of other concerned groups as appropriate”.

In this context, the Syrian Government, throughout the implementation of any national strategy for children or the issuance of a Child Law, should ensure that the programmes of elimination of the worst forms of child labour are in line with these strategies and laws.

“Each Member shall take all necessary measures to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions giving effect to this Convention including the provision and application of penal sanctions or, as appropriate, other sanctions.”

A lot of the cases mentioned in the Convention are considered in Syrian criminal laws, such as drugs, prostitution, kidnapping, etc. However, it is important to put the emphasis on the compulsory work of young persons, are often perceived as legal activities while but withholds the exploitation and abuse of those working children.

Article 15 of Law-Decree No. 3, concerning the traffic in persons, dictates that “Concerned authorities must take the measures necessary for the protection of the victims of traffic and the provision of support for physical, mental and social recovery in cooperation, when needed, with public institutions, unions and civil society organizations.

The most vital aspect of Law-Decree No. 3 is the treatment of trafficking victims. The legislator has taken into account the various conditions where the victims can benefit, in complete confidentiality, protecting the dignity and the life of the victim, from the support of the State in terms of health, education, legislation, housing, etc. The Law acknowledges the status of the victim – regardless of the reasons and conditions – and offers support to the victims and their parents through social integration mechanisms. In addition, children and women are granted special care being the most affected by the trafficking of persons (or other crimes).

“Members shall take appropriate steps to assist one another in giving effect to the provisions of this Convention through enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance.”

As a result of the importance and widespread nature of this challenge, and the necessity of international cooperation, Law-Decree No. 3 dedicates an entire chapter to the trafficking in persons. Thus, Article 17 stipulates the creation of a division in the Ministry of Interior for the prohibition of the trafficking in persons.

The ratification of Convention No. 182, and the issuance of a Law-Decree concerning the trafficking in persons, demonstrate the will of the Syrian Government in fighting and prohibiting these crimes. However, the determination of the Syrian Government will be further strengthened with the issuance of executive instructions for the law and the control of its implementation, especially in terms of granting the status of victim to young persons in all types of illegal or worst forms of child labour, regardless of the will of the working child or the pressure he or she was subject to. In this situation, the child falls outside the scope of the law, and falls under Article 3 of Law-Decree No. 3 concerning the trafficking in persons, which stipulates the protection of children and young persons, regardless of crimes and sanctions, and their rehabilitation and social integration through the provision of all sorts of assistance and the total respect of their human rights.

In view of the above, part of the network of detention centres and prisons, public institutions and civil society organizations needs to be dedicated to addressing such issues. Also, criminal law could be amended to include the indictment of those who offer work to or abuse young persons in all sorts of illicit activities, whether in direct or indirect employment, the facilitation of this employment, or who fail to disclose its incidence. Severe sanctions must apply in case the child is employed or abused by family members or guardians. Parents often impel their children to undertake illicit activities as in case of arrest the sentence of young persons, as opposed to adults, is perceived to be shorter and easier than the adult.

In terms of the legal aspect of child labour prevention, Syria has achieved substantial progress by ratifying several international conventions and issuing a set of rules regulating child labour, prohibiting child abuse and trafficking, as well as employment in illicit activities. Nevertheless, additional achievements, mainly the issuance of a Child Law, are still needed.

4 • Characteristics of child labour in Syria based on available information

4.1 Statistical limitations

The characterization of child labour in Syria confronts many difficulties as a result of the absence of a child labour survey and the scarcity – if not deficiency – of statistical data. Complexity abounds when research targets working children aged below 15 years. The statistical abstracts of 2000 published by the Central Bureau of Statistics – the main official source for statistical data in Syria – make reference to working children in the age category 10- 14. However, since 2001, the age category 10 -14 was excluded from the data published in the statistical abstracts. This comes as a result of Syria's ratification on 18 August 2001 of Convention No. 138. The omission of age groups below 15 years from active population figures is itself a positive action, reflecting the commitment of the Government to respect the minimum working age of 15 years. However, this commitment does not exempt the Government from finding alternatives necessary to monitor child labour in its actual form, even when results contradict the exemplary situation sought by authorities. The commitment of the Government to the minimum working age stipulates the creation of such alternatives as a means to assess the extent of child labour incidence and in order to fight the problem.

The analysis of the incidence of child labour deals with several complexities, such as the recent statistical tables on labour force distributed according to age. Categories of age are divided by five years, starting with ages 15 -19. This first category comprises working children aged 15- 17 and 18 -19 years. This categorization does not permit the study of the indicators of legal child labour (above 15 years). However legal, the Syrian State has taken into account the consequences of this type of child labour by issuing a set of instructions and decisions pertaining to the protection of working children from night work or hazardous work that endangers their physical and mental development.

As a result of the shortage of statistics necessary for the identification of characteristics of child labour in Syria, the study team used the most recent statistical abstracts in addition to the findings of available child labour studies, including governmental reports on child labour or related issues.

It is important to note that it is not possible to generalize the characteristics of child labour, extracted from the used statistics and studies, for the following reasons:

- Available statistics are not sufficient to cover all indicators of the incidence of child labour.
- Most of the studies reviewed have partially covered the characteristics of child labour by specific sectors or regions. Of the reviewed studies, only two covered the entire country: Central Bureau of Statistics, FAFO, UNICEF: Child labour in Syria, 2002,⁸⁵ based on the results of the Internal Migration Census, 2000; and Abdullah Atouz: Causes and consequences of child labour in Syria, 2005, the only field work specifically designed for the study of child labour.

⁸⁵ Prepared by the Central Bureau of Statistics, FAFO institute and UNICEF.

According to the abovementioned studies, mainly Child labour in Syria, the number of working children in Syria, between the ages of 10 and 17 years, stands at 621,000 or 17.8 per cent of total children in this age category. In terms of age distribution, 26,000 working children are aged 10-11 years, 172,000 are aged 12-14 years, and 323,000 are aged 15-17 years (these values include children enrolled in school). According to the study, female working children constitute around 27.5 per cent of total working children. Child labour in Syria mirrors a worrying development trend as portrayed in table 11. The problem could be linked to intertwined factors, such as poverty and school drop-out rates, especially given that the Syria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, implemented six years after Child labour in Syria, demonstrates the spread of child labour in early ages, parallel to the age of schooling, where 4 per cent of children in age category 514- are working.

Table 11: The size of the child labour force and participation rates by age and sex

Age category	Working children in the labour force (thousands and %)						Children's participation rate in economic activity		
	Males		Females		Total		Males	Female	Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	(%)	(%)	(%)
10-11	12	2.7	14	8.2	26	4.2	2.8	3.3	3.1
12-14	118	26.2	54	31.6	172	27.7	17	8.4	12.8
10-17	320	71.1	103	30.3	423	68.1	48.8	16.3	32.9
Total	450	100	171	70.1	621	100	25.2	10	17.8

Source: Child labour in Syria, 2002, p. 8, outdated information.

Previous studies, which looked into the reasons for the spread of child labour, considered the economic conditions of households to be a central factor of child labour. The poorer the economic condition of households, the higher the possibility of child labour. According to Abdullah Atouz's study,⁸⁶ middle-income households are urging their children to work, especially during the summer vacation. The deteriorating quality of education is another factor for the increased school drop-out rate and child labour. According to various studies, family disintegration is also a factor influencing the spread of child labour. It could be said that the persistence of family disintegration, the exacerbation of poverty and the increase of school drop-outs are intertwined factors. Development indicators, which associate the three different issues of poverty, drop-out and child labour, demonstrate the occurrence of substantial challenges that face decision-makers and planners and strategy designers.

4.2 The characteristics of child labour according to the geographical distribution of working children

4.2.1 The spread of child labour in urban and rural areas according to sex

According to nearly all studies, the highest incidence of male child labour occurs in urban areas, especially for the age group 10-14, while female child labour spreads in rural areas, mainly for the same age group, at family activities. According to labour force data from the statistical abstracts of 2000, distributed by age, sex and residency, the percentage of male children of the age group 10-14 working in urban areas out of total males is higher than the share of female working children

⁸⁶ A. Atouz: Causes and consequences of child labour in Syria (Teshrin University, 2005)

out of total females at, respectively, 1.7 per cent and 1.2 per cent. However, in rural areas, the share of female working children of the age group 10-14 rises to 8.8 per cent of total working females versus 2.9 per cent of total working males. According to certain studies, child labour in rural areas often starts at the age group 10-11.

Table 12: Distribution of labour force of age group 10 -24 years, by age groups and sex, 1999 (urban-rural)

Urban-rural	Urban			Rural			Total		
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Age group									
10-14	1.7	1.2	1.6	2.9	8.8	4.2	2.2	6	3
15-19	11.3	5.8	10.5	14.1	24.7	16.5	12.7	17.7	13.5
20-24	13.9	17	14.3	14.3	18.3	15.2	14.1	17.8	14.7

Source: Syria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 1999.

*Child labour in Syria*⁸⁷ reveals a larger share of working males in urban areas than the share of working females. The study notes that the work of female children is more prevalent in rural areas, and starts at the early age of 10-11 years. Compare with the next paragraph – more comparison and analysis

Moreover, the statistical abstracts of 2008 reveal similar trends in terms of the relative increase of male child labour in urban areas and female child labour in rural areas, and their concentration in the agricultural sector.

Table 13: Distribution of labour force aged 15- 24 years, by age groups and sex, 2007 (urban-rural)

Urban-rural	Urban			Rural			Total		
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Age group									
15-17	4.5	1.4	4.1	4.5	5.2	4.6	4.5	3.4	4.3
18-19	4.6	2.7	4.3	5.2	5.3	5.2	4.9	4	4.7
20-24	14.7	17.4	15.1	16.3	20.8	17.1	15.4	19.2	16

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2007.

Females working in agriculture in rural areas, generally do so despite the absence of remuneration, with the exception of certain types of harvest activities that rely on manual work on the basis that female wages, especially for children, are cheaper than male wages.

4.2.2 The distribution of child labour according to governorates and sex

Studies have confirmed the relationship between child labour and a set of development indicators at the governorate level. Child labour incidence increases in governorates of high population growth rates and high school drop-out rates, in addition to agricultural governorates in the north-

⁸⁷ Central Bureau of Statistics; FAFO; UNICEF: Child labour in Syria (2002)

eastern area. Accordingly, this reflects the interactive relationship between child labour on the one hand and successes or failures of the development process on the other hand. In this regard, according to *Child labour in Syria*⁸⁸, the lowest child labour rate was registered in the governorate of Soueida, followed by Tartous and Dar'a. Conversely, the highest rates were registered in north-eastern governorates characterized by large-scale agricultural activity and a high number of children working on family land. In addition, there is an increase of female working children in other governorates, such as Deir Al Zour, Alhasskeh, Al-Rakka, Idleb and Aleppo.

Table 14: Participation rate of working children aged 10- 17 years in economic activity, according to governorate and sex

Governorate	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Damascus	21.3	0.8	11.1
Rif Damascus	24.4	2.2	13.4
Homs	22.8	6.2	14.6
Hama	22.7	11.4	17
Tartous	15.3	5.4	10.3
Lattakia	21.5	11.9	16.9
Idleb	31.7	12.5	22.6
Aleppo	32.5	10.1	21.8
Al-Rakka	24.6	19	21.9
Deir Al Zour	27.9	27.6	27.7
Alhasskeh	23.4	23.5	23.5
Al-Soueida	12.8	1.8	7.5
Dar'a	18.6	3	10.9
Quneitra	35.5		17.9
Total	25.2	10	17.8

The Syria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2006, led to similar findings, where the highest share of working children was registered in north-eastern governorates and Hama, where child labour is concentrated in agricultural activities. The lowest share of working children was registered in Soueida followed by Tartous and Dar'a. The lowest school drop-out rate was registered in Soueida and Tartous, along with the lowest population growth rates. Conversely, child labour incidence has increased in eastern governorates, which are witnessing high population growth rates and school drop-out rates. Although child labour in Dar'a has expanded less, it has now spread out as a result of drought and the internal migration of a large number of residents from eastern governorates seeking jobs.

4.2.3 Distribution of child labour in rural and urban areas according to place of birth and residence

Studies have differentiated between the place of birth or residence and the place of work of children. The work of children in urban areas does not mean they were born or live in those areas. Poverty and the degradation of development indicators force children to leave their place of residence, especially at a relatively later age, in order to find job opportunities. *Child labour in Syria*⁸⁹ shows that most working children live in rural areas at an early age and move at a later age.

⁸⁸ ibid

⁸⁹ ibid

Table 15: Distribution of working children and participation rates in economic activity, by place of birth and residence, and age groups

Age groups	Distribution of working children by place of residence (% and thousands)			Participation rates in economic activity (%)	
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
10-11	1	5.8	4.2	0.8	5.4
12-14	25.4	28.8	27.6	8.6	16.9
10-17	73.6	65.4	68.2	25.7	39.9
Total	%	100	100	13	22.5
	Thousands	323	398	621	

Source: Child Labour in Syria, 2002, p. 9, outdated information..

Abdullah Atouz's study⁹⁰ demonstrates that the percentage of working children who are born in rural areas is four times the percentage of working children born in urban areas. Moreover, the share of working children resident in rural areas is higher than those living in urban areas. According to Shaza Qadamani's study,⁹¹ the share of rural working children migrating to the city – Aleppo – is higher than urban working children. This is due to a set of repulsion factors, such as the lack of basic development structure in the north-eastern rural area, and the attraction factors of Aleppo, being the number one industrial city in Syria.

4.2.4 Characteristics according to the educational status of working children

According to nearly all studies, the majority of working children are either school drop-outs or have never enrolled in school. The illiteracy rate of working children is high, especially for female working children, with a small share of children working while enrolled in school. According to Abdullah Atouz's study, the majority of working children are not enrolled in school or have dropped out of education. Thirteen per cent of working children have never enrolled in school, 52 per cent have dropped out of school and 35 per cent study while working. The study of Shaza Qadamani,⁹² has shed light on the increase of illiteracy rates among working children especially female working children.

The quantitative study executed by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs within the framework of the preparation of a Youth National Strategy – in cooperation with the National Planning Commission and UNFPA⁹³ – demonstrates the relationship between poverty and school drop-out rates within the study sample and shows that poverty is behind the non-enrolment of 2 per cent⁹⁴ of children and the drop-out rate of 6.72 per cent of children, knowing that more than half have dropped out of school during basic education.

*Child labour in Syria*⁹⁵ shows that more than half of working children between the ages of 10 and 11 years still go to school, while the percentage drops to 11.5 per cent of total working children aged between 12 and 14 years, and to 1.5 per cent for the age group 20-24.

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ S. Qadamani. Statistical analysis of the condition of working children in the city of Aleppo (field work for a Master's degree in Population Studies, 2008).

⁹² *ibid*

⁹³ Empowerment and Social Participation of Youth, project for the support of the national youth strategy in Syria, Quantitative Report year

⁹⁴ Poverty was defined as the inability to cover educational expenses or the need for financial support

⁹⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics; FAFO; UNICEF: Child labour in Syria (2002)

Table 16: Distribution of working children aged 10 -24 years, according to age group and regularity of attendance

School attendance	10-11 (%)	12-14 (%)	15-17 (%)	18-19 (%)	20-24 (%)
Regular	52.5	11.5	3.5	2.1	1.5
Irregular	47.5	88.5	96.5	97.9	98.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100

These findings sound reasonable knowing that basic education at that time did not exceed grade six when children are aged 12, if they pass all grades. The drastic change of curriculum between grade five and grade six can lead a lot of children to drop out of school if no support is offered from outside school, which is difficult to provide in poor and large households.

4.2.5 Child labour profile: Age

Previous studies have shown that child labour increases as the children get older, especially among boys, whereas it decreases among girls. This phenomenon may be explained by the cultural practice of early marriage for girls – guaranteed by law – which was revealed by the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2006. In fact, it seems that a fifth of the women in the sample were married before reaching 18 years of age. Nevertheless, *Child labour in Syria*⁹⁶ shows that, regardless of the gender distribution, child labour significantly increases as the children get older, since more than a third (68 per cent) of the child labour force is estimated to be in the 15-17 age bracket. Similarly, the report from the Child Data Unit⁹⁷ has shown that the proportion of child workers in the age bracket 6-14 did not exceed 7.6 per cent of all children in that age group in 2000. Nevertheless, these rates increased with an increase in the age bracket: 3.1 per cent in the 10-11 age group, 12.8 per cent in the 12-14 age group, and 32.9 per cent in the 15-17 age group, with an apparent difference between the genders as shown in the table below.

Table 17: Rate of child labour, per age category and gender

Age	10-11 (%)	12-14 (%)	15-17 (%)
Females	3.3	8.4	16.3
Males	2.8	17	48.8
Total	3.1	12.8	32.9

Source: wa7dat bayanat al tofl”

Abdullah Atouz’s study⁹⁸ confirms the above results, and concludes – as does Shaza Qadamani’s study⁹⁹ – that child labour in the age bracket 8-14 increases as the child gets older.

