

Child Labour in Arab States

Child labour is a significant problem in the region and there is growing evidence that its worst forms persist in many countries. The urban informal sector, seasonal agriculture, street work and domestic labour are of particular concern. Underlying this problem are rising poverty and widening income distribution differentials, an educational system that is unable to retain children, and uneven regional economic and social development that strongly favours urban areas. Although the gender gap in school enrolment has been slowly narrowing, inequity and illiteracy persist.

Working children in this region are vulnerable to participation in illicit activities such as drug trafficking and the commercial sex industry, recruitment by religious extremists, poor health, exposure to unsafe working environment, and lack of access to skills training.

With a focus on alleviating widespread poverty, accelerating development, improving the health and status of children and women, child labour and other issues concerning the large numbers of youth have begun to receive greater attention. In most Arab countries, the minimum age for employment in hazardous work has been raised from 16 to 18 years. All Middle East and North African countries have ratified ILO Convention No. 182. Ministries of labour and employers' and workers' organizations have established child labour units in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen. Other countries are still in the process of developing national plans of action to address the issue of exploitive child labour.

IPEC is supporting the Governments of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen to adopt and implement an explicit child labour policy, identify national priorities and realize objectives through a coherent national policy. Projects aiming at promoting access to quality basic education through the development of scholarship programmes, flexible schedules, and alternative curricula are being implemented.

Across the region, there is still a need to raise awareness of child labour among policy makers and civil societies and to collect more reliable and consistent data. Lack of coordination of efforts among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, lack of good quality affordable schooling options, and lack of information sharing and community awareness of the dangers inherent in child labour are among the main barriers to successful elimination child labour.

IPEC PROJECTS - 2004-05

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| TBP Support Projects - 1: | Lebanon and Yemen |
| Country Programmes - 3: | Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon |