

End child  
eXploitation

Child labour today



## About **End Child Exploitation**

End Child Exploitation is a UNICEF UK campaign to raise awareness about the grim realities of child exploitation.

This report, the third in the series, exposes the exploitation of children as workers. Tens of millions of children around the world today work long hours from very young ages. Some are even recruited as cannon fodder for political causes, or are treated as sex toys.

Here we explain the nature and scale of the problem and the growing international concern to eradicate the worst abuses. The report describes cases from around the world of children who start work instead of attending school, of those whose lives are endangered by their work, and of children who are treated as if they were items to be bought or sold, rather than as human beings.

It also brings the picture closer to home and looks at the exploitation of children at work in the United Kingdom. It reports on the experiences of professionals involved in the field, and the opinions of British children themselves, gathered in a unique survey. The report also reveals how foreign national children are brought into the UK specifically to be exploited as workers, in homes as well as restaurants, factories and farms. It looks at the serious inadequacies of the protection currently available, particularly for children brought to the UK especially to be exploited, and recommends action to be taken.

This report also describes some of UNICEF's current initiatives to advocate for the rights of the world's 350 million child and youth workers and to protect them against abuse at work, as well as pinpointing the action needed to end the economic exploitation of children.

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Quarry workers in Peru – a boy rests from his work, leaning his head on his sledge-hammer, while another shovels stones with a spade on a hillside quarry outside Lima, the capital.

Credit: UNICEF/HQ96-0946/Alejandro Balaguer

## Contents

<b>Child labour – the issues</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What is child labour?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Why children work</b>	<b>12</b>
The supply: what pushes children into work?	12
The demand: why employers want children	15
The role of education	17
Action to stop child labour	18
<b>Working children around the world</b>	<b>21</b>
Who works where?	21
The work child labourers do	22
The most vulnerable child workers	27
Child labour in industrialised countries	31
<b>Child labour in the UK</b>	<b>35</b>
An issue that affects many	35
Real lives – working children in the UK	38
UK national children at work	38
Trafficked children at work	45
Stopping the exploitation of children at work	52
<b>UNICEF in action</b>	<b>54</b>
Creating a “protective environment”	54
Focus on education	55
Focus on the most vulnerable children	57
<b>UNICEF UK Agenda for Action</b>	<b>62</b>





*Recyclers – these children, from Dhaka, Bangladesh, spend all day breaking up used batteries. The tiny pieces of metal inside can be recycled at 10 Taka (1p) a piece.  
Azizur Rahim/UNICEF/1998 Bangladesh*



*"We are the world's children. We are the victims of exploitation and abuse. We are street children. We are the children of war. We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS. We are denied good quality education and health care. We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination. We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account. We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone."*

Statement from the Children's Forum to the United Nations, May 2002

## Child labour – the issues

In May 2002, two teenagers from Bolivia and Monaco delivered this message to a special meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly about children. Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta and Audrey Cheynut summarised the views of a special Children's Forum, which coincided with the General Assembly session. They gave a clear message that young people think that the UN and governments have not done enough to end the exploitation and abuse of children.

In the opening decade of the 21st century, reports about children being exploited to make money for others are even more horrifying than the accounts that circulated during much of the last century. For example, children are – literally – enslaved to make carpets that decorate homes in Europe and North America. They are whipped because their employer thinks child servants should collect buckets of water more quickly. They are held captive so that older men can have sex with them. They are even recruited as cannon fodder for political purposes.

The sheer numbers are both startling and sobering – literally tens of millions of children around the world today work long hours before they have even reached the age of 10, let alone 18.

Child labour came under the international spotlight in the 1990s. For the first time since the industrialised world's campaigns on the issue a century earlier, diplomats and economists started discussing why vast numbers of children were working rather than being educated, and what should be done about it. This time, the focus was on developing countries.

This new attention to an old issue was largely due to worries raised by people in industrialised countries such as the United Kingdom. Trade unionists, politicians and campaigners for social justice voiced concern that jobs were disappearing rapidly as businesses switched production from the industrialised world to developing countries where labour costs were much lower. Simultaneously, organisations in developing countries sounded the alarm when they saw children working longer and longer hours – not only producing goods for export, but also providing a cheap and malleable workforce for the local economy. Their worry was echoed by activists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, who realised that the transition that started in 1989 was provoking an economic crisis which hit children particularly hard.

As more attention was given to the work children were performing, so the statistics about the numbers involved became more startling. The estimates of children between 5 and 14 in full-time employment had risen from 100 million at the beginning of the 1990s to 120 million by 1996.<sup>1</sup> Six years later, when the information available had been scrutinised more carefully, the total was estimated at 211 million, along with a further 141 million young people aged 15 to 17 who were also in employment.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the new millennium, 1 in 12 children in the world was reckoned to be involved in work which put their health at risk or caused them serious harm.

The late 1990s saw a series of initiatives – by governments and international organisations such as UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank – to consider the policies needed to address child labour globally, and the priorities for action. Two separate international conferences in 1997, in Amsterdam and Oslo, agreed to a proposal that stopping types of child labour that caused particular harm to children should be a priority – referred to initially as “intolerable” and later as the “worst forms” of child labour. Both endorsed UNICEF’s priority of ensuring that children, particularly more girls, attended school and went on attending classes for longer.

In 1999, a new international convention was adopted at the annual International Labour Conference, the “Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention” (also referred to as ILO Convention 182). This identified four categories of child labour, which governments, trade unions and employers’ organisations all agreed it was urgent to stop. The Convention was rapidly ratified and came into force the following year.



By June 2004, 150 countries had ratified it. In the course of the international deliberations, a whole new vocabulary has been developed for distinguishing between different categories of work involving under-18s (see *What is child labour?* on page 7).

*Young brickmaker – a boy uses a spade to mix clay mud to make bricks, in Huachipa, on the outskirts of Lima, Peru.*  
UNICEF/ HQ96-0961/Alejandro Balaguer

From 1999 onwards, UNICEF gave special priority to education, to ensure that children attended school rather than starting work too young. UNICEF has also been advocating for the quality of education to be good enough to keep children in school once they have enrolled.

*School survey – Anne Njoki, aged 10, attends a special class for students who are being trained to conduct a survey of children in their neighbourhood who do not attend school (part of the “Let’s Go to School” campaign) at Ruthimitu Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya.*  
UNICEF/HQ04-0317/Mariella Furrer



In 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, focused on education policies. It was an opportunity to reflect on how badly girls were missing out at school in comparison to boys, and on what action was needed to make “education for all” a reality. In the same year the UN adopted a new convention to stop children (and adults) being trafficked – taken away from their homes, often to other countries, to be involved in commercial sexual exploitation or other forms of economic exploitation in arduous and unacceptable conditions. UNICEF has paid special attention to the predicament of children who have been trafficked (most of whom are girls), particularly girls who work in private homes, not traditionally seen as places of work.

In May 2002, the United Nations reviewed the situation of children in general, summarising its agenda for the 21st century in “A World Fit for Children”. This emphasises the need for quality education for all children, and commits the world’s governments to a set of actions to protect children against abuse, exploitation and violence. Richer nations, such as the United Kingdom, committed themselves to providing assistance to other countries for social and economic development, poverty eradication programmes and universal education, as well as specific support to address child labour and its root causes.

### Action now to end child labour

After the years of discussion, since the beginning of the new millennium the emphasis has been on action – implementing the policies agreed to combat child labour. Five years after the Convention to end the “worst forms” of child labour was adopted, it is clear – as we outline in this report – that a huge amount remains to be done.

Five years on, we also now know what actions have been most effective in ending the harm inflicted on children by work. We have learnt that passing laws to ban child labour is not enough, but also that progress is difficult unless a country has the right laws in place.

The UK’s laws on the employment of young people were introduced in the 1930s. They are confusing and hard to implement, making it difficult to prevent teenagers aged 13, 14 or 15 who still have to attend school from being abused at work. The lack of a clear message from the Government on the circumstances when children should not be employed also creates conditions in which even worse abuse occurs, in particular involving children who have been trafficked to the UK.<sup>3</sup> It is important that the UK’s laws and regulations should be coherent and widely understood by employers, children and their parents, as well as the wider public. This is not yet the case.

Alongside laws, it is also important to build on success. This means evaluating the impact of actions taken and learning what has been effective. If initiatives are not well-tuned to children’s needs, they may cause further harm to young workers. Any evaluation of efforts to stop child labour should also include listening carefully to the views of the young people affected – and being ready to modify initiatives in the light of their feedback.



We have also learnt that the policies and actions taken to stop child labour need to go far beyond the narrow issue of employment. They must foster conditions in which children from poor families can grow up and learn. This means that school-age children should not have to leave home to earn a living elsewhere; by comparison, working after school or as well as attending school is not so damaging. Measures to stop child labour must address the poverty that obliges parents to send their young children to work rather than to school, primarily by providing adults with jobs paying a living wage.

In areas where HIV/AIDS is now rife and children are the main breadwinners for a family after the death of one or both parents, the priority should be to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as to encourage financial support for child-headed households, which will reduce their need to go out to work at a young age.

In areas where the children of indigenous or minority groups start work much younger than other children, the priority should be to end discrimination and support a range of measures to bolster the income of an entire community.

In all the parts of the world where girls attend school for fewer years than boys and where they are routinely sent to work when younger than boys (or obliged to leave school to get married), it should be a priority to promote girls' education and to narrow the gender gap.

#### References

1 ILO, Child Labour: targeting the intolerable, ILO, Geneva 1996.

2 ILO, A Future without Child Labour, ILO, Geneva 2002.

3 UNICEF UK, End Child Exploitation: Stop the traffic!, UNICEF UK, London 2003.



*The burdens of an adult at age 11 – Chikondi\* sits outside her home in Lilongwe, Malawi. Both her parents died of HIV/AIDS and, as the oldest girl of five orphans, she is now head of the household. Her day-to-day existence is a struggle. She does not know where she will get food. With no choice but to leave school and turn to prostitution, Chikondi is now pregnant, and it is highly likely that she is HIV positive. She has no hopes or dreams for the future. UNICEF UK/2002/Sarah Epstein*

*\* name changed to protect identity*



## Definitions

**Child/children** – everyone under the age of 18, entitled to the rights proclaimed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to be protected from economic exploitation.

**Young person/young people** – sometimes used to refer to older children (teenagers) and sometimes to all children. A European Union Directive on young workers defines “young person” as anyone under 18.<sup>1</sup>

**Adolescent** – usually teenagers who have passed puberty (although 18-year-olds are considered to be adults rather than children). The EU Directive on young workers uses “adolescents” to refer to 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds who are entitled by their country's law to have left school and to be in full-time employment, but who still have rights to special forms of protection.

**Child labour** – conventionally referred to children working before they reached the lawful minimum age for employment in their country (nowadays usually 14, 15 or, as in the UK, 16), often the same as the cut-off age for compulsory attendance at school. Now redefined to refer to all young people engaged in harmful employment, whether they are school-age or older.

**Worst forms of child labour** – used in a 1999 Convention to refer to four particularly harmful types of work involving anyone under 18, including:

- Forms of slavery, servitude and forced labour, including forced recruitment for use in armed conflicts;
- Commercial sexual exploitation (prostitution or pornography);
- Illicit activities;
- Hazardous work that jeopardises the lives, health or morals of those involved.

**Unconditional worst forms of child labour** – the first three of the above, as defined by other international laws (and consequently “unconditional”); work considered hazardous for young workers has to be identified in each country and may vary from country to country.

**Minimum age for admission to employment** – a legal minimum age set for full-time employment in more than 130 of the world's 194 countries.

**Child trafficking** – children under the age of 18 recruited in one place and then moved to another (sometimes across borders) to be subjected to commercial sexual exploitation or near-slavery (forced labour or servitude).

## What is child labour?

The term “child labour”, coined in Britain during the 19th century, implies that the children involved should not be working. “Youth employment”, on the other hand, implies something quite different – that young people need appropriate training and support to enter the labour market and to find jobs when they leave school. Many languages do not have a phrase that implies that children should not be working and use expressions more similar to “child work”.



*Few prospects – 12-year-old Beatrice, cleans pots in a yard in the town of Mombasa on the southeastern coast of Kenya. She works as a domestic in a relative's home and no longer attends school.*  
UNICEF/HQ96-1395/Giacomo Pirozzi

The terminology used is important because it implies what should be done in response: a “child labourer” should be returned to school; a “youth” or “adolescent” worker should be assisted in getting a job, with more supervision and protection than an adult worker.

## The Rights of the Child

The UN spelled out the full range of children’s rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989. This has been signed and ratified by all the countries in the world except two.<sup>2</sup> The Convention contains one particular article about economic exploitation – article 32; it also guarantees other rights relevant to whether children should be working or not.

Article 32 commits governments to recognising:

“... the right of the child 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 to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”

It condemns forms of work that interfere with education and those that cause harm. The Convention spells out a child’s right to education, as well as identifying the forms of harm to which children should not be exposed. A second part of the same article describes the measures governments must take to implement this right. They must:

- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
- (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
- (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

In practice, despite the near universal ratification of the Convention, many countries have not fulfilled the obligations in “b” and “c”. Many have specified a minimum age but do little to enforce it.

Article 28 guarantees every child’s right to education and stresses the importance of equal opportunity for all children to have access to education. It requires governments, “progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity” to:

- Make primary education compulsory and available free to all children;
- Encourage the development of secondary education, including general and vocational education, and to make these available and accessible to all children;
- Take measures to encourage regular school attendance and to reduce drop-out rates.

### UN rights that protect working children UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

- Article 6** *Governments must ensure that children are able to survive and develop “to the maximum extent possible”.*
- Article 11** *Governments must prevent “the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad”.*
- Article 19** *Governments must take action to protect children against all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.*
- Article 20** *Governments must provide special protection and assistance to children who are deprived of their own family environment.*
- Article 22** *Specifies that refugee children have the same rights as all other children.*
- Article 24** *Guarantees children their right “to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health” and to abolish traditional practices that are prejudicial to children’s health.*
- Article 27** *Every child has a right “to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”; parents have the main responsibility for this, but governments are required “within their means” to assist parents, as well as to provide material assistance and support in case of need.*
- Article 28** *Every child’s right to education – see text.*
- Article 31** *Concerns children’s right “to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child”.*
- Article 32** *Against economic exploitation – see text.*
- Article 34** *Governments must protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. In particular this means preventing the “exploitative use of children in prostitution” or in pornographic performances and materials.*
- Article 35** *Requires governments to take action to prevent children from being trafficked.*
- Article 36** *Requires governments to protect children “against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child’s welfare”.*
- Article 39** *Governments have a responsibility to help children recover from exploitation, neglect or abuse (particularly their physical and psychological recovery and return and reintegration into the communities they come from).*



Two other provisions in the Convention are also vitally important for working children. Article 3 says government agencies and other institutions taking action concerning a child or children must base their decisions on what is in the children's "best interests". Article 12 emphasises that when a child is capable of forming his or her views, these should be given due attention, in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

These general provisions are relevant to organisations such as UNICEF which want to end child exploitation. Every initiative has to ensure it is in children's best interests, and that the views of children, particularly those who are more mature, must be sought and taken into account in deciding what initiatives are suitable.

### International conventions on child labour

Two main conventions deal with child labour: the Minimum Age Convention and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. Both have been adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) – the specialist organisation in the UN dealing with the world of work – and ratified by the UK.

The Minimum Age Convention is based on the principle that children should not start work before reaching a minimum age. Between 1919, when it was set up, and the 1970s, the ILO adopted 10 separate conventions specifying the minimum age at which children could start various jobs. In 1973, a general Minimum Age Convention (ILO Convention 138) was adopted to apply to every type of employment and every country. Each country that ratifies this Convention commits itself "to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons" (article 1).

The Convention says that the minimum age for employment should "not be less than 15 years" but allows developing countries to opt for a minimum age of 14 on a temporary basis. Some countries make 16 their minimum age. The Minimum Age Convention has a special provision allowing children aged 13 and 14 to be employed in "light work" (or aged 12 and 13 in countries where 14 is the minimum age for full-time employment). Associated provisions explain that such children are only supposed to work in limited circumstances: the government has to specify which types of work are permitted as "light work" and the hours and conditions involved. The Convention also prohibits young people under 18 from being involved in dangerous work without training.

The Convention came into force in 1976 and had been ratified by 135 states by the end of 2004. All these countries have set a minimum age (42 at 14, 59 at 15 and 30 at 16) and have pledged to enforce this.

## The “worst forms” of child labour

By the mid 1990s, there was evidence that vast numbers of children below the minimum age of 14 were working full-time. Responding to concern about this, the ILO began to draft a new convention. This involved getting international agreement on the circumstances in which children of any age should not be working, as well as identifying the steps for governments to take to eliminate what came to be called the “worst forms” of child labour. The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention was adopted in 1999 and came into force a year later.<sup>3</sup>

The “worst forms” include children of any age below 18 who are involved in forms of slavery and forced labour, including forced recruitment for use in armed conflicts, commercial sexual exploitation (prostitution or pornography), illicit activities (particularly the production or trafficking of drugs), and hazardous work that jeopardises their lives, health or morals. With the exception of hazardous work, these “worst forms” are defined by other conventions and are consequently referred to as “unconditional worst forms”.

The types of work regarded as “hazardous” have to be identified in each country. The ILO set out the criteria for identifying them, as work that might expose children to:

- Physical, psychological or sexual abuse;
- Work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces;
- Work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; and
- Work in an unhealthy environment which would expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations which might damage their health.

