



## Implementing Measures to prevent Child Labour in Less Economically Developed Countries

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## Introduction

In many countries across the world, children do not have the opportunity to go to school and many children have to work to provide food and shelter for their families.

There are currently around 152 to 160 million children in labour, which makes child labour an important global issue. Not only can child labour have physical and psychological consequences, but it can also prevent children from pursuing an education. The lack of education in some areas is the reason why it is very difficult to exit the cycle of poverty. Families send their children to work



instead of school to provide income for food. Since these children don't get an education, they can not attain jobs that can earn enough to allow their children to go to school. This becomes a cycle where every generation of parents sends their children to work. It is important to note that child labour is very different from child work. Child work is legal and does not affect the child negatively in any way.

Child labour occurs the most in less economically developed countries (LEDC). There is next to no governmental aid for families living in extreme poverty in these countries. Furthermore, there is less surveillance on companies on how they operate. This lack of measures taken does not prevent the employment of children.

This issue has been present for a very long time. However, the recognition that child labour is not ethical has only sparked in the 1800s. This is around the time when the industrial revolution started. Countries and organizations such as UNICEF, are aiming to achieve the goal of eliminating child labour by 2030. The United Nations sustainability goal 7.8 is to end modern slavery, trafficking and child labour.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Child Labour**

Child labour is defined to be the exploitation of children through any form of work that denies them their rights to an education and a childhood. Child labour is also



often physically, mentally, and morally damaging due to hazardous working conditions, stress, and many more factors. Examples of child labour are Mining, clothing production, and the construction of roads and other infrastructure. Child labour tends to mostly happen in less economically developed countries.

### **LEDC**

LEDC is an abbreviation for “Less Economically Developed Countries”. Countries are classified as either LEDC or MEDC based on development indicators such as GDP, the standard of living, development in education, health and the type of industries that dominate the market in the countries.

### **MEDC**

MEDC is an abbreviation for “More Economically Developed Countries”.

### **Exploitation of Children**

Child exploitation is defined as when someone (individual or organisation) takes advantage of a young person for their benefit. These activities are usually illegal. Forms of child exploitation are but are not limited to child labour, child soldiers, sexual exploitation of children and the use of children in criminal activities such as distribution of narcotics.

### **Elimination of Child Labour**

Eliminating child labour is the implementation of measures to avoid child labour from taking place. Another goal is to help all children currently suffering from child labour by helping them out.

### **Illicit Activities**

Illicit activity is any activity that is illegal according to the law and not considered morally acceptable.



### **Hazardous Working Conditions**

Hazardous working conditions are conditions in a workplace that pose health risks. These include mental and physical harm. Examples of hazardous working conditions are poor air quality; extreme temperatures, noise or radiation and unsafe buildings or workplaces. These conditions can lead to medical conditions such as hearing loss, cancer, injury to limbs, mental injury, respiratory problems and many more. Death is also very common in hazardous working conditions. According to AFL-CIO, 275 people die in hazardous working conditions each day. These also include children.

### **Extreme Poverty**

Extreme poverty is defined as living with under \$1.90 per day. This is measured using the international poverty line. Extreme poverty causes individuals and families to have to resort to illicit activities, loans or other desperate methods to put food on the table. Families in poverty also have no emergency funds in case of a medical emergency.

### **Poverty Cycle**

The cycle of poverty has been defined as “a phenomenon where poor families become trapped in poverty for at least three generations”. This cycle starts with parents who do not earn enough of an income to provide food and shelter and education for their children. Instead of going to school, these children need to start working at a young age, sometimes even at the very start of their childhood. These children then grow up without a decent education which does not allow them to have a comfortable income. This then leads to their children also entering child labour. To break this cycle, one generation of children need to follow education to receive a higher paying job. This cycle continues until there is external intervention. For example, financial aid.

### **Children’s Rights**

Children are considered to be between the ages of 0 and 18. These children are given certain rights which allow them to grow up with a fair childhood where they can follow an education as well as develop themselves. Child rights include health



rights, education rights, freedom of expression, protection from discrimination, rights protecting against violence as well as protection from illicit activities.

