



Making a living

Seventy per cent of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 a day or less are female

1. Introduction

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 32

1. States Parties recognise 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.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has a number of Conventions that relate to work and young women:

- ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No 111)
- ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No 100)
- ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)
- ILO Maternity Protection Conventions, 2000 (No 183)
- International Labour Conference Resolution on Gender Equality, Pay Equity and Maternity Protection, 2004

MICHELLE GILBERT

"It is a moment for which we have waited for over 200 years. Never losing faith, we waited through the many years of struggle to achieve

our rights. But women were not just waiting; women were working. Never losing faith, we worked to redeem the promise of America that all men and women are created equal. For our daughters and our granddaughters, today we have broken the marble ceiling. For our daughters and our granddaughters, the sky is the limit. Anything is possible for them."
Nancy Pelosi, on her election as the first woman Speaker of the US House of Representatives, January 2007¹

The last decade has opened up a multitude of possibilities for many young women. More are in paid work than ever before, and in some countries they are entering professions that traditionally used to be regarded as 'men's jobs'. As a result, they are gaining in confidence and many are making their voices heard on the world arena. But as ever with a group who are trying to break into new areas, this is not always easy. And as we have seen in chapter two on family life, girls and women who work are generally doing so in addition to the hours they put in at home.

The reality for the vast majority of girls and young women in the world is an invisible and undervalued contribution to the economy, both in cash and in kind. And 70 per cent of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 a day or less are female. Their contributions include unpaid household work, traditional (female) work



More women and girls are earning a living than ever before, but much female work is still traditional and unpaid.

such as the *devdasi* or temple prostitution system in India where girls are sent away from the family home to work as sex workers, and paid work to mitigate the economic vulnerability of being poor.

Children are paid very little to work long hours in poor conditions; others have to leave their homes and even their countries in order to find work, and then there are many who are unable to find work. While new legislation and social protection measures brought in over the last 15 years now exist to protect children from working at an early age, or working instead of going to school, or being exploited in factories or as domestic labour, many children still work in such conditions. Thousands more are trafficked against their will, often to work in the sex trade, or are sexually exploited.

There has been a big debate over whether children should work at all, and this continues, as well as discussions about the push factors such as poverty, and family expectations that lead children to work rather than go to school. Although child work can help secure income for the family and even build children's skills, dangerous and exploitative child labour can damage their health and keep them out of school.² Girls are more at risk of falling into exploitative situations, therefore efforts are

needed to protect them from harmful labour.

There have been many achievements, largely driven by women themselves refusing to take no for an answer. But it will be some time before the sky is the limit not just for some young women in the United States, but for girls and young women all over the world.

2. Paid work

At first glance, the future of paid work for young women looks bright. More women are earning a living than ever before, ideally giving them a route to economic independence that will allow them more say over their lives. Since the 1980s the numbers of women in the paid work force have grown faster than the numbers of men in every region of the world except Africa. In Latin America the growth rate for women has been three times that of men, while in the European Union 80 per cent of all growth in the labour force has been attributed to women's participation. The ILO's *Global Employment Trends for Women* (2004) states that the gap in the labour force participation rate for men and women has been decreasing in all regions over the past decade, although another survey points out that labour force participation rates are still

lower for young women than young men, particularly in South Asia.^{3,4}

New industries, such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), have opened up new possibilities of work for young women. In some countries, particularly in South Asia, ICTs have created new types of work that favour women, often because it can be done from home. Most of these jobs are in service industries, banking, insurance, printing and publishing. Women – often young women – are employed in call centres or data processing. The International Labour Organisation reports that telecentres and fax booths have created a quarter of a million jobs in India in the last four years alone, a huge proportion of which have gone to women.⁵ However, although many women are software programmers, very few are in hardware design. Nor are many involved at policy level; mostly they are involved at quite a low level.

All too often, paid work can simply mean a different form of exploitation. Despite their increasing participation in the workforce, women are still poorer than men. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, United Nations Under-Secretary-

General notes that: "No poverty reduction strategy in Least Developed Countries could be successful without the creation of productive employment with special attention to women and the youth." In fact, the gap between women and men in poverty has continued to widen, in a phenomenon that has become known as the 'feminisation of poverty'.⁶

Worldwide, women only earn between 30 and 60 per cent of men's earnings.⁷ Equal pay is still not a reality, even in the rich world.

In addition, many of the jobs done by women are badly paid, insecure and part-time. In 2000, in Japan and the US almost 70 per cent of all part-time workers were women. In France almost half the 29 per cent of women working part-time are on short-term temporary contracts.⁹ Sometimes this is by choice, but often it is because this is the only work women can find.

