

# A report on child labor

[Business](#), [Work](#)



The reaction of a typical citizen of a western state to child labor is generally one of disgust. They dream up images of a shoe factory in South Eastern Asia with hundreds of children stooped over sewing machines slaving their youth away. Instead of going to school or playing these children are locked in dangerous workshops, paid barely enough to survive. The truth of the matter is quite different. The average westerner does not realize that most often child laborers are working alongside their parents on small, familyowned pieces of land.

They are not tortured by a mean overseer, but rather surrounded by family and friends. My intent is not to paint a glowing picture or to diminish the fact that children would be better off in schools, but we must be realistic.

Generally life for the child laborer is not as bad as many imagine and frequently theirhard workis the difference from their family thriving and their family starving. Not only that, but when they work in the export-manufacturing sector of the economy their labor can fuel future growth of the economy, preventing their children or grandchildren from having to work in factories.

This is not to say that we should do nothing to help child laborers, but rather that we should focus our aid in areas other than merely restricting the importation of items produced by them. We need to turn to more creative devices that will focus on improving theeducationand opportunity for education rather trying to focus on blindly banning child labor. In short, child labor is not the purely evil institution many feel it is and can even be useful in developing third world economies.

At the same time we should still try to attempt to do more to develop those economies in order to not only end child labor but also to reduce all the forms of suffering which go on in the third world. Before examining child labor abroad we should look at it here in the United States. Throughout much of our country we employ thousands of, frequently illegal, immigrant laborers to work on farms producing our nation's food supply. These laborers most often work in family units, with children working the fields side by side with their parents.

When pesticides are used farm workers are often not warned or given insufficient warning to prevent their exposure to these dangerous chemicals. The result is that here in America, there exists a large number of children who work rather than going to school and while working are exposed to conditions similar or worse than that of third world factories. Little of this is done beyond the limits of the law. Agriculture has been granted many perks in labor law that would seem absurd in other sectors of the economy, despite the hazards involved in this type of work. All age limits imposed on other types of labor are reduced in agriculture.

Outside agriculture 13 and 14 year old children cannot work more than three hours a day during a school week. These restrictions do not exist for farm workers; instead children from the age of 12 can work full days as long as they have their parents' consent. Even ten and eleven year olds can work as long as it is during short seasonal harvests, but they require special permission from the Department of Labor. Even these minimal restrictions can be avoided as many of these laborers do not speak English, do not know

their rights, and are generally afraid of going to the authorities for fear of being deported from the country.

Workers endure this system for an estimated average annual income of \$7,500, a rate few Americans would be willing to accept. They are paid poorly, the rights they don't know exist are abused, they are exposed to pesticides, and their children are not given the opportunity to get an education. This makes one wonder why they even come here. The answer is that the money they earn here is better than what they would make at home.

Despite the abuse they suffer, it is worth it for the amount they get paid. Not only that, but here their labor is somewhat regulated by the government.

Conversely, in Mexico regulation is often relaxed or nonexistent. It is better for children to work here where they at least are protected, even if minimally, than in Mexico where the same is not true. While working here they are able to send or take money home and support relatives. Evidence throughout the world has proven that when the opportunity for education is low or when the schools in an area are poor, the rate of children working is high. With this in mind we should work to improve education in Mexico. The family members supported by their farm-working relatives would be able to educate their children.

This, in turn, would improve the economy in future years, making it no longer worthwhile to come to the United States to work. Better education in Mexico could make migrant farm workers in the United States a major source of growth for the Mexican economy. Internationally the situation is frequently similar. Eighty percent of child laborers abroad work in agriculture. Only

eight percent of children work in manufacturing and of those only five percent manufacture items for export. This leaves a very small number of children worldwide that we can have much of an effect on through import restrictions.

What we should do is try to limit the reasons that children work abroad, not just the demand for their labor. If a family will starve without the work of their children our efforts should be focused on increasing the wages their parents receive. The best way to do this is improving their level of education. It is too late to achieve this for the current generation, but we can use the labor of some children to improve the education of others to help future generations. Organizations like Rugmark, Kaleen, and Care & Fare are excellent examples of where international efforts should be focused.

Essentially they take funds from the sale of each rug sold internationally and invest those funds in schools and hospitals for children in the country in which the rugs were made. Organizations like Rugmark focus on banning child labor from the carpet making industry but that is not necessary. As long as they collect money from the sale of carpets they are able to improve the economy. With those funds they can invest in education for the rest of society. Taking children from the carpet making industry will only move them into other, unregulated industries that could be more dangerous and detrimental to their development.

Using organizations like Rugmark and Kaleen would be improving the economy on the backs of children, but perhaps this is a price we must pay for improvement. One other problem in the third world that deserves

examination is that of children working when their parents do not. There is a high correlation in South Asia between child labor and adult unemployment. The reason for this is not definite, but one can only assume that it is due to either the parents not wanting to work or employers preferring children to adults. It is known that employers frequently rather have children in their shops as they complain less and are more pliable.

If they are unwilling to employ adults in they factories, then this is a matter for the governments of those states. They must enact and strictly enforce laws ensuring that children are not working in their parents place. It is one thing for a child to work in order to feed their family, but another because the parents are too lazy or an employer to greedy to hire them. Education could still be a force to decrease child labor here. As child labor is high when educational opportunity is low, the mere act of building a school and hiring good teachers could do much to decrease child labor in the near future.

Parents might decide that if their children could get a good education and live a better life, that they should work instead of their children. The main idea of what has been outlined above is that the best tool for reducing child labor is education. This is an investment, and as such the rewards may not be reaped for decades, but it is still worth the effort. We should use education, even if it must be funded or supported by the work of children, to improve the economies of countries dependent upon child labor.

This is a pragmatic solution and one that is not beautiful, but if we were to merely ban importation of items produced by children we would in effect be cutting off our collective nose despite our face. Without educational

opportunities in third world states children not working will only be street children, doing nothing with their time. We should also not be unwilling to encourage cultural change when it allows parents to stay home and do nothing while their children labor away in factories. Education is not a creative solution to the problem of child labor, but it is really the best tool we have to save future generations from suffering.