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Update on preparations for the Fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour

Purpose of the document

This document provides an overview of the progress made in the preparations for the Fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, to be hosted by the Government of South Africa in the week of 15–20 May 2022. The document provides updated information and presents the principal outcomes of the preparatory regional consultations and the discussion on the title, agenda and envisaged outcomes. It also touches upon participation, communication and logistical and financial aspects. Lastly, it sets out the role of the ILO constituents and other partners in the preparatory process and during the conference. (See the draft decision in paragraph 23.)

Relevant strategic objective: Fundamental principles and rights at work.

Main relevant outcome: Outcome 7: Adequate and effective protection at work for all.

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

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: See the draft decision.

Author unit: Governance and Tripartism Department (GOVERNANCE).

Related documents: [GB.338/POL/4](#), [GB.340/POL/7\(Rev.1\)](#) and [GB.341/POL/INF/1](#).

► I. Introduction

1. Against a background of rising child labour figures and additional challenges resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour will take place during the week of 15 May 2022 in Durban, South Africa. The host Government will convene ILO constituents, international and regional organizations, civil society organizations, Alliance 8.7 partners and other stakeholders to the conference, which will take place in a hybrid format, with a combination of in-person and online participation.
2. During a side event of the 109th Session (2021) of the International Labour Conference, the ILO presented, for the first time together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), new Global Estimates on Child Labour covering the period 2016–20.¹ The data show a modest, but ongoing, reduction in child labour in Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America and the Caribbean but a substantial increase in Africa, resulting in a global increase from 152 to 160 million children. As in previous periods, hazardous work accounts for roughly 50 per cent of all child labour. Seven out of ten (112 million) children in child labour are in agriculture, most of them in the family context.
3. For the second consecutive period, the report also registers a significant increase in child labour among the youngest age group, the 5- to 11-year-olds. As the report is mainly based on national household surveys conducted before March 2020, the social and economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were not reflected. The report warns that global figures may rise to between 169 and 206 million in 2022, depending on the nature of measures taken by governments and their capacity to reverse the increases and on the determination of governments to implement the measures.
4. Against this backdrop and building on the achievements of the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour in 2021,² the fifth global conference will take stock of progress achieved since the last conference in Buenos Aires in November 2017. It will serve to identify good practices, viable solutions and also implementation gaps. It will reinforce the commitment of all stakeholders to accelerate the fight against child labour in line with target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³ and to coordinate local, national, regional and global efforts. Lastly, the conference also provides an opportunity to highlight the link between the elimination of child labour, other fundamental principles and rights at work and the broader Decent Work Agenda of the ILO.
5. The ILO has set up a task team to coordinate with the host Government on the thematic and logistical preparations for the fifth global conference. This task team has started working with the Government of South Africa and is coordinating closely with the secretariats of the Workers' and the Employers' groups.

¹ ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward* (New York, 2021).

² <https://endchildlabour2021.org/overview/>.

³ <https://indicators.report/targets/8-7/>.

► II. Thematic preparations

Bilateral consultations

6. Throughout 2021, the Office and the host Government held several consultations to determine key aspects of the conference. During these meetings, the Government of South Africa proposed to focus the agenda on accelerating and building resilient labour markets to eradicate child labour, forced labour and human trafficking, with a human-centred approach in line with the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. This would lead to a call to “put children first” as part of COVID-19 response and recovery programmes, by addressing the structural root causes of child labour. It could be linked to a focus on universal access to education, the school-to-work transition, social protection, livelihoods, the informal economy, agriculture and decent work. The conference title will be “Fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour”.

Regional consultations

7. Between 16 November and 16 December 2021, five regional consultations took place for the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and the Arab States, which were organized in close collaboration with the respective ILO Regional Offices, and in coordination with the Government of South Africa.⁴ All but one of the consultations took place entirely online; the African meeting was in a hybrid format. The main objective of the regional consultations was to identify regional challenges, policy priorities and good practices in eliminating child labour and to establish regional and common thematic priorities for the fifth global conference. In parallel, the Office sent a survey to ILO constituents and other stakeholders to capture the main thematic priorities and good practices for each region.
8. The participants in the consultation meetings were determined in collaboration with the regions and following nominations from the secretariats of the Workers’ and Employers’ groups. A total of 360 representatives from governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations, civil society and regional and international organizations participated in the regional consultations: 79 in the Americas, 72 in Africa, 82 in Asia and the Pacific, 66 in Europe and Central Asia, and 61 in the Arab States. Governments and the social partners made up almost three quarters of all participants. The rest were representatives from the ILO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF and regional and civil society organizations.
9. The regions brought up a broad variety of topics to be discussed at the conference, reflecting regional challenges and concerns. A series of common thematic areas emerged from the consultation process, such as: education, the school-to-work transition, social protection, poverty and informality, decent work for adults, child labour in agriculture, the impact of COVID-19 on child labour, financing the fight against child labour, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and policy coordination and coherence. Other topics mentioned in more than one region were: child labour in supply chains, child labour and migration, conflict, discrimination, forced labour and trafficking of children.

