International Women's Day is celebrated around the world every year to build support for women's rights and their participation in political, economic and social spaces.

The official 2019 theme from the United Nations is “think equal, build smart, innovate for change”. But if a woman's right to be free, safe, and educated isn’t protected from birth her opportunities, well-being and agency over her own life are put at risk.

Defending the rights of girls is therefore fundamental to building gender equality and must also be marked on International Women's Day.

Girls in child labour are some of the world’s most exploited children and they especially need our support, solidarity, and action. International Women's Day is a chance to shine the spotlight on girls, as the roots of their extra vulnerability to abuse and marginalisation lies in their gender.

HIDDEN, IGNORED, AND ABUSED

The latest figures from the International Labour Organisation suggest that girls make up 42% of the 152 million child labourers in the world. However, this is unlikely to be the true scale of the problem, as the type of work girls are more likely to engage in is often less visible and under-reported, such as domestic services in private homes.

Traditional gender roles also place the burden of domestic chores on girls shoulders. Two-thirds of children performing household tasks or caring duties for at least 21 hours a week are girls, and girls aged 5-14 spend 160 million more hours a day on household chores than boys. This unpaid work can also be alongside labour outside the home, placing a 'double burden' on the most marginalised girls and undermining the time they can spend focusing on their education.

Girls across the world are 1.5 times more likely to be excluded from primary school than boys, and for girls in child labour the picture is much worse. When girls are deprived of access to education due to labour, they are also more susceptible to gender-based violence, discrimination, and exploitation— including sexual violence, early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

If girls' labour and exploitation is hidden from official statistics there is a huge risk that programmes, policies and efforts to end their exploitation are neglected too. Help change this reality by taking action today.

If every girl currently in child labour, both in and outside the home, was able to fulfill her basic right to education instead, the results could be transformative for her personally, her family, her community society, and even for the health and prosperity of future generations. For example:

- Universal secondary education could virtually end child marriage
- Women who have a secondary education earn almost twice as much as those with no education, helping to break the poverty cycle
- An education is proven to increase civic engagement and women report it increases their ability to make decisions within the household
- A child whose mother can read is 50% more likely to live past the age of 5

WRITE FOR CHANGE

Write to your decision-maker and demand that they commit to paying special attention to the experiences of girls in child labour when they make their report to the United Nations in June.

This year every country’s government is being asked to report on their progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8, which includes a target to end child labour in all its forms by 2025.

Use the momentum of International Women's Day to remind your elected representatives this March that we cannot build gender equality without protecting girls' rights to be free, safe, and educated.

Download and edit our template letter here, with advice on how, who and where to send it!

SHARE THE MESSAGE

Help raise awareness of the injustices facing girls in child labour this International Women's Day. Create your own posts on social media and use the hashtags #100Million and #IWD19, or simply click the Twitter or Facebook icon under one of the graphics to join the action.

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   All the facts in this resource can be found in these reports (click the title to view):
   - ILO: Give girls a chance (2009)
   - World Bank: Missed opportunities, the high cost of not educating girls (2018)
   - UNODC: Global report on trafficking in persons (2016)