

Child Labor in Bolivia

Bolivia is aiming to make life a little more fair for its youngest workers - with an unusual move. A new law there allows children as young as 10 to work legally. Child labor is a fact of life in many countries in the world, but Bolivia's the first to legalize it for children so young. There are critics, but the law has the support of one important group - the Bolivian Union of Child and Adolescent Workers, known as UNATSBO.

Sara Shahriari is a reporter in the capital, La Paz. She's been following this story.

Welcome to the program.

SARA SHAHRIARI: Thank you.

MONTAGNE: What kind of work are we talking about?

SHAHRIARI: We're talking about children in Bolivia doing all sorts of work. You'll see young people in the countryside working on family farms, herding sheep, herding llamas. Young people participate in the sugarcane harvest. In the city, people are shining shoes, they'll go out with their families to sell flowers on the street. And you'll even see young people, teenagers, working in silver and tin mines under really extreme working conditions.

MONTAGNE: Well, clearly there's a difference between a young person, you know, a 10-year-old kid, selling flowers on the streets - between that, and a young person working in a mine.

SHAHRIARI: Mining remains the worst form of child labor. And the government does not permit it legally for a child of any age. But despite that, it remains a job where a young person say, 14, 15 years old, can make a lot more money than at other jobs. And retains its attraction because of that, despite how dangerous it is.