



International
Labour
Organization



Tackling child labour

100 years of action



Tackling child labour 100 years of action

The long road to a world
free of child labour

The ILO's contribution 1919-2019

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“I want to be like the other children. When I see them playing and going to school, I want to join them.”

An 11 year old child.

Introduction

152 million children in child labour

Child labour is a global human and labour rights issue that affects us all. Child labour denies girls and boys of their right to a childhood, to a good education and to grow up safe and protected from harm. These children work long hours, for little or no pay and have no knowledge of their rights. About half of them work in hazardous work places and dangerous situations, sometimes resulting in injuries and illnesses that can have life-long effects on children, or may even be life-threatening.

The abolition of child labour is one of the principles on which the International Labour Organization (ILO) was founded in **1919**, and has remained a constant concern ever since. The ILO's Centenary year presents an important occasion to look back at the history of efforts made to tackle the problem and the challenges which remain in achieving the goal of a child labour free world.

At the very first International Labour Conference delegates discussed the need for effective regulation to restrict children's work in industry and established a Convention accordingly. In subsequent years further Conventions were adopted extending similar protections to other sectors. The standards set in those early years recognized that there should be a legal minimum age for work, that working hours of young people should be restricted, and that exposure of children to hazardous work was unacceptable.

The Conventions and Recommendations on child labour and children's work established by the ILO in the early part of the twentieth century were the first international and legally binding instruments concerning children's rights. Today, the Conventions on Minimum Age and on the Worst Forms of Child Labour are universally accepted as fundamental human and labour rights standards. Indeed, almost all the world's children are covered by Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

73 million children in hazardous work

The scale and nature of the problem has evolved along with the economic and social progress of the past century. During the period of early industrialization, there was no recognition of the principle of universal education. One hundred years ago the systematic use of child labour was still largely unchallenged in much of the world. Today, the prohibition of child labour and the effective regulation of the work of children who have reached the relevant minimum age is almost universally accepted.

However, a major challenge remains. There are still some 152 million children trapped in child labour (88 million boys and 64 million girls), with 73 million of them in hazardous work - largely in the various sectors of the informal and rural economies. Some 4.3 million children are subjected to forced labour.

4.3 million children in forced labour

There is no single or simple answer to child labour. Its prevalence is strongly linked to family and community poverty which in turn is perpetuated by it. The response must be based on policies which promote social and economic development, effective legal regulation, compulsory education through to the minimum age for employment, decent work for adults and young workers of legal working age, as well as effective social protection.

This book provides a short overview of the history of efforts to end child labour and, in particular, the central role that the ILO has played and continues to play.

The early regulation of children's work

(PRE 1919)

The first national legislation on child labour

Child labour is the term that refers to work that has been prohibited for children either because of their age or because of the nature of the tasks involved. Historically, in virtually all societies some children have worked in some way. However, the types of work they have performed and the forms of their employment have varied among societies and over time.

The recorded history of action to regulate children's work dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Europe at that time children's work – and what we now define as child labour – was widespread, particularly in agriculture and in the small trades. The industrial revolution that spread across Europe led to large concentrations of children working in factories and mines, often working long hours and in dangerous conditions. In time, the miserable conditions in which large

numbers of children toiled prompted social reformers to call for regulation of their work.

In the United Kingdom, the earliest factories had developed around the expanding cotton industry where much of the labour was provided by children, many of them orphans and often below the age of 10. In **1802**, the first piece of factory legislation was adopted, promoted by a factory owner who wished to see protections established for working children. Subsequently, an Act of **1819** stipulated that no child under the age of 9 be employed in cotton mills, and set a maximum working day of 12 hours for those under the age of 16.¹

Elsewhere in Europe, calls for regulation were growing, often inspired by emerging trade unions. In **1839**, Prussia passed a law prohibiting factory employment of those younger than 9 and limited the labour of those under the age of 16 to 10

hours a day.² In France, a law of **1841** covering factories and workshops, set a minimum age for employment at 8 years for companies employing more than 20 employees and limited daily working time to eight hours for children aged 8 to 12 years.³ In **1837** in Switzerland, the Canton of Zürich forbade the employment of school-age children in factories.

Child labour was widespread during America's industrial revolution when children worked in street trades, cotton mills, mines, factories and farms, with many working from a very young age. A National Trades' Union Convention in **1836** was the first body to call for a minimum age for factory workers. Responding to calls for legislative intervention, in **1842**, the State of Massachusetts limited the workday for children under the age of 12 to 10 hours with other States also beginning to legislate in this direction.⁴ A National Child Labor Committee was formed in **1904** and campaigned

for a federal child labour law. However, it was not until **1938** that a federal law was eventually approved.

In Africa, mainly ruled by colonial powers at the time, children were “invisible” in labour issues and were not differentiated from adults. Some legislative texts attempted to enact age thresholds for employment – for example, the age of 12 according to the Tunisian Decree of **1910**. However, their true purpose was to allow settlers to recruit children by establishing conditions that were not enforceable.

Elsewhere, during the pre-1919 period few efforts were made to regulate children's work through legislation. Some of the worst and most abusive forms of labour exploitation, including slavery and bonded labour, persisted in many parts of the world and often involved children.

In both Europe and the United States, child labour began to decline as the labour and reform movements grew, as labour standards in general began improving and as the needs of employers changed. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, trade unions were part of broad social movements both in Europe and the United States calling for the abolition of child labour and for domestic and international legislation to forbid it. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a movement for compulsory education gathered pace, driven both by social reform and the needs of the second industrial revolution for more skilled workers. Over a relatively short period, there ensued a major expansion of compulsory public education in Europe and the United States. Child labour now conflicted with children's access to education, and, increasingly, parents withdrew children from work.

Economic progress also helped to reduce child labour as higher wages for adults meant that families had less need to rely upon the labour of their children.⁵ In addition, mechanization and machine tools gradually eliminated some forms of work which had been primarily undertaken by children.

By the end of the nineteenth century most European countries and North American States had adopted legislation covering factory or industrial work of children, specifying a minimum age of employment and maximum hours of work.⁶

*“Come out of bed, little sleepy head,
And get your a bite to eat.
The factory whistle’s calling you,
There’s no more time to sleep.
The children all grew up unlearned,
They never went to school.
They never learned to read or write;
They learned to spin and spool.
Every time I close my eyes,
I see that picture still,
When textile work was carried on,
With babies in the mill.”*

Song “Babies in the Mill”, by Dorsey Dixon,
Testament Records T-3301, Chicago, 1964.



Two of the tiny workers, a raveler and a looper in Loudon Hosiery Mills. Loudon, Tennessee, 1910.

© ILO/Lewis Wickes Hine.

First steps in international cooperation

In several countries politicians and labour activists wanted to see standardized measures to tackle child labour extended through international agreement. One of the earliest international discussions on child labour took place at the first Congress of the International Workingmen's Association held in Geneva in **1866**. Congresses of this body in subsequent years emphasized the importance of the State's role in education and called for compulsory education as a means of preventing child labour.⁷

Possibilities of international regulation were discussed in the French and German Parliaments as well as at an international factory and mine labour conference held in Berlin in March **1890**. Its recommendations included the regulation or prohibition of child labour and employment of young persons, but no international commitments were formally entered into.⁸

Alongside these developments, efforts were being made to forge international agreements on conditions of work through the creation of the International Association for Labour Legislation which had been founded in **1900**, with the establishment of an office in Basel, Switzerland the following year. It was composed of various national associations campaigning for international action on labour standards and became an important laboratory for subsequent work of the ILO.⁹ In September **1913**, the Association called a Conference in Berne in which 13 States participated. Two Conventions were drafted, one regulating working hours of women and children and a second prohibiting night work of children. However, the First World War broke out destroying all hopes of concluding any of the international treaties and bringing the functioning of the International Association for Labour Legislation to a close.

THE BERLIN LABOUR CONFERENCE.

LIMITATION OF CHILD AND FEMALE LABOUR.

ABOLITION OF SUNDAY LABOUR.

[RECEIVED March 23, 9.30 p.m.]

London, March 23.

It is reported that the International Conference summoned by the Emperor William of Germany and now sitting at Berlin to consider various questions connected with labour in Europe has already come to certain conclusions.

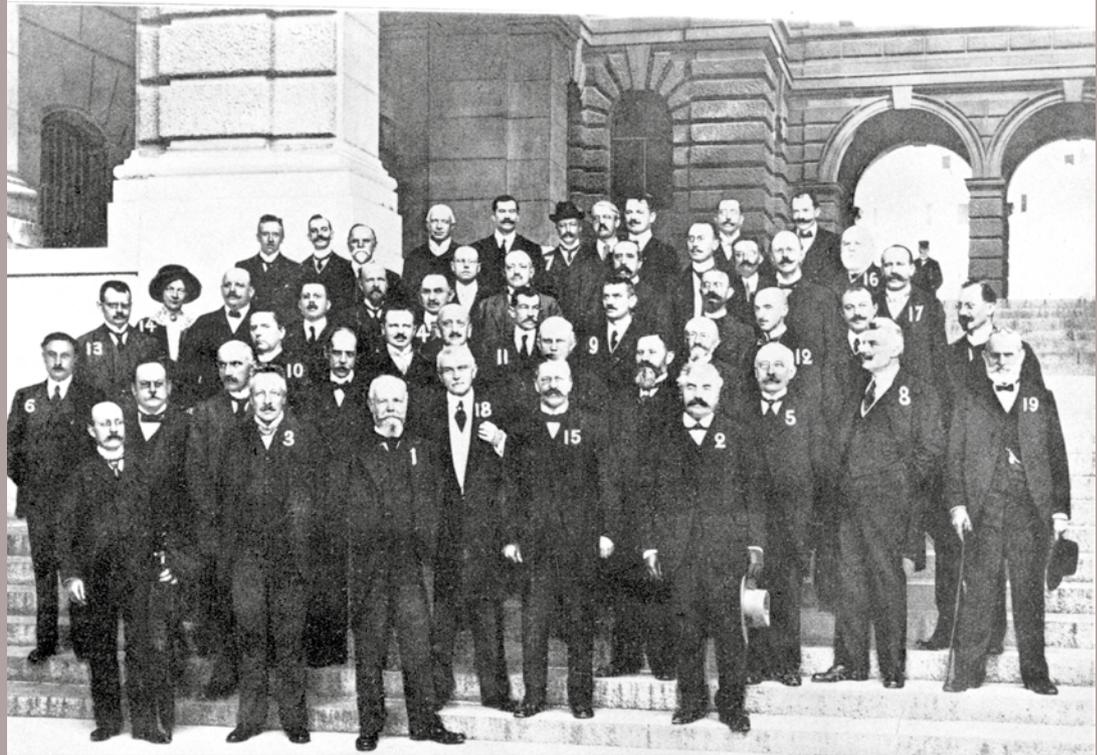
It is believed that the delegates have agreed that it is desirable to adopt legislation prohibiting children under fourteen years of age from working in mines, from performing night work, and from being employed for more than six hours a day.