Women tend to work longer hours than men because they are also juggling childcare and unpaid work in the home. Surveys in six states in India showed that women typically spend 35 hours a week on household tasks and caring for children. Men only spend four hours on these tasks.¹⁰

And discrimination on the part of employers continues to be rife: Human Rights Watch¹¹ lists a litany of problems related to the abusive and sexist practices of both corporations and private individuals when it comes to employing women:

- Job advertisements in Ukraine often specify 'man' among the requirements for work in business and government agencies, and employers often deny women employment based on age and marital status and family status.
- Private manufacturing companies in Mexico, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic routinely oblige female job applicants to undergo pregnancy examinations as a condition of work and deny work to pregnant women.
- South African farm owners deny black female farm workers legal contracts, pay them less than men for similar work, and deny them maternity benefits.

The ratio of estimated female earned income to estimated male earned income, 1991-2003, selected countries⁸

Canada	0.63
Chile	0.39
China	0.64
Côte d'Ivoire	0.32
Indonesia	0.45
India	0.31
Japan	0.44
Kuwait	0.37
Lebanon	0.31
Russia	0.62
South Africa	0.45
Sweden	0.81
Uganda	0.70
Thailand	0.59
US	0.62
UK	0.65

UNDP Human Development Report, 2006

- Guatemala's labour code denies live-in domestic workers equal rights. Many of these are indigenous women.
- Sexual harassment and violence in the workplace are common and constant threats to working women's lives and livelihoods. Female migrant workers in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia are especially vulnerable to abuse.

If women fare less well than men, young women as a group do even worse. They may even be recruited precisely because it is felt that they can be more easily laid off than men. As new entrants to the labour market, they tend to be the first to lose their jobs and the last to be rehired. Ironically, the fact that their mothers are now working may even mean that eldest daughters in particular are at greatest risk of being withdrawn from school or work in order to look after siblings while the mother is away from the house.¹²

3. New opportunities?

Globalisation has meant new opportunities for young women. In many countries of the South, young women are employed in factories. This is partly because they are considered more amenable than men and can be paid less for working long hours. But such openings have also meant new opportunities: in one survey of young female workers in Bangladesh's exclusively female garment factories,¹³ researchers found that: "Despite the stigma and physical stress associated with garment work, most young women reported that they value the work and the independence associated with it and feel that it is less of a hardship than agricultural work." Most contributed to the family income, which gave them more status at home. The researchers concluded that "this new opportunity for work has created a period of adolescence for young girls that did not previously exist as a life cycle phase."

Working outside the home may also give young women more confidence and self-esteem. A small study in Argentina of the views of young people in their mid-twenties on the criteria for defining adulthood¹⁴ found that 90 per cent of young women (as opposed to 65 per

cent of young men) viewed 'women's capability of supporting a family financially as a marker of adulthood'. In countries like Bangladesh, where young women are typically confined to the home, the large numbers of young women going out to work is likely to have a significant effect on their ability to make their own life choices. In Egypt, however, young women tend to stop working once they are married.

But it may also mean that young women are exploited. They work long hours for little money, sometimes in appalling conditions, like this young woman in Bangladesh:

Nasrin Akther¹⁵

"Until recently, I had to work from 8am until 10pm each day. We get only two days off a month. I walk to work and back because I cannot afford to take a bus or bicycle rickshaw. The factory is three kilometres away and it takes 30 minutes to walk. I normally get home at 10.30pm.

"I get a regular wage of 1,650 taka (£18.68 a month or nine pence an hour), not counting overtime. We pay 200 taka for rent and 800 for food each month. Usually I spend about 400 taka a month on soap, detergent, toothpaste and things like that. Occasionally, I buy some extra thing like fruit, biscuits, bus fare – but not frequently.

"If we want to use the bathroom, we have to get permission from the supervisor and he monitors the time. If someone makes a mistake, the supervisor docks four or five hours of overtime wage, or lists her as absent, taking the whole day's wage.

"In my factory there is no childcare, no medical facilities. The women don't receive maternity benefits. We have to work overtime, but we are always cheated on our overtime pay... it is very crowded, very hot and badly ventilated. The water we have to drink is dirty. The workers often suffer from diarrhoea, jaundice, kidney problems, anaemia, and

eye pain. Our seats have no backs and since we have to work long hours, we suffer from backaches and shoulder pain.

"I cannot support myself with the wage I am getting. I have rice and lentils for breakfast, rice and mashed potato for lunch, and for supper rice and vegetables. I eat chicken once a month when I get paid, and maybe twice a month I buy a small piece of fish.

"Because we have to work very long hours, seven days a week, we have no family life, no personal life, no social life."

