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FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Preparations for the V Global Conference on Child Labour

Purpose of the document

This document highlights the importance of 2021 as a turning point in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 8.7 on child labour and forced labour. It provides information on developments since the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour, including the recent adoption by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly of resolution 73/327, declaring 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. It also highlights the importance of organizing the V Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour in 2021 and provides information on the status of the preparations, including with regard to mobilizing the required resources. The Governing Body is invited to provide guidance on the proposed course of action leading to 2021. It is also invited to request the Office to pursue that course of action and to inform the Governing Body at its 340th Session (October–November 2020) of progress made (see draft decision in paragraph 21).

Relevant strategic objective: Fundamental principles and rights at work.

Main relevant outcome/cross-cutting policy driver: Outcome 7: Adequate and effective protection at work for all.

Policy implications: Full alignment with UN General Assembly resolution 73/327 and SDG target 8.7.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: Additional extrabudgetary resources will need to be mobilized to pursue the proposed course of action.

Follow-up action required: See the draft decision.

Author unit: Governance and Tripartism Department (GOVERNANCE).

Related documents: GB.332/POL/3.

Introduction

1. The V Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour is a global deliverable of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21 (output 7.1). In accordance with the current four-year cycle of global conferences on this topic, it should take place in 2021. This is four years ahead of the 2025 deadline set by SDG target 8.7 to end child labour in all its forms.¹

Context and outcome of the IV Global Conference

2. In November 2017, the Government of Argentina hosted the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour. With the Governing Body's approval, the scope of the IV Global Conference was enlarged to include forced labour, in line with target 8.7, and decent work for young people of legal working age. There were participants from 138 countries, including from a significant number of least developed countries, representing governments, workers' and employers' organizations, enterprises, civil society, youth organizations, UN agencies and other international and regional organizations.
3. Prior to the IV Global Conference, the ILO released new global estimates on child labour and forced labour. According to those estimates, in 2016, 152 million children between 5 and 17 years of age (of whom 42 per cent were girls and 58 per cent were boys) were still subject to child labour, and at least 25 million women, men and children were in forced labour, including human trafficking. The report *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012–2016* called for urgent measures to accelerate progress, as, at the pace of reduction achieved during the period covered by the report, there would still be 121 million children in child labour in 2025.
4. The IV Global Conference ended with a renewed commitment from the international community to implement integrated policies and programmes towards the elimination of child labour. The outcome document, the *Buenos Aires Declaration on Child Labour, Forced Labour and Youth Employment*, provides valuable guidance on how to develop such an integrated approach. It makes specific reference to the informal and rural economies, crisis situations and armed conflict, and supply chains. It underlines the fact that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a unique opportunity to accelerate the eradication of inequality and poverty, and welcomes the establishment of Alliance 8.7. The Declaration commits all stakeholders to a rights-based approach and to serving the best interests of the child and urges the international community to take action in three areas: (1) policy and governance; (2) knowledge, data and monitoring; and (3) partnerships and innovation. It underlines the importance of global partnerships, of new forms of cooperation and of subregional and regional initiatives in generating concerted policies and innovation.
5. The IV Global Conference organizing committee invited the ILO's tripartite constituents and other stakeholders to submit pledges to carry out concrete actions to accelerate the pace towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour. In total, 96 action-oriented pledges were registered during the IV Global Conference. More than half of the pledges were made by governments and regional groups. These pledges referred to policy actions, the promotion of partnerships, advocacy work, the ratification of international instruments and legislative

¹ Target 8.7 is: "Take 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."

actions at the national level. For the first time, explicit references and commitments were made to the elimination of forced labour. Pledges were reviewed by a tripartite committee established during the IV Global Conference to ensure consistency with international standards, and then publicly announced.²

6. At its 332nd Session (March 2018), the Governing Body endorsed the Buenos Aires Declaration and requested the Office to support its implementation in conjunction with the ILO Plan of Action for the period 2017–23 to give effect to the conclusions concerning the second recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work, adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2017. The Governing Body reconfirmed its commitment to the elimination of child labour and forced labour and requested the Office to continue providing technical assistance to achieve these objectives. Furthermore, it asked the Office to make an overview of the pledges made in Buenos Aires, clustered per theme and/or subject; and requested the Office, in cooperation with Alliance 8.7, to organise before the V Global Conference a mid-term review of the progress made in eliminating child labour and forced labour and achieving SDG 8.7 in these matters. The Governing Body also encouraged the UN General Assembly to declare the year 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.