Since this Convention was adopted, the phrase “child labour” no longer refers exclusively to children working before they are 14 or 15, but to all cases in which children are exposed to harm at work, including work which deprives them of other basic rights, such as their right to education, or which exposes them to physical or sexual abuse.

It is now a priority for UNICEF and other international agencies to take action to end the “worst forms” of child labour, which involve an estimated 180 million children.

UNICEF is also clear that all countries should set a legal minimum age for entry into employment and that governments should take steps to ensure that this is respected. This does not mean prohibiting those children below the minimum age from working or earning any money. It is reasonable for children to help out in the home and to contribute to a family business, as long as this does not jeopardise their education or expose them to harm.



*Forced into prostitution at the age of 15 – Yv\* stands silhouetted against a window in a brothel in the southern port city of Sihanoukville, Cambodia. Yv is 21 years old and has been a commercial sex worker since the age of 15, when she was abducted and sold into prostitution for US \$130. She earns an average of US \$1.00 per client and receives up to 8 clients a day. She says she requires all her clients to wear “double” condoms, but many clients of sex workers refuse to use condoms. UNICEF/HQ00-1004/Shehzad Noorani*

*\* name changed to protect identity*



## Child trafficking

In November 2000, the UN adopted a Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the "Palermo Protocol"). The Protocol is linked to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In order to move towards ratification of this Protocol, the UK had to criminalise trafficking. This resulted in two pieces of legislation – the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (which made it an offence to traffic for sexual exploitation) and the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc.) Act 2004 (which made it an offence to traffic people for exploitation, including slavery and forced labour).

The UN also adopted a Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, making a distinction between migrants who are helped to cross frontiers illegally (that is, smuggled), and others who are trapped in some form of exploitation as a result, usually after being coerced or tricked (trafficked). Child "trafficking" refers to the actions involved in recruiting and moving children under 18 so they can be subjected to what the Protocol calls "exploitation". These are the most abusive forms of child labour, along the lines of the "unconditional worst forms" of child labour: being pressed into prostitution or involved in making pornography (while someone else makes money out of it), or any sort of forced labour, slavery or servitude.

The UN has also adopted guidelines on the way that governments should treat victims of trafficking, including children,<sup>4</sup> and UNICEF has developed special guidelines that apply to trafficked children.<sup>5</sup>

*Branded for life – a Laotian girl who was trafficked and forced to work as a domestic servant in Bangkok, Thailand, shows scars on her arms from being burned with an iron by the owner of the house. Her tongue was also cut as a punishment and her body bears many other scars from violent abuse that occurred almost weekly over seven years. She finally escaped and has returned to her home in the southern province of Savannakhet, Lao People's Democratic Republic.*

UNICEF/HQ04-0741/Jim Holmes

### References

1 Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June 1994 on the protection of young people at work.

2 Somalia and the United States. It was ratified by the United Kingdom in December 1991.

3 Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/pec/ratification/convention/text.htm>

4 The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, 2002. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch>

5 UNICEF, Guidelines for Protection of the Rights of Children Victims of Trafficking in Southeastern Europe, May 2003. Available at <http://www.seerights.org>





## Why children work

Children start work when they are too young, or take on work that is hazardous, for many reasons. Children in developing countries do so because they and their families need the extra income. Indeed, many end up working unpaid for their employers in exchange for their board and lodging. In contrast, children in industrialised countries, including the UK, seek work for quite different reasons, usually to establish financial independence from their parents.

Here we focus on children who are driven into the world of work by poverty. However, even for poor families there are decisions to make about what work children should take on. Parents rarely wish to expose their children to danger, but may see no alternative. All too often, both parents and young people are unaware of the risks involved.

The reasons children work can be divided broadly into “supply” and “demand” factors. The very fact that so many different factors are at play is one reason why there is no single solution, no magic recipe for putting an end to the economic exploitation of children.

### The supply: what pushes children into work?

#### Poverty

The main reason why children start work instead of attending school, or leave school before completing their primary education, is that their families are poor and cannot pay the basic costs of food and housing without their child earning something as well. But the reasons why

*Living on the world's leftovers – children who work collecting rubbish they can use or sell follow a bulldozer through one of the largest refuse dumps outside Phnom Penh, Cambodia.*  
UNICEF/HQ96-0035/Franck Charton

*“I am the only working child in the family. My elder brother can't work since he goes to school full time. It was my mother who asked me to work, saying that I would help the family if I worked instead of staying home. So my father gave me the money to buy a shoe shining box. I worked as a shoe shiner for three years, then shifted to washing cars.”*

10-year-old Ethiopian boy



### Case study – domestic slavery

*Net\* from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, started work at 13 after her father died and when her uncle no longer allowed her family to plant rice in their former fields. Net's mother was paralysed and could not work, so the burden fell on the children.*

*Net met a man who said he could find work for her in Thailand. She ended up working as a domestic servant in Bangkok, cleaning floors and washing clothes and dishes.*

*"My boss was a very old man. If I looked up, he hit me. His wife was a good woman. She was kind. She asked me what the problem was, but I could not tell her. I cried every night for three months."*

*Net received no wages and eventually ran away. With the assistance of the Thai police, she reached a residential centre where she could learn new skills before returning home.*

*\* name changed to protect identity*

families are poor vary enormously – some are global, some are national and some are historic.

Some adult workers are not paid enough to support their families, and sometimes even the wages from both parents' incomes are not sufficient to keep their family housed, clothed and fed. However, it is also common to find families in which one or both parents are not earning anything, maybe because a parent has died or left home, or because adults are unable to get work. Sometimes employers prefer to employ children, finding them more obedient and cheaper than adults.

Alongside families where all the children are expected to work and earn their living from a young age, there are others where just one or two children work to earn money to enable another sibling to attend school.

Around the world, the details vary but the story is the same. There is not enough money for families to survive without some or all of their children working.

### Family breakdown

Families break down for many reasons, leaving the household short of income. Sometimes divorce leaves one parent looking after more children than she or he can afford to feed. Divorce is sometimes brought about by domestic violence, which also directly drives children to leave home when they are still young.

The death of either parent precipitates economic disaster for many households. In parts of Africa, this has now become all too common as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Families also lose their livelihood as a result of natural disasters and human crises that leave people destitute and force children to start earning. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in which almost one million people were murdered, left huge numbers of orphans. Five years later, more than 45,000 Rwandese households were still headed by children, mostly girls, who bore the responsibility for providing for their brothers and sisters.<sup>1</sup>

### HIV/AIDS

By 2001, the UN estimated that 13 million children around the world under the age of 15 had lost either one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. About half become orphans before they are 10.

The result of the premature death of one or both parents is that children take on the responsibility of seeking an income to support themselves and their younger brothers and sisters. In the case of HIV/AIDS, children often take on this role when their one surviving parent becomes seriously ill and is unable to work.

A survey in 2002 of girls working as domestic servants in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, found that more than three-quarters were orphans. More than a third of those questioned were not attending school.<sup>2</sup>

In richer countries, government institutions generally play a role in protecting children against the impact of crises or poverty, providing subsidies or grants to them or their families. However, this sort of support is not available to most children in the world. The extended family plays a role in protecting orphans and other children in need, but traditional systems for providing protection buckle when vast numbers are involved. This is the case in parts of Africa affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### Attitudes to girls

All around the world, children belonging to particular social groups leave school and start work earlier than other children in the same country. In industrialised countries the obvious differences are based on wealth and social class: children from poor families start work several years before their peers in rich households. In these countries, however, there are likely to be laws, which are enforced, making it compulsory for all children to attend school until a minimum age (16 in the UK).

In most parts of the world, gender is also a crucial factor: girls are discouraged from staying at school beyond puberty (and are sometimes withdrawn much earlier) and are propelled into adulthood much younger than boys, either into work or an early marriage.

In some countries, school is a threatening place for teenage girls, where they are at risk of sexual harassment from male classmates and teachers, and sidelined by prejudice and poor curricula. Simply because they are girls, many are kept at home or drop out of school.

UNICEF estimated that, at the end of 2003, 121 million children of school age were not attending school: well over half (65 million) were girls.<sup>3</sup>

### Discrimination against minority groups

Some children also leave school and start work earlier than others because of their origin or identity. In Latin America, indigenous children start work first. In South Asia, the caste system determines that children from *dalit* families (who have low status in the caste hierarchy) or *adivasi* (tribal or indigenous) communities start work first or do not attend school at all. In southeast Europe, it is children from the Roma minority. In each case, a combination of supply and demand factors are at work: the communities concerned feel that the school system was not designed for them and consider it normal for children to abandon school early and start work.

Surveys by UNICEF and Save the Children UK in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirm that the vast majority of Roma are unemployed. Although 92 per cent of school-age children attend school on average, in some areas as many as 80 per cent of Roma children do not. Those who are in school often drop out early to seek work. The underlying problem is one of prejudice and discrimination in local social services and the community, rather than a lack of infrastructure or services. Between 1999 and 2001, UNICEF began supporting special educational programmes for Roma children, in cooperation with World Vision.



*A bride at 12 – Tizalem, from the Amhara region of Ethiopia, has her hair braided the day before her wedding to 24-year-old Gegahun Deribe. Marriage at such an early age can have harmful consequences for children – including health problems and physical abuse from their husbands. Once married, girls often do not go back to school.*

UNICEF Ethiopia/2003/Getachew





*Heavy load – a boy from the Quechua indigenous group carries a stone to build a fence in the village of Cirullo, near the town of Uncia in North Potosi, Bolivia.*  
UNICEF/HQ97-0372/Alejandro Balaguer

### **The demand: why employers want children**

Alongside factors which push children into earning money are others which pull children into the world of work.

A major proportion of today's working children are employed in a family business or farm. The role of the family as a basic economic unit in many parts of the world still generates a demand for children to start work rather than study. In some cases this does them no harm. The heads of family enterprises regularly comment that school gives their children a less useful training than on-the-job experience. Of course, this approach reduces their child's opportunities later in life.

### **Cheap and obedient**

The relatively low wages paid to children are often a reason why employers prefer them to adult workers. Some children work unpaid, particularly as domestic workers, in conditions that would be denounced as "slavery" if they involved adults. Employers find children more obedient and easier to control. Unlike older workers, they are unlikely to initiate protests or form trade unions.

It is also easy for adults to intimidate children. Employers can force child workers into submission when the children are dependent on them for food, lodging and even emotional support. In most parts of

the world, it is still considered acceptable for parents to beat their children. Employers take advantage of the public's acceptance of corporal punishment to beat their child workers as a means of controlling them.

### **"Nimble fingers"**

In the country with the largest number of child labourers in the world, India, adults justify the involvement of children in certain jobs on the grounds that only they have the "nimble fingers" which enable them to give special attention to detail. Some sorts of work, they argue, cannot be performed by adults.

This is just one of many myths used to justify the numbers of children working today, myths which offer largely spurious arguments but strike a chord with local public opinion and come to be believed because they are repeated so often.

*In a town in northern Greece, Albanian children who were forced to wash car windscreens at traffic lights and to hand their earnings over to adults said they had become like "robots". They had to obey orders and were never allowed to make any decisions of their own.*

Terre des Hommes Foundation,  
The Trafficking of Albanian  
Children in Greece, Lausanne 2003



### **Inadequate laws**

More than 130 countries have signed an international convention saying that children may not work full-time before 14 or 15 years of age. However, in some of the countries concerned, laws on this are confusing or vague and not enforced. There are particular difficulties when laws are inconsistent – for example, one dictating that children must remain in school until they are 12, while another decrees that they may not start work until 14: the inconsistency is almost bound to precipitate children into the labour market before they reach the legal minimum age.

*Intricate work – Rakibul Islam painting the spokes of rickshaw wheels in Jessore, Bangladesh. Rakibul works for his "uncle", who provides him with food and the opportunity to learn a trade in exchange for his labour.*  
UNICEF Bangladesh/Shehzad Noorani



In some countries, there are so many laws affecting the employment of children that parents and employers alike are baffled. Employers can usually point to a loophole to justify a young child working for them. Even when there are laws to regulate health and safety at work, these are rarely enforced in the informal economy where working children are found, routinely exposing them to serious risks.

### Poor infrastructure

Another factor is the practical difficulty of establishing a child's actual age in countries where the infrastructure may not be in place for e.g. systematic birth registration. This can disadvantage children in many ways – law enforcers are hampered because they do not have the means to absolutely establish the ages of e.g. teenagers, and, without appropriate documentation, young people may also be denied access to state services such as schools.



*Combining work and school – a group of young bangle makers take part in UNICEF-supported non-formal classes in Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh, India. By allowing them to both work and study, the project aims to give these children some hope in terms of their future prospects.*  
UNICEF India/2001/Lisa Heydlauf

### The role of education

Children who receive little or no school education miss out on the knowledge that can create options for them later in life. Without it, they make less contribution as adults and are more exposed to exploitation and abuse. Not attending school is consequently both a cause and effect of child labour.

The importance of education for a society's economic and social development is widely acknowledged. However, even countries that have made an explicit undertaking to send every child to school still



have to do a great deal to turn this commitment into reality. The shortcomings of existing school systems remain a major factor that “pushes” children on to the labour market when they are too young.

Sending children to school does not come without a cost. In many countries, parents still pay a fee for their children to attend primary school, as well as buying books and providing a school uniform. For a poor family these are significant costs, alongside the lack of income for the household while a child is at school.

To tackle these economic realities, Brazil introduced a “school scholarship” for low-income families. This is an income subsidy tied to a child’s continuing attendance at school. The incentive has had a marked effect, reducing the frequency of child labour in the areas where it has been tried.<sup>4</sup> However, while the Brazilian government was able to make funding available, similar subsidies are not yet forthcoming in other parts of the world.

### **Action to stop child labour**

The various causes of child labour outlined here need to be tackled at different levels:

- Immediate causes (a parent dies and the family desperately needs extra income).
- Underlying causes (public opinion thinks the most appropriate work for girls is in the house, or that it is acceptable for poor children to work instead of attending school).
- Structural or root causes operating at the level of an entire economy or society.<sup>5</sup>

An immediate cause can be addressed by action in the short term, such as providing grants to needy families, while addressing root causes means bringing about major changes in the economic order at national or international level.

No single action, however well intentioned, stops child labour or puts an end to the harm which children suffer. Instead, we need a coordinated set of actions. This involves:

- Putting the right laws and policies into place (and ensuring the public knows about them and the government has the political will to implement them).
- Addressing the root causes of child labour.
- Preventing children from leaving school and entering the labour market prematurely.
- A range of activities to protect children who are already at work, in some cases to support them and in others to withdraw them from work that is causing them harm.

Implementing a coordinated set of actions in this manner is very much in line with UNICEF's more recent emphasis on all-round improvements for children by influencing the general environment in which children grow up (see *UNICEF in action*, page 54).

We have already learnt a great deal about the impact of different measures, and this has improved the effectiveness of many projects to stop child labour. However, numerous organisations are involved, each tackling different aspects of the problem, and they sometimes adopt different approaches. UNICEF believes that providing practical support to child workers and preventing the worst abuses is more realistic than attempting an immediate ban on the recruitment of under-15-year-olds into any job at all.

### Monitoring initiatives to stop child labour

One of the first lessons learnt in the 1990s was an obvious one: that it is vital that children do not suffer further harm as a result of initiatives to stop child labour. This means keeping a careful eye on the impact of every initiative. There is no point, for example, in campaigning to stop 13-year-old girls from working in factories if they are sacked and end up worse off as a result.

In the mid 1990s, campaigners realised that publicity about children working in developing countries' factories and manufacturing cheap exports was sometimes worsening the situation for those children. This was particularly the case in Bangladesh, where thousands of teenage girls were summarily dismissed when employers thought the US was about to impose a boycott on garments manufactured with the help of children. UNICEF and others intervened to provide schooling and other alternatives for the dismissed girls.

A similar case arose in 1996 after a television documentary in the UK showed how clothes on sale in Marks & Spencer shops were being manufactured (without the retailers' knowledge) in a factory in Morocco employing girls from age 12 upwards. The publicity led to 80 to 100 girls being dismissed without any notice or severance pay. Independent researchers noticed that, "the dismissals led to the girls being harmed rather than helped".<sup>6</sup>

### Listening to children

A key message in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is that children have a right to voice their views on matters affecting them and to have these taken into account. This means consulting those affected by initiatives to stop child labour to find out the actual effects on them.

Listening to the comments children make about the impact of initiatives specifically intended to help them gives a clearer message. In West Africa, researchers talked to teenagers in Mali, where the Government is keen to stop young people from being trafficked to neighbouring countries where they have been subjected to abuse. They found that many teenagers had no prospects of staying at school or earning a living locally, but were finding it harder to go abroad to work as a result of the Government's counter-trafficking measures. Some

*"Government regulation of child labour would be good. Some parents make it seem as if work is the responsibility of children."*

15-year-old girl street vendor in Lesotho

*"It would not be right to restrict children from working because they would not get money."*

10-year-old boy street vendor in Lesotho

UNICEF, "Child Workers in the Shadow of AIDS. (Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda)", *Listening to the Children*, Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, 2001

#### Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

*Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.*

*The views expressed by working children reflect the disagreements elsewhere about the most appropriate action to deal with child labour (see box above).*

had even been arrested to stop them leaving. The Government had ordered all young people leaving the country to have special identity papers, but in practice these remained hard to come by and resulted in border officials extorting larger bribes than before from young Malians crossing the border.<sup>7</sup> The review concluded that the initiatives intended to stop the exploitation of children needed to focus more carefully on preventing the harm being experienced by a minority of the young migrants.

