



Concept Note for a Thematic Session on

## **Stronger voices, fairer incomes, brighter futures: decent work pathways for ending child labour**

At the 6th Global Conference on the elimination of child labour

Marrakech, Morocco

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2026 – 09.15 à 11.00 (GMT+1)

### **I. Context**

The global commitment to social justice, reaffirmed in the *2025 Doha Political Declaration*, places decent work, fair remuneration and social protection at the centre of sustainable development. Yet, for millions of workers, these commitments remain unfulfilled. Nearly one in five workers worldwide lives in poverty, and most of the world's informal workers lack basic protection, stable earnings or mechanisms to claim their rights. These persistent deficits undermine household stability and limit adults' capacity to secure a fair return for their labour.

The *2024 Global Estimates of Child Labour* reveal that 138 million children are still engaged in child labour, with 54 million in hazardous work. The persistence of child labour is closely linked to economic insecurity: when adult workers cannot earn enough to meet basic needs, households may turn to children's labour as a coping strategy.

In this context, living wages and adequate livelihoods are essential strategies to eliminate child labour. Ensuring that adults earn a sustainable wage that allows their families to meet fundamental needs with dignity, directly reduces the economic pressures that drive children into work. Living wages can strengthen household resilience, support children's schooling and free families from the short-term survival choices that perpetuate intergenerational poverty.

Evidence from trade unions and other membership-based organizations such as cooperatives underscores the importance of workers' collective voice to achieving living wages and adequate livelihoods. Where workers are able to organize—particularly in unorganized sectors such as domestic work, smallholder agriculture and informal services, they can negotiate better earnings, safer conditions and more equitable participation in value chains.



These gains have direct implications for child labour, not only by raising wages for adult workers and livelihoods for families but also by protecting children from hazardous work. Gender-responsive organizing is especially important given the over-representation of women in precarious, low-paid sectors where child labour risk is high.

. In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of voluntary living wage initiatives, including by multinational enterprises, that could contribute to reducing child labour. It is important, however, that these be aligned with the broader wage-setting process based on ILO principles of wage-setting, including collective bargaining and bipartite and tripartite social dialogue. It is also imperative that these initiatives consider the needs of workers and their families as well as economic factors, including tackling the root causes of low pay and the capacity of enterprises to pay. When purchasing practices, wage-setting mechanisms such as collective bargaining or minimum wage setting, and social protection systems are aligned to ensure that adult workers earn enough to live with dignity, families are less vulnerable, and child labour becomes less prevalent. Thus, living wages can constitute a powerful and necessary pathway toward ending child labour, advancing social justice, and enabling children to realize their right to education and a brighter future.

## II. Issues to be addressed

The session will highlight how strengthening decent work for adults – through greater voice and improved livelihoods – offers a powerful pathway to ending child labour.

It will also explore experiences in promoting living wages and stronger adult livelihoods as transformative levers for addressing child labour, reducing the economic pressures that push families to rely on children's work. It will illustrate how these initiatives may enhance family resilience, support children's schooling, and enable households to transition away from harmful coping strategies. Central to this discussion will be the importance of collective worker voice based on the realization of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, and collective interest representation in securing fair remuneration, improving working conditions and protecting children from hazardous forms of work, taking into account local contexts, root causes of low pay, as well as economic factors. The session may additionally discuss efforts to advance living wages and living incomes more broadly, in line with ILO principles.



## Key issues for discussion will include:

The relationship between inadequate adult earnings, economic vulnerability, and the persistence of child labour, especially in informal and rural economies.

The role of living wages in reducing household dependence on children's labour and strengthening pathways to decent work.

Experiences in extending worker voice, collective organization and democratic workers' organizations and collective bargaining in achieving fair remuneration, safer conditions and reducing child labour pressures.

Gender-specific barriers to fair pay and representation, and how gender-responsive organizing and wage-setting can reduce child labour risks.

Experiences of governments, employers and their organizations, trade unions and value-chain actors in operationalizing living-wage initiatives, to reduce the dependence of families on child labour, and promote freedom of association and access to trade unions

Opportunities for improving existing initiatives in line with ILO principles of wage setting and embedding these into national child labour policies.