

# 5TH GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR

DURBAN, 15-20 MAY 2022

## Conference Report



# 1. Context and opening

The latest global estimates on child labour, developed by the ILO in cooperation with UNICEF, have shown that between 2016 and 2020, child labour has increased for the first time in over 20 years. Given this concerning trend, and with the deadline to end child labour in all its forms by 2025 (Sustainable Development Goal 8.7) fast approaching, the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour (5GC) took place with a particular sense of urgency.

Bringing together representatives of government, workers' and employers' organizations, as well as representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), UN agencies, and, for the first time, children, the conference was held in a hybrid format in Durban, South Africa from 15-20 May 2022. The conference not only focused on sharing data, good practices and challenges in the struggle to eliminate child labour, but specifically focused on providing a clear and actionable way forward, which was not only reflected in the thematic panels, but especially in the outcome document, the [Durban Call to Action](#), which was adopted by acclamation during the final session.

Mr Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization, emphasised the enormous challenges in the fight against child labour, not least of which was the pandemic, but also the increase of conflict and the impact of climate change that affected children more than anyone else. He noted with concern that progress had stalled in recent years, and that, especially on the African continent, child labour had increased, particularly among young children aged 5-11.

It was for this reason that the conference took on a symbolic meaning: hosted for the first time in Africa, and with only three years to go to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7, solutions to eliminating child labour should and would emerge from the continent, and Africa had shown that it was an incubator for innovative approaches that the world could learn from.

While child labour was always linked to poverty, we should not resign ourselves to accepting it as inevitable, and progress against this fundamental human rights violation had been made, most notably through the universal ratification of ILO Convention No. 182, and the wide ratification of ILO Convention No. 138. Furthermore, he was pleased to note that the conference would address the root causes of child labour; such as expanding access to education and social protection, decent work for adults, financing for the implementation of national action plans, child labour in agriculture, and dedicated attention to the most vulnerable groups such as refugees and migrants, as well as children with disabilities.

Furthermore, the current juncture also provided emerging opportunities, such as a human-centred approach to the global recovery from the pandemic through inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the closing of the digital divide, fairer trade that would distribute the benefits more equitably, and finally a potential for international cooperation to mobilise global responses to global challenges. Multi-stakeholder partnerships such as Alliance 8.7 had made a real impact, and a truly just transition to a carbon-free economy with children's rights and the gender dimension at its centre was possible, albeit requiring nothing short of a new social contract.

With these points in mind, Mr Ryder closed on an optimistic note: what mattered most was what participants of the conference would do when they returned home, and the Durban Call to Action

would offer a state-of-the-art roadmap. In other words, “let’s get to work”.

Under the headline “[N]o country can claim progress if it is built on the backs of children”, President Cyril Ramaphosa similarly emphasised the importance of tackling the root causes of child labour, especially poverty, as “dire material conditions” put families into impossible predicaments, leading not only to children working in factories and mines, but also in less visible environments such as domestic servitude or family farms, or exposing children to the worst forms of child labour such as sexual exploitation.

He shared how his country, South Africa, had been successful in reducing child labour by enshrining the rights of children in the constitution and also by tackling the root causes of child labour through increased access to free and quality education and extending social protection, making sure “that no parent ever has to make that choice”.

However, more remains to be done, and child labour needs to be much more comprehensively addressed through international cooperation and coordination, as well as through making trade more inclusive so that countries can industrialise and share in the wealth they help produce. He concluded by calling on all delegates to adopt the outcome document, the Durban Call to Action.

## 2. Key messages from the thematic panels

Under the motto “Upscale, Upskill & Integrate”, delegates listened to and participated in 12 thematic panels as well as 28 side events sharing recent trends, challenges and achievements, root causes, and, most crucially, showing practical and actionable solutions and initiatives to renew and accelerate the fight against child labour.

This short report will focus on the key messages and themes from the thematic panels held between 17-19 May 2022. For more in-depth information, a full technical report is also available.

