



International
Labour
Office

ILO Convention
No.182

Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour

Ten years of Progress under ILO Convention 182

Ten years ago a global consensus was reached to tackle and eliminate the worst forms of child labour as a main priority for national and international action. In June 1999 the International Labour Conference unanimously adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, No. 182. Rapid progress has been made ever since. The Convention has recorded an unprecedented rate of ratification and has now been ratified by over 90 percent of the International Labour Organization's 182 member States.

Millions of child labourers have benefited from the Convention's drive against practices such as the use of children in slavery, forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, prostitution, pornography, forced or compulsory recruitment for armed conflict and all forms

of work that are likely to harm the safety, health or morals of children. Scores of ILO member States have taken immediate and effective measures under the Convention to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour *as a matter of urgency*. As a result, the number of children in the worst forms of child labour is decreasing more rapidly than the overall decline in all forms of child labour.

President William J. Clinton speaking in support of Convention 182 during the 1999 International Labour Conference



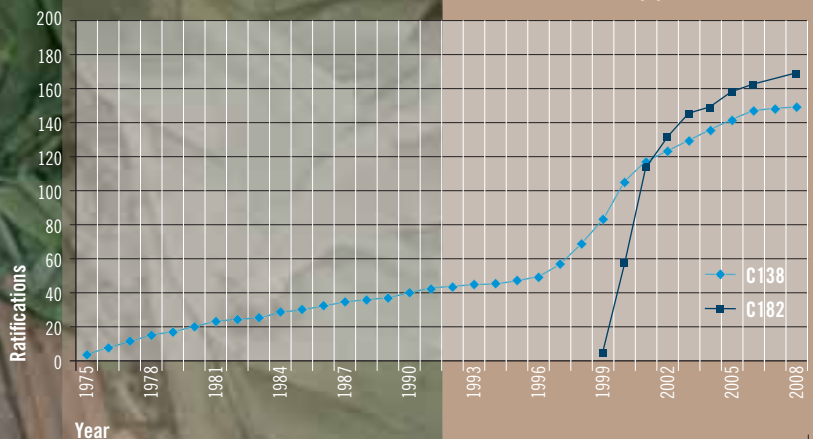
In 1999 former child labourers joined the Global March against Child Labour, arriving in Geneva to support the new Convention.

Unprecedented ratifications and support

In the history of international labour standards, the pace of acceptance of Convention No. 182 has been unparalleled. Following its adoption in 1999, the Convention received 100 ratifications by 2001 and 150 by the end of 2004. By February 2009, 169 countries had ratified the Convention. Universal ratification is now within reach and would be a first in the 90 year history of the ILO and its more than 180 conventions.

By shining a global spotlight on the worst forms of child labour, Convention No. 182 has also helped mobilise massive international support for the ILO's other key international standard on child labour, the Minimum Age Convention, No. 138. This Convention states that the minimum age of employment shall not be less than the age of compulsory schooling, and in any case, shall be not less than 15 years. (Members whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed may initially specify a minimum age of 14 years). Widespread acceptance of this Convention took off following adoption of Convention No. 182, with ratifications nearly quadrupling to over 150 at the beginning of 2009.

Number of ratifications of Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 by year



From ratification to law and practice

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention has helped to generate a wave of action against child labour. Since its adoption, scores of governments have enacted far reaching policies and interventions. These include new or enhanced legal frameworks to tackle the worst forms of child labour, enforcement mechanisms that include sanctions against those who break laws, national plans and programmes that set specific timeframes for action, direct action and assistance for the affected children and their families, including education and training as well as monitoring mechanisms to track progress.

Efforts to tackle poverty and expand access to education have gone hand-in-hand with action against child labour. Improved data collection and analysis have led to a better understanding of the nature and extent of the problem and targeted action.



Convention No. 182 and Recommendation No. 190 in brief

Convention No. 182 applies to boys and girls under the age of 18. It defines the worst forms of child labour to include: a) slavery and slavery-like practices, including forced labour, trafficking of children and forced recruitment for armed conflict; b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution or pornography; c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities and d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to be harmful to a child's health, safety or morals. The last category, also referred to as "hazardous work", must be determined by the governments of each country after consultation with employers' and workers' organisations.

