

Concept note for a launch event and thematic session on

The Central Role of Social Protection in tackling Child Labour

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

Wednesday 18 May 2022, 12.30 - 14.15

The Background

Social protection and child labour are two important issues cutting across the spheres of decent work and human rights. The right to social protection is guaranteed by various human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC). It is also an important element of decent work addressed in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), which are the two most prominent instruments in this area. Together, these instruments provide a normative policy vision of how universal social protection can be achieved in the twenty-first century.

To fully harvest the power of these instruments and amplify their impact on child labour, they need to be coupled with ILO's Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Worst Forms of Child Labour No. 182 (1999) and the ILO Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Convention No. 138 (1973).

Social protection has an important role in contributing to the prevention and elimination of child labour. It reduces vulnerabilities, empowers communities, ensuring that children attend, and remain in school and parents have the income to sustain their development and their education, without resorting to child labour to supplement household income. Overall, social protection helps alleviate poverty and economic insecurity that underlie child labour. In this context, the International Labour Conference in June 2021 called on member States to build universal social protection systems, and in particular to "invest in social protection for children, in particular with a view to eliminating child labour"

Various studies have assessed the extent to which different elements of social protection systems and social protection instruments such as conditional and unconditional cash transfers, in-kind benefits and school feeding programmes, and how they contribute to eliminating child labour. Evidence suggests that social protection is indeed a powerful policy tool for reducing child labour. Hereby, a universal social protection system seems to be most appropriate, as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach to tackle the problem.

However, despite these measures, social protection is not sufficiently used as a means towards the elimination of child labour. Social protection coverage remains woefully low in many parts of the



world. Children are particularly affected by the lack of social protection. Before the pandemic, nearly three quarters of children, 1.5 billion, lacked social protection. Effective coverage of children is particularly low in Asia and the Pacific (18 %), the Arab States (15.4 %) and Africa (12.6 %). These coverage gaps are associated with significant under-investment in social protection systems for children.

Spending on all types of social protection remains insufficient. The global average of GDP that countries spend on social protection is 12.9 per cent. But, while high-income countries spend 16.4 per cent, and upper-middle-income countries 8 per cent, low-income countries are spending just 1.1 per cent of their GDP. Closing this 'financing gap', to ensure at least minimum provision for all, must be a priority. Developing countries would need to invest an additional US\$1.2 trillion – equivalent to 3.8 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) – to close the annual financing gap in 2020.

With the first increase in the absolute number of child labourers, policy makers must introduce an integrated social protection system which includes child benefits and childcare services as well as provision of parental leave and access to healthcare, in addition to decent wages. To this end, ambitious investments into universal social protection systems are needed.

The event will comprise two parts: i) the launch of the ILO and UNICEF report on Social Protection followed by ii) a panel discussion and a subsequent plenary session. The report will be launched by high-level representatives from both UNICEF and the ILO. It will include a presentation of the key findings and recommendations of the report, and remarks by senior staff of each organization.

Issues to be addressed

To fully harness the power of social protection to end child labour, important questions need to be asked. How to close the financing gaps in social protection in order to meet children's needs and reduce the vulnerability of families? How can countries address child labour by investing in a nationally-defined social protection floor as a first step in reinforcing their social protection systems? What can countries do to make and attract sustained investments in universal social protection systems? How can social protection instruments effectively be implemented in the rural economy and agriculture as a means to address child labour?

Moreover, panellists will be asked to discuss challenges in expanding access to social protection to prevent and tackle child labour, including challenges arising from the low investments into child-sensitive social protection and persistent coverage gap. Importantly, panellists will shed light on good practices and success stories on how social protection has helped in tackling child labour including good practices in extending social protection to workers in the informal and rural economy.

Answers to these and other related questions will be central to advance social protection as a means to end child labour.

