Monday 23 September 2013

Embargoed until 09:00 GMT on 23 September, 2013

Global number of child labourers down by a third since 2000

A new ILO report shows that the fight against child labour is on the right track, but the goal of eliminating its worst forms by 2016 will not be met at the current pace.

GENEVA (ILO news) – A new report* by the International Labour Organization (ILO) says that the global number of child labourers has declined by one third since 2000, from 246 million to 168 million. But even the latest improved rate of decline is not enough to achieve the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016 – agreed by the international community through the ILO.

What is child labour?

Child labour is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work undertaken by children below the appropriate legal minimum working age, based on the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), as well as the worst forms of child labour defined by the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, (No. 182).

“We are moving in the right direction but progress is still too slow. If we are serious about ending the scourge of child labour in the foreseeable future, then we need a substantial stepping-up of efforts at all levels. There are 168 million good reasons to do so,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

The latest ILO estimates, published in the lead-up to the Global Conference on Child Labour, which takes place in Brasilia next month, show that most of the progress was made between 2008 and 2012, when the global number fell from 215 to 168 million.

More than half of the 168 million child labourers worldwide are involved in hazardous work. This is work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development. The current number of children in hazardous work stands at 85 million, down from 171 million in 2000.

Hazardous work is often treated as a proxy for the Worst Forms of Child Labour, since children in hazardous work account for the overwhelming majority of those in the worst forms.

Other main findings of the report:
- The largest absolute number of child labourers is found in the Asia-Pacific region (almost 78 million), but Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest incidence of child labour in terms of proportion of the population, at over 21 per cent.
- The incidence of child labour is highest in poorer countries but middle-income countries have the largest numbers of child labourers.
- Child labour among girls fell by 40 per cent since 2000, compared to 25 per cent for boys.
- Agriculture remains by far the most important sector where child labourers can be found (98 million children, or 59 per cent), but the problems are not negligible in services (54 million) and industry (12 million) – mostly in the informal economy.
Regional trends

- Between 2008 and 2012, child labour among children aged 5-17 years declined in Asia and the Pacific, Latin American and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa regions.
- Asia and the Pacific registered by far the largest decline, from 114 million in 2008 to 78 million in 2012.
- The number of child labourers also decreased in Sub-Saharan Africa (by 6 million), and modestly in Latin America and the Caribbean (by 1.6 million).
- There are 9.2 million child labourers in the Middle East and North Africa.

Drivers of progress

The report identifies a number of actions that have driven progress in the fight against child labour in recent years. Policy choices and accompanying investments in education and social protection appear particularly relevant to the decline in child labour.

Other actions include the political commitment of governments, the increasing number of ratifications of the two ILO child labour Conventions, sound policy choices and solid legislative frameworks.

“No one can take sole credit for this result, as many have helped draw attention to the negative impacts of child labour on economic growth, the future of societies and the rights of children. However, the ILO’s role in leading the fight against child labour, through its standards and supervisory system, advice, capacity building and direct action, deserves special mention,” concluded Constance Thomas, Director of the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).


For more information on the Global Report, please contact the ILO Department of Communication and Public Information of the ILO at +41 22/799-7912 or newsroom@ilo.org
Child labour is work that children should not be doing because they are too young to work and should be in school or, if they are old enough to work, because it is dangerous or otherwise unsuitable for them.

Le travail des enfants est un travail que les enfants ne devraient pas avoir à faire parce qu'ils sont trop jeunes pour travailler et qu'ils devraient être à l'école ou, s'ils ont l'âge de travailler, parce qu'il est dangereux ou autrement inadapté pour eux.

El trabajo infantil es aquel trabajo que los niños no deberían hacer, pues son muy jóvenes para trabajar y deben asistir a la escuela, o, si tienen edad para trabajar, pero el trabajo que realizan es peligroso o es de algún modo inadecuado para ellos.

Global trends in child labour (age group 5-17)

Together we can create a world without child labour!

Ensemble, nous pouvons créer un monde sans travail des enfants!

¡Juntos podemos crear un mundo sin trabajo infantil!

www.ilo.org/childlabour