

International Day for Elimination of Child Labour, 12th June

Irish Forum for Global online seminar

Webinar Report

Dublin, Ireland

Introduction

The Irish Forum for Global Education (IFGE) has convened a lunch time webinar titled "International Day for the Elimination of Child Labour" - a global event commemorated annually. Irish Civil society, Irish Aid, politicians and academia were invited with 21 participants attending.

The meeting was chaired by IFGE Steering committee member Mr. John O'Brein and co-facilitated by Abdulahi Adem, IFGE Coordinator. Three experts, Dr Chris O'Connell of Comhlámh, David Joyce of Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Diego López González of The International Trade Union Confederation were invited to present sessions.

Opening remarks

John O'Brien welcomed the participants and thanked their time. He introduced himself and the Coordinator to the participants noting that we have an excellent line up of speakers for launch of the "International Day for the Elimination of Child Labour in Ireland".

The purpose is to possibly look at the progress towards the elimination of child labour, the process that has become to a halt in our view even before the covid-19 pandemic. Since 2016, the number of children in child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide. Child labour is a major barrier to the achievement of universal access to primary and secondary education. More than a third of all child labourers are out of school while the majority who manage to combine work and school have poorer educational outcomes.

Session 1: Child labour: joining the dots of inequality and power by Dr Chris O'Connell, Comhlámh

Dr Chris O'Connell, is the Volunteer Quality and Capacity Building Project Officer at Comhlámh where he co-ordinates the "Put Children First: End Orphanage Care" campaign. Prior to working at Comhlámh, Chris carried out research in collaboration with Anti-Slavery International. Chris is an experienced advocate, educator and researcher, with a particular background and interest in socio-environmental issues, with a focus on Latin America.

In slide presentation, Dr. Chris noted that Working children and adolescents are primarily human rights subjects and the State is obliged to protect those rights, including the right to work and to participate in public life with their own opinion and participation; in short, addressing the regulation of child labour within a framework of human rights protection could imply a much more comprehensive framework of obligations' compliance and exercise of rights.

He gave a context to the Child labour situation in Bolivia, presenting that 850,000 children are economically active (UNICEF). Almost half under 14 years of age (ILO minimum age). Successive (>6) years of mobilisation by NATS (Child and Adolescent Worker Societies) around new Constitution and beyond. New Child and Adolescent Code (2014) promised a new approach to child labour, the minimum age was reduced from 14 to 10 meaning children in Bolivia can enter into legal contract by age 12.

In December 2023, the president of Bolivia, Eva Morales said that he was against the eradication of the Child labour, but acknowledged children should not be exploited or forced to work. Some work out of necessity. Bolivia adopted the 2014 child labour code, it lowered the minimum working age from 14 to 10, only when self-employed and when it will impact their education. The response from the civil society, ILO was that children should not be working below the minimum age, causing protests and this was the situation in 2013 and 2014.

Dr. Chris has presented the lessons learn in the abolition of the child labour noting the following 4 lessons- you can found out the details lessons learn in details, their impact and underlying issues can be found on the presentation of enclosed [Child Labour.pptx](#)

1. Abolition alone is not effective
2. Estimates about the prevalence of modern slavery are, at the very least, questionable
3. Tendency to sensationalise these issues by multilateral institutions, national governments and the media
4. Listening to the voices of survivors and those with lived experience is crucial

Session 2: Corporate accountability, due diligence: where are we now and where to? By David Joyce, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

David was marking the international day against child labour in Geneva. He shared the link for his presentation of 111th [international labour conference](#) available here <https://vimeo.com/835748676>

For the IFGE session, David sent a [recording](#), he thanked IFGE for the invite, sharing background information regarding the International labour organisations(ILOs) launch of the first world day against child labour in 2002 as a way to highlight the plight of children engaged in child labour.

He noted the theme for this year is emphasizing the link between social justice and child labour, the slogan for the day is *"Social justice for All"* . The abolition of child labour is a corner stone for social justice through which every worker freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity and treatment of the fair share of the wealth that they have helped to generate.

His main take on the presentation was his reflection on the motion focusing on role of the private sector in the abolition of child labour, he noted that there was a bullet point in the motion seeking to ensure that the private sector implements human rights due diligence and international responsible business conduct agreement between businesses government unions and NGOs

He went on to call on Ireland to actively engage in efforts to promote all issues mentioned in the motion but particular that one also about the promotion of human rights due diligence and legislating mandatory human rights due diligence for the private sector so as to ensure child labour can be eradicated by the target date of 2025.

