



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Saint Louis Chapter

UN75 CONSULTATION

Child Labor

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The United Nations Association (UNA-USA) of Saint Louis

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1. INTRODUCTION TO UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF USA OF SAINT LOUIS

The United Nations Association of USA of Saint Louis is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to educating, inspiring, and mobilizing Americans to support the principals and vital work of the United Nations and its agencies. We accomplish our work with public events that bring the global agenda of the United Nations to the local community. We are a program of the UN Foundation, and we represent the largest advocacy network of UN supporters with over 200 Chapter across the United States.

2. CONSULTATION INTRODUCTION

(2.1) In an effort to join the global conversation around the United Nations 75th anniversary, the UNA-USA of Saint Louis is submitting this UN75 Consultation Report with focus on *Child Labor*.

In order to make recommendations to the UN this consultation evaluated current trends on child labor from the global and local perspectives.

Child Labor is defined as *work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development.*

(2.2) Methodology

The UN75 Consultation on Child Labor was held on April 25th, 2020 in Saint Louis. This virtual event engaged the UNICEF USA office in New York, a guest speaker from Egypt,

and a local speaker who gave us an overview of current trends in child labor.

We collected demographics of our audience to include age, gender, education level, and occupation. We also divided the audience into three different discussion groups to evaluate the current trends on child labor, and the impact of climate change, poverty and inequality on this global issue. COVID-19 was discussed as it is hard to ignore its impact on the health of humanity and the economy of the world. The discussion groups had a Facilitator and Rapporteurs assigned to them.

3. DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY

Participants were asked to take an anonymous and voluntary demographic survey during the consultation through the survey capabilities available on Zoom. The purpose of this survey was to identify any trend(s) in demographic group(s) who were interested in the topic of Child Labor. The survey asked participants to confirm their age (within a range), gender, profession, and their level of education.

Of the 47 participants in attendance, there were 37 survey respondents (79%). All participants were over the age of 16, with a relatively even distribution between all age categories in the survey; 29% of respondents were between ages 16 and 24, 27% between 25 and 40, 20% between 41 and 55, and 24% were ages 55 and above. A large portion of the respondents were female (73%) and 27% were male. The largest number of respondents consisted of students (35%); other occupational sectors represented education (16%), nonprofit

(11%), healthcare (8%), accounting and finance (5%), and technology (2%).

Over half of respondents (51%) had a master’s or doctoral degree. Nearly 73% of respondents had an associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and/or doctoral degree; the remaining 17% of respondents were either in high school, or had a high school degree their highest completed level of education.

4. LEGAL CONTEXT

Child labor is a global issue that currently affects an estimated 152 million children. It is a crisis that not only affects children in developing countries but that also includes children living in wealthy nations like the U.S. This problem that steals the childhood and the educational opportunities of children younger than 10 years of age is a violation of fundamental human rights. It is also a reflection of UN member States failure to comply with international and domestic laws meant to protect the children of the world. This has a negative impact on the wellbeing of children, and the economic development of impoverished nations.

(4.1) International Laws

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has introduced protocols and policies to protect and set standards on the following issues surrounding child labor:

ILO Co10 - Article 1

Children **under the age of fourteen** years **may not be employed** or work in any **public** or **private** agricultural undertaking...

Convention	# of ratifications
C138- Minimum Age-Non-Agriculture work (15 years of age, and 13-14 for light work no harming health or interfering with school.	172
C010- Minimum Age-Agriculture work (14 years of age)	55
C123 Minimum Age-Underground work (16 years of age)	41
C182- Worst Forms of Child Labour (18 years of age)	186

The *International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) along with the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* both have stipulations that “recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation,”⁽¹⁾ and to be protected “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.”⁽²⁾

(4.2) Domestic Law

In the U.S. the federal child labor laws are regulated by the Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) of 1938.

5. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In 2017 the International Labor Organization (ILO) reported an estimated 152 million children engaged in some form of labor around the world with agriculture accounting for 70% of the child labor sector. Child labor affects boys and girls, and 48% of

these children are 11 years of age and under.(3) Egypt has reported unemployment rates as high as 13% for the general population. In 2010, it reported 1.6 million children ages 12-17 in the labor force with 82% of these children exposed to unsafe working conditions. The Labor Law in Egypt does not include provisions for child labor in agriculture.(4)

6. U.S. PERSPECTIVE

Child labor in the U.S. has mainly relied on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) established in 1938. The FLSA Act generally navigates the circumstances a child can legally work in the U.S. based on the age of the child and the condition of the work. It restricts most child labor below age 16, and hazardous work for most minors is off-limits until they turn 18 (Workers Under 18, 2020).(5)