The conference made clear that tackling child labour requires addressing the complex and interrelated root causes of it, such as poverty, the increasing impact of climate change or conflict. In sharing good practices and calling for practical, actionable solutions, delegates consistently emphasised the need for increased cooperation, coordination and social dialogue on a national, regional and global scale if we are to achieve SDG 8.7 by 2025.

### EDUCATION

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic had led to the largest education crisis ever, with some 1.5 billion learners affected by school closures in 2020, and as recently as January 2022, some 616 million still suffering from full or partial school closures. Sadly, if not unsurprisingly given the importance of education in achieving SDG 8.7, this was a significant setback and may have led to as many as 16.8 million more children in child labour, particularly young children aged 5-11.

Education is one of the most effective tools to keep children out of labour and enable sustainable, long-term changes. However, education is frequently inaccessible to vulnerable children, as school fees or indirect costs such as uniforms, books or scholar transport can create barriers for children of poorer families, a condition which worsened as the pandemic led to loss of earnings of parents and the need for children to contribute to the household income forced many into labour.

Once children have dropped out of school, it can be difficult to motivate them to return. This can be remedied by incentives or specialised curricula for older returning children, but remains a challenge, especially as the world recovers from the pandemic.

However, even before the pandemic, some countries, especially in the Global South, struggled with providing safe, healthy and well-resourced school environments, most often due to a lack of financing. Even when adhering to the UNESCO Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action which recommends that 4-6 percent of GDP or 15-20 percent of overall government expenditure be spent on education, this can be insufficient for low-income countries with young populations. This problem can be compounded by natural disasters which destroy infrastructure and thus increase pressure on public finances.

Apart from these challenges, the panel also discussed some good practices, such as making school attendance compulsory, public-private partnerships where business support the funding of schools directly or indirectly, as well as providing flexible curricula to motivate children to come back to school after long absences, or removing barriers to school attendance through school meal programmes, free scholar transport and other measures such as bursaries.

Concretely, the panel called to:

- Align the minimum working age with the end of compulsory schooling.
- Ensure access to early childhood development services, childcare, and pre-primary education, which increase the chance that students not only stay in school but also succeed.
- Improving the overall quality of education and ensuring access to all children by making education genuinely free and compulsory, including abolishing school fees, providing scholarships and bursaries (including for girls), eliminating costs for books, uniforms and transport, and providing school meals, which often serve as incentives for families to enrol and keep their children in school.
- Commit to the UNESCO Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, guaranteeing that 4-6 percent of GDP or 15-20 percent of public expenditure be invested in education.
- Provide or increase universal child benefits to address poverty as a driver to school leavings.
- Education sector support for back-to-school campaigns and outreach, flexible school calendars and curricula to promote school attendance for all children (including children with disabilities, pregnant girls and young mothers, and children engaged in hazardous or harmful work). This is of particular importance given the harmful impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education for school- age children.
- Strengthen the capacity of national institutions to coordinate and monitor efforts to eliminate child labour.
- Create safe, healthy and well-resourced school environments, particularly in fragile contexts, including investing in teachers (providing pre-and in-service training, improving their working conditions, and building their resilience in times of natural disasters).
- Strengthen international partnership and global advocacy to provide opportunities for cooperation between national and international organizations and others.

## **SUSTAINING PEACE AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE THROUGH THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR**

New research by the ILO highlights the importance of focusing on two interrelated issues: conflict and climate change. Examining four types of crises within these two larger groups (armed conflicts, natural disasters, disease outbreaks and economic crisis), the research found that almost half of the estimated 160 million children in child labour live in countries that are affected by conflict.

Those crises have a double effect: on the one hand, they generate and amplify many of the root causes of child labour, such as population displacement and forced migration, poverty and food insecurity, or recruitment of children by armed forces and groups; and, on the other hand, decrease

almost all protection factors that states, the international community or CSOs can provide, such as law enforcement, access to essential services and social protection, access to education or other critical infrastructure such as health and transport. Furthermore, the interrelation between climate change and crisis is likely to evolve into a self-accelerating dynamic, as decreasing crop yields lead to intensified conflict over scarce resources.

