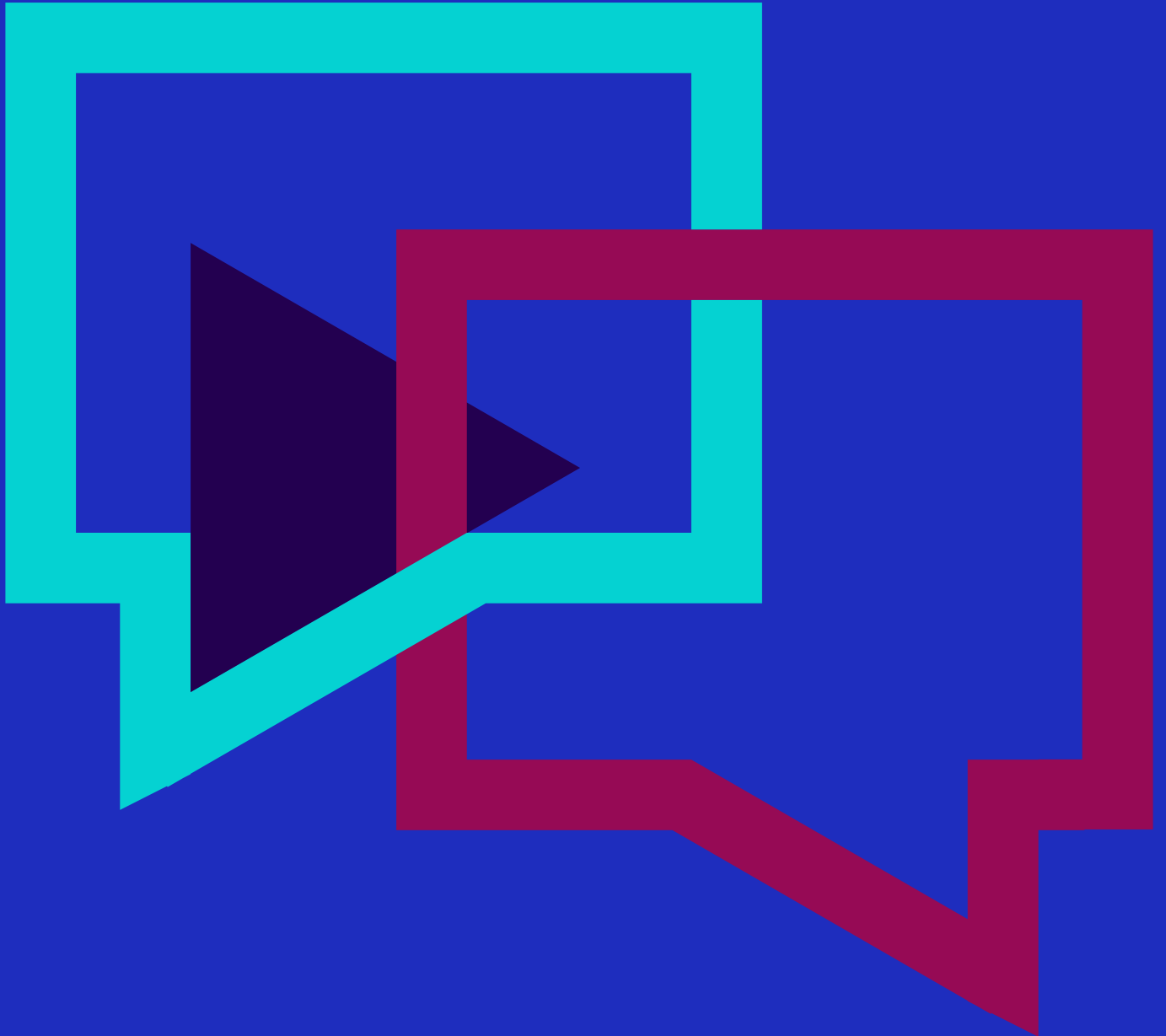International Labour Organization

▶ **Ethical guidelines for research on child labour**

▶ Ethical guidelines for research on child labour

Contents

▶ Acknowledgements

---

1 The ILO projects MAP16 (Measurement, awareness-raising and policy engagement to accelerate action against child labour and forced labour) and RTA (From research to action: Using knowledge to accelerate progress in the elimination of child labour and forced labour) have established the International Advisory Board (IAB) to provide guidance to key research activities to address child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking issues. The IAB consists of technical experts from the ILO, international organizations, workers' and employers' organizations, USDOL, Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder countries, national statistical offices, INGOs and the research community.

▶ Abbreviations

ACASI   Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interview
CAPI   Computer-Assisted Personal Interview
CLMRS   Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System
IAB   International Advisory Board
ILO   International Labour Organization
IOM   International Organization for Migration
NSO   National Statistics Office
UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

▶ Glossary

Academic misconduct	Any action which gains, attempts or gain, or assists others in gaining or attempting to gain unfair academic advantage.[2] Academic misconduct can take several forms, including plagiarism, the deliberate misinterpretation or fabrication of data, or deliberate bias in reporting findings.
Anonymity	This refers to situations in which someone's name is not given or known.[3] It means that either the research does not collect identifying information on individuals (such as the name or address) or that individual responses cannot be linked with participants' identities.[4]
Child	A person below the age of 18 years. This stems from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the case of child labour, it does not relate to the concept of the age of majority.
Child labour	In line with ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182, child labour is defined as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development".[5] This includes work that is mentally, socially, physically, or morally dangerous to children; and/or work that interferes with their schooling, including their ability to attend and benefit from school. The term "child labour" refers to work for which children are too young or that may be physically or psychologically injurious to their health and well-being.
Confidentiality	A condition in which the researcher knows the identity of a research subject but takes steps to protect that identity from being discovered by others.[6] A confidential participant is known by the researcher, but their identity is disguised in the research report.
Conflict of interest	This refers to situations in which someone cannot make a fair decision because they will be affected by the result.[7] Research can be influenced by people or organizations, and conflicts can occur when there are expectations about the research findings, when organizations deliberately select sample populations to influence results, or when the data collection and analysis is influenced by personal relationships.

---

2   University of Cambridge, "Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct", available at: https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/what-academic-misconduct

3   University of Cambridge, "Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct".

4   Endicott College, "What Is the Difference between Anonymity and Confidentiality?", available at: https://www.endicott.edu/about/research-at-endicott/institutional-review-board-irb/what-is-the-difference-between-anonymity-and-confidentiality#:~:text=Anonymity%3A%20Providing%20anonymity%20of%20information,individual%20responses%20with%20participants'%20identities.

5   ILO, "What Is Child Labour", available at: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm.

6   Endicott College, "What Is the Difference between Anonymity and Confidentiality?"

7   University of Cambridge, "A Conflict of Interest", available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflict-of-interest.

Dependency	A situation in which you need something or someone and are unable to continue normally without them.[8] In the case of research, this refers to research participants who develop a relationship with the researcher whereby they depend on them for information, safety, or advice. Dependency may occur when research participants develop expectations that the researcher can help them, for example to find a better job or to escape an exploitative relationship.
Domestic work	Following Convention No. 189, "domestic work" is work performed in or for a household or households, and a "domestic worker" is any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship. Child domestic work refers to children's work in the domestic work sector in the home of a third party or employer. This general definition includes both permissible and non-permissible work situations.[9]
Hazardous work	Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of those undertaking the work, specifically children.[10] Hazardous work is one of the worst forms of child labour.
Forced labour	According to the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), forced labour is "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily."[11] Forced labour may be imposed by the state, by private companies[12] or by individuals on both adults and children in a variety of sectors, including agriculture, construction and domestic work. Forced labour may take different forms, such as bonded labour, trafficking for forced labour, forced commercial exploitation and forced begging. Forced labour and exploitation are not interchangeable terms. Forced labour differs from exploitative employment situations, such as those characterized by extremely low wages and substandard working conditions.
Positionality	Social or political influences that might push the researcher to personally interpret findings in a particular way.
Power relations	In interpersonal interaction, the relative status, power, and/or dominance of the participants, reflected in whether expectations and behaviour are reciprocal, and consequently in communicative style.[13] Several factors, including wealth, gender, education, and country of origin, may shape these differences.
Research integrity	The standards expected of a researcher in ensuring that the research findings are valid, reliable, and free of bias.

---

8 University of Cambridge, "Dependency", available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dependency.

9 ILO, "Child Labour and Domestic Work", available at: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Childdomesticlabour/lang--en/index.htm.

10 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

11 Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).

12 ILO, Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour (2018).

13 Oxford Reference, "Overview: Power Relations", available at: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100341187;jsessionid=184F42772EB0A6565BFB4C77DC9B2FB4.

Trafficking of children	The Palermo Protocol (2000) differentiates between trafficking of children (under 18 years) and adults. The United Nations defines trafficking of children as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and/or receipt" of a child for the purpose of slavery, forced labour, and/or exploitation.[14]
Trafficking for forced labour	A person trafficked for forced labour is a victim of a form of crime in which the victim is recruited, transported, transferred, or harboured or received by certain means, including coercion, deception or abuse of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation in forced labour. When the victim is a minor, the means are irrelevant.[15]
Worst forms of child labour	According to the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), the worst forms of child labour, demanding "immediate and comprehensive action" from the international community, include the following:[16]

• slavery and similar practices like trafficking;

• prostitution and pornography;

• implicating a child in illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs.

This includes any kind of work which, "by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out," has the potential to harm the "health, safety, and morals of children" (see "Hazardous work").[17] This includes work done by children in unsafe conditions, resulting from "poor safety and health standards or employment conditions", that may cause the death, injury, or illness of a child.[18]

---

14 ILO, Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour (2018).

15 ILO, Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour (2018).

16 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

17 Convention No. 182.

18 ILO, "Children in Hazardous Work" (2013).

▶ Key icons

National statistics office: considerations for child labour surveys

National statistics office: case studies

Questions to ask yourself as the researcher, ideas or tools

Case studies from child labour or child violence research studies

Case study

Checklist

Actions

How
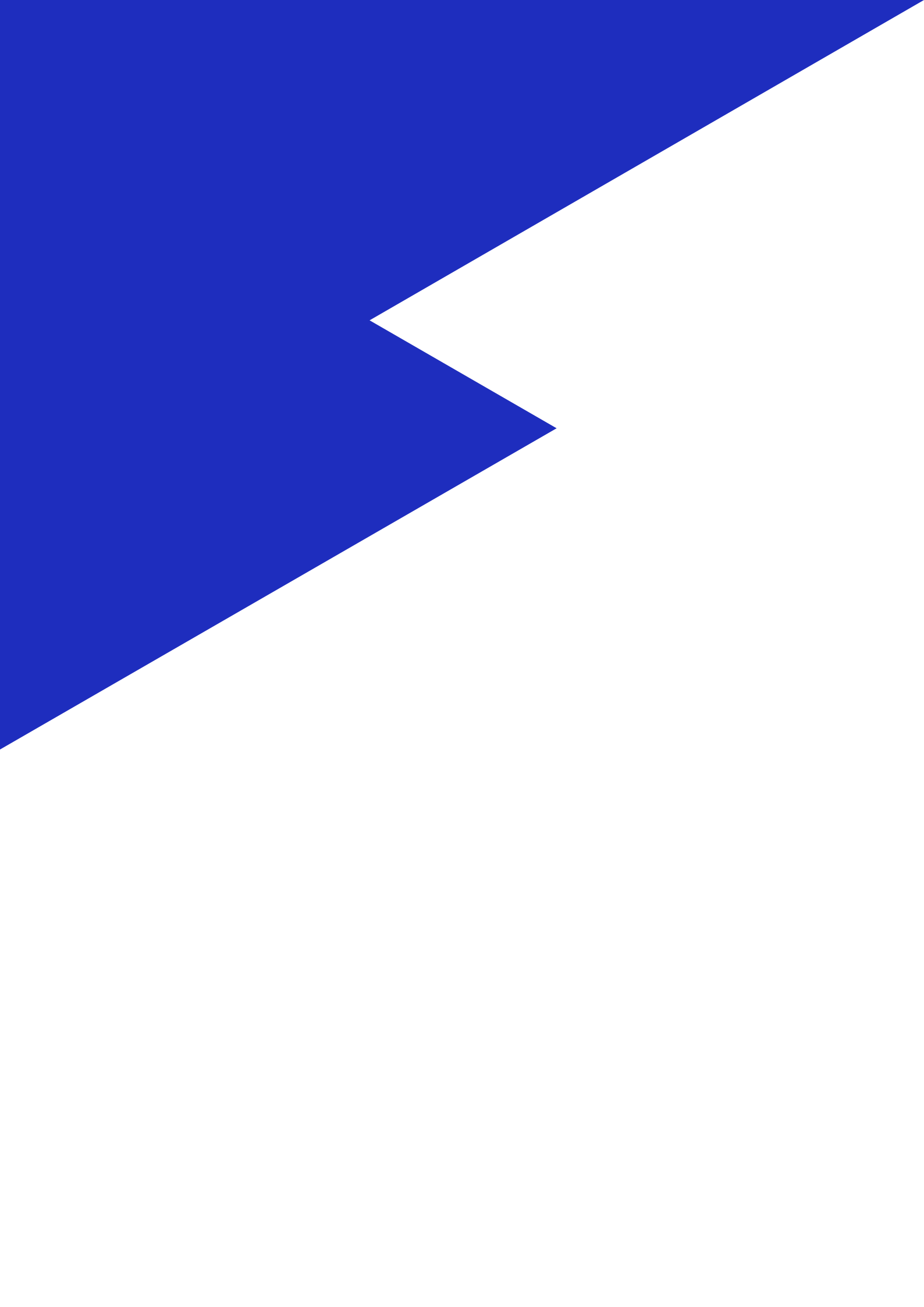
Introduction

Globally there are millions of working children and children in "child labour", which is often defined as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development". This can be expanded to include work that:

▶ is "mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children";

▶ interferes with their education by preventing them from attending school, forcing them to leave school early, or "requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work".

