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Children rally against child abuse outside the Lahore Press Club on May 30

More than five million children under the age of 10 are working in Pakistan, and the problem is worsening in both sheer numbers and prevalence, said an international NGO on World Day Against Child Labor Tuesday.

“According to recent surveys, around 11 million to 12 million children are employed as child labors across the country; half of them are aged below 10,” said Rashid Aziz, national manager of the Legal Advisory Unit at the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC).

“The percentage of economically active children aged 10-14 years has increased from 10.9 percent in 2000 to 13.6 percent in 2011. This is a serious concern,” he said.

Under Pakistani law, children may leave school at 10 years old but cannot start working until age 14,

but after reviewing the laws and data, SPARC is calling for better enforcement and stricter standards. The organization is recommending the government increase the minimum working age to 16 years old.

The organization pointed to domestic employment as the worst form of child labor; 18 housemaids were killed by their employers since 2010, said SPARC's Sobia John.

“Government should target such vulnerable families in their poverty reduction programs,” she said. “Poverty is the main reason people pull their daughters out of school.”

Maryam, a 12-year-old housemaid in Lahore, said she works to support her family. “My mother visits me at the beginning of the month to collect my monthly salary of 2,500 rupees (US\$26),” she said. “I do not get any share except from the charity of visiting relatives.”

Every fourth household in Pakistan employs a child, according to the International Labor Organization.

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