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KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES IN THE NORTHERN ZONE OF COLOMBIA'S PALM OIL SECTOR WITH REGARD TO CHILD LABOR

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ACRONYMS

CL	Child Labor
CLRISK	Child Labor Risk Identification Model
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DANE	National Administrative Department of Statistics (Spanish acronym)
DCIs	Data Collection Instruments
DNP	Planning National Department (Spanish acronym)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FEDEPALMA	National Federation of Oil Palm Growers (Spanish acronym)
FPS	Family Police Station
FL	Forced Labor
GAV	Gross Added Value
GEIH	Great Integrated Household Survey (Spanish acronym)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICBF	Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (Spanish acronym)
ILO	International Labor Organization
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
MOL	Colombian Ministry of Labor
POA	Partners of the Americas
RA	Rapid Assessment
SIRITI	System for the Registration and Eradication of Child Labor and its Worst Forms (Spanish acronym)
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labor
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund



1. INTRODUCTION

Econometría has been commissioned by Partners of the Americas (POA) to conduct a labor study on the palm oil sector in the northern region of Colombia, to collect information on key actors' understanding, perspectives and actions in relation to Child Labor (CL) through a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) analysis. This study was conducted using qualitative research with a complementary quantitative analysis of secondary data for the selection of the municipalities to be targeted for the study's fieldwork, which was tailored according to the topics and objectives of the study.

To address CL and forced labor (FL) in the agricultural sector, POA is implementing the *Palma Futuro* project, financed by the United States Department of Labor, with the objective of improving the implementation of social compliance systems that promote acceptable conditions of work and reduce CL and FL in palm oil supply chains.

This study was conducted in four municipalities: Puebloviejo (Magdalena), San Alberto, El Copey, and Agustín Codazzi (Cesar), located in the departments of Magdalena and Cesar, which correspond to the regions of Colombia where *Palma Futuro*¹ is implemented.² By obtaining information on KAP towards CL, this study aims to determine i) how stakeholders at the community level behave and act with regard to CL, and (ii) the factors that increase the risks of CL in the target regions of the study. This study is not intended to analyze the prevalence of the phenomenon, nor assess the existence or absence of CL in the sector and regions analyzed.

Palma Futuro will use the information and analysis presented in this report to understand the factors that increase the risks of CL in Colombia's palm oil sector, as well as to inform the project's strategy and activities to better address existing gaps and barriers regarding CL eradication policies.

This study applies a qualitative approach oriented towards analyzing CL using multiple constructions of meaning within the framework of social life. Thus, it seeks to "*understand and deepen the phenomenon, analyzing them from the point of view of the participants in their environment and in relation to the aspects that surround them*" (Guerrero Bejarano M. A., 2016). The results presented in this study are therefore not intended to generalize or extrapolate, but rather to shed light on the realities and perspectives of the people interviewed from municipalities included in the study.

This report contains four sections, described as follows:

1. An introduction that aims to contextualize: 1) the objective and scope of the study; 2) the international and national key definitions and concepts regarding CL and, 3) the prevalence of CL in Colombia.

¹ In Colombia, *Palma Futuro* provides support to five palm oil mills and its supply chain in the departments of Magdalena and Cesar in the northern region of Colombia.

² Section 2.4 presents the methodology implemented for the selection of the study's municipalities.



2. The methodology applied: 1) the KAP model; 2) the qualitative methodology implemented; 3) the data triangulation strategy and, 4) the process for selecting the municipalities included in the study.
3. The principal findings organized by Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices.
4. The conclusions of the study.

1.1 OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Despite Colombia's efforts to prevent and eradicate CL and the progress made in reducing its rate over the past five years, cases of CL continue to be reported in various agricultural activities.³ In addition to this, a key issue faced by Colombia is the lack of available information regarding the incidence of CL in various agricultural chains, its causes and consequences, as well the specific activities in which children and adolescents participate in these sectors.

The main objective of this study is to obtain information regarding KAP in the northern zone of Colombia's palm oil sector, where Palma Futuro is implemented, to determine how stakeholders at the community level behave and act with regard to CL. The project and its stakeholders expect to use the information gleaned from this study to understand the factors that can increase the risk of CL, particularly in the palm oil sector.

It is important to note that this study does not seek to determine the existence of CL within the studied municipalities (Puebloviejo -Magdalena, San Alberto, El Copey, and Agustín Codazzi-Cesar); its findings therefore cannot be representative of these individual municipalities, nor should they be considered representative of the Colombian palm oil sector as a whole. As this study employs a predominantly qualitative methodology, it is essential to clarify its scope and identify its limitations.

Qualitative research focuses on answering the "how?" and "why?" of social dynamics and processes, centering the experience of people, their words, and behaviors. Such information is collected through primary data sources (interviews, focus groups, forums) which are found to best contribute to the understanding of the problem to be analyzed. Therefore, it is not intended to quantify reality nor to make statistical inferences from the information collected.

Qualitative studies employ methods of analysis that are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which the data is collected. They focus on natural, situated practices and interactive, dynamic processes between the researcher and participants. Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies seek to delve deeper into the socio-cultural phenomenon studied based on individual experiences of participants. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from these personal experiences cannot be extrapolated to the larger universe from which the sample was selected.

It is important to note that while the qualitative sample was intentionally selected to best represent the diversity of the universe to be studied, it does not claim the statistical representativeness of a more widely administered survey.

³ https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/ech/trabajo-infantil/bol_trab_inf_2019.pdf



1.2 INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL KEY DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS REGARDING CHILD LABOR

A taxonomical premise for rigorous research requires the definition and enforcement of basic concepts. For the purposes of this study, it is therefore essential to begin with a clearly defined concept of CL that is consistently applied throughout the entire research process. This section provides background information on international and national definitions and legal frameworks that have been considered by the research team to inform the approach and analysis of this study.

The most widely accepted definition of CL, issued by the International Labor Organization (ILO),⁴ is defined as:

“work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.”⁵

This definition emerged from the agreements made during International Conferences of the ILO that gave rise to the fundamental Conventions and Recommendations on the minimum age to work (Convention 138, 1973) and (Recommendation 146, 1973); the worst forms of child labor (WFCL) (Convention 182, 1999) and (Recommendation 190, 1999). In response to this, Colombia issued Law 515 (1999) to ratify and adopt Convention 138, which established the minimum working age as 15. Colombia further enacted Law 704 (2001) to ratify Convention 182 and adopt measures to prohibit and eliminate the WFCL.

An additional measure taken by Colombia to address CL was the approval of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989, through Law 12 (1991). This convention, specifically Article 32, offers protection to children against economic exploitation. In this context, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) issued Resolution 3597 (2013) which outlines the WFCL, classifies hazardous activities, and subsequently designs and promulgates the Public Policy for the Prevention and Eradication of CL and Comprehensive Protection for Working Adolescents.⁶

Under this international framework, and based on the commitments that Colombia has acquired for adherence to key international conventions, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) defines CL as *“all work performed by a child or adolescent who is under the legal*

⁴ As a 'tripartite' agency of the United Nations, the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers from 187 Member States to set labor standards, formulate policies (including child labor policies) and develop programs promoting decent work (<https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang--es/index.htm>)

⁵ <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

⁶ Línea de Política para la Prevención y Erradicación del Trabajo Infantil y Protección Integral al Adolescente Trabajador 2017 - 2027 | Portal ICBF - Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar ICBF



legal minimum age for employment and which, therefore, restrains the education and full development of the child or adolescent; or any work performed by a child or adolescent that is considered to be hazardous or included under the worst forms of child labor” (ICBF, 2023).

Colombian Law 1098 of 2006 (Childhood and Adolescence Code), which establishes the norms referring to the protection and guarantee of children's rights, defines CL as a violation that prevents children and adolescents from fully realizing their healthy development and therefore establishes protection measures to avoid mistreatment, exploitation, abuse and negligence against children, including CL.

This law, in line with Article 7 of ILO Convention 138, prohibits the work of children under 15 years of age, except in cases involving artistic, cultural, athletic, or vocational training programs approved by the competent authority that does not affect their health, integral development, or school attendance. It also establishes that a responsible adult must supervise the work of minors between 15 and 17 years of age, and that work may not interfere with their education or physical and mental development. For cases where these conditions are met without violating their rights, minors who work must receive fair compensation, have access to education and medical care, and be free of conditions that subject them to discrimination or exploitation.

Colombia's definition of CL also includes the concept of extended CL, which refers to children who perform domestic activities for more than 15 hours a week or who accompany adults in work activities such as street vending, bicycle taxis, marketplace or shop work, mechanic work, car washing, and recycling. In addition, it includes penalized confinement, in which children assume, for more than one hour a day and without breaks, roles that are the responsibility of their adult caregivers; this includes caring for other children, older adults, or people with disabilities.

In any case, and regardless of age, children's involvement in dangerous, harmful, or illegal activities that harm their health, safety, or morals, including slavery, use of minors for illicit purposes, prostitution, and commercial sexual exploitation, is also considered to be CL (Colombian legislation and ILO Convention 182).

Under the Colombian regulatory and political framework, there are several constituent elements of CL

- **Age:**
 - » Children under 15 may not work unless they have “authorization from the Labor Inspectorate or the local territorial entity to perform remunerative activities of an artistic, cultural, recreational and athletic nature, which may not exceed fourteen hours per week” (ICBF).
- **Type of activity:**
 - » Without exception, labor activities cannot risk children's health, safety, or morals.
 - » Activities considered under the WFCL (Resolution 3597 of 2013) are prohibited.



- **Time dedicated to the activity (Article 114 Law 1098 of 2006):**
 - » Adolescents between 15 and 17 years of age may only work a maximum of six hours per day, 30 hours per week, and not to continue beyond 6:00 pm.
 - » Adolescents over 17 may work a maximum of eight hours per day, 40 hours per week, and not to continue beyond 8:00 pm.
- Work may not interfere with other rights, especially the right to education, health, recreation, and integral development (Law 1098, 2006).

1.3 PREVALENCE OF CL IN COLOMBIA

For the purposes of follow-up and monitoring of CL, the Colombian National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) has applied a special module as part of its labor market survey (the Great Integrated Household Survey, or GEIH) during the fourth quarter of each year since 2012. The MOL leads the *Information System for the Registration and Eradication of Child Labor and its Worst Forms* (SIRITI), which seeks to identify and provide a comprehensive institutional response to situations of CL in Colombia.⁷

According to the most recent figures reported by DANE (2023), the national reported rate of CL in Colombia during the fourth quarter of 2022 was 3.4%,⁸ consisting of an estimated 369,000 children and adolescents in the country between ages 5 and 17 who reported working at least one hour per week with or without pay. Disaggregating by age range, the CL rate for children ages 5 to 14 was 1.3%, which represents an estimated 110,000 children involved in CL in Colombia. On the other hand, the rate registered for adolescents ages 15 to 17 was 10.3%, which is equivalent to an estimated 259,000 adolescents.

Regarding children ages 5 to 14, it is worth highlighting the downward trend of CL rates in Colombia from 2012 to 2022 (Figure 1). In 2012, the first year in which the DANE began monitoring CL through the GEIH, 463,494 children were engaged in CL, representing a CL rate of 5.8%. In contrast, by 2022, the number of children ages 5 to 14 engaged in CL had reduced to 110,000. This represents a decrease of 76.2%, implying a drop in the rate of CL by 4.5 percentage points.

Similarly, the population of working adolescents⁹ ages 15 to 17 has also experienced a significant decrease since 2012 (Figure 2). In 2012, the DANE estimated the number of adolescents engaged in work as their main activity to be 626,884, representing a CL rate of 23.9%. In contrast, figures reported in 2022 were 259,000, representing an estimated 10.3% of adolescents engaged in work as their main activity.

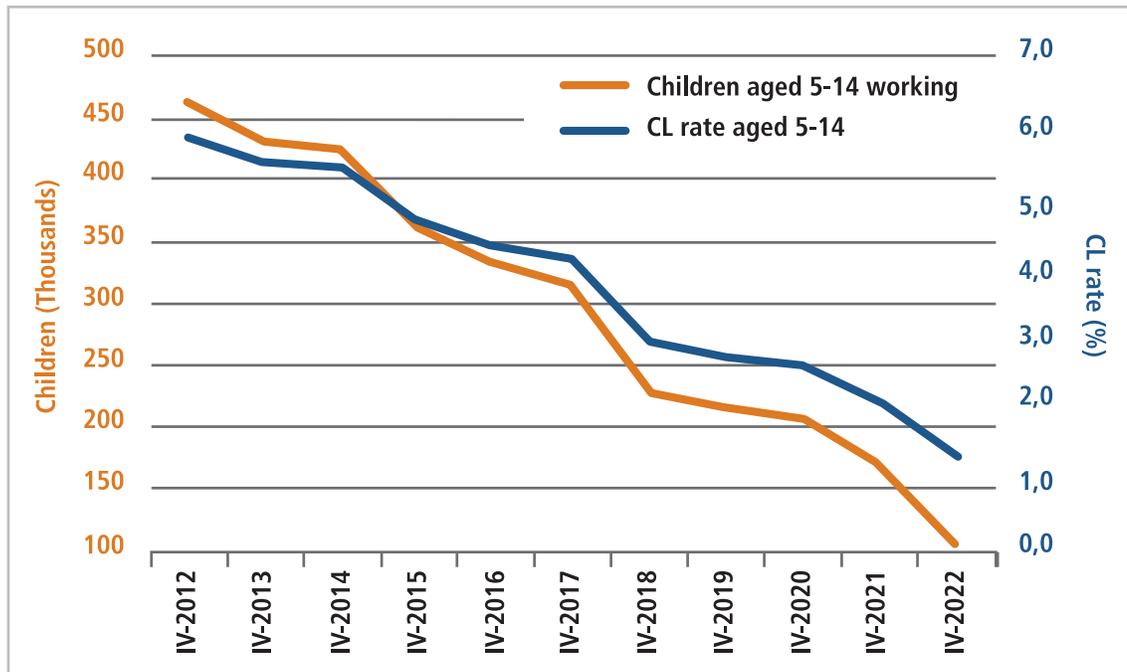
⁷ SIRITI - System for the Registration and Eradication of Child Labor and its Worst Forms (Spanish acronym) (mintrabajo.gov.co).

