



International
Labour
Office

GIVE GIRLS A CHANCE

Tackling child labour, a key to the future

MEDIA SUMMARY



NOTE

The section numbering in this summary corresponds to the numbering in the published report.

Foreword

It is now ten years since the ILO adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). The Convention, which became the most rapidly ratified of all ILO Conventions, helped generate an enormous change in attitudes towards child labour. An important element of the Convention was that attention should be given to the special situation of girls and to children at special risk.

The ILO estimates that some 100 million girls are involved in child labour around the world. Many have little or no access to education and many are working in situations that place their health, safety and morals in serious danger.

This report focuses on girls and child labour, the theme of the World Day against Child Labour for 2009. This, of course, does not diminish our concern with the harm suffered by boys engaged in child labour. However the report *is* intended to bring home to readers the particular vulnerability of girls.

The report presents a comprehensive profile of child labour among girls. In its assessment of the work that girls perform in the world today, it presents important new statistics on certain aspects of that work – for example, on the extent of engagement in unpaid household services. While there is little difference in the involvement of boys and girls in economic activity in general, the report suggests that girls work significantly more than boys in household chores and as a result often jeopardise their schooling.

Although progress has been made in reducing child labour during the course of the past ten years, the onset of the global financial crisis threatens to erode recent advances. When families are pushed deeper into poverty and have to choose between sending their sons or their daughters to school, it tends to be the daughters that lose out. As the crisis deepens, young girls could well be among the main victims.

The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour has acquired substantial experience of working to combat child labour, both at the local level in its work to assist children, and at the policy level in work with governments. Tackling child labour effectively calls for an integrated policy response based on strategies for reducing poverty and promoting decent work for adults. Among these strategies, the single most important policy step is the provision of free quality education for all children up to the minimum age of employment.

As we review the progress in combating child labour that has been achieved over the past ten years, as well as the challenges that lie ahead, the report provides ample evidence that the situation of girls warrants special attention. The opportunities or lack of opportunities that girls are afforded early in life may well determine their future and that of future generations. Girls have the right to grow and develop free of child labour and girls have the right to education. We must give girls a chance to make these rights a reality.

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ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

Chapter 1: Why focus on girls?

1.1 Girls and boys should have equal rights and opportunities

There are very few countries or communities where girls have exactly the same opportunities as boys. Access to education is a human right, yet in much of the world boys and girls continue to be treated differently in terms of access to education. The result of these inequalities can be seen in global literacy statistics. Of the 16 per cent of the world's population who are unable to read or write a simple statement, almost two out of three are women. Many girls who are denied education enter the workforce at an early age.

Discrimination against girls continues as they reach adolescence and grow into adulthood. Once in the workforce girls are more likely to be engaged in types of work for which earnings are relatively low and they face various forms of discrimination in the labour market.

1.2 Girls work is often hidden

Much of the work undertaken by girls is less visible than that of boys. Typical examples are domestic work, work in small-scale agriculture, and work in small home-based workshops. The often hidden nature of domestic work has given rise to particular concerns. Girls engaged in domestic work are frequently reported as being treated poorly and sometimes being physically abused. Although some of these cases do become public, the fact that the work takes place within the confines of a private home means that abuse very often goes unseen and unreported. The problem extends beyond domestic work. Girls working in many other situations also have little contact with others outside the immediate work environment, thus giving rise to concerns for their safety and welfare. Some of the worst forms of child labour may entail girls being deliberately hidden from the outside world. Girls trafficked for labour and prostitution, for instance, can sometimes be held as virtual prisoners.

1.3 Girls can be particularly vulnerable

In many societies cultural norms and values place women in an inferior and vulnerable position. Girls and young women are more likely to lack basic education, which makes it more difficult for them to protect their rights. Along with factors such as their relative lack of physical strength, the absence of protective legislation and a failure to enforce laws, vulnerability of girls may relate to the work situation itself. A United Nations report on violence against children drew attention to the problem of violence against children at the workplace, including both verbal and physical abuse. It identified a number of sectors in which violence can be a particular problem. Most of these were sectors in which girls work in large numbers.¹

1.4 The double burden

The term "double burden" is used to describe the workload of those who are not only engaged in an economic activity but also have responsibility for unpaid domestic work in their own household. Girls often spend significantly more time on household chores and caring duties than do boys.

