

World Day 2009: Give girls a chance: End child labour



The World Day Against Child Labour will be celebrated on 12 June 2009. The World Day this year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark ILO Convention No. 182, which addresses the need for action to tackle the worst forms of child labour. Whilst celebrating progress made during the past ten years, the World Day will highlight the continuing challenges, with a focus on exploitation of girls in child labour.

Around the world, an estimated 100 million girls are involved in child labour. Many of these girls undertake similar types of work as boys, but often also endure additional hardships and face extra risks. Moreover, girls are all too often exposed to some of the worst forms of child labour, often in hidden work situations.

On this World Day we call for:

- Policy responses to address the causes of child labour, paying particular attention to the situation of girls.
- Urgent action to tackle the worst forms of child labour.
- Greater attention to the education and skills training needs of adolescent girls - a key action point in tackling child labour and providing a pathway for girls to gain Decent Work as adults.

Girls and child labour

ILO standards require that countries establish a minimum age of employment (generally 15 though developing countries can set the age at 14). They also require that children (including adolescents aged 15-17) are not involved in work designated as a worst form of child labour.

However in many countries of the world, girls below the minimum age of employment can be found working in a wide range of occupational sectors and services and often in the worst forms of child labour.

Large numbers of young girls labour in agriculture and in the manufacturing sector, frequently working in dangerous conditions. A major sector of employment for young girls is domestic work in third party households. Oftentimes this work is hidden from the public eye, leading to particular dangers and risks. The extreme exploitation of girls in

the worst forms of child labour includes slavery, bonded labour, prostitution and pornography.

Girls face multiple disadvantages

Most child labour is rooted in poverty, often associated with multiple disadvantage. Socio-economic inequalities based on language, race, disability and rural-urban differences remain deeply entrenched. Girls can face particular disadvantages due to discrimination and practices which allocate certain forms of work to girls. Many girls take on unpaid household work for their families, usually more so than boys. This work may include childcare, cooking, cleaning, and fetching water and fuel. Girls often also have to combine long hours of household chores with some form of economic activity outside the household presenting girls with a “double burden”. This can have a negative impact on any opportunity for school attendance and can present a physical danger to girls.

Girls still disadvantaged in education

Millennium Development Goal 2 calls for all children to complete a full course of primary education by 2015. Millennium Development Goal 3 has a target of eliminating gender disparity both in primary and secondary education. However globally some 75 million children are still not enrolled in primary school. For every 100 boys in school, there are only 94 girls and girls in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged. Gross enrolment at secondary level in developing countries is 61% for boys and 57% for girls. In least developed countries the figures are 32% for boys and 26% for girls. It is clear that in much of the developing world huge numbers of girls are failing to access education at post primary level.

Girls may often be the last to be enrolled and the first to be withdrawn from schools if a family has to make a choice between sending a boy or girl to school. Girls’ access to education may also be limited by other factors, for example the safety of the journey to school or lack of adequate water and sanitation facilities.

Without access to quality education, girls drift into the labour force at an early age well below the minimum age of employment. It is therefore vital to extend secondary education and skills training for girls and to ensure that children from poor and rural households can access this provision.

Decent Work and development by educating girls

Education for a child is the first steps towards obtaining Decent Work and a decent livelihood as an adult. Research has proven that educating girls is one of the most effective ways of tackling poverty. Educated girls are more likely to have better income as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and to have decision making power within the household. They are also more likely to ensure that their own children

are educated, helping to avoid future child labour. Tackling child labour among girls and promoting their right to education, is therefore an important element of broader strategies to promote development and Decent Work.

The World Day Against Child Labour

The World Day Against Child Labour aims to promote awareness and action to tackle child labour. Support for the World Day has been growing each year. In 2009 we look forward to a World Day that is widely supported by governments, employers and workers organisations, UN agencies and all those concerned with tackling child labour and promoting the rights of girls.

- We would like you and your organisation to be part of the 2009 World Day.
- Join us and add your voice to the worldwide movement against child labour.
- For more information contact ipecc@ilo.org.