



Preventing Child Labor

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Introduction

Despite the numerous international efforts to eradicate child labor, it remains the most pressing challenge to the world. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines child labor as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and/or mental development”¹. This broad definition covers any form of work that interferes with the schooling and is harmful to the child’s health and development.



Source: UNICEF

Child labor prevents millions of children across the globe from enjoying their fundamental rights. It not only violates the children’s rights and hinder their progress towards economic development and social justice but also a great barrier to achieving Sustainable Development

¹ “What Is Child Labour,” International Labour Organization, n.d. <https://www.ilo.org/topics/child-labour/what-child-labour>.

Goals (SDGs). Child labor prevalence rates have gone down over the past years; however, progress has slowed down significantly because the recent economic disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic have reversed some of the earlier gains made.

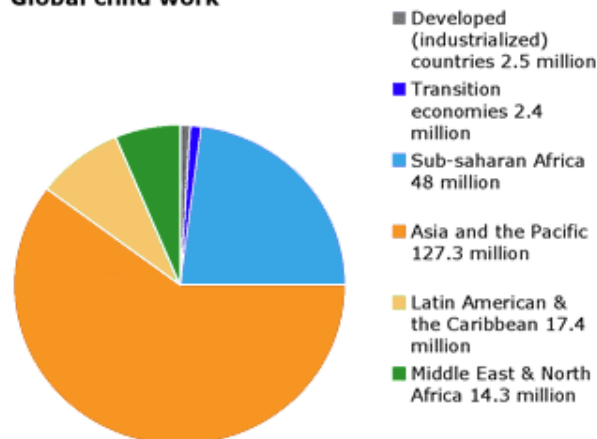
According to data, there were 160 million children, nearly 1 in 10 globally, that are engaged in child labor as of 2020². And in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), slightly more than one in five children ages 5 to 17 are engaged in labor detrimental to their health and development, as of 2024³. This is a worrying trend given the international commitment to end all forms of child labor by 2025 as part of the UN's most important guidance on this issue, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴

Various factors are contributing to this trend of child labor, including poverty, lack of access to education, cultural norms, and the economic crisis. Despite the significant improvements made in eradicating the menace, particularly in some regions such as Asia and Latin America, the situation remains a very disturbing one in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, which accounts for the highest share of child labor globally.⁵

The call to address child labor is not only an issue of human rights but it is also essential for sustainable development. To achieve the SDG target of ending child labor in all its forms, it requires a collective and coordinated international action, effective policy implementation, and the involvement of all stakeholders, ranging from governments to civil society. This issue brief explores the root causes,

the global scale of child labor, international frameworks such as SDGs aimed at eradicating child labor, the current issues, the stance of major blocs and policy recommendations for ending the problem.

Global child work



Source:

<https://laborawareness.wordpress.com/statistics/>

Background

As defined by the International Labour Organization, child labor is any work that is mentally, socially, physically, or morally dangerous and harmful to children. This involves work that interferes with their schooling, deprives them of the opportunity to attend school, or requires them to combine schooling with excessively heavy work. It is worth noting that not all works done by children are classified as child labor, as ILO recognizes that some forms of work may be beneficial for children's development.⁶

² UNICEF 2021, Child labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward - UNICEF data, June 9, 2021, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-labour-2020-global-estimates-trends-and-the-road-forward/>.

³ UNICEF 2024, Child labor statistics - UNICEF data, June 2024, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-labour/>.

⁴ 1. ICCROM, "SDG 8.7: End Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Child Labour," ICCROM, n. d.

<https://ocm.iccrom.org/sdgs/sdg-8-decent-work-and-economic-growth/sdg-87-end-modern-slavery-trafficking-and-child-labour>.

⁵ UNICEF 2024, Child labor statistics - UNICEF data, June 2024, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-labour/>.

⁶ ILO, "Child Labour," International Labour Organization, n. d., <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/child-labour>.

The International Labour Organization's *Minimum Age Convention* (No. 138) and *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention* (No. 182) offer the framework for distinguishing between the harmful and acceptable work. However, child labor as defined undermines the well-being and violates international conventions. Recommendation No. 190, which accompanies Convention No. 182, recommends that any definition of "hazardous work should include: work which exposes children to physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; work underground, underwater, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces; ... work for long hours, night work, and unreasonable confinement to the premises of the employer".⁷

According to ILO and UNICEF, there were 160 million children, nearly 1 in 10 globally, engaged in child labor. 79 million were involved in hazardous work as of 2020. The prevalence is highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, where almost

24% of children aged 5–17 are engaged in some form of labor.⁸ This shows that boys are more likely than girls to be involved in child labor, even though girls often face hidden forms of labor, such as domestic work. These alarming numbers show that the progress in reducing child labor has stalled, with increases in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa due to population growth, conflict, and economic downturns worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹

Child labor is usually caused or driven by a variety of socio-economic factors. However, these vary from region to region but there are some common themes that cut across. Among these causes are poverty, lack of access to education, cultural norms, conflict, and the economic crisis because of COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the global child labor crisis by increasing poverty and reducing access to education.¹⁰

⁷ ILO, "ILO Conventions on Child Labour," International Labour Organization, n.d., <https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipecc/what-child-labour/ilo-conventions-child-labour>.