With regard to female labour, it is proposed to forbid the employment of women in mines under any circumstances, and to prohibit their engagement or that of children in unhealthy or dangerous trades.

It is understood that the Conference recommend the abolition of Sunday labour except in special cases.

International Conference for the Protection of Labour, held in Berne, 15-25 September 1913.

© Keller.



*"The Berlin Labour Conference",
press article, South Australian
Register, 24 March 1890.*

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A call for action and the first ILO standards

1919–1944

Establishment of the ILO and abolition of child labour set as an aim

The aftermath of the First World War saw the opening in January **1919** of the Paris Peace Conference, which established a Commission on International Labour Legislation. This Commission recommended the creation of the ILO to promote peace through social justice and to overcome conflicts of interest through dialogue and cooperation.

The ILO started functioning that same year bringing together employers' and workers' organizations and governments at the international level in a search for rules and policies from which all could benefit.¹⁰

The rules established by the ILO – International Labour Standards – were to be legal instruments setting out basic principles and rights at work.

Conventions and Protocols were legally binding international treaties that could be ratified by member States, whilst Recommendations were to serve as non-binding guidelines addressed to all.

The Constitution of the ILO was contained within the Treaty of Versailles adopted by the Peace Conference. As one of the ILO's aims it set “the abolition of child labour and the imposition of such limitations on the labour of young persons as shall permit the continuation of their education and assure their proper physical development”.¹¹

The regulation of children's work was on the agenda of the first International Labour Conference of the ILO in Washington DC in November **1919**. Under the heading “Employment of children”, the agenda specified three issues: the minimum age of employment; work during the night; and work in unhealthy processes.

Employers' and workers' organizations were also keen to see new standards to regulate children's work. An international trade union conference in **1919** had demanded regulation in the form of a minimum age, limited hours of work and had called for compulsory education for all children. Major employers in the industrialized countries had also come to consider child labour as unacceptable.

At the Washington Conference the first international standard on child labour was adopted: The Minimum Age (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 5) established a minimum age of 14 years for employment or work in industry. However, it included various exemptions (including a lower minimum age for certain countries) and made no reference to working hours.¹² At the same Conference a further Convention was adopted restricting night work of women and children.

“It is the exploitation of childhood which constitutes the evil... most unbearable to the human heart. Serious work in social legislation begins always with the protection of children.”

Albert Thomas,
First Director of the ILO (1919–1932).

*Albert Thomas
receiving flowers
from workers'
children in Ogre,
Latvia, 1927.*

© ILO.



Further early work on standards

The minimum age standards developed during the ILO's first two decades were the first of a number of international labour standards on the rights of children. Subsequently, standards were established which extended the concept of the legal minimum age beyond industry. In **1920**, a Minimum Age (Sea) Convention (No. 7) was adopted for maritime work, and in 1921 a similar standard was adopted for agriculture. Minimum age standards were included in a number of other Conventions concerned with safety and health as well as conditions in specific industries.¹³ While most Conventions excluded work in family enterprises and allowed for other specific exceptions, those targeting particularly hazardous occupations or sectors set higher age thresholds.¹⁴

In **1933**, the Minimum Age (non-industrial employment) Convention (No. 33) was adopted in order to broaden occupational coverage. It prohibited employment of “children under fourteen years of age, or children over fourteen years who are still required by national laws or regulations to attend primary school” (article 2).

Workers' and employers' organizations continued to play a central role throughout the twentieth century in negotiating new standards on child labour.

All in all, the inter-war period saw a period of rapid standard-setting on minimum age and conditions of work for young people. Other ILO standards were also adopted during this period shaping the governance of the world of work. Among these, the Forced Labour Convention 1930 (No. 29) was relevant to the protection of children as it covered the issue of bonded labour.

Although Conventions relating to child labour were often better ratified than those on other areas of ILO work, the ratification rate proved to be low. Much of the world and child labour in it remained outside the reach of the new standards.¹⁵

It also became apparent at an early stage that there often remained a considerable gap between law and practice, between a member State's intentions (as expressed by the ratification of a Convention) and its ability to effectively eliminate child labour on the ground through the application of standards on minimum age of employment.

“With regard to child labour, we are informed that in some cases children are taken to the factories so that the women may have the opportunity of looking after them... How is this possible?... Such a situation, we workers can never accept, and we appeal to the countries in question to protect their children and pass legislation in the near future...”

Corneille Mertens,
General Secretary of the *Commission syndicale*, at the
7th Session of the International Labour Conference,
1925.

A human rights issue – momentum builds

1945–1990

Following the formation of the United Nations (UN) in **1945**, the ILO became its first specialized agency responsible for social and labour questions. The ILO's status, its structure as the only tripartite Organization in the UN system, and its international labour standards placed it in a unique position to lead the international effort against child labour.

The Philadelphia Declaration, adopted at the **1944** Conference of the ILO, reaffirmed the objectives of the ILO as contained in the Constitution – including the regulation of children's work. With the end of the Second World War in sight, the Declaration sought to adapt the guiding principles of the ILO to the new aspirations aroused by the hopes for a better world. The Declaration, which was incorporated in the Constitution of the ILO in **1946**, included a call for attention to children's welfare and for equality of educational and vocational opportunity.

The **1950s** and **1960s** began to see a greater focus on the human rights dimension of children's rights and a welcome, broader interest in tackling child labour. In **1959**, a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child stated the commitment that “the child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development”.



*Young construction
worker, India,
1960s–1970s.*

© ILO.

*ILO vocational
training assistance
programme, Sudan,
1960s–1980s.*

© ILO.



The Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Recommendation (No. 146)

During its first three decades, the ILO adopted 11 Conventions and five Recommendations concerning the minimum age for admission to employment or work.¹⁶ In 1970, the ILO Governing Body decided that the existing Conventions on minimum age should be revised and consolidated. The minimum age standards that had been adopted in the inter-war period were regarded as being of restricted applicability, concerned as they were with specific economic sectors or occupations. It was felt that the time had come to replace them with an instrument which could establish broader, clearer and up to date standards.¹⁷

The Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) was thus adopted by the International Labour Conference. It applies to all sectors of economic activity and covers children whether or not they are employed for wages.¹⁸ The Convention establishes the principle that the minimum age for employment or work should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling, and sets a basic minimum age of 15 years. Member

States whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed can initially specify a minimum age of 14 years. The Convention offers added flexibility by allowing a lower minimum age for “light work”.¹⁹ This is defined as work which is neither harmful to children’s health or development, nor prejudicial to their attendance at school, their participation in vocational training or their capacity to benefit from the instruction they receive. The Convention also sets a standard age of 18 years for hazardous work with very limited exemptions.



*Committee on
Minimum Age, in
session, at the
58th Session of
the International
Labour Conference,
1973.*

© ILO.

The International Year of the Child 1979

The United Nations declared **1979** the International Year of the Child (IYC). The theme of the year was the well-being of children, with special attention given to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. The issues highlighted by the IYC were very pertinent to the discussion around child labour and the activities carried out helped to further stimulate the campaign against the problem.

As part of its contribution to the IYC, the ILO published a summary of 15 national studies illustrating the scale of the child labour problem. A resolution adopted at the International Labour Conference that year put forth a request that the ILO reinforce its work through factual surveys of child labour situations and practices. A technical meeting of social scientists held that same year considered methodologies which could be used for research into child labour.²⁰

ILO activities extended

During the **1980s** the ILO gradually stepped up its activities. In addition to the supervisory work on the application of the child labour Conventions, coordinated through its International Labour Standards Department, new technical research and limited country-level efforts were now being supported through its Working Conditions and the Environment Programme.

The **1980s** fuelled a debate about the impact of the growing phenomenon of globalization on poor and marginalized groups. The situation of children in child labour was gaining increased attention with a rise in the number of non-governmental organizations taking up the issue. While their specific concerns and proposed strategies for tackling child labour were diverse, the cumulative impact was to ensure a continuous flow of reports about child labour in the world's media. From bonded labour in South Asia, to commercial sexual exploitation in South East Asia and children working in cocoa production in West Africa, a steady stream of information emerged.

In some countries and regions, coalitions of NGOs were established to campaign against child labour. Responding to a growing consumer demand for ethical standards on trade, some of these groups were later to become active in product labelling campaigns, which were intended to inform consumers that they were purchasing goods free of child labour.

