

Child Labour Rising As Uzbek Economy Worsens

Author: [Gairatjon Sultanov](#)

Families are pulling their youngsters out of school and putting them to work to ensure that there is food on the table

Ten-year-old Jakhongir is one of the scores of children who cart heavy goods around the Siab district bazaar, where people from all over the region travel to buy vegetables and other produce.

Jakhongir, who used to go to the local middle school, says that if he did not work his family could not afford to eat, "My father retired because of illness, and receives a pension of only 11,000 som (around \$9-\$10) a month, and my mother is at home looking after my three little brothers. This is not enough money for us, and as the oldest child, I have to help."

Sherali Ergashev, 12, says his earnings are used to put food on the family table. "I can make 1000-1500 som a day, which I use to buy bread, potatoes, onions, carrots and so on. The people in charge of the market, the police, and my teachers want me to stop, because if I do our family will be left without bread."

His father, Ali Ergashev, says there is simply no other choice, "I am forced to ask my son to do this work, because I am disabled with arthritis, and my wife is also an invalid. Although we are both disabled, the state doesn't pay us any pensions."

The head of the education board in Samarkand, Anvar Bekmurodov, says they have visited some of the parents involved and tried to explain that it's illegal for children to work in the bazaar, "But the parents did not want to listen to us." In fact, some were extremely hostile towards the officials, driving them out of their homes with axes.

Kakhramon Usmoniyon, a local official charged with the prevention of juvenile delinquency, said he had tried, but failed, to stop the practice. "We took carts away from children many times, and made them leave the markets. The next day their parents came to the station asking for them back and pleading with us to let the kids earn some money."

Amid fears that the children would turn to crime, the police, in agreement with the district market administrators, allow children from poor families to work provided they register at the market's police station.

"There is a special registration book that contains photographs and complete information about the children and their parents," said Usmoniyon. "The kids make around 200-250 som a day. They are all under our control."

Medics in the region are, however, critical of children so young doing such heavy work. According to local doctor Rano Bobomurodova, children should not perform taxing manual labour until at least the age of 14. "They could easily injure themselves and do themselves permanent damage, otherwise," he said. "What sort of a future will the republic have if the younger generation cripples itself, and has no education?"

Although Uzbekistan is a signatory to the UN convention on the rights of the child, local authorities have long flouted its provisions, frequently employing Soviet-era practices of mobilising children to gather cotton and do other seasonal agricultural work.

The practice of individual families putting their own children to work is relatively new, only really developing since the mid Nineties, as economic and social problems in the newly independent republic worsened.

Kamiljon Ashurov, a civil rights activist from Samarkand, says if the problem is to be truly resolved it is important that the causes and not just the symptoms are attacked, "We need to solve economic problems, employment issues, and develop social support for poorly-off sections of the population with large-scale reforms. Only then will our children not have to work in the markets."

Gairatjon Sultanov and Umida Khasanova are independent journalists in Uzbekistan.

Location: [Uzbekistan](#)

Focus: [Central Asia](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/child-labour-rising-uzbek-economy-worsens>