



## Fair Trade and Economic Justice

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May 11 is World Fair Trade Day, and in many countries around the world, May 1 is celebrated as Labor Day. In this era of globalization and interconnectedness, the things we buy are directly related to labor rights and economic justice issues around the world.

Globalization has benefited the U.S. with lower prices for goods, which means we are able to buy more things for the same amount of money.<sup>1</sup> Economists and free trade advocates view this as good news. It's good news, too, when someone who works for minimum wage can afford more food and clothes for their family.

However, the lower cost of goods we experience is due largely to the cost of labor being lower in other countries. With lower costs of labor come poor working conditions, stemming from lax labor and environmental laws.

Buying things that are "fair trade" certified is one easy way we can put our faith into action by supporting small farmers, artisans, and entrepreneurs. When you go to your local fair trade store or buy items with the fair trade stamp on them, you know you are spending your money on an item that was ethically made by people who were paid fairly for their work.

This is how global communities grow sustainably. Having a multinational company build a factory does not, on its own, allow the local community to grow in a healthy and sustainable way. The income local workers earn is often accompanied by long work hours and difficult working conditions. This income then goes into the local economy, which means the entire community has a dependence on a company that could leave or go bankrupt.

This is why many of our global partners are looking to find different solutions for their communities. Many young people all over the world are leaving their small, poor, rural communities to find better-paying work in larger cities, either in their home country or in another country. There they can be at risk of being taken advantage of, trafficked, or forced into modern slavery. How can these

communities survive when the young leave and then return traumatized . . . if at all?

The global economic system is huge and complex, and it won't change overnight. But you can begin the change by thinking about the things you buy and where they come from. Buying local, used, or fair trade items or buying from companies that have fair labor standards is a simple change many of us can make. From there, we can move towards more direct advocacy by supporting laws that promote fair trade principles, boycotting companies that use forced labor or have substandard working conditions, and encouraging members of your community to do the same.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecipe.org/publications/the-economic-benefits-of-globalization-for-business-and-consumers/>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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