

**United Nations
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Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence
against the girl child
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre**

From the Kitchen to the Classroom: Call for Political Commitment and Empowerment to Get Girls Out of Child Domestic Labour and Into School

The Invisible Girl Child Labour

Child labour is on the decline worldwide. The 2006 International Labour Office's (ILO) Global Report on child labour cites an overall 11% decline, down from 246 million in 2000 to 218 million in 2004. Thanks to recent government efforts to eliminate hazardous child labour in many countries, the number of children in hazardous work fell sharply from 171 to 126 million (26%), with an even steeper drop (33%) in the 5-14 age group.¹

Comparing girls and boys, the ILO statistics show that young girls and boys aged 5-11 years are involved in child labour at roughly the same rates (51% girls and 49% boys) but six out of ten working children aged 12-17 years are boys. More boys also tend to work in hazardous conditions as they get older.²

If these statistics seem like good news for girls, education statistics say otherwise: of the 100 million children of primary-school age worldwide who are not enrolled in school, 55 million are girls.³ Fewer girls also make it to secondary school in most developing countries. Worldwide 66% of boys compared to 61% of girls are in secondary school. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where girls most suffer from lack of access to education, the girls' secondary school enrolments are much lower—23% compared to boys' 29% in sub-Saharan Africa and 39% compared to boys' 51% in South Asia.⁴

Given that fewer girl children are in school, it seems that there is a gap in the child labour statistics with a proportion of girls unaccounted for. So, where are the missing girls? Unlike boys who tend to be found in work that is more visible to the public eye, girls carry out domestic work for their family or others, or are engaged in service types of work in the informal economy, or in the entertainment industries—sectors and occupations where the work is less visible and harder to identify and measure. Emerging statistics indicate that millions of school-age girls worldwide are working in **domestic service**, which is **among the most invisible of female-dominated occupations**. Considered an extension of female duties in their own homes, girls' domestic work is undervalued, often unpaid, and generally not counted as "work."

Refocusing the Lens on the Hidden Working Girl Children

Actions to combat child labour in the past 15 years have focused on the more visible forms in the industrial sector, where more boys are usually found.⁵ The initial focus on the more visible forms of child labour is understandable as they are easier to address than the less visible ones. Much has been done to commendable successes, with the reduction in number of child labourers in those areas being the testament to that fact. Now, however, is time to move on to the next and more challenging target, where attention and action are seriously needed and where working children, especially girls, are the most vulnerable and least protected.

The latest ILO estimates put most of the more than 200 million working children in the agricultural sector (69%) and services (22%), with only 9% in industry.⁶ Child labour in agriculture usually takes place in a family context⁷ among populations in extreme poverty in rural areas. Exploitative child labour in this sector is extremely hard to tackle. This paper, therefore, addresses the situation of invisible working girls engaged in domestic service for other families, an occupation in which a clear employer-employee relation exists.

Actions to address the exploitation of mostly girl children in domestic service have only just begun and need much more institutional and public support to tackle challenges in multiple fields: child labour, education, gender equality, child rights, fundamental human and workers' rights, and migrants' rights.

Girl Domestic Workers in the Spotlight

Vulnerability of child domestic workers was mentioned almost two decades ago. In 1989, the ILO stated: “youngsters working as household domestic servants may be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all, and the most difficult to protect.”⁸ Yet, the exploitation of child domestic workers remains largely unknown to the larger public and efforts mostly by non-governmental organizations to address their exploitation have encountered high sensitivity and resistance by communities, including parents and employers, and governments.

