

Ethics

Child labour

RecyCOOL Lessons

Disclaimer

These lessons have been created for and tested with young people in Slovakia, the Czech republic, Germany, Hungary and Croatia. They are open-source and available for adaptation for different groups globally.

All lessons were created in the Erasmus+ project as educational materials for young people 15+. These are peer-to-peer youth educator lessons created through an inclusive and participatory educational approach. The content, information, opinions, and viewpoints contained in these educational materials are those of the authors and contributors of such materials.

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Child labour

Description of the lesson:

In this lesson we are going to see what child labour is and learn about how it all started and spread to the textile industry. Then we will look at present-day child labour situations in garment supply chains. Finally, we will look at some tips on how to avoid supporting child labour.

Objective

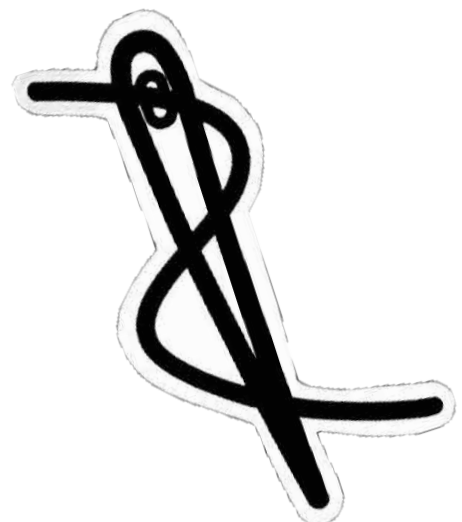
Objective of this lesson is to understand what child labour is and how it is present in the textile industry.

After this lesson you will be able to

- explain what child labour is
- explain how children are working in the textile industry
- list options to stop child labour and how it's being prevented by law

Tools and materials:

access to internet



CHILD LABOUR:

Work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children or interferes with their education. It is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity.



Do you remember your childhood? What does it mean for you to be a child? How is it different from being an adult in your surroundings? I hope you had a nice and active childhood, where you could go to school, live with your family, have friends to play with in your free time and generally enjoy life.

But for many children, it's only a dream. They wake up early to go to work just like adults, do long shifts and earn very little money or just get paid by daily meals. Could you imagine living like that at the age of 5-6?

Some of them work in textile factories making garments. Maybe what we actually wear now was made by a young child in Bangladesh.

Child labour is when children are doing tasks that are hurting their development (physical and mental), and it steals their dignity, childhood and time for school. It can even be slavery, where children are forced to work.

How it started

Child labour was mainly household duties the first times for over thousands of years, like doing the dishes, helping in the kitchen, outside with animals and plants for long hours. There was a famous writer in Hungary, who wrote a book about an orphan girl, who was adopted for the sole purpose of helping around on a farm non-stop for little food and a bed to sleep on in abusive step-families.

And there are other books, like Anne of Green Gables, where the orphan girl was loved and cherished, nurtured and educated while helping around on the farm.

Two very different lives for young girls, but there are common things: they were both poor orphans without family, food and possibilities. The difference was in their adopted family's treatments toward them.

Child labour in England also started like household duties, but then labour markets came, where mass-produced stuff was sold and they needed more hands. **Children were already working at home so it seemed an obvious step to make them work in the markets and later from there it was an easy step into the factories.**

In the US, children worked mostly in mines, glass factories, in the textile industry, agriculture, and also as newsboys, messengers, shoe shiners.

With the Industrial Revolution came the rise of child workers. As the world became more industrialised, a lot of poor families had to send their children to work, so the family could survive. **Importantly, one of the root causes of child labour is poverty wages their parents may be earning.**

Children were favourable because of less wages to pay to them, smaller size and quick work also made them desirable, not to mention that they were too afraid to rebel against their poor working conditions.