4. Men's jobs, women's jobs

Young women may also find it difficult to break into what are traditionally considered 'men's jobs'. Research by Britain's Equal Opportunities Commission between 2003 and 2005 showed that not only is there still a gender pay gap in the UK, of 18 per cent for women working full time and 41 per cent for those working part-time, but three-quarters of working women are still found in five occupational groups. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) calls these "the five 'c's" – cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical". These jobs, which are often classified as 'women's work', are paid less than the equivalent 'man's job', even when both require similar qualification levels. One major cause of girls being in these groups is because they choose certain subjects at school. The EOC said: "There is a clear financial incentive for women to choose training and work in sectors where men dominate the workforce, as pay tends to be higher in those areas".¹⁶

Emily the engineer

Emily, an engineering student in Edinburgh in Scotland, is one young woman who has chosen her career in an area not traditionally considered 'women's work':

"Office jobs just didn't appeal to me. I remember my careers test saying I should be a hairdresser! That didn't appeal either.

I was interested in science, maths and the environment and after doing some research myself decided to become a civil engineer. At university I was one of only three girls doing engineering, and it was difficult sometimes but we had a female lecturer who was very inspiring and always managed to motivate me. I am still really enjoying the training and learning and have got to do a lot of practical experience, which I love. The experience is as vital as the degree so I would advise anyone to get as much experience as possible whilst they are young. It can be difficult working in an area dominated by men; however I am passionate about what I do and that shines through to others. I hope I am leading the way and soon others will follow."¹⁷

5. Migration

Between 185 and 192 million migrants live outside their country of birth. About half are women. Many have left their children behind with sisters, mothers or daughters, in order to earn a living overseas. In the Philippines, for example, an estimated 3 million to 6 million children (10 to 20 per cent of all under-18s) have been left by parents working overseas.¹⁸

Young people all over the world leave their homes as young adults to migrate to a new village, city or country. Some leave to marry or find an education; most leave to work. Young people between the ages of 15 and 30 are the most likely to migrate. In one Kenyan study, over 10 per cent of Kenyan young men and women in their late teens and early twenties moved across district boundaries in a single year. Young women migrated at greater rates than young men between the ages of 15 and 20. Similar patterns were also observed in a study in Brazil.¹⁹

Few statistics exist on why young people migrate. The census in Mexico is one that does collect such data. It shows that about 53 percent of men and 34 percent of women aged between 20 and 24 gave work-related

Reasons for Migration by Age and Sex, Mexico 2000²¹

Reason	Age 10–14		Age 15–19		Age 20–24	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Look for work	6.8	6.9	31.0	29.1	42.6	27.2
Change workplace	4.2	4.5	5.9	4.4	10.9	6.4
Study	6.4	6.4	12.6	10.6	10.8	8.9
Reunite family	46.8	47.1	28.6	27.5	18.2	21.8
Get married	0.1	0.4	1.0	11.4	5.3	22.8
Health reasons	2.4	2.0	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.1
Violence or safety	4.0	3.7	2.7	1.7	1.3	1.2
Other reasons	29.4	29.0	17.0	14.3	10.2	10.6

Growing up Global: the Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries, CB Lloyd (ed), 2005.

reasons for migration. About 23 percent of women ages 20-24 said they migrated to get married or form a union, compared with only 5 percent of men. A similar proportion migrated for education. These results show that while migrating for work purposes is more important for men, it is still the reason why a significant number of young women leave their homes.²⁰

6. Unemployment

Young people between 15 and 24 make up half the world's unemployed. And young women's unemployment exceeds that of young men in all regions of the South with the exception of East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.²²

Percentage of labour force aged 15-19²³

	More developed countries	
	1990	2005
Young women	32	27
Young men	36	30
Less developed countries		
Young women	48	41
Young men	59	50

Youth in a Global World, Population Reference Council 2005

Working against young women's poverty²⁴

Tap and Reposition Youth (TRY) is a project in Kenya that tries to address young women's poverty and lack of

employment opportunities. TRY works with girls aged between 16 and 22 in low-income and slum areas of Nairobi. It is a livelihoods project, that started with a basic lending and savings scheme and moved on to giving social support and responding to individual needs. In 2004 Young Savers Clubs were set up for younger women, who formed themselves into groups of 20 to 25 members and held weekly meetings led by a credit officer or mentor. One young woman saver, aged 19, said: "I tried [saving money] at home many times, but I see something like shoes and I break the tin and use it [the money]. With Young Savers, the money is safe because it is in the bank. It cannot be given to someone else, like my husband when he sees something he wants to buy with my money." TRY loans have financed a wide range of business ventures run by young women in the slum areas around Nairobi, including:

- A hairdressing salon
- A fruit-juice business
- A meat selling business
- Buying and selling firewood
- A second hand clothing business

Club members also appreciate making friends and being able to learn: "What attracted me, apart from saving, are the seminars. I especially like the way we

are taught about how to run businesses and about nutrition and keeping fit. We do exercises for about 20 minutes. In the group, problems – even individual problems – are less troublesome when we share them," said one woman aged 20.

7. Child labour

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 15: Child Labour

Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

States Parties shall in particular:

- provide through legislation, minimum ages for admission to every employment;
- provide for appropriate regulation of hours and conditions of employment;
- provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of this Article;
- promote the dissemination of information on the hazards of child labour to all sectors of the community.