As concern mounted, a UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities recommended the appointment of a Special Rapporteur, Professor Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (Tunisia), to produce a report on the “exploitation of child labour”. This report, submitted in **1982**, drew heavily on research and background documentation provided by the ILO. It provided examples of child labour situations throughout the world, in both developing and industrialized countries. The report called for a global strategy with a five-year time-frame which would set education as a priority and include building public awareness as well as working with the media.²¹

A report presented to the International Labour Conference in **1983** made the case for a comprehensive approach to child labour with the objective of its total elimination as part of the development process. It highlighted the importance of policy measures which could have an impact on child labour in a positive and sustainable manner, while at the same time calling for immediate and direct action to eradicate the most objectionable forms of child labour and, pending its total abolition, to protect children from unsafe or exploitative working conditions. It gave examples of such work: young girls working in small industrial enterprises in tasks involving very fine wires, resulting in loss of eyesight within five to eight years; children in bondage; children working underground in mines; and children employed as seasonal and cheap labour in pesticide-soaked fields.²²

The need for significant resources to tackle child labour was also highlighted in the **1983** report as was the need for cooperation between United Nations agencies so as to use the various areas of expertise to maximum effect. UNICEF had already added impetus to child labour elimination efforts through a programme centred on children in especially difficult circumstances, and the World Health Organization had by then implemented certain initiatives focused on child labour.

“Child labour is rooted in poverty. Unemployment and underemployment, precarious incomes, low living standards, and insufficient opportunities for education and training are its underlying causes. Children work because they must – for their own survival and that of their families.”

Francis Blanchard,
Director General of the ILO (1974–1989), in his
Report to the 69th Session of the International Labour
Conference, 1983.

The worldwide movement against child labour

Writing in **1988**, an important ILO official reflected on the growing movement against child labour in a paper that reviewed initiatives undertaken by a wide range of organizations in 20 countries.²³ The idea of a “worldwide movement against child labour” thus emerged, and became a vision that was to guide ILO activities. If there was to be a worldwide movement against child labour, the ILO needed to be at its centre providing leadership with the standards and knowledge it had generated. However, it was also clear that a major expansion of work would be necessary if there was to be an effective response to the needs of member States, and this would require additional resources.

In **1989**, with support from the Government of the Netherlands, the ILO undertook its first major development cooperation project on child labour – the so-called “Smokey Mountain” project – that assisted children involved in child labour picking through rubbish at a dump site in Manila (The Philippines). The project worked with local partners

in delivering a range of services which included support for children to access formal education, non-formal education support, livelihood skills training for both older children and adult community members, as well as access to health programmes.

*Assistance
programme for
children working on
dump sites – part
of the ILO “Smokey
Mountain” project,
Philippines, 1990.*

© ILO/Maillard J.



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in **1989** was a major step forward for children's rights and gave further impetus to the campaign against child labour. The Convention defines as a child anyone under the age of 18 and it sets out a number of rights including, in Article 32, "the right of children to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education or be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development". Other articles of the CRC are also relevant to efforts that tackle some of the worst forms of child labour.

The CRC established that, in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, and the subsequent near-universal ratification of the CRC reflected a strong global commitment to the principles of children's rights. In line with the CRC, ensuring the best interests of the child is a principle which guides all of the ILO's work on child labour.

The link between the CRC and ILO standards was reinforced over the years. The ILO regularly provided information to the Committee dealing with the CRC, particularly in cases concerning the application of Article 32, and the Committee regularly urged member States to comply with the ILO's child labour standards.

In **2000**, the United Nations General Assembly adopted two Optional Protocols to the CRC to increase the protection of children from involvement in armed conflicts, from being sold and from sexual exploitation. These situations had also explicitly been included under the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182) and the two sets of international standards thus complement each other. In 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a third Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure.

A new Programme and a new Convention

1990–2000

The formation of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

The largest gathering of world leaders in history took place in **1990** at the UN World Summit for Children. The Summit adopted a Declaration in which world leaders committed to “work for special protection of the working child and the abolition of illegal child labour”.

Against the background of this summit, the Government of Germany proposed to the ILO a new global campaign against child labour. The intention was to support a sustainable initiative in which other donor countries would participate. In September **1990**, the Minister of Labour Norbert Blüm notified the ILO of his government's decision to make a significant annual contribution over a period of five years to a new programme, which led

to the establishment of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour in **1992**.

According to the document which established IPEC, the Programme would support, across the world, demonstration activities with a direct bearing on the prevention of child labour, and the removal, protection or rehabilitation of children involved in child labour. It would also support data gathering and dissemination; the mobilization of employers' and workers' organizations and NGOs; advocacy aimed at political leaders; coordination between international agencies, and the international exchange of views and experiences.²⁴

The new Programme became the ILO's “operational arm” in the fight against child labour. Within a short time, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Thailand and Turkey had signed up as partners of IPEC. In **1995**, the number of donors expanded, and the programme received a major boost when funding was provided under a US Department of Labor Cooperative Agreement that same year.

Establishing political will and strengthening legal provisions

IPEC's starting point for action at the country level was to ascertain the political will and commitment of governments to address the problem of child labour in cooperation with employers' and workers' organizations. Ensuring national ownership of efforts was important especially as child labour was often seen as a sensitive issue. As a first step, a memorandum of understanding was agreed with the host government. National Steering Committees were then established, led by the Ministries of Labour and bringing together other relevant Ministries (typically Education, Health, Planning and Social Welfare Ministries), along with representatives of the trade unions and employers' organizations as well as civil society representatives.

The ILO provided support to member States which included assistance leading up to the ratification of the minimum age Convention and to States' efforts to give effect to their provisions through legislation

and practice. This included support to the drafting process; reviewing draft legislation; and providing constituents and other relevant stakeholders an opportunity to discuss the legislative framework. Assistance was also given to ILO constituents to report more effectively to the ILO supervisory system on the application of the Conventions. Many countries modified laws related to the minimum age for admission to employment, and started to establish lists of hazardous child labour, in consultation with workers' and employers' organizations.

Direct action and monitoring

The presence of IPEC at the country level meant that it could support and learn from action programmes that withdraw children from child labour and/or prevent their entry into it. These programmes were implemented with a range of partners, and some of them gained a high profile. For example, in **1995**, Bangladesh faced the threat of import restrictions of goods from factories employing children, mainly girls, in the textile and garment sector – an industry which accounted for two-thirds of Bangladesh's total earnings. The ILO and UNICEF were asked to step in to assist. An agreement with the employers' association was established to determine the number of working children under the age of 14; to implement a monitoring system aimed to remove them from work; to set up education programmes; and to provide partial compensation for loss of income to children formerly in child labour and to their families. As a result, more than 8,000 children were successfully withdrawn from 800 garment factories and enrolled in special education programmes.²⁵

In the run up to the **1996** European Football Championship (and the football World Cup in 1998), media and public attention focused on Sialkot in Pakistan, which produced 30 million soccer balls annually, with much of the stitching done by an estimated 7,000 children. A joint project that aimed to eliminate child labour in the industry was established by the ILO and UNICEF following a manufacturers' agreement to participate voluntarily in the process.²⁶

These and other interventions during the **1990s** served to further develop insights both on the scale and nature of child labour in a wide variety of industries and national contexts, and delivered crucial learning about the mutually interdependent nature of fundamental rights at work.

Social partners' key role

In the years that followed the birth of IPEC, the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) together with IPEC implemented projects that would build the capacity of trade unions to respond to child labour, while the International Trade Union Confederation also frequently supported capacity building of its affiliated organizations. At the sectoral level, global union federations in education, agriculture, textiles, garments and leather, domestic work and mining all partnered in sectoral initiatives to tackle child labour. As well as participating in National Steering Committees, many trade unions became involved in implementing Action Programmes to build awareness of and to tackle child labour particularly through advocacy for public service delivery, supporting community capacity, and, crucially, through negotiations and action for decent work and better family incomes.

“The area-based approach (to tackling child labour) must result in the empowerment of communities, including in the rural areas, to demand public services – including education – needed for child labour elimination and to support an environment conducive to rural workers’, small enterprise and cooperative organization.”

Nitte Manjappa Adyanthaya,
Workers' representative, India, Vice-President of the
Indian National Trade Union, at the IPEC Steering
Committee, 2011.

Employers' organizations have also played a key role. The ILO's Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) has worked to build capacity through its own projects with the international business community. Together with the International Organisation of Employers, it has developed guidance to employers on how to avoid the use of child labour. Employers' organizations, together with trade unions, have played an important role on National Steering Committees. They have also been involved in various sectoral initiatives, and a number of them have established Child Labour Units and implemented their own Action Programmes.

“Employers are fully committed to the respect of human rights and to eliminate the risks of child labour in their supply chains. However, the challenges are huge and complex and now, more than ever, employers seek collective action and collaboration.”

Jacqueline Mugo,
Employers' group spokesperson, Executive Director of the Federation of Kenyan Employers, at the World Day Against Child Labour event during the 105th Session of the International Labour Conference, 2016.

UN World Summit on Social Development 1995 – child labour linked with other fundamental rights

Rapid globalization had provided the impetus for an escalating international debate on trade and labour standards (often called the “social clause debate”) when the World Trade Organization (WTO) was set up in **1994**. At around the same time, the International Labour Conference began a major review of standards-related issues.

In **1995**, the outcome document of the UN World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen called on governments to safeguard the basic rights of workers, “and to this end, freely promote respect for relevant ILO Conventions, including those on the prohibition of forced and child labour, freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively and the principle of non-discrimination”. Linking child labour with the three other categories of fundamental rights proved to be crucial. Earlier, child labour had been seen rather as a sub-category of forced labour. The idea of a new ILO Declaration on fundamental labour standards gathered force thanks to the discussions held at the Copenhagen Summit.²⁷

Following the Summit, the ILO set up a campaign to promote ratification of the core Conventions. Until then, the Minimum Age Convention had been widely regarded as a technical Convention lacking the characteristics of other human rights instruments²⁸ and had still received only 45 ratifications more than twenty years after its adoption. However, once the Copenhagen Summit had linked the elimination of child labour to other basic workers' rights – and at a time when the preparation, negotiation and adoption of ILO Convention No. 182 reawakened wider interest in child labour – the ratifications of Convention No. 138, substantially increased, rising to 106 in the next five years.

