



What's wrong with children working?

Not all children's work is bad. Many New Zealand children work—they do chores around the house, paper rounds, they work in shops or do jobs like babysitting. This work can help children learn new skills, develop responsibility and money management, and get experience in a work environment in preparation for future employment, parenthood and participation in society. But not all work may have a positive effect on children's lives. Other kinds of work can damage their health and hinder their growth and development.

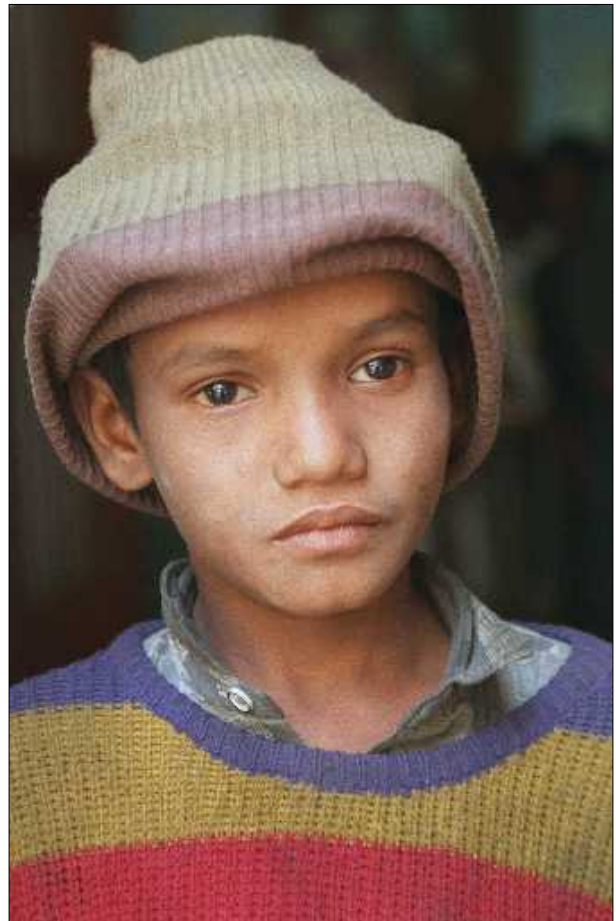
Child labour is defined as exploitative when it involves:

- too many hours spent working
- work that causes too much physical or psychological stress
- poor or dangerous working conditions
- inadequate or no pay
- too much responsibility
- work that interferes with children's access to education
- work that undermines children's dignity and self esteem
- binding children to a work arrangement

Working children have limited opportunities to go to school and for normal childhood play. Children involved in agriculture and some industries risk exposure to hazardous chemicals. Children working in poorly ventilated factories face respiratory damage. Construction workers have a high risk of injury. Girls in domestic service face abuse and sexual exploitation. AIDS has increased the demand for young girls in prostitution, putting them at even greater risk of sexually transmitted diseases and other health problems.

How many children are working?

Globally, it is estimated that about 250 million children between ages 5 and 14 are in employment. 120 million of these are in full time work, sometimes beyond a normal working day of 8 hours.



Around 50 to 60 million child labourers work in hazardous circumstances that cause ill health and chronic disease and can sometimes lead to their death. Their jobs may expose them to harmful chemicals or fumes, keep them in an unsafe workplace or force them to stay hunched in one position for hours at a time.

Boys are involved in paid work more commonly than girls, but far more girls than boys work in the home or in home-based industries without pay. This kind of work is often ignored or underestimated, but is one of the main reasons why girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys. Rural children, in particular girls, tend to start work around the home at an early age – some at 5-7 years old.

"If my parents had been rich I would have gone to school." Dibou, 13 year old maid from Senegal

What causes child labour?

There is no doubt that poverty is the primary cause of child labour. At a structural level, the International Labor Organisation (ILO) points to a strong correlation between income levels and child labour. Countries registering the highest rates of child labour are among the poorest.

At a household level, children often work to supplement their families' income. With an increasing number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and other causes, there are many more child-headed households. These children work simply to survive. Children who have lost contact with their family or have been abandoned (including 'street children') work to support themselves.

Access to education also affects the incidence of child labour. In some areas there are not adequate schools or teachers available to run classes, denying children an education. Even where schooling is available, it may be costly. Children may also work to earn money so that their siblings can attend school.

Girls in particular may be burdened by work within their own households, as they perform onerous chores and care for the rest of their family, without remuneration or even the recognition that what they are doing constitutes child labour.

What is being done to stop harmful child labour?

The most extreme, exploitative and hazardous forms of child labour such as child prostitution, child soldiering and bonded labour must be immediately abolished. Where children must work in other jobs due to poverty, their rights should be protected, they should receive adequate pay and they should have access to education.

World Vision's experience in developing nations shows that children will continue to work until there are viable alternatives to sustain the entire family and community. If we ignore this reality, we do so at the peril of the children. The answer is never simple. Sometimes well meaning



Child Labour

"I go to work early at six in the morning. The assignment given to me is to roll beedies (cigarettes). I roll more than 2000 beedies a day. If I fall sick for a day I will not be paid. If I go a little late to work they will beat me. If I cannot roll 2000 beedies they will beat me."



intentions can have devastating results. It is tempting to want to simply pass laws banning child labour.

In 1994 the USA introduced the Child Labor Deterrence Act, which aimed to prevent goods made with child labour from being imported into the USA. Garment factories in Bangladesh, fearing that they would lose valuable contracts, dismissed many child workers. World Vision Bangladesh estimated that as many as 70,000 children were forced out of factories and onto the streets because of the USA's new law. Some child workers may have moved into more hazardous jobs, such as welding or in the sex industry, making them worse off overall.