In various parts of the world, working children have set up their own organisations that call on policy makers to listen to their views. Some have criticised efforts to abolish child labour and say the priority should be to improve their working conditions. Most support efforts to eliminate particularly abusive forms of exploitation. In the Philippines, SUMAPI, an organisation of 5,000 child domestic workers, calls for the employment of children to be banned below a minimum age and for tough new laws to regulate the conditions of child domestics who are old enough to work.<sup>8</sup>

### Creating a “protective environment”

UNICEF is supporting a range of projects to end the economic and sexual exploitation of children, as well as other initiatives to promote respect for children’s rights. In recent years UNICEF has concentrated on improving the forms of protection available to children who risk exploitation, abuse and violence (see *UNICEF in action*, page 54).

#### References

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*“About 1 in every 12 children in the world today are involved in the ‘worst forms’ of child labour.”*

## Working children around the world

### Who works where?

Today, more than 350 million children, aged from 5 to 17, are at work.<sup>1</sup> They can be differentiated on the basis of their age, the effect that working has on their basic rights and, in particular, the extent to which their work causes them harm.

More than 140 million of the total are old enough to be working under international standards. Nevertheless, getting on for half of these – 60 million – suffer harm because they are involved in the abuse of the “worst forms” of child labour, from which they should be protected. The remaining 80 million have reasonable jobs, either in industrialised or developing countries.

Out of approximately 211 million working children under 15, more than half (over 120 million) are involved in the “worst forms”. So, together with older adolescents, almost 180 million young people below 18 are involved in the “worst forms”, approximately 1 in every 12 children in the world today. The vast majority of these, more than 170 million, are engaged in work that is hazardous, posing a health risk and, in some cases, even threatening their lives.

*Young gardeners – two small children working in a vegetable garden in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, in the district of Cusco, Peru.*  
UNICEF/HQ96-0957/Alejandro Balaguer



Among the working children younger than 15, most are below the minimum age for legal employment. A significant proportion are very young – between 5 and 11 – and many of these are not even paid for their services.

The incidence of child labour is highest in Africa, where 41 per cent of 5- to 14-year-olds are known to work, compared with 21 per cent in Asia and 17 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Nevertheless, with its higher population, Asia has the largest total number of working children, 60 per cent of the world's total.

A summary by the ILO showed that in 2000, the world's 211 million working children aged from 5 to 14 were situated in the regions of the world as shown in the pie chart on the right.<sup>2</sup>

A recent UNICEF survey in 25 countries in just one region, sub-Saharan Africa, revealed that almost one-third of the working children aged between 5 and 14 were involved in the "unconditional worst forms" of child labour. In addition, almost 10 per cent were working for more than 43 hours a week, threatening their well-being.<sup>3</sup>

This is an alarming picture. However, it is important not to misinterpret the statistics. Most of the world's 211 million children under 15 who work still live at home and work there or on a family farm, in relatively little danger.

### The work child labourers do

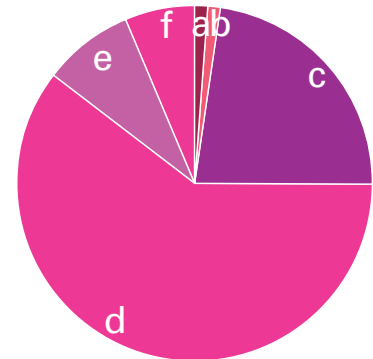
The 19th century images of child labourers as tiny chimney sweeps or tethered to treadmills in Britain's "satanic mills" are very obvious cases of exploitation: incidents of working children who are suffering abuse today may be overlooked since they are not nearly so visible, although they may be equally as extreme. A 10-year-old playing an accordion to tourists in a holiday resort and asking for money may be earning some extra pocket money, but may also be a victim at the beck and call of a modern-day "Fagin".

Stereotypes of what constitutes "work" also influence the types of work that the public thinks of as "child labour". This, in turn, influences the types of jobs that are the subject of laws and regulations, omitting some children's work that we now know to be harmful. While the stereotypes focus on factories and the formal sector of the economy – conventional men's work – work inside the home is often overlooked, whether it involves children performing household chores for their own family (widely regarded as acceptable and necessary for every child's upbringing), helping to earn money by supporting a family business, or working in someone else's house as a full-time live-in servant.

### Children in the rural economy

More children work on farms than in any other form of work. The ILO's survey in 2000 indicated that 70 per cent of the world's working children were engaged in agriculture, fishing, hunting or forestry. This reflects the dominance of the rural economy in many developing countries. Some only help out on a family farm at peak times when

### Child work worldwide



- a Developed (industrialised) economies 2.5 million
- b Transition economies 2.4 million
- c Sub-Saharan Africa 48 million
- d Asia and the Pacific 127.3 million
- e Latin America & the Caribbean 17.4 million
- f Middle East & North Africa 13.4 million

*The figures indicate the number of child workers in each region.*





*Helping out on the farm – a boy, Ruben, collects sisal fibres (used to make twine, rope and other textile items) on his family's plantation near the town of Conceicao de Cot in the eastern state of Bahia, Brazil. UNICEF and several municipalities in the region have developed a project that creates flexible hours for after-school programmes and provides subsidies to families to ensure that their children are not kept out of school because they have to work. The project, part of a larger UNICEF-supported programme to eliminate child labour, now assists 160,000 children, including 30,000 in the sisal production region.*

UNICEF/HQ00-0367/Alejandro Balaguer

there is a need for manual labour, such as weeding and the harvest. However, agricultural work is not necessarily benign. In the US, farm work accounts for 42.7 per cent of all fatalities among workers aged 14 to 17.<sup>4</sup> Other hazards in agriculture are mentioned below.

### Children in the informal economy

It's not in the factory but on the streets of developing cities where most of today's urban working children can be found. Some actually live on the street, having left or lost their families, while others earn their living there, hawking food, drinks and a whole range of other products, carrying everything from someone's shopping to crippling loads, and running to and fro at their employer's orders. Almost by definition, the informal sector is unregulated: whatever labour laws and regulations apply in the formal economy, such as factories and the civil service, are not observed and little attempt is made to enforce them. This applies both to laws governing a minimum age for employment and those covering health and safety at work. The millions of children living and working on the streets around the world come into this category, as do many apprentices sewing and hammering away in small workshops.



## Children in the export economy

Although it was concern about children in developing countries producing cheap exports for the industrialised world that fuelled publicity about child labour in the 1990s, the export economy involves a relatively small proportion of working children under 15. No accurate data is available, but about 5 per cent, some 10 million children, are thought to be involved in producing either agricultural or manufactured products for export.

The involvement of children under 15 in the growing and harvesting of agricultural products such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, sisal, tea and tobacco<sup>5</sup> has provoked protests in countries importing these products. Examples include:

- **Brazil** – protests in the late 1990s at the numbers of young children involved in harvesting oranges for export;
- **Malawi** – trade unions have reported on the high number of children involved in growing tobacco for export, and negotiated changes with employers;
- **Egypt** – the predicament of young children picking flowers at night for perfume manufacturers was highlighted in the early 1990s;
- **Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast)** and other countries in West Africa – the involvement of children in cultivating cocoa was criticised in 2000, in particular as some teenagers were held captive on the farms where they were working.

In each of these cases, the most serious problem was that children were being exposed to danger, not just that they were young. A survey of cocoa farms in four West African countries concluded that all the children working on them (more than a quarter of a million) were exposed to hazards, as they invariably used machetes in their work and many were exposed to pesticides.<sup>6</sup> The finding disguises the fact that some children were exposed to much more harm than others.

In addition to helping grow agricultural products, children under 15 work in other export industries. The first cases to receive publicity in the late 1980s focused on young children making hand-knotted carpets in India for export, often in conditions of slavery. In the early 1990s, the focus was on girls manufacturing garments in factories in Bangladesh. While the conditions were not nearly as bad in this case, the protests led a Senator in the US to propose a law banning imports made by children. This provoked a crisis in Bangladesh when thousands of girls were summarily dismissed. Subsequently the focus moved to Pakistan (children stitching footballs in the town of Sialkot, where once again there was concern that the bad publicity would lead to child workers being sacked and thus made worse off than before) and to the neighbouring Punjab in India, where children were involved in making footballs and other sporting goods.

While such campaigns can present dangers to the child workers involved, they have had an important side effect. Many companies



*Young ticket seller – while his friend watches, a boy sells lottery tickets to passing drivers on a bridge in the southern province of Dong Thap, Viet Nam. UNICEF/HQ99-0891/Roger LeMoyne*

For more information about child labour and corporate social responsibility, please go to UNICEF UK's online Child Labour Resource Guide, which can be found at [www.unicef.org.uk/clrg](http://www.unicef.org.uk/clrg)

based in the industrialised world have now adopted codes of conduct intended to stop children below 15 from being involved in manufacturing goods that the company imports from developing countries – even if the country concerned allows children to start work younger than 15. These codes generally specify minimum standards for labour rights and environmental protection. They have been welcomed by campaigners for corporate social responsibility, although sometimes they seem to be used by companies primarily to fend off public criticism, rather than to bring benefits to children in the areas supplying the products that the company sells.

### “Invisible” child workers

Many working children are virtually invisible to outsiders, as they work in the privacy of people's homes. Most of these workers are girls.

Children working inside people's houses now receive far more attention than before, although there is still no accurate estimate of the number of child domestic workers worldwide. A recent estimate suggests that 700,000 girls are involved in such work in just one country, Indonesia. In Ethiopia, girls below 14 employed as live-in domestics were reported in 2001 to earn an average of US\$1.20 a month – less than £1.00.<sup>7</sup>

The different terms used to refer to these employees reflect different attitudes towards them: “domestic servants”, “maids” or “household helps”. The organisations campaigning on their behalf generally refer to them as “child domestic workers” to avoid derogatory terms such as “skivvies”, even if some of the children involved are treated as slaves – unpaid, working long hours and not allowed to leave their employer.

Working as a servant in someone else's house, especially as a live-in servant, has different implications for a child of 8 than for a young woman of 15 or 16. In the Philippines, about 10 per cent of the

*Helping out at home – 12-year-old Werlyn Tonacao tends a smoky fire of corn cobs in the kitchen of her home in the city of Davao, the Philippines. One of a family of seven children, Werlyn attends a multigrade class in the Pagan Grande Elementary School, in addition to helping her mother with household chores and in the family shop.*  
UNICEF/HQ96-1026/Shehzad Noorani





300,000 children reported to work as household helps are between 10 and 14, while most are older. In other parts of the world, recruitment starts before children reach 10. In Haiti there is a long tradition of boys and girls from poor families being sent to live with slightly better off households to work as servants, known as *restaveks* (from the French phrase meaning “stay with”). It is widely acknowledged that *restaveks* are treated badly; for example, a special whip is on sale in Haiti for punishing them. Efforts by UNICEF and others have not yet convinced the public in Haiti to abandon this practice and the ill-treatment of children involved.

Children working in other people’s homes are employees. However, in many countries this is seen as a form of charity rather than employment or exploitation, and often excluded from the terms of employment law. The children concerned are rarely given a formal contract.

### “Homeworkers”

Some children who work in their own home are simply helping out with household chores. Others are participating in a family business, such as helping to run a shop after school. However, households also take in work on a sub-contracted basis, such as stitching pieces of leather to make footballs in Pakistan and India. They and the adult workers in their households are “homeworkers”.

While children working in their own homes are in an environment that ought to protect them against harm, some are nevertheless exposed to

*Family industry – 11-year-old Medina stretches to reach a skein of wool to incorporate into the carpet that she and her younger siblings are weaving. Her family migrated to Peshawar, Pakistan from Afghanistan in 1997. As members of the Hazara ethnic group, they are discriminated against – Medina’s father is therefore afraid to seek formal employment or send the children to school. The family barely survives by weaving carpets.*

UNICEF/HQ01-0301/Shehzad Noorani





exploitation or hazards. Children in parts of India work at home rolling tobacco into thin cigarettes, or *beedi*. They are inevitably exposed to a health hazard from working with tobacco; in addition, many have to work to pay back money which their parents have borrowed.

Routinely, laws concerning child employment do not apply to children working at home in a family business. There is consequently a danger that families and employers avoid the terms of the law by claiming that children are working for their own family when this is not the case.

### Apprentices

Young people need training. One of the best ways of learning skills is in an apprenticeship to someone with acknowledged expertise in a craft or business. The US Department of Labor defines apprenticeship as “a cross between a real job, on-the-job training, and related classroom instruction” where “workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation.” In the US, young people have to be at least 16 to be eligible (or 18 in the case of hazardous occupations).<sup>8</sup> However, in developing countries apprentices are often used for all manner of odd jobs, with no one checking whether the role involves genuine on-the-job training. In these circumstances, apprenticeships become an excuse to abuse and exploit young people.

### The most vulnerable child workers Children working away from home

Some children decide for themselves to leave home to seek work, while others are sent away by parents who hope they will “better themselves” elsewhere. Children under 15 who live and work away from their families are exposed to the greatest risk of abuse. They no longer have a relative to check up on how they are and are not mature enough to look after themselves. Indeed, younger children are totally dependent on their employer to look after them and cannot even run away or protest at ill-treatment.

Some children may leave home with a trafficker – recruited or deceived by someone who intends to use them for commercial sexual exploitation or put them into a situation close to slavery, or they may come under the control of such a person after leaving home. The ILO estimated that in 2000, some 1.2 million exploited children had been trafficked.

### Worse than work – slavery and sexual exploitation

The ILO’s Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention distinguishes “unconditional worst forms”, which automatically constitute an abuse wherever they occur, from hazardous work, which it is up to each country to identify for itself. Many unconditional worst forms are close to slavery and are not recognised by the public as genuine “work” – particularly when children earn money by having sex with adults.

According to ILO data, approximately eight million children are believed to work in these especially horrific circumstances – forced into bonded labour or other forms of slavery, into prostitution or pornography, or into participation in armed conflict or other illicit activities.

#### Case study – trembling with tiredness

*“I wake up at the first cockcrow, I clean the house and the kitchen, I collect kindling, which we sell in bundles at the market and we survive thanks to the money it brings in. I do the cooking and washing. I go to the market, I chop wood. My aunt’s children go to school and I stay home to do everything. I only eat once a day... If I happen not to sell enough oranges they tell me I am cursed and ‘good for nothing’. And if I’m ever unlucky enough to lose any, I have to pay them back out of the little money that my parents give me whenever they stop by to visit. I want to go back to my parents ... I often have headaches. At night I tremble, I’m so tired.”*

*Matou, a 12-year-old in Guinea, working for a woman 85 kilometres away from her home.*

*When Matou’s parents learnt about her suffering, they urged her employer to send her to school. Her employer promised she would, but nothing has come of it.  
(Recorded for UNICEF, 2003)*

## Bonded labour and other forms of slavery

Out of these eight million, the largest group, almost six million, are subjected to forced or “bonded” labour. Children become victims of bonded labour (also known as debt bondage) when they or adult relatives accept a loan and agree that the child should work to pay it back. However, the repayments are not on the basis of a fair exchange: in bonded labour, the value of the work far exceeds that of the original loan. Children sometimes work for years to pay off relatively small sums. For example, in 2001 four child migrants were rescued off a ship supposed to be taking them from West to Central Africa: on arrival they were scheduled to work for eight years to pay off the costs of their trip, just 1,000 kilometres across the sea.<sup>9</sup>

South Asia is the area where the largest numbers of children are reported to be “bonded”, and certain industries, such as the hand-knotted carpet industry in north India and Pakistan, have become infamous because of the presence of so many bonded children.

## Child soldiers

International legal standards ban the recruitment of young people into the armed forces until they are 16 and prohibit under-18s from being conscripted, as well as prohibiting their recruitment by militias or insurgent groups. Nevertheless, each time a new war has broken out in sub-Saharan Africa in the past two decades, there have been reports of boys as young as 11 sent into combat and of girls used both as combatants and in support roles. Wars on other continents have also involved young recruits, with armed opposition groups in Colombia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka all enrolling children, as well as groups closer to home, in Northern Ireland.

Although some youngsters are demobilised before reaching 18, they generally remain deeply marked by their military experience and find it difficult to re-adapt to ordinary life. Furthermore, many people in their communities are terrified that former child soldiers will go on resorting to violence.

At the beginning of this decade, an estimated 300,000<sup>10</sup> children had been recruited into various armed groups. The total seemed to have fallen by 2004, but the problem remains serious.

## Commercial sexual exploitation

Teenage girls account for the vast majority of the children who earn money in prostitution, but boys are involved as well. Both boys and girls are used to produce child pornography. The number of children involved was estimated at 1.8 million in 2000.

Young children who have not even reached puberty suffer from the interest of paedophiles, while the demand for commercial sex with girls who have only just passed puberty has increased as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Men in various parts of the world deliberately seek sex with girls of 15 or younger on the assumption that they are less likely to have contracted HIV/AIDS than older women. Some people who are HIV-positive even believe that sex with children, and

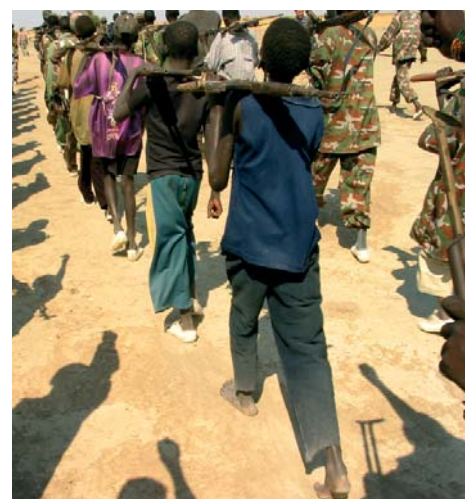
### Child soldiers and the UK

On 12 February 2002, the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force. This Optional Protocol obliges state parties to take all feasible measures to ensure under-18s do not take part in hostilities.