⁸ According to DANE's methodology, the CL rate is the number of boys, girls and adolescents ages 5 to 17 that are engaged in CL, divided by the total number of children and adolescents of this age group.

⁹ Per Colombian law, minors from 14 to 17 years of age are considered adolescents.

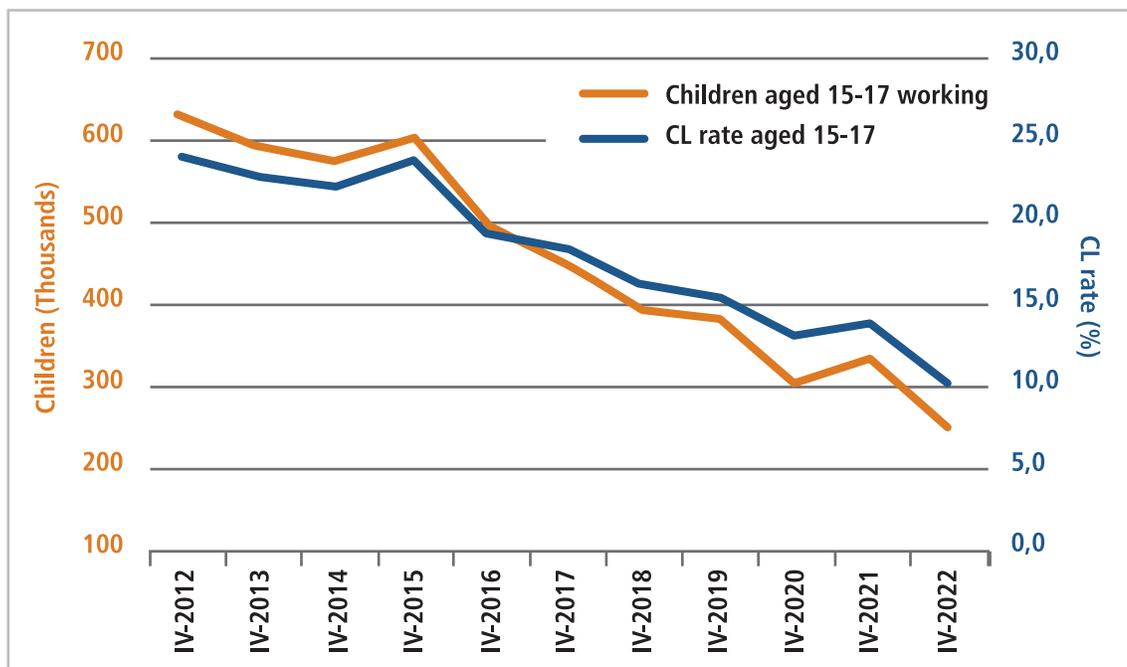


Figure 1 – CL rate and working population aged 5 to 14 in Colombia, 2012-2022



Source: GEIH-DANE

Figure 2 – CL rate and working population aged 15 to 17 in Colombia, 2012-2022



Source: GEIH-DANE



According to the GEIH, in 2022, working children and adolescents (ages 5-17) were concentrated in rural areas (55.6%; equivalent to 205,538 children and adolescents). In addition, the populations with the highest concentrations of CL were among boys (69.5%) and adolescents ages 15 to 17 (70.1%) (See Table 1). The majority of those engaged in CL were attending school at the time of the survey (56.9%), but also happened to be working to help their families for economic reasons (33.3%). In addition, DANE reported that the prevalence of CL in the capital cities of Cesar and Magdalena (the departments included in this study) was relatively low, at 1.5% in Valledupar and 1.7% in Santa Marta.

Table 1. Selected features of working population aged 5 to 17 in Colombia, 2022

Indicator	Percentage
Urban population	44.4%
Rural population	55.6%
Boys	69.5%
Girls	30.5%
5 to 14 years of age	29.9%
15 to 17 years of age	70.1%
CL rate in Valledupar	1.5%
CL rate in Santa Marta	1.7%
5 to 17 years of age who work and attend school	56.9%
5 to 17 years of age who work to help their families for economic reasons	33.3%
National population from 5 to 17 years of age working	369,383

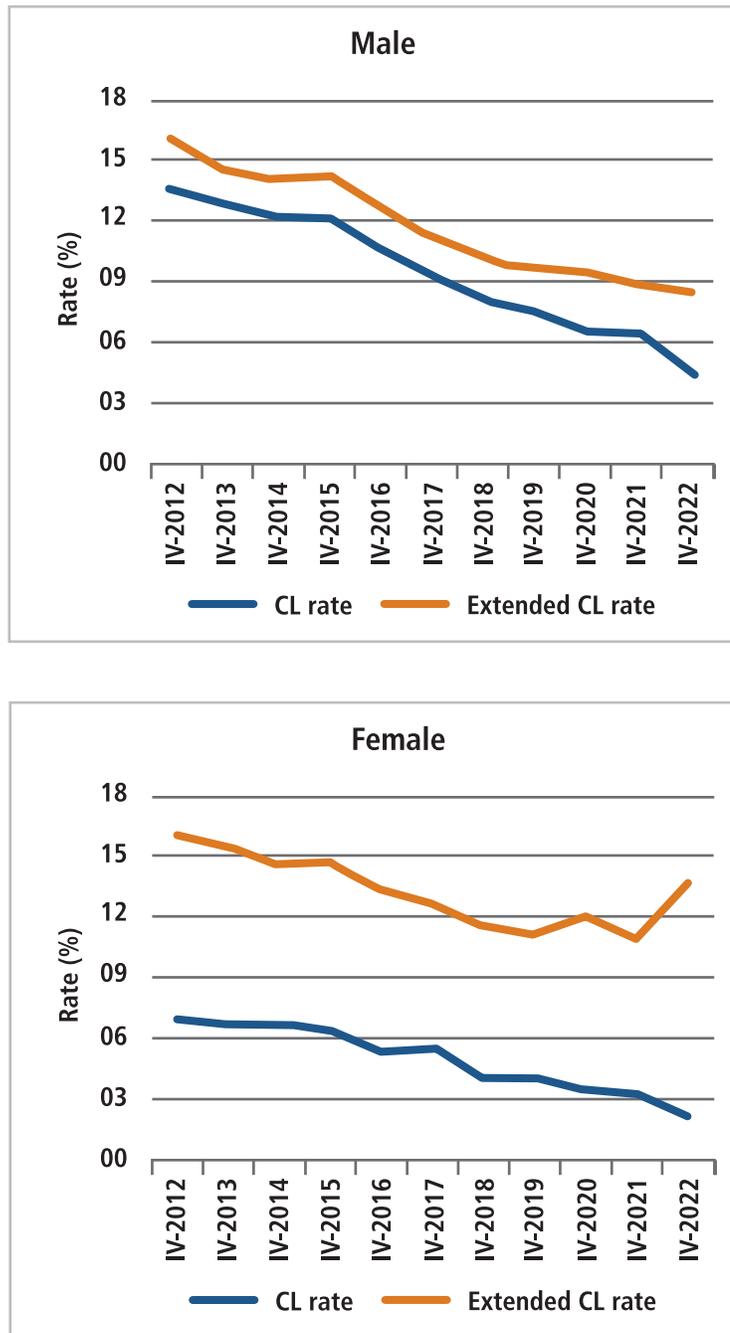
Source: GEIH-DANE

The following Figure shows the patterns of both CL and extended CL¹⁰ rates from 2012 to 2022, disaggregated by sex. In analyzing these graphs, it is possible to see a downward trend in both CL and extended CL rates from 2012 to 2022. Although this is the case for both boys and girls, there are nevertheless important differences to note. For instance, rates of CL are higher among boys than they are for girls, but in contrast, participation in housework is more common among girls than it is for boys. Although housework rates are more stable over time, they experienced an uptick from 2020 to 2021, most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic which forced children to study in their homes and left them more vulnerable to housework.

¹⁰ According to DANE, the extended CL rate results from the sum of children who reported having worked in the reference week, plus the population of children that dedicated 15 hours or more to household activities, divided by the total population of children.



Figure 3 – CL rate and extended CL rate by sex, aged 5-17 in Colombia, 2012-2022



Source: GEIH-DANE



2. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

2.1 KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES MODEL

The KAP model originated in the 1950s and was initially used for research conducted in the fields of family planning and population studies.¹¹ The KAP methodology is applied for the purposes of collecting information on three components: Knowledge; Attitudes and Practices in the context of the topic of interest. These components are viewed as critical for behavioral change models,¹² given that knowledge forms attitudes, and that both knowledge and attitudes are the building blocks through which practices emerge (Ahmad 2015). Consequently, KAP are considered to be the basis for determining human behavior (Liao, Nguyen, Sasaki – 2022).

Within this model, Knowledge refers to what people understand or know about a specific subject; Attitudes are related to peoples' feelings and predetermined opinions towards the subject; and Practices reflect the ways in which individuals demonstrate their knowledge and attitudes through their actions (Kaliyaperumal 2004).

The subject of this study is the phenomenon of CL; the KAP analyses conducted for this study provided information that contributes to a deeper understanding of the knowledge, cultural beliefs, social norms or patterns, and behavioural dynamics of those interviewed, which could either limit or facilitate practices of CL in the selected municipalities of the study.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

As mentioned before, this study employs a predominantly qualitative methodology; known as Rapid Assessment (RA).¹³ The RA model is a systematic approach conducted by a team of researchers which combines multiple methods for data collection and triangulation during analysis. A key feature of the RA model which is not always present in qualitative research methodologies is the attention to feedback, clarification, and verification¹⁴ of data and methodology that is applied consistently throughout the research process (Cole, 2002).

The research team conducted the RA model applying diverse qualitative techniques to identify gaps in KAP that could prevent or facilitate CL, in selected municipalities within the palm oil sector in Colombia (see section 2.4 which describes the process of identification of municipalities for this study). Qualitative data collection instruments (DCIs) applied for this study included in-depth interviews with key actors in palm oil production, as well as with

¹¹ Designing and Conducting Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice Surveys in Psychiatry: Practical Guidance - Chittaranjan Andrade, Vikas Menon, Shahul Ameen, Samir Kumar Praharaj, 2020 (sagepub.com) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0253717620946111>

¹² Behavior Change Models analyses the different factors that could explain human behavior. Social problems in many domains, including health, education, social relationships, and the workplace, have their origins in human behavior. See https://assets.cambridge.org/97811084/96391/frontmatter/9781108496391_frontmatter.pdf

¹³ This methodology has been widely applied in studies of various topics, such as poverty and public health, and has recently been adopted by the ILO and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), who have carried out more than 40 studies using the RA methodology since the late 1990s, mainly related to working conditions and CL in various countries and regions around the world (ILO – UNICEF, 2006).

¹⁴ In this study, feedback was provided during the design and testing of the DCIs. Clarification was also obtained as a result of the pilot test and during the training of field staff. Verification was sought out via ongoing dialogue with participants during fieldwork.



members of the community and local institutional stakeholders. Additionally, focus groups were conducted using participatory group work techniques to identify and understand the extent to which local attitudes lead to CL practices.

The fieldwork conducted for the qualitative exercises (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) began on March 17, 2023, and concluded on March 30, 2023.¹⁵ The following table outlines the use of each DCI over the course of the fieldwork conducted for this study:

Table 2 - Data Collection Instruments coverage achieved

Department	Municipality	Qualitative Data Collection Instruments	Number of exercises
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Adolescents Interviews, female duo	1
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Adolescents Interviews, male duo	1
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Adolescents Interviews, mixed gender duo	1
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Palm oil fruit small producers workshops	1
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Community stakeholders focus group	1
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Public officials focus groups	1
Cesar	Agustín Codazzi	Total per municipality	6
Cesar	San Alberto	Adolescents Interviews, female duo	1
Cesar	San Alberto	Adolescents Interviews, male duo	1
Cesar	San Alberto	Adolescents Interviews, mixed gender duo	1
Cesar	San Alberto	Palm oil fruit small producers workshops	1
Cesar	San Alberto	Community stakeholders focus group	1
Cesar	San Alberto	Public officials focus groups	1
Cesar	San Alberto	Total per municipality	6
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Adolescents Interviews, female duo	1
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Adolescents Interviews, male duo	1
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Adolescents Interviews, mixed gender duo	1
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Palm oil fruit small producers workshops	1
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Community stakeholders focus group	1
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Public officials focus groups	1
Magdalena	Puebloviejo	Total per municipality	6
Cesar	El Copey	Adolescents Interviews, female duo	1
Cesar	El Copey	Adolescents Interviews, male duo	1
Cesar	El Copey	Adolescents Interviews, mixed gender duo	1
Cesar	El Copey	Palm oil fruit small producers workshops	1
Cesar	El Copey	Community stakeholders focus group	1
Cesar	El Copey	Public official focus groups	1
Cesar	El Copey	Total per municipality	6

Source: Econometría

¹⁵ Information on the demographics and characteristics of the municipalities included in the study's fieldwork can be found in Annex 1.