4.2.6 Child labour profile: Gender

The available data on child labour does not provide an accurate picture on the gender differences present in the phenomenon, which has limited the depth of the analysis on the issue. Child labour, however, differs greatly between girls and boys in issues such as the size of this phenomenon among

⁹⁶ ibid

⁹⁷ Central Bureau of Statistics; UNICEF. Multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) (2006)

⁹⁸ A. Atouz: Causes and consequences of child labour in Syria (Teshrin University, 2005)

⁹⁹ S. Qadamani. Statistical analysis of the condition of working children in the city of Aleppo (field work for a Master’s degree in Population Studies, 2008)

each gender, the start age of work, the geographic distribution, as well as the sectors in which they work and the salaries obtained. *Child labour in Syria*¹⁰⁰ shows that the average contribution of children in the economic sphere varies between 10 per cent for females and 25.2 per cent for males, and girls are estimated to represent 27.5 per cent of all children in the workforce. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2006, confirms that the rate of working children – out of total children – increases to 5 per cent for boys, whereas it decreases to 3 per cent for girls. Abdullah Atouz's study showed that in the age bracket 8-9 years, a higher rate of girls work, whereas the opposite is true in the higher age category of 12-14 years. As previously stated, one of the reasons for such results is the practice of early marriage among girls, in addition to social norms that limit girls' freedom and mobility as they reach puberty.

4.2.7 Characteristics pertaining to the sector and type of work

The studies have shown that the majority of working children work in the private sector, and more specifically in the informal sector rather than the formal one. In addition, they have shown that some children work for themselves and that unemployment varies between 3 per cent and 6 per cent.

In fact, Child labour in Syria indicates that 97 per cent of working children are employed in the private sector, without any noticeable difference between boys and girls. There are many reasons that explain this distribution across sectors, such as the fact that employers (whether formally or informally) prefer to hire children as they are cheap labour and unaware of their rights. What most of these children want, and hope for, is a job at any cost.

As for unemployment among children, it is said to be concentrated in the 15-17 age category and reaches its highest levels in other urban areas (9.5 per cent) in comparison with the centres of the governorates, at 4.4 per cent, and rural areas with 2.7 per cent of child unemployment.¹⁰¹ In addition, unemployment reaches 4.2 per cent among boys and 2.9 per cent of girls.

In line with these results, the numbers presented in the statistical survey of 2008 point out that unemployment reaches 6.9 per cent among boys in the 15-17 age category (out of total unemployed boys), which is similar to the girls' unemployment for that same age group (6.8 per cent).

4.2.8 Characteristics by sector of activity

Previous studies have revealed similar results in the distribution of children in the different sectors of activity. Most of the children were concentrated in agricultural work, followed by the manufacturing sector, the services sector and finally construction. According to *Child labour in Syria*, 56 per cent of all working children are employed in the agriculture sector and the rate of girls working in the fields exceeds that of boys.

¹⁰⁰ Central Bureau of Statistics; FAO; UNICEF: *Child labour in Syria* (2002), footnote 104 in Arabic

¹⁰¹ Central Bureau of Statistics; FAO; UNICEF: *Child labour in Syria* (2002).

Table 18: Distribution of the unemployed aged 15 to 24 years, by age category and gender 2007

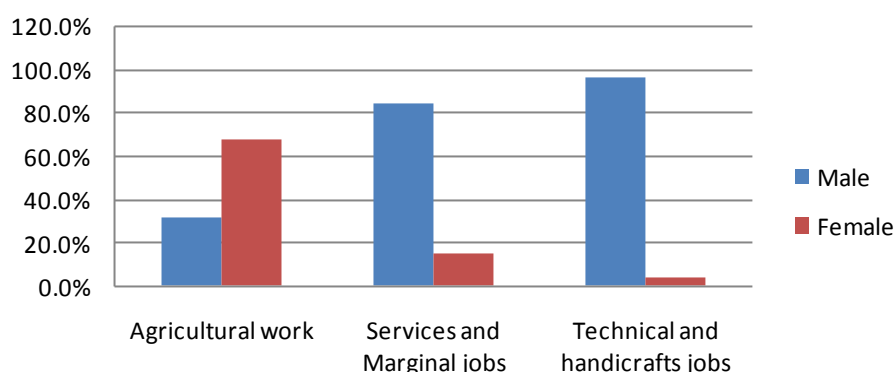
Age category	Unemployed, but used to work			Unemployed, and never worked			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
15-17	3,602	1,097	4,699	22,493	11,062	33,555	26,095	12,159	38,254
18-19	4,757	1,042	5,799	26,580	16,631	43,211	31,337	17,673	49,010
20-24	12,754	3,139	15,893	77,904	77,549	155,453	90,658	80,688	171,346

Table 19: Distribution of working children, by economic activity and gender

Sector of economic activity	10-17			10 to 14 (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	
Agriculture and hunting	41.1	94.0	55.6	65.1
Manufacturing and extractive industry	23.2	3.8	17.9	15.2
Construction	11.4	0.6	8.4	4.4
Commerce, restaurants and hotels	19.0	0.3	13.9	11.5
Transport and delivery	1.8	-	1.3	1.0
Financial services	0.1	-	0.1	0.1
Other services	3.4	1.4	2.8	2.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Child labour in Syria, 2002, p. 11.

In his study, Abdullah Atouz uses different classifications for jobs; he nevertheless reaches the following results: in line with other reports, he finds that working children are mostly employed in agriculture (44 per cent) with the rate of girls exceeding that of boys. However, in Atouz's study, 34 per cent of the children work in services in selling and marginal jobs, such as begging.

Figure 5: Distribution of working children by gender and sector of activity¹⁰²

4.2.9 Characteristics according to the wages children earn

Previous reports have shown that the rate of children working with pay is almost equal to that of children working without pay. The latter are mostly concentrated in the agricultural sector and among children, especially girls, working in family establishments. Furthermore, all the studies have pointed out that children receive very low wages and have no bargaining power to improve their conditions.

Children working with pay do not exceed 47 per cent of employed children, whereas the proportion working for their families for no pay reaches 44 per cent. However, most of those who work for no pay work in the agricultural sector (77 per cent) and are girls.

The monthly salary of working children varies between 2,000 S.P and 3,000 S.P. Shaza Qadamani's study, however, shows that 29 per cent of children work for a monthly wage of less than 1,000 S.P. In contrast, according to the study published by the Syrian Committee for Family Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), children's monthly salaries vary between 4,000 S.P and 8,000 S.P. It must be noted that the field work for this study was undertaken mostly in Damascus, where wages are generally higher. Furthermore, this study was conducted after the increase in wages in the public sector. Nevertheless, the two studies were in agreement concerning the fact that children's pay is subject to the control of their parents.

4.2.10 Children's working hours

According to previous studies, the total number of working hours per week for children is around 40 hours, which amounts to over six hours a day, with some children even working up to 12 hours a day. In addition, children who both work and attend school work fewer hours than those who have dropped out of school. In fact, 81 per cent of working children do so for 40 hours per week or more, and they are mostly children who have dropped out of school.¹⁰³

Qadamani's study has shown that children's working hours are in direct violation of the Syrian Labour Law, and that 85 per cent of them work day and night, with many of them having a second job in addition to their main one.

¹⁰² A. Atouz: Causes and consequences of child labour in Syria (Teshrin University, 2005).

¹⁰³ A Central Bureau of Statistics; FAFO; UNICEF: Child labour in Syria (2002).

4.2.11 Worst forms of child labour

It is difficult – given the available data – to distinguish, within the phenomenon of child labour, between bad and good forms of employment as stipulated by the ILO, and more specifically Convention No. 182, which aims to ban the worst forms of child labour. This section delves into this issue, relying on the previous studies that have attempted to observe child labour in certain marginal jobs, such as smuggling, prostitution and drug dealing.

The “Phenomenon of child delinquency: Causes and consequences” study¹⁰⁴ estimates that 96 per cent of boys in correctional facilities and at the Central Aleppo Prison worked prior to their incarceration. Among them, 14 per cent worked in smuggling. On the other hand, the rate of girls who are currently in correctional facilities and who had previously worked is 38 per cent.

The field work conducted by the Centre of the Homs Governorate in 2006 found that the rate of children arrested for smuggling (selling foreign cigarettes, for example) reached 11 per cent in 2004, and 7 per cent in 2005. The study concluded that “each time the government restricts the import of a product which thus ends up being smuggled, the number of children working in that field increases [...] since juveniles receive a more lenient sentence than adults if caught”.

Finally, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2006,¹⁰⁵ revealed that 3 per cent of children in the age category 5-14 who are still in school have to work in gruelling difficult jobs. It must be noted, however, that the estimate reached by this survey is probably on the low end of the spectrum, since many children may work in dangerous jobs but for fewer hours than was specified in the methodology of that research work.

4.2.12 The parents’ situation

Studies have revealed a link between the parents’ socio-economic status and child labour. Children’s participation in the labour force is higher in families that are headed by the mother, and/or in families where the mother does not work. In addition, there is an inverse relationship between child labour and parents’ education, whereby the rate of children joining the workforce increases as the parents’ educational level decreases.

An interesting finding, however, is that child labour decreases, even in poor families, if the mother is employed and if she enjoys a certain minimal level of education. Furthermore, the child’s participation in the labour force increases in families where one of the parents is also an employer or self-employed. In fact, Atouz’s study concludes that the mother’s income is a major factor determining whether or not children in the family will work. He links this to the fact that the mother’s earnings “represent a certain income level for the family”, and families that respect a mother’s right to work also steer clear of resorting to child labour, except in dire and extreme circumstances.

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Daw. Mohammad: A field work study which combined boys and girls in the Aleppo prison and correctional facility in 2001 and 2002 (2003)

¹⁰⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics; UNICEF. Multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) (2006).

Table 20: Distribution of working children aged 8 -14 years, according to the mother's monthly income¹⁰⁶

Income category	Number	Rate (%)
No mother	240	4
The mother has no income	2,760	46
4,000-6,000	2,790	46.5
6,000-8,000	180	3
8,000-10,000	30	0.5
Total	6,000	100

Shaza Qadamani's study reaches similar results concerning children's labour force participation rate in families headed by women, as well as in terms of the effects of the parents' low level of education. However, what she also discovered was that the father's educational level affects the type of job that the child falls into.

4.3 Child labour in camps and Palestinian gatherings

It was estimated that the rate of Palestinian refugee working children is 1.5 per cent of children in the 5-14 age category, and it is higher among boys. Furthermore, it would seem that child labour increases among those who have dropped out of school (similarly to Syrian children), and among children in rural areas and in the camps of Aleppo.

4.4 Effects of child labour on the children

Previous studies have confirmed the negative effects of child labour. On the physical and mental health level, children joining the labour force at an early age suffer from a delay in their physical development, and their mental abilities are weakened. Furthermore, many children now suffer from chronic illness and impairments as a consequence of their early joining of working life (back pain, joint pain, asthma, allergies, etc.). In addition, children suffer from physical abuse, such as beatings, as confirmed by most of those in the correctional facilities and former child workers.

Dr. Daw's study shows that 23 per cent of the children who were sexually assaulted or abused in the sample happened to work, and were attacked in their work environment.

In addition, child labour leads to an increase in the prevalence of many social ills, such as smoking, addiction, etc.¹⁰⁷ This may be explained by the fact that the child needs to make up for all the loss and missing elements in his or her life, especially if he or she comes from a broken home. Further than this, "the children joining the labour force, especially those who drop out of school, are exposed to various types of violence and sexual harassment, especially among girls working as maids".

The study of the Syrian Committee for Family Affairs and the MOSAL¹⁰⁸ reveals that 41 per cent of the sample suffered from various illnesses, most of which resulted from the work the children were employed in.

¹⁰⁶ A. Atouz: Causes and consequences of child labour in Syria (Teshrin University, 2005)

¹⁰⁷ S. Qadamani. Statistical analysis of the condition of working children in the city of Aleppo (field work for a Master's degree in Population Studies, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ Supported by UNICEF, year

5 • The field work

5.1 The methodology

In order to assess the worst forms of child labour in Syria, a qualitative study was undertaken relying on two techniques: focus groups and in-depth interviews. While the qualitative study allows for a thorough look at this phenomenon, its results may not be generalized. As such, despite their importance, the results may only be used to give an indicative picture of the situation. This may help in the development of programmes and projects aimed at dealing with child labour and its spread. What adds to the importance of the qualitative study is that it completes the preceding chapters and serves as further documentation of what previous studies have concluded in terms of results.

The most important aspects or topics dealt with by this qualitative study are:

- First axis: Reasons behind children joining the work force.
- Second axis: The children's work environment.
- Third axis: The working child's family environment.
- Fourth axis: Consequences of child labour on the child.

In line with the research, and in order to reach its objectives, 27 focus groups were undertaken in various regions as shown in table 21 below.

Table 21: Distribution of focus groups

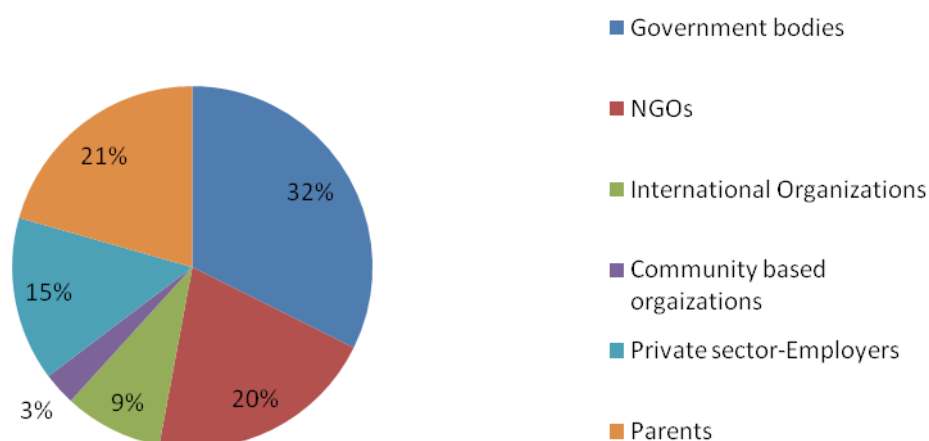
Region	Governorate	Children			Parents	Total
		Male	Female	Mix		
Southern region	Damascus	Children	1		1	2
		Children begging on the streets	1	1		2
		Children in conflict with the law	1	1		2
	Rif				1	2
Central region	Damascus	1	1			2
	Dar'a	1	1			2
Coastal region	Homs	1	1			2
	Lattakia	1	1			2
Northern region	Aleppo	Tartous	1			1
		Children	1	1		2
		Children in conflict with the law		1		
	Idleb		1			1
Eastern region	Deir Al Zour	1	1			2
	Alhasskeh	1	1			2
Iraqis Palestinians				1	1	1
			1		1	2
Total		12	10	1	4	27

In addition to the focus groups, and in order to validate and support the results, 34 in-depth interviews were conducted with various stakeholders and experts in the field of child labour, from government bodies, charitable organizations, international organizations, etc. Figure 7 portrays the distribution of the interviews.

Figure 6: Map of Syria



Figure 7: Distribution of in-depth interviews with governmental and non-governmental bodies



5.1.1 Criteria for selection of the study sample

- (a) Geographic criterion:** All Syrian regions were represented through the selection of two main cities in each region while focusing on certain areas more than others, either due to their size – such as the southern region, for example – or due to the presence of refugees in it (Palestinians and Iraqis).
- (b) The development situation:** Some governorates were left out in terms of development from most five-year plans (FYPs) prior to the tenth. Following the tenth FYP, these governorates were given special attention. It is for this purpose that these governorates were selected, while taking into account both urban and rural areas as well as the gender distribution of children. It must be noted that these regions experienced the highest population growth, as well as the highest rate of poverty and unemployment. As such, four focus groups were dedicated to the eastern governorate, in addition to a focus group with girls in correctional facilities and their parents. The northern region was represented by the governorate of Aleppo at first; however, since it was the end of the harvest season, the research team went to Rif Idleb in order to study the phenomenon of child labour in agriculture, especially among girls.
- (c) Age bracket:** The selected children's ages varied between 9 and 15 years, in accordance with the terms of reference of the research. The sample included children from the age of 9 because the rate of children dropping out of school and joining the labour market increases, starting in the fourth grade, i.e. 9 to 10 years of age. In addition, the upper threshold of 15 years of age was selected because the worst forms of child labour occur at this age and under. This is due to the fact that Syrian law, as mentioned in Chapter 3 above, abides by international agreements pertaining to child labour that allow children aged 15 years and above to work given certain specific conditions aimed at

protecting said children; whereas, prior to this age, children are not allowed to work, as per the law. This, however, does not mean that child labour – for children under 15 years of age – does not exist. In fact, most countries, if not all, are unable to eradicate this phenomenon.

- (d) **Gender criterion:** Despite the difficulties it faced, the research team attempted to represent, to the best of its abilities, both male and female children in the focus groups. More difficulty was faced trying to reach out and contact girls, in particular. The carefulness in representing both girls and boys stems from the conviction that differences exist between the two genders, which are all the more fuelled by the law in certain cases. For example, the legal age for marriage for girls is lower than that for boys, and this age is a major factor in school drop-outs in the first instance, and joining the labour force in the second instance. In addition what further elucidated the need to highlight the gender differences was what has come to be known as the glass ceiling for girls, which is an expression of the traditions and customs that dictate the manifestation of child labour among girls. Indeed, girls' and boys' participation in the labour force differs whether it be from the standpoint of what motivates them to work, the type of work, or even the place of work and the control of remuneration.
- (e) **Criteria of professions (best effort):** Based on previous studies, and certain interviews undertaken at the beginning of the study, it would seem that child labour is mostly focused in agriculture, manufacturing industries and some services sectors, in addition to marginal professions, such as selling gum on the street, cleaning cars or begging. It is for this reason that the research team attempted, to the best of its abilities, to represent children working in these fields.
- (f) **Correctional facilities for children in conflict with the law:** The research team was careful to monitor the negative effects of child labour at a young age through following up on certain cases that led working children (boys and girls) to deviate. It is for this purpose that several focus groups were conducted within correctional facilities for juveniles in conflict with the law and with behavioural problems.
- (g) The research was conducted at the same time as the arrest of a gang that exploited children by having them beg and work in marginal professions. The gang was arrested with the help of one of the charitable NGOs, which is why the research team addressed this NGO and undertook a focus group with some of the children who had been exploited by this gang.

