



**Issue:** The elimination of child labour  
**Forum:** Human Rights Council  
**Position:** Chairs  
**Name:** Merle Beerens and Lucas Meyer

## Introduction

Sustainable development target 8.7 reads to: *“Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”*. Child labour, although already heavily decreased in the past decades, still forms a big problem in today’s world. Child labour has devastating consequences on children, for they are still in the midst of their psychological development. The effects of these traumas often show only after the child has already become an adult. ILO and UNICEF estimate that still around 168 million children suffer from child labour. This research report aims to create a deeper understanding of the issue. It summarises the history of child labour, outlines the mayor causes of child labour and offers suggestions on how the issue could be tackled.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Child labour

The UN makes a clear difference between children in employment, child labour and hazardous child labour. Children in employment do not necessarily suffer from their employment. On the other hand, child labour is defined as work that damages the child either physically or mentally, influences their development or hinder schooling. There are four forms categorised as the worst form of child labour, stated in Article 3. Of the ILO convention no. 182:

- (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Light work is allowed for children between 13-15 years old, hazardous work only for adults, so above 18. In strictly supervised situations and in very poor countries, kids between 12 and 14 years old are also allowed to be admitted for employment.

### **Hazardous child labour**

This is the biggest form of the 'worst forms of child labour', namely category (d) as stated above. It is further defined by ILO as work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions, that can cause serious illness, injuries, or even can get the kid killed. Hazardous labour can furthermore cause permanent disabilities, serious illness, or psychological health issues. It is important to realise that such a hazardous environment has way more influence on a child than on an adult, while children's' minds are still developing.

## **General Overview**

### **History of child labour**

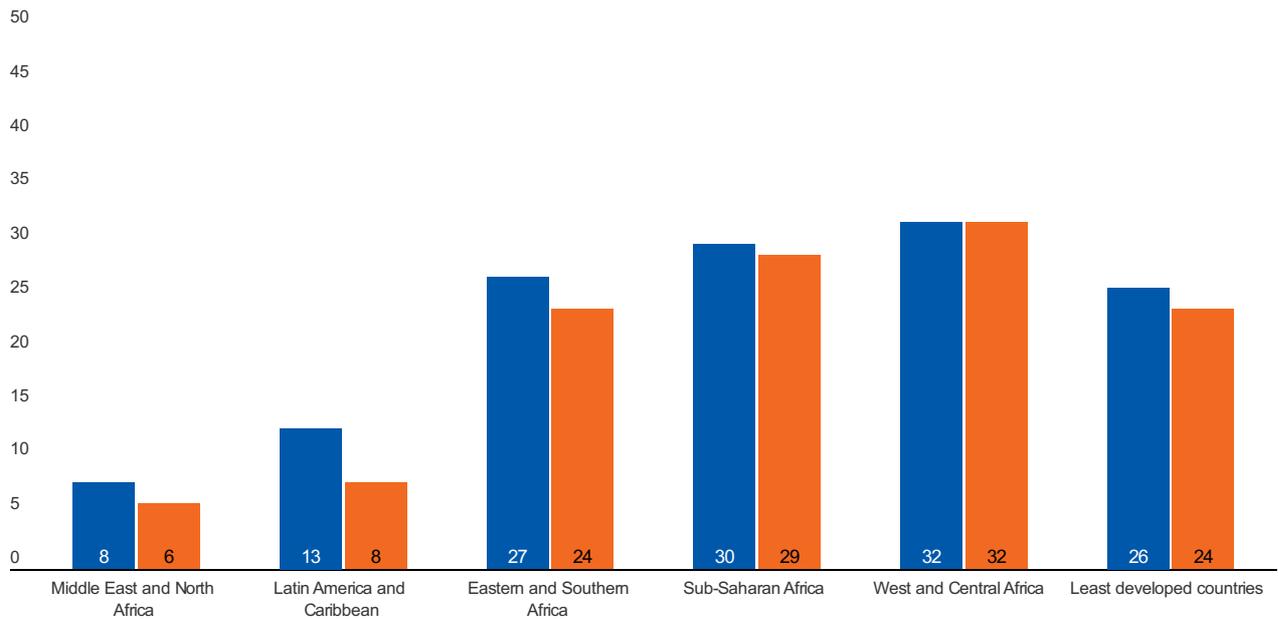
We have not always been familiar with the concept 'child labour'. In the middle ages the concept 'child' was not even really known, for children were already engaged in adult activities as soon as they seemed capable, which would be already around the age of 13. This was mainly caused by short life expectancy and little welfare.

