

No end to child labour

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Despite efforts by the labour department, nearly 1.5 lakh children, include differently-abled youngsters, continue to toil in various industries

Despite a steep drop in the number of child workers in the State over the previous decade, recently released Census data reveals over 1.5 lakh children are still labouring under the sun and in dingy factories, every day.

In an effort to root out the practice once and for all, the Labour Department launched an intensive 11-day campaign on January 21, with its officers conducting raids in all districts. The department has also launched a signature campaign at the trade fair in Chennai.

“We want to create awareness among the public. At the trade fair, people visiting our stall are signing on the board that displays slogans against child labour,” a senior official of the Labour Department says.

Besides Chennai, which is thronged by a large floating population on a day-to-day basis, neighbouring Tiruvallur and Villupuram top the list of districts employing children.

“Our effort is mostly directed at identifying children who are forced to work and those employed for economic reasons,” says the officer, adding the 1.5-lakh child-labourer population includes differently-abled children and those who have to take care of their younger siblings in the absence

of parents.

Rescued children are either enrolled in nearby schools or taught in bridge schools before being mainstreamed.

Child labour continues to exist in textile industries, agricultural fields during cotton plucking, brick kilns, beedi-making units and matchstick factories in Tamil Nadu.

New phenomenon in Kanyakumari

Availability of rice and fish has attracted labourers from West Bengal, Orissa and even refugees from Bangladesh, to the fishing trade in Kanyakumari.

“As traditional fishermen families have moved away from the trade, especially after the tsunami, youngsters from other States, who have come in search of jobs, have entered fishing. The place suits them well as the food matches their staple diet of rice and fish,” says V. Palanisamy, inspector of labour, Nagercoil.

On Wednesday, Mr. Palanisamy rescued three children from Uttar Pradesh, engaged in the fishing industry in Kottilpadu near Colachel Port.

“The boys are from Unnao district in Uttar Pradesh. They have bank passbooks and Aadhaar cards. They live with other families from their State and make cotton candy when not involved in fishing,” he says.

Young workers from other States too are engaged in fishing activities, a phenomenon unheard of in the past.