## General Overview

### History

Child labour has existed since the dawn of human civilization. Nowadays, we might imagine that the normal course of action for a child is education. However, in mediaeval times, for example, very few children had access to education and it was expected that all children would find labour. In mediaeval times, these jobs were gender-specific where boys would work in the fields with their father while girls did household chores. Another important example of child labour in history is during the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution refers to the period and changes from an economy of agriculture and handcrafted goods to one of manufacturing and technology. This shift was caused by scientific innovation and more specifically the steam engine. This engine allowed the energy in coal and wood to be transformed into mechanical energy used for machines to produce goods on a larger scale. During this industrial revolution, many employees were needed to mine and transport resources, run the steam engines and work in factories. To fill all the vacancies, companies tended to prefer children over adults because children could be paid less and were smaller. This allowed them to fit into smaller areas as well as work more carefully due to having smaller fingers. Some employers in the present day also choose to employ children for these same reasons.

In the mid-1800s, countries passed laws to make school compulsory up to a certain age. Some of these countries have also implemented a minimum wage for adults as well as children. These laws and regulations have improved over time by decreasing the use of loopholes by companies to still employ children. In western countries, the use of children for cheap labour has been greatly reduced, however it is still a large issue in LEDCs.



## Current Situation

Although many measures have been taken to avoid the use of children for labour, it is still happening on a large scale. Most cases of child labour are found in LEDCs compared to MEDCs. MEDCs have fewer people living in poverty which allow most children to follow an adequate education. However, in LEDCs, children do not have the time for school since they spend their days working to earn an income. Reasons for a financial strain on families include health issues or other emergencies that use up any financial savings families have, or issues that prevent primary wage income earners (Usually parents/guardians) from doing their job. This deprives children of childhood. Child labour also provokes implications in their physical and mental wellbeing. These end up affecting the personal development of these young people. Personal development is of vital importance in children because it allows them to think about their goals in life. It also helps them develop their personality and skills which gives them a deeper understanding of themselves and prepares them for adulthood.

Appendix A shows up to which age children are protected against hazardous working conditions. This diagram demonstrates that many countries are lacking in the legal regulations that are required to protect children.

The current statistics about child labour are as follows:

- “Nearly 1 in 10 children in the world are subject to child labour, with many forced into hazardous working conditions”.
- “Roughly 160 million children were subjected to child labour at the beginning of 2020”

These statistics show that this is a pressing issue that requires immediate attention.

Child labour is an infringement of children’s rights.

## Why are children used for Labour?

The use of children in labour is purely business-oriented. The aim of a business that produces goods, is to decrease the cost of production as much as possible to gain the highest profit margin. Ways to decrease the cost of production are, for example, lowering the wage of employees or illegally employing factory workers. Children are typically paid much less than adults. Often, they get paid under 2\$ a day and



occasionally, they do not earn anything but pay off a debt. Children who suffer from child labour have no other choice so companies and organisations take advantage of this by paying them a minimum. These children also work illegally which means companies are not obligated to pay for health insurance or sick days.

Another reason why companies favour the use of children is that they tend to be smaller than adults. Smaller children can reach smaller areas in shafts during the mining of materials or allow them to reach into machines for reparations. Children with smaller fingers are also which make them very beneficial in the production of textiles and clothes.

## Major Parties Involved

### **United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF)**

UNICEF was founded by the United Nations General Assembly on 11 December 1946. It aims to provide nutrition, shelter and healthcare for children who need it. It also works to ensure quality education and protects the rights of children. One way that UNICEF is protecting children's rights is through the elimination of child labour. To eliminate child labour, they are financially and socially helping families of children in need. This can allow the parents to find work and the children to go to school while also having enough food on the table to go around. UNICEF is also raising awareness for this issue. They are communicating the importance of education and its role in combating child labour. UNICEF is also working with governments to implement new and detailed laws prohibiting the use of child labour and decreasing the use of loopholes to bypass these laws. Another method of UNICEF to combat child labour is by working with companies to review their supply chain. Many large companies are not aware of the fact that their goods are produced by children because companies sometimes have hundreds of smaller contractors to do specific tasks. By closely monitoring the supply chain, instances, where children are exploited, can be noticed and methods to prevent this can be put in place.



