

Child Labour & Forced Labour

A glossary of definitions

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Contents

Child	2
Child labour	2
Child Work/Light work	2
Worst forms of child labour	3
Unconditional worst forms of child labour	3
Conditional worst forms of child labour	3
Adult Forced Labour	3
Child Forced Labour	4

Child

According to the [International Charter on Children’s Rights](#) and to [ILO Convention 138](#) on Minimum Age, a child is any human being, male or female, below the age of 18.

Child labour

The [ILO defines child labour](#) as “**work that** deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that **is harmful to physical and mental development**”.

Child labour specifically refers to work, hazardous or not, that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, or obliging them to leave school prematurely, or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Child Work/Light work

Not all work done by children is classified as child labour. Children’s and adolescents’ participation in economic work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with or prejudice their schooling or their participation in vocational orientation or training programmes is generally regarded as positive.

Child work (light work) includes activities such as helping their parents around the home, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays for a few hours and under adult supervision. These kinds of activities contribute to children’s development and the welfare of their families. It provides them with skills and experience and prepares them to be productive members of society during their adult life.

Worst forms of child labour

According to [ILO Convention 182](#), there are four categories of the worst forms of child labour:

- a) All forms of **slavery** or practices similar to slavery, such as the **sale, trafficking** of children, **debt bondage** and serfdom or **compulsory labour**, including **forced** or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict
- b) The use, procuring or offering of a child for **prostitution**, for the production of **pornography** or for pornographic performances;
- c) The use, procuring or offering of a child for **illicit activities**, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- d) Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (**hazardous work**).

Unconditional worst forms of child labour

Categories (a), (b) and (c) are known as the *unconditional* forms of child labour, meaning they are **prohibited without regard** to the age of the child, the nature of the tasks executed, the conditions and circumstances in which those tasks are executed.

See below for further information on category (a) – [Child Forced Labour](#).

Conditional worst forms of child labour

Category (d) – hazardous work – is a *conditional* worst form of child labour, meaning it must be defined locally, through the nationally defined list of hazardous activities.

Hazardous work is work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, **is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children**. According to [ILO Convention 182](#), the precise nature of those tasks that are prohibited are to be defined and reviewed by each country.

See ICI's [comparative analysis of child labour decrees](#) in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

Adult Forced Labour

ILO operationalized the definition of adult forced labour in its 2012 guidance document, [Hard to see, harder to count - Survey guidelines to estimate forced labour of adults and children](#):

*“Forced labour of adults is defined, for the purpose of these guidelines, as work for which a person has not offered him or herself voluntarily (**concept of “involuntariness”**) and which is performed under the menace of any penalty (**concept of “coercion”**) applied by an employer or a third party to the worker. The coercion may take place during the worker’s recruitment process to force him or her to accept the job or, once the person is working, to force him/her to do tasks which were not part of what was agreed at the time of recruitment or to prevent him/her from leaving the job.”*

The operational definition of forced labour can be split into the four principal dimensions:

1. Un-free recruitment
2. Work and life under duress
3. Impossibility of leaving an employer
4. Penalty or menace of penalty

Examples of (4) *penalty or menace of penalty* include the following means of coercion:

- Threats and violence
- Restriction of workers' freedom of movement
- Debt bondage
- Withholding of wages
- Retention of passport or documents
- Abuse of vulnerability

Child Forced Labour

The [ILO guidelines](#) operationalize the concept of forced labour specifically for children (p.17):

“For the purpose of these guidelines, forced labour of children is defined as work performed by children under coercion applied by a third party (other than by his or her parents) either to the child or to the child’s parents, or work performed by a child as a direct consequence of their parent or parents being engaged in forced labour.

The coercion may take place during the child’s recruitment, to force the child or his or her parents to accept the job, or once the child is working, to force him/her to do tasks which were not part of what was agreed at the time of recruitment or to prevent the child from leaving the work.

If a child is working as a direct consequence of his or her parents being in a situation of forced labour, then the child is also considered to be in forced labour.”