

Poor accommodation
Physical/sexual, emotional abuse

Violence

No school
No right to play

Hazardous conditions

Isolation and confinement
No visits from/to family
No days off



International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

ILO policy and response to child domestic labour

In the framework of the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), the ILO recognizes three categories of child labour that must be abolished:

- All work done by children under the minimum legal age for that type of work, as defined by national legislation in accordance with international standards;
- Work that endangers the health, safety or moral of a child, either because of its nature or because of the conditions under which it is performed;
- Unconditional worst forms of child labour, defined as slavery, trafficking, bonded labour, forced recruitment into armed conflict, prostitution, pornography or illegal activities such as the sale and trafficking of drugs.

ILO Convention No. 138 sets a general minimum age of 15 years for admission to employment, with some flexibility for developing countries to set a lower minimum age, at 14 years. Very few countries, however, include domestic employment in national minimum age provisions. This has been accepted as flexibility in the minimum age reflecting the difficulty of enforcement in private homes. Yet studies show that children enter domestic employment when they are very young, mostly between 12 and 14, so there is clearly a need for countries to consider setting a minimum age for domestic employment. As an immediate step, countries should act to prevent the employment of children under the minimum age and to gradually withdraw young children from domestic service.

ILO Convention No. 182 addresses the plight of children under the age of 18 exploited in domestic service, when they:

- perform domestic tasks under conditions of forced labour, debt bondage, slavery or practices similar to slavery;
- are trafficked into domestic work; or
- undertake tasks and face working conditions that are likely to harm their health, safety and moral well-being.

The Convention says that immediate action can and must be taken not only to remove children from such labour but also to ensure that such labour is eliminated.

Through its **International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**, ILO works with governments, workers' and employers' organizations and civil society to prevent and eliminate child domestic labour. A first step in this is recognizing child domestic labour as a form of child labour and potentially a worst form of child labour to be eliminated, by including child domestic labour in national plans and strategies to combat child labour. IPEC's work is generally organized around four main pillars of activity:

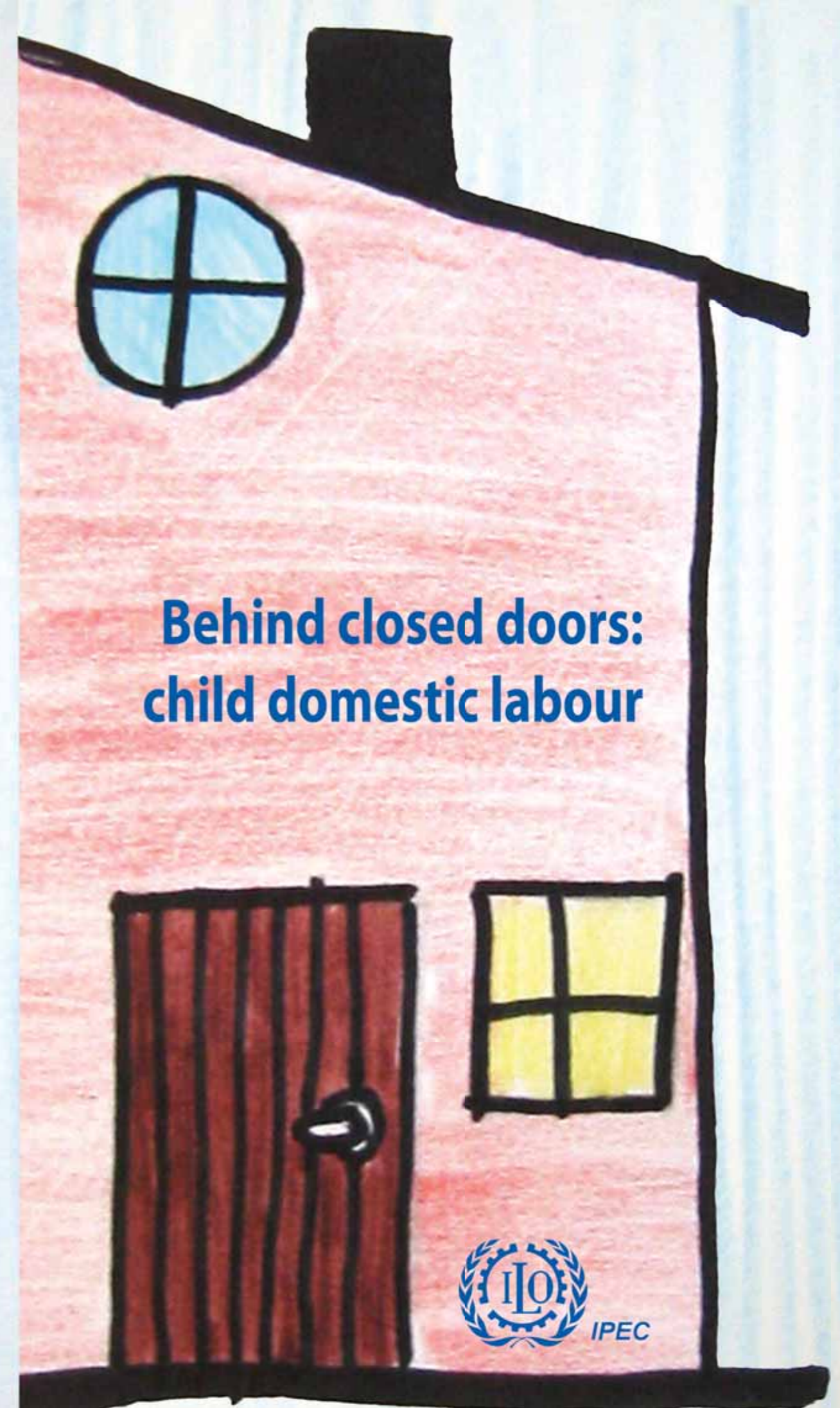
Data and methodology efforts to build the knowledge base through research, data collection, rapid assessments of the situation of child domestic labour, analysis and lessons-learning, information sharing and good practice compilation;