5.1.2 Constraints in the field work

a- Fear of admitting to child labour

The target age of children for this study was under the legal working age of 15 years; as such, the work of children under that age is illegal, which entails that their closest kin in charge of them and/or their employers could face legal consequences. It was thus hard to get admissions of child labour from guardians and/or employers. This difficulty was overcome, as well as possible, through the use of helpers within the local community, or even opinion leaders, by visiting them and motivating them to help the research team and to accompany it during the field work.

b- Difficulties in bringing the children together in one area

The focus groups required the transportation of some children from one region to another for the purpose of geographic representation. This necessarily scared some of the children and their parents, which resulted in their refusal to go in many cases despite the encouragement that was presented to them. This obstacle, in addition to the one mentioned above, created a significant impediment for the research team.

c- Difficulty in representing females

Gaining access to girls, in particular, was difficult, especially in conservative areas. The research team thus had to visit the girls at their place of employment on several occasions, whether it be on the agricultural land they worked on or the houses in which they were employed as maids. Both the research teams and the girls, however, were subject to constant pressure from the employer.

d- Weak responsiveness from some stakeholders

Administrative and procedural bureaucracy played a negative role when it came to the in-depth interviews. For many of the meetings, a request had to be placed several times with the official counterpart. On more than one occasion, the research team had to visit the relevant party several times in order to complete one interview. Many stakeholders did not even agree to sit down for an interview to begin with, and the research team had to instead send a letter containing the questions to the parties involved, who in return replied with brief answers. The research team was very flexible in the face of these obstacles and was satisfied receiving partial answers as opposed to no answers at all.

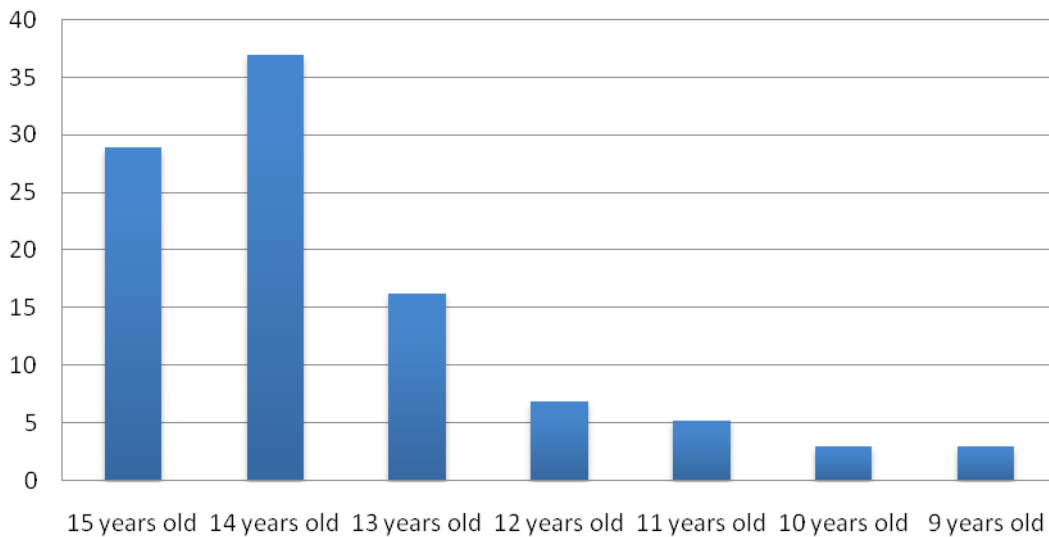
5.2 Characteristics of the children in the sample

The number of children in the sample for the focus groups was 173 boys and girls and they were distributed along the following criteria.

5.2.1 Age

The children were distributed as per the figure below.

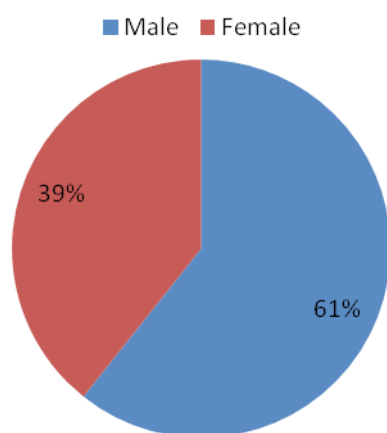
Figure 8: Age distribution of children in the sample, disaggregated by gender



Child labour increases with age, as shown in the above figure, whereby the highest rate of working children was registered for children aged 13-15 years, peaking at 14 years of age. What might explain this phenomenon is that children's physical features are much stronger in this age category than between the ages of 9 and 10 years, but at the same time, their wages are similar to those of younger children. The employer thus gains more from this by obtaining more effort from the child for less than what he would normally pay an adult.

5.2.2 Gender

Figure 9: Distribution of children in the sample according to gender

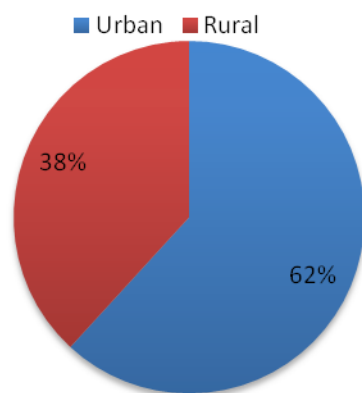


61 per cent of the children in the sample were males, while 39 per cent were females. This gender distribution is considered acceptable since it is in line with previous studies and research, which point out a higher rate of child labour among boys than among girls.

5.2.3 Place of residence

The place of residence of the children varied as follows.

Figure 10: Distribution of children in the sample according to their place of residence

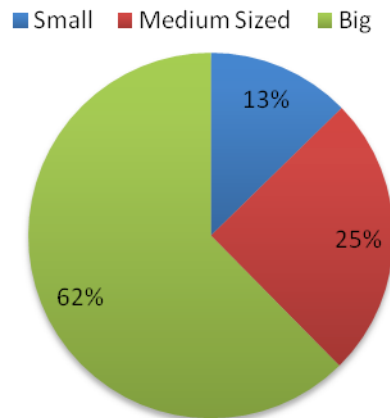


Out of the 173 children involved in the sample, 62 per cent lived in the city as opposed to 38 per cent who resided in rural areas. This is not consistent with the reality, as rural residents form 54 per cent of the total population; however, the need to monitor the distribution of professions as much as possible necessitated that more weight be given to urban areas, where child labour includes the industrial sector as well as construction work, begging and other such jobs. Jobs in the rural areas, however, are mostly linked to the agricultural sector only.

5.2.4 Family size

The distribution of the children in the sample according to their family size was as follows.

Figure 11: Distribution of children in the sample according to their family size

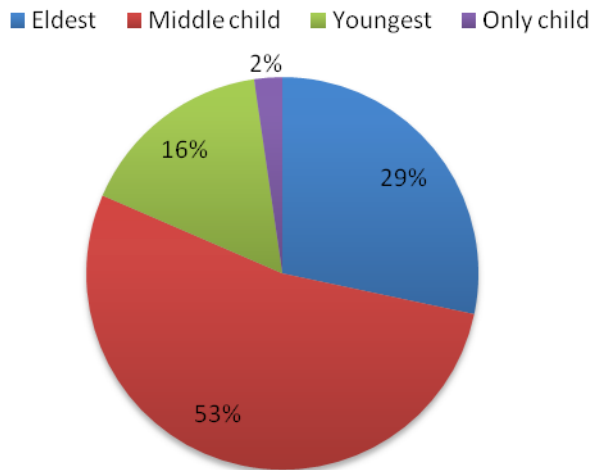


Results showed that nearly half of the children (46 per cent) were part of a large family (eight people or more), followed by 41 per cent coming from medium-sized families (five to seven individuals). Only 13 per cent of the children in the sample had families that were constituted of four people or less. Generally, child labour tends to be more apparent in bigger families, especially the low-income ones. It is in this environment in particular (big family, low household income or lack of income, low educational level, etc.) that child labour thrives.

5.2.5 Child's position in the family

The sample was distributed as follows in terms of the child's position in the family.

Figure 12: Distribution children in the sample according to their position in the family

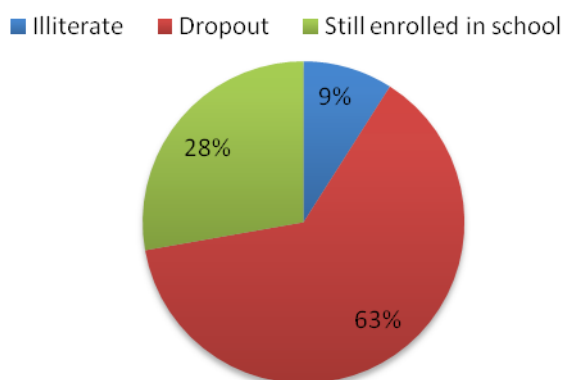


The field work results show that 29 per cent of the working children are the eldest among their siblings, and they are often sent to work in order to help their parents. If the majority of children in the sample are middle children in their family, it is probably due to the big family sizes they come from leading to the fact that more than one child may be working within one family – among them, the older sibling. Many of the children in the focus groups had older siblings who were working but not included within the sample. In fact, 50 per cent of the children had one or more siblings who also worked.

5.2.6 The child's educational level

The children in the sample were distributed as follows in terms of their educational level.

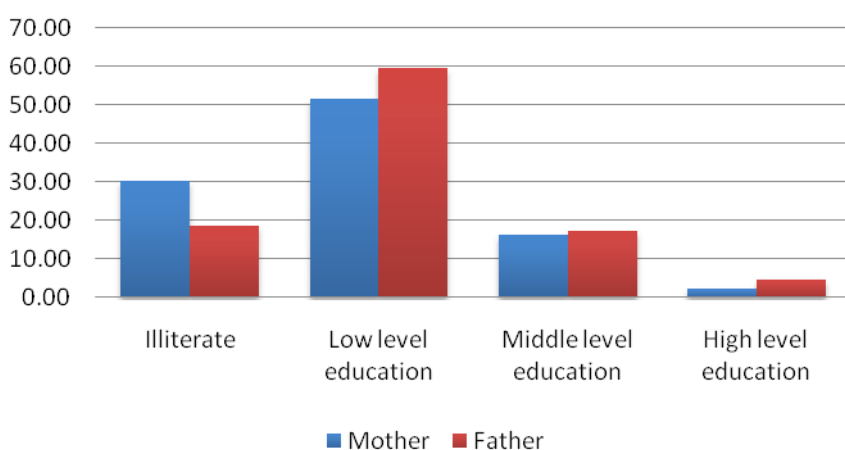
Figure 13: Distribution of children according to their educational status



Based on the rates seen above, about three-quarters of the working children are either illiterate or have dropped out of school, while 28 per cent are still enrolled in school but also work at the same time. This entails that these children are also in danger of eventually becoming drop-outs, especially as they get older, due to the difficulty of studying and working in parallel. These results show the strong correlation between child labour and dropping out of school.

5.2.7 The parents' educational level

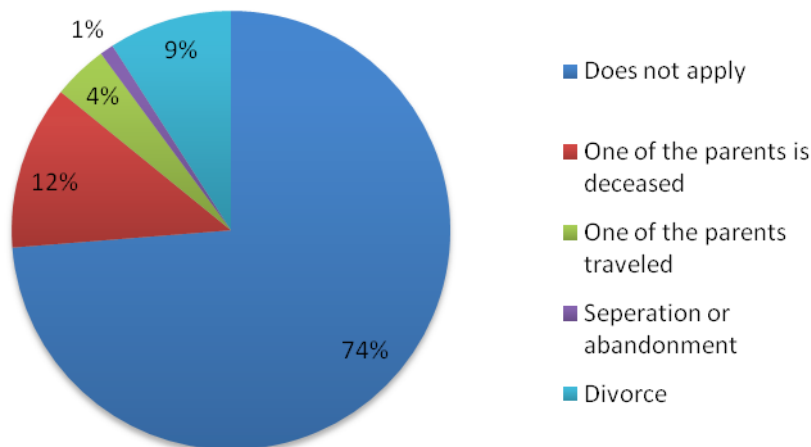
Figure 14: Parents' educational level



As evidenced by the figure above, more than three-quarters of the children in the sample grew up with illiterate parents, or at least parents with a very low level of education (sixth grade and under). 78 per cent of the fathers and 82 per cent of the mothers were either illiterate or had a very low elementary level of education. Fathers and mothers with a high level of education (university degree) are practically non-existent in this sample (4.6 per cent and 3.2 per cent, respectively). These results may be linked to the family size as shown in figure 11. Previous studies have shown a correlation between the level of education of the parents, especially that of the mother, and the family size, whereby the more educated the parents the more likely the use of contraceptive and family-planning methods.

5.2.8 Family disintegration / breakup

Figure 15: Rate of family dissolution

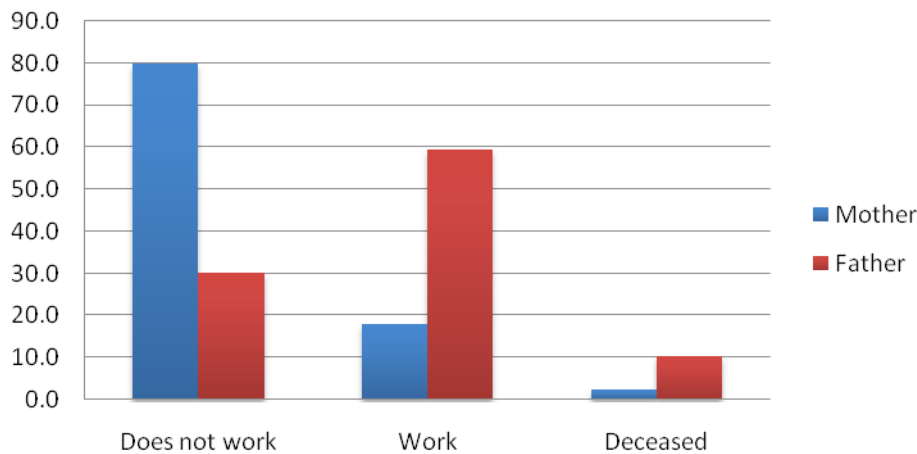


Results from the research show that more than a quarter of the working children come from broken/dysfunctional families due to the death of one of the parents, divorce or abandonment. This number is not insignificant when compared to the rate of broken families at the national level. This indicates that the children lack the nurturing environment they require at this critical age, which necessitates much care and attention from both parents.

5.2.8 Parents' work status

a- The following figure shows the work status of the parents

Figure 16: Parents' work status



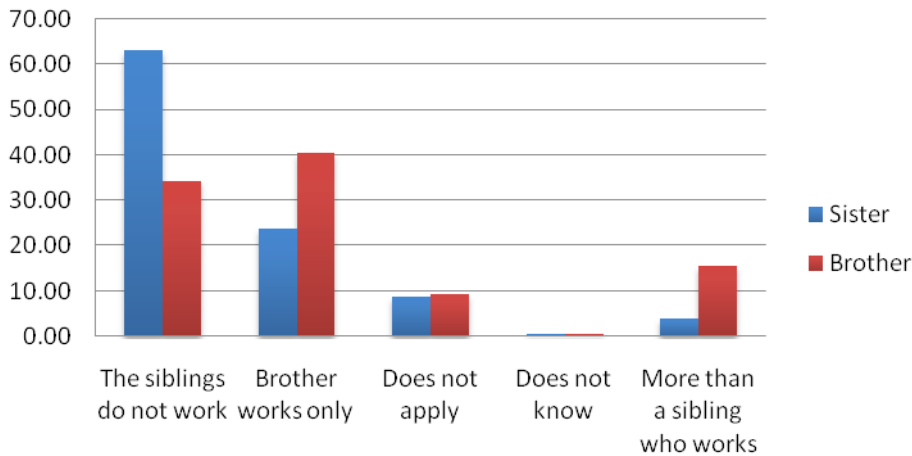
The fathers of 30 per cent of the working children in the sample are unemployed. The same applies to 80 per cent of the mothers. This would indicate a correlation between the employment status of the mother, namely her unemployment, and child labour. In fact, some of the children in the sample admitted during the focus groups that they work so that their mothers and sisters would not have to. This is a representation of transmitted cultural norms, which are still widespread in rural and urban areas alike in addition to it being linked to the low level of education of the mother.

An educated mother who is able to find a decent job does not cause her family embarrassment, and the ingrained cultural norms are slowly being replaced with respect for the social standing decent employment offers women. However, the fact that there is a lack of employment opportunities for individuals with poor qualifications leads to the children having to work. What encourages this even more is the demand for children by employers, due to their low pay and the long hours they work, and the possibility to use them in more than one task at the same time. It is interesting to see the inverse relationship between child labour and the mothers' employment, which is in line with previous Arab studies that have tackled the issue of child labour. The Egyptian case,¹⁰⁹ for example, which shows this inverse relationship, attempted to counteract child labour by providing work opportunities to the mothers.

