

Concept note for a thematic session on

HIGH LEVEL PANELS

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

Monday 16 May 2022, 12.30 – 14.00

The Background

The global community is scheduled to meet in Durban, South Africa in the V Global Conference on the Elimination of child labour, in May 2022. After pledging to accelerate progress towards its elimination when it last met in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2017, and to make tangible progress towards achieving Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals which calls for the “immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”, stakeholders are meeting again to face a stark reality: the increase in child labour globally.

As of 2022, Child labour remains a persistent problem in the world. The latest global estimates of child labour released by ILO and UNICEF in June 2021 indicate that 160 million children are in child labour globally and among which 79 million are found in hazardous work. Worldwide, the number of children in child labour has increased by 8.4 million in the past 4 years, which is the first increase in two decades. Sub Saharan Africa has been the worst affected region reporting an increase in child labour both in terms of percentage and absolute numbers. From 70 million children in children in 2016, it has increased to an alarming figure of 86.6 million in 2020. While there has been some progress in regions like Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas, such progress has not been sufficient to offset the increase in prevalence globally. Nevertheless, lessons and success stories can be drawn from regions that have shown progress, for innovative solutions and inspiration.

A number of factors have impeded progress towards eliminating child labour globally. Access to quality education remains one of the foremost challenges. Child labour is both a cause and a result of excluding children from school. According to the Global Estimates, 35% of all children in child labour are out of school. Hazardous child labour constitutes an even greater barrier to school attendance. Especially worrying is that younger children aged 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 are particularly in danger of exclusion from education due to child labour, with 35% and 28% of the above age groups in child labour not attending school respectively. On the other hand closure of schools during the pandemic has had a heavy impact on education. Although data is yet to emerge on the full impact of the pandemic on education, it can safely be assumed that regardless of other factors, the mere absence of children from school for a long period will result in many children not returning to education even when schools open.

The link between social protection and child labour is an established fact. Social protection plays a key role in empowering communities, reducing vulnerabilities, 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.

Various studies have been conducted on the link between child labour and different elements of social protection such as conditional and unconditional cash transfers, in-kind benefits and school feeding programmes. Research has also been conducted on convergence of various social protection mechanisms on the child and on the family to make protection more comprehensive. However, despite these measures, social protection as a means towards the elimination of child labour remains weak.

The gender dimensions of child labour too cannot be ignored. Overall, and across regions, more boys (11.2%) than girls (7.8%) are in child labour. Over the years, child labour has reduced more among girls than boys. Solutions and actions to eliminate child labour therefore should consider these dynamics and address the different factors that push and pull boys and girls into child labour.

New global challenges, such as Covid-19, may further endanger global progress against child labour. The global estimates forecast that without mitigation measures, the number of children in child labour could rise from 160 million in 2020 to 168.9 million by the end of 2022. In addition to its own challenges, the Covid-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated major deficits in decent work across the world. Poor working conditions, inadequate wages, precarious contracts, the lack of mechanisms for social dialogue, weak legal frameworks and as mentioned previously, lack of access to social protection have all contributed to increased vulnerability of families, pushing them to resort to child labour to meet ends. Other challenges such as poverty, informality, crisis, conflict and fragility all affect the achievement of SDG Target 8.7. If priorities are not set, and urgent action is not taken, the already challenging task of achieving the SDG target may become even more challenging.

The VGC will provide a forum to share state-of-the-art approaches to using inclusive education, social protection, labour inspection and other proven means to eliminate child labour, as well as other elements of target 8.7. It will also identify emerging policy innovations that respond to the dynamic and evolving nature of the challenge.

Therefore, the V Global Conference is a pivotal moment for the global community including governments, workers' and employers' organizations, civil society, academia and all other stakeholders to renew their commitment and energy, to reverse the upward trend in child labour and to put the effort to end child labour back on track.

Format of the session

The two High Level Panels will take place on Monday, 16th of May, for a duration of 1h30 mins each.

To the extent possible, panellists will be present in-person and engage from the conference venue. A limited number of panellists (possibly two) will join online and will appear on the screen.

The panellists will each make a 5-7 minute pitch or respond to a prior-agreed broad question posed by the moderator, which may be followed up by another more specific question in the second round and/



or given an opportunity to make a brief concluding remark. At the end of each panel discussion, the moderator will reach out to the audience for questions and brief comments.

The third segment titled “Voices from the world: United to End Child Labour” will comprise brief video and in-person statements from key countries and participants, showing their support for the conference and for the elimination of child labour globally. Each statement will be between 1-2 minutes including introductions.

High level panel 1

SETTING GLOBAL PRIORITIES

The Background

High level panel 1 will be dedicated to exploring the overall situation of child labour, identifying most pressing challenges that need to be addressed at a global level, and lay out priorities for the global community for the next four years leading toward 2025. The panel will bring together some global leaders in the fight against child labour, who will share their perspectives, identify priorities, inspire the participants towards taking action and set the tone and the context for the Global Conference. The panel will speak to the issues and challenges in a solution oriented, forward looking manner, exploring the effect of the above mentioned challenges as well as the role of innovation, integrated approaches, tripartism, multi-stakeholder collaboration, decentralization of policies, data and monitoring, and awareness raising.