Domestic service (in third-party households) is the single largest employer of working girls worldwide. The ILO estimates that **more girl children under 16 are working in domestic service than any other category of work or child labour.**⁹ According to ILO- and UNICEF-commissioned studies conducted in early 2000s, staggering numbers of children work in domestic service *in other people's homes* in all developing regions of the world—for

like a broom stick. A sadistic member in the family may choose to “punish” her with burning cigarettes, a hot iron or other “creative” tools. She learns to stay away from the men in the family or the male relatives, but it often proves difficult. They may speak to her using lewd words or touch her in inappropriate ways. Or they may do something worse.¹⁹

Tougher for the Girl, Toughest for the Migrant and Ethnic Girl: Multiple Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child in Child Domestic Labour

No doubt the extreme working hours and conditions, various forms of exploitation and abuse are very harmful to the CDWs. Bad nutrition and lack of proper care often stunt their

Trafficking of many young girls in West and Central Africa is recognized in many instances as an extension of the traditional custom of “p

and the United States. In August 2006 Save the Children released reports on abuses among CDWs in West Bengal, India.³¹

Legal and Institutional Frameworks at the international and regional levels: In 1999 the ILO adopted the Worst Form of Child Labour Convention No. 182 (C. 182). Using C. 182 as a framework, the ILO has stimulated social dialogue with government, employers' and workers' (tripartite) organizations and other social partners. The social dialogue has led to landmark agreements among tripartite and social partners in three regions, recognizing CDL as a potential worst form of child labour: the Bamako Declaration adopted by francophone African countries in March 2000, the Panamanian Inter-institutional Declaration against the Worst Forms of Child Domestic Labour in the Homes of Third Parties by eight countries in Central America and the Dominican Republic in April 2002, and the Framework for Follow-up Action to Combat CDL by 16 countries in the Asia-Pacific region in October 2002.³²

National Action: The declarations have provided frameworks for action at the country level.

The National Plans of Action of Cambodia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras were among the first to prioritize CDL as a form of child labour to prevent and eliminate.³³ Some governments have also begun some positive steps. India just amended its child labour law, adding a ban on CDL for children under 14 years, which comes into effect in October 2006. Morocco has proposed a bill to regulate CDL, stipulating clear working and sleeping hours, days off and holidays.³⁴

Since 1995, ILO-IPEC has launched CDL-specific action in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Arab States, with over 80 action programmes to date.³⁵ Several of these countries have prioritized CDL as a worst forms of child labour to be eliminated in ILO-IPEC Time-Bound Programmes.³⁶

Programme interventions range from capacity building on research, awareness raising, networking and social mobilization, advocacy and support towards legislative and policy changes, direct services to CDWs (e.g., withdrawal and rehabilitation of CDWs, education and vocational skills training, organization of support groups), social dialogue with CDWs' employers, and working with local authorities and trade unions to address CDL issues. Different countries may place a focus on different types of intervention, depending on the needs and stages of interventions.

Direct Action with CDWs, Out-reach, Direct Services and Empowerment:drawal 008 Tw 1.1.2()(mm4 7

available. In addition, over 30 of 178 ILO member countries still have not ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138.⁴²

irrespective of where the children and workers come from. Promote the use of model employment contracts for domestic workers above the minimum working age.

Strengthen the education and empowerment components of the programming through training and awareness raising on gender equality, child rights, fundamental human and workers' rights, and representation of domestic workers among institutional partners and communities. Make use of available resources in this area (in addition to resources specific to CDL mentioned above, a set training materials recently published by the ILO is appropriate for this purpose: *Empowerment for Children, Youth and Families: 3-R Trainers' Kit on Rights, Responsibilities and Representation*⁴⁴).

Promote and strengthen the participation of young DWs through support groups or self-organization, and encourage linking DW organizations with the local trade unions.

Ensure that project staff understand the principles of gender mainstreaming. Provide necessary training and practical tools to staff members to integrate gender equality in programming.⁴⁵

Promote and support community-based monitoring of CDL. Encourage and mobilize local partners such as schools, community organizations, families and youth to participate, and link community-based efforts to local official enforcement and monitoring systems.

Promote organization among domestic workers and provide a supportive environment for them, as well as necessary direct services. The primary objectives are to immediately rescue and rehabilitate victims of violence and reintegrate them into society and withdraw CDWs below the minimum working age from CDL and reintegrate them in the formal school system.