¹⁰⁹ As previously mentioned in the socio-economic chapter.

b- The siblings' employment situation

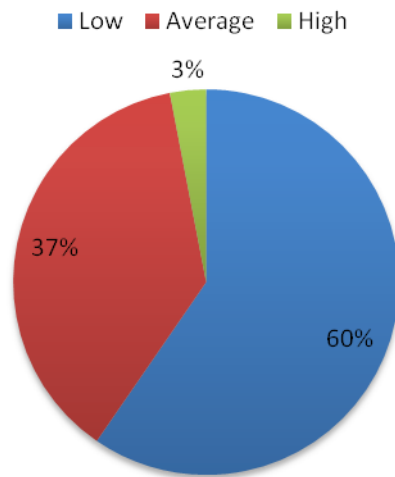
Figure 17: Siblings' work status



It would seem that 57 per cent of working children in the sample have brothers who work and, among them, 40 per cent of those children have one brother who is employed, and 16 per cent have more than one brother in the workforce. This indicates a typical progression of families towards abusing child labour due, most often, to the economic situation that forces the parents to choose child labour over school. The percentage of working sisters, on the other hand, was less than that of brothers, whereby only 24 per cent of children had a sister who was in the labour force, with those only having one employed sister constituting 4 per cent and those having more than one sister working constituting 28 per cent.

5.2.10 The parents' economic conditions

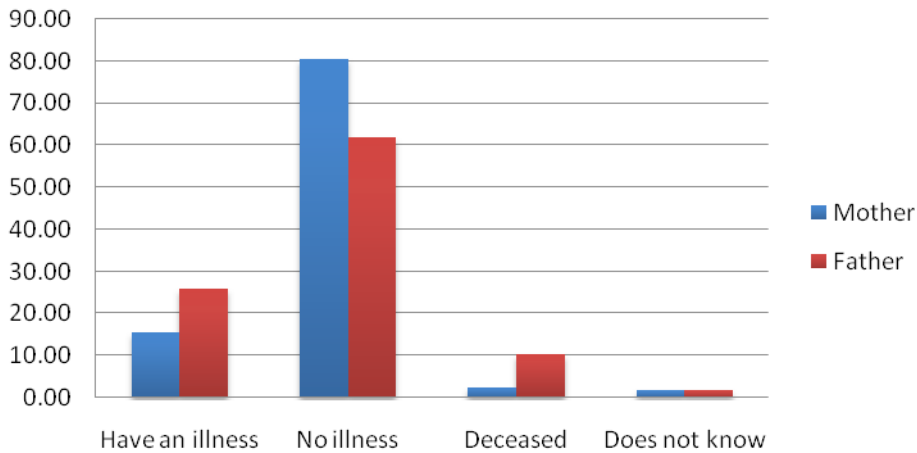
Figure 18: Family's income level



Results indicate that 60 per cent of the working children surveyed said they came from a poor background, whereas 38 per cent said they come from middle-class backgrounds and only 3 per cent admitted coming from rich families. This confirms the roles poverty and high cost of living play as principal factors behind child labour. It must be noted, however, that the answers the children gave concerning their living standards do not necessarily accurately reflect the living conditions of the family. As such, there may be misvaluations on behalf of the children about their own situation, due to two factors: (a) the child feeling embarrassed about honestly discussing his or her family's financial situation; and (b) the availability of food and clothes, even if relative, may be an indicator for the child concerning his own living conditions, or at least about the sufficiency of financial means in the family.

5.2.11 The parents' health situation

Figure 19: Parents' health situation

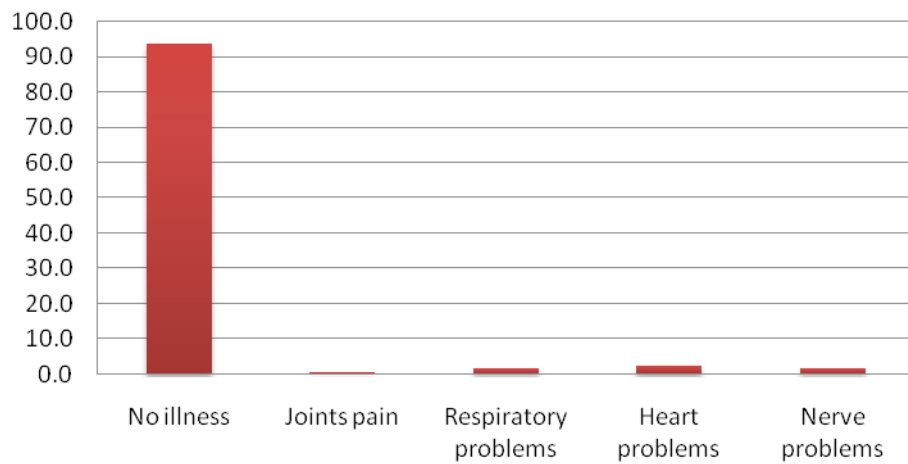


It would seem, based on the results of the focus groups, that more than a quarter of the children in the sample have parents suffering from chronic diseases, with evident disparities between mothers (15 per cent) and fathers (26 per cent). The illnesses that were recurrently mentioned were mainly back problems, joint problems, asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc. These illnesses, in many cases, prevent or stand in the way of the parents working. This is in line with the results that have emerged from the work status of the fathers, which have shown that 30 per cent of the children live in families with unemployed fathers. In addition, these illnesses are added monthly costs – in terms of medicines – which are an additional burden for poor families.

5.2.12 The child's health situation

a- Prior to them joining the labour force

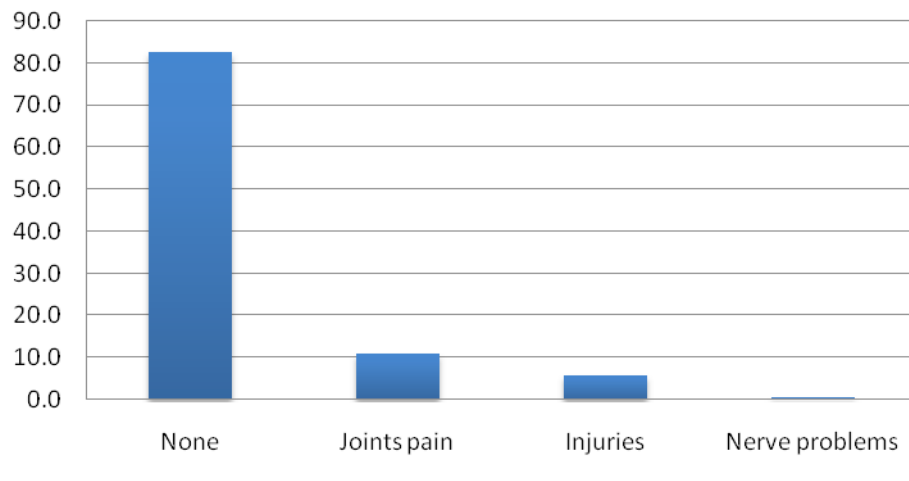
Figure 20: Distribution of children according to their health status prior to joining the labour force



It is evident from the above figure that the rate of children suffering from illnesses prior to joining the labour force was minimal. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that even those with poor health were made to work, which doubled the effects of their illnesses on them, especially breathing, heart and joint problems.

b- Illnesses resulting from work

Figure 21: Distribution of children according to their health status after joining the labour force

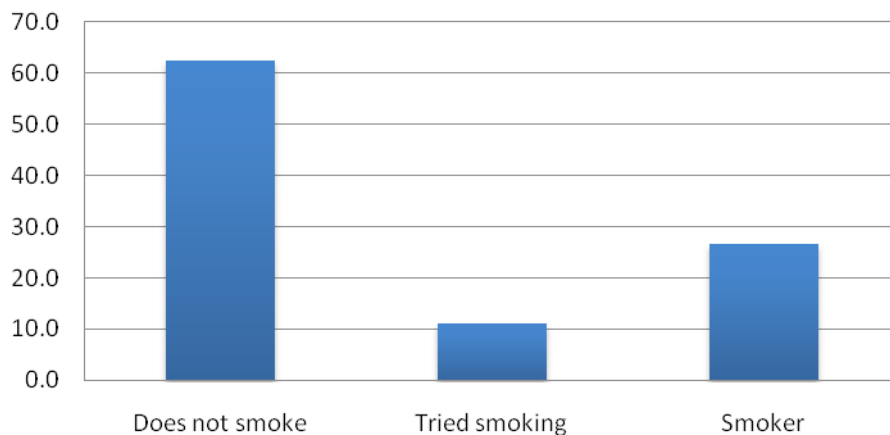


Field work results show that 11 per cent of the working children suffer from joint and back problems, and 6 per cent from work-related injuries, such as those caused by dropping, overturning or working of machines, or even as a result of beatings (particularly for maids). In addition, a very small percentage of children suffer from neurological injuries, such as concussions due to falling or accidents whilst going to or returning from their jobs. These numbers are likely to increase so long as child labour continues. In general, it is noticeable that the number of children who suffer from injuries/diseases/illnesses after joining the labour force is almost three times higher than the number prior to joining the workforce.

5.2.13 Smoking and drug abuse

a- Smoking

Figure 22: Distribution of children vis-à-vis smoking



More than a quarter (28 per cent) of the 173 children in the sample smoke, and about 11 per cent of the others had at least tried smoking but had not kept it up. These results are worrying for children aged 15 years and under as they are in an environment that encourages this number to continuously grow.

b- Drug abuse and addiction

Figure 23: Distribution of children according to drug abuse

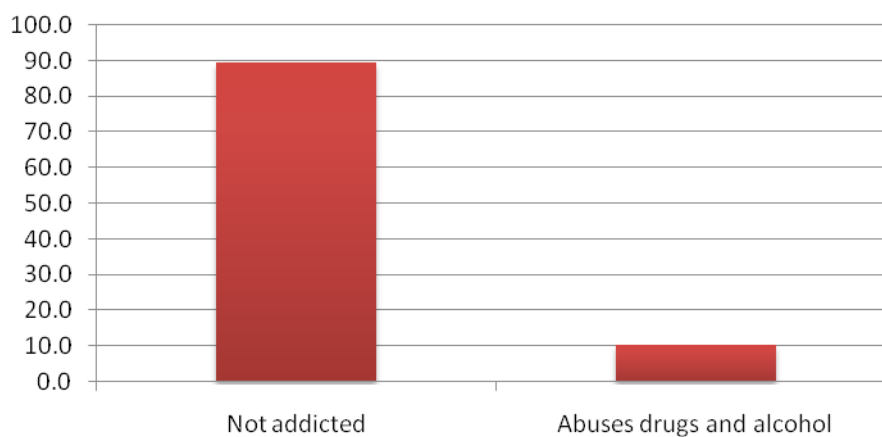
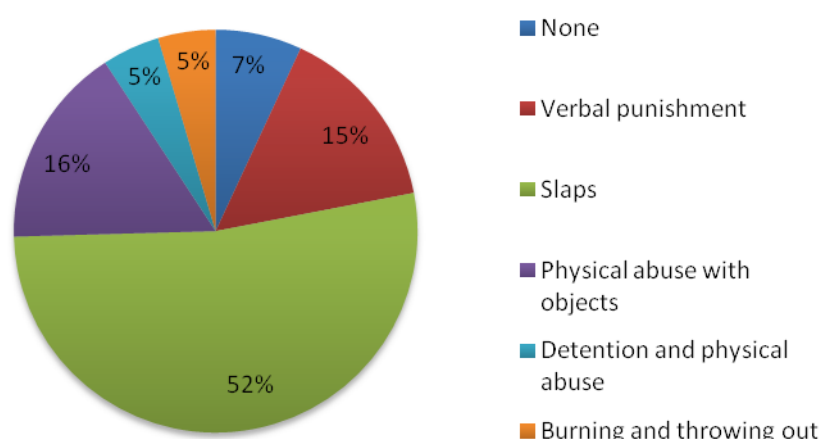


Figure 23 shows that 10 per cent of children in the sample abuse at least some drugs, starting with “the torch” (an adhesive and sticky substance with a poignant smell), continuing to drinking gas (household gas fuel) and finishing with some pills. This phenomenon is mostly evident among children who have been to correctional facilities. In some of the other interviews, the children did not discuss their own abuse and addiction in particular, but that of their parents, one of their relatives or even their neighbours or friends. In general, it is difficult for the child to admit that he or she has a substance abuse problem, considering this issue is forbidden and has severe repercussions and sentences.

5.2.14 Adopted method in the upbringing of the family

Figure 24: Punishment methods employed by parents



More than half the children in the sample (52 per cent) were punished through violence (such as slapping) by their parents, and 16 per cent admitted to being hit with a stick, a water hose, or even cables, etc. Five per cent were even punished by being locked at home, tied with chains and hit from time to time, and another 5 per cent reported being burned or thrown out of the house to be easy prey on the street with all the dangers this entails. The last two punishment methods were higher among children who had attended correctional facilities, but they were nevertheless also a fact for children who had not been to the correctional facilities, especially among children in the eastern regions.

These results confirm those of the study “Child Violence”,¹¹⁰ whereby most of the children in the sample were subject to some form of family violence. Nearly 88 per cent of the children were subject to verbal abuse and 72 per cent were subject to beatings, 49 per cent suffered from deprivation, 59 per cent were victim to threats and 43 per cent even went to prison.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Barakat. Muta’a; Ezz. Iman. Survey of Violence against Children in Syria, Summary Report (UNICEF, Damascus, 2003).

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 21.

5.2.15 The child's work situation

The following table shows the distribution of the 173 children in the sample according to the economic sectors and jobs in which they work.

Table 22: Distribution of children per profession and sector of activity

Sector	Current profession	Rate per profession (%)	Rate per sector (%)
Industry	Electrical mechanic	13	22
	Car mechanic	7	
	Boxing of vegetables and making drinks	2	
Agriculture	Various types of agriculture	18	18
Construction	Lifts blocks, makes cement	7	7
Services	Does deliveries	20	24
	Maids in houses	4	
Handicrafts	Sewing, barbering	13	13
Other	Begging, garbage collecting	11	16
	Prostitution	5	
Total		100	100

The above results indicate that child labour is concentrated mainly in the services sector (24 per cent), followed by the industry sector (22 per cent), agriculture (18 per cent) and the remainder is distributed in other jobs such as begging, picking up garbage, even prostitution and, finally, crafts and construction. Keeping in mind that it is not possible to generalize these results, they do nevertheless reflect a change in the rankings of the sectors in which child labour is concentrated. Previous studies have indicated that child labour is mostly concentrated in agriculture and industry, whereas current results of this study show a shift, with child labour being predominantly in the services sector, followed by industry and agriculture. The differing results concerning the most common sectors of employment are logical since the services sector on the whole has experienced rapid growth over the last few years, especially in cities and their surroundings. This is in line with previous results, which have pointed out that the majority of working children are located in urban regions. In addition, the agricultural sector has experienced a slowdown – in part due to the drought – especially in eastern regions. As such, the results obtained in the above figure are acceptable, but they would nevertheless benefit from national statistical surveys to confirm the numbers.

The results also reflect the dangers to which children are exposed at work; and, despite the variance in the level of risk these jobs pose on the children, the one sure thing is that they all involve some

risks, and some may even be referred to as the worst forms of child labour, especially when taking into consideration that all the children in the sample are aged 15 years and younger. Begging, prostitution and working as maids in homes are considered to be some of the worst forms of child labour, even for children aged over 15 years. Working on the streets and begging exposes the child to the risk of accidents, being exploited and even possibly molested. Most of the children begging on the streets were either sent there by their parents, their older brothers or even by gangs, who seize their earnings in exchange for providing them with a place to sleep at night. Many of these children who work for gangs have to endure harassment and molestation often times, an issue that will be further discussed later in this chapter. Girls working as maids in houses are also exposed to much physical violence and sexual molestation. Among the girls in the sample, many who worked as maids did suffer from violent abuse at the hands of their employers, and the research team witnessed many of the effects and consequences of this violence on the bodies of some of them. If poverty is what pushes the families to have their daughters work, it is these daughters who end up paying the price.

The situation is even worse when the girl is made to sell her body for money, whether it be with her consent, that of her parents or even her husband. These cases are considered as some of the worst forms of child labour in regards to their effect on the mental and physical health of the girl as well as its societal impact. Prostitution exposes the girls to sexually transmitted diseases, which the girls then transfer to other partners, thus creating an area of danger for individuals and society alike. In addition to this, prostitution eliminates a girl's self-respect and self-esteem. What is striking about these cases also is that a boy (no older than 12 years) chaperones these girls until the early hours of the morning (up until 5 a.m. in many cases) and collects the money they earn. This gives an indication as to what the future will be like for this boy who works all hours of the night in this environment.

Children who work in mechanic shops and electricity are also exposed to much physical danger, the least of which is injury, the worst being the loss of a limb. As was previously mentioned in figure 21, 8.5 per cent of the children in the sample had work-related injuries. This applies to jobs that entail car spraying, furniture spraying or even hairdressing whereby the children contract illnesses such as asthma as a result of exposure to harmful chemical substances. The agricultural sector also exposes the children to many dangers due to the use of pesticides, not to mention the long working hours that the child spends directly under the sun. Jobs within the services sector – such as delivery roles – expose children to the risk of traffic accidents in addition to the possibility of being molested, especially when delivering orders to houses.

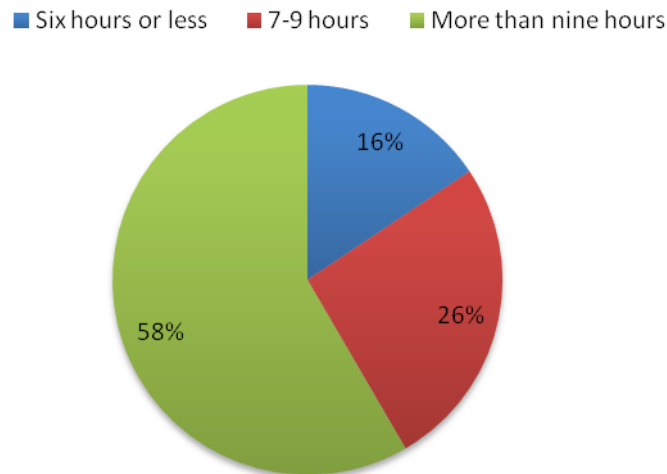
Working in the construction field is also very dangerous for children due to the vast amount of effort and strength it requires. When considering that the children mainly work in moving heavy items – such as concrete blocks, sand, gravel – over many floors, then the damaging side of this job is quite obvious.