Whether work can be considered as child labour can vary according to the child's age, the working conditions, the number of hours they work and the type of work they perform, and the sector in which the work is performed (ILO n.d.).

Children and young people are routinely asked about aspects of their lives, including work. Children are interviewed in workplaces, in their households and while in the care of service providers. In any of these situations, interviewing children about their lives and work raises ethical and safety questions for children themselves, for parents or family members who may be responding on their behalf, and for the interviewer. Understanding the risks, ethical considerations and practical realities related to child labour can help minimize harms and increase the likelihood that children and proxy respondents[19] will disclose accurate and reliable information.

To address the ethical and safety challenges associated with researching child labour, it is important for everyone in the research team to understand the potential risks that study participants might encounter by participating in a study – and potential risks for the research team members themselves.

These guidelines are intended to help researchers and organizations, including national statistics offices, to design and implement studies and data collection tools that are ethically sound and appropriate to collect information about child labour. These guidelines can be used for all types of research, from surveys to qualitative focus groups. They were drafted in consultation with experts on child labour and national statistics offices.

---

19 Those responding on a child's behalf, including parents, other legal guardians and family members.

These guidelines start with the rationale for specific guidelines for children in child labour, prior to launching into the principles behind the guidelines, which are phrased in the form of guiding questions. A decision tree is included in Part 1 to help you decide whether new primary data collection on child labour, or with children, is necessary at all. There are 12 guiding questions, and checklists to help you reflect on and address ethical risks at each stage of the research process, including before, during and after the fieldwork phase of a research project. These guidelines do not replace any national regulations or professional standards related to data collection that differ across countries, including national statistical laws. They also do not offer definitive answers to all ethical questions but are intended to help you pose the right questions and find answers as you design and conduct your own research on child labour.

▶ Children may …

The diverse circumstances of working children

Research can take place with children or proxy respondents at worksites, in their homes or while children are in the care of service providers. Children may be working at the time of interview, or you may be asking about previous experiences of work. Interviews with children have different ethical and safety considerations depending on the child's situation.

Overall, working children may:

▶ work in a sector that is prohibited depending on their country and age. Children may lie about their age, especially if they are minors;

▶ have limited knowledge of their rights;

▶ not have legal status if they are migrants, or have had their papers taken from them. Children may worry about deportation;

▶ be transient, mobile or living and working on their own away from family. Children may feel especially vulnerable when alone;

▶ face ethnic, social, religious or gender discrimination;

▶ feel sad or isolated due to working conditions, for example, child domestic workers living with employers when care is not provided in the same way as employers' children. This can include physical and emotional isolation (Blagbrough 2020);

▶ feel positively about some aspects of their work;

▶ be attending school full- or part-time, while working part-time or doing seasonal work. Not all children are working full-time.

Children in hazardous work may:

▶ be fatigued or exhausted due to working conditions;

▶ experience workplace bullying by peers or supervisors, or sexual harassment on the way to or at work;

▶ have injuries or sickness requiring immediate intervention;

▶ feel watched or under surveillance by employers;

▶ have limited personal freedoms.

Children in the worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work may additionally:

▶ feel mistrustful of adults when they have none in their lives they can trust;

▶ feel trapped with no safe way out;

▶ have experienced threats of abuse against themselves or their families;

▶ have experienced physical, sexual or psychological abuse;

▶ experience memory loss of certain events;

▶ be susceptible to violence, fines or penalties by employers;

▶ show symptoms of trauma, stress, anxiety, or hostile or self-protective behaviours (Wood 2020);

▶ demonstrate risk behaviours or underestimate risks;

▶ show symptoms of substance abuse or dependency;

▶ feel and experience social stigma due to their work, risking rejection by family and community members if past events or the nature of their work are revealed.

Children are usually very willing participants in research. But the above complexities, particularly for children in the worst forms of child labour, can make it hard to approach children, establish their trust and cooperation, obtain truthful responses, and ensure that children fully comprehend their decisions (Zimmerman and Watts 2003). For these reasons, researchers must give children real options to withdraw at each stage of the research (ILO 2005).

Adopting ethical and safety procedures benefits both the researcher and respondent. If approached in a sensitive and non-judgemental way, children can benefit from sharing their experiences with an interested adult. Similarly, the more children feel that they are respected and listened to, the more likely they are to share details of their experiences.

▶ Principles behind the guidelines

Child participation

Children have a right to express their own views, when they are capable of forming them, in all matters affecting them, and the views of the child must be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12). This has implications for respondent selection, as discussed in Guiding Question 2. A child's participation in research can take many forms, for example, as participants or co-researchers in qualitative research, or respondents in survey research.[20] Sometimes, research about child labour can be done without involving children at all. The decision tree in Guiding Question 1 can help you to decide whether this is the case.

Best interests of the child

What has the most positive effect on a child's life should be a primary consideration (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3). A child's best interests should be the priority when making research decisions, such as on children's participation. Their best interests may include education, privacy, development, survival and freedom of expression. What constitutes best interests is not always simple or clear, necessitating consultation with stakeholders (including children) to define them, as outlined under Guiding Question 2.

Do no harm and non-maleficence

Researchers should avoid causing harm or injury to children, including as a result of participating in research. If significant harm is likely, research should *not* proceed. Potential harms should be mapped out with strategies in place to minimize them, so that the benefits to research participants outweigh the harms (ECPAT International 2019). Guiding Question 3 includes questions to ask as part of harm identification in risk assessment during study design, while Guiding Question 7 includes questions to help ascertain risks at the interview stage. Risks should be determined for the safety of both the participant and the researcher.

Respect

Children's decisions should be viewed within wider social, cultural, legal and environmental considerations as well as power dynamics. Upholding participants' dignity involves accepting their decision, when fully informed, to participate in research or not. Guiding Question 6 includes examples of informed consent and assent wording to help children understand what is being asked of them so they can make informed decisions.

---

20 For simplicity, the term "participant" is used to refer to qualitative or mixed methods research and the term "respondent" is used for quantitative survey research throughout these guidelines.

Part 1.

Research design

This first section includes guidance on ethics considerations on child labour during the research design phase. The guiding questions in this section cover the following topics: (a) assessing whether child labour data should be collected; (b) incorporating the "do no harm" principle into study data; (c) how to assess risks prior to beginning studies on child labour; (d) how to prepare referral information and what legal obligations exist to report child labour and abuse; and (e) the ethical concerns associated with the recruitment, screening, and training of research team members.

▶ Study preparation and ethics considerations checklist

- ▶ Use a decision tree to decide whether children need to be involved in your research, and consider safe data collection options.
- ▶ Identify appropriate local partners and solicit their input to study design and methods.
- ▶ Develop terms of reference for partners, including government partners, that include ownership of, access to and use of data.
- ▶ Conduct a benefits and harms risk assessment – ensure that benefits outweigh harms.
- ▶ Consider ethics in study design (budgeting, participant compensation, child-friendly methods, appropriate interview questions).
- ▶ Pilot-test study instruments and make revisions for clarity and appropriateness.
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with any legal obligations to report child abuse to the authorities; consider an ethical review and allocate sufficient time and budget for this.
- ▶ Prepare adequate and realistic referral mechanisms for the setting.
- ▶ Include ethical considerations in the training and selection of interviewers.
- ▶ Screen potential research staff carefully to evaluate whether they are prepared to work with vulnerable children, and to identify any possible biases they may have.
- ▶ Develop training tools to ensure that all research staff are trained in chid safeguarding measures and have contingency plans for any possible challenge that may arise during fieldwork.
- ▶ If the study requires an interpreter, ensure that they are vetted and trained on project objectives, child safeguarding practices, and child-friendly language to be used during interpretation.

?

Guiding Question 1.
Should child labour data be collected?

Given the substantial costs of research, in time and financial resources, for children, proxies and researchers, there is a need to balance potential contributions to knowledge with the potential for harm. The decision tree presented in figure 1 is intended to help researchers, including national statistics offices (NSOs), to decide whether primary data collection is needed and whether children or proxies should be interviewed or surveyed (see also Guiding Question 2). It also offers potential options and alternative data sources to obtain information about working children without jeopardizing children's safety or the integrity of the data.

Please note that the research questions in the decision tree are not comprehensive – rather, they provide an example that can be adapted more specifically to particular contexts.

A risk assessment should be carried out by the research team during the design phase, which should include an analysis of the risks and benefits to children of including them in the research (see Guiding Question 3). This will include determining whether the interview may put either the participant or the researcher in danger, as well as referral challenges (see Guiding Question 5), and may lead to the decision of not undertaking the research.

▶ **Figure 1. A decision tree for ethical research on child labour**

WHY do you want to collect data?
WHAT questions do you want to answer?
HOW will data be used?

Potential questions answered by population-based surveys for prevalence:
- Can existing data answer the research questions?
- Has child labour increased?
- Have the forms of child labour changed?
- Have the risks or protective factors for child labour changed?
- What are the nature, characteristics and forms of child labour?

Potential questions answered by other data sources:
- Is there a change in forms of reported child labour?
- Is there an increase or decrease in service use by working children?
- Are services being accessed or delivered differently and is this safe and effective?

Primary research options that are safe and can provide relevant information
- Map services, including changes in availability and resources
- Conduct short surveys or key informant interviews with service providers
- Interview children only if possible to do so safely and with full consent (e.g. in children's services or shelters)

Can existing data answer the research questions?

NO **YES**

Use existing data
- Analyse data from existing surveys
- Analyse service case records (e.g. child labour monitoring and remediation systems data)

Is there a national lockdown or significant movement restrictions?

YES **Can data be collected remotely (e.g. phone interviews or via internet or mobile devices)?** **NO**

DO NOT DO IT

Interviewers cannot safely conduct private confidential interviews (remotely or in person)

NO **Can you ensure confidentiality, privacy and ethical protocols?** **NO**

YES

YES

Proceed with caution – safe to collect data on child labour through surveys or interviews with children or proxies

Remember that representative data can only be collected through surveys with a random sample of children (or proxies), children's services or shelters

Note: If the responses lead you to one of the green boxes, proceed with research. The subsequent principles will help you to design, conduct and disseminate ethically appropriate research on child labour.

Source: Adapted from UNICEF (Peterman et al. 2020) and UNFPA (kNOwVAWdata et al. 2020) decision trees.

Children and participatory research: Key considerations

"Participatory" research emphasizes the participation of members of communities affected by that research. Co-produced research includes several local beneficiary representatives as part of the research team in the design, planning and conduct of the research. Partnering with local organizations, community leaders and industry representatives helps foster well-informed research and can improve the utilization of the findings. However, these approaches present ethical challenges to researchers, particularly related to the questions of positionality in research. These include internal group power dynamics that influence interactions between stakeholders and researchers, blurred boundaries between researchers and research subjects, conflicts of interest, the preservation of anonymity and questions of data ownership (Durham University Centre for Social Justice and Community Action 2011).

There are many ways in which children can be involved in research, satisfying the children's rights to have their opinions heard.[21] But their interest still needs to be protected, and the "do no harm" principle needs to be fulfilled (see Guiding Question 2). Moreover, if you are considering a more active role of children as co-researchers, the national legislation concerning children's work must be considered.

Ownership of research data: Key considerations

The research team should discuss data ownership and use prior to the start of the study. Key discussion questions can include the following.

- ▶ Can data be anonymized, and can confidentiality be assured?
- ▶ Will one or several research teams own and be responsible for the data?
- ▶ Will the donor have partial ownership of the data?
- ▶ Will the data be made public?
- ▶ Who will have access to and use of the data?
- ▶ Where will the data be stored, how and for how long?

These questions should encourage discussions on data anonymity and security, promises made to study participants during the informed consent process (see Guiding Questions 7 and 11), and open-access research. Research teams are advised to make decisions about data ownership based on principles of equity and inclusion. To the extent feasible, individuals and groups who can use the data for policies, programming or research should have fair access to the data, with particular care taken to maintain the privacy and security of research study participants. Where researchers plan to interview study participants who may need assistance, the team should check whether national referral procedures exist or, if not, develop referral procedures in line with existing protection mechanisms. In addition, researchers must make sure that data are shared in a proportionate and timely manner and in a way that does not put the participant at risk.

---

21 Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms the right of the child to participate in matters affecting them. This article states that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".

Useful sources when designing studies on child labour

Types of groups and sources that may be useful to consult when designing studies on child labour include the following:

▶ children's community or drop-in centres;

▶ technical and vocational education and training providers;

▶ child protection services (non-governmental organizations or government entities);

▶ children's rights groups;

▶ trade unions and workers' organizations;

▶ employers' associations;

▶ labour inspectorates, law enforcement officials;

▶ specific ethnic group service providers;

▶ international organizations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as non-governmental organizations;

▶ academic institutions working on child health, violence, labour and children's rights.

