

# SOME COMPARATIVE ASPECTS REGARDING CHILD LABOR AND STREET CHILD

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*One of the problems that many countries are facing nowadays represents child labor.*

*In 2004 there were 218 million children working illegally in the eyes of international treaties. There are countries where this thing is happening due to the underdeveloped economic situation; children have no other chance except working from early ages more than 8 hours in a day for a small wage. In other cases we find different situations such as: child slavery, child trafficking, or more worst - child soldier's. We all have seen more than once images with children who have switched toys with guns, bombs and mines. Romania is dealing during last years with the unpleasant situation of street children and beggars.*

*Key words: child labor, street child, employment*

## **1.1 International problems regarding child labor**

In 2004 there were 218 million children working illegally in the eyes of international treaties.

Child labor is defined as all economic activity for children less than 12 years, any work for those aged 12-14 of sufficient hours per week to undermine their health or education, and all "hazardous work" which could threaten the health of children under 18.

Almost all child labor occurs in developing countries, largely in agriculture but also including domestic service, factory production and backstreet workshops. Despite a fall of over 10% in the figure since the last assessment in 2000, over 25% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa and 18% in Asia remain trapped within the cycle of poverty of which child labor is part.

More than 126 million of these children are engaged in hazardous work, such as mining or handling chemicals, which is otherwise described as the "worst forms of child labor". A further class within this latter description is known as the "unconditional" worst forms of child labor and refers to any form of slavery or coercion, trafficking, prostitution and military enrolment – no statistics are available for this category but the numbers are likely to be close to 10 million.

There is an additional category of "working children" not included in these statistics because the profile of age, nature of work and hours is not regarded as harmful. For example, light work of a few hours per week could be regarded as beneficial; "child labor" by contrast should be eliminated.

Poverty is the seed-bed of child labor. Poor parents send their children to work for reasons of economic expediency, the consequent denial of education setting in motion a mutually reinforcing cycle liable to pass down the generations. It is nevertheless over simplistic to attribute the problem solely to poverty; schools are often prohibitively expensive, of poor quality or inaccessible. Cultural pressures can undermine perception of the long term value of education, especially for girl children.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has regenerated the supply side of the child labor equation. Households where adult members suffer prolonged periods of illness suffer dramatic cuts in income and forced sales of assets which are compensated by withdrawing children from school and sending them to work. Africa in particular has seen a dramatic rise in the new phenomenon of child-headed households, brought on by AIDS mortality. An estimated 10% of all children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Africa are heads of households, compelled to provide for siblings. There is evidence that the global fall in child labor is being reversed in African countries most affected by HIV/AIDS.

This supply of child labor is accommodated by the demand of employers for a cheap and flexible workforce, including small-scale enterprises whose owners exploit their own family members. It is a mistake to think of globalization as a force for improvement in labor standards. Although large-scale manufacturing industries may not directly rely on child labor, backward linkages created through subcontracting labor-intensive segments of the product may be less compliant. For example, corporations such as Monsanto and Syngenta have been accused of bidding down cotton seed prices to the point that farmers are unable to afford adult labor.

Girl children are in demand for domestic service, the invisible nature of which adds to their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Absence from official statistics is even more likely for those girls kept away from school in order to work for their own families in the home or on the land.

Unfortunately, 20 countries have not yet ratified the ILO convention, notably India and Nepal where child labor remains stubbornly widespread – estimates suggest there are up to 25 million Indian child laborers with many more millions unaccounted for, whilst in Nepal 42% of boys aged 10-14 are working. In 2006 India strengthened legislation by extending its definition of hazardous work to include domestic labor and catering establishments but there is deep skepticism that attitudes towards children will change. The worst form of exploitation of girls - child prostitution - is being fought in part by extra-territorial laws that permit prosecution of citizens who sexually abuse children in another country. For example nationals from many European countries and the US can now be charged at home for engaging a child prostitute in Thailand.

Universally recognized children's rights are however insufficient means of combating child labor. Although almost every country has laws prohibiting the employment of children below a certain age, the legislation may exempt certain sectors - often the very sectors where the highest numbers of working children are found. In other countries, penalties for violating child labor laws are inadequate. And probably the most common obstacle to adequate legal protection for children is that legislation is not enforced.

## **1.2 Development Solutions**

The integration of child labor concerns into national development strategies is therefore the preferred route to a lasting solution. Reduction of chronic poverty through broad-based economic and social development, with a strong emphasis on human resource development, will create the environment for fundamental change in cultural attitudes towards children. Tanzania and Brazil are countries which have been singled out as adopting development strategies which recognize the importance of child labor.