Ratification of the Convention also obliges governments to:

Design, implement and monitor programmes of action

Designate national mechanisms to monitor the Convention's implementation

Enforce the Convention's provisions, including with penal or other sanctions

Take effective and time bound measures to prevent engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour and to remove and rehabilitate those children who are victims of it; to ensure access to free basic education for children removed; to reach out to children at special risk and to take account of the special situation of girls

Assist one another in giving effect to the Convention, including support for social and economic development, poverty eradication programmes and universal education

Recommendation No 190, which accompanies Convention 182, proposes a general outline for achieving the Convention's goals. These include, among others, collecting detailed information and statistical data on child labour; mobilising public opinion and involving employers' and workers' organisations and civic organisations, monitoring and publicising best practices, and creating jobs and providing skills training for parents and adult family members of concerned children.



Progress and hope: but major challenges remain

During this decade of progress, there has been much cause for hope, but it is clear that major challenges remain. In terms of actual numbers, globally, child labour is now on the decline. The most recent global report on child labour in 2006, pointed to an 11 per cent fall in the numbers in child labour worldwide. Significantly, the number of children in the worst forms of child labour decreased much more sharply, by 26 per cent overall, and by 33 per cent for children in the 5-14 age group. The report pointed to “a sea change in the awareness of child labour across the world, and a broad consensus... on the urgency of eradicating this scourge”.¹

However, more needs to be done. Recent progress reports suggest that the international community is a long way from reaching the development targets set in the Millennium Development Goals. If present trends continue it is estimated that by 2015 there will still be 29 million children not enrolled in primary school. There is a risk that many of these and other out of school children will drift into the labour force and become exposed to the worst forms of child labour.

The current global financial and economic crisis also threatens to hinder progress in tackling poverty and reaching development targets. Unemployed adults find it harder to keep their children in school. Sometimes children are taken out of school and sent to work as families seek to cope with the loss of income. Many children may find themselves pressed into work, when they should be seeking an education. The response to the crisis must include measures to re-prioritize budget expenditures to benefit poor and vulnerable households and to prevent an erosion of progress with regard to the elimination of child labour and its worst forms in particular.

¹ILO: *The end of child labour: Within reach* (Geneva, 2006).





A Global Action Plan on child labour

Against the background of positive trends in tackling the worst forms of child labour, the ILO's Global Action Plan against Child Labour endorsed by the Governing Body in late 2006 calls for the Organization to support its member States in pursuing the target of 2016 for the effective abolition of all worst forms of child labour. In order to achieve this, member States were encouraged, in accordance with Article 7 of Convention No. 182, to design and put in place appropriate time bound measures by the end of 2008.

The Global Action Plan also calls for the ILO :

- to support national responses to child labour, in particular through more effective mainstreaming of child labour concerns in national development and policy frameworks;
- to further develop the Time Bound Programme approach, through which governments undertake to eliminate particular forms of child labour within a specified time period;
- to further develop knowledge, tools and capacity, including building and strengthening appropriate statistical and analytical capacity for data collection;
- to promote a worldwide movement at the global level to bring awareness and resources to the problem at national level, and
- to bring a focus to Africa as the greatest development challenge.

Critical role of the social partners

Employers' and workers' organisations advocated strongly for the adoption of Convention No. 182 and continue to be central to the campaign against child labour. The Convention sets out specific roles for them. Within the framework of the IPEC programme, a range of initiatives promote further cooperation with the social partners and enhance their capacity, building on their particular expertise and avenues through which they can assist in tackling child labour.

«The ILO's tripartite constituency are natural leaders in sustaining consciousness of child labour, keeping it on the agenda, and building alliances for its elimination, nationally and globally.»

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia, speaking at the international Labour Conference, 9 June 2006



International Cooperation – delivering the commitment

A significant element in Convention No. 182, Article 8, brings international cooperation and assistance to bear in prohibiting and eliminating the worst forms of child labour. The Convention reaffirms that the worst forms of child labour concern all, and that countries should help each other to eliminate such intolerable exploitation of children, wherever it may exist. No child anywhere should be forgotten. This is the pledge of the 169 countries that have ratified the Convention thus far. Rights of children, no matter the level of development, are to be protected and assistance will be provided to those who need it to fulfil the commitment.

The leading role of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) would not have been possible without the support of donors. In 2008, some 17 governments contributed to support the Programme. The continued support of donors for international cooperation will be crucial in efforts to reach the 2016 goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour. It is time to redouble efforts to help those well on their way to walk that last difficult mile and to help others address the obstacles that are holding them back.