Photo credit: [Andrew Fare](#)



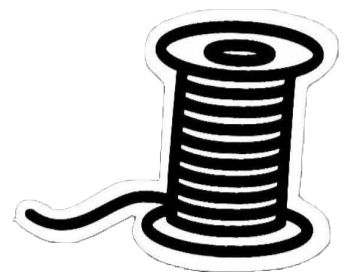
It is also worth noting that the first declaration of child rights was not published until 1923, meaning that cultural perceptions of child labour were different than they are today. In 1989, the United Nations published the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and remains one of the most widely adopted international human rights treaties in history.

What age the children started working and for how long
On average, it was around 10 years old in early 19th-century Britain, but in industrial areas it was 8,5 years old. They worked long hours – a day could look like 10–14 hours long – in miserable conditions and dangerous places.

How they work in textile industry

Garment work is undervalued in the industry. Children are often utilised in tasks in textile factories and processing facilities, including dyeing, sewing, spinning, weaving, cutting and trimming threads, folding, and also packing. Sometimes they do embroidery too. Tasks include cotton picking in some countries, where they use the advantage of small fingers, that don't ruin the cotton.

In the Global South, where cotton is one of the main crops, children are forced to harvest the delicate fibres. They work long hours sowing cotton in the spring, and then weeding through the summer months. Also in the cotton industry, children are employed to transfer pollen from one plant to another.