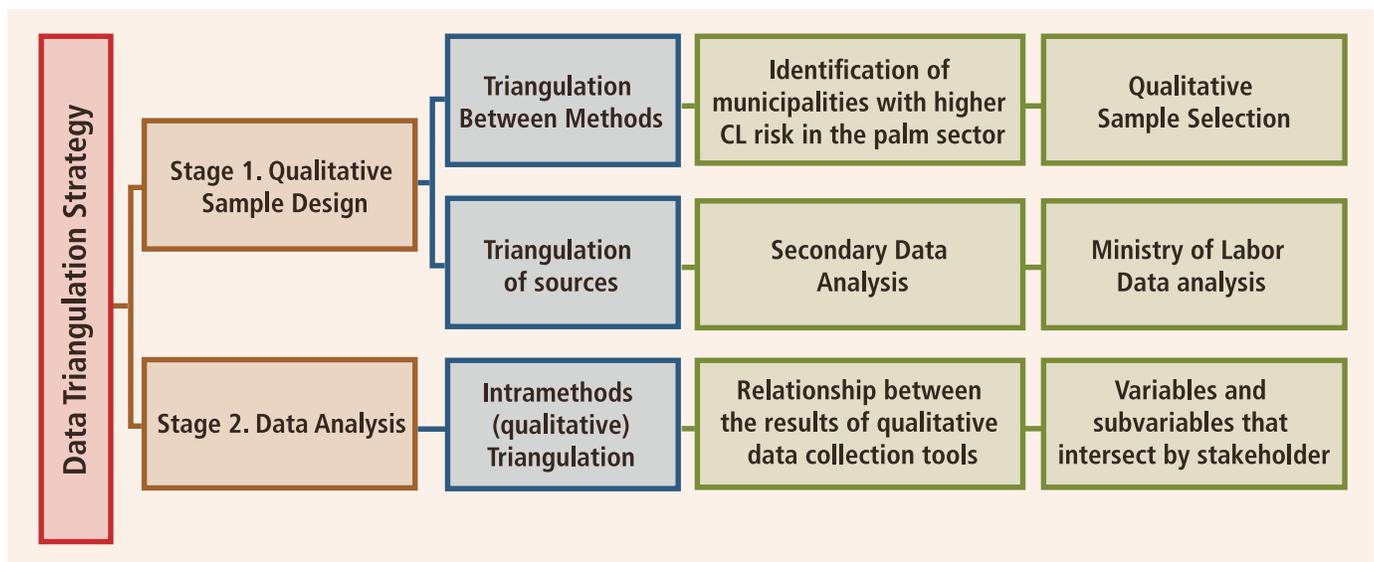
2.3 DATA TRIANGULATION STRATEGY

When applying a mixed methods approach that aims to contribute to the cohesion and robustness of research results, triangulation is a means of validating findings for the verification of said results (Mejia-Perez, 2020). Ensuring high-quality data is crucial for data triangulation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), as it increases the validity of results and identifies potential biases in the research design that should be addressed. For this study, triangulation was carried out for the design of the qualitative sample using multiple methods (qualitative and quantitative) and for the sources of the data collected (primary and secondary).

As such, this study developed and utilized a “nested” mixed methodology, in which the main research method was qualitative, complemented by an analysis of quantitative secondary sources which were used to select the fieldwork sample.

Two stages of triangulation were carried out, each of them linked to the different phases of the research: 1) the design of the qualitative sample, through triangulation between methods (qualitative and quantitative¹⁶) and data sources (primary and secondary information) and, 2.) the analysis of the data, through triangulation between the different DCIs and the diverse stakeholders interviewed (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Data Triangulation Strategy



Source: Econometría

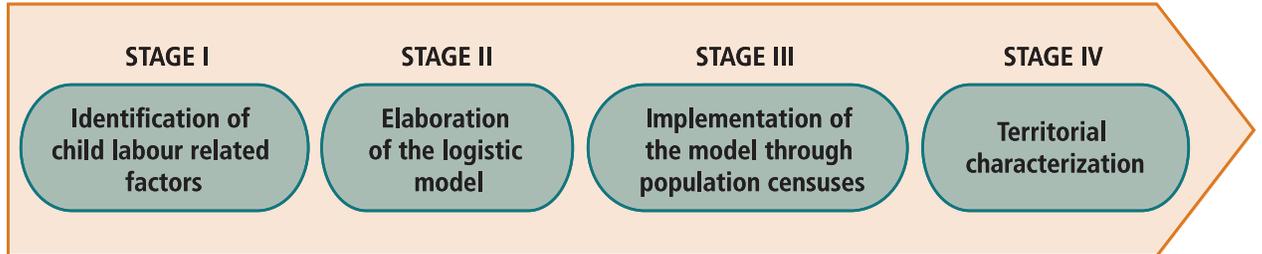
¹⁶ Quantitative methods employed for this study primarily involved desk research through the collection of secondary information obtained from the following sources: DANE, SIRITI, and Planning National Department (DNP).



2.4 IDENTIFICATION OF THE STUDY MUNICIPALITIES

To define the study's municipalities in the departments of Magdalena and Cesar, where Palma Futuro is implemented, the research team used the Child Labor Risk Identification (CLRISK) model created by the ILO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2018). This model consists of four stages, as detailed below.

Figure 5 - Stages of the application of the Child Labor Risk Identification Model



Source: ILO and ECLAC- CLRISK model 2018

The first stage is the identification of risk factors associated with CL. Both national and regional sources were consulted by the research team to increase the relevance and precision of the target selection, considering the effective variation of individual, family and contextual features (development environment).

The second stage consists of estimating a binary choice econometric model with logistic distribution, where the dependent variable takes either the value of 1, if the child engages in CL, or 0 otherwise:

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the child is engaged in CL } (p) \\ 0 & \text{otherwise } (1-p) \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

The risk of CL (p_i) is explained by a vector of independent variables X^{17} that are related through the vector of parameters or estimators β . Within this vector is the set of determinants that correspond to the factors identified in the first stage of the methodology, following the estimate model below:

$$p_i = Pr [Y_i = 1 | x] = F(x_i' \beta) \quad (2)$$

¹⁷ The independent variables in the model were: 1) children's age; 2) children's gender; 3) rural residency; 4) school attendance; 5) parents' education level; 6) parents' marital status; 7) number of children in the household; 8) residence in a capital city; and 9) socioeconomic status.



Where $F(\cdot)$ is a cumulative distribution function that ensures that the probability is between 0 and 1. As the methodology proposed by ILO & ECLAC (2018) assumes a logistic distribution $\Lambda(\cdot)$, the model takes the following form:

$$p = Pr[y = 1 | x] = \Lambda(x' \beta) = \frac{e^{x' \beta}}{1 + e^{x' \beta}} \quad (3)$$

The marginal effects¹⁸ are estimated as follows:

$$\partial p / \partial x_j = \Lambda(x' \beta) [1 - \Lambda(x' \beta)] \beta_j \quad (4)$$

The estimation is made both at the national level and for the departments of Magdalena and Cesar. In this regard, it should be clarified that, when considering the data sample of the GEIH from the whole year, statistical representativeness can be obtained at the departmental (regional) level. However, the "CL module" is only applied in the fourth quarter of each year; as such, four sample years were appended to maximize statistical sampling.

In the third stage, the estimators obtained during the second stage are used to extend the estimations to municipalities by using the available information from the most recent population census. In Colombia, the most recent census is the 2018 National Population and Housing Census, which is available in the form of anonymized microdata on the DANE website.¹⁹

Finally, in the fourth stage, a territorial characterization is carried out to detect the higher or lower presence of the factors associated with the risk of CL at the municipal level, allowing for the identification of municipalities where the qualitative information will be collected.

It's important to mention that only those municipalities involved in palm oil production were considered for this analysis. In Colombia, the National Federation of Oil Palm Growers (Fedepalma) divides the palm oil sector into four zones (north, central, east and southeast). In total, these regions include 21 out of Colombia's 32 departments, containing 160 municipalities. The targeted geographical zone for this study is the northern region, specifically the departments of Cesar and Magdalena.

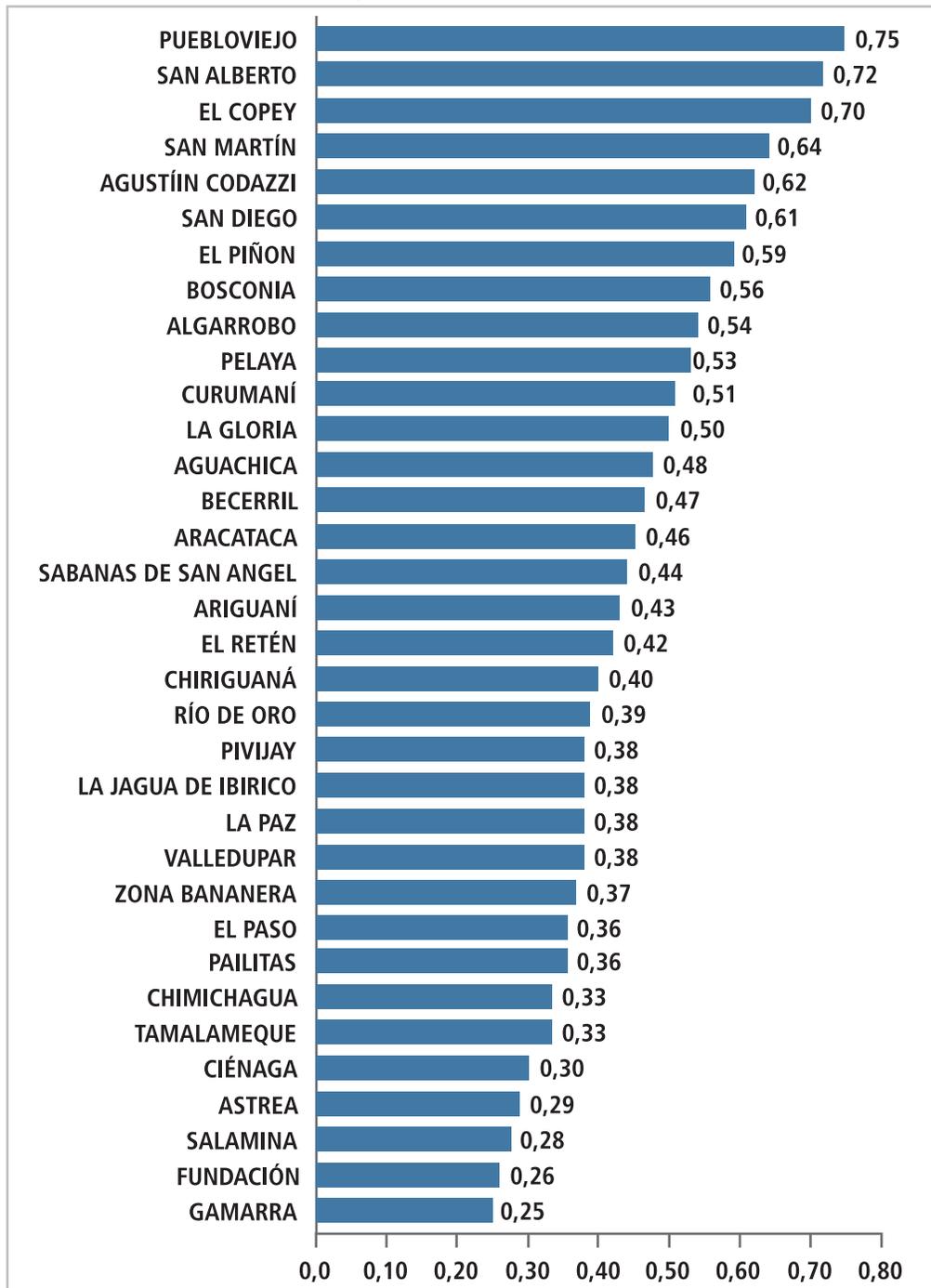
¹⁸ Marginal effects explain how a dependent variable changes when a specific independent variable changes. Binary variables measure discrete change, while continuous variables measure the instantaneous rate of change.

¹⁹ https://microdatos.dane.gov.co/catalog/643/get_microdata



The following illustration shows the score received by each municipality, based on the CLRISK model:

Figure 6 – Selection score



Source: Econometría, using 2017-2020 GEIH and 2018 Census data from DANE.

As seen in the graph above, the four municipalities that have the highest presence of factors associated with the risk of CL are: Pueblo Viejo (Magdalena), San Alberto, El Copey and San Martin (Cesar). The research team selected the municipalities of Pueblo Viejo (Magdalena), San Alberto, El Copey, and Agustín Codazzi (Cesar) for the conduction of the study. San Martin was replaced by Agustín Codazzi because this municipality has a greater presence of palm crops and is more representative of palm-producing communities.



3. FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KAP ON CL

The findings presented below are derived from a qualitative data collection methodology described in Chapter 2. This type of research emerges from the concept of multiple constructions of meaning in the framework of social life, recognizing that *“human acts are not governed by mechanical movements or by an immanent and external order to individuals, but by the meanings that they assign to their actions”* (Guber, 2005).

The analysis of the information on KAP in CL focuses on the understandings, experiences, and perspectives of the participants who were interviewed. In this sense, the information presented in this study is influenced by the unique meaning that each individual attributes to the research topics. Based on this understanding, the KAP analysis was carried out with information collected from a group of participants (as seen in Table 2).²⁰

3.1 KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned in section 2.1, Knowledge refers to what people understand or know about a specific subject. In the case of this study, the analysis of Knowledge is specifically focused on participants' knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of CL. This section presents the principal findings of study participants regarding 1) their knowledge of children's rights; 2) their awareness and recognition of CL; 3) their knowledge of the consequences of CL; and 4) and their knowledge of actions for the prevention of CL.

3.1.1 FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

KEY FINDING 1

In general, the participants interviewed demonstrated an awareness of children's rights, with the most commonly referenced rights being the right to life, the right to education, and the right to recreation.

To begin, the study asked the participants interviewed to share their understanding of children's rights according to the CRC. This was an important starting point to gain relevant information on participants' knowledge as it relates to rights that are inextricably intertwined with CL. Furthermore, the CRC explicitly deems it the responsibility of the state to make these rights widely known,²¹ particularly for children and adolescents, whose knowledge of their rights is crucial for them to feel confident in voicing their concerns in cases where these rights are not respected.