? Guiding Question 2. How can the "do no harm" principle be incorporated in study design?

How research is designed, and the methods used, can affect the balance of harms and benefits to children. Working with experienced local organizations and individuals can help to identify any flaws in study design or methods that can impact participants.

Potential types of specialty expertise required from partners

Child labour research, especially on the worst forms of child labour, often requires assistance from specialists in different fields. Local partners may be able to provide expertise or assistance in a number of areas, including the following:

▶ **Protection and security** – to ensure study participants have options to protect them from harm, including problems from traffickers, former employers, acquaintances or family members.

▶ **Legal information and action** – to strengthen the governance and regulatory landscape and draw on legal service providers for assistance.

▶ **Health** – to provide or advise on medical and public health services to support the health needs of study participants and survivors.

▶ **Psychology** – to support the psychosocial well-being of research study participants, including providing referrals to mental health counsellors as needed.

▶ **Business and economic transformation** – to break down supply chains to pinpoint how business and economic actors can better identify child labour within these systems.

▶ **Advocacy** – governmental and non-governmental global actors can use their platform to engage in wider outreach and advocacy and should be included in the study's advisory group and initial design.

Engaging local partners from the start

International researchers may not have realistic expectations on topics, timelines or appropriate participants for research on child labour. Local partners can provide contextual information and map potential risks, and improve the utilization of the findings (see Guiding Question 1). You should identify groups or individuals who have good local knowledge and reputation and consider setting up study advisory groups or research co-production partners. Ethical research involves joint input from local partners to the overall research process, rather than simply implementation of data collection.

Partner selection to help with ethical conduct of a study will depend on the research aims and participants. For example, studies involving children's experiences where harm could be disclosed will benefit from partners who can help set up a referral network (see Guiding Question 4). Often, partners can advise on safe access to children as well.

For government partners, you should assess their capacity, goals and research intentions. Mapping the positive and negative implications of government involvement, or interest, in the research is important to ensure that working children are not harmed from participating in research.

Research partners: Questions to ask on positionality

▶ What national pressures does the partner face that may affect their responses to reports of child labour? Examples include minimum wage demands or industries struggling to recruit adult workers.

▶ What international pressures does the partner face that may affect their response to reports of child labour? Examples include trafficking in persons rankings, and trade agreement conditionalities dependent on absence of child labour.

▶ Do negative findings pose a risk to the government partner's reputation? How might they react in policy and legislative measures? What are the implications for working children?

Adverse consequences of study publication

Findings from a baseline survey of working children in the seafood and fishing sectors in Country B were published, indicating that high proportions of children were exposed to hazardous work and injuries compared to those working in other sectors. While there were no such recommendations in the report, the government proceeded to implement a rapid child labour ban in these sectors, leaving children out of work immediately in some districts, while some were dismissed without pay. As no viable alternatives were provided to make up for the lost earnings, some children were pushed into worse forms of work, according to media reports. Mapping potential adverse consequences of anticipated findings during study design can help researchers make clear statements in reports about what to do or not to do with findings and protect study participants.

Adequate budgeting

You should budget for all aspects of partnerships, not just data collection. For example, this may include covering costs of staff time to organize data collection activities and to establish community partnerships, for example for referral services. Data collection costs may include travel reimbursements for children and other participants, interpreter costs, rental costs of child-friendly spaces, materials to communicate with children and any costs to implement child-friendly activities.

Consider compensation of participants

Compensation can affect existing power dynamics – between researchers and participants, among child and adult participants and among wider community members. How compensation is given and to whom can incur ethical risks – for example, does giving a child compensation incur risk of punishment from caregivers or employers who do not receive any? Risks of not giving compensation can include mistrust and even aggression in communities – offering something is often conducive to a positive dynamic between researchers and participants (Mapatano 2019).

However, significant payment may act as an incentive or even coercion to participate, even among those with less relevant insight, casting doubt on the accuracy of data collected (Graham et al. 2013). However compensation, if offered, should be adequate to accurately reflect the cost of the participant's time. Any in-kind assistance such as services should be those that participants would benefit from and would not otherwise be able to access. Alternatively, small gifts can be offered as tokens of appreciation (for example, mobile phone credit, school stationery or books).

Decisions about compensation or gifts should be made with local partners, including the local ethics board, and participants themselves, based on their preferences and what is safe and most useful for them. Ideally, children's and adult's participation should not incur loss of income, missing school or other important daily activities (ECPAT International 2019).

NSO considerations: Lotteries to incentivize participation

Some NSOs have introduced lotteries at the district or regional level to incentivize participation in surveys – prizes can be distributed to winning households to compensate for participation. In Country E, households were only entered if they offered 100 per cent participation in the survey, increasing response rates and completion of surveys. However, this tactic should be approached with caution, as it may reduce the likelihood of participation in follow-up interviews if households are not awarded with the prize.

Incorporating child-friendly methods suited to age and competency

If children are participants in or co-producers of research, you should consider child-friendly methods to collect data. Examples include body mapping for children to indicate where they may feel pain from work or work-related injuries, or a "day in the life" timeline whereby children can illustrate typical daily activities (when, where and how long) and their likes and dislikes about work-related activities (Terre des Hommes 2018). In particular, "day in the life" time-use methods allow children to use their own words for activities and do not rely on children's differing perceptions of what constitutes "work" – the information obtained can be coded by interviewers later. In many countries, working on family farms is not recognized as work, or work is considered a normal and unremarkable part of children's days, meaning it can go unreported (Morrow 2013).

Having a narrative conversation rather than direct questions and answers can help to reduce recall bias. Similarly, small talk, play, recurrent visits, patience and time can help in building trust with children and obtaining reliable data on delicate issues such as family background or illicit activities. Furthermore, children's conception of time in many countries relies on daylight rather than clock time, and anchoring questions with day- or night-time references can also reduce recall bias.

Surveys can be made child-friendly, with use of graphics, comics or videos to illustrate difficult concepts (for example, dangerous chemicals, using Likert scale responses for frequency or severity).[22] Computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) or audio computer-assisted self-interview (ACASI) methods may be appropriate in these circumstances.[23]

Selecting respondents

While children may be able to share information from their first-hand experience, these experiences may be traumatic for them. Researchers can also consider using a parent or close relative proxy respondent, who can answer questions on behalf of the child.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using proxies that should be considered by the research team. Child-reported information may be more accurate – however, children can misreport their experiences, as it may be difficult for them to track hours worked or speak at length about what their "work" includes. Proxy respondents may be knowledgeable about the child's activities. There is a tendency, however, for proxies to underreport child labour (Galdo, Dammert and Abebaw 2019). In particular, adult proxies may underreport hours worked in economic activities (especially on family farms) and household chores (especially for girls) (Dziadula and Guzman 2020; Galdo, Dammert and Abebaw 2020). Children have reported hazardous exposures more frequently than proxies (Janzen 2018). Emerging research using satellite imagery suggests that child reports are more accurate (Lichand and Wolf 2022). Respondent selection should be carefully considered based on the aims of the research and ethical risks and benefits posed to the potential respondent.

Partnerships, child-friendly methods and participation

The study "Child-led research: from participating in research to leading it" examines examples of children and young people who led their own research and took actions based on their findings. Young researchers were engaged in all stages of the research project and, even though they were not involved as co-researchers, were critical participants as they reflected jointly on the processes and outcomes of their research. Focus groups were convened with the young researchers in their own languages, ensuring they felt comfortable enough to express themselves. In addition, five children and young people were recruited to form a research advisory group, reviewing and providing feedback on the research project, methods and interview questions. This resulted in several key and productive changes to the study. Moreover, results for the pilot indicate that young researchers use their research findings to make changes in their own lives and to lead advocacy activities that bring about change in their communities.

---

22 For example, the Instrument for Psychosocial Assessment of Child Workers used drinking cups to depict frequency in a Likert scale (ILO 2004a).

23 For example, the Population Council has used CAPI and ACASI methods to interview adolescent girls (Population Council n.d.).

Design ethical and appropriate interview questions

A. Ethical sequencing of questions. Start with "easier" or less potentially upsetting topics (for example, questions about the child's interests), or perhaps even a game. In Violence Against Children Surveys, violence questions are positioned in the middle of surveys, to give researchers a chance to build rapport with the participant before asking sensitive questions. Importantly, this ensures that the interview does not end on a potentially heavy or upsetting note. Closing questions should be positive and future oriented (for example, children's hopes for the future). Guiding Question 7 provides suggested preamble language to support you to introduce sensitive questions related to children's work.

B. Neutral phrasing. Language should be inclusive and non-judgemental, and should fit with how participants describe issues in terms of age, gender and culture. Language should not shame children or make them feel like victims, or that they have behaved badly (ECPAT International 2019). Questions can include a suitable preamble to aid children's understanding. For example:

> One NSO included the following positive closing question in the labour force survey children's module:
>
> What do you do for fun/ hobbies when you are not working?
>
> ▶ Playing
>
> ▶ Watching TV
>
> ▶ Studying
>
> ▶ Other

Structured questionnaire	
Ask	**Don't ask**
Sometimes when children are at work, people say or do things to make them feel bad. Since you've worked in this job, has anyone at work ridiculed you, insulted you or made you feel ashamed?	Have you been bullied at work? Have you been shouted at for misbehaving at work?
For what reasons are you currently not attending school?	Why aren't you in school like other children of your age?

C. Indirect questions. Child labour is a sensitive topic. Indirect questions can encourage accurate reporting, as direct questions such as "did [*you/name*] work?" or direct reference to child labour can cause participants to become defensive or shut down. Training interviewers on probing techniques can help encourage participants to elaborate further. Furthermore, if children cannot be removed from harmful situations, indirect questioning on knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions, rather than direct questioning about experiences, is an ethically sound approach. You should still make it clear to the participant what the potential risks of disclosure of harms may be, so that they can decide whether they want to disclose anything even if not directly asked. Vignettes, or stories using characters, are another way to ask about sensitive topics when participants are hesitant to report their own experiences.

List experiments in survey research, whereby respondents are queried on several items from a list, which randomly includes or excludes a sensitive item without responses being disclosed to enumerators, are also used to elicit information on sensitive topics like child labour (World Bank n.d.).

Question examples

▶ Indirect question: "How do/does [*you/name*] spend time throughout a typical day?"

▶ Vignette attitude question:[24]

Sita and her brother Prasad work on the same construction site. Sita and Prasad both work for 10 hours a day, carrying heavy loads and digging. Prasad received 200 rupees per day and Sita received 80 rupees per day. Sita didn't question her lower pay.			
How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
"Girls' work" is not as important as "boys' work"			
Boys and girls should be paid the same when doing the same work			
Girls should not take up work outside the home			

▶ Stand-alone attitude questions (response options: agree–disagree, Likert scale):

– "Child workers should have the same rights as adult workers."

– "If a child makes a mistake at work, it is acceptable for the supervisor to hit or slap them."

▶ List randomization example (Asadullah et al. 2021), whereby participants are asked to agree or disagree with certain phrases:

1. It is important for girls to attend school.

2. Birth of a girl brings just as much happiness to a household as birth of a boy.

3. Literate mothers can take care of their children better than illiterate mothers.

4. A girl should be married off before age 18. [*ask treatment group only*]

Pilot-test interview questions

You should pilot-test questions to identify potentially sensitive phrasing, and alternative questions or response options, with child and adult participants. Ideally, you should conduct cognitive interviews examining how participants understand different terms used in child labour research. For example, you may need to determine alternative phrasing of hazardous work questions, such as "Working in dust or fumes?", to make them more easily understood by children. An alternative might use more specific terms and the outcome of the hazard, for example: "Working indoors or outdoors where dust, sand, dirt, smoke or fumes make it hard to breathe or see clearly?"

One study cognitively tested the question: "What is your main reason for working?" with children.

Some children responded that they were working to earn money for themselves, not for their parents. This was not a response option, so it was added to the final questionnaire.

---

24 Adapted from ILO's Work in Freedom questionnaire.
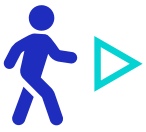
▶ Actions

- ▶ Engage local partners from the start, who have local knowledge and can ensure that respondents are selected appropriately based on the criteria of the research study.
- ▶ Consider potentially adverse consequences of anticipated findings on the children included in the study.
- ▶ Consider compensation of participants.
- ▶ Design ethical and child-appropriate interview questions.

▶ How

- ▶ Ensure that the budget allows for adequate engagement of local partners, such as non-governmental organizations, to enable partnership throughout the study.
- ▶ Map any adverse consequences of anticipated findings during the study design so researchers can make clear statements on how findings should *not* be used.
- ▶ In consultation with local partners, outline how participants should be compensated, based on what is safest and most appropriate in the context.
- ▶ Incorporate child-friendly data collection methods in the tools used for the study and ensure that questions are sequenced ethically (beginning with easiest topics), are phrased in a neutral manner, and are indirect.
- ▶ Pilot-test questions ahead of using them in the study to ensure they are appropriate for children.

NSO considerations: Selecting respondents

While children are the preferred respondents for child labour surveys, it is not always possible to interview them because they may not have reached the developmental age to respond to complex questions. Questions on hours spent at work can be problematic for young children aged 5–11 years. Recall periods vary by a country's data needs, for example, for past year prevalence of child labour. For children, seasonal work can be difficult to report on when conducted several months prior.

