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## **I. Introduction to the Committee**

UNICEF, which stands for the United Nations Children's Fund, is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of children around the world. Established in 1946 after the second world war, UNICEF's initial mission was to provide emergency food and healthcare to children in countries devastated by World War II. Today, its mission has expanded to promoting child protection, education, health, and emergency relief. UNICEF works in over 190 countries, addressing challenges such as malnutrition, access to clean water, child labor, and gender inequality. The organization's work is guided by the principles outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was put into action in 1990, and its goal is to ensure that every child, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to survive, thrive and fulfill their potential.

UNICEF functions as both a policy advocate and a provider of essential services, working in partnership with governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other international bodies. It provides technical assistance and financial support to governments to improve the quality of life for children, especially in low-income and conflict-affected regions. UNICEF also plays a key role in coordinating global efforts to respond to emergencies, such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, and health crises, being the world's largest provider of vaccines. Through its campaigns, partnerships, and field operations, UNICEF strives to raise awareness of children's issues on the international stage and mobilize resources to achieve lasting change. Its ultimate aim is to work towards the realization of the vision of peace and social progress enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and create a world where every child's rights are upheld, and no child is left behind.

## **II. Country Matrix**

Republic of Colombia

Kingdom of Morocco

Argentine Republic

Arab Republic of Egypt

Commonwealth of Australia

United States of America

Dominion of Canada

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Republic of Turkey

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Republic of Honduras

Socialist Republic of Vietnam

People's Republic of China

Republic of India

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Kingdom of Cambodia

### **III. Overview of Topic**

#### **TOPIC: Child labor in fast fashion**

Child labor is a persistent issue in the fashion industry, particularly regarding cotton and garment production. As of 2021, UNICEF estimates that more than 160 million children are affected by child labor worldwide, and there has been a significant increase in child workers between the ages of 5 and 11. These children are deprived of their fundamental rights and education, and are often exposed to harmful chemicals, including pesticides, causing serious health impacts. Cotton is an important agricultural commodity as it is the main raw material for textiles, and has a high incidence of child labor. A common reason that children and their families become subject to forced labor are the low cotton prices and wages, and the reliance of factories and farmers on cotton production.

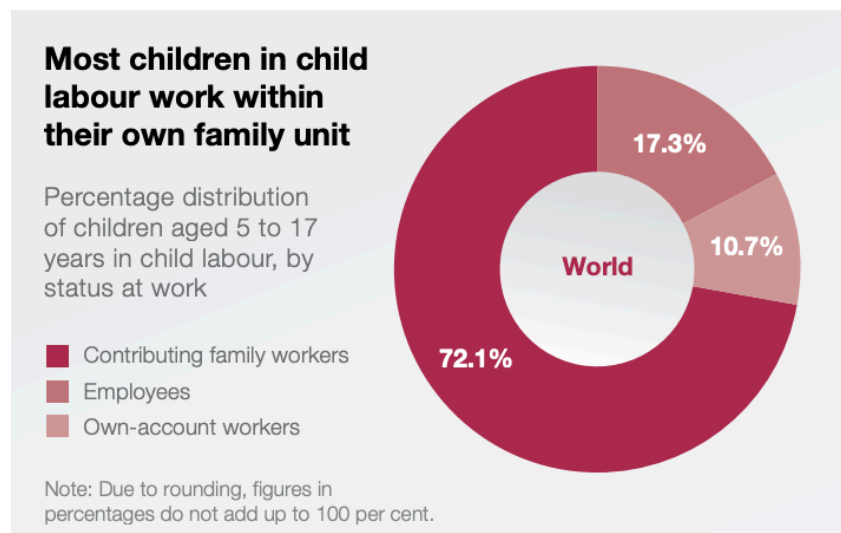
The concept of fast fashion, or the rapid production of inexpensive clothing by mass-market retailers, heightens the demand for child labor, particularly in less developed countries. Most producers within the supply chain look for low-skilled labour and short-time delivery. Some consider that this makes the work more suitable for children, due to their agility and small stature. As a response to growing ‘micro-trends’, fast fashion becomes more rapid, and more children become exploited. In this rapid trend cycle, producers resort to unethical labor practices, which involve bonded labor, withholding wages, restriction of movement, excessive overtime, and abusive working and living conditions.

According to the European Commission, “businesses must comply with human rights and environmental standards, which include the prohibition of child labour, and it is the mandate and duty of state institutions to regulate business’ compliance.” Most countries have prohibited child labor, yet the enforcement of labor laws has been poor. Supply chains within the fashion industry can become fragmented, making it difficult to find the source of production. The lack of compliance and urgency to act from governments, along with corruption and pressure from the

industry, has enabled conditions for child labour to occur in many countries, particularly in Africa and Asia.

