

KEY
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KILM 1. Labour force participation rate

Introduction

The labour force participation rate is a measure of the extent of an economy's working-age population that is economically active; it provides an indication of the relative size of the supply of labour available for the production of goods and services. The breakdown of the labour force by sex and age group gives a profile of the distribution of the economically active population within a country.

The labour force participation rate is calculated by expressing the number of persons in the labour force as a percentage of the working-age population. The labour force is the sum of the number of persons employed and the number unemployed. The working-age population is the population above a certain age, prescribed for the measurement of economic characteristics. The information for this indicator is available in table 1 for 187 economies, and is presented for each economy by sex and the following standardized age groups - 15 years old and over, 15 to 64, 15 to 24, 25 to 54, 55 to 64, and 65 and over (except where different age detail applies, in a given economy).

Use of the indicator

The indicator for labour force participation rates plays a central role in studying the factors that determine the size and composition of an economy's human resources and in making projections of the future supply of labour. The information is also used to formulate employment policies, to determine training needs and to calculate the expected working lives of the male and female populations and the rates of accession to, and retirement from, economic activity - crucial information for the financial planning of social security systems.

The indicator is also used for understanding the labour market behaviour of different categories of the population. According to one theory, the level and pattern of labour force participation depend on employment opportunities and the demand for income, which may differ from one category of persons to another. For exam-

ple, studies have shown that the labour force participation rates of women vary systematically, at any given age, with their marital status and level of education. There are also important differences between the participation rates of the urban and rural populations, and among different socio-economic categories.

Malnutrition, disability and chronic sickness can affect the capacity to work and are therefore also considered as major determinants of labour force participation, particularly in low-income environments. Another aspect closely studied by demographers is the relationship between fertility and female labour force participation. The relationship is used to predict the future evolution of fertility rates, given the current trend of female participation in economic activity.

Comparing the overall labour force participation rates of countries at different stages of development reveals a particular U-shaped relationship. In less-developed economies, economic growth is associated with expanding educational facilities, a shift from labour-intensive agricultural activities to urban economic activities, and a rise in earning opportunities, particularly of the prime-age (25 to 54 years) male family head in relation to those of other members of the family. These factors together tend to lower the overall labour force participation rate for both men and women, although the effect is weaker for the latter and shows a wider range of variation.

At higher levels of development, the trend tends to become reversed; labour force participation rates increase with greater employment opportunities for all and higher demand for income by both men and women. In many industrialized economies, this pattern continues to be observed for women, but not so for men (except for young males), an indication that the U-shaped relationship is somewhat distorted at the highest level of development.¹

It is also instructive to look at the labour force participation rates for males and females by age

1. G. Standing: *Labour force participation and development* (Geneva, ILO, 1978).

group. Labour force activity among the younger age group (15 to 24 years) reflects the availability of educational facilities, while labour force activity of older workers (55 to 64 years or 65 years and over) gives an indication of the attitude toward retirement and the existence of social safety nets for the retired.

For females, labour force participation is generally lower than for males in each age category. At prime age, the female rates are not only lower than the corresponding male values, but often exhibit a somewhat different pattern. During this period of their life cycle, women tend to retreat from the labour force to give birth to and raise children, returning - but at a lower rate - to economically active life when the children are old enough. In developed economies, female participation rates are, however, increasingly becoming similar in profile to those of men and are markedly approaching male levels as well.



Box 1a. Resolution concerning statistics of the economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment, adopted by the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, October 1982 [relevant paragraphs]

Concepts and definitions

The labour force (the currently active population)

8. The labour force or "currently active population" comprises all persons who fulfil the requirements for inclusion among the employed or the unemployed as defined in paragraphs 9 and 10 below.

Employment

9. (1) The "employed" comprise all persons above a specified age who during a specified brief period, either one week or one day, were in the following categories:

(a) "paid employment":

(a1) "at work": persons who during the reference period performed some work for wage or salary, in cash or in kind;

(a2) "with a job but not at work": persons who, having already worked in their present job, were temporarily not at work during the reference period and had a formal attachment to their job. This formal job attachment should be determined in the light of national circumstances, according to one or more of the following criteria: (i) the continued receipt of wage or salary; (ii) an assurance of return to work following the end of the contingency, or an agreement as to the date of return; (iii) the elapsed duration of absence from the job which, wherever relevant, may be that duration for which workers can receive compensation benefits without obligations to accept other jobs;

(b) "self-employment":

(b1) "at work": persons who during the reference period performed some work for profit or family gain, in cash or in kind;

(b2) "with an enterprise but not at work": persons with an enterprise, which may be a business enterprise, a farm or a service undertaking, who were temporarily not at work during the reference period for any specific reason.

(2) For operational purposes, the notion of "some work" may be interpreted as work for at least one hour.

(3) Persons temporarily not at work because of illness or injury, holiday or vacation, strike or lock-out, educational or training leave, maternity or parental leave, reduction in economic activity, temporary disorganization or suspension of work due to such reasons as bad weather, mechanical or electrical breakdown, or shortage of raw materials or fuels, or other temporary absence with or without leave should be considered as in paid employment provided they had a formal job attachment.

(4) Employers, own account workers and members of producers' cooperatives should become considered as in self-employment and classified as "at work" or "not at work", as the case may be.

(5) Unpaid family workers at work should be considered as in self-employment irrespective of the number of hours worked during the reference period. Countries which prefer for special reasons to set a minimum time criterion for the inclusion of unpaid family workers among the employed should identify and separately classify those who worked less than the prescribed time.

(6) Persons engaged in the production of economic goods and services for own and household consumption should be considered as in self-employment if such production comprises an important contribution to the total consumption of the household.

(7) Apprentices who received pay in cash or in kind should be considered in paid employment and classified as "at work" or "not at work" on the same basis as other persons in paid employment.

(8) Students, homemakers and others mainly engaged in non-economic activities during the reference period, who at the same time were in paid employment or self-employment as defined in subparagraph (1) above, should be considered as employed on the same basis as other categories of employed persons and be identified separately, where possible.

(9) Members of the armed forces should be included among persons in paid employment. The armed forces should include both the regular and the temporary members as specified in the most recent revision of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO).

(continued)

Box 1a (continued)

Unemployment

10. (1) The "unemployed" comprise all persons above a specified age who during the reference period were:

- (a) "without work", i.e. were not in paid employment or self-employment as defined in paragraph 9;
- (b) "currently available for work", i.e. were available for paid employment or self-employment during the reference period; and
- (c) "seeking work", i.e. had taken specific steps in a specified recent period to seek paid employment or self-employment. The specific steps may include registration at a public or private employment exchange; application to employers; checking at worksites, farms, factory gates, market or other assembly places; placing or answering newspaper advertisements; seeking assistance of friends or relatives; looking for land, building, machinery or equipment to establish own enterprise; arranging for financial resources; applying for permits and licences, etc.

(2) In situations where the conventional means of seeking work are of limited relevance, where the labour market is largely unorganized or of limited scope, where labour absorption is, at the time, inadequate or where the labour force is largely self-employed, the standard definition of unemployment given in subparagraph (1) above may be applied by relaxing the criterion of seeking work.

(3) In the application of the criterion of current availability for work, especially in situations covered by subparagraph (2) above, appropriate tests should be developed to suit national circumstances. Such tests may be based on notions such as present desire for work and previous work experience, willingness to take up work for wage or salary on locally prevailing terms, or readiness to undertake self-employment activity given the necessary resources and facilities.