²⁰ The characteristics of study's participants can be found in Annex 2.

²¹ Article 42 of the CRC establishes that those governments that recognize the convention are responsible for making the rights of children widely known, to adults and children alike.



When asked about their knowledge of children's rights, the adolescents interviewed mentioned the following: the right to life, the right to education, the right to health, the right to have a family, the right to express themselves freely and to be heard, the right to have a name and a nationality, the right to a decent home, the right to develop their personality without discrimination, the right to make their own life decisions, the right to recreation, the right to food, the right to a favorable environment for their development, and the right to be treated with respect.

Although most of the adolescents interviewed demonstrated a general recognition of their rights, in one municipality, the participating adolescents had difficulties in conceptualizing the rights of children,²² revealing that they did not recognize themselves as *rights holders*.²³ This is significant, given the evidence that children and adolescents who lack knowledge of their rights are at increased their risk of becoming victims of abuse, exploitation and discrimination. It cannot be assumed that children and adolescent are aware of their rights, or that these rights are guaranteed, simply because they are defined by the law (Children & Young People Now, 2022).

Among the small producers interviewed, the most commonly referenced rights included the right to education, the right to play, the right to care, the right to love, the right to good treatment and protection, the right to food, the right to life, the right to decent housing, and the right to integral development. In one focus group, the right to sport was brought up in the context of the limited opportunities that children have to play sports in rural areas:

"The only sport they see is a cockfight in the yard because there is nothing else around here." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

The unfulfillment of children's rights was also mentioned by small producers in reference to the lower quality of education available in the countryside, consequently resulting in limited opportunities for children:

"You know very well that ... the child has the right to a decent education and in the countryside [this isn't available], so [the party at fault for this] is the state, not us." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Most of the public officials interviewed hold positions that involve protection or surveillance of the rights of children and adolescents, so as expected, their knowledge of children's rights was much more complex, and based on national regulations. As public officials, they acknowledged their role as guarantors of children's rights and their responsibility to convene other public actors for the provision of social services. In addition to the rights referenced by adolescents and small producers interviewed, public officials mentioned the right to protection and other "unnamed" rights, referring to rights that are inherent to human beings, even if they are not expressly established by law.²⁴ These "unnamed" rights included the fact that not all rights have to be explicitly stated for children to be entitled to them. This demonstrated their recognition of the need to protect children above any other interest (best interests of the child principle).

²² The question was ¿Do you know some of the fundamental rights of children and adolescents? Which ones do you know?

²³ This is particularly significant given that 37.9% of this municipality's population is under the age of 20.

²⁴ See Article 94 of the Political Constitution of Colombia.



3.1.2 CL AWARENESS AND RECOGNITION OF CL ²⁵

KEY FINDING 2

Knowledge of CL varied among study's participants. Cultural norms, economic need, legal regulations, and knowledge of legal frameworks all influenced these perspectives; of those interviewed, public officials exhibited more clarity of knowledge regarding norms on CL.

After discussing their knowledge of children's rights, the actors interviewed were asked to share more specific information on their understanding of CL. Based on their answers, the research team identified that most of the study's participants possessed a basic understanding of concepts related to CL; however, as expected, the depth of this knowledge varied among the different groups of informants.

The adolescents interviewed associated CL with aspects such as dropping out of school, working for their families out of economic necessity, or as a compulsory practice imposed by adults (i.e., associated with exploitation). Some expressed the view of CL as a voluntary practice that adolescents can engage in with their parents' authorization.²⁶ None of the adolescents interviewed, however, referred to legal aspects of CL, such as minimum age, hours worked, or type of activity.²⁷

In analyzing a specific response of one of the adolescents interviewed, it is evident that they viewed CL as a negative practice:

"it is something that should not happen, because [children] should only be studying,"
(Interview, Male Adolescents, 2023).

One of the female adolescents interviewed echoed this sentiment, making a clear connection between CL and the violation of children's rights:

"They are violating a right... which is the right to education, because if [children] work, many do not have the time to work and at the same time study." (Interview, Female Adolescents, 2023).

²⁵ The question inquired about the open concept of CL, not about the specificity of extended CL or exceptions to normativity. The question posed to the stakeholders was: "For you, what is CL?" to deepen the discussion on the level of knowledge and specificity of each type of stakeholder.

²⁶ One of the female adolescents interviewed did not name any element of CL, which may denote a lack of knowledge

²⁷ As mentioned, in section 1.2, in Colombia, adolescents over 15 years of age may work in activities that do not put their integrity at risk and with a maximum number of hours allowed.



The community leaders interviewed recognized CL as a form of physical and psychological “exploitation.” Like the adolescents interviewed, some community leaders referenced the connection between CL and the violation of children’s right to education. They further associated CL with economic hardship experienced by families, such as the head of household’s inability to work.

Among small producers interviewed, CL was portrayed as a reactive practice resulting from economic need, lack of opportunities for young people, inequality, and poor-quality education. It was also commonly characterized as an activity that is “forced” by an adult; recurring or permanent; and performed by a child that is under 15 years of age. Concerning the latter, some of the small producers expressed the opinion that starting at age 15, children should be able to work on farms, as it would give them the opportunity to learn valuable farming skills. These participants did not consider children’s occasional work with family members to be harmful, but saw it rather as a formative experience, as illustrated in the following testimony:

“We sometimes tell a worker to “pepear”²⁸ and he goes to pick up the pepa,²⁹ but he goes with his family, he goes with his two, three children, he goes with his wife, so I cannot say that it is child labor, but instead an occasional job, that at the same time is giving him a lesson.” (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Another association with CL made by the small producers was the unfair compensation of children and adolescents for their work, due to adults “taking advantage” of them not being protected by labor laws that establish fair and dignified wages. This pay discrepancy was denounced by one participant, who explained how they themselves had engaged in the subcontracting of children, but at a price equivalent to adult wages:

“I have subcontracted children and I pay the normal full day as if they were an adult, I am not going to pay them four thousand or five thousand pesos.” [far less than the minimum wage]” (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Despite this testimony pointing to the informant being engaged in practices associated with CL, it should be noted that this finding does not constitute a trend in the information collected but is rather an isolated result among the patterns of KAP identified in the participants interviewed. Overall, the small producers interviewed considered children’s participation in farm activities to be educational and an opportunity for parents to pass on knowledge to the future heirs of the land. As stated by one participant:

“Children have to be taught, we have to teach them responsibilities, we have to teach them that things are won, that things are achieved with sacrifice, but it is not that we are going to take the child and work him to the bone, it cannot be like this.” (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

²⁸ Harvesting of palm fruit on the ground.

²⁹ Colloquial expression for palm oil fruit.



In general, participants' testimonies indicated the existence of a cultural norm associating work with practical upbringing and the responsibility that parents have to provide their children with the necessary tools for supporting themselves in the future:

"In the countryside, the children are taught to work from a young age so that they learn to maintain their culture, if not, there would be no [farms], if we do not teach the children to do anything in the field, [all there would be is] a bunch of lazy people and who produces in the field, nobody." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Small producers further pointed to work as an activity that could be used to prevent youth from consuming psychoactive substances (drugs or alcohol):

"Yes, here there is a lot of drug addiction among youth, why is there drug addiction? Because...if you do not involve [children] in something that keeps them on track, [they] [will seek out drugs and alcohol in the street] ... [and will meet other bad influences, causing them to go astray]." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

As for the community leaders interviewed, they expressed an awareness of adolescent labor in terms of the Colombian regulations that place limits on the type of work and number of hours that adolescents are permitted to work. Their responses also placed a particular emphasis on the need for adolescents' work schedule to not interfere with their studies, stating that they should be able to fully commit to their education. Some community leaders stressed the importance of engaging children in household chores so they can learn important life skills. However, they did note that such work should not interfere other rights, such as education, recreation. Nevertheless, these testimonies demonstrated a lack of clarity on whether they considered extended CL to be a form of CL, particularly with regards to children and adolescents who engage in household, domestic, or farm-related tasks.

The public officials interviewed appeared to possess a greater depth of knowledge on the concept of CL. This included knowledge on adolescent labor regulations such as limitations on the number hours worked, type of activity, and the complexity of the application process to obtain work permits from the MOL. This result was expected, given that these individuals work in public institutions and understand regulations and policies related to the subject. This group associated CL with aspects such as developmental risks, physical danger, psychological integrity, and limitations for children to effectively access their rights.



3.1.3 AWARENESS OF POTENTIAL CL CONSEQUENCES

KEY FINDING 3

The participants interviewed perceived 1) dropping out of school, 2) the neglecting of academic responsibilities and 3) negative effects on mental and physical health to be recurring consequences of CL that have immediate and long-term impacts on children's lives.

To gauge participants' awareness of the consequences that CL can have on children and adolescents' lives, the research team asked the various actors interviewed to share and discuss their opinions regarding this issue. The most commonly referenced consequences of CL among the participants interviewed included: 1) dropping out of school, 2) the neglecting of academic responsibilities and 3) negative effects on mental and physical health, especially when the decision to work is based on economic need.

Regarding dropping out of school and the neglecting of academic responsibilities, the small producers and community leaders interviewed mentioned consequences of CL associated with the prioritization of money over pursuing education. The expression of "taking a liking to money" was used in several of the focus groups, referring to an easy life, vice, and loss of values. This idea of "taking a liking to money," leading adolescents to abandon their studies to work full time, was also associated with serious consequences such as loss of opportunities due to lack of education. From the perspective of these actors, CL was perceived to impact children's plans for their lives, limit their opportunities for the future, and lead to both present- day and future consequences:

"Because there are many opportunities today, if you do not have an education, you are nobody in life, nothing." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

The public officials interviewed recognized that the economic incentive of working full time can discourage children from continuing their studies.³⁰ This can be seen in the following testimony of one of the participants:

"[Adolescents] get used to generating income, to having money and they no longer like school, and they don't want to study." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Several of the adolescents interviewed expressed feeling "sadness" for other children who must work and who are forced to abandon their studies, which affects their future, as illustrated by the following testimony. It is important to highlight that among the adolescents interviewed, there was consensus that if work did not affect their studies, they did not consider it to be a risk.

³⁰ Some of the public officials interviewed discussed several of the actions taken by the local government to overcome this situation, involving the design of awareness-raising campaigns on the consequences of CL.



"Some young people...or their parents do not have enough money [to afford] an education, and sometimes you feel sad." (Interview, Female Adolescents, 2023).

Regarding physical consequences, the community leaders interviewed pointed out that children working in palm plantations have a higher risk of being harmed physically given that they do not possess the same physical strength as adults and are less experienced in handling potentially dangerous tools. Regarding impacts on mental health, community leaders mentioned the loss of childhood experiences because of CL, given that working children must sacrifice not only their study time, but also their free time for recreation. This argument was also made by small producers, who associated CL with mental risks given that working children cannot enjoy their current stage of life, and instead must assume responsibilities typically meant for adults:

"[Children engaged in CL] will not have beautiful memories of childhood, but only memories of working to support their families, work and work and they did not enjoy their childhood stage." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Legal consequences of CL were also identified by the adolescents and small suppliers interviewed. In Colombia, CL is a criminal offense that can lead to *"parents [being put] in prison for not giving their children attention"* and *"[children] [being] take[n]... to Bienestar [Child Protection Services]³¹."* (Interview, Mixed Adolescents, 2023).

Finally, for community leaders, CL was perceived to increase a child's vulnerability to risks such as sexual exploitation and the consumption of psychoactive substances. This perception was particularly related to the group's view of CL being associated with informal work, leading working children to be *"in the street rummaging through everyday life"* (Focus Group, Community Leaders, 2023). The risk of normalizing CL was also mentioned by some participants, given that it might lead to an acceptance of children and adolescents carrying out activities that could be harmful to them.

3.1.4 PREVENTION OF CL

KEY FINDING 4

Most study participants agreed that parents, caregivers and schools should be co-responsible for the protection of children and CL prevention. Participants also highlighted the importance of improving both the quality of education and the availability of services for children, as well as the economic conditions of families, for the prevention of CL.

³¹ This refers to situations in which a child or adolescent who has suffered a threat to or violation of their rights receives protection from the ICBF and is separated from their parents or caregivers, to ensure they are in a protective environment in which they can overcome any physical, social, emotional and psychological problems resulting from inadequate care, in addition to being provided with the care and resources necessary to fully develop.



A fundamental aspect regarding Knowledge of CL on which participants were asked to share their perspectives was CL prevention. To analyze participants' understanding of this Knowledge component, the research team collected their opinions and perceptions regarding what they consider to be necessary actions for CL prevention, and who should be held responsible for carrying out these actions.

When asked about measures that should be taken for the prevention of CL, all participants emphasized the importance of improving the economic and working conditions of families in the countryside so that children do not have to assume responsibilities intended for their adult caregivers. Along with this, they asserted that children must have better opportunities and higher quality education, which would ultimately lead to reduced vulnerabilities.

Regarding the actors' responses on who should be responsible for CL prevention, most of the participants agreed that parents, caregivers and schools were the main actors that should be held responsible. The community leaders interviewed referred to parents as primarily responsible for protecting their children from hazardous activities and violations of their rights, given that they should pay attention to their children and be aware of how they are spending their time. For this reason, according to them, it is crucial for parents to receive education and be equipped with information on children's rights, their role as guarantors of protection, and the definitions and consequences of CL.³²

"I would say that this is more the parents' responsibility than anyone else's, that as a parent, you need to [ensure your child is studying, and not working], so... [it is the parent's responsibility to make sure that their child does not go down the wrong path]." (Focus Group, Community Leaders, 2023).

