



International  
Labour  
Office

# The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

## What it is and what it does



“*It is the exploitation of childhood which constitutes the evil...most unbearable to the human heart. Serious work in social legislation begins always with the protection of children.*”

*Albert Thomas, first Director of the ILO*





# The International Programm

## What it is and what it does



### Our mission:

## A world free of child labour

Child labour is one of the critical issues of our time, affecting an estimated 215 million children worldwide. The ILO has worked to eliminate child labour over its 90 year history, adopting internationally recognized labour standards on child labour and in 1992 establishing the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). IPEC has made significant progress in tackling the problem of child labour and is working in nearly 90 countries and benefiting millions of children. IPEC employs internationally recognized labour standards and technical cooperation projects towards achievement of its objective of eliminating child labour.



## IPEC and the ILO: A comprehensive approach

The ILO is the oldest member of the United Nations family. Working with its 182 member States, the ILO is the only “tripartite” UN agency, bringing together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes. On its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1969, the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize.

One of the ILO’s first actions was adoption of an international standard on child labour – Minimum Age Convention No. 5. In 1973, the ILO adopted the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and in 1998 the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* highlighting core areas of overarching concern, including the elimination of child labour, the right to freedom of association and collective

bargaining, and the elimination of forced labour and discrimination linked to employment, expressed in the ILO’s *Decent Work Agenda*. The ILO’s Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) has been ratified by more than 90 percent of the ILO’s 182 member States since its adoption in 1999.

Child labour remains central to the ILO’s mission and standard setting activities. IPEC is part of a broad-based effort throughout the ILO that combats child labour through utilization of the expertise of a wide range of departments dealing with policy integration, employment, sectoral activities, social protection, skills, enterprise development, communications, and supporting employers’ and workers’ activities.

# e on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

## Child labour worldwide – Its nature and extent

The ILO's most recent estimates suggest that there are still 215 million children involved in child labour, which violates international standards. Child labour is work that is unacceptable because the children involved are too young and should be in school, or because even though they have attained the minimum age for admission to employment, the work that they do is unsuitable for a person below the age of 18. Many children are victims of the worst forms of child labour, such as bonded labour, slavery or practices similar to slavery, production and trafficking of drugs or other work which is likely to harm their health, safety or morals.

The number of children in child labour has continued on a declining trend, falling by 3 per cent over the four years from 2004. The number of children in hazardous work has also been declining, particularly among children below 15 years of age. However there are still 115 million children in hazardous work.

The regional picture indicates that child labour has been declining in the Asia-Pacific region and in Latin America and the Caribbean, but has increased in Sub-Saharan Africa. In absolute terms the largest number of child labourers is in the Asia-Pacific region (114 million), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (65 million) and Latin America and the Caribbean (14 million). In terms of the relative extent, Sub-Saharan Africa presents the most alarming picture. One in four children are child labourers in the region, compared to roughly one in eight in Asia-Pacific and one in ten in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Most child labourers continue to work in agriculture. Only one in five working children is in paid employment, the overwhelming majority are unpaid family workers. The most recent estimates suggest there has been a significant decrease in the number of girls in child labour but girls still work in large numbers in many sectors.

## How did IPEC come about and how has it evolved?

In 1990 the Government of Germany provided a significant contribution to establish an unprecedented new ILO technical programme on child labour. This development – along with the decision to make child labour an inter-departmental theme in 1992 – laid the groundwork for a new “long-term effective campaign against child labour” by the ILO.


Since then, IPEC has leveraged its experience to develop an effective global operation spanning five continents and nearly 90 countries. Flexible support from donors has been critical to supporting this comprehensive programme that operates on the principle of providing support to countries at very different stages in their response to child labour, while at the same time overseeing a worldwide movement to eliminate child labour.



## How and where does IPEC work?

IPEC is highly decentralized, adapting its strategy and applying its principles where they are needed most – at the country and grass-roots levels. Nearly 90 per cent of its staff of over 400 – half of them women – work in the field. Headquarters staff support field projects with technical advice, data collection, research and evaluation to create a comprehensive body of knowledge on child labour and the best way to tackle it. ILO field offices also provide support at the country, sub-regional and regional levels. At these levels, child labour specialists, sub-regional coordinators and Chief Technical Advisers manage projects close to or at the ground level where they can be most effective.