While sharing examples from Kenya, Niger, Chad, Somalia and Papua New Guinea, panellists showed that while each situation is specific and complex in its own way, there is also clearly an underlying triangular relationship between climate change, conflict and (the worst forms of) child labour common to all scenarios.

The conclusion from both the research and the panel discussion is clear - policies must address these issues comprehensively and holistically, and any policy must have the rights and protection of children at its core. Concretely, the panel called for:

- Children's needs need to be put at the centre of all policies addressing conflict and climate change
- Policies to be comprehensive and harmonised in order to effectively address the interrelated issues of climate change and crisis
- The impact of climate change on workers to be acknowledged and governments to support climate justice and decent work and social protection.
- Planned and coordinated resource mobilisation to move from reacting to a crisis to preventing it
- Endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments on children in conflict situations (as adopted by the 2007 "Free Children from War" conference organised by UNICEF and France)
- Increased global coordination and cooperation in order to accelerate efforts to halt or reverse the worst effects of climate change.

## **AFRICAN UNION SESSION ON POLICY PRIORITIES TO END CHILD LABOUR IN AFRICA**

Global child labour goals will not be achieved without a breakthrough in Africa. Despite unprecedented levels of awareness and commitment, child labour has increased in both absolute and relative terms since 2012. However, the continent is not a monolithic bloc, and significant achievements have been made, particularly in the Northern and Southern regions, whereas child labour is now most prevalent in the middle belt of Africa (Central, Western and Eastern Africa). Child labour is a significant problem in the informal sector, as well as in agriculture: 60 percent of children in agriculture are less than 12 years old, and many of those do hazardous work. Furthermore, 72 million children at primary school age are not currently in education. The agenda for this meeting was shaped by the African regional consultation in November 2021, and the session provided a forum for stakeholders to discuss both challenges and policy priorities to end child labour on the continent.

The overall message from this panel was that the challenges are large, but not unsurmountable. However, this requires meaningful regional and global cooperation and coordination, especially in regard to tackling the root causes of child labour.

Concretely, the panel concluded that:

- Countries show high commitment to ending child labour, illustrated for example in the high level of ratification of ILO conventions and the adoption of the [African Union Ten Year Action Plan on Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery](#).
- Inclusive agriculture and rural development as well as sustainable use of natural resources are key to support the elimination of child labour.
- There is a concrete need for financing:
  - ◊ of projects and campaigns targeted specifically at child labour;
  - ◊ instruments in agriculture that address the vulnerabilities of farmers to climate change and conflict;
  - ◊ to expand technologies in agriculture to reduce reliance on child labour;
  - ◊ to expand social protection to agricultural farmers;
  - ◊ to ensure free access to education in rural areas.
- Inclusive digitalisation (i.e. ensuring that this does not inadvertently increases the digital gap, for example between rural and urban areas) can be a useful tool to increase access to education.
- Laws, rules and regulations need proper enforcement.
- The transition from informal to formal economy needs to be accelerated, for example by supporting companies to promote more and better jobs.

## **INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: THE FORMULA FOR A REGION MOVING CLOSER TO ENDING CHILD LABOUR**

The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region has steadily reduced child labour over the past 15 years despite the pandemic. Given the urgency of the conference to accelerate and upscale action against child labour, this session provided an opportunity for representatives to share learnings and good practices from the region.

Following the Third Global Conference on Child Labour (2013), the region has worked to put in place comprehensive strategies, strengthened its structures, policy frameworks and human teams working to achieve Target 8.7. This has been made possible by the strong political will of the countries to work together through the Latin America and the Caribbean Child Labour Free Regional Initiative (RILAC) - a shared work network that is:

### **Regional (comprised of 30 countries)**

RILAC has been able to adapt quickly to the pandemic because it was already prepared for it by making intensive use of communication technologies to overcome two major challenges: distance and language differences. Thus, the tripartite representatives from all over the region have a direct and daily communication channel to be part of the decisions taken within the framework of the Strategic Plan.

