The Invisible Children
June 2004 and every year is World Day Against Child Labour. On that day, thousands of young people across the globe will unite in solidarity with the millions of children for whom the world of work is the only life they know.

Child labour is about the exploitation of the most vulnerable in society – children. According to the ILO’s most recent estimates, there are more than 246 million child labourers between the ages of 5 to 17 in the world today. Over 100 million children do not go to school and most child labourers have no time to play. That’s millions of children worldwide every day who are prevented from developing to their full potential.

Young people in education have an important role to play in raising awareness of issues of social justice. By arming themselves with knowledge and mobilizing their peers, they can exert the necessary influence in their communities to bring about social change. Teachers and educators can play a central role in this process by helping young people gain access to information and by facilitating an exploration of the issues involved.

This brochure offers you and your students an opportunity to play your part in the growing worldwide movement to eliminate child labour. We hope that the information and ideas supplied here can form the basis for a short lesson in which you, the teacher, can introduce your students to the issues involved and, through follow-up activities and discussion, initiate a process which will make a real difference to the lives of the millions of children enslaved through child labour world-wide.

What is “child labour”?

There are as many different forms of child labour as there are economic activities. Some children toil long hours in noisy and dangerous factories. Others work in the fields from dawn until dusk. Some are trafficked into the sex industry while still others find themselves in bonded labour working to pay off a debt that will never be cleared. Some will be badly injured, physically handicapped or even die before reaching adulthood as a result of their labour. For others, the psychological scars of what they have endured will stay with them for life.

The “Invisible Children”

Possibly the most vulnerable group of child labourers in the world today are also the least visible. These are the children who carry out their tasks far away from the public gaze. Working in the privacy of other peoples’ homes, they have limited access to education and no time to play. With little or no pay and even fewer rights or protection under the law, they are highly vulnerable and yet almost totally unseen. The World Day Against Child Labour this year is dedicated to highlighting the plight of Child Domestic Labourers, the “Invisible Children”.

Jean from Haiti

Jean said he was 12 but looked much younger. He came from the north, near Cap-Haitien, and thought his parents were alive, but he had had no contact with them for several years. Two or three years earlier, a woman he had never seen before came to his village and chose him to be her restavek child (domestic labourer). She took him, by himself, to Port-au-Prince. The woman beat him frequently; he felt scared and trapped by her. Eventually the woman ‘fired’ Jean, told him to leave her house and suggested he return to his rural home. He had no means to return home nor even a precise idea as to where his home was. He lived on the streets of Port-au-Prince for a time, eventually befriending a boy about his own age. The boy’s mother let him move into her house. He now cares for the family’s five children and does not go to school (although the family’s children go to school). However, Jean does have time to play, gets adequate food and is not beaten. He feels that his situation is much better than it was. Jean nevertheless said that he would like to go back to his real family, if he knew how. When asked if he thought his parents would help him if they knew his wish to return, he began to cry.

What is Child Domestic Labour?

In nearly every home in every country of the world, children lend a helping hand. This can be a positive experience through which they learn how to accomplish simple tasks and master basic skills. In this way they feel that they are contributing to the family, a contribution which is usually encouraged and valued. This is not Child Domestic Labour.

Child Domestic Labour refers to situations where children perform domestic tasks, not in their own home, but in the home of a third party or ‘employer’ under exploitative conditions. Child Domestic Labourers work behind closed doors, in the privacy of peoples’ homes. As well as disguising the scale of the problem, this lack of visibility greatly increases the potential for exploitation and abuse.

In many countries of the world, however, children working as maids, child-minders, cooks, gardeners and cleaners are an accepted fact of everyday life. Current research suggests that, worldwide, more girls under the age of 16 are employed in domestic service than in any other form of work.

Victims of exploitation

Almost without exception, children who are in domestic labour are victims of exploitation. This exploitation can take several different forms:

- They are exploited economically by having to work long hours for low wages. Sometimes they are paid nothing for their work and often are given no time-off.