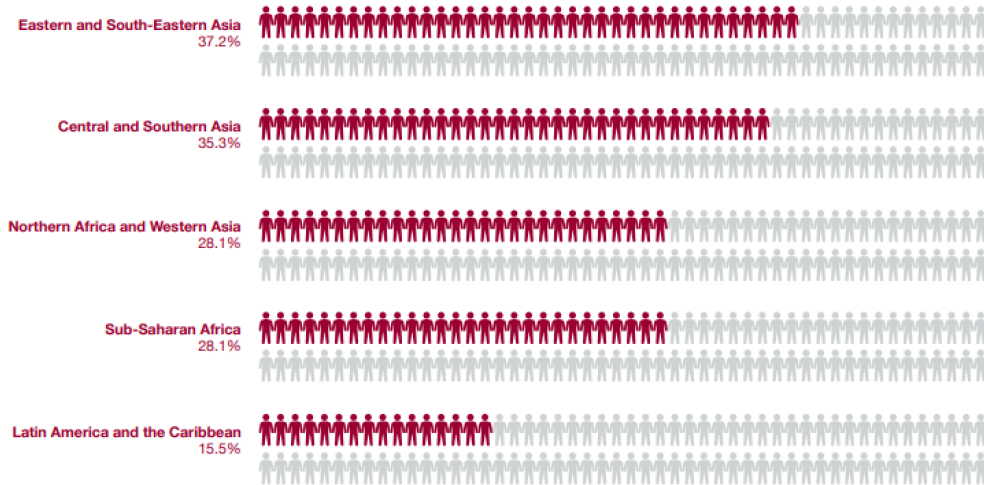
As a matter of fact, The International Labour Organisation (ILO) states that the 160 million children subject to child labor makes up 26.5% (1 in 5) of the children in Africa, 5.6% of the children in Asia, and 79 million of them are in hazardous work.

Furthermore, it is important to note that a significant determinant of child labor is poverty. The World Bank highlights that in low-income countries, over 40% of children are involved in some form of labor to contribute to household incomes. In many cases, children work directly for their families, helping on farms, in family businesses, or performing household tasks that support the survival of the entire household. Additionally, studies show that child labor rates are highest in regions with extreme poverty, particularly in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, where almost 40% of children aged 5-14 are engaged in work that interferes with their education and development. This calls for the need for poverty alleviation policies to address the issue effectively.



## Across all regions, significant shares of children in child labour are out of school

Fig 28. Percentage of children aged 5 to 14 years in child labour not attending school, by region



UNICEF works globally to protect children from harmful labor practices, advocating for stronger regulations, corporate accountability, and sustainable development to ensure that children's rights are upheld in every aspect of the global economy. Addressing child labor in fast fashion is essential to breaking cycles of poverty and safeguarding the well-being and future of millions of children around the world.

## IV. Key Terms

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

**is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling by:**

depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

(ILO)

**Forced Labor:** all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily. (ILO)

**Minimum working age:** the youngest age at which a person is legally allowed to work, as determined by national laws or international agreements, aiming to ensure that children are protected from exploitation and harmful labor practices.

**Fast Fashion:** cheaply produced and priced garments that copy the latest catwalk styles and get pumped quickly through stores in order to maximise on current trends. (Earth.org)

**Value Chain:** refers to the full lifecycle of a product or process, including material sourcing, production, consumption and disposal/recycling processes. (CISL)

**Supply Chain:** the sequence of processes involved in the production and distribution of a commodity. (Oxford Languages)

**ILO:** International Labour Organisation, devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. (ILO)

**Micro-trending:** a niche or industry specific consumer behavioural trend which is mass market ready and short-lived.

**Sweatshop:** a factory or workshop, especially in the clothing industry, where manual workers are employed at very low wages for long hours and under poor conditions.

**Bonded labor:** A person becomes a bonded labourer when their labour is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan. (NHRC)

**Contributing family workers:** people who assist a family or household member to operate a family business or farm, or assist a job in which the assisted family or household member is an employee or dependent contractor. (ICSE)

**Own-account workers:** workers who operate their own economic enterprise or engage independently in a profession or trade. Own account workers may work with one or more unpaid family workers. (ECOSOC, 1989)



## V. Why is Child Labor in Fast Fashion an Important Issue?

Child labor in general is an issue that's still prevalent and is increasing every year. The COVID-19 pandemic landed many families into poverty and forced minors to take on heavy jobs to help support and improve their economic situation. Overall, children are exploited and forced to work in hazardous areas that could impact their health and risks putting their lives in danger. Choosing to allow children to work difficult labors for lower wages denies them their basic human rights and halts the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Some of their goals impacted include:

- **3) Good Health and Well-Being:** "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"
- **4) Quality Education:** "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"
- **10) Reduced Inequalities:** "Reduce inequality within and among countries"

Large clothing retail companies such as Shein and Temu promote the popularity of fast fashion, making it difficult to eliminate child labor completely. Child labor in fast fashion is mainly seen in developing countries in the Eastern part. With their low wages, increase in poverty, and large population, children are prone to working in hazardous factories to support their families and becoming exploited by unsustainable clothing corporations.