In some countries, NSOs collect data with or on children who are of the legal minimum working age and above. However, it is suggested to reduce this age limit and use either a child of the appropriate age as a direct respondent when possible or a proxy respondent for younger children.

In Country D, cultural preferences led to greater adult proxy reporting. Parents were reluctant to allow direct interviews with children, feeling offended that enumerators did not trust their word. A mitigation strategy used was to assure parents that information disclosed, including by children, was confidential and would not be disclosed to third parties, in line with confidentiality legislation.

Frequency of surveys can influence disclosure. Quarterly labour force surveys in Country D allowed enumerators to build good rapport with respondents, which led to high response rates. Country F pursued a living standards survey involving several household visits over one month to complete various modules, including on child labour. Enumerators lived in communities and built rapport with families, even playing games with children, which led to adults being comfortable with children being interviewed separately.

NSO case study: Engaging hard-to-reach indigenous groups

Child labour is considered part of developing manhood in some indigenous communities in Country E, where it is common that youths operate heavy machinery on farms. These communities have their own laws in place, and external enumerators were prohibited from entry. The NSO of Country E pursued a strategy to engage local leaders, who reviewed survey questions and recommended adjustments for cultural sensitivities, such as not asking about sexual behaviours. The NSO then trained local enumerators from the community to administer surveys in the locally spoken language. To adhere to community rules that prohibited use of electronic tablets, paper-based surveys were conducted, with data transferred to tablets afterwards. Communities that are anticipated to be hardest to reach should be contacted well in advance of surveys and the entire data collection process tested to ensure timely completion.

NSO case study: Including street children in child labour surveys

Country F used a household questionnaire and a separate questionnaire for street children who did not live in household structures. Special considerations included approaching group leaders for consent to interview street children, as they often supervised their activities. Enumerators conducted interviews during the evenings or night-time when children were resting, because during the daytime children were scattered while working, and it was unknown which children lived in households and which lived on the street. For the safety of enumerators in insecure areas, plain-clothed police officers accompanied them. This ensured that enumerators were protected while also not scaring the children, as the police were dressed normally.

Guiding Question 3.
How can risks be assessed prior to beginning studies on child labour?

Research with children about their lives and work is associated with risks at each stage of research, from initial contact with children to the public release of information. Risks should be mapped and a plan to mitigate them made before the research starts.

Benefits and harms tool: All participants

This adapted ECPAT tool can help research teams identify all the possible positive and negative effects of your research (ECPAT International 2019). You should list these for each domain, along with strategies to increase benefits and offset harms, then rate the likelihood that benefits will outweigh the harms if the strategies are implemented. The research team should add up all responses – if there is a positive score and insignificant or minor harms, proceed. If the team has a negative score with moderate or substantial harms, consider if the team can make changes – otherwise, do not proceed with the research.

	Benefits	Strategies to enhance benefits	Harms	Strategies to minimize harms	*If strategies are implemented, do benefits outweigh harms?**
Social					
Economic					
Psychological					
Legal					
Political					
Others					
Benefits minus harms:					

* Completely/partially/to limited extent.

Benefits and harms of children's participation: Questions to ask

▶ Are you confident that children will not be burdened with responsibility or work if they participate in the research? (for example, miss school, have to work hours to make up the time).

▶ Are you confident that children will not be physically harmed?

▶ Are you confident that children will not experience unreasonable psychological harm or distress?

▶ Are there appropriate trauma-informed or child-sensitive support services available to offer support?

You may need to consult local partners and thematic experts to answer these questions. If you answer "no" to any question, you should amend the design of the research before proceeding.

Risks during and after data collection, which can be considered in the benefits and harms tool, include the following.

Punishment of children by parents or employers. Parents may get angry when children disclose hazardous conditions, especially if the child works with the family, and children might therefore incur punishment for disclosures following interviews (NORC 2020). Similarly, a child who participates in an interview may be scolded for not completing a work task on time. It is usually best to approach children outside worksites and working hours.

Dismissal of child workers by employers. Employers may dismiss child workers, with or without pay, if they are fearful that children reporting hazards in research are subsequently identified by the authorities, who may implement child labour bans without provision of alternatives. Children may also have to forfeit their pay for participating in interviews. Solicit buy-in from employers about the purpose of the research and be transparent about any mandatory reporting obligations (see Guiding Question 4). Consider carefully how research is communicated with government partners (see Guiding Question 12).

Community stigma if occupation is made public. Children in particular forms of work, including commercial sexual exploitation, bonded labour or other worst forms of child labour, may be ostracized or shamed if their work becomes known to their community or families. Maintaining privacy and anonymity during and after research (see Guiding Question 10) is very important to mitigate this risk.

You should consider potentially upsetting topics for working children or adult participants in design of study instruments and during data collection, which may include the following.

Education and schooling. Children may feel shame at not attending school or be upset that they cannot attend due to work obligations, or may have had to repeat a grade.

Hazardous work. Parents may feel shame at being unable to protect children from hazardous work, and children themselves may feel ashamed, sad or angry that they have to do tasks that may be hazardous or unpleasant.

Work-related injuries. Children may have traumatic memories of workplace accidents and injuries. Witnessing friends or family members get injured or even killed in workplace accidents is particularly distressing for children.

Physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Children in hazardous work or the worst forms of child labour may have experienced various abuses and have traumatic or upsetting memories related to them. It should not be assumed that emotional abuses are less upsetting than sexual or physical violence.

Questions on these topics should be phrased as neutrally as possible, to minimize risks of distress and potential punishment of children who disclose hazards or abuses. Questions should refer to specific tasks or violence exposures rather than using vague terms that could be subjectively interpreted (see Guiding Question 2).

Ethical review: Benefits and challenges

Every study must adhere to a written ethical and safety protocol that either accompanies or is built into the study design document. This ethical guidance document, drafted for researchers conducting fieldwork, should describe the main protective strategies for participants and research team members throughout each study phase. The most effective ethics protocol, and one more likely to be approved by a local ethics board, needs to be locally informed. While research teams must invest more time and incur a higher cost to develop and seek approval for an effective ethics protocol, these resources are necessary to maintain the highest standard of safety and protection for both the participants and the research team.

It is best practice for research ethics protocols to be submitted to local ethical review boards, or institutional review boards, so that ethical risks are considered by a third party not involved in the research. Protocols can be stand-alone or built into the study design document, and should describe the main protective strategies for participants and researchers throughout each study phase. Drawing on previous ethics protocols from studies conducted on child labour in similar contexts can help you to develop your own (ILO 2003; ILO and UNICEF 2005; Lahman 2008).[25] Effective ethics protocols that are more likely to be locally approved are locally informed. The inclusion of a country-level ethical review and approval can assist in the development of a well-informed research ethics and safety protocol and give the research team and project both local and international credibility. Ethics approval also ensures that results will be eligible for publication in peer-reviewed journals – which is increasingly a prerequisite for publication.

Benefits of ethical review include locally endorsed ethical and safety standards, and local and international credibility. Challenges include locating an ethical review board – if none is available, consider setting up your own informal ethical review committee, which might include local experts and organizations familiar with child labour or the geographical region. You should allocate sufficient preparation time to develop ethics protocols, and budget for potential costs of ethical review.

▶ Actions

- ▶ Provide clear and detailed instructions within the ethical and safety protocols for members of the research team on how to ensure the safe and respectful conduct of the study, protect participant security, and monitor the safety of the research team.
- ▶ Ensure the ethics protocol is reviewed by all members of the research advisory team.
- ▶ Adjust grant application and delivery timelines to adequately account for ethical and safety protocol development.

▶ How

- ▶ Draw on previous ethical and safety protocols from studies conducted in the country, in similar contexts, or on related subjects.
- ▶ Adapt all protocols to the local context, ideally with the help of local partners.

---

25 ILO 2003, ILO and UNICEF 2005, and Lahman 2008 are presented as helpful references. ILO and UNICEF 2005 includes a module on ethical considerations, while Lahman 2008 covers ethical research with children more broadly.

? Guiding Question 4.
What sampling and access challenges create ethical concerns, and how can they be addressed

Questions of sampling and access challenges can create ethical concerns that should be considered by research teams during the research design phase of studies on child labour. In line with the "do no harm" principle covered in Guiding Question 2, teams should build ethical sampling strategies into their study and ensure that appropriate steps are taken in order to limit bias and discrimination.

How can an ethical study sampling strategy be built into the study design, implementation and dissemination?

When deciding upon a research design and sampling strategy, researchers must first determine safe and ethical ways to identify, contact and interview study participants. Local advisers can provide guidance on local inequalities and safe ways to include individuals in a study. While children who have been exposed to the worst forms of child labour may be able to share information from their first-hand experience, these experiences may be traumatic for them. Individuals must be included in the research sensitively to ensure that their needs, rights, and preferences – including the right to decline to participate – are respected during the study. As with all research, the sampling method should minimize the risks to which individuals are exposed and ensure that their autonomy and privacy are continuously protected.

When conducting sampling for both qualitative and quantitative data generation methods, it is important to ensure that no individual is denied a benefit to which they would otherwise have been entitled, and that no individual has a burden unduly imposed on them because of the sampling frame or sampling method used. Consideration must also be given to the sampling method used when conducting qualitative interviewing to ensure that no individual's privacy, autonomy or well-being is compromised. To illustrate, for example, snowball sampling – a sampling method in which an individual who is interviewed is approached to identify other individuals who may fit the study inclusion criteria – is often used in qualitative interviewing when trying to access hard-to-reach, marginalized or vulnerable populations. Here, however, it is important to ensure that the individual – whether it is the child themselves, their guardian or a proxy – does not provide any identifying or contact information of others who fit the study inclusion criteria. Instead, researchers should provide guardians or proxies where relevant with information about the study and the contact details of the researchers with an invitation to contact them should they wish to participate in the study. In this way, their privacy is protected.

▶ Actions

- ▶ Engage with a local advisory committee. Ensure selection criteria for local advisers are defined prior to the start of the research project.
- ▶ Consider recruitment processes or how study participants – including current victims and survivors of child labour – will be safely and anonymously invited to participate in the study.
- ▶ Consider where children will be interviewed, the length of time needed for the interviews, and the effects these choices might have on their safety, anonymity or income.

▶ **How**

- ▶ Establish a consultation process with the advisory committee or advisers.
- ▶ Report and seek feedback on the study design, methods and child safeguarding mechanisms[26] to the local advisory committee.
- ▶ Pilot-test recruitment and interview techniques with a small number of children.
- ▶ Draft an operational planning document to clarify the ways in which recruitment, logistics, safety and security procedures, and contingency plans will be implemented during fieldwork.
- ▶ Develop a decision tree or a flowchart to illustrate these steps.

How can common sampling biases create ethical concerns, and how can the study design limit biases and potential discrimination?

Sampling biases occur when the participants in the study are not reflective of the population. A study may, for example, overrepresent children who speak a particular language or are in a geographically convenient location. Instead, individuals should be sampled based on whether they meet a study's inclusion and exclusion criteria related to the specific research objective.[27] In this way, fair subject selection avoids disproportionately representing certain groups of children or networks. Of particular concern in studies on child labour are hard-to-reach children – such as those who are without guardians, have limited mobility, are geographically isolated, have lower levels of literacy, or are less competent in the language in which research may be conducted. These groups may be underrepresented. Marginalized and oppressed groups are, in many cases, also excluded or underrepresented in studies on child labour.

While it is crucial to seek local viewpoints, researchers must reflect upon whether these perspectives are representative of all groups. Researchers should ensure that the research objectives do not privilege certain groups of children or overlook inequalities when setting a sampling frame and selecting study participants. They should also aim to include the widest participation possible of children in terms of gender, age group, language, family structure, education and socio-economic background. In addition, researchers should reflect on how sampling strategies may introduce representation bias. Snowball sampling, which is often used in research on the worst forms of child labour, demands fewer resources. However, it is associated with phenomena such as recruiting more cooperative subjects and "masking" – the process by which representatives selectively refer other members of the target population to the study, protecting close friends or relatives by not referring to them (for example, when there is a strong privacy concern).

▶ **Actions**

- ▶ Identify marginalized or hard-to-reach children engaged in child labour.
- ▶ Remain transparent regarding possible sampling bias.

---

26 Examples of safeguarding policies by organizations who work with children in child labour: Terre des Hommes (n.d.) and Save the Children (n.d.).

27 Research on child labour often focuses on specific groups or regions: in these cases, belonging to a specific group or living in a specific location would be among the inclusion criteria.

▶ Use relevant data (census, sector, etc.) to identify the range of children in the target group, when possible.

▶ Sample individuals based on the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria related to the specific research objective.

▶ When researching hard-to-reach children or worst forms of child labour, consider using respondent-driven sampling.

Guiding Question 5.
How can referral information be prepared and what legal obligations exist to report child labour or abuse?

Working children, particularly those in hazardous work or the worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work, may disclose exploitation or abuse during data collection. Before the study starts, you must have considered what to do in these situations. An interview with a child worker in an extremely vulnerable situation or in a dangerous context provides an opportunity not only to collect information, but also to provide useful information to the child on support services or to remove the child from that context.

