



**ALLIANCE**

# Regional brief for the Arab States

**2017 GLOBAL ESTIMATES OF  
MODERN SLAVERY AND CHILD LABOUR**

# Introduction

In 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 17 interrelated goals and 169 associated targets to guide global development. SDG Target 8.7 calls on governments to:

*Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.*

The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour<sup>1</sup> and the 2016 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery<sup>2</sup> chart how far we must still travel to honour these commitments. This brief summarises key results from the global estimates for the Arab States region. It also addresses main regional policy priorities on the road to the 2025 date for ending child labour and the 2030 date for eradicating modern slavery.

## Child labour: main facts and challenges

Table 1

### Key statistics: child labour

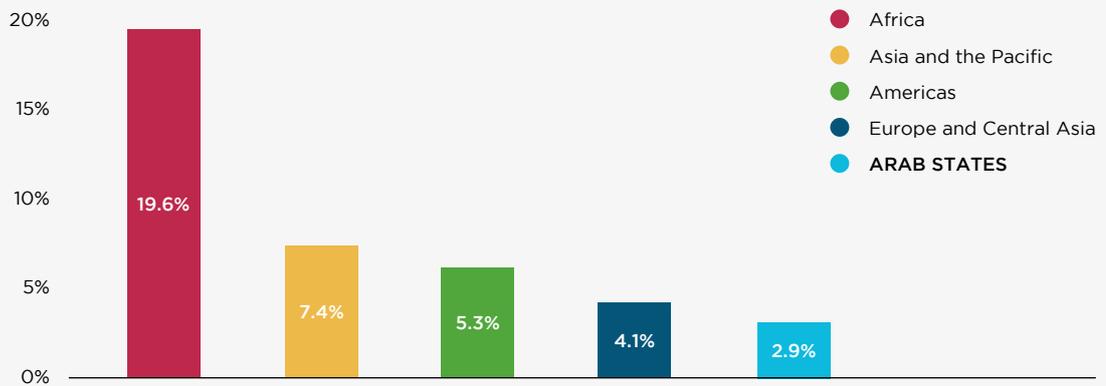
Number (000s) and percentage of children in child labour and hazardous work, by age range, Arab states region, 2016

	Children in child labour		Children in hazardous work		
	Number (000s)	%	Number (000s)	%	
<b>World</b>	151 622	9.6	72 525	4.6	
<b>Arab states, total</b>	1 162	2.9	616	1.5	
<b>Arab states, age</b>	5-11	441	1.9	124	0.5
	12-14	374	4.2	145	1.6
	15-17	347	4.0	347	4.0

The global estimates indicate that about 3 per cent of all children in the Arab States region are involved in child labour (Figure 1). About half of these children (1.5 per cent) are in hazardous work. Both prevalence numbers are the lowest in the world when compared to other regions. In absolute terms, 1.2 million children in the Arab States are in child labour and 616 thousand are in hazardous work.

