

Working instead of learning

Child labour during harvest time

It was natural for children to help out on the family farm – they looked after livestock or took care of their siblings. Every pair of hands was needed, especially during harvest time. The first restriction on this practice in the Rhineland came in 1825 with the introduction of compulsory schooling in Prussia. As a result, 90% of children were attending school regularly by 1864. At the same time, compulsory schooling led to resistance, especially in the 'poor' Eifel region. In order to continue to utilise the labour of children during the harvest and at the same time not restrict their school education, special holidays such as the 'potato holidays' were introduced.

The labour of children continued to play an important role well into the second half of the 20th century. Only the widespread use of machines such as potato harvesters changed this.