



Virtual Symposium on Ending Child Labour by 2025 *'Act, Inspire and Scale Up' in Agriculture and Value Chains*

EVENT REPORT

2021 is a landmark year. As the world is grappling with the health and unfolding socioeconomic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we enter into the Decade of Action to Deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. 2021 has also been designated as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.

Today, 152 million children around the world are engaged in child labour, of which 71% (or 108 million children) work in agriculture, including fishing, forestry, livestock herding and aquaculture. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated poverty - one of the main triggers of child labour - and has imposed challenges to children's education, development, safety and wellbeing. Thus, the discussion on the topic is both timely and necessary.

Against this backdrop, on the occasion of Europe Day, the EU Delegation in Rome organised a 'Virtual Symposium on Ending Child Labour by 2025', bringing together its partners to discuss the most critical challenges to accelerate progress towards meeting the SDG Target 8.7, the most pressing problems and barriers that need to be addressed, the impact of Covid-19, the key ingredients of successful partnerships, as well as how to inspire and scale up action on the way ahead.

The panellists reflected on different aspects of child labour - from agriculture and agri-food systems transformation, through human dignity, gender inequality, human rights to rural poverty and rural development - highlighting the complex nature of the issue. To effectively address child labour and deliver change, there is a need to develop a holistic and whole-of-supply-chain approach. In 2021, the focus needs to be on 'scaling up' action, matching commitments with tangible results. The international community must take immediate, concrete and effective action to find a way to come out of the scourge of child labour. The magnitude of this task requires cooperation at all levels and through all sectors. Breaking down siloes and forging strategic multistakeholder partnerships will be an essential step on the way forward.

Alexandra Valkenburg, *Ambassador of the European Union*, underlined that setting the path for a prosperous, peaceful and resilient future will require a people-centred, inclusive and rights-based approach to development, which builds on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. 2021 highlights the need to reinvigorate partnerships, strengthen alliances to inspire, and scale up action to ensure that children have the future they deserve.

Stefano Sannino, *Secretary-General of the European External Action Service*, stressed the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation and coordinated global action to build back a better future as we embark on the last decade to realise the SDGs. “Partnerships need to be at the centre of our thinking and of our actions. The Team Europe approach testifies to the European Union’s global solidarity to support partner countries and assist the most vulnerable in line with the principle of leaving no one behind”, added the Secretary General.

Gilbert F. Hougbo, *President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development*, emphasised the need to distinguish between the exploitation of children and household work. The latter is not necessarily harmful to children per se, as it provides skills and helps children build up their confidence and autonomy. Stepping up commitment to alleviate rural poverty and adopting a gender-sensitive approach offers a way to effectively address child labour.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, *Prefect of the Dicastery of Integral Human Development*, called on our conscience and made us remember that beyond the data and figures, there are individual human beings whose dignity is robbed and fundamentally abused. “Childhood should be a time of playing, schooling, education, and introduction to cultural, moral and civil virtues for their integral growth and for building up society. It is not meant to be spent in the drudgery of servitude”, pointed out Cardinal Turkson.

Honourable Ignatius Baffour-Awuah, *Minister of Labour and Employment Relations of Ghana*, reiterated that child labour is neither confined to one sector, commodity or value chain, nor can it be categorised as a purely human rights issue. More attention needs to be dedicated to the strong correlation between the size of family incomes and the involvement of children in child labour. Building on President Hougbo’s remarks, the Minister stressed the importance of identifying the stage at which children need to learn their trade without being categorised as child labourers.

According to **Els Haelterman**, *Head of Partnerships and Fundraising of the IDH Sustainable Trade – Beyond Chocolate Partnership Initiative*, the added value of multistakeholder partnerships lies in identifying a “smart mix” to develop action-driven coalitions to achieve common goals while factoring in the human rights due diligence legislation and the three pillars of sustainable development.

Máximo Torero, *Chief Economist of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization*, underlined that progress towards ending child labour would depend on how successful we are in addressing the root causes of child labour in agriculture. According to Mr Torero, long-term sustainability will require turning the “vicious circle of child labour and rural poverty into a positive circle of education, decent work and better livelihoods”.

Martin Seychell, *Deputy Director-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission*, outlined the European Union’s commitment to the fight against child labour through various instruments and projects. “The biggest mistake we can make is to work in isolation. We need to identify the complexity of supply chains, all segments, actors, the prevalence of child labour and related risks. It is essential to understand the local context and to associate with the beneficiaries in all project phases”, said Mr Seychell.

