

The [European Children's Rights Unit](#), School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool.

Did You Know...?

- [168 million children](#) worldwide are in [forced labour](#). This is almost 11 % of the total child population.
- Many of these children are [also victims of trafficking](#).
- The International Labour Organisation estimates that globally [20.9 million](#) are [subjected to forced labour](#), and [880,000 in the EU](#).

The EU enacts binding law which protects children from labour, exploitation and harmful working conditions.

[Check out ECRU's other Brexit Briefing Papers:](#)

- [EU Migrant Children](#)
- [Forced Migrant Children](#)
- [Child Protection](#)
- [Children's Education](#)
- [Children's Health](#)
- [Children's Family Life](#)
- [Children's Leisure and Football](#)

The Impact of Brexit on Child

Employment



Is there a child labour issue in the UK?

Yes. The EU divides its attention between regulating the legitimate employment of children (e.g with rules about Health and Safety) and using law to combat unlawful and exploitative child labour.

Despite the overall highly developed workforce in the UK, child labour remains a real issue which the 2008 economic crisis has worsened.

How bad is it?

A [Child Labour and Protection of Young Workers in the EU](#), study estimates that [4 million young persons](#) are caught in the labour market, often engaged in zero-hour contracts and that 'there are an unknown but [substantially high number of very young children working in other EU Member States](#)'.

What has the EU done to solve child labour?

By introducing [The Young Workers Directive \(Directive 94/33/EC\)](#) the EU has prohibited children from working if they are in full-time compulsory schooling.

However, the Directive permits children who are at least 14 years of age, to participate in light domestic work or social/cultural activities, that are not dangerous and will not harm them in any way or harmful to them in anyway.

What has the EU done to tackle the trafficking of children?

The [EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) gives children, who are more vulnerable as potential victims, particular attention. This is by recognising forced labour as a form of child exploitation and stating that a child's consent will not legitimize the work.

What will happen if the UK stays in the EU?

Provided that the UK remains, all the EU legislation setting standards for youth employment will stay intact: young workers will remain protected. The vote to Remain will allow the work of the [Europe Strategy 2020](#) to proceed, which focuses on enhancing young peoples' qualifications and in turn, equips and enables young people for entering adulthood.

And if the UK leaves the EU?

Trafficking children for forced labour will fall into the domain of international crime, but our domestic legislation will not efficiently address it. EU agencies such as [EUROJUST](#) and [EUROPOL](#) play a key role in tackling such crimes and so leaving the EU will severely limit children's access to protection.

The [employment rights of UK citizens](#) [will also be negatively affected](#). EU law provides a vast array of non- discrimination measures, reaching areas such as parental leave, the health and safety of pregnant and breastfeeding workers, the thresholds of healthy working hours. Brexit may [result in protective measures for child employees](#) being withdrawn, and also detrimentally affect working parents.