(4) Notwithstanding the criterion of seeking work embodied in the standard definition of unemployment, persons without work and currently available for work who had made arrangements to take up paid employment or undertake self-employment activity at a date subsequent to the reference period should be considered as unemployed.

(5) Persons temporarily absent from their jobs with no formal job attachment who were currently available for work and seeking work should be regarded as unemployed in accordance with the standard definition of unemployment. Countries may, however, depending on national circumstances and policies, prefer to relax the seeking work criterion in the case of persons temporarily laid off. In such cases, persons temporarily laid off who were not seeking work but classified as unemployed should be identified as a separate subcategory.

(6) Students, homemakers and others mainly engaged in non-economic activities during the reference period who satisfy the criteria laid down in subparagraphs (1) and (2) above should be regarded as unemployed on the same basis as other categories of unemployed persons and be identified separately, where possible.

KILM 3. Status in employment

Introduction

Indicators of status in employment distinguish between three important and useful categories of the total employed. These are: (a) wage and salaried workers, or employees; (b) self-employed workers; and (c) contributing family workers (also termed unpaid family workers). These three groups of workers are presented as percentages of the total employed for both sexes and for male and female separately.¹ The sub-categories of the self-employed group - self-employed workers with employees (i.e. employers) and self-employed workers without employees (i.e. own-account workers) - are not available for all economies but are presented wherever possible.

The indicator on status in employment is available for most developed (industrialized) economies and transition economies, as well as for many Eastern Asian, Latin American and Caribbean economies. Unfortunately, there are only a few sub-Saharan African economies for which this indicator is available and, where coverage does exist, it is typically available for less than four years. Currently, information is also unavailable for large developing economies such as China and India. As a whole, information for the indicator is included in table 3, at least to some extent, for 112 economies.

Use of the indicator

As its title suggests, this indicator provides information on the distribution of the workforce by status in employment and can be used to answer questions such as: What proportion of employed persons in an economy (a) work for wages or salaries; (b) run their own enterprises, with or without hired labour; or (c) work without pay within the family unit? According to the

International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE), the basic criteria used to define the status groups are the types of economic risk, an element of which is the strength of institutional attachment between the person and the job, and the type of authority over establishments and other workers which the job-holders have or will have as an explicit or implicit result of the employment contract.²

Breaking down employment information by status in employment is useful for understanding the development of both labour markets and economies: it provides a statistical basis for describing workers' behaviour and conditions of work, and for defining an individual's socio-economic group.³ A high proportion of wage and salaried workers in an economy can signify advanced economic development. If the proportion of own-account workers (self-employed without hired employees) is sizeable, it may be an indication of low job growth in the formal economy and a high rate of job creation in the informal sector. Where a large share of workers are unpaid family workers, there is likely to be poor development, little job growth, widespread poverty and often a large rural economy.

The indicator is strongly linked to the employment-by-sector indicator (KILM 4). With economic growth, one would expect to see a shift in employment from the agricultural to the industry and services sectors, which, in turn, would be reflected in an increase in the number of wage and salaried workers. Also, a shrinking share of employment in agriculture would probably be reflected in a lower share of unpaid family workers, who are often widespread in the rural sector in developing economies. Economies which show a trend of falling proportions in either the number of own-account workers or the number of unpaid family workers, and an accompanying rise in wage employees, are probably moving from a lower-income economy with

1. The sum of the three groups of workers - wage and salaried, self-employed and contributing family workers will not always add up to exactly 100 per cent. The main reason is that some economies were unable to classify all workers by the three status categories, so that a fourth category, "workers not classifiable by status", must be included. This fourth category is not presented in table 3. Another fairly common reason stems from rounding, in which percentages sum just below or just above 100.

2. Resolution concerning the international classification of status in employment, adopted by the 15th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, 1993; website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/class/icse.htm>

3. United Nations: *Handbook for producing national statistical reports on women and men*, Social Statistics and Indicators, Series K, No. 14 (New York, 1997), p. 217.

a large informal and/or rural sector to a higher-income economy with high job growth. The Republic of Korea is one such example, where intensive shifts in shares of status in employment accompany economic growth.

Shifts in proportions of status in employment are generally not as sharp or as clear as shifts in sectoral employment; this may be due to the different kinds of employment by status within each sector of the economy. An economy with a large informal sector, in both the industry and services sectors, may tend to have large proportions of both self-employment and unpaid family work. It may be more relevant to view status in employment within the various sectors in order to determine whether there has been a change in their relative shares. Unfortunately, such information is not currently available in this issue of KILM, but could possibly form the basis for future work.

KILM 4. Employment by sector

Introduction

The indicator for employment by sector breaks down employment into three broad groupings of economic activity: agriculture, industry and services. Table 4a presents data for 200 economies for the three sectors as a percentage of total employment. All regional groupings are covered, although only for one or two years in the majority of economies in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. Because users may be interested in analysing trends in employment in greater detail, this edition of KILM has incorporated two new tables showing breakdowns of employment by sector as defined by the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities, Revisions 2 (1968) and 3 (1990). Table 4b presents employment by ISIC 3 tabulation category as a percentage of total employment for a total of 55 economies, while table 4c presents employment by ISIC 2 major division for 76 economies. Because of the relatively recent date of ISIC 3, many economies have not yet converted their classification systems accordingly; hence, the greater coverage for the table relating to ISIC 2. Percentage breakdowns are shown by sex for virtually all economies covered.

Use of the indicator

Sectoral information is particularly useful in identifying broad shifts in employment and stages of development. In the textbook case of economic development, labour flows from agriculture and other labour-intensive primary activities to industry and the services sector; in the process, workers migrate from rural to urban areas. At a later stage in the development cycle, the industrial sector begins to lose ground in its share of total employment as the services sector enters a period of rapid expansion.

Classification into such broad groupings may obscure fundamental shifts within industrial patterns. An analysis of tables 4b and 4c, however, allows for identification of individual industries and services where employment growth or stagnation is occurring. One can see, for example, how employment in the hotel and restaurant sector (ISIC 3, tabulation category H) has evolved in

economies such as Switzerland or in the Caribbean, where tourism provides a major portion of the national product. Or one may wish to see which sectors in the transition economies are experiencing recovery and employment expansion since the changeover to market economies in the early 1990s.

It is also interesting to study sectoral employment flows in connection with productivity trends (see KILM 18) in order to separate within-sector productivity growth (i.e. resulting perhaps from changes in capital or technology) from the productivity growth resulting from shifts of workers from lower- to higher-productivity sectors.

Finally, the breakdown of the indicator by sex allows for the analysis of gender segregation of employment by specific sector. Are men and women equally distributed in certain sectors, or is there a concentration of females among the services sector where wage rates are on average below those in the industrial sector? Women may be drawn into lower-paying service activities because they are faced with barriers raised by employers or trade unions, or due to cultural attitudes, that prevent them from entering industrial employment. Women may also have less access to the education and training required for industrial jobs. In addition, because work in the services sector often reflects the type of work women traditionally do in the home, such as childcare, nursing and cleaning, women are seen as particularly well suited for this type of work. In situations where childcare is not available, women may choose to work in specific types of services that offer greater flexibility in allowing them to combine family responsibilities with employment.