In terms of the role that schools should have in the prevention of CL, the public officials interviewed identified them as playing a crucial role in raising children's awareness of their rights, ensuring that they recognize themselves as rights holders and are able to identify risks of rights violations. Furthermore, they placed importance on the need for schools to be a safe space with the capacity to quickly identify violations of children's rights and take appropriate actions for their protection and rights restitution. They explained the measures that are taken in schools by social workers and schools' interdisciplinary teams, and the ways in which public institutions collaborate with them to identify and address cases of CL, as seen in the following testimony:

"The social workers were very aware of why the children are leaving school, why they are absent [they send us reports of students with high levels of absenteeism]. We work hand in hand with the schools, although they also have their [own] interdisciplinary teams too... [However, with the reports they send us, we work to investigate why they're missing] ..." (Focus Group, Public Officials, 2023).

³² These participants did not identify any institutions, aside from schools, as co-responsible for CL prevention.



Community leaders also discussed schools as being responsible for CL prevention, specifically mentioning the role of schools in providing psychosocial support, educating adults through “Schools for Parents,”³³ maintaining ongoing communication with caregivers and children, and conducting one-on-one follow-up with children to determine reasons for absenteeism.

The public officials interviewed additionally acknowledged the co-responsibility of several public institutions in ensuring that children's rights are guaranteed. The main national-level actor identified by this group was the ICBF. At the municipal level, they recognized the need for coordinated efforts between all the secretariats that make up the office of the municipal mayors. This once again highlights the importance these actors placed on the principle of co-responsibility in the protection of children.

Another institution mentioned was Family Police Stations (FPS),³⁴ given that they deal with cases related to the violation of the rights of children and adolescents. Some of the public officials interviewed mentioned that joint work has been carried out between FPS and the MOL; they also explained that while they are working on coordinating with social organizations and the private sector on efforts to combat CL, this has not yet resulted in concrete actions or productive partnerships. Participants further identified training and awareness-raising efforts for farmers on the prevention and eradication of CL as relevant so that the sector understands the definitions, risks, and consequences of CL.

3.2 ATTITUDES

As mentioned in section 2.1, Attitudes are how people feel towards CL along with predetermined opinions. Based on Juan's fictional story,³⁵ the research team surveyed participants on issues related to gender roles, age, life plans and the outlook for children's futures, and the probability of cultural practices and attitudes, contributing to the acceptance of CL within each of the communities visited. Various issues were discussed in the conversations held with participants, including whether work should be considered a form of education; whether CL is a result of economic need; and if parents should have the authority to decide whether their children work, among others.

In all DCIs, Juan's routine was presented as follows:

³³ The School for Parents are spaces created within the schools for teachers to guide parents about parenting, training, risk management and other relevant topics to strengthen their capacities as guarantors of rights.

³⁴ FPS are the agencies or entities responsible for providing specialized and interdisciplinary care to prevent, protect, restore, repair and guarantee the rights of those who are at risk of or are/have been victims of gender-based violence (and/or other forms of violence) in the family context, as established by Colombian Law 2126 (Law 2126, 2021)

³⁵ The DCIs included a section where the daily routine of Juan (a fictional character of a 13-year-old boy) was analyzed, in which he went to work with his father and his 17-year-old brother several days of the week at a palm plantation. After reading the story, different questions about attitudes and practices were asked, specifically regarding participants' opinions and perceptions of Juan's routine as detailed in the story.



“Every weekday, I wake up around six in the morning; the first thing I do is brush my teeth, then bathe and get ready to go to school; I must be there at 7am, when my classes start. Depending on the day of the week, I study different subjects (my favorites are math and biology) and I play with my friends at recess. About twice a week after school, I come home, have lunch, and go to a nearby farm, where my father and my older brother (17 years old) have been working since the morning. At the farm, I help transport the tools and fruit and do some cleaning tasks. What I like most about those days is that I earn money for my expenses and I’m able to help around the house. On Saturdays, I go to the farm from early morning until noon; on Sundays, we all stay home to rest.”

Based on this and other situations presented to the participants, questions were asked regarding the interviewees’ perception of Juan’s routine. The results of these exercises are presented below.

3.2.1 ATTITUDES ABOUT JUAN’S ROUTINE

This section presents the participants’ beliefs, opinions, and attitudes toward Juan’s routine as described above. Given that Juan’s routine describes a situation of CL, it is important to note that participants responses expressing the acceptance or normalization of Juan’s routine could also reflect the acceptance or normalization of CL.

KEY FINDING 5

The participants interviewed demonstrated a higher tendency to accept and justify CL. Those who justified or approved of CL argued that, if a child’s work did not interfere with their education; was paid and carried out of their own free will; was done to support their family; and was carried out under parental supervision; it should be considered acceptable.

Several of the adolescents interviewed revealed a widespread acceptance of Juan’s routine, given that his work on the farm was interpreted as voluntary, supervised by family caregivers, and carried out for both his own benefit and that of his family. Overall, adolescents tended to express acceptance of CL practices when they were viewed as being carried out voluntarily. The fact that Juan studied and that his work did not interfere with his education was an additional key factor mentioned by this group as justification for Juan’s routine. This is reflected in testimonies such as the following:

“I say it’s fine, as long as [Juan is not being forced to work]; that [working] is something that he wants and that he does not neglect his studies. I think it’s a good thing, because sometimes you also want to have your own money to spend on things, on whatever you want to eat...” (Interview, Mixed, Adolescents, 2023).



While many expressed an acceptance of Juan's routine, there were also testimonies from adolescents expressing more complex views towards his routine. These testimonies revealed opinions that did not necessarily agree with CL, but nevertheless provided reasons for its justification. Adolescents who held these positions understood that living conditions in rural areas are different from other contexts, and in many cases are accompanied by lack of opportunities and complex economic situations for families.

These same insights were observed in adolescents' testimonies from the analysis of knowledge, demonstrating that their attitude towards CL was not necessarily one of blind acceptance, but rather an acknowledgement of the reasons that it might be justified by the different parties involved. Another common justification of CL observed in adolescents' responses was that work can be considered a form of life education; it is important to note, however, that this opinion was only held in scenarios where work did not interfere with children and adolescents' rest, recreation, and schooling.

Small producers and community leaders interviewed held similar views to those of the adolescents interviewed. More than half of these participants expressed either their approval or justification of Juan's routine; of the reasons cited by these groups for their approval or justification, three were most commonly referenced: 1.) Juan's work schedule did not interfere with his studies; 2.) Juan chose to work "of his own free will" and it did not severely impact his education or development; and 3.) His work was supporting his family to meet their basic needs and was supervised by his father and brother. In analyzing the information gathered through interviews with the different actors, it is evident that the reasons for their justification or approval of CL was closely linked to their personal experiences and opinions, including whether they began working at a young age to support their families, which was considered by some to have played a fundamental role in their upbringing:

"I think what my compadre says is valid because it is true, it is reality, [when children accompany adults at work] ...they [gain] experience and that gives [them confidence] to [perform] those tasks. [This is positive] because [they are improving his skills in the work that will be his livelihood], and he is already 13 years old and soon he [will be] of legal age... The law contradicts itself [because when children] begin [their] studies, [they] also [should] begin [assuming]...[work] responsibilities [to gain skills for the future] ..." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

Finally, in the case of public officials interviewed, fewer testimonies were collected that expressed acceptance of Juan's routine and his engagement in CL. Participants expressed some justification for his routine, which mainly consisted of reasons such as the local context and unique realities of families that are specific to the region. In particular, they referred to the lack of opportunities, the needs of families, and their degree of vulnerability as sufficient for justifying the use of CL for families to meet their basic living needs.



KEY FINDING 6

Among those that expressed rejection of Juan's routine, the most commonly cited reason was the importance of children dedicating themselves exclusively to their studies and prioritizing the enjoyment of their free time. Other reasons for this rejection included the belief that parents should be solely responsible for supporting their family, the illegal or informal nature of CL, the violation of children's rights when they work, and the risk of children "taking a liking to money" and abandoning their studies.

In the case of adolescents interviewed, and as mentioned before, fewer participants expressed an outright rejection of Juan's routine. Of those that rejected Juan's routine, reasons cited included the importance of children and adolescents dedicating their time to education and leisure; several adolescents expressed how exhausting Juan's routine must be, given the physical effort required to work, on top of keeping up with schoolwork. Others expressed a total rejection of CL due to its illegal nature: *"It is bad because children still cannot work because they are minors"* (Interview, Mixed, Adolescents, 2023). Several adolescents reflected on the responsibility of parents to work to sufficiently provide for their children.

Among the small producers and community leaders interviewed, fewer participants expressed the view that CL is not acceptable under any circumstances. The main reason for their disapproval of Juan's routine was the importance they placed on children dedicating themselves exclusively to their studies and the enjoyment of their free time. Some of the interviewees expressed disagreement with minors engaging in any form of work because they considered it to be outside the norm or illegal. These participants also held similar views to other actors regarding the negative impact of CL on education (see previous section), and the responsibility of parents to sufficiently provide for their children. Another concern expressed by these actors was the possibility of Juan "taking a liking to money" after receiving payment for his work, resulting in him dropping out of school to work full time and ultimately limiting his future opportunities.

More than half of the public officials interviewed tended to reject Juan's routine. The largest trend identified among this group was the belief that children should exclusively dedicate themselves to their studies and the enjoyment of their free time. These participants also pointed to the municipalities' lack of sport and recreation spaces as a factor contributing to children's vulnerability to CL, a finding that is consistent with what was identified in the analysis of Knowledge. Additionally, testimonies regarding Juan's routine revealed a negative attitude towards the illegal nature of a 13-year-old adolescent engaged in CL, and the fact that parents placing their children in situations of CL are responsible for the violation of their rights.

Finally, regardless of whether informants expressed attitudes of acceptance or rejection towards Juan's routine, testimonies revealed a widespread understanding of the particular contexts in which rural families, due to their situation of vulnerability and limited opportunities, seek to involve the highest number of family members possible in income-earning positions.



3.2.2 ATTITUDES REGARDING AGE AND CL

Given that Juan's story focuses on a 13-year-old boy who works with his father and 17-year-old brother several days a week, interviewees were asked whether Juan's routine would be acceptable if he were 16 years old instead of 13. Interviewees' responses to this question indicated that their attitudes towards CL remained the same, regardless of whether Juan was presented as 13 or 16 years old. Once again, participants that justified Juan's routine pointed to the skills he was gaining and the support his work provided to his family. Participants that recognized Juan's routine as CL expressed feelings of rejection due to its illegal nature and emphasized the importance of children dedicating themselves to their studies and enjoying their free time.

KEY FINDING 7

The participants interviewed who justified CL agreed that it is more "acceptable" for a 16-year-old to be working than it is for a 13-year-old, given that they possess higher levels of responsibility and decision-making capacity.

Among those who rejected Juan's routine in the previous chapter, their responses further revealed attitudes of rejection towards all underage³⁶ work.

Participants expressed an overall consensus that a child's age is a factor in determining whether CL should be considered "acceptable." This is particularly interesting given that Juan's 17-year-old brother, also a working minor, was not perceived by any of the participants to be at risk of CL.

Community leaders interviewed agreed that working at age 16 is even more justifiable due to their higher level of responsibility and decision-making capacity compared to that of a 13-year-old who, according to them, may not have the maturity level necessary to handle finances:

"At age 16, a person is more responsible and has more concentration on what he or she is doing, because a child is very distracted..." (Focus Group, Community Leaders, 2023).

As highlighted in the knowledge section, the public officials interviewed demonstrated a greater degree of clarity regarding current regulations on the ages at which adolescents could perform specific jobs. Their testimonies are clear in expressing that there is a marked difference between a 13-year-old and a 16-year-old working, given that Colombian regulations allow the latter, with special permits, to work in specific activities with a defined work schedule (fewer hours than usual) if it does not interfere with their school and recreational activities. Additionally, they pointed to the fact that a 16-year-old has more decision-making capacity

³⁶ Colombian regulations consider children and adolescents under the age of 18 to be minors.



than a 13-year-old, making it more acceptable from them to work (provided they comply with all necessary regulations).

Finally, the small producers and community leaders interviewed that rejected Juan's routine as CL also agreed that, regardless of age, no minors should work. In their opinion, there is no difference between Juan working at age 13 or at age 16. Participants pointed the possible dangers of minors working in farms at any age; in particular, they mentioned again the risks for adolescents to "take a liking to money," ultimately leading to them discontinuing their studies.

3.2.3 GENDER ROLES IN CHILD LABOR

To gather information on attitudes regarding CL and gender roles, participants were asked how they would feel if Maria, a girl of the same age as Juan (13 years old) were to be in the same situation. All participants held attitudes reflecting a generalized rejection towards female CL, even though they presented numerous justifications as analyzed in the previous sections.

KEY FINDING 8

Participants interviewed revealed a consensus in terms of the relationship between gender and division of labor, with females tending to be responsible for care and household work, and males tending towards jobs that require strength.

Among the small producers interviewed, discussions related to gender, regardless of age, arose. Most commonly mentioned were the defined gender roles of women on palm plantations, which involve tasks such as cooking, cleaning, "pepear" sowing, and administrative tasks (exclusive to extractor plants). Regarding "the jobs that women do not do," physical activities and otherwise more dangerous tasks, such as using the *malayo*³⁷ were mentioned. The following testimony clearly expresses these views:

"[Women] are not doing forced labor³⁸ like a male... [you can't tell them to] "take the malayo and cut"... you can't... There are women who cut because they want to, they like that... she (if Juan were Maria) ...would contribute to the cleaning... pollinate, pepear (sic)... organize the tools...[she would be assigned] the most flexible, lighter jobs... then we are talking about a girl." (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

³⁷ The malayo is the tool palm pickers use to lower the fruit from the tree. It is a hook-shaped knife placed at the end of a long stick to reach the fruit at a high altitude.

³⁸ In this context, "forced labor" refers to work that requires strength; for many of the actors interviewed, there is a common perception of "forced labor" referring to heavy manual labor, rather than a labor rights abuse.