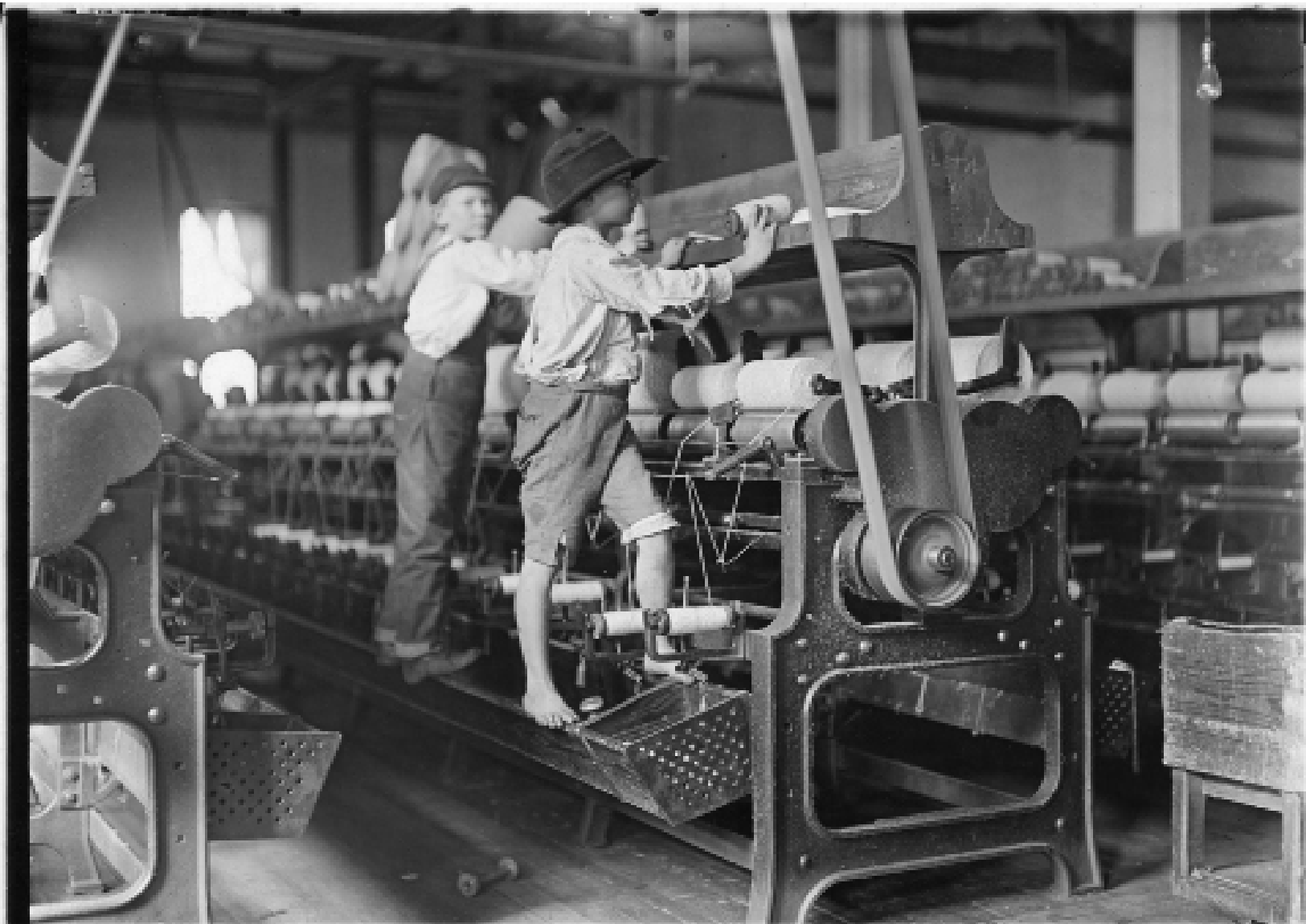


They are subjected to long working hours, exposure to pesticides and they are often paid below the minimum wage.

The cotton-picking was a big problem in Uzbekistan, where the government forced children to spend the summer picking cotton while threatening them with firing from schools if they did not work. Today, however, [the problem has been addressed](#).

In Southern India, factory managers have even been known to put hormones in girls' food so they won't have their periods as they are weaker during these days. [It's important to remember that big fashion brands' unfair purchasing practices may be driving this – for example with last minute changes to orders and short lead times.](#)

Photo credit: [Lewis Hine / The U.S. National Archives](#)



How many of them are working

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) says **170 million child labourers** are forced to work in the textile industry mostly for Europe and US, and also worldwide.

Child labour is mostly present in the Global South:

- It is around 10% of the labour force in the Middle East
- 2-10% in Latin America and Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa has around 26% of child labourers aged between 5 and 17

Compared to millions of kids working, the number for laws and regulations against child labour is extremely small, and legislation is often forgotten where lack of food and schools still exist.

Field researchers say that some recruiters in Southern India have bribed children to work for them, by promising good wages, food and training – and the children end up like slaves instead of a dream-life that they were promised.

This short movie shows one case of how a young girl started working at a factory instead of going to school, and how she was wronged. Some children are undocumented, so they don't even know how old they are, like this girl Nasreen.

[Read her story](#) – it explains how she was kept as a slave and how she managed to get out of the situation and build something positive out of her experience.

Another form of child labour is when children **[skip school](#)** only during the harvest time in places where cotton is grown. It is not full-time work, but it is a form of child labour nevertheless.



Photo credit: [The Guardian](#)

Causes of child labour

- poverty
- vulnerability
- no schools, lack of education
- no other options for the family to earn money
- natural disasters
- climate change
- conflicts
- migration
- lack of laws against child labour

In the UK, the first attempt was **the Factory Act of 1833**. It prohibited employing children younger than nine, also limiting the working hours to 9 and 12 hours a day depending on their age, and on top of that, the Act totally eradicated night shifts.

In India, the government has enacted **the Child Labour Amendment Act, 2016**. This Act completely prohibits the employment of children below 14 years.

In Pakistan, on 6th August 2020, the country **banned child domestic labour** for the first time.

In Bangladesh it is illegal to employ children under 14, but 12–13 year olds can do “light work” for up to 42 hours/week. All-night shifts, working at railways, ports and factories are totally banned.

Many good attempts were made in the last 20 years to lower the number of children in child labour worldwide. **The UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 is saying that child labour should be eradicated by 2025**. ILO estimates that from 2000 to 2012 the number of child labourers **decreased by 30%**.



What can we do against child labour?

First, we can make sure we don't buy from brands that are known for using children at their factories. Transparency on where our clothes are made is really important. [Fashion Revolution's Fashion Transparency Index 2022](#) finds that 86% of brands disclose a policy against child labour but just 4% of brands disclose that they pay living wages.