¹ P.S. Pinheiro: "Violence against children in places of work.", chapter 6 of United Nations: *World report on violence against children* (UN doc. A/61/299, 29 Aug. 2006), p. 242. Available at: http://www.violencestudy.org/IMG/pdf/6._World_Report_on_Violence_against_Children.pdf.

1.5 Girls, work and HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has forced many children to enter the labour market prematurely. UNAIDS has estimated about 12 million children under 18 years of age have lost one or both parents as a result of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. Many children who become household heads have little option but to seek work to support themselves and their siblings.

Among young people in the 14-25 age group in Africa, the prevalence of HIV tends to be significantly higher among females than among males. Moreover, girls are generally at greater risk of being sexually abused and of becoming HIV-positive than are boys.²

1.6 Investing in girls for the future

Research shows that educating girls is one of the most effective ways of tackling poverty. Educated girls are more likely to earn more as adults, marry later in life, have fewer and healthier children, and have decision-making power within the household. Educated mothers are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated, thereby helping to avoid future child labour. Tackling child labour among girls and ensuring their right to education are therefore important elements of broader strategies to promote development.

1.7 International Conventions and attention to girls

The ILO's Conventions and Recommendations, along with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, provide an important legal framework for addressing issues of child labour and for ensuring that girls receive special attention.

2009 is the tenth anniversary of ILO Convention No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Article 7 (e) of ILO Convention No. 182 stipulates that the special situation of girls must be taken into account. An ILO Global Action Plan on the Worst Forms of Child Labour was endorsed in 2007 and pursues the goal of eliminating all the worst forms of child labour by 2016. Among the areas identified for action in the Plan is the need for attention to the special situation of girls.

² ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work: *HIV/AIDS and work: Global estimates, impact on children and youth, and response* (Geneva, ILO, 2006), p. 33.

Chapter 2: Statistics on girls work

2.1 Global statistics on child labour among girls

The ILO's most recent global estimate of the extent of child labour indicated that more than 100 million girls were involved in child labour. Girls accounted for approximately 46 per cent of all child workers.³

Approximately 53 million girls were estimated to be in *hazardous work* identified as one of the *worst form of child labour*. Of these, 20 million were less than twelve years old.

Reliable estimates on the extent of the worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work (for example, commercial sexual exploitation of children, forced and bonded labour, etc.) are difficult to obtain, but specific studies on the subject show that the majority of children involved are girls.

2.2 Sectoral distribution of employment

The majority of girls who work are in agriculture. In a survey of data from 16 countries some 61 per cent of economically active girls in the 5–14 year age group were working in this sector.⁴ The services sector, which includes children in domestic work in third party households, represents 30% of the number working, with 9% in industries.

2.5 Children in unpaid household service: The invisible work of girls

A comprehensive and gender-sensitive picture of children's work has to take into consideration the performance of unpaid household services - commonly called household chores. In collecting data on child labour in the past, a distinction has been made between economically active children and children involved in household chores. The distinction between the two, however, was essentially technical. A resolution on child labour statistics adopted at the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2008 established that the broadest concept related to the measurement of child labour is that of children in productive activities falling within the general production boundary as defined in the System of National Accounts (SNA). This includes both children in employment and children in other productive activities, the latter being defined as "the production of domestic and personal services by a household member for consumption within their own household", i.e. household chores.

It has become evident that a definition of work that is restricted to economic activities is insufficient to capture a number of very important forms of non-economic work. This is of particular importance from the gender perspective, given that it is girls rather than boys who tend to be assigned to unpaid household services.

2.6 The prevalence of unpaid household services

The difference between girls and boys in terms of their involvement in unpaid household services is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa (44 per cent), followed by Latin America (29 per cent), transitional and

³ ILO: *The end of child labour: Within reach* (Geneva, 2006).

⁴ The 2006 estimates of child labour provided for the first time a global sectoral distribution of children's employment, but not disaggregated by sex. The indicator of employment by sector broke employment down into three broad groupings of economic activity: agriculture, industry and services.

developed countries (15 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (8 per cent). Overall, the percentage of girls aged between 5 and 14 who are working is 15 per cent higher than that of boys (chart 2.7).

