



THE END OF CHILD LABOUR: WITHIN REACH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A future without child labour is within our grasp. Significant progress is being made in global efforts to end child labour, but much remains still to be done - progress should not lead to complacency. A strong and sustained global effort is still required. The ILO has a central leadership role to play in the promotion of a more cohesive and coherent worldwide movement that is mobilized around attainable targets.

This second Global Report on child labour under the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, offers for the first time a truly dynamic picture. The new global estimates presented in Part I allow the ILO to assess global and regional trends. A remarkable picture emerges. In 2004 there were 218 million children trapped in child labour of which 126 million were in hazardous work. Though the participation of girls in child labour and hazardous work is on a par with boys in the youngest age group (5-11 years), boys predominate very considerably at older ages in both categories.

However, the number of child labourers globally fell by 11 per cent over the last four years whilst those engaged in hazardous work decreased by 26 per cent. For the age group of 5-14 years the decline in hazardous work was even steeper - by 33 per cent. The global picture that emerges is that child work is declining, and the more harmful the work and the more vulnerable the children involved, the faster the decline.

Latin America and the Caribbean are making the greatest progress - the number of children in work has fallen by two-thirds over the last four years with just 5 per cent of children now engaged in work. Least progress has been made in sub-Saharan Africa

where population growth, HIV/AIDS infection and child labour remain alarmingly high.

An important part of the positive trends set out here has been related to ILO standards. There are encouraging advances in ratifications in many parts of the world, and while ratification of Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 is only a first step, many ratifications have been accompanied by concrete action against child labour.

Political commitment through the adoption of coherent policies in the areas of poverty reduction, basic education and human rights, is central to the progress made by countries, both past and present, in combating child labour. Economic growth alone will not eliminate child labour, though clearly it is important. Policy choices matter, and those which open gateways of opportunity for poor people, are central to efforts aimed at eliminating child labour. The report presents country examples from East Asia, including China, and from Brazil to illustrate that in addition to poverty reduction, the decision to focus on mass education in particular is an important prerequisite for moving countries to the transition point in tackling child labour.

Part I goes on to examine the historical experience of the first industrial nations to reinforce the central message of what works in combating child labour. Around a century ago, the extensive use of child labour ended in the first industrial nations due to a mix of interventions that helped transfer children from the workplace to the schoolroom. Economic growth, improvements in the adult labour market, changes in technology, decline in fertility rates, the

availability of decent schools, changing cultural patterns, and legal instruments and their enforcement worked together to create a virtuous cycle. The report goes on to examine how a society can be "tipped" from one where there is a high prevalence of child labour, to one where the right of children not to work becomes fully recognized and the social norm.

This distilled wisdom concerning how to put an end to child labour has become part of the ILO's policy framework and is embodied in its core standards on child labour. In fact, as this report makes plain, our knowledge of the dynamics of child labour is profound. What has become clearer over the years is that responding to child labour requires making the right policy choices, and not simply having the right technical tools. And it requires the central involvement of employers' and workers' organizations in the spirit of social dialogue.

In many cases these choices have to be made within the context of crisis and insecurity, exemplified by the tsunami of 2004 and the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, as well as by the man-made disasters of conflict and economic crisis. Children are often the most affected by crises, and are at increased risk of entering child labour, in particular its worst forms. The final section of Part I of the report documents the efforts the ILO is making to respond to the increased vulnerability of children in the wake of conflict and natural catastrophe.

Global reports provide an important opportunity to reflect on progress over the last four years. Part II of the report reviews efforts to strengthen the ILO's major programme of technical co-operation - the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) - and in mainstreaming child labour as part of the Decent Work Agenda. IPEC is the leading international programme dedicated to child labour elimination and the largest programme of its kind within the ILO. Since its establishment in 1992, IPEC has spent \$350 million with annual expenditure running at \$50-60 million. Since 2002 IPEC's projects and programmes have reached around 5 million children.

In taking stock of the last four years there is much to be proud of. IPEC has continued to gain support from the donor community and has been at the

forefront of the worldwide movement against child labour. New frameworks and technical tools have been put at the disposal of member States, in particular support to Time-Bound Programmes (TBPs) aimed at assisting countries to implement Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Important contributions to research and data collection have been made, not least in illuminating global and regional trends set out in Part I of the report. There have been important breakthroughs by IPEC in advocacy, tackling the worst forms of child labour, child labour monitoring, developing a learning culture through knowledge management, and in mainstreaming child labour within the Decent Work Agenda.

