

Skills challenge innovation call

Preventing forced labour in Africa through skills and lifelong learning

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1. Context

Many people in Africa lack opportunities to develop relevant knowledge and skills that would allow them to earn a decent living and find their place in society – especially during times of global health crises. As a result, they can be left vulnerable to some of the most severe forms of exploitation in the labour market that still prevail today, including forced labour. In 2016, the ILO estimated that on any given day there were around 3 million men, women and children in Africa working in situations that they could not refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power. No country is immune and forced labour occurs in a variety of sectors, particularly in domestic work, agriculture, artisanal mining and quarrying, construction, forced begging and many areas of the urban informal economy.

Recent international instruments have placed a new emphasis on addressing the causes of forced labour and ensuring the full respect of all offended persons, highlighting the key role to be played by education and skills training on both fronts. The African Union's Ten-Year Action Plan to Eradicate Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in Africa (2020-2030) sets out measures that member States should implement to ensure that technical and vocational education and training is expanded, improved and made accessible, and that informal apprenticeship systems are upgraded to offer improved skills for young people, gender-sensitive protections for labour rights and social protection, protection against hazardous work by children, and functional skills recognition systems. These objectives are in keeping with the regional priorities laid out in the **Abidjan Declaration**, such as to invest in human capital by strengthening education, skilling, reskilling, upskilling, and lifelong learning.

The potential of skills development interventions to help socially and economically empower people vulnerable to or in situations of forced labour is clear. Yet, more needs to be done to effectively and systematically integrate this issue into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) practices in areas or economic sectors where forced labour is prevalent. The ILO recognizes the key role of public, private and civil society organizations in fostering an innovative and inclusive approach to skills systems that can bring about progress towards making decent work for all a reality. It is for this reason that this call on innovation and skills invites all stakeholders

to propose new and innovative ideas, solutions and practices to contribute to the prevention of forced labour in Africa through skills and lifelong learning.

2. What is the topic of the call?

The **Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention No. 29, 1930** emphasizes the need to educate and inform those considered particularly vulnerable to forced labour and to take effective measures for the rehabilitation of victims, including through skills development.

Indeed, education and skills training can play a key role in tackling some of the individual, structural and community factors that enable forced labour and prevent people from 'breaking the cycle' of vulnerability once they become victims. Some of the concrete ways in which skills training can reduce individuals' vulnerability to forced labour include¹:

- Providing vulnerable workers with adequate skills and raising awareness about forms and risks of forced labour to prevent them from situations of forced labour, enhance their employability and thus reduce their vulnerability to income shocks;
- In highly stigmatized occupations, often affected by forced labour, professionalizing work through enhanced skills and certification to improve dignity and respect by employers and communities and to strengthen labour rights, and eventually wages, working and living conditions;
- Providing former victims with appropriate skills to reintegrate employment in good working conditions, or start their own business and no longer depend on unscrupulous recruiters/employers.

Solutions to this call will focus on achieving positive and sustainable change at three different levels (individual, structural and community) through innovative skills and lifelong learning interventions to help contribute to the eradication of forced labour in areas and/or economic sectors in Africa where vulnerable populations are still subjected to such forms of exploitation.

¹ ILO, 2020. Global Guidelines on the Prevention of Forced Labour through Lifelong Learning and Skills Development Approaches. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_762720.pdf

ILO, 2020. Global Guidelines on the Economic Reintegration of Victims of Forced Labour through Lifelong Learning and Skills Development Approaches. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_762709.pdf

3. What are we looking for?

The ILO, through this new Skills challenge innovation call, is looking for entities or legally recognized non-profit organizations with innovative ideas and solutions that can contribute to the prevention of forced labour in Africa through skills and lifelong learning.