"There is a saying that goes: 'The youth is the hope of the nation'. How can we build a good and progressive nation if our children are forced to stop schooling because of work? How can we build a bright tomorrow if we are not given a bright today?"

Analou, 16, Vice President, Barangay Cabayugan Active Children's Association, the Philippines²⁵

It is a fact that many thousands of girls under 18 work in order to earn money. Some of them combine work and school to earn a bit extra for themselves and for their families. Others work long hours in mines or in agriculture or as domestic workers from a very early age. The International Labour Organisation and UNICEF

distinguish between child work, child labour, and hazardous child labour (see box below). There is of course a big difference between Sarah, aged 16, in Canada who earns some pocket money with a Saturday job and Mili, aged 10, a domestic worker in Indonesia who works long hours for little pay and lives away from her family. According to the ILO definition, Sarah would fall into the first category; Mili into the second or even the third. The issue of child labour has led to many debates, from those who want to ban child work altogether to children's movements such as the African Movement of Working Children and Youth who want the right to work. An essential difference between international standards and the basis of the Movement's work is that the children are primarily concerned with working conditions, while international standards focus on work sectors.

Definitions of child work versus child labour

Child work: Children's participation in economic activity that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education, can be positive. Work that does not interfere with education (light work) is permitted from the age of 12 years under the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 138, Minimum Age Convention.

Child labour: This is more narrowly defined and refers to children working in contravention of the above standards as defined in ILO Convention 138. It includes all children below 12 years of age working in any economic activities, those aged 12 to 14 years engaged in harmful work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour.²⁷

Worst forms of child labour: These involve, under ILO Convention 182, children being enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked, forced into illegal activities and exposed to hazardous work.²⁸ Hazardous work includes "any activity or occupation that by its nature or type leads to adverse effects on the child's safety, physical or mental health, or moral development".²⁹ This includes mining or construction, work with heavy machinery or pesticides. It also applies to any child under 18 working more than 43 hours a week.

The African Movement of Working Children and Youth

Since 2003, Plan has supported the development of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth, a movement of 450 child-led groups/clubs in 19 African countries. The Movement has a gender balance of 53 per cent girls, 47 per cent boys. Domestic workers, vendors, apprentices and self-employed children on the street are active members of these groups that have organised themselves into a formalised structure.

These children consider that they have to work, due to their social and economic conditions, and that their work is part of their struggle to overcome the poverty they face. They have developed a framework of 12 basic rights they would like to see realised. The right to:

- be respected
- self expression and to form organisations
- learn to read and write
- remain in the village (avoid urban migration)
- be listened to
- equitable legal aid
- rest when sick
- healthcare
- light and limited work
- work in a safe environment
- play

Their perspective is not theoretical, it is rooted in their own lives, and they want to build a better present and future for themselves and their younger sisters and brothers in order to ‘blossom out’.²⁶

The International Labour Organisation estimates that 217.7 million children between the ages of five and 17 were engaged in child labour in 2004. The largest proportion – 122 million – live in Asia and the Pacific, 49.3 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 5.7 million in Latin America and the Caribbean.³⁰

Nearly 70 per cent of children engaged in child labour are working in hazardous

Girls in hazardous child labour (millions)³¹

Trafficked	1.2
Debt bondage or other forms of slavery	5.7
Prostitution or pornography	1.8
Armed conflict	0.3
Other illicit activities	0.6
Total (millions)	9.6

Instraw, The Girl Child, 2004

Wary young fruit-sellers at work in Sierra Leone.



conditions. Girls may be sold into bonded labour, or to traffickers for sexual slavery in order to pay off their parents’ debts, pay medical fees for a member of the family or to add to household income.

Children who work face another danger too: they often miss out on education, which, as we have seen in Chapter 3 – *Education*, is particularly crucial for girls’ empowerment. Girls often start work at a younger age. This may affect boys’ and girls’ future earning capacity

differently – one study in Brazil found that in rural areas, girls who began working at the age of seven earned 55 per cent less than if they had begun working at age 15 or older, whereas for boys the difference is only 23 percent.³²

There is not a huge difference between the number of boys and the number of girls working; the gap widens as the age of the child increases: by 15 – 17, girls make up only one-third of those in that age group in paid work, as girls are married or kept at home for domestic tasks.

Girls perform a variety of different kinds of work, including agricultural, textile, factory, informal and domestic labour, sex work, not to mention unpaid household and care-giving duties. The majority of children who work – 69 per cent – do so in agriculture. This can involve long hours in the fields, often hard physical labour, sometimes dealing with dangerous chemicals. Rural children, and girls in particular, may start work at the age of five or six. In some countries, children under 10 account for up to 20 per cent of child workers in rural areas.³⁵ Much of this work is difficult to identify, partly because children may work as part of family units or on family farms and because agriculture as a sector is not well regulated. Twenty-two per cent of child workers are involved in services – this would include the many girls who work as domestic servants. Others work in industry, in factories producing toys or carpets, many for Western consumption.