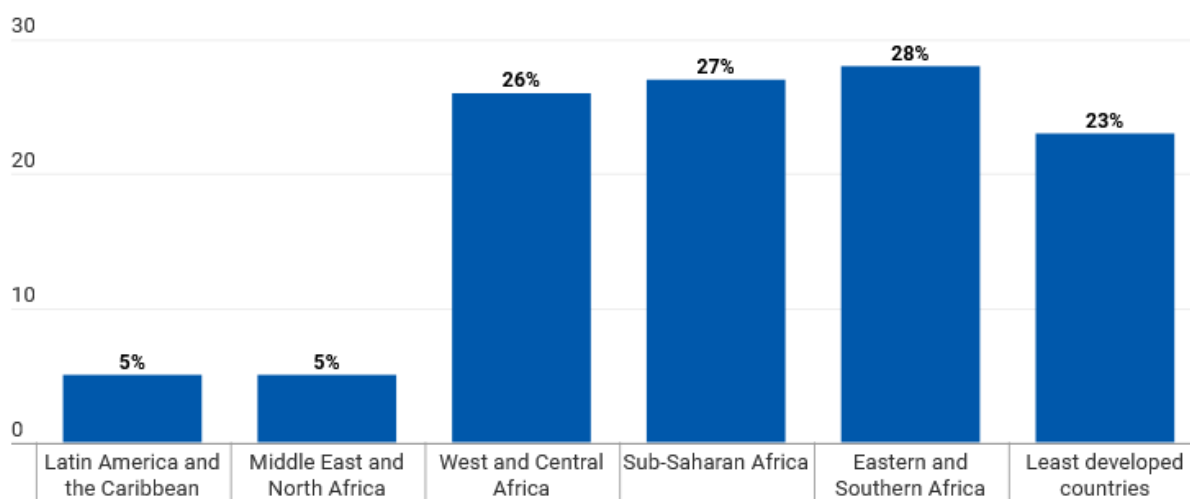
⁸ UNICEF/ILO 2021, Child labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward - UNICEF data, June 9, 2021, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-labour-2020-global-estimates-trends-and-the-road-forward/>.

⁹ World Bank Group 2020 World Bank Group, "World Bank Confirms Economic Downturn in Sub-Saharan

Africa, Outlines Key Policies Needed for Recovery," World Bank, October 8, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/08/world-bank-confirms-economic-downturn-in-sub-saharan-africa-outlines-key-policies-needed-for-recovery>.

¹⁰ Covid-19 and the Worst Forms of Child Labor, n.d., <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/Covid-19-WFCL-policy-response.pdf>.

Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in child labor, by region



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

Migration within and across borders has contributed significantly to the rise of child labor in recent years. Many children migrating, particularly unaccompanied or because of conflict and economic hardship, are at the highest risk of exploitation and abuse.¹¹ In 2020, it was estimated that millions of displaced children were in labor because of the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen and other hotspots where migration and displacement increase their vulnerability.¹²

The UN's 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development* (or UN Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs), which was adopted by all United Nations member states, clearly addresses the

issue of child labor under Goal Number 8, and specific target 8.7 calls for the states to "take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms." Taking steps to achieve this target is crucial for realizing other related goals, including those on quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5) and reducing inequality (Goal 10).¹³

By understanding the scale and causes of child labor and the frameworks established to eliminate it, the international community can

¹¹ Human Rights Watch 2017, "How Wars and Disasters Fuel Child Labor," Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/12/how-wars-and-disasters-fuel-child-labor>.

¹² United Nations 2022, "A Record 37 Million Children Displaced Worldwide: UNICEF | UN News," United

Nations, June 17, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120642>.

¹³ United Nations, "Alliance 8.7 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs," United Nations, n.d., <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/alliance-87#targets-tab>.

coordinate more effective interventions. The international community has made considerable efforts to eradicate child labor, but the challenges remain, especially in the context of ongoing economic and social instability. Innovative approaches are needed to achieve the ambitious goal of eradicating child labor by 2025.



Issues to be Resolved

Poverty is the common factor that drives child labor. In many places, families need additional income to survive, and their children are compelled to earn income to support the family. It is asserted by the ILO that child labor is most prevalent in the poorest regions, where economic vulnerabilities compel the children to work. Addressing this issue means resolving the economic disparities, creating jobs, and providing social safety nets, thereby preventing families from engaging children in labor.¹⁴

Also, lack of access to quality education contributes to the high prevalence of child labor. Children are likely to engage in child labor just to fill the gap in regions where the opportunities

to attend school are scarce or inadequate. Moreover, even if the opportunities are available, the cost of schooling, coupled with the economic hardship, usually forces families to choose between taking their children to work or school. Ensuring universal access to free and compulsory education is crucial to ending child labor. Educational reforms must be aligned with efforts to support families economically, especially in rural and underserved areas.¹⁵

Even though many countries have ratified the international conventions on child labor, enforcement is often lacking. This is due to corruption, lack of resources, or inadequate governance. This makes it difficult to eradicate child labor in countries, especially in the developing countries. Empowering national legal frameworks to ensure compliance with international standards and increasing monitoring and enforcement are critical issues that need to be addressed. Additionally, legal loopholes in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and informal industries where child labor is rampant need to be addressed. Addressing these issues will prevent children from being exploited into the workforce.¹⁶

