

**11<sup>th</sup> African Regional Meeting**  
*Addis Ababa*

Information Note

**Parallel Session I: Combating Child Labour – Promoting Youth Employment**

*Thursday, 26 April*

*10.00-12.00*

*“.....high priority should be given to planning for and meeting the needs of children and youth in national development policies and programmes and to the progressive extension of the inter-related measures necessary to provide the best possible conditions of physical and mental growth for children and young persons.”*

Minimum Age Recommendation (146) 1973, Article 1

*“Policies and programmes that aim to prevent cycles of disadvantage from being repeated across generations are critical in achieving social inclusion and decent work for youth.”*

Resolution concerning youth employment, ILC, 2005

**Introduction**

Africa’s population remains among the world’s most youthful. From a labour and employment perspective, childhood and youth as the two earliest stages of life determine, by and large, “success” or “failure” throughout later working life. A good education and appropriate skills are key components of a good start in the labour market. In turn, starting right is crucial to getting and keeping decent jobs as adults. And it creates the foundations for future prosperity of economies and societies.

Despite some progress, many African countries still face various difficulties in giving their children and youth a good start in life, so that they can lead productive and fulfilling lives as adults. In 2004, 38 million children of school-going age were not in school<sup>1</sup> and 49.3 million children were working. Although the proportion of children who work declined between 2000 and 2004, their number increased by over 1 million due to a large increase in the child population, with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest incidence of child labour than any region in the world.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the number of unemployed young people aged 15 to 24 grew by almost 30 per cent between 1995 and 2005 and the youth unemployment rate reached 19.5 per cent in 2005, with every other unemployed being a young person. However, most young Africans cannot afford to be unemployed and strive to eke out a living, often in the informal economy. Africa is the only region

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<sup>1</sup> *Strong Foundations*, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2007, Paris, 2006, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> ILO: *The end of child labour: Within reach*. Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work., Geneva, 2006, Table 1.2, page 8

where the number of young workers living on less than the \$1 a day poverty line has increased since 1995 (by almost 7.7 million).<sup>3</sup>

Child labour and youth unemployment and underemployment therefore remain serious challenges to decent work in the region. On the one hand, a range of policies and other measures are still needed to target the root causes of child labour and prevent the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour, while providing for the withdrawal, rehabilitation and social integration of those already engaged in such activities. On the other, efforts should be geared to creating sufficient decent work opportunities to ensure that the number of young working poor is reduced at the same time as reducing youth unemployment significantly.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of this session is to focus on the interplay and linkages between child labour and youth employment problems with a view to:

- Shedding light on how the two combine to shape employment outcomes of young people in their youth and, later, as adults;
- Identifying policies and measures to address these issues jointly and in a complementary fashion in order to lay the foundation for decent work through working life
- Discussing the respective roles of the government, employers' and workers' organizations and other key players in the design and implementation of responses to these problems; and
- Providing guidance to the Office on some key areas for joint work by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) in Africa over the coming years.

### **Key issues and challenges**

Interest of policy-makers and the research community in child labour and youth employment has increased significantly in recent years reflecting the growing magnitude of these problems in many African countries and the renewed commitment to effectively tackle them. However, there has been little effort to examine the relationship between them, in particular the implications that engagement in child labour may have for employment as children grow older. Improving the knowledge base on these dimensions in Africa is an important issue for policy-making and advocacy. Such knowledge would allow government institutions and the social partners to devise informed policy and operational interventions, as well as a more efficient and optimal allocation of resources.

