

## Labor: Child Labor and Young Workers

# Child Labor & Young Workers, Overview

Child labor can be a contentious issue, especially between developed and developing economies. Although most would agree that young children should not be forced to work, many disagree on the costs and benefits of older child labor, especially in situations where the child is living in extreme poverty or is forgoing basic education for work. The ILO estimates that in 2004 there were at least 218 million children working illegally according to ILO Conventions, or about 13.9% of the world's population of children.

The ILO provides a series of 3 guidebooks on the theme of child labor. [Guide Two—How Employers Can Eliminate Child Labour](#) (PDF) could be a useful tool for companies who are implementing or updating their child labor management systems.

It is important to distinguish between the terms “Economically Active Children,” and “Child Labor.” Economically active children are all children who are working, whether or not this work is deemed illegal by ILO Conventions. Child labor is a sub-section of economically active children referring to all children working illegally, as defined by ILO Conventions [138](#) and [182](#). Child labor is also sub-divided into “Non-Hazardous” and “Hazardous” child labor, with the minimum age standard being age 18 for hazardous work.

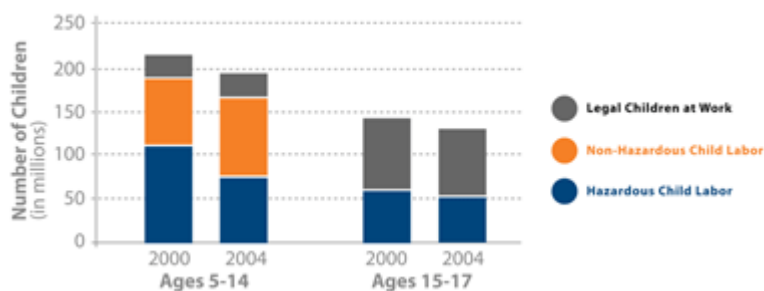


Figure 1: Global Prevalence of Child Labor by Age and Type — Click on the image for a larger view

Source: [Global Child Labour Trends: 2000 to 2004](#)

## Minimum Age

Minimum age is one of the more difficult labor aspects to monitor since ILO Conventions allow for different minimum ages in different countries and for different sectors. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to be vigilant of prevailing minimum age laws in all countries in which you have operations. Databases such as the ILO's [National Labour Legislation database \(NATLEX\)](#) are good resources to quickly search national laws, but companies are responsible for verifying that this information is up-to-date and accurate.

ILO [Convention 138](#) specifically addresses how States can set minimum age guidelines for and should be read in great detail. Although laws vary from country to country and even within countries, the general rules set forth by the ILO are the following, assuming they do not conflict with compulsory education:

<b>Ages</b>	<b>Acceptable Type of Work (as defined by Convention 138)</b>
0-13	None
13-15	“Light” Work
15-18	“Non-hazardous” work
18+	All legal work

## Worst Forms of Child Labor

ILO [Convention 182](#) focuses specifically on the eradication of the worst forms of child labor. For the purposes of this convention, a child is considered anyone under the age of 18 and the worst forms are described as:

- All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery
- Using, procuring, or offering children for sexual purposes or pornography
- Using, procuring, or offering children for illicit activities
- Any other work that is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children

The pharmaceutical industry is particularly vulnerable to violations of the worst forms of child labor under the hazardous work clause. Given that various stages of pharmaceutical production involve exposure to dangerous chemicals and machinery, companies must practice due diligence to ensure that their facilities comply with international and national laws regarding child employment in dangerous environments.