



# HMUN 2025

Implementing measures on companies involved  
with child labour

UNICEF

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**Forum:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

**Issue:** Implementing measures on companies involved with child labour

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## Introduction

The issue regarding child labour is not a problem that has occurred recently. The concept of using children to work has been around for centuries. Minors have been used to work on farms throughout history, but the rise of using them in companies and factories started during the Industrial Revolution. The circumstances in these workplaces were not safe or clean. Children would often get into accidents and walk away with injuries. In more recent years, rules and laws have been implemented in regions all over the world, making it, for example, illegal for children under a certain age to have a job and minors to have rules regarding working. Although measures have been taken, there are still companies using adolescents to do the necessary work. The facts on this topic can be quite wary, seeing as not all cases of child labour are registered or known.

In this research report, the issue of child labour and implementing measures on companies that are involved with child labour will be discussed and elaborated on.

We hope this research report will provide a good start on the research for the conference HMUN 2025 next April.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Adolescent

A person under the age of eighteen and under the age of full legal responsibility. Also called a child or minor.

### Convention

The term convention is defined as: *“an agreement between countries covering particular matters, especially one less formal than a treaty.”*

### Labour

Work that a person does, especially physical or mental effort, especially when hard or required.

## Minor

A person under the age of eighteen and under the age of full legal responsibility. Also called a child or adolescent.

## General Overview

### What is child labour?

The term child labour is more than just a term. The issue does not limit itself to working in factories or in agriculture. It also includes, for example, trafficking to work as a child prostitute and children being forced to work in armed conflict. It does not include work that does not interfere with their education, such as having a part-time job outside of school or in the holidays or helping out a family member at home or at their business. These jobs are to learn important life skills and help with the minor's development and might even help with the family's welfare. Child labour has been defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as: "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development." It frequently refers to work that stops children from attending school and causes mental, social and physical harm.

There is a difference between child labour, which is illegal, and work done by a child, which is legal. The rules regarding age, how many hours and what jobs are different per country. For example, the United States of America has set their minimum age for working in non-agriculture jobs at 14, but still restricts the hours allowed to work and prohibits children under 18 from working in hazardous workplaces. While in Burkina Faso it is illegal to work under the age of twelve. Even though this rule has been set, four out of ten children between the ages of 5 and 17 have to work in the country of Burkina Faso.

Seeing as cultures and religious beliefs vary in every country, the rules and outlook on child workers do as well, as shown by the comparison made earlier between the countries United States of America and Burkina Faso. This is the case with a lot of countries. But it also depends on which continent. The continent with the most children working in 2024 is Africa. This whole region makes up about 72 million of the working children. The next largest ones are Asia and the Pacific, with about 62 million child workers. To be specific, the area with the most minors in the workforce is the Sub-Saharan region. The total in this part of Africa was more than the rest of the world combined. Whereas other region's numbers decline, the sub-Saharan region increases its number of child workers.

Although there has already been so much done to try to fix the issue at hand, the problem is not gone. There have been decreases in numbers in certain areas, but meanwhile, in others, the numbers have risen.

### **Reasons and results of child labour**

The reasoning of children getting a job can be different for every single one of them. The most common reasons will be quickly discussed here.

Firstly, the low wages of parents. If the parents do not earn enough, their children may need to step in to support the family's needs. There is a clear correlation between low adult wages and child labour, especially in agriculture. With this also comes that children are easier to exploit and thus companies favour hiring children. Secondly, children will work for a lot less money than adults; they want to satisfy the demand for cheap, unskilled labour and children sometimes have the small physical attributes needed for jobs like climbing trees to pick fruits and other foods or fitting in small spaces like chimneys.

Child labour is usually seen as a way out of poverty, but in reality, it does the opposite. When children can be hired to do the work adults usually do, the wages can be lowered and thus contribute to poverty. When companies stop hiring children, these adults can negotiate for higher pay. As a result of children working and not getting the right education, they will end up at lower-paying jobs, and thus the cycle of poverty within families continues.

### **Impact of covid on child labour**

The number of child labourers that were decreasing started rising again with the sudden and quick rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic started in 2020, the whole world changed. Schools shut down, people lost their jobs, everyone had to stay home, and millions lost their lives. With this, children had to start or continue working to help support their families during this time. Not only due to parents losing jobs due to businesses shutting down but also due to lack of transportation to markets for food or the loss of customers. Around 8.9 million children were predicted to enter the workforce by the end of 2022 due to the Covid pandemic. And the work conditions for children already involved with child labour were predicted to get worse. Due to limited educational options and school closures during the pandemic lockdown, poorer job



prospects, and the emergence of chronic health conditions among working children, the effects of the pandemic's increased child labour could persist for decades.