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

The ILO is a United Nations agency that aims to improve the social, economic, and labour rights of all workers by setting international labour standards. The ILO is making efforts to abolish child labour. To reach this goal, the ILO has established the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). IPEC currently has projects underway in 88 countries and spends tens of millions of dollars annually.

### **United States of America (USA)**

The USA has one of the highest demands for goods produced in Asia and Africa. Many of these products are produced through child labour. Companies such as H&M and Philip Morris have a history of using children. USA's government has passed laws against buying, selling and importing products produced with child labour. For example, section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930 prohibits the importation of products that are manufactured by child labour. The Department of Labour (DOC) in the USA is also tasked with reducing the likelihood of products made by child labour being imported into the country.

### **China**

China is a country with a large role in child labour. 7.74% of all children aged 10 to 15 were working in 2010. China is responsible for a large share of the production of all goods in the world and is known for cheap production costs. These could tempt companies to employ children to cut costs. To avoid this, the Chinese government has put in place numerous measures and laws. For example, one law states that children under the age of 16 are not permitted to partake in business activities. (China. REGULATIONS BANNING CHILD LABOUR, 2002)

### **LEDCs**

The ILO estimates the continent of Africa to have the largest number of cases of child labour in the world compared to its youth population. The number of children suffering from child labour is estimated to be 72.1 million with 31.5 million in hazardous working conditions.



In Asia and the Pacific, the number of children in child labour is 122.3 million in 2004. Many of these are also under hazardous working conditions.

## Timeline of Key Events

1890	Some countries in Europe have already started to place child labour laws in place
December 11 <sup>th</sup> 1946	Formation of UNICEF
2002	China publishes a set of laws protecting children from child labour
December 19 <sup>th</sup> 2016	Resolution (A/RES/71/177) adopted by General Assembly: Outlines what the rights of children are
The Year of 2021	International Year of Elimination of Child Labour: this event aims to raise awareness for the issue of child labour

## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

### **Laws prohibiting the importation of goods manufactured through child labour**

Numerous countries have passed laws to reduce and avoid the importation of goods produced by child labour. An example of such laws is section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930 in the USA. This law prohibits the importation of goods made through child exploitation. The department of labour (DOL) is also responsible for decreasing the importation of goods made through child labour.

### **Laws prohibiting the use of child labour**

National and international laws have been put in place to prohibit the use of child restrictions. This is done by implementing an age restriction for employees. The international child labour standards set the minimum age for light work at 13, and



general employment at 15. For hazardous work, employees need to be 18 or above but in some cases, it can be lowered to 16. China is a major party involved in child labour and has passed numerous laws protecting the rights of children. A few examples of regulations that ban child labour are:

- No employment of children under the age of 16,
- Parents/Guardians need to ensure that their children do not suffer from illegal employment and that their physical and mental well-being are well protected,
- When companies employ, employers need to check the identity of candidates to ensure the age restriction laws are respected.

### **National child labour committee (NCLC)**

The NCLC was a non-profit organisation. This organisation shut down due to lack of funds but in the time that they were active, they have made a lot of improvements in the field of child labour. Its main goal was to raise awareness for the exploitation of children. On top of this, the NCLC also promoted children's rights, well-being, and education.

### **Government-supported programmes and initiatives**

Initiatives such as the IPEC are supported by most of the member states of the United Nations. Another example of a solution is the Dutch Ministry's efforts in projects tackling child labour. The Dutch Ministry has launched multiple projects along with UNICEF such as 'Work: No Child's Business'. Its goal is "Children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and (future) decent work. We contribute to the global efforts to end all forms of child labour by 2025.". It achieves this by focusing on providing an education for children stuck in child labour and/or poverty. It also wants companies to take full responsibility for what happens in their production chains to make sure everything stays legal.