Policy and framework development including technical support to governments as they develop National Plans of Action against child labour, Time-Bound Programmes to eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and national policies and programmes. Time-Bound Programmes in Nepal, the Philippines and Tanzania include actions to combat child domestic labour.

Direct action including actions in prevention, protection, recovery and reintegration of children. For example, in prevention IPEC works with families and communities to help them to generate income, manage resources and build a sustainable future in which children can stay in school rather than work. Protection projects include support to community watch groups who identify at-risk children and families. Recovery and reintegration projects include training psychosocial support staff, formal/non-formal education and vocational training, and community-based support to children who have exited child domestic labour and their families.

Capacity building and exchange IPEC provides support to national partners to build capacity in a wide range of skills, including child-focused project management, research, analysis and advocacy. Exchange of experience and lessons-learned is done at national and subregional level and between subregional initiatives.

ILO-IPEC programmes to combat child domestic labour run in Africa (Senegal, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia), Central and South America (Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru), Asia (Philippines, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia) and, since 2000, in Haiti.



Behind closed doors:
child domestic labour



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Child domestic labour

Almost without exception, children who are employed in domestic service are victims of exploitation, often of several different kinds. They are exploited economically when they have to work long hours with no time off, low or no remuneration at all. They are at risk of sexual abuse and harassment and vulnerable to other forms of physical and emotional abuse.

They are exploited because they generally have no social or legal protection. They suffer harsh working conditions including, for example, having to handle toxic substances or lift heavy weights. They invariably are deprived of the rights due to them as children in international law, including, for example, the right to health, education, family protection and care. They may be confined and isolated, denied visits with their family and association with friends. Often they live in poor accommodation, with inferior food. They may be psychologically abused, being known by the local word for 'servant' rather than their own name.

Children who enter domestic service often leave their own family at a very early age to do work in the households of others and are considered almost as 'possessions' of the family they work for. They are deprived of education and training, so that their longer-term future is also blighted. They are also regularly denied the right even to play, although they may have to watch the family's children having fun, or even take them to the park or baby-sit them.

Domestic service remains one of the most common and traditional forms of occupation for children, particularly girls. Existing research suggests that, across the globe, more girls under 16 are employed in domestic service than in any other form of work.

Domestic work or family chores performed by children include an extremely wide spectrum of situations under varying conditions. Some of them are acceptable — e.g. children participating in the chores in their own family helping parents, or teenagers' baby-sitting or cutting the grass of a neighbour for pocket money outside school hours. The fact that such work is not part of child labour that needs elimination should not obscure our concern about slavery-like situations or other worst forms of child labour within private household. Countries may opt to make a minimum working age applicable to domestic employment and treat it as a form of child labour. In addition, if any child under the age of 18 has entered domestic labour as a result of being trafficked, coerced, traded into bonded or forced labour, in conditions similar to slavery or engaged in hazardous work, then this is considered a worst form of child labour. Under the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), such labour must be eliminated as a matter of urgency and the child removed from danger and supported.