### **Tripartite (governments, employers and workers participate at the same level)**

The tripartite composition of RILAC has been key to influencing sustainable policies and the operation of a Network of Focal Points (representatives formally designated by each country), which in an operational manner, meet monthly to evaluate, design and make decisions within the framework of the Strategic Plan.

### **Sharing a vision, a political agreement, and work in coordination, although approaches vary according to local needs**

Despite the progress made, it is important to redouble efforts to ensure that, given the effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable groups, no child is left behind and that target 8.7 is met.

The South-South and Triangular Cooperation strategy has made it possible to disseminate lessons learned, which build more solid and validated proposals that countries are adapting to their own realities. This, little by little, is building a regional formula with its own identity in each country.

The panel concluded with a recommendation that the conference's Call to Action will highlight RILAC as an example of the kind of innovative regional initiative that could be reproduced in other regions of the world.

## **THE CENTRAL ROLE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN TACKLING CHILD LABOUR**

This session was divided into two parts - the launch of a new report on social protection by the ILO and UNICEF was followed by a panel discussion on challenges and good practices.

Today, 160 million children, or almost 1 in 10 are engaged in child labour - and more than half of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. COVID-19, conflict and climate change are likely to push more children into child labour. To reverse this trend, a multi-sector approach is critical, where social protection plays an important role. And the evidence is clear: social protection, including child benefits, has the potential to mitigate this increasing risk: specifically, estimates show that child labour can decline by as much as 15 million if adequate measures are put in place. As of yet, the enormous potential of social protection remains mostly untapped and critical gaps remain, only 26.4 percent of children worldwide receive social protection benefits. Our path towards inclusive recovery requires putting children at the centre. This calls for the urgent expansion of social protection coverage as a critical pillar to ensure that we end child labour once and for all.

The report sought to improve understanding on how social protection can contribute to eliminating child labour. Results related to social protection programme effectiveness showed that despite a limited focus on children or on addressing child labour outcomes, they nevertheless reduced children's engagement in work. However, the report also saw some studies that reported increases in children's productive activities, calling for a more careful understanding of unintended impacts and the need to design programmes that are child-sensitive.

The presentation of the report and the following panel discussion made clear that social protection is central not just to fighting child labour, but to development in general, or, as one panellist put



it: Policymakers should recognise that countries do not build social protection systems after they develop; they build social protection systems in order to develop. The discussion also considered the financing gap to social protection, as many, especially low-income, countries do not spend adequate amounts on social protection measures. However, the panel also highlighted that where domestic resources are insufficient, international partners need to be mobilised to help bridge the gap. To put it into concrete terms, and in perspective: 77.9 billion USD would be required to establish a basic social protection floor in low-income countries, a small number when compared to the global fiscal stimulus response to the pandemic, which came to around 19 trillion USD.

## CSO FORUM

Given the size of the task of eliminating child labour and recognising the need to address root causes and cooperate across sectors, issues and stakeholder groups, the CSO Forum brought together representatives from organisations that are not directly involved in tackling child labour, with the aim to foster new alliances, develop innovative ideas and improve actions taken. The forum brought together representatives from groups fighting the sexual exploitation of children, advocates for transparency in global supply chains, advocates for monitoring and accountability of multilateral development banks, and farmers.

Advocates for transparency in supply chains can play a crucial role in ensuring that products are sourced, produced and traded without child labour, not just by raising consumer awareness, but by harnessing new technologies that make every consumable item traceable.

In terms of tackling sexual exploitation of children, CSOs have achieved successes with developing industry-wide codes of conduct. In this concrete example, this code focussed on the tourism industry, but the underlying principles are transferable to other sectors and industries as well. These codes of conduct typically involve both suppliers of services and products (establishing policies and procedures, awareness-raising and training on reporting mechanisms, zero tolerance policies etc.) as well as consumers (awareness-raising). In order to ensure accountability, CSOs also contribute to reporting on the implementation of codes of conduct.