This comparison suggests that whilst most of the 250 brands evaluated have a policy against child labour, the lack of transparency on living wages suggests a disconnect between the fact that [garment workers earn on average 45% less than a living wage](#), which means they cannot afford their basic needs like food, housing, health care and sending their children to school.

[This cycle of poverty means that children are sometimes forced into child labour – poverty is a root-cause of child labour.](#) When parents cannot afford to make ends meet, they may be forced to take children out of school and put them into work.

Fashion brands would reduce the risk of child labour by addressing the root cause – poverty wages. Fashion brands should focus on improving garment worker wages to a level that is enough for a worker and their family to live on (known as a living wage), so that any children of that workers can go to school and not work.

If you are looking to see which brands are transparent, the Fashion Transparency Index is a helpful tool looking at 250 of the world's biggest brands and retailers. [It is important to remember that just because a brand discloses that they don't have child labour in their supply chain, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.](#)



Photo credit: [World Vision](#)

What is most important is that they have robust monitoring systems in place to surface and identify cases of child labour and are able to remediate them.

To read more about what brands should do in terms of monitoring their supply chains for child labour, check out this resource by the [Ethical Trade Initiative](#). This is a really complex issue, however, so do keep this in mind. [Some criticisms can be found here](#), as banning child labour is not always the best solution to children in poverty with no other alternative.

There are not easy solutions to this complex problem. [Overall, due diligence that surfaces child labour is important and brands must be accountable for fixing the problem.](#)

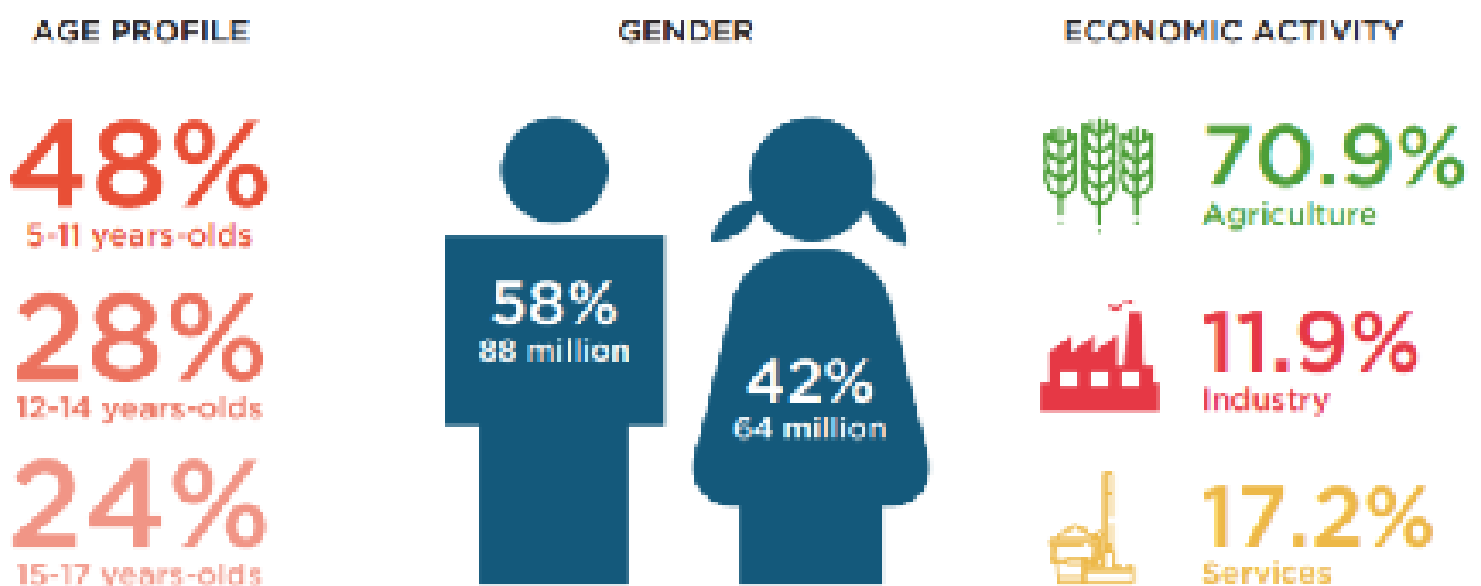
The Fair Wear Foundation is an independent, non-profit organisation that works to improve conditions for workers in garment factories. Fair Wear works with member brands who are committed to improving the lives of garment workers worldwide. Fair Wear member brands are regularly audited to ensure they are child-labour free. You can find a list of member brands [here](#):