Developments since the IV Global Conference

7. Since the IV Global Conference, efforts towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour have been reinvigorated and accelerated in many countries. In July 2020, on the margins of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, Alliance 8.7 will present a review of the progress made towards eliminating child labour and forced labour since the IV Global Conference. A detailed review of the implementation of the 96 pledges will also be presented. An initial assessment has already indicated that progress has been made, particularly in respect of ratification,³ legislation and the adoption of comprehensive national action plans in line with the Buenos Aires Declaration. Over 50 countries, with the technical support of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour (IPEC+) flagship programme, have undertaken actions towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour.⁴ Action has also accelerated on some thematic priorities, such as supply chains. This was evident in a meeting organized in January 2020 by the Government of the Netherlands on ending child labour in global supply chains, which facilitated the sharing of good practices and lessons learned in this regard.⁵

² An official list of the pledges made can be found on the web page of Alliance 8.7 relating to the Global Conference, at <https://www.alliance87.org/events/iv-global-conference-on-the-sustained-eradication-of-child-labour/>.

³ Since the IV Global Conference, the following ratifications have been registered: the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138): 2 (Suriname and Vanuatu); the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182): 5 (Cook Islands, Eritrea, Marshall Islands, Palau and Tuvalu); and the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930: 22 (Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Malta, Mozambique, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe).

⁴ A detailed list of actions is provided in *IPEC+ Global Flagship Programme Implementation: Towards a world free from child labour and forced labour*, pp. 14–17.

⁵ See <https://takingnextsteps.nl/>.

8. The IV Global Conference further stimulated new partnerships. It paved the way for the consolidation of Alliance 8.7 to enhance multi-stakeholder action with the full involvement and leadership of the ILO's tripartite constituents. Under the umbrella of Alliance 8.7, 18 ILO member States have become pathfinder countries on the elimination of child labour and forced labour, thereby promoting integrated strategies across government levels and in collaboration with other stakeholders.⁶ Alliance 8.7 also promotes coordinated action across the UN system on specific thematic areas, notably supply chains, migration, conflicts and humanitarian settings, and the rule of law and governance. A recent example is the collaboration of the ILO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Children's Fund on the publication and dissemination of a global report entitled *Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains*, which was presented to the G20 Employment Working Group and launched at the Paris Peace Forum in November 2019.
9. There has also been enhanced action by the social partners at the national and global levels. Representative workers' and employers' organizations participate actively in Alliance 8.7, the pathfinder country process and in regional meetings on target 8.7. The ILO's business networks on child labour and forced labour convene businesses of different sizes to develop solutions that extend across supply chains and that support national-level processes.⁷
10. The renewed commitment and action following the IV Global Conference led to enhanced resource mobilization efforts at different levels. For example, resources have been mobilized from national budgets through the Alliance 8.7 pathfinder country process. In addition, the IPEC+ flagship programme has seen increased extrabudgetary contributions from development partners.⁸
11. The IV Global Conference propelled high-level advocacy and commitment at the global and regional levels. In July 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted [resolution 73/327](#), declaring 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. Among other actions, the resolution invites all member States, organizations of the UN system, other international and regional organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, individuals and other relevant stakeholders, to observe the International Year, as appropriate, through activities aimed at raising awareness of the importance of the eradication of child labour, and to share best practices in this regard. The resolution also invites the ILO to facilitate the implementation of the International Year, and all relevant stakeholders to make voluntary contributions and to provide other forms of support for the International Year.
12. Furthermore, the [Panama Declaration for the ILO Centenary: The future of work in the Americas](#), adopted in 2018 by the 19th American Regional Meeting of the ILO, the [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#), adopted in 2019 by the International Labour Conference, and the [Abidjan Declaration – Advancing Social Justice: Shaping the future of work in Africa](#), adopted in 2019 by the 14th African Regional Meeting of the ILO, identify child labour and forced labour as major obstacles to the achievement of decent work. In December 2019, the African Union adopted a Ten-Year Action Plan to Eradicate Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery. The new President of the

⁶ More information about the pathfinder strategy and commitments can be found on the [Alliance 8.7 website](#).

⁷ More information about the business networks can be found on the websites of the [Child Labour Platform](#) and [Forced Labour Business Network](#).

⁸ For further information, see [IPEC+ Global Flagship Programme Implementation: Towards a world free from child labour and forced labour](#).

European Commission has pledged to take a zero tolerance policy towards child labour.⁹ The Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour has continuously promoted national action towards reaching target 8.7. A regional conference on reaching target 8.7, organized by Alliance 8.7 in collaboration with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children¹⁰ in Kathmandu in November 2019, provided a platform to share good practices on accelerating national action to end child labour and forced labour across the Asia and Pacific region.

13. The above summary of developments indicates that the IV Global Conference has played a critical role in harnessing action at the national, regional and global levels. As mentioned above, if the current cycle of global conferences were to be maintained, the next global conference would take place in 2021, during the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. The ILO, along with other Alliance 8.7 partners, has already started technical work towards the production and publication, in 2021, of new global estimates on child labour and forced labour. They are likely to show that a significant number of children are still subject to child labour. This implies that additional and reinvigorated international commitment and action are required to put an end to child labour in all its forms by 2025, as per target 8.7, and further increases the importance of 2021 as a key turning point for strategic action at the international level in that regard. Similar efforts and strategic considerations are also required with regard to forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking if target 8.7 is to be reached by 2030.