These solutions can include proposals to:

- create new skills training programmes or improve existing ones in order to upgrade skills in a vulnerable sector or occupation and facilitate better working conditions, or to generate alternatives in terms of job opportunities in areas affected by forced labour;
- improve the promotion and the accessibility of skills training programmes for vulnerable groups and put in place inclusive policies to decrease the chances of dropouts;
- integrate complementary courses into TVET curricula and programmes to raise awareness of the risks and effects of forced labour and strengthen trainees' resilience to it;
- support skills trainers and training providers in becoming agents of change to prevent and combat forced labour within their communities;
- strengthen career and vocational guidance and counselling services and establish partnerships to facilitate the referral of victims of forced labour to appropriate skills training programs and other support services;
- set up mechanisms for the formal skills recognition of vulnerable persons and victims of forced labour who have acquired skills and competencies to provide them with recognized qualifications on the labour market;
- Integrate new ways of skills development and delivery for young people at risk or victims of forced labour.

The ILO's Skills challenge innovation call aims to support the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, as well as SDG 8, which seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. In particular, the call aims to accelerate progress towards achieving Target 8.7 of the SDGs, that is, to '*end modern slavery, trafficking and child labour*'.

4. Who can apply?

Any entity or legally recognized non-profit organization with contractual and registered capacity that has been in existence for at least two calendar years prior to the call deadline. The applicant may be registered outside Africa.

By entity or non-profit organization, we mean government agencies, employers' and workers' organizations, cooperatives, education and training institutions (including schools, public and private training providers, and universities), NGOs and civil society organizations, universities and other research and educational institutions.

The ILO reserves the right to carry out reasonable due diligence, including contacting references provided and other third parties to confirm the eligibility of participants and may refuse to award the grant to a participant if there is suspicion of any irregularity, fraudulent activities, etc.

We accept all types of innovations, i.e. innovative approaches, projects, tools, technologies and partnerships that offer solutions that contribute to the prevention of forced labour through skills and lifelong learning.

We accept ideas and solutions at any stage of development. They can be early stage innovations or at a more advanced stage. They can be ideas to improve, expand and/or promote a solution that is already being implemented. They can be the idea of a single organization or involve a joint collaborative effort of different actors, such as governments, employers' and workers' organisations. In case of a team work, a project leader should be identified to coordinate the activities and to report to the ILO.

5. What will the winner receive?

The winning proposal will receive:

Financial support

The winning entry will receive **a grant of \$30,000** (paid in local currency and into a bank account in the name of the entrant/entity) to implement the proposed solution.

The grant will be paid in one instalment.

The ILO reserves the right to adjust, suspend, terminate or withhold any disbursement of grant funds at its sole discretion.

Participation in a six-month innovation lab

Through boot camps and remote mentoring, the winning proposal will receive technical support to transform their ideas into prototypes ready for implementation.

The Skills Innovation Lab will take place in two stages:

1. Prototyping

The programme has a duration of up to six months. During this time, a representative of the winning initiative, together with experts from the ILO and its partners will participate in boot camps organized by the ILO. In the boot camps, participants will receive training and mentoring to prototype their project. Throughout the process, participants will communicate, debrief and share documents and feedback through a virtual laboratory.

The objectives of the first phase of the Innovation Lab are:

- Refine the solution: With support from experts, the winner will develop and refine their idea and solution.
- Create a prototype: The innovator will receive technical support and facilities to develop a prototype or test version of their solution.
- Develop an action plan: At the end of the process, the innovator will develop a final prototype report, including an action plan and/or business plan for their innovation.

The process and methodologies to be used in the Innovation Lab will be adapted to the stage of development of the winning solution.

2. Pilot

Once the prototype has been developed, the innovator and partners will test the solution through a pilot test. The Skills Innovation Steering Committee will be in charge of monitoring progress and impact, in consultation with the project partners. Each pilot is expected to be completed in a maximum of 12 months. At the end of the pilot test, the innovator will be invited to present its prototype to an audience of key national and international partners.

Global visibility

The winning proposal will receive visibility for its ideas and solutions, including an invitation to a global event to present the innovative idea to potential partners and sponsors, press articles in the media, videos, among others.

Access to a wide network of experts in the area of skills development

The winning idea and shortlisted applications will be invited to join the ILO Global **Skills Innovation Network**. Through the network, members will have the opportunity to exchange with other innovators and to share their solutions with ILO partners.

6. What does the winner have to do?

To receive the grant, the applicant must sign a **Grant Agreement with the ILO**, which includes clauses on intellectual property rights, financial reporting requirements, criteria for disbursement of funds, dispute resolution and details of the implementation of the proposed solution. Grant recipients are, of course, expected to comply with the terms and conditions stipulated in the agreement.