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Controversies in labour statistics

*Ageing societies: Problems and
prospects for older workers*

Privatization, employment and social protection

*Public authorities and the other social partners:
Changing relationships*

*Retraining and returning to work:
An issue that concerns us all*

Select bibliography

Statistical annex

International Labour Office Geneva

Chapter 2

Ageing societies: Problems and prospects for older workers

Industrial societies are ageing rapidly. By the turn of the century more than a quarter of the population will be over 60 years of age in many industrialized countries. The economic and social consequences of this development give rise to much speculation. Some social scientists believe that the ageing of the population is generally associated with decreasing economic potential due to growing age-dependency which entails increased government expenditures for social security, higher tax rates for the economically active and reduced labour productivity. They believe that it could even lead to intergenerational conflict if measures are not taken in time to reduce the burden of rising old-age dependency on a decreasing proportion of economically active younger people. The declining birth rates in some countries may also lead to greater migratory movements or to increasing relocation of industries to countries with an abundant younger labour force.

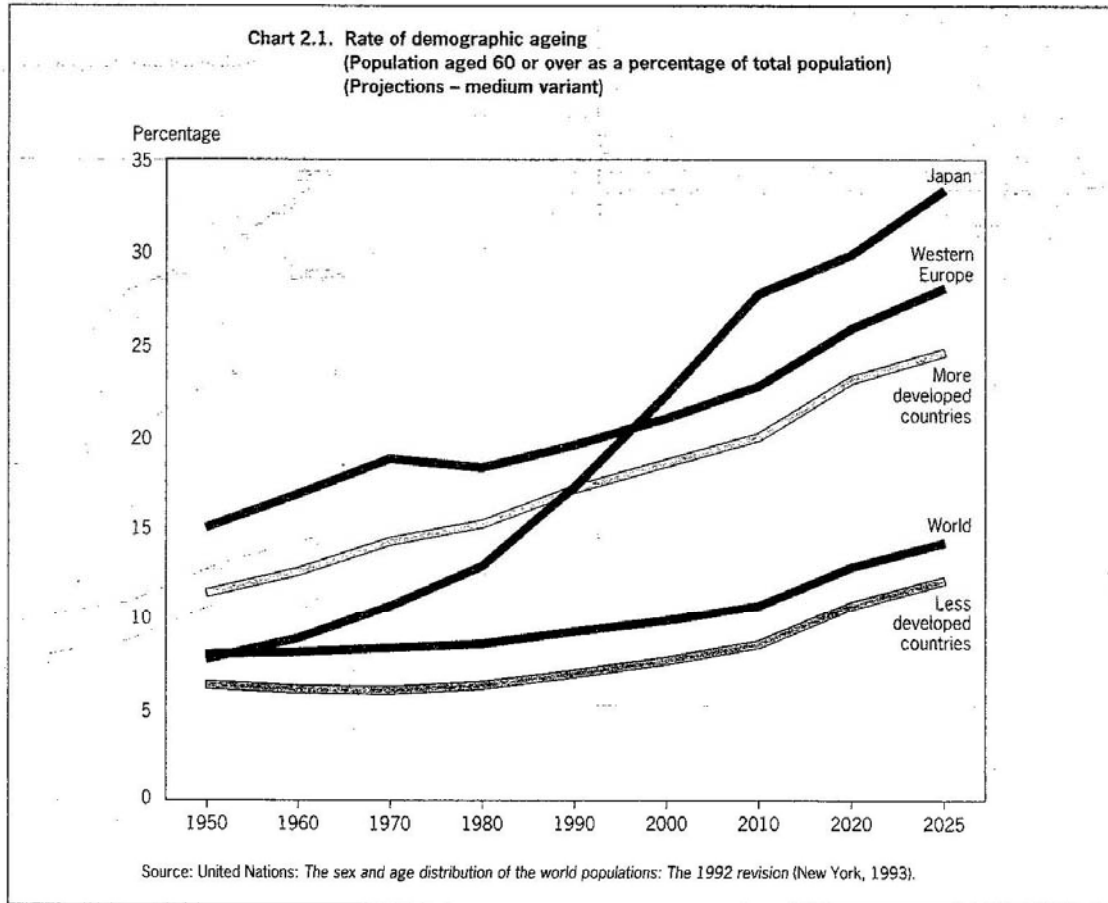
Others, by contrast, believe that societies could benefit from the accumulated experience and skill of older workers to boost productivity, provided economies adapt to a maturer workforce. They are confident that the financial burden of old-age dependency could be reduced through increased savings and other appropriate and timely measures.

This chapter will discuss some of the issues of population ageing that are already affecting industrialized countries. In particular, it will focus on the present trend whereby older workers are often pushed or pulled out of the active labour force prematurely due to labour market constraints. The decline in participation rates of older workers runs counter to demographic trends and aggravates the problem of old-age dependency and rising social expenditures. It also gives rise to many questions as to why older workers are so often the first victims of enterprise restructuring or government mea-

asures to reduce labour supply. Is it because they cost more or are less productive or is it because they welcome opportunities to retire early? What is the cost to society of this rapid increase in the number of older inactive people? Can the present trend of early exit be sustained in the long run? If not, what can be done to reverse the trend? To what degree is early exit due to ageing workers not being able to cope with the demands of the job or to declining health? Is working capacity affected by age and if so how can it be maintained or enhanced? How are employers adapting to a maturer workforce? What do our senior citizens want and what will be their role in society in the future? These are but some of the questions that will be discussed in this chapter.

Starting with the trends of population ageing in the world as a whole and labour force participation rates in industrialized countries, we will go on to discuss some of the issues relating to the increasing marginalization of older workers. This will be followed by a presentation of the different points of view concerning the consequences of early exit and the possibilities for reversing the trend. The next part will deal with a new approach to the problem based on the relationship between ageing and working capacity and the response of employers with regard to the need to make investments in older workers. Finally, we highlight some emerging signs of future developments in an ageing society.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide solutions, defend a position or even to provide answers to all the questions raised, but rather to draw attention to some of the issues and problems that ageing societies are already having to face and those that they are likely to face in the years to come. It is hoped that the different approaches and points of view presented in this chapter will stimulate further debate and reflection on how societies can adjust to



a maturer workforce and transform the burden of old-age dependency into benefits for the economy and society as a whole.

Trends

Population ageing: A global phenomenon

The world's population as a whole is ageing faster than it is growing. Whereas in 1950 the 200 million persons aged 60 or over represented only 8 per cent of the total population, evenly distributed between developing and industrialized countries, by the year

2025 their numbers are projected to have increased sixfold to reach 1.2 billion, representing about 14 per cent of the total population, of which 72 per cent will be in developing countries. The most rapidly ageing country, Japan, will take only 25 years to double its elderly population (see chart 2.1).

This demographic shift is attributed mainly to the general decline in fertility rates and to improved health, which has lengthened life expectancy in all parts of the world. The crude birth rate for the total world population dropped from 38 to 27 births per 1,000 population between 1950 and 1990, with rates ranging from an average of 31 among less developed regions to 15 in more developed regions. In

several European countries birth rates have fallen below replacement levels and unless there is a reversal in fertility trends, some demographers predict that by the middle of the next century there will be one-third fewer Germans and Danes than in 1980. The populations of Italy, Belgium and Switzerland would be 15-20 per cent smaller than they are today.

Life expectancy at birth has improved from 46 to 63 years (61 for men and 65 for women) as a world average during the same period. The gap between less developed and more developed regions narrowed from 25 years (41 and 66 years respectively) in 1950 to 13 years (61 and 74 years respectively) in 1990. Japan has the longest life expectancy, with 82.1 years for women and 76.4 years for men (1990), followed closely by several Western European countries. However, in recent years life expectancy at older ages has been increasing even more rapidly than life expectancy at birth in countries where infant mortality rates are low. At the age of 65 the average life expectancy is 20 years for women and 16.2 years for men in Japan (1990) and it is close to this in other industrialized countries.