Familiarize yourself with any legal obligations to report child abuse to the authorities. If mandatory reporting applies, this must be considered when assessing the benefits and harms of children's participation in the research. Moreover, you must make participants aware of the potential risks of their disclosure before seeking their consent or assent and how the child can or cannot be part of these processes. You should consider whether reporting has safety implications for the child and whether it may even cause harm, when there are limited or poor-quality response services (Devries et al. 2015).

Referral challenges in a Violence Against Children Survey

The Good Schools Study in Uganda included a survey with nearly 4,000 primary school-aged children on experiences of violence. The researchers enlisted referral service partners, preparing and agreeing referral protocols to activate following disclosures of violence (accounting for severity and timing of violence exposure, for example sexual violence versus physical violence, past week compared to past year occurrence). Despite this, severe challenges included just 4 per cent of 529 children who had experienced violence being followed up by referral partners within agreed time frames (Devries et al. 2015). Harms of referrals included stigmatizing children by naming them publicly as "abused", and exposing children to retaliation by perpetrators who came to know of a child's disclosure. The researchers had to actively follow up on cases and, given poor responses from services, hired a dedicated study counsellor to follow up outstanding child protection cases.

Sample wording from the Good Schools Study consent form about conditions under which confidentiality would be breached:

If you tell me about something that makes me think your current safety or well-being might be at risk, I may need to let the District Probation Officer or the health centre know so that I can do my best to keep you safe.

Do not raise expectations of benefits of participation or access to services that are available. Child protection services are lacking or overstretched in many countries with child labour, which may not be considered part of child protection system remits. In one country, social workers in local child protection systems applied the Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS) to provide child protection and support. (International Cocoa Initiative 2021). Education or income-related services beyond child protection may play a role in child labour monitoring, which might be at the family or school level (ILO 2004b). In the CLMRS, effective types of remediation support to reduce hazardous work include providing school kits or uniforms, bridging classes, building school canteens, and other school infrastructure improvements. Referrals at the family level can include connecting families to village savings and loans groups or government social welfare schemes.

Be "resource ready". Information should be presented concisely to children, in a language and format that they understand. Make children aware of the willingness of the study team to assist them in accessing services where necessary.

Be discreet when offering referral information. Children should be interviewed privately but within sight of others (see Guiding Question 7). Consider providing referral information verbally or offer to support the child at a specific time to access services after the interview

▶ Actions

- ▶ When designing a study involving interviews with children previously involved in child labour, consult with caseworkers or organization representatives to better assess which potential participants are fit to be interviewed.
- ▶ When interviewing children, one should be ready to detect signs of distress, as interviewers may be conducting interviews without knowing whether the child has been or is currently engaged in child labour. All research teams should be trained on detecting signs of distress. In all interviews, include information in the consent process about the potentially upsetting nature of some of the questions and give participants the option to skip these questions.
- ▶ If interviewers detect distress in a participant during an interview, instruct them to ask the participant if they wish to stop the interview. If the interviewer sees fit, they should terminate the interview and refer the participant to support services.
- ▶ Only provide participants with information about referral services if requested.

▶ How

- ▶ Map a list of referral services aimed at victims of child labour, including shelters, psychosocial care, legal aid, health services, and trustworthy law enforcement contacts. Child labour monitoring systems, when they exist, can represent useful resources in this context.
- ▶ Equip all research team members with the list of referral services.
- ▶ Train all interviewers and interpreters on possible signs of distress and appropriate ways to respond to participants showing signs of distress during interviews.
- ▶ Develop referral procedures that are simple to implement and train all interviewers on how to use these procedures.

?

Guiding Question 6.
What ethical concerns are associated with the recruitment, screening and training of research team members?

Conducting research on child labour requires careful consideration of key ethical concerns associated with the recruitment, screening and training of research team members. Members of the research team will need to be trained on key concepts related to child labour, such as key definitions, child safeguarding practices, non-verbal cues, and child-friendly informed consent and assent procedures.

Careful recruitment and selection of interviewers, interpreters and co-workers. Ideally, you should recruit interviewers, interpreters and co-workers from communities where you are conducting the research for the reasons outlined in Guiding Question 2 on local partners. In some cases, it might be appropriate to hire interviewers and interpreters from outside the study region. Children or adult participants may not trust or may feel ashamed of speaking to someone from the same community or cultural background about certain topics, such as workplace violence or, for girls, work outside the home where this is culturally unacceptable. Do not enlist child or adult workers themselves as on-site interpreters in an informal way, as information about child participants may be leaked or treated as local gossip.

Similarly, the nature of gender relations with informants should also be considered and might influence participation and responses. Based on the topic (for example, sexual exploitation), it is critical to ensure the appropriate alignment between the gender of the child and of the researcher (ILO 2005). If available and applicable in the study country, follow child safeguarding policies, such as official background checks for potential interviewers and interpreters. Develop screening procedures to assess whether interviewers and interpreters are prepared to work on sensitive issues around child labour – this can include giving all potential team members a test to check for any potential biases and levels of sensitivity and awareness on topics related to child labour. Consider the gender of enumerators and participants and how this can affect data collection (see NSO case study below on "Female enumerators").

Consider training topics. Besides training on child labour definitions and the purpose of the research, training for interviewers, interpreters and co-workers should include:

> ▶ Basic introduction to hazards, conditions, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuses that working children may experience (see "Children may…" section of this report);

> ▶ Basic introduction to gender, ethnic, and religious discrimination and inequality that working children may experience in the study region, including interviewers' own possible biases, fears and stereotypes;

> ▶ Reading body language and non-verbal cues from children, particularly for signs of discomfort and especially trauma or abuse;

> ▶ Role plays to identify possible biases or inappropriate language or techniques for engaging children who may have experienced trauma;

> ▶ Interview techniques with children that involve child-friendly methods (see Guiding Question 2);

> ▶ Power relations and allowing children to define the terms of the interview (see Guiding Question 7);

> ▶ Seeking informed consent and assent (see Guiding Question 7 for example of age-appropriate wording);

> ▶ Referral protocols to services with whom partnerships or agreements have been established at the design stage (see Guiding Question 4) and emergency intervention procedures (see Guiding Question 9);

> ▶ Local terminology appropriate to child labour;

▶ Ethical issues and concepts related to the sectors that are the subject of the interview, for example, domestic work, agriculture or street vending;

▶ Special attention and training should be given to interpreters recruited for research studies on child labour. Interpreters should be trained fully on the appropriate definitions and child-friendly language, based on the age of the participants included in the study.

You may consider organizing psychological or mental health first aid training for interviewers, which is increasingly included in studies on sensitive topics with vulnerable populations, to teach skills to respond to signs of mental health disorders. Training should include child-sensitive support.

Identify risks to interviewers and interpreters. Risks can vary by sex. For example, in conflict-affected areas, male interviewers from outside communities can be suspected to be local militia or armed forces. Female researchers can face threats including sexual harassment and rape (ILO 2005). During data collection, interviewers should be able to flag risks and say "no" if there is a danger to themselves or participants.

An interviewer's or interpreter's own past experiences of child labour can influence how they are affected by a participant's story and may bring up potentially upsetting memories that prevent the interviewer from carrying out a thorough and unbiased interview. Secondary trauma, whereby interviewers and interpreters can feel strong emotions in response to accounts of abuse or exploitation by participants or frustration at being unable to assist children directly, can occur, especially for accounts of the worst forms of child labour. Debriefing processes and counselling support for interviewers should be considered during and after data collection. For qualitative data collection, specific attention should also be paid to those who transcribe and translate the interviews, who are still exposed to the potentially traumatic narratives shared by study participants, even though they have not been involved in data collection. Transcribers and translators should be provided with training and support – in addition to those carrying out the interviews.

NSO considerations: Training enumerators

▶ Enumerator and field staff training should elaborate on the concepts and definitions of child labour, and other topics in surveys. It should not be assumed that enumerators understand these concepts and why the survey is being carried out.

▶ Even in surveys where child labour is a short module (for example, in labour force surveys), comprehensive training should be provided. Overall, standard enumerator training can take three to four weeks, with additional days for the child labour modules or for the stand-alone national child labour surveys.

▶ Training should be delivered over multiple rounds, with emphasis on practice and pilot exercises by enumerators.

▶ A family violence expert and psychologist delivered special training modules in Country A. Having experts on hand during training was useful for the many questions enumerators had about dealing with sensitive situations. In addition, experienced interviewers also contributed information about how they identified child violence and subsequent handling of those situations, which usually involved stopping the interview and consulting with the field supervisor. Experienced enumerators sharing first-hand experiences and delivering training sessions was also recommended.

NSO case study: Female enumerators

Country D hired female enumerators only. This decision was made for several reasons, including the perception that women can more easily build rapport with children and with mothers who respond to questions about children's work within many contexts. Female enumerators are often young mothers themselves and can relate to respondents. More than one enumerator is sent into survey areas for safety reasons.

Moreover, it is worth recalling that in many countries and contexts, it is not culturally appropriate for women to speak with men who are not relatives, and their safety should be taken into due consideration.
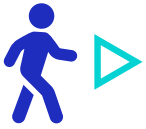
▶ Actions

- ▶ Screen potential research staff to ensure they do not have any involvement with forced labour, trafficking or child labour. Check for potential conflicts of interest.
- ▶ Assess the understanding of child labour amongst potential research team members.
- ▶ Develop training tools that include practice exercises and mock interviews.
- ▶ Invite an expert on child trauma and mental health to participate in exercises. Invite local experts, partners and survivors – including individuals and formal groups – to discuss issues related to local child labour or trafficking dynamics and victim characteristics.
- ▶ Design practical scenarios and use case studies to highlight common ethical dilemmas and problem-solving strategies related to victims of child labour.
- ▶ Conclude the training phase with a debriefing to discuss challenges faced and remaining concerns.

▶ How

- ▶ Recruit team members through job advertisements and by referral from trusted groups or individuals.
- ▶ When conducting job interviews, include questions assessing the ability of researchers to conduct interviews in sensitive, non-stigmatizing, child-friendly and empathetic ways.
- ▶ Develop adequate safeguarding training materials.
- ▶ Develop selection criteria for participants, including when participants should not be selected.
- ▶ Invite local experts to take part in training sessions and provide feedback on interview questions during training and piloting.

Part 2.

Research implementation and data collection

This section includes guidance for researchers on ethical considerations during the fieldwork data collection phase. Guiding questions in this section cover the topics of (a) key concerns and good practices for informed consent; (b) ethical concerns and practices for ensuring safety and establishing trust during interviews; (c) how to avoid upsetting or retraumatizing proxy respondents; and (d) how to best prepare research team members to carry out referrals as needed during research.

▶ Research implementation checklist

- ▶ Stop interviews if the interviewee shows any signs of distress, such as asking multiple times to go to the bathroom, or fidgeting. Train all members of the research team to identify common distress signals in children.

- ▶ Include special guidance on the ethics and safety protocol for assessing risks and implementing measures appropriate for children.

- ▶ Provide the research team with training and information on appropriate child protection referral practices for participants who are in danger.

- ▶ Develop and implement a formal security protocol for fieldwork and assign a security lead.

- ▶ Formulate questions in an empathetic and child-friendly manner, and train the research team on the signs of trauma and stress in children, and the ways in which they can avoid retraumatization during interviews.

?

Guiding Question 7.
What are the key concerns and good practices for informed consent?

You should be sure that children and adult participants agree to participate in the research, that is, they clearly understand the purpose and content of research, the intended use of the information, the right not to answer questions, and the right to terminate the interview at any time.

Informed consent involves briefing participants with this information and asking if they voluntarily agree (or consent) to participate, with 18 often the legal age of consent for various purposes in many countries. *Informed assent* is when a child informally agrees to be part of the research, but they are too young to legally give consent. When a child is too young to give consent, consent should be sought from their parents. Participants can *dissent* at any time in the research, which means they can withdraw.

Considerations for children. Getting truly informed consent or assent with children can be challenging, as they may not have the developmental capacity to readily understand what is being asked of them or the potential consequences of taking part in research. You should use age-appropriate language to convey concepts such as confidentiality, anonymity and any referral procedures that may be implemented following disclosures of abuses or hazards. You should consider how gender norms, age and cultural differences may affect how a child feels about giving consent or assent. For example, boys may more readily consent to research in cultures where they are permitted more independent decision-making compared to girls, who may defer to family members for permission to take part in research.

One NSO developed a detailed checklist for conduct of interviews, which included:

▶ Date of interview and response;

▶ Informed consent preamble;

▶ Whether written consent via signatures or thumbprints was provided, including by children directly;

▶ Witnesses to informed consent procedures.

Informed consent and assent: Information to provide verbally and in writing

▶ Purpose of research.

▶ Duration of interview or activity and any compensation.

▶ Topics covered, including those that may be potentially distressing and how support can be accessed.

▶ Voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

▶ Confidentiality of responses and anonymity.

▶ Procedures that will be followed if, for example, abuse or hazard disclosure is made, with any mandatory reporting procedures.

▶ Information on how findings will be used.

▶ How to withdraw from or complain about the research, with contact details to do this.

Ensure that information has been understood. After reading information sheets and providing this information in written form, you can ask participants to verbally summarize back to you what the purpose of the research is, what is being asked of them, how the data will be used, and so on, which can indicate the participant's extent of understanding of the informed consent process.

One NSO recommended talking through all the modules with the head of household first, before asking for permission to interview children (above the direct respondent age) so that when the time came, enumerators simply informed the household head that it was time to interview the child. Informing the household head and child about the anticipated duration of the interview was also important to secure their participation.

