

Asia-Pacific partners revitalize collaboration to tackle child labour and forced labour in the region

Regional stakeholders emphasize rights-based strategies and collaborative efforts to tackle the pervasive issues, supported by international partnerships and innovative solutions.

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A worker mother and her child at her working place in Dhaka, Bangladesh. © Shutterstock

BANGKOK (ILO News) - Representatives of governments, employers and workers from across the Asia and the Pacific region have agreed to strengthen collaboration and to embrace an integrated, rights-based approach in their efforts to address child labour and forced labour in the region.

Meeting at the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting on Child Labour and Forced Labour, organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Bangkok during 18-21 March 2024, the event brought together participants from 18 countries with ILO specialists, regional bodies, UN

agencies and NGOs. It set out to revitalize collaboration following the COVID-19 pandemic, build capacity and foster knowledge exchanges on eliminating child labour and forced labour in the Asia-Pacific region.

The event was supported by the Global Accelerator Lab (GALAB) Project which is part funded by the United States Department of Labor as well as the governments of the United Kingdom and Japan.

A wide range of discussion took place over the four days including the importance of addressing the challenges through the lens of fundamental principles and rights at work.

“We need to see child labour and forced labour within the context of fundamental principles and rights at work. This could be collective bargaining, freedom of association or occupational safety and health but we need to push for an integrated approach,” said ILO Governance Director Vera Paquete-Perdigão.

The need for broad engagement with stakeholders such as ministries of agriculture, supply chain actors or organizations dealing with crisis situations was recognized in view of the prevalence or risks of child labour and forced labour that they face.

The importance of collaboration was stressed Dr Linda Alfarero Lumayag, Head of Big Data, Research and Information, Malaysian Employers Federation, Malaysia.

“Child labour and forced labour have a transnational and cross border nature so countries in the region should not confront the issue in isolation,” she said. Dr Lumayag also highlighted how stronger migration governance was needed to address the challenges.

Poverty levels, a lack of access to social protection, funding shortfalls and low levels of compliance were all recognized as root causes of forced labour and child labour which need to be tackled.

“Informality remains a major issue, social protection needs to be extended while there is also an increased number of countries in crisis. All these require a renewed commitment from our constituents to work harder and accelerate progress on the elimination of child labour and forced labour,” said Philippe Vanhuynegem, Branch Chief, Fundamentals Branch, Governance Department, ILO.

Innovative approaches, good practices and lessons learned were presented by a number of countries and partners including regional bodies, NGOs and UN agencies.

“We need to hear from other countries and groups about the programmes they have so we can connect our efforts and improve our ability to tackle these issues,” said Cedrelia Tamati, from Samoa’s Ministry of Commerce.

The important role that workers organizations have to play was emphasized by Shakil Akhter

Chowdhury, General Secretary, Bangladesh Labour Federation.

“Workers representatives have an important role to play in the elimination of child labour and forced labour from workplaces. Trade unions play a vital role to monitor supply chains, advocate for workers rights and provide support for victims. Workers must have a seat in discussions,” he said.

Priorities for future actions to prevent and address child labour and forced labour and advance fundamental principles and rights at work at the national level and in the region were also identified.

There are more than 160 million children and 28 million individuals trapped in child labour and forced labour globally. In the Asia and the Pacific region there are an estimated 48.7 million children in child labour and 15.1 million forced labour victims.

Xiaoyan Qian, Director of the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific, and the ILO Country Office for Thailand, Cambodia and Lao People’s Democratic Republic said, “Our region is not short of commitment. Neither is it short of good practices and examples. We now need to convert these commitments to tangible action and impact for the millions of children and workers who need our support.”



Group photo at the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting on Child Labour and Forced Labour, 18-21 March 2024, Bangkok, Thailand. © ILO

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