In recent years, garbage collection has become a more common job among children. What is particularly dangerous about this job is that children are sometimes made to look through trash containers for plastics and other such garbage that is in demand. The child is directly exposed to

germs and viruses, which may cause several illnesses.

5.2.16 Working hours

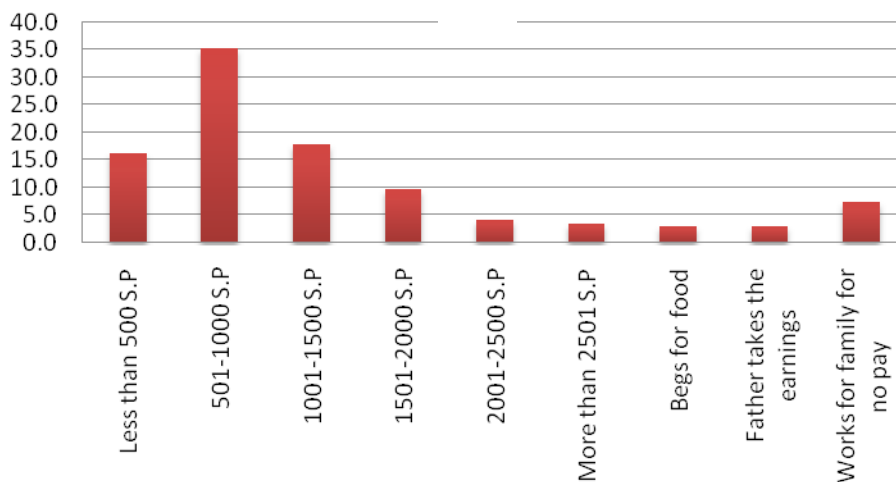
Figure 25: Hours of work per day



What may be inferred from the figure above is that 57 per cent of children in the sample work over nine hours a day – more than an adult’s working hours per day. More than a quarter of the sample work between seven and nine hours per day, and the rest work six hours per day or less, which is almost equivalent to the number of hours adults work.

5.2.17 Weekly remuneration

Figure 26: Distribution of children according to their weekly earnings



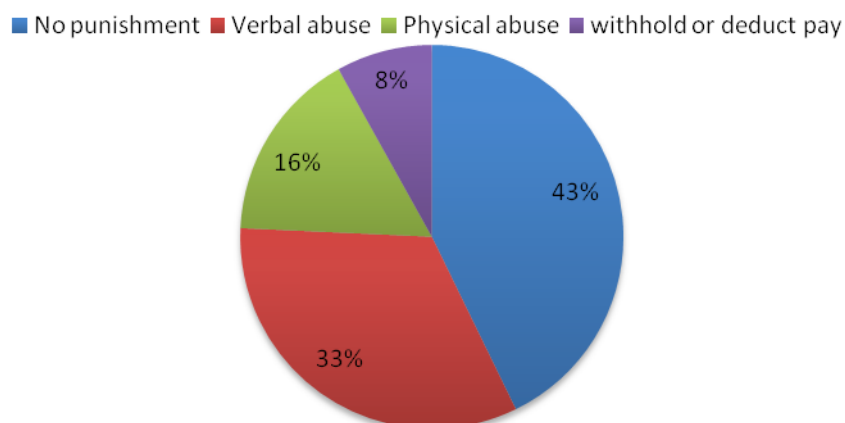
More than half the children earn less than 1,000 S.P. per week, in contrast to one-third obtaining between 1,000 S.P. to 2,500 S.P. per week. Begging, on the other hand, can earn a child as much as 1,000 S.P. per day sometimes, a major factor increasing the number of children begging in the streets.

Among child workers, 7.5 per cent work with their family for no pay, while another 2.9 per cent of the children in the sample work outside of their family without knowing how much they earn, since their salary is handed over to their guardian directly. This was particularly noticeable among girls working in the agricultural sector and as maids in households. An equal amount – 2.9 per cent – of the children in the sample, especially children begging on the street, work and make just enough to be able to eat and afford somewhere to sleep. These children begging in the streets have mostly either run away from home or were thrown out and they work for someone who provides them with somewhere to stay.

While only certain parents are directly handed their children's pay, this does not mean that the rest do not confiscate their children's remuneration in part or completely. In reality, most of the children in the sample give the money they earn to their families. What is noteworthy here is that many of the children have complained about their father also being their employer and have even admitted to preferring working for strangers since they could earn better pay.

5.2.18 Punishments to which children are exposed in their jobs

Figure 27: Distribution of children by type of work punishment they suffer

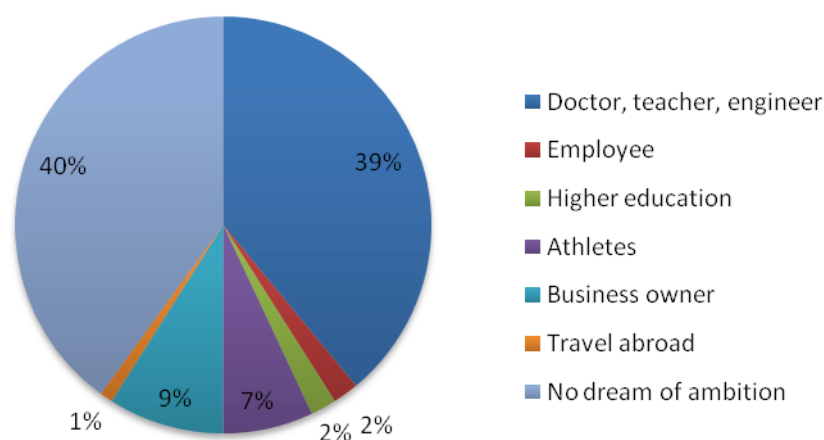


Results presented above show that 43 per cent of children in the sample reported that they have not suffered any punishments at work or from their employers. The remaining children have all been punished to varying degrees, most of which has been mild (35 per cent), or has taken on a more physically violent form (16 per cent), and some have even had pay deducted from their remuneration (8 per cent). While it is not possible to generalize these results, as has been previously explained, it was nevertheless noticed through the in-depth interviews that children tend to conceal the degree and type of punishment they receive from their employers. In fact, many of

these children do not tend to view violence from their employer as punishment, but rather as a teaching and training method. This phenomenon increases when the employer is also the father, whereby the incidence of violence increases because the father, in this case, has both a custodial authority and an economic authority over the child.

5.2.19 Dreams and ambitions

Figure 28: Distribution of children according to their dreams and ambitions



The above figure represents the dreams and aspirations of the working children. What is striking is that 40 per cent of these children do not have a dream or ambition, whereas 39 per cent of them would like to receive a university degree in medicine, engineering, law, etc. Around 9 per cent of these children wanted to become business owners, and 7 per cent would want to become athletes – more specifically, football players. The remaining answers, which are relatively few, expressed desires to continue studying, to have a decent job or even to travel. However, what is most alarming in these results is the large number of children who do not have any dreams for the future. It would seem that these children have never been given the opportunity even to dream since they left the educational system and started working at a very young age, or they come from broken homes that abandoned them, which threw the child into the world of responsibility. These children have not had time to ever think of their ambitions.

Notable is the importance of the aspirations of the children who wished to obtain university degrees in medicine, engineering and law. These aspirations entail that the children would have preferred to continue their education rather than work, were it not for the factors that forced them to drop out of school, their families and their living conditions.

The desire of 7 per cent of the children to become athletes – and more specifically, football players – probably stems from the increasing spread of this sport through various media channels. This

desire may also spread from the fact that these children have been deprived of the right to play due to the fact that they entered the labour market, and nearly 57 per cent of them work over nine hours per day. As such, these children do not have time to play, even though it is one of their rights and an essential factor contributing to their personal development.

Nevertheless, whether the children have a dream that has never been realized, or have not even dared to dream, the question remains: who killed their dream? Is it their families, their schools, poverty, or all of these combined?

5.3 Causes of child labour

The factors that lead to child labour and render it a worrying phenomenon beyond its threat on the future of the children, overlap in many respects. The results of the field work have confirmed what previous studies had concluded: poverty is the main cause for the spread of this phenomenon. Children who have stated that they come from poor backgrounds constituted 57 per cent of the sample. School drop-out is considered the second cause for child labour, as well as a consequence, since it would not be a growing phenomenon, nor would it occur at such an early age, were it not for poverty. A correlation may also be highlighted between poverty and the low levels of general awareness and education – and the large size – of the family. The combination of all these factors creates an environment where the chances of a child gaining an education decrease significantly, while increasing the likelihood of him or her entering the labour market at an early age. Divorce and family break-ups also exacerbate the effect of poverty on violence against children at home and at school. It is useful here to mention the initiative taken by the Syrian Government to combat poverty and limit its spread, demonstrated by the development of a poverty map of Syria in 2005 as a first step in order to determine the size of the problem and provide requirements to address it.

The effects of the factors determining child labour, i.e. poverty, dropping out of school and family disintegration, are not only reciprocal effects, but also cumulative ones. What this signifies is that these factors fall into a vicious circle to create more poverty, more drop-outs and more family break-ups. If this cycle is to be broken, then the solution should start by addressing the school drop-out phenomenon as it encompasses and affects most of the other negative aspects mentioned above.

5.3.1 Poverty

Poverty has been determined to be the primary reason behind child labour. For children, the main goal of working was reported to be helping their parents financially, especially in light of the worsening living conditions in general. Parents and children who were interviewed unanimously agreed with this. A father from Rif Damascus, said: “I used to earn 150 S.P. per day for a family of 11, which used to be sufficient. But now, prices have increased at a much faster pace than our wages”. If the high cost of living is in part due to the global financial crisis, and in another part due to internal economic matters, it is also nevertheless attributable to the natural and climatic conditions that have prevailed in the country in recent years, and which contributed to worsening matters. The drought that the country has been suffering for quite some time now has had a negative effect on various regions, especially in the east of the country. Issues become even more complicated when considering the government policy aimed at correcting the prices of fuel and fertilizers. The combination of all these factors resulted in the migration of a large portion of the

population of the eastern region to more coastal or southern areas, more specifically Dar'a, since it is a governorate with a variety of crops. These "migrants" end up living in tents after taking their children out of school, especially the girls, to work during the summer and ensure a stock of food supplies for the winter. In some cases, certain villages were completely deserted.

This situation is worse in rural areas than it is in cities, especially for girls. According to the results of the field work, as well as those of the interviews with stakeholders, poverty is the cause of girls working, and this employment is first and foremost concentrated in agriculture in rural areas, after which comes working as maids in houses and working in artefacts (manual labour) in the city.

The incidence of poverty worsens when the father is unemployed, in addition to the fact that most

"I work in agriculture to help my parents who have agreed to that".
Girl from Rif Dar'a

"I work in agriculture due to our bad financial situation and my parents cannot afford to provide for my education".
Girl (15) from Rif Adlab

"I left school because I come from a family of six and our income is very low because my father is unemployed and my mother works on an agricultural land. We suffer from extreme poverty and the available money is not enough to even feed us and is definitely not enough to cover school costs".
Girl (14) from Rif Lattakia

of the mothers of the children in the sample also do not work.

"I left school because I did not have enough money to cover the basic costs; I couldn't even afford to buy a pen because my father does not work".
Girl (15) from Homs

A high incidence of young girls working as maids in houses in the city was registered, especially in the northern and eastern regions. An employer of one of these girls who was interviewed in Aleppo said that the main reason for which these girls are sent to work is because the parents are "broke" and this way they receive an advance on the pay of their daughters of between six months and one year. The girl thus becomes a captive at her employer's household in exchange for the money that her parents or guardians have received. She is no longer free to quit her job even if she faces abuse.

“I don’t receive a salary. My parents are the ones who take it and I do not know how much it is ... I saw my parents on the Adha Eid and I was shocked that my father had passed away. I have not seen my sisters, Qamar, Hayfen and Shirine, in nine years”.

Girl (15), a maid in Aleppo

The effect of poverty is even more obvious when one of the parents falls ill. The children bear the burden of responsibility even earlier due to a lack of social security networks, which would otherwise take charge in these cases.

“I work in agriculture due to my difficult conditions at home. My mother and father are both ill and there is no-one else to take care of us”.

Girl (14) from Dar’a

These results are in line with those of the “Consultations with Syrian families about their living conditions in light of the recent socio-economic reforms”,¹¹² in which researchers have confirmed that “there is a gap between the average income for the Syrian family and average household expenditure ... this imbalance is exacerbated by the faster increase of the cost of living than the increase in the level of income”.¹¹³

5.3.2 School drop-outs

Despite the great efforts of the Syrian Government to ensure the enrolment in school of all Syrian children, boys and girls alike, and despite the fact that primary education is free of charge (see socio-economic chapter), child labour still threatens these efforts since it is one of the main factors leading to school drop-outs.

It is hard to distinguish which is the cause and which the consequence between school drop-outs and child labour. What may be said is that they each lead to the other based on the belief among some that: if a child fails at school for any reason, then they should be placed at a job where they may learn something, regardless of how young they may be or whether they are physically and mentally ready for it.

Some of the main reasons behind school drop-outs are described below.

a- Inability to manage work and school simultaneously

Results of the qualitative research confirmed that the low income level of the children’s families is the main factor that leads to child labour. Some of the children in the sample left school immediately, while the others continued studying for a while longer, attempting to manage work and school; but when they failed to do so, they chose to drop out and work full time. Poverty is the reason behind drop-outs in these cases.

¹¹² Syrian Committee for Family Affairs, 2006

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 85

“I left school because my parents asked me to work in agriculture. There is a lot of work in this field and they require a lot of people. I agreed to leave school because I couldn’t manage both school and work”.

Girl (15) from Rif Adlab

“My dad made me leave school in the third grade so that I could work. I would like to go back to school, but my dad forbids it”.

Boy (13) from Alhasskeh

b- Verbal and physical abuse

Despite the issuance of various directives to teachers to abide by the proper educational methods to deal with students, and which forbid the use of physical or emotional abuse in schools, such mistreatment is still a major factor contributing to the children’s decision to drop out of school. Memorandum number 120/543 (1/4) issued on 13 January 2004 on behalf of the Minister of Education specified the procedures to be undertaken against those teachers who employ these methods (following an investigation with them). The first step is to transfer them to another school, but it may reach the point of referring them to a civil service court. The Directive also holds the school principal responsible in addition to the teacher in case the incident is not reported and the proper measures not implemented within 48 hours of the event.

Despite the rigour of this decision and its emphasis on the eradication of physical, emotional and mental abuse from schools, this phenomenon nevertheless prevails. Though its incidence may be diminishing in the capital city, Damascus, it is increasing outside of it, the worst cases being found in the governorate of Dar’a and the northern and eastern governorates.

This phenomenon has obviously created feelings of hatred towards the schools in many students, which has led to an increase in the incidence of drop-outs and, in consequence, an increase in the number of children in the labour force. Most of the children in the sample complained of verbal and physical abuse in all its forms, starting with slaps, to beatings with a stick on the hands and feet, and even beatings with hoses.

“I suffered from countless forms of mistreatment from my teachers and I remember the last time a teacher slapped me on the first day of exams. That same day they took me to the police station because I hadn’t returned the books that day. I promised to hand in the books the next time. I didn’t do the exam and I left school for good after that”. And after asking him about the possibility of returning to school, he said: “I would go back on one condition only, that I don’t receive beatings, hitting is forbidden anyway”.

Boy from Lattakia

“We go to school and get a beating, we go back home and my parents hit me and tell me to go back to school”.

Boy (13) from Damascus

“I left school without any reason other than I hate it because the teachers are very hard on the students. One even broke a stick on my back and my parents had to take me to hospital. But I didn’t report the school”.

Boy (13) from Tartous

“I used to love school but they used to hit me and threaten me with imprisonment in rooms full of mice so I began hating school a lot and so I left”.

Girl (13) from Homs

“I was not able to like school, not ever. Why? Because they used to hit me with a stick on the back of my hands and I didn’t understand anything”.

Boy (12) from Dar’a

The method of hitting on the back of the hands was very noticeable in Dar’a in particular, where all the children interviewed there, without exception, reported that their teachers used this method of beating. As for the northern and eastern regions, a more noticeable beating method was that of hitting with a water hose.

“One of the teachers broke my cousin’s hand. His parents reported him but in vain”.

Boy from Dar’a

The psychological abuse a child may suffer is no less dangerous than the physical abuse. Psychological abuse may lead to depression and low self-esteem, especially if the abuse comes from a teacher who is supposed to set an example for these children. The problem worsens when the teacher aims the criticism at the student’s personality, capabilities and financial situation rather than a particular action or behaviour.

“I left school at the beginning of the academic year because one of the teachers told me not to come anymore, since it was pointless. Yes, I used to be beaten and despite that I still wanted to go to school. But the teacher said there was no point to me coming and asked me to stop coming, so I did”.

Boy (14) from Aleppo

The father of the abovementioned boy confirmed that the reason his son dropped out of school was because the teacher asked him to stop coming. There are also some children who left school after feeling they were being discriminated against due to their appearance, which revealed their poor financial situation.

“I was not exposed to physical violence, but I always felt as though the teacher discriminated against me because I was poor. The signs of poverty were so obvious. So I felt that the teacher always paid more attention to those students whose financial situation was better, and didn’t give me much time. It’s for that reason that I didn’t want to go to school anymore, to not feel like I was worth less than others, that I mattered less”.