On the other hand, not all of the longer life-span gained can be expected to be spent free of disabilities, mental disorders and ill health. Results of research conducted since the early 1970s generally suggest that healthy life expectancy has not been increasing at the same rate as life expectancy at birth or at older ages. This will have serious implications for elder care and health and medical expenses. Available data also suggest that women can expect to spend more years in a disabled state than men, although the difference seems to diminish with age.

The rate of demographic ageing is very different according to countries. Many developing countries still have a relatively young population; in others, however, "middle-ageing" is already pronounced and the demographic shift will be particularly pronounced early next century. In industrialized countries populations are already relatively old. In Sweden, the country with the largest proportion of elderly, close to one-quarter of the population is already over 60 years of age.

Age pyramids are useful tools to help visualize the different stages of population ageing and predict the future (see chart 2.2). The age pyramid of Mexico is typical of a developing country with a young population, whereas Japan's is an example of a rapidly ageing population. The age pyramids of France illustrate well the problem many industrialized countries will have to face when the "baby

boom" generation, born after the Second World War, reaches retirement age in 10 to 15 years' time.

Old-age dependency

Population ageing is a sign of prosperity and of great social achievement. But it also gives rise to concern. A major concern is the increasing old-age dependency on the economically active population. The dependency ratio measured by comparing the relative sizes of population age groups - those usually assumed to be economically active compared with those who are not - indicates a clear shift in dependency. In the less developed regions there is a slow but steady decrease in the under-15 age group and a gradual increase in the over-65 age group. In the more developed regions as a whole old-age dependency is overtaking young-age dependency.

These ratios are but rough estimates of dependency because they do not take into account non-demographic factors, such as variations in labour force participation rates, unemployment rates and levels of social benefits. Labour force participation rates of the different age groups vary greatly according to gender and national circumstances. An ILO cross-national analysis of labour force participation rates for persons aged 55 and older, using 1980 labour statistics of 151 countries, showed that the participation rates are much higher in developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America than in developed countries of Europe and North America. For men aged 65 and over the participation rates ranged from 4 per cent in Hungary to 91 per cent in Mozambique. The participation rates for women were lower in all countries, although much of this could result from systematic under-reporting of female economic activities.

The labour force participation rates of older people are linked to the level of economic development. The decline in participation rates at older ages is associated with higher national per capita income, the ageing of the population generally, increased urbanization, and the institution of social security systems. Increased wealth is partly exhibited by longer periods of education, shorter working lives and longer periods of retirement. On the other hand, the informal working conditions associated with the small-farm agriculture and self-employment predominant in most developing countries enable many older people to continue working.

A more accurate picture of economic dependency ratios may be obtained by applying age- and

sex-specific activity rates to current and projected population statistics. Such calculations were made by the United Nations using ILO activity rates for 1975 and projections up to the year 2025. Among the inactive population those under 40 were classified as young dependants and those over 40 as old dependants. It was estimated that if the low level of economic activity of older persons persists, by 2025 there may be only 2.4 active persons for each ageing dependant in East Asia, and as few as 1.5 active persons for each ageing dependant in Western Europe. (Current dependency ratios can be found in the statistical annex to this publication.)

Labour force participation rates of older workers in industrialized countries

Labour markets in industrialized countries are undergoing important structural changes. Not only has the growth of the working-age population begun to decelerate as a result of reductions in the size of young cohorts now reaching working age, but also working life has become shorter. This has been accentuated by a period of high unemployment since the mid-1970s. During this period young people have been encouraged to stay in education longer and older workers have been given incentives to retire early, thus reducing the labour supply at both ends.

The legal age of entitlement to an old-age pension is 65 in most industrialized countries, except for Denmark, Iceland and Norway, where it is 67, Ireland, where it is 66, and France, Japan and New Zealand, where it is 60. In some cases the age of entitlement varies according to the number of years of contributions that have been made to the pension fund. Some countries still have a lower retirement age of up to five years for women, but moves are being made to equalize pension rights (e.g. in Australia, Austria, Greece, Portugal and the United Kingdom). While mandatory retirement is often a condition in employment contracts, pension systems as such usually permit workers to continue in employment under certain conditions for an additional number of years or for as long as they wish.

On the other hand, most countries permit early retirement on an actuarially reduced pension up to five years before the "normal" retirement age is reached. As unemployment became more acute, a variety of schemes were introduced in several countries to encourage older workers to retire earlier, of-

fering compensation for loss of earnings, and to bridge the gap until a full pension could be claimed. Older workers who had become unemployed and who had reached a specified age were no longer required to register as looking for work and were offered early retirement benefits. Furthermore, the rules applying to disability pensions were sometimes relaxed in order to cover also those older workers who had difficulty in competing in the labour market.

These measures accentuated the general trend of declining labour force participation rates of older workers and resulted in a substantial lowering of the average retirement age. In several countries (e.g. Finland, Germany, Netherlands) it dropped to six years below the statutory pensionable age.

The decline in labour force participation rates has been particularly marked among older men. Female participation rates have been increasing generally, even among older women, which partially offset the decline in male participation rates. In some countries the decline in activity rates for men aged 60-64 has been particularly sharp since 1970 (70.8 per cent in the Netherlands, 69.3 per cent in Austria, 66.9 per cent in France, 55.6 per cent in Finland, 51.6 per cent in New Zealand and between 30 and 40 per cent in several other countries). However, in Japan and Sweden the level has remained relatively high throughout the period. In some countries there are signs that the downward trend may have been halted in recent years. Chart 2.3 illustrates the variations in labour force participation rates from 1960 to 1990 for older male and female workers for selected countries (Austria, France, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden and the United States).

The latest labour force participation rates for older men and women in different age groups for 18 industrialized countries are shown in table 2.1. As can be seen, the participation rates for men aged 55-59 vary greatly, from 94.1 per cent in Japan - followed by several other countries with rates of over 80 per cent - to 59.2 per cent in the Netherlands. Several countries have participation rates of between 60 and 70 per cent for this age group, which, compared with prime age participation rates of over 90 per cent, already represent a sharp decline.

Sweden has the highest overall participation rate because 77.2 of all Swedish women in that age group are also active. The activity rates for women are also high in other Nordic countries, over 60 per cent, but are only around 20 per cent in Austria, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain.

CHILD LABOUR

ILO, World Labour Report-1992

The elimination of child labour

The exploitation of child labour is one of the most disturbing aspects of the international labour scene. No one knows for sure how many children are working. Statistics are difficult to come by; most of these children are unpaid family workers, or are in the informal sector, or are working illegally – invisible to the collectors of labour force statistics. But the total number is certainly in the hundreds of millions. And although the condition of child workers has worsened dramatically in recent years, and their number has certainly increased in many countries, few have yet developed comprehensive plans to deal with this serious and difficult problem.

Asia has some of the highest numbers of child labourers – accounting for up to 11 per cent of the total labour force in some Asian countries. India probably has the largest number – an estimated 44 million. And in Indonesia, for example, there are 2.7 million working children aged between ten and 14.

African countries are reported to have up to 20 per cent of their children working, making up to 17 per cent of the total workforce. In Nigeria, for example, an estimated 12 million children participate in various categories of work.