In **1996**, a WTO Ministerial Conference held in Singapore also made a commitment to the observance of internationally recognized core labour standards including the prohibition of child labour. It recalled that the ILO was the competent body to set and deal with these standards and reaffirmed support for its work in promoting them.²⁹

While some countries still feared that admitting to a child labour problem could lead to trade sanctions, governments increasingly came to realize that acknowledging the problem and working with the ILO to tackle it provided a strong argument against sanctions and for assistance instead.³⁰

Consensus emerges on the need to tackle the worst forms of child labour

A consensus had been emerging since the Director General's report to the ILC in **1983** that, while all child labour should be eliminated, there was a particularly urgent need to address its worst forms. The experience obtained by IPEC through its work on the ground reinforced the need for prioritization and urgent action. Against this background, the ILO's Governing Body decided to place child labour on the agenda of the 1998 International Labour Conference, with the aim of adopting new international standards that would tackle the worst forms of child labour.

Subsequently, two international conferences were held in **1997** – a reflection of the major interest that had developed. In February, the Dutch Government and the ILO organized a Conference in Amsterdam which focused on what were considered the most harmful forms of child labour and urged action towards their eradication as a matter of immediate priority.³¹

In October **1997**, the Norwegian Government convened a Conference in Oslo at which the ILO and UNICEF presented a joint report looking at strategies to tackle child labour. In his key note address, Mr. Michel Hansenne, the then Director General of the ILO, suggested main strategies to combat child labour based on government commitment, backed up by a time-bound programme of action, and strengthening the international legal framework by the adoption of an international Convention to suppress all “extreme” forms of child labour. He further suggested to translate the growing global concern about child labour into a programme for international cooperation.³² At the same time, the Executive Director of UNICEF focused strongly on the importance of education as a key policy tool and as the single most cost-effective way to eliminate child labour.

ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW)

In **1998**, the efforts to promote the Conventions on child labour received a further major boost when the International Labour Conference adopted the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW). The Declaration covers the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining; the effective abolition of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the elimination of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. It emphasizes that all member States have an obligation to promote, realize and respect the principles established in the fundamental International Labour Standards irrespective of whether a member State has ratified the Convention or Protocol concerned or not.

The Declaration became an important statement of political commitment, with wide recognition within the international community. The United Nations and various other bodies, such as meetings of the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers, emphasized its significance, and several regional investment banks required lenders to

recognize the fundamental principles and rights at work. A quarter of the value of global trade is now within the framework of agreements that include labour provisions. These commonly refer to the Declaration, while the obligations of the parties usually include maintaining labour laws and practices in line with the Declaration.³³

Fundamental principles and rights at work are embedded in several international instruments that promote responsible business conduct, such as the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration), the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the UN's Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights. They were also incorporated as principles of the UN Global Compact, established in **2000** to promote corporate sustainability and responsible business conduct. In addition, most of the multi-stakeholder initiatives on labour rights refer to the universal principles of the Declaration.



"I firmly believe that the four fundamental human rights referred to (in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work) should be subscribed by all. I look forward to close cooperation between the ILO and my Office on the issue of ensuring that children have their right to life chances, to be educated, to receive medical care, to laugh, to play. Indeed to be a child without being forced into labour of any kind."

Mary Robinson,
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997–2002), at the 86th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1998.

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The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention

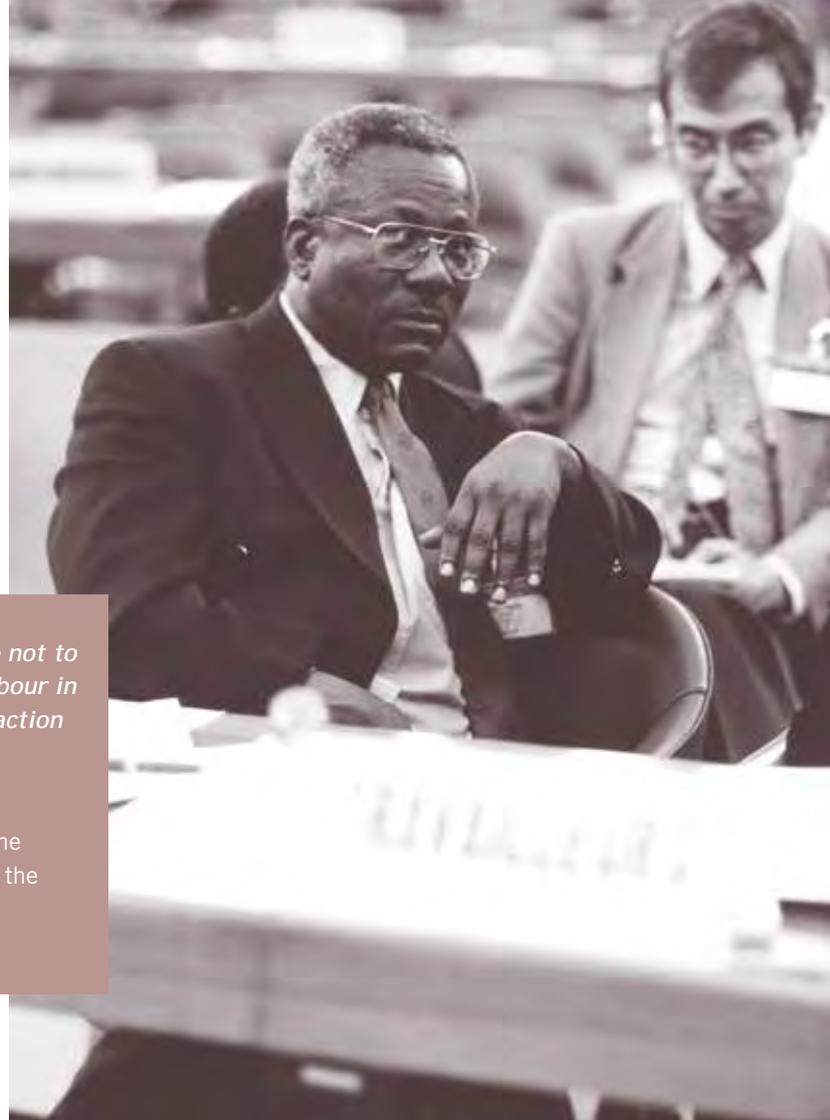
The **1998** International Labour Conference held the first discussions on the worst forms of child labour which led to the adoption of **the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182** and Recommendation No. 190 the following year. The Convention reinforces the principles of the **Minimum Age Convention No. 138** and calls for urgent action against the worst forms of child labour. These are defined as “all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour including forced or compulsory recruitment of children in armed conflict; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances” (commonly referred to as commercial sexual exploitation of children); “the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children” (commonly referred to as hazardous work).

From left to right: Assefa Bequele, former Director of the ILO Working Conditions and Environment Department and Achi Atsain, Government delegate, Côte d'Ivoire, Chairperson of the Committee on Child Labour, at the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1999.

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The trade union movement had been influential in helping to push child labour to the top of the international policy agenda in the **1990s** and, together with employers' organizations, played a key role in negotiating Convention No. 182. At the time it was adopted, the Convention was unique in the importance it gave to programmatic initiatives. It required Members to design and implement programmes of action to eliminate as a priority the worst forms of child labour.



“Let us therefore urge all persons everywhere not to seek to find excuses for the scourge of child labour in its worst forms. Let us instead start remedial action now, as the Convention demands.”

Leroy Trotman,
Workers' delegate, Barbados, Vice-Chairperson of the
Committee on Child Labour, at the 87th Session of the
International Labour Conference, 1999.

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Such programmes should include measures to remove and rehabilitate those children who were victims of child labour; to ensure access to free basic education for children removed from it; to identify and reach out to children at special risk and to take account of the special situation of girls.

The atmosphere at the beginning of the **1998** discussion was unlike anything seen before during an International Labour Conference. The Global March Against Child Labour, a worldwide alliance of NGOs and trade union organizations with headquarters in India, had organized marches of children who were both involved in child labour and

removed from it and mobilized social activists in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the United States to support the development and adoption of the new Convention. Led by Kailash Satyarthi from India – who was to receive the Nobel Peace Prize some years later for his work against child labour – former working children together with civil society and trade union representatives, marched with flags and banners across four continents, finally descending on the Palais des Nations in Geneva where the Conference was being held. The marchers enthusiastically joined delegates from around the world in calling for the new and strengthened child labour standards.

Children participating in the Global March Against Child Labour, 86th session of the International Labour Conference, 1998.

© Steyne S.



Thus in **1999**, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention was adopted unanimously at the International Labour Conference, following negotiations of the text that, with few exceptions, were marked by cooperation, good will and consensus. The Conference made clear that **Convention No. 182** complemented and supplemented **Convention No. 138**, and this proved to be a bedrock of the integrated approach towards the eradication of all forms of child labour eventually adopted by the ILO. This was the first unanimous adoption of a Convention in the ILO's history, and the first to be negotiated by a Conference committee without a vote being taken.

It was also the first International Labour Conference to be addressed by a President of the United States of America. President Bill Clinton announced his Government's support for the ILO's action against child labour as well as its intention to ratify the new Convention. The United States ratification was signed in December **1999**.



“We worked together to achieve a truly practical instrument... No votes were taken, no representatives intimidated, all views were heard in the interest of finding solutions to enable ratification by all member states.”

Bokkie Botha,
Employers' delegate, South Africa, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Child Labour, at the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1999.

