

# Child labour: 'Official figures unreliable'

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**BANGALORE, FEB. 16.** Bangalore Urban, has a population (as per the 2001 Census) of 56.86 lakh. The foot soldiers toiling for much of the insatiable expansion of the City, its poorest, come from "poverty zones", slums in common lingo.

And hi-tech Bangalore is all set to earn the dubious distinction of a City that stands on the frail shoulders of six- to 14-year-olds, the hardest hit among the slum dwellers, who are building our City for us.

A report based on a survey of five slums in the City conducted by the Sociology and Social Anthropology Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies says the number of slum children out of school is twice as many as in the State Government's latest survey.

The report says an average of 21 per cent of children from four of the five slums are out of school; the Government's January 2001 State-wide survey puts the figure at 10 per cent. In the fifth slum, Rajgopalnagar, it is 48 per cent.

There is a "pervasive presence and use of child labour in the City's economy" that shows up the "link between urban growth, education deprivation, and child labour," A.R.Vasavi, who led the study, says. Her report says "there are no accurate surveys or data about the actual number of child labourers in the City; the figures from the



Children from slums are 'prime labour material' — Photo: K.Bhagya Prakash

State's labour office were unreliable."

For example, in 1996-97, the Child Labour Cell documented only 12 children working in hazardous and 88 in non-hazardous industries in Bangalore. For 1999-00, the numbers were 33 and 104, respectively. In 2001, the number suddenly rose to 7,015 for non-hazardous, while for hazardous it was 147.

The report reveals the existence of a number of "no-where" children, neither working nor at school. Those aged between

12 and 14, who were prime child labour material, becomes liabilities for their employers soon. While at younger ages, the children are compliant, even submissive, and could be ripped off with nominal wages, as they grow older, they become less so, and therefore dismissed, to be easily replaced by younger recruits.

"Illiterate, untrained, and redundant in the employment sector", these older boys, in most cases, are found "hanging out" in the slums.

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