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Hazardous child domestic work: A briefing sheet





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ILO definitions

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Child	A person under the age of eighteen.
Domestic work	Household tasks performed in the household of a third person. Usually excludes domestic chores carried out by members of the family.
Child labour	Work undertaken by children under the legal minimum working ages. The law normally lays down various minimum ages for different types of work. (e.g., normal full-time work, light work, and hazardous or potentially harmful work).
Child domestic labour	Domestic work undertaken by children under the legal minimum working age, as well as by children above the legal minimum age but under the age of eighteen, under slavery-like, hazardous, or other exploitative conditions – a form of “child labour to be eliminated” as defined in international treaties.
Child domestic workers (CDWs)	Children who carry out either child domestic labour, as explained above, or permissible domestic work.
Employer	Members of a household that provides work for child domestic workers.
Worst forms of child labour	<p>A term defined in the ILO Convention No. 182. It comprises (Article 3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; • The use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performance; • The use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities—in particular, for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; • Work which, by its nature or because of the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of the child. (commonly referred to as “hazardous work”)
Light work	Work permitted by law for children of at least twelve or thirteen years of age. The law may allow for specific activities which are not harmful to a child’s health and development and do not prejudice attendance at school and participation in vocational training, nor “the capacity to benefit from the instruction received.” For statistical purposes, ILO defines this as work which does not exceed fourteen hours per week.
Hazard and risk	<p>A “hazard” is anything with the potential to do harm.</p> <p>A “risk” is the likelihood of harm from a hazard being realised.</p>

This briefing sheet explains:¹

- I. ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182
- II. Defining child domestic labour
- III. Identifying what is hazardous about child domestic labour
- IV. Guidance for decision makers on risk prevention or risk reduction measures
- V. Addressing child domestic labour in the context of the conventions
- VI. Conclusions

*The hazardous child domestic work:
A Briefing Sheet is targeted at
policymakers, trade unions,
employers' organizations
and other stakeholders involved
in the debates within countries
on the hazardous work lists
required by Conventions Nos. 138 and 182.*

The briefing sheet reinforces the three IPEC pillars of “prevention,” “protection” and “withdrawal/rehabilitation” of children engaged in hazardous work.

Prevention

ILO standards on child labour require that children under the national legal working age (refer to “child labour” on the Definitions Section) should not be domestic workers. They should be in school and should be free to meet and play with other children. This is the only way to adequately prepare them for their futures

Protection

IPEC’s protection strategy recognizes that many children who are above the minimum legal working age in their country (e.g., 14-17 years) continue to be at risk from workplace hazards and need to be protected. This may require improving occupational safety and health (OSH) and working conditions. Strengthening risk management² is considered to be an important basis for these types of initiatives.

Withdrawal/rehabilitation

As per Convention No.182, efforts should be made to achieve the removal and rehabilitation of children in the worst forms of child labour, including those in domestic work, as rapidly as possible and as a priority. Rehabilitation in this case means providing direct support to withdrawn child domestic labourers to rebuild their lives as children, with their families and communities.



Photo: Fernando Vindas

¹ The technical content in this briefing sheet is drawn primarily from: IPEC, *Health and safety fact sheet on hazardous child domestic labour*. ILO, San Jose, 2005. Originally produced in Spanish: *Fichas de seguridad y salud sobre trabajo infantil doméstico peligroso*.
² ILO, *Guidelines on occupational safety and health systems*. Geneva, 2001.



I. ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention No. 138 (C138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182 (C182) both require ratifying countries to:

- Define and make lists of hazardous work prohibited to children under 18 years.
- Enforce the prohibition of this work through law and action.

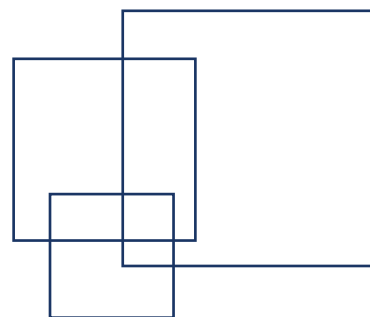
C138 requires that countries set a minimum age for admission to work of not less than 15 years (developing countries may initially set a minimum age of 14 years). Hazardous work (and other worst forms – defined by C182) may not be permitted for anyone below 18 years. According to C138, a minimum age for light work can be set at 13 years (12 for developing countries).

Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 do not aim to prevent children from assisting their parents by participating in family chores, making beds, setting the table, helping in the garden, and performing other tasks for the good of the family unit. However, the use of a child in hazardous types of work as determined in accordance with C138 and C182, even when occurring within a family setting, should be considered as the worst forms of child labour and prevented as such. All girls and boys under eighteen must be protected from these dangers either by an improvement in the health and safety standards and general working environment or by withdrawing them from the workplace altogether.

Therefore, when the hazardous work list is being determined at the national level, under C138/C182 and following tripartite consultation, domestic labour must not be overlooked.



Photo: Gilberto Bolaños





II. Defining child domestic labour

Child domestic labour is domestic work undertaken by: a) children under the legal minimum working age, and b) children above the legal minimum age but under the age of eighteen and subject to slavery-like, hazardous, or other exploitative conditions; a form of “child labour to be eliminated” as defined in international treaties.

Child domestic workers are classified as children who carry out either child domestic labour, as explained above, or other permissible domestic work.

It is clear that millions of children work in peoples’ houses, all over the world. However, due to the informal and hidden nature of the work, achieving reliable and accurate estimates is problematic and the estimates are thought not to capture the full scale of the situation. Nevertheless, some data are presented at the end of this document to offer an insight into the magnitude of child domestic work across the world.

It is important to note that the term “child domestic labour” usually excludes domestic chores carried out by members of the core (nuclear) family.³

Fact: Child domestic workers do a wide range of work in and around employers’ homes

In urban areas, child domestic labour activities consist mainly of cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children and the elderly. In rural areas, children are also likely to participate in farming activities. Some common activities carried out by child domestic workers are listed in Box 1.

Box 1: Common activities carried out by child domestic workers

- Serving food
- Cleaning the kitchen, equipment, and utensils
- Attending to and serving guests
- Washing and Ironing clothes
- Sewing
- Cleaning and polishing shoes
- Organizing rooms
- Making beds
- Cleaning objects, decorations, equipment, furniture, and furnishings
- Sweeping and washing floors
- Cleaning toilets and bathrooms
- Maintaining outside areas
- Cleaning automobiles or other transport equipment
- Repairing equipment and dwellings
- Giving personal assistance and care
- Accompanying persons
- Caring for animals
- Cleaning areas where animals are kept
- Making purchases
- Organising and storing purchases
- Seeking and hauling water
- Seeking and hauling firewood and other fuel
- Disposing of garbage and/or refuse

³ While child domestic labour is usually understood as domestic work done by children in the employer’s household rather than in their own family, care should be taken not to allow an over-extended notion of “family” or of a disguised “adoption” to camouflage a situation that is equal to the worst forms of child labour in domestic work. There are many cases in the literature of children being taken in by members of the extended family only to be put to work as domestic workers under extremely exploitative conditions.

Fact: Both boys and girls are involved in domestic labour

Overall, child domestic workers are more likely to be girls, but there are a few countries in which boys outnumber girls.

Generally, child labour is typified by a lack of gender equity as social patterns and stereotypes traditionally associated with girls and boys often determine the activities that are assigned to them. Girls are often more likely to be overloaded with work than boys since, in addition to their domestic workload in the employers home, they may also be required to complete a series of chores and jobs when they return to their own homes.

Fact: Child domestic labour is often overlooked as a problem

Many people, from policymakers to the general public, do not give Child Domestic Labour the recognition that it warrants given its potential for abuse and violation of children's rights. Domestic work for children is often seen not as a job but as a favour granted by the employer to help poor children and their families.

As a result of these prevailing attitudes, laws and policies to protect child domestic labourers are usually not created or, if created, are not enforced. National decision makers and local government officials, including labour inspectors, often do not consider child domestic labour as a "labour issue". There are several reasons for this:

- Labour codes are not systematically applied to child domestic labour because it is informal, lacks recognition as a form of economic activity, and occurs in private homes.
- Labour laws and regulations are seen by many as unenforceable with private homeowners.
- Child domestic workers are rarely counted by national statistics because they are difficult to reach and often hidden behind closed doors.
- There is social and institutional reluctance in

many countries to accept that domestic service is a form of child labour. In fact, child domestic labour is often excluded from laws and policies designed to address other forms of child labour because it is seen as impinging on the rights of the family.