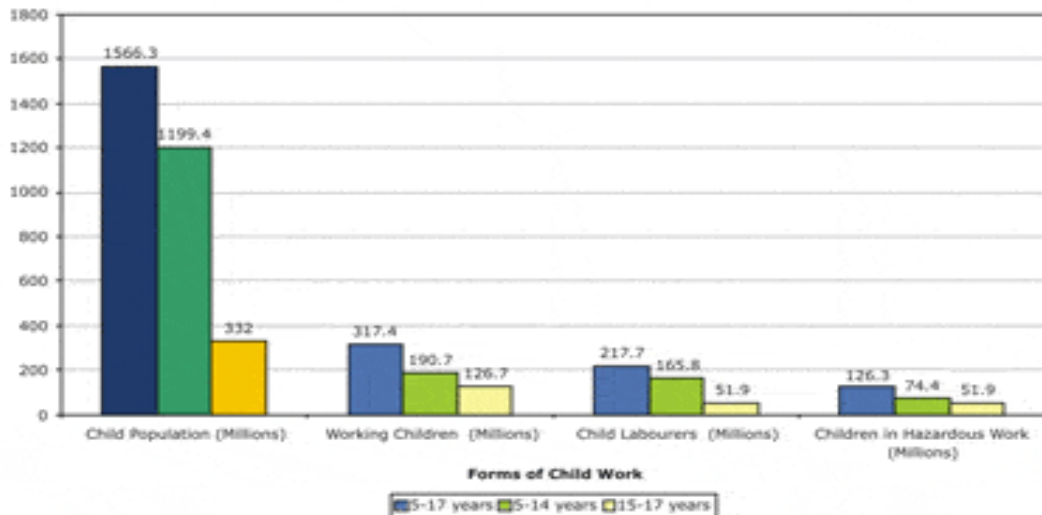
## **1.3 Child Soldiers**

The grotesque abuse of children for military purposes survives seemingly beyond the powers of development strategies or human rights law. Programmers for reintegration of child soldiers call for complex psychological therapies rather than mere schooling. Children are vulnerable to this most extreme form of labor typically in countries suffering longstanding civil conflict, in regions of extreme poverty and a complete breakdown of central authority. The proliferation of lightweight but deadly small arms of sophisticated modern design – a child of 10 can be trained to strip down a Kalashnikov – enables a cheap, unquestioning and expendable army to be conscripted from children. Warlords will abduct or purchase child soldiers from their families with impunity.

The UN lists 12 countries in which an estimated total of 250,000 children are found in military service, amongst them Sri Lanka, Uganda, Nepal, and Philippines. There may be as many as 70,000 child soldiers engaged in government and rebel armies in Burma. These countries are now under pressure to sign the “Optional Protocol” to the CRC which would compel new laws and reintegration of child soldiers into normal life. The International Criminal Court already considers the recruitment of children under age 15 for military purposes to be a war crime.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the greatest incidence of economically active children – 26.4 per cent of all 5-14 year-olds, compared to 18.8 per cent for Asia and the Pacific and 5.1 per cent for Latin America. It ranks second behind Asia in absolute terms, with 49.3 million children working. All are children who have no fair chance for a real childhood, an education or a better life. Child labor persists even where it has been declared illegal, and is frequently surrounded by a wall of silence, indifference and apathy. The persistent challenges of widespread and extreme poverty, high population growth, the AIDS pandemic, recurrent food crises, and political unrest and conflict clearly exacerbate the problem.

**Estimates of Various Forms of Child Work**



**Graph 1: Estimates of various forms of child work**

Source : [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

There are some 317 million working children in the world in the age group 5-17 years, an incidence rate of more than 20 percent of the child population in the age group. Unsurprisingly, in the fragile conflict ridden Sub-Saharan Africa one in every four children below 14 years of age is economically active which is also home to nearly half the worlds out-of-school children. This is the only region where the number of children workers has actually increased since 2000. There has been progress in eliminating child labour, but it is still modest. Boys slightly outnumber girls amongst working children in the world in the ILO estimate. In fact it is generally accepted that the number of working girls is often underestimated by statistical surveys; however, reality says that a large proportion of children involved in child labour are girls, especially when the unregulated, informal sector such as domestic work is concerned.

### 1.4 General facts about situation from Romania

A recent study concluded that about 8% of the country's 7 to 15 year olds work.

According to the 1992 Population and Housing Census in Romania, about 9,000 children under the age of 15 worked.

Street Children - A recent survey on street children found that the main types of work they did was agriculture, begging, delivery work, loading/unloading goods, car wash in the street or at the crossroad , sorting the junk scrap which can be recycle and prostitution.

Street children can be very easy recognize due to their dirty , second hand clothes,a phisical nondevelopment due to a bad nourishment ,diseases and an exposure to dangerous and very toxic substances .

From the point of view of communication it is very easy to observe that they are using just a few words ,short sentences , and jargon language specific for some categories .

In most of the families ,kids are working because this is their contribution to the family budget , a part of it is spending mostly for food .A 35% of the girls interviewed during the research have confessed that were practising prostitution as an alternative for earning money .

Apart school abandonment , children who workers do not have the necessary time to go to school, this having a negative impact because they have to switch between time for lessons with time for work.As a consequences of this fact a large percent of the stret children are illiterate .

During last years , it can be observed a change regarding the level of employment by ages. The number of kids under 14 years was in 2002 , 3818 thousands , last years it was 3346,9 , a decrease of 14 % , a very good thing for our society . Children of 15 ages and up, who have the right to work legally, of course a number of hours per day, are no longer implied so many in economic activities, from the database provided by Laborista (www.ilo.org) . More than 5 % of them have dropped out this kind of work .

## 1.5 Conclusions

What is the most sad thing about this is the fact that children are representing our future. We all will have a better life after ten or twenty years if we are taking care of the new generation , which at its side will look after us when we will be old enough not to be able to work . If we don't protect them , who should be more in charged to do it ? In our country the social systems has move on , even if we have a number of NGO , still it is not enough to say that children are now the beneficiaries of very good life conditions , that in a couple years we won't see street children or beggars .

Our lives are in our hand and their future depends of our actions .

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