Late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution started, with immense consequences for society. Small villages blew up into big cities, and due to the low wages and relatively large families all children were expected to help in providing for the family. However, work conditions were absolutely horrible and inhumane. Children worked for hours and hours in smoky fabrics, toxic coal mines, as prostitutes, or selling cheap products such as matches. Especially in the fabrics and mines, children were used to crawl into the narrowest shafts because they were so small. What is even worse, as a result of such bad working conditions, the breadwinner of the family – which would be the father – often died at an incredibly young age, leaving the children to work even more, particularly because child wages were only around 10-20 % of an average male wage.

Not only life in the city was tough: many families still worked in agriculture, including children. Although work was categorised less dangerous than in the factories, children still worked way too long. In addition, they worked with dangerous tools and had to carry way too heavy products resulting in health problems and eventually could lead to death from exhaustion.

### **Current statistics**

As of today, UNICEF estimates 246 million children are in employment, 168 million children 5 to 17 years old are child labourer, of which 70 percent works under extreme conditions. Almost one fifth of all child labour is found in Africa (70 million), another 62 million in the



Percentage of children between 5-17 years old engaged in child labour divided per sex and per region. Source: [www.data.unicef.org](http://www.data.unicef.org)

region. In Africa 1 out of 5 children is in employment, in Sub-Saharan Africa, almost 40% of the children is working. 48% of working children is aged 5 to 11 years old, around 70% works in agriculture, which includes fishery, commercial farming and livestock herding.

Most children working are boys, around 23 million more in respect to girls. Thus, boys are more vulnerable for child labour as well as hazardous child labour than girls. However, girls work mostly in under-reported environments such as private households, so maybe statistics about child labour among girls are not as accurately.

Surprisingly, the clear majority of all child labour happens within the family. This means that most children work on behalf of their parents and not of a third party or company. Two third of all children work at home with their parents, which is initially unpaid work but consists of helping the parents in earning their money. Mostly working on the field for example.



Furthermore, 4.3 million children work in forced labour. This covers 'jobs' such as prostitution or compulsory service in the army. Forced labour also concerns labour imposed by state authorities, for reasons of discrimination or the expression of political views for example. Forced labour is found in almost every sector of the economy and apart from the state can also be imposed by enterprises or individuals. Common forms of forced labour are domestic work, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, sexual exploitation and forced begging. Labour turns into forced labour when the worker in question has not offered him or herself voluntarily and

when the situation involves fraudulent debt, withdrawal of wages, restrictions of someone's free movement and (sexual) violence.

### **Causes of child labour**

Evidently the biggest and most primary cause of child labour is poverty. As stated before, immense poverty demands children to work in order to provide for the family, because otherwise they will simply starve. In Africa, overpopulation still is a big problem. Couples tend to get a lot of children, which results in more mouths to feed and an even bigger problem.

Another issue is lack of proper education. Children simply have no other way to get through the day. Most child labour happens in rural areas, where schools are often scarce, difficult to reach, too far away, too expensive, or too low in quality of education.

Child labour also has its cultural reasons. In many cultures, children take on their parents' jobs. Parents too often approve of their children working. They either don't know the benefits of proper education, or they simply believe the earlier children learn the better. In particular regarding girls, it is often believed that taking up the domestic work is a better way to spend time than enjoying a proper education. Work is very valued, and was also in Europe for example seen as a way of schooling for a long time. However, in Africa this culture was even stronger and this is often still the case.

Lastly, the reason for such a high demand for low-educated workforces has to be taken into account. The way the economy in peripheral countries is arranged also makes room for child labour. For example, the large informal economy facilitates child labour, as well as lack of technological equipment. In addition, the income of many families is very unsteady. For example, if the harvest is bad one year, suddenly the family will make no profits, called an 'income shock'. At that point, parents take their kids out of school and let them work.

## **Major Parties Involved**

### **International Labour Organisation (ILO)**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was founded in a very early stage, even before the establishment of the United Nations, namely in 1919. The ILO has a tripartite governing structure, which means that they bring together governments, work employers and workers together to create strong, fair and equal dialogue and come to actual action. The ILO's "main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues". Every year the ILO holds a convention where all member states are represented, as well as one employer and one worker from every member states. The ILO has adopted several conventions, one of which

is the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, containing four main principles, of which one is to end child labour.

## **UNICEF**

As the UN body responsible for the wellbeing of the Child, UNICEF is a very important tool of the UN in order to reach the goal of eliminating child labour. UNICEF focuses on the wellbeing of children and therefore aims to create a safe environment for a child to grow up and develop themselves. The best way in order to tackle child labour is keeping – or getting – children to school according to UNICEF. UNICEF works strongly together with ILO in order to ban the worst forms of child labour according to convention no. 182, and also tries to better other crucial aspects for the wellbeing of children such as health, nutrition and access to sanitary.

