

Child labour



Background Briefs
Development issues and efforts

In the developed world, it is uncommon to see young children working outside the home.

Worldwide, however, more than 130 million children, some as young as four, work outside the home to support themselves and their families.

In undeveloped countries, children work in many different kinds of industries and perform work that is dangerous or has long-term effects on their health. For example, children as young as three work alongside family members scavenging through garbage dumps in Indonesia. At any time of the day, there are 3000 people working in Indonesia's largest garbage dump and a thousand of them are children. In Kenya, children work without protective gear in coffee plantations where injuries caused by the sharp spines of the coffee trees easily become infected. Their skin is covered in toxic white pesticide dust. In Bolivia, boys as young as 10 crush rocks at mines.

By the time they are 12 they work deep underground using pickaxes to break the rock. These children develop lung disease caused by inhaling the rock dust their work creates.

Brick kilns and gravel quarries are a common sight in India. Over one-third of the children working at one kiln and one-quarter of the children working at a quarry were shipped from other areas by their parents who were either forced to sell them into slavery or are dependent on the wages that their children earn. Children often work at these sites for 12 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Domestic work is another category of employment filled by children. Estimated numbers of child domestic workers around the world range into the hundreds of millions. In Haiti, approximately 300 000 children, some as young as six,

work as domestic servants, cooking and cleaning.

There are different kinds of child labour. Some child labour (lifting heavy loads, being exposed to dangerous pesticides or working in unsafe conditions) is harmful to a child's development. Other labour is not harmful and is often necessary. This kind of work may be part-time and does not stop children from attending school. Plus, it can be beneficial by giving them an income, a sense of accomplishment and social and work-related skills useful to them in the future.

It is important to ensure that children who work gain the knowledge, tools and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential, but attending school can be difficult for children who must work to help support their families or pay for school supplies and tuition. Sometimes older children stay home and work so that their younger siblings can also have a chance to attend school.

Preventing children from working is one way to ensure they attend

school. Unfortunately, children driven out of the workforce often are not able to earn money for the necessities of life or end up in more dangerous jobs such as working in the commercial sex trade. Rather than trying to stop all child labour, it is important to look at how work and school are balanced so that children benefit from both.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) realizes that some children must work; however, they believe working children should lead lives free from exploitation, abuse, neglect and discrimination. This means making sure their working conditions are safe and healthy, and providing them with access to good-quality basic education. For example, CIDA is helping child miners in Bolivia find less harmful work and get an education. In Côte d'Ivoire, CIDA helps raise awareness among farmers and cocoa cooperatives about the need to protect children from pesticide exposure, carrying heavy loads and using dangerous tools.