

Policy Analysis Document  
**CHILD LABOR**



*"My mother is often ill and cannot work.  
I want to continue studying.  
I deserve to be loved as a child."*

**An 11-year-old child from Dhaka (Bangladesh)**



## DEFINITIONS

### What is child labor?<sup>1</sup>

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The term “child labor” is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development<sup>2</sup>. It refers to work that is dangerous or harmful to children’s physical, mental or moral wellbeing.

Whether or not particular activities can be classified as child labor depends on a series of conditions that we outline below; as such, this classification may vary from one country to another:

- child’s age
- type of work
- degree to which the activity interferes with the exercise of other rights, such as the right to education
- number of hours performed
- conditions under which it is performed

1. OIT: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--es/index.htm>

2. Global compact: [https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues\\_doc/human\\_rights/CRBP/Childrens\\_Rights\\_and\\_Business\\_Principles.pdf](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/human_rights/CRBP/Childrens_Rights_and_Business_Principles.pdf)

## What is the minimum age for admission to employment?<sup>3</sup>

Convention No. 138 of the ILO defines the minimum age for admission to employment.

Type of work	Minimum age
Light work: children between the ages of 13 and 15 years old may do light work, as long as it does not threaten their health and safety, or hinder their education and vocational orientation and training.	Between 13 and 15 years old; in exceptional cases, between 12 and 14 years old.
Basic minimum age: the minimum age for work should not be below the age for finishing compulsory schooling, and in any case not less than 15.	15 years old; in exceptional cases, 14 years old.
Hazardous work (a specific category of the worst forms of child labor): any work which is likely to jeopardize children's health, safety or morals should not be done by anyone under the age of 18.	18 years old; in exceptional cases, 16 years old (under strict conditions).

### International legal framework

#### International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions 138 (1973) and 182 (1999) define working children as:

- children under 12 years old who perform remunerated activities;
- children between 12 and 14 years old who perform work other than light work; and
- all children engaged in the worst forms of child labor (Article 3 of Convention 182), such as slavery, sale, prostitution, pornography, use in armed conflicts and illicit activities, and in other types of work determined by each government (for example, mining, construction, etc.).

*Hazardous child labor* is a specific category of the worst forms of child labor which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. The types of work referred to under Article 3(d) shall be determined by national laws or regulations or by the competent authority.

Article 32(1) of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), states that the "right of the child 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".

All of Educo's program countries have ratified the above conventions.

3. OIT: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--es/index.htm>

## What is not child labor? Children's tasks<sup>4</sup>

Not all tasks done by children should be classified as child labor that is to be targeted for elimination. Children's participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling, is generally regarded as being something positive (Convention No. 138 of the ILO permits any type of light work that does not interfere with children's education starting at 12 years old). This includes activities such as helping parents around the home, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays. These kinds of activities contribute to children's development and to the welfare of their families; they provide them with skills and experience. It is for this reason that it is important to distinguish between child labor and children's tasks.

## What is the current situation worldwide?<sup>5</sup>

- Currently, there are 168 million children aged 5-17 years old engaged in child labor. More than half of them, 85 million, are in hazardous work.
- Asia and the Pacific still has the largest number of children engaged in child labor (almost 78 million or 9.3% of the child population), but Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest incidence of child laborers (59 million, over 21%).
- In Bangladesh, hazardous work accounts for 63 % of employment among children aged 5-9 years old; 56% of employment among children aged 10-14 years old; and 57% of employment among children aged 15-17 years old (UCW, 2011)<sup>6</sup>.
- There are 13 million (8.8%) children engaged in child labor in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Agriculture remains the sector in which the largest number of child laborers can be found (98 million, or 59%), but the problems are not negligible in services (54 million) and industry (12 million). The majority of child labor takes place in the informal economy.



4. OIT: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--es/index.htm>

5. OIT: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--es/index.htm>

6. <http://www.ucw-project.org/>

## What is our commitment?

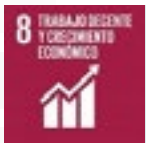
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Educo's mission is to work with children and their communities to promote just and equitable societies that guarantee their rights and wellbeing. As such, we work to eliminate child labor, so that children can enjoy their right to live in safe and protective environments.

By 2018, we aim to achieve the following results:

- Increase the number of working children who join the education system.
- Improve the mechanisms for coordinating the fight against exploitation and the worst forms of child labor.

As a member of the ChildFund Alliance and civil society, we contribute to the following Sustainable Development Goals:



**Target 8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms.**



**Target 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.**

## Open debate

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Eliminating child labor requires commitment and action on the part of everyone, the private sector, families and governments, in particular. As a member of civil society, Educo calls for governments to fulfill their obligations and commitments to eliminating this phenomenon; and we are, ourselves, committed to strengthening children's capacities, in order to promote their role as active agents of change. We do, however, recognize that the issue of child labor is a complex one that requires systematic analysis of different action strategies. Solutions that focus exclusively on prohibiting child labor have not been successful in eliminating the problem given that the underlying causes have not been addressed. In keeping with the principle of children's survival and development, we accept the need to eliminate child labor. Likewise, and at the same time, if we consider the best interest of the child, we defend the urgent need to resolve the problem of protection, by applying different action strategies against child labor in order to prevent or minimize the harm that may come with it.