Decide how to obtain parental consent, children's assent and sequencing. Who to ask first? Seeking children's assent first out of earshot of parents can result in children being more frank, but in some countries it may not be culturally appropriate. Ensuring privacy for children can be difficult, and parents often want to be with their children when they are interviewed (Morrow 2013). Consider the cultural context and develop a protocol for what to do when a child wants to participate and parents do not, and vice versa (ECPAT International 2019). Where possible and safe to do so, children's preferences on their participation should be respected.

Age-appropriate consent wording

Consent wording should be age appropriate. Researchers should formulate different consent scripts for children and for adult proxies. Consent preambles should be worded in a way that ensures that participants understand the concepts, using language appropriate to their age and role.

Example child assent preamble from survey with working children

Hello, my name is _____ . I am a researcher working for [*organization*], here in [*country*].

We are doing a study about children on farms in [country]. We are asking you and children like you to help us, because we would like to know more about what it is like for children your age.

If you agree to be in our study, we are going to ask you some questions about what kind of work you do, like farm work and household chores. We will also ask some questions about hazards and dangers you may have experienced while doing work. This will take about one hour. My colleague may join us at some point to quietly observe the interview.

You can ask questions about what we are doing or asking at any time. If you decide that you want to leave, you can. There is nothing wrong with that. You can also choose to not answer any question if you don't want to.

If you agree, it means that you want me to interview you. If you do not, you do not have to. No one will be upset if you do not want to be involved, or if you change your mind.

Do you agree to be interviewed?

Interviewing "hidden" child domestic workers

It can be especially difficult to interview child domestic workers in third-party or employer households, as they are employed individually in private homes. It can be even more challenging if child domestic work is seen as a shameful practice. In some countries, child domestic workers are a status symbol, and employers may not conceal workers from visiting interviewers. Child domestic workers should always be interviewed privately so that they can share their experiences, but employers often refuse requests for privacy. Strategies to overcome employer reluctance have included two interviewers visiting employer households, with one interviewing the child domestic worker and the second interviewing the employer simultaneously in a separate room. Building relationships with local contacts who can provide introductions to employers may allay their fears about a researcher's motives and encourage them to allow child domestic workers to be interviewed. The ILO and UNICEF *Manual on Child Labour Rapid Assessment Methodology* includes specific guidance on researching child domestic workers,[28] including target issues and behaviours, background research, and how to identify, access, and interview child domestic workers, including "hidden" workers (ILO and UNICEF 2005).

---

28 Refer to pages 68–74 of the manual for further information, including specific guidance and tools for researching child domestic workers.

Keep a written or recorded record of consent given. This must be kept separately to data for confidentiality reasons (see Guiding Question 10).

NSO considerations: National statistical law, or what to do when consent is mandated?

▶ Statistical laws may guide the design and implementation of mandatory child labour surveys, as in some countries there is a legal requirement to respond to some (for example census) or all sample surveys conducted by NSOs. Research teams should be aware of the implications of such laws but should still seek to get information voluntarily first rather than invoking the law immediately if participation is refused, as pursued in Country E.

▶ Statistical laws often do not include special provisions for children for informed consent or assent, as the legal age of consent is usually 18 or above in most countries. NSOs should make culturally appropriate decisions about child assent and consent in their country context.

▶ Many NSOs in different countries send letters to households in advance, informing them of the purpose of the survey and information about the NSO and contact details. In Country A, this recommended practice gave households time to consult with others before deciding whether to participate, and recipients could call in advance to opt out of the survey. In Country C, where participation was mandated by statistical law, enumerators took time to explain the importance of the survey to ensure a high response rate, noting that participation should never be forced

Guiding Question 8.
What ethical concerns and practices relate to ensuring safety and establishing trust during interviews?

Ensuring a child's safety is a priority and risks should be mapped, with mitigation plans, at the research design stage. Research takes time, and small talk, repeated visits, play and patience can help researchers establish trust with children and increase the likelihood of obtaining reliable data with them on sensitive topics such as child labour.

Example questions that may be used to assess risks

▶ Do you have any concerns about carrying out this interview with me?

▶ Do you think talking to me could cause any problems for you, for example, with your family, employer or anyone else?

▶ Have you ever spoken with someone [interviewer's profession] before? How was that experience?

▶ Do you feel this is a good time and place to speak with me about your life and work? If not, is there a better time and place?

Safeguarding considerations to assess risk. Ask the child, away from others, where they prefer and feel safest to conduct the interview, which should be in a neutral setting – away from parents, guardians, employers or anyone who may cause the child to avoid the truth or make them feel nervous. Ask whether they would like anyone to help them with the questions, or to be with them during the interview. This could be a sibling, another child worker or other trusted adult. For safeguarding reasons, the location should be visible to others (for example in the distance) and not involve adult data collectors being out of sight with a child. Ensure that rooms are not closed off or out of sight of other people.

Be sympathetic and supportive, and maintain a positive attitude and neutral expression. Avoid showing shock, sadness, frustration, disappointment or emotions when listening to a child. It is important for interviewers to be aware of their perceptions of childhood, children's work and labour to reduce bias and influence over a child's answers (O'Kane and Barros 2019). This should be included as part of the training provided to interviewers in order to equip them with the proper tools and questions to assess this during research. This is because children can be easily influenced by adults, and to gather accurate responses it is important to be as neutral as possible. This consideration applies equally to revealed attitudes towards child labour among adult participants.

Give children the right to withdraw throughout the interview. Include preamble wording throughout data collection instruments that tell children what the next section is about and give them the option to decline response or withdraw. For example, you can include preambles before sensitive survey modules to "check in" with participants and ask for permission to continue:

- ▶ "I would like to know more about the things children are doing at work. These questions will help people learn how to keep children safe. I would now like to ask you about things you have been doing. Is that OK?" (Hazardous work section) (ILO 2022).

- ▶ "Thank you for telling me about the things you are doing at work. I would now like to ask you some questions about things that people sometimes do to children and adolescents that may hurt them or make them feel uncomfortable, upset or scared at work. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. I just want to know your ideas. If at any point you feel like you want to skip a question or stop answering these questions, just tell me. If you want to talk about any of the things I ask you about, please let me know. Is it OK if we continue?" (Workplace violence section) (ILO 2022).

The decision tree (figure 2) can help to decide what to do when a participant becomes distressed during an interview.
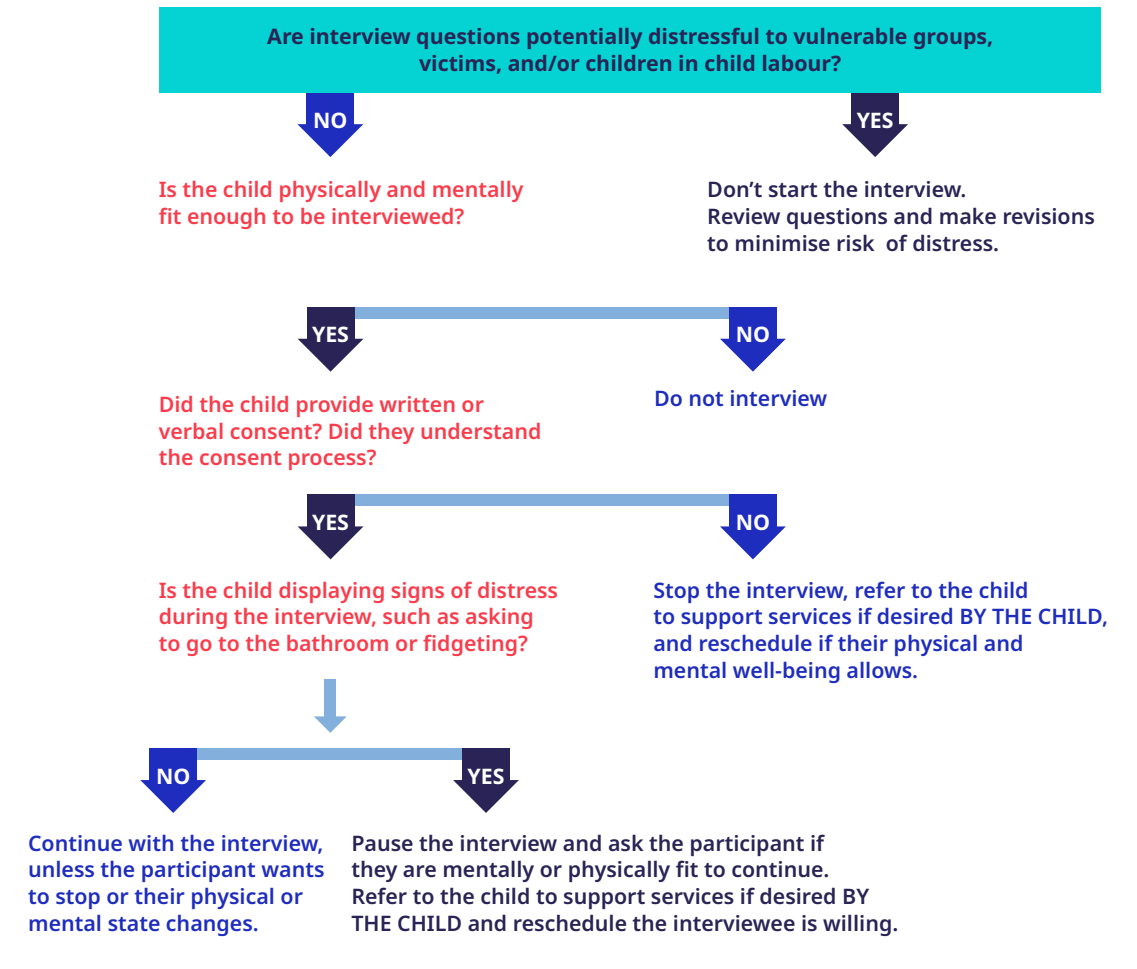
▶ **Actions**

- ▶ Assess risks with child participant when possible.
- ▶ Incorporate safeguarding practices to ensure trust during interview.
- ▶ Be sympathetic, supportive and neutral.
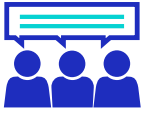
▶ **How**

- ▶ Ask children where they prefer to conduct the interview, to select the safest possible place.
- ▶ Ask children prior to beginning the interview if they require help or support.
- ▶ During the interview, avoid being reactive to participants' responses to ensure accurate answers.

▶ **Figure 2. A decision tree: Responding to interviewee distress**

Are interview questions potentially distressful to vulnerable groups, victims, and/or children in child labour?

NO

YES

Is the child physically and mentally fit enough to be interviewed?

Don't start the interview. Review questions and make revisions to minimise risk of distress.

YES

NO

Did the child provide written or verbal consent? Did they understand the consent process?

Do not interview

YES

NO

Is the child displaying signs of distress during the interview, such as asking to go to the bathroom or fidgeting?

Stop the interview, refer to the child to support services if desired BY THE CHILD, and reschedule if their physical and mental well-being allows.

NO

YES

Continue with the interview, unless the participant wants to stop or their physical or mental state changes.

Pause the interview and ask the participant if they are mentally or physically fit to continue. Refer to the child to support services if desired BY THE CHILD and reschedule the interviewee is willing.

Guiding Question 9.
How can researchers avoid upsetting or retraumatizing children?

The 2003 WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women contain recommendations on how interviews should be conducted to avoid potentially upsetting topics. These recommendations can be adapted to use with child participants in studies on child labour (Zimmerman and Watts 2003). Interviewing children about experiences that were frightening and painful can cause them to experience retraumatization. Many children might feel shame when speaking about what has happened to them, and may exhibit distress before, during and after interviews. Do not ask questions that are worded in a way that would illicit an emotionally charged response from child participants. Be prepared to respond to children's distress.

▶ Actions

- ▶ Train research team members to identify symptoms of distress, trauma or retraumatization in children.
- ▶ Establish a mechanism to avoid retraumatization with participants.
- ▶ Limit sensitive questions to what is strictly necessary for the particular study.
- ▶ Formulate questions in an empathic, child-friendly manner.

▶ How

- ▶ Build in a longitudinal approach to interaction with participants, incorporating follow-ups and retrospective, child-friendly methods.
- ▶ Design and distribute a checklist to research team members to identify common symptoms of trauma or distress in children.
- ▶ Ensure that questions are not designed in a way that would provoke a strong or emotional reaction from children interviewed. This includes excluding any questions that will cause distress or force children to reveal traumatic details that are not relevant to understanding their experiences.
- ▶ Questions that imply negative judgements about children's actions or decisions should not be asked, such as "What do your parents think of what you did?" or "Why did you agree to do this?"

Guiding Question 10.
How can research teams be best prepared to carry out referrals as needed during research?

When conducting research on child labour, especially in its worst forms (including hazardous work), teams should be prepared to make referrals when and if necessary or mandatory (see also Guiding Question 5). Safe and reliable referral depends on the list of providers assembled at the start of each study and updated throughout if necessary. Referral to relevant services should always be offered to children engaged in the worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work. In cases where the child is being exploited by a third party, referral should be offered to their responsible guardian. In cases of unaccompanied children at risk of harm, referral should systematically be offered. If a child requests or accepts a referral, the interviewer should make every effort to facilitate the referral beyond simply providing written information, for example by contacting the support service on their behalf. The interviewer should, however, refrain from offering their own phone number or other contact details.

