



Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Office of International Labor Affairs

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

Worker Rights in Focus: Exploitative Child Labor

Children all over the world deserve the opportunity to be children and to reach their fullest potential. Instead, millions of children are exposed to exploitative conditions in the workplace and are kept out of school to work, furthering a destructive cycle of poverty and abuse. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that there are over 215 million child laborers globally, and of these, over 115 million are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor, recruitment into armed services, drug production and prostitution. Governments should develop and enforce national minimum age laws to prevent and eliminate such exploitative child labor practices.

A Universal Problem

Exploitative child labor, including hazardous work, is an impediment to protecting children's rights, breaking the cycle of poverty, and promoting a healthy and sustainable workforce. Abolishing exploitative child labor and protecting children from hazardous work are significant challenges for nearly every country. Common problems in this area include:

- Children, under the minimum age, working in the formal economy or engaged in street vending or other informal activities;
- Allowing a child to perform work that is hazardous, strenuous, not for education or training purposes, or disruptive to the child's personal development;
- Lack of laws specifically protecting children from hazardous work or covering certain sectors;
- Failing to enforce child labor laws or carry out child labor inspections in the informal sector;
- Abuse of apprenticeship programs to provide child labor to employers; and
- Physical or sexual abuse of child workers, including domestic workers, at the workplace.

Highlights from the 2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (HRR) address the extent to which individual countries respect human rights and worker rights. The 2010 HRR highlighted exploitative child labor in numerous countries, including the following instances:

- In Uzbekistan, many schools, particularly in rural areas, closed for six to eight weeks during the fall cotton harvest and sent students to work in the fields;
- Children in cocoa communities in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire continued to be subjected to the worst forms of child labor, such as carrying heavy loads and being exposed to hazardous conditions likely to harm their safety or health;
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, children made up to 30 percent of the informal mining sector, often performing dangerous mine work;
- Child labor in Vietnam's urban, informal economy remained problematic, particularly among migrant children whose families were unable to register them in school;
- In Sudan, the illegal recruitment and use of child soldiers remained a serious problem;
- In India, there is no overall minimum age for employment, and children continued to work in exploitative conditions in the hybrid seed, carpet, apparel, and many other industries; and
- In Haiti, children, mostly girls, between the ages of six and 14 worked as domestic servants without pay or adequate food, and often did not attend school.

All 2010 Human Rights Reports are available at:
<http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/index.htm>.

Contact For more information about the work of the State Department's Office of International Labor Affairs, please contact labor@state.gov.