Cultural practices are a driving force behind child labor. In some cultures, in some regions, child labor is accepted as a normal routine of childhood or rite of passage, where children are working to contribute to the family income. Due to its acceptance as something traditional, families do not see anything wrong with it. Creating awareness and educating communities about the dangers of child labor can shift social attitudes toward valuing education over children working.¹⁷

Conflict and crisis are an important cause of child labor. In areas that experience conflicts,

¹⁴ OECD, "Child Labour: Causes, Consequences and Policies to Tackle It: Read Online," OECD, n.d., https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/child-labour_f6883e26-en#page1.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Alhassan Abdullah et al 2022., "Social Norms and Family Child Labor: A Systematic Literature Review," MDPI, March 30, 2022, <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/7/4082>.

natural disasters, or economic instability, children become vulnerable to exploitation and forced labor. This is because displaced children often become unprotected and prime targets for child labor recruiters, hence the high rates of child labor across the globe. There must be humanitarian efforts to safeguard these vulnerable children in these situations. This will prevent these displaced children from engaging in child labor.^{18 19}



Source: Andy Newman, 'They sell candy instead of going to school. New York isn't stopping them', *New York Times*, 13 March 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/13/nyregion/migrant-children-selling-candy-subway-laws.html>

Another issue is the *lack of consensus among stakeholders*, particularly between aid donor countries and recipient countries, on the best approach to resolving the problem. Donor countries are often pushing for rapid eradication of child labor with emphasis on accountability and measurable outcomes, which may overlook local economic conditions, while recipient countries argue that a gradual approach integrated with economic development with direct control over the funds is more realistic. This divergence creates challenges in aligning international policies and interventions. Building a consensus will ensure that both donors and recipients align their strategies, focusing on long-term solutions.²⁰ But how can this divergence be resolved to reach a consensus?

The return of *child labor in the United States* because of the COVID-19 pandemic and mass migration from Latin America is another issue facing the fight against child labor. The COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent economic downturns have led to a resurgence of child labor in the United States, and this is worsened by the mass migration from Latin America. This increased the vulnerability of migrant children to exploitative labor practices. This has become a great concern to stakeholders.²¹

Investigations in the United States revealed a growing number of children are working in

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch 2017, "How Wars and Disasters Fuel Child Labor," Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/12/how-wars-and-disasters-fuel-child-labor>.

¹⁹ International Labour Organization 2017, "ILO: Prevent Child Labour, Protect Children in Conflict and Disaster," International Labour Organization, June 14, 2017, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-prevent-child-labour-protect-children-conflict-and-disaster>.

²⁰ International Labour Organization, "Social Dialogue and Child Labour," International Labour Organization, n.d., <https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipecc/action-against-child-labour/social-dialogue-and-child-labour>.

²¹ UNICEF, "Child Alert: Child Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean," UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/child-alert/migration-latin-america-caribbean>.

hazardous industries such as meat processing, manufacturing, and agriculture, often under dangerous conditions and during night shifts. In 2023 alone, nearly 5800 children were found employed in violation of labor laws, an 88% increase compared to 2019.²² After the pandemic, demand for workers increased as businesses reopened, leading to a relaxation of child labor laws in certain states.

For example, some States are calling for an ease on the restrictions on child workers, allowing longer work hours and riskier jobs.²³ The migrants from Latin America, including many children unaccompanied, have created a vulnerable labor force that can be easily exploited by employers looking to fill labor gaps in industries such as agriculture and meatpacking. Despite the existing federal laws, enforcement remains weak, and many children continue to face unsafe working conditions.²⁴ What should the United States do to combat the resurgence of child labor in the States?

Children in conflict zones are among the most vulnerable to child labor due to the breakdown of social structures and the prevalence of armed conflict. The situations in Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, and the Uyghur regions serve as heartbreaking examples of how political instability and conflict worsen the problem of child labor:

In China there are widespread reports of forced labor, including children, particularly in Xinjiang in Uyghur. Children in Uyghur are separated from their families and kept in state-run boarding schools or camps where they are subjected to exploitative labor practices. These practices deprive the children of their rights.²⁵

In Gaza, the current conflict has caused severe economic hardship for families. As a result, many children are forced into labor to support their households.²⁶

The military coup in Myanmar has resulted in human rights violations, including the recruitment of child soldiers, and forced labor. The children are often coerced into working in dangerous conditions.²⁷

The war in Ukraine has also led to massive displacement of families, creating a significant risk of child trafficking and exploitation. The disruption of education and social services worsens the vulnerability of children who may be forced to labor to support themselves and their families.²⁸

These cases raise critical questions: Should the international community focus more on prevention strategies in conflict zones to protect children from labor exploitation? How can the UN, through international law and peacekeeping

²²U.S Department of Labor, “Child Labor Enforcement: Keeping Young Workers Safe,” DOL, n.d., <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/data/child-labor>.

²³ US News, 2023, “States Are Loosening Restrictions on Child Labor,” US News, June 26, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2023-06-26/states-are-loosening-child-labor-laws>.

²⁴ UNICEF, “Child Alert: Child Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean,” UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/child-alert/migration-latin-america-caribbean>.

