



## Community-based care and mentoring for adolescent girls in domestic labour in Burkina Faso

Photo: Terre des hommes

***This case study describes an innovative approach to care and mentoring support for adolescent girls in domestic labour in Burkina Faso.***

### Background

In Burkina Faso, food insecurity and household poverty are drivers of child labour. Every year, many children, particularly very young adolescent girls (10 to 14 years), migrate from rural areas to cities to become domestic workers in other, wealthier families. These girls are deprived of their right to education and are often found in exploitative and abusive situations. Terre des hommes (Tdh) in Burkina Faso started a project to support these child domestic workers through community-level interventions.

### Community-level support for domestic workers

The project consisted of two main interventions:

#### 1. School-based drop-in centres

- Terre des hommes set up drop-in centres, called “Point d’Espoir”, where girls who were domestic workers could meet up twice a month, in a safe and neutral place to meet, share experiences and access support. The drop-in centres were located in schools across various districts and opened on Sundays. During the week, when schools were open, awareness-raising sessions were organised for the students of the schools about the risks and consequences of child labour, as many of these students had child domestic workers at home.
- The Points d’Espoir also served as a bridge between a total of 1,000 young domestic workers and various child protection services, such as police and social services, who visited the centres periodically to interact with the girls and discuss their situations, and to provide information on how to report violence or other abuse in the workplace.

## 2. Big Sisters: peer-to-peer support and mentoring

- The Big Sisters support system was created by the local communities and supported by Tdh. The Big Sisters were older adolescent girls aged 17 to 19 years, who were current or former domestic workers and who acted as mentors to the newly arriving young domestic workers aged between 10 and 14 years old.
- The role of the Big Sisters was to provide advice and to support the younger girls. They would visit them in their workplace and acted as an intermediary between younger girls and various service providers that played a role in protecting young domestic workers. The Big Sisters mentors could draw on their own experiences in domestic labour to help others. They also mediated in situations when employers refused to pay the child domestic worker or when they were forced to work extremely long hours. Big Sisters are always accompanied by a Tdh social worker and a robust safeguarding system is in place.
- If a girl was identified as being at risk, for example a survivor of exploitation or abuse, or being deprived of their rights such as access to food, education or health, support was provided at the Point d'Espoir or by a Tdh social worker. In an emergency situation, Tdh could provide direct assistance, first aid support and access to healthcare, and refer the child to other specialized services including social state services. For less urgent cases, girls are referred to state social services and Tdh social worker teams, who will work jointly with social services to assist the girl individually with case management services.

### Successes

- Girls who were working as domestic servants and who were otherwise “invisible” were supported to connect with their peers, and to participate in psychosocial and recreational activities. They were also provided with information sessions and training courses about how to prevent and respond to situations of abuse and forms of exploitation, and about where to report abuse. These activities helped girls to strengthen their self-esteem and develop their autonomy.
- The Big Sisters provided critical and unique support to the young domestic labourers by providing them with the information and self-confidence to address issues in the workplace.

### Challenges

- It was at times difficult to know whether all employers who employ young girls as domestic workers allowed them to access the available support from the Point d'Espoir, Big Sisters and Tdh social workers. This required more intensive monitoring, follow-up and outreach.
- The “Big Sister” approach has not yet been fully evaluated. While Big Sisters were always accompanied by Tdh social workers, there were potential risks that Big Sisters and their younger mentees would face risky situations in relation to the employers. Careful monitoring, support and supervision are needed at all times.



*Awareness session with adolescent girls*

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>