When gross abuse of child domestic workers surfaces in the media, experience has shown that some action is usually taken by the government or interested groups to improve the situation or to punish the offenders. Such actions are often short lived however (sometimes only as long as the media pursue the topic), and it is not known what percentage of abuse goes unnoticed. The extensive literature on the subject suggests that many harmful situations go unrecognized and that these "invisible" cases are widespread and common.

Fact: Child domestic labour is not often in the best interests of the child

Defenders of domestic work for children maintain that the work is beneficial for the child, particularly for girls, as they are taught important skills in maintaining and running a household. They note that domestic service provides children with more secure places to spend their days, more and better food, clean water, and safer places to sleep than they would have otherwise had. They are generally thought to be out of harm's way.

However, several international and local studies by a variety of groups have shown that, on the contrary, children are hired primarily because they are cheaper to employ and easier to control than adults⁴. It can be reasonably assumed that a proportion of people who hire child domestic workers are more interested in the services received than in the wellbeing of the child.

The studies also illustrate that children engaged in domestic labour are often viewed by employers as harder-working and more stable at work, more obedient, and better trusted than adult workers. They are also willing to work longer hours. As a result, they are at greater risk of being subject to abuse than adults.

⁴ See for example: IPEC, *South Africa – Child domestic workers: a national report*, ILO, Geneva, 2002, p. 18; and discussions on the following websites: <http://www.wfmh.org/childlabor.htm>, http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_14398.html, and <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/sweat5/chap2.htm>. Accessed on January 2006.

III. Identifying what is hazardous about child domestic labour

Child labourers are susceptible to all the dangers faced by adult workers when placed in the same situation. Moreover, the work hazards that pose risks to adults can have an even more severe effect on the health and well being of children.

Children differ biologically from adults in their anatomical, physiological and psychological characteristics, placing them at greater risk from hazards. They are more likely than adults to be poorly trained, under-supervised and to lack experience. Children do not always perceive dangerous situations correctly and may also have increased susceptibilities to chemicals.⁵

This section describes and discusses some of the main hazards and risks faced by domestic workers with a special emphasis on the extra risks faced by child workers.

Tasks

Tasks associated with selected domestic work activities and associated hazards and risks

- **Preparing food:** There are over forty tasks that child domestic workers are known to do in connection with preparing food. They use sharp kitchen utensils to cut meat and vegetables, they slaughter animals, they pour and light fuel for cooking, they cook with oils and fats that can splatter and explode, and they work around hot stoves and pans in sometimes smoky environments.
- **Cleaning the kitchen, equipment, and utensils:** One of the many tasks related to this activity is scrubbing kitchen surfaces and utensils, sometimes using excessive force in awkward positions, with potentially harmful cleaners.
- **Washing clothes:** This activity includes a series of tasks such as transferring heavy loads of clothes from places where they are kept to areas where

they are washed. These areas are as diverse as bathrooms, patios or terraces, public communal washing areas, or rivers and lakes. In some cases, the clothes need to be hauled back and forth between external laundry services. Clothes are often scrubbed by hand for long periods of time with caustic detergents, chlorine bleach, and other potentially hazardous chemicals.



Photo: Gilberto Bolaños

5 ILO, *Children at Work: Health and Safety Risks*. Geneva, 2002.

- **Cleaning objects, decorations, equipment, furniture and furnishings:** Tasks include washing items with potentially harmful cleaners.
- **Sweeping and washing floors:** It is common for child domestic workers to work bent over for hours every day while sweeping and washing floors, particularly in countries where the traditional brooms have short handles. They may also spend considerable time working on their knees without adequate rest breaks. Both situations can lead to serious ergonomic injuries.
- **Maintaining outside areas:** This activity may involve sharpening tools and power equipment for turf and garden maintenance. It may involve spreading chemical substances on plants to fertilize and control pests. Child domestic workers may be required to clean outside walls, roofs and/or chimneys, sometimes at high elevations, with potentially harmful chemical disinfectants and cleaners.
- **Repairing equipment and dwellings:** Child domestic workers repair and maintain homes, doing activities such as fixing roofs, changing light bulbs, repairing lamps and electrical sockets, cleaning gutters and downspouts, and painting walls and gates. Sometimes this type of work is conducted at dangerous heights on uneven surfaces with inappropriate ladders.
- **Giving personal assistance and care:** This is perhaps one of the most recognized child domestic labour activities, since it includes the tasks of transferring, changing position or posture, aiding with crutches, canes, walkers, helping to dress and undress, changing clothes, diapers and devices (such as catheters or drains), bathing, as well as feeding and giving massages. Child domestic workers may also be in charge of complying with medical prescriptions that involve injections and treating wounds. These tasks can lead to a variety of injuries and illnesses.
- **Hauling water:** In some dwellings it is necessary to transfer and haul water to the dwelling. In many cases, children must carry the heavy water containers for long distances.