IPEC has received strong support from governments – over 60 have signed agreements with the ILO declaring their commitment to address child labour in a comprehensive way. In each country where IPEC works, tripartite National Steering Committees and Project/ Programme Advisory Committees oversee activities. IPEC works primarily through Ministries of Labour but is increasingly promoting the engagement and networking of other key ministries, especially Education, and national statistical offices. IPEC projects support national policy frameworks such as National Plans of Action (NPAs). Based on initial work in support of NPAs, IPEC has developed and promoted the design and implementation of more than 20 comprehensive Time-Bound Programmes for the elimination of child labour in its worst forms.



## IPEC's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC)

Over the last decade the ILO has become the world's most important source of child labour related statistical information. Through IPEC's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC), established in 1998, the ILO has supported more than 300 child labour surveys, 66 of which have been national in scope. It is this capability that has enabled the ILO to publish global and regional child labour estimates. SIMPOC's main strategic goal is to improve understanding among policymakers and key partners at the national and international levels regarding:

- child labour trends,
- factors underlying child labour,
- the special situation of the girl child, and
- linkages between child labour and other development issues.

An important outcome of this technical capability has been closer ties with key partners, especially through the inter-agency Understanding Children's Work (UCW) programme launched in 2000 in collaboration with UNICEF and the World Bank. As a result, more countries have information on the nature and extent of child labour, the basis on which to plan and act. National capacity to collect and analyse data has also been strengthened significantly.





## Our strategy: Making child labour everybody's business

The ILO strategy against child labour has long been focused on prevention, with an emphasis on providing policy support in key areas, tailor-made technical assistance to member States and encouragement of national ownership and commitment. As part of this strategic thrust, IPEC's approach is to leverage the comparative advantages of the ILO to enhance its influence on the policy agendas of key national, regional and global child labour actors – to create more leaders, rather than only more followers, in the struggle for a child labour-free world.

IPEC has harnessed the power of strategic planning to the quest for results. The refinement of evaluation strategies and consolidation of experiences has strengthened activities at all levels, from local to global. Impact assessment methodologies have been improved by developing approaches for tracing and tracking children and families as beneficiaries as well as measuring the impact of measures promoting policy development, legal reform, institution building, social mobilization and other measures that help create an environment conducive to combating child labour.

IPEC's strategy is grounded in the ILO's fundamental Conventions. The strategic goal as set out in Convention No. 138 is for member States to "pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour". Within this overall focus on policy development, priority attention is given to the worst forms of child labour as defined in Convention No. 182, including:

- All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced and compulsory labour, including forced and compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs and;
- Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Focusing on the worst forms works hand-in-hand with the overall goal of eliminating all forms of child labour. In fact, Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 are complementary, with the worst forms providing an entry point to tackle all forms of child labour.

# Practical support to countries

IPEC is dependent on voluntary donor contributions to assist countries. The Programme is a key expression of international solidarity – including facilitating increasing South-South cooperation – set out in Article 8 of Convention No. 182. In this regard, IPEC is primarily a field-based programme that delivers practical support to countries through its projects. These projects typically combine direct interventions such as support to children suffering from child labour - through for example education and training - with advocacy, capacity building of ILO constituents and social mobilization. Over the years the scale of these projects has increased to generate greater impact and sustainability. Larger projects are subject to external evaluation to enable lessons learned to be part of the future project planning cycle and as part of building knowledge.



## Leading a worldwide movement

IPEC's strategy has always followed two tracks: stimulating national efforts and generating a supportive and enabling international environment based on a vigorous worldwide movement against child labour. The ILO plays a central convening role for the major actors of the worldwide movement and provides the policy framework through its standards. IPEC's operational experience provides the knowledge base to enable the ILO to assume intellectual leadership within the worldwide movement – particularly on what works in combating child labour. Important vehicles for an enhanced global effort are key development and human rights frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Promoting integration of the child labour concern into work on the MDGs that run to 2015 is central to IPEC's efforts to strengthen the worldwide movement against child labour.



# Responses to different types of child labour

The scope of IPEC's work reflects the varied forms of child labour worldwide. Below is a snapshot of the comprehensive and evolving engagement of the Programme with the many facets of the child labour problem:

- *Agriculture*, as the economic sector with the majority of working children, many in hazardous work, is a major priority. IPEC has supported the formation of an International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture involving a number of agricultural organisations, and which aims to develop a partnership approach to tackling child labour in the sector. IPEC has also been in the forefront of international efforts to eliminate child labour in tobacco and cocoa farming.
- *Small scale mining* is a particularly hazardous sector for child labourers. IPEC has led the way in international efforts to remove children, some as young as 8-9 from working in mines in many countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. In 2005, IPEC helped broker an international Call to Action to eliminate child labour in the sector.
- *Child domestic labour* is a significant part of child labour, and involves predominantly girls. IPEC's strategy is to bring this often hidden form of child labour to light with withdrawal and rehabilitation for those working below the minimum age for employment or trapped in slave-like conditions. For those above the minimum age, the emphasis is placed on improving working conditions through proper labour regulations.
- *Trafficking* for sexual or labour purposes is a global problem. IPEC assists governments and its social partners in over 30 countries to evaluate the problem and develop necessary responses, including through broad protection, prevention, legislation and law enforcement, and victim assistance. Within the UN Global

Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN. GIFT) IPEC promotes concern for the labour and children's dimension. In a related area, the impact of migration on child labour is emerging as another important issue.

