



FACTS ON

Child Labour

One out of six children in the world today is involved in child labour, doing work that is damaging to his or her mental, physical and emotional development.

These children work in a variety of industries, and in many parts of the world. The vast majority are in the agricultural sector, where they may be exposed to dangerous chemicals and equipment. Others are street children, peddling or running errands to earn a living. Some are domestic workers, prostitutes, or factory workers. All are children who have no fair chance of a real childhood, an education, or a better life.

Children work because their survival and that of their families depend on it. Child labour persists even where it has been declared illegal, and is frequently surrounded by a wall of silence, indifference, and apathy.

But that wall is beginning to crumble. While the total elimination of child labour is a long-term goal in many countries, certain forms of child labour must be confronted immediately. An ILO study has shown for the first time that the economic benefits of eliminating child labour will be nearly seven times greater than the costs. This does not include the incalculable social and human benefits of eliminating the practice: nearly three-quarters of working children are engaged in what the world recognizes as the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking, armed conflict, slavery, sexual exploitation and hazardous work. The effective abolition of child labour is one of the most urgent challenges of our time.

World Day against Child Labour, 12 June 2004

Focus on child domestic labour

Child domestic labour refers to situations where children are engaged to perform domestic tasks in the home of a third party or employer that are exploitative. Whenever such exploitation is extreme – and includes trafficking, slavery-like situations, or work that is hazardous and harmful to a child's physical or mental health – it is considered one of the worst forms of child labour.

Almost without exception, children who are in domestic labour are victims of exploitation. They 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 are exploited economically: forced to work long hours with no time off and low or no wages. They generally have no social or legal protection.

Key Statistics

- 246 million children are child labourers.
- 73 million working children are less than 10 years old.
- No country is immune: There are 2.5 million working children in the developed economies, and another 2.5 million in transition economies.
- Every year, 22,000 children die in work-related accidents.
- The largest number of working children – 127 million – age 14 and under are in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest proportion of working children: nearly one-third of children age 14 and under (48 million children).
- Most children work in the informal sector, without legal or regulatory protection:
 - 70% in agriculture, commercial hunting and fishing or forestry;
 - 8% in manufacturing;
 - 8% in wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels;
 - 7% in community, social and personal service, such as domestic work.
- 8.4 million children are trapped in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, prostitution, pornography and other illicit activities.
 - 1.2 million of these children have been trafficked.

Child domestic workers are deprived of the rights due to them as children in international law, including the right to play, visits with their family and friends, and decent accommodation. They are denied an education, jeopardizing their chances of a better future. Both girls and boys face physical or mental abuse, with the possibility of sexual abuse being particularly high for girls. Despite this, more girls under 16 are in domestic labour than in any other category of work.

ILO in action against child domestic labour

Based on the principal ILO child labour Conventions and on practical experience in Africa, Asia and south and central America, the ILO advocates a dual strategy: to remove all children under 18 years of age from the worst forms of child domestic labour, especially those under the minimum working age; to ensure that adolescents above the minimum age are working in decent conditions. The ILO builds national and local capacity – through its constituents and partners – for all of the actions below.

Research and awareness-raising: The hazards of domestic service are often underestimated because the problem remains hidden and difficult to measure and analyse. Only solid evidence and recognition of the problem can lead to appropriate policies, legal frameworks and financial support.

Prevention: Income generating activities and financial schemes help families meet their basic needs and send their children to school. Improved educational opportunities for girls can prevent their entering domestic service. Community mobilisation creates a common sense of responsibility that protects the vulnerable.

Withdrawal: These children work in the private sphere without the possibility for outsiders to monitor their work. The ILO collaborates with the labour inspection or child protection services to identify and remove children. Trade unions, local schools and non-governmental organizations contribute to information and reintegration schemes.

Protection: Children above the minimum working age and in acceptable conditions can benefit from group support networks and improved access to education. With supportive adults, they create actions such as the Weekly Rest Campaign, which calls for domestic workers to be given at least one day off per week.

For more information: www.ilo.org/chlldlabour

The ILO and the fight against child labour

Eliminating child labour is an essential element in the ILO's goal of "Decent Work for All". The ILO tackles child labour not as an isolated issue but as an integral part of national efforts for economic and social development.

1919: The first International Labour Conference adopts a Minimum Age (Industry) Convention (No. 5).

1930: Adoption of the first Forced Labour Convention (No. 29).

1973: Adoption of the **Minimum Age Convention (No. 138)**.

1992: The ILO establishes the **International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**. Action includes: assessment studies, capacity building, legal reform, awareness raising and social mobilization, prevention, withdrawal and rehabilitation of children from hazardous work, and the creation of alternatives for the families of child labourers.

1996: **Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action:** The elaboration of the principle that a crime against a child in one place is a crime anywhere. The ILO codifies this into an international standard by developing a convention three years later which spells out the role of enforcement and penalties.

1998: Adoption of the ILO **Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work:** Freedom of association, abolition of forced labour, end of discrimination in the workplace, and elimination of child labour. All ILO Member States pledge to uphold and promote these principles.

1999: Adoption of ILO **Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182)**. Focused world attention on the need to take immediate action to eradicate those forms of child labour that are hazardous and damaging to children's physical, mental or moral well-being. Ratified by 3 out of 4 ILO Member States.

2002: The ILO establishes 12 June as **World Day Against Child Labour**. More than 80 countries are supported by the ILO in the formulation of their own programmes to combat child labour.

2004: The first global **economic study on the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour** says the benefits will be an estimated US\$ 5.1 trillion.

International Labour Office
4, route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22 Switzerland
Tel. +4122/799-7912 Fax +4122/799-8577
www.ilo.org/communication
June 2004