- **Seeking and hauling firewood and other fuel:** Tasks associated with this activity can lead to cuts and ergonomic injuries, primarily from lifting and moving heavy loads. Pressurized fuel cylinders add another level of risk if they are transported without being properly secured.
- **Providing security:** Security tasks consist of walking around the dwelling or installations at night to protect and take care of them. This may require the use of firearms and may increase the risk of violence or other forms of abuse.

Hours of work

Studies have shown that in many countries, children report working more than twelve to fourteen hours per day (up to sixteen hours per day in some cases), seven days a week. Children living in the homes of their employers are often on call for work duty throughout the whole day and night with little or no separation between work and private time.



Photo: Fernando Vindas

Long hours of work are a serious hazard for child domestic workers. Dawn to dusk is too often a typical working day, and the need for rest periods and holidays is generally ignored.

Excessive working hours and the denial of sleep can have a direct impact on the health and growth of children, with long-term consequences in some cases, including chronic fatigue syndrome. Due to physiological changes that occur during childhood and adolescence, child workers are particularly susceptible to fatigue. Sleep laboratory research has shown that adolescents may actually need as much or more sleep than younger children, at about 9.5 hours per night.⁶

According to a range of studies summarized in the recent ILO report, *Working time: Its impact on safety and health*,⁷ long working hours, particularly those involving the irregular distribution of working hours and work at night, negatively affect adult health. The report states that regularly working in excess of 48 hours per week constitutes an important occupational stressor, which significantly increases the risk of mental health problems. Regularly working more than 60 hours per week clearly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease. The impact of long working hours on child health is not known although it is reasonable to assume that children would be at least as prone to the stated negative health effects as adults.

Harassment, violence and isolation

Children in domestic work report suffering frequent physical and verbal abuse, many say that they do not think they are free to quit their jobs.

The child frequently has no say, no control over conditions of service, often no access to his or her earnings, no privacy, no opportunity to go to school, no social interaction with peers and, for those living in employers' homes, little or no chance to see his or her family. Some never leave the house, sleep on the kitchen floor, have virtually no holidays or rest breaks, and are paid very little or nothing at all.⁸ Many report being lonely.

Child domestic workers experience discrimination in the household, even by the employers' children, and are often spoken to in different tones than family members use with one another. Such isolation is harmful for children and may lead to psychological

stress and damage even where there is no physical abuse.

Girl children, particularly those living in employers' homes, are at special risk of sexual harassment and abuse (although boys are not spared such abuse). Sexual harassment and abuse is much more than just a mental health hazard; it negatively affects children's lives in many ways and can have harmful consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV infection.

A study in one country found that the girls arriving in support centres for children working in prostitution had often been former domestic servants who were sexually abused in their places of work and turned out onto the street.⁹

As in all forms of sexual abuse of children, the child faces long-term repercussions from such exploitation. The impact is severe on the reproductive health of girls whose bodies are not ready for sexual activity. Beyond the risks of STD infection, they may suffer lesions that do not heal properly and complications from pregnancy. There is also psychological damage from sexual activity that is not understood or that causes shame or guilt (and, sometimes, exclusion from the family or community).



Photo: Gilberto Bolaños

⁶ Carskadon, M.A., *Sleep patterns during adolescent development*, presentation to the US National Research Council. Washington DC, 25 June 1997.

⁷ See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/publ/wtwo-as-03.htm> for the report. Accessed on January 2006.

⁸ Black, M., *Caged birds, silent song*, available at <http://www.newint.org/issue292/caged.htm>. Accessed on January 2006.

⁹ IPEC, *Helping hands or shackled lives?* Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it. ILO, Geneva, 2004.