It is worth noting that only one of the small producers' focus groups reflected on the implications of the dual role of women in the labor force, that is, "*the role of work and the role of the household*" (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023). This discussion led to a debate among participants on the double burden that women carry given their responsibilities in both care/household work and farm activities; while a man wakes up at approximately six in the morning to start his day, his wife would have gotten up at two in the morning to leave breakfast ready and clean the home. If she also worked in the plantation, she would continue to engage in additional housework after arriving home at the end of the day.

Community leaders interviewed revealed a "direct relationship" between performing housework and being a woman. Their testimonies also pointed to the same correlation for girls, who they stated must stay at home helping with care activities, or "help" in the palm farms with "simple" work and cleaning. When discussing care work, expressions such as "*that's women's work*", and "*men's jobs are masculine (strength), women's jobs are feminine (cleaning, home, care)*" were commonly mentioned (Focus Group, Community Leaders, 2023).

As mentioned throughout this chapter, it is evident that the public officials interviewed were the actors that possessed the most knowledge of CL in terms of its legal implications and the limits of Colombian regulations. When presented with a version of Juan's story that had a female protagonist, the attitudes of the public officials remained the same. Their testimonies were clear in stating that, regardless of the whether they are male or female, no person under the age of 15 should work:

Regardless of whether it is a girl or a boy, the rights are equal for both, they are exposed equally [to CL practices]. So, regardless of sex, a fundamental right is being violated. (Interview, Public officials, 2023).

While public officials' testimonies demonstrated clear attitudes of rejection towards all underage work in violation of Colombian regulations, regardless of sex, they also recognized that CL, and palm work in general, presents differently for males as compared to females. They pointed to girls and women being linked to tasks such as feeding employees, cleaning, and all "housework," rather than working in the field. According to them, in sectors such as palm, which involves risks associated with physically demanding labor, gender stereotypes linking women with domestic activities and men with physical work are reinforced.

Furthermore, public officials' testimonies highlighted girls' increased vulnerability and risk of exposure to sexual abuse and exploitation when working on palm plantations, particularly among migrant and indigenous populations. They also mentioned risks of early marriage and sexual abuse in girls and adolescents. Girls' increased risk of abuse and sexual exploitation in spaces of possible CL was additionally observed in the testimonies of community leaders. In contrast with public officials and community leaders, small producers did not commonly mention girls' increased risk of abuse and sexual exploitation when engaged in CL.



KEY FINDING 9

Testimonies pointed to the existence of unconscious gender biases that view women as incapable of assuming roles outside of caregiving and domestic work. This is contradicted, however, by interviewees claiming that women are capable of anything and are even “smarter than men,” pointing to the potential existence of a social desirability bias.³⁹

As described in the previous section, for all actors interviewed, testimonies pointed to the existence of unconscious biases derived from cultural gender stereotypes, where women are considered too weak to perform tasks in the field. Despite the presence of these biases, all actors were quick to clarify that “women are capable of anything,” reflecting the existence of contradictory messages likely resulting from a social desirability bias. Expressions such as “*little girls help their mothers do chores early before going to school*” followed by clarifications such as “*women are smarter and more capable than us [men]*” were commonly observed among the different stakeholders (Focus Group, Smallholders, 2023).

Similarly, testimonies included expressions such as “*a woman doing [hard work in the field] looks bad*” and “*it is not that I am a macho man...there are things that women should not do and not because they are incapable*” (Focus Group, Community Leaders, 2023). These testimonies underscore the fact that cultural gender stereotypes are still rooted in these territories and are materialized in the gendered division of labor within the palm sector, regardless of whether there is presence of CL.

3.2.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Participants were asked to discuss their opinions regarding the outlook of adolescents' future lives. In analyzing their responses, the following key finding was identified.

KEY FINDING 10

Public officials, community leaders, and small producers interviewed held more pessimistic views about the future of adolescents like Juan, mainly due to the lack of available opportunities in their territories.

³⁹ Social desirability is understood as the need for social approval and acceptance, which can result in interviewees responding to questions in a way they believe will be viewed positively by others. In other words, individuals' desire for approval and acceptance causes them to express opinions that they perceive to be in line with appropriate and culturally accepted behaviors (Francia, 2023).



When asked for their opinion regarding Juan's future, the adult actors interviewed (public officials, community leaders, and small producers) tended to provide pessimistic responses, citing the limited opportunities available for youth in their territories.

Most of the small producers interviewed considered that having started working at age 13, Juan would have limited opportunities and an unpromising future. They discussed how Juan "taking a liking to money" might lead to him using his paycheck to buy alcohol and drugs; additionally, working in agriculture (particularly in the palm industry) was viewed as the only option for those without a university degree. The testimonies of small producers revealed a rather negative attitude towards young people, in which they are represented "lazy," with no desire to work, and "junkies," which is viewed as a direct consequence of the few opportunities they have in the municipalities beyond agricultural work.

Despite these negative attitudes, some small producers painted a more positive picture of Juan's future, envisioning him as a professional and a palm entrepreneur, supporting the family business:

"He is prepared, he finished his studies, he graduated, I am sure he finished his studies and graduated and at minimum, no matter how badly he has done, he is an agronomist." (Focus Group, Small producers, 2023).

Community leaders expressed significant uncertainty about what could happen to Juan in ten years, with most testimonies indicating three possibilities for his future: 1) dedicating himself to agricultural work, specifically within the palm industry; 2) becoming a criminal, because he "took a liking to money" and has no other opportunities and 3) becoming a college-educated professional (less mentioned).

Community leaders' testimonies revealed disappointment with the opportunities available to young people to "advance in life," and on several occasions, expressed that this lack of opportunities was related to the need for youth to remain in the palm industry, thus associating agricultural work with "settling" in their careers. Only one focus group of community leaders envisioned Juan as a professional by the age of 23, stating that he would have surely dedicated himself to the palm business as an entrepreneur.

Among public officials, although some of those interviewed had optimistic views regarding Juan's future, most of this group held a more negative outlook. The most pessimistic of these opinions asserted that Juan would become accustomed to working on the farm and would have no choice but to continue doing so. Some testimonies mentioned that by "taking a liking to money," Juan would lose his interest in studying or "getting ahead in life" (i.e., advancing professionally), and would resign himself to remain in palm cultivation. These more negative attitudes appeared to equate agricultural work with work that would not add value to Juan's life, but rather stagnate his future opportunities, such as pursuing a university education. The following testimony represents these negative views regarding Juan's future:



"He's going to continue working there on the farm, because that's what he got used to and what he was taught... He doesn't study well, nor is he going to do anything... He has already gotten used to it and is no longer going to be interested in studying at all... And a person at a certain age is no longer interested in improving intellectually, those people get used to that... They live from paycheck to paycheck, get used to the payment and that's it. They are like conformists maybe, like they stay there, that is their comfort zone, rather." (Focus Group, Public officials, 2023).

More positive viewpoints (though less commonly expressed) perceived Juan's future as empowered, with him taking over the family farm or studying at the university and becoming "a palm scholar" (Focus Group, Public officials, 2023). In these few cases, agricultural work was perceived as an industry, usually family-owned, by which individuals can develop successful and lasting careers over time.

KEY FINDING 11

A marked difference was observed between adolescents' outlook of their futures and adult interviewees' (public officials, community leaders, and small producers). Notably, adolescent's outlooks were more optimistic when envisioning their life in ten years, and they recognized the importance of education for a successful adult life.

Upon analyzing the information collected from the adolescents interviewed, eight trends regarding future life plans were identified, including the desire to: 1) pursue a university career (or the recognition of the importance of education for their lives); 2) leave their community to study or live abroad; 3) be financially successful; 4) start a business; 5) start a family; 6) work to improve their community; 7) dedicate themselves to working in the field; and 8) have a career outside of the palm industry.

The biggest trend identified regarding life plans in adolescents was the desire to pursue a university degree. Many saw a direct relationship between having a university education and opportunities to "get ahead in life" and "fulfill dreams." It is important to highlight that opportunities to pursue a university education are located in capital cities outside of the rural areas in which they reside.

When discussing their future, adolescents interviewed recognized the importance of education in their lives, including both primary and secondary school. Furthermore, they pointed to their schooling as something that has been formational for them since childhood, providing them the opportunity to envision their future, socialize with classmates outside of their typical home life, and prepare them to leave their home to pursue a university education. They also clearly viewed university education as something that will prepare them for adulthood, their career, and as previously mentioned, the opportunity to "get ahead" and fulfill their dreams.



Most of the adolescents interviewed envisioned their future selves studying to be professionals, thus guaranteeing the lifestyle they desire, for example traveling the world, supporting their families, helping their parents, or “*being successful*,” in many cases, they also mentioned the desire to help society, especially those in most need. These testimonies demonstrate the adolescents’ analytical capacity to associate a college degree with a successful, productive life, thus reinforcing the idea that if CL prevents children from studying, they will not have a satisfactory adult life.

KEY FINDING 12

Marked gender differences were observed between the plans of the female and male adolescents interviewed. Female respondents tended to express interest in careers more associated with care issues while men identified more with careers directly related to strength or more “masculine” activities.

Similar to the gender roles analyzed in section 3.2.3, among the career aspirations discussed by adolescents interviewed, it is interesting to note that in terms of life plans, female adolescents tended towards prioritization of their professional training above marrying and having children; in several instances, the female adolescents interviewed were clear that they do not plan on having children. As one female adolescent commented:

“[I haven’t considered having] children... maybe at some point, but it is not something important...I had not even thought about it.” (Interview, Female Adolescents, 2023).

On the other hand, there were more male adolescents interviewed who accompanied their expectation of pursuing a university education with the possibility of starting a family and providing for them. Additionally, it was the males, rather than the females, who dreamed of being successful in terms of having money, living a life of luxury, and thus living well with their family. This can be observed in the following participant testimony:

“My future dream ... is to make money (sic), too much money, that’s what I want, to study something that will help me... For me for now it is important to be able to earn a good salary and become independent... I would also like to have my children and not have a bad life with them, I would...like to [provide] them with luxuries, [so] that they do not lack anything, and [I want them to have a good quality education].” (Interview, Male Adolescents, 2023).

3.3 PRACTICES

As mentioned in section 2.1, Practices are the ways in which individuals’ knowledge of and attitudes towards CL are reflected through their actions. This section analyzes the practices associated with CL as described by interviewees and will focus on understanding the possible



similarities between Juan's routine and those of the children and adolescents of the municipalities visited. This section provides an analysis of CL practices related to age, gender, and migration in the selected municipalities.

3.3.1 PRACTICES RELATED TO JUAN'S ROUTINE

All actors interviewed, including adolescents, community leaders, public officials, and small producers, were consulted regarding the similarities and differences that could be identified between Juan's routine and that of the children and adolescents of the municipalities visited.

KEY FINDING 13

There is a consensus among all actors interviewed that in general, children and adolescents in their municipalities are dedicated to studying and have spaces for recreation. However, testimonies point to children being assigned certain responsibilities within the family farms or households as a deep-rooted cultural practice, and as something that is part of their formation for life.

In general, the adolescents interviewed confirmed that they attend school and have spaces for recreation like those of Juan. However, there were some instances in which adolescents mentioned that like Juan's story, they occasionally (but not regularly) help their parents or relatives with agricultural tasks on their family farms. Those who live on farms stated that they support their parents in their free time, and in some cases, interviewees mentioned supporting relatives in restaurants and receiving payment for this. It is important to note that all the adolescents who mentioned doing some kind of work framed it as "support" or "help." This is a perspective that is culturally rooted in rural areas of the country, given that family support is associated with preparation for adulthood and is considered crucial for adolescents' formation. This can be seen in the following testimony:

"I have little time left in the afternoon because I have to do the tasks that are assigned to me and the time I have left [is little] because I accompany my dad in his work so as not to leave him... in reality, as a son you feel strange if he asks you "since you have free time, let's go and accompany me for a little while" and you say no, you feel bad to tell him no. So, I would say in my routine that I finish my class in the morning, I do my homework and I accompany him in the work he does..." (Interview, Male Adolescents, 2023).

The clarifications made above are necessary because, strictly speaking, the practices mentioned by the adolescents interviewed would present a CL risk if the work performed on the farm was dangerous, or if the "help" time exceeded the hours permitted by Colombian regulations.

When asked about recreation, adolescents explained that they usually have time for this after completing their homework; some mentioned that they practice sports, or that they play



with their friends. Regardless of the activity, each adolescent interviewed appeared to have free time with which to do as they please after finishing their homework.

Although the adolescents interviewed did not consider themselves to be engaged in CL, some did mention cases of friends or relatives in their age range who have dropped out of school to work. In general, these situations were justified by the level of vulnerability or “need” of these individuals’ families, leaving them with no other option. All cases of CL described by interviewees were due to financial need, resulting in these individuals dropping out of school to dedicate themselves to working, either in agriculture or another industry.

In the case of small producers, community leaders, and public officials, similarities were observed between their testimonies and those of adolescents, regarding the practices they identified in the selected municipalities. They also considered children and adolescents’ support with tasks on family farms to be a common cultural practice. Community leaders and small producers justified these practices as formational for adolescents, and crucial for the sustainability of rural activities in these municipalities.

Expressions such as *“Yes of course, because just like the children (sic) you have to guide them, you have to teach them the importance of both studying and working from time to time, especially those of us who own land...”* (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023), were common among the group of producers. Similar testimonies were also received from community leaders, and even adolescents, who expressed understanding of and experience with these cultural practices in their daily lives.

Even though respondents acknowledged that helping on family farms is a common cultural practice, it did not cloud their recognition that this “help” could still be considered CL if the work performed was dangerous or if the hours worked exceeded that permitted by Colombian regulations. During the focus groups and interviews with community leaders, small suppliers and public officials, participants also mentioned cases of minors who were forced to drop out of school to work for financial reasons.