Latin America is the most urbanised region of the developing world, so children here are more likely to be working in cities. Up to 26 per cent of children in some countries may well be working. Brazil has the greatest number of working children – seven million, according to a government household survey which indicates that around 18 per cent of Brazilian children between ten and 14 are economically active. And a similar proportion of Mexican children between 12 and 14 years old are also working.

Child labour may be concentrated in developing countries, but it is certainly not confined to them. Italy has some of the highest numbers in Western Europe. There have been reports of tens of thousands in the Naples region alone, with the leather industry a particular cause for concern. Spain, too, has signifi-

1.2 From work to exploitation: Some characteristics of child labour	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Working too young</i> – children in developing countries often start factory work at the age of six or seven. • <i>Working long hours</i> – in some cases 12 to 16 hours a day. • <i>Working under strain</i> – physical, social or psychological; in mines, for example, or sweatshops. • <i>Working on the streets</i> – in unhealthy and dangerous conditions. • <i>For very little pay</i> – as little as \$3 for a 60-hour week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With little stimulation</i> – dull repetitive tasks, which stunt the child's social and psychological development. • <i>Taking too much responsibility</i> – children often have charge of siblings only a year or two younger than themselves. • <i>Subject to intimidation</i> – which inhibits self-confidence and self-esteem, as with slave labour and sexual exploitation.

cant numbers – some sources suggest more than 100,000 – with most of the children working in agriculture, generally on family farms. In the United Kingdom a survey in 1985 discovered 40 per cent of the children questioned were working, the majority doing so illegally, either in terms of the hours they worked or the jobs they were doing.

In the United States the majority of child workers are employed in agriculture and a high proportion of these are from immigrant families. The United Farmworkers Union reported in 1985 that hundreds of thousands of children work on farms and plantations throughout the country. And many children are also employed in everything from fast-food stores to garment factories. A 1990 study by the General Accounting Office showed a 250 per cent increase in child labour law violations from 1983 to 1990. And a “sting” operation carried out by the United States Department of Labor during three days in 1990 found more than 11,000 children working illegally.

Child work and child labour

Most children work. After the age of six or seven they may help around the home, running errands, or spending time helping their parents on the family farm. This can make a healthy contribution to their development; in rural areas in particular such work can prepare children for the tasks of adulthood and help pass traditionally acquired skills from one generation to the next. Children learn to take responsibility and pride in their own activities. Even in the wealthiest countries, children are encouraged to work for a few hours a week.

“Child labour” implies something different – that young people are being exploited, or overworked, or deprived of their rights to health or education or just to childhood. Some of the characteristics which might indicate exploitation are indicated in box 1.2.

More children are at risk of such exploitation nowadays because more families (particularly those in cities) are now working for wages – so their children too are more likely to be working outside the home, away from parental protection.

Why children work

Most children work because their families are poor. And if family survival is at stake everyone has to lend a hand. In the developing countries rural working children will often help parents maximise the meagre output from their family farms. But they can also work alongside their parents in commercial agriculture. In Zimbabwe, for example, workers on tobacco and cotton plantations are paid according to each task they complete – and children from the age of seven can be drawn in to help parents complete the task more quickly.

In urban areas children are more likely to work for wages outside the home – generally having been sent there by their parents. A study for the ILO of child workers in leather tanneries in Cairo asked parents why the children were at work rather than school (the average age of the children was 12 years). Over 90 per cent of the parents replied that the family needed the children's income.

Interestingly though, when the children were questioned, only 50 per cent of them gave “the family needs the money” as the first reason. The children tended to play down the fact that they had been obliged to work. Under these circumstances, if a child has to work she or he often thinks it is their choice.

Those children with the least choice about working are those trapped in debt bondage. This is the most shocking way in which poverty can drive children into hard labour. According to a report noted by the ILO's Committee of Experts, there are several million child bonded labourers in South Asia. Such servitude

can arise in a number of ways. Often it is the result of the parents being given a loan to meet some urgent need. The debtor has then to repay this by working. In practice the debt does not decrease; it climbs ever upwards—a combination of usurious interest rates and outright fraud. The whole family becomes permanently enslaved and the moneylender even claims repayment from succeeding generations.

Children can also be enslaved on their own. Parents may send them to work in the house of a landlord or moneylender. These children may stay for many years, not knowing how long they must work, or even the size of the debt they are paying off.

Such practices may be illegal but they remain widespread in certain countries—sustained by ignorance, fear and intimidation. An estimated one million children in India work in bonded labour in brick kilns, stone quarrying and construction and thousands more in carpet-weaving. Similar practices are found in Pakistan—though thousands of people here have recently been released from bonded labour in the brick kiln industry by a court order, and the Government has pledged to release them all.

Work and school

Poverty may be the most significant cause of child labour, but it is not the only one. Many children work because there is little else to do: schools are unavailable, inadequate or too expensive. Indeed, one way to estimate the number of working children is to start from school enrolment ratios. Most poor children in developing countries, when not at school, can be presumed to be working. And with primary school enrolment rates as low as 27 per cent in Burkina Faso and Niger, for example, the chances are that many children are spending their days herding cattle or goats.

But even if all children out of school are counted as workers this would underestimate their numbers. Many working children, probably the majority of those in the cities, *also* go to school. In Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, for example, 77 per cent of working street children attend school. As one commentator put it: "One cannot help but admire the initiative demonstrated by working children who manage to keep up in their studies. Trying to keep up the demands of both work and study must place them under considerable stress. The wonder is not that some drop out, but that so many persist."

The relationship between school and work can be complex. Children may not necessarily be kept away from school by the need to work. In Lima, for example, only a quarter of working children not attending school said that their work prevented them. Another 23 per cent said they just didn't like school, 18 per cent said they lacked the necessary funds, and 12 per cent said they did not have the legal documents.

Then again, many children actually work *in order* to go to school. In Kenya, for example, the cost of uniforms, books, stationery and other items can be 2,000 Kenyan shillings (US\$70) per year. And they may need to work in the streets to earn the necessary money. In Cochabamba, Bolivia, it is the children *not* working who have the lowest levels of educational achievement.

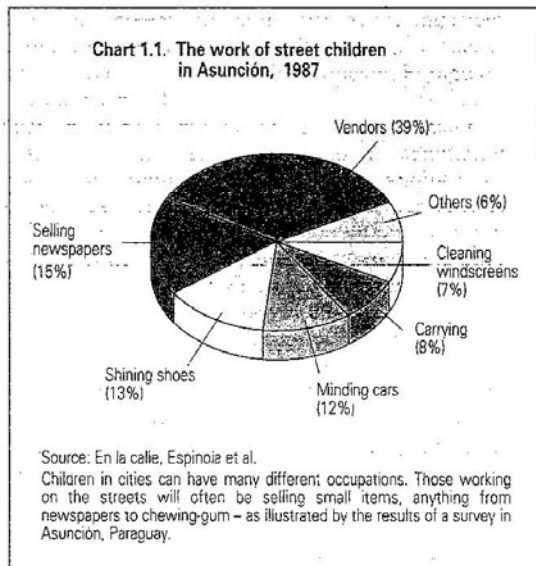
The work children do

Most child work is agricultural. Children in developing countries (and in some developed ones too) join in the activities of the family farm from a very early age. Starting with light tasks, such as looking after animals, collecting firewood and fodder and drawing water, they will later learn to sow and reap. In commercial agriculture, on plantations for example, they often work as part of the family team: weeding, spreading fertiliser, tending plants; though they often share in the heavier tasks.