2.7 Hours in unpaid household services

While an analysis of hours in employment showed that boys and girls work roughly the same hours, differences were more noticeable when comparing the intensity of “household chores” by sex. In all the countries surveyed, girls worked more hours per week than boys.

The proportion of girls between 5 and 11 years old who are engaged in household chores for 28 hours or more is twice as high as for boys, and about three times as high among children aged between 15 and 17 years.

2.8 Impact of work on school attendance

School attendance rates vary significantly according to whether children undertake an economic activity only, an economic activity combined with household chores, or household chores only (chart 2.10). The lowest attendance rates were among girls only engaged in an economic activity (61.3 per cent), while girls involved in both an economic activity and household chores had an attendance rate of 71.3 per cent. This apparent paradox suggests that children combining an economic activity with household chores devote fewer hours to the former than do those engaged exclusively in an economic activity and that it is the long hours spent in regular employment that are most detrimental to school attendance. Girls who were not involved in any economic activity but were occupied only in household chores had an attendance rate of 81.5 per cent.

2.9 What can we learn from this picture?

While it is important not to draw global conclusions solely on the basis of data taken from the survey of sixteen countries, the data does provide an important indication of the pattern of work among girls and boys engaged in both economic activities and unpaid household services. A key point is that if economic and non-economic activities are taken together, the statistics indicate that girls work more hours than boys. There is little difference between the hours that boys and girls spend working in economic activities but girls work quite significantly more than boys in unpaid work in their own household.

Chapter 3: Features of child labour by girls

3.2 Agriculture

Close to two thirds of economically active girls in the 5–14 age group work in the agriculture sector. Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors in terms of the number of work-related deaths, accidents and cases of occupational disease and ill health.

Light work appropriate to a child's age can have a positive side, helping them to learn skills that may be useful in their adult lives. However, owing to a variety of factors, including poverty, a demand for cheap and seasonal labour and family debt in the form of bonded labour, many girls and boys end up performing work that is clearly hazardous rather than light work appropriate to their age.

3.3 Domestic work

This section of the report looks at children working beyond the immediate family in third party households. Throughout the world children can be found working in households other than their own performing tasks such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, minding children and gardening. The overwhelming majority of child domestic workers are girls.

Domestic work can be hazardous both because of the conditions of work and the tasks undertaken. Many girls work very long hours, often more than 15 hours daily, and they are always on call.⁵ The heavy workload and lack of rest can pose a serious problem, and many girls experience stress and fatigue due to lack of sleep. Because the work is undertaken in private households, many girls are completely under the control of the employer. There are frequent reports of girls being subjected to beatings and brutal treatment, as well as to verbal or sexual abuse.

3.4 Manufacturing sector

About 9 per cent (almost 20 million) of the estimated 218 million child workers worldwide are employed in manufacturing. Girls and boys produce a range of goods including garments, carpets, toys, matches, brassware, footballs, fireworks, and hand-rolled cigarettes. These are sometimes manufactured in workshops set up within the household, where the whole family takes part in the production line.

The manufacturing method itself may encourage the involvement of children. For example, many women work as independent contractors in the garment industry, where they are paid on a piece-rate basis. In such situations, there is every possibility that there will be pressure on the daughters to help their mothers, or to take over the domestic duties so that their mothers can concentrate on their output. In both cases the likely outcome is that the girls will miss school.

Because labour inspection is virtually non-existent in home based production, child labour can all too easily go unchallenged. Some employers hire children because they are more manageable than adults. Children, and girls in particular, are looked upon as more docile and more suited to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work.

⁵ See, for example, Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11690/section/6>.

3.5 Mining and quarrying

The extent and severity of the hazards and the risk of disease, injury and death make mining and quarrying particularly dangerous. Many countries have therefore ruled that work in mining and quarrying by persons under the age of 18 should be regarded as one of the worst forms of child labour. The ILO estimates that nearly 1 million children from 5 to 17 years of age work in mines and quarries.⁶

Studies suggest that the proportion of boys and girls working in mining and quarrying is often similar. Girls can be found working in the extraction, transportation and processing stages of mining as well as in related jobs such as selling food and supplies to the miners. Girls in the sector may also be targets of abuse and of child prostitution.

