

Child labour: Everything you need to know

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Child labour is the exploitation of children who are deprived of their childhood by work that prevents them from attending school or causes physical, mental, or social harm. In their early developmental years, children are especially vulnerable to injuries, though physical and mental health problems may not be evident for years. Worldwide, the ILO estimates that each year, 22,000 child labourers are killed at work.

It is estimated that 168 million children between the ages of five and 17 are child labourers. That's a huge number - it's as many as all the people who live in the United Kingdom, Argentina, Canada and Malaysia added together. Most child labourers, almost 108 million, work in agriculture. About 4.3 million children are in forced labour, including child soldiers and children exploited in the commercial sex trade. Child labour exists on almost every continent. Almost half of all child labour (72.1 million children) is found in Africa; 62.1 million children are engaged in child labour in the Asia and the Pacific; 10.7 million children in the Americas; 1.2 million children in the Middle East and 5.5 million children in Europe and Central Asia, according to the ILO.

Child labour is also common in fragile contexts where there is insecurity or armed conflict. Child labour is concentrated in the world's poorest countries, where about 25% of children are engaged in exploitative work. Sub-Saharan Africa has more child labourers than any other region. Sub-Saharan Africa, home to 27 of the world's 28 lowest income countries, has more child labourers than anywhere else. More than 3.4 million children in Bangladesh are engaged in child labour. Causes of child labour include poverty, barriers to education, cultural practices, market demand, and the inadequate/poor enforcement of legislation and policies to protect children. The effects of child labour deprive children of their right to education, expose them to violence and reinforce intergenerational cycles of poverty. But sadly, child labour keeps children from getting the education they need to break free from the cycle of poverty.

But families and employers often hide what they are doing because they worry they will be taken to court or sent to prison for having child labourers. It is a shocking fact that 46 countries do not have laws to protect children under 18 from doing dangerous work.

As many as 152 million children aged 5 to 17 around the world are engaged in child labour, working in jobs that deprive them of their childhood, interfere with schooling, or harm their mental, physical, or social development. Nearly half of them — 73 million children — work under hazardous conditions, such as carrying heavy loads on construction sites or digging in open-pit mines. By definition, child labour is a violation of both child protection and child rights.

According to the International Labour Organization, a U.N. agency, more than two-thirds of child labourers are involved in family agriculture. Others work long hours in factories or domestic service.

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Since 2000, when the ILO began monitoring child labour, the number of children exploited fell by 94 million, a dramatic global reduction. However, the decline slowed between 2012 and 2016 — the most recent reporting period — and the incidence of child labour increased in sub-Saharan Africa. Clearly, a stronger global effort will be required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating all forms of child labour worldwide by 2025.

Shocking Child Labour Statistics

- 152 million children worldwide are victims of child labour; 88 million are boys and 64 million are girls.
- Girls may be more present in less visible and therefore under-reported forms of child labour such as domestic service in private households, and girls are much more likely than boys to shoulder responsibility for household chores, a form of work not considered in child labour estimates
- Girls who leave school early do so disproportionately to undertake responsibility for chores within their own homes, while boys are more likely to leave school prematurely to join the labour force.
- 48% of all victims of child labour are aged 5-11 years.
- Almost half of child labour victims (73 million) work in hazardous child labour; more than one-quarter of all hazardous child labour is done by children less than 12 years old (19 million).
- Almost half of child workers are in Africa (72.1 million); 41% (62.1 million) are in Asia and the Pacific.
- 71% of child labour takes place in agriculture, which includes fishing, forestry, livestock herding and aquaculture.
- 19% of child labour victims live in low-income countries; 2 million victims live in high-income countries.
- There is a strong correlation between child labour and situations of conflict and disaster. The incidence of child labour in countries affected by armed conflict is 77% higher than the global average; the incidence of hazardous work is 50% higher.
- Forced labour is thought to generate around \$150 billion a year in illegal profits.
- More than two-thirds of all children in child labour (69.1%) work as contributing family labourers on family farms and in family enterprises, not in an employment relationship with a third-party employer.
- Children forced by their household circumstances or other factors to leave school before their fifteenth birthday are less likely to ever find jobs and those who do find jobs take much longer to do so.
- Former child labourers are much more likely to have only primary education or less.
- Young persons who worked as children (up to the age of 15) are more likely to be in low-paying jobs.
- June 12 is World Day Against Child Labour.

At the time of writing this article on 7 October 2020, these are the hours of child labour, for 2020,

October, this week and today according to The World Counts:



242,815,788
Hours of child labor
IN THE WORLD, THIS YEAR

IN 2020 THIS MONTH THIS WEEK TODAY



5,503,781
Hours of child labor
GROWTH, SO FAR IN OCTOBER

IN 2020 THIS MONTH THIS WEEK TODAY



2,039,226
Hours of child labor
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THIS WEEK

IN 2020 THIS MONTH THIS WEEK TODAY



307,285
Hours of child labor
GROWTH, SO FAR TODAY

IN 2020 THIS MONTH THIS WEEK TODAY

Here are some highlights of child labour history:

1938 — The U.S. Fair Labour Standards Act restricts hours and types of jobs for children under age 16.

1973 — The Minimum Age Convention, ratified by 172 countries, sets the minimum age for employment but allows some exceptions.

1989 — The U.N. enacts the Convention on the Rights of the Child to guarantee the protection of children's rights to grow and thrive.

1992 — The International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is founded to promote the global elimination of child labour and to support countries in their efforts.

1999 — The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, ratified by 186 countries, requires ending practices like slavery, child trafficking, debt bondage, forced labour in armed conflict, prostitution, pornography, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities.

2021 — The U.N. General Assembly declares this to be the Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.

2025 — All forms of child labour are to end this year under Target 8.7 of the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals.

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