He reflected on the question of what is meant by human rights due diligence and has happened in the legislative areas since June 2021. He has informed that the duty to practise human rights due diligence has been part of [The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#) introduced in 2011 and since then it was also incorporated into the number of processes including the [OECD guidelines for responsible business](#) and the [ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy](#), so in 2018 the OECD has adopted due diligence guidance for responsible business conduct which provided a kind of detail of step by step guide and how companies should avoid and printing on the rights of others in the first impacts with which they are involved by identifying things mitigating and accounting for how they address their impact human rights and that outlined a number of steps just mentioned briefly so it talks about embedding responsible business conduct policy management systems

1. identifying and assessing actual and potential adverse impacts associated with the operation services that of course use child labour
2. Ceasing, preventing and mitigating adverse impacts that are found
3. tracking implementation and results then of that work
4. communicating how impacts are addressed
5. where necessary providing for our cooperating remediating when necessary.

A research commissioned by the European Commission (EC) on options for regulating due diligence has found that only one third of business do some form of due diligence and in the same study 70% of European businesses agreed that an EU regulation on mandatory due diligence for human rights and environmental impacts could provide benefits for business leading to the proposal of [Corporate Sustainability due diligence directive](#) or CSDDD in short.

Consequently, the European trade union confederation has been working very hard on that initiative on all our behalf to try and ensure and effective instrument that would be in line and coherent with The UN guiding principles, the OECD guidelines and ILO tripartite declaration, he noted that all the instruments are excellent in terms of content but are not legally binding. In Ireland, work is ongoing with Irish coalition on business and human rights trying to build political support and raise awareness about CSDDD and try to ensure the Irish government and representatives of the European parliament play a positive role in ensuring that this process leads to an effective instrument.

Updating the legislative developments, David noted on 1st of June, the European parliament voted the CSDDD, the next step is negotiating the report mandate for the parliament for what is known as trial out negotiations for the final text with European commission and European council. the vote sent an important message that mandatory due diligence and human rights matters more than ever and the EU has an opportunity to deliver for workers, people and planet in tackling child labour and private sector has a role to play.

Session 3: Alliance 8.7 and its partnership potential for a joined-up Irish response Diego López González – International Trade Union Confederation

For this session the chair has welcomed and introduced Mr. Diego López González. Diego is Development Cooperation Policy Coordinator at the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

He coordinates trade union engagement on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Asia-Pacific and African regions and has been leading on the ITUC's work on social dialogue and the SDGs.

He explained the alliance 8.7 as a **global Partnership** that aims to achieve target 8.7 of the SDGs: eradicating forced labour, ending modern slavery and human trafficking, and prohibiting and eliminating the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 ending child labour in all its forms.

He noted there are many challenges to ending Child labour, forced labour and forced marriages, to respond to these challenges the alliance aims to bring a coordinated response at global level by accelerating action – putting forward government strategies to achieve targets, conducting research and sharing knowledge, and driving innovation and leveraging resources.

In terms of governance and structure, he noted who is part of the alliance Governments (Chair: France, Deputy: Argentina), representatives of workers' organisations, Representatives of employers' organisations (and companies through business networks), international Civil Society Organisations, the UN and International Organisations (IOM, UNICEF, OHCHR, FAO, UNHCR, UNODC, UNDP, UN Women, OECD). Membership also includes Regional Organisations (OSCE, ICMPD, African Union, Bali Process, Regional Initiative Latin America and Caribbean Free of Child Labour) and Research Institutions (e.g. UN University and partners)

All these work is coordinated through global coordination group where decision are taken and all specific actions are put forward. Most of this work goes through the path finder countries who produce road maps and implement it at country level, also pathfinder countries that volunteer to move forward and progressing on the targets of so basically they look forward road maps of country level but beyond the pathfinder countries there's also action and working groups that up there's global partners to be Alliance or apparently there around participate in the specific action groups and specific activities of the alliance and also make complete pledges 8.7

The current pathfinder countries are mainly from the global south, there are however Germany, Netherland and France. There is a need for others to join the voluntary process of becoming pathfinder

Beyond the works of pathfinder countries, there is a also the work of action groups and working groups, currently two actions groups active one is on supply chains – which central hub for members to work on the supply chains and one migration action group that looks issues of migration with in borders and increase vulnerability to abuse and exploitation that migrants maybe facing.

There are specific working groups, for those that are part of global coordinating group, these are the SDG 8.7 monitoring group which prepares standardized indicators and reporting formats for pathfinder countries and advise on the implementation of the report to improve the quality and consistency of the reporting and produce pathfinder country accountability framework.