Farmers' organisations play an important role in giving a voice to those who are directly impacted by child labour and hold those to account that impact child labour. Especially by including minority groups such as children and women, these groups can contribute to a more nuanced discussion on child labour: whereas the common assumption is that all child labour is negative, such organisations draw a clear distinction between child labour and child work, the former being harmful and depriving a child of their rights, whereas the latter - from an appropriate age - can contribute to skills-building of young people and thus help prepare them for work opportunities later on in life.

Finally, organisations that monitor multilateral development banks have leverage over how projects are financed and are thus effecting a move towards standard-setting in financing projects. The key message here was that investment is not neutral, but has significant effects, such that the maxim becomes investing better, not necessarily more.

The overall theme of this session was accountability, and how accountability in different sectors, industries, in investment and along the supply chain, can and will provide positive outcomes contributing to the fight against child labour.

## **DECENT JOBS FOR YOUTH: ELIMINATING HAZARDOUS EMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH**

This session discussed key challenges and opportunities in supporting the transition of young people into decent work, especially of those who have experienced child labour and hazardous work. Once again, panellists pointed to the importance of social protection and access to education. Several key statements highlighted the difficulties many learners face when they do not have adequate access to food, water and other resources, such as electricity, light or educational resources. Universal social protection is therefore essential and should be a key part of strategies aiming to reduce vulnerabilities, especially for marginalised youth.

Overall, education is of course a key component in enabling transitions into safe and decent work. Governments were called on to incentivise businesses to promote apprenticeships programmes, which would in turn also benefit companies in that they train their own future workers. Similarly, governments, businesses and academic institutions must work together in order to develop policies that ensure young people have access not only to vocational training, but also to decent work once they are fully trained.

In all aspects and strategies, youth involvement in decision-making processes will be key however, and be able to design solutions that protect their physical and especially their mental health, several panellists called mental health the greatest threat to overall health, wellbeing and productivity. Therefore, especially for children who have experienced child labour and hazardous work, it must be treated as an occupational hazard and psychosocial support must be provided. In a wider sense, promoting decent jobs for youth must also mean addressing social stigmas, and mental health should be treated like any other illness and, bringing it back to social protection, covered by insurance or state funding.

## **FINANCING THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR**

The question of financing arose in various sessions throughout the conference, and this event provided a forum to discuss, in practical terms, how to mobilise resources and funding to make the investments required to tackle child labour and its root causes. Apart from the moral case for financing, the business case is also clear as research shows that every one dollar invested in children brings a return of seven dollars.

Firstly, National Action Plans can play an important role in securing financing, as the example from Ghana showed: through free education from primary to high school, and multi-stakeholder approaches across the whole of government and social partners, significant achievements could be made. Mobilising and securing domestic finance is furthermore important to ensure that agreements and commitments made can be implemented sustainably and effectively.

Secondly, by focusing on trade and investment, for example by setting solid standards throughout the supply chain and supporting trading partners in the implementation and monitoring of such standards, much progress can be made.

Thirdly, a focus on trade and investment goes hand in hand with a larger change from “traditional” Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) towards financing. While some regions, such as the EU,

remain leading donors globally and provide crucial funding for, among other projects, education, ODA is only part of a solution, not a solution in itself. Most importantly, the private sector must be brought in and financial markets must be activated to leverage sustainable finance, and building ecosystems which channel funding towards initiatives that comply with good practices.

Fourthly, with this change from assistance to financing, it is also crucial that ODA is catalytic, and can act as an incentive to crowd in other funding from multilateral development banks, national budgets and the private sector. One such example comes from so-called [development impact bonds in Kenya](#), in which initial funding provided by development agencies attracted additional private sector and government funding of almost twice the size.

Fifthly, multilateral development banks such as the World Bank shared their steep learning curve in terms of eradicating child labour. In 2018, the World Bank started introducing standards for labour and working conditions in projects it invests in, and also began to focus on wider issues such as health, education and local economic development. This change ensures that due diligence is at the core of investment and financing decisions.

Finally, moving away from financing on a broader scale, an important contribution was also made by a representative of the Grameen Foundation, who shared how microfinance banks can counter unintended negative outcomes on child labour by working directly with financial services providers as well as with those receiving microloans.