## **IPEC**

IPEC stands for “International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour”. It is a programme created by ILO in 1992. Although it aims to eliminate all forms of Child Labour, it currently focuses on eliminating the worst forms by supporting and working together with countries and governments. Projects are focused nationally and are mostly practical. IPEC aims to tackle child labour through legislative development, but also through direct action, such as supporting children that suffer from child labour. The programme works in seven areas: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Social dialogue, Education, Child labour monitoring (CLM), Labour inspection and Time-bound programmes.

## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

Evidently, child labour prevalence is the largest problem in Sub-Saharan Africa. 40% of all children living in the area in question are employed. Child labour is especially hard to tackle, because of the cultural status it has. As explained earlier, in certain societies it is the norm for children to help their parents on the field already from the age of 5. Another factor of influence is the Islam. It used to be common for parents to send their children to a Quranic teacher, where they would divide time between begging on the streets and studying the Quran. Child labour was in this case a way of paying for Quranic education. In imperialistic times, child labour was also very common and even encouraged through certain kinds of Taxes and the way child labourers were actually traded for pieces of land or certain goods or tools to the family. However, countries in the region do try to change. Certain countries have implemented laws to make child labour illegal or to prohibit children from working during school hours. ILO also has two programmes running in Africa: Combating Exploitive Child Labor Through Education in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia (KURET) and eliminating the worst forms of child labour in the ECOWAS states.

## Timeline of Key Events

1973	Minimum Age Convention was adopted by ILO
1992	International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) was initiated by the UN
1998	“Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work” was adopted by ILO, aiming to eliminate all child labour
1990	“Convention on the Rights of the Child” was adopted by UN
1999	ILO “Worst Forms Convention” was adopted, which prohibited all worst forms of child labour

## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

Several steps have already been taken to tackle child labour. Programmes have been installed and data has been collected. For example, several conventions taking active steps towards eliminating child labour, have been signed.

In 1973 for example, the Minimum Age Convention no. 138 was signed, which sets the minimal age for light work at 13, for admission to employment at 15 and for hazardous work at 18. Convention no. 182 was signed in 1999, defining a ‘child’ as a person under 18 plus strongly urging for action to eliminate all worst forms of child labour. This convention was probably the most important document on the issue signed ever, for almost all UN bodies operate based on this convention. Several conventions on the protection of children have been signed as well, such as the Medical Examination of Young Persons Conventions (can be found in the ‘Appendix-section’).

The UN have also adopted several resolutions concerning the rights of children and the problem of child labour. For example, the UN Security Council Resolution 1261, which targets the problem of child soldiers. Two resolutions ‘concerning statistics of child labour’ have also been adopted. Another very important resolution was the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’.

## Possible Solutions

Much progress has already been made in tackling the issue of child labour. World Bank estimates that between 1960 and 2003, events of child labour already decreased from 25% to 10%. The biggest progress was made in South America. There are several aspects to the issue the delegates may find a solution for.

Although poverty was stated as the main reason for child labour, ‘ending poverty’ is not really an option as this intertwines with so many other problems and is such a complicated concept. On the contrary, access to good-quality education for all children is the perfect way to come a step closer towards the end of child labour. If all families would have the option for

their kids to experience good education, they are less likely to be sent to work. Naturally, good education and schools also enable kids to learn, play and develop in a safe environment, hence contributing to the emotional and psychological health of children, so in general this is always a good option. When talking about 'better education', one should focus on for example sufficient school buildings, tools and equipment and schooled teachers.

Another really big part of the solution, is the status schooling has in third world countries. The delegates should find ways to make schools more attractive to parents. For example, schooling should be as cheap as possible, nearby and awareness should be spread to educate communities about the importance of education as well as the damaging effects of child labour. Families can also be supported with so-called 'social transfers', which is direct support for a family for example with money in times of an income shock.

It is also of utmost importance that all countries recognise the big problem of child labour and the devastating effects it has on the development of children. Therefore, the UN should encourage all nations to implement laws that forbid child labour, especially all the worst forms of child labour. International law forbids it already, as stated in the "Worst forms convention", however international law is not binding, while national law is. So national laws on the prohibition of child labour will have direct effects for enterprises and individuals violating it. Laws could refer to the prohibition of worst forms, prohibition of work during school hours and the instalment of a minimal age in order for a child to be able to work.

Furthermore, the monitoring and controlling of situations in which child labour is common should be improved. This connects to the importance of collection of accurate data as well. Much child labour happens within the family, which are unregistered little businesses. Actually, macroeconomic changes should be made, as the current system fuels child labour. It is simply too easy to have a child working unmonitored.

Lastly, direct support should be given to children suffering from child labour. The delegates may think about for example psychological help, medical help and offering education next to their work. Social protection is also important, such as health insurance, support services and child care. This creates a protection system within the community, that will hinder exploitation and neglect of kids.

## Appendix/Appendices

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-labour/>

[https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/child\\_labour.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/child_labour.pdf)

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