### Companies involved with child labour

Companies involved with child labour vary from clothing brands to oil companies to cosmetic brands. To maintain a good image and keep clients, companies will reassure buyers that the brand they're buying from is ethically and environmentally friendly, that said the company does not know for sure where their products come from, or they do know and choose to lie. For example, businesses try to reassure clients that their palm oil is sustainable, while that oil is produced by children. When companies make such claims, people continue to buy their products and children have to keep working to keep up with demand.

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, companies are responsible for respecting human (labour) rights across all their business operations, including at the level of suppliers and subcontractors.

The issue of companies using children to work for them has been going on for a while. That is why there have already been measures taken to reduce this. For example, in the United States of America, thousands of companies have received penalties and fines totalling up to about 27 million U.S. dollars U.S. Department of Labour's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) between 2017 and 2023. In 2022 there was a peak in child labour violations with an increase of 130% in civil penalties in the last six years. This rise points to the need for stricter measures and penalties, but seeing as a lot of bigger companies are directly or indirectly involved with child labour, the fines could be easily paid off and then can be seen as ineffective in stopping the use of child workers.

Companies such as Temu or Shein have recently been big in the news regarding child labour and forced workers. Both of these brands are online shopping stores with extremely low prices; that is why they are very popular; buyers can buy more for less. But lately, they have been accused of not being morally responsible regarding their factory workers. These companies have become smarter in getting around laws. That way they can continue to do what they do. During the COVID pandemic, people started ordering online a lot more and companies like these grew and so did the numbers of forced and child labour. Shein has admitted to two cases where, in each case, a person under the legal working age, which is sixteen in China, was involved. During audits at two different vendors, the two child labour incidents were discovered. All other accusations of wrongdoings have been repeatedly denied. Not only are these companies accused of using minors as employees, but they are also accused of using and mistreating minority groups such as the Uyghurs.

## Timeline of Key Events

### **18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century**

The industrial revolution in the United States and Europe, causing the rise of child labour

### **1802**

The first law on child labourers in Great Britain was made. It was aimed at controlling the apprenticeship of pauper children to cotton mill owners. It was shown ineffective as enforcement was not provided. In 1838 the Factory Aid was implemented, which provided inspections, making the law more effective.

### **9<sup>th</sup> of March 1839**

Prussia set a law controlling the usage of children in industrial practices, forbidding children under the age of nine to work in factories, setting the limit of work hours under the age of sixteen to ten hours a week and outlawing night and Sunday shifts for children. This made Prussia the first region to set such rules.

### **1874**

The Dutch parliament passed the Child Labour Act, making it illegal for children under the age of twelve to work in factories.

### **1890**

International efforts to regulate child labour started with the first International Labour Conference in Berlin.

<b>1938</b>	The U.S. Fair Labour Standards Act restricts the hours and what kind of job a minor under sixteen can have.
<b>6<sup>th</sup> of June 1973</b>	Minimum Age Convention sets a minimum working age with some exceptions approved by 172 countries.
<b>1986</b>	The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, which was amended in 2016. It states: “any person below the age of 14 years is defined a child, and child labour is a way of exploiting these children.”
<b>1992</b>	The IPEC (International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour) is founded, which promotes the global elimination of child labour and supports countries in their efforts.
<b>12<sup>th</sup> of June 2002</b>	The first edition of the World Day Against Labour, which has now been held every year.
<b>2020</b>	Start of the covid pandemic, which would last multiple years. Lots of children were forced into child labour due to schools and businesses shutting down and to maintain their family’s welfare.
<b>2021</b>	The United Nations General Assembly declares 2021 as the year of the elimination of child labour.
<b>2025</b>	International commitment is set to end all types of child labour that year under Target

8.7 of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

## Major Parties Involved

### Africa

As previously mentioned in this research report, Africa is the region with the largest amount of active child labour. Specifically, the Sub-Saharan region has actually seen a large increase recently in the number of children involved in labour. The Sub-Saharan region accounts for more child workers than the rest of the world combined. The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour has indicated that one in every five kids in Africa works, and around nine percent work in hazardous work environments, which would add up to about 31.5 million minors. Together with organisations like the International Labour Organisation, countries in Africa have been working hard to lower the numbers.

