

Thursday 4 May 2006
EMBARGO: Not for publication before 14:00 UTC
ILO/06/15

NEW ILO REPORT SHOWS MARKED DECLINE IN CHILD LABOUR WORLDWIDE

BELIEVES ITS WORST FORMS CAN BE ELIMINATED IN 10 YEARS

GENEVA (ILO news) – Child labour, especially in its worst forms, is in decline for the first time across the globe, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said today, in a new, cautiously optimistic report ^{1/} entitled “The end of child labour: Within reach”.

The ILO report also says that if the current pace of the decline were to be maintained and the global momentum to stop child labour continued, it believes child labour could feasibly be eliminated, in most of its worst forms, in 10 years.

“The end of child labour is within our reach”, says Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO. “Though the fight against child labour remains a daunting challenge, we are on the right track. We can end its worst forms in a decade, while not losing sight of the ultimate goal of ending all child labour.”

The new report says the actual number of child labourers worldwide fell by 11 per cent between 2000 and 2004, from 246 million to 218 million.

What’s more, the number of children and youth aged 5-17 trapped in hazardous work decreased by 26 per cent, to reach 126 million in 2004 as opposed to 171 million in the previous estimate. Among younger child labourers aged 5-14, this drop was even more pronounced at 33 per cent, says the report.

Four years ago, the ILO issued the most comprehensive report to date on global child labour. Applying the same statistical methodology used in that report, the ILO finds a significant decline in child labour since then.

The report attributed the reduction in child labour to increased political will and awareness ^{2/} and concrete action, particularly in the field of poverty reduction and mass education that has led to a “worldwide movement against child labour”. Through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the ILO assists in building national capacity to deal with child labour and providing policy advice. In addition, through direct action, the Programme over the past decade has reached some 5 million children. These initiatives have played a significant catalytic role, both in mobilizing action and demonstrating how child labour can be eliminated.

Over the last five years, IPEC has helped several countries put in place appropriate time-bound measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. The report calls on all member States that haven’t done so yet to adopt time-bound plans by 2008. According to the report, more than 30 member States of the ILO have already set time-bound targets with a similar or even earlier target date than 2016 to abolish the worst forms of child labour.

Despite considerable progress in the fight against child labour, the report also highlights important challenges, particularly in agriculture, where seven out of ten child

labourers work. Other challenges include addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on child labour, and building stronger links between child labour and youth employment concerns.

The report calls for greater national efforts, involving organizations representing employers and workers, as well as governments – the partners that make up the tripartite ILO. It also calls for the strengthening of the worldwide movement to make child labour history. Meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 would further help to eradicate child labour, the report says.

Regional trends

According to the report, **Latin America and the Caribbean** have seen the most rapid decline in child labour over the four-year period. The number of children at work in the region has fallen by two-thirds during that time, with just 5 per cent of children now engaged in work.

The report presents Brazil as an example to illustrate how countries can move forward in tackling child labour. Activity rates among the 5-9 age group fell by 61 per cent from 1992 to 2004, and among the larger 10-17 age group by 36 per cent.

Another country with significant decline in child labour is Mexico. As half of the children in Latin America live in either Mexico or Brazil, these reductions are very important and testify to the fact that the overall decline is a real trend.

Asia and the Pacific also registered a significant decline in the number of economically active children, according to the report. However, as the child population also declined, the percentage of working children was less reduced. The ILO estimates that the region still has the largest number of child workers in the 5-14 age group – some 122 million.

The report says Asia is a prime example of how political commitment to reducing poverty and expanding education has had an important bearing on child labour elimination. However, around the world, progress is uneven.

With 26 per cent of the child population, or almost 50 million working children, the **sub-Saharan African** region has the highest proportion of children engaged in economic activities of any region in the world. According to the Global Report, the convergence of high population growth, grinding poverty and the epidemic of HIV/AIDS has hindered progress in the fight against child labour.

However, there are signs of progress. For example, primary school enrollments in the region increased by 38 per cent between 1990 and 2000.

The report also refers to the unprecedented international movement to put the plight of the continent front and centre of the world's attention that opens a window of opportunity for Africa's fight against child labour.

“In this 21st century, no child should be brutalized by exploitation or be placed in hazardous work”, said Mr. Somavia. “No child should be denied access to education. No child should have to slave for his or her survival. Let's keep up the momentum. Let's resolve to keep investing in the struggle for the right of all children to their childhood.

The **International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)** is the world's largest programme dedicated to the eradication of child labour and the biggest single operational programme of the ILO. Since its establishment in 1992, IPEC has spent US\$350 million, with annual expenditure now running at US\$50-60 million. Beyond the ILO's tripartite structure of governments and employers' and workers' organizations, IPEC works with others, including: private businesses, community-based organizations, NGOs, the media, parliamentarians, the judiciary, universities, religious groups and, of course, children and their families. National and community action is crucial for the success of the IPEC programme. Through local authorities and municipalities, IPEC can reach children in the informal economy and small and medium-sized businesses that provide the bulk of employment, and promote integrated approaches to get children out of work and into school.

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^{1/} *The end of child labour: Within reach*, Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, report to the 95th session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva 2006. Available in PDF format for download at www.ilo.org/declaration as of 14:00 UTC 4 May 2006.

^{2/} Nine out of 10 ILO member States, representing nearly 80 per cent of the world's children, have now ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), while four out of five member States representing over 60 per cent of the world's child population have ratified the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).