

Child Labor - Background

Child labor refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful. This practice is considered exploitative by many international organizations. Legislations across the world prohibit child labor. These laws do not consider all work by children as child labor; exceptions include work by child artists, and supervised training.

The campaign highlights the critical importance of improving safety and health for young workers above the minimum legal age for work. It also stresses the critical importance of removing children below the minimum age for work from all forms of child labor and ensuring they have access to quality education.

According to UNICEF, children in the United States “are employed in agriculture, a high proportion of them from immigrant or ethnic-minority families.” There have also been a number of incidents of western companies exploiting child laborers in developing countries to save production costs.



How many children are involved and in what sectors?

The ILO estimates that of the world's 215 million child laborers, 115 million are involved in hazardous work, 41 million are girls and 74 million boys; 53 million are aged 5-14, and 62 million are aged 15-17. The highest concentration of hazardous child labor is in **agriculture** (59 %) followed by 30 % in services (e.g. **domestic work, street-based work**) and 11 % in industry (e.g. **small workshops, mining, construction**).

What are some of the specific hazards for children in these sectors?

- In *agriculture*, children may be exposed to toxic **pesticides** or fertilizers, **dangerous blades** and tools, carry **heavy loads** and suffer from attacks or bites from animals or insects (e.g. mosquitoes transmitting malaria and other diseases).
- In *mining*, children may use poisonous **chemicals**, face the risks of **mine collapse** and sometimes work with explosives.
- In *construction*, children may carry **heavy loads**, **work at** tall heights and risk injury from **dangerous machinery**.
- In *manufacturing*, children may use **toxic solvents**, perform **repetitive tasks in painful positions** and risk injury from **sharp tools**.
- In *domestic work*, children may suffer from different forms of **abuse**, long work hours and live **in isolation** away from their family or peers.
- In *scavenging or waste-picking*, children may be at risk of infection from exposure to **toxic chemicals** and wastes.

What are the key steps required to tackle hazardous child labor?

The problem of hazardous work is part of the wider child labor problem. Tackling child labor therefore requires governments to ensure children have the opportunity for free quality education at least until the minimum age of employment. It also requires measures to tackle the poverty that breeds child labor by promoting social protection, ensuring decent work for adults and enforcing laws against child labor.

- Determining or reviewing the list of hazardous work after consultation with employers' organizations and trade unions
- Improving the collection of data on occupational accidents and illnesses, including analysis of the sex and age of children involved;
- Awareness-raising, so that both adults and children recognize the dangers;
- Developing policies and up to date regulations to protect children;
- Promoting effective law enforcement through integrated labor inspection services working in concert with other actors; and,
- Working with workers' representatives and employers' organizations to help ensure that work is safe for all.