Nowadays rural peasant families also provide labour for other activities. Many parents have to send their children to work in mines, or in small factories—making matches or carpets, perhaps. Others migrate as a family in search of work. In Peru, for example, families migrate seasonally from the highlands to the tropical lowlands for gold-panning. An ILO study in the Department of Madre de Dios has shown that 20 per cent of the workers in gold production are aged between 11 and 18. And in July 1991 local labour inspectors discovered 71 secret cemeteries containing the bodies of dozens of children.

Children who live in cities tend to be involved in a much broader range of activities—from factory work to domestic service, to small handicraft enterprises, to selling newspapers, to prostitution.

Employers often claim that there are types of work for which children are particularly suited. The carpet weaving industry in India employs around 300,000 people, of whom about one-third are children. Employers say that children have nimble fingers and



keen eyesight, and will sit in the same posture for hours at a time. Small size is also an advantage for the 28,000 Indian children who work in the mines at Meghalaya. They have to crawl through tunnels 90 centimetres wide. Indeed, as they become older they no longer fit and lose their jobs. But most child work could also be done by adults. The real attraction of children is that they will work long hours for low pay and make very little trouble. Inexperienced and lacking adult confidence, they are easily intimidated by adults and, when working illegally, they are understandably unwilling to protest against their conditions.

Domestic work, particularly for young girls, is one of the largest (and least visible) users of child labour in urban areas. This will often be in the child's own home; a young girl takes on responsibilities and frees her mother for work elsewhere. But girls are also likely to work as domestic servants to richer families in the city. This is a feature of most developing countries. A study in urban areas of Colombia, for example, found that 40 per cent of 11 and 12 year-old child workers were domestic servants.

City children have a range of other options. Aside from domestic service, they may be employed in small factories, or work at home or on the streets. The streets of Mexico City, for example, are full of children selling lottery tickets, selling chewing gum,

washing windcreens, unloading trucks, shining shoes or a multitude of other tasks. The range of occupations of street child workers in Asunción, Paraguay, is shown in chart 1.1.

There may be a diverse choice of occupations in the city, but children do not, as is commonly supposed, flit frequently from one to another. In Lima only 14 per cent of girls, and 43 per cent of boys, had ever had a different occupation. Children often have much more invested in their work than meets the casual eye, either in terms of the skill they have acquired, or the network of contacts and agreements among those with whom they share the streets.

All child labourers, wherever they work, sell some of their childhood – but none sell as much as those driven to prostitution. Children in the largest cities are at greatest risk. And it is a problem for rich countries as well as poor. Studies in Europe and North America show how runaway children are the most likely to sell their bodies.

But developing countries have the greatest numbers of poor children and so have the most severe problems. A study of 4,000 child prostitutes in the city of Concepción in Chile in 1990, for example, suggested a correlation between the number of marginalised families and the incidence of child prostitution. The children involved were girls between 9 and 14 years old; they were ostensibly in the city centre selling sweets but took on adult poses and wore exaggerated make-up. The study reported, however, that the girls took to prostitution not just to earn money but also as a form of "aggression" against the society around them.

Children in most countries have always been used as prostitutes, but the situation in some Asian countries, like Thailand, has been aggravated by the expansion of mass tourism. Prostitution is illegal in Thailand, though there are very few prosecutions. A new Brothel Elimination Act came into force in October 1991.

Prostitution is a job for both boys and girls. Indeed in Sri Lanka, for example, the majority of child prostitutes are boys. Here there is a very protective attitude towards girls just before and after puberty, while boys have a greater freedom of movement, particularly at night.

What children earn

Most child workers "earn" nothing at all, since their work consists of helping their parents. Bonded

labourers, too, see no financial reward for their efforts. Other child workers may only receive payment in kind. This is often the case for those who work in restaurants or in domestic service. But even those employed as wage labourers can receive pitifully small amounts for many hours of work. Children in electric light bulb factories in Indonesia, for example, work from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. six days a week for US\$3 per week. Child coffee pickers in Zimbabwe earn roughly the same for a ten-hour day six-day week. In Nepal children in carpet factories earn US\$1 per day or less.

Children are employed in such tasks because they will work for less than adults. And some employers say they would have to close down if they could not employ children. Some 15 per cent of workers in the match and firewood industries in Siwakasi in India are under 15. To replace them with adult workers would cost around 32 million rupees (US\$1.5 m) a year and the employers have threatened to resort to subcontracting the work should child labour be banned from their factories.

Though they may be paid relatively little, children can make a substantial contribution to family income. Working children in Brazil, for example, earn on average only one-third of the minimum salary. But 20 per cent of working children aged between 15 and 17 contribute around one-third of family income.

Children tend to be better paid on the streets. Child street hawkers in Nigeria, for example, often earn more than adults. In Recife, Brazil, the municipal Government found that children could make up to three times the minimum wage by begging or selling fruit at the busier intersections; many of these children would certainly be earning more than their parents. Prostitution can be one of the most highly-paid "jobs" for children. Though many sell themselves for pitifully small sums, others can earn relatively large amounts. In the Philippines, for example, they can earn US\$15 a night though the median is around US\$5.

The costs of child labour

Putting children to work may seem a rational approach to poverty with financial benefits for everyone concerned. But there are heavy costs too.

Some of these are clear enough. Children crushed by cars in busy streets, or infected with HIV through

numerous sexual contacts, or victimised (or even killed) by police as an expendable inconvenience.

But there are also subtler and more insidious effects. Poor children are generally malnourished already, but their work then increases their energy requirements and their calorie deficit. And if they suffer from anaemia, fatigue and inadequate sleep they become much more susceptible to infectious diseases and tuberculosis. Reports on the carpet factories in Pakistan in 1991 estimated that half the 50,000 bonded children in the industry never reach the age of 12 – victims of malnutrition and disease. A WHO report on child workers cites other physical health hazards including bony lesions and postural deformity attributable to such work as carpet-weaving, embroidery and lifting heavy weights. Young, growing bodies suffer from strain when overloaded, since the bone structure (especially the spine) is still soft. The eyesight of young girls working for 12-14 hours a day in microcomputer factories or embroidery is reported to be damaged within a period of five to eight years.

Children are also more susceptible to accidents. Long hours and fatigue can often prove fatal in sweatshops using poorly maintained and dangerous machinery.

There are social and psychological costs too. Working children can be separated from their families. Children whose social interactions are restricted because of their long working hours suffer in their social and emotional development. And street children faced day after day with adult hostility can have a serious problem in maintaining a healthy self-esteem.

Heavy though the price paid by individual children may be, one must also add the cost to society as a whole: a diminished contribution in the future from adults whose health, education and energy have been sacrificed during their childhood.

Agenda for action

Although almost everyone agrees that child labour is regrettable, not everyone agrees that something can, or should, be done about it. The doubters fall into two camps:

- *Radicals* argue that child labour is yet another symptom of economic and social injustice, and that no improvement can be expected in the absence of more radical social change.

1.3 Basic minimum age for employment in various countries

12 years: Bangladesh, Belize, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Fiji, Haiti, Jamaica, Morocco, Nigeria, Qatar, St. Lucia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen.

13 years: Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, Swaziland, Tunisia, United Kingdom.

14 years: Angola, Argentina, Bahamas, Bahrain, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Italy, Kuwait, Liberia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malawi, Mauritania, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Togo, Venezuela, Zambia.

15 years: Afghanistan, Albania, Austria, Barbados, Botswana, Chile, Comoros, Cuba, Denmark, Dominica, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritius, Mozambique, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Seychelles, Somalia, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Yugoslavia.