UN General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child, 2008 (A/63/426)

“...Urges all States that have not yet ratified... Convention No. 138 and Convention No. 182...to consider doing so as a matter of priority.

Also recognizes that the prevention and eradication of child labour and action towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals... mutually reinforce each other.

Also calls upon all States to elaborate and implement... time-bound strategies for the immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour...”

The ILO and Child Labour

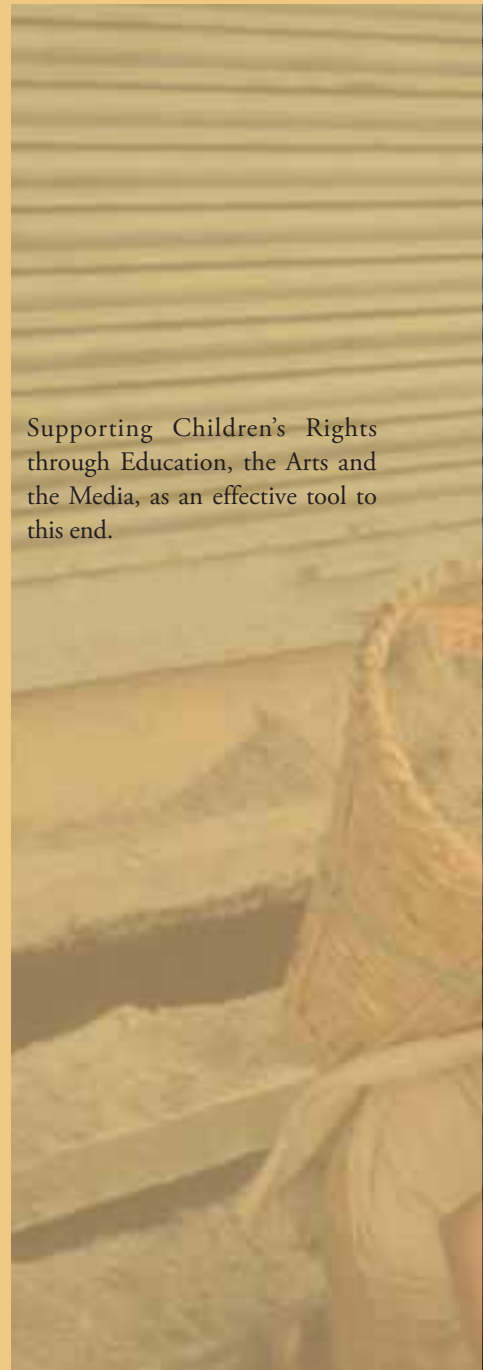
The elimination of child labour is a longstanding objective of the ILO. In 1919 the ILO's first Conference adopted a convention fixing the minimum age for employment in industry. The Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) provide the comprehensive and modern-day labour standards for tackling child labour, which are among the fundamental principles and rights at work accepted by the international community.

Since 1992, the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour has carried out conceptual and policy work, demonstrated practical action in the field, developed an enhanced statistical and knowledge base on child labour and stimulated action benefiting children, families and communities across the world.

Hundreds of projects supported by IPEC at the local level have resulted in millions of children being prevented from or helped out of child labour through the provision of education and skills and income generation and other assistance for their families. The programme has worked with children in many fields such as football stitching, carpet weaving, agriculture, domestic work, mines and quarries and in saving young girls and boys from trafficking and sexual exploitation and helping those who have been affected by armed conflict.

The ILO has also been at the forefront in creating greater awareness of the need for coordinated policies and action to tackle child labour. It has worked to broaden alliances with other UN agencies on the critical linkages between child labour and education and to end trafficking and child labour in agriculture. Interagency work with the World Bank and UNICEF provides a forum to enhance child labour research and bring coherence to policies and approaches. A global campaign to raise awareness and involve and empower young people works through a broad coalition of partners and uses SCREAM,

Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media, as an effective tool to this end.





Time for urgent action

As the global jobs and social crisis deepens, the time for urgent action against child labour becomes ever more critical. It is time for national governments, employers and workers and civil society to review progress made in eliminating the worst forms of child labour. In the face of economic downturn, we must take more urgent measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

The ILO is ready to work with all those who seek to free children from child labour.

Join the campaign now!

*ILO Convention No 182:
A decade of commitment to end the worst
forms of child labour*



www.ilo.org/ipec

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