Unfortunately, there are some issues concerning the scope of the FLSA Act and recently activists in the U.S. have stood up for the rights of working children in the U.S. to protect them more from some harmful jobs especially in the field of agriculture such as tobacco farms (Ramchandani, 2018).(6)

In 2019 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration officially changed the federal minimum age to purchase tobacco from 18 to 21; this is while it is still legal for kids at age 12 to work on a tobacco farm of any size with parental permission, and there is no minimum age for children to work on small tobacco farms or those owned by family (It is legal for kids to work on tobacco farms, but it can make them sick, 2018).(7)

7. THE WORLD WE WANT

We want to create a world where there is leadership and action from the top, and from governments at all levels from the international community. A world where there is transparency and diligence. A world in which when promises are made to children rich and poor, that promises are kept. A world that does not see children as commodities that can be **exploited** for **economic gain** (Convention on the Right of Child. Art. 32). A world where a mother does not have to choose between her children and the next plate of food at her table. A world where 10-year-olds do not have to become activists to remind adults of their promise to end **debt bondage, forced and compulsory child labor** (C182. Art.3) and to die in the process of pursuing justice for other children. A world where children under 17 are not forced to work in **mines, quarries, construction sites**, or garbage dumps (C138. Art. 5/3). A world that does not make exceptions to the child labor laws,

Article 32 UNCRC

*“States Parties recognize **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 in the child’s education....”***

because a 5 year old who is exploited in a family farm and exposed to chemicals, needs as much protection as the rest of the

children working under the non-agricultural labor laws (C138. Art. 5/3). A world where children 16 and under who are forced to work in agriculture are protected so that the 42% of children fatalities in family farms are eliminated. A world where there is **free quality of education, vocational training, and rehabilitation** for children involved in

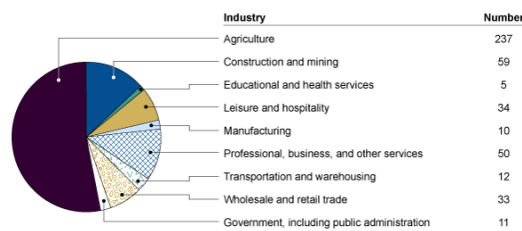
child labor and for youth rescued from labor trafficking so that no one is left behind (C182. Art. 7). A world where there are higher livable wages, especially for adults so that 121 million children can receive proper education and become the next leaders of the world. A world where multinationals that exploit poor countries and pollute our environment take responsibility and become part of the solution. A world of “united” nations working together for the common good of humanity, and for the survival of the human race under the mandates and protocols of the UNITED NATIONS.

8. THE STATE OF THE WORLD IF CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE

(8.1) Future World Outlook

If the current trends in child labor laws and protocol violations continue, the world will suffer even greater socio-economic disparities. The children of today will not have the educational skills required to add the human capital needed for countries and vulnerable communities to be lifted out of poverty. UNICEF estimates that there will be approximately 121 million children still involved in child labor by 2025. This is significant because the global community has made a commitment to eliminate all kinds of child labor by 2025. The Sub-Saharan Africa region has the highest incidence of child labor in the world with an estimated 56 million children 5-17 years of age involved in hazardous work. Furthermore, the population in this African

region is expected to double by 2050. This may prompt more migration of vulnerable people looking for better work opportunities while adding more stress to the already 70 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their home countries. This adversely impacts possible humanitarian relief efforts, and the wellbeing and educational opportunities of children. In the U.S. about 40 million jobs have been lost to COVID-19. The global economic stress of this pandemic will put vulnerable children at risk of being exploited in child labor, especially in agricultural industries which account for 70% of child labor activity. Children who work in family farms account for 3% of all working children. However, they represented 42% of all work-related



Source: GAO analysis of Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries data. | GAO-19-26
 Note: The total for fatalities for the period was 452. However, one fatality was excluded because of unpublshable data.

fatalities in children under 17 years of age between 2003-2016 in the U.S. alone. **8** If we want to make a real impact on the socio-economic

development of countries and vulnerable communities around the world, we need to adopt and commit to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*. We also need to commit to many of the International Labor Organization’s conventions on child labor so that all member States are held accountable for developing national laws that protect the future generation of children and open educational opportunities critical for the economic development of their nations. Article 32 of the CRC reads that “*States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or the interfere with the child’s*

education, or to be harmful for the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development." We are far from reaching these goals.