- *Commercial sexual exploitation* is a key area often linked to trafficking. Every year, more than 1 million children are forced into prostitution, trafficked and sold for sexual purposes or used in child pornography. IPEC has developed intervention models for the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation and withdrawal in countries as diverse as Albania and Peru. This included a focus on demand by men for sexual exploitation and attention to the tourist sector where IPEC has worked with others to promote sustainable "child-safe tourism."
- *Forced and bonded labour* is a particular concern in some countries in South Asia, West and Central Africa and some economic sectors, such as mining and quarrying in Latin America. Nearly 6 million children are thought to be affected. IPEC has responded through supporting national plans and projects against trafficking and child domestic labour.
- *Children in armed conflict* has been a growing problem over the last decade, often leading to sexual slavery or forced labour, and with boys becoming victims of forcible recruitment. Since 2002, IPEC has developed education and skills training activities in Central Africa, Colombia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka aimed at withdrawing and reintegrating former child soldiers and preventing recruitment. The ILO is now positioned as the lead agency on the economic reintegration of older children.
- *Children in illicit activities* refers to the production and trafficking of drugs, organized begging and children involved in criminal activities. Though its criminal or clandestine nature makes gathering information difficult, IPEC partners have conducted rapid assessments and developed innovative intervention models in Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa and Thailand.



# Global Action Plan

In November 2006, the ILO Governing Body endorsed a Global Action Plan which reconfirmed commitment to the elimination of child labour as one of the Organization's highest priorities.

The Global Action Plan sets out a strategy over the years to 2016. It embodies the principle that effective action against child labour can only be achieved at the country level and that member States must lead this effort. In particular, the plan called on member States to adopt time-bound measures by the end of 2008 to meet the target of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016.

In pursuit of this ambitious goal, IPEC has strengthened its role as a promoter and facilitator of effective responses to child labour in all countries through:

- Supporting national responses to child labour, in particular through more effective mainstreaming of child labour concerns in national development and policy frameworks.
- Turning the worldwide movement against child labour into a catalyst for effective action and impact at the national level.
- Promoting further integration of child labour concerns within overall ILO priorities, in particular Decent Work Country Programmes.

This more focused strategy, outlined in the three pillars of the Global Action Plan, underscores the need for a solid research and knowledge building programme to enhance IPEC's work, as well as a special focus on Africa, where the least progress has been made in tackling child labour.



# Social mobilization – How IPEC promotes its message and mobilizes support

Given the fundamental importance of changing attitudes in order to achieve sustained change, all IPEC field projects have advocacy and awareness raising components. A great deal of IPEC's communications and advocacy work targets local audiences. For example, in Latin America a web-based regional information platform on child labour provides news, access to publications, and information on IPEC's work to a Spanish-speaking audience.

IPEC also contributes to worldwide advocacy efforts through an international campaign to raise awareness among the general public both in industrialized and developing countries. Since its launch in 2002, the World Day Against Child labour, held on June 12 each year, has provided a major focus for advocacy efforts and has become the primary annual event focusing public attention on child labour issues worldwide. The World Day has become a global event, with activities held in more than 70 countries on or around 12 June. The event attracts major media attention and receives support from other UN agencies and a wide range of partners.

IPEC has also developed a programme of work aimed at raising awareness of young people on child labour through educational and arts activities. A specialist resource *Supporting Childrens Rights through Education, Arts and the Media (SCREAM)* has been translated into many languages.



# Partnerships – How does IPEC work with others?

Just as the ILO is a partnership between governments, trade unions and employers, tripartism is fundamental to IPEC's approach and brings a unique alliance to its work with other UN agencies. IPEC also joins forces with other groups and organizations such as non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, educational, research and arts institutions and the media.

Governments must be the driving force behind the elimination of child labour. Not only do they need to make the necessary policy and legal changes to fulfil their obligations under the Conventions, but they should also identify and commit resources to scale-up successful pilot initiatives and make sure that child labour concerns are integrated into relevant national policies and programmes. Most importantly, governments should provide the main support for processes of lasting change to achieve a child labour-free society.

