

## CHILD LABOUR IN LATIN AMERICA

### 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.
- 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 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.
- Although accurate statistics are not available, child labour is a potentially growing problem in the poorest and largest Caribbean countries, especially in Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Suriname.
- In Brazil, there are more than 7 million child labourers. Of these, over 560,000 are child domestic labourers.
- In Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, 20 percent of all girls between the ages of 10 and 14 are engaged as domestics, and in rural areas the percentages are even higher.
- In Honduras, 40% of working children are in the agricultural sector. In Guatemala, the figure is 65% and in El Salvador 67%.
- During the busy season preceding the Christmas holidays, roughly 3,500 children are working in El Salvador's fireworks factories.
- There are approximately 314,900 economically active children between the ages of 5-17 in Ecuador, a nation with a total population of 12 million people.
- IPEC has estimated that some 50,000 children are working in small-scale gold mining in Peru and 13,500 in Bolivia.

## **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. Some examples of recent IPEC projects in Latin America include:

**PERU - Mining:** Since 1998, direct assistance projects have been implemented with IPEC support in two mining regions of Peru. The projects have benefited some 1,000 children between the ages of six and 18 and their families. The aim has been to withdraw children from hazardous work and rehabilitate them through education, skills training and other support services.

**PANAMA, COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA, GUATEMALA, EL SALVADOR, and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC - Sexual Exploitation:** This project is aimed at preventing and eliminating the worst forms of child labour. It will assist countries in the sub-region that have demonstrated a commitment to end child labour by ratifying the ILO Convention of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (C.182) to implement the Convention and its Recommendation by: Carrying out policy and action oriented research on the worst forms of child labour, conducting awareness raising activities, supporting a process of tripartite consultation to develop national programmes of action and preventive strategies, and formulating and implementing action programmes for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

**GUATEMALA - Fireworks:** IPEC, in partnership with the Government and NGOs, is implementing a project to prevent 2,500 children from entering work in the fireworks industry, while at the same time withdrawing some 2,200 child workers in the same sector in two municipalities in the vicinity of Guatemala City.

## **ILO 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.

These instruments have been almost universally ratified in Latin America.

## **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 fact sheets, IPEC Programme to Prevent and Progressively Eliminate Child Labour in Small-scale and Traditional Gold Mining in S. America, ILO-National Institute of Statistics Survey, IPEC Programme for the Identification, Elimination and Prevention of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Anglophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, IPEC Programme to Combat Child Labour in the Fireworks Industry in El Salvador, IPEC Programme to Contribute to the Prevention and Elimination of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Dominican Republic, UNICEF (2001). "Profiting from abuse: An investigation into the sexual exploitation of children", and *Global March Against Child Labour's Child Labour News Service*, 1 April 2002, available at: <http://www.globalmarch.org/clns/index.html>