A Call to Action

Around the world, hundreds of thousands of children, particularly girls, are exploited when working in domestic service. This issue is culturally sensitive and complex. Its root causes, including demand, conditions and impact on children, their families and societies have to be addressed simultaneously.

It is consequently imperative to call national and international communities to act and to work together as a matter of urgency. Action needs to be taken in:

- Awareness raising and prevention that addresses the root causes of vulnerability and exploitation;
- Protection and withdrawal of children from exploitation and support for them as they rebuild their lives;
- Developing time-bound measures, programmes and plans that set specific goals and deadlines to combat child domestic labour and other worst forms of child labour, linking this initiative with the national development effort, particularly a poverty reduction strategy and the provision of quality education, skills training and job creation;
- Mobilizing international support for action to combat the exploitation of children in domestic labour and other worst forms of child labour, and
- Keeping children's rights high on the international agenda.

What pushes/pulls children into domestic service?

Contexts of vulnerability

Poverty is almost always a context for the early entry of children into child labour. A family might be poor because adult members do not have skills to match market needs, or have low educational levels and are considered unemployable. There may be no work available, even when there are family members who could be working. Conflict, illness or natural disaster may have taken away the breadwinner, leaving a dependent household with no-one to depend on. In some but by no means all poor families, putting children to work is seen as a way to earn an income or at the very least reduce outgoings.

Gender discrimination

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in communities where they are considered inferior or more expendable than male members of the family, or where they are seen to have specific responsibilities. The status of the girl within her own household is perpetuated by the role she may take on in someone else's: as someone whose role is to serve others. Often the girl-child is not sent to school or is taken out of school early in the belief that she does not need to be educated or should not be too educated in case it blights her marriage potential. The result is that girls' options are limited throughout their lives.

Views of 'women's work'

In most countries, socio-cultural factors play a big role. Domestic service is seen as 'women's work'. Many parents see it as the only option for a girl-child who must work, since it is thought to be light and 'appropriate'. This view of 'women's work' is held by many women, and mothers of working children often quote it as a reason for sending a daughter into domestic service. In some countries, adult women who do domestic work take their daughters with them both to keep an eye on them during the working day but also because they want the child to learn the work.

Ignorance of the risks

Families often see domestic service as training for the girl-child in household skills she will need when she marries. As a result domestic service, unlike most other forms of child labour, is seen as an apprenticeship for a girl-child, and a valid alternative to education. Often, domestic service is seen as preferable to other work for girls because it is perceived as 'protected' work. Families and communities translate the safety of the family home into safety in someone else's home, not questioning whether employers will provide the protection to which the child has a right. Sometimes, employers themselves see 'taking in' a child to work in the home as an act of benevolence. In some societies, this may even be systematized into real or false adoption, or quasi-adoption by extended family members.

Desire for education

Children who are denied access to education or whose experience of school is negative may look upon domestic service as a path to learning. They may hope to work for a year to earn money to re-enter education. Sometimes this does happen; more often, the money earned falls far below expectations and the year of work turns into years of exploitation. If the employer denies the child access and time to study, the child soon falls behind and re-entry into education becomes difficult.

Social hierarchies

Domestic service is also a function of social ideas about hierarchy. In many parts of the world, for various reasons, there is a belief that people on the 'lower rungs' of the scale should perform services for those on the 'higher rungs', including working in their households and catering to their domestic needs.

Debt bondage and trafficking

When a child is pulled into domestic service in exchange for money as collateral, or in repayment of a debt, the child is said to be in 'debt bondage'. Debt bondage is a particularly pernicious situation in which a child can be trapped in domestic work in the employer's household because of the relationship between borrower and employer in which the employer has all the power and the child is in the middle, denied all rights and protection.

Child domestic labour and child labour in general all become more risky when the child enters them in another town or country. This is the situation of trafficked children. Isolated from family and community, the trafficked child may not understand any support systems available, may not speak the local language, may be in a situation of irregular migration and may be without papers if the employer holds them as a guarantee of compliance. There are regular reports of children losing all contact with their families, never returning to their home.