## MAKING A BREAKTHROUGH IN AGRICULTURE TO END CHILD LABOUR

Given the prevalence of child labour in agriculture - after all, 70 percent of all children in child labour work in crop farming, livestock, forestry, fishery and aquaculture - it is clear that this topic needed to be addressed in a separate session, organised in collaboration with the FAO. The panel looked at short, medium and long term solutions, particularly with a view to the fact that many children are engaged in work in the informal sector or in family farms.

An introductory presentation delivered by the FAO representative made clear that efforts to change agriculture need to move away from approaches exclusively focusing on labour, and towards cross-sectoral projects, increasing partnerships and cooperation.

One of the root causes for child labour in agriculture is poverty, with climate change and conflicts further complicating the situation. The panel therefore discussed solutions such as shifting attention towards neglected agricultural communities and smallholder producers that frequently rely on the worst forms of child labour, and extend access to social protection, most importantly with regards to food security. Extending social protection will also help overcome barriers to education - once families are more secure, they are more likely to send their children to school. However, it is also important to work with families in neglected communities to raise awareness on the importance of education.

Two drivers of poverty in agriculture are piece rate wages and restrictions on freedom of association. In the case of the former, the piece wage system needs to be abandoned in favour of fair prices for agricultural products that allow a decent living for producers. In the case of the latter, freedom of association will not only enable workers to negotiate better wages through collective

bargaining, but also to hold employers who violate (child) labour laws to account.

Finally, laws and regulations must not only be formulated, but actually acted upon and compliance needs to be consistently monitored.

The panel once again emphasised that many of these solutions can only be achieved by better national and international cooperation, as well as through social dialogue.

## VULNERABILITIES

This panel focused on the complex interplay of various, interrelated root causes of child labour, particularly as they affect the worst forms of child labour.

New ILO research sheds new light on four vulnerabilities in particular: situations of crisis, the impact of climate change on child labour, situations of informality and discrimination, especially as experienced by indigenous people. The scene-setting presentation highlighted five vulnerability factors:

- **Crisis**, as the panel on climate change and crisis also discussed, about half of the 160 million children in child labour live in areas affected by conflict, and, on average, child labour rates are 77 percent higher in countries that experience conflicts than elsewhere.
- **Crisis and climate change** make precarious migration more likely - 500 million children live in places at risk of climate-induced migration.
- **Discrimination**, indigenous people are disproportionately represented among the poor, which in turn leads to a disproportional rate of children in child labour.
- **Informal economy**, even one parent working informally significantly increases the risk of child labour, as they are less protected.
- **Economic vulnerability associated with shocks**, as the pandemic showed, economic shocks, meaning the loss of earnings of adults in contexts without adequate social protection, increases children's vulnerability to child labour.

Following this presentation, the panellists took turns to identify medium- and long-term solutions that can mitigate some of these vulnerabilities:

### 1 Recognising the gender dimension

Women and girls, men and boys are affected differently by different vulnerabilities. For example, 90 percent of children in domestic labour are girls, and this is often an invisible issue. Furthermore, women and girls often have little to no support from their communities to deal with the increased care burden. Recognising care work as work can help to mitigate some of the exploitation women face.

### 2 New challenges brought on by school closures

Online schooling of children during COVID has exposed children to sexual predators operating online. Governments need to move and change tactics to respond to this new digital threat. Similarly, crimes relating to the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) require national but also regional responses.

### 3 Discrimination

All Member States should commit and collaborate to eliminate child trafficking and child labour to create an environment where children grow and realise their potential irrespective of gender, race, class or disabilities.

### 4 Precarious migration

Children of undocumented parents, children who have been trafficked or are migrating without documents are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and feel this vulnerability in their entire migration experience. All actors should re-commit towards focusing on the best interest of the child, and the migration status of a child should never be a factor of discrimination. States are responsible to ensure the legal identity of all children; and are responsible to protect and address vulnerability regardless of status. Taking this responsibility calls for a change in mentality.