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, 2021 “Forced Labor in China’s Xinjiang Region,” U.S. Department of State, July 1, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/forced-labor-in-chinas-xinjiang-region/>; U.S. Department of Labor, “Against Their

Will: The Situation in Xinjiang,” DOL, n.d., <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/against-their-will-the-situation-in-xinjiang>.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2022: Rights Trends in Israel and Palestine,” Human Rights Watch, n.d., <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/israel-and-palestine>.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2022: Rights Trends in Myanmar,” Human Rights Watch, n.d., <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/myanmar>.

²⁸ UNICEF, “War in Ukraine: Support for Children and Families,” UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/war-ukraine-pose-immediate-threat-children>.

operations, better ensure the protection of children's rights in these conflict zones? What roles do sanctions, diplomacy, and humanitarian aid play in reducing child labor in conflict areas, and how can aid programs be better structured to protect children from being exploited?

Finally, despite the broad international agreement to eliminate child labor, the difference in how this law is to be interpreted and applied persists. For example, the *ILO Conventions No. 138* and *No. 182* offer a framework for eliminating child labor, setting the minimum age for employment, and prohibiting the worst forms of child labor. However, the application of these laws can vary significantly between countries with different interpretations of what makes up "light work."

Some countries have argued that there should be flexibility in interpreting child labor standards, especially in agriculture sectors where children's work is often seen as part of family life. So, while international principles exist, achieving a universal interpretation of child labor laws remains a challenge.²⁹ Can there be a universal interpretation of these laws owing to the social, economic, and cultural differences? If yes, how should that be done?

The role of the United Nations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015 offer a comprehensive framework to combat child labor and promote the rights of children globally. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth specifically targets the elimination of child labor

through Target 8.7, which calls for immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery, and secure the prohibition and elimination of all forms of child labor by 2025.

Child labor intersects with other global priorities, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution). By aligning efforts with the SDGs, the UN and its partners can work together towards creating a world where every child is free from exploitation and can thrive.³⁰ That is why the United Nations, through its various organs, specialized agencies, conventions, and collaborative efforts with governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), plays an important role in addressing child labor globally.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA):

The UN General Assembly supports the fight against child labor by setting international standards, adopting resolutions, and promoting global cooperation. The resolutions that relate to child labor focus on human rights, education, and economic development, which are very vital for combating the root causes of child labor. Even though the General Assembly's resolutions are not legally binding, they carry some moral and political weight and often serve as a foundation for member states to enact laws and policies to address child labor in their various countries. Are there ways that the General Assembly can make these resolutions legally binding? The UNGA supports the SDGs, especially SDG 8.7, aiming to end child labor by 2025. The member states are encouraged to formulate and implement national policies that align with ending child labor by 2025.³¹

²⁹ 1. Janet Golden / Made by History, 2024, "100 Years on, We're Having the Same Debate about Child Labor," Time, May 23, 2024, <https://time.com/6977973/child-labor-amendment-centennial/>.

³⁰ United Nations, "The 17 Goals | Sustainable Development," United Nations, n.d., <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

³¹ United Nations, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs," United Nations, n.d., <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>; United Nations, "Are UN Resolutions Binding? - Ask Dag!" United Nations, n.d., <https://ask.un.org/faq/15010>.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC): The UNSC has addressed child labor in the context of conflict zones, where children are most vulnerable to exploitation. The UNSC is always against the use of children in armed conflict, particularly hazardous forms of child labor. UNSC resolutions such as Resolution 1612 (2005) established a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the use of child soldiers, while Resolution 2225 (2015) expanded this focus to include the abduction of children in conflict.³² Unfortunately, the UNSC's ability to address child labor directly is limited, except that it intervenes when child labor intersects with issues of global security, such as recruitment of children by armed groups or exploitation in post-conflict zones.³³

United Nations Secretary-General: The UN Secretary-General engages public addresses, reports, and engagement with member states to advocate for the protection of children, including protection from child labor. The Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict highlights child labor issues, more especially in war-torn regions. The Secretary-General also encourages countries to ratify and implement international conventions related to child labor and children's rights, ensuring global cooperation in addressing the challenge.³⁴

United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF): UNICEF focuses on child protection, including preventing child labor. Its works involve improving access to education, advocating for the rights of children, and reducing vulnerabilities that lead to child labor, such as poverty and lack of social protection. UNICEF ensures children are kept in school and out of the labor market, especially in areas like agriculture, domestic work, and the informal sector in partnership with governments and local organizations.³⁵

International Labour Organization (ILO): The ILO leads global efforts to end child labor. Convention No. 138 (on minimum age) and Convention No. 182 (on worst forms of child labor), which have been ratified by most UN member states, set the legal frameworks for member states to establish minimum working ages and eradicate hazardous child labor.³⁶ The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), is working to end child labor across the globe by monitoring the implementation of international labor standards, including the conventions mentioned above. The ILO's Global Action Plan helps member states with technical assistance, capacity building, and data collection to assess child labor trends.³⁷ The World Day Against

³² United Nations, 2005, "Security Council Establishes Monitoring, Reporting Mechanism on Use of Child Soldiers, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1612 (2005) | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," United Nations, July 26, 2005, <https://press.un.org/en/2005/sc8458.doc.htm>.