Physical, chemical, and biological dangers

Children in domestic service may be exposed to hazardous substances such as cleaning fluids and agricultural chemical products. They may work in kitchens with poor ventilation in close proximity to fire and smoke. They may not understand the threat of fire or explosion when handling liquid petroleum gas and flammable liquids in enclosed areas. They also may have to use processes that involve equipment that is beyond their physical capabilities, and they may not be instructed on how to operate the equipment safely.

Child domestic workers who care for animals, younger children, and the elderly are at risk of infection from bacterial, viral, and parasitic illnesses from secretions, blood, excreta, and vomit from persons or animals.

Continuous exposure to high levels of noise at work can cause permanent hearing problems and damage.¹⁰ Repeated noise levels of 80 dB(A) upwards can result in risk of permanent hearing damage. Furthermore, studies on noise exposure among young and adult workers have found that young workers are more susceptible to noise-induced hearing loss than adults. Therefore, noise exposure limits set for adults would not be adequate for children.¹¹

Child domestic workers are particularly prone to ergonomic problems because of their small size and underdeveloped bodies. They carry and manipulate heavy loads and are often forced to adapt to equipment and surroundings designed for larger adult workers. This can lead to serious injury to the hands, wrists, joints, back or other parts of the body. In particular, injuries can result from:

- Working with a bent back (e.g., sweeping and washing floors, harvesting farm produce).
- Lifting or pushing heavy loads (e.g., transporting water, hauling laundry).

Ergonomic injuries usually develop slowly over a period of months or years as a result of repeated exposure and can be very painful or even permanently crippling.¹² The risks of long-term affects are even greater for children who suffer these injuries when their bodies are still in their development stage.

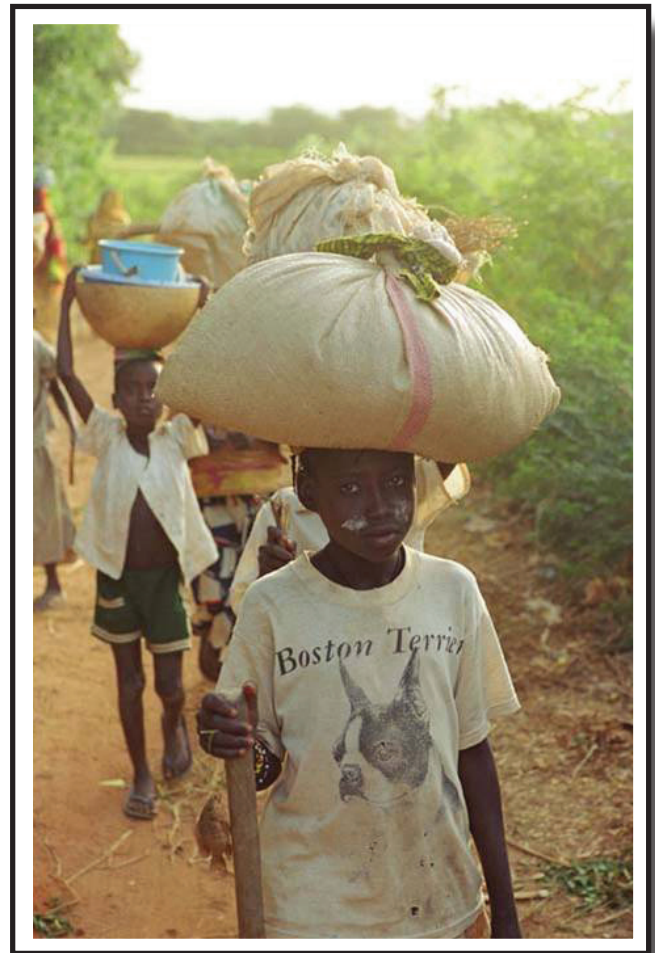


Photo: ILO

- Tools and tasks that require repeated twisting hand or joint movements (e.g., washing clothes for long periods of time with no rest breaks).
- Applying excessive pressure on parts of the hand, back, wrists, or joints (e.g., working on one's knees, washing floors for extended periods).
- Working with the arms outstretched or over the head (e.g., cleaning ceilings or high walls or furniture).

¹⁰ As a guide, if you cannot hear a normal conversation clearly when you are two metres away from the speaker, the noise level is likely to be around 85dB(A) or higher. If you cannot hear someone clearly when you are about one metre away, the level is likely to be around 90dB(A) or higher.

¹¹ ILO, *Children at Work: Health and Safety Risks*. Geneva, 2002, p. 74.

