

# SAFE JOBS FOR YOUTH MONTH: 2023 RESOURCE KIT



## IMMIGRANT YOUTH ARE WORKING THE MOST HAZARDOUS JOBS

This February, a [New York Times investigation](#) revealed that migrant youth, who have been crossing the border for years to financially support their families back home, have taken up some of the most dangerous jobs in the country. These posts require tasks such as packaging cereal using dangerous machinery in factories, roofing, working in slaughterhouses using sharp machinery, deboning chicken at Whole Foods and more. The number of youth traveling across the border unaccompanied reached 130,000 last year, three times what it was 5 years earlier, so we can expect more youth to be seeking these jobs this summer. Minors as young as 12 years old have been found performing tasks that are typically illegal for those under 18. As one US representative put it, there are “Stories of kids dropping out of school, collapsing from exhaustion, and even losing limbs to machinery are what one expects to find in a Charles Dickens or Upton Sinclair novel.”

To secure jobs, young workers will use false identification and the employing staffing agencies do not verify social security numbers. Companies will often escape the repercussions of employing youth by blaming subcontractors when they are discovered. When a company is cited for dangerous practices, the citations never amount to above \$15,000, which many complain is not high enough to encourage corporations to change their practices. Companies found to be in violation include Ben & Jerry's, Fruit of the Loom, Ford, General Motors, J. Crew, Cheetos, Walmart, Whole Foods, Target and others.

To respond to the problem Health and Human Services, the government agency that protects the health of people in the United States, has established a hotline for young workers to report dangerous working conditions, but the New York Times found that the hotline is unresponsive to requests.

Learn more here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html> and

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/27/us/biden-child-labor.html>

**MINORS AS YOUNG AS 12 YEARS OLD...**

**HAVE BEEN FOUND PERFORMING TASKS THAT ARE TYPICALLY ILLEGAL FOR THOSE UNDER 18.**

# 130,000

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS TRAVELD ACROSS THE BORDER IN 2022.

“ COMPANIES WILL OFTEN ESCAPE THE REPERCUSSIONS OF EMPLOYING YOUTH BY BLAMING SUBCONTRACTORS. ”



## ACTIVITY

Listen to the Daily Podcast [“A New Child Labor Crises in America”](#) with your students. When the podcast is over, split the class into groups. Assign each group one of the following questions and have them report their findings to the bigger group.

For this activity, we encourage you to consult the [Are You a Working Teen Factsheet](#), which details the tasks that youth can and can't do, and the hours they are permitted to work.

1. What are some of the jobs the reporter identified that young people are working? Which of these jobs have tasks that are illegal? What are some of the hazards and associated injuries that could result from the work?
2. How might working a dangerous job negatively impact the future of a young person? What are the benefits to working these jobs? How might the negative consequences of working these jobs outweigh the benefits?
3. In the story, the reporter mentions that in addition to performing dangerous tasks, young people are working for long hours, sometimes for 8 hours after school. How could working long hours negatively impact young workers?
4. What are some ways that you can get this story out to your community (friends, teachers, youth groups etc.?)



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## CHILD LABOR LAWS ARE BEING REPEALED AND SCALED BACK

### Federal Laws Overview

- At least **10 states** have introduced bills or passed laws rolling back child labor protections.
- Over the last year, the **number of minors employed** in violation of child labor laws **increased by 37%** (See Figure A)
- The Fair Labor Standards Act sets national standards for wages, hours and child labor standards. 16 states already have laws that are weaker than the Fair Labor Standards Act. The bills and laws in Figure B would **expose more children to unsafe work conditions**.
- Policy recommendations suggested to protect young workers include:
  - Raise minimum wages
  - End the division between agricultural and non-agricultural work, which allows for fewer protections for agricultural workers
  - Enforce wage and hour laws
  - Pass the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act
  - Implement immigration reform that curbs the exploitation of unaccompanied minors
  - Strengthen labor standards enforcement
  - Empower young people to form unions



## CHILD LABOR VIOLATIONS ARE ON THE RISE

### Child labor violations are on the rise

Minors employed in violation of child labor laws and hazardous occupation orders, fiscal years 2015–2022



Figure A

From <https://www.epi.org/publication/child-labor-laws-under-attack/>.



## ACTIVITY

Lead students through a round of [Kahoot](#) on child labor laws. Then ask your students to read through the information on the page above and answer the following questions.

1. Read through the info sheet above. What are some of the tasks that minors have been found doing across the United States that violate child labor laws?
2. Many of the bills detailed in Figure B allow minors to work extended hours. Why might teens want to work extended hours? How might extending the hours that youth are allowed to work affect their ability to focus on school? What other repercussions could working additional hours have?
3. Why might companies support the repeal of child labor laws? Why should companies support stronger protections for child workers? According to the information above, what can companies do to respond to the repeal of child labor laws?
4. How might the repealing of child labor laws in one state impact child labor laws on a federal level?
5. What are some actions you can take to advocate against the repealing of child labor laws?

## A CLOSER LOOK: IOWA

- A proposed bill would let teens as young as 14 years old work as apprentices in work-based learning programs - which would expose them to hazardous tasks including manufacturing, mining, construction, processing or others. It would also make employers immune if the child is injured, becomes ill or dies on the job.
- One of the country's largest cleaning services for food processing was recently discovered to have employed more than 100 children as young as 13 years old cleaning dangerous meat processing equipment, including power driven equipment, razor sharp bone saws, and skull splitters. Three of them suffered injuries and many of the youth employed were connected to illegal employment by traffickers who were profiting off their employment.
- The new Iowa legislation would allow:
  - Minors as young as 14 to work 6 hour nightly shifts in industrial laundries or meat freezers during the school year and even longer in the summer
  - Allow 15 year olds to lift up to 50 pounds on assembly lines
  - Allow 16 and 17 year olds to serve alcohol. (which some have noted could lead to sexual harassment)
- Union members have asked for legislators to respond by addressing low wages, unsafe work, lack of access for affordable childcare, and to support underfunded public schools
- The bill has advanced but not yet been ratified