³³ United Nations, 2005, "Resolution 1612 (2005) /," United Nations, July 26, 2005, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/554197?v=pdf%2C+https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FUnited Nations Security Council Resolution 1612](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/554197?v=pdf%2C+https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FUnited_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1612).

³⁴ United Nations, 2024, "2023: Alarming Levels of Violence Inflicted on Children in Situations of Armed Conflict – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict," United Nations, June 13, 2024, [https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2024/06/2023-](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2024/06/2023-alarming-levels-of-violence-inflicted-on-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict/)

[alarming-levels-of-violence-inflicted-on-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict/](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2024/06/2023-alarming-levels-of-violence-inflicted-on-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict/).

³⁵ UNICEF, "What We Do," UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/what-we-do>.

³⁶ The Library of Congress, "International Labor Organization: Child Labor Convention Ratified by All ILO Member States, a First in ILO History," The Library of Congress, n.d., <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2020-09-30/international-labor-organization-child-labor-convention-ratified-by-all-ilo-member-states-a-first-in-ilo-history/>.

³⁷ World Health Organization, 2021, "ILO Joins the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All," World Health Organization, February 10, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/10-02-2021-ilo-joins-the-global-action-plan-for-healthy-lives-and-well-being-for-all>.

Child Labor, observed on June 12, helps to raise awareness globally about child labor.³⁸

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC): The UNHRC monitors and investigates violations of children's rights through its Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including causes and consequences. The council also holds sessions that focus on child labor as a human rights issue, urging countries to fulfill their obligations under international law.³⁹

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): UNESCO works to end child labor by promoting education as a tool to prevent children from entering the labor market prematurely. It engages its "Education for All" (EFA) initiative to ensure all children, especially those at risk of child labor, have access to free and compulsory primary education. It also collaborates with countries to enhance the education systems and raise awareness of the negative impact of child labor on children's development.⁴⁰

What the UN Cannot Do

While the UN plays a crucial role in the global fight against child labor, its efforts are limited. One of the things that the UN cannot do in fighting child labor is to directly intervene in a country's domestic affairs unless permission is given by that country or if the Security Council warrants the intervention for peace and security reasons due to the sovereignty of the member

states. China has been one of the countries strongly advocating for the sovereignty of countries, which has become part of its foreign policy.⁴¹ As a result, the ability of the UN to implement child labor laws or policies within individual countries is highly limited.

Also, despite the broad mandate of the UN, it cannot carry out large-scale interventions or long-term programs because of financial constraints, especially in regions with limited donor support. So, even though the UN may have many ambitious interventions to end child labor, it is constrained by the unavailability of adequate resources.

Again, while the UN can establish international legal frameworks and promote their ratification, it lacks the enforcement mechanisms. The UN relies on the member states to enforce international conventions and laws within their territories. This might lead to uneven implementation of child labor policies, but the UN is limited in its capacity to enforce even implementation.

In sum, the United Nations plays a crucial role in the fight against child labor, from developing international standards through the ILO to ensuring children's protection through UNICEF. However, the UN faces challenges relating to state sovereignty and enforcement mechanisms. The UN can only intervene when child labor intersects with issues of global security, such as the recruitment of children by armed groups or exploitation in post-conflict zones. Nevertheless, the UN's advocacy, monitoring, and capacity-building efforts offer crucial support toward

³⁸ Wikipedia, 2024, "World Day Against Child Labour," Wikipedia, June 12, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Day_Against_Child_Labour.

³⁹ United Nations Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child | Ohchr," United Nations Human Rights, n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>; Human Rights Watch, "Child Labor," Human Rights Watch, n.d., <https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-labor>.

⁴⁰ UNESCO, "Education for All (EFA)," UNESCO, n.d., <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/TVETipedia+Glossary/show=term/term=Education+for+all>.

⁴¹ Ted Anthony 2024, "China, at UN, Warns against 'expansion of the Battlefield' in the Ukraine War," AP News, September 28, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/china-united-nations-general-assembly-51ea58a6cd821656382f06ad0b3b93bc>.

global and national strategies to eliminate child labor.

industries. This resolution was passed with unanimous support from member states, indicating a global consensus on child protection..⁴⁴

Landmark UN Resolutions

General Assembly (GA) Resolutions

GA Resolution 71/177 (2016)-Rights of the Child: This resolution highlights issues affecting children's rights, including child labor. It calls on stakeholders to take decisive actions to implement the SDGs, especially SDG 8.7, aiming to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and eliminate child labor by 2025. This was passed with widespread support..⁴²

International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (2021): This resolution was adopted by the General Assembly, declaring 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child labour. It aimed to raise awareness and promote activities to combat child labor. This was adopted by 134 votes, 2 against and 3 abstentions..⁴³

GA Resolution 76/147 (2022)-Rights of the child: This resolution underscores the global commitment to the elimination of child labor. It emphasizes the importance of comprehensive policies to combat child labor, particularly in agriculture, domestic work, and hazardous

Security Council (SC) Resolutions

SC Resolution 1612 (2005): This resolution, adopted unanimously, condemns the recruitment and use of child soldiers and provides for country-specific resolutions against this practice..⁴⁵

SC Resolution 2427 (2018), Children and Armed Conflict: This resolution empowers measures to protect children affected by conflict, including preventing them from being recruited as child laborers. It calls for accountability mechanisms to track violations against children and underscores the reintegration program for former child soldiers. This resolution was passed unanimously..⁴⁶

SC Resolution 2601 (2021): This resolution underlines the importance of coordination between the UN, regional, and subregional organizations in preventing violations against children affected by armed conflict, including child labor. This was unanimously adopted..⁴⁷

⁴² United Nations, "Rights of the Child," United Nations, n.d., <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/858341?v=pdf>.