¹² See <http://www.itcilo.it/english/actrav/telearn/osh/ergo/ergoa.htm> for a discussion on ergonomic hazards and ways to prevent them. Accessed on January 2006.



IV. Guidance for decision makers on risk prevention or risk reduction measures

Decision makers need to discuss and debate what domestic labour activities and situations should be considered hazardous for children in their countries and develop risk prevention or reduction measures. Below is a list of selected hazards to help begin this process.

Chemicals

Chemicals used in the domestic environment should be officially registered for domestic/consumer use by the government chemical registration scheme. Ideally, child domestic workers should receive appropriate instruction and training to use such chemicals. Appropriate personal protective equipment should be provided (at no charge), properly stored and replaced at regular intervals. However, in practice it is difficult to monitor whether these steps are taken in peoples' homes.

Under no circumstances should 14-17 year olds either use or be exposed to use "toxic" chemicals/substances. This would include pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, termite-killers, rodenticides), acids (e.g. muriatic acid (hydrochloric acid)) to clean masonry or other surfaces, and chemicals solvents (e.g. paint thinner, white spirit, naphtha, toluene, trichloroethylene, and acetone) to dissolve greases, oil, paint, glue, and similar substances.

Musculoskeletal problems

Because their bodies are still growing, child workers are at risk of bone, tissue and muscle damage - some of which could be permanent - from carrying heavy or awkward loads; from repetitive/forceful actions, and from working for long periods in unnatural/awkward body positions.

Child domestic workers should not be assigned tasks that require performing repetitive actions, standing, working on knees or squatting for extended periods each day. Adequate rest breaks should always be provided.

Simple carts and other assistance devices reduce the amount of hazardous lifting necessary and can improve productivity.

Care and supervision, isolation

The work carried out by child domestic labourers needs regular adult care and supervision. Working long periods in isolation, with no human interaction, may have both short and long-term negative psychosocial consequences and may be considered hazardous work. Once a child tires, he or she becomes particularly vulnerable to injury, and this vulnerability is multiplied if the child is working alone.

Therefore, for a variety of reasons, child domestic workers should not be required to work alone for extended periods each day.

Noise

Child domestic workers should not be allowed to work in areas with high noise levels of 80dB(A) or above. Ear protection (ear plugs) may be required to help protect against short term exposure to noise.

Electricity

Fixed electrical systems and equipment should conform to national electrical standards, and be properly maintained by competent persons.

In no case should children be exposed to danger of electrocution, electric shocks or burns through working with or near unprotected electrical wiring, electrical equipment in bad repair, or equipment that has been modified by people who are not electricians.

Portable electrical equipment, such as electric lawnmowers, power tools, pressure hoses and so on,

is particularly dangerous. Such equipment is often used with long cables and poorly maintained cable extension systems and there is a risk of cables being cut or damaged resulting in electrocution. Use of such equipment by child domestic workers must be properly supervised or discouraged.

Long hours of work, fatigue and sleep needs of adolescents

Workers—particularly children—need clearly defined working hours in order to balance their work and social lives, reduce stress, and plan external activities (e.g., play with peers).

Child domestic workers should not be on call for work in employers' homes at all hours of the day and should not be confined to the household during non-work hours. They should be allowed to sleep, on average, 9.5 hours each night.

Falls

Falls may occur from heights, on the same level or even into wells/pits. Falls from the same level occur from slippery surfaces, uneven ground, poor lighting, tripping over objects or being pushed by a moving object.

Some of the most common causes of accidents are falling from ladders, working platforms, or from roofs. Work at heights by child domestic labourers should be strongly discouraged.

Diseases

There are a whole host of diseases that can be spread from human wastes and secretions, or cleaning out areas contaminated with animal/rodent faeces and urine.

As a condition of employment, employers (heads of households) should ensure that child domestic workers are immunized for preventable diseases and if not, should pay for them to be immunized. Child domestic workers should not be regularly exposed to

waste and secretions, especially human (e.g. faeces, urine, blood, saliva), particularly those of sick persons.

In many instances, overalls and gloves can help reduce risks of infection. Proper washing and sanitary facilities must also be available so that child workers can wash contaminated skin etc in order to reduce the risk of infection.

Information and instructions, contact numbers

Employers should provide child domestic workers with contact information and instructions of what to do in case of an accident or emergency.