The UK government formally ratified the Optional Protocol on 24 June 2003. However, the government accompanied its ratification with a declaration reserving the UK's right to deploy under-18s where there is a “genuine military need” and “by reason of the nature and urgency of the situation it is not practicable to withdraw such persons before deployment or to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of their ship or unit.”

By including this declaration, UNICEF UK is concerned that the Government will continue to both recruit and deploy under-18s – contravening the spirit of the Optional Protocol, which was adopted to protect children from armed conflict. As the Joint Committee on Human Rights<sup>11</sup> stated in its 2003 review of the UK Government's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child: “[w]e are concerned at the extent to which the commitment to keep under-18s in the Armed Forces out of combat zones is undermined by the terms of the Declaration”.

The UK actively targets under-18s to join its armed forces and has the lowest age of recruitment among European states. It is estimated that 6,000-7,000 under-18s are currently serving in the UK armed forces.



Laying down arms – part of a ceremony to demobilise a group of child soldiers in Sudan. © Guillaume Bonn/Think



*Sex for sale – Alexis\*, 15, leans against a car on a street where boy sex workers often wait for clients, in a major city in Colombia. Alexis ran away from home at the age of 11 to escape a stepfather he fought with and became a sex worker. His family does not want him back because he stole money from them to buy drugs. Alexis was once in a shelter programme but returned to drugs and prostitution. He says, "I missed the freedom of the streets. The streets are exciting but they also destroy you... when I went back to the street, I fell deeper into drugs. I want to leave them, I know they harm me, and I want to leave prostitution too."*

*\*name changed to protect identity*

particularly virgins, will remove their own infection. The role of tourists from richer countries who pay for sex with local children has come under the limelight, but probably accounts for only a small proportion of the problem.

International congresses, attended by representatives of governments and other organisations, were organised in Sweden and Japan in 1996 and 2001 to develop a common agenda to combat this form of exploitation. A great deal has been learnt about the techniques for preventing commercial sexual exploitation, as well as how to protect the children involved and enable them to rebuild their lives afterwards, but the dimensions of the problem are still huge.

### Other illicit activities

Children are used in a range of other illegal activities around the world. When this was categorised as a "worst form" of child labour in 1999, the focus was on young people involved in the drug trade. Cases of this sort have been reported in the UK and other parts of Europe, but two other types of illicit activity involve larger numbers of children. In one of these cases in particular, there has been relatively little reaction from the authorities.

Children from both Eastern Europe and other parts of the world have been brought to EU countries in recent years to take part in house break-ins and other crimes. In France, children from part of northwest Romania were taken to Paris. In 2000, Romanian children accounted for almost one in six of the juvenile offenders appearing in Paris courts.<sup>12</sup>

Large numbers of children have also been brought into EU countries to beg, as a profitable way for the adults controlling them to earn an



income. In 2003, Albanian children begging in Greece were estimated to be earning 30 to 50 euros a day (£20 to £35).<sup>13</sup> Many of the children involved should have been attending primary school. The authorities allowed them to wander around tourist areas late in the evening, offering flowers for sale or playing music to persuade people to give them money.

Throughout the world, child beggars are deployed outside places of religious worship – churches, mosques and temples – to take advantage of the charity of worshippers, who have no idea how the children concerned use their money and whether they have to hand it over to an adult who is exploiting them.

### Hazardous and dangerous work

All sorts of work exposes young people to danger and jeopardises their health (or even their lives). These dangers are sometimes obvious: children handling gunpowder in a South Indian city, in a place which specialises in making fireworks and matches; and children working in quarries, where splinters of rock fly around. The fact that children are working in such conditions confirms both their desperation for an income and the attitude of some employers who see children as a disposable, as well as a cheap, workforce.

In Kenya, during a recent UNICEF investigation, children working on farms described the hazards they faced<sup>14</sup>. The main ones mentioned included cuts and wounds from pruned coffee and tea bushes, long working hours, lifting heavy loads, exposure to farm chemicals, lack of drinking water and toilets, and excessive noise. Most of the children worked without the bare minimum of protective clothing, such as gumboots, gloves, raincoats and overalls. Several children had broken a limb after falling from fruit trees. Many were bitten or stung by spiders and insects as they worked in the bushes. The absence of even the most basic medical care caused simple wounds to become infected. Eye and ear infections were common, as were skin allergies from exposure to pesticides and other chemicals – the fields they worked in were regularly sprayed with pesticides.

Children are more vulnerable to the toxic effects of pesticides than adults: in 2003, the US Environmental Protection Agency estimated that children aged between 3 and 15 may experience at least three times the cancer threat the same chemicals pose to adults.<sup>15</sup> However, Kenya's child plantation workers inevitably resumed work much sooner after spraying than was safe.

More than 1 in 10 of the young farm workers, boys as well as girls, described being sexually abused by men on the plantations, particularly in the early evening, while awaiting transport to return to their homes.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere in Africa, children have described accidents while fishing on lakes in Ghana and Uganda, falling into the water and contracting water-borne diseases such as schistosomiasis.

The dangers inherent in other types of work are less obvious. This fact, as well as a child's relatively underdeveloped sense of danger, is a

#### Case study - sex tourism

*Binta\*, a 17-year-old young woman in a tourist area of Senegal, stopped attending school after failing an exam when she was 12; she began selling fruit in tourist areas but soon realised she could earn more by having sex with foreign tourists staying at the hotels. Each year, thousands of Europeans flock to the coastal five-star hotels intent on having a good time – which for some involves the sexual exploitation of local girls and boys.*

*UNICEF has organised training for staff working for Avenir de l'Enfant (Future of the Child), a children's charity in Dakar, and provided them with office equipment and a motorbike to allow them to visit the children's villages, as well as bars and clubs in the tourist areas. They talk to families and tourists about sexual exploitation, raising awareness of the risks to children and their families.*

*\*name changed to protect identity*



*Stone breakers – child workers  
at a stone quarry in Accra, Ghana.*  
© Tom Craig

reason why children should not be involved in hazardous work and why inspectors are needed to check the risks that all young workers face.

### **Child labour in industrialised countries**

Most of the above examples suggest that child labour is a problem only in the developing world. This is not the case. Among the young people who are old enough to be working in Europe, North America or Japan, there are some whose work is hazardous or otherwise unacceptable, particularly children who have been trafficked into these countries especially so that someone else can make money out of them. In most industrialised countries, children routinely start earning money before reaching the minimum age for full-time employment (variously set at 14, 15 or 16) and some of these workers are engaged in hazardous or illegal work.

Estimates of the number of young people working on farms in the US vary from 300,000 to 800,000.<sup>17</sup> Many are from minority groups, particularly Spanish-speaking immigrant families (many of whose children were born in the US). Under US laws, the legal age for most farm work is only 12 if a parent accompanies the working child. However, like so much other legislation on employing children, this contains loopholes. It requires children to be 14 years old to work in cherry orchards, but only 13 to work in cucumber, berry and spinach



fields. Children who are 14 can work unlimited hours in the fields before or after school, but the same law limits the number of hours that 14-year-olds can work in other jobs to just three a day during term-time. The laws vary from state to state and crop to crop, even though farm work exposes young workers to pesticides and to greater risks than other types of work.

In some European countries, it is predominantly minority groups, such as Roma and recent immigrants, whose children start work while still below the minimum legal age for employment. However, some industries involve more child workers than others. In Portugal, some 47,000 school-age children were reported to be working instead of attending school, many of them making shoes.<sup>18</sup> The Portuguese government has made efforts for more than a decade to end this practice. Fewer children are employed in workshops or factories than in the past, but there has been a corresponding increase in the number of children working in their own homes.

Until recently, many school-age children in other parts of southern Europe skipped school to work in family businesses. However, in these and other EU countries, different categories of children are now subjected to economic and sexual exploitation – those brought into the EU especially for this purpose from other parts of the world. They include children from Albania begging in Greece, children brought from Romania to France, Italy and elsewhere to take part in criminal activities, Eastern European teenage girls forced into prostitution, and children imported especially from West Africa to work as live-in domestic workers in France, the UK and elsewhere.

### EU Directive on the Protection of Young People at Work

In 1994, the Council of the European Union issued a Council Directive on the Protection of Young People at Work<sup>19</sup> to reduce the discrepancies on youth employment in its member countries. This sets minimum standards for all EU states for both children (those still required by law to attend school), and adolescents and young people who are under 18 but above the minimum legal age for employment.

It specifies that children aged 14 and 15 may undertake “light work” and that 13-year-olds may work for a limited number of hours each week, to be set by national legislation. Some exceptions are allowed for children involved in cultural, artistic, sporting or advertising activities. The Directive specifies the maximum number of working hours for school-age children: 2 hours on a school day and 12 hours a week during term-time, with a maximum 7-hour day for 13- and 14-year-olds and 8 hours for 15-year-olds. No one under 18 is allowed to work during the night, except in some exceptional cases.

Certain types of hazardous work are prohibited for all young people below 18, such as work which is “beyond their physical or psychological capacity”, involves their exposure to toxins and substances that might affect their health, and involves a risk of accidents, which young people might not recognise or try to avoid.<sup>20</sup>

*Rescued from traffickers – two young women embroidering at the UNICEF-assisted Mother and Child Friendly Wing of the Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Chisinau, Moldova. UNICEF has supported the centre, which provides specialised services for children, since July 2003. Long-term referral services providing psycho-social, medical and legal support to children victims of trafficking and mothers with children are also being established. UNICEF/MOL-01261/Pirozzi*





The UK was slower than other EU countries to modify its laws in the light of this Directive. New regulations came into force in August 1998<sup>21</sup> with minor amendments concerning 16- and 17-year-olds in April 2003.<sup>22</sup> Northern Ireland has slightly different rules, allowing 16- and 17-year-olds involved in sea fishing to start work at 4am and to continue until midnight.<sup>23</sup>

More recently, the EU has also been trying to standardise legislation on human trafficking, including children. However, in most EU countries, the level of protection provided to children who have been trafficked is still extremely low, and the proportion of children exploited in EU countries who were born outside the EU is reported to be growing.

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*On the streets –  
15-year-old prostitutes  
in Walsall, Birmingham.*  
Karen Robinson/Panos Pictures

## The Children's Rights Alliance of England

Although the UK government has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there are several areas where children's rights are not addressed. UNICEF UK is a member of the Children's Rights Alliance of England (CRAE) – an alliance of over 180 organisations committed to children's human rights. Among other things, CRAE monitors developments in children's rights and their latest report, State of Children's Rights Report 2004, summarises key developments – positive as well as negative – in children's human rights in England over the past 12 months. The report is available at [www.crae.org.uk](http://www.crae.org.uk).

## Definitions

**UK national** – the term “United Kingdom national” is not defined in the nationality law of the United Kingdom. It has been defined in various ways and at various times for the purposes of other United Kingdom legislation, international agreements, treaties and so on.

The significance of the term “national” in international law is that it signifies a person connected with a State by a special legal tie entitling that State to protect the person in its relations with other States. Generally speaking, the term “United Kingdom national” or, more colloquially, “British national” covers:

British citizens

British Dependent Territories citizens

British Overseas citizens

British subjects (under Part IV of the BNA 1981)

British protected persons

British nationals (Overseas)

(referenced from the Immigration & Nationality Directorate)

**Foreign national** – any person who is not covered by the categories above.

## Child labour in the UK

### An issue that affects many

Child labour, with its denial of a childhood, is not just a feature of developing countries, as was highlighted in the previous section. Look beneath the surface of most cities, towns and even villages in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and you will find children working.

This is usually nothing more sinister than dropping newspapers through letterboxes, clearing café tables or shampooing hair. The young people involved are learning how to operate in the adult world and are gaining independence and some sense of responsibility. UNICEF accepts that some work may be beneficial to young people (see *What is child labour?*, page 7).

But even in these seemingly innocuous cases, the vast majority of children – around 79 per cent according to UNICEF estimates – are working without a permit.<sup>1</sup>

Children's rights in this area are still not taken seriously. Although the Government introduced the Children's Bill in 2004, designed in part to extend the protection offered to children, the issue of child work is still largely being ignored.

More worryingly, there is evidence that a proportion of these working children are exploited by their employers or exposed to dangerous situations. This section on child labour in the UK tells of children working alongside a known sex offender; of a 12-year-old actor who was lucky to escape serious injury when a film stunt went wrong; and a 10-year-old boy working a 40-hour week alongside full-time school.

UNICEF campaigns in 158 countries around the world for children to be in school rather than in the workplace – this should apply in the UK as much as in any other country in the world.

### Child labour and trafficking

Look more closely and there's an even grimmer version of “all in a day's work” for children in this country. Restaurant kitchens, nail bars and food processing factories are staffed by foreign national children who have been brought into the UK.

There is a clear line between children who are smuggled into the UK – coming here to better their education, re-unite with their families or escape a war-torn country – and those who are trafficked. According to the Palermo Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (see page 11), children brought here to be exploited are trafficked. The protocol states that:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking’ in persons.”

Consent of the child victim to the intended exploitation is irrelevant

Names have been changed throughout this UK section in order to protect the identity of the young people concerned.



even if none of the following means have been used: “force, coercion, abduction, deception, abuse of power or actions taken while one is in a state of vulnerability or while one is in the control of another person”.

Any child brought to this country to carry out exploitative work is trafficked, whether or not they have been deceived about their fate. This is partly because, in these circumstances, it is considered impossible for children to give informed consent. They may, for example, simply be submitting to the authority of their parents who are handing over their sons or daughters, in desperation, to traffickers.<sup>2</sup>

Some of these young people end up working extremely long hours and in poor or even dangerous conditions. Some, particularly children from China, will be bonded workers, working to pay off the cost of their passage to this country, plus interest, which often accumulates in disproportionate measure to the original sum. They are, in effect, slaves.

Then there are the most pernicious forms of child labour of all: young, trafficked people used as drug mules or prostituted for sex.

Perhaps the hardest to find are the children used as slaves in people’s homes. On page 50, we give the example of a 15-year-old from Rwanda who for two years was locked in the kitchen of a house and forced to cook, clean and have sex with the men living there.

Many of these exploited foreign children come into the country hunched in the back of a lorry, often with a group of adults. Others come by air and pass through non-EU channels, EU channels, or no official channel at all. Most, according to police sources, will have been helped over the UK’s immigration wall by an agent.<sup>3</sup>

They may seek asylum at their point of entry and later go missing from the care of social services when they are picked up by their trafficker. Or they may stay on a lorry until it reaches a pre-arranged drop-off point. From here, they might meet contacts who put them to work.

The most alarming cases are those children given a false passport and brought into the country by adults for the explicit purpose of exploitation. In almost all instances, these children walk through immigration unchecked.

### Government agencies and trafficking

Currently no one government agency has responsibility for people trafficking, although the recently established Serious Organised Crime Agency will have trafficking as part of its remit. While immigration officers we interviewed say they are sensitive to the issue, and training to recognise trafficked children is set to be implemented, their job is to clear queues at ports and airports as quickly as possible. The police are mostly overstretched and can only act on intelligence.

Many social services, such as Kent and Sheffield, have established good practice, with specialised units for unaccompanied asylum seekers and trafficking victims. But others, already overwhelmed with

## Paladin Child

*Paladin Child, a three-month-long police operation in 2003, tracked unaccompanied asylum-seeking children coming through Heathrow's non-EU entry channels. Children were asked where they were going; where immigration staff were suspicious, they took details and the whereabouts of the child was followed up, either with relatives or social services. According to the operation's final report, 1,738 unaccompanied children came in during that period, 12 of whom could not be traced at the end of the exercise.*

*The Metropolitan Police's recommendations, based on Paladin's findings, include:*

- *More training for police and social service child protection officers on the risk indicators to identify trafficked children;*
- *Airlines to have policies to safeguard children in transit;*
- *The setting up of a permanent unit at Heathrow to look after unaccompanied children, and consideration of such units at all ports;*
- *Adaptation of the Paladin project for a focused group of children such as those they were unable to trace i.e. trafficked children.*

## ECPAT UK

*ECPAT UK (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) is a coalition of organisations such as UNICEF UK who work on children's rights. Through our membership of ECPAT UK, UNICEF UK helps fund specialist research on the UK trafficking situation.*

*ECPAT UK's first research report, What the Professionals Know (2001), was the first of its kind in the UK. The report took a preliminary look into whether children were being trafficked, and asked professionals in many fields what they knew about trafficking. The report concluded that the UK is certainly not exempt from this tragic trade.*

*The organisation's second report, Cause for concern? London social services and child trafficking, showed that despite the fact that child trafficking is a growing problem in the UK, the majority of social workers in the London region are not being given the information, training and resources they need to be able to help those children affected.*

*ECPAT UK's research has been crucial in highlighting the challenges that the Government faces in tackling child trafficking and in countering the misconception that trafficking is not a problem in the UK.*

the problems of UK national children, either do not have the resources to cope with trafficked children or fail to understand the specific needs of this most vulnerable group.

While agencies are overstretched and no one has the clear remit to address child trafficking as a child protection issue, trafficked children will continue to enter the UK and be exploited.

What is needed is: central coordination of trafficking issues; more training and better monitoring of children coming into the UK; safe house accommodation for those that end up in the care of social services; and leave to remain in the UK if at risk of being re-trafficked. (see *UNICEF UK Agenda for Action* on page 62).

