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Preparations for the V Global Conference on Child Labour

Summary: This paper provides an overview of the V Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour to be hosted by the Government of South Africa and held in Durban, and tentatively scheduled for April or May 2022. It presents the current situation with regard to child labour and discusses the linkages between the V Global Conference and the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (2021), main topics for discussion at the Global Conference, partnerships, and logistical considerations.

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Related documents: [GB.340/POL/7\(Rev.1\)](#).

▶ 1. Introduction

1. Worldwide, 152 million children are victims of child labour; almost half of them, 73 million, work in hazardous child labour. By region, almost half of child labour, 72.1 million, is found in Africa; 62.1 million in Asia and the Pacific; 10.7 million in the Americas; 1.2 million in the Arab States; and 5.5 million in Europe and Central Asia.
2. Child labour declined by 38 per cent between 2000 and 2016. However, progress slowed significantly between 2012 and 2016. In sub-Saharan Africa it even started to increase. Almost half of children in child labour, and a quarter of those in hazardous work, are aged 5–11. In that group, progress stalled.
3. Of the total number of victims of child labour, 88 million are boys and 64 million are girls. However, the number of girls is likely underestimated, as they are prone to be trapped in hidden forms of child labour such as domestic servitude.
4. Some 71 per cent of child labour occurs in agriculture, often in the context of family farms that are functionally dependent on child labour. Improving rural livelihoods and increasing opportunities for decent work in agriculture are critical to the elimination of child labour.¹
5. An integrated approach that recognizes the linkages among the fundamental principles and rights at work, including to empower workers and small producers to negotiate for better wages and prices so that households can end their reliance on child labour, is needed, in both rural and urban areas.²

Global conferences on child labour and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

6. Since 1997, countries have found a forum to discuss, share good practices, advance policies and commit to the elimination of child labour in successive global conferences. The conferences resulted in a series of declarations, which serve to identify policy priorities and mobilize political support for the elimination of child labour.
7. In 2020, the Government of South Africa submitted the country's expression of interest to the ILO to host the V Global Conference in 2022. This reaffirmed the country's long held commitment to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work.
8. Target 8.7 of the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 commits all United Nations (UN) Member States to "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". The Conference will convene with only three years left to achieve the 2025 child labour target, and eight years to achieve the 2030 target on forced labour. Although the primary focus of the V Global Conference is on child labour, it will also consider other elements of target 8.7.

¹ ILO, *Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016*, 2017.

² ILO, *Ending Child Labour by 2025: A Review of Policies and Programmes*, second ed., 2018.

COVID-19

9. The Conference comes as the world is responding to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, economic and social development and equality. Millions more children risk being pushed into child labour, which may rise after 20 years of sustained progress.³
10. Evidence is mounting that child labour is increasing as education is cut short and livelihoods are lost. With school closures, the impact of the digital divide has worsened. Distance learning has been deployed; however, half of the total number of learners have no access to a household computer and 43 per cent have no internet at home. In sub-Saharan Africa, 89 per cent of students do not have access to a household computer and 82 per cent lack internet access.⁴ Moreover, in most countries, girls have less access to technology and the internet than boys.⁵
11. In many countries schools are still closed.⁶ Even as classes restart, parents may no longer be able to afford to send their children to school and more children may be forced into hazardous jobs. Gender inequalities may worsen, with girls particularly vulnerable to exploitation in agriculture and domestic work.⁷
12. Vulnerable population groups among whom child labour is most prevalent – such as those working in the informal economy and migrant workers – suffer most.⁸ Furthermore, there is a risk that attention and resources previously devoted to eliminating child labour will be redirected to cope with other multiple and compounding challenges posed by the pandemic.
13. Young workers are being disproportionately affected by the economic downturn.⁹ Even before COVID-19, more than one in five young persons was not in employment, education or training, three quarters of whom were women. Poor quality education systems and a lack of decent job opportunities for young people may lower perceived returns to education, leading to school dropouts and child labour.¹⁰

► 2. The International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour

14. In 2019, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution declaring 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour and requested the ILO to facilitate its implementation.
15. At a high-level launch event for the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour in January 2021, countries and organizations were invited to submit “action pledges” on measures and activities to be implemented during the year. This was the first of a series

³ ILO and UNICEF, *COVID-19 and Child Labour: A Time of Crisis, a Time to Act*, 2020.

⁴ UNESCO, “Startling Digital Divides in Distance Learning Emerge”, Press release, 21 April 2020.

⁵ ITU, “Bridging the Gender Divide”, 2019.

⁶ See UNESCO’s dedicated webpage.

⁷ ILO and UNICEF, *COVID-19 and Child Labour*.

⁸ ILO, “COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy: Immediate Responses and Policy Challenges”, ILO brief, May, 2020.