Sleeping in employers' homes

Several studies have shown that children living in the homes of their employers are significantly more likely to experience conditions consistent with the worst forms of child labour.¹³ Whilst providing lodging may be a benefit, it also poses great risks to children - particularly girls. Hence, child domestic workers should not be required to sleep in employers' homes



Photo: Fernando Vindas

¹³ IPEC, *Investigating the worst forms of child labour: A synthesis report of selected rapid assessment and national reports*. ILO, Geneva, 2005.



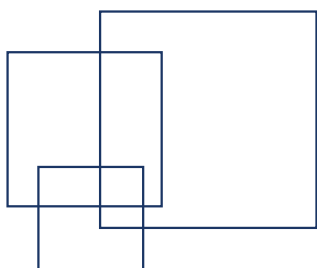
V. Addressing child domestic labour in the context of the Conventions

Child domestic labour is imbedded in the cultures and societies of many countries throughout the world. It is unlikely that this form of employment will be eliminated altogether.

On the other hand, it is fair to say that most people oppose child domestic workers being physically, psychologically, or sexually abused in an employer's home; damaging their growing bodies due to constantly carrying heavy loads or sitting for long hours in unnatural positions. Most people would object to children being told to do tasks that expose them to electrical and fall hazards, harmful chemical substances, sharp and high-speed equipment, etc. Nevertheless, the data and experiences from study after study suggest that these situations occur frequently and that countless child domestic workers are engaged daily in what could be considered hazardous work.

Fact: Child domestic workers can benefit from intervention by national leaders who are committed to their safety and security

The problems related to hazardous work by child domestic workers will not be solved overnight. In many countries, child domestic workers are so common that they are not noticed – they are a part of everyday life. The fact that they work in an unregulated sector with no labour representation and behind the closed doors of private individuals makes finding a solution more difficult. However, steps can be taken to begin addressing child domestic labour and its most hazardous forms.



Fact: The most important first step for decisionmakers is to acknowledge that domestic work should be addressed in the context of child labour under C138 and C182

Below is a simple guide to be considered by those with the power to set national programmes in motion. It does not represent the only actions that can be taken, but it provides decision makers with ideas and methods to begin to develop their own views on how to address child domestic labour in the national context.

- Recognize that domestic service is not acceptable work for children under the national legal working age; and that many hazardous tasks or conditions of domestic service may not be acceptable work for children under the age of eighteen.
- Recognize that child domestic workers are engaged in a form of employment and not some alternative type of child-raising. They have the same rights as other young child workers in employee/employer relationships – even if the work is done in the informal economy.
- Include child domestic labour in national discussions of hazardous work under C138 and C182.
- Convene meetings with representatives from labour groups, private businesses, national and local governments, child rights advocates, employers of domestic workers, occupational safety and health experts, child psychologists, and education specialists to discuss, argue about, and define hazardous activities or situations that are not “permissible” domestic work for children.
- Design and implement monitoring programmes to identify and characterize child domestic workers and detect the work in its worst forms.

- Identify children at special risk with a view to protecting them and take special account of the vulnerability of girl-children.
- Prioritize children who are under the minimum working age. For adolescents above the minimum age, propose protective measures so that conditions can be improved from hazardous to non-hazardous over a reasonably short timeframe.
- Put in place measures to protect child domestic workers until they can be removed from hazardous work without being adversely affected (such as providing them with places to go to interact with peers and caring adults).
- Design direct action programmes to rapidly remove and rehabilitate child domestic workers found in exploitive or hazardous conditions; provide such aid as counselling, remedial schooling, and family support.
- Provide direct assistance to support children who have left child domestic labour so that they can rebuild their lives within their families and communities (including programmes to support those families).
- Provide access to free education.
- Support public awareness campaigns to help a) the public and employers understand that domestic labour is not permissible for children under the national legal working age, and b) to recognize what is a “permissible” and a “not permissible” domestic task for children between that age and eighteen.