### Asia and the Pacific

Countries in Asia and the Pacific, such as China, have recently been in the news a lot concerning multiple companies that allegedly use children in their factories to make the products, which usually get shipped to Western countries. In 2018 there were an estimated 122 million children between the ages of five and fourteen working in these areas. The reason for them to work is that they feel compelled to do so for their survival. And millions of these children are not enrolled in school. There has been a decline in the percentage of child workers in Asia. The numbers went from 7.3 percent in 2016 to 5.6 percent in 2020. This might seem like a small number, but it is still seen as a big problem.

Seeing as a lot of Western countries rely on imports from Asia, the continuance of ordering products that might be made by children would not help solve this. This problem is particularly hard to fix with the rise of online shopping and high demands for goods produced and exported from Asian countries.

### Global March Against Child Labour

The Global March Against Child Labour States that they are “a *worldwide network of trade unions, teachers' associations and civil society organisations that work together towards the shared*



*development goals of eliminating and preventing all forms of child labour, slavery and trafficking and ensuring access by all children to free, meaningful and good quality public education.”* They want to eliminate child labour by questioning, addressing and changing the system and reasons that force children to work. The Global March is seeking to do this on not only a regional but also a global level. This organization works with a three-pronged strategy, or what it calls the Triangular Paradigm. It addresses the key points affecting children’s futures: child labour, education for all and eliminating poverty.

## **ILO**

ILO stands for International Labour Organization. This organization focuses on promoting social justice and internationally recognizing human and labour rights. They set standards worldwide, including key conventions on the topic of child labour. Some examples are Convention Number 138 regarding the minimum employment age and Convention Number 182 which talks about the worst types of child labour. The ILO works closely with employers, government, workers and partners to combat the issue at hand on child labour through advocacy, monitoring and programs. The International Labour Organization plays a key element in solving this problem.

## **Save The Children**

Save The Children is one of the biggest international NGO’s regarding children. They believe that every child deserves a future, as their motto states. This organization keeps itself busy with improving and protecting children’s rights in 120 countries all across the globe. They work in the most disadvantaged communities, helping them understand and educating them on children’s rights and that children should be in school and not working. The company started in 1919 with the launch of the Save the Children Fund. By being active for over a century, they have achieved so much. For example, setting up programs to help with food insecurity in families all over the world and helping families and children adapt to the climate crisis to minimize the threats they are under.

## **Possible Solutions**

When looking at this issue, there are multiple ways of handling the problem. One way is trying to solve the issue of why children go into the workforce or handling the problem by solving the issue of companies involved in child labour. Seeing as there have already been steps taken to solve the base issue at hand, it will not be an easy one. An important point to discuss is the fact that the solutions necessary may vary in different areas. Looking at Africa, for example, the reasons for

children working there can be quite different because of their lesser economy than, for example, in the United States of America.

An important aspect to look at when looking at the problem of child labour is solving the issue of non-accessible education. A big reason for children working is not being able to go to school. If fixing the education problem will help with the number of child workers, then that might be a solution worth considering.

If looking specifically at companies using child workers, a big issue to consider is how to get those companies and higher-ups, such as governments, to agree to the solutions and measures taken. And making sure they stick to the mandatory measures implemented on them. Doing this could be done by meetings with CEOs or other company owners, regular checkups or other maybe similar things. Of course, these issues could again raise other problems.

## Further Reading

*ILO homepage.* (n.d.). International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/>

A useful source of information on this topic is the ILO (International Labour Organization) website. As they are a main contributor to solving this problem, they carry a lot of useful information on this topic. On their website, you can find the programs that they do to combat child labour, measures and conventions implemented to solve the issue, and information and statistics per country and programs in those countries.

*Facts, History, FAQs, what you need to know about Child Labour.* (n.d.).

<https://www.wvi.org/stories/facts-history-fags-what-you-need-know-about-child-labour>

Another useful source is the World Vision page on child labour. On this site, you can find out what child labour exactly is and learn more about it.

*List of goods produced by child labour or forced labour.* (n.d.). DOL.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods-print>

If needed to know what goods are being produced by child labour and in what country the most, the Bureau of International Labour Affairs (ILAB) made a list of products believed to be produced by forced labour or by children.

We hope this research report provided enough information on the issue at hand.

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