In countries with mandatory reporting of child labour, not reporting can result in legal liability for the person who does not report a case. However, reporting must be balanced with the need to adhere to confidentiality of the participant. Furthermore, sometimes reporting can make things worse for the participant, when justice systems may be too weak to appropriately respond. These instances should be carefully considered using the benefits and risks tool (see Guiding Question 3), to decide whether and how best to proceed with the research.

▶ Actions

- ▶ Update regularly the list of referral services aimed at children, including community groups and organizations who are involved in child labour identification, referral, monitoring, and follow-up in the community where research is being conducted.
- ▶ Translate referral information into relevant languages and age-appropriate language and print copies on small cards so the participant can keep the information at hand but hide it easily, if necessary.

▶ How

- ▶ Draft written referral procedures for children and include instructions in training sessions.
- ▶ Develop agreements with service providers on referral procedures for victims of child labour.

NSO case study: Indirect referrals to social welfare ministry

In many countries, referral systems at the household level may not be possible based on local laws or national statistical laws on confidentiality.

Country F pursued an indirect referral strategy to the social welfare ministry in cases where children were declared in surveys as working in hazardous sectors such as mining or quarrying. Given legal requirements to maintain individual confidentiality, the NSO informed the social welfare ministry about the region or district where cases were found, for them to investigate directly. This strategy ensured that individual confidentiality was maintained, while increasing the likelihood that children in hazardous sectors would be followed up.

Part 3.

Data analysis, interpretation, reporting and dissemination

This third and final section provides guidance for ethical research after data have been collected, during the analysis and interpretation of data, drafting reports, and disseminating information once it is published. The guiding questions cover the topics of (a) ethical considerations for data storage on child labour; and (b) ethical obligations related to dissemination and follow-up with communities and stakeholders.

▶ Interpretation and dissemination checklist

- ▶ Ensure that local community members, policymakers and beneficiaries are given the opportunity to discuss research findings and recommendations via workshops led by the data analysis team.
- ▶ Ensure that researchers are accountable for incorporation of the inputs received and acknowledge all those who contributed to the research and who wish to be included publicly.
- ▶ Review findings with relevant members of the community for feedback before sharing publicly.
- ▶ Discuss the dissemination plan with proxies, participant advisory groups, and local leaders as necessary before finalization to ensure that the safety of children – both those who participated in the research and those currently engaged in child labour in the community - is upheld during dissemination.
- ▶ Avoid risk of stigmatizing children or communities by naming the groups or populations associated with potentially stigmatizing practices, their prevalence, or behaviours.
- ▶ Avoid risk of disclosing recruitment or exploitative practices that might help replicating them in different contexts.

? Guiding Question 11.
# What are the ethical considerations for data storage?

Research on child labour remains sensitive in many countries. Care should be taken to ensure that data are handled sensitively and confidentially by the research team.

All team members must be trained to anonymize interviews and maintain security for all participants and interview data (paper, electronic, recordings) – including all personal information. Personal information refers to all information "relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural, or social identity" (European Parliament 1995).

NSO considerations: Data-sharing

▶ Data-sharing agreements or memoranda of understanding can be used for information-sharing with government agencies and non-governmental organizations, as pursued by Country E.

▶ Data can usually only be published in aggregate form due to confidentiality provisions in national statistical laws. In some countries, anonymized microdata can be publicly shared in data repositories.
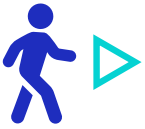
▶ Actions

▶ Develop data security measures that detail how participant information will be anonymized and kept secure.

▶ Only collect data that are essential for the research project (when information is not needed or is not essential, it should not be collected).

▶ Replace names with code numbers and redact place names and other data that might lead to reidentification, which may include profession, education, gender, age, religion, ability status or ethnic background.

▶ Store code keys or code links to participant information in a password-protected system with limited access to only necessary personnel. Encrypt files to add an extra layer of security.

▶ Avoid using third-party platforms, such as transcription or coding services, that store data on another server.

▶ When appropriate, destroy data after a set period (that is specified during the ethical review process) after publication.

- ▶ Use an anonymized code system for anonymizing data.
- ▶ Establish and outline data security processes and storage mechanisms.
- ▶ Keep identifying information separate from data (for example, informed consent forms).
- ▶ Use secure storage (for example, encryption) – not email or cloud storage – with hard copies locked away.
- ▶ Use fake names or participant codes during write-up so no one is individually identifiable, including ensuring that location or other descriptions mean participants remain unidentifiable.

? Guiding Question 12.
What are the ethical obligations related to dissemination and follow-up with communities and stakeholders?

The dissemination of research findings entails ethical obligations, particularly the obligation to communicate findings to participants, the local population and relevant organizations, including government representatives. Communication of the findings should be conducted in language that is easy to understand. Because the purpose of research on child labour is to prevent, reduce or respond to exploitation, research findings should be accompanied by concrete and feasible recommendations for policymakers or organizations. Long-term relationships with local collaborators can provide researchers with the opportunity to increase the impact of the study.

When determining which findings to present, do not conceal meaningful data for political reasons (for example, causing political offence to the government) or to avoid upsetting a donor or organization (for example, align findings with outcome desired by the donor or local or international group). Rather, ensure that findings and recommendations are interpreted in a context-relevant way.

### Who interprets the data, and who formulates the findings?

Ethical considerations do not end once data are collected – the information collected must be interpreted and analysed in a way that does not put the respondents (including children or their proxies) at risk and that aims to generate evidence towards the advancement of policies or programmes to address child labour.

To ensure findings and recommendations are interpreted in context-relevant ways, to the extent possible, the data analysis team should involve local community members, policymakers and beneficiaries in discussions on the findings and recommendations. This is especially important for studies aiming to build child labour indicators in line with international standards and national legislation – which will require review by both international and national stakeholders working on child labour.

How can communities and participants be involved in validating findings?

To the extent possible, members of the target communities should be involved in the development of the final interpretation of the findings and recommendations to offer input and identify phrases or interpretations that could cause harm to participants or the beneficiaries.

Furthermore, reports should always include a methodology section detailing not only the research tools, study sample and locations (when possible) – but should also include an explanation of the key ethical considerations taken by the research team in developing the research study design and implementing research. When speaking of the study's limitations, researchers should reference key ethical decisions that may have limited the scope of the study. This also serves as a way to avoid any risk of academic misconduct, as it provides transparency on any potential biases in the findings or gaps due to ethical considerations made by the research team.
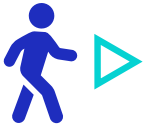
▶ **Actions**

- ▶ Involve key stakeholders with local knowledge of the context, power dynamics and vulnerabilities in the analysis and development of recommendations.

▶ **How**

- ▶ Host validation workshops and sharing with community before publication. This could include child-friendly versions of reports produced, in order to ensure that the children interviewed are included in the process.
- ▶ Provide clarification to stakeholders and beneficiaries on methods and analytical procedures employed in the research.
- ▶ Ensure there is a methodology section that outlines ethical considerations and limitations of the research, and tools in an appendix
- ▶ Avoid breaching individual confidentiality in reporting.[29]

---

29 See ILO Ethical Guidelines for Research on Forced Labour for reference.
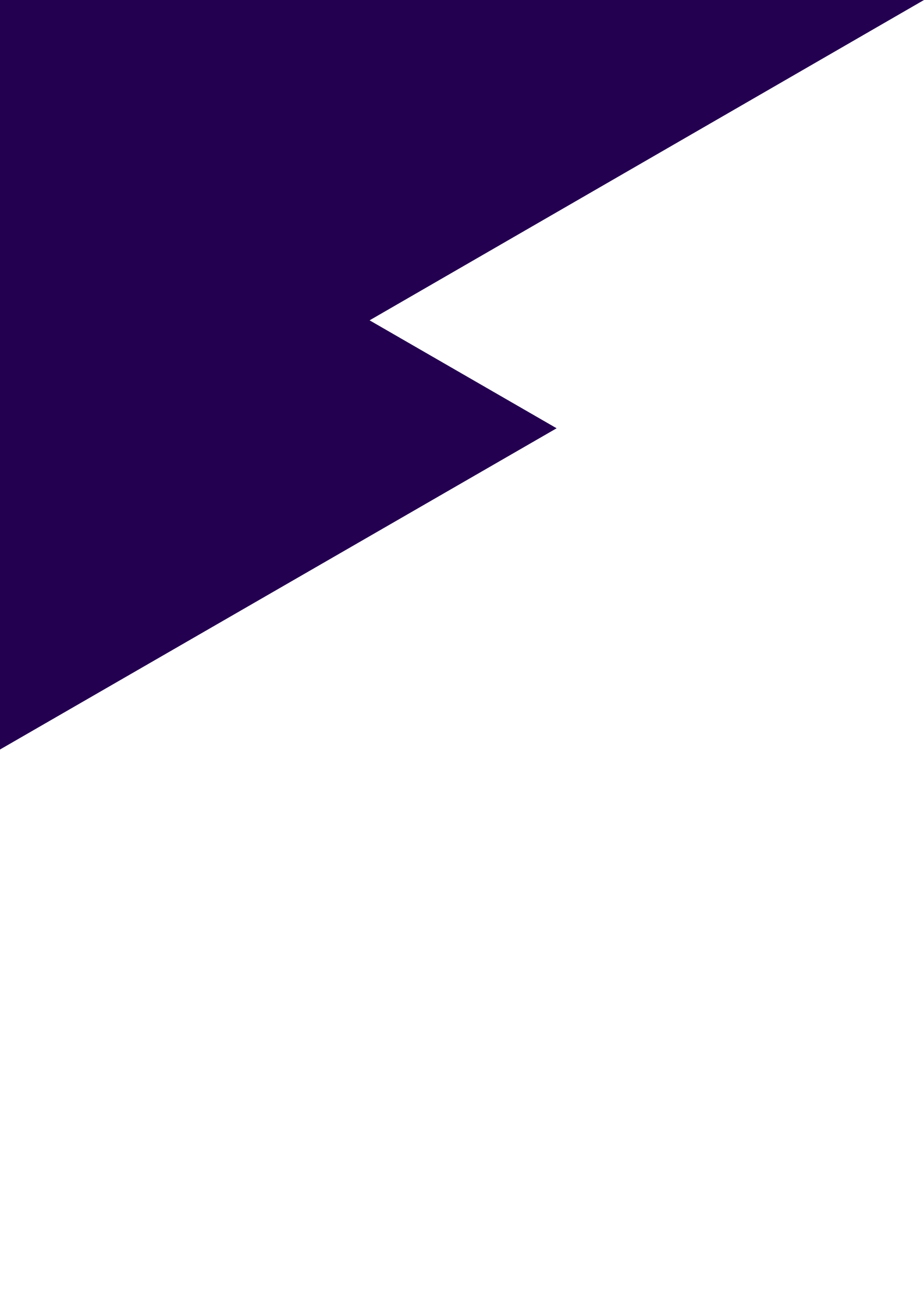
Conclusion

Research, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, has the potential to improve the circumstances for research participants and for the wider population by ensuring findings are used to reduce child labour. However, research can also expose research participants to harms, raising ethical and safety challenges.

Through recommended questions and actions, these guidelines provide contextual guidance for research teams to develop approaches to mitigate risk and gather resources to support the ethical design, preparation, implementation and dissemination of studies on child labour. To implement these guidelines in the most effective way, research teams should engage with well-positioned stakeholders, including local partners and community members. This type of coordination will help create a network for knowledge-sharing, safe and effective referrals, and, thus, strong ethical and safety procedures to support high-quality data collection and dissemination. Each research team is responsible for ensuring that a study is ethical and identifying the ways in which this guidance can be applied to produce ethical and equitable research within their research context.

At the most basic level of ethical research, researchers must adhere to the principle of "do no harm", meaning that researchers shall ensure that study participants are not worse off for having participated in the research. In practice, the research team should work proactively to assess and mitigate risks of harm and implement measures to protect survey participants, research team members, and the community that is under study. This implies understanding the circumstances and factors that increase the risk of being exposed to harm, including the cultural, political, social and economic context, and the exposure of research subjects to potentially traumatic events. Against this framework, it is particularly relevant to consider any legal obligation to report abuses or exploitation and its safety implications, particularly when there are limited or poor-quality support services.

However, other principles can help ensure that research goes beyond the "do no harm" principle and maximizes the potential benefits of the research to study participants. These are as follows.

▶ **Respect for autonomy of participants.** Each research participant's autonomy and decision-making should be respected, and those with different capacities protected. Upholding the dignity of participants, whether they be adults or children, involves accepting their decision, when fully informed, to participate in the research or not and to withdraw at any moment. Recall that children have a right to express their own views in all matters affecting them, and their views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.[30]

▶ **Informed consent.** Informed consent procedures should be applied that ensure research study participants clearly understand the study and provide their consent without any duress, inducement or pressure. Informed consent is usually – though not exclusively – obtained from those aged 18 years and older, and procedures for obtaining it must ensure that participants understand the consent language, know they can decline for any reason, and comprehend their right to withdraw their consent at any time without giving reason and without fear of negative consequences. For children below 18 years, it is recommended whenever possible or appropriate to gain informed consent from a parent or legal guardian and to gain informed assent from the child using age-appropriate language.