KEY FINDING 14

In general, the participants considered that within the palm sector, employers avoid hiring minors, particularly in extraction plants and large producing farms.

There was a wide consensus among participants interviewed in stating vehemently that, especially in palm oil companies, employers do not hire minors to work.

In interviews with community leaders, only participants from one municipality mentioned that it is common for children and adolescents to work in the fishing industry, specifically in the cleaning and descaling of fish. Interviewees clearly reflected their belief that these cases constitute CL since children abandon their studies to dedicate themselves to this work. As mentioned in one focus group:



“Yes, [this constitutes CL], because here you can see that...the children work since childhood, if we go to (name of another municipality) [it's] worse, right now we are in the shrimp season, because [it's high season for fishing] and there are young people of all classes fishing ...” (Focus Group, Community Leaders, 2023).

On the other hand, public officials tended to identify more cases of CL occurring in urban areas such as marketplaces or other informal activities. Only one official mentioned having seen situations of sexual exploitation and begging in their municipality. Further, the existence of a clear protocol for dealing with complaints or findings of CL was only mentioned by public officials in one municipality; in general, however, public officials did not seem to view CL as a common problem in their territories:

“...in [my time as] an official in the mayor's office, I have not seen [a single reported] case of a...minor [working] on a farm, [it is] very unlikely... Not a single case, most cases of child labor are reported in the municipal capital... in the small market where they sell fish, that is where most cases of child labor are reported... but in the palm sector, I have not had a single case in the four and a half years that I have served as commissioner...” (Focus Group, Public officials, 2023).

Finally, it is important to reaffirm that the different key actors that participated in the study only identified a few cases of CL (none associated with the palm oil sector), mainly consisting of adolescents who dropped out of school to dedicate themselves exclusively to work, because of high levels of vulnerability in their families. The testimonies also referenced other causes of school dropout aside from CL, such as, for example, teenage pregnancy leading to early marriages, and consumption of psychoactive substances, among others.

“Right now...there is a lot of need [within the communities] ... Here I have seen many who leave school to go to work... They don't have money to buy notebooks, they don't have money to buy...books, the parents don't have [money to afford school supplies] ...[Many families are struggling financially]...” (Focus Group, Small Producers, 2023).

3.3.2 CL PRACTICES RELATED TO AGE, GENDER STEREOTYPES AND MIGRATION

KEY FINDING 15

Participants did not believe that the falsification of documents allowing minors to work was a common practice in their territories. This was explained in part due to the existence of hiring mechanisms at extraction plants or other formally constituted companies that help prevent the use of false documents.



Participants' testimonies did not indicate that the falsification of identification documents allowing minors to work was a common practice in their municipalities. Interviewees explained that hiring processes of formally constituted companies are linked to national systems that can easily identify false documents; as a result, according to interviewees, the hiring of minors does not occur in extractive plants or in large oil palm plantations. The few cases of falsification of documents mentioned in testimonies involved adolescents falsifying documents needed to enter soccer schools; however, these were only mentioned as isolated cases, based on word-of-mouth, and not directly confirmed by the research team.

KEY FINDING 16

The gender stereotypes analyzed in the attitudes section are reflected in the everyday life practices of children and adolescents living in the selected municipalities.

In reviewing respondents' testimonies, it is evident that the gender stereotypes analyzed in the Attitudes section are present in the everyday life practices of children and adolescents. Respondents considered that girls are typically the ones that help their mothers with care and household tasks such as cooking and cleaning, while boys are more often involved in accompanying their fathers to work in the field. While there is less evidence of a balanced division of household work between boys and girls, testimonies referenced cases of families in which both boys and girls were involved in field work as part of their training.

In this sense, the testimonies identify the clear division of labor based on the gender roles of adult men as providers (those who have the physical strength to engage in hard manual labor in the field) and adult women as responsible for domestic and care work, and perhaps light activities in the field, such as *pepear* or pollination (in the case of the palm sector). They also point to the direct relationship between girls and boys helping their mothers and fathers with tasks that are linked to their respective gender roles. Given that boys were not commonly cited as being involved in domestic work, but there are testimonies of girls being involved in both domestic and field work, there is also evidence of girls experiencing a double burden of labor starting from an early age.

KEY FINDING 17

Participants did not indicate CL in migrant children and adolescents as more common than in other groups. Instead, interviewees considered that, as is the case for non-migrants, cases of CL in migrant children and adolescents are isolated and result from the economic need of their families.

In terms of migration, most interviewees considered that there are no cases of CL in migrant children and adolescents residing in their municipalities. This is consistent with their testimonies asserting that cases of CL are, in general, uncommon in these territories, where the cases of migrant children or adolescents engaged in CL are isolated and associated with the economic



need of their families. Interviewees once again pointed to the assertion that extractive plants and large oil plantations do not hire minors under any circumstances; they also mentioned that employers of these companies are relatively reluctant to hire migrant workers if they do not have their migratory status regularized.



4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING KNOWLEDGE:

- In general, study participants demonstrated an awareness of children's rights. This was significant, given that understanding children's rights is a prerequisite to ensure that these rights can be guaranteed. This finding applied to the adolescents interviewed, which is crucial given that their understanding of their rights is necessary for them to feel confident in voicing their concerns in cases where these rights are not respected.
- Knowledge of CL varied among study participants. Cultural norms, economic need, legal regulations, and knowledge of legal frameworks all influenced these perspectives; of those interviewed, public officials exhibited more clarity of knowledge regarding norms on CL. This was expected, given that many of the public officials interviewed work in positions related to child protection.
- Study participants perceived the greatest consequences of CL to be related to limits on education and impacts on mental and physical health. Many of the participants recognized that these consequences could have a long-lasting impact that affects the futures of working children and adolescents.
- Most study participants agreed that parents, caregivers and schools should be co-responsible for the protection of children and CL prevention. Participants also highlighted the importance of improving both the quality of education and the availability of services for children, as well as the economic conditions of families, for the prevention of CL.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING ATTITUDES

- The participants interviewed demonstrated a higher tendency to accept and justify CL than to reject it outright. Those who approved of, or justified CL argued that, as long as a child's work did not interfere with their education; was paid and carried out of their own free will; was done to support their family; and was carried out under parental supervision; it should be considered acceptable.
- Fewer participants expressed an outright rejection of CL. Among those that expressed rejection of CL, the most cited reason was the importance of children dedicating themselves exclusively to their studies and prioritizing the enjoyment of their free time. Most participants who expressed rejection of CL were public officials.
- The attitudes of participants towards CL tended to remain the same, regardless of the age of the child. This included both those that demonstrated attitudes of rejection of CL, in addition to those that expressed acceptance of or justification towards CL. When presented with situations where an older adolescent was working, the attitudes of participants that accepted CL were amplified, viewing this work as even more acceptable.



- Participants interviewed revealed a consensus in terms of the relationship between gender and division of labor, with females tending to be responsible for care and household work, and males tending towards jobs that require strength.
- Participants' testimonies pointed to the existence of unconscious gender biases that view women as incapable of assuming roles outside of caregiving and domestic work. This was contradicted, however, by interviewees claiming that women are capable of anything and are even "smarter than men," pointing to the potential existence of a social desirability bias.
- Public officials, community leaders, and small producers interviewed held more pessimistic views about the future of adolescents, mainly due to the lack of available opportunities in their territories. In contrast, adolescent participants tended to hold more optimistic views regarding their future, discussing their plans to continue studying, which is significant given the connection between CL and the right to education. Nevertheless, marked gender differences were observed between the plans of female and male adolescents.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING PRACTICES

- There is a consensus among all participants that in general, children and adolescents in their municipalities are dedicated to studying and have spaces for leisure and recreation. However, testimonies pointed to children being assigned certain responsibilities within the family farms or households as a deep-rooted cultural practice, and as something that is part of their formation for life. Participants understood that these practices could potentially constitute a case of CL, depending on whether the activities violated Colombian regulations regarding adolescent work.
- In general, the participants indicated that within the palm sector, employers avoid hiring minors, particularly in extraction plants and large producing farms. Participants indicated that to their knowledge, they did not believe the falsification of documents for minors to work to be a common practice in their territories. This was explained in part due to the existence of hiring mechanisms at extraction plants or other formally constituted companies that help prevent the use of false documents.
- The gender stereotypes analyzed in the attitudes section are reflected in the everyday life practices of children and adolescents living in the selected municipalities. The practices of male and female adolescents indicated the possibility of the gendered double burden of labor originating from an early age.
- Participants did not believe CL in migrant children and adolescents to be more common than in other groups. Instead, participants considered that, as is the case for non-migrants, cases of CL in migrant children and adolescents are isolated and result from the economic need of their families.



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ANNEX 1. CHARACTERIZATION OF FIELD WORK MUNICIPALITIES

Fieldwork municipalities were chosen from a shortlist generated as a result of the estimation of a priority score model (Section 2.4). This model brought together intensiveness of oil-palm production and CL risk, and the top eight scores of this estimation brought the following list of municipalities to be the stage of qualitative field work:

Table A1-1 – Fieldwork municipalities

Municipality	Department
San Alberto	Cesar
Puebloviejo	Magdalena
El Copey	Cesar
San Martin	Cesar
Agustín Codazzi	Cesar
San Diego	Cesar
Bosconia	Cesar
El Piñon	Magdalena

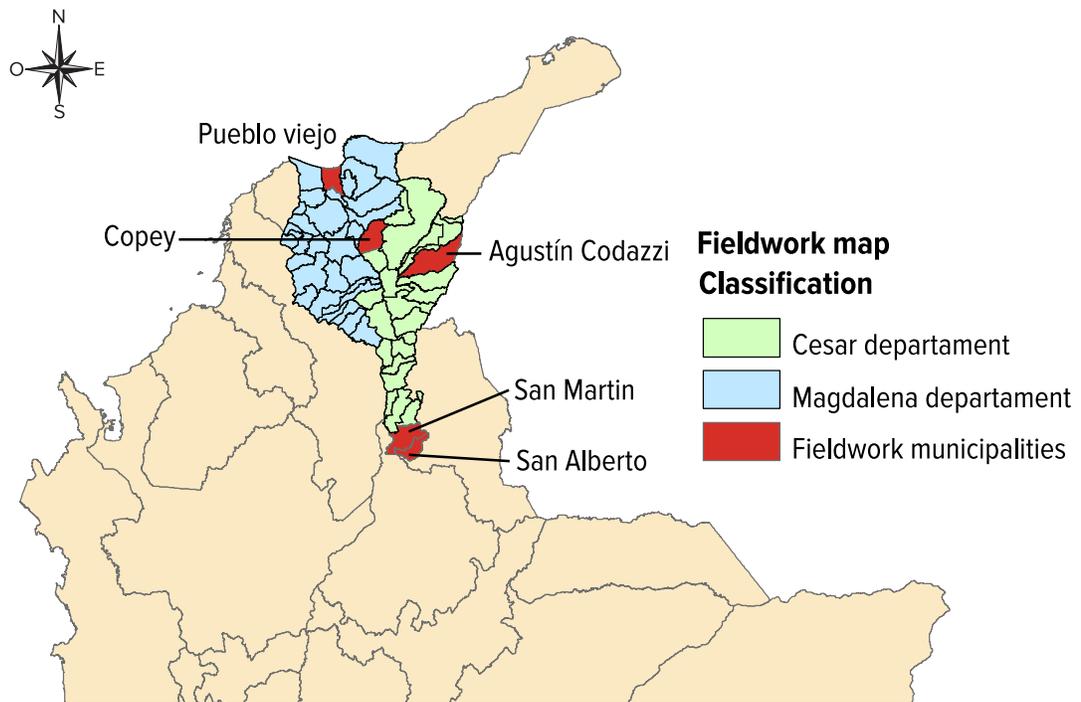
Source: Econometría

Demographic data comes from the 2018 National Population Census, and for more recent information, its population projections. Economic data comes from DANE's Subnational Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimations. In this regard, it is important to point out that our subnational economic aggregate account system only allows for GDP to be calculated at a department level, not at municipality level. However, Gross Added Value (GAV) statistics are available, and given the conceptual consistency of GDP / GAV accounting definitions⁴⁰, municipality GAV levels and its decompositions are accurate depictions of the economic activity of the selected municipalities.

⁴⁰ From the production perspective GDP is equal to the value of production minus intermediate consumption plus taxes minus subsidies on products. Gross value added is defined as the value of production minus the value of intermediate consumption and is a measure of the contribution to GDP made by a unit of production, industry or sector (DANE 2021).



Figure A1-1 – Department maps and fieldwork municipalities.



Source: Econometría

Codazzi (Cesar)

According to the 2018 National Population Census 2018, this municipality, formally known as Agustín Codazzi, had a total population of 60,768 persons, which amounts to 5% of the department's total population (1,200,574). It is composed of 48,157 urban inhabitants (79.2%) and 12,611 rural inhabitants (20.8%). Its demographic structure shows a male-to-female ratio of 50.2% to 49.8%, with 39.8% of the population reported as 20 years of age or younger, and an average of 2.1 children per household.

The economic structure of Codazzi's production is highly dependent on primary activities,⁴¹ which includes palm oil production: in 2020, 71.64% (approximately \$1.01 trillion Colombian pesos) of the municipality's total GAV (approximately \$1.4 trillion Colombian pesos) came from primary activities. This dependency has recently resulted in economic downturn; the economic profile of Codazzi shows a dramatic reduction in economic activity between 2020 and 2021, with GAV falling by 47.44%. This can all be explained by a reduction of primary activities, which fell to \$273.57 billion Colombian pesos, implying a lower share of 36.88% of total GAV. Despite this reduction, palm oil continued to account for a large share of total agricultural production in Codazzi for 2021, at 64.9%.