Sok Keng – Cambodia

Sok Keng is 14 and lives in a small village outside Phnom Penh. She knew from an early age that she would have to work to help her family to survive. She was very young when she went to work in a nearby garment factory. In Cambodia, the garment industry contributes over \$1.6 billion to the economy. It employs 200,000 workers, most of whom are women, who are able to support their families on their wages.

The ILO has been working with the Cambodian government to identify underage workers like Sok Keng, who are placed in training centres and given the skills to get a good job in the industry once she is legally able to work.³⁶

The ILO statistics for 2000-2004 show that the global number of child labourers in the age group 5 to 17 fell by 11 per cent, from 246 million in 2000 to 218 million in 2004.³⁷ This is encouraging, as the numbers of children working in the most hazardous forms of labour appear to be particularly reduced. The drop was

Percentage of children engaged in child labour in the developing world³³

	Girls	Boys
Sub-Saharan Africa	34	37
Eastern and Southern Africa	29	34
West and Central Africa	41	41
Middle East and N Africa	7	9
South Asia	15	14
East Asia and Pacific (excl. China)	10	11
Latin America and Caribbean	8	11
All developing countries (excl. China)	17	18
All least developed countries	26	29

Hagemann et al, Global Child Labour Trends, 2000-2004, 2006

Child labour and sex distribution³⁴

Sex and age group	Distribution by sex (%)
5-14	
Boys	51.3
Girls	48.7
15- 17	
Boys	62.0
Girls	37.9
Total 5 – 17	
Boys	53.8
Girls	46.2

Ibid

greatest in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the numbers of children working fell by two-thirds. In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the numbers increased by 1.3 million from 48 to 49.3 million. Overall, there was a slightly greater drop in the number of girls working than the number of boys, with 172 million boys working compared to 146 million girls.

8. Domestic workers

“Instead of guaranteeing domestic workers’ ability to work with dignity and freedom from violence, governments have systematically denied them key labour protections extended to other workers. Migrants and children are especially at risk of abuse.”

Nisha Varia, senior researcher for the Women’s Rights Division of Human Rights Watch.³⁸

More girls under 16 work in domestic service than in any other category of child labour, according to the ILO. For example, in Indonesia, there are nearly 700,000 child domestic workers and in El Salvador there are more than 20,000 between the ages of 14 and 19. Although it is difficult to find statistics on domestic workers, as they are not included in national workforce figures, it is estimated that around 90 per cent are girls.³⁹

A recent report for Human Rights Watch⁴⁰ notes that: “Exploitative working conditions often make domestic labour one of the worst forms of child labour... In the worst situations, women and girls are trapped in situations of forced labour or have been trafficked into forced domestic work in conditions akin to slavery.”

Human Rights Watch notes that many child domestic workers find employment through brokers, who liaise with the family, but often make false promises about a better future for their daughters and at the same time demand a fee for finding the work, which is often far from home. In Morocco, brokers were found to receive a proportion of the girl’s salary to ensure that she keeps working. In some cases, the broker actually collects the salary and delivers it – or some of it – to her parents, who may not even know where she is.

In addition to long hours, often appalling conditions, and hard physical labour, the girls are separated from their parents, and sometimes locked into their employer’s house. Many are from rural areas working in cities far from home. Sometimes they are forbidden to visit or even telephone their families. Vina, who began working when she was 13, recalled, “I was always depressed because I could not leave the house to visit my mother or sister. No one came to visit me. It was not allowed.”⁴¹ Apart from the psychological trauma, this also makes it difficult for them to seek help if they are in trouble.

These are some of the findings from surveys:

- A 2002-2003 baseline survey conducted by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the University of Indonesia estimated that there were 2.6 million domestic workers in

Indonesia, out of whom a minimum 688,132 (26 percent) were children; 93 percent of those were girls under the age of eighteen.⁴²

- An ILO-IPEC study found that child domestics perform the same amount of work as adult workers, which tends to surpass their physical capacity and stamina.⁴³
- In El Salvador, IPEC used data from the Salvadoran census bureau to conclude that approximately 21,500 youths between the ages of 14 and 19 work in domestic service. Some 20,800 – over 95 percent of these youths – are girls and women.⁴⁴
- A 2004 study by the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank in Morocco found that child domestic workers are “perhaps the most vulnerable group of urban child workers.”⁴⁵ A 2001 study by the Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science estimated that between 66,000 and 86,000 girls under fifteen were working as child domestic workers, and a 2001 government survey found 13,580 girls under fifteen working as domestics in the greater Casablanca area alone. Of the girls in the Casablanca survey, 870 were under eleven years old.⁴⁶

Domestic workers’ stories

“If I did something the employer didn’t like, she would grab my hair and hit my head on the wall. She would say things like, ‘I don’t pay you to sit and watch TV! You don’t wash the dishes well. I pay your mother good money and you don’t do anything [to deserve it].’ ... Once I forgot clothes in the washer, and they started to smell, so she grabbed my head and tried to stick it in the washing machine.”