Figure 1

**Percentage of children in child labour, 5-17 years age group, by region, 2016**

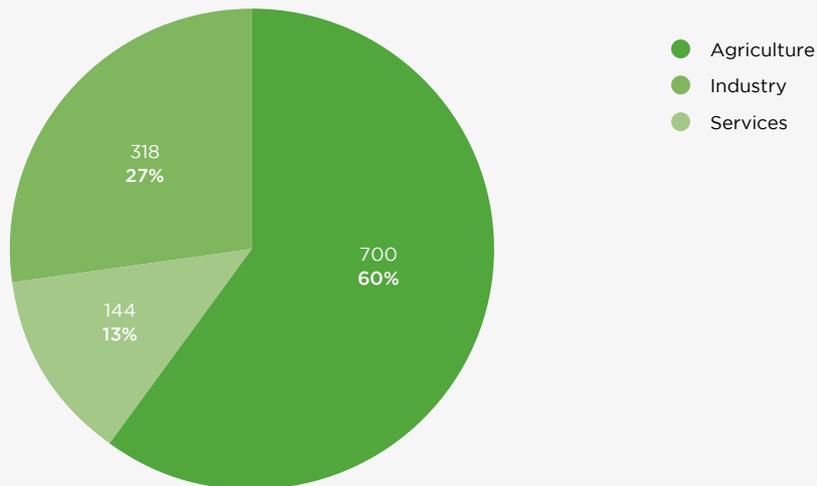


**The estimates also highlight that:**

*Agriculture predominates.* Agriculture accounts for 60 per cent of all child labour and for 700 thousand children in absolute terms (Figure 2). Child labour in agriculture relates primarily to subsistence and commercial farming and livestock herding; most is unpaid and takes place within the family unit. Of the remaining children in child labour, 318 thousand (27 per cent) are found in the services sector and 144 thousand (13 per cent) are found in industry.

Figure 2

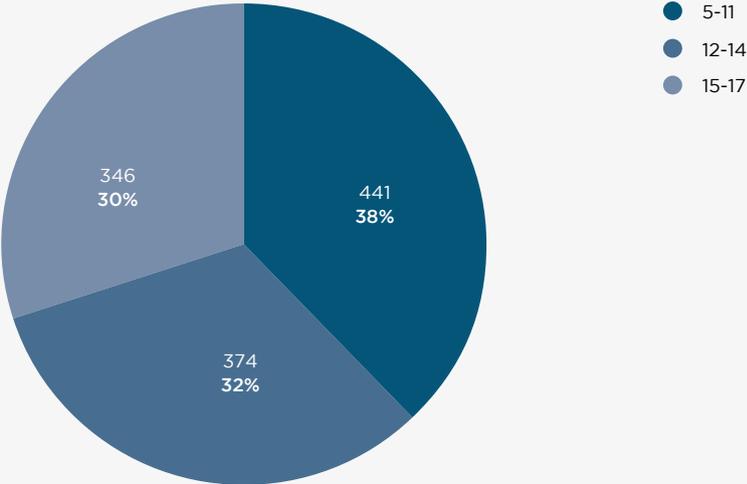
**Percentage distribution and number (000s) of children in child labour, by branch of economic activity, Arab States, 2016**



All age groups are concerned by child labour. The age breakdown of children in child labour indicate that 38 per cent of all those in child labour are in the 5-11 years age bracket, 32 per cent are aged 12-14 years and 30 per cent fall into the 15-17 years age range (Figure 3). This age profile of child labour in the Arab States is “older” than in other parts of the world.

Figure 3

**Percentage distribution and number (000s) of children in child labour, by age group, Arab States, 2016**



Children in the oldest age group are the largest group in hazardous work. All children must be protected from hazardous child labour – children facing hazardous work conditions directly endangering their health, safety and moral development. Four per cent of children aged 15-17 years (347 thousand in absolute numbers) are in hazardous work. While younger children in hazardous work are more likely to be in agriculture, children aged 15-17 are not only in agriculture (46 per cent), but also in services (29 per cent) and industry (25 per cent).

# Modern slavery: main facts and challenges

Table 2

## Key statistics: modern slavery

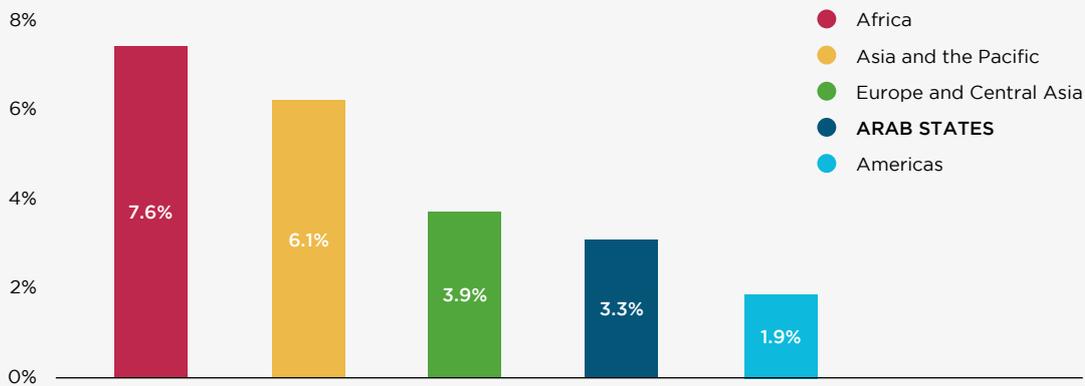
Number (000s) and prevalence (per 1,000) of persons in modern slavery, by age, sex and category, Arab states region, 2016