Set against these considerable accomplishments, the report highlights important challenges. Agriculture and child domestic work have been relatively neglected for action against child labour at national and international levels. Furthermore, there is a need to craft political strategies that seize opportunities to mobilize constituencies for combating child labour utilizing multiple entry points. The report concludes that greater national ownership, supported by employers' and workers' organizations, and backed up by a more vibrant worldwide movement, can create the environment in which technical tools and frameworks are put to optimum use and child labour action taken to national scale to have real impact.

Part III of the report sets out the key challenge facing the worldwide movement against child labour: how best to mainstream child labour elimination into key development and human rights frameworks. Of particular concern is how to position child labour concerns within the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Poverty Reduction Strategies linked to them. Though child labour is not an explicit target, action will have to be taken against child labour to reach many of the MDG targets, especially those related to education. The report draws attention to the increasing recognition of this connection at the national and international levels, though much still needs to be done.

Perhaps the greatest progress has been made in recognizing the link between child labour elimination and Education for All (EFA). Since 2002, an inter-agency group combining ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF,

the World Bank, and the Global March Against Child labour has met annually, which has led to the establishment of a Global Task Group at the Beijing EFA High Level Meeting in November 2005. The report also highlights the extent to which HIV/AIDS is transforming our view of child labour and achieving EFA, and how IPEC is developing models of response to HIV/AIDS. In many ways education can be viewed as a "social vaccine" against the pandemic.

Youth employment has a prominent place in the MDGs and is also, through a life-cycle approach, intimately linked to the Decent Work Agenda. This report suggests ways in which a better connection can be made between youth employment and child labour concerns using both the Youth Employment Network (YEN) and the ILC Resolution on youth employment adopted in 2005.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the greatest challenge to the development community, as the region least on track to reach the MDGs. The region also has the highest incidence of working children and has made the least progress, due in part to its staggering population growth, where the population doubles every generation. This report examines a number of possible entry points whereby child labour elimination can be strategically placed in the follow-up to the G8 agenda set out at the Gleneagles Summit in July 2005 and IPEC's role in helping the region face this crisis.

The need to strengthen and widen the worldwide movement against child labour is a major theme. A growing set of global actors has emerged over the last decade, including other UN-system agencies. Donors have been central to putting child labour on the international agenda. The role of employers' and workers' organizations of course remains central to child labour elimination efforts, and the report provides examples of important initiatives taken by them over the last four years. It also examines the challenge presented by the growth of the informal economy where much of the world's child labour, particularly its worst forms, is to be found. It also provides examples of how employers and trade unions are broadening their partnerships with other civil society actors, for example through sector alliances in industries such as sporting goods and agriculture.

There is a growing consensus that children should be viewed as active partners in the worldwide movement against child labour. The first global report reflected this and this second report explores the meaning of children's participation and the strategies that have been adopted to ensure that this goes beyond tokenism.

One of the by-products of a more vigorous and pluralistic worldwide movement over the last decade has been a growing diversity concerning basic concepts, causation and responses. This has not always been in support of ILO policy and there were points during the last decade where the worldwide movement appeared polarized. The adoption of Convention No. 182 in 1999 did much to accommodate diversity within unity but residual disagreements on strategy remain among the international agencies, and with some elements of the international NGO community. That said, the worldwide movement is stronger than a decade ago, though part of the momentum generated at the end of the 1990s appears to have stalled. The report outlines several steps that need to be taken at all levels, in particular by the ILO, towards revitalizing and strengthening the global effort against child labour.

Part IV sets out an action plan that builds on the three-pillar approach from the 2002 report, but in a more focused way, defining clear targets. It proposes that the ILO and its member States continue to pursue the goal of the effective abolition of child labour, committing themselves to the elimination of all the worst forms of child labour by 2016, and that they put in place appropriate time-bound measures by the end of 2008. In pursuit of these targets, over the next four years the ILO will strengthen its efforts to develop coherent and comprehensive approaches to abolishing child labour. The proposed action plan rests on three pillars: supporting national responses to child labour, in particular through effective mainstreaming in national development and policy frameworks; deepening and strengthening the worldwide movement; and promoting further integration of child labour concerns within overall ILO priorities regarding Decent Work as a global goal. This more focused and strategic approach to global leadership will help ensure that the ILO will make a more effective contribution to making child labour history. ■