## **VI. Timeline of Child Labor in Fast Fashion**

**1800s-1900s** - The move to the Industrial Revolution in many countries allowed for big countries to exploit children to pay for less workers and keep up with the consumer culture in society

**1833** - *The Factory Act of 1833* (UK) limited the amount of hours children could work and established the system for factory inspections regularly

**1842** - *Mines Act* (UK) banned children under the age of 10 from working in land mines

**1904** - The International Child Labor Committee was founded in the United States to advocate for laws restricting child labor; they wanted to complete their goal by "promoting the rights, awareness, dignity, well-being and education of children and youth as they relate to work and working."

**1919** - The International Labor Organization (ILO) is founded to promote fair working conditions, including child labor regulations and safety standards.

**1938** - The *Fair Labor Standards Act* (USA) bans children from working in factories and establishes a minimum working age

**1960s** - Major fashion brands move their production to developing countries where child labor laws were weak

**1974** - The Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) is established, which led to an increase of textile exports from developing Asian nations to Western markets

**1991** - Child labor in fashion industries increase to other developing Asian countries, such as Bangladesh and Thailand

**1999** - The ILO adopts the *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention*, which calls for the immediate elimination of any work that could harm the health, safety, and morals of children

**2013** - Rana Plaza factory collapse kills over 1,100 workers (including children aged 13-14 years old) in Bangladesh, exposing the dangerous conditions of labor

## VII. Recent Actions from Countries

Although child labor is still a significant problem in large branding industries, many countries took action and implemented safety laws and measures to ban the exploitation of children in hazardous areas. UNICEF mentions that while child labor is declining in many parts of the world, there are still some areas who are increasing their use of children in the perilous working industry. The organization states one of the most effective ways to reduce this increase, saying, “Education can play a key role as part of a multi-sectoral approach to end child labour through supporting children’s learning, socialisation and development. Globally, education expansion has been associated with declines in child labour. Yet more needs to be done to strengthen this association to ensure every child is in school, learning, and not in the fields or factories, working.”

Some enactment from countries include:

### United States of America

- ***Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) - 2021***: Bans imports from China’s Xinjiang region due to forced and child labor concerns and the disquite of human rights
- ***Agreement with Perdue Farms over Violations of Child Labor - 2025***: Perdue farms in the United States have been found to be using children as a form of labor. The U.S. Department of Labor is currently requiring the company to pay \$4 million and implement stronger inspections and regulations.

### United Kingdom

- ***Modern Slavery Act 2015***: An act of the UK Parliament that discloses steps to prevent modern slavery and child labor in large supply chains and industries. It calls for companies to publish official statements that details their efforts in ethical practices within the corporation.

### Russian Federation

- ***Labour Code of the Russian Federation - 2001***: Sets minimum working age at 16 years (with some exceptions of 14 years old with parental consent) and restricts any hazardous work for anyone under the age of 18

### People’s Republic of China

- ***Labour Law of the People’s Republic of China - 1994***: Sets minimum working age at 16 and prohibits any companies from hiring anyone under that age

- ***Compulsory Education Law - 1986***: Requires nine years of education to minimize child labor

### People's Republic of Bangladesh

- ***Bangladesh Labour Act - 2006***: Sets the minimum working age at 14, prohibits any hazardous work to anyone underage, and requires companies to maintain a registry for all workers to prevent any secretive underage hiring
- ***National Child Labour Elimination Policy - 2010***: Goal to eradicate child labor by 2025
- **Ratification of ILO Conventions**
  - Convention No. 182 (Ratified 2001) - eliminates “the worst forms of child labor”
- ***International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC)***:
  - Calls for the deletion of child labor
  - Combats abuses of children in developing countries and protects children's rights to education and health
  - Currently has operations in 88 countries and is funded by UNICEF and other nations struggling with child labor, such as Bangladesh

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Although child labor in fast fashion is increasing, there have been actions to cease the actions by large clothing retail companies. From UNICEF's ongoing actions to countries' implementation of child protection Acts, there is still progress made and awareness spread concerning the harsh conditions of child labor in clothing production industries. Most of the United Nations's actions are focused in Asia, where the use of children working under the age of 18 often occurs. Both developed and developing countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh, have applied various acts to try and stop the ongoing spread of child exploitation. One of the most prominent acts from them all is the ILO's Conventions No. 138 (on Minimum Age) and 182 (on Worst Forms of Child Labor), which are known as the "fundamental" Conventions to combating child labor.

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