Child workers in mining face serious health hazards and risk being severely injured, permanently disabled, or even killed. Health problems, however, may not become apparent until years later when the child grows up. Because their bodies and minds are still growing and developing, the risk of being injured or falling ill is for children even greater than for adults.

3.6 Forced and bonded labour

Forced labour is work or service that is exacted under the threat of punishment and undertaken involuntarily. It is a violation of ILO Forced Labour Convention 1930 (No. 29).

Bonded labour is when an individual's labour is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan. The person is then trapped into working for very little or no pay, often for seven days a week. In some regions of the world bonded child labour is a common traditional arrangement in the agricultural sector. Children born into families that are bonded are likely to become bonded child workers themselves.

Girls frequently enter bonded labour through debt-bondage arrangements negotiated by their parents or guardians, who borrow money by entering into a contract with a broker. Employers offer advances to the male family members, who then put the whole family to work. Debt bondage can render any daughters in the indebted family especially susceptible to abuse.

3.7 Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation

Trafficking is a crime, through which victims are reduced to commodities to be bought, sold, transported and resold for labour, sexual exploitation and other criminal purposes.⁷

Much trafficking of children involves young people from rural areas. Young people often do not see rural life as offering attractive prospects for the future. As a result, they can all too easily find themselves recruited to work far from home, sometimes having been promised work with high earnings. When they arrive at their new workplace, they very often find that what is expected of them is not at all what they were promised.

Trafficking can be for purposes of labour exploitation, and it is also closely associated with commercial sexual exploitation. While it is impossible to know the true extent of the problem, the ILO has estimated that at least 1.8 million children are exploited in commercial sex or pornography worldwide, the vast majority of them being girls.⁸

⁶ IPEC: *Eliminating child labour in mining and quarrying: Background document* (Geneva, ILO, 2005).

⁷ IPEC: *Combating trafficking in children for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners*, (Geneva, ILO, 2008).

⁸ ILO: *A future without child labour: Global report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (Geneva, 2002).

3.8 Girls associated with armed forces and groups

The term “children associated with armed forces and groups” refers to those below 18 years of age who are or have been recruited or used by an armed force or group in any capacity, including but not limited to children used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. In other words, the term does not refer only to boys or girls who take a direct part in hostilities. It is estimated that there are at least 250,000 girls and boys associated with armed forces and groups throughout the world.

In times of war girls and young women are often subjected to severe sexual violence. There are many horrific testimonials of girls being abducted, sexually abused, subjected to extreme violence, mutilated and forced to live under inhuman conditions, sometimes as “bush wives”. Girls, including those who join armed forces “voluntarily” in order to escape poverty or for material gain, are particularly vulnerable in situations of conflict.

At the local level, there can be different perceptions of boys and girls who return to their villages after having left the armed forces and groups. Communities may not welcome girls because of the stigma attached to rape, sexual slavery and mothering babies fathered by armed fighters or as a result of rape. It is important that girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups receive appropriate support.

Chapter 4: Investing in the education of girls

4.1 Education – a human right and a key to tackling child labour

Global data show that at all levels of education girls have less access than boys. Almost two thirds of the world's illiterate population is female, a statistic that reflects the extent of educational inequality. Investing in the improvement of girls' access to education is widely acknowledged as providing benefits that are important not only in terms of girls' personal development but also as a means of supporting social progress and economic development in general. Educating girls can provide benefits to their future families, their communities and society at large.

4.4 Data on gender disparities and factors affecting girls' education

Some 75 million children are still not enrolled in primary school, and 55 per cent of them are girls.⁹ In 2006 about two-thirds of the countries with data available had achieved gender parity in primary education enrolment. However more than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States had yet to do so. Some countries, including Pakistan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger, still enrol only 80 or fewer girls for every 100 boys at primary level. In 2005 in Afghanistan, there were fewer than 70 girls for every 100 boys entering school. On the other hand, improved policies in some countries have led to a higher enrolment rate.

The number of children enrolled in secondary school worldwide, expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of secondary school age (the gross secondary school enrolment ratio), is 67 per cent for boys and 63 per cent for girls. However, enrolment ratios vary enormously from region to region. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the secondary school enrolment ratio for boys is just 36 per cent and for girls only 29 per cent.