Collaboration with employers and workers is fundamental to IPEC's approach. A key strategy is to strengthen and take advantage of social dialogue opportunities to influence policy development and reform in areas such as employment, trade, social welfare and education. Much of IPEC's work with the social partners is targeted at increasing their capacity, through training and networking activities, in order to enhance their critical role in advocacy. However,

a particular challenge for employers' and workers' organizations is to penetrate the informal economy where so much of child labour is found.

In recent years, IPEC has given increasing attention to corporate social responsibility initiatives in such diverse sectors as the garment industry in Bangladesh, the soccer ball, surgical instruments and carpet industry in Pakistan, cocoa in West Africa and sugar cane in El Salvador. Numerous projects at the country level engage with the private sector in promoting the recognition of the child labour problem in their corporate responsibility policies and programmes and address the challenge of working with the unregulated informal economy.

IPEC is increasingly part of wider networks that aim to promote concern with child labour as part of the "Delivering as One" concept in the United Nations system. IPEC supports a variety of inter-agency initiatives covering research (Understanding Children's Work programme), education (Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education for All), agriculture (International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture), and child trafficking (UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking). Given the complementary and mutually supportive roles, there has in particular been an evolving partnership with UNICEF that was reinforced by a heads of agency agreement in October 1996.





# Accomplishments – What has IPEC support accomplished?

Substantial progress has been made in the struggle against child labour. Around the world, there is a growing society-wide consensus that it is unacceptable to rob children of their childhood and the right to education through child labour. The ILO has brought hope of lasting change to children, their families and the societies they live in.

IPEC's work with its constituents and through donor-funded projects and activities have contributed substantially to this changing social landscape. These accomplishments include:

- Ratification of key ILO Conventions providing frameworks for effective policy and action. Remarkable progress has been made in the ratification of Conventions Nos.138 and 182. Convention No. 182 became the ILO's most rapidly ratified Convention and universal ratification of Convention No.182 is in sight. Three out of four children in the world now live in countries that have ratified Convention No. 182, while two out of three of the world's children live in counties that have ratified Convention No.138.
- Tangible benefits to children and their families. IPEC projects have led to direct actions in prevention, protection, recovery and reintegration of millions of children. IPEC has estimated that in the 2008-2009 period more than 52 million children received a direct or indirect benefit through some degree of exposure to or participation in activities as a result of the implementation of projects, institutional capacity building or policy advice from the ILO in the area of child labour. Children benefit from services such as formal and non-formal education and training, support for income generation opportunities for families and their communities, community watch groups who identify at-risk children,

legal reforms, policy development, and awareness raising and social mobilization campaigns that help create a protective environment for all children.

- Knowledge generation and sharing. IPEC has made a major contribution to global knowledge about child labour. It has pursued important research into the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour, bonded labour, and the demand for child labour. Knowledge on the concrete steps in eliminating child labour has been documented through evaluations and collections of good practices for different interventions and types of child labour.
- Attracting donor support. IPEC has steadily gained donor support. From an annual budget of US\$6 million from one donor (Germany) and operations in six countries in 1992, IPEC is today operational in nearly 90 countries with an annual expenditure of around \$60 million contributed by 30 donors. IPEC is the largest technical cooperation programme of the ILO.
- Developing technical tools. IPEC has developed a range of important frameworks and technical tools to assist its constituents in their efforts to tackle child labour. These encompass the Time Bound Programme framework now adopted in over 20 countries. Projects seek to support national plans of action to eliminate child labour within a specified time period. In addition, IPEC has produced numerous tools, guidelines and training manuals for policy-makers and field practitioners in areas such as: education, child labour monitoring, agriculture, hazardous work, legislation, child trafficking, child domestic labour, commercial sexual exploitation, gender, evaluation, mainstreaming of child labour in development policies and HIV and child labour.



## Looking forward – What is IPEC’s vision and what challenges still lie ahead?

The accomplishments of the past years gives cause for hope. Yet important challenges remain. Greater political commitment and national ownership is needed, supported by a more vibrant worldwide movement. Taken together, these factors can create a political environment that puts technical tools and frameworks to optimal use and raises child labour action to a level sufficient to have real impact. Our vision is a world where communities and sectors are increasingly and verifiably child labour-free.

In this context, IPEC’s long-term mission as part of the ILO remains unchanged: the elimination of child labour worldwide, with eradication of the worst forms of child labour as a priority.



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