



Concept Note for a Side Event on

[Pathways to the Future: Addressing the Structural Roots of Child Labor through Digital Innovation and Integrated Policies]

at the 6th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, Marrakech,
Morocco

[11 February 2026] | [16:30 – 18:30] | [In-person]

I. Keywords

SDG 8.7 (Elimination of child Labor); Social protection systems; Education and TVET- Labour Market Linkage, Digital innovation and Artificial intelligence.

II. Background & Rationale

Child labor is one of the most prominent global challenges, as it represents a direct violation of children's rights and an obstacle to sustainable human and economic development. According to International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates in 2024, approximately 138 million children worldwide were engaged in the labor market, including about 54 million children working in the worst forms of child labor. Although the total number of working children has decreased by more than 20 million since 2020, this progress remains insufficient to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, which aims to eliminate child labor by 2025.

In the Arab region, the phenomenon is even more complex due to structural and systemic economic and social obstacles that exacerbate and deepen the prevalence of child labor. Disparities in economic growth rates and job creation among countries and regions, coupled with high rates of poverty and unemployment among youth and graduates, compel poor and low-income families to rely on child labor as a coping mechanism to the current situation. Furthermore, rapid and rising demographic growth contributes to a surplus of labor supply that exceeds the capacity of these economies to absorb; this leads to increasing unemployment and reducing family incomes, and therefore increasing the likelihood of children being forced into the labor market at an early age. Child labor rates in Arab countries range from less than 5% in some to



more than 20% in others, highlighting the extent of the disparity. In general, in Arab countries where child labor is prevalent, the following is observed:

- Child labor rates are higher in rural areas compared to urban areas, as males constitute the majority in the agriculture and services sectors, while girls' participation in domestic and care work within the informal sector remains less visible.
- Approximately 52% of children are engaged in the agricultural sector, 31% in the informal services and trade sector, and 17% in the industrial and craft sectors. The majority of these works involve hazardous forms of labor, such as economic exploitation or trafficking; it is even more exacerbated with the appearance of new forms of informal digital work, which are difficult to monitor and may draw children away from traditional protection systems.
- Population growth and the imbalance between labor supply and demand: Both rapid demographic growth and youth unemployment push vulnerable families to resort to child labor as a negative coping mechanism. The surplus supply of labor also creates an increasing demand for low-cost, unprotected labor. In this context, children are particularly exploited within the informal sector, thus deepening the prevalence of the phenomenon and reinforcing its structural nature.
- The phenomenon of fragmented Arab labor markets: The market is divided into a limited formal sector that provides social protection and stable wages, and a vast informal sector that lacks conditions of decent work and creates a constant demand for cheap and unprotected labor, including children. This fragmentation excludes large numbers of young people from stable employment opportunities, increasing unemployment and precarious fragile work, weakening family incomes, and encouraging the integration of children into informal economic activities.
- The declining role of the public sector as a major employer of job seekers, due to limited resources, public debt pressures, and partial economic reforms, is increasing unemployment and weakening families' ability to rely on stable income sources. This pushes these families to bring children into the workforce to compensate for the shortfall.
- Furthermore, weak wage flexibility, unequal opportunities across sectors and regions, high levels of informal employment, and



inadequate legal protections contribute to persistent poverty, vulnerability, and the prevalence of child labor.

This high-level session, to be held as part of the 6th International Conference on the Elimination of Child Labor (February 11-13, 2026), serves as a regional Arab platform to highlight the Arab contribution to eliminating child labor. It will focus on innovative, integrated, and comprehensive solutions and policies for child protection, reflecting the commitment of Arab states to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which guarantees children the right to education, healthcare, and protection from all forms of violence and exploitation, as well as the relevant Arab and international conventions on combating child labor, particularly Arab Labor Convention No. 18 (1996) and international conventions concerning minimum working age (No. 138/1973) and the prohibition of the worst forms of child labor (No. 182/1999). Furthermore, building on the outcomes of the high-level Arab conference on Child Labour and Social Protection Policies, held in Cairo from 3-4 December 2025, which underscore the importance of achieving the goal of completely eliminating child labor, and necessitates accelerating national plans to achieve the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goal number 8.7.

III. Key Objectives

This session aims to move from "describing the problem" to "proposing solutions," through the following:

1. Dismantling Structural Obstacles: Analyzing the relationship between the informal economy and child labor, and how to design more comprehensive and flexible social protection policies.
2. Presenting Innovative Solutions: Presenting practical models for using big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence to guide labor inspections and build Early Warning Systems.
3. Bridging the Gap: Formulating recommendations to link the outputs of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) with the changing demands of the labor market to break the cycle of poverty and its perpetuation, and
4. Building Partnerships: Strengthening cooperation between governments, the private sector (Tech Companies), and civil society to develop national data protocols for monitoring the phenomenon.



IV. Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

Encourage to identify tangible and actionable outputs, such as:

1. Strengthening Arab and international commitment to developing comprehensive policies aimed at eliminating child labor.
2. Introducing a preliminary roadmap for integrating digital solutions into national strategies to combat child labor.
3. Developing priority interventions to reform education and social protection policies and linking them to the labor market in Arab countries.
4. Proposing an initiative to exchange technical expertise between countries advanced in digitalization and countries affected by the phenomenon.

V. Session Format

Session Style: The session will adopt a "Davos-style panel" approach, where the facilitator poses key questions to the speakers to stimulate discussion and generate practical solutions. As well as key speakers

Interpretation: interpretation is requested from Arabic - English and via- versa.

VI. Proposed speakers and targeted audience

Speakers: The session is expected to feature five to 6 high-level speakers from relevant ministries in Arab countries, Arab and international organizations, and the private sector. (TBC)

Target Audience: Decision-makers (high-level officials in ministries of labor, social affairs, digital economy, and education) / Representatives of employers' and workers' organizations / Policymakers and social consultants / Private and non-profit sectors / Technology experts and social entrepreneurs / International organizations and specialized bodies.

VII. Session Flow

- 1: Innovation Vs. the phenomenon (monitoring and data):
 - ✚ How can artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms be used to identify "hotspots" in the agricultural sector and the informal economy?



- ✚ What are the requirements for linking databases of education, health, and labor market to build an effective national Early Warning System?
- Theme 2: Structural policies (education and social protection):
 - ✚ How can social assistance programs (cash transfers/social security, etc.) be redesigned to be conditional and effective in keeping children in schools?
 - ✚ What is the new role of vocational and technical education in absorbing children above the legal working age and protecting them from hazardous work?
- Theme 3: Legislation in the digital age:
 - ✚ With the emergence of digital child labor, such as "kid influencers", do we need new legal definitions and new cyber-social protection mechanisms?