Child Labour: Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative on the World Day against Child Labour

Brussels, 11 June 2021

In 2021, we mark the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. Despite the progress made globally over the years, in 2020, there were still 160 million children in child labour, with 79 million children trapped in hazardous work. This is a heavy blow, as for the first time in the past 20 years, we see an increase in the number of children in child labour. Millions of children further risk falling victim to child labour due to the coronavirus pandemic and its socio-economic consequences.

The European Union has a zero tolerance approach against child labour. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child makes concrete commitments to work towards freeing supply chains of EU companies of child labour, as well as strengthening labour inspection systems for monitoring and enforcement of child labour laws. The protection of children also plays a key role in the EU's new Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, as victims of child labour are often also victims of trafficking. The fight against child labour also figures prominently in the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024.

The EU works around the world to eliminate child labour and to protect children through development cooperation, political dialogue, human rights, social, humanitarian and trade policies. Ensuring social protection floors and quality education are key factors, contributing to a decline in child labour, including during humanitarian crises. With measures tackling inequalities and social exclusion, we seek to help lift parents, families and caregivers out of poverty and ensure access to quality education for children. We use trade incentives, such as General Scheme of Preferences, to cooperate with partners to combat child labour.

In particular, we tackle child labour in the garment, conflict minerals, fisheries and agriculture sectors. The CLEAR Cotton project is a concrete example of how the EU is assisting to eliminate child labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains. Through this project, the EU has helped to free more than 4,000 children in Burkina Faso and Mali from child labour and reintegrated them in the education system, to learn and build their own future.

We should not forget that children are the first to suffer from poverty, exclusion, inequalities and conflict. It is vital to assist countries to strengthen and expand their social protection schemes, to guarantee the continuity of accessible and quality education, and to ensure the capacity of labour inspection. As we battle the coronavirus pandemic, we need to step up our efforts to prevent children's rights from backsliding. We need to ensure that they are at the centre of the global post-COVID-19 recovery.

The clock is ticking. We commit to get back to the positive trend over the past decades and accelerate the pace towards ending child labour in all its forms by 2025. Children hold the key to a better today and a better future, and it is our human imperative to enable them to live up to their full potential.

Press contacts:

Peter STANO (+32 2 295 45 53)
Daniel FERRIE (+32 2 298 65 00)
Xavier CIFRE QUATRESEOLS (+32 2 297 35 82)
Nerea ARTAMENDI-ERRO (+32 2 299 09 64)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email