Child workers remain problem for RI: Study

A new study shows that Indonesia remains a country with a high number of child laborers, despite its record of reducing children’s involvement in the labor market.

The study, titled “Understanding Children’s Work and Youth Employment in Indonesia”, found that child labor is commonplace, especially in the eastern part of the country.

“Almost 7 percent of children aged between 7 and 14 years old, or 2.3 million children in absolute terms, were in employment in 2009. Almost 600,000 children aged less than 10 years were already in employment in that year,” the study reports.

Scott Lyon, a researcher from Understanding Children’s Work, an inter-agency research project that authored the report, said that the child laborers were stripped of their rights to education, physical safety, protection and recreation.

“Most of those children are officially school students but they spend most of their time off school compared to children with no involvement in employment,” he said during the launch of the report.

The project involved the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations’ Children Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank.

Lyon said that children’s involvement in employment had actually shown a downward trend. “The overall decline masks a slight rise during 2008-2009, coinciding with global economic crisis,” he said. Despite such a decrease, the level of children’s involvement in the labor market remained high.

Child workers mostly work in the agricultural sector, the report shows. It also reports that almost all children working with their families are doing so as unpaid labor.

These children are also exposed to hazardous working conditions.

“Working children face about a 25 percent chance of suffering ill-health related to work over the course of 12 months. Younger children are at greater risk of work-related illness and injury. Meanwhile, children working within the family are at greater risk of work-related illness and injury than children working outside the family,” the study reports, adding that one out of four out-of-school children, over 260,000 in absolute terms, had less than four years of schooling.

Data from the ILO shows that there are 215 million child workers, half of whom are exposed to the worst form of child labor, including slavery and involvement in armed conflicts.

Five million children are involved in forced labor, including sexual exploitation and a vicious cycle of debts.

ILO Indonesia director, Peter van Rooij, said child labor could negatively affect children both in terms of prosperity and health. “Unfortunately, millions of children are still involved in employment. They can’t go to school or attend learning activities in school rooms because they have to go work,” said Rooij.
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