### 5 Funding for social protection

Social protection systems cannot function without adequate funding. Taxation systems have to be more progressive, to fight against tax evasion, and this reform has to include a minimum tax for multinational corporations of at least 15 percent (as per G7 recommendation). Due diligence along supply chains is not the only issue where multinationals are concerned - if and where they pay taxes is a key issue.

## CHILD LABOUR IN SUPPLY CHAINS

Child labour in supply chains is a complex issue that requires multi-stakeholder and multi-sector solutions. The panel discussed ways in which governments and trading blocs, as well as workers' and employers' organizations and CSOs can play a role in eliminating child labour.

Decent, secure and properly remunerated work for adults is the cornerstone of combating poverty and child labour. To deliver fair wages for workers is part of a company's responsibility to respect human rights. Therefore, employers need clear, practical and robust methods to measure progress towards living wages for the workforce, and for workers in the supply chain. Trade unions play an important part in this, not just through holding companies to account, but also as collective bargaining ensures fair wages for decent work.

While some employers have made significant progress, the contributions from representatives of the United States and the European Union showed that the voluntary approach to ensuring due diligence and thus supply chains free from child labour has failed. Increasingly, both trading blocs are therefore designing trade measures that put the burden of proof and due diligence on companies, requiring them to thoroughly examine their supply chains and take action.

Importantly, the panel also discussed the limits to national legislation. There is a risk that the loopholes in a patchwork of regulations increases vulnerabilities of children, so strong regional and global initiatives that harmonise legislation on labour standards and inspections are necessary, accompanied by strong partnerships between governments through free trade agreements and other economic measures.

## CHILDREN FORUM

This was the first time that children were represented in a special forum at a global conference, and the first time they were progressively engaged, both virtually and in-person, to understand their perspectives and what policies proposals they are making to drive stakeholders to end child labour. The conference hosted over 60 children and young people from different parts of the world, representing Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

The following is their own call to action, covering their expectations to the delegates at the 5GC:

As we children and young people of the world have convened in Durban, from other parts of the world, we are saying no to child labour, and we are asking governments and all other actors, to respect and consider our voices to eradicate child labour by 2025.

We have captured in this statement our Call for Action for diverse stakeholders. We are of the hopes that, once these proposals are considered by the various number of stakeholders, then we can make the needed impact to end child labour.

We hope that this conference does not become one of just words... but of actions in the aftermath of this conference and this is what we are asking for:

### Protecting the rights of children

- Social protection, assistance, and the provision of safe spaces for children during emergencies.
- Governments should make the needed budgetary allocations to support and enrich children's development especially in poorer and more marginalized communities.
- Key decision and advanced initiatives should be formulated inclusive of children's voices to ensure that in emergencies children's rights and wellbeing are not violated or relegated to the background.
- Consequently, states should adhere convention on the rights of the child, the SDG 8.7, and nationally approved policies and laws on the protection of the child.
- Governments should consider a multistakeholder approach to protecting the rights of the child.

### Financing

- Richer countries should commit to provide, in an official document, assistance for countries, especially in cases of emergency, for example, providing safe spaces for children and shelters that can be used to empower the children and their parents or caregivers on matters pertaining to child labour.
- Governments should commit to initiatives that enhance the appropriation of finance in a way which maximizes the usage of finances to support the access to social protection, free quality public education, health care for all children, including provision of free sanitary towels for children to ensure full attendance in school, regardless of one's status or background.
- At the same time, stakeholders inclusive of children need to be empowered to demand accountability and transparency from government at all times, corruption and misappropriation of funds will disallow the opportunities of free access to public quality education for all, and in

turn, diminish the abilities of children to pursue their dreams and aspirations, and their quest to become meaningful members of society.

### **Democratic participation**

- To ensure the democratic representation of children and young people in key decisions that affect them and most of all times, and in the implementation of decisions and policies. Children and young people voice matter. They are able to articulate their issues, in a better way they are properly engaged. Ensuring the hefty participation of children and young people in key decision making, which includes conferences and the formulation of national action plans to protect children from labour and harmful work.
- Children and young people need to be engaged in all manners they are allowed to be engaged in a democratic manner, organizations such as Student Unions, child based groups, and CSOs have to engage all manner of children to understand their situation, and provoke able solutions which are intended to enhance their livelihood and secure their future.