Saida B, child domestic worker, age 15, Casablanca, Morocco.

“I work 13 hours each day as a domestic worker, beginning at 4.30am. It’s heavy work: washing, ironing, taking care of the child.” Flor receives about US\$26 each month for her labours. “In the morning I give milk to the baby. I make breakfast, iron, wash, sweep.” The only domestic

worker for a household of four adults and a three-year-old, she is also responsible for preparing their lunch, dinner, and snacks, and she watches the child. “Sometimes I eat, but sometimes I am too busy.” When she finishes her workday, she heads to her fifth grade evening class. “Sometimes I come to school super tired.... I get up at 2am to go to work.” When she rises at 2am to return to work, she must walk one kilometre along a dangerous road to catch a minibus. “At 2am there are gangs where I live. This morning there was a group from a gang that tried to rob me of my chain. There is no rest for me. I can sit, but I have to be doing something. I have one day of rest each month.”

Flor N, San Salvador, aged 17⁴⁷

“When the lady went to drop off the children to the grandmother’s house, the man would stay at home... he raped me many, many times; once a day, every day for three months. He hit me a lot because I didn’t want to have sex. I don’t know what a condom is, but he used some tissues after he raped me. [After paying off my three months’ debt] I took a knife, I said, ‘Don’t get near me, what are you doing?’ I told the lady; she was very angry with me and [the next day] she took me to the harbour and said she bought a ticket for me to Pontianak. I had no money to get home from Pontianak. I haven’t gone to a doctor.”

Zakiah, returned domestic worker from Malaysia, age 20, Lombok, Indonesia.⁴⁸

9. Social protection

As poverty is often the reason why girls work and are kept out of school, increasing family incomes can help prevent child labour. So does social support when there is a crisis such as illness or the loss of the family home or livelihood.

Social protection is defined as financial and social safety nets designed to protect



Helping with the milking in Ecuador – all in a day’s work for girls in traditional societies.

poor and vulnerable people from extreme poverty and reduce their vulnerability to economic and social shocks. These can be cash benefits, abolishing school and hospital fees, or protecting the property of orphans in the aftermath of a parent’s death. Helping to establish legal frameworks that will deliver children’s rights is also a form of social protection.

In countries that have invested in such social support, in particular in Scandinavia, child poverty has been all but eliminated. This support includes a small payment, usually made to mothers, dependent on the number of children they have – a child benefit. It also includes free healthcare and education. In Latin America and in Asia, some of the most visible impacts of such social support have been to increase the number of girls who attend and remain in school (see Chapter 3 – Education) and improvements in the nutrition of girls. Mexico’s Oportunidades programme has had a greater impact on girls’ school enrolment than boys’. The Bangladesh cash-for-education programme has resulted in a 20-30 percent increase in primary school enrolment, with the children involved likely to stay in school up to two years longer than other children.⁴⁹

10. Trafficking

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 35

• States Parties shall take national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of, or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

• Considering that, in order further to achieve the purposes of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the implementation of its provisions, especially articles 1, 11, 21, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36, it would be appropriate to extend the measures that States Parties should undertake in order to guarantee the protection of the child from the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

“There was a woman who came to the market to buy charcoal. She found me and told my mother about a woman in Lomé who was looking for a girl like me to stay with her and do domestic work. She came to my mother and my mother gave me away. The woman gave my mother some money, but I don’t know how much.”

Kéméyao A., child trafficking victim, age 10, Lomé, Togo⁵⁰

Carole was 14 years old when she was trafficked to Bangui in the Central African Republic. Her mother said: “I gave my daughter to her father’s cousin so that she could have a better future. I was divorced and felt overwhelmed... She has come back to me as empty-handed as the day she left. I acknowledge that I have wronged my daughter: I never imagined her aunt would maltreat her.”⁵¹

Around 1.2 million children every year are victims of trafficking, both internationally and within national borders. Some 80 per cent of

those being trafficking globally are girls and women.⁵² A significant proportion of those being trafficked annually from Eastern to Western Europe are children from poor families.

Girls who are trafficked often end up working in slave-like conditions as sex workers. Their passports are removed, and they are unable to leave. Their families have no idea where they are or what they are being forced to do, believing that they have left to find better opportunities elsewhere.

According to the US State Department, human trafficking generates an estimated 9.5 billion dollars annually with between 600,000 and 800,000 victims each year.⁵³ It is often linked to criminal activity, and as such remains hidden and is therefore difficult to tackle.

Traffickers keep young women under control by confiscating their identity documents, threatening to report them to the authorities, using violence or threats of violence against the girl or her family, keeping her locked up and isolated, depriving her of money or saying she owes a debt to the trafficker.