16 years: Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Bulgaria, Burundi, China, Congo, Czechoslovakia, France, Gabon, Guinea, Kenya, Mongolia, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United States, former USSR, Zaire.

Note: This table is intended only to give a general picture. In many countries the basic minimum varies according to sector of production. The lowest figure is used here. "Child labour: Law and practice", *Conditions of Work Digest* (Geneva, ILO) Vol. 10, 1/1991, provides specific information on each country.

- *Conservatives* agree that child labour is the inevitable result of poverty, but conclude that the way forward is to tackle poverty.

Either approach risks postponing change into the indefinite future. Action can be taken now on a broad front, social, economic and political – with governments, employers, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working alongside each other. And within governments this will involve coordination between many departments, not just ministries of labour but also of health, for example, and education and welfare.

Many children who, for the present, *have* to work need as much support and protection as they can be given. This might mean health services, or feeding programmes, or non-formal education schemes which can fit in around their work. They can also be given vocational training which could allow them to get better, less exploitative jobs, both now and in the future.

But the longer term aim must be to reduce and eventually eliminate child labour. And experience shows that there are many practical steps which can help achieve this. These include:

- *Improving and enforcing legislation*
- *Promoting school enrolment*
- *Raising public awareness*
- *Supporting community action*
- *Targeting hazardous environments*

Improving and enforcing legislation

The basis for any approach to child labour is effective legislation. Since 1919 the ILO has adopted a number of Conventions, of which the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), is the most significant. This requires member States to specify a minimum age for employment – not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, not less than 15 years.

Countries with less developed economies and education systems may, however, specify 14 years as the minimum. And the age can also be varied according to the type of work – lower (13 to 15, or 12 to 14) for lighter work, higher (18) for work likely to jeopardise a child's safety, health or morals. There have been more than 100 ratifications of the earlier minimum age Conventions and 40 governments have now ratified Convention No. 138.

In practice, most governments have set 14 or more as a basic minimum age (box 1.3), with variations: for light work the minimums are generally about 12 and for hazardous work between 16 and 18.

Governments thus diverge somewhat from the age standards set in the Convention. And national legislation often falls short in other respects too. It can apply only to people working under a contract of employment and thus exclude those working in the informal sector or in family enterprises, where the majority of child labourers are actually found. Then again, the laws may only cover certain industries such as factory work or mining. Agriculture (the major employer in many countries) is a common exclusion.

1.4

The challenge from Brazil's children

Brazil has around seven million child labourers, many of them working on the streets. For years they were treated merely as delinquents, and only NGOs and charitable organisations tried to help them.

Then in 1985 the Government decided to step in and take a fresh approach. It established, in conjunction with UNICEF, the Alternative Services for Street Children Project – a scheme which differed radically from previous approaches. First, it was to serve as a "dissonant" voice in Government, challenging the bureaucracy and acting as the spearhead for policy and programme change. But just as important, it would avoid becoming bureaucratized by moving away from the Government professionals and opening it up to broad public participation.

The Government recognised that community programmes tended to be more creative, more practical and much less expensive than those of the Government. These included protected employment for children so they could earn money without being exploited. They worked as messengers, for example, and many businesses were happy to pay for this new and reliable service. Other projects provided small "restaurants" for the children that

offered nutritious food and places for the children to meet each other, as well as make contact with project volunteers.

This programme turned up a host of new ideas. But it also discovered familiar problems. The number of programmes helping children did double. But they still covered only a fraction, perhaps 10 per cent, of those in need. The project had certainly challenged the Government system, but it exposed the limitations of the load which community groups can be expected to shoulder.

In 1990 the Government took two major steps towards taking a greater share of that responsibility. It enacted a Statute of the Child and the Adolescent and it created a new Ministry for Children. There will also be a National Council on Children and Adolescents (made up of both government and NGO representatives) to supervise all projects and programmes concerning children.

The children themselves are demanding action. A group of poor children in São Paulo, for example, took to the streets in 1991 with street theatre to dramatise their plight. Said 12-year old Claudette Nunes: "We want to see the changes which will allow parents to look after their children – to see law become reality".

But enforcement can also be a problem. Many countries find it difficult to follow through on their own legislation. In one region of Egypt, for example, there are only four inspectors covering 20,000 establishments and they have to examine all aspects of working conditions. Indeed, a problem for inspectors in many countries is the diversity of issues which they have to address. In several countries in Europe, Africa and Latin America they are required to intervene in labour disputes, leaving relatively little time to actually inspect premises and supervise the application of the law. Though many countries, including Colombia, Peru and India, have special bureaux for child labour these do not have an enforcement mechanism of their own.

Hong Kong is one of the most striking examples of what can be achieved with strong legislation, a well staffed inspectorate and rigorous enforcement. The fine for illegal employment of children is 10,000 Hong Kong dollars (US\$1,300). Inspections are regular and persistent and carried out by 244 inspectors of the Women and Young Persons Division of the Labour Department. In 1986, for example, 250,167 inspections were carried out in 19,274 establishments. Such a strict approach evidently works. In 1986 only 123 cases were discovered and most of these were mere technical offences rather than serious exploitation.

Promoting school enrolment

Education is the single most important means of drawing children away from the labour market. Millions of children never complete even a basic education; primary school drop-out rates are high in many parts of the developing world, as in Mexico (31 per cent), Togo (48 per cent), Bangladesh (80 per cent). In other countries the drop-out rate is very low, as in Singapore and the Republic of Korea where the incidence of child labour is also very low.

The first step is to ensure that primary education is free and universal. Parents are certainly dissuaded from sending children to school by school fees. In Nigeria, for example, primary school enrolment dropped from 92 per cent in 1981/82 to 75 per cent in 1985/86, partly because some states introduced fees.

For poor children to be able to afford to go to school it is not enough that it be free, however. Enrolment rates can be increased (as well as child nutrition) by providing food supplements at school. But parents must also be convinced that the education offered is of a sufficient quality and relevance that it also justifies the loss of their children's earnings. A good starting point may well be non-formal education for working children. In India, for example, a scheme run by the Indian Institute of Education has been operated for 4,000 working chil-

1.5

The children of Smokey Mountain

A thousand children clamber over a 200 metre pile of rotting, smouldering garbage. Each with a sack in one hand and a metal spike in the other, they dodge around dump trucks, diving onto the latest cascade of rubbish to see what treasures it might offer.

Smokey Mountain, on the outskirts of Manila in the Philippines, is so visually shocking that it has become an international symbol of child exploitation. Less visible, though just as striking, are the efforts which many organisations – from government agencies to churches, to local community groups – are making to offer the children of Smokey Mountain new hope and a new direction.

The ILO, in conjunction with the Philippines Department of Labour and Employment, and with finance from the Government of the Netherlands, launched in 1989 a pilot project to take advantage of all this commitment and effort.

The project's immediate aim is to offer protection to the working children. A "drop-in" centre has been opened in the heart of the dump site. Here the children can find drinking water, a free lunch, and a safe place to play and rest, as well as first-aid attention and informal counselling.

The next aim is to help children leave the dump. In a rented apartment, the "Sabana", at the foot of the mountain, children can get informal schooling and some vocational training and even start income-generating activities like painting and selling T-shirts. The idea, however, is not to create new institutions but rather to capitalize on what is already available. The local community has been involved in planning the programme from the outset. And the

project also draws its staff from the community – people who understand the problems and are prepared to work for long periods in these difficult conditions. Then there are the local NGOs, which are such an effective force in the Philippines – some specialise in urban poor programmes; others in community development; others in legal issues. All have the experience to provide back-up and support to the community workers.

