

CHILD LABOUR STORIES

CVETI - BULGARIA

Cveti is a girl of 12. She has been registered in the database of the Local Commission to Combat Juvenile Delinquency. She lives with her family - her parents and 4 sisters aged between 4 to 10 and a brother of 13 - in a small town near Sofia. Every morning she travels with her mother and sisters to Sofia to 'work' for the family.

Cveti and her sisters have never attended school. She has been engaged in pick-pocketing from a very early age. Her brother goes to school and their parents are determined that he should complete his secondary education.

Cveti usually steals in busy trams and shops. She is eager to earn as much as possible. She said she was making money to prepare for her marriage that her father had planned for her for next year.

According to the child protection law she was referred to the local department for child protection and to the IPEC implementing agency in order for her to get enrolled in school. A special Plan of Action for working with her parents was designed. Her parents are receiving counselling for finding a job and for enrolment in the vocational training subsidised by the Government. The parents will receive financial support conditional on Cveti's regular attendance at school. The parents were also counselled by the Directorate on Social Assistance on the effects of stealing - a "worst form of child labour" according to the ILO - on their daughter's future. The local police also started an investigation on the criminal part of the case since this type of exploitation of child labour usually means that organised criminal groups are involved. The protection of Cveti from possible revenge of organised gangs has been a key element of her rehabilitation plan.

KADER - TURKEY

Kader is 8 years old. She has 2 brothers and 2 sisters. Her father is jobless and her mother is almost blind. Kader used to work with her elder sisters and brothers in cotton picking for the survival of their family but she also had another responsibility in the family. She was her mother's eyes.

With IPEC's effort, Kader and her brother Selahattin (12 years old) registered with the social support center within the framework of an IPEC programme entitled Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour in Seasonal Commercial Agriculture Through Education implemented by the Ministry of National Education. After one and a half months of work with Kader and Selahattin, the IPEC project coordinator convinced their family to enroll Kader and Selahattin in primary boarding school. At first, her mother let Kader's brother go to boarding school but said that she couldn't live without Kader. Kader is her eyes, and she can't do anything without

her. It was very difficult to convince her mother but she eventually made a sacrifice for the sake of her child.

Kader is now one of the lucky children enrolled in boarding school through the ILO-IPEC Project being implemented in Karatas/Adana. Since 2002 the Ministry of National Education, in cooperation with IPEC Turkey, has started to offer special quotas for working children, and as a result thousands of working children have been withdrawn from work and enrolled in schools.

MILI - INDONESIA

When Mili's father died, she and her mother left their village to find jobs in Jakarta as domestic workers. She was 11 years old.

Mili soon found an employer in Bekasi, a suburb of Jakarta, but was separated from her mother. At first, her pregnant employer was kind to her and treated her as a part of the family. But after the baby was born, she became harsh with Mili. Mili worked under constant harassment and verbal abuse. Being yelled at all the time, she felt useless and unwanted. She had not been paid for her work for over a year and a half when she discovered the Sanggar Puri centre for child domestic workers, run by an NGO called YKAI, which works with IPEC.

After six months, YKAI social workers successfully removed the 12-year-old girl from her job. She was keen to continue her education and went back to school.

SOK KENG - CAMBODIA

Sok Keng (14 years old) lives in a small village outside of Phnom Penh where working in quarries is the only option for many families to earn a little money to support themselves. The work is backbreaking and poorly paid, but Sok Keng knew at an early age she would have to work to help her family to survive. Too small to be much help in the quarry, she went to a nearby factory to find work. In Cambodia, the garment industry is playing a key role in rebuilding the country's economy with over 1.6 billion dollars in exports. It employs some 200,000 workers, mostly women, who are able to support an entire family on their wages. But those higher wages also attract underage girls like Sok Keng who falsify their documents to get a job.

Under a unique partnership with the Cambodian government and employers, the International Labour Organization is working with companies to help them apply the country's labour laws. Underage workers like Sok Keng are identified by the ILO's factory monitors and placed at one of the training centres set up in nearby villages. There she learns the skills to get a good job in this expanding industry once she is legally of age to work.

