



12th June 2020

COVID-19: Committing to the health, safety and development of African children

Africa has the world's highest incidence rates of child labour. The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour by the ILO indicate that 1 out of every 5 children in Africa is involved in child labour, a proportion more than twice as high as in other regions of the world. The problem is severe in sub-Saharan Africa where more than 40% of all children aged 5–14 labour for survival (about 48 million children). And 9% of African children are in hazardous work.

Many African children toil in private homes as servants, in farming, on construction sites, in mines, in garages, in shops and other enterprises in the informal sector. Some work and live in slave-like conditions, while others are forced into prostitution or end up in the streets of cities far away from their houses. Children are faced with serious threats to their health and safety, as they are exposed to biological, chemical and environmental hazards that often result in physical injury and illness. COVID-19 poses further threats to exacerbating health and safety plight of children, as well as contributing to the incidence of child labour.

ITUC-Africa affirms that trade unions have an important role to play through their educational work and other campaign activities to combat and defeat child labour. Trade unions must be at the forefront in battling for the elimination of child labour. This is so because child labour is worsening the unemployment and living conditions of workers on the continent.

On the occasion of the World Day against Child labour, the ITUC-Africa commends the public health measures adopted by African governments aimed at protecting their people, including children. We urge our governments to use broad and inclusive policy and programme and collaboration with social partners and other stakeholders to turn around the challenges COVID-19 is posing to people and children. The pandemic must not be allowed to become a ready excuse for the worsening of child labour practices. Part of the progressive response to COVID-19 should be that African governments rededicate to the pursuit of financing education for all children.

ITUC-Africa also commends the efforts of various national, sub-regional and international actors in addressing the problem of child labour. ITUC-Africa will continue to support the ILO Africa project Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa” (ACCEL Africa) launched in 2018 with particular focus on the specific supply chains, namely Cocoa, Coffee, Cotton, Gold and Tea. We call on our affiliates and social partners to do the same. Importantly, we ask our affiliates and all stakeholders to join our efforts to -

- Promote the ratification and the application of the ILO Convention No 138 (1973); on Minimum Age for Employment, and Convention No.182 (1999) on Worst Forms of Child Labour.
- Take initiatives to develop community awareness against child labour.
- Conduct action-oriented investigative surveys to explore the problem of child labour in Africa, and;
- Intervene actively or to organise interventions where possible in specific cases of child labour

Together #WeSayNoToChildlabour!



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