		(a) Forced labour	(b) Forced marriage	(a&b) MODERN SLAVERY	
<b>World</b>	No. (000s)	24 851	15 442	40 293	
	Prev. (‰)	3.4	2.1	5.4	
<b>Arab states, total</b>	No. (000s)	350	170	520	
	Prev. (‰)	2.2	1.1	3.3	
<b>Arab states, age</b>	Children	No. (000s)	62	73	135
		Prev. (‰)	1.0	1.2	2.2
	Adults	No. (000s)	284	100	384
		Prev. (‰)	3.0	1.1	4.0
<b>Arab states, sex</b>	Male	No. (000s)	278	35	313
		Prev. (‰)	3.3	0.4	3.7
	Female	No. (000s)	64	138	202
		Prev. (‰)	0.9	1.9	2.8

The global estimates for 2016 indicate that there were a total of 520 thousand victims of modern slavery<sup>3</sup> in the Arab States on any given day in 2016. This translates into a prevalence of 3.3 per 1,000 persons, the second lowest in the world (Figure 4). Due to limitations of the methodology and data,<sup>4</sup> these estimates are considered to be conservative. The Arab States region is host to over 25 million migrants most of them hailing from countries of South and South-East Asia whose conditions of work, amid reports of violations of rights, are not captured in these estimates. Nor are incidences of forced marriage in what are typically tribal societies, comprehensively encapsulated.

Figure 4

**Prevalence of modern slavery, by region, 2016**

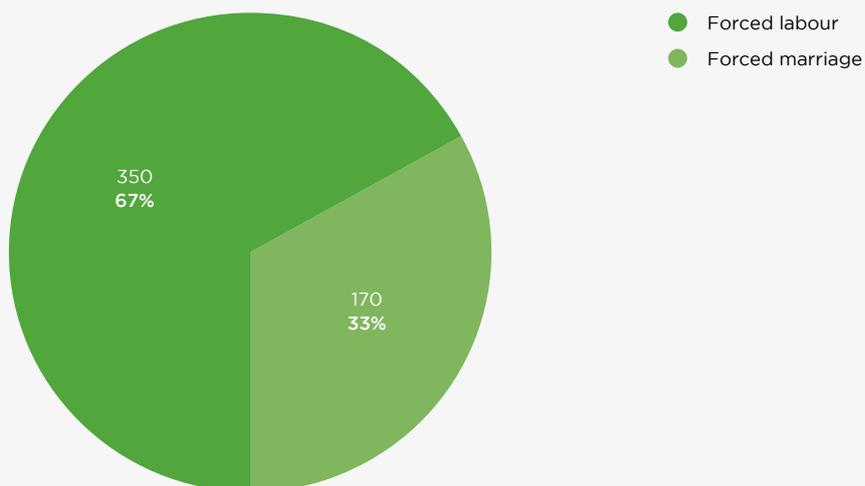


**The estimates further highlight that:**

*The largest share of those in modern slavery were victims of forced labour. About two-thirds (67 per cent) of the total were victims of forced labour<sup>5</sup> and 33 per cent were victims of forced marriage (Figure 5). Forced labour, for the purposes of the estimates, covered three areas: forced labour imposed by private actors; forced sexual exploitation; and State-imposed forced labour.*

Figure 5

**Percentage share and number (000s) in forced labour and forced marriage, Arab States, 2016**



*Many forced labour victims were in situations of debt bondage.* Debt bondage is defined for the estimates as being forced to work to repay a debt and not being able to leave, or being forced to work and not being able to leave because of a debt. Over half (51 per cent) of all victims of forced labour imposed by private actors in the Arab States region were in debt bondage. The share was especially high among those forced to work in agriculture, domestic work, or manufacturing. And, in particular, this share was very high among women (89 per cent), the highest in the world. It is likely that these figures reflect a mix of cases of both traditional forms of bonded labour and newer forms of debt bondage where recruitment fees and agency charges become the debt that binds.

