



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

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No excuse for child labour in domestic work

Significant progress has been made in reducing the number of child labourers worldwide, however, 215 million girls and boys remain at work, over half of them in the worst forms of child labour.

According to the latest figures in a new ILO report, Ending Child labour in domestic work, there is strong evidence from research on child domestic work in Sub-Saharan Africa that many children in domestic work have no, or only one, parent alive. For example, the movement of large numbers of children in Liberia from rural areas to live with relatives or friends of relatives in urban settings mirrors the long established tradition of child fostering across much of West Africa.

The situation varies between the developed and the developing world, but no country is immune.

Domestic work is an important source of employment for adults as well as for young workers above the minimum working age. Recent statistics have confirmed, for example, that 13.6 per cent of all female wage workers in Africa are domestic workers.

In some societies, the notion of the child domestic worker's employer as a benefactor has been legitimized by the description of this relationship as "adoption" by strangers or "fostering" by extended family members – practices which still prevail across much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Trafficking is also recognized in many cases, for instance in the West and Central Africa region, as an extension of the traditional custom of "placing" a child with extended family members. Such "placement" for domestic work has been recorded, for example, in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali.

In recent years, countries in a number of regions have, with ILO-IPEC support, been active in building national and local capacity to combat the worst forms of child labour in domestic work. For example, a number of West African countries have put in place community-based child labour monitoring systems to identify child domestic workers, determine why they are working, and assist, as necessary, in remedying their situation.

Trade unions have also taken action against child labour in domestic work through organizing locally and globally, and through awareness-raising, campaigning, education, counselling, monitoring and legal action. As a result, thousands of children found in child labour in domestic work have been withdrawn from places of work and have benefited from rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes.

For example, in Tanzania the Conservation Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU) has been active for many years in preventing and withdrawing and child domestic workers from harmful situations and supporting their rehabilitation.

The ILO report calls for improved data collection and statistical tools so that the true extent of the problem can be ascertained. It also presses for governments to ratify and implement ILO Convention 138, concerning the minimum age for admission to employment and ILO Convention 182, on the worst forms of child labour.