## The numbers involved

By its very nature, trafficking remains clandestine and hard to root out. As yet, no one has been able to count all of these most exploited children. The biggest challenge is at ports, where it takes 15 minutes to scan a lorry for carbon dioxide emissions – the sign that humans are breathing inside. Immigration officers do not have the time to check whether each lorry is carrying more than just its legitimate cargo. Their colleagues checking passports are just as overworked, and have to meet queue-clearing targets.

However, there are some statistics, which, taken together, give some indication of the situation. A recent police operation – Paladin Child – tracked the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children coming into Heathrow airport. Over three months in 2003, it found 12 children entering the country who could not be traced, seven of whom came from countries where traffickers are known to operate.<sup>4</sup> “We’re making assumptions here, but they may have been brought in for economic exploitation or domestic servitude,” said a senior police officer involved in the operation.

A report by ECPAT UK on child trafficking in London found a total of 35 cases in 2003.<sup>5</sup> In 2001, West Sussex social services reported that 66 children had gone missing from its care since 1995.<sup>6</sup> Evidence suggested they had been picked up by the people who trafficked them into the country.

A 2003 UNICEF study reported that 250 child trafficking cases had been uncovered in the UK since 1998. It made clear, however, that this was just the tip of the iceberg.<sup>7</sup>

In 2003, police at Dover started keeping records of the trafficking cases they regarded as “sinister” – that is involving children and some level of organisation, such as fake documents. It found 39 such cases over the following 15 months.<sup>8</sup>

While the Metropolitan Police question whether the results of the Paladin Child operation show evidence of trafficking, they are sufficiently concerned by the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving to call for a multi-agency response to child trafficking.<sup>9</sup> They also point out that Paladin Child monitored only non-

EU channels. As their report says, Victoria Climbié – the Ivoirian girl trafficked for benefit fraud who died in London from severe abuse in 2001 – came in via France, through an EU channel on a UK passport.

The final report of Paladin Child also recommends more targeted training of immigration officers and employees of visa agencies.

While UNICEF welcomes this, it is also calling for a comprehensive, national strategy to provide adequate identification, care and protection for children trafficked to the UK.

### **Real lives – working children in the UK**

The case studies reported below – covering both UK nationals and foreign nationals – come from places as diverse as Oxford, Folkestone, Belfast and Birmingham. They come from rural Lincolnshire and central London. They could probably have come from anywhere in the UK.

Alongside those case studies, we also report the findings from a unique survey of 2,200 young people at school around the country, one of the largest ever surveys on this subject. However, the sample was not a random one, and so is a snapshot of working children rather than a complete picture. The children's survey was accompanied by a teacher's survey, whereby teachers gave their opinions on child work. Some of their comments are included at various points in this section.

What is certain, however, is that the child employment laws in this country are not adequate and that thousands of children are exposed to levels of risk which should not be acceptable, either here or in the developing world.

In the case of the UK nationals reported here, "child" or "young person" refers to those of compulsory school age, 16 or under, in accordance with child employment legislation. When talking about young people in prostitution, the definition has been widened to include young people up to the age of 18, in accordance with the Sexual Offences Act 2003. When referring to foreign national children, "child" or "young person" refers to those up to 18, as this is the child/adult cut-off point in asylum legislation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which underpins all of UNICEF's work – and which makes it explicit that children should be protected from sexual abuse – applies to everyone under the age of 18 (*see What is child labour?, page 7*).

### **UK national children at work**

"I enjoy working as it makes me feel independent. I don't always have to rely on my mum to give me the money to go out."

Stella Beattie, a 15-year-old girl from London who works as a waitress.<sup>10</sup>

This is a typical response when young people are asked about working outside school: the majority enjoy earning money, and the adult responsibility, that a job entails.

According to the Children's and Young Persons Act 1933, still the prime piece of legislation on child employment, all working young people of

#### **UNICEF UK's working children survey**

*Our survey targeted schools from all over England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with a questionnaire administered to students aged between 12 and 16. We were careful to select a mix of state and independent, urban and rural, and mixed and single-sex schools. This was not a random selection – for practical reasons, there was a bias towards schools with which UNICEF already had a relationship – so the results can only be a snapshot of child employment patterns, although the same stories could probably be found in most schools up and down the country.*



school age should be licensed by their local education authority. However, like 79 per cent of her employed peers, Stella does not have a permit to wait tables.

The hours that children can work are also set by law. Jobs cannot start before 7am or finish later than 7pm. Outside the entertainment industry, 13 is the youngest that children can work in most cases. During the school week, they cannot work for longer than 12 hours and they should only work for a maximum of two hours on a Sunday.

But many young people work earlier, later and longer than this. Our survey found that 5 per cent of young people work for more than 12 hours during the school week. More than one in five children questioned said they worked for more than two hours on a Sunday.

A 15-year-old waitress from Morayshire worked until 10pm during the school week and until 11pm at the weekends.

One 10-year-old boy from Oxfordshire worked for 40 hours each week in his father's shop, as well as going to school. The mother of a classmate said: "He's always exhausted. He wanted to come to football practice the other night with my son, but he then burst into tears, saying that he couldn't because he had to work."

A 1998 report on child employment in North Tyneside found that 25 per cent of working children were under 13.<sup>11</sup> Our survey found that almost a quarter of respondents started work before they were 12, or even younger.

In England and Wales, permits for children to work are issued by local authority child employment officers, who also have to ensure that children are not taken on without this registration. However, there are only around 25 full-time child employment officers for the whole country. In Cheshire, for example, there are more than 15,000 school children aged 13 and over, but just three child employment officers who work two days a week each. Child employment is a very low priority for many local authorities.

Education welfare officers, who are assigned to schools to ensure that all legal obligations relating to a child's education are met, can flag up concerns if a child is frequently absent. But they too tend to be overworked and under-resourced.

It is unlikely that such a wide-scale breach of adult employment – or any other – law would be tolerated. Yet there have been just 38 prosecutions for the improper employment of children since records began in 2000.<sup>15</sup> One reason for this is that most child employment officers refuse to take evidence from the young person – to avoid them facing the potentially traumatic experience of being forced to appear in court – so in most cases there is insufficient evidence for court proceedings.

Very few young people, parents, teachers or even employers are aware that child employment is regulated. When teachers were asked from

#### **What the law says**

*National regulations applying to England and Wales state that:*

- *All children of compulsory school age who work must be registered and issued with a work permit (however, the Government is due to consult on a recommendation that the employer registers, rather than the child<sup>12</sup>).*
- *In most circumstances, children under 13 cannot be employed other than as actors or models.*
- *Children may not work before 7am or after 7pm.*
- *Children may not work for more than two hours a day<sup>13</sup>, or more than 12 hours in any week during term-time.<sup>14</sup>*
- *Children aged 14 and below may not work for more than 25 hours a week during the school holidays, although 15-year-olds are allowed to work up to 35 hours a week.*

what age they thought children could be employed legally, answers ranged from 13 to 16, while one Bedfordshire teacher said: "I think they need a permit only for certain types of employment."<sup>16</sup>

More than 40 per cent of the young people we surveyed said their parents had helped them find their job. This indicates that, in many cases, it is likely that the parents know the hours their child is working. While the Government must ensure that child employment laws are better understood, it is also vital that parents play an active role in ensuring that their child is not spending too long at work.

### A confusing patchwork of laws

There are several likely reasons for this general ignorance, which effectively puts children outside the law. The first is that regulations on child employment are manifold and confusing: although the 1933 Act is the principal relevant statute, there are a plethora of other European directives, national laws and local by-laws that dictate how and when children should work. Often these laws vary from one county to the next: in Staffordshire, a child can work behind the counter in a butcher's shop, while in neighbouring Cheshire they can't. Some local authorities ban children from working on milk rounds, while others sanction it. In Croydon, children may deliver milk, but only on Saturdays and Sundays.<sup>17</sup>

Worse, more than 9 out of 10 local authority by-laws on school-age working conflict with national legislation. Just 13 councils have by-laws that are completely in step with the national law. A third of English councils allow children as young as 10 to work – something that the 1933 Act explicitly prohibits.<sup>18</sup>

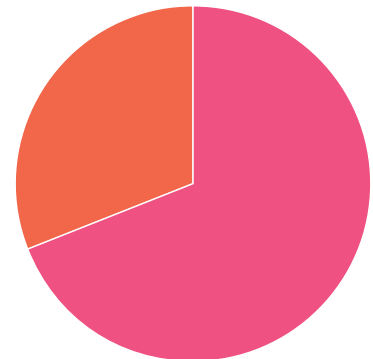
It is also extremely difficult to find information on what is and isn't legal. Officially it is the Department of Health that regulates child employment, but it is not easy to find details on its website of what is permissible and what is not.<sup>19</sup> A recent survey showed that just 17 of 149 local authorities in England publish child employment information on their websites.<sup>20</sup> Some local education authorities did not have the rules in written form at all.

Even council employees do not understand the regulations; concerned parents who call their council for information are often referred to several different members of staff before someone realises they need to speak to the child employment officer.

In Scotland, the situation is more confusing still. There is no one official who grants permits: it may be an area registration office, the local department of education or even the school itself.

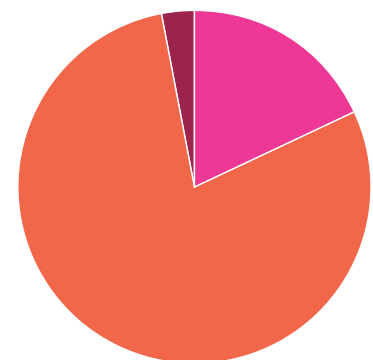
In Northern Ireland, under the Employment of Children Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996, employment cards (the equivalent to a permit) are issued by the relevant education and library board to the employer, rather than the child. Work must not start more than one hour before school or end more than one hour after the school day finishes.

### Do you currently have a job?



UNICEF Working Children Survey, Spring 2004

### Do you have a work permit?



*\*includes those working as babysitters or paid domestic help, for which permits are not needed.*

UNICEF Working Children Survey, Spring 2004

### Case studies – working for gangmasters

*Thirteen-year-old Kelly Adamson had not been to school for two years. Instead of playing with her peers or learning maths, she worked full time, picking onions in a warehouse in Spalding, Lincolnshire, a market town better known for its flower festival than child labour. Just before Christmas, Kelly was found and sent back to school.*

*She was not employed directly by the company in question but had been contracted to work by a South Yorkshire “gangmaster” – a supplier of cheap, casual labour, traditionally to the agriculture or horticulture industry, although such labour is also used in the factories and warehouses of other industries.*

*Kelly’s working day started at around 5am, when she was picked up in Yorkshire by the van that took her and 14 adults over the county border into Lincolnshire. Depending on who was picked up first, and the traffic, the journey took up to two hours. The shift finished at 4pm, so Kelly arrived home at around 6:30pm. She says that when she was 11, she went to school for one day, but “didn’t like it”. The school confirmed that she had not been attending.*

*Elsewhere in Lincolnshire, 13- and 15-year-old girl cousins were found working the evening shift in a food processing plant, which finished at 10pm. Again, they were working for a gangmaster, although this time they had been subcontracted by a second gangmaster, who had seen their original documentation. Although the 15-year-old might have passed for over 16, her cousin was obviously younger.*

*“Gangs are operating the length and breadth of this country, and there is no reason to believe that what was going on here was unique,” says a labour expert.*

### “A workforce with no bargaining power”

In spite of the multitude of laws that govern child employment, many areas of potential abuse and exploitation are still left open. The protection built into adult employment does not apply to children. Work within the home – such as babysitting and cleaning, jobs often done by young people – falls outside the regulations since the employer is not a business. Contracts drawn up with a child aged under 16 are not enforceable by law.

There is no minimum wage: many experts fear that when the minimum wage for 16-year-olds is introduced, employers will just take on younger people, for less money. Although the results of our survey show that the average pay for working children is £4 an hour, one child reported he was paid just 50p an hour. A boy from Llanrwst, Wales, earned an average of just 77p an hour when he spent a summer working for a garage.

“Children are a workforce with no bargaining power,” said one child employment expert.

UNICEF strongly believes that one key way to prevent this kind of exploitation is to ensure that children are informed of their rights in the first place, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, rather than feeling that they are at the mercy of unscrupulous adults. With an awareness of their rights, and the resultant recognition that they have a choice in the matter, young people should feel more empowered to avoid, or extricate themselves from, exploitative situations.

Other young people just slip through the safety nets. Although full-time education is compulsory in this country up to the age of 16, students in their final year of school are sometimes allowed to extend work experience into a semi-permanent arrangement. One education welfare officer said: “Often teachers in the final year of schooling would prefer a troublesome student to be out of school, and they tell the child not to bother coming in. It just gets extended until the line is very fudgey.” He added: “I want to see the emphasis shifted to the employer. We should be registering the employer as fit to take on children and not the other way round.”<sup>21</sup>

This last point ties in with one of the recommendations made by the Better Regulation Task Force in their report *The Regulation of Child Employment*, February 2004 – recommendations which were accepted in principle by the Government in May 2004 (see *UNICEF UK Agenda for Action on page 62*).

Even though babysitting is not considered a form of employment, it is still work and keeps many of the young people in our survey from going to bed before 2am or 3am, even during a school week.

### Health and safety issues

The employment of 13-year-olds also creates health and safety issues. All employers of school-age workers are supposed to carry out an



additional risk assessment, which takes account of the age and inexperience of the child employee. Very few do. A survey of child employment in riding stables, for example, found that one in three of the sample had had accidents at work.<sup>22</sup>

Children as young as 13 are allowed to drive a tractor on private land.<sup>23</sup> According to health and safety experts, hundreds of children are hurt on farms every year, although accidents are likely to be unreported by the order of 60-70 per cent. In 2003, for example, a 15-year-old boy needed surgery after falling from the back of a farm vehicle being used to track foxes. He had started work at 5:30am and had probably fallen asleep. Between 1993 and 2002, four children were killed whilst working on farms.<sup>24</sup>

Some working practices raise child protection issues. An academic who researched working children in Oxfordshire found a 14-year-old girl working with the male owner of a newsagents at 3:30am, folding newspapers and inserting colour supplements. "This would be a wonderful opportunity for someone to groom<sup>25</sup> a child," she said.

In Werrington, Staffordshire, a newsagent who carried out a serious sexual assault on a 14-year-old customer still employs up to 15 delivery boys (although the local child employment officer said he will not license girls to work there). "It seems crazy that a music teacher or a football coach will have to have a Criminal Record Bureau check, but someone who might be working alone with a 14-year-old in the early hours of the morning does not," said the child employment officer. "We can refuse to give a licence to a child because they'll be starting work at 6:55am, rather than 7am, but not because they'll be working with someone on the Sexual Offences Register.

"I feel that children could be at risk, but I'm not allowed to do anything which would cause a business to close down, so at the moment there's nothing I can do about it."

### Children working in entertainment

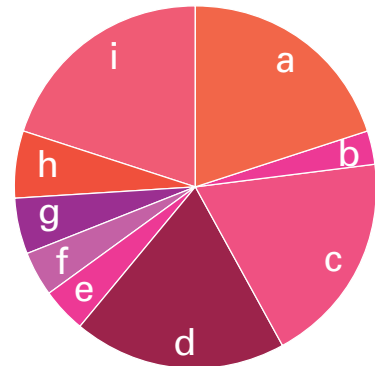
Children working in the entertainment industry are regulated by yet another set of laws, predominantly the 1968 Child Performance legislation. "This law is interpreted in different ways by different people, so the whole thing needs to be rethought," said another child employment officer. "There are far more serious dangers of children being abused in these situations as they are often working away from home."

Although production companies must employ chaperones, training is minimal.

### The teacher's point of view

Many teachers think that working is a positive experience for their students: "On the whole, I do not believe that work affects our pupils' ability to study. The good ones do both comfortably, while the less academic ones probably wouldn't do as much school work as they should regardless of a job," said one teacher from Cambridgeshire.

### What kind of work do you do?



a	Shop work	20%
b	Building	3%
c	Babysitting*	19%
d	Waiter/tress	19%
e	Farm work	4%
f	Paid domestic*	4%
g	Paper round	5%
h	Cleaner	6%
i	Other**	20%

\* not covered by child employment laws

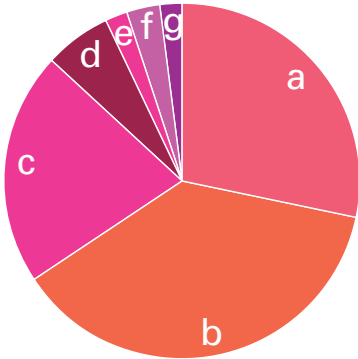
\*\*includes things like hairdressing, garage work, working on a market stall, kitchen help, serving fast food, paperwork and filing, pet sitting and gardening

UNICEF Working Children Survey, Spring 2004

### Case study – stunt that went wrong

Sam Roberts was 12 when he won a part in a film. He was granted an entertainment licence, which stated explicitly that no child should take part in a performance "in which life or limb are endangered". But when the shooting started, in Berkshire, he was told his role included a stunt where he would be strapped into an armchair and dangled from a railway bridge. A double-decker bus would then be driven towards him until he was eyeball-to-eyeball with the passengers. In the event, the bus failed to stop, and Sam's foot smashed through the windscreen.