⁴¹ According to DANE, primary activities are: Agriculture, livestock, hunting, forestry, and fishing; Extraction of mines and quarries. Secondary Activities are: Manufacturing industries and Construction. Tertiary Activities are: Electric power, gas, and water generation; Trade, transportation, storage, accommodation and food services; Information and communications; Financial and insurance activities; Real estate activities; Professional, scientific and technical activities; Public administration, education and health; Artistic and entertainment activities.



El Copey (Cesar)

This municipality's population (30,159 inhabitants) represents 2.5% of the population of the department of Cesar. Of these inhabitants, 25.5% live in rural regions (7,690 people) and 74.5% are concentrated in urban areas (22,469 people). El Copey has a male-to-female ratio that is similar to Codazzi, at 50.1% to 49.9%. The percentage of the total population under 20 years of age is 41.5%, and the average household has 2.2 children.

In 2021, primary economic activities in El Copey (\$192.76 billion Colombian pesos) represented 41.2% of the total municipality's GAV (\$467.76 billion Colombian pesos). This share implied an increase from the previous year, which was reported at 36.7%. Between 2020 and 2021, total GAV for El Copey grew by 30.4%. Palm Oil production accounted for 72.7% of El Copey's total agricultural production in 2021.

San Alberto (Cesar)

This municipality has 26,247 inhabitants and a male-to-female ration of 49.9% to 50.1%. The percentage of its inhabitants living in rural areas is 20.5% (5,390 people), while 79.5% (20,857 people) reside in urban areas. Its share of the population age 20 or younger is 37.9%, and the average number of children per household is 1.67.

In 2021, primary economic activities in San Alberto (\$152.19 billion Colombian pesos) represented (27.4%), secondary activities (32.6%) and tertiary activities (40%). From 2020 to 2021, San Alberto's GAV grew by 30.3% (from \$426.32 billion Colombian pesos to \$555.64 billion Colombian pesos). Palm Oil production accounted for 89.1% of San Alberto's total agricultural production in 2021.

Puebloviejo (Magdalena)

According to the 2018 National Population Census, this municipality's population (29,824 people) represents 2.3% of total population of the department of Magdalena. This municipality has a higher concentration of rural inhabitants at 68% (20,281 people), with a lower percentage of inhabitants residing in urban areas, at 32% (9,543 people). The male-to-female ration is 51% to 49%. Regarding its young population, 41% of the total population is age 20 or younger. The average household has 1.92 children.

In 2021, primary economic activities in Puebloviejo (\$34.94 billion Colombian pesos) represented (18.7%). Puebloviejo's GAV has a higher dependency on tertiary activities (75.3%). In terms of economic value, its 2021 GAV was \$187.01 billion Colombian pesos, which represents a growth rate of 30% when compared with 2020 (\$143.77 billion Colombian pesos).



Table A1-2 – Fieldwork Municipalities Demographic and Economic Indicators

Indicators	Agustín Codazzi	El Copey	San Alberto	Puebloviejo
Total Population	60,768	30,159	26,247	29,824
Male Population Ratio	50.2%	50.1%	49.9%	51%
Population aged 20 and less	39.8%	41.5%	37.9%	41%
Rural Population	20.8%	25.5%	20.5%	68%
Urban Population	79.2%	74.5%	79.5%	32%
Average Number of Children per Household	2.1	2.2	1.7	1.9
GAV Primary Activities Share	36.9	41.2	27.4	18.7
GAV Secondary Activities Share	9.1	19.3	32.6	6.0
GAV Tertiary Activities Share	54.0	39.5	40.0	75.3
GAV 2021	741,738	467,761	555,64	187,01
Palm Production as share of Agricultural Activities	64.90%	72.70%	89.10%	79.10%

Source: DANE and DNP (2021).

Note: Total GAV measured in billions of Colombian pesos (current prices).

Location of Fieldwork Municipalities in Palm Oil Nucleus

Within the palm oil production chain, a Palm Oil Nucleus is defined as the combination of a palm oil extraction plant and the plantations which provide it with palm fruit.⁴² In line with this definition, the extraction plants most closely located to the fieldwork municipalities are presented in the table below:

Table A1-3 – Extraction Plants and Fieldwork Municipalities

Fieldwork municipality	Extraction plant
Codazzi	Extractora San Fernando S.A.
El Copey	Extractora Grupalma S.A.S., Extractora Vizcaya S.A.S.
Puebloviejo	Grasas y Derivados S.A. (Gradesa),
San Alberto	Agroindustrias del Sur del Cesar Ltda. y Cía. S.C.A. Agroince

Source: Econometría, based on Fedepalma (2019)

⁴² Infografía Núcleos palmeros 2019_Baja (fedepalma.org)
<https://repositorio.fedepalma.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/141256/infografia-nucleospalmeros-2019.pdf?sequence=1>



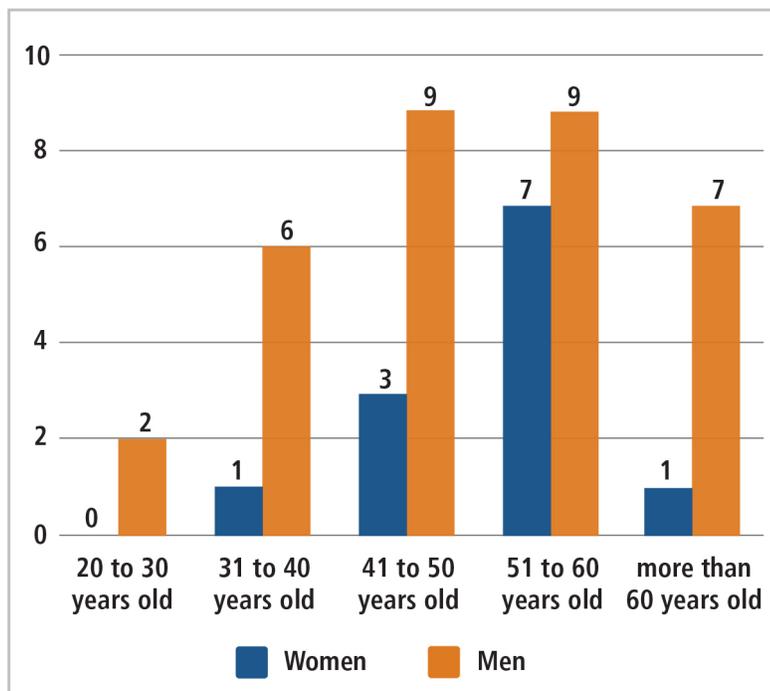
ANNEX 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF PALM OIL PRODUCERS INTERVIEWED

Among the 45 palm oil producers interviewed, 27.66% were women and 73.33% were men. Among the group of women, the average age was 51.9 years (see the distribution by age range presented in the Figure A2-1). Of these women, two had not received any form of education; two had completed some years of primary school; two had finished primary education; four had completed some years of secondary education; one had completed on or more years of technical school; and one held a university degree (see Figure A2-2).

Among the group of men, the average age was 50.75 years (see the distribution by age range in Figure A2-1). Of these men, one had not received any form of education; ten had completed some years of primary school; three had finished primary school; five had completed some years of secondary school; five had graduated from secondary school; and eight had completed one or more year of technical school (see Figure A2-2).

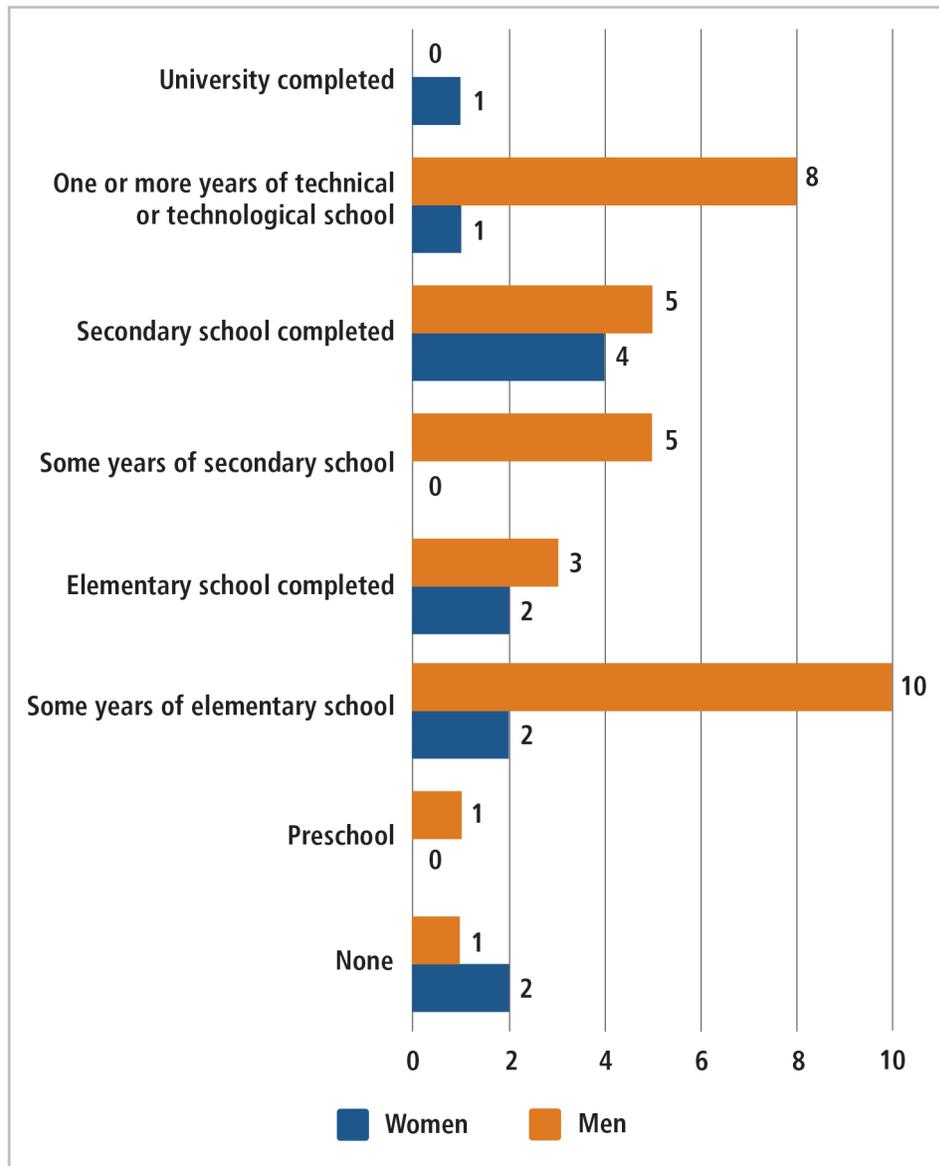
Figure A2-1 – Number of women and men interviewed by age range



Source: Econometría, based on DCIs applied in qualitative exercises



Figure A2-2 – Number of women and men interviewed by studies carried out



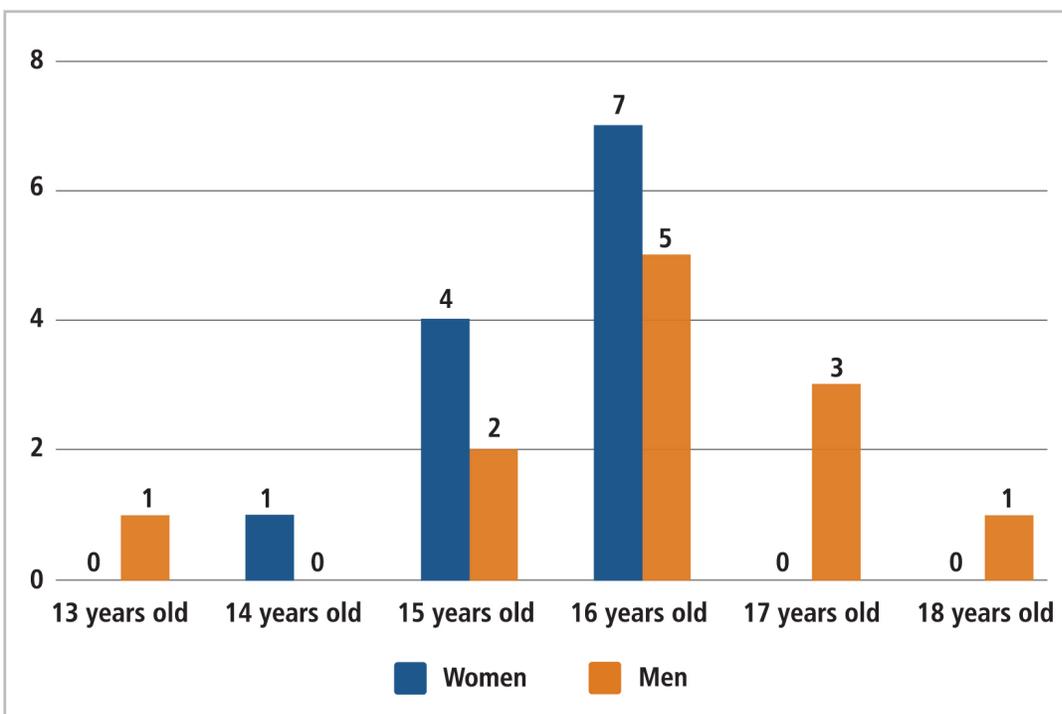
Source: Econometría, based on DCIs applied in qualitative exercises



CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENTS

Among the 24 adolescents interviewed, 50% were female and 50% male; all of them were enrolled in an educational institution at the time of the fieldwork and were between grades 9 to 11 of secondary school. All except one were daughters and/or sons of the head of their household. On average, female adolescents interviewed were 15.5 years old, and male adolescents were 16 years old. The age distribution of the adolescents interviewed can be found in the following figure:

Figure A2-3 – Ages of the adolescents interviewed



Source: Econometría, based on DCIs applied in qualitative exercises

