

# FACTS ON CHILD LABOUR



International  
Labour  
Organization

## The child labour challenge

Of all the world's children, approximately one in seven is involved in some form of child labour. However, action by the international community over the past decade has shown results in tackling child labour. The International Labour Organization's most recent global estimates indicate that the number of children involved in child labour fell by 11 per cent, to 218 million, between 2000 and 2004<sup>1</sup>. Other positive developments leading to the recent decline in child labour include:

- Expansion of access to basic education. Many countries that have removed school fees have seen dramatic increases in school enrolments.
- Implementation of social transfer programmes which have involved governments making a cash transfer to poor families on condition that children attend school. Such programmes have had a significant impact on child labour in Latin America and elsewhere.
- Increased action on the part of governments, with ILO Conventions on child labour now being widely ratified.

Despite this progress, child labour remains a significant problem in many countries. Thus there remains an urgent need to tackle the problem in a holistic manner, combining education with poverty reduction strategies.

## ILO strategy on child labour

The elimination of child labour is one of the four fundamental principles of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and is a key element of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. The ILO's policy on child labour is contained in the child labour Conventions: the Minimum

<sup>1</sup> ILO: *The end of child labour: Within reach. Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (Geneva, 2006).

Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).<sup>2</sup>

The ILO is pursuing a Global Action Plan to tackle child labour. It starts from the premise that effective elimination of child labour can only be achieved at the country level and that member States must be at the forefront of such efforts. The plan calls for the adoption of time-bound targets to meet the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016 and identifies various means by which the ILO can support this process. This target parallels and contributes to both the Millennium Development Goals on education and poverty and to the effective abolition of all forms of child labour, a fundamental goal of the ILO.

Needless to say, the ambitious target of 2016 for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour set in the Global Action Plan is just around the corner, and a concerted effort needs to be taken by stakeholders to achieve it. Fundamentally, this requires the political will of governments to stay focused in their efforts to end child labour.

<sup>2</sup> [www.ilo.org/ipec/action/legal/conventions](http://www.ilo.org/ipec/action/legal/conventions).

### REGIONAL STATISTICS<sup>1</sup>

*The proportion of children engaged in economic activities in sub-Saharan Africa is the highest of any region in the world, 26%, representing close to 50 million children.*

*The largest absolute numbers of working children are in the Asia Pacific region, where 122 million children aged 5-14 are working.*

*Latin America and the Caribbean have made most progress with just 5% of children aged 5-14 now engaged in work.*

*Almost 7 out of 10 working children are in the agricultural sector. 22% work in services and 9% in industry, including mining, construction and manufacturing.*

## The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour was established in 1992 and currently has operations in more than 80 countries.

- IPEC is the largest programme of its kind globally and the single largest operational programme in the ILO.
- IPEC has made a real difference in many countries both through work with governments and other partners at the policy level, and through programmes assisting individual children.

In the 2006-07 period the country level programmes supported by IPEC provided services to assist almost 430,000 children who were either involved in or at risk of child labour. **Of this number more than 203,000 children were withdrawn from child labour. The large majority of these children were involved in the worst forms of child labour.**<sup>3</sup>

IPEC also works to ensure that efforts to tackle child labour are integrated into national policy and legislative frameworks.

The number and range of IPEC's partners has expanded over the years and now includes other international and governmental agencies, employers' and workers' organizations, community-based organizations, the media, and of course, children and their families.

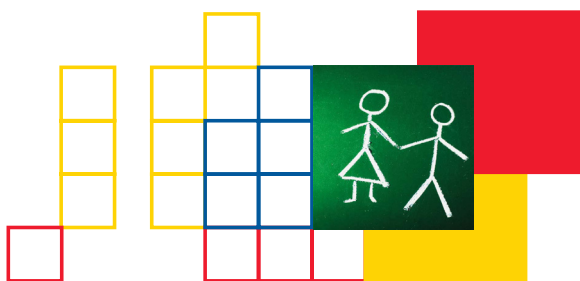
Some examples of IPEC work related to education and targeted at children include:

- In **El Salvador**, IPEC supported a network of 100 non-formal education centres to facilitate enrolment and retention in school of children removed from worst forms of child labour. Results from impact assessments and independent evaluations showed that the centres had a significant, positive effect on formal school enrolment and retention, despite their relatively low operational costs. As the IPEC project drew to a close, the Ministry of Education assumed the financing of all aspects of the centres.

- In **Brazil**, IPEC supported the Government to design training modules for educators to carry out the national programme Jornada Ampliada. This programme provided extended school sessions for children and adolescents in eight towns and was aimed at reducing the likelihood that children would work long hours after school.
- In **China**, IPEC has been implementing a project which seeks to prevent trafficking and labour exploitation by promoting education and skills. The project has supported the application of a recently amended compulsory education law and the design of a life skills curriculum to assist middle school children in preparing for the challenges of adolescence and adulthood.
- In **West Africa**, an IPEC project has been working in a number of countries to support development of skills training for vulnerable children, at or around the minimum age of employment, to minimize risks of their involvement in worst forms of child labour. Some 10,000 children were provided with education services.
- In **Indonesia**, the Indonesian Teachers Association identified a number of elementary schools where children were at high risk of dropping out, as they had already begun working after school in footwear workshops. A programme was developed consisting of remedial classes and extracurricular activities with the aim of keeping at-risk students in school after standard hours, so that they would gradually lessen their engagement in footwear production.
- In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, an IPEC Child Soldiers Project has provided an integrated package of services to former child soldiers. This includes catch-up education to provide them with basic literacy and numeric skills, vocational skills training, and services for the transition between skills training and the start of economic activity for those old enough to begin work.

For more information on the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, visit: [www.ilo.org/ipec](http://www.ilo.org/ipec).

<sup>3</sup> IPEC: *IPEC action against child labour 2006-2007: Progress and future priorities* (Geneva, ILO, 2008).



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