### Hours worked per school week Monday-Friday



a	0	28%
b	1-4	37%
c	5-8	21%
d	9-10	6%
e	11-12	2%
f	13-15	3%
g	15+	2%

UNICEF Working Children Survey, Spring 2004

However, the majority of teachers surveyed said that students with jobs were tired and less attentive. A teacher from a boys' school in The Wirral said: "Some of the boys who do milk rounds or paper deliveries turn up shattered and not capable of [school] work. If they have morning jobs they often miss sleep or breakfast." A Bridlington teacher said: "Work has just become another pressure on children. They already have a huge burden of work with GCSEs. Increasingly, I find pupils are more committed to their paid work than their education."

"Those who work after school or all day on Saturday or Sunday do not have enough time to unwind and relax," said a citizenship teacher from Lancashire. "This can result in them having insufficient time to do their homework properly. The type of work they do should be checked out more: I suspect that some employers exploit their youth and lack of experience."

Some of the teachers questioned had policy suggestions for improving the way young people work. A teacher from Romford suggested that schools could negotiate contracts with the major employers in the area – such as supermarkets – for an agreement on the maximum number of hours students could work each week.

### Young people's opinions

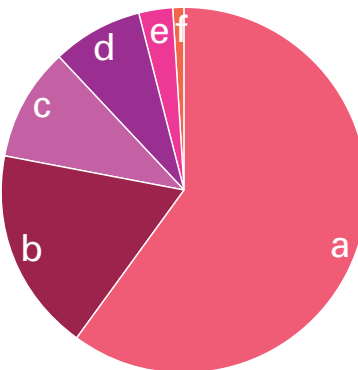
The majority of students questioned in the survey felt that work was valuable, both financially and socially.

Some, however, said that working put a drag on their performance at school. "I don't get much sleep, I don't get paid enough, and it takes all my energy up," said a 14-year-old boy from Wiltshire with a paper round. Another 14-year-old boy from the West Midlands said: "Kids should not be allowed to work because people can pick you up and it might be dangerous." A 15-year-old girl from London thought: "Working in term-time gets in the way of [children's] education so it would be better just for half-term."

However, the survey also showed some worrying results, including some children starting work when they were very young and a few working very long hours, even during the school week. Our survey found that 14 per cent of young people had started working when they were 12, and 2 per cent when they were 10. Around 1 per cent were just 8 years old when they started their first job.

A 15-year-old girl from Cornwall said that she worked until 11:30pm on school nights, in a restaurant belonging to a friend of her father. In Swindon, a 15-year-old boy said he worked as a cleaner, not finishing until 10:30pm on weekday evenings. His mother, who worked at the same place, got him the job. A 13-year-old Dorset boy picked up skittles from 9pm to 11pm on school nights, while his mother played.

### Hours worked on Sunday



a	0	60%
b	1-3	18%
c	4-5	10%
d	6-7	8%
e	8-9	3%
f	10+	1%

UNICEF Working Children Survey, Spring 2004

## What they said...

A selection of comments from the UNICEF Working Children Survey, Spring 2004

"Working can give children experience which is valuable, particularly if they are interested in the industry they are working in."

16-year-old girl

"We learn the value of money."

15-year-old boy

"Some children may be better at practical work and should be given a chance to use their skills."

15-year-old girl

"I enjoy being with people and making new friends."

16-year-old girl

"Although at the moment I'm not earning much, it is a start in the career I want to pursue."

16-year-old girl working in a hairdresser's

"Children want mobile phones, clothes and to go out and have fun with their friends. These things all cost money – having to earn it themselves shows them that money doesn't grow on trees!"

15-year-old girl

"Single parents cannot afford to pay for everything that their children need – working also helps prepare children for the world of work and the value of money."

16-year-old girl

"It keeps us out of mischief!"

14-year-old girl

"It gives me fresh air and exercise"

15-year-old girl who does a paper round

"Working teaches people from a young age what is expected from them in the 'real' world. It builds confidence and teaches responsibility and self worth."

16-year-old girl

*Positive*

"I don't get much sleep and I don't get paid enough!"

14-year-old boy

"I think a minimum wage should be introduced for children because I know some who get exploited and are willing to accept a very low wage because they need the money to contribute to the family's income."

16-year-old girl

"Some jobs exploit children and pay them as little as possible while they do as many hours as possible."

15-year-old girl

"I think I should get paid per hour not for each day! I also only get about 15-30 minutes to eat lunch because it is always so busy."

15-year-old girl who earns £20 for a 10-hour day at a hairdresser's

"When there are major exams we shouldn't have to work."

14-year-old girl

"I did too many papers per round and the pay was ridiculous. My paper bag was so heavy I couldn't ride my bike and it was quite a walk from the newsagent and back."

13-year-old boy

"It involves a lot of heavy lifting and causes pain throughout the day."

16-year-old boy who does building work with his stepfather

"Working should not interfere with schoolwork and studying."

16-year-old girl

"My job took up lots of my free time and I had to work all through the school holidays."

15-year-old girl

"I am too tired after school to work and too tired to get up for school the next day."

16-year-old girl working as a fast food assistant 2 evenings a week

*Negative*



### Case study - cold calling

*Sarah Belchamber was 14 when she decided she wanted to earn a little pocket money. She found a vacancy at a home furnishings company in her home town in Cheshire and started work there, without a permit. The money was good – £5 an hour – but there was a catch.*

*“The job was to call people and ask how old their property was, and whether or not they wanted a free home makeover. Every hour you had to have five bites, otherwise you weren’t allowed a break, or only five minutes after an hour and a half.”*

*“Only those who turned up for their shift first would be allowed to stay and work. There were only enough computer terminals for 15 people to be working at any one time, but about 20 would be rostered on. We were all told to turn up for work, and then we’d be sent home at the last minute. Some people complained, but the manager said it was nothing to do with him.”*

*The child employment officer who was called to investigate the case said: “There were six or seven school-age young people employed there. Children are not allowed to be employed cold calling. The owner claimed they were doing market research, but in my mind there was no doubt that offering people a home makeover is a sales pitch. The employer was also guilty of a breach of health and safety regulations. I told him that if I found him doing it again, he’d be prosecuted.”*

### Case study – selling sex at age 12

*Emily Wilson, aged 12, would repeatedly slip out of her care home into the streets of Doncaster. The suspicions of the home’s social worker were confirmed when an adult prostitute contacted an outreach worker to say that Emily was picking up men on the street for paid sex.*

*Ironically, Emily was one of the “lucky” ones. Outreach workers in the town said they had picked up only one girl working on the streets in the past 12 months, as they were probably now more likely to be working from flats and houses – “off-street” prostitution – which is even harder to monitor.*

*An outreach worker says: “We have a very good practice here for sharing information between police, social services and other agencies. But we suspect that the girls are now going to men’s flats who they know, or working from their drug dealer’s place.”*

In London, one 14-year-old girl started her paper round at 5:30am, while a 13-year-old boy from Lancashire started his paper deliveries at 6:30am. A 14-year-old girl from County Derry worked 16 hours during the school week, 5 hours on Saturday and up to 7 on Sunday: during the school holidays she worked a 50-hour week.

Some may argue that these young people chose to work these hours. Others would say that, somewhere in the equation, there is an adult who is effectively taking advantage of their youth and inexperience. As well as empowering children by informing them of their rights in the first place, the upholding of those rights through legal measures and necessary enforcement are obviously of paramount importance if young people are to be properly protected.

### Cultural norms

In some communities, employing children full time is the norm, and is seen as positive and beneficial for both the employer and the child concerned. In the small Roma community in Northern Ireland, for example, boys often start their working life at 11 or 12, once they have been confirmed. They usually help their fathers in their business, which might be tarmacking roads or cleaning windows with power hoses.

Whatever the discrimination and exclusion felt by some communities, every child in the UK has the right to go to school, a right set out in law. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it clear that all children have the right to develop to the fullest, a right infringed if a child works full time at the expense of their education.

### UK national children in the sex industry

Very few, but some, girls are being used for commercial sexual exploitation in this country. In London, which is the only policing area to have a specialist standalone vice squad, 30 girls under 18 were found working in the capital’s sex industry in 2003. The previous year, the figure was double, but police say the fall is because detection rates are likely to have dropped as prostitution moves away from the street and behind closed doors.

The youngest working prostitute found in London to date was 13, although the girls more usually are 16 or 17. Most girls – and so far no boys have been found working on the streets in London, although they have in Glasgow – have been in care. The girls are usually controlled by a pimp, whom they often regard as their boyfriend.

### Trafficked children at work

The majority of children who enter the UK in the back of a lorry are brought here for positive, if illegal, reasons, such as access to education or the possibility of future work – in short, a better life. Unless they come with their family whose asylum claim fails, they are usually given leave to remain in the country until they reach 18.

But a proportion of these children are brought in with the explicit purpose of material gain for adults. Rather than attend school, the children are put to work in fields, factories, restaurants and brothels.

Some are trafficked for petty crime or drug smuggling, others for domestic slavery.

The deaths of at least 20 Chinese cockle-pickers in Morecambe Bay, Lancashire, in February 2004 put the media spotlight (temporarily at least) on illegal working adults. However, the world of the illegally employed, and exploited, vulnerable trafficked children remains in the shadows. As one child health expert put it: "Most of the kids want to work. They are incredibly diligent and responsible. They feel a huge amount of responsibility to their parents, who will probably have paid to get them over here. They would like to lead an honest life, but they have to do things that are humiliating and degrading."

On top of the difficult, frightening and hazardous journey into the country, once trafficked children have arrived, they suffer the abuses common to many forms of exploited labour. They are almost certainly not fed properly and are denied access to health care. They are vulnerable to physical abuse from their employers. They also suffer strong psychological damage: many feel isolated; they may not be able to speak English, or are kept away from others from their own community. Traffickers often take away identification papers, leaving the child wary of seeking help because of their uncertain legal status. It is common for traffickers to threaten violence to family members in the child's home country if they do not do as they are told.<sup>26</sup>

As traffickers realise that immigration services and police forces have uncovered their techniques in the south-east of England, it is likely that they are now targeting entry points in other parts of the country. When trafficking was first uncovered in Britain, most cases centred on Gatwick airport; now organisations working with trafficked children say they increasingly receive calls from all over the country – for example, ECPAT (see page 37) has been contacted by concerned social workers from the north of England, as well as Scotland and Wales.

### Trafficked for many reasons

In the vast majority of cases, children are brought in for labour.

An ongoing police investigation into Turkish boys brought into the UK to work in restaurants has uncovered evidence of "hundreds" of cases over a couple of years.

Oxfordshire social services takes on an average of eight new children a month: "most of whom have been dropped off on lorries on the M40", said one social worker.

Children from different countries are trafficked for different reasons. For example, Chinese children – predominantly boys – usually do not claim asylum, enter illegally and remain outside of the attention of the authorities. This is the hardest ethnic group to trace, as Chinese communities tend to be relatively insular, and because of the involvement of so-called "snakehead" gangs of organised people smugglers. For this group, illegal working is governed by fear. The children, who mostly come from Fujian province – an area from where people have traditionally migrated – are usually bonded. This means

### Case study – working seven days a week in a restaurant

*Jin Lai was brought to a Kent police station by someone who lived near where he had been sleeping rough. He spoke no English, but the police soon established that he did speak Mandarin Chinese. An interpreter from Immigration and Social Services was called in.*

*Although he had no documentation, Jin Lai said he was from Fujian Province in China and that he was 16 years old.*

*Social services placed him in a foster home, but within a few days a number of men called, claiming to be the boy's uncles and asking to visit. The foster parent did not reveal the boy's address and informed Kent social services. Social workers managed to contact one of the alleged uncles on his mobile phone, but he refused to disclose an address.*

*Lai eventually admitted that he had been living and working in a restaurant. He had been made to work seven days a week and slept in a makeshift dormitory with other males from China. He had run away from the restaurant, and started sleeping outside, which is where he had been when he was found. He said he did not feel comfortable disclosing how much he or his family owed to the people who brought him into the country.*

*Lai was moved to a new foster home and agreed not to tell his agents where he was. He enrolled at a local college and started taking English classes. He is now almost 18 and is concerned about his future.*

that their families will have paid smugglers to bring the child to the UK – a figure of £20,000 is not unusual – and the child then has to work to pay off the debt. Unpaid debts can result in threats to the child's family.<sup>27</sup>

A Sussex social worker cited the case of two 16-year-old Chinese boys who arrived together, each with a bond of £10,000. They were taken into care, but said that they needed to work to pay off the bond. "One of them said they had been travelling for three months to get here," she said. After a week, one of the boys went missing, only to return a week later. "He said that he had 'phoned home and his parents had told him that he had to work in order to pay off the bond. He had also been contacted by the snakehead, who told him that he needed to have a job by Monday. He asked me what day it was. I told him it was Tuesday. We never saw him again," she said.

A youth worker based in one port said: "We cannot hold on to Chinese children. If they get picked up and are brought to us, we're lucky if we can hold on to them for 24 hours." Evidence suggests that these children are picked up by gangs and taken to work.

"They are incredibly difficult to trace once they have come into the country," said a Chinese immigration lawyer who works in London. "Children disappear into communities. They'll be used for work in restaurants and factories, particularly in the garment industry."

The positive West African tradition of sending children to friends or family to be fostered and brought up – to allow the child "a better life" – has been corrupted to provide a ready means for exploitation. West African children who are trafficked may be used for domestic slavery or for benefit fraud, as well as for prostitution.<sup>28</sup> The tragic case of Victoria Climbié was a powerful example of this.

Children from Eastern Europe tend to be trafficked to beg – in the streets of Belfast<sup>29</sup>, for instance – and to work in the sex industry.

### Working in restaurants

The restaurant trade, with its long hours and poor pay, is a prime employer of trafficked children all over the country. "If you want to find trafficked children, just look in a takeaway restaurant," said one police officer. This is particularly a problem in restaurants owned by people from cultures where the full-time employment of children is the norm, even though UK law – and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – states that they should be in school.

An early evening joint police and immigration raid on a Chinese restaurant in Folkestone uncovered 15-year-old Ami Li, from Fujian province. She had entered the country with a group of adults, none of whom had declared asylum and so were all illegal.

In nearby Faversham, a 14-year-old Bangladeshi boy was found living and working in an Indian restaurant. "He's an amazing cook, very adept at chopping. But he had absolutely no social skills," said a social worker. "It was clear that he had been in child labour for some time,



probably before he came to this country.” The restaurant owner denied that the child was working. The boy is now attending a school attached to a reception centre.

One senior ex-police officer was having a meal one evening in an Indian restaurant in south Wales only to spot a Botswanan girl of 14 working in the kitchen. “My colleague, who was from Botswana, went to talk to her, but she obviously was afraid to say very much.”

Police picked up a 13-year-old Bangladeshi boy, caught shoplifting from a supermarket in Sheffield, who had no papers and no evidence of having entered the country. He had been living with a man who owned a restaurant. “We couldn’t prove that he’d been working there, but he had very rough hands, usually a sign of kitchen work,” said a social worker.

### Working on farms and in factories

In the same way that they exploit adult migrant workers, who often do not speak English and are vulnerable because of their immigration status, gangmasters in the agricultural sector and in factories also exploit foreign national children. Gangmasters take on casual labourers and contract them out to farmers and factory owners. Although they have been able to operate without regulation, under the Gangmasters Licensing Act 2004 they now have to be registered. While some are good employers, others exploit their workers, who tend to come from the least empowered sectors of society: migrant workers and low-skilled women. Adults are taken on to work long hours for low pay in poor conditions, and are charged unreasonable amounts for their accommodation, work clothes and transport.

Children are occasionally found in the same conditions. Although the numbers are not large, this may be because no one agency specifically checks factories and warehouses for the presence of children.

Gangmasters are obliged to prove only that they have seen a work document that they have reason to believe is genuine. But a Kent youth worker said he had himself found piles of employment permission forms, with names scrappily cut out and pasted in. “Anyone could see that someone’s form is being used time and time again. I can’t believe that the employment agencies don’t know that the kids are under age.”

### Criminal activity

While there is little evidence that children are brought into the country explicitly to be exploited for criminal activity, there is evidence that they are exploited criminally once they are here. This can range from enabling an adult to falsely claim child benefits or a housing upgrade to active involvement in criminal activity, such as cigarette or drug smuggling.

Social workers in Oxford said they believed that a Kosovan criminal gang were controlling Kosovan boys, encouraging them to break into houses and steal car keys. A former social worker from West Sussex

#### Case study – whole family working in furnishings

*A 14-year-old Czech boy was found inside a gangmaster’s van stopped in Lincolnshire in 2003 on its way to a factory making home furnishings. “He was interpreting for his whole family – his mother, father and brother were with him. He was obviously going to work too,” says the immigration officer.*

said that foreign national boys in her care were frequently found with credit cards which had been stolen to order.

Customs and Excise do not divulge figures of child drug mules, but police at airports say they occasionally suspect children and give them the appropriate hand scan – which shows if drugs have been touched – or urine test. In 2003, two Jamaican children, aged 12 and 14, arrived alone at Heathrow. They were stopped at immigration and found to have swallowed cocaine in condoms. “These children were obviously being used by an adult,” said a police officer based at the airport. “But one of the problems is that children cannot be questioned without the presence of a responsible adult. Also, at Heathrow, there is nowhere we can comfortably hold children for questioning.”<sup>30</sup>

Some children have also been found smuggling cigarettes: one 10-year-old girl was found with two suitcases-full.<sup>31</sup> Romanian women living south of the Irish border travel to Belfast with their children to beg. “We think this is organised because all the women have been given train tickets and are told to meet up in the same place before they start begging,” said one youth worker; a police officer said he counted 13 women, mostly with their children, on one Tuesday alone.