Preparations for the V Global Conference: Current situation, constraints and proposed course of action

14. Within the framework of target 8.7, from an international policy and action viewpoint, the Office considers that it is important to organize the V Global Conference in 2021. The objectives of the V Global Conference could be: (i) to serve as a catalyst for accelerated and coherent action at the global, regional, national and local levels; (ii) to provide an opportunity to continue learning from good practice and innovative approaches; (iii) to review progress on existing pledges and formulate new ones, as appropriate; (iv) to identify or enhance cooperation mechanisms to scale up proven solutions; and (v) to explore innovative funding modalities. The V Global Conference, in addition to highlighting the central role of the social partners, could also be an opportunity to enlarge the participation of, and strengthen the commitments by, the private sector, in close consultation with other relevant partners. Finally, the preparatory process could generate inputs for a possible UN General Assembly resolution on the effective elimination of child labour and forced labour, as a follow-up to resolution 73/327, aimed at increasing the chances of meeting the target 8.7 deadlines on child labour by 2025 and on forced labour by 2030.
15. Consultations started in 2017 with a focus on Africa as the potential region to host the V Global Conference. An ILO member State has already signalled its interest in hosting but has yet to confirm its offer. This would entail the allocation of the necessary resources from the national budget of the host country.
16. The Office would be able to provide technical support to the host country of the V Global Conference, as per previous practice. This would entail, for example, the publication of new

⁹ See Ursula von der Leyen's *Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024*, p. 17.

¹⁰ See <https://saievac.org/>.

global estimates and policy reports for 2021. In coordination with the host country and the Alliance 8.7 partners, the Office would also provide technical input to the thematic agenda of the V Global Conference. The Alliance 8.7 event that is planned to take place in July 2020 in the margins of the high-level political forum on sustainable development is also expected to support the preparations for the V Global Conference by reviewing progress made and identifying good practices. France, as the current chair of Alliance 8.7, has already provided financial and overall support.

17. For the IV Global Conference, the Office managed to redeploy funds from within the overall approved budget level for the concerned biennium (approximately US\$450,000) to support the participation of tripartite delegations from least developed countries. In addition, approximately US\$600,000 was also mobilized in 2016–17 to support the preparatory process through several regional meetings and the negotiation of the draft Buenos Aires Declaration in Geneva. The regional meetings were aimed at preparing tripartite constituents for the IV Global Conference and at consulting on the creation of Alliance 8.7. In the current resource-constrained environment, however, the Office would not be in a position to sustain the same level of financial support, unless other work is discontinued or given less emphasis.
18. In order to mitigate these resource constraints, the Office proposes a number of measures. First, it proposes to engage with development partners and other partners of Alliance 8.7, including through its Global Coordinating Group, with a view to mobilizing resources to enable the meaningful participation of tripartite constituents, in particular from least developed countries. Second, concerning the preparatory meetings, it is possible to envisage cost-saving measures. The Office considers that, in view of the action that has been deployed through Alliance 8.7 and the fact that national processes are well-advanced, preparatory regional meetings may not be necessary. The Office will nonetheless ensure the full involvement of regional and subregional organizations and initiatives. Cost-saving measures would also be possible by aiming at a short and concise outcome document, thereby reducing the number of preparatory meetings.
19. In addition, and in line with the spirit of the ongoing UN reform processes, collaboration agreements and enhanced partnerships with other UN agencies and Alliance 8.7 partner organizations could be explored, with a view to sharing responsibilities for thematic areas or segments of the V Global Conference. This would not preclude the full involvement of the social partners in the V Global Conference.
20. Despite all the efforts being deployed, if, by June 2020, a host country and the necessary resources cannot be identified, the V Global Conference would have to be postponed until the biennium 2022–23. In any event, the ILO, together with its Alliance 8.7 partners, would propose additional activities to implement resolution 73/327. This could include a special event on the margins of the 110th Session (2021) of the International Labour Conference, in combination with the World Day against Child Labour, followed by a high-level event during the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. These events could also prepare the ground for the drafting and adoption of a possible UN resolution on the effective elimination of child labour and forced labour as a follow-up to resolution 73/327, as mentioned above.

Draft decision

21. *The Governing Body requested the Office to pursue the preparations for the V Global Conference on Child Labour and the course of action proposed in paragraphs 14–20 of document GB.338/POL/4, taking into account the views expressed and guidance provided during the discussion, and to inform the Governing Body at its 340th Session (October–November 2020) of progress made.*