

Concept note for a thematic session on

Sustaining peace and climate resilience through the elimination of child labour

at the V Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, Durban, South Africa

Tuesday 17 May 2022, 12.30 – 14.15

The Background

More countries are experiencing some form of conflict than at any time in the past three decades. Before the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in 2020, fragile contexts were already home to 76.5% of all those living in extreme poverty globally, while hosting only 23% of the world's population. The interlinked nature of the threats they face – conflict, pandemics, climate change, food insecurity, resource scarcity, terrorism, disasters, forced displacement – requires multidimensional thinking and integrated, evidence-based strategies that equally embrace inclusion and innovation.

Violent conflict, climate change and disasters have staggering economic costs, and there is evidence that they are linked to unemployment and decent work deficits through a “vicious cycle”. On the one hand, crises – including the COVID-19 pandemic – can severely halt and reverse sustainable economic development, with large implications for the world of work, in terms of availability and quality of jobs. Regarding the quality of work, for instance, conflict and widespread violence may increase informality and non-contractual and unregistered work, and prop up illicit economies, built around – and making workers dependent on – continued violence. Furthermore, conflict severely limits the degree to which workers enjoy basic social protection and fundamental rights and principles at work – often pushing many children into worst forms of child labour.

On the other hand, unemployment and decent work deficits can themselves be key contributing factors to conflict. Indeed, the lack of respect of fundamental rights at work such as child labour can trigger grievances and lead to conflict.

The Decent Work Agenda, including the elimination of child labour, is an essential element of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus where employment, decent working conditions and social dialogue can contribute to peace and resilience. In collaboration with Member States, tripartite constituents, international and national partners, and with the direct involvement of local populations and stakeholders, a two-fold approach to crisis response can allow for an immediate response centred on livelihood, employment and social protection for the families, which simultaneously stimulates and assists long-term socio-economic development in an inclusive and rights-based manner. By doing so, decent work and social justice are promoted as key drivers of resilience and peace, addressing the underlying factors of fragility such as child labour that made the society and economy particularly vulnerable to external shocks in the first place.



Conflicts, disasters and fragility have devastating effects on children's lives, contributing to the wider global crisis in child protection. Children are especially at risk of many forms of abuse and exploitation in such settings. For example, children may lose the protection of their family and broader network and easily become victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, recruitment into the armed forces and groups or other worst forms of child labour.

Children may be deprived of schooling and training sometimes for long periods, for instance in the event of protracted displacement, which affects their future choices. Lost or reduced household incomes as a direct result of the crisis or disaster can have devastating effects on children, affecting their daily food and dietary intake and consequently their development. The lack of access to safe and adequate childcare and the psycho-social trauma suffered by all family members also prolongs the recovery process.

Issues to be addressed

This panel will include a scene-setting presentation, followed by an interactive conversation, facilitated by a moderator. It will explore the following key issues:

- How conflict, disasters and climate change impact on child labour (and forced labour)
- How addressing conflict, disasters and climate change can positively impact on child labour (and forced labour)
- Child labour as a key conflict driver to be addressed for sustaining peace
- Strategies to prevent child labour (and forced labour) during/after a crisis building on the ongoing humanitarian response and with a focus on the specific situation of children associated with armed forces and groups
- Positive and negative synergies between private and public sector interventions in response to conflict, disaster, climate change and their consequences on child labour and forced labour
- Good examples where such work has been put in practice