### **UNICEF helping companies analyse their production chain**

One of UNICEF's goals is to filter out any child labour in the production chains of any company. To complete this, UNICEF is working with companies to analyse and



investigate their production chains to highlight any instances of child labour and take measures to eliminate these while also protecting the children. UNICEF also helps companies design measures that avoid children from being recruited in the first place.

### **IPEC target group priorities**

The IPEC programme has published a list of target group priorities. This means they have made a list of areas that urgently need a lot of attention. These priorities are made to eliminate the use of children in instances such as:

- slavery or similar practices,
- sale or trafficking of children,
- compulsory labour or debt bondage (Debt bondage is when an individual is in debt to another and needs to provide labour to pay it off. This type of forced labour is difficult to get out of),
- prostitution or the production of pornographic material,
- illicit activities,
- any activities that are physically or physiologically damaging to a child.

## Possible Solutions

### **Provide financial support to families in poverty**

By providing financial support, parents can send their children to school to follow an education instead of to the workplace since feeding the family will not be an issue. Education is the way out of child labour and poverty.

### **Provide free and accessible education in LEDCs**

Many communities have inaccessible education. This makes parents more likely to choose to send their children to work. By opening new schools, more children will be able to follow an education.



### **Strengthen laws and regulations for minimum working age**

Many current laws about labour and the use of children are not ideal and many loopholes can be found to still bypass these rules. By reviewing these international and national laws, its issues can be corrected.

### **Minimum age needed to discontinue an education**

Many countries have a minimum age to start working, however not as many have a minimum education everyone needs. In the Netherlands, it is mandatory to continue with a full-time education up to the age of 16. After this between the ages of 16 and 18, children still need to follow classes twice a week.

### **Campaigns to spread awareness about child labour in companies and schools**

Campaigns to spread awareness can show the extensive implications of child labour. Most people buying products do not know how they are produced. However, these campaigns can aim to spread the truth about the origin of products made using child labour. This could convince people to think twice about the origin of a product before buying it.

### **Campaigns discouraging the labour of children**

Campaigns can be set up to contact and communicate with manufacturing businesses in LEDC to show to issues and consequences of Child Labour.

### **Financial aid from member states to UNICEF and the IPEC programme**

Member states of the United Nations can be urged to donate a certain amount to UNICEF and the IPEC programme. This donation would be used to combat child labour by implementing measures such as financial aid and extra regulations for the production of goods.

### More control and investigations into the use of children in hazardous workplaces

UNICEF, other existing organisations or a new organisation can be tasked with closely monitoring businesses with hazardous workplaces. Investigations can be led in cases of suspected child labour.

### The minimum wage for children

Implementing a minimum wage for the employment of children which is not too low while also reasonable could convince companies to employ adults instead since the savings on the production costs would not be high enough. A minimum wage for children would also ensure that children are not taken advantage of for low wages.

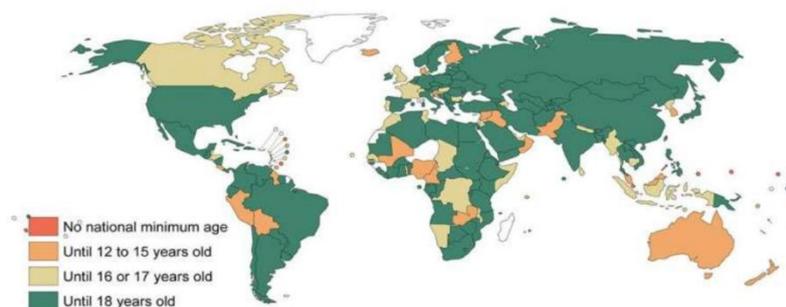
### Improving supply chain transparency of goods

A lot of child labour goes undetected in the production chain by large companies while other companies try to hide the fact that they are taking advantage of children. Transparency in the supply chain would encourage companies to do their best to regulate and monitoring for child labour. Governments and NGOs would also be able to assist companies with this task.

## Appendix/Appendices

- **Appendix A:** World Policy Analysis Center, Child Labor Database, 2016

### How long are children protected from hazardous work when legal loopholes are considered?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Child Labor Database, 2016

WORLD Policy Analysis Center

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