But the most common way that a trafficked child is used to commit offences is where he or she is a passive victim. “We think that benefit fraud is one of the biggest incentives to traffic children into this country,” said the head of an African community organisation. In many instances, the child will also be used in the house as a domestic labourer – as happened in the tragic case of Victoria Climbié.

### Domestic labour

In many countries, particularly in West Africa and South and Southeast Asia, sending a girl child or, less usually, a boy to live and work in someone else’s house is perceived as not only acceptable but desirable. These children often help out in the house while they also attend school, something that they might not have done had they stayed at home. Parents believe that the higher social status and comparative wealth of the new household will prove to be of benefit to their child. Other parents send their children away out of economic necessity. In any case, family structures in these countries are often looser than in Britain. A family friend is known as, and treated like, an aunty or uncle. Bringing up someone else’s child is not unusual.<sup>32</sup>

But traffickers have transformed this tradition into a negative practice. Some families take in children to exploit, rather than help, them.

There is strong evidence that children are privately fostered – taken in by individuals who are not vetted by social services – and used for domestic slavery.

It is extremely difficult to quantify this problem in the UK. By its very nature, domestic slavery remains clandestine. In many of the cases reported, the victims said they were locked in the house and so had very little contact with the outside world – even neighbours may not realise that children are being held.

#### What is private fostering?

*Private fostering is defined in the Children Act 1989 as a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) being placed for more than 28 days in the care of someone who is not the child’s guardian, or close relative, by private arrangement between parent and carer.*

One expert reports that the trafficking of African children to the UK for domestic work is guarded by secrecy, emotional blackmail and the desire of the child to remain in the UK.<sup>33</sup> The child may be aware that their parents have made huge sacrifices to get them into this country in the hope of a better life.

Some people who use children to do their cleaning or their child care may not even accept that they are doing anything wrong, because where they come from it is not unusual for young people to do such work. A neighbour who challenged a woman who brought her eight-year-old girl niece from Nigeria to work in her house in London was told that the girl "was not doing anything that she wouldn't be expected to do back home".

There are some available figures on the problem. In London, 14 cases of trafficking for domestic servitude were identified in 2003.<sup>34</sup> The children involved were from Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, Somalia, Burundi, Ghana and Eritrea.<sup>35</sup>

Some social services departments, such as Sheffield, now routinely visit children who are privately fostered to ensure that no exploitation is taking place, but most do not. This means that almost anyone can turn up at Birmingham or Luton airport, for example, and claim a child, without any checks carried out on their suitability as foster parents/carers. While figures are not reliable, an estimated 15,000-20,000 children are in private foster care in the UK, the majority of them from West Africa.<sup>36</sup>

The 2004 Children's Bill will tighten the regulations, but still relies on the foster parent to register with social services – a measure highly unlikely to stop child domestic labour.

The main problem with domestic labour is that it cannot be monitored. Child domestic servants are also isolated from other children of their own age. Even if she (mostly girls are used in domestic labour, although there are reports of boys similarly exploited) does meet other people, if she's not going to school she may not be able to speak English.

One family may just ask the child to help babysit, but in other families she may be expected to act as the sole carer of other children in the household, as well as cleaning and cooking. "The child is prey to the whims and fancies of each member of the family regarding her work responsibilities," said the head of an organisation that works with trafficked children.

Anne Okoro, from Nigeria, was brought into the UK by her aunt in 2001 when she was 15. Although she was enrolled in school, Anne was made to get a job in a care home as well as working as a maid and nanny to her cousin's newly born child. When she eventually managed to make contact with an organisation working with the Nigerian community in London, Anne was in "tattered clothes, with her belly swollen from malnourishment", said the head of the organisation. "She had bruises on her, and her aunt had made her cut off all her hair."

#### **Case study – locked in a kitchen for two years**

*Adina Mukakalisa was originally from Rwanda, but moved to Uganda when she was very young. When she was a teenager, her parents died, and she found work helping on a market stall in Kampala. One day, when Adina was nearly 15, the woman who ran the stall told her to go with two men who were going to take her to live abroad, where she would be safe and could go to school.*

*Adina was put on a plane to the UK. A man collected her at the airport and took her to a house where another man was living. For the next two years, Adina was forced to live in the locked kitchen. She had access only to a toilet and a basin where she could wash. If she climbed on a chair, she could just see into the garden. She didn't know where she was.*

*Adina's "job" was to clean and cook for the man who, after some time, was joined by a second. After a couple of months, the role took on a new element – she was taken upstairs and raped.*

*After around two years – exact timings are difficult in such circumstances – one of the men, drunk, failed to lock the kitchen door. As he slept, Adina found the keys to the front door. As she shut the door behind her, he woke up and ran after her. She hid in a ditch and, when he had gone, managed to flag down a car. The driver dropped her at Marylebone Police Station in London. Adina was then 17 years old.*



## Working in the sex industry

Trafficking children for commercial sex is one of the most pernicious forms of labour exploitation. Traffickers bring children into the UK from all over the world, and through a variety of routes, to work in the sex industry here. Although the children come from many countries, West Africa and Eastern Europe are currently the prime source regions.

Again, there is no way of quantifying the problem. In a six-week operation in London's sex industry at the start of 2004, the Metropolitan Police found two under-18-year-olds, one Kosovan and the other Latvian.<sup>37</sup> Oxfordshire social services are currently looking after two girls who were trafficked for sex, one from Albania and the other from Rwanda. A Birmingham private care home knows of one girl from Burundi who was held against her will for three months and forced to have sex. She was pregnant by the time she was taken into care.

The extent of the problem is likely to be much wider than just these known cases.

According to the police, girls brought into the country for sex are usually kept in a flat and either driven to clients' homes or taken out to solicit under the close watch of the pimp. Occasionally, they will be given travel tickets and told where to go, but even then the pimp will tell the girl exactly what route to take and where she is allowed to stop to buy a drink or go to the toilet.

"If they deviate, they'll be fined, which means their bond will be bigger, or they'll just be physically punished," said a Metropolitan Police officer. "A 15-year-old Romanian girl we found being held in a west London flat was raped to 'keep her in line'."

Traffickers operate with virtual impunity, as it is extremely hard to prove that a trafficked girl is sold for sex. The child is usually too petrified to give evidence, because she does not trust police or in order to protect herself – or her family back home – from future harm.

UNICEF is lobbying for victims to be allowed a six-month period of reflection once they are identified. This would allow them time to decide whether or not they wish to stand trial, as well as receive counselling. A period of reflection also allows time for family tracing and to prepare the child for their return. UNICEF believes it is in the best interest of the child to live with their family wherever possible.

Some girls believe the trafficker is a boyfriend, taking them to a better life. A 16-year-old Congolese girl who came into Dover claimed the man with her was her partner. Social services were suspicious and she was taken into care, but after three weeks she chose to return to the man, who threatened social workers. Once a child is 16, they can decide for themselves whether or not they remain in care.

In some cases, the girls will have worked as prostitutes in their own country, which often prejudices juries against them. Police are not able to promise a victim that, if she is brave enough to give evidence, she will not be forced to appear in court face to face with the trafficker or pimp.

Police surveillance operations are often necessary to gather sufficient evidence. But police are extremely reluctant to leave a girl in a situation where she is being sold for sex. "The only girls who are ever likely to talk are those who have absolutely nothing left at home," a police officer said. "They have no families and so the traffickers cannot threaten to harm their loved ones. They have nothing to lose. Then they may talk to us."

There are currently no special facilities for trafficked children. UNICEF believes safe houses should be provided, where children can live safely while their case is assessed. Telephone access would be supervised to ensure that they cannot re-establish contact with the traffickers.

### Stopping the exploitation of children at work

There may seem little to connect a child who works in a pub until 10pm on a school night with one trafficked from Romania to be used as a prostitute. But both are examples of child labour exploitation in this country today, albeit that one is obviously more extreme than the other.

Large numbers of children are exploited in the former way. All over the country children are working for longer hours in more dangerous conditions and in a less regulated environment than the law permits.

In terms of foreign nationals, until the necessary monitoring mechanisms are in place, there is no way to count all the children who have been trafficked into the UK for labour exploitation. Where there is data, this is highly likely to understate the problem.

It is difficult to reach out to children who are being exploited – particularly those from very different cultures or who are effectively used as slaves – but there are ways to curtail this exploitation.

UNICEF actively seeks to reduce the incidence of child labour generally, as well as eliminate its most hazardous forms. The recommendations on page 62 should help to build a protective environment to prevent the exploitation of children that is happening here.

#### References

- 1 UNICEF, End Child Exploitation: Faces of exploitation, UNICEF UK, London 2003. Other studies show large regional variations in the proportion of working children who have permits. One study found that just 1 per cent of working children in urban Scotland had permits, compared with 29 per cent in rural Scotland (Hobbs, S and McKechnie, J, "Children and Work in the UK: the evidence" in Pettitt, B (ed), Children and Work in the UK: reassessing the issues, Child Poverty Action Group, London 1998.
- 2 UNICEF, End Child Exploitation: Stop the traffic!, UNICEF UK, London 2003, p4.
- 3 Interview with Kent police, May 2004.
- 4 Operation Paladin Child was carried out by the Metropolitan Police between August and November 2003.
- 5 ECPAT, Cause for Concern? London social services and child trafficking, ECPAT UK, London 2004.
- 6 Somerset, C, What the Professionals Know: the trafficking of children into and through the UK for sexual purposes, ECPAT UK, London 2001.
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- 8 Interview with Kent police, May 2004.
- 9 Recommendations in Paladin Child: a partnership study of child migration to the UK via London Heathrow, media pack, Metropolitan Police and Reflex, 2004.
- 10 This comment and all others from young people and teachers on school-age working are taken from the UNICEF UK Working Children Survey, Spring 2004.
- 11 O'Donnell, C and White, L, Invisible Hands: child employment in North Tyneside, The Low Pay Unit, London 1998.
- 12 This consultation was due to start in February 2005. For further details see "The Regulation of Child Employment", Better Regulation Taskforce, February 2004, and the response of the Department for Education and Skills, May 2004. Available at

#### Case study – a sex worker who slept or cried when she wasn't working

One day in September 2001, Cynthia Llaweny's father told her that she and her brother were going to the UK from Uganda. "We had to go with him as we didn't have anywhere else to go. He didn't tell us much about where we'd be going: he only said that he would look after us," she says.

When they arrived, the father left her brother, James, at Tooting Broadway tube station. He was later taken into care. Cynthia was taken to a house by the two men who had accompanied her on the flight.

"It was a big house. It had about eight rooms. The men put me in one and there were five other girls already living in it," she says, adding that there were about 40 girls in total at the house.

Three days after she was moved in, she was bundled into a van with other girls and they were taken to a place where men came to pick them up for sex. It later emerged that this was Clapham Common in south London. "We were made to get out of the car and stand by a wall. Men would drive by and pay money directly to the men guarding us. We would be told to go with them. Then, when we returned to the house, we were locked in the room again," she says.

During the day, Cynthia's door was kept locked. She was also given pills because, she was told, otherwise she would worry too much. "Each girl would be given a number to decide when they were going to work. Mine was number three. When I wasn't working, me and the other girls sat in the room sleeping or crying."

<http://www.brtf.gov.uk/taskforce/responses%20new/Govt%20Response%20to%20Child%20Emp%20Rpt.pdf>

13 The government has said that it will consult on the suggestion from the Better Regulation Taskforce that children should be allowed to work for more than two hours on a Sunday. The consultation on this is expected to start in February 2005.

14 TUC/NSPCC, *Too Much Too Young*, TUC/NSPCC, London November 2001.

15 This figure was correct as of November 2003, the latest date for which data was available (National Network for Childhood Employment and Entertainment).

16 UNICEF Working Children Survey, UNICEF UK, London Spring 2004.

17 TUC/NSPCC, *Dazed and Confused: why child employment laws in England are baffling parents and teenagers*, TUC/NSPCC, February 2004. *Child employment laws are, however, set to be simplified following consultation due to start in February 2005.*

18 *Ibid.* This found that of the 149 local authorities in England surveyed, 119 of the 132 who responded have by-laws that fail to interpret correctly the laws on employment of 13 to 16-year-olds.

19 The information, aimed at a "professional audience", is available at

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/06/63/69/04066369.PDF>

20 *Dazed and Confused*, *op.cit.*

21 The government is minded to consult on this point; see previous footnotes.

22 Forthcoming report from Judith Penrose Brown, assistant education officer for Oxford.

23 There are caveats, but these are derisory: the child should be allowed to drive the tractor only if they have been trained to drive it and can reach the pedals. See <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/as10.pdf>. The Transport and General Workers' Union has an ongoing campaign to tighten legislation on children working on farms.

24 Health and Safety Executive, *Fatal Injuries in Farming, Forestry and Agriculture 2002-2003*, HSE, London 2003.

25 To establish a relationship with the intention of committing a sexual offence with that person.

26 *End Child Exploitation: Stop the traffic!*, *op.cit.*

27 *What the Professionals Know*, *op.cit.*, p12.

28 Afruca, *Trafficking of African Children to the UK: denouncing of better life syndrome*, Afruca, London October 2003. Available at <http://www.afruca.org/nigeria%20trafficking%20seminar%20report.pdf>

29 Interview with police and child protection agencies in Belfast, May 2004.

30 *Operation Paladin recommended a suitable private environment to risk-assess unaccompanied children at ports.*

31 *Cause for Concern?*, *op.cit.*

32 *Trafficking of African Children to the UK*, *op.cit.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Cause for Concern?*, *op.cit.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *British Association for Adoption and Fostering.*

37 *Operation Konitki, a joint operation between the Metropolitan Police and immigration services between 1 January and mid-February 2004.*



## UNICEF in action

UNICEF is active throughout the world in the fight to protect children from harm, both during emergencies and at other times. Children affected by violence, abuse and exploitation are one of UNICEF's five priorities for 2004 – along with immunisation and related health measures, education (particularly for girls), early childhood development and children affected by HIV/AIDS. UNICEF is also pressing governments to increase their spending on children.

### Creating a “protective environment”

In recent years UNICEF's work has especially emphasised all-round improvements for children – changes that have long-term effects, in contrast to small-scale projects which benefit only a few. This approach means trying to influence the general environment within which children grow up. UNICEF aims to create a “protective environment” for children, ensuring a safety net for all children at risk, with interconnected strands working together to protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse. In essence this means:

- Challenging popular attitudes and prejudices that result in abuse, and encouraging the media and general public to confront exploitation, abuse and violence.
- Ensuring that governments are truly committed to protecting all children, and that they put the right laws in place and enforce them.
- Giving children the information they need to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation, and ensuring their participation.
- Ensuring that everyone – teachers, parents, community leaders and others – knows how to recognise abuse and what to do about it.
- Making services available to children who are exploited, abused or subjected to violence – without discriminating against any because they were born in another country, belong to a minority group, or for any other reason.

In the UK, the current priority is to put the right laws in place, as existing laws are failing to meet the needs of exploited children.

A protective environment has a broad effect on children's lives. In certain situations it can be more effective at reducing child labour than targeted programmes. For example, the Indian state of Kerala has drastically reduced child labour by a series of economic, educational and social reforms, including efforts to improve adult wages. These have effectively increased the protection available to children.

### Improving and enforcing laws

One way of improving the protective environment is to persuade governments to improve their laws or to enforce existing ones. In



*The “protective environment” – brought about by all-round improvements for children across a wide range of environmental factors.*

Bolivia, UNICEF promoted a new Code of Boys, Girls and Adolescents that became law in October 1999. Similarly, it used its influence in Viet Nam, where the Government passed a law preventing child prostitution and providing assistance to girls under 18 who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

### Focus on education

UNICEF wants to make it easier for children everywhere to go to school and to prevent them dropping out before they finish their basic education. Much of UNICEF's work aims to encourage girls in particular to attend and stay on at school, in the knowledge that this will bring long-term benefits – educated girls tend to marry later, have fewer unwanted pregnancies, and their children have lower mortality rates because of better health practices. Education is also one of the best ways of helping children who have started working full time when young, as well as a way of reducing the number of children who do so.

Some projects supported by UNICEF aim to get working children into full-time education, while others provide classes that children can attend while they go on working, referred to as “non-formal education”. Although some people may prefer to see children attending school full-time and not having to work at all, in the short- and medium-term this is not feasible for more than a handful of children – providing part-time education for many seems a fairer approach.

### Breaking with tradition

In Lesotho, herding livestock is viewed as a tradition that prepares young boys for manhood, and about 20 per cent of boys spend their childhood doing this without ever going to school. Traditionally, boys begin herding at the age of three or four, accompanying their elder brothers, cousins or other boys employed by the family, and they qualify as full-time “herd boys” by the age of seven.

“To be employed as a herd boy is beneficial and makes a boy able to endure hardships,” explained one woman. “A boy who goes to school will not find employment.”<sup>1</sup>

In an effort to improve the lives and prospects of herd boys, UNICEF and the Government of Lesotho undertook what initially appeared to be an insurmountable challenge: changing traditional attitudes and customs by providing learning opportunities for thousands of herd boys. Now, alongside Lesotho's familiar cattle-posts, the new “learning posts” dot the mountainous landscape.

These learning posts have changed the lives of herd boys in even the most remote parts of the country. After a long day tending his herd, 13-year-old Teboho Lesoana comes to the learning post in the mountain village of Liqobong. In a one-room schoolhouse, Teboho and a group of other herd boys learn by candlelight. The conditions may not be ideal, but they are learning to read, write and do basic arithmetic. This is an important first step.