Some facts:

- UNICEF estimates that 1,000 to 1,500 Guatemalan babies and children are trafficked each year for adoption by couples in North America and Europe.
- Girls as young as 13 (mainly from Asia and Eastern Europe) are trafficked as ‘mail-order brides.’ In most cases these girls and women are powerless and isolated and at great risk of violence.
- Large numbers of children are being trafficked in West and Central Africa, mainly for domestic work but also for sexual exploitation and to work in shops or on farms. Nearly 90 per cent of these trafficked domestic workers are girls.
- Children from Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana are trafficked to Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon and Gabon. Children are trafficked both in and out of Benin and Nigeria. Some children are sent as far away as the Middle East and Europe.⁵⁴
- The International Organisation for Migration estimates that 1,000 girls between 14 and

24 are taken from Mozambique to work as sex workers in South Africa each year.⁵⁵

- Other documented cases include reports of girls from Malawi being trafficked to the Netherlands and Italy to work in brothels run by Nigerian madams.
- Women and children are trafficked in Afghanistan, both internally and to Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia for forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Children may be sold into debt bondage in the brick kiln and carpet-making industries.⁵⁶

Coco's story

When she was growing up in Romania, Coco would help out at home every day while struggling to stay in school. Then, when she was nine, her father left the family. Her mother was disabled by mental illness, and the family had to support itself by begging. For a while, Coco's older sister worked to support them, but then decided that it was too difficult and left the family too. They never heard from her again. So when Coco was 18 and a friend offered to take her to Ireland for a job in a restaurant, she jumped at the chance.

"My friend's sister and a man waited at the airport," Coco says. "They imprisoned me in an apartment. My friend's sister was there all the time, and they forced me to work as a prostitute. I tried to escape many times, but I didn't succeed and I was beaten."

After two months, the police uncovered the trafficking ring and Coco was freed. Scared and isolated, Coco returned to Romania with the help of the International Organisation for Migration. She stayed for six months at one of the organisation's shelters, where she found people she could trust and who would help her move forward with her life. Coco decided to go back to school and graduated from high school in a year. She also studied computers and secretarial skills while working as a waitress at a

small restaurant. "Now I am in my first year at the university studying social work," notes Coco. "But I also work with ADPARE to assist in reintegrating other victims of trafficking."⁵⁷

Because of the concern over human trafficking, and in particular its effect on women and girls, the UN adopted a Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and girls, to supplement the UN Convention on Transactional Organised Crime. The Council of Europe has also introduced legislation aimed at reducing trafficking in the region. The challenge, as usual, has been how to enforce laws that protect the victims of trafficking. Girls who have been trafficked need both psychological and social support to come to terms with what has happened to them and to build a new life.

10. Sexual exploitation

Trafficking is often linked to forced sexual activity. Globalisation and the use of the Internet to sell sexual services and pornography, and the rise of sex tourism, have made such exploitation harder to combat. Many of the girls being trafficked for sex are very young.

Surveys indicate that 30 to 35 per cent of all sex workers in the Mekong sub-region of Southeast Asia are between 12 and 17 years of age.

Mexico's social service agency reports that there are more than 16,000 children engaged in prostitution, with tourist destinations being among those areas with the highest number.

In Lithuania, 20 to 50 percent of sex workers are believed to be minors. Children as young as age 11 are known to work as sex workers. Children from children's homes, some 10 to 12 years old, have been used to make pornographic movies.⁵⁸

Brazil's sex tourism industry exploits an estimated 500,000 girls under the age of 14. Thousands more serve as sex workers in remote mining camps under conditions of virtual slavery.

Guatemala City has also become a centre of international sex trafficking, with girls from all over Central America smuggled in and forced to work as sex workers.⁵⁹

In Sri Lanka, the government estimated that there were more than 2,000 child sex workers in the country, but private groups claimed that the number was as high as 6,000.⁶⁰

RR's story

RR is 10 years old. On November 30, 2002, she was found by a merchant in one of the busiest parts of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. She was very dirty, and dressed in trousers and a pullover and wearing Japanese-style slippers. She had about \$12 in her pockets, the results of her 'sexual activity'. It had been 48 hours since she returned to her mother's home. She was frightened to go back as she had not met the 'goal' her mother had established. She said she did not want to go home, as she was afraid her mother would beat her.

She was taken to the Children and Adolescents' courthouse, where she told the judge that she lived with her mother and seven siblings. Her brother Tito, aged 15, cleans car windscreens, her 14 year old sister had run away with a boyfriend; her brother Eduardo was 13 and a drug addict, and her other siblings were younger than her. She told how every morning she would leave her home and cross the Puente de la Amistad to the border city of Foz de Iguazu. Her pretext was that she was buying sweets to sell. She said she had an established 'cliente'.