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“We thank you for achieving a breakthrough for the children of the world... Passing this Convention alone however will not solve the problem. We must also work aggressively to enforce it.”

Bill Clinton,
President of the United States of America (1993–2001), at the
87th Session of the International Labour Conference, 1999.

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Improved knowledge and methodology on data

In the years immediately following IPEC's inception in **1992**, its country programmes supported studies on issues related to child labour in sectors which were as varied as agriculture, fishing, street children, brick kilns, domestic work, gold mining, rubbish-trash picking, footwear production, and street work. In the early 1990s, the ILO and UNICEF developed a rapid assessment methodology with the aim of assisting countries in collecting the most complete bank of information possible about child labour. Rapid assessments tended to focus on very sensitive areas, including forms of child labour which predominantly involve girls, such as domestic work, trafficked children, and commercial sexual exploitation of children, amongst others. These early studies and rapid assessments helped to develop the knowledge base, raise awareness of problems, and identify potential ways to tackle child labour in different branches of the economy.

However, it was not until the late 1990s that a robust methodology for national and global estimates was established, although rough estimates of child labour had been attempted

during the initial years of IPEC. In **1998**, IPEC established a Statistical, Information and Monitoring Programme (SIMPOC), which played the leading role in developing the application of statistically reliable methodologies to measure child labour. Approximately 100 child labour surveys in around 60 countries were supported technically or financially by IPEC between **1998** and **2019**. While in the early years, the use of “stand alone” child labour surveys were the main method, the integration of child labour modules into other national surveys was encouraged with a view to making child labour estimates more sustainable.

The ILO also promoted discussion within the periodic International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) to establish consensus around collection of data and measurement of child labour. Recent years have brought to the fore the notion of bringing household chores into discussions on child labour measurement, which is in turn critical to ensure better accounting for the forms of work that fall disproportionately on the shoulders of girls. A new Resolution concerning child labour statistics

was adopted in October **2018** by the 20th ICLS which will serve as the main reference point for worldwide efforts to measure and monitor child labour going forward.

In **1998**, an inter-agency initiative, the Understanding Children's Work project (UCW), was established involving the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank. A richer understanding of why children work and the serious negative repercussions of child labour for children's health and safety as well as for their ability to attend and benefit from school was gained through interagency efforts combined with better data. This improved understanding has informed policies designed to eradicate child labour and has allowed countries to move faster and more effectively when implementing these policies. In addition, "School to work transition" became an important field for research and policy development.

Academic interest was also stimulated now that the international profile of child labour was attracting more attention, thus further adding to the knowledge base. As a result, the number of academic papers on the subject began to rise significantly with more than a threefold increase during the 1990s.³⁴

Another notable initiative was a **2003** analysis of the economic costs and benefits of eliminating child labour. It demonstrated that the benefits of eliminating child labour were nearly seven times greater than the costs. While child labour remained fundamentally a human rights issue, the analysis demonstrated that there was also a strong economic case for ending it.³⁵

Action and advocacy reach new heights

2000–2019

Time-bound programmes and global action

Following the adoption of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, IPEC began to implement larger scale projects to support the implementation of national Time-bound programmes (TBPs) to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. TBPs generally had a twin focus – mainstreaming child labour concerns into national policies while, at the same time, implementing programmes to tackle child labour in particularly hazardous sectors in a given timeframe. El Salvador, Nepal and Tanzania first implemented the TBP approach, beginning in **2001**. Workers' and employers' organizations played a key role in the oversight and development of all programmes and policies on child labour through their role in National Steering Committees.

In recognizing the realities of development work, a time-bound programme made it possible to reconcile the aim of eliminating all child labour with action targeting its worst forms as a priority.

Writing in **2005**, a former IPEC Director of Operations reflected that “the concept of the TBP was readily accepted by several countries which had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IPEC. Today the TBP is a very good example of a technical cooperation project designed to support our member States in implementing a Convention they have ratified. It is a programme aimed at ensuring the active participation of stakeholders, national ownership and sustainability.”³⁶

“I am here, Mme President, to plead for the empowerment of countries like mine as we seek to end child labour and set our children both free and on a firm foundation for the future they deserve.”

Benjamin Mkapa,
President of Tanzania (1995–2005), at the 89th Session of the International Labour Conference, 2001.

IPEC was active in 107 countries

The expanded programme was able to provide support to member States at a level never previously possible. Over the ten-year period **2004–2014**, IPEC was active in 107 countries, 42 in Africa, 25 in the Americas, 17 in Asia and the Pacific, 16 in Europe and Central Asia and seven in the Arab States. The size of these programmes varied from multi-million-dollar, multi-year, time-bound programmes such as in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Brazil, El Salvador, Indonesia and India, to smaller country programmes, such as in Liberia, Tunisia, Romania, and Belize.

Reflecting the increased attention placed on girls in child labour in the years following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention No. 182, gender was increasingly mainstreamed into IPEC's programmatic activities. By the mid-2000s, the issue of gender was universally regarded as a vital component in addressing child labour.

IPEC had 88 offices in 75 countries

Increasing focus was placed on effective project design and evaluation to ensure that good practices could be replicated and not so good practices avoided. A Design, Evaluation and Documentation section was established in IPEC and during the peak period of the **2004–2005** biennium, it carried out 79 project evaluations.

It is worth recalling that, in the late 1980s, the regular budget of the ILO had only one dedicated position dealing with child labour.³⁷ By **2006**, primarily due to donor support, IPEC had 88 offices in 75 countries and a worldwide staff of 474 professional and general service personnel.³⁸ At the same time, the regular budget staff dealing with child labour was also considerably increased.

IPEC succeeded in attracting support from a wide range of donors. After the initial involvement of Germany, many other European countries as well as the European Commission joined in, as did Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

A particularly significant boost was given by the United States. Following an initial promise of USD 30 million by President Clinton, from **1995** to **2019**, the Government of the United States contributed some USD 600 million to support the ILO's work on child labour. This support has enabled IPEC to implement projects in over 90 countries, mainly in Asia, Africa and Latin America, including country and regional programmes as well as projects focusing on specific types of child labour. In the early 2000s, South-South cooperation became a new modality for sharing experience and building capacity through peer learning and mutual support. In **2005**, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Brazil and the ILO on combating child labour through South-South Cooperation in Portuguese-speaking African countries.

“Children can help. In a world of diversity and disparity, children are a unifying force capable of bringing people to common ethical grounds. Children's needs and aspirations cut across all ideologies and cultures.

The needs of all children are the same: nutritious food, adequate health care, a decent education, shelter and a secure and loving family. Children are both our reason to struggle to eliminate the worst aspects of warfare, and our best hope for succeeding at it.”

Graça Machel,
Expert of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and former Minister for Education and Culture of Mozambique (1975–1989), in her report *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, to the General Assembly, 1996.

Children withdrawn from child labour going to school and learning a trade, Conservation, Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers' Union (CHODAWU) and IPEC project, Tanzania, 2003.

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Community learning and child labour rehabilitation centre, IPEC project, Cambodia, 2010.

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Advocacy, trends and new standards

Advocacy at the international, national and community level played an important role in ILO's efforts to raise awareness of the need to tackle child labour. Knowledge products were widely disseminated and helped to stimulate action, while a campaign to promote ratification of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention helped it to become the most rapidly ratified Convention in the history of the ILO.

The ILO produced Global Reports on Child Labour in **2002**, **2006** and **2010** as part of the follow-up process to the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. These reports provided analysis of policies on child labour and examples of the impact of relevant country level experience, together with global estimates on child labour which, for the first time, allowed progress and trends to be tracked.

The estimates contained in the Global Reports were used by the ILO's Governing Body to develop Action Plans that guided the ILO's work. The significant reduction in child labour between **2000** and **2004** led to the optimistic conclusion that the end of child labour could be within reach. Progress was such that, in **2006**, the ILO set the target

of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016. However, the more recent estimates have shown that progress has been slowing down.

The reporting process under the Declaration was eventually changed, but for over twelve years the Global Reports produced a considerable amount of information – and insight into – how to approach child labour problems.³⁹ Estimates have continued to be made and published regularly.

Joint and separate manuals developed by the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and the ILO's Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) also helped advance efforts to tackle child labour.⁴⁰

In **2014**, the International Labour Conference adopted the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention No. 29 (1930) and Recommendation No 203 to strengthen action against forced labour, including human trafficking for forced labour. The new instruments contained new provisions on victim protection, prevention and compensation, including for children, thus complementing the child labour Conventions.

