



1. Child Labour

Child labour is work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children. It interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely or to combine school attendance with excessively long and/or heavy work.

Not all work done by children is classified as child labour that should be eliminated. Work that does not affect children's health and personal development or schooling can be constructive, such as helping around the home or in a family business or earning pocket money outside school time. Whether a job is classified as child labour depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, and the impact of the work on the child's health, development and access to education.

1.1 Child Labourers

- Workers must have reached the minimum legal age for employment before they start work. Under international standards, the minimum age is 15 years, or the age at which compulsory schooling is completed, whichever is higher. National law should specify the minimum working age, which may be set temporarily at 14 in developing countries.
- National law may allow children who are 13-15 years of age (or 12-14 if the minimum working age is 14) to do light work outside of school hours. Children who are at least 14 years of age also may be allowed to work as part of a government-approved training programme.

1.2 Worst Forms of Child Labour

The worst forms of child labour are forbidden for all children under age 18. Under ILO Convention 182, the worst forms of child labour are forced labour by children; the use of children in prostitution, pornography, and illicit activities (e.g., drug production and trafficking); and work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (hazardous work).

1.3 Hazardous Work

Hazardous work is work that is likely to jeopardise or harm the health, safety or morals of a child, due to the nature of the work or the conditions in which it is carried out. ILO Convention 138 fixes the minimum age for performing hazardous work at 18 years. However, national law may allow workers under age 18 who are 16 years or older to undertake hazardous work if their health, safety and morals are fully protected, and they are adequately trained to do the work.

Most industries involve some form of hazardous work. Some examples include:

- working in an unhealthy environment, e.g., one involving toxic chemicals, high noise levels, high temperatures, or risk of burns or injury;
- work that exposes children to physical, sexual or psychological abuse;
- carrying heavy loads;
- working at dangerous heights or in confined spaces; and
- using dangerous equipment or tools.

National law should set out a list of jobs that are considered hazardous.

Under international standards, night work and work for long hours are considered hazardous for workers who are less than 18 years of age, regardless of whether the work itself is hazardous, so they should not be required to work overtime or at night.

1.4 Documentation

Often national law requires employers to keep records that document the age of workers and/or to keep a register of workers under the age of 18. These practices can provide evidence to show that the employer is complying with legal requirements on child labour.

Types of employer action that can lead to non-compliance

- Hiring workers who have not yet reached minimum working age.
- Engaging workers under age 18 in work that is likely to harm their health, safety or morals, or in work that could expose them to physical, sexual or psychological abuse.
- Employing workers under age 18 in hazardous work without meeting the necessary conditions and training requirements for them to perform the work.
- Allowing workers under age 18 to work overtime or at night.
- Failing to verify workers' ages prior to hiring, or to comply with national law regarding documentation of workers under age 18.

Key action points for employers

- Check the minimum age for employment set by national law.
- Create a procedure to ensure that all workers are above the minimum legal working age at the time of hiring (e.g., asking for identity documents to check dates of birth).
- Ensure that children ages 13-15 (or 12-14, in countries where the minimum age is 14) are only doing light work outside school hours in accordance with national law, and that children working in a government-approved training program are at least 14 years of age.
- Make sure that workers under 18 are not exposed to verbal or physical abuse in the workplace.
- Check to see whether national law sets out a list of prohibited jobs for workers under age 18.
- Make sure that workers under age 18 are not required to perform hazardous work unless all conditions and requirements are satisfied.
- Do not permit overtime or night work for young workers.
- Check national law for additional restrictions on working hours for workers under age 18.
- At a minimum, ensure that young workers have at least 12 hours of rest each day and one day off work per week.
- Keep a register of all workers under age 18, and comply with national requirements to verify and document workers' ages.

Key references

ILO Convention 138 and Recommendation 146 on Minimum Age; ILO Convention 182 and Recommendation 190 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour