

Concept note for a thematic session on

Decent Jobs for Youth: eliminating hazardous employment among youth

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

Wednesday 18 May 2022, 14.45 – 16.30

The Background

A large number of young workers aged 15-24 are in, hazardous occupations, including worst forms of child labour. Available data on youth employment indicates that this group is over-represented in the informal economy, as well as in non-standard forms of employment and seasonal work. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 77 per cent of working youth were in informal jobs, compared with 57.9 per cent of adult workers – a percentage that is expected to have increased severely due to the economic recession and the growing refugee crisis. Workers in these situations are less visible to health and safety enforcement authorities and are often deprived of appropriate health and safety training and other prevention measures, as well as effective workplace representation, all of which make them more likely to find themselves in hazardous working conditions.

Hazardous work for young people deserves urgent action. Global estimates of child labour indicate that of the 160 million children engaged in child labour, almost half are engaged in hazardous child labour (79 million). Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls at every age. However, when household chores performed for 21 hours or more each week are considered, the gender gap narrows and, some of the worst forms is still underestimated, such as sexual exploitation or domestic work, which affects specially girls. 35 million children in child labour are between the ages of 15 and 17 and while they may have reached the legal minimum age to work, their right to safe and decent work is not respected. Many of them are still found in the agriculture sector and face a wide range of threats to their health and well-being, including driving heavy machinery, being exposed to and handling toxic pesticides, extreme weather temperatures, isolation, and carrying heavy loads. It is therefore in the 15-17 age group that the goals of eliminating child labour, addressing the deficit of decent work for youth, and ensuring occupational safety and health intersect most explicitly.

Poverty is not the only one, but the greatest single force driving children into the workplace. When families cannot afford to meet their basic needs like food, water, education or health care, children became more vulnerable to child labour. On the contrary, when parents have access to decent jobs, they can support their children' education for a longer period, in better schools, which will allow them to have access to better jobs in turn in the future. Similarly, young people coming from families facing discrimination or bonded labour are more likely to be at-risk of ending in worst forms of child labour.



Even in better times, young people face a tough situation in the labour market. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic they were around three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. The crisis now threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities within and between countries. The COVID-19 crisis has severely affected labour markets around the world, hurting young people more than other age groups. The share of young people not in employment, education or training has risen in many countries and has not yet returned to pre-crisis level in most cases, especially when it comes to hazardous work.

Issues to be addressed

This session will delve into key challenges and opportunities to support the transition of young people 15 to 24 years of age into decent work, especially when they have experienced hazardous employment or Occupational Safety and Health risks. The panel will share actions, progress made, good practices and challenges that target the dual goal of eliminating child labour while boosting the quality and protection of youth in the labour market, taking into account gender and no discrimination issues. To put the issue into perspective, the situation of the families will also be discussed. In particular, some speakers will explain the positive impact of combatting discrimination and improving livelihoods of vulnerable households on the reduction of child labour, the access to good education for children and ultimately on decent work for youth, including through some examples of vocational training to promote entrepreneurship.