- Because their status is generally not recognized under local laws, they have no legal protection and can be subjected to harsh and dangerous working conditions, for example, handling toxic substances such as cleaning fluids, etc.

- Child Domestic Labourers are deprived of the rights due to them as children under international law, including the right to play, health, freedom from sexual abuse and harassment, the right to visits to or from their family, association with friends, decent accommodation and protection from physical and mental abuse.

Children who enter domestic labour often leave their own family at a very early age to work in the houses of others and are considered almost as ‘possessions’ of the household. They work in isolation and are subject to verbal, physical, emotional and, in some cases, sexual abuse. They are deprived of an education and training, so that their longer-term future is also blighted.

An Ethiopian girl

The girl in question is ten-years-old. She was taken to Addis Ababa to work as a live-in maid by her aunt, after the death of her parents when she was eight. Her aunt could not afford to keep her and was promised by a broker that she would be able to live with a family and just look after their four-year-old child in exchange for food, clothes and schooling. Her aunt gladly handed her over. The reality was very different. The family of seven that employed her did not allow her to play with the children. She was not allowed to leave the compound alone and was therefore confined to the house. She was given only leftovers to eat. “All the children go to school or kindergarten,” she says. “But, I am not allowed to go to school. I always beg the house lady to send me to night school, but she always tells me that I am not there to go to school but to work for the family.”

A study on child domestic labour in Ethiopia, (unpublished draft), (Geneva, ILO-IPEC, 2002), p.44.

Asha from Nepal

Asha is twelve-years-old and has been working for her employer for four years. Her father works as a kamaiya (bonded labourer) for one of her employer’s relatives. Asha has two brothers and one sister, whom she seldom sees. Her work begins at five in the morning with sweeping and mopping the house, and ends at ten o’clock at night with dishwashing. She is illiterate and is unlikely to be sent to school as there is no one to share her workload. She is unaware of the amount of her salary, which she thinks her parents receive in the village from the landlord for whom they work. According to the kamaiya system, in fact, it is likely that her salary is built into her father’s payment of his debt to the landlord.

How many are there?

Estimates about the numbers of children in domestic labour vary from country to country. The figures below were based on local studies and probably under-represent the true figures. Even so they still paint a disturbing picture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>559,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>250,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>700,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As yet no statistics are available to indicate the number of children in domestic service in Europe and North America.

What can be done?

Through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child labour (IPEC), the International Labour Organization (ILO) is spearheading global efforts to make all child labour a thing of the past.

Because the root causes of Child Domestic Labour are many and complex, the issue must be tackled on two fronts. The world of political action plays a key role through the ratification and implementation of international conventions on the reduction and elimination of child labour. At a social level, practical programmes on the ground can help child labourers directly, while at the same time awareness-raising campaigns can mobilize key sectors of society.

Students and young people are an important group in society and their active involvement is central in the international efforts to eradicate child labour. Sharing the information in this brochure is the start of that process. By engaging your students in any or all of the suggested activities included, you will help them enter the world of the Child Domestic Labourer and so relate more fully to their plight. This may encourage some students to seek more information on the subject of child labour through the websites and contact points provided on the back of this brochure. There they can learn how to become more actively involved in the global effort to combat Child Domestic Labour. In so doing they can help to shine a light on these hidden lives and so ease the suffering of all the world’s “Invisible Children”.

Activity 1

The Word Box

This activity is designed to involve the whole group and will help the students in a simple yet powerful way to connect with the thoughts and feelings of a Child Domestic Labourer. It may be useful to re-read to the group any or all of the real life stories of child labourers contained in the text above before beginning the activity.

Ask each student to think about the emotions they imagine a Child Domestic Labourer would feel as they go about their tasks every day. Then ask them to write down three of those emotions, using one word to describe each emotion, for example ‘lonely’, ‘sad’, ‘disappointed’, etc. When each student has written down their three words, ask them to carefully tear around each word on the page so that they now have three slips of paper with a word on each one.