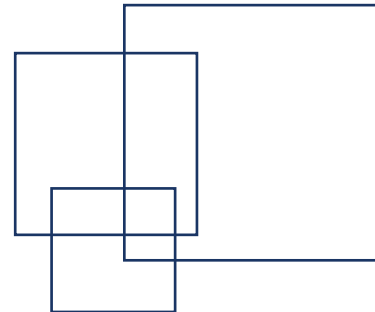


Photo: Gilberto Bolaños

VI. Conclusions

Not everyone who hires a child domestic worker is guilty of terrible abuse. To suggest that is counterproductive and may drive this form of employment further behind closed doors. Although the data are lacking, it is probable that there are many children who benefit by working in the homes of others. But cases of gross exploitation do exist, and those that surface in the media are only the tip of the iceberg. Many more cases go unnoticed.

The numbers of child domestic workers are great in many countries; in some countries this type of labour is the main form of employment for girls. However, any nation with long-term aspirations of growth and advancement built on the contribution of its citizens should recognize clearly that the exploitation of children, in conditions that put their physical and psycho-social health at risk, is not in the nation's best interests.

National leaders and policymakers need to recognize that a safe and healthy core of children is crucial to the future success of their countries

Countries that have ratified C138 and/or C182 have already recognized the importance of protecting child labourers from hazardous work. Hopefully, the information and guidance presented in this briefing sheet will motivate those countries to use these conventions to actively address child domestic labour and eliminate it in its worst forms.



Photo: Gilberto Bolaños

Country	Estimated figures
Southeast and East Asia ¹	
Cambodia, capital city	27,950 children aged between 7 and 17 - one in every 10 children in Phnom Pehn is considered as a CDW. Of them, 41.4% are boys and 58.6% are girls.
Indonesia	688,132 domestic workers are under the age of 18, representing 26.5% of the total 2,593,399 domestic workers nationwide.
Mongolia	6,148 children are employed as CDWs in 6 central districts of Ulaanbaatar city, and 30,427 are employed as children herding livestock and domestic chores in the rural aimags.
Philippines ²	230,000 children worked in private households, of the same survey 120,000 children who lived away from home are employed in private households. (Visayan Forum Foundation, Inc., an NGO, offers a higher estimate of one million CDWs in the country.)
Thailand	10,728 domestic workers are 17 years old or below (out of the total 233,211 domestic workers) 85% of whom are female.
Central America and the Dominican Republic ³	
Costa Rica	12,498 children
Dominican Republic	48,017 children
El Salvador	21,508 children
Guatemala	38,878 children
Honduras	20,764 children
Nicaragua	25,208 children
Panama	9,300 children
Other Countries ⁴	
Bangladesh	300,000 children (in Dhaka)
Burkina Faso	81,200 children 'placed' with families (in Ougadougou & Bobo-Dioulasso)
Ethiopia	6,500 – 7,500 children (in Addis Ababa)
Haiti	250,000 children, of whom 10% are under 10
India	20% of all children under 14 working outside the family are in domestic service
Kenya	200,000 children
Morocco	66,000-88,000 children between the ages of 7 and 15, of whom 70% are under 12
Nepal	62,000 children under 14 (in Kathmandu)
Peru	150,000 children (in Lima)
Senegal	53,370 under 18, of which 12,000 are between 6 and 14
South Africa	53,942 children under 15
Sri Lanka	100,000 children ¹⁴
Venezuela	60% of all girls working between the ages of 10 and 14 are in domestic service In Hanoi, one in every 100 households in Hanoi employs a child under 16 for domestic tasks.
Viet Nam	In Ho Chi Minh City, 2,161 children aged 10 to 17 are employed in domestic labour, in which 10.5% (227 children) are under the age of 15.
1	These figures are quoted in: IPEC, <i>Child domestic labour and emerging good practices to combat it in South East and East Asia</i> . ILO, Geneva, 2006.
2	According to the Philippines National Statistics Office report on the 2001 Survey on Children 5-17 years old.
3	These figures are quoted in: IPEC, <i>Trabajo infantil doméstico en América Central y República Dominicana: Síntesis subregional</i> . ILO, San Jose, 2002, p. 55.
4	These figures are quoted in: IPEC, <i>Helping hands or shackled lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it</i> . ILO, Geneva, 2004, p. 15.

Note: Given the hidden nature of child domestic labour, the numbers and percentages presented above (and for other countries for which data are available) must be viewed as indicative only of the scale of the issue. It is likely that the estimates under represent the true situation because they account for only the visible side of child domestic labour.

¹⁴ This is the UNICEF-quoted figure. Note that the Department of Census and Statistics 1999 Child Activity Survey in Sri Lanka calculates that there were 19,111 children identified as in domestic work in that country.



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