

Concept note for a thematic session on

Child Labour In supply chains

at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, Durban, South Africa

Thursday 19 May from 14:45 to 16:30 pm

The Background

According to the 2019 Alliance 8.7 report on “Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains”, children in child labour are more likely to be involved in the production of goods and services for the domestic economy. At the global level, the report indicates that the presence of child labour in global supply chains varies by region; the contribution of child labour to global exports is estimated at 9% in North Africa and Western Asia, 12% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12% in Central and Southern Asia, 22% in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 26% in Eastern and South Eastern Asia.

In supply chains, the root causes of child labour involve a combination of structural factors, including weak governance, low rates of economic growth, high levels of poverty and informality, lack of decent work for parents and youth of legal working age, limited access to quality and free education, as well as to social protection floors, and the many barriers that all workers, including migrant workers, continue to face to fully enjoy all their fundamental principles and rights at work. Particular attention is needed at the level of the extraction and production of raw materials in many countries where child labour is most concentrated, and which are linked to supply chains. This includes the agricultural sector, which accounts for 70 per cent of children in child labour worldwide and up to 82 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

The role of poverty, including non-income dimensions of poverty such as food insecurity and poor health, is central to understanding vulnerability to child labour. Poor households are more likely to have to resort to child labour at the expense of their children’s education to meet basic needs and deal with uncertainty and shocks. On family smallholder farms, where child labour occurs most often, families need to be able to reduce their dependency on child labour to sustain their livelihoods. Farmers must secure a fair price for what they produce and be able to enhance productivity by investing in labour-saving technologies or hiring adult workers instead of relying on children.

Due to the complexity of these challenges and the myriad of interdependent actors in supply chains, addressing child labour in supply chains calls for a greater understanding of the shared responsibilities and the need for more coherent efforts and collective action among a wide range of stakeholders. Past and more recent crises have confirmed the important role of Governments to increase investment in the formalization of enterprises and workers, as well as in expanding access to quality and free education and social protection floors, to mitigate the socio-economic vulnerability of households.



Governments also need to consider whether their laws and policies sufficiently prevent unscrupulous businesses from benefiting from child labour, and if not, how their scope and enforcement should be enhanced to eliminate unfair competition practices and establish a level playing field among all enterprises. Trade and investment policies and agreements increasingly include provisions on the elimination of child labour and international instruments on responsible business conduct, such as the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, include provisions on the responsibilities of companies, including on contributing to address the root causes of child labour. Further efforts on these policies, in collaboration with employers' and workers' organisations, can help accelerate opportunities for inclusive national and local development that effectively eliminates child labour and provides opportunities to break the cycle of poverty for parents and families through sustainable supply chains.

Social dialogue and collective bargaining are critical to create more decent jobs in supply chains, including for women and young workers, and build more sustainable production systems. Similarly, there is also a consensus that the promotion of responsible business conduct is an important avenue to tackle child labour, including by conducting due diligence in a meaningful way. This process requires businesses to go beyond their first-tier suppliers and map their full supply chain to effectively identify, prevent and mitigate child labour risks in all stages of their production process. It also calls on businesses to focus more on the prevention of child labour, including by considering the need to invest more on traceability and adjust business models and practices.

Given the multidimensional and often hidden nature of child labour in supply chains, new partnerships have emerged that focus on collective action, where governments, employers, trade unions and civil society recognize the role they must play in addressing the systemic root causes of child labour and supporting cross-sectoral collaboration to prevent displacement of child labour from one supply chain to the other. If scaled up, and fully aligned with relevant public policies and programmes, such initiatives can be important vehicles in the collective and cross border action needed to end child labour in supply chains.

With only a few years left to reach SDG Target 8.7, and in the face of increased risk of child labour in supply chains, driven by conflicts, amplified inequalities and climate change, it is urgent for leaders to end child labour in supply chains and multiply the impact they can have to foster more inclusive economic growth.

Issues to be addressed

Over the last decade, a wide range of actors have initiated, tested, and learnt from a variety of solutions that can help to accelerate progress toward the elimination of child labour in supply chains. The session will bring together leaders shaping the future of supply chains to discuss how we can get from where we are now in the fight against child labour in supply chains to where we want to be by the SDG target date of 2025.

It will look at how governments, businesses, trade unions, and civil society committed to end child labour in supply chains can turn ambitious goals into concrete actions and scale up approaches to address persisting and emerging root causes of child labour. In doing so, the session will look at the



specific roles and responsibilities of both public and private actors in this shared responsibility and goal. Panellists will also explore new public and business-led efforts to improve the impact of child labour due diligence and accelerate collective action from the private sector.