Education

Education is the key to literacy and the basis of progress for all individuals. It unlocks the potential of children and allows them to maximise their capabilities. If necessary, alternative school programs should be run in the evenings and on weekends so that children that work full-time still have the opportunity to attend school.

Incentives such as free meals for children at school can help compensate for the loss of income when a working

child goes to school instead. Education is also important because it can inform and educate children about their rights, which in turn helps children to avoid exploitation and child labour.



Address poverty

We also need to address the issues of poverty that are the underlying reasons why many children work. Aid donor countries such as New Zealand have a responsibility to provide adequate assistance to developing countries to help them increase education levels and reduce poverty. Poor countries are also kept poor through an international trade system that is unfair to them, and through the servicing of debts that consumes funds that could otherwise be used for provision of services to their people.

While children work in order to try and reduce their family's poverty, for a whole society child labour can actually serve to exacerbate poverty. If children are prevented from going to school they will remain illiterate, meaning that as adults they cannot find well-paid jobs and their own children may be forced to work.

Child labour can also drive down the wages and working conditions for adult workers, making it more likely that children will need to work to supplement their family's income. If we are to help countries to develop, we need to reduce child labour and support universal education. Education should be affordable, relevant and accessible to all children.

Child Soldiers

As many as 300,000 children under the age of 18 serve in government forces or armed rebel groups. Some are as young as eight years old.

Children are most likely to become child soldiers if they are poor, separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in a combat zone or have limited access to education. Orphans and refugees are particularly vulnerable to recruitment. (Human Rights Watch 2003)

Answers to tough questions – child labour

Don't poor countries have to use cheap labour and child labour in order to develop?

Wages and labour standards are different in developing countries compared to those we expect in developed countries. However it is intolerable that children anywhere should have to work in dangerous conditions for long hours, often for wages well below \$1 per day. Child labour can actually be bad for a country's development. Because of their age and vulnerability, children can be paid low wages, which drives down the adult wage rate and means that neither adults or children are able to earn a decent wage. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) cites examples of countries that have taken measures to protect children from exploitative work and have subsequently achieved economic growth.

By preventing children from getting an education and affecting their health, child labour can also be counterproductive to development. If children grow up illiterate or chronically ill, they are unable to earn an adequate living and must continue in low-paid work, condemning them and their families to poverty. In order to develop, countries need to invest in their children.

Isn't the best strategy for ending child labour to boycott products that are produced with child labour?

Unfortunately, it isn't that simple. Most children work because they have to—they are forced into it by poverty or because they are orphaned. If we boycott products that are produced by child labourers but don't provide them with another source of income, these children will still face the same problems. Taking away their livelihood can just force them into even more dangerous or exploitative work, such as prostitution or pornography. Also, consumer boycotts usually only affect a tiny fraction of the industries in which children are employed. Many children are employed in the informal economy in their own countries, which is unaffected by the actions of Western consumers.

The member states of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) voted in 1999 to adopt Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This calls for an end to the worst forms of child labour, including all forms of slavery, trafficking or bondage of children, prostitution or pornography, trafficking of drugs or other illegal activities and children working as soldiers. Children in other types of work should be protected from exploitation, educated about their rights and given access to services such as health care and education.

The real cause of child labour is simple: poverty. If we want to end child labour we need to provide children and their families with other sources of income. Programs to end child labour need to incorporate income-generation and job creation programs for families. Countries also need to be given assistance so that they can provide education, social services and employment for their citizens.



Isn't child labour the fault of parents who make their children work instead of letting them go to school?

Just like in New Zealand, parents in developing countries want the best for their children. Many parents value education very highly and would like their children to go to school if it were possible. However if they can't afford school fees or there is no school in their area, they may prefer their children to work as an alternative.

Some children are sold or coerced into exploitative child labour, or forced by their parents to work. However studies suggest that many children are actively involved in the decision to begin working. They may feel loyalty to their family and want to contribute to the household income, or take pride in working, especially when they cannot go to school.

It is of course necessary to involve parents in any efforts to reduce child labour or improve conditions for child labourers. Children's income is often very valuable to a family. Sometimes it can contribute up to a third of the household's income, even where parents are working. But it is also important to work with the children themselves and understand their circumstances.

Child Labour in New Zealand

New Zealand ratified Convention 182 Concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labour on 14 June 2001. The government has formed the Child Labour Officials

Advisory Committee (CLOAC) to raise public awareness and understanding of Convention 182 and to encourage initiatives to identify and eliminate the worst forms of child labour in New Zealand.

Chaired by the Department of Labour, CLOAC is a multi-agency government committee with representatives from the Department of Labour, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Police, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Te Puni Kokiri, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

New Zealand provided its first report to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on Convention 182 in September 2003. The report refers to programmes aimed at awareness raising and prevention of harmful child labour and to New Zealand legislation prohibiting harmful child labour. The report is available at <http://www.dol.govt.nz/PDFs/ILO-Convention-182-report.pdf>

Action you can take

JOIN the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign to help build a better world for children, and encourage governments to keep the promises they make to assist children. Click on http://www.unicef.org/say_yes/ for more information.

JOIN the Jubilee Aotearoa Campaign. This campaign seeks to raise NZ public and government countries about the plight of heavily indebted poor countries. Jubilee is a worldwide movement that calls for the cancellation of developing countries' *unpayable* debts. Jubilee Aotearoa's website is at <http://www.debtaction.org.nz/aboutjubilee.html>

BUY fair trade goods (goods such as fair trade coffee, chocolate and tea are usually available in NZ), when possible.

SUPPORT World Vision's Children in Crisis Programme which helps children find alternatives to hazardous labour.

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Compiled by World Vision Australia 1999, updated 2003. Adapted for World Vision NZ by Barbara Ruck 2004.