

FACTS ON Education and Skills Training to Tackle Child Labour



The background

The latest estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that there are some 218 million children worldwide involved in child labour. A large number of these children do not attend school at all, others may attend irregularly. As they become adults, lacking the education and training that could enhance their chances of decent work, many of these children become part of a large pool of unemployed and underemployed youth. Across the world some 85 million young people between 15-24 are unemployed, and another 300 million are working but remain poor, often working on a precarious basis.

Inadequate education and skills development keep economies and individuals trapped in a vicious cycle of low education, low productivity and low income. Child labourers become poor adults, and in turn their children are likely to become child labourers. Education and skills are the key to breaking this inter-generational cycle of child labour and poverty.

Basic education is needed to the minimum age of employment

Participation in basic education at least to the minimum age of employment should be the stepping-stone upon which individuals build their own future success and their contribution as members of society and the economy. Low educational attainment deprives young people of learning core work skills and being able to participate in job training. The importance of children having access to a full course of basic education is reflected in the ILO Minimum Age Convention, No. 138 (1973) which states: "The Minimum Age...shall be not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years".

In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the United Nations and the international community set the target of ensuring that by 2015 all children complete a course of primary education. The picture of progress towards this target is mixed, with some countries making progress, but many others lagging far behind. Statistics on education are alarming:

- More than 70 million primary school aged children are still not enrolled in school.
- At secondary school average attendance is just 46% for boys and 43% for girls.

- In sub Saharan Africa only one child in five attends secondary school.
- 96 million young women and 57 million young men are illiterate.

It is clear that vast numbers of the world's young people suffer from a serious shortfall in basic education, and hence all too often lack core employability skills. It is against this background that a paper for the general discussion on "Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development" for the 2008 International Labour Conference identifies the need to "support national and international commitment to expanding the coverage of good quality basic education as a human right and an indispensable foundation for vocational training, lifelong learning and employability" (page vii).

Overcoming education and skills disadvantages

Whilst much international concern has focused on the need to expand access to elementary education to achieve the MDG target, there is also increasing focus on the importance of expanding secondary education. As countries make progress in expanding access to elementary education, there will be an increasing demand for secondary education and vocational training. In this context there is growing interest in vocational education within schools, and skills which strengthen the connection between school and work. Skills training for youth aged 15 to 24 is also seen as an area in need of strengthening to help tackle the problem of youth unemployment and underemployment.

Failure to find a job may be linked to lack of relevant skills and training, low demand for the skills which young people have, or to changing demand in the labour market. The

ILO WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR CONVENTION, 1999 (No. 182)

"Each Member shall... take effective and time-bound measures to... ensure access to free basic education, and, wherever possible and appropriate, vocational training, for all children removed from the worst forms of child labour..."

ensuing mismatch can lead to long periods of job seeking, unemployment and sustained periods of lower skilled and precarious work. Some steps to be considered in the context of developing education and skills provision are the need to:

- Strengthen access to basic education for all children.
- Ensure young people obtain core work skills. Individuals are most employable when they have broad based education and training with portable skills, including literacy, numeracy, ability to learn, and social and interpersonal skills.
- Expand provision of relevant quality skills training in rural areas. Some 70% of child labour is in rural areas.
- Provide career guidance and counseling to guide young people into meaningful occupations in the future.
- Upgrade the quality of traditional apprenticeships, the largest source of skills training in the informal economy, and improve certification and recognition of apprentices' skills in order to improve their employability in the formal economy.
- Provide "second chance" programmes to support those who have left school before acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and who have drifted into low paid and possibly hazardous work in the informal economy.
- Ensure that girls have equal access in all education and training provision and that special measures are taken when needed to help keep young women in school or in training programmes.

Providing skills training to former child labourers

The ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is working with governments and social partners in many countries to support development of National Plans to tackle the worst forms of child labour. It is also working at community level with a range of partners that provide education and training opportunities for children vulnerable to child labour, or who are being withdrawn from child labour. For younger children the emphasis is on

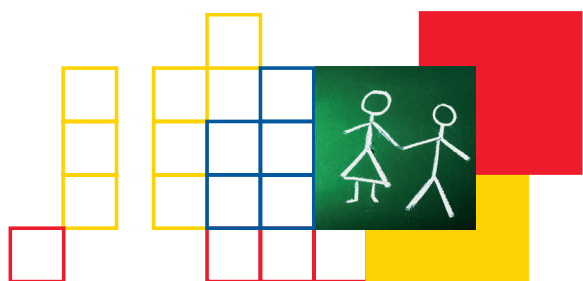
enabling them to access basic education. For older children at or above the minimum age of employment, support includes programmes that enable these older children to access skills training which can improve their prospects of obtaining decent work.

ILO HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION, 2004 (No. 195)

"Members should... promote access to education, training and lifelong learning for people with nationally identified special needs such as youth... and the socially excluded..."

If you would like further information on ILO work in the areas of child labour and skills, please contact ipec@ilo.org or skills@ilo.org.

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