PANEL DISCUSSION



1. What do you see as the most critical challenges ahead to accelerate progress towards meeting the target of ending child labour in all its forms by 2025? What are the most pressing problems and barriers to action that need to be addressed?

The most pressing problems and barriers are (i) rural poverty, (ii) increasing pressure on national budgets, (iii) growing indebtedness, (iv) lack of recognition and protection of human dignity, (v) lack of decent employment opportunities; (vi) lack of fair living incomes and fair pricing of commodities, (vii) incapability of local economies to cater for the growing youth population, (viii) unsustainability of supply chains, (ix) limited access to education and schools, and (x) the lack of data and evidence on the number of children engaged in child labour.

2. What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on the fight against child labour, and what implications does this have for where we go from here? Does Covid-19 change what we need to do or merely reinforce the need to act?

The pandemic does not change the fundamental nature of what we need to do; it makes the action more urgent. Even before Covid-19, the world was not delivering what it was supposed to deliver, especially in terms of rural poverty and food security and nutrition. The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic is expected to be greater than the health impact, directly affecting lives and livelihoods as well on the national and global economies. Thus, the challenge ahead is not just about accelerating what we have done before; but we also need to rethink and transform our approaches.

In such context, there is a need to:

- link poverty alleviation to long-term economic development;
- support governments to increase capacity and resilience building, as well as to strengthen social protection and healthcare systems;
- ensure better access to education in rural areas, and make sure that children stay in schools;
- create social structures that can equip families and provide decent financial support;
- sustain family livelihoods by ensuring fair living income and fair pricing of commodities;
- incentivise and better target investments, particularly in rural infrastructure;
- create decent employment opportunities and work conditions for the youth, especially between the age group of 15-17;

- make value chains and production systems more sustainable;
- develop economic systems that do not reduce people into an object of economic gain and interest, and recognise the supreme value of the dignity of a human being.
- adopt a gender perspective, recognising the role of women in girls as agents of change;
- integrate gender-sensitive child labour concerns in the design of value chain and agricultural investment programmes;
- transform the agri-food systems and the agricultural sector to increase the welfare and resilience of the most vulnerable farmers;
- ensure that the law enforcement of the due diligence legislation is complemented with poverty reduction and livelihood support along the value chains; and,
- raise awareness among consumers on the impact of their choices.

3. What more can be done to foster the partnerships and collaboration needed between the wide variety of actors with a role to play to make real progress? What are the key ingredients for successful collaborations that deliver concrete results?

- To identify the type of interests of various parties involved in the fight against child labour;
- to adopt a holistic approach: develop specific programmes to meet specific objectives;
- to develop more mature partnerships that can scale-up, delivering on common ambitions and goals;
- to involve key actors at all levels, across all sectors, along the whole value chain;
- to clearly define the roles, responsibilities and contributions of each partner;
- to set out clear and measurable targets and monitoring mechanisms to measure progress;
- to create a safe space to talk and to learn from each other;
- to share not only best practices but also failures and lessons learnt;
- to emphasise the need for strong national ownership and more equal and balanced partnerships; and
- to respect the principles of transparency and accountability: partners must respect each other, be honest about what they want to achieve, and must be able to hold each other accountable.

4. In the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, what do you see as the key next step that needs to be taken to do just that and put us on a path to achieve this goal by 2025?

- **Mr Torero:** The key next step is to recognise the importance of reducing inequalities and target interventions to specific goals. We also need to create a “pulling effect” towards schools and education.
- **Ms Haelterman:** We need to break down the existing silos and focus on ‘scaling up.’ We need to act better and act faster.
- **Mr Seychell:** We need to shift from a piecemeal to a holistic approach to effectively address the root causes of child labour. Education must play a central role in keeping children in schools. In our partnerships, we need to strive to create win-win situations. In our investments, we need to give fresh impetus to poverty reduction.
- **His Eminence Cardinal Turkson:** Teaching about the dignity of every human person must become concrete and tangible. “We must put manuals of growth in the hands of children.” This means that we must engage concretely in the development and growth of children through education.

- **Minister Baffour-Awuah:** The fight against child labour must be holistic. Ensuring decent living income and fair pricing for commodities is the surest way to empower farmers.

What is next?

- On **11 July**, the EU Delegation in Ghana will organise a concert against child labour. For more information, please visit the Delegation's website: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ghana_en
- **12 July:** International Day on the Elimination of Child Labour
- **2-3 November 2021:** FAO Global Conference "Giving Children a Future. Working together to end child labour in agriculture."