RR went to stay with a neighbour. Her mother was taken into custody by the police. She was the first girl to benefit from the Centre for the Prevention and Integral Attention to Boys, Girls and Adolescents of Sexual Commercial Exploitation in Ciudad del Este, run by the diocese and supported by the ILO. Today she goes to school, and receives psychological attention and healthcare. She no longer lives with her mother.⁶¹

Keerthi's story⁶²

Keerthi, aged 13, lived in a poor family in rural Andhra Pradesh, India. Her mother and stepfather showed her little affection. Perhaps to compensate for the neglect, she started to fantasise about a glamorous life in the city, and she became obsessed with cosmetics.

Vijaya, a 'friend', arranged for her to meet a man named Pandu, for whom she was acting as an intermediary. Pandu's offer of a job as a domestic worker in the city was enough to persuade Keerthi to go with him. But when she was deposited in a brothel in Mumbai, she realised how cruelly she had been tricked.

After 10 days of being forced to work as a sex worker, Keerthi managed to run away. She boarded a train without a ticket and almost reached home before being discovered by a ticket inspector. A community worker found her crying, and calling out for help in a rural railway station. She took her to a transit home for rescued children in a nearby provincial town.

Meanwhile, a local organisation working in partnership with Plan in Keerthi's home district contacted her family and the head of her village. Negotiations were held about the type of help and support the child would need. Keerthi was also consulted. She suffered from severe trauma and she needed professional help from a child psychologist.

Eventually she was able to return to her family. As with other returned children, the local organisation will follow her progress for at least six months.⁶³

11. What still needs to be done?

Women's work has always been of central productive importance and in many parts of the world is becoming of increasing economic relevance. This must not go hand in hand with

exploitation, particularly of young women and girls, who are the most vulnerable.

In many cases the work that girls and young women are forced into is both illegal and entirely unacceptable. Where it is not, many governments have signed up to international legislation which aims to protect children who have to work. International laws do not prohibit child labour *per se*, recognising that many children have to work in order to survive and learning how to work can help young people to enter the labour market when they are adults. Girls and young women have a right not to have to work at a young age or for long hours so that they are prevented from going to school. There is also international legislation on women and equal pay. One of the key issues is enforcement of legislation, for example, the enforcement of minimum age legislation in the absence of a birth certificate.

Attitudes towards girls' and young women's work are crucial. Social policies are needed to tackle discrimination in the workplace. Parents need to be convinced that it is more important for their daughters to go to school than to work. And the kind of discrimination that means an employer sees women's work as of less value than men's should be outlawed.

So how can girls and young women be protected from exploitation and discrimination?

- As we have seen in this report (Chapter 3 – *Education*), education can be the key to a girl's future, to that of her children and family as a whole. Programmes that enable working girls to continue to attend out of school classes are vital for them to fulfil their potential.
- Targeted benefits, such as child benefit, stipends and pensions can act as a protective measure against girls being 'pushed' into exploitative labour for the poorest and most vulnerable families.
- Reducing unpaid household work would free up girls' time for education. There are clear advantages to girls of providing basic water access, fuel efficient stoves and other home related technology,

as well as, in some parts of the world, diversification of agricultural production which is not gender-specific.

- Legislation against child domestic labour is understandably difficult to enforce as this is largely a hidden problem. The key is finding the balance between work and education, and enforcing the law when girls have been sexually or economically exploited or abused.
- Gender sensitive national programmes of action against trafficking are crucial to successfully tackling trafficking. Such a programme could include updating and enforcing legislation, providing appropriate protection, support and rehabilitation services for girls and mobilising relevant private sector industries, such as the travel industry.

12. Girls' voices

“One of the most critical problems here in the Philippines is child labour. It is a common problem, yet remains unsolved mainly due to the lack of knowledge about Child's Rights... We should get involved and give these children attention. We could start by educating friends and families on the rights of a child and that child labour is in violation of these rights. We could seek the assistance of concerned community officials to enforce laws that protect children against any kind of abuse or violence, but most of all we could show these children that we care. We should let these children know that every child has great value and that their role is not just to work for their families but to be what they dream to become.”

Analou, 16, Philippines

“Some relatives come from the cities to the village and take these girls to towns promising to help them learn a trade but end up introducing them into prostitution, forced labour and other illegal activities. This usually happens to girls who come from a poor family background... Female relatives

who are accomplices promised their parents that they will sponsor them in school or a trade, only to end up introducing the child into prostitution. Since the girls might not have the transport or means to return to the village they have no choice than to give in.”

Violet aged 15 and **Martha** aged 16, Cameroon⁶⁴

“As a domestic worker, you have no control over your life. No one respects you. You have no rights. This is the lowest kind of work.”

Hasana, child domestic worker who began employment at age 12, Indonesia.⁶⁵

“I am a girl and I will call myself a feminist because I truly believe that woman should be in the same level playing field as man. I believe in the 'role' thing – how men and women are different and equal. If our skills match up or exceed that of man, then our wages should reflect that.”

Zhu, 17, China⁶⁶