*Modern slavery affected children as well as adults.* One of the most alarming findings of the 2016 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery was the extent to which this crime affected children. About 135 thousand victims in the Arab States were children below the age of 18 years. Children were especially likely to be victims of forced marriage; a total of 73 thousand children were living in a situation of forced marriage in 2016, translating into a prevalence rate of 1.2 per 1,000 children (Figure 6). And, owing to the way children's forced marriage was measured, this figure understated its total extent.<sup>6</sup> Forced labour affected an additional 62 thousand children, a figure that included children in commercial sexual exploitation.

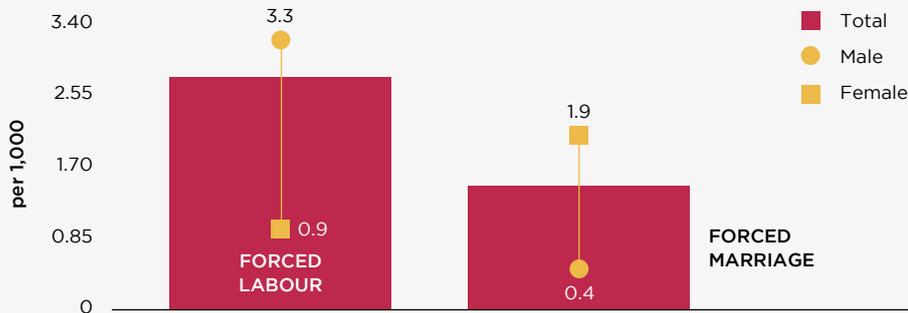
Figure 6



*The prevalence of modern slavery was higher for males.* There were 3.7 male victims per 1,000 compared to 2.8 male victims per 1,000. These overall numbers masked a gap between males and females in forced marriage (Figure 7); females were more than three times more likely to be in a forced marriage than males. The prevalence of forced labour, by contrast, was higher among males. There were also large gender-based differences in the means of coercion in forced labour; sexual violence, for example, was limited almost exclusively to female victims.

Figure 7

Prevalence of modern slavery, by sex, Arab States, 2016



# Policy priorities on the road to 2025 and 2030

The Arab region is unique as a social and economic entity. The resource rich sheikhdoms of the Gulf sit alongside the more populous but naturally less well resource-endowed countries. All the Gulf States are characterised by significant presence of migrant populations that outnumber the local citizenry, with the exception of Saudi Arabia.

Ending child labour and modern slavery will require a concerted effort that addresses a host of issues – economic, social, cultural and legal – that contribute to vulnerability and enable abuses. There can be no one-size-fits-all solutions; responses need to be adapted to the very diverse environments in which child labour and modern slavery still occur. It is nonetheless possible to identify some overarching regional policy priorities emerging from the global estimates and a growing body of research and practical experience.

*Extending social protection systems, including floors.* In the relatively poorer states of Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, the coverage provided by social protection mechanisms is less than adequate. Commensurately, vulnerabilities associated with poverty, sudden job loss, natural disasters, economic crisis and other shocks can force households to resort to child labour as a coping mechanism. These shocks can also play a central role in pushing people into modern slavery. Social protection is critical to mitigating these vulnerabilities. This points to the continued need to build social protection systems, including floors, to help prevent vulnerable households from resorting to child labour and vulnerable people from being caught up in modern slavery.<sup>7</sup> Well-designed social security systems are needed, which cover the national population as well as migrant workers, whose status as temporary expatriate contractual workers inhibits their inclusion in national policy

*Ensuring fair and effective migration governance.* The unique vulnerabilities faced by migrants should be addressed through broader reforms to migration governance designed to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks and social costs of migration. Prospective migrants need adequate preparation prior to departure to smooth the adjustment to their new location; unprepared and ill-informed migration significantly increases the risk of child labour and modern slavery in countries of origin and destination. Ensuring security en route is critical as this a time of maximum vulnerability. Recruitment processes, which have contributed to significant financial woes for migrant workers, leading many into debt bondage need to be addressed and reformed. The compliance of host governments with international conventions governing the rights of migrants generally is necessary for protecting migrants at their destination.

