



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IT'S NOT A GAME

**SAVE THE CHILDREN'S SURVEY ON
CHILD LABOUR IN ITALY**

2023



Save the Children

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Child labour is a global phenomenon affecting many countries, including Italy, that jeopardises the fundamental rights of children and adolescents. It impacts not only their health and psychosocial well-being: children and adolescents who start working before the permitted legal age, without any legal protection, risk having their learning and development path compromised or even interrupted, fuelling a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion continuing even in adulthood.

The lack of a systematic data collection in our country on this topic prompted Save the Children, ten years after its first research, to conduct a new survey on child labour in Italy. The purpose is to give an overview of the issue, understand its characteristics, its evolution over time as well as its connections with school drop-out. Last but not least, to investigate the relationship between child labour and involvement of adolescents in the juvenile justice circuit.

Although the phenomenon of child labour in Italy is not as dramatic as in other parts of the world, the research highlights how the engagement of adolescents in work activities before the legal working age (set at 16 years of age) is widespread in the country and, in a significant number of cases, it threatens their education and personal growth paths.

- One in five (20%) 14-15-year-old children either works or has worked before the legal working age. Among them, more than one in ten started at the age of 11 or earlier. Based on these data, it is estimated that 336,000 minors aging 7 to 15 have experienced child labour – i.e. 6.8% of the age group.
- 27.8% (approximately 58,000 minors) of working 14-15 year olds did jobs that were particularly harmful for their educational development and psycho-physical well-being. Falling in this category are jobs being described as dangerous by the working children themselves and activities performed during night-time or continuously during school time.
- High on the list of sectors most concerned with child labour are catering (25.9%) and retail in shops and businesses (16.2%), immediately followed by work in the fields (9.1%), on building sites (7.8%) and continuous care for siblings or other relatives (7.3%). This last figure does not include small housework carried out as part of shared family responsibilities. New forms of online work are also emerging (5.7%).
- Although 70.1% of the 14-15 year olds who work or have worked did so during holiday periods or on public holidays, labour is intensive in terms of devoted time: more than half of the 14-15 year olds work every day or a few times a week, and about 1 in 2 works more than 4 hours a day.

- Child labour has implications on the learning career: it reduces the time devoted to studying, increases the risk of school failure, limits school attendance, thus often fuelling early school leaving and drop-outs. Almost in 1 in 2 cases (40.4%), being engaged in a working activity undermines the possibility to study, and 14-15 year olds who work fail the school year almost twice as often as their peers who never worked. Temporary school interruptions are also more than double in number in the case of working students.
- Almost 40% of the minors and young adults involved in the Juvenile Justice Services stated that they had worked before reaching the legal working age. One in ten had the first job under the age of 11. Among them, more than 60% were engaged in work activities that were detrimental to their psycho-physical development and well-being.

In light of the data presented above, alarming after a decade of silence and inaction, we renew our call for the immediate adoption of effective measures and interventions to prevent and counteract the entry of minors into the labour market before the legal age. A systemic approach is indispensable, involving the school system and the territory for a capillary and multidisciplinary intervention and connecting institutions, educational and child protection agencies and the Third Sector, aiming at building shared values, finding solutions and implementing synergic actions to protect the rights of children and adolescents.

To this end, Save the Children requests that the Parliament appoints without further delay the Parliamentary Commission for Children and Adolescents, and that this commission promptly initiates a fact-finding investigation on child labour, aimed at adopting measures preventing and combating the phenomenon.

Moreover, it is necessary to plan a systematic and periodic survey on child labour in Italy, its most serious forms and risk factors at the territorial level, to be carried out by ISTAT; to ensure that training is provided to the staff of the agencies in charge of identifying and assisting children aged 16 and under potentially exposed to child labour; to promote students' education on the rights and legislation governing work in Italy within the civic education courses, starting from secondary school; to ensure that municipalities set up an Operational Programme to prevent and combat school drop-out and child labour by activating a care system dedicated to working minors aged 16 and under and their families, acting at the local level through a partnership between the private entities and public social services; to introduce individual support plans for minors in severe poverty - so called "educational dowries" - within the framework of the measures against poverty for families with minor children aimed at ensuring school attendance and educational support.