⁹ ILO, *Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being*, 2020.

¹⁰ ILO, *World Report on Child Labour 2015: Paving the Way to Decent Work for Young People*, 2015.

of events and campaigns that are expected to raise the issue of elimination of child labour higher on the global policy agenda and help accelerate progress toward achieving SDG target 8.7.

16. The ILO will organize briefings for Member States in New York and other events, including at the High-Level Political Forum of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July and the UN General Assembly in September. Member States may propose a new UN resolution on the elimination of child labour. In addition, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will host a major conference on child labour in agriculture in November 2021. These activities will build momentum for the V Global Conference.

▶ 3. The V Global Conference

17. The V Global Conference 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 forced labour and human trafficking. It will also identify emerging policy innovations that respond to the dynamic and evolving nature of the challenge.
18. At the IV Global Conference in Argentina, many governments, social partners and others made pledges to take new measures to eliminate child labour. The V Global Conference will provide an opportunity to assess progress in implementing these pledges, as well as those made during the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, and to make new commitments.
19. A tripartite consultation on the V Global Conference was held on 12 February 2021, informed by a concept paper that provided possible themes for the Conference. These were:
 - mobilizing increased, targeted investments to tackle the **socio-economic root causes** of child and forced labour and reigniting progress among 5–11 year olds;
 - the elimination of child and forced labour as a condition for well-functioning **labour markets**, particularly decent work for youth, and linkages with education, skills development, a smooth school-to-work transition and life-long learning;
 - the high prevalence of child labour in **agriculture**;
 - the formalization of the **informal economy** and the creation of decent work;
 - preventing **COVID-19** from reversing years of progress against child labour, and seizing opportunities to build back better;
 - leveraging the rich, distinct experience of the **regions** and highlighting in particular the innovations of the Africa region;
 - action-oriented, time-bound **commitments** to achieve SDG target 8.7.
20. Participants welcomed a focus on these themes and stressed the importance of others. They also expressed the need to avoid the risk of diluting the focus of the conference from addressing the root causes of child labour. Topics underlined by the participants included universal, free, quality public education; universal social protection; domestic and care work; rights-based approaches; child labour in supply chains; use of children in armed conflicts; a holistic view of child labour that would include human trafficking;

coordination among related initiatives; identifying champions; enhanced enforcement capacity; and cultural factors and the need for dialogue at the local level.

The way forward

21. Five tripartite regional consultations (in Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America) will be held to further discuss the thematic focus of the V Global Conference and shape its agenda. These will commence in July 2021.
22. SDG target 8.7 will be achieved mainly by governments ensuring the rule of law and an enabling environment for the elimination of forced and child labour; by employers and their organizations ensuring fair business practices that promote decent work and respect human rights; and by workers' organizations defending the interests of workers, including the elimination of child labour.
23. Therefore, social dialogue and tripartism will be the key means to achieve the goals of the Global Conference. Governments and employers' and workers' organizations will be closely consulted in its preparation, and in determining the nature and content of its possible outcomes, such as a declaration, a UN resolution, and new pledges.

External partnerships

24. A central goal of the Global Conference is to facilitate new partnerships and enhance existing ones, leveraging the distinct roles and mandates of participants.
25. Alliance 8.7 is an inclusive global partnership committed to achieving target 8.7 by accelerating action, sharing knowledge, driving innovation and mobilizing resources. Established in 2016, it has more than 200 partners and 24 pathfinder countries, which have committed to go further, faster to achieve SDG target 8.7. The Global Conference provides an opportunity for Alliance partners to strengthen mechanisms for exchange and cooperation and further coordinate with tripartite and UN initiatives.
26. UN agencies, notably UNICEF and the FAO, as well as UN Special Rapporteurs and other experts with mandates relevant to target 8.7, will make important contributions to the Global Conference.
27. Children have the right to express their views on matters and decisions that affect them, and to have those views taken into account. Following robust child safeguarding procedures, the Global Conference will solicit input from affected children, including children in child labour.

Logistics, financial commitments and the role of the ILO

28. The V Global Conference will take place in Durban over two to three days and is tentatively scheduled for April or May 2022. All ILO Member States will be invited to send a tripartite delegation. The Employers' and Workers' groups of the ILO will also nominate representatives to the Global Conference. In order to ensure equal opportunity for all UN Member States to participate, least developed countries will receive special consideration. UN agencies, civil society and other organizations will also be invited.
29. As host of the V Global Conference, the Government of South Africa, together with interested Member States as donors, will make a significant financial contribution to ensure the preparation and holding of the event.

- 30.** The ILO will contribute human and financial resources. It will work closely with the Government of South Africa on all aspects of the Global Conference, including to develop the agenda, draft technical papers and conduct research to inform the debate.