The co-existence of child labour and youth unemployment and underemployment in many African countries is symptomatic of a combination of problems, including overall lack of sufficient or sustainable decent jobs, chronic poverty, poor enforcement of laws and regulations, cultural norms and attitudes. Today's unemployed and underemployed

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<sup>3</sup> ILO: "*The Decent Work Agenda in Africa: 2007-2015*", Report of the Director-General, Eleventh African Regional Meeting, Addis Ababa, April, 2007, Geneva, 2007, pp. 38-39.

youth are often yesterday's child labourers and tomorrow's working poor. Thus, efforts to alleviate the problems of child labour and youth unemployment and underemployment in Africa cannot be dissociated from one another, nor can they be addressed separately from overall endeavours to promote decent job opportunities on a sustainable basis. This calls for pro-employment and pro-poor strategies, which are necessary conditions for the success of more targeted interventions aimed at ending child labour and facilitating the transition of youth to the labour market. In this context, there is a need to prioritize employment in national policy-making, by making it central to broader economic and social policies so as to promote sustained growth through increased aggregate demand. It is equally important to invest in those sectors which have the highest potential to create job opportunities, especially for young people, while reducing poverty levels (e.g. agriculture, forestry, rural non-farm economy, tourism, construction).

The key to both eliminating child labour and promoting youth employment is education and training. Education is a human right and constitutes the foundation of young people's employability. Free and compulsory education of good quality up to the minimum age for entering employment or work is the most important tool for eliminating child labour. Access to education at higher levels as well as to training throughout working life is essential to ensure that the workforce has the skills the labour market needs. Policy and other interventions should, first and foremost, facilitate access to education for all while at the same time ensuring that the quality and relevance of national education and training systems meet the rapidly changing requirements of companies and economies. Measures to (re)integrate children withdrawn from child labour into the education system or vocational training to enable adolescents to move into less harmful and more remunerative jobs are also required. To complement these measures, programmes to better link school with the world of work such as apprenticeship schemes and on-the-job training can help young people enter the labour market. In many African countries, there is an urgent need to transform informal types of apprenticeship into a structured and protective system of learning and training. Other measures such as career guidance, job counselling and labour market information are also critical to help young people in their career choice and job search.

The situation of adolescents in hazardous work constitutes another important link – indeed an overlap – between child labour and youth employment issues. Those in the 15-17 age bracket fall into both the category of children and that of youth. According to ILO Conventions, these adolescents can have access to the labour market provided that they do not engage in the worst forms of child labour, including hazardous forms of work. The detrimental health effects of hazardous work and the vulnerability to health risks associated with poverty and marginalization (e.g. HIV) tend to impair employability, and thus the chances of finding and keeping a decent job in youth and sometimes even as adults. Initiatives to remove hazards from the working environment or to facilitate the removal of adolescents from prohibited forms of work into skills training from where they can re-enter the labour market and enjoy decent work can kill two birds with one stone as they help reduce child labour while increasing employment opportunities for youth.

More generally, the goal of making decent work a reality through working life requires that rights at work are promoted and respected, regardless of a worker's age. Existing International Labour Standards apply also to young people and provide a comprehensive legal body to ensure the protection of young people in the world of work, including their right to join associations of their choice. Furthermore, specific provisions that regulate the timing and conditions of young people's induction to work are meant to prevent their exploitation and child labour. The problem often arising at the country level is weak enforcement, often stemming from the high concentration of children and youth in informal economy jobs which tend to fall beyond the realm of national labour legislation and/or labour administration institutions. A related challenge is to improve cooperation and coordination among governments and the social partners, as well as other key actors, to maximise the impact of agreed responses to this matter.

### **Possible questions for debate**

- Ways and means to strengthen empirical evidence on the impact of child labour on youth employment outcomes
- Ways and means to support and sustain initiatives by African countries to combat child labour and promote youth employment either jointly or through targeted and complementary interventions, with emphasis on the situation of girls and young women
- Measures to enhance enforcement of and compliance with appropriate national labour legislation and regulations concerning child labour and youth employment to promote decent work throughout the life-cycle
- Arrangements and mechanisms to ensure the involvement of relevant government institutions and the social partners, as well as other players (e.g. civil society, private sector, international organizations, donor community) in the search for Effective responses to these challenges
- Key priorities for joint work by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) in Africa over the next years.