

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7628>



Brazil

Almost 20% of children are in paid work in Brazil

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV567 - April 2022 -

Publication date: Saturday 23 April 2022

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A joint study by Brazilian academic Guilherme Lichand, who works at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and his colleague Sharon Wolf, from the University of Pennsylvania, USA, measured the underreporting of child labour in Brazil and concluded that the actual number of children aged 7-14 working in the country is seven times higher than official statistics show.

The most recent official data from the World Development Indicators (WDI), a database of international statistics compiled by the World Bank, showed that in 2015, 2.5 per cent of Brazilian children in this age group were working, equivalent to 738,600 people. But the study by Lichand and Wolf concluded that the real percentage was 19.15 per cent, or approximately 5,650,000 children, according to research reported in the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper.

Tackling study bias

The official figures of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are based on surveys conducted in several countries. "These surveys usually follow a methodology in which adults are first asked if their children work. If they lie, out of fear of punishment, embarrassment or any other reason, the final statistics show a smaller number," Lichand explained.

The parameters used by the researchers to define child labour follow the definitions of international agencies, such as Unicef, and were developed with children in school.

"If the child is under 12 years old, whatever the number of hours worked, and receives some kind of remuneration for it, it is already considered child labour. If the child is between 12 and 14, it is defined as 14 hours a week or more, as long as they are not in hazardous occupations. From the age of 15, it is 41 hours," Wolf explained.

The study reveals that when children are asked directly whether they do any paid work, the response tends to be much higher than when responsible adults are asked the same question.

Researchers were able to test this difference on the basis of responses from children and parents working in cocoa harvesting in rural Côte d'Ivoire in a study conducted by an NGO. In this case, where 2,000 people were interviewed, the children were found to be telling the truth, as the NGO's results differed by just under one percentage point from the children's answers.

From data collected by the World Bank in 97 countries, the researchers were able to establish a relationship between the parents' reports and the closest match to reality. The model considers items such as the percentage of children engaged in hazardous activities in each country and the number of hours worked.

As the incidence of working children is higher among students in rural schools than in urban schools, it was also necessary to consider in the calculations whether the responses came from more or less urbanised areas.

For Bolsonaro, it is good that children work

In the case of Brazil, as one of the few countries in the study to conduct any research asking children this question, it was possible to compare the results obtained through the World Bank database with those from the national survey.

In the official 2019 Brazilian survey, 15% of 10- and 11-year-olds said they had worked for at least one hour a week. If children outside the school system are considered, that percentage can be as high as 19%, which is in line with the survey result, Wolf added.

"It's not about occasionally helping parents with household chores, it's about paid child labour. When President Jair Bolsonaro, for example, says that it is good for children to work, what kind of work is he talking about? He is not clear in his definition, and that slows down the discussion," the researcher explained.

The cocoa sector was chosen in Brazil to collect data because it has historically had a strong presence of child labour. The organisation Papel Social was contracted in 2018 by the ILO to investigate the activity in some areas in the interior of Brazil.

"There are about 7,000 children and adolescents working in the cocoa chain, mainly in the states of Bahia and Pará. The phenomenon is the same in palm oil, tobacco and gypsum," explained Papel Social's executive director, Marques Casara.

Source [La Diaria \(Uruguay\)](#).

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