Now pass an empty box, or any other suitable container, around the room. This is the ‘Word Box’ into which the students will put their slips of paper. Now shake the box to mix up all the words and pass the box around again. As each student picks a word from the box ask them to read the word aloud. Then using that word, encourage them to put themselves inside the mind of a Child Domestic Labourer and make a sentence incorporating the emotion they have chosen from the box. The sentence should start with the phrase: “I am lonely because …”, “I am afraid because …”, “I am angry because …”, and so on. A full sentence might be: “I am lonely because I have not seen my family for years and I don’t know if I will ever see them again.”

Encourage the group to use their imagination in this activity. By trying to put themselves inside the mind of a child labourer and speaking with her/his voice, they will begin to identify on a personal and human level with millions of suffering children around the world. It is this move from sympathy to empathy which will release the energy for change.
Labourers struggle with every day of their lives … hardships and challenges that many Child Domestic Labourers struggle with every day of their lives … Don’t be afraid to let the group’s imagination go to work. Students will enter into the world of a Child Domestic Labourer. Don’t be afraid to let the group’s imagination go where it will … it is almost impossible to exaggerate the hardships and challenges that many Child Domestic Labourers struggle with every day of their lives.

This activity is very easy to do but do not be deceived by its simplicity! Making use of one of the most powerful tools for change available to them, their own imagination, the students will enter into the world of a Child Domestic Labourer. Don’t be afraid to let the group’s imagination go where it will … it is almost impossible to exaggerate the hardships and challenges that many Child Domestic Labourers struggle with every day of their lives. This activity involves the whole group and gives each student an opportunity to participate as much, or as little, as they want. This activity is very easy to do but do not be deceived by its simplicity! Making use of one of the most powerful tools for change available to them, their own imagination, the students will enter into the world of a Child Domestic Labourer. Don’t be afraid to let the group’s imagination go where it will … it is almost impossible to exaggerate the hardships and challenges that many Child Domestic Labourers struggle with every day of their lives …

As you move through the group, this imaginary Child Domestic Labourer will take on a life of her/his own. They may acquire a name, have a favourite colour, be fanatical about a sport or music, share their deepest fears or most treasured hopes. By the time the activity has worked its way through the room and our tired child labourer has come to the end of her/his day, the group will have a deeper understanding of the daily life of millions of the world’s children. They may also have begun to realize that essentially, at a very human level, a Child Domestic Labourer is no different from any other young person anywhere on this planet.

Activity 2

A Day in the Life

In this activity you are asking the students to imagine what a day in the life of a Child Domestic Labourer is like. This activity involves the whole group and gives each student an opportunity to participate as much, or as little, as they want. This activity is very easy to do but do not be deceived by its simplicity! Making use of one of the most powerful tools for change available to them, their own imagination, the students will enter into the world of a Child Domestic Labourer. Don’t be afraid to let the group’s imagination go where it will … it is almost impossible to exaggerate the hardships and challenges that many Child Domestic Labourers struggle with every day of their lives. Ask for a volunteer to start the activity, then explain to the group that this activity will move right around through the group until it ends up back with the first volunteer again. Then ask the volunteer to imagine she/he is a child labourer telling us about an average day in her/his life, starting with when they wake up in the morning, how they feel, what they see and smell, and so on.

At first, students may find it difficult to enter into this imaginative world. They may need prompting from you to help them. Try not to suggest things, but rather ask questions that will help move the activity along, for example, “What is your bed like?”, “Do you have a room of your own?”, “Did you have enough sleep? If not, why not?”. Remember that the students must describe their experiences in the first person. Every sentence must start with ‘I’. This is very important.

After a few sentences move on to the next student reminding them that they must take up the story where the last student left off. Remind them also that the story must move them through a day in their life as a child labourer, so it may help to ask occasional questions, such as “What time is it now?” or “Did you have any lunch?”. Certain other questions might help to paint a bigger picture of the life and dreams of the Child Domestic Labourer, such as “When did you last see your family?”, “Do you have any brothers or sisters?”, “Who do you play with?” or “What do you want to do when you grow up?”.