*Protecting vulnerable populations in situations of conflict and disaster.* Aside from the Gulf States all the other countries of the region are acutely affected by conflicts that have drawn in others as well. These fragile situations – characterized by income shocks, a breakdown in formal and family social support networks, displacement and disruptions in basic services provision – create an elevated risk of child labour and modern slavery. Indeed, the global estimates indicate that child labour significantly higher in countries affected by armed conflict than global averages. There are also numerous cases of modern slavery used as a tactic of warfare; armed groups, for example, employing sexual violence and forced marriage as a means to subjugate a population. This discussion underscores the urgent need to enhance responses to child labour and modern slavery among emergency-affected populations. Prevention and protection measures addressing child labour and modern slavery should be systematically included during all phases of humanitarian action. Tools are needed to rapidly assess risks of child labour and modern slavery in order to guide responses.

*Strengthening legislation and enforcement.* The establishment of a legal architecture consistent with international legal standards relating to modern slavery and child labour remains a key priority in a number of Arab States countries. It is also essential that relevant legislation, including labour laws, apply to all workers, including migrant workers that include among their numbers women domestic workers that are as yet not covered under the labour laws. But laws alone are insufficient if not accompanied by adequate enforcement. Despite the enactment of criminal laws on forced labour, slavery and human trafficking in many Arab States, statistics show that the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions is very small relative to the scale of the overall problem. This means that criminal law enforcement needs to be intensified, particularly in response to cases of very severe abuse. It is equally important to strengthen the administration of labour justice, to apply both sanctions for the offenders and remedies for the victims of modern slavery. Systems of inspection also need to be strengthened, to enable effective victim identification in the sectors of the economy where modern slavery and child labour occur.

*Building the evidence base.* While the regional estimates for the Arab States are a major step forward, our information on modern slavery in the region is far from complete. Modern slavery affecting children, including forced recruitment by armed groups, commercial sexual exploitation and child marriage, is an especially important region-wide knowledge gap. There is also a need to more effectively capture specific sub-populations such as adult victims of forced sexual exploitation and victims in conflict contexts. The regional-level information provided by the global estimates needs to be augmented by further research and data collection efforts on all dimensions of modern slavery at the *country level* to generate the country-specific evidence necessary for informed national policy responses. In the areas of both child labour modern slavery, there is also an ongoing need for information about the impact of policies and interventions in order to guide policy choices.

# End notes

1. *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016*. International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva, 2017.
2. *Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*. International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation, Geneva, 2017.
3. In the context of this report, modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery like practices, and human trafficking. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used an umbrella term that focuses attention on commonalities across these legal concepts. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power. In order to make this set of complex legal concepts measurable, the Global Estimates focus on two key forms of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage.
4. For a detailed discussion of this point, see *Methodology of the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*, International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation, Geneva, 2017.
5. Forced labour is defined by ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) as “all work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.” The global estimates of forced labour is based on three main categories of forced labour defined as follows: forced labour imposed by private agents for labour exploitation, including bonded labour, forced domestic work, and work imposed in the context of slavery or vestiges of slavery; forced sexual exploitation of adults, imposed by private agents for commercial sexual exploitation, and all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children; and State-imposed force labour, including work exacted by the public authorities, military or paramilitary, compulsory participation in public works, and forced prison labour.
6. All child marriage is generally considered to be forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties by definition has not expressed full, free and informed consent. However, it is important to be clear that for the purposes of these estimates, the measurement of forced marriage is limited to what was captured by the surveys. That is, forced marriage in the estimates includes all marriages of both adults and children that were reported by the survey respondent to have been forced and without consent, regardless of the age of the respondent. Accordingly, the estimates do not include every instance of child marriage, as child marriage is not currently measured adequately at the scale or specificity required for a global estimate.
7. The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) provides a key framework for ensuring social protection for all.





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AND CHILD LABOUR

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