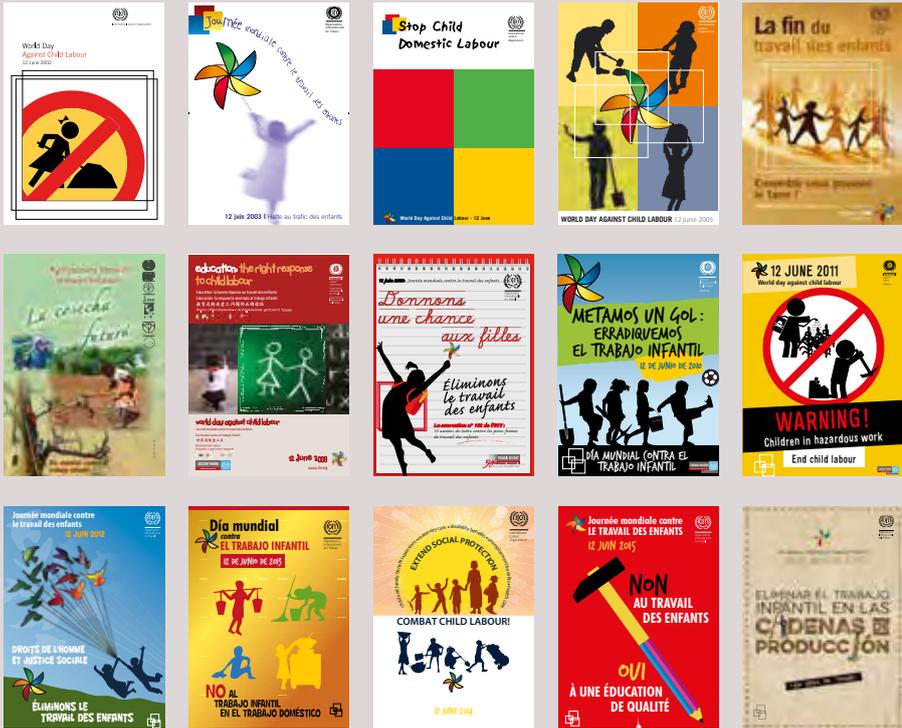
The World Day Against Child Labour

The World Day Against Child Labour was first organized by the ILO in **2002**, and since then it has been an important annual opportunity for advocacy. Although the ILO took the lead role and identified a specific theme each year, the event gained significant support beyond the ILO's constituents, with partners and organizations in a large international network using the ILO's key materials and messages to promote the World Day. High-level statements of support were regularly made by constituents and UN partners. The media attention generated by the occasion regularly exceeded that of any other event involving the ILO. Many themes for this day have been highlighted over the years, including education, child labour in mining, agriculture, supply chains, situations of conflict and disaster. Reflecting the growing attention to the specific vulnerability of girls, trafficking and girls in child labour were made the themes of the World Day in **2003** and **2009** respectively, and child domestic labour was the theme in both **2004** and **2013**.

Convention No. 182 had been adopted on 12 June **1999**, and determined the date of the World Day.

It has thus mostly coincided with the International Labour Conference held in Geneva which has enabled the ILO to involve Conference delegates in marking the occasion. On the World Day in **2009**, US Senator Tom Harkin addressed the Conference. He was a longstanding supporter of the ILO's work on child labour, and on the integrated approach IPEC was adopting – targeting root causes as well as immediate service delivery to children affected.

In June **2015**, the Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi addressed the Conference and a World Day forum. He had been the joint winner, with Malala Yousafzai, of the **2014** Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in “the struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education”. In his remarks he highlighted the plight of children who remained in bonded labour, calling for a major international effort to get these and other children out of child labour and into school. He also made a plea for the ratification of the then adopted Protocol to the ILO Forced Labour Convention (No. 29).



"I come across children who are sold and bought like animals and sometimes at a lower price than animals. I come across children who are producing wealth at the cost of their childhood and freedom... Each one of them has a beating heart, and they are looking at us to help. We have to respond..."

Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 2014, founder of the Global March Against Child Labour, at the World Day Against Child Labour event during the 104th Session of the International Labour Conference, 2015.



World Day Against Child Labour

Clockwise from upper left:

- 1) Ghana, 2017.*
- 2) Pakistan, 2016.*
- 3) Indonesia, 2013.*

© ILO.

*From left to right:
Juan Somavia,
Director General
of the ILO
(1999–2012); Tom
Harkin, US Senator,
and Kailash
Satyarthi, Founder
of the Global March
Against Child
Labour, at the
World Day Against
Child Labour event,
Geneva, 2009.*

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Involving communities and children

Many of the partner organizations in IPEC projects – including teachers' trade unions and many others – made efforts to engage communities and children themselves to give them a voice in determining solutions to the challenges they face and to develop strategies which were in the best interest of the children concerned. In numerous projects, especially after **2008**, accountable public authorities and representative workers' and employers' organizations were supported by IPEC in reaching out to affected communities and families in the informal and rural economies.

An education and social mobilization programme *Supporting Children's Rights through Education the Arts and the Media (SCREAM)* was developed in **2002** to empower children and youth by equipping them with knowledge and skills to participate actively in the campaign against child labour and to bring about social change thereby implementing a key principle of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention: that programmes of action against child labour should take into consideration the views of the children who are directly affected.

SCREAM has been used in over 70 countries and involved hundreds of thousands of children since its launch, with many more engaged through broader outreach. In Paraguay, for example, since the first pilot initiative conducted by IPEC in 2005, the Ministry of Education brought SCREAM to six of 17 departments in the country and involved more than 20,000 students and 550 teachers.

“SCREAM has helped develop children's talents and their ability, creativity and motivation to contribute towards the development of their communities. They now are aware of their rights and are empowered to speak out against child labour.”

Geoffrey Nsubuga,
SCREAM trainer, Somero Uganda, 2010.

In **2013**, the Music against Child Labour Initiative was co-founded by the ILO, JM International, the International Federation of Musicians and a number of the world's most highly renowned musicians and conductors. It aims to support a key principle of SCREAM – that arts education empowers and fulfils children and is crucial to a fully-rounded curriculum.

Another example of effective advocacy is the *Red Card against Child Labour campaign*, launched also in 2002, which was developed together with FIFA, the world football body, it has been effective in mobilizing public and community attention on child labour.



SCREAM activities in Uganda.

© Somero Uganda/Namirembe M.

"Today's children are tomorrow's men and women. They may need our support and protection today, but we and our nation and our society will need their support and protection tomorrow."

Michel Aoun,
President of Lebanon, at the launch of the National
Choir against Child Labour, Lebanon, 2018.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda and national development efforts

The ILO's Decent Work agenda, which had been set in **1999**, was based on four mutually interdependent pillars: employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality and non-discrimination as crosscutting objectives. In **2004**, Decent Work Country Programmes were introduced providing a framework for government and social partners to agree on national priorities for ILO work. Child labour was included in a large number of these Programmes as a priority or an outcome.

The Decent Work Country Programmes helped to link the ILO's work more closely with broader UN efforts to support national economic and social development. The UN Millennium Development

Goals had set a number of targets for the **2000–2015** period and many were relevant to tackling child labour, including targets on poverty reduction and access to education. The number of people living in extreme poverty declined by more than half between **1990** and **2015**, while the number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide fell by almost half between **2000** and **2015**.⁴¹ Progress in these areas proved to be very important for the overall global efforts to reduce child labour.

A Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization was adopted in **2008** by the ILO, reaffirming its strategic objectives established in the Decent Work agenda and including the fundamental principles and rights at work, which, in the words of the **1998** Declaration, enabled people to claim a fair share of the wealth they had helped to create. In a resolution of the **2012** International Labour Conference, that was to guide the future development of IPEC and the establishment of the ILO's integrated strategy on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, it was stressed that among those rights, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were particularly important. This was to give new vigour to the engagement of representative workers' and employers' organizations in the ILO's work to support constituents to end child labour.

“We want children to go to school, to have fun with their family, to play, to dream, to build social and family ties that are the basis of their future lives.”

Michelle Bachelet,
President of Chile (2006–2010 and 2014–2018) at the presentation of the National Strategy on the Eradication of Child Labour and the Protection of Adolescent Worker (2015–2025), Chile, 2015.

IPEC+, the ILO's child labour and forced labour programme

An ILO review in **2014** resulted in a new model of delivering services and activities to constituents which was centred on a number of integrated Flagship Programmes. IPEC+ was thus created bringing together IPEC and the ILO's Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour which had the effect of creating a combined force which would support the ILO's constituents in their fight against child labour, forced labour and human trafficking, guided by the ILO's Integrated Strategy on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and the broader ILO Decent Work agenda. These challenges share some of the same root causes although the solutions are similar only in part. Vulnerability to these forms of abuse is increased by social exclusion, poverty, poor governance, and decent work deficits. Such causes include persistent and widespread violation of the rights to organize and bargain collectively and to work free from discrimination.

IPEC+ focuses efforts in three areas where violations of fundamental rights remain particularly acute: the rural and informal economies; enterprises and global and domestic supply chains; and situations of crisis and fragility. In its country-based interventions the Programme increasingly uses an integrated area-based approach to all fundamental rights in tackling child labour. Ghana's "Torkor Model" has attracted much attention". It sprung from concerns about hazardous and trafficked child labour in lake fishing. Ghana's General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU) organized the canoe fishers and women fish processors who, with ILO and teachers' union support, created an integrated, community-owned and supervised strategy to sustainably eradicate all forms of child labour by ensuring education for all children and, crucially, improving adult occupational safety and health, working methods and productivity to end dependence on child labour.

International and regional support – monitoring progress and calls for scaled-up action

Global child labour estimates covering the period **2004–2008** showed that compared to earlier trends, a significant slowing down in reduction of child labour had taken place. Against this background the Government of the Netherlands, in close cooperation with the ILO, convened a Global Conference in The Hague in May **2010**. The Conference agreed on the need to scale up action and adopted a “Roadmap” which aimed at eliminating the worst forms of child labour by **2016**. In order to monitor progress and ensure that the international community maintains its focus on child labour, follow up Conferences were held in Brazil (**2013**) and in Argentina (**2017**).

The Brasilia Conference followed an acceleration in progress that had taken place between **2008** and **2012**. The Brasilia Declaration moved beyond that of The Hague: it stressed the indivisibility of Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 and emphasized the need to tackle socio-economic root causes. It also advanced the language and strategy of the global campaign by calling for the “sustained eradication” of child labour and promoted a

“We have said that it may take a village to bring up a child, but it takes a union to organize the village to ensure that the child is in school and the village is enjoying decent work.”

Andrew Tagoe,
Workers’ representative, Ghana, General Agricultural Workers’ Union, at the World Day Against Child Labour event during the 105th International Labour Conference, 2016.

perspective that was bottom-up, global and which understood that, while child labour in global supply chains should be tackled with vigour, child labour was primarily present in local, informal and especially rural economies. Further, the Declaration affirmed that as long as children of elementary school age continue to enter child labour it will not be eliminated.

