

World Day Against Child Labour

The International Labour Organization (ILO) introduced the World Day Against Child Labour in 2002, as part of their efforts to eradicate this unacceptable phenomenon. The day is observed each year on 12 June, and this year the focus will be on the impact of conflicts and disasters. It is also an opportunity to consider what measures have been taken at international and EU level to prevent child labour, and with what success.

Child labour

The UN [defines](#) child labour as work performed by children who are under the minimum age legally specified for that kind of work, or work that, because of its detrimental nature or conditions, is considered unacceptable for children and is prohibited. Not all work performed by children should be considered child labour. Forms of work that are beneficial to a child's personal and social development, that do not interfere with schooling and childhood but provide useful experience and skillsets should be encouraged.

Worst forms of child labour: these represent the biggest concern within the scope of child labour. According to ILO Convention No 182, these forms of labour are prohibited for any person below the age of 18 and must be eliminated as a matter of urgency. They include: all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery; involvement of children in commercial sexual exploitation; involvement of children in illicit activities and work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (Article 3).

Global trends. In recent years, there has been a [significant decline](#) in the number of children between the ages of 5 and 17 involved in child labour, from an estimated 246 million children worldwide in 2000 to 168 million in 2012. Child labour among girls fell by 40 %, compared with 25 % for boys from 2000 to 2012. However, despite this considerable drop in the numbers of child labourers around the world, 11 % of the overall child population is still affected and more than half of them (85 million) are engaged in hazardous work. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with highest rate of child labour, with 21 % of children employed as child labourers. Globally, the largest number of child labourers (59 %) are in the agricultural sector. Although the phenomenon of child labour is more commonly associated with non-EU countries, in spite of a lack of reliable comprehensive statistical sources, there is [evidence](#) that child labour persists in the EU and Europe as well.

Root causes. It is [believed](#) that child labour is commonly driven by family and community poverty paired with lack of access to decent work for adults and youth (income insecurity, inadequate wages), weak social protection and lack of free, quality, public education and other public services.

Future goals. The ILO's initial [goal](#) was to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2016. However, despite its efforts, supported by increasing commitment from countries all over the world, and notable progress, that goal has still to be achieved. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, and [Goal 8](#) in particular, set the target of eliminating all forms of child labour by 2025. It is necessary to implement existing standards and tackle root causes of child labour. The recent [ILO IPEC+ Flagship Strategy](#) identifies priorities requiring immediate action.

Protecting children from child labour in conflicts and disasters. More than [1.5 billion](#) people live in areas affected by conflict, violence and fragility. It is [projected](#) that 200 million children a year will be affected by climate change disasters in the coming decades. Furthermore, it is [estimated](#) that one in ten of the world's children live in conflict-affected areas, while over [10 million](#) children were refugees in 2015 worldwide. Conflicts and crisis deprive millions of children of their basic human rights and increase the number of children at risk of exploitation including child labour, human trafficking and sexual abuse. Recent migration flows to Europe where, in 2015 and 2016, children made up [30 %](#) of asylum-seekers, with [56 000](#) unaccompanied children applying for asylum in 2016, presented the European Union's commitment to eradicate child labour with even greater challenges.



International legal framework for combating child labour

Since its establishment in 1919, the ILO has been committed to the abolition of child labour as one of its main goals. It has played a crucial role in raising awareness of the importance of eliminating child labour, as well as in establishing widely recognised standards.

Three major international conventions establish the legal framework for national action against child labour.

[ILO Convention No 138](#) on the minimum age for admission to employment and work, adopted in 1973, has been [ratified](#) by 169 countries, including all European Union (EU) Member States. It is a crucial document that lays down the standards for minimum age for employment, calling on the parties to set the minimum age for employment at 15 (Article 2.3) or at least 18 for hazardous work (Article 3.1). It also emphasises the importance of taking all necessary steps to ensure the effective abolition of child labour.

[ILO Convention No 182](#) on the worst forms of child labour, adopted in 1999, has been [ratified](#) by 180 countries, including all EU Member States, and is known to have been the fastest ratification in the history of the ILO. It calls on members to ensure immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency (Article 1).

The UN [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) adopted in 1989, has been [ratified](#) by 196 countries, including all EU Member States. In the framework of prohibiting child labour, the CRC confers upon children the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (Article 32). Although it does not specify a minimum age for employment, it urges parties to stipulate one as well as to regulate hours and conditions of employment and provide penalties and sanctions.

EU action to combat child labour

The EU's strong commitment to eliminating child labour is reflected in Article 32 of the 2012 [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) (CFR), which prohibits the employment of children and stipulates that the minimum age of employment may not be lower than the minimum school-leaving age. The main legal instrument prohibiting child labour in the EU is [Council Directive 94/33/EC](#). It allows Member States to set the minimum age for employment below the minimum school-leaving age only exceptionally, in Article 4.2. No major difficulties have been encountered with the [transposition](#) of the directive into national law; most Member States already had legislation providing for the prohibition of child labour prior to the adoption of the directive.

There is also an external dimension to the fight against child labour, and to the EU's [full commitment](#) to its eradication. Building upon a [document](#) from 2010, the [Commission Staff Working Document, Trade and Worst Forms of Child Labour](#), SWD(2013) 173 provides the framework for understanding the complexity of the issue, emphasising the link between trade and child labour, and pointing out the positive impact of economic growth on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. More recently, a [Commission Staff Working Document](#), SWD(2017) 147, addresses child labour in the context of promoting sustainable garment value chains through EU development action. The Council of the EU has, meanwhile, [reaffirmed](#) its strong commitment to eliminating child labour, particularly its worst forms, and stressed the importance of eradicating the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including child soldiers.

The **European Parliament** has [addressed the issue](#) of child labour and its various forms within and outside the EU in a number of resolutions, condemning it and calling for measures that would facilitate its elimination. For example, in 2010, Parliament [called](#) for all future trade agreements to provide for a ban on the exploitation of child labour. Subsequent resolutions, on the [EC-Uzbekistan partnership and cooperation agreement](#) (2011) and on [child labour in the cocoa sector](#) (2012) repeated that call, with specific reference to forced child labour, while the 2013 [resolution on the global cotton value chain](#) referred to a traceability mechanism for goods produced through child or forced labour. More recently a Parliament resolution on the [EU flagship initiative on the garment sector](#) (2017) calls on the Commission to propose binding legislation on due diligence obligations for supply chains in the sector including standards for the elimination of forced and child labour.

Numerous parliamentary questions ([E-008964-16](#), [E-007726-16](#), [E-005186-16](#), [E-004481-16](#), etc.) have been tabled asking the Commission to elaborate on different aspects of child labour within and outside the EU. The Commission has, meanwhile, repeatedly confirmed its commitment to eradicate child labour, in close cooperation with the ILO and other international organisations.