

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Addressing the issue of child labour and
exploitation



Forum	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
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Introduction

Child labor and exploitation is affecting around 152 million children worldwide. It is work that deprives children of their childhoods and exposes them to harmful conditions, usually in the fields of: agriculture, manufacturing, and domestic service.

This exploitation violates basic human rights, hinders physical and cognitive development, and continues the cycle of poverty and inequality. The causes of child labor include poverty, a lack of education, and societal norms that minimize the value of these children's childhoods to pawns. The past attempts to combat (and end) child labor have involved legislative measures, law enforcement, education initiatives, and international collaboration.

Despite promising starts to some of these attempts, they have all become void in the long-term. This confirms that child labor and exploitation require continuous global attention alongside multiple multifaceted solutions to ensure a better future for the children.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Labour

Child labour is work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular schools, and is mentally, physically, socially, or morally harmful.

Exploitation

Exploitation is the act of unfairly or unjustly taking advantage of someone or a group, typically for personal or collective gain.

Convention

A convention is an agreement between different countries that is legally binding to the contracted states.



General Overview

Child labour and exploitation are serious violation of children's rights, it come in various forms such as forced marriage, sexual abuse, and human trafficking. Forced marriage robs children of their autonomy and exposes them to a life of coercion that often ends up creating or continuing cycles of abuse. Sexual exploitation causes unfixable harm as vulnerable minors are used as objects for the gratification of others. Human trafficking involves the abduction or recruitment of children for various exploitative purposes, including forced labour and prostitution. These acts leave negative impacts on children for the rest of their lives. Physically, they may endure hazardous working conditions, malnutrition, and impaired growth. Psychologically, the trauma inflicted can lead to anxiety, depression, and decreases overall health.

In developing countries, child labour is considered socially acceptable due to economic challenges. Families struggling with limited household incomes may feel forced to send their children to work, viewing it way to increase income and reduce financial burdens. This economic necessity creates a vicious cycle, practically guaranteeing the deprivation of multiple generations from proper education and perpetuates poverty. In many cases, the immediate need for increased income often takes priority over the long-term consequences child labour and exploitation has on a child's development, resulting in a terrible compromise for their future.

Nevertheless, child labour and exploitation still occurs in developed countries, with most of the cases focusing on sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, the continued development of digitization and technology is helping facilitate these crimes, making it easier for perpetrators to exploit children. While the internet serves as the centre for the distribution of explicit material involving minors, online platforms provide traffickers with a cloak of anonymity that allows them to operate with more effectively and with less fear of being caught.



Major Parties Involved

Governments

Governments play an extremely significant role in the issue of child labor and exploitation, however their involvement in the matter is not only positive, as governments can also make it easier for child labor to exist. This is as if a government doesn't properly enforce their labor laws, has a sub-par regulatory framework, or has corruption within and throughout their regulatory frameworks (even if it's up to standards), it may lead to the continuation and persistence of child labor. Additionally, governments will always find that issues like economic issues will always take priority, even over a socially pressing issue such as child labour.

Some governments who have had direct involvement in child labour and exploitation in recent years are: India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. All these governments' recent use of child labour has been consistent with the sectors of agriculture, factories and manufacturing plants, as well as other informal sectors.

Other governments who have extremely strong legislation and have implemented a multitude of measures to counter child labour and exploitation are: the USA, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Canada. All these governments' fight against child labour and exploitation has been consistent with actively participating in international efforts to eradicate the problem, as well as focusing on responsible business practises and supply chain transparency, promoting awareness and education. Some also have their own laws and legislations which have been monumental in that country's fight.

The International Labour Organization

The ILO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that was established in 1919 and are 'devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights.' Over the past 100+ years the ILO have been setting labor standards and developing policies and programs that have aided a wide range of labour related issues, including child labor. As an agency under the UN, the ILO have provided assistance to member states multiple times and continue to be available to help with regards to any labor issue.