*“When we arrive at school, we pray and then we learn. Some day, if someone else can look after the animals, then I'd like to go to school during the day.”*

Teboho Lesoana, 13-year-old  
Lesothan herd boy

## Non-formal education for working children

Bangladesh's "Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children" (BEHTRUC) project started 10 years ago. It builds on the experience of a small project for children who were dismissed from jobs in garment-making factories following international concern at the use of child labour in the industry (see page 24). The project is now much larger and aims to benefit more than 350,000 working children in 6 cities. The idea is to reach working children by making education available at times convenient to them. It targets children between 8 and 14 years old in a range of occupations, from girls working as domestic helps to boys who are motor mechanics and welders. Over two years, classes provide them with life skills and basic education.

Eleven-year-old Sumy, who has already been working full time for 3 or 4 years as a domestic helper, gives her opinion on these classes. "One day some friends told me about the Hard to Reach school. They said this was a special school for working children because you only had to go for two hours a day. I went home and told my employer and asked her if I could go. She made some inquiries and finally she agreed. I learned how to read, how to do some mathematics, about my country and about the Bangla language. I learned how to keep myself clean and I made many friends."<sup>2</sup>

## Education – the key to reducing child labour abuse

UNICEF supports a regional initiative in north India where extreme forms of exploitation have been common, including child bonded labour. This is India's "carpet belt", located around Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, where, for the past two decades, tens of thousands of children have been employed making hand-knotted carpets for export. Part of the initiative is directed at working children, but the aim is also to increase school enrolment, particularly for girls, and to boost the income of adult women, as this will reduce their dependence on loans and on the money that their children earn.

The *Bal Adhikar Pariyojana* (Child Rights Initiative) is a community-based project. It started in 1998 and by mid-2004 extended to 800 villages with a population of about 1.6 million, a third of whom were under 15.

As a result of campaigns by the project and the Government's Department of Basic Education, by September 2003, 80,649 children who were not attending school (47 per cent of them girls) had been brought back to school. To reach other children, 200 "alternative learning centres" were set up. These provided non-formal education as a first step to reintegrating children into the regular school system. More than 13,000 children have progressed via these alternative learning centres into ordinary schools.

The project is not restricted to promoting education; it also provides small loans on reasonable terms to mothers to enable them to start ventures to earn an income, pay off exorbitant loans and finance their children's schooling. It has the wider objective of creating "child-friendly villages", with a general environment that protects children against economic exploitation and abuse.

*"My mother and employer both noticed that I became much happier because I was going to school."*

Eleven-year-old Sumy, a pupil at a Hard to Reach school for working children in Bangladesh

*"We like being in school and no longer feel left out."*

Two girl students who enrolled in school after attending alternative learning centres in North India. Their parents add:

*"We can see our children have progressed – even our girls are receiving education."*



*First steps to learning – while two other students watch, a woman teacher writes on a slate held by a girl, in a non-formal primary education school supported by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), in the village of Kalibari, Mymensingh district, Bangladesh.*  
UNICEF/ HQ97-0326/Shehzad Noorani



### Focus on the most vulnerable children

With 245 million working children currently suffering some kind of abuse<sup>3</sup>, UNICEF aims to give priority to those who are most vulnerable or suffering most. This means focusing on children involved in particularly harmful forms of child labour and giving special attention to child workers whose situation has been aggravated by HIV/AIDS or warfare.

### Children used as soldiers

In countries where large numbers of children have been recruited into government armies and opposition armed groups, UNICEF plays a leading role in organising their demobilisation and return to ordinary life. In Central Africa, conflicts have affected so many children and so many countries that UNICEF has been organising the demobilisation of tens of thousands of child soldiers in Angola, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as in some other countries.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNICEF made direct contact with the leaders of opposition armed groups, first to persuade them not to recruit children and later, following peace agreements, to take part in discussions about demobilisation.

In Sri Lanka, UNICEF has been involved for many years in trying to convince the armed opposition Tamil Tigers not to enrol children.



*Leaving their weapons behind – adolescent boys wearing civilian clothes walk away from the weapons they once carried as child soldiers, during a demobilisation ceremony in a transit camp near the town of Rumbek, southern Sudan, after being evacuated by UNICEF from a combat zone in a nearby province.*

*Beginning on 23 February 2001 in southern Sudan, UNICEF, with the help of World Food Programme (WFP) relief flights, airlifted more than 2,500 former child soldiers out of conflict zones and into reception centres in safe areas. There, the children received health care, education, psychosocial counselling and vocational training whilst attempts were made to trace their families. Children for whom no family member could be traced remained under the long-term care of local authorities and NGOs, assisted by UNICEF. UNICEF/ HQ01-0093/Stevie Mann*

The assistance provided to children who are demobilised from military units consists of far more than simply sending them home. It includes providing teenagers with basic education and life skills training, which they missed out on in military service, and giving older children an opportunity to learn a skill they can use to earn a living. Some child soldiers are accused of having killed neighbours or relatives, so there have to be negotiations with their families and with community leaders before they can return home.

### Children who are sexually exploited

UNICEF works internationally and nationally to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It focuses its efforts on preventing sexual exploitation from happening in the first place, protecting girls (and boys) who have been exploited, and providing opportunities for them to recover and return home.

UNICEF channels support to local groups such as *Avenir de l'Enfant* in Senegal (see *Working children around the world on page 30*). With UNICEF support, *Ndhimë Për Fëmijet* (Help the Children), a non-government organisation in the south of Albania, works with sexually abused or exploited children, many of whom have been trafficked to Greece. The NGO has helped reintegrate 400 children annually into schools in four Albanian cities. Brothers and sisters of the children also receive counselling and support, bringing the number of children assisted through the programme each year to 2,500.<sup>4</sup>

### Children without primary carers

Children in sub-Saharan Africa have been hit particularly hard by HIV/AIDS, and over 11 million children in the region have been robbed of one or both parents by AIDS.<sup>5</sup> When parliamentary elections were held at the end of 2002 in Kenya, one country severely affected, UNICEF took a public stand to persuade the new parliament to take

more concerted action to address the issue of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, estimated at almost 900,000 in a country of 30 million.<sup>6</sup>

Within days of being elected, the new government took action. It declared that primary schooling would be free. The cost to the Government was likely to be almost US\$100 million (£53 million). When the new school year started in January 2003, 1.3 million children sought admission to school for the first time, in addition to the 5.9 million pupils already enrolled. Schools experienced massive overcrowding, but the impact has been vital for children who have lost parents to AIDS. For them, free education represents a unique chance to attend school rather than having to earn a living.

UNICEF contributed \$2.5 million (£1.3 million) to the Kenyan initiative, for teaching and learning materials, recreational equipment, training for 5,000 teachers, and basic water and sanitation facilities. The World Bank has promised \$50 million (£27 million) over three years in grants to support the education initiative. The British and Swedish governments have also pledged support.<sup>7</sup>

### Children working as live-in domestics

For more than 10 years, UNICEF in Brazil has sought to place the issue of child labour high on the country's social and political agenda. Child labour has been almost halved – notably on sugarcane, sisal, orange, and tobacco plantations, as well as on dumps and other hazardous locations – but some 3.8 million children are still believed to be engaged in harmful work.<sup>8</sup> Some of these are “invisible” child labourers, not seen as a problem by the public.

In Belém, a town in the north, UNICEF supports a project assisting girls employed as domestic servants. Many are not only exploited at work, but are victims of violence and sexual abuse. So far the project has benefited 141 girls aged between 8 and 18. Half of the participants receive a small cash stipend that enables them to stop working and return to school, an incentive that has been used successfully to help many other working children in Brazil return to school. All the participants receive assistance through health and job skills training programmes. Their families are also involved. Some 2,500 public school teachers have been trained to replicate the project in other cities in the State of Pará, where it is common for children to work as domestic servants.

In Nigeria large numbers of boys, as well as girls, are employed as domestic servants, often starting when very young. UNICEF supports MELPWOOD (Mediation for the Less Privileged and Women's Development), an organisation in Enugu, which is helping 12-year-old Iyagu and others. After his father's death when he was eight, Iyagu and three of his brothers and sisters were sent away from home. He worked as a servant for two widows. However, he received no payment and was not sent to school. After a year he ran away and eventually managed to get home to his mother.

MELPWOOD provides assistance to orphans and other vulnerable



*Taking a break from domestic drudgery – a group of girls stand on the staircase in CEAFFRO, the Centre for Afro-Eastern Studies, in Salvador, Brazil. Supported by local and international organisations including UNICEF, UNDP and Save the Children, CEAFFRO offers services to domestic workers aged 11 years and older. These include projects to improve self-esteem and to teach domestic workers basic literacy and an understanding of worker's rights, including the right to be protected from violence and abuse. UNICEF/HQ01-0441/Claudio Versiani*



children, teaching them vocational skills so they can make a living and avoid further exploitation. The organisation also helps fund schooling for the 55 children taking part in the project.

### Helping communities to protect their children from trafficking

The tradition in parts of West Africa of sending children away to live, work and be educated in the households of relatives or others, hoping this will give them a helping hand to get on in the world, has been manipulated to ensure a supply of full-time “household helps” or skivvies. In Benin, some of these children work in the country’s cities, but many are trafficked abroad to other countries in West and Central Africa. Since 1999, UNICEF has been working with local communities to establish committees in villages to warn parents of the dangers facing children who are sent away, and to alert the police when children go missing. So far, more than 170 committees have been established. Fewer children have left as a result.

### Supporting vulnerable adolescents

In the Philippines, up to five million people arrive by boat each year in the capital, Manila. About half are in search of work and a better future, and many are children. A local organisation, Visayan Forum, provides help and advice to children arriving in Manila’s port and has set up a halfway house there, operating 24 hours a day.

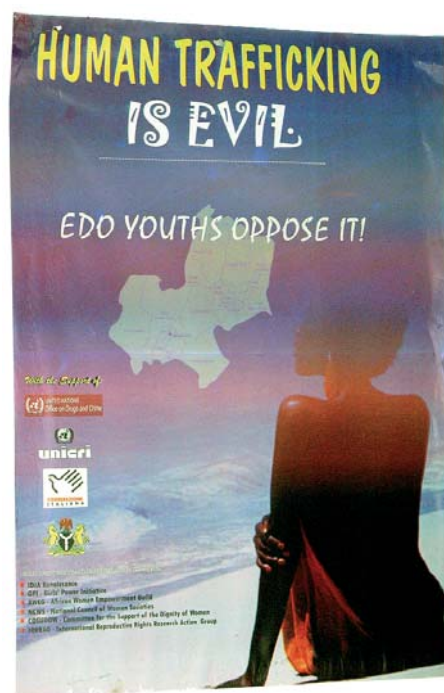
Research by Visayan Forum showed that 13 out of 20 children leave home without knowing where they will end up working, while 6 out of 10 said that their fare was deducted from their subsequent wages. Many had language problems, while others experienced fear, jealousy and intimidation.

Children intercepted in Manila port are usually taken to Visayan Forum’s halfway house. The organisation helps them overcome their traumatic experiences and start afresh. In the wake of the success of the first halfway house, three others have been established in harbours elsewhere in the Philippines. Visayan Forum also helps children understand the nature of child trafficking and the hazards of child labour.

As a lead agency in a campaigning alliance, Child Labourers and Advocates for Social Participation, which receives technical assistance from UNICEF, Visayan Forum has been successful in persuading the authorities to improve laws on child protection. It has also provided legal advice to young people so that abusive employers are investigated and prosecuted.

### Changing the rules to protect trafficked children

Alongside efforts to ensure that laws in individual countries are appropriate to catch and punish child traffickers, UNICEF has been enlisted to identify the most appropriate ways of protecting children who have been trafficked. Unfortunately, around the world trafficked children are routinely treated as if they were illegal migrants, are sometimes imprisoned for activities they have been forced into by traffickers (such as begging or prostitution), and are very rarely treated as if they have any rights.



*Stark warning in Nigeria – an anti-trafficking poster on the walls of a building where a new Youth Resource Centre is being developed, with active support from UNICEF, and with strong participation by a lively and involved group of young people. The centre will provide health services, advocacy and sensitisation on trafficking and HIV/AIDS, as well as training to ensure that there is an alternative to the temptations of child labour and work abroad. The young people have chosen to be trained in subjects such as photography and IT. UNICEF’s aim is to replicate such centres throughout the country as a key element in the anti-trafficking programme.*

*UNICEF UK/2004/David Bull*

In one area where teenage girls have been trafficked in large numbers, Southeast Europe, UNICEF developed a special set of "Guidelines for Protection of the Rights of Children Victims of Trafficking in Southeastern Europe".<sup>9</sup> Governments in the region have committed themselves to taking the steps outlined in these guidelines on 11 different issues.

Elsewhere in Europe, in the UK as well as in other EU countries, the way trafficked children are treated by the police and other statutory agencies falls below the standards set out in these guidelines. It will be just as relevant to introduce these guidelines in the UK and other Western European countries to which children are being trafficked.

#### References

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- 5 UNICEF, Africa's Orphaned Generations, UNICEF, November 2003.
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## UNICEF UK Agenda for Action

### Child labour

In order to eradicate the worst forms of child exploitation such as exploitative labour, we need to tackle the issue of poverty, since poverty is both a direct cause of child labour, and a determinant factor in preventing children from accessing an education that can protect them against exploitation.

UNICEF UK calls for more and better aid to make poverty history and end child exploitation.

### More aid:

Child poverty will not be eradicated without an immediate and major increase in international aid. Rich countries have promised to provide the extra money needed to meet internationally agreed poverty reduction targets. This amounts to an additional \$50 billion per year, according to official estimates.

- UNICEF calls on the UK government to keep its commitments to provide 0.7% of its national income in aid and to use the G8 Summit and its presidency of the EU to urge other rich countries to do the same.

### Better aid:

Aid must also be made to work more effectively for poor people to achieve maximum benefits. Three key areas of reform are needed:

- Aid needs to be more closely focused on poor people's needs. This means more aid being spent on areas such as basic health care and education.
- Aid should support poor countries' and communities' own plans and paths out of poverty.
- Aid needs to be more predictable, so that poor countries can plan effectively and take control of their own budgets in the fight against poverty.

**MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** is a unique UK alliance of charities, trade unions, campaigning groups, faith communities, and celebrities who are mobilising around key opportunities in 2005 to drive forward the struggle against poverty and trade injustice.

UNICEF encourages companies and individuals to join the struggle to make poverty history and thus help to end child exploitation.

- Companies can help tackle exploitative labour conditions. The issues related to child labour are complex and manufacturers and retailers, for example, source products from a long and complex chain of suppliers. Companies can inform themselves of the issues by consulting UNICEF UK's online Child Labour Resource Guide, which can be found at [www.unicef.org.uk/clrg](http://www.unicef.org.uk/clrg)



- Individuals can take action to support UNICEF's campaign by lobbying the Government on their 0.7% pledge. For more information, please visit [www.unicef.org.uk/messagetotony](http://www.unicef.org.uk/messagetotony)

### Children working in the UK

There has been some development to improve legislation relating to children working in the UK. In May 2004, the Government accepted, further to additional scoping work and public consultation, recommendations from the Better Regulation Taskforce that aim to simplify and clarify existing legislation. UNICEF UK fully supports their recommendations that the Department for Education and Skills:

- Should commence work on consolidating child employment legislation
- Should consult on moving to a system of regulation in which employers register with their local authority as an employer of school-age children, rather than applying for a permit for each child employee.
- Should produce simple, best practice guidance on the law which can be used by local authorities, employers, children and parents.

While UNICEF UK welcomes the above measures as vital improvements to the current situation, our research shows that the following is also necessary to protect children who work:

- A Criminal Record Bureau check should be carried out on anyone working directly with a child.
- There should be stiffer penalties for those who break the law regarding child employment, including prison sentences where it is deemed that gross negligence by the employer has put the child's life at risk.
- We support the findings of a study by the University of Paisley, at the request of the NSPCC, that further research on child employment is necessary and that children and young people should be consulted in the process (Article 12, UNCRC). If we are to fully protect children while they work, we must be clear about the challenges that they face. Further research would include such areas as the relationship between work and educational achievement, risks to health and safety and a cost-benefit analysis of the working experience.

### Child trafficking

In August 2003, UNICEF UK published its first report on trafficking, *Stop the traffic!* Since then, UNICEF has welcomed the Government's response to several of our recommendations. The Asylum and Immigration Bill 2004 made it an offence to traffic people for any purpose and it has been announced that a new register for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK will be established.

However, while developments have been made in certain areas, efforts to address the root causes of trafficking are lacking and protection and care for children who are victims of trafficking is still non-existent. To this end UNICEF UK calls on the UK government to:

- Provide more and better aid to tackle poverty and thereby help prevent child trafficking.
- Develop a national strategy for tackling child trafficking and appoint a single agency to lead and coordinate all counter-trafficking efforts .
- Endorse and implement the UNICEF guidelines as set out in UNICEF, *Guidelines for Protection of the Rights of Children Victims of Trafficking in Southeastern Europe*, May 2003 (available at [www.seerights.org](http://www.seerights.org)). In particular, we highlight the importance of:
  - Identification of child victims of trafficking
  - Referral and interagency cooperation
  - Interim care and protection
  - Implementation of a durable solution

**child**  
**MAKE** **POVERTY** **HISTORY**



*Handling chemicals – Hashu works for a battery-making factory in Keranjang, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He works 10 hours a day, and earns 120 Taka (just over £1) per week.*

*UNICEF Bangladesh/Shehzad Noorani*