## How we work

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Evidence shows that education is a key element in all effective actions to eliminate child labor (ILO)<sup>7</sup>: *it helps prevent children from being forced into work and also makes it possible to guarantee the rehabilitation and reinsertion of children who have been liberated from the worst forms of child labor through access to free basic education and, whenever possible and appropriate, to vocational, technical or professional training*<sup>8</sup>.

Educo's main efforts focus on raising awareness to help change cultural perspectives, practices and attitudes, and on strengthening education programs for promoting and protecting Child Rights.

- Improved access to quality education: we promote Child Rights; we strengthen the capacity to make informed decisions that are not detrimental to individual wellbeing; we foster the development of self-knowledge, self-confidence, self-esteem and a resilient character; and, we improve opportunities and capacities to opportune access decent employment through technical professional training.
- Reinsertion and incorporation of working children or former working children in the educational system: we facilitate access to education through adapted schedules and syllabi.
- Changes in attitudes and practices and promotion of a protective environment: we raise awareness among communities, families and employers in order to promote the rights to education and protection and to promote a safeguarding culture.
- Changes in attitudes and practices in the private sector: we raise awareness and coordinate with the private sector to improve working conditions and promote that which is established in the document Children's Rights and Business Principles.
- Generation of family income: we offer technical training for families and young people to help reduce child poverty.
- Establishment of local protection system: we promote the formation of Local Rights Committees for the prevention and elimination of the worst forms of child labor.
- Changes in local policies through awareness raising and advocacy: we promote the rights to education and protection, as well as a safeguarding culture.
- Reinforcement of the capacities of working children: we seek to boost their resilience and their capacity to express their opinion and to be taken into account. Children are also agents of change in society and their active participation in formal and informal public forums can influence decision making and social attitudes and practices.

7. <http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Action/Education/ChildlabourandEducationforAll/lang--en/index.htm>

8. United Nations General Assembly, (2002). A world fit for children. Adopted resolution S-27/2.

## Evidence: What we've achieved

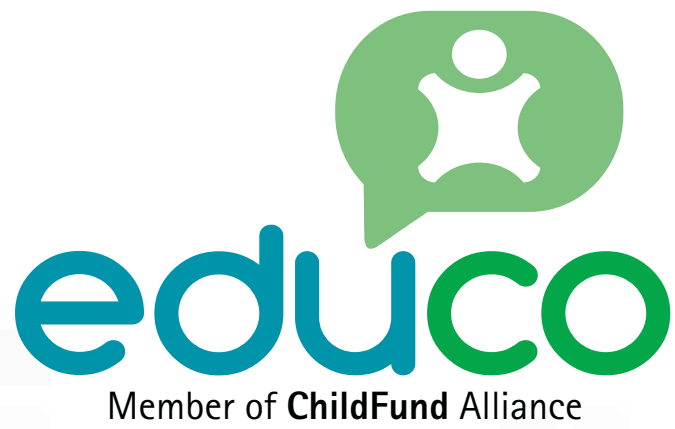
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**Bangladesh:** The Education for Working Children project is carried out in five urban slums of Dhaka. Every year, some 1,000 working children attend non-formal primary school on a daily basis, where the syllabi and learning schedules are adapted to the students' personal situation. The project has had a significant impact: as the course progresses, approximately 40% of the students end up leaving their jobs to focus on their studies. The quality of education provided is evident in the high percentage (84%) of students who successfully pass the official government exam, thus obtaining validation of their primary studies and making it possible for them to continue on to secondary school or vocational training. At the same time, actions carried out to raise parents' and employers' awareness results in greater protection and better treatment both at home and in the workplace, with the consequent reduction in workload and cases of violence and abuse. Likewise, it has been observed that children experience notable changes with respect to self-esteem, social relationships and behavior as a result of their participation in the project.

**Benin:** Through the Accelerated Course Program, Educo and its local partners provide guidance to working children so that they can rejoin the formal education system. In parallel, activities are carried out to raise awareness of children's rights at two levels: on the one hand, with parents and guardians and other actors involved in child labor, in order to foster their respect for rights and to promote a protective environment that prevents situations of risk and mistreatment. On the other hand, actions are undertaken to raise children's awareness of their rights so that they can avoid falling into child labor networks or, if they are already engaged in this activity, can liberate themselves from it.

**Burkina Faso:** We have promoted the creation of a Regional Coordinating Committee for Child Labor. This committee is formed by all regional authorities, including governors and different local government actors, and consists of detecting and fighting against child labor, designing plans for social and school integration, and carrying out advocacy campaigns to demand the application of legal frameworks that prohibit child labor.

**El Salvador:** The Local Rights Committees for the prevention and eradication of the worst forms of child labor, in collaboration with the ILO, contemplate a system for monitoring working children and advocacy through local policies with comprehensive strategies. Ten municipal policies have been created that include strategies for preventing and eliminating the worst forms of child labor; efforts to collaborate with local government and local rights committees have also been fruitful. Response reports are also being prepared at the municipal level, for children who have suffered some type of physical harm as a result of child labor. On the other hand, vocational workshops have been conducted with adolescents and young people in those areas where child labor is most prevalent.



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