1.4m children abandon school for work, says new report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the consent of their parents, some 1.4 million children in Bangladesh are abandoning school for work, a new report said.

Another 2.2 million school-going children, aged between 7 and 14 years, are also working outside their school hours, the report said.

The report titled 'Understanding Children's Work in Bangladesh', commissioned by the International Labour Organization, Unicef and the World Bank, was launched yesterday at the city's Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel.

The report underlines economic considerations as a major influence in the parents' decision to involve their children in work or send them to school.

According to it, Rajshahi and Barisal have the largest percentage of child employment of 15.3 percent while Dhaka and Chittagong have the lowest at 9.8 percent and 8.4 percent respectively.

According to Scott Lyon from the Understanding Children's Work (UCW) programme, a big concern is the number of children working in informal sectors.

A large number of children are working as domestic help and in various miscellaneous industries, which fall in the 'grey area' and are under no regulation or monitoring, he said.

The reasons for being out of school extend beyond the need to work, the report said.

Only 21 percent children who are out of school do not go to school because of work. As many as 38 percent do not go to school because they are 'not good in studies or are unwilling to study, the report added.

"Statistics show that children’s employment appears to be trending downwards," said Scott Lyon, adding that the percentages dropped from 16.8 percent to 11.6 percent between 2002 and 2005.

However, a lot more needs to be done on the issue, he said.

The report suggested quality basic education and access to a second chance at learning opportunities to reduce child employment.

Child-friendly policies for promoting schooling, as an alternative to child labour, is also vitally important, its said.

Labour and Employment Secretary Shafique Alam Mehdhi, Women and Children Affairs Joint Secretary Reaz Ahmed, director of ILO Country Office for Bangladesh Andre Bogui and Unicef deputy representative Michel Saint-Lot were present at the programme.