



Resolution 2548 (2024)¹

Children in the world of work: eradicating harmful child labour

Parliamentary Assembly

1. As the 2025 deadline for achieving Target 8.7 on ending modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Union's corollary commitment to ending child labour in all its forms approaches, the latest figures show a worsening global situation, exacerbated by the impact of recent socio-economic crises, the Covid-19 pandemic and armed conflicts. The elimination of harmful child labour has become an important and urgent priority for the international community, which must be addressed more effectively. The Council of Europe member States must contribute to the global action in this area.

2. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines child labour as “work that deprives children [any person under 18] of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development”. The worst forms of child labour include all forms of slavery, sale and trafficking of children, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and the use of a child for prostitution, the production of pornography or unlawful activities such as drug trafficking.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly deplores the fact that, according to the ILO, worldwide 79 million children aged 5 to 17 years are working in hazardous conditions in agriculture, manufacturing, hotels, restaurants and domestic services. Alarming, this includes about 3.3 million children trapped in forced labour. In 2020, around 3.6 million children were employed in Europe, with half of them in hazardous work. While data collection on the scale of children in work and on their situation needs to be improved at international and national levels, it is clear that for a large number of children working in unsafe or insalubrious conditions, and certainly for those in forced labour situations, there are adverse effects on their physical and mental development.

4. The Assembly notes that children and adolescents are more vulnerable to hazards than adults, in particular in the context of work: they face a greater risk of exposure to certain diseases and toxic substances, injury, permanent disability, psychological damage and death, while being less aware of risks than adults and less capable of making informed judgments due to their lack of knowledge and experience.

5. The Assembly recalls that child labour has multiple root causes (such as poverty, unemployment of parents, insufficient educational opportunities, migration, traditional or cultural habits, employers' demand for cheap labour and income inequalities) and consequences (notably impacts on mental and physical health, capacity to complete a normal educational path and develop a skills base conducive to better paid and more secure jobs and higher social status) which require the sustained and holistic attention of member States.

6. The Assembly refers to the existing international and European legal instruments that set the regulatory framework for States to follow in order to protect children's well-being and eradicate harmful child labour. It highlights in this context the importance, for the global action, of two legal instruments that have been ratified by all States: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (except by the United States of America) and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Convention No. 182).

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 24 May 2024 (see [Doc. 15982](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Eka Sepashvili).
See also [Recommendation 2276 \(2024\)](#).



7. At the European level, several Council of Europe instruments provide a protective legal framework for children. These include the European Social Charter (ETS Nos. 35 and 163 (revised), notably Article 7 requiring 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”), the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, Article 4 banning slavery and servitude), the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, Lanzarote Convention), the Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185, Budapest Convention), the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) and the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027).

8. The Assembly welcomes the European Union's commitment to eradicate child labour through the European Union Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024), the European Child Guarantee and the new legal initiatives aimed at ensuring corporate sustainability due diligence through trade. The European Union action plan supports free and easily accessible compulsory education for children until they reach the minimum age for work, while extending social welfare programmes to help lift families out of poverty in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child envisages a set of key actions such as dedicating 10% of overall funding under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument outside the European Union to education, technical assistance to strengthen labour inspections systems for monitoring and enforcement of child labour laws and working towards making global supply chains of European Union companies free of child labour.

9. The Assembly also welcomes a series of national laws in European countries that require enterprises to conduct due diligence to ensure compliance with international conventions regarding human rights and child labour in global supply chains. It believes that further improvements in legislation may be needed to further secure conditions of decent work, support lifelong learning and cover the new forms of work resulting from technological progress and changes in the labour market, in order to ensure an appropriate level of child protection in the future.

10. The Assembly is concerned about the gaps between law and practice, as well as the lack of attention to addressing the root causes of child labour. It strongly supports the Durban Call to Action which was adopted on 20 May 2022 at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, and which sets out a comprehensive framework with six commitment areas aimed at accelerating action to eradicate child labour. This framework lays out a multistakeholder approach to promoting decent work for adults and young persons above the minimum age of work, policy reforms to prevent and eliminate the worst forms of child labour and human trafficking, efforts to end child labour in agriculture, effective protection of the right of children to education, universal access to social protection and stronger international co-operation to enforce laws against child labour and forced labour.

11. The Assembly underscores the pivotal role of public authorities in ensuring effective collective action with a view to ending child labour in all its forms by 2025 and calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly to:

11.1. put in place national action plans for the elimination of child labour in general and harmful child labour in particular;

11.2. implement measures proposed in the Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour, adopted in May 2022, by involving all relevant national stakeholders (employers, trade unions, governmental agencies, parliaments, local authorities, community groups, schools, media, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations) and engaging in international co-operation;

11.3. clarify and strengthen the responsibilities and obligations of enterprises for ensuring respect for human rights and effectively eliminating child labour in global supply chains and public procurement, in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;

11.4. strengthen the implementation of national laws, regulations and policies to eliminate child labour, in particular forced labour, and to reduce the informal sector of economy by enhancing the capacity of law-enforcement bodies, labour inspectorates and child protection services to detect and eradicate harmful practices;

11.5. make full use of the Council of Europe legal instruments, the European Union initiatives and the ILO conventions with a view to eliminating forced labour and human trafficking;

11.6. address the root causes of child labour by ensuring adequate social protection of children and their families or caregivers;

11.7. enhance aid for development aimed at capacity building in developing countries to eliminate child labour and improve the population's access to social services and benefits;

11.8. improve data collection and conduct research on emerging patterns of child labour for better informed policies and decisions.

12. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to monitor the implementation of national measures to eradicate child labour, in particular the worst forms of child labour, and to hold governments to account for their commitment to achieve Target 8.7 on modern slavery, trafficking and child labour of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2025.