

Children and Work Research Series: Session 3

The Sense and Non-Sense of the ILO's Global Estimates on Child Labour

Dr. Edward van Daalen

On the 10th of June 2021 the ILO released its latest Global Estimates on Child Labour for the period 2016-2020. For the first time since 2002 – when the first set of global estimates as we know them today were released – the numbers are higher than the previous estimates: 160 million children in child labour compared to 152 million for the 2012-2016 period. Despite what is implicitly suggested in much of the popular media-coverage around the new estimates, the rise in numbers is unrelated to the Covid-19 pandemic, as study does not actually include data from 2020. As has been the case since 2002, the global estimates grab the headlines and set the tone and scope of the discussion for the years to come; it is very hard to find a publication (academic or popular) that does not mention the most recent numbers in its very first paragraph. Besides serving advocacy purposes, the global estimates have become the statistical foundation of the global child labour regime. Several global policy documents adopted in more recent years directly link the global estimates to the objective to eradicate all forms of child labour as legally defined in Convention 138 on the minimum age to employment and Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour. As the glue between the ILO's legal commitment to the elimination of child labour and the global policy agenda that is working towards this end, the global estimates have been elevated to the principal indicator of progress/regress and are largely taken for granted. In this session, we will question and problematise the global estimates on child labour by engaging with their history, their impact on the discussion, the statistical structure behind the numbers, and the problems of obtaining the data. What, for instance, would happen if we asked working children about their work instead of their parents or relatives through standardised household surveys?

Speaker's Bio

Edward van Daalen (edward.vandaalen@unige.ch) is a socio-legal researcher who specialises in international human/children's rights law. He holds a PhD in international public law from the University of Geneva, for which he studied the role of organised working children in the development of international child labour law. His PhD thesis 'Decolonising the Global Child Labour Regime' was recently awarded the 2021 Law and Society Association Dissertation Prize. He has published various innovative chapters and articles in leading human rights journals, including the *International Journal of Human Rights* and the *International Journal of Children's Rights*. He is an organising member of the 'Children and Work Network' and founder of the 'Law and Cinema Club' at the Sciences Po Law School. For his current postdoctoral research project at the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism at the McGill University he critically engages with the objective to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2025 as stipulated in Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)