Girl (15) from Rif Lattakia

c- Lack of interest in the education of girls

Despite the fact that the results of the field work showed that the phenomenon of dropping out of school was one which affected both genders, in many cases, especially if the financial situation did not allow for all the children to be educated, it is generally girls who are made to drop out. This is not to mention certain environments that show no interest in girls’ education in the first place.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of the *Second National Report on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the Syrian Arab Republic* (2005). This report shows that the enrolment rate of girls in schools in the first grade is much lower than that of boys, especially in the eastern governorates. Similarly, the enrolment rate of girls in Roqat is 92.5 per cent, which is slightly lower than the enrolment rate in Deir Al Zour (93 per cent).

“I have one boy. I made my four girls leave school and work so that I could send my son to school ... but he failed”.

The mother of one of the children

The *First National Report Concerning the Situation of Residents in the Syrian Arab Republic* (2008) reaffirms these same results when it discusses the widening gender gap in terms of school enrolment. The study shows an increase in the “gender gap from (-4.2) in the first six years of primary education to -6.4 in the following three classes”. Many similar cases were found in Dar’a and in the eastern and northern regions during the field work.

“I got to third grade and I left because of my parents. They don’t want to educate girls”.

Girl (14) from Dar’a

“My sisters work like me. One of them works in Egypt and the other one works in Adlab. The early working age does not apply to boys in this family”.

Girl (15), a maid in Aleppo

Girls’ situations become even more difficult in conservative environments, such as the northern and eastern regions, especially when the school is far away from home and there are no transportation means, according to the parents.

“I left school because there was no-one to take me anymore. The school is about a half hour away from our house”.

Girl (15) from Aleppo

Though the Ministry of Education has adopted a flexible school schedule policy¹¹⁴ so that school exams do not coincide with the harvest season, the Director of Primary Education at the Ministry of Education has stated that while “this is no longer an official policy, it may be applied on a case-to-case basis in some schools”.

d- Compulsory Education Law

The Compulsory Education Law is one of the laws that was relied upon to decrease the drop-out rate. Despite the fact that most concerned parties were assured that it was a good law when it was issued, there seems to have been some inefficiencies in its application on the one hand, and a need to update it on the other. The director of one of the correctional institutes in Aleppo stated that: “The government was very successful in issuing the law of compulsory education, but it has struggled a bit in its application ...”.

When the Director of Basic Education at the Ministry of Education was questioned about the existence of committees set up to follow up on the issue of school drop-outs, he reassured the research team that such committees existed. He also assured that there were “secretaries of compulsory education who are in charge of supervising the schools. Each secretary is in charge of about 20 schools, and they follow up the cases of drop-outs in each school by sending warnings to the parents”.

In reality, however, despite all these efforts, all of the parents who were interviewed stated that they had never received any warning concerning the drop-out of their child; the children also confirmed this. The concerned responsible at the Ministry of Education confirmed that what the parents and children said “was sometimes true ... and is it for this reason that we let go many of the secretaries and hired new ones. But we also face obstacles from the parents themselves. A lot of parents have little contact with the school, and so it is hard to locate them many times as we cannot find their addresses”. He added: “The fine which the parents have to pay in case their child drops out is 500 S.P, which is a small amount which the parents give no consideration to. The money that their working child makes greatly exceeds that amount. The Ministry of Education is currently looking to amend this law”.

¹¹⁴ Entailing that the beginning and end of the school year is not specified or fixed, but is subject to the agricultural season.

e- Difficulty of the curriculum and lack of qualified teachers

The school curricula have been modernized and amended on more than one occasion in Syria. In fact, the newest amendment will take place at the beginning of the next school year (2010–11), according to one of the stakeholders at the Ministry of Education. While the goals from this amendment are noble and aim to elevate the level of education on a continuous basis, in reality there is a discrepancy between the stated goals and what is achieved. It is preferable that the curricula are not amended until the teachers and educators are properly trained and qualified to teach them. If the teachers are not properly trained, then the curriculum becomes harder to teach and understand, as many of the children and their parents specified.

“I left school because I didn’t understand anything and the teachers do not care about anyone”.
Boy from Lattakia

“I left school because it was hard, and since I am the eldest there was no-one to help me or teach me”.
Boy from Damascus

Taking into consideration that the majority of the working children’s parents are of a very low educational level, and are hence unable to help them, the children have no choice but to rely on remedial courses or the help of a private tutor. The issue of poverty, however, further hampers the situation, since the parents of the children have admitted to not being able to afford hiring a private tutor or paying for the remedial courses.

One of the issues that stands in the way of a good educational process is the high number of students per division, sometimes reaching as many as 50 students – of different levels, capabilities and needs – in one classroom. It is hard for the instructor in these circumstances to allocate enough time and attention to each level, considering the high number of students. Many students are unable to keep up with their classmates and require extra attention. Sometimes, the parents might have a relatively decent level of educational and are thus able to help their child with schoolwork. However, most of the time, the parents’ educational level is quite low, and they may even be illiterate, which is problematic for the student. As shown in figure 14, the percentage of illiterate parents or parents who have only reached a primary level of education was quite high, 78 per cent for fathers and 82 per cent for mothers. These parents cannot offer their children any help and, as such, the only available solution for the family is to resort to private lessons. These lessons, and the child’s chance to continue to study, are also subject to the parents’ financial situation.

In addition to the difficulty of the curriculum and the lack of proper qualification and expertise of the teachers, what exacerbates the student’s aversion to school is the cancelation of recreational activities such as art classes, sports classes, music, etc. for the benefit of others such as mathematics, physics, etc. These recreational courses, however, are not in vain; on the contrary, they are a stimulating break for the students as they also develop their mental and motor skills and channel their energy in a positive way. These courses should be considered of equal importance as others. Schools, however, often neglect them and many times teachers do not even take the classes seriously

and fail to actually teach them properly. The children in the focus groups have mentioned this on several occasions.

“Mrs [D], eats in class and she sends the students to get her chips and Coke. If any of the students open their mouth, she hits them ten times with a stick. She is an art teacher and she never taught us any art”.

Boy from Dar’a

The results of this field work are in line with those of the study “of households concerning their living conditions amidst the recent economic and social reforms”.¹¹⁵ The authors of this study have outlined the three most important improvements to elevate the level of education, these being: “teaching technique, training of the teaching staff, etc.”¹¹⁶

f- Automatic promotion system (promotion from one class to another)

The “automatic promotion system” is one of the factors leading to children dropping out. This system relies on the idea that it is unacceptable for a student to fail the same class more than two times. Instead, this student is automatically promoted to the next class. This system would be successful if it were supported by intensive teaching cycles that would tackle the weaknesses of the failing students and allow them to catch up to their classmates. Passing a student to the next – and more difficult – grade, while he or she still has not grasped the material of the previous class, creates more problems in his or her learning, which leads the student to forgo studying and drop out of school to join the labour force.

During the field work, it was noticed that a large portion of the children made it to the fifth and sixth grades, and even the seventh sometimes, even though they were practically illiterate! Having students in the fifth grade who are barely capable of reading and writing is an indicator of the failure of the educational system rather than the failure of the student or the family. The basic principle in education is that the school is in charge of this process to the extent that students should not require external help. Such cases as those mentioned above were mostly located in Dar’a, Deir Al Zour and Alhassekeh, which are the regions that suffer more than others to provide a proper teaching staff.

“I have failed the fifth grade as well as the third and second, and I don’t know how to read or write”.

Boy from Dar’a

When the responsible at the Ministry of Education was interviewed about the solution to this problem, his answer was: “We have a dense and intensive curriculum, in which each year actually comprises of two. Schools are asked to open special sections in or out of school hours to teach the curriculum. But it is hard to gather all the students from different areas, some of them far, in one place”.

¹¹⁵ Syrian Committee for Family Affairs, 2006.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 84

Other factors leading to the dropping out of children and their joining the workforce were brought to light during the field work. Such factors included the limited capacity or motivation of some teachers, transforming the class into a nap time rather than teach it, the excelling students oppressing and teasing the weaker ones, and the physical development of children who have been automatically promoted to the next grade after failing, which leads their classmates to be afraid of them, etc.

5.3.3 Family break-up

What is meant by family break-up or dissolution is the absence of one or both parents due to divorce, death, migration, etc. In these situations, the family loses its main breadwinner, and the remaining family members are then obligated to work, especially the children.

“My father passed away and my older sister is in ninth grade. I work to provide for my mother and sister”.

Boy from Damascus

This topic brings up two issues.

First issue

The first issue pertains to the decline of traditional social safety nets (which were widespread in previous patterns of production and social development), such as the extended family, the clan or even the village. Many changes have occurred that have transformed and modified the role of these networks, which thus highlights the importance of having alternative networks (such as social security) based on modern institutional foundations and which meet the needs of the families in these situations.

Second issue

The second issue is reflected in the spread of a culture of acceptance when it comes to making the child work instead of the mother. The research team encountered many mothers of working children who stated that they would be frowned upon were they to work – it is socially unacceptable, whether it be from the husband who forbids his wife to work, or from the social environment that perceives child labour in a positive light if it prevents the woman from working. This is despite the fact that a working mother is more capable of managing her family’s affairs and providing for them than her child is. Furthermore, working mothers decrease the pressure on or the rate of working children as shown in the socio-economic chapter.

While the death of one or both of the parents is a matter that no-one can have control over, it is not the case when it comes to fathers deserting their families and relinquishing their responsibilities towards them. This not only has negative repercussions on the family as a whole, but it also leaves the child with severe psychological scars. An adviser at one of the centres for children in conflict with the law in Damascus pointed out that family dissolution comes second to poverty in encouraging child labour, “out of 350 delinquents in this institute, more than 100 come from broken homes due to divorce. This divorce often puts the child in between the parents, which

increases the problems between them and creates an environment whereby the child can easily be exploited by others”.

During the field work, it became evident that the fathers of the children in the sample had left their families and started new ones, leaving the responsibility (of their first family) to their children. It is hard to neglect the sadness in the eyes of these children when they talked about their fathers who left them or, for some, never knew them. One of the children from the eastern region (Bassam, nine years old) was left by his father who travelled to Lebanon when he was still a baby. He never went to school, and had been working since the age of five. He was working until the early hours of the morning. When he worked, he stood near the police station to stay protected in case someone tried to attack him:

“I sleep in gardens and the streets so that I don’t spend any money on transport”, and about smoking and sniffing gas he says: “it smells really good”.
Boy (9) from Alhasskeh

It is very likely that this child would start abusing drugs in the near future if he was not already. The same goes for Abdallah, a 12-year-old from Deir Al Zour, whose father left him as a baby and went on to marry again and move to Aleppo after divorcing his mother who also left him. He said, while crying: “I wouldn’t even recognize my own mother if I saw her”. He lives at his relatives’ house and works in the vegetable market to provide for himself.

“I work because we are poor and our financial situation is very bad. My dad travelled abroad and he does not send us any money at all”.

Boy (13) from Aleppo

“I stopped going to school and started working because my father divorced my mother and I live with my father and his new wife. My mom used to help me with my schoolwork and follow up on me. But now that she’s not here, there’s no one to help me”.

Boy (15) from Tartous

The above reflects the need for protection mechanisms for children who come from broken homes and who are neglected by either or both their parents. This is what the involved government bodies have begun to work on through, for example, the law proposal to establish an alimony fund and a social solidarity fund in addition to a child law proposal, of which a first draft has been completed. This law represents the basis upon which to begin tackling the abovementioned phenomenon. In addition to these governmental efforts, a law should be implemented to protect against family violence and to provide a support mechanism to protect these children, since neglect is considered to be a form of abuse and mistreatment of children.

5.3.4 A higher estimation of gainful employment at the expense of education

There is a widespread disbelief in the value of education due to the low financial returns it provides. Since education – based on the assumptions that have been fuelled by the wage policies in place since the mid-1980s – does not yield as high returns as free labour, then it has no perceived worth. This is especially the case when considering that it takes at least 16 years to obtain an undergraduate university degree, after which one obtains jobs that pays less than if one were self-employed or had a basic degree. It is based on these ideas that many choose to shorten the amount of time spent in school and join the labour force much earlier.

“There you are, university degree holders who are unemployed, my sister being one of them. That’s why I decided to cut short my schooling and learn the profession I like”, and she adds: “At the end of the day, we study so that we can ensure a good, financially secure future for ourselves, and we can’t get that by studying”.

Girl from Tartous

“Studying is a waste of time”

Girl (15) from Lattakia

5.4 The child in the work environment

5.4.1 The desired qualities in a child

The results of the interviews showed that employers prefer obedient, well-behaved and strong-willed workers at whom it is possible to throw many different tasks simultaneously without facing any objections. Such qualities are usually found in young children. There was an obvious demand by employers for children aged between 12 and 16 years, as confirmed by a responsible official at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Hasaka, who stated that: “Employers prefer employing children of these ages because a child any younger is more preoccupied with school, more or less, and probably also not strong enough. Whereas a child older than 16 becomes a man and is more likely to demand his rights, which is exactly what employers do not want. That is why they prefer to employ children between those ages”. Additionally, children of those ages are more likely to work longer hours for less pay, which an older child would not agree to. As shown in figure 25 above, 58 per cent of the children in this study work more than nine hours per day. Similarly, figure 26 illustrates that more than half the children earned less than 1,000 S.P. per week.

“The child may be employed in more than one task at the same time. He can clean cars, offer drinks, clean the place, make home deliveries, etc. The child naturally accepts all these orders, as well as beatings. He is unaware and ignorant about his rights”.

Director of one of the institutes

“Employers want strong children to forego hiring an adult ...”.

Director of one of the electronic sites involved in these matters

What is most pertinent from the interviews, however, is that most of the employers themselves worked from a very young age.

5.4.2 Child's gender and its relation to the work

The results of the study have shown (see figure 9) that child labour is more widespread among boys than it is among girls. On the other hand, however, a clear division of labour according to gender exists due to societal norms.

“It is hard for a girl to work in a café, or in the gathering of plastic and empty cans, just as a boy does not work in picking parsley and vegetables ... Boys are more likely to work in services and in lesser numbers in industry. Girls, however, work in agriculture mainly and as maids in houses, and unfortunately secretly in prostitution”.

Government official in Alhasskeh

“The job determines the gender of the child employed. Sewing is a girl's job, which is not suitable for boys. Whereas jobs which involve chemicals are boy-oriented. It is the job which determines the gender”.

Government official in Damascus

“Boys are wanted more than girls because they are physically stronger and they can go to places which are strictly for men... Girls, on the other hand, have fewer jobs available to them, such as being maids in houses”.

Director, institute in Aleppo

The results of the field work have shown that girls work primarily in agriculture, as non-paid workers or family help. This is most apparent in environments with a high population growth rate as well as big families. Their jobs require long hours, working from early in the morning until sunset.

“Girls work in agriculture for very long hours, beginning at dawn and not ending till after sunset, and they only earn 6,000 S.P. for the picking and harvest season”.

A mother of one of the girls working in Dar'a

Girls also work as maids in houses, and are required to live with the families they work for on a constant basis. In these jobs, girls are constantly working.

“Employing girls on a fixed working day is not desired by parents because they worry about their daughters and the dangers they may face on their way back home”.

Broker for girls

Boys, on the other hand, work in services as delivery boys since many customers prefer receiving their orders from children than from adults.

“On the one hand, people feel safer when dealing with children at their doors than with young men. On the other hand, boys do not receive any of the insurances that adults would obtain and are happy with whatever they get paid”.

Director at one of the reform centres in Damascus

Boys also work at construction sites on mechanical jobs, for example, which require great physical strength. Such jobs affect their health as they put great pressure on their undeveloped bodies. It should be noted here that 11 per cent of children reported having back and joint pains after they began working (see figure 21).

5.5 The child's nationality

Results of the interviews highlighted two trends when it comes to the issue of nationality. Eastern governorates, in particular, and the rural part of northern regions do not accept foreigners in general. Kinship and community ties are still dominant there. These forms of ties usually lead to closed-up and introverted societies.

“In our region, they prefer Syrians, more specifically they prefer Syrians from the eastern region. People here do not prefer foreigners, they prefer to employ those they know. Foreign labour is not accepted in our society most of the time, except for the very rich families”.

Member for the executive board in the eastern region

As for the second trend, it is most noticeable in industrial cities – such as Damascus – where profit is maximized by employing cheap labour. The young labour force of all nationalities suffers from exploitation as they work outside any legal protection. Iraqis, however, suffer more than others due to the fact that many of them do not have any identification papers. They may not appeal in front of any court of law and, as such, they are severely exploited by the private sector. Many employers end up withholding half the child's remuneration to ensure he will continue working, since he is a foreigner and may leave the country whenever he pleases.

“When it comes to boys, preference is given to the least costly, whatever their nationality may be. As for girls which are employed in prostitution, Iraqis are the most popular ones and they are mostly concentrated in Damascus”.

Lawyer at one of the associations in Aleppo

Iraqi children do not differ from Syrian ones in terms of work. They work in restaurants, delivery and free professions; however, none of those in the sample worked in mechanics, electrical work or other such jobs. This may be due to the fact that these children were still attending school while also working in the industrial sector, which usually requires a child to be available from morning to evening. It is for this reason that their work is concentrated in restaurants and delivering orders. As for Iraqi girls, many of them work in sewing and manual work, which they may do from home.

The mothers often work with their daughters in this profession, and there usually is a middleman between the trader/salesman and the Iraqi family. The presence of this middleman, more likely than not, exposes the family to exploitation as he takes a commission on their earnings.