(8.2) Opportunities/Job Prospects for Children with the Current Trends

The children under 17 who are being exploited in child labor will have fewer opportunities in regard to job prospects because their physical and mental health along with their educational opportunities have been jeopardized by the system that refuses to protect them. Poverty and marginalization of communities of color or minorities have forced families to utilize their children for work to make ends meet. In developing countries debt bondage is a common practice. The International Labor Organization estimates that about 50% of labor victims are linked to bondage labor. This was the case of Iqbal Masih who was forced to work in a carpet making factory in Pakistan at the tender age of 4 in precarious conditions that were detrimental to his health and development. Child labor in the U.S. has mainly relied on the Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) of 1938 to restrict the age limit and working hours for children in non-agricultural settings. Sadly, the law does not have the same protections for farm working children who work in hazardous conditions and who are exposed to pesticides. These children will be worse off.

(8.3) Socio-Economic Mobility for the Next Generation with Current Trends

COVID-19 has exposed the current inequities in access to technology in African American and minority communities as

children have moved into online learning due to mandatory shutdowns. In Missouri, The Annie E. Casey Foundation reported in 2019 that across all races 63% of fourth graders are not proficient in reading, and 70% of eighth graders are not proficient in math. Given these figures and the current pandemic, we think this generation will be less mobile despite the increase in technology. We also think families will be worse off financially due in part to job losses because of the stay-home orders thus creating a bigger divide in the economics of vulnerable households.

In the context of child labor, we know that children who work in farms are exposed to pesticides and unsafe working conditions which will potentially have a permanent negative impact on their physical health making them less mobile and economically unstable.

(8.4) Healthy/Natural Environment Outcomes

In the context of child labor, we know that the majority of children come from economically stressed households where the level of poverty forces children to engage in the labor force at ages even below the national and international accepted standards. From the mines in Burkina Faso, to the carpet factories in Pakistan, to the welding garages in Egypt, to the farm lands of the U.S., children who are involved in child labor are unfortunately exposed to very unhealthy and unsafe environments that are detrimental to their health and well-being.

The environment might be different with real commitment to environmental policies

and effective legislation on immigration and child labor that protect a future generation beyond self-interest and boundaries. The leadership of nations and the collaboration of partnerships with academia, civil society, and governments at all levels is needed for a coordinated approach to solving the critical environmental issues we face today. If rich countries were to decrease their overconsumption of products, and investment in waste management systems were put in place in developing countries to combat the incredible amount of litter, especially plastic and recyclable materials, we would not have the plastic pollution crisis we currently face, and young children would not be exploited in landfills. The engagement of corporations for solutions to their negative environmental footprint is critical for fairness in the share of economic resources to solve the damage they have caused.

9. IMPACT ON PROGRESS IF CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE

(9.1) Climate Change

The current pandemic has temporarily reduced air pollution and CO2 emissions due to mandatory confinement, reductions in surface and air travel, and the demand for energy from the manufacturing sector. However, before COVID-19 the world was already facing a plastic pollution crisis with an estimated 150 million metric tons of plastic circulating in the ocean. The demand for gloves, masks, disposable protective gowns, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) for hospitals and first responders around the world, which is

critical for combating this pandemic, will continue to add to an already stressed and polluted environment. If not disposed properly, this PPE equipment will end up in the ocean or in landfills adding to global emissions. This could potentially expose children who work in landfills to become ill adding to the long-term negative impacts to their health and socio-economic development.

(9.2) Poverty and Inequality Outcomes

Ending poverty and inequality around the world is one of the priorities of the 2030 agenda with 17 Sustainable Development Goals addressing issues of hunger, quality of education, economic growth, the environment, and children and women's rights to name a few. However, the United Nations estimated that in 2015 there were 736 million people living in extreme poverty with 55% of them lacking social protections, especially in conflict-affected areas and in displaced population around the world. Before the pandemic, Egypt had an estimated 13% unemployment rate and Gaza a 43% rate. COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the job market across the world. This will push impoverished countries into deeper poverty if measures are not taken to improve their educational resources. Implementing higher livable wages for adults is needed as big corporations are profiting from cheap labor and relaxed labor standards perpetuating the cycle of poverty. UNICEF reported that in many developing countries the education of girls is not valued. This forces many young girls into the hidden labor market of servitude, exposing them to exploitation,

violence, and trafficking. This trend will have a negative impact on any progress towards gender equality and economic growth in developing countries.