NAZIA - PAKISTAN

Sixteen year old Nazia is one of the many beneficiaries of the ILO-IPEC "Elimination of Child Labour in the Soccer Ball Industry in Sialkot" project. She was a stitcher of soccer balls (or football, as it is known in most parts of the world) until admitted to a non-formal education centre, where she is now enjoying the skill of sewing in a very different way. She says that most village children were destined for stitching before the arrival of the project. It changed

their lives in many ways. Education was certainly the most beneficial, but an alternative skill like sewing is by no means less important. “It has added to the confidence of girls by proving them capable of learning and performing other skills as well,” she says. Education gave the children a second chance - and an alternative skill is a third chance. Sewing is essential for girls in rural life because it is a social sign of maturity. It adds to the family income and helps save money which otherwise would have gone to tailors. Sumera of the same village also says that lives of girls have improved with the learning of tailoring. “No one from the village, including our parents, thought us capable of doing anything but stitching which had become a hereditary skill. But by learning tailoring, the girls saw their respect going a few notches up the social ladder.”

Launched in 1997, the Soccer Ball Project, which joined the forces of many partners including FIFA (International Football Federation), achieved all the targets it set, and went beyond: it educated 10,572 students through 255 non-formal education centres, mainstreamed 5,838 of them and provided health cover to 5,408 students. It also succeeded in cleaning up 95 per cent of the manufacturing line of hand-sewn soccer ball industry in Sialkot district.

The real contribution of the project, however, goes beyond these tangible targets and lies in the transformation in perception and behaviour in the target community. The most telling long-term impact of the project was convincing the people of Sialkot district that children must not be denied their right to be children - that they had to have the right to education, recreation and health coverage.

The social acceptability of the project grew further when it helped improve working conditions for adult workers in the industry at the stitching centres. Before the launch of the project, most of the stitching was done in homes and it was difficult to monitor home-based units, whether it was to stop child labour or to ensure decent working conditions.

Monitoring by the “Independent Monitoring Association for Child Labour” (IMAC) ensures that children are no longer involved in any form of child labour in soccer ball production in Pakistan. The monitoring system consists of both internal and external monitoring. Internal monitoring used by the participating manufacturers, helps them to make sure that their sub-contractors neither use children at the work places/stitching centres nor slip the material into houses where there could be a likelihood of children’s involvement in work. The monitoring helps manufacturers to check any unfair practices by their sub-contractors, at the same time that it enables better quality control of their products which in turn gives an added value to their products.

AIDS ORPHANS - SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Rosemary Wangui takes care of 13 children. Four are her own, four are from a sister who simply disappeared one day, and five are from her second sister who died of AIDS. How Rosemary provides for this extended family that is so dependent on her, is nearly beyond belief. In a country with a 50% unemployment rate, it is a miracle that she finds employment at all.

Lucy Njoki is 13 years old. She is Rosemary’s niece, whose mother died of AIDS. When Lucy’s mother fell sick, Lucy dropped out of school to support her. But after her mother’s death, an NGO funded Lucy’s return to school. She steadily worked her way up to the top of the class,

despite having to help her extended family by working evenings and on weekends. At the end of the year, the funding received from the NGO for her schooling dries up. She already knows neither she nor her big family will have any means to keep her in school. Her part-time job is about to become her full-time job again.

John Njenga, Rosemary's eldest son, is 14 years old and sometimes works in a nearby quarry, earning one dollar a day. He left school in the final term of Grade 9, after Rosemary's parents died, and one year later her sister passed away. As the eldest he was called upon to bring income into the family. He was 12.

Sub-Saharan Africa already outranks the rest of the world for the proportion of its children in the labour force. It also outranks the rest of the world for its huge percentage of AIDS orphans. The two make a deadly combination. The misery of AIDS orphans begin even before the death of their parents. Just as the virus attacks the human body, so does AIDS wipe out a household's savings and all its resources. Many children drop out of school during this period to help support their parents' steady decline and eventual funeral costs. When they drop out of school, their nightmare begins.