The global financial and economic crisis threatens progress

There is serious concern that the current global economic and financial crisis could have a significant negative impact on education and child labour. A number of reasons justify this concern:

- The prospect of a major increase in unemployment and poverty resulting from the crisis. In cultures where higher value is placed on the education of male children and a poor family has to decide between educating a boy and a girl, the girl may well lose out.
- Remittances are a key source of income for rural families and can provide a financial buffer to allow for younger children to receive an education. A decline in remittances (both national and international) is expected, and this could have a serious knock-on effect in poorer regions.
- Governments may be forced to make budget cuts. Education is sometimes seen as a "soft" budget that can easily be reduced. Cuts in spending on education can create pressure leading to children dropping out of school and entering the workforce.
- A reduction in international aid budgets could threaten donor support for education and jeopardize any education plans that depend on it.

⁹ UNESCO: *Overcoming inequality: Why governance matters – EFA Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2009). This Report provides the data used in section 4.4.

The report says it is critical that the response to the crisis must include measures to re-prioritize budget expenditures so as to benefit poor and vulnerable households. It is important to guard against the risk of both girls and boys being removed from school.

4.6 Tackling barriers to the education of girls

For girls, the distance to school and safety concerns, lack of separate sanitary facilities at school, and lack of female teachers particularly at secondary level, are factors which can lead to early drop out from school. Tackling these problems and providing quality education requires adequate financial resources to be allocated to the education sector.

Chapter 5: Adolescent girls and the youth labour market

5.2 The transition to a decent work situation can be especially difficult for girls

Adolescent girls receive a variety of conflicting and confusing messages on their gender role from their parents, teachers, peers and the media, and these can often be decisive in channelling girls into working at home or taking up some form of employment. Such decisions may well affect their future capacity to support themselves and other household members. To assist girls above the minimum age of employment the report calls for:

- providing opportunities for former child workers who miss out on basic education;
- labour market and youth employment programmes that include explicit strategies to facilitate female participation;
- tackling gender stereotypes in skills training so that young women have the chance of moving into a wider range of occupations;
- providing apprenticeship opportunities for young women;
- overcoming gender constraints at the enterprise level and in entrepreneurial training;
- ensuring young workers are aware of their rights.

Chapter 6: Summary and the policy response

6.1 Governments have prime responsibility

This report says it is the responsibility of Governments to take the lead in tackling child labour and that ten years after the adoption of Convention No. 182 it would be appropriate for national governments, to reflect on progress being made and action required to meet their obligations under both Convention No. 182 and Convention No. 138, with specific attention to the situation of girls.

6.2 Focus on poverty reduction

Girls and boys in situations of poverty are much more likely to be engaged in child labour than those from more affluent families. Development policies that seek to reduce poverty and vulnerability of children are the key to achieving major and sustainable progress in tackling child labour. It is important that issues of tackling child labour and promoting decent work for adults are integrated into such strategies.

Investment in the education and training of girls can play a very important role in helping to break the poverty cycle and should be a priority reflected in development plans and programmes.

Social protection measures that target poor families can also play an important role. Cash transfer programmes to poor families and incentives such as school food programmes, which ensure that poor children receive a meal each day at school, can make the difference between a child being in school or in child labour.

6.3 Focus on education

The provision of free, compulsory and quality education, at least up to the minimum age of employment, is the most important policy step a government can take to tackle child labour. Reducing the indirect cost of education (uniforms, books, transport, food, etc.) is also an important means of removing burdens that may otherwise prevent poor families from sending their children to school.

There are often specific barriers to girls' participation in education arising from cultural attitudes, safety concerns, and the multiple disadvantages that girls may experience. Such barriers need to be identified so that appropriate strategies to tackle them can be identified and implemented.

6.4 Labour inspection

Labour inspectorates need to be strengthened and to develop policies to address child labour and to provide appropriate training for inspectors, bearing in mind the special problems facing girls and the need to reach children of both sexes engaged in "hidden" work.

6.6 Responses to the financial crisis

The global financial and economic crisis is pushing an increasing number of families into poverty and could have a very negative impact on child labour. When a poor family has to choose between sending either a boy or girl to school, in cultures in which a higher value is placed on boys education, girls are at particular risk. The response to the crisis must include giving priority to budget expenditure that benefits poor and vulnerable households. Care must be taken to guard against the risk of both girls and boys being pulled out of school, and it should be noted that girls are at special risk.



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