



Child labor in Latin American countries

Economic and Social Council



Shattered Vows: Tracing the Devastation Caused by
Violating Human Rights



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Student Officer: Maartje Bus
Position: President chair

Introduction

Child labor remains a persistent and challenging problem in many Latin American countries, despite ongoing efforts to combat it. This research report highlights key aspects of this problem and examines the causes, consequences and actions that are being taken or can be taken to address and eliminate child labor in that region.

Definition of Key Terms

Domestic Worker:

Those workers who perform work in for a private household or households.

Exploiting:

To treat someone unfairly in order to get money or make an advantage.

Child Labor:

Child labor refers to the employment of children in work that is harmful, interferes with their ability to attend regular schools, and is mentally, physically, socially, or morally detrimental.

Forced Labor:

Forced labor involves situations where individuals are coerced to work through the use of violence, threats, or other forms of intimidation. It can overlap with child labor in cases where children are forced to work against their will.

Minimum Age for Employment:

The minimum age for employment is the legally defined age below which children are not allowed to work, except for light work or specific vocational training programs.

Worst Forms of Child Labor:

This term, as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO), encompasses the most egregious and harmful forms of child labor, including slavery, trafficking, forced labor, and involvement in hazardous work that may jeopardize the health, safety, or morals of children.

International Labor Organization (ILO):

The ILO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that sets international labor standards and promotes social justice and fair labor practices globally.

Social Responsibility:



Social responsibility refers to the ethical obligation of individuals, organizations, and corporations to act in ways that benefit society. In the context of child labor, it involves taking steps to ensure that business practices do not contribute to or exploit child labor.

Supply Chain Transparency:

Supply chain transparency involves the clear disclosure and understanding of the processes and entities involved in the production and distribution of goods and services. It is crucial for identifying and addressing issues such as child labor within supply chains.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

CSR is a business approach that integrates social and environmental concerns into a company's operations and interactions with stakeholders. In the context of child labor, CSR includes efforts to ensure ethical labor practices within the company and its supply chains.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Monitoring and evaluation are processes used to assess and measure the impact of initiatives and programs aimed at eliminating child labor. This includes regular assessments, audits, and reviews to ensure compliance with standards.

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives:

These are collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders, including governments, businesses, NGOs, and international organizations, to address complex issues such as child labor through collective action and shared responsibility.

General Overview

There is a lot of child labor in Latin American countries. Yet it is difficult to measure to what extent this happens. A study by the International Labor Office shows that the extent of child labor is worrisome. Some important conclusions:

- There are more than 7 million child workers in Brazil. Of these, more than 560,000 are child domestic workers.
- In Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, 20% of all girls between the ages of 10 and 14 work as domestic workers, and in rural areas the percentage is even higher.
- In Honduras, 40% of children work in the agricultural sector. In Guatemala it is 65% and in El Salvador 67%.
- During the busy season preceding the Christmas vacations, about 3,500 children work in El Salvador's fireworks factories.
- There are about 314,900 economically active children ages 5-17 in Ecuador, a country with a total population of 12 million.
- IPEC estimates that about 50,000 children work in small-scale gold mines in Peru and 13,500 in Bolivia.



Main causes of child labor

One of the main causes of child labor in Latin America is poverty. Families with poor economic conditions often make their children work to supplement the family income. Limited access to basic needs, such as education and health care, further exacerbates this cycle, which can leave children trapped in exploitative working conditions.

Lack of accessible quality education is a major contributing factor to child labor. Many children are forced to work to contribute to their family's income rather than attend school. Inadequate educational infrastructure, combined with sociocultural norms, often perpetuates a cycle of generational illiteracy and limited opportunities for these children.

Consequences of child labor

Child labor has serious consequences for the educational development of children. Working at an early age makes children less likely to attend school, or leave school early, which limits their opportunities to acquire essential skills for a better future. This creates a downward spiral because they will then earn less in the future, which in turn forces their children to perform child labor.

Working in hazardous conditions exposes child workers to physical harm and psychological distress. Long working hours, hazardous tasks and exposure to harmful substances compromise their physical well-being and hinder their overall development.

Major Parties Involved

Brazil

Child labor remains a concern in various sectors in Brazil, such as agriculture and domestic service. Economic factors such as poverty and income inequality contribute to the prevalence of child labor in Brazil. Brazil has implanted laws to combat child labor, but it turns out that this is not enough.

The International Labor Organization

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a specialized United Nations agency established in October 1919 under the League of Nations. Its primary objective is to promote social and economic justice through the establishment of international labor standards.

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)

UNICEF works to protect and promote the rights of children worldwide. It addresses issues such as child labor, advocating for policies and programmes to ensure the well-being of children.



Timeline of Events

1 February 1836	First state child labor law in the USA
1938	The "Fair Labor Standards act has passed". This meant that children from now on could only work from the age of 14.
20 November 1989	The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) has passed.
2013	The International Labor Organization releases quadrennial estimates that reveals a drop of 47 million child laborers over the last four years internationally, leaving 168 million youth still in child labor and 85 million trapped in hazardous work.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

There have been many previous attempts to solve child labor in Latin American countries. For example, The International Labor Organization has written conventions and recommendations to address the issue of child labor. Latin American countries actively participated as signatories to these treaties, which demonstrated their commitment to eradicating child labor. To illustrate, the Minimum Age Convention of 1973 (No. 138) sets parameters that determine the permissible age for work, while the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention of 1999 (No. 182) outlines provisions that prohibit the involvement of children in hazardous work. Collectively, these conventions serve as a framework and affirm a global commitment to protect the well-being and rights of young individuals in the labor market.

A specific effort to address child labor in Latin American countries involved the implementation of the "Program for the Eradication of Child Labor" (Programa para la Erradicación del Trabajo Infantil or PETI) in Brazil. PETI was a government initiative launched in 1996 with the aim of eliminating child labor and promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable children. PETI contributes to protecting, preventing and releasing children and adolescents aged up to 15 years old who are in a child labor situation, with the exception of apprentices aged 14 and over.

An important development in the field of child labor is the creation of UNICEF. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (until 1953 was this called "the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund"). UNICEF is an organization within the United Nations that is committed to the well-being of children, including through the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF has been important in reducing child labor in Latin American Countries as it seeks to safeguard the rights of children and ensure that they have good future prospects.



Possible solutions

One possible solution is to establish an international collaboration involving governments, NGOs and companies to create standardized monitoring and reporting systems for child labor in Latin American countries. This initiative could be facilitated by a global organization such as UNICEF, which ensures that all countries adhere to a uniform set of standards. This can make it easier to identify and tackle child labor across borders.

Another possible solution is to promote global initiatives that focus on significant investments in education and skills development programs. By addressing the root causes of child labor, such as poverty and lack of educational opportunities, member states can strive to create long-term, sustainable change. Support for education can come from both developed and developing countries, promoting a sense of shared responsibility.

Member states can also integrate ethical labor practices into international trade agreements to encourage countries to adopt and enforce measures against child labor. Developing a system in which compliance with certain labor standards becomes a condition for participation in preferential trade agreements can help us to combat child labor. This approach ensures that economic benefits are linked to responsible labor practices. In addition, provide support and resources to countries that may face economic challenges.



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