As a precondition, before being allowed to sign a grant agreement with the ILO, the winner must produce, within three weeks, a detailed work plan and budget that will form the basis of the main goals to be achieved. Final payment is subject to the satisfactory completion of this detailed work plan.

7. What are the eligibility criteria?

In addition to the above, the proposal must meet the following criteria:

- The proposed solution responds to a clear need;
- The proposed solution has the support and commitment of key stakeholders in the issue;
- The proposed solution is submitted by an entity or by a legally recognized non-profit organization registered in Africa or elsewhere;
- Participants are available and can start the Innovation Lab phase from November 2021.

8. How to apply?

To submit a proposal:

1. Review the eligibility criteria and conditions for participation in the call, as well as the **Grant Agreement with the ILO**;

2. Submit your solution on the ILO Innovation Platform by 15 September 2021 (midnight Geneva time). To submit an idea the entity or organization will have to sign up to create a user account: <https://bit.ly/3a9kxwX>.

If the entity or organization already has an account, they can go directly to the Challenge page: <https://bit.ly/3v327FY>. You can **also send the completed application form and supporting documents to skills@ilo.org**.

Applications can be submitted in English and French. Participants will receive an email confirmation that their application has been received. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

The dates and deadlines for the call are:

10th June 2021 Launch of the call

15th September 2021 Deadline for the submission of ideas

15th November 2021 Announcement of the winner

November 2021 Start of the Skills Innovation Lab

November 2022 End of the pilot

If you have any questions regarding the competition call in general or the application process, please contact us at: skills@ilo.org

9. How will the proposals be assessed?

All proposals will be assessed by an independent panel, composed of ILO specialists in the areas of skills and employability and of fundamental principles and rights at work, external innovation experts and other external members.

All proposals will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1) Value for ILO priorities in skills development

- The solution develops added value to the ILO's global priorities in the area of skills development;
- It contributes to or generates new social and economic outcomes for direct beneficiaries and direct partners in general;
- It contributes to the achievement of the SDGs;

2) Fit with the ILO's mission and experience

- The solution demonstrates how it will leverage the ILO's network and expertise on forced labour and skills development issues;
- It engages or includes ILO stakeholders and partners in new and different ways;

3) Innovation

- The proposal focuses on issues of an urgent nature or that have not been explored before;
- It is substantially different and creative (i.e. through new approaches, tools, or methodologies) and/or adds value to existing solutions

4) Potential impact

- The idea or solution is suited to the priorities and needs of the identified beneficiaries;
- It is appealing to potential partners and has the potential to build synergy with other initiatives in the country or in the Africa region;
- It has the potential to produce positive and sustainable change at the individual, structural and community level for populations vulnerable to forced labour;

5) Sustainability and scalability

- There is a strong likelihood for the benefits (and/or activities) of the solution to continue beyond ILO support;
- It has potential for scalability to other territories and/or countries;
- It can generate and provide valuable lessons for the sector;

10. What is required in terms of recognition of the ILO?

The winning entry should acknowledge that the activity is carried out with the support of the ILO through the ILO Skills Innovation Facility in all articles produced and published (e.g. reports, brochures, press releases, videos, software, conferences, seminars, blogs, social media, etc.), using the logo of the ILO Skills Innovation Facility and mentioning the following:

"This...is produced/realized with the support of the International Labour Organization through its Skills Innovation Facility, part of the Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS)."

However, the applicant may not use in any case, unless previously agreed in writing, the logo of the ILO, nor that of any other partner organization of the ILO Skills Innovation Facility.

11. What is expected from the winning solution?

One of the central purposes of the ILO is to document and disseminate the lessons learned from the process of developing and implementing the solution. The winner is expected to participate in the analysis and documentation process to capture the lessons learned during the innovation work.

This process includes financial reporting and regular project updates, and the possibility for ILO staff and consultants to collect data, information, stories and testimonies, and to conduct field studies.

The winner is also expected to be an active member of the **ILO Global Skills Innovators Network** and to share their experiences with other innovators as well as those interested in learning about skills development and innovation.