## 3. Outcome document

The [Durban Call to Action](#) has undergone an extensive preparatory process, starting with regional consultations in late 2021 and several rounds of drafting consultations with tripartite members of the ILO as well as partner organisations such as other UN agencies as well as CSO representatives.

Nevertheless, the document did not arrive fully formed at the conference, but also incorporated key themes and messages from each event in order to ensure that it could become a comprehensive, actionable document. Together, the Durban Call to Action resulted in six commitments to scale up action and 49 immediate and effective measures to take:

- I Accelerate multi-stakeholder efforts to prevent and eliminate child labour, with priority given to the worst forms of child labour, by making decent work a reality for adults and youth above the minimum age for work.
- II End child labour in agriculture.
- III Strengthen the prevention and elimination of child labour, including its worst forms, forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons, and the protection of survivors through data-driven and survivor-informed policy and programmatic responses.
- IV Realize children's right to education and ensure universal access to free, compulsory, quality, equitable and inclusive education and training.
- V Achieve universal access to social protection.
- VI Increase financing and international cooperation for the elimination of child labour and forced labour.

The document was adopted by acclamation during the final session of the conference on 20 May 2022.



## 4. Reach of the Conference

Owing to global circumstances, the 5GC was organised as a hybrid event, i.e. allowing participation of and contributions from both virtual and in-person delegates. While this was on the one hand a reflection of the continuing restrictions imposed on global events by the COVID-19 pandemic, it also responded to demands of participants from the preparatory regional consultations, in that the hybrid format would allow for broader participation in the conference. It is therefore worth reflecting on a few key statistics of the conference.

During the six days of the conference, 54 sessions with 270 speakers were held, which, in addition to the 1,150 in-person delegates, reached a global audience due to the conference's hybrid nature: the ILO's International Training Centre (ITC) team recorded 15,000 views of the livestream, and 43,800 visits to the website, as well as 8,000 hashtags with the conference tag #RaiseYourHandForKids, and found that 18 celebrities with millions of followers had been reached, thus amplifying awareness of the conference.

With 2,750 people registering online and following the sessions on Zoom, as well as another 1,107 people watching the proceedings on YouTube, the conference had a record attendance of almost 4,000 people.

It is interesting to note that the ITC team's statistics indicate that participants used the website for more than just information on the day's proceedings - only 5,700 visitors used the agenda page, while the bulk of visits were elsewhere on the page. Visits to the [website](#) thus indicate the wide-spread interest in the conference, with a total of 45,000 new visitors as well as 7,000 returning visitors to the site during the event, and the [challenge page](#), which asked users to post a picture of them raising their hand in solidarity with the cause of ending child labour, proving to be by far the most popular one with around 16,500 visits. In reference to the tools used to disseminate information about the conference, it should further be mentioned that around 18,000 of these visitors originated from Facebook pages, compared to 4,000 redirected from the ILO pages, 3,100 relying on Google and a comparatively small number of 1,400 users coming from Twitter.

This is in contrast to a closer analysis of the conference's overall performance on social media. Between Alliance 8.7 and ILO social media accounts, Twitter returned the most impressions on conference posts (around 217,000), while Facebook garnered more engagements with 79,200 likes, shares and comments.

The #RaiseYourHandForKids social media challenge was joined by nearly 8,000 people, including the DG of the ILO Guy Ryder, the Labour Minister of South Africa TW Nxesi, as well as dozens of UN officials and 18 celebrities. Again, it is interesting to note that Facebook far outperformed other social media in engaging users in the challenge, garnering 5,600 engagements compared to Twitter's 1,300 posts, 750 Instagram and 280 LinkedIn posts.

Finally, 9 press releases were released before, during and after the conference, generating over 750,000 impressions and reaching more than 300 global media outlets.



**5TH GLOBAL  
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LABOUR**

DURBAN, 15-20 MAY 2022