BRAULIO - PERU

Like many other children in La Rinconada, 14-year-old Braulio had worked in the mine since he was very young, carrying heavy loads of ore and working also as a quimbalatero, or stone crusher. When he was 13, he says, "One day I didn't feel well, I was very tired and fell down a few times while I was working. At the exit from the mine my barrow overturned and all the ore fell out. The captain was watching me. He kicked me hard because of this."

Braulio had heard about the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) project for the mines in Rinconada, which had been reaching out to the community through its partner organization, CARE. "I had heard about it on the radio. I decided to contact the project. They came to the mine and talked to the mine manager, and he was sanctioned. After that I only worked for one more month, helping to take care of the owner's warehouse".

The IPEC project in La Rinconada aims to strengthen and expand health, education, nutrition and other services, as well as to improve the working conditions of adult miners. Awareness raising is also a priority. When Braulio, his brothers and their father began to attend meetings organized by the project, "We learned that working was not good for us. I had aches and pains, sometimes we didn't eat well, and it was difficult to go to school and study. Now we are in a better situation. We know more and want to move ahead and be successful in our lives".

Braulio's father now understands how important it is to offer a better future for his children. "My father was very grateful and told them that from now on only he would work, and that we could devote ourselves to school". Over 2,500 children have been helped by the IPEC/CARE project, which is working towards the progressive elimination of child labour in artisanal mines. The local community supports this goal and has increased its vigilance over child labour, to keep other children from sharing Braulio's experience

R R - PARAGUAY

R.R is 10 years old. On November 30, 2002, she was found by a merchant from Ciudad del Este on Adraina Jara y Pampliega street. It was approximately 9:00 p.m. when she was found in one of the most frequented parts of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay.

She was very dirty, and was dressed in pants and a pullover, and wearing Japanese-style slippers. When she was found, she had about 12 USD (80.000 Gs, Guaraníes) in her pockets, a product of her “sexual activity”. It had been 48 hours since she had returned to her mother’s home, but she feared returning as she had not met “the goal” which had been established by her mother.

R.R.’s first contact was with Petrona Perez, of the Local Committee of the Prevention and Elimination of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation programme in Ciudad del Este, a group formed by the ILO along the Paraguay-Brazil borders. Perez had been observing the small girl and had offered to return her to her family. R.R. used the opportunity to tell Perez that she would not return home as she was certain her mother would beat her.

On 2 December 2002, Petrona took the young girl to the Children and Adolescents Courthouse, to enter charges and to turn her over to the authorities. The judge referred the case to Municipal Ministry for the Rights of Children and Adolescents, who then gave custody of the girl to a provisional guardian who would provide protection and support, as required by the law.

At the Courthouse, R.R. told the judge that the money found in her pockets was the fruit of her “sexual work”. She explained that, encouraged by her mother, she would leave her house in the morning and at times, according to the labour market, would cross the Puente de la Amistad (Friendship Bridge), arriving in the border city of Foz de Iguazu, Brazil on the pretext of buying candies to sell later. She admitted to having an “established clientele”.

The girl’s mother was detained by the police and taken into custody at the Women’s Prison in Ciudad del Este. Meanwhile, R.R. was taken into provisional custody by a next door neighbour.

Prior to the involvement of the courts in R.R.’s life, she lived with her mother, an employed widow of 40 years of age, together with 7 siblings. Her siblings include a 14-year-old sister, who ran away with her boyfriend; Eduardo, a 13-year-old drug addict; Tito, who at 15 years of age works in the streets cleaning windshields; and the others who are still very young.

Young R.R. was the first beneficiary of the Center for the Prevention and Integral Attention to Boys, Girls and Adolescents of Sexual Commercial Exploitation in Ciudad del Este, an action program executed by the Diocese of the Ciudad del Este, with the support of the ILO.

Today R.R. goes to school, receives psychological attention and health care, and takes part in personal development workshops, making positive steps towards improving her behaviour and outlook. She has been taken completely out of the commercial sexual exploitation situation and away from the influence of the adults, including her mother and step-father, who used to transport her from her home to the center of Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguazu to prostitute herself. Her family is also receiving assistance from the Center.