Link concrete administrative and managerial guidelines to implement girl-friendly education programme, promote gender equality in school curriculum and school mechanisms, and address special needs of girls and boys.

Link action to combat exploitation of CDWs with income generation schemes for the

Gender inequalities entrenched in the beliefs and cultural practices must be tackled with active efforts to educate the girls, their families, their employers and their immediate

Notes

¹ ILO, *The End of Child Labour: Within Reach*, Geneva, 2006, pp. 6-8.

² *Ibid.*

³ UNESCO, *Education for All: Literacy for Life*, Paris, 2005, p. 1.

⁴ UNICEF, *Childhood Under Threat: The State of the World's Children 2005*, Table 5: Education (1998-2002 figures).

⁵ The classifications of child labour that are still currently used by the ILO reflect this bias towards more visible sectors. Using the International Standard Industrial Classifications of All Economic Activities, Revisions 2 (1968) and 3 (1989) the ILO puts child workers in three main categories: agriculture (hunting, forestry and fishing), industry (mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction and public utilities), and services (wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels, transport, storage and communications, business-related services, and personal, community and social services). ILO, *The End of Child Labour*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Children working in agriculture usually work alongside their parents on the family or others' farms. The children's work is largely invisible in national data as it is usually absorbed in the "piece work" or "quota systems" based on family work unit, in which only those above the minimum working age are registered as "workers."

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50,000 CDWs in West Bengal receive just Rs 500 (US\$10). Save the Children, *Abuse among Child Domestic Workers: A Research Study in West Bengal*, 2006, http://www.crin.org/docs/save_uk_cl_ind.pdf.

¹⁹ A newly released study by Save the Children on CDWs in West Bengal reveals high levels of emotional, physical and sexual abuse among 50,000 CDWs in Calcutta: 68% faced physical abuse with 46.6% facing severe abuses leading to injuries; 32.2% had their private parts touched with 20% forced to have sexual intercourse; 50% did not get any leave in a year and 37% never saw their families; 27% of the CDWs' parents admitted knowing their children were abused and 32% of parents did not even know where their daughters were working. Save the Children, *Abuse among Child Domestic Workers*.

²⁰ ILO, *Child Domestic Labour in South East and East Asia*, pp. 30-32. Studies in South Africa and Turkey also indicate girl CDWs working longer hours than their male counterparts. ILO, *Helping Hands or Shackled Lives*.

²¹ ILO, *Helping Hands or Shackled Lives*, p. 49.

²² Only 30% of girls versus 61% of boys have a weekly day off in Cambodia and 37% versus 58% in Thailand . ILO,

place in June 2006 in Chennai, India with Arundhaya and the National Domestic Workers Movement as the hosts. For more information on CWA and TFCDW see: http://www.cwa.tnet.co.th/Network/tf_domestic.html.

⁴¹ These publications are available on CWA's website which contains an extensive list of materials on CDWs, http://www.cwa.tnet.co.th/References/ref_domestic.html.

⁴² ILO, *The End of Child Labour*, p. 16. As of the end of August 2006, there are 147 countries having ratified the ILO Convention No. 138, up from 116 in April 2002.

⁴³ Some recommendations are based on "ILO Agenda on Decent Work for Domestic Workers."

⁴⁴ Busakorn Suriyasarn, Rosalinda Terhorst and Nelien Haspels, *Empowerment for Children, Youth and Families: 3-R Trainers' Kit on Rights, Responsibilities and Representation*, ILO, Bangkok, 2006. Available for download at: <http://www.ilo.org/asia/library/pub4d.htm>.

⁴⁵ See two ILO publications: Nelien Haspels and Busakorn Suriyasarn, *Promotion of Gender Equality in Action against Child Labour and Trafficking: A Practical Guide for Organization*, ILO, Bangkok, 2003. Available for download in English, French, Chinese, Indonesian, Khmer, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese at:

<http://www.ilo.org/asia/library/pub4a.htm>, and ILO, *Good Practices: Gender Mainstreaming in Actions against Child Labour*, Geneva, 2003.