⁴³ United Nations, 2019, "General Assembly, Adopting 5 Texts, Establishes 2021 International Year for Ending Child Labour, Promotes Cooperation between United Nations, Regional Organizations | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," United Nations, July 25, 2019, <https://press.un.org/en/2019/ga12167.doc.htm>.

⁴⁴ United Nations, 2022, "Rights of the Child," United Nations, January 6, 2022, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/402/13/pdf/n2140213.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁴⁵ United Nations, 2005, "Security Council Establishes Monitoring, Reporting Mechanism on Use of Child Soldiers, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1612 (2005) | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," United Nations, July 26, 2005, <https://press.un.org/en/2005/sc8458.doc.htm>.

⁴⁶ United Nations, "Resolution 2427 (2018) /," United Nations, n.d., <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1633323?v=pdf>.

⁴⁷ United Nations, 2021, "Security Council Strongly Condemns Attacks against Schools, Urges Safeguarding of Right to Education, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2601 (2021) | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," United Nations, October 29, 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14680.doc.htm>.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolutions

ECOSOC Resolution 2008/18: This resolution promotes full employment and decent work for all, recognizing the importance of social development and the eradication of child labor..⁴⁸

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society: Civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating for the end of child labor. The ILO and Human Rights Watch consistently provide data, reports, and advocacy that shape UN resolutions and policies. For example, the ILO's Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor remains a key tool, and the NGOs have successfully lobbied for stronger child labor clauses in UN resolutions, particularly through partnership with ECOSOC and participation in global forums..⁴⁹ The Global March Against Child Labour is a coalition of civil society organizations, trade unions, and teachers that works to eliminate and prevent all forms of child labor..⁵⁰

United Nations Themes

World Day Against Child Labour: This is observed annually on June 12th to raise

awareness about child labor and promote actions to eliminate it..⁵¹

Human Rights and Democracy: That is ensuring that human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled, which is closely tied to eliminating child labor..⁵²

Education for All (EFA): This is UNESCO's initiative to ensure universal access to quality education, addressing one of the root causes of child labor..⁵³

Country and Bloc Positions

African Union (AU): The African Union plays an essential role in addressing child labor in Africa, where it is most prevalent. The AU supports international frameworks like the ILO conventions and SDGs but emphasizes the need for Africa-specific strategies, such as the African Union ten-year plan, which includes commitments to reducing child labor by 2030..⁵⁴ The AU works closely with the ILO, UNICEF, and other international bodies to implement child labor prevention programs, particularly focusing on education and poverty alleviation as key drivers in addressing the issue..⁵⁵

⁴⁸ ECOSOC, "Promoting Full Employment and Decent Work for All," United Nations, n.d., <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023/resolution-2008-18.pdf>.

⁴⁹ UNICEF, "What Is Child Labour?" UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour>.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Careers, "10 Organizations Working to End Child Labor," Human Rights Careers, n.d., <https://www.humanrightscarers.com/issues/organizations-end-child-labor/>.

⁵¹ United Nations, "World Day Against Child Labour - Background," United Nations, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-day-against-child-labour/background>.

⁵² United Nations, "About UN Human Rights | Ohchr," United Nations, n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us>.

⁵³ Unesco, "Education for All (EFA)," Unesco, n.d., <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/TVETipedia+Glossary/show=term/term=Education+for+all>.

⁵⁴ The African Union, 2020, "The African Union Ten Year Action Plan on Child Labour Plan Moves toward Implementation," The African Union, September 21, 2020, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200921/au-ten-year-action-plan-child-labour-plan-moves-toward-implementation>.

⁵⁵ African Union, 2021, "African Union Is Committed to Ending Child Labour and Other Forms of Human Exploitation," African Union, May 29, 2021, <https://au.int/en/articles/african-union-committed-ending-child-labour-and-other-forms-human-exploitation>.

Arab League: The Arab League supports the call to eliminate child labor; however, it faces challenges in addressing child labor in conflict-affected regions like Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The instability in these areas has led to an increase in child labor as children are often forced to work to support their families or, worse, are recruited as child soldiers. The Arab League supports the SDGs, including SDG 8, and collaborates with the ILO and UNICEF to implement programs aimed at reducing child labor in the region.⁵⁶

Brazil: Brazil is one of the actors that is making strong strides in reducing child labor. The country has been recognized for its success in reducing child labor through the Bolsa Familia program, which provides cash transfers to low-income families under the condition that their children attend school.⁵⁷ This program has made a great success in reducing child labor in Brazil.