Save the Children

Save the Children is an NGO that work to ensure that every child has a proper childhood, growing up healthy, with an education, and safe. They were founded in 1919 and are currently in over 100 countries. One of the multiple issues they work towards fixing is child labor, and through their partnerships with the communities they work in, governments, and other organizations, they've been able to break the cycle of inequality for 118 million children. Their work is done primarily in emergency and conflict zones.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
June 2, 1788	Factory Act in the UK restricts the working hours of children in textile mills
April 11, 1919	The International Labour Organization (ILO) is established
June 2, 1930	The ILO Convention on Minimum Age is adopted
November 20, 1959	Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child
June 26, 1973	Adoption of ILO Convention No. 138
November 20, 1989	Adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
1992	Launch of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour by the ILO
June 17, 1999	Adoption of ILO Convention No. 138
September 25, 2015	Inclusion of the elimination of child labor in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under Goal 8



UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Name of the Resolution, Date of the Resolution (Resolution Number)
- Rights of the child, 19 December 2016 (A/RES/71/177)
- Programme of Action for the Elimination of the Exploitation of Child Labor, 10 March 1993 (E/CN.4/RES/1993/79)
- UN experts urge action to address alarming increase of child labour in agriculture sector, 30 May 2022
- The ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1992 (No. 182)
- Child labour rises to 160 million – first increase in two decades, 10 June 2021
- Ending child labour by 2025- Geneva, 2018

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been many attempts to solve the issue of child labor and exploitation in the past, and it is incredibly difficult to categorize and of these attempts as a failure as child labor is extremely complex and success in it has usually depends on the effectiveness of said attempts' implementation, the realism of the targets, and the commitment of those working.

Based on that criterion, there are some attempts that stand out and are considered successes. The first being the early labor laws, these laws have contributed significantly to stopping children from being forced to work in many nations (mainly industrialized ones, though), as well as permanently changing societal norms in many. Another successful attempt includes the ILO conventions that have set international standards for child labor. The Global March Against Child Labor and the CSR programme have also made great impacts, respectively. The Global March Against Child Labor has raised massive amounts of global awareness on the matter, and CSR has given rise to



many businesses taking on a more ethical way of functioning and subsequently eliminated child labor.

Other attempts which are still ongoing but have showed great promise include the United Nations Declarations on the right of the child and the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor. The UN Declarations have been extremely crucial in international discourse yet there is a lack of belief that they will be able to fully implement and enforce their goals globally. IPEC on the other hand has made significant steps in research and intervention, yet the persistence of child labor suggests that there's still a long way to go.

Lastly, the attempt which has been considered most likely to fail are the SDG's, more specifically the elimination of child labor by 2025. With still over 150 million children worldwide involved in child labor, it's very unlikely that that goal is met.

Possible Solutions

Any solutions for child labor and exploitation cannot be simple, it must be multifaceted. I must also point out that the effectiveness of any solution isn't straightforward, as there are cultural and economic (as well as other) factors to consider.

The first and most logical solution to point out is ensuring access to quality education. By providing children with the opportunity to go to school, not just are you giving them the minimum of what they deserve, but you are also equipping them with the tools for a better future, and subsequently breaking the cycle of poverty and child labor.

Next is the proper and strict enforcement of laws. By doing this, a clear message will be sent that child labor is a line that cannot be crossed, which will likely cause the changing of societal norms and reinforcing the public's commitment to protecting children's rights. However, for this to be a viable solution, there must be an unprecedentedly large collaboration between all major stakeholders in a country.

Another would be setting up poverty alleviation programmes. This would target the root cause of child labor by providing families with financial support or opportunities for income that would allow them to stop seeing their kids as necessary help for when it comes to making money.



There are multiple forms of poverty alleviation programmes, including Holistic poverty alleviation, which is when an environment where families thrive economically is created, eliminating the economic factors that cause child labor.

Lastly is corporate accountability and promoting ethical supply chains. Businesses' have significant impact when it comes to child labor, as many of them hire underaged kids to the work that nobody else wants to do, they take advantage of the financial situations of these kids and of the societal norms that have made the kids think that it's ok for them to be working. By promoting ethical supply chains, other businesses which hire children will slowly die out unless they change their ways. Especially in a world in which ethical and environmental ways of functioning a business are celebrated, this solution would do well.



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