

## CHILD LABOUR IN ASIA

### WHAT IS CHILD LABOUR?

- Child labour: all forms of work performed by children under the age laid down in ILO standards for that kind of work.
- Worst forms of child labour: slavery, debt bondage, prostitution, pornography, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, use of children in drug trafficking and other illicit activities, and all other work likely to be harmful or hazardous to the health, safety or morals of girls and boys under 18 years of age.

### WHAT IS THE SITUATION OF CHILD LABOURERS?

- The ILO has recently estimated that some 246 million children aged 5-17 years are engaged in child labour around the world. Of these, some 179 million are caught in the worst forms of child labour.
- Roughly 2.5 million children are economically active in the developed economies, 2.4 million in the transition countries, 127.3 million in Asia and the Pacific, 17.4 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, 48 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 13.4 million in the Middle East and North Africa.
- The Asian-Pacific region harbours the largest absolute number of economically active children (5-14 years), some 127 million or 60% of the total.
- Workers under 18 face particular hazards. For example, in the US, the rate of injury per hour worked appears to be nearly twice as high for children and adolescents as adults. Similarly, a survey of 13 to 17 year olds in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in 1998-98 revealed injury rates ranging from 3 to 19% of children working before or after school. In the developing countries, an ILO study found average rates of injury and illness per 100 children ranging from a low of 12% in agriculture (for boys) to a high of 35% (for girls) in the construction sector.
- In Thailand, the trafficking of children represents an annual trade equivalent to 500 billion baht, or around 50-60 per cent of the government's annual budget. As a business, child trafficking is more profitable than drug trafficking.
- In 1996, it was estimated that a total of 194,180 foreign child labourers were working in Thailand. Most of the children were from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia; 70 per cent were boys who typically work on construction sites, or in small shops, factories or homes.
- The majority of young Chinese women who are trafficked from Yunnan Province are sold to work in the sex industry in Thailand.
- In Jaipur, India some 13,000 children are working in the gem polishing industry.
- It has been estimated that 18,000 children are working in small-scale mining in Papua New Guinea. The estimates for the Philippines and Indonesia are 9,300 and 2,180 respectively.
- In Jakarta, the estimated number of child domestic workers is 70,700. A survey recently conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics put the total number of child labourers in Indonesia (between the ages of 10 and 14) at 2.3 million.
- An estimated 1,160 children are working on jermals (fishing platforms) in the Philippines. Up to 2,900 children may be recruited annually in this sector.
- In Bangladesh, roughly 6.3 million children are engaged in about 300 forms of work. Of these, 45 are considered to be risky for children.

- The number of economically active children in Pakistan has been estimated to be 3.3 million.

### **ILO ACTION - EXAMPLES**

The ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is the world's largest technical cooperation programme on child labour. Since its inception in 1992, IPEC programmes in more than 75 countries have had considerable impact in both removing hundreds of thousands of children from the workplace, raising general awareness of this problem and building the capacity of institutions with responsibility for child labour. Recent examples of IPEC projects include:

**NEPAL** - In 1998-99, IPEC was instrumental in rescuing more than 4,000 children from hazardous work, while providing support for their rehabilitation and re-integration. Over 3,700 child workers have also benefited from the Non-Formal Education/Out-of-School Programme, and more than 2,500 children were provided with support to join formal school.

**BANGLADESH** - This project preceded from a 1995 commitment by all Bangladeshi garment producers to free their workplaces of child labour. During the three years that followed, the actual number of children employed in this sector was reduced from almost 10,000 in 1995 to around 1,500 in 1998. This was achieved via a programme based on child labour monitoring and social rehabilitation. It involved cooperation between employers, the Bangladeshi Government and various UN Bodies.

**PAKISTAN** - Commencing in August of 2000, this project was designed to prevent and eliminate child labour in the production of soccer balls in the Sialkot district. It was based on workplace monitoring and the provision of alternatives to children and their families, including basic education, pre-vocational and skills training, basic health care and income generation opportunities. To date, more than 90% of Sialkot's stitching centres are being monitored, some 6,019 children are enrolled in newly-created non-formal education centres and 3,229 children have been provided with healthcare.

### **CONVENTIONS**

The ILO's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) has been ratified by 116 countries. Its aim is the effective abolition of child labour in those children under the age of completion of compulsory schooling or, in any case, under the age of 15 years.

The ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), ratified by 117 countries, focuses on the abolition of the worst forms of child labour for children under 18 years of age.

### **OTHER RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS**

Other relevant international standards include: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), outlining the economic, civil, cultural and social rights of children. Ratified by all UN member States except two, the CRC is monitored by the Committee on the Rights of the Child; and, the Optional Protocols to the CRC (2000) extending CRC obligations relating to the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and to the involvement of children in armed conflict.

*Sources: ILO. Global Report: A Future Without Child Labour, Report I(B) International Labour Conference, 90th Session, 2002, IPEC Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific: Briefing Note on Trafficking in Greater Mekong Sub-region, IPEC fact sheets, IPEC Programme to Combat Child Labour in the Fishing Sector in Indonesia and the Philippines, Global March Against Child Labour's Child Labour News Service, 1 April 2002, available at: <http://www.globalmarch.org/clns/index.html>, UNICEF (2001). "Profiting from abuse: An investigation into the sexual exploitation of children", Labour Ministry survey, Bangladesh, and IPEC Country Programme Progress Report for Bangladesh.*