

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: The question of child poverty and forced labor

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Introduction

Child poverty and forced labor are critical global challenges affecting millions of children worldwide. According to the latest estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF, 160 million children—63 million girls and 97 million boys—were engaged in child labor at the beginning of 2020, accounting for 1 in 10 children globally. Thanks to an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years, reversing two decades of prior progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation, with economic shocks and school closures pushing more children into labor. Projections indicate that an additional 9 million children are at risk of being forced into child labor by the end of 2022 due to the pandemic's impacts.

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a significant rise in child labor, with an increase of 16.6 million children over the past four years, driven by factors such as a population with extreme poverty, and inadequate social protection measures.

Child labor deprives children of their fundamental rights, limits their future opportunities, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. This report examines the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to child poverty and forced labor, emphasizing the need for international cooperation and policy reform to address these pressing issues.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Poverty

A condition in which children lack necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education due to economic hardship.

Forced Labor

Any work or service exacted from a person under threat of penalty and without their voluntary consent, as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Worst Forms of Child Labor (WFCL)

Includes slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, forced recruitment for armed conflicts, and hazardous work that endangers the health and safety of children.

Minimum Age Convention (ILO Convention No. 138)

Establish a minimum age for employment to prevent child labor exploitation.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7

Calls for the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labor by 2025.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

A United Nations agency that sets international labor standards, develops policies, and devises programs to promote decent work for all individuals, including the elimination of child labor.

Key Issues

Poverty as a Root Cause of Child Labor

Poverty remains the primary driver of child labor worldwide. Families living in extreme poverty often have no choice but to rely on their children for additional income to sustain basic needs such as food and shelter. In many cases, children are forced to drop out of school and enter the workforce to support their families, leading to a cycle of generational poverty. The lack of access to quality education, especially in rural areas, exacerbates the issue, as children without an education are left with limited employment opportunities outside of exploitative labor conditions.

Exploitation and Trafficking

Child labor is not only a result of poverty but also of exploitation and trafficking. Many children are trafficked into forced labor in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and domestic work. Organized crime networks and unscrupulous employers take advantage of legal loopholes and the lack of law enforcement in some regions to exploit children for profit. Once trafficked, these children often experience physical abuse, extreme working conditions, and a complete lack of legal protection. The absence of strong child protection services leaves many victims without access to rehabilitation and justice.

Weak Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

Despite the existence of international conventions and national laws against child labor, enforcement remains weak in many parts of the world. Corruption, lack of resources, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms prevent effective law implementation. Many countries have ratified agreements to end child labor but struggle with enforcing these laws due to economic and political challenges. Additionally, multinational corporations often fail to ensure that their supply chains are free from child labor, allowing exploitative practices to persist. Strengthening legal

frameworks and enforcing stricter penalties against those who employ children in forced labor remain significant challenges.

Health and Psychological Impact

Children engaged in forced labor suffer from severe health and psychological consequences. Many work in hazardous conditions that expose them to toxic chemicals, dangerous machinery, and extreme physical exertion. As a result, child laborers often experience chronic illnesses, malnutrition, and serious injuries that can have lifelong effects. Additionally, forced labor can lead to severe psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The absence of social support and medical care further compounds these problems, making it difficult for affected children to break free from exploitation and reintegrate into society.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is the primary body responsible for authorizing peacekeeping missions. It consists of five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and ten rotating members. Permanent members often have differing views on intervention, influenced by geopolitical and national interests. Some members advocate for more proactive peacekeeping measures, while others prioritize state sovereignty and non-intervention policies. The UNSC's decisions significantly impact peacekeeping effectiveness, as all missions require its approval.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) strongly opposes child labor, aiming to eliminate it and protect children's rights. The ILO defines child labor as harmful work that affects children's health, education, and development. Through conventions like Convention No. 138 (minimum age for employment) and Convention No. 182 (eliminating the worst forms of child labor), the ILO works with governments, employers, and workers to create policies, raise awareness, and promote safe environments for children. Their focus is on ensuring access to education and supporting families to reduce the need for child labor.

International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

Established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1992, IPEC aims for the progressive elimination of child labor by strengthening countries' capacities to address this issue and promoting a worldwide movement to combat it. Operating in 88 countries, IPEC collaborates with a diverse

range of partners, including employers' and workers' organizations, government agencies, perviousness's, NGOs, and community-based organizations. The program focuses on removing children from labor, providing education, and assisting families with training and employment opportunities, hereby contributing to the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

Fashion Industry Initiatives

The fashion industry faces significant challenges related to child labor, particularly in regions such as India, China, Turkey, and Vietnam, where materials like cotton and leather are elevated risk. Brands often struggle to monitor labor practices within their supply chains, especially in subcontracted home-working segments. Industry experts advocate for improved monitoring and labor practices, and comprehensive recognition, prevention, and mitigation strategies. New regulations, such as the EU's Corpora sustainability Due Diligence Directive, aim to enforce stricter oversight. Efforts to address child labor in fashion require collaboration among local governments, NGOs, and international brands.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1919	Founding of the International Labour Organization (ILO)	Established international labor standards, including child labor regulations, and set up a framework for future international agreements on labor rights.
1924	Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child	Recognized the need to protect children's rights globally, setting a precedent for future child protection legislation.
1938	Introduction of the Fair Labor Standards Act in the US	Set minimum age restrictions for child labor in the US and established federal wage and hour laws to prevent child exploitation.
1973	Adoption of ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138	Set international standards for the minimum age of employment, pushing for education as an alternative to child labor.
1989	Adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Established a legal framework for protecting children worldwide, emphasizing the right to education, health, and protection from exploitation.

1999	ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182	Identified and prohibited the most exploitative forms of child labor, including slavery, human trafficking, and forced recruitment in armed conflicts.
2000	Palermo Protocol adopted by the UN	Strengthened international action against human trafficking, including child trafficking, by enforcing stricter anti-trafficking measures.
2013	UNICEF launched the End Child Labor Initiative	Increased awareness and funding for programs aimed at rescuing child laborers and reintegrating them into educational systems.
2015	Adoption of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Goal 8.7 aimed to eradicate forced labor and child labor by 2025, mobilizing governments and organizations worldwide.
2020	COVID-19 pandemic increased child labor rates	Economic crises forced millions of children into labor as families struggled to survive, undoing years of progress.
2021	UN Alliance 8.7 launched major initiative to accelerate action	Strengthened global efforts to eliminate child labor and forced labor through targeted policy changes, funding, and international cooperation.
2022	Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labor	Renewed commitments from governments to take stronger actions against child labor, with new pledges for legal enforcement and corporate responsibility.
Present	Ongoing efforts to eliminate child labor and poverty	Governments, NGOs, and international bodies continue working on solutions, but challenges such as enforcement, funding, and political will remain significant barriers.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has established two fundamental conventions to combat child labor:

Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention, 1973): This convention mandates that member states set a minimum age for admission to employment or work, aiming for the effective abolition of child labor. It requires countries to establish national policies for the elimination of child labor and to set a minimum age for entry into work or employment.

Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999): This convention focuses on the immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, forced labor, trafficking, and work that is harmful to children's health, safety, or morals. Its universal ratification, reflecting a global commitment to protect children from the most severe forms of exploitation.

UNICEF and ILO Joint Programs

Collaborative initiatives by UNICEF and the ILO have developed social protection policies aimed at supporting vulnerable families. These programs focus on enhancing access to education, health, and economic opportunities, thereby addressing the root causes of child labor. For instance, in June 2024, the EU, ILO, and UNICEF launched an 18-month program in Sabah, Malaysia, to promote socio-economic inclusion and protect the rights of children in oil palm plantations. The initiative is set to provide better access to education and training opportunities for children working and living on these plantations.

Legislation and Trade Sanctions

Some countries have enacted laws prohibiting the import of goods produced using child labor. These legislative measures aim to reduce demand for products made under exploitative conditions and encourage ethical labor practices. For example, the United States has implemented the Tariff Act of 1930, which allows for the prohibition of imports produced by forced or indentured child labor.

Corporate Responsibility Initiatives

There has been a growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility, urging companies to adopt fair trade and ethical labor practices. Initiatives like the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and the Fair-Trade certification system encourage businesses to ensure their supply chains are free from

child labor and other forms of exploitation. These programs promote transparency and accountability, encouraging companies to commit to ethical sourcing and labor standards. That it has been inconsistently applied or undermined by geopolitical interests.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Legal Frameworks

Many countries lack effective laws and enforcement mechanisms to prevent child labor, allowing exploitation to continue. Implement stricter child labor laws, set minimum age requirements for employment, regulate working hours, and establish penalties for violations. With a robust legal framework and enforcement, children will be better protected from exploitation, and violations can be addressed swiftly. For example, India's ratification of ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 has significantly strengthened its legal response to child labor.

Expanding Education Access

Children often enter the workforce because they lack access to education or because schools are not affordable or accessible. Provide free and quality education for all children and vocational training and skill development programs to prepare them for future employment. By ensuring that children can attend school instead of working, they gain essential skills for better job opportunities, helping break the cycle of poverty that leads to child labor.

Economic Support for Families

Impoverished families may rely on the income generated by their children working to meet basic needs. Increase financial aid to families, create job opportunities for adults, and offer microfinance programs that support family businesses and income generation. By reducing the financial pressures on families, parents will be less likely to send their children to work, allowing them to focus on education and other alternatives to child labor.

Improved Corporate Accountability

Many companies indirectly contribute to child labor through unethical supply chains that lack transparency or monitoring. Enforce supply chain transparency, require businesses to implement

ethical sourcing policies, and conduct regular audits of suppliers to ensure compliance with labor standards. Holding companies accountable for their supply chains ensures that they eliminate child labor from their processes, promoting ethical practices throughout the industry.

Community Engagement and Awareness Campaigns

Lack of awareness about the harmful effects of child labor and the importance of education may contribute to its continuation in local communities. Launch awareness campaigns to educate parents and children about the dangers of child labor and the benefits of schooling. Engage local leaders and organizations in promoting child rights. Community-driven awareness initiatives help change attitudes, leading to collective action against child labor. Local leaders and communities can play a vital role in creating sustainable change and protecting children's rights.

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