When comparing the average wages of Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi children in the sample, they amount to be nearly equal (1,111 S.P. per week for Syrians; 1,106 S.P. per week for Iraqis and Palestinians). This shows that the young labour force is at risk of exploitation whatever their nationality may be and that there is a minimum wage for children, which employers struggle to go under.

There was an obvious trend among the Iraqi children in the sample to continue studying while working. In fact, all of the Iraqi children in the sample, except for one, worked and attended school. Combining school and work burdens the children even more, however, and exacerbates their stress levels. They return from school at 1 p.m., spend two to three hours doing homework, after which they go to work and stay there late.

Due to the long hours they work, boys, more so than girls, are at risk of harassment in the middle of the night since they mostly work outside of the house.

“I come back from school at one, I study till four and then I begin sewing with mother till one or two in the morning. I feel overworked and sometimes faint because I am so tired”.
Girl

“I was harassed by two people who had been drinking beer but I was able to run away from them”.
Boy (in eighth grade), works from 6 p.m. until 5 a.m.

“I sometimes bump into people who steal my money and I don’t tell my parents because I am worried that they would forbid me from working. I told my teacher but he did nothing”.
Boy (13, in sixth grade)

Most of the Iraqi children insisted that they are the ones who asked to work in order to help their parents. The parents agreed due to their dire financial situation. In addition, the Iraqi children in the sample are very particular in that more than half of them come from families where the mother is the head of the household. Many of their fathers have gone missing in Iraq and they know nothing of them, whether they are dead or alive. As a result of this, the families live in very difficult circumstances, leading to depression in many cases, especially for the mothers who do not know what tomorrow will bring for their families. These tense, stressful and difficult psychological and financial situations affect the family as a whole. In fact, all the children in the sample admitted to being hit and reprimanded by their parents, especially their mothers, or even by their siblings. The absence of the father further exacerbates the burden placed on the mother to financially provide for her family and raise them; and, in many cases, forcing her to send her children to work to raise enough money to eat.

As for Palestinian children, there seemed to be no apparent differences between them and Syrian children. There did seem to be some slight differences in their living conditions depending on which camp they lived in. Most of the children living in the Yarmook camp were enrolled and attending school, whereas this was not the case for children in the Jermana camp where most children dropped out of school to work, especially after moving from UNRWA schools to state schools. Parents of these children pointed out that these state schools' follow-up on children who drop out is quite weak, if present at all.

As for working in households, certain ostentatious employers seem to prefer hiring non-Syrian maids as it is known that foreign maids cost more than Syrian ones.

“There was a decrease in demand for Syrian girls as soon as Sri Lankan and Filipina maids were available.”

There are many obstacles that stand in the way of having Syrian girls work as housekeepers in homes, since it is not a valued profession in the society. Usually, Syrian girls are only employed by middle-class to low-income families, which is not often declared since it is considered shameful for the family. The research team was able to reach some of these girls, not without great difficulty, however, and interviewed them in secret since they never officially stated their professions.

As for foreign housekeepers, who enter the country via recruitment offices for maids, the Director of the International Migration Organization (IMO) confirmed that many of these girls enter the country using forged documents, especially when it comes to their age.

“Foreign maids come in with fake documents, often to hide their real age. Due to this, they are often unprotected by the law and far away from their families, which makes it hard to reach them. If they were younger than 15, they wouldn't be let in. That's why they fake their age”.

Director of the IMO

These girls are deceived and are often exploited, and forced to work in jobs that they did not sign up for when deciding to come to the country, such as prostitution.

“The victim doesn't enter the country for prostitution, but after she does enter, she is exploited and lured into the profession. You can lure Iraqi girls in with money, or you can offer to let them sing at the joint, and bit by bit she finds herself involved in prostitution. The real challenge we face is to have a control mechanism. I don't think that nationality is a factor which influences the decision-making here. Any person who is under age is part of the target group, regardless of nationality”.

Director of the IMO

5.6 Violence in the child's work environment

It was previously pointed out in section 5.2 that many children are subject to violence in their work environment and that most of them accept it, since they consider it part of the process of learning the job.

“I hear harsh words with most warnings I get, and sometimes get a small kick as well. But it's not a problem, because I am learning the job”.

Boy from Lattakia

What may be noticed from the above quote is that the child mentions the beating in passing as if it were not a problem. His focus is on learning the skills necessary for the job rather than the means of learning. When interviewing their parents, it was obvious that they too supported the idea of violence as a mean to learning.

“If the employer hits my son with reason then I don't mind, so long as is it within reason. But if he had no reason to hit my son then I would go confront him about it”.

The father of one of the children in the eastern region

“Parents don't allow their daughters who work as maids in houses to be beaten usually. But they don't mind if it's a slap or two from time to time if the situation required it”.

Broker for girls

It is apparent that there is a widespread culture that considers hitting for the sake of learning on the job to be normal and acceptable, just as it used to be acceptable for teachers to hit their students. There seems to have been a shift in this culture for the benefit of learning the job rather than school education in light of the economic changes that have occurred and placed emphasis on money over everything else. The only constant issue that has not changed is the culture of violence as a means to educate or teach.

5.7 Consequences and effects of child labour

The integration of a child in the labour market at a very young age has serious physical, societal and psychological repercussions. It also creates an environment that facilitates deviation, leading him or her to end up in correctional facilities. According to the statistics of the criminal security department, during the period 2008–09, 286 children were arrested for begging, 62 girls for prostitution and 222 boys for selling cigarettes. The focus groups and interviews led for the purpose of this research confirmed that many of the children in correctional facilities were working children.

“About 80 per cent of the children present in the institute were working before they got here. 10 per cent worked for their family and the remaining 10% were students”

Representative of a correctional facility in Damascus

Hence, it would seem that about 90 per cent of the children in these correctional facilities are victims of child labour, and a proportion of them work for their parents who are supposed to offer them a safe environment. And although the results of this study may not be generalized, they do, however, present a clear picture of the dangers of child labour and its negative effects. Some of the worst effects or risks of child labour are the following.

5.7.1 Sexual harassment

Working children are more exposed than others to sexual harassment because they spend most of their time outside the home and the safety of his/her family. If it is not the work environment itself that the child is exposed to, then it is on the streets while he/she is returning home. Considering that about 58 per cent of the children in the sample work for more than nine hours per day, this entails that they work until very late at night, some children even work until early morning. This necessarily exposes these children to all forms of harassment, and especially sexual harassment.

Some of the children discussed how their friends were raped by their employers, and some discussed harassment they suffered themselves.

“I was almost kidnapped while I was working. One of them tried to grab me and put me in the car but I was able to run away as did he in his car”.

One of the children from the interviews

“A taxi driver tried to kidnap me but thankfully a police passed by us and I stopped him and told him that the driver wanted to kidnap me. He arrested him”.

Palestinian boy who works until 11 p.m.(this incident occurred as he was returning home)

Even some of the employers reported cases of the children working for them being harassed.

“One of the kids that work for me was almost molested, but I got into a fight with the person attempting it and we even filed a complaint at the police station”.

An employer

5.7.2 Begging and exploitation

Some children face problems with their families and it sometimes reaches the point where they are thrown out of the house or ran away, thus finding themselves on the streets without any protection. In these cases, the children are often caught between the hands of gangs – such as the one which was recently caught – who lure them by promising a place to stay and food in exchange for their services. When interviewing some of the children caught by these gangs, most of them came from broken homes, were exposed to violence, and some were even tied with chains by their fathers or step-mothers. They ran away from this environment to the streets. The only available option to them on the streets was often joining such gangs, who made the children work and abide by their conditions, which included informing the police whatever the gang made them memorize.

According to one of the responsible individuals at an organization that works in the care and rehabilitation of these children: “the main problem stems from the fact that many of these children do not have any identification papers, and when they join the gangs they are immediately trained as to how best to deal with the police if they are ever caught. They are told to give a fake name and give the name of the gang leader as their father. So when they are released, it is done under a fake name, and hence the fake father [head of the gang] may come and claim he lost the family papers, and so the child is registered under his name, which allows him to take the child back”.

This gang was sometimes home to as many as 30 to 40 children in one room, during which time they were subject to all forms of persecution and harassment. They were required to bring back no less than 500 to 700 S.P. daily. If they were unable to collect that amount, then they were not allowed to return to the shelter until they did, even though they would have to work until very late at night. Otherwise, the child would be beaten by his boss. Even if the child came back with the required amount, worse dangers awaited as they went to sleep that night, often the child was molested and sexually harassed and raped by gang members.

Based on the interviews with the children who worked for these gangs, it was shown that most of them were raped by the gang leader or his son, or even by other children like him. In fact, the older children assault the younger ones, especially the younger girls among them.

“I was assaulted by the son of the gang leader once”.

One of the children who fell victim to the gangs

“There was a girl with us, named “M”, she was completely ruined due to all the assaults she suffered”.

One of the children who fell victim to the gangs

5.7.3 Smoking and drug abuse

It was previously shown that more than a quarter of the children in the sample smoked and 10 per cent of them took drugs, such as sniffing or drinking gas, drinking alcohol and smoking weed. Most of these children ended up in correctional facilities.

“I sniff benzene, and drink gas and alcohol, and I do cocaine. Whenever I drink the gas I feel dizzy and I sleep on the floor. People think I am sick so they give me money”.

“I drink Arak and smoke pot”.

Smoking, drinking and drug abuse obviously require money that the child does not always have, especially if he or she is working for someone or being exploited by a gang that takes all of his or her earnings. This leads many children to steal to have enough money to buy their addictive substances.

“I went online and watched a dirty video. But to be able to watch it all the time I stole a mobile phone from someone on the streets and downloaded around 175 videos on it so that my friends and I can watch it”.

One of the children who was begging on the streets

5.7.4 Health problems

The most serious of injuries that may occur to the children are those that happen as a consequence of handling machinery for which they are not sufficiently experienced. The results of the interviews show that 6 per cent of the children suffered from injuries due to falling or dropping such equipment.

“Many children fall asleep on the job due to the exhaustion they suffer. Their hands are often near the machines. In our village, some children lost their hands due to these machines.”

A father of one of the children

The even more preposterous issue is that these working children have no rights. The employer is in charge of their livelihoods, but often takes the necessary precautions to absolve himself of any responsibility towards the children. Everyone accepts this (the children and their parents) because the employer has leverage over them; and with this, one of the parents confirms:

“There are cases where a paper is signed absolving the employer from any responsibility in case the child working for him is injured in any way”.

A father of one of the children

6 • Efforts to protect childhood and combat the worst forms of child labour

The Syrian Government declared its commitment to protecting children through many international agreements, including labour conventions as mentioned in the Legal chapter. A National Conference for Children in Syria, held in Aleppo on 7-9 February 2004 under the aegis of the First Lady, Mrs Asma Al-Assad, shed light on several issues pertaining to children, particularly violence against children, exploitation, the quality of education, etc.

In addition, in December 2004, a Forum for Child Protection was held in Damascus. It gathered local, Arab and international experts on the topic of child protection from violence and exploitation. Among the most important results of this forum was the suggestion of a national strategy for child protection from violence and all forms of exploitation. The Syrian Committee for Family Affairs prepared and presented the strategy to the Government. On 2 October 2005, the Government approved this strategy and allocated a budget for its implementation. It also tasked the Syrian Committee for Family Affairs to supervise the implementation of the strategy, which is comprised of eleven components: research and statistics concerning mistreatment of children; a national database to register cases of child mistreatment; awareness campaigns; inclusion of child rights in primary education curricula; inclusion of child protection principles in university curricula; enhancement of the skills of relevant professionals in the field; establishment of a child help hotline; and establishment of a comprehensive Syrian law for child protection. The strategy also includes a definition of exploitation as: “the exploitation of children at work or any other form of activity which creates benefits to others. This includes but is not limited to child labour and prostitution”.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour organized many workshops in cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF in an attempt to curb the phenomenon of child labour in the country.

In addition to the above, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated in the national document on the criteria for the development of school curricula and its principles are being integrated in educational curricula. Moreover, university degrees that bear any relation to education or children have begun teaching child rights.

The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs initiated the establishment of a family protection unit and took charge of training technicians to work in this unit in coordination with UNICEF and the Rainbow Association. As for the comprehensive child protection legislation, the commission – in cooperation with various relevant stakeholders – issued a draft Child’s Rights Law that calls for the strict monitoring of employers. The commission also conducted a research project pertaining to the mistreatment of children in Syria. This study, however, only gave partial treatment to the issue of child labour, which fell outside its original scope. The committee also began working on a national database and awareness campaign aimed at informing the public of the sanctions that follow from the mistreatment of children.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mr Yasser Ali, Director of Policies at the Syrian Committee for Family Affairs.

As for the role of the media, many child-related programmes were developed, some of which tackled the issue of child labour and its dangers.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the Ministry of Information is currently working on two axes: on the one hand raising awareness concerning these issues, and on the other hand developing information venues specialized in issues pertaining to childhood. In addition, as part of its yearly plan, the Ministry has included the need to produce various programmes tackling the topic of child labour.

As part of the reformation of the education system,¹¹⁹ the Ministry of Education has developed several programmes, one of which requires primary-school teachers to obtain a teaching certificate from the university's faculty of education. In addition, there are 17 programmes to improve the quality of the education process and its outputs. New curricula for the 2010–11 school year were developed for the first grade through to the fourth grade, the seventh grade and tenth grade, and new curricula will be prepared for all the remaining grades. These new curricula encourage students to research and think for themselves while the teacher plays a guiding and not a lecturing role. Furthermore, the Ministry, in coordination with UNICEF, is launching a new process that gives a second chance at education for those under 18 years of age, in particular girls, with the potential of teaching 300-400 students each year. The Government, in cooperation with international organizations, is also working towards “child-friendly schools” and has already established nearly 650 such schools (with a final aim of 5,000 schools). Finally, the Ministry is drafting a law that makes education compulsory until the ninth grade.

NGOs have also been active in the fight against child labour. The Union of the Revolutionary Youth Organization undertook several workshops, lectures and conferences with youth, their parents and families. The main aim of these activities was to raise awareness about the dangers of violence and child labour and to establish what is referred to as a “Culture of Children’s Rights”. More attention was paid to youth outside of schools by attracting them to various activities and meetings that would encourage them to return to school.¹²⁰

The Good Shepherd’s Monastery organized several summer camps for working children (most of whom were Iraqi with some Syrians) and paid the wages to parents so that the children may rest. These summer camps included remedial courses and some of the children who took part in them even returned to school.¹²¹ An Internet campaign was even launched under the title “Children at Risk”.

The Association for the Protection of Children at Homs has made much effort to combat child labour and has even undertaken a study dedicated to street children’s labour. The association secured assistance through this study for children staying at the shelter it runs with the help of two social counsellors. In addition, the association has worked towards providing work-from-home opportunities for these children’s mothers (such as sewing, for example), as well as jobs for their older siblings to substitute for the child working. Based on the above, it may be concluded that confronting a dangerous phenomenon – such as very young working children or work in unsafe conditions – still requires large efforts by the concerned governmental and non-governmental entities. It also requires the coordination of all these efforts. The most important challenge consists

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Mazen Nafaa, Director of Media Development at the Ministry of Information

¹¹⁹ Interview with the Director of Basic Education at the Ministry of Education.

¹²⁰ Meeting with Mr. Fouad Assi, Director of the Educational Activities Department at the Revolutionary Youth Organization.

¹²¹ Interview with Sister Mary Claude Naddaf, head sister at the convent.

in finding practical alternatives for child labour, especially in the presence of many obstacles and constraints that weaken the impact of the previously mentioned programmes.

6.1 Conclusions

This study identifies the main causes of child labour, the characteristics of working children, as well as its most important consequences. This section presents the study's conclusions grouped into five categories: general conclusions, followed by conclusions regarding characteristics of working children, factors leading to child labour, environments where child labour thrives, and finally the risks to which child workers are exposed. For the most part, the field work reached similar conclusions to those revealed in previous studies on child labour, whether they concern the causes that encourage child labour, the characteristics of the children, or even the direct consequences of an early integration in the labour market. However, some differences with previous studies were registered, especially concerning the geographical and sectoral distribution of child labour.

6.1.1 Conclusions regarding the characteristics of working children

Taking into consideration that the children in the study are all aged below 15 years, and that their work exposes them to many dangers such as violence, harassment and injury, then their jobs may be considered to fall under the category of worst forms of child labour. The following are the most important findings concerning the characteristics of working children:

- Child labour begins at an early age (between 9 and 10 years), is more apparent among boys than girls, and increases with age. Girls' employment is concentrated in the younger age categories and decreases as they grow older.
- Child labour for boys is concentrated in urban settings while it is the opposite for girls who are more likely to work in rural areas.
- Gender differences exist in terms of: starting age, geographical distribution, sectoral distribution and salary. In general, girls begin working at an earlier age in the family business without pay, or they work for a salary in other families but their parents receive the wage. They also work as maids in households in the cities. Boys, on the other hand, work on construction sites or in other jobs that require physical strength.
- Most working children are either illiterate or have dropped out of school. Those who are still enrolled in school are at risk of dropping out due to pressure and work-related stress.
- Children who ended up in correctional facilities were previously child workers.
- The children's distribution by sector of activity was as follows: out of 173 children, 124 worked in the services sector, 22 in industry, 18 in agriculture, followed by begging, garbage collecting, handicrafts and construction.
- More than three-quarters of the children in the study earned a salary of less than 1,500 S.P. per week (of which, 16 per cent earned less than 500 S.P. per week). Earnings from

begging sometimes exceeded 1,000 S.P. per day which may have increased the average earnings in the sample. Most of the children in the sample give their earnings, in part or in whole, to their families.