⁴ <https://endchildlabour2021.org/south-africa-global-conference-regional-consultations/>.

Action from other partners

10. Broad engagement of partners is important for the success of the conference. During the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, the ILO consolidated its collaboration on combating child labour with the Alliance 8.7, the FAO, UNICEF, the Global March Against Child Labour, the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations Global Compact and others, leading to renewed or intensified engagement.
11. Alliance 8.7 will mobilize its network of partners to encourage broad participation and identification of keynote speakers and panellists. The FAO organized a process of regional consultations and a Global Solutions Forum in November 2021 to engage with agricultural stakeholders (ministries, producers' and farm workers' organizations, civil society, academia, the private sector and financial institutions) on child labour, as a contribution to the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour and the achievement of SDG target 8.7. The outcomes of the forum are expected to inform the fifth global conference.⁵
12. On 10 January 2022, the Global March Against Child Labour launched an Africa Virtual March Against Child Labour⁶ to help ensure that children do not get trapped in child labour as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and to advocate for the return to school of all children. The work of the International Trade Union Confederation and the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation has been instrumental in advocating for increased national and international spending on universal social protection to prevent child labour.
13. Several national governments have shown strong engagement and have made serious commitments that can be brought to the conference. In addition, regional initiatives are being used as mechanisms to mobilize commitments from Member States. This includes the African Union's ten-year Action Plan, the European Union's zero-tolerance policy against child labour, and the regional initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour.

Envisaged outcome

14. In line with the deliberations of the regional consultations, the Government of South Africa has proposed an action-oriented outcome of the conference, in the form of a call to action for renewed and accelerated commitment of governments and other stakeholders. The precise arrangements for developing this call to action and defining a follow-up mechanism will be determined in close consultation with the ILO constituents.

► III. Logistical preparations

Participation

15. The conference will take place in a hybrid format, combining the physical presence of as many delegations as possible with the online participation of those delegations and participants unable to travel. The host Government is planning to receive a maximum of 2,000 participants to the conference in Durban and at least a similar number of online participants. These will

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/childlabouragriculture/global-solutions-forum/>.

⁶ Africa Virtual March Against Child Labour.

include tripartite delegations from the 187 ILO Member States, regional and international organizations, civil society representatives, and financial and academic institutions. The participation of civil society and business will be defined in consultation with ILO constituents and in line with the practice of previous sessions of the Global Conference on Child Labour.

16. This poses complex challenges to ensure that online participants can contribute fully to the conference and have access to all plenary sessions, panels, thematic sessions and side events. The Office is considering the best options for facilitating the virtual part of the conference, including through the involvement of the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin. The invitations to the conference will be sent by the Government of South Africa.
17. Both the ILO and the host country agree on the importance of the participation of children. The arrangements for invitations will be discussed in the upcoming weeks, to ensure that the participation of children and young people is in accordance with the respective international labour standards and the objectives of the conference.

Communication

18. The Office and the host Government have set up a small team to develop a coordinated communication strategy for the conference. This will include an announcement, which has already been published on the conference website and the ILO website; a content-driven mobilization campaign in the three official languages leading up to and extending beyond the conference; identification of and engagement with potential multipliers and partners for dissemination; and the development of a media strategy.

Budget

19. The conference costs will be shared between the host Government and the ILO. The Government of South Africa will cover the rental of the conference venue, including all related logistics, audio-visual equipment, rooms for the conference secretariat, and local transportation of delegations.
20. The ILO will utilize existing resources for the production of specific technical papers, the meetings for the development of the outcome document (call to action), the travel costs for tripartite delegations from least developed countries, the travel costs and accommodation of speakers, additional ILO staff costs, and the development of technical background thematic papers for the conference.

► IV. Next steps

21. The Office will continue to coordinate the preparatory process of the Conference through tripartite consultations involving the regional groups of governments and the Workers' and Employers' group secretariats. This process should address and finalize the following points:
 - (a) the thematic aspects of the agenda;
 - (b) the invitation process and modalities of participation (whether invitation-only or open to a wider audience online);
 - (c) the hybrid arrangements of the conference;
 - (d) the participation of children and young people;

- (e) the participation of civil society organizations;
 - (f) the role of Alliance 8.7, the Global March Against Child Labour, United Nations agencies and other potential partners in the conference; and
 - (g) the consultation process on the conference outcome (call to action).
22. Social dialogue and tripartism will be the key means to achieve the goals of the global conference. The Office will organize regular meetings in the coming weeks with the regional coordinators of the Government group and the secretariats of the Workers' group and Employers' group to consult on these points and all other key aspects of the conference. The Office and the host Government will provide updated information periodically through the conference's official website and the ILO website.

► Draft decision

23. **The Governing Body requested the Director-General to take into account the views expressed during the discussion as the Office continues to engage in the preparatory process for the Fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in 2022.**