China: China is among the countries that are signatories to several international conventions against child labor, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182). The Chinese government set a minimum working age of 16; however,

enforcement remains a concern, particularly in the context of marginalized groups like Uyghurs. Domestically, China has implemented policies through the Labour Law of the People's Republic of China, but child labor continues in some informal sectors, often in rural areas.⁵⁸

European Union (EU): The European Union strongly opposes child labor and has been a vocal advocate for its elimination through global partnerships. All EU Member States have ratified ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 on the minimum age for employment and the worst forms of child labor. The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 emphasizes the need to address child labor through development cooperation, trade policies, and human rights dialogues with third countries. The EU also supports international frameworks like the ILO-UN Alliances 8.7, which aim to eradicate child labor by 2025.⁵⁹

Germany and Norway: These countries are leading in advocating for human rights and sustainable development policies, leveraging their influence to push for the abolishment of child labor globally. They as well provide financial and political support for international efforts to eliminate child labor.⁶⁰

India and Bangladesh: These countries historically had high rates of child labor but

⁵⁶ International Labour Organization, 2018, "ILO, the Arab League and FAO Discuss the Implications of Child Labour for Arab States," International Labour Organization, 5 February 2018, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-arab-league-and-fao-discuss-implications-child-labour-arab-states>.

⁵⁷ Centre For Public Impact (CPI), 2019, "Bolsa Família in Brazil," Centre For Public Impact (CPI), September 2, 2019, <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/bolsa-familia-in-brazil>.

⁵⁸ China Labour Bulletin, 2003, "Child Labour in China: Causes and Solutions," China Labour Bulletin, 25 November 2003, <https://clb.org.hk/en/content/child-labour-china-causes-and-solutions>; U.S. Department of Labor, 2020, "U.S. Department of Labor Releases Reports on International Child Labor and Forced Labor That Highlight China's Labor Abuses," U.S. Department of Labor, 30 September 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/ilab/ilab20200930>.

⁵⁹ European Commission, 2022, "EU Reinforces Commitment to Ending Child Labour," European Commission, June 10, 2022, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-reinforces-commitment-ending-child-labour-2022-06-10_en; European Commission, "Child Labour," European Commission, n.d., https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/human-development/child-labour_en.

⁶⁰ International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, "Take on the Global Responsibility to Work Hard to Be More Effective in the Fight against Child Labour and Forced Labour," International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, n.d., <https://endchildlabour2021.org/pledges/germany/>; Norgesportalen, Development policy and humanitarian efforts, n.d., <https://www.norway.no/en/central-content/en/values-priorities/dev-policy-hum-efforts/>.

have taken bold and significant steps in reducing child labor through legal reforms, education initiatives, and economic interventions. For example, India passed the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016, which strengthens prohibitions on child labor, while Bangladesh's National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2010) focuses on the eradication of child labor by 2025.⁶¹ These actions taken by these two countries may be replicable in other countries with high rates of child labor.

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): The NAM, which consists of 120 countries primarily from the Global South, dominates the UN General Assembly (GA) and holds diverse views on child labor. Many of the member states, especially those from Africa and Asia, face challenges in addressing child labor due to poverty, weak institutional frameworks, and conflict. However, they are united in supporting the SDGs, particularly Target 8.7 on eliminating child labor. NAM calls for greater international cooperation, capacity building, and financial resources to support member states in eradicating child labor.⁶²

Russia: Russia is a signatory to key international conventions on child labor, including the ILO's conventions on minimum age and the worst forms of child labor. Russia

advocates for national sovereignty in addressing the issue, often pushing back against what it perceives as external interference in domestic labor laws. The country also supports multilateral frameworks for combating child labor but emphasizes a state-centered approach to implementation. Russia supports the SDGs, however, emphasizing the fact that countries should be able to tailor their strategies to local conditions.⁶³

United States: The United States has taken a firm stance against child labor. As a leading advocate for global child labor eradication, the U.S. has established strict regulations through the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), setting minimum age standards for employment. Internationally, the U.S. supports the ILO conventions and actively participates in initiatives like Alliance 8.7 to combat child labor globally. However, the U.S. has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has been a point of criticism by some human rights organizations.⁶⁴

Major International Organizations (IOs)

International Labour Organization (ILO): The ILO is the major global body working hard to eliminate child labor across the globe. Its

⁶¹ Government of India, About child labour ministry of labour & employment: Government of India, n.d., [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2023/Bangladesh.pdf](https://labour.gov.in/childlabour/about-child-labour#:~:text=Subsequently%20the%20act%20was%20amended,Years)%20in%20the%20scheduled%20hazardous;Bangladesh,Bangladesh,Minimal Advancement – Efforts Made but Continued Law and Practice that Delayed Advancement, n.d., <a href=).

⁶² International Labour Organization, "ILO Conventions on Child Labour," International Labour Organization, n.d., <https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipecc/what-child-labour/ilo-conventions-child-labour>.

⁶³ U.S. Department of Labour, "Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor - Russia," U.S. Department of

Labour, n.d., <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/russia>.

⁶⁴ Thea Lee and Jessica Looman, 2023, "Combating Child Labor within and beyond Our Borders," U.S. Department of Labor Blog, 7 June 2023, <https://blog.dol.gov/2023/06/07/combating-child-labor-within-and-beyond-our-borders>; Marcia Eugenio 2023, "Enforcement Is Key to Ending Global Child Labor," U.S. Department of Labor Blog, 6 September 2023, <https://blog.dol.gov/2023/09/26/enforcement-is-key-to-ending-global-child-labor>; Wikipedia, 2024, "U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child," Wikipedia, September 6, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._ratification_of_the_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child.