- The majority of the children in the sample (57 per cent) work more than nine hours per day.
- Children did not suffer from discrimination due to their nationalities, in general. Nevertheless, Iraqi children were slightly discriminated against, more so than others, due to the fact that their employers had a tendency to withhold their pay so that they did not leave the country without notice. Iraqi children, similarly to Syrian children, worked in restaurants, as delivery boys and other free employment.
- Most of the Iraqi children had not dropped out of school.
- Iraqi girls' work was limited to being maids, sewing and other such handicrafts, which they often obtained through a middleman who exploited them.
- More than half of the Iraqi children in the study came from families where the mother was the head of the household.
- There were no apparent differences between Palestinian and Syrian children. Differences were noticed among Palestinian children depending on which camp they lived in; most of the children in the Yarmook camp were enrolled in school, and the opposite is true for children in the Jermana camp.

6.1.2 Conclusions concerning the factors leading to child labour

- (1) **Poverty:** Most of the children in the sample said that they began working to help their parents financially. Parents and employers confirmed these answers, as did stakeholders and representatives of governmental bodies and organizations who were interviewed for the study.
- (2) **School drop-outs:** The most important factors causing children to drop out of school are: the difficulty in keeping up with school work and their jobs; the violence they are exposed to at school; the lack of interest in educating girls; the weak curricula; and the limited capacities and motivation of teachers. Moreover, the social value of money at the expense of education is another factor encouraging dropping out of school.
- (3) **Family dissolution:** The negative impact of this phenomenon increases with the modest role that traditional social safety nets play nowadays (extended family, community, etc.) and the decline in security networks and institutionalized family support, as well as the spread of a culture of acceptance towards children, instead of mothers, working.

6.1.3 Conclusions concerning the environment where child labour thrives

- (1) Child labour was linked to several important indicators. Nearly 87 per cent of the children in the sample came from big families (five to eight members) and most of their parents tended to be illiterate. Moreover, 31 per cent of the fathers of the children in the sample, and 80 per cent of the mothers, did not work. In addition, a quarter of the fathers as well as the mothers suffered from chronic diseases.
- (2) Three-quarters of the children in the sample come from families that use physical discipline, whether it be a slap or a strike with a stick or hose – or even cables sometimes – reaching the point of tying the child up with chains, burning or throwing him or her out of the house.

6.1.4 Conclusions concerning risks to which working children are exposed

These risks may be classified as follows:

- Sexual harassment, which may lead to rape.
- Violence, especially among girls working as housekeepers.
- Exploitation by gangs.
- Partaking in physically and psychologically harmful behaviours such as smoking, drug abuse, watching pornographic images, etc.
- Illness, which affected about 18 per cent of the children in the sample after they started working.

6.2 Major constraints

This section presents the major constraints that need to be addressed in confronting the phenomenon of child labour. These constraints involve both the governmental and the community/civil society levels.

a- At the governmental level

- Recognizing the phenomenon, the extent of its spread and dealing with it properly. In fact, it has thus far not been treated as a serious issue that negatively affects children, families and society.¹²²
- Difficulty of activating organizations working in social care and protection so as to make them an integral part of a national social security system that addresses the risks posed to children, especially in cases of divorce, sickness or death of the parents.
- Modernizing pro-poor development policies that deal with inequality in the distribution of resources among people within and across governorates.
- Inadequacy of the measures to combat juvenile delinquency, whereby the current procedures and processes do not focus on the causes of drug and alcohol abuse, but on the abuse itself.¹²³

¹²² One of the members of the executive office at Deir Al Zour stated: “We sit in public places such as restaurants and cafes with decision-makers, and children work there and serve us our food and drinks in front of these decision-makers who do not say a word. This shows that there is a lack of interest in this issue which encourages its spread.” One of the directors of the correctional facility also stated: “Decision-makers and stakeholders are unaware of the seriousness of the phenomenon. Policemen in charge of juvenile affairs and other such parties are completely absent.”

¹²³ Answers of the Juvenile Delinquency Centre.

- Weakness of the inspection staff at Social Affairs Directorates in terms of numbers and qualifications. The authority of the Ministry is limited to issuing penalties against employers¹²⁴ and enforcement is further hampered by the lack of cooperation of the community with the inspectors.
- Weakness of the committees that address the school drop-out phenomenon. Despite the presence of a multitude of committees, many of those involved pointed out that these committees are but ink on paper. Not one of these committees ever went out to inspect the schools and the children, or followed up with them.
- Weakness of the educational infrastructure; especially schools, whose number did not increase in conjunction with the extension of basic education until the ninth grade.
- Lack of police specializing in juvenile affairs in all governorates, and weakness of the tourist police who are in charge of controlling solicitation.
- Community support and local solutions for children who run away from home or are living in difficult conditions. These children end up in correctional facilities that expose them to worse dangers.

b- At the level of the community and civil society organizations

- Lack of knowledge and absence of a culture of child rights in society, which is reflected in the continuous use of harsh physical discipline in families and schools, and which places children at risk of either dropping out of school or running away from home.
- Presence of a culture that does not encourage women to enter the labour force; especially mothers, whose role as child bearers is “sanctified” at the expense of their economic role. This culture thus encourages child labour, especially in poor families. This culture is also reflected in the fact that the labour rate among young girls decreases as they get older and closer to the marriage age.
- There is only a small number of NGOs that are concerned with this matter. In fact, no more than 46 NGOs in Syria tackle these issues, and most of them are located in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Lattakia. Twenty-six of these organizations include child protection in their mission statements and goals, and nine of them are content with including “protecting children from displacement” as part of their objectives. The remainder of the organizations mention the protection of children in the workplace.¹²⁵
- Difficulty of obtaining licences for the development and creation of new associations. Indeed, 27 requests to form an NGO were rejected.¹²⁶
- Lack of financial support for these NGOs, leaving it up to each organization to secure its own funding. It must be noted, however, that there are discrepancies in their abilities to

¹²⁴ Interview with Mr. Maher Rizk, Director of Services at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

¹²⁵ Table of NGOs concerned with child issues, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

¹²⁶ Interview with a member of the executive office in Deir Al Zour.

fund raise based on their religious affiliations. The NGOs must also get approval from the Ministries of Social Affairs and Labour in order to receive aid from donors. In addition to this, there is a common belief that there is no need to donate for the rehabilitation of street children, children begging in the streets and vagrants, since it is seen as the responsibility of the Government to combat these issues.

- Weak capabilities and qualifications among the NGOs working in the field, leaving them unable to carry out their role. Most of them are new to the job and lack of civil society organizations in this field: In fact, among all the childcare and protection partners of the Ministry of Social Affairs, only one association was registered to have civil and national identity. The other associations all had religious affiliations.

6.3 Recommendations

This section presents the team's recommendations organized into four subsections: legal recommendations, recommendations for governmental agencies, education recommendations and civil society recommendations.

6.3.1 On the legal level

- An official declaration by the highest ranks in the country for the abolition of the worst forms of child labour by the year 2016, which is in line with the goal expectancy of the ILO (2006) and the decision adopted during the 18th International Conference for Labour Statisticians in 2008.
- Revision and amendment of all laws to make them in compliance with international commitments, and strengthening of law enforcement mechanisms.
- Creation of a higher national committee in charge of all affairs pertaining to children. Its mission would be to present law proposals, prepare plans and projects for collaborative efforts with the relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies to ensure the advancement and realization of child rights in Syria.
- Creation of a regulatory body in charge of monitoring and evaluating children's rights in the country. Representatives from MOSAL, the Ministries of Education, Justice and Interior would take part in this committee as well as representatives from the committee for family affairs, civil society, labour union members, etc.
- Amend the national texts that exclude child labour in facilities run by their families.¹²⁷ In addition, new texts must be put in place that enforce controls on child labour and guarantee the rights of working children. These texts would also allow for the supervision, regulation and inspection of these family businesses by inspectors from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour to make sure that the labour laws are respected.

¹²⁷ Labour law and Agricultural Relations Law.

- Revision of the Labour and Social Insurance Laws to include workers in establishments with less than four workers, the self-employed, labourers in the agricultural sector, housekeepers and maids, and porters.
- Issuance of a law to protect families and institute a minimum level of income per family. This would be funded by the National Solidarity Fund to which the government budget would contribute through special taxes on transactions, profits and capital.
- Development of mechanisms to prevent family and institutional violence, and to address these cases.
- Abide by international agreements that require medical examinations for working children.
- Adoption of proper mechanisms to monitor and supervise the locations where the worst forms of child labour occur, and enforce tougher sanctions on the employers.
- Amend the penal code as follows:
 - Stop the criminalization of juveniles who are exploited in any form of illegal work, such as smuggling, selling drugs, etc.
 - Only undertake protective measures against them and ensure social protection of measures.
 - In addition, the law should be amended to criminalize and prosecute any person who was directly or indirectly involved in the exploitation of children in illegal activities, and enforce the severest penalties if the exploitation is undertaken by their guardian or family members.
- Bridge the gap in the current Syrian laws by proposing a law against forced labour.
- Adopt a special work contract for the employment of juveniles (aged 15 to 17 years), which takes into consideration their specific situation, guarantees their rights and requires the signature of either of the parents or the child's guardian.
- Enforce controls that ensure the return of the child to his parents or guardians.¹²⁸

6.3.2 On the level of governmental agencies involved in developmental issues in general, and children in particular

- Undertake a periodic quantitative survey to study child labour in Syria – specifying the size of the phenomenon, its spread and distribution in detail and highlighting any changes – or include child labour questionnaires in other national relevant studies.

¹²⁸ It was revealed through the field work that gang members often take the children out of the correctional facilities themselves. The children are handed over based on the name of the father, whom they are told to lie about and is usually the leader of the gang.

- Amend the National Plan for the protection of children from violence to include a special part that would protect children from early work and require that any national child protection strategy include articles that prohibit the worst forms of child labour.
- Reinforce the commitment of the Government to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016 (in accordance with international agreements) by getting the Government to set measurable targets.
- Obtain the Government's commitment to a pro-poor development strategy that eliminates inequalities between governorates and regions and improves the living conditions of all citizens.
- Promote implementable policies that encourage women to join the workforce, especially if they are the head of the household. Prepare the private sector to absorb this new female labour and guarantee their rights, regardless of their marital status.
- Revisit and amend the Social Security Law to include unemployment compensation, create subsidies for new entrants to the labour force and develop an alimony fund to include divorcees and widows.
- Adopt development programmes targeting less-developed regions and helping them diversify their economy, especially in the northern and eastern regions where there is a high prevalence of child labour.
- Promote a culture of child rights in society through an implementable nationwide communication strategy.
- Train and develop the capacities of the staff of the Social Affairs and Labour directorates so they may follow up and monitor child-labour infringements and violations.
- Involve civil society in addressing corruption, especially when it comes to hiding the phenomenon of child labour from inspectors.

6.3.3 On the level of education

- Form supervisory committees in charge of ensuring the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law, and following up drop-out cases on the national and regional levels. These committees should also have the authority to conduct inspections and impose sanctions and fines on violators.
- Commission educational counsellors to help those children who failed in early grades and to help them through their problem areas until they reach the same level as their classmates.
- Adopt the principle of “open and continuous educational chances for all” through an open education system, outside the normal school hours. It would allow drop-outs and

people who have not attended school in a long time to get an opportunity to study again. Such systems would be available in public schools as well as private ones, and would abide by conditions set by the Ministry of Education.

- Form consortia for donors (FAO, UNICEF, ILO, UNDP, etc.) to implement the “one free meal a day” programme in schools in less-developed parts of Syria.
- Establish financial aid or benefit funds for poorer students to provide them with the required material and supplies.
- Provide continuous training for teachers in all aspects, theoretical and technical, in line with the amendments made to the curriculum and new teaching methods, and impose strict conditions forbidding all forms of violence against children.
- Move towards a more applied learning system and equip schools with computers in order to better prepare students for their future work life.
- Improve the educational environment by building schools with gardens and playgrounds, providing clean water, equipping schools with proper heating systems, and limiting the number of students per class.
- Promote extracurricular activities such as music, sports and art classes, which aim to reinvigorate students, increase their interest in school and develop their potential in general.
- Increase the efficiency of vocational training through the integration of career guidance in the early stages of education. Use tax incentives to encourage the private sector to support vocational training by linking the number of training opportunities for students to the job opportunities available for the graduates.

6.3.4 On the level of community-based work

- Modernize the law on NGOs in order to provide them with a safe environment and incentives to work on the field, and lessen the impediments to their creation.
- Encourage the establishment of organizations that deal strictly with children issues, including child labour; and especially NGOs that encourage national development rather than class or sectarian development.
- Allow organizations to provide alternative places of care in case of the death of one or both parents, especially for children who are victims of child labour and who have to leave their habitual place of residence to move closer to their jobs.
- Involve the organizations in the monitoring and evaluation of the level of respect for child rights on all levels.

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Annex

Case 1

“E” is a 15-year-old girl from Aleppo who works as a maid.

“E” is a girl with no real identity of her own. She comes from a poor family and has many siblings. Her family consists of her father, her mother, her deceased stepmother, four brothers and seven sisters. Her brother is in jail and her father died recently, though she was not informed of his death until she visited some of her family members for the Adha Eid. Her father passed away due to a heart attack and her mother suffers from the same heart conditions and self-medicates. She cannot afford to visit a doctor to undergo tests.

“E” never went to school. She has been working at this family’s house for the last six months. They are a family of five. She also has two sisters who work as maids, one of them in Adlab and the other in Egypt. She has not seen some of her siblings in nine years and does not know some of them except through pictures. She says that the work principle in her family only applies to the girls, seeing as the men in her family do not work.

She works based on a contract that was signed between her employer and her parents; she does not know how much she earns nor does she ever receive the pay herself. Her salary is immediately sent to her family. Her workday begins at 7 a.m. Prior to this family, “E” had worked at another household since she was eight years old. During this time she was exposed to beatings, and her body still retains some of the scars. The daughter of the head of the household used to be jealous of her and constantly hit her. She was even beaten with a hose one day by the lady of the house. At that point, she decided she wanted to leave her work due to the severity of the abuse she had to endure. She was made to return, however, and submit to the situation because her parents were in debt. “E” is not alone to be working in such conditions. Her sisters, relatives and friends also work in similarly horrid situations.

“E” never goes out anywhere, except with her boss. She dreamt about going to school, and she still wishes she had a chance to get an education. She cannot do that though before her parents pay off their debt and her brother is released from prison. Despite the fact that her father has married more than one woman (her stepmother having 11 children), and they all live on the earnings of the daughters, “E” still thinks of her parents and does not want to achieve her dreams until they achieve theirs.

Case 2

“M.S.” is a 14-year-old boy from Deir Al Zour working as a delivery boy for vegetables.

“M.S.” comes from a broken home and he knows nothing of his family. His father left him and married another woman in Aleppo. His mother has been divorced for a long time and he knows

nothing of her. He even said, in tears, that he would not recognize his own mother were he to see her.

He lives in a relative's house in Deir Al Zour. He studied until sixth grade and never failed a class. Despite this, he left school because he was unable to keep up with his studying and work, and his staying with his relatives is dependent on him earning enough to pay his dues. He works as a delivery boy, delivering vegetables on a small wagon for eight hours per day. He earns between 10 S.P to 25 S.P for each delivery he makes. He is well known in the neighbourhood to be an orphan and as such he suffers many beatings from other working children like him. There is nobody to protect him and he is required to fix his issues on his own.

The environment in which he finds himself on the streets is quite bad. His friends all smoke, but he does not. He is a peaceful child who does not want to create any problems and does not want to be kicked out of his house. He loves animals and dreams of playing with them; he even wanted to become a veterinarian one day, but he knows his dream is impossible.

This child is victim to his family and society. He found himself not only having to be responsible and looking after himself at a very young age, but also responsible to help out the family with which he lives. There is no one to help him or to facilitate things in his life. The lack of organizations that are ready to take care of cases such as "M.S.", through the provision of financial support, education, etc., makes it so that he – and others like him – remain hostage to their circumstances.

Case 3

"M" is a 15-year-old boy from Lattakia and he works in a sewing shop.

"M" dropped out of school due to his hatred towards it. This hatred stems from his teachers' mistreatment towards him. "M" dropped out in fourth grade but he does not know how to read or write. He says: "I suffered all kinds of mistreatment from the teacher at school. On my last day of school I received a beating from my teacher – it happened to also be the first day of exams – because I had not returned a book I borrowed. They took me to the police station where I promised I would return the book the next day, which I did. I also left school for good that day".

"M" works in a sewing factory for 12 hours a day on average and earns 500 S.P per week. He gives part of it to his mother, puts part of it away and spends the rest on days off when he goes with his friends to the beach.

His employer hits him whenever he is late. He also receives beatings on the streets sometimes when he is delivering orders to clients. He made the decision to work on his own once he left school, which his father also encouraged by taking him to his current employer. His friends are still in school and he wishes he could be with them but he gets scared whenever the teacher asks him to go up to the board. He is scared the teacher could hit him in front of his friends if he makes any mistakes.

He feels sad sometimes because his friends will have a respectable future, whereas he will just be a “worker” according to his own words. He adds: “I wish there were no beatings in school, hitting is forbidden by law anyway. Despite this, the teacher used to pull me by the hair which would hurt me a lot and make me cry. My boss hits me from time to time at work, but at school they constantly beat me with a stick”.

“M” never tried smoking and he says he hopes he never will in his life. He hopes to go back to school one day, but a school that treats students properly. Obviously, school itself was the reason for dropping out in this case, similarly to many other cases.



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