There are other accreditations like Fair Trade Label Organization, the Global Organic Textile Standard and the Ethical Trading Initiative. **If you need to buy garments, it is better to support these brands or small local businesses. Be careful where and how you spend your money.**

We have the responsibility to use our voices for those who can't speak up for themselves. Families need to break the cycle of poverty, earn decent wages so that their children have access to education and training. **You can talk about child labour with your family and friends to raise awareness and also in your school.**

Photo credit: [International Labour Organization](#)

OF THE 152 MILLION CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR

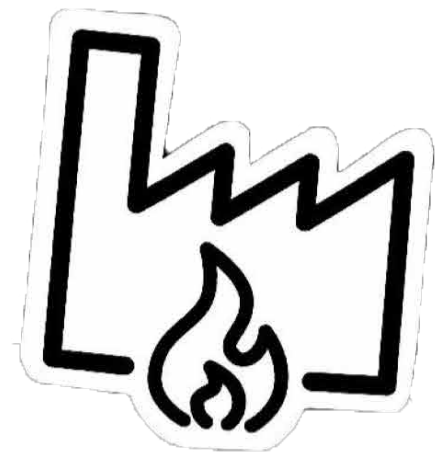


Task

You can watch [this video](#) about how Nasreen, the already mentioned girl who escaped child labour could come out of this cycle and is able now to speak up for the rest of the children, who are still in the same situation. Nasreen works to empower garment workers around her, including supporting campaigns like [Good Clothes, Fair Pay](#) which work to address poverty as a root-cause.

At the same time she is encouraging people throughout the world to do the right thing:

The day when we can use our voices is 12th June – as this is the World Day against child labour, it is a great opportunity to raise awareness of the ongoing issue globally. You can watch and share this video [The Child Labour Experiment](#)



Reflection

In this lesson we have learned about child labour, how the textile industry is employing children and what laws are there to stop this. We have also explored what we can do to stop child labour.

The most important thing to understand is that these children are not happily going to work and enjoying their time there, but are forced to do that to support their families or themselves. Poverty is the major cause and with education and support these children can be freed from modern-day slavery and can have a good life.

We encourage you to ask yourself these questions and give an honest answer:

Before the lesson did you know these things happen in the world? Could you feel sympathy with any of the children who were listed as an example in this lesson? Which one of them specifically? What part of their story hit you the hardest? Can you grasp why?

Could you understand the hard situation of the widowed mother in the task? What would your decision be if you were in her place? Can you imagine working 12-15 hours a day and in such conditions?

How would you feel if you didn't get your due wage after a hard day of work? Do you think it is acceptable for anyone in any part of the world to not get their due wage for their job?

Would you be willing to speak up for someone who has gone through such injustice in their life?

Can you think of something you personally can do which would improve the situation?

We hope you are now doing a little research of your favourite brands, as well, and check if they have a policy against children and a robust monitoring system in place to surface risks of child labour.

Just because there is a policy against child labour does not always mean it does not exist! If it is not on the internet, you can request information from the company. An honest and ethical fashion brand will give you answers to your questions. This would mean they have nothing to hide and are willing to be transparent about it, which is something Fashion Revolution welcomes.

Transparency entails a lot of other topics, as well, and child labour is one of the issues that the Fashion Transparency Index takes a look at specifically. Find out more [here](#).



Resources

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Attachments

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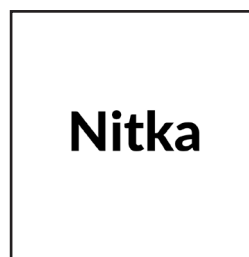
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