By the time of the Buenos Aires Conference in **2017**, progress had again slowed. The Declaration of this Conference spells out a series of principles and actions to tackle child labour which are divided into three areas: politics and governance; knowledge, data and supervision; and partnerships and innovation.

The three international Conferences backed by various ILO policy statements all identified education, legal regulation, social protection and labour market policy as the four areas where national policy choices and interventions play an important role.

The link between the minimum age for admission to employment or work and the age for the end of compulsory education was firmly established by the Minimum Age Convention No. 138. Ensuring that both boys and girls access quality education at least up to the minimum age for admission to employment or work has remained a key policy tool in tackling child labour.

National legislation in most countries has established rights, legal measures where laws have been broken, and sanctions for violators. Most countries have prohibited child labour and have put in place legal regulation of work of children who have reached the minimum age for admission to employment or work. However, labour inspection services which monitor the law often remain poorly resourced and are largely ineffective at reaching areas in which child labour is most prevalent – in the rural and the informal economy.

Family and community poverty remains one of the root causes of child labour. In order to help mitigate the vulnerabilities that force families to resort to child labour it is essential to support decent work and incomes for adults and youth, as well as social security protection. Just as essential is the upgrading of family enterprises so that they can escape their dependence on the unpaid work of their children.

Children whose education was impeded by child labour enter adolescence lacking the skills needed for gainful employment. This has left them vulnerable to joblessness or to low-paid, insecure work in hazardous conditions. Active labour market policies, such as building systems for vocational training, expanding apprenticeship opportunities, strengthening labour market institutions, and encouraging youth entrepreneurship are needed to help promote decent work for youth of legal working age.

“Eradicating child labour is the only possible way forward and it is a commitment that we all have, it is a universal goal, as is creating the conditions to generate employment for young people.”

Mauricio Macri,
President of Argentina, closing statement of the
IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of
Child Labour, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2017.

At the regional level, the ILO has supported the development of initiatives, strategies and action plans to address child labour.

In Latin America, the ILO acts as technical secretariat to the Regional Initiative, Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour, established in **2014**. This tripartite Initiative, which currently brings together 30 countries, operates through a Network of Focal Points. It has developed innovative strategies, tools and methodologies to support its' aim of becoming the first developing region to be free of child labour.

In Africa, the ILO has supported the African Union in developing a continental action plan on child labour, forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. The ILO has also supported the development of the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Regional Action Plan for the elimination of child labour. This Regional Action Plan includes a peer review mechanism to assess country level action against child labour in the ECOWAS (15) countries.

In South Asia, the ILO has supported regional coordination and learning through the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) Regional Action Plan on Child Labour and Alliance 8.7, with a focus on particularly affected sectors such as brick kilns.

“If we walk out of this room and say, those 168 million children shouldn't be at work, they shouldn't be denied a childhood, they should be in our schools, but their parents should also have the dignity of decent work and social protection; that is a collective message that simply underpinned the best of sustainability, but it is also the best of our humanity.”*

Sharan Burrows,
General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), at the World Day Against Child Labour event during the 104th Session of the International Labour conference, 2015.

** Figure from the 2012 ILO Global estimates on child labour.*

*II Global Conference
on Child Labour,
The Hague, The
Netherlands, 2010.*

*Clockwise from
upper left:*

*1) Piet Hein
Donner, Minister of
Social Affairs and
Employment,
The Netherlands,
and Marcia Helena
Carvalho Lopes,
Minister of Social
Development and
Fight Against
Hunger, Brazil.*

*2) Wambui Njuguna,
African Network for
the Prevention and
Protection against
Child Abuse and
Neglect.*

*3) Kinsu Kumar,
formerly in child
labour, India.*

*©Tycho Müller
- Tycho's Eye
Photography.*





III Global Conference on Child Labour, Brasilia, Brazil, 2013.

Counter clockwise from upper left:

1) Marta Santos Pais, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Constance Thomas, former Director of IPEC; Dorothy Rozga, International Executive Director of ECPAT.

2) Heliopolis Youth Orchestra (opening ceremony).

3) Youth representatives from Brazil (closing ceremony).





IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2017.

Counter clockwise from upper left:

1) Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2014, founder of the Global March against Child Labour; Nozipho Mbanjwa, journalist CNBC Africa; Khouloud Mannai, Tunisian General Labour Union; Christy Hoffman, Deputy General Secretary, UNI Global Union; Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General, IOM; Linda Kromjong, Secretary General, IOE; Francisco Martínez, CEO, Adecco Group Argentina; Guy Ryder, Director General, ILO.

2) Guy Ryder, Director General, ILO.

3) Youth representative's message.



Some results of actions

In projects funded since 1995, over 1 million children have been withdrawn or prevented from entering child labour through the provision of education opportunities or other interventions.

IPEC activities have involved thousands of partners from all regions of the world, including many employers' and workers' organizations; efforts have been directed at capacity building, at direct action where the constituents are present in the communities or workplaces where child labour exists, and in supporting the convening role that national trade union centres play.

Since **2004**, ILO projects have supported over 65 countries to develop, revise or update their legislative framework to comply with the provisions of the Conventions on child labour.

During the same period, more than 300 child labour policies have been developed with some support from IPEC. These included national child labour elimination strategies, national action plans for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and sectoral policies aimed at ending child labour in specific regions and districts or in communities in which particular commodities such as sugar or cocoa are produced.

Projects assisted constituents and other relevant stakeholders to include child labour in relevant development, education, anti-poverty and other social policies and programmes in over 50 countries and in more than 200 policies and programmes.

Since 1999, over 500 research and policy papers and thematic, country, regional and global reports on child labour were made available.

Ratification of the Child Labour Conventions

Ratification of the Conventions on child labour and their subsequent effective implementation has remained the anchor for the ILO's development cooperation with constituents.

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention is the most rapidly ratified ILO Convention to date. By early **2019** it was only three signatures short of universal ratification, and was already covering virtually all of the world's children. Achieving universal ratification will be a first in the history of the ILO.

Ratifications of the Minimum Age Convention increased significantly after **1995** when it was accepted to be an important human rights standard, and as attention to child labour was reawakened by the campaign for and development of ILO Convention No. 182. In fact, following the adoption of Convention No. 182 numerous member States ratified both Conventions. By January **2019**, Convention No. 138 had 171 ratifications, covering more than 80 per cent of the world's children. In line with the conclusions of the III Global Conference on Child Labour held in Brasilia in

2013, more member States developed integrated policies that reflected the mutually supportive nature of these two fundamental Conventions.

"How pleased I am to see advancing the process of ratifying Convention No. 182 against the worst forms of child labour. The international community must not tolerate the unacceptable. Ratification by all states will make it possible to denounce conditions of life that flout human dignity. It will also protect from infamy those who are the true owners of the future, children from all continents."

Ruth Dreifuss,
Federal Counsellor (1993–2002), Head of the
Federal Department of the Interior, Switzerland,
2000.

External Partnerships

At both the international and national levels the ILO has supported partnerships to help develop a focus on child labour and the mainstreaming of child labour strategies into broader development frameworks. Many of these partnerships involved cooperation with other UN agencies but not all of these initiatives have been durable. On some occasions, partnerships developed around specific events or issues did not have sustained organizational commitment. Yet they have been useful reminders of the existence of the problem of child labour and the need to take action against it.

The Child Labour Platform (CLP) is among the particularly successful partnerships. A membership-based work stream of the UN Global Compact Labour Working Group, it is a business-led, cross-sectoral platform to eradicate child labour in supply chains. Jointly chaired by the International Organisation of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation it operates with the support of the ILO. The aim is to

foster exchange and identify obstacles for business in implementing the ILO and Global Compact child labour principles, and to advise on how to overcome them.

“The Child Labour Platform has given Primark an opportunity for dialogue with companies across sectors, which is vital to fully understand the problem and take effective action.”

Katherine Stewart,
Director of Ethical Trade and Environmental Sustainability, Primark, at the World Day Against Child Labour event during the 105th Session of the International Labour Conference, 2016.

Another longstanding partnership is the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture (IPCCLA), which brings together the ILO, FAO, IFAD and the IUF, with the participation of the Global March. It supports collaboration between labour and agriculture stakeholders to better address child labour through integrated area-based approaches in agriculture and in rural communities.

Other important partnerships have included those established around education (including the Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education For All (GTF) and the Music against Child Labour Initiative), violence against children (the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children), trafficking (the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking), children in armed conflict (the Paris Principles Steering Group on children and armed conflict) and children in emergencies (the Child Protection Working Group).

“Child labour, human trafficking and modern slavery are heinous crimes that destroy lives, wipe out prosperity and reverse development gains. To stop these abuses, the global community – business and the public sector – must work together to denounce them where ever they exist. Together we can eliminate these injustices.”

Roberto Suarez Santos,
Secretary-General of the International
Organisation of Employers (IOE), Geneva, 2019.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals

In September **2015**, UN member States adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, a set of 17 interrelated goals and associated targets to promote economic, social and environmental development. The importance of decent work in achieving sustainable development was highlighted by Goal 8, which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

In adopting **target 8.7**, countries committed to “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 to end child labour in all its forms”. This is a hugely ambitious target and one requiring major international commitment and national action.

The ILO promoted the establishment of a global partnership of organizations and groups committed to helping member States to achieve target 8.7. The new partnership – Alliance 8.7 – represents a broad coalition involving more than

200 organizations (at the time of publication), among them: UN agencies, employers’ and workers’ organizations, and international organizations. This coalition works across four goals: accelerating action towards compliance with the target; conducting research and sharing knowledge; driving innovation; and increasing and leveraging resources. The ILO’s IPEC+ flagship programme is the ILO’s contribution to Alliance 8.7.

“To achieve the SDG targets, all stakeholders need to come together, working in new and strengthened partnerships to create a world free from fear and violence where no child is left behind.”