The pilot project has been so successful that in March 1991 it was decided to extend it for a further three years. This will continue not just the practical benefits of the project but will also work on some of the broader aims of the scheme. These include extending this model of operation to other garbage sites and to other types of hazardous employment. The partnership between the Government and the NGOs has been demonstrated to be particularly effective. But the project will also explore just how such activities should fit into government policy. Since legislation in most countries bars children from such dangerous activities, this leaves unclear what help governments can offer to those children who are working. The experience here, it is hoped, will help show how this policy vacuum can be filled.

The project also aims to create awareness of the dangers of child labour in general – and of how it can be tackled. So it will also be used as the basis of public information campaigns, both national and international. Smokey Mountain may in the end be a symbol not of despair but of hope.

children in a group of villages in Maharashtra. Teaching of subjects like languages and mathematics was closely linked to the children's daily needs. Only about 25 per cent of the children dropped out (often because of domestic responsibilities); most of the parents have been very enthusiastic.

It should also be noted, however, that there can be gaps in legislative provisions – with a gap of one or more years between the age to which education is compulsory and the age at which children may start work. In these cases it may be helpful to amend the laws on education.

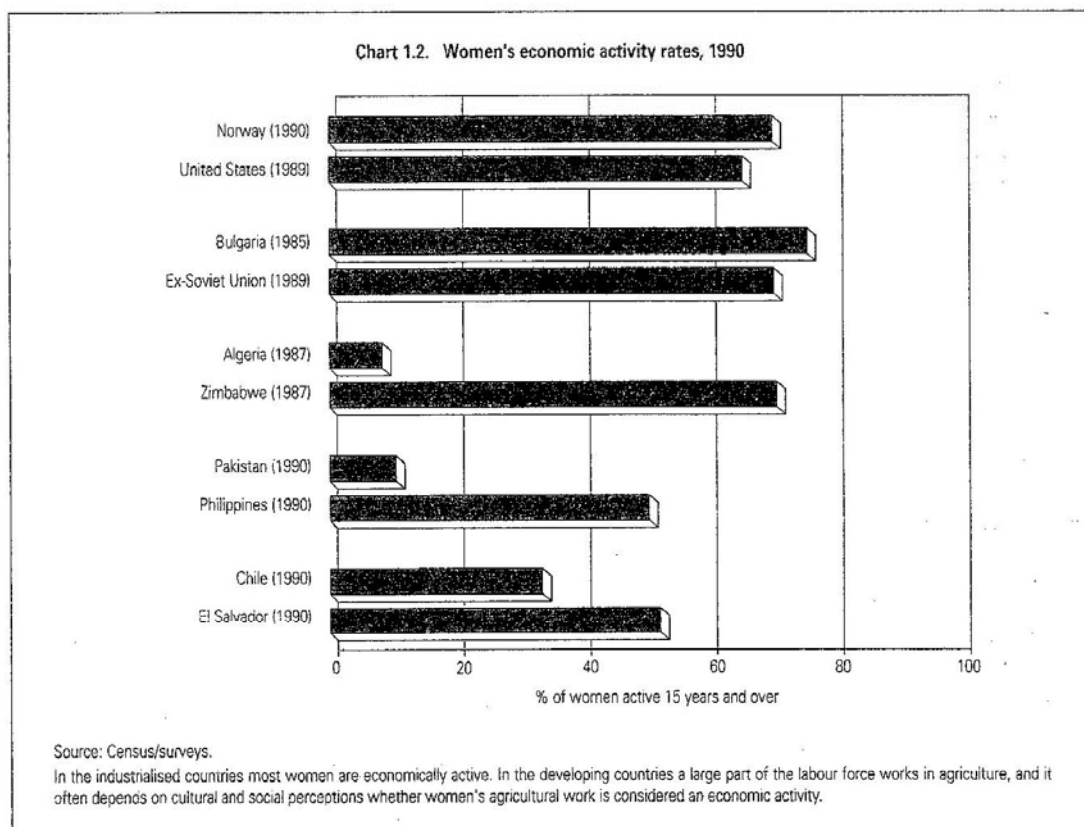
Raising public awareness

Child labour is accepted as a way of life in many countries. Much needs to be done to alert public attention both nationally and internationally to the problem. There have been innovative approaches in several countries. In Kenya, for example, community drama has been used in schools to illustrate to both parents and children the exploitative nature of much child labour.

But the mass media can also play an important role. A striking success story is the campaign against child prostitution in the tourist resort of Pagsanjan in the Philippines. By 1983 there were an estimated 3,000 boys aged between nine and 14 working as prostitutes for male homosexual tourists. A local pastor alerted Australian newspapers and television to what was going on. In 1985 the *Melbourne Age* carried a feature article: "Monsters in shorts and thongs", which was followed up by other TV and newspaper coverage.

This produced a strong response in Australia and elsewhere. The press in the Philippines ran a series of articles on the problem, on what local people were trying to do and on the Government response. The campaign grew in strength, working with the families concerned and through the schools. The number of children now involved has dropped to around 300.

"In Pagsanjan," says one local citizen, "we swallowed our pride, and endured the humiliation of having our town tarnished because of its association with child prostitution. But we expose this evil so that other towns can learn from our experience."



Supporting community action

All successful community development programmes are based on the involvement and initiatives of the communities themselves. For child labour the logical place to start is with the children.

Brazil, with some of the most serious child labour problems in the world, also has some of the most imaginative ways of tackling them – but much of the energy and many of the ideas come from non-governmental and community-based groups. The National Movement of the Boys and Girls of the Streets, for example, has been formed from spontaneous popular groups which arose in the early 1980s. Their primary aims include the defence of children's rights and training – both for children and for “street educators” for children. When the Government was debating its new Statute of the

Child and the Adolescent, for example, the children themselves went to the legislature to argue their case. The background to the Brazilian approach is outlined in box 1.4.

Similarly in Ecuador the Premature Workers Programme, run by the National Institute of the Child and the Family, gives support to non-governmental organisations working with child workers – as well as giving direct support in terms of health and nutrition and contacting children through its own network of street educators.

Targeting hazardous environments

The long-term aim must be to eliminate all child labour. But there are some urgent immediate priorities. Children can be removed from the most dangerous environments – from the glass factories,

from the construction sites, from the coal mines – places for which they have neither the experience nor the physical development to cope.

Among the worst of these working environments are the garbage dumps. Children all over the world spend their days rooting around for scraps of material they can salvage and sell. The most notorious perhaps is Smokey Mountain in the Philippines. Smokey Mountain is now also an encouraging example of just how to tackle child labour dangerous environments – some of the measures currently being taken are outlined in box 1.5.

An international challenge

Child labour is deeply rooted in poverty and social deprivation. Removing it will be a long and complex task – legal, social, economic and political. But progress is possible. More information will always be needed, more investigations, more analysis. In the end what counts is action, from communities, from employers, from trade unions, from governments, and from international organisations. A number of governments, including Brazil and India, now have national plans of action on child labour. The increasing number of ratifications for the ILO's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (about 138), is another encouraging indication of the priority now accorded to this issue – as is the large number of countries which have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The global community now has the opportunity to live up to such commitments: to enact the legislation and to enforce it; to make schooling a real and practical alternative for working children; and to allow poor families to give their children a happy childhood and prepare them for a healthy and productive working life.