Communication, engagement and advocacy working group which communication and started direction of the communication and advocacy of the alliance, the role of the action group is to mainly provide knowledge and research and to put advise and to contribute to respirce mobilization and technical cooperation that would help the progress of target 8.7

Membership also includes regional organizations and Business Networks. but to give you a bit more detail into the ratio of the country's basically the idea of this going faster and further taking others on board and respecting applicable international human rights and understanders and these pipeline the countries need to also include the social Partners in different consultations and include all stages in order to progressive the steps that are undertaken for this is first of all the development of a roadmap

which we target 8.7 so this is done to a specific workshop where interested IDS of the alliance our work together and Country level with their actions that will contribute to achieve based on this roadmap there are reporting requirements against every year to Showcase progress and to provide disability of those countries achieved so there's a manual progress reported but also update the indicator framework and then there is also support the

Diego has also explained the role of the trade union plays in the alliance and gave insights how Irish trade unions can support this process. This include inclusion of trade unions in all processes to accelerate progress on 8.7 and guaranteeing that work of the alliance is directly linked to ILO supervisory system. Noted the importance of moving forward the agenda of labour rights in supply chains related to target 8.7 and try to due diligence in national legislation to ensure the use of child labour is abolition is supply chains and to guaranteeing labour rights and fair recruitment in the discussion on migration.

What could Irish Unions do on Alliance 8.7?

- Advocate for the engagement of the government of Ireland in the Alliance.
- Support in the elaboration of a national action plan. Put forward pledges
- Use the Alliance to support union work on supply chains advocating for mandatory due diligence.
- Identify Irish companies doing business related to situations of child labour or forced labour
- Establish global solidarity networks around target 8.7

Discussions, Questions and conclusion of the Work Shop

When the presentation of the Diego has concluded the Chair thanked him and noted the broad sphere of activities that Alliance 8.7 is undertaking, he further noted the key message is the number of EU countries involved in the alliance so far while you have 2 big players, there is a need for more EU countries involvement. The chair asked anybody who would like to make contribution to indicate.

Gertrud Cotter asked about how do you progress this in Ireland context ? what can we collectively do ? a second question was Trociare is in the process developing corporpate accontablity legislation and asked if there was any linkages with the alliance 8.7 on this since Trocaire is in advanced stage of proposing this legislation ?

Diego commented on the alliance point of view and noted there is no any specific progress from the alliance as the countries voluntarily request to join, there is an area of work which will be interesting for Irish organisations to push Ireland to take a role in the alliance, they can become a member or pathfinder country with more responsibility – there is advocacy element to it with concrete proposals of what can be done, not sure the entry points.

On the corporate accountability legislation, there is specific due diligence legislation in other jurisdictions such as UK and France, EU as well as so trying to move from basic corporate accountability to proper due diligence legislation is important.

Marc Ó Cathasaigh(TD green party), noted that he will be more than happy to delve more into this initiative and would like to know if there are specific focus on target 8.7 and he would be more than happy to do more ground work to find out and establish government position on the alliance 8.7 and asked to follow up with him directly noting that he is quite focal on the SDGs, we need to be very specific and target. he also acknowledged the internationalism aspect of unions which is very important in unionist work, mentioned INTO represented in the meeting and noted work on European work corporate responsibility and due diligence and noted Ireland should have a focal role in that. Establishing European borders as trade borders, were Ireland apply value to goods not only monitoring but ethical values which we would like to reflect European wide market place. Civil society, union groups and politicians myself pus the most possible outcomes at European level.

Emer from Irish Aid has also commented thanking who contributed the informative briefing and presentation, outlining the structures as they are currently from Irish aid or from the department of foreign affairs development cooperation perspectives. Our approach is partnership led, several of our partners who will be active on child rights and education are members of alliance 8.7, so we will support through that. In terms of broader government efforts, our approach would be through cross cutting issues like this, its most powerful when it comes from perspective that is grounded in Irish experience and in Ireland's own positioning internationally. Human rights unit are active in multilateral fora, they will liaise with DEC as the focal point for SDGs – an important entry point and department of enterprise, trade and employment.

For engagement at current level, the department of foreign affairs have a strategy on business and human rights. The conversation on different points is the right one to be having and looking forward how this discussion goes.

The Chair noted, he had known there has been discussions and workshops and some significant discussions with business representative here in Ireland about corporate responsibility and to some extent on due diligence of child labour, so things are happening, to what level we are at stage where we are ready to engage with the alliance.

Emer from Irish Aid clarified that this work will be seen as part of cross cutting and that the department of foreign affairs' policy on social protection has very strong commitment to the role of social protection to our partner countries in preventing and responding to child labour and in many other sectors the same point can be made, it would be linked to more strong to our underlying principle of responding to the furthers behind first.

The chair thanked everyone for their contributions and the webinar was officially closed at 2:00 pm