

Child labour



Child labour is defined as work that **deprives** children of their childhood, education and dignity, and that is physically and mentally harmful to their development.

■ Origins

The practice of using child labour has existed throughout human history, but it reached its peak during the industrial revolution, when children were often employed in **mines** or factories because they were more submissive and could be paid much less than adults. •

■ Important steps in children's rights

Recognising the injustice of such conditions for children, who had to work in unhealthy and unsafe environments and whose needs were often **neglected**, governments started to implement policies aimed to protect children from any form of exploitation. Over the years, laws have been passed to restrict the working age for children, reduce their working hours, meet their educational needs, and improve their living conditions. These are some of the **milestones** in the process of children's empowerment:

- the **Declaration of the Rights of the Child**, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1959. The document recognises, among other rights, children's right to education, play, a **supportive** environment and healthcare;
- **Convention No. 138** (1973) by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which set 18 as the minimum age for starting jobs that might be harmful to a person's health and safety;
- the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989), which set standards for protecting the rights of children, recognising their role as individuals.



■ Child labour today

According to estimates published by the ILO and UNICEF in 2021, the number of children in child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide. These children do not go to school and have almost no time to play; most of them do not receive proper nutrition and care; many have to work in hazardous environments and are often subjected to some form of forced labour or illegal activities, such as trafficking and prostitution. In regions troubled by conflicts they are also used as soldiers. ••

■ Causes of child labour

The main cause of child labour is poverty: children have to work to help their families to survive. This situation is obviously more common in developing countries, where the unemployment rate is higher, access to compulsory and free education is limited and where legislation protecting children from exploitation is often violated.

to deprive: *privare*
 milestone: *pietra miliare*
 mine: *miniera*
 to neglect: *trascurare*

supportive: *favorevole, di supporto*
 to trim: *tagliare*
 underneath: *al di sotto di*

Most of them started to work when they were seven years old, and they were often given dangerous jobs such as going **underneath** moving machinery.

Eastern and Southern Africa have the largest percentage of child labourers.

1 Answer the questions.

1. How long has child labour been practised?
2. Why were children employed at the time of the Industrial Revolution?
3. Where did they have to work?
4. What does the Declaration of the Rights of the Child recognise?
5. What does the ILO convention establish?
6. How many children are still working today?
7. How are children employed in regions troubled by armed conflicts?
8. What is the main cause of child labour?

2 Read what three child labourers say about their daily routines. For questions 1-8, choose from the children A-C. Each child may be chosen more than once.

Which child...

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1. has only one parent? | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. doesn't have anything to eat in the morning? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. doesn't have a proper bed? | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. takes something to prevent them from falling asleep? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. has to put up with annoying insects? | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. has to transport heavy containers? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. can't do anything to protect their hands? | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| 5. wishes s/he could have a better job in the future? | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

A. Pharady

I usually work the whole day, from six in the morning to six in the evening. I start by walking out of the village to get water for my family and our neighbours. I fill a tank with water and carry it in a cart. The tank weighs up to 200 kg. After doing my morning chores, I start my working day in a brick factory. I go there with my mum and my sister. My father got sick and died leaving us in a lot of debt. Our work at the factory is really hard also because the temperature often reaches more than 35 degrees. The family pay depends on the number of bricks we load. My dream is to become a teacher, but I know that is impossible if I don't go to school.



B. Alejandra

My father wakes me up at four in the morning to help him collect shellfish. I never have the time to eat breakfast because I have to hurry to get all the things I need to stay out all day. I always take pills with me to help me stay awake and cigars, that help to repel mosquitos. I usually spend up to 14 hours in the mud, looking for shellfish and the mosquitos are everywhere! When I return home from work, my body is covered with their bites. It is really difficult to pull the shellfish from the mud, I often get scrapes and cuts. I don't earn much money. If I'm lucky I might collect two baskets of shellfish and earn \$1.40.

C. Sandy

I wake up so early that I can't see my hands in the darkness of my home. I jump up from the mattress I share with my three brothers. I don't have breakfast, because there isn't any, and I don't have boots to wear, I walk bare foot. I work on a farm which I get to in the landowner's truck, together with other children and some adults, too. My hands are my most valuable working assets, but I can't afford to buy gloves. I have to trim garlic plants using a knife, pick potatoes, and pull onions out of the soil. I can bring home up to \$7, to contribute to my family income and buy a pair of shoes. Sometimes the wind blows so hard that it cuts my face.

Adapted from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_decl_fs_44_en.pdf