▶ **Beneficence and non-maleficence.** Ethical and safety protocols should be guided by the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, which requires researchers to maximize the benefit of the research and minimize potential risks of harm, including physical, legal, economic, psychological or social harm, to study participants and researchers. If harm is possible, researchers should consider not proceeding with the research. The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, even when it is not simple or clear.

▶ **Equitable treatment of study participants.** Equitable treatment of study participants starts at the very beginning of the research and should be ensured throughout the study. While individuals should be sampled based on whether they meet the research inclusion and exclusion criteria, in accordance with the research objectives, ethical considerations at the research and sampling design stage can limit bias and discrimination. At the data collection phase, the selection of a safe location for an interview, and attention to circumstances such as gender or disability, are elements that can contribute to equitable treatment of research participants. At the data analysis phase, to the extent possible, members of the target community should be involved in the final interpretation of the findings and recommendations to offer input and identify interpretations that could cause harm to study participants or beneficiaries. The dissemination of research findings also entails ethical obligations, particularly the obligation to communicate findings to study participants, the local population and other stakeholders. The communication of the findings should be conducted in a language that is easy to understand.

▶ **Confidentiality.** Confidentiality and data protection should be maintained to ensure that study participants' identities are concealed.

---

30 See Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

▶ **Transparency.** Research methods should be transparent, and findings should faithfully represent an unbiased and accurate interpretation of the data without causing harm to the study population. The information should be interpreted and analysed in a way that accurately represents the situation, does not put the respondents at risk, and contributes to the advancement of interventions that address child labour and forced labour.

The above elements shall be reflected in written ethical and safety protocols describing the main protective strategies for study participants and research team members throughout each research phase. Ethics protocols are specific to children, local contexts and populations, as well as the specific study. Examples of such protocols are not given to provide "model answers"; instead, we list key questions and critical steps and processes that should be considered when carrying out a study on child labour. The most effective ethical protocol needs to be locally informed, and it is best practice for research ethics protocols to be submitted to local ethical review boards, or institutional review boards, so that ethical risks are considered by a third party not involved in the research. In addition to ensuring that research is conducted according to high ethical standards, ethics approval also gives the research local and international credibility and ensures that results will be eligible for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Ensuring that ethics is mainstreamed in the research process from its design to the communication of results requires investment in both time and financial resources. However, this investment will not only avoid any harm to research subjects and research team members; it will also contribute to the quality of the research, improve the circumstances for research participants, and help ensure that findings are used to reduce child labour.

▶ References

Asadullah, Niaz, Elisabetta De Cao, Fathema Khatoon, and Zahra Siddique. 2021. "Measuring Gender Attitudes Using List Experiments." *Journal of Population Economics* 34: 367–400.

Blagbrough, Jonathan. 2020. *Children Serving Children: Exploring Relations between Child Domestic Workers and the Children of Employing Families in Mwanza, Tanzania*. Children Unite. Available at: https://www.childrenunite.org.uk/_files/ugd/e6fe93_e7a02e38feb94d9eb65b123845dfdfb5.pdf.

Devries, Karen M., Jennifer C. Child, Diana Elbourne, Dipak Naker, and Lori Heise. 2015. "'I Never Expected That It Would Happen, Coming to Ask Me Such Questions': Ethical Aspects of Asking Children about Violence in Resource Poor Settings." *Trials* 16: 516.

Durham University Centre for Social Justice and Community Action. 2011. *Community-Based Participatory Research: Ethical Challenges*.

Dziadula, Eva, and Danice Guzman. 2020. "Sweeping It under the Rug: Household Chores and Misreporting of Child Labor." *Economics Bulletin* 40 (2): 901–905.

ECPAT International. 2019. *Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children*. Available at: https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Guidelines-for-Ethical-Research-on-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-ECPAT-International-2019.pdf.

European Parliament. 1995. Chapter 1, Article 2a of European Parliament and Council Directive 95/46/EC. *Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals regarding the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data*. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A31995L0046.

Galdo, Jose, Ana C. Dammert, and Degnet Abebaw. 2019. *Child Labor Measurement in Agricultural Households: Seasonality, Proxy Respondent and Gender Information Gaps in Ethiopia*. IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

———. 2020. *Gender Bias in Agricultural Child Labor: Evidence from Survey Design Experiments*. IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

Graham, A., M.A. Powell, D. Anderson, and R. Fitzgerald. 2013. *Ethical Research Involving Children*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti.

ILO. 2003. "Ethical Considerations When Conducting Research on Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labour." In *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)*.

———. 2004a. "Instrument for Psychosocial Assessment of Child Workers: Background & References." In *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)*.

———. 2004b. "The School Based Monitoring System." In I*nternational Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)*.

———. 2005. *Ethical Considerations When Conducting Research on Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Nepal, 2005*. Available at: http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_1341/lang--en/index.htm.

———. 2022. *Child Labour Stand-alone Surveys: Model Questionnaire*. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/child-labour/publications/WCMS_844271/lang--en/index.htm.

———. n.d. "What is Child Labour." In *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)*. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm.

ILO and UNICEF. 2005. *Manual on Child Labour Rapid Assessment Methodology.* Available at: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_1819/lang--en/index.htm.

International Cocoa Initiative. 2021. *Effectiveness Review of Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems in the West African Cocoa Sector.* Available at: https://clmrs.cocoainitiative.org/.

Janzen, Sarah A. 2018. "Child Labor Measurement: Whom Should We Ask?" *International Labor Review* 157 (2): 169–191.

kNOwVAWdata, UNFPA, UN Women, and WHO. 2020. "Decision Tree: Data Collection on Violence against Women and COVID-19." Available at: https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/decision-tree-data-collection-violence-against-women-and-covid-19.

Lahman, Maria. 2008. "Always Othered: Ethical Research with Children." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 6 (3).

Lichand, Guilherme, and Sharon Wolf. 2022. *Measuring Child Labor: Whom Should Be Asked and Why It Matters*." Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4125068.

Mapatano, Jérémie. 2019. *When You Become Pombe Yangu (My Beer): Dealing with the Financial Expectations of Research Participants*. The Bukavu Series. Available at: https://www.gicnetwork.be/when-you-become-pombe-yangu-my-beer-dealing-with-the-financial-expectations-of-research-participants/.

Morrow, Virginia. 2013. "Practical Ethics in Social Research with Children and Families in Young Lives: A Longitudinal Study of Childhood Poverty in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India), Peru and Vietnam." *Methodological Innovations Online* 8 (2): 21–35.

NORC. 2020. *NORC Final Report: Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana*. NORC at the University of Chicago. Available at: https://www.norc.org/PDFs/Cocoa%20Report/NORC%202020%20Cocoa%20Report_English.pdf.

O'Kane C., and O. Barros. 2019. *It's Time to Talk! Children's Views on Children's Work: Lessons Learned from a Global Participatory Research Project*.

Peterman, A., A. Guedes, G. Berman, R. Subrahmanian, and C. Cappa. 2020. *Research on Violence against Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Guidance to Inform Ethical Data Collection and Evidence Generation*. United Nations Children's Fund. Available at: https://data.unicef.org/resources/research-on-violence-against-children-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-guidance/.

Population Council. n.d. "Audio Computer-Assisted Self Interviewing (ACASI)."

Save the Children. n.d. "Safeguarding." Available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/accountability-and-transparency/safeguarding-children.

Terre des Hommes. 2018. *It's Time to Talk! Children's Views on Children's Work*. Netherlands: Terre des Hommes.

———. n.d. "Child Safeguarding Measures."

Wood, Laura C.N. 2020. "Child Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Health: A Practical Review of Factors Contributing to Children's Vulnerability and the Potential Impacts of Severe Exploitation on Health." *BMJ Paediatrics Open* 4 (1): e000327.

World Bank. n.d. "List Experiments." DIME Wiki. Available at: https://dimewiki.worldbank.org/List_Experiments.

Zimmerman, Cathy, and Charlotte Watts. 2003. *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women. Geneva: World Health Organization*. Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42765.

▶ Appendix: Methodology

This research builds on a desk-based and consultative approach with global and country experts and researchers who are well versed in the study of child labour in various contexts. Several methods were used to develop this guidance.

Method 1. Literature review and development of decision tree

> ▶ A literature review was conducted of relevant sources, including those suggested by the ILO, and searches were conducted by the research team, with a focus on guidelines for national surveys.

> ▶ A decision tree was developed to serve as guidance on when to pursue primary data collection on child labour and when not to, with alternative options provided, based on the literature review conducted.

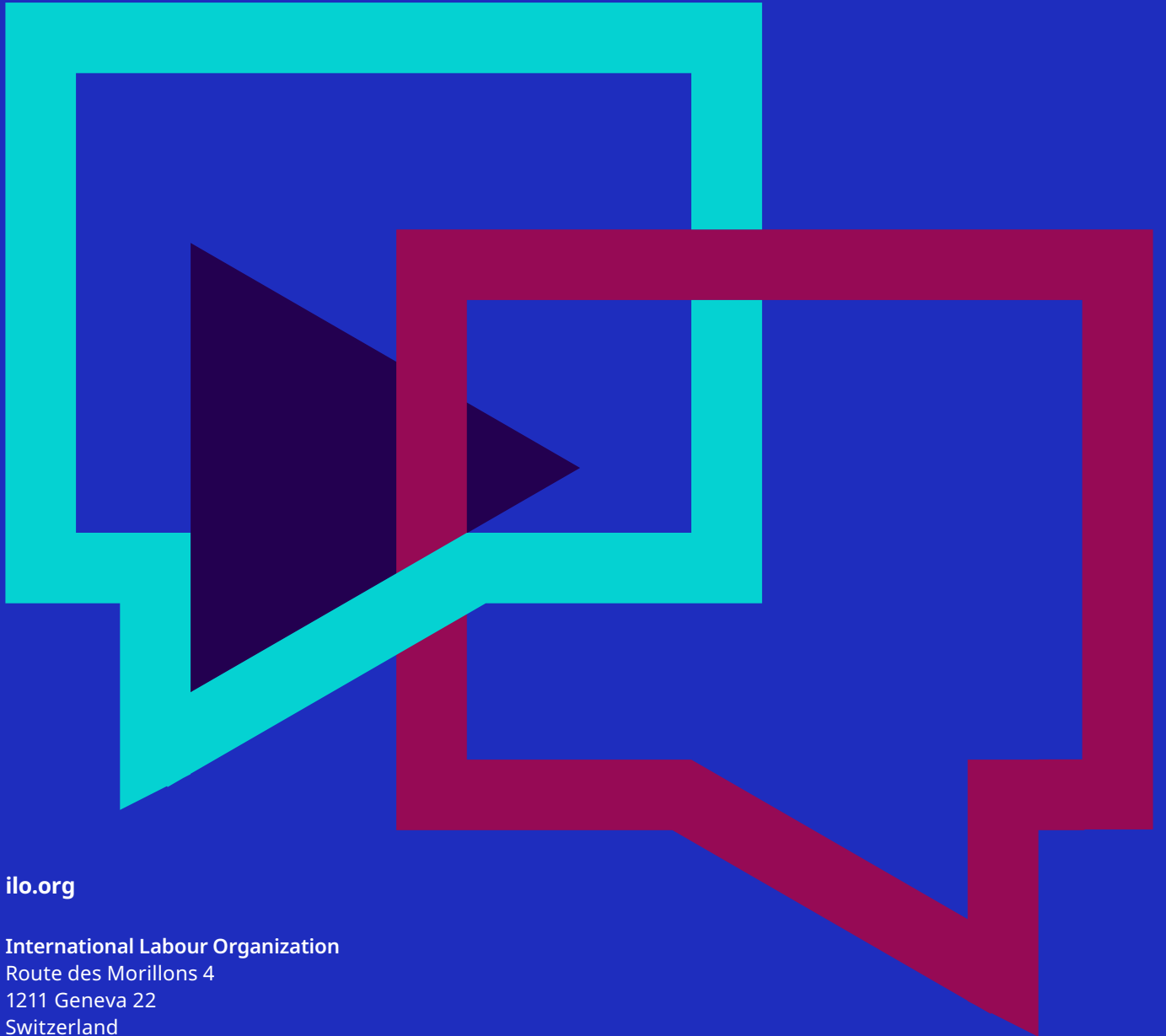## Method 2. Expert discussions at country level

This involved case studies and consultations at the country level with national statistics offices (NSOs). The discussions with NSOs from various countries in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Central America provided information on country-level research practices. These discussions targeted statisticians, qualitative researchers and service providers. Countries were anonymized and are included as case studies in these guidelines.

Findings from these expert discussions were triangulated with the rapid evidence assessment, which provided a contextualized understanding of how research on child labour operates in the field across different contexts. The case studies brought a richer understanding of the variety of complexities and vulnerabilities associated with research on child labour and informed the development of the guidelines by identifying or confirming key areas that required attention. Ultimately, the ethical guidance draws on study participants' feedback, well-informed recommendations, suggested good practices and lessons learned from past experiences. The research team drew lessons and good practices from interviews held with NSOs.

Criteria for selected case studies

The following criteria were applied for selection of case studies:

> ▶ Documented practices of child labour;

> ▶ Types, forms and sectors of child labour defined by the ILO International Conference of Labour Statisticians, from overt to more hidden forms;

> ▶ Relevant research at the country level;

> ▶ Geographical representation and accessibility;

> ▶ Buy-in and existing expertise from a core number of local stakeholders.