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Activity 3

Imagine the Future

This activity combines imagination with discussion – an exploration of what is possible combined with the potential for action.

Ask the class to imagine a world without child labour. A world where children will not have to work long hours in dangerous conditions. A world where children are free from abuse and exploitation. A world where all children’s rights are recognized and respected.

Then ask them to imagine that they are the Director General of the International Labour Organization, Ask them what they would do to stop child labour if they were this person. Encourage them to answer in the first person, for example, “I would call a meeting of all world leaders to make sure all children go to school …”, or something similar.

Different students may have different views on this. Listen to them. Encourage debate and discussion. Write the suggestions for action on a board (if you have one) in the classroom. Otherwise, ask one of the students to write them on a piece of paper.

Now ask the students to imagine that they are the leader of their own country. The President or Prime Minister, someone with the power to get things done. What would they do to stop child labour? Again, encourage them to express themselves in the first person, as though they are the leader, they are the one with the power to get things done. Encourage debate and discussion. Like before, write the suggestions for action on a board or ask one of the students to write them on a piece of paper.

Now read out the suggestions for action that have been written down. Tell the students that they have the power themselves to get things done. Ask them to consider formulating their views and suggestions into a letter and sending it to the ILO Director General. Ask them to consider sending a similar letter to the head of their own government and the relevant ministers. Ask them to consider sharing their views with their local public representatives by either writing to them or meeting them in person. Ask them to look at ways of sharing this information with their friends, their families and their local communities. Ask them to imagine what might happen if enough people knew about the plight of child labourers and decided to do something about it.

Imagine the possibilities!

Imagine …
The organizations behind the “Invisible Children”

- The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** is the United Nations specialized agency which seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. Within the UN system, the ILO has a unique tripartite structure with workers and employers participating as equal partners with governments. ([www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org))

- The ILO’s **International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)** is the world’s largest technical cooperation programme on child labour. Its aim is the progressive elimination of child labour worldwide, with the eradication of the worst forms an urgent priority. ([www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/index.htm))

- **Education International (EI)** is a world-wide trade union organization of education personnel, whose 26 million members represent all sectors of education from pre-school to university 310 national trade unions and associations in 159 countries and territories. EI’s work to end child labour is a key aspect of its human rights campaign. ([www.ei-ie.org](http://www.ei-ie.org))

ILO-IPEC, 4 Route des Morillons, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, e-mail: ipec@ilo.org

Additional information and education resources

- “**Helping hands or shackled lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it**”

  A new report prepared by Dr June Kane with technical guidance and inputs from ILO-IPEC staff. As of 12 June 2004, the full publication can be downloaded from [www.ilo.org/childlabour](http://www.ilo.org/childlabour)

- **World Day Against Child Labour, 12 June 2004**

  IPEC’s home page for the World Day Against Child Labour 2004 provides further information on the issues surrounding Child Domestic Labour which can be downloaded from [www.ilo.org/childlabour](http://www.ilo.org/childlabour)

- **SCREAM Stop Child Labour Education Pack – Supporting Children’s Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media. ILO-IPEC 2002.**

  This community-based education and social mobilization programme will provide teachers and educators with further activities to conduct with a wide range of age groups of children. Further information and the education modules themselves are available in download format from [www.ilo.org/scream](http://www.ilo.org/scream).

- **ILO-IPEC Fact Sheets on Child Labour**

  A series of detailed fact sheets on child labour issues are available in download format from [www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/factsheet/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/factsheet/index.htm).

⇒ **A special request from ILO-IPEC and EI to all teachers and educators**

*If you use this brochure (and we hope you will) in order to conduct an activity related to Child Domestic Labourers with your students, then we would like to hear from you. Please send us details of your activities with any supporting material, including drawings, writings, photographs, and so on. Please also let us know if you and your students would agree to us using such material in official documentation and promotional supports, such as our web sites. Our contact details are included in this brochure. Please accept our sincere thanks for your support and that of your students – it all helps and does make a difference!*

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