(9.3) Advice to the UN Secretary-General

a) Transparency across all agencies of the United Nations so that a cohesive effort to eliminate all forms of child labor be accomplished by 2030. A deadline of 2025 is unattainable at the rate nations are currently working to end child labor and address other children rights violations, but especially because of the setbacks with the current pandemic.

b) Evaluation of best practices across UN agencies so that child protection programs can be expanded to places where there are major child rights violations such in the Sub-Saharan African region as well as in well developed countries like the U.S.

c) A commitment to reliable data collection across member States for stronger policies and to better assess funding needs for services and programs.

d) Accountability measures for member States that have ratified many of the ILO conventions addressing the rights of the child. It is worth mentioning that member States have overwhelmingly ratified *Convention 138*-Minimum Age for Non-Agriculture work, and *Convention 182* Worst Forms of Child Labor. However, Convention C010 Minimum Age for Agriculture work, and Convention C123 Minimum Age for Underground work remain forgotten under the UN system as only 55 and 41 countries respectively have ratified these conventions. We cannot afford this double standard as

we will deepen the inequalities that keep these poor countries poor. The cycle of poverty will never end if member States do not make a real commitment for change.

d) Expand on holistic approaches that provide health services to children rescued from the labor force as well as alternative learning opportunities for youth who have aged out of the normal school systems due to labor exploitation at incredibly young ages.

e) Engagement with the corporations that exploit marginalized communities where they offer cheap labor so they can be held to higher standards on working conditions and higher livable wages for adults so that children can attend school and be children.

f) Educate people and communities on the dangers of child labor and the setbacks for socio-economic development in the long term.

g) COVID-19 has in the short term reduced the global CO2 emissions, at the same time that it has increased the use of plastics for the critically needed PPE equipment in hospitals, nursing homes, and for first respondents. We should look at opportunities to continue low carbon pathways while we look for efficient ways to deal with environmental pollution due to the increase use of disposable plastics.

10. ACTIONS FOR A BETTER WORLD

(10.1) Actions as UNA-USA

UNA-USA Chapters can host events to educate their local communities on the Sustainable Development Goals, child labor and immigration laws, and labor trafficking,

A recommendation to reach out to community leaders, and community organizations with similar global missions and mechanisms in place to engage a larger audience for advocacy efforts and resource sharing.

UNA-USA chapters have the unique opportunity to participate in the Universal Periodic Review to engage with issues related to the SDGs which the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva evaluates for all member States.

There is a need to connect with experts to engage schools, universities, and the community at large to bring awareness of the 2030 agenda. The purpose should be to advance efforts to combat poverty, gender equality, education inequalities, and labor laws affecting children.

(10.2) Actions as Individual

ACTION 1: The importance of educating yourself on issues affecting your local community in order to bring experts who can help you educate others and inspire people into action for change.

ACTION 2: Collaborate with like-minded organizations addressing community issues such as child labor to bring to light best practices, and to come together to make a bigger impact.

ACTION 3: Engage with your legislators to promote changes to laws that are outdated or that need amendments to address violations that may not be so readily visible by your representatives.

(10.3) Actions as Organization

ACTION 1: Local government should work with community organizers who are trying to improve the quality of life of marginalized communities. They should be more open to adopting the 2030 agenda and especially work on issues affecting children.

ACTION 2: The business community needs to be made aware of their footprint in the socio-economic development of the people they employ overseas for cheaper labor which in the long run affects entire communities. They should be encouraged to be part of the solution.

ACTION 3: International organizations working on global issues who can share best practices and challenges which can open opportunities for collaboration to strengthen programs and secure more sustainable economic resources.

(10.4) Actions by the UN

The role of the United Nations is to hold all its agencies to the highest standards as transparency is required for the world to trust the work of the entire UN system. The UN should make sure that its member States not only ratify conventions on the protection of children's rights across the world, but that they are actually implementing national laws to enforce these protocols. Technical support should be offered to countries with insufficient means to comply with international agreements so that everybody is held accountable. Member States have overwhelmingly ratified *Convention 138*-Minimum Age for Non-Agriculture work, and *Convention 182* Worst Forms of Child Labor. However,

Convention C010 Minimum Age for Agriculture work, and Convention C123 Minimum Age for Underground work remains forgotten under the UN system as only 55 and 41 countries respectively have ratified these conventions.

(10.5) Effectiveness of the UN

To be effective, the UN and its agencies need to work in a **transparent** and cohesive way. **Collaboration** with many key holders is imperative as no single agency has the solutions for our world's problems. **Reliable data** collection and sharing is critical to address our current problems. It needs to hold its **member States accountable**, and it needs to **anticipate** the mega problems of 2050.

Endnotes

1. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) Article 10(3)
2. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20th, 1989, Article 32(1)
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