

**STOP CHILD  
LABOUR**

**Forum: HRC**

**Issue: Addressing the violations of child labour  
with regards to fast fashion**



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### **Introduction:**

While the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has forbidden Child Labour, thereby obligating all member states to eliminate it, it remains a pressing problem. Even occurring in members of the United Nations. Child Labour exploits minors and denies these their basic human rights; they work in conditions that are seen as 'unfit' for their age, wage or interfere with their quality of life.

These conditions are too often normalized or ignored, the main cause being the eternal fight for pure economic gain. The countries where child labour occurs profit off their harsh, inhumane, working conditions. The exploited in question following promises or simply having no other choice in their country: often a LEDC. At the same time, the west MEDC's claiming to follow and promote human rights laws, continue to knowingly import low priced goods. Again, for economic gain.

The United Nations need to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem. It needs to address the issue with collaborative force and delicacy, considering the many lives and cultures influencing and influenced by child labour, specifically in fast fashion. The Human Rights Committee (HRC) must strive to protect what it stands for: human rights

around the globe. To find both short- and long-term solutions to tackle the pressing issue.

### **Definition of Key terms:**

**Child labour:** The term 'child labour' describes the wrongful employment of a minor, either illegally or through exploitation. It is considered exploitative or wrongful if its conditions deprive the child of their childhood, basic human rights or dignity. E.g., long workhours, mentally or physically draining work, extremely low wages, unfit industry for children, inability to attend school, etc.

**Exploitation:** 'Exploitation' is often used when speaking of an unfair use of others, for benefit or to gain an advantage. This often applies to labour and the unrightful manner of how labourers are treated, for economic gain of their boss.

**Fast fashion:** The term 'fast fashion' for one literally refers to the speed at which clothing is produced, often to meet the speed at which trends change. It is associated with the exploitation of its workers, as due to their harsh working conditions a large quantity of clothing is produced at high speed, for low prices. The workers often being child labourers, due to the simplicity of the work done. Often large international clothing corporations benefit from fast fashion, as means of meeting the trends and profiting from the low import costs.

**Less Economically Developed Country (LEDC):** Countries with a less developed economy, based on how a country organizes, uses and trades its money.

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## Background:

Beyond popular belief, child labour is still a prominent force in supporting many large clothing brands. A phenomenon with detrimental consequences to the child in question. While its scale declined between 2000 and 2012 by 30%, it has been rising again. A factor for this rise being the corona virus. International labour organization (ILO) estimates that around 170 million are engaged in child labour at this moment. This is a grave 11% of children in the world exploited, living in conditions not fit for their age and depriving them of their right to education and a 'normal' childhood. To understand the complexity of the issue it is important to consider all factors involved.

Firstly, a main component to why it exists is the general living situation of those in child labour and their families. Child labour occurs most frequently in developing areas, where quality of life is low, including: education levels, hygiene, income, living area, etc. As result, these children become part of a decades old 'cycle' of way of living, with no option to escape it. It often happens that their parents are low educated, often with large families, and are in desperate need of extra income. Left with no other choice to survive, parents send their children off to work. Consequently, the child barely gets an education, and the cycle continues. As one can imagine, the Covid-19 pandemic had heavy effects on these lives: it increased unemployment, illnesses, etc. widening the wealth gap between rich and poor in developing countries.

Furthermore, businesses play a large role in the existence of child labour. This is based on the strive for economic gain. Often these give false promises to the children and trick

them into working for them, treating their employees unfairly. However, a fair question to ask is to what extent you can blame these businesses for employing children, in developing countries? It is apparent their government does little against child labour. Thus, if they were to make the ethical choice to refrain from utilizing it, their rival business might gain large advantage due to their lower costs of production.

Additionally, wealthy countries and businesses from areas such as Europe or the U.S. are also a consistent factor to why it continues existing. Due to their loyalty to their demand and, again, strive for economic gain, they continue to purchase low priced goods from businesses using child labour. However, it is complicated due to the complex supply line of textiles and clothing in the fashion industry. The business wherefrom the wealthy international companies often purchase are checked for labour violations. Not digging further to where that business got their goods. Further to the beginning of the supply chain, is where most human rights are violated.

Lastly, the increase in use of social media, especially Tiktok, has caused trends to rapidly change and overconsumption to increase. Pushing demand for low priced clothing up extremely. Promoting businesses such as SHEIN.

### **Major parties involved:**

**The International Labour Organization (ILO):** This is an organization that works to improve fairness, both socially and economically, in the labour field. It has previously created an agreement with as goal to eliminate child labour completely by 2025. Mainly

through forms such as reclarifying laws to protect children against it and social protection. However, it seems the numbers are not declining quickly enough to meet the date.

**Child labour monitoring (CLM):** It is part of the ILO and is meant to provide an accurate view of how many children are still in unfair labour.

**Action for the Rights of the Child (ARC):** This is a UN based organization focussing on the rights of the child. This includes child labour but also refugees, etc.

**Countries with the most child labour:**

India: 5.8 million children between ages 5-17

Bangladesh: 5.0 million children between ages 5-17

Pakistan: 3.8 million children between ages 5-17

Nepal: 2.0 million children between ages 5-17

Many others (China, Cambodia, North Korea, etc.)

**Relevant UN treaties, resolutions, and reports:**

**Convention on the rights of the child (1989):** <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

### **Complaint procedures under the UN human rights treaties (2013):**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-no-07-rev-2-individual-complaints-procedures-under-united>

### **Previous attempts to solve the issue:**

**The Convention of the Rights of the Child:** It was an attempt to protect the human rights of children across the globe, and at least for member states of the United Nations. Nonetheless, it has failed to end child labour, even in countries that had signed the treaty. A reason for this can be that it has been insufficient in monitoring if it has been appropriately followed.

**Non-governmental Organisations (NGO's) and campaigns:** They have fought to raise awareness and go against the unfair usage of children in labour. While these are welcomed and do raise awareness, they often do not have the power to really change the situation. This is because of the constitutions in the developing countries, which are often non-democratic.

**The existence of the Fairtrade Label, Global Organic Textile Standard and the Ethical Trading Initiative:** These are a great source of transparency toward the consumer. However, these struggle to uncover the full textile supply chain due to lack of transparency and are thus not always accurate.

## **Possible solutions:**

**Raising awareness:** By raising awareness consumers in wealthy countries can make more informed decisions on from which brands to purchase. This might increase demand for local and ethical shopping.

**Education:** Educating those in developing areas on their rights is highly important for them to stand up against an unfair employer.

**Transparency/tracking policies:** To ensure the whole supply chain is clear and that large corporations are obligated to check these

**Fines:** Against those who breach agreements made on child labour  
e.g. by using the Child Labour Index



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