Marta Santos Pais,
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on
Violence Against Children, 2009–2019, during the Subregional
consultation workshop on the global Alliance 8.7, Bangkok,
Thailand, 2016.

From left to right:
 Guy Ryder, Director General of the ILO; Bob Mitchell, Vice-Chair, Board of Directors, Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition; Linda Kromjong, Secretary-General, IOE; Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Economics Prize Laureate 2001; Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, ITUC; Kevin Hyland, Anti-Slavery Commissioner, United Kingdom, at the official launch of the Alliance 8.7, New York, 2016.

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From left to right:
 Hamoud T'feil Bowbe, Labour Advisor, Ministry of Labour, Mauritania; and Beate Andrees, Chief, ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch, at the Alliance 8.7 pathfinder country strategic workshop, Nouakchott, Mauritania, 2019.

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A picture of child labour today

Between the ILO's estimate of child labour in **2000** and the estimate for **2016**, the numbers of children involved in child labour fell from 246 million to 152 million and the number of children in hazardous work from 171 million to 73 million.

Almost one in ten children worldwide remain in child labour. Of this number, 71 per cent work in agriculture, primarily in subsistence and commercial farming, as well as in livestock herding and fishing. Some 69 per cent work – commonly unpaid – within their own family unit. Most children involved in child labour are thus not in an employment relationship with a third-party employer; rather, they work on family farms or in family enterprises.

Boys account for 58 per cent of children in child labour (altogether there are an estimated 64 million girls and 88 million boys involved). During the **2012** to **2016** period the decline in child labour was lower for girls than for boys, meaning that the gender gap has narrowed. It is more than possible that these global figures understate the

child labour of girls, as it may be less visible and under-reported, such as those involved in domestic work for a third party. Girls are also much more likely to perform household chores in their own homes. Estimates of children's involvement in household chores were produced for the first time in 2016. However, as the analysis was limited to children who are not in employment, these estimates are not included in the global figure of 152 million children in child labour.

“Each time a soldier takes off his army tunic, he makes it possible for many children to put on their school uniforms.”

Oscar Arias Sánchez,
President of Costa Rica (1986–1990 and 2006–2010),
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 1987, at the 95th Session of
the International Labour Conference, 2006.

Nine out of every ten children in child labour are in Africa or in the Asia and the Pacific region with Africa accounting for almost half of the total global number. It is the only region where the numbers have continued to rise, which is most likely a consequence of broader demographic and economic forces, and insufficient resources available for or allocated to ensuring universal education. Also, as compared with other regions, Africa has a greater prevalence of agriculture as the main source of family livelihoods. In addition, the region has been severely affected by conflict

and disaster, which both heighten the risk of child labour.

Child labour continues, however, in every region, including in some of the world's richest countries.

Some 4.3 million children are trapped in forced labour. This includes 1 million children in forced labour for sexual exploitation, 3 million in other forms of forced labour in the private economy, and 300,000 children in forced labour imposed by state authorities.



Nitte Manjappa Adyanthaya, Workers' delegate, India, and Dagoberto Lima Godoy, Employers' delegate, Brazil, of the ILO Governing Body, at the exhibition to mark 20 years of the IPEC programme, Geneva, 2013.

© ILO.

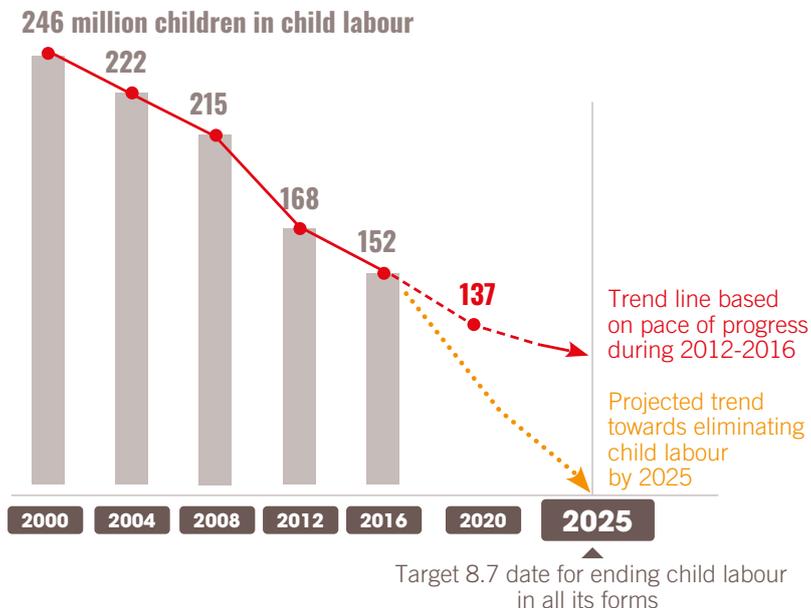
Ending child labour remains a formidable challenge

Despite all the international, national and local attention and efforts, the data show that the challenge of ending child labour remains formidable.

It is also evident that reaching and helping the remaining group of children involved in child labour could become particularly challenging as those who remain are among the hardest to reach children.

This may be because they work in remote areas very poorly serviced by education and other services, in situations of conflict or disaster, or within the poorest of families and communities where reliance on children's work remains an important coping mechanism.

The figure on this page shows the decline in child labour since 2000 and a projection to 2025 assuming that the recent rate of progress is maintained. This rate of reduction would still leave 121 million children in child labour in 2025. The need to scale up efforts to eliminate child labour is clear.



The way ahead

Much is now known about the strategies that are most relevant in tackling child labour. The keys to progress lie in effective policies that support sustainable change in the areas of education, social protection, labour markets, and labour standards, as well as in social dialogue, rural development and the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Many countries have achieved remarkable progress when the right policy mix has been put in place. However, it is also clear that much remains to be done. In many communities, and in countries in all areas of the world today, the daily lives of too many children remain blighted by child labour.

In this ILO Centenary year, the recently launched independent report of the ILO Commission on the Future of Work provides direction for meeting the challenges ahead. The concept of a Universal Labour Guarantee, along with the proposals on lifelong learning, social protection floors, decent work for youth, the school to work transition, and on the need for action to achieve decent and sustainable work in the rural economy, are all very relevant to the efforts made to eliminate child

labour. The report emphasizes the importance of social dialogue and the need for an inclusive approach in these and other policy areas.

The UN Sustainable Development Agenda also provides an important vision for an integrated approach to economic and social development. Through its role within Alliance 8.7 and in other relevant partnerships, the ILO can make a major contribution to support the efforts of member States to eradicate child labour. The ILO brings to those discussions its vast experience of the effective implementation of international labour standards, its role as a leader in policy and knowledge, and its special relationship with its constituent governments and employers' and workers' organizations as well as the wider network of the worldwide movement against child labour. It will also bring to such discussions the new experience being generated by the work of the IPEC+ flagship programme in member States.

While major challenges remain, further and greater progress is possible. With commitment and well-targeted policy responses, the goal established in the Constitution of the ILO one hundred years ago – the abolition of child labour – can finally be achieved.

“We must act now to stop child labour once and for all. Acting together, it is within our means to make the future of work a future without child labour.”

Guy Ryder,
Director-General of the ILO, at the World Day Against Child Labour event during
the 105th International Labour Conference, 2016.

Music just for you

*Perhaps one of those children
hard at work,
has never heard music.*

*Perhaps he does not know that,
at this very moment,
a song is playing just for him.*

*But I hope that he can hear our
thought,
even if his ear cannot.*

*I hope that in the few hours he
has to rest,
our music will lull him to sleep.*

Poem by Martina, 13 years old.

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Milestones

1919

Treaty of Versailles establishes the ILO. The aim of abolition of child labour is stated in the Constitution.

1919

The ILO's first Conference in Washington DC adopts the Minimum Age (Industry) Convention No. 5.

1930

The Forced Labour Convention No. 29 is adopted.

1944

The ILO Declaration of Philadelphia restates the aims of the Constitution and calls for children's welfare and assurance of equality of educational and vocational opportunity.

1973

The Minimum Age Convention, No. 138 is adopted. It consolidates the earlier standards regulating child labour and codifying acceptable work of children.

1979

The UN International Year of the Child brings a renewed focus to child labour.

1989

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is adopted. Its Article 32 provides for the right of children to be protected from economic exploitation or hazardous work.

1992

The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour is launched.

1995

The World Social Summit, Copenhagen links child labour with other fundamental labour standards.

1997

The Amsterdam Child Labour Conference focuses on the worst forms of child labour. The Oslo International Conference on Child Labour adopts an Agenda for Action.

1998

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work is adopted, covering child labour, forced labour, freedom of association and discrimination. The Global March arrives at the International Labour Conference in Geneva.

1999

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182 is adopted, with significant commitment to ratifications and a realistic prospect of achieving universal ratification.

2010

The Conference at The Hague adopts a Roadmap for the elimination of the Worst forms of child labour by 2016.

2013

The Brasilia Conference reviews progress against the 2016 target and endorses integrated approaches to achieve the objective of the “sustained eradication” of all forms of child labour”.

2014

The Protocol No. 29 to the Forced Labour Convention is adopted to cover the issue of trafficking.

2015

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are launched, notably, target 8.7 “immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 – to end child labour in all its forms”.

2017

The Argentina Conference focuses on both child labour and forced labour.

The ILO wishes to acknowledge contributions received for the child labour programme since 1992 from the following:

Australia



Denmark



Germany



Korea



Panama



Sweden



Austria



Dominican Republic



Hungary



Luxembourg



Poland



Switzerland



Belgium



European Union



Ireland



Netherlands



Portugal



United Kingdom



Brazil



Finland



Italy



New Zealand



Qatar



United States



Canada



France



Japan



Norway



Spain



The ILO also acknowledges with thanks contributions to the programme which have been received through Public-Private Partnerships.

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