Convention No. 138 (on minimum age) and Convention No. 182 (on worst forms of child labor) provide a great framework for addressing child labor. The “International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour” (IPEC) is one of the largest initiatives worldwide working to end child labor.⁶⁵

United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF): UNICEF, as part of its duties, focuses on protecting children’s rights and advocating for their education and well-being. UNICEF works closely with governments, civil society, and local partners to address the root causes of child labor.⁶⁶

World Bank: The World Bank, through various initiatives like Global Partnership for Education (GPE), invests in improving access to education, which is key to reducing child labor.⁶⁷

Examples of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Save the Children: This organization works to stop child labor by providing education, advocating for stronger laws, and supporting vulnerable families with economic opportunities.⁶⁸

Anti-Slavery International: Being the world’s oldest human rights organization, it advocates

for the eradication of child labor and modern slavery.⁶⁹

World Vision: World Vision is a global organization that focuses on providing support to vulnerable families and children and addresses the root causes of child labor through education, advocacy, and direct intervention.⁷⁰

Some Possible Proposals for Action

The UN and the international community have made some efforts in preventing child labor across the globe, as achieving the goal will contribute to achieving the SDGs more especially Goal 8, Target 8.7. However, the progress expected is not seen much more, especially in high-prevalence countries. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has taken away the successes achieved over the years. This means that there is the need for more proactive actions toward ending child labor across the globe by 2025. As you prepare as delegates or committee members to deliberate and draft your resolutions, below are some proposals to consider.

Promoting Access to Free and Quality Education: This advocates for programs that ensure free, compulsory, and accessible education with specific attention to the most vulnerable populations, such as rural children,

⁶⁵ Wikipedia, 2024, “Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention,” Wikipedia, 26 June 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worst_Forms_of_Child_Labour_Convention.

⁶⁶ UNICEF, “Action against Child Labour,” UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/documents/action-against-child-labour>.

⁶⁷ World Bank, 2022, “The Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank Group: The Facts,” World Bank, 22 September 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/the-global-partnership-for-education-and-the-world-bank-group-the-facts>.

⁶⁸ Save the Children’s Resource Centre, 2019, “Save the Children’s Position on Child Labour,” Save the Children’s Resource Centre, 2019, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/save-the-childrens-position-child-labour/>.

⁶⁹ Anti-Slavery, “Ending Child Slavery,” Anti-Slavery, n.d., <https://www.antislavery.org/what-we-do/ending-child-slavery/>.

⁷⁰ World Vision, “Ending Child Labor,” World Vision, n.d., <https://www.worldvision.org.uk/our-work/child-labour/>.

girls, and marginalized ethnic groups. This will reduce child labor by increasing school enrollment rates and retention, especially in areas where children work due to a lack of educational opportunities. In considering this proposal, consider the following questions: What steps can the UN and countries take to improve education access? How can education systems be designed to accommodate children currently engaged in child labor? What role can technology play in improving education access and quality for children at risk of child labor?

Strengthening Corporate Responsibility and Supply Chain Accountability: This proposal seeks to encourage countries to implement corporate accountability laws that make companies, particularly those in industries prone to child labor, for example, agriculture, textiles, and mining, responsible for eliminating child labor in their production process. This is to promote responsible business practices. Let these questions guide you in your debate: What legal measures can the UN and countries introduce to hold companies accountable for child labor in their production process? How can international cooperation help monitor and enforce this corporate responsibility? How can certification programs and regular audits be implemented to ensure compliance with child labor standards?

Introducing Conditional Aid and Trade Agreements: This proposal recommends the introduction of conditions tied to international aid or trade agreements, where countries must demonstrate significant progress in eliminating child labor to qualify for financial assistance or favorable terms of trade. This is to leverage economic incentives to compel governments and industries to take serious steps toward ending child labor. Considering these questions can aid your debate: Would your country support or oppose such conditions tied to aid or trade agreements? Why? How can conditionality be designed to ensure it is fair and effective without punishing vulnerable populations?

Addressing Cultural Norms and Practices:

This proposes an engagement in long-term, culturally sensitive programs that challenges societal norms that perpetuate child labor, especially in regions where child labor is viewed as a traditional or normal practice. This is to encourage community-based interventions that involve local leaders, parents, and children to shift societal attitudes that promote child labor and ensure child rights are prioritized. These questions should guide your deliberation: How can your country go about cultural sensitivities around child labor? What role can community-based organizations and civil society play in advocating for change at the grassroots level? Would your country be willing to accept the culturally sensitive programs that challenge societal norms? Why?

Conclusion

As you deliberate to draft resolutions, there is an important challenge that faces you as participants in this UN modeling conference. The challenge is that you are limited in your exposure to the realities of child labor beyond U.S. borders. As U.S. citizens, you may view this issue primarily through a Western lens, potentially underestimating the cultural, economic, and political complexities that drive child labor in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

So, the questions remain if those who have not experienced the harsh conditions of extreme poverty, conflict, or inadequate governance systems can truly understand the urgency of eradicating child labor in these regions. Moreover, are U.S. citizens well equipped enough to prescribe solutions for countries with vastly different socio-political contexts? This raises the critical question: Can the fight against child labor be effectively led by those who may not fully grasp its root causes on the ground?



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