

Ten Questions and Answers on Child Labour

1. What is exactly meant by child labour?

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO conventions, child labour is any form of work for which children are too young, or which is hazardous or exploitative, or which is detrimental to their physical or mental development, or prevents them from attending school. Child labour deprives children of their childhood and violates children's rights worldwide.

2. Worldwide, how many children are involved in child labour?

Some 152 million girls and boys between the ages of five and seventeen are affected, that is one in every ten children in the world. Almost half of these children work under hazardous conditions, carrying heavy loads or toiling in quarries. Child labour takes place in seventy percent of family farming. Nearly half of those children engaged in child labour are younger than twelve years. Africa is the continent where most girls and boys work (72 million), followed by Asia (62 million), Latin America (11 million). Yet, child labour takes place across Europe and Central Asia (5 million) as well. The current Corona pandemic has already caused numbers to rise and this trend will undoubtedly continue.

3. What does “hazardous” child labour mean?

The worst forms of child labour are designated as “hazardous.” The International Labour Organisation (ILO) thereby includes activities carried out under hazardous conditions, or that are likely to harm health, safety or morals of children. These comprise child prostitution and child pornography, the use as child soldiers, drug smuggling, underground and mine work, night work and the use of dangerous machinery. It also includes working in unhealthy environments where children might be exposed to hazardous substances, dangerous noise levels or vibrations. Hazardous child labour is moreover often linked to child trafficking.

4. Why do children have to work?

There are multiple reasons for child labour, the most important being extreme poverty. Child labour is at once the cause and the consequence of poverty. As a rule, those children engaged in child labour have to contribute to the family income. The factors, however, that lead to child labour are multifaceted and interrelated: Low incomes, limited access to education and social security, discrimination and inequality, external events such as the death of a parent, debt, and so forth. These factors all contribute to parents feeling driven to send their children out to work instead of sending them to school. Other external events such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, wars and displacement are also factors that further facilitate child labour.

5. Which set of solutions will be effective against child labour?

Child labour is a complex problem for which there are no simple solutions. Broad-based social transfer programmes that give families money in order to send their children to school instead of to work in the fields have proven to be successful. The so-called Child Labour Free Zones, which rely on the involvement of all stakeholders in local communities, have also been successful models to prevent child labour.

6. Why is the fight against child labour taking so long to succeed?

Since 2000, child labour has been steadily decreasing. All ILO member states have signed Convention 182, which prohibits hazardous child labour. Notwithstanding, lax monitoring in numerous countries has resulted in substandard compliance with this ban. In many states, children's rights have not been adequately implemented in accordance with international provisions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A further problem is the existence of legal loopholes in some national laws that permit child labour in certain industries and hence legal age limits to be undermined. The entry age for admission into employment must coincide with the completion of compulsory education, which comes into force either from the age of fourteen or fifteen, depending on the national jurisdiction.

7. Ban child labour or protect working children? Which is the best way?

Again, there is no simple answer to this question. Child labour is a reality in many low-income countries that cannot be dismissed or overlooked. A strict ban on any kind of child labour could lead to work taking place clandestinely or illegally, thus further worsening the predicament for those exploited girls and boys. Given such a context, all that can help is a holistic approach that concurrently combats structural inequalities and poverty. In addition to enabling parents to earn a living wage, such an approach should also focus on improving education and social systems. While laws to protect children are vitally important, they must also be consistently implemented and accompanied by measures that address the underlying causes of child labour.

8. In which products has child labour been used?

Worldwide, girls and boys are exploited as cheap labour so that people across Europe can buy cheap goods. It is estimated that some 10 – 25 percent of child labour takes place in global supply chains. Numerous supermarkets and shops sell products that involve the use of child labour. Unfortunately, to date, there are very few industry-specific seals that identify child labour-free products, notably *Fair Flowers* for flowers, *Good Weave/Rugmark* for carpets, and *Xertifix* for natural stones.

9. What has Bread for the World been doing to combat child labour?

Children's rights play a vital role in Bread for the World's international project works. Bread for the World's global partner organisations have been supporting families in securing their livelihoods through income-generating measures and thus finding a way out of poverty. They have also been exerting influence on the educational systems in their respective countries, thus creating better access to education for disadvantaged children. Through targeted lobbying, our partner organisations are not only committed to bolstering international agreements for the protection of human rights but also to demand their implementation in their respective countries.

10. On a personal level, what can each of us do against child labour?

As consumers, we also bear responsibility. Ultimately, our purchasing decisions boost the demand for certain products that foster child labour. Hence, it makes good sense to buy regional, seasonal and Fair-trade products. Some seals and certificates guarantee that goods have been produced under fair conditions and without the involvement of any child labour. When shopping, for example, how about enquiring where products come from. This can also help and educate people about the issue. Educational work can both create and increase public awareness concerning the problem. With the support of public initiatives and lobbying, we can also demand that political measures, such as a supply chain law for companies, be introduced in order to eradicate child labour.