Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 15484
17 March 2022

Children in the world of work: eradicating harmful child labour

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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One out of ten children in the world is involved in harmful labour. It is estimated that 79 million children, aged 5-17, are working in dangerous conditions in agriculture, manufacturing, in hotels, restaurants, and domestic service. Child labour exists in all countries, including in Europe. It deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity. It is a violation of the rights of the child and comes at a high economic and social cost. The Covid-19 pandemic has further aggravated the situation.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right to be protected from "performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development". The European Social Charter requires States Parties "to provide that the minimum age of admission to employment shall be 15 years, subject to exceptions for children employed in prescribed light work without harm to their health, morals or education".

It follows that not all work done by children should be classified as harmful child labour. Some forms of work – if done part-time or occasionally, with due respect to the best interest of the child, and by children over the age of 15 – can even help to equip children with essential life skills. With the fast development of new forms of labour (especially online) such work should, however, be better regulated, to ensure due child protection.

The UN General Assembly has declared 2021 as "International Year to fight for the Eradication of Child Labour". On this occasion, the Parliamentary Assembly should propose means of putting an end to harmful child labour, and better regulation of all child work.