



**International Labour Organization
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**

**El Salvador
Child Labour in Garbage Dumps:
A Rapid Assessment**

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Preface

Unacceptable forms of exploitation of children at work exist and persist, but they are particularly difficult to research due to their hidden, sometimes illegal or even criminal nature. Slavery, debt bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in the drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work are all defined as Worst Forms of Child Labour. Promoting the Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and immediate action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, is a high priority for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Recommendation (No. 190, Paragraph 5) accompanying the Convention states that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms, as a matter of urgency.” Although there is a body of knowledge, data, and documentation on child labour, there are also still considerable gaps in understanding the variety of forms and conditions in which children work. This is especially true of the worst forms of child labour, which by their very nature are often hidden from public view and scrutiny.

Against this background the ILO, through IPEC/SIMPOC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour/Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) has carried out 38 rapid assessments of the worst forms of child labour in 19 countries and one border area. The investigations have been made using a new rapid assessment methodology on child labour, elaborated jointly by the ILO and UNICEF¹. The programme was funded by the United States Department of Labor.

The investigations on the worst forms of child labour have explored very sensitive areas including illegal, criminal or immoral activities. The forms of child labour and research locations were carefully chosen by IPEC staff in consultation with IPEC partners. The rapid assessment investigations focused on the following categories of worst forms of child labour: children in bondage; child domestic workers; child soldiers; child trafficking; drug trafficking; hazardous work in commercial agriculture, fishing, garbage dumps, mining and the urban environment; sexual exploitation; and working street children.

To the partners and IPEC colleagues who contributed, through their individual and collective efforts, to the realisation of this report I should like to express our gratitude. The responsibility for opinions expressed in this publication rests solely with the authors and does not imply endorsement by the ILO.

I am sure that the wealth of information contained in this series of reports on the situation of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour around the world will contribute to a deeper understanding and allow us to more clearly focus on the challenges that lie ahead. Most importantly, we hope that the studies will guide policy makers, community leaders, and practitioners to tackle the problem on the ground.



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¹ Investigating Child Labour: Guidelines for Rapid Assessment - A Field Manual, January 2000, a draft to be finalized further to field tests, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/guides/index.htm>

Executive Summary

The phenomenon of child labour in El Salvador is closely linked to the circumstances in which many Salvadorian families live, given that 50 per cent of such families are classified as poor or extremely poor. The various types of work performed by children include, among others: picking cotton and coffee; fishing; urban work; and scavenging—or the sorting and collecting of waste materials at dumpsites. The situation of these child workers is distinctly characterized by the failure on the part of the authorities to apply legal provisions—contained in the Constitution and in other legislation—that regulate some of these types of work.

El Salvador's economic problems have contributed to some extent to the need to find alternative means of satisfying basic needs. This has given rise to a series of related problems that include child labour and one of its worst forms: scavenging at dumpsites. A variety of factors underlies the enormously hazardous nature of this type of work. These include the environmental conditions in which it is carried out, the exposure to contaminants capable of producing a wide variety of diseases, and the many social problems related to human survival in places where refuse is deposited.

This study was based on the Rapid Assessment methodology developed jointly by the ILO and UNICEF and implemented by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). It is one of 38 rapid assessments undertaken in 19 countries and one border area in the context of the IPEC/SIMPOC (Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) project to investigate the worst forms of child labour.

The sites chosen for this assessment of child labour in garbage dumps were selected on the basis of specific characteristics, such as size and neighbouring environment. These criteria led to the selection of the Mariona-Nejapa and Cutumay Camones (Santa Ana) dumpsites.

The field investigation was conducted using a number of instruments aimed at providing a diagnosis of the child labour situation. The application of such instruments provided important information for understanding the problem as a whole.

The quantitative and qualitative data collected revealed that the garbage dumps produce a daily chain of subsistence among children, their parents and the middlemen who receive the collected waste materials from them. The children sort through and collect the materials, which they then hand over to their father as a means of complementing the meager income of the household. The father then delivers the collected items to the middleman, who, in turn, sells them directly to factories or wholesalers. This is the scenario enacted each day at dumpsites; children's involvement in it makes it one of the worst forms of child labour, given the unhealthy and hazardous conditions described at greater length in the report.

The empirical results of the study indicate that the presence of child workers at both sites is due to the existence of a 'market' for recyclable waste materials. They also showed that while the collection sites shared some general characteristics, the profile of the child workers differed depending upon the site.

Some of these differences concerned children's relationships with their relatives. For example, in Mariona, family ties were more fragmented, implying that the children there were more vulnerable and had more difficulty integrating with others. Likewise, drug and alcohol-related problems were noted among child scavengers in Mariona, as well as among their immediate families. They also presented a higher dropout rate and fewer prospects for the future than their counterparts at the Santa Ana dumpsite.

In addition to describing the conditions of poverty prevailing at the garbage dump, the study draws conclusions and makes recommendations for eliminating child labour. The main recommendation concerns achieving the goal proclaimed by the slogan: "Work for parents and school for children". This entails providing the necessary promotion, organization and training to form community enterprises or partnerships. Such enterprises would hire the fathers and mothers of these children as employees in new and modern transfer stations in solid waste management systems. The recommendation also entails providing assistance to children whose parents are engaged in this type of work through Child Welfare Centres [*Centros de Bienestar Infantil*] or through other assistance mechanisms.

The full text of this report is available in Spanish at
<http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/standards/ipecc/simpoc/elsalvador/ra/garbage.pdf>