Since 2002, global trends in child labour reveal a persistent prevalence of hazardous work by youth 15 to 17 due largely to working conditions that violate legal standards. Rather than address occupational safety and health (OSH) conditions and remove hazards in order to protect youth, companies and employers tend to mitigate risk in their supply chains, by ‘over-correcting’ and not allowing youth under 18 to work although those over 15 normally have a right to work in the context of country laws and core labour standards based on International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 138 and 182.

This paper demonstrates how years of data highlighting child labour and hazardous conditions of work have resulted in preventing and scarifying away employers from hiring or purchasing goods produced from any youth under 18. Through qualitative and quantitative research, we have explored options for addressing the risks of child labour and gaps in younger youth employment. Our focus was to determine how employers and farmers react to youth of legal working age. We researched reports on the topic, and met with over 100 employers, farmers and unionists. Nearly 90% of the situations and inquiries as part of the survey maintained that they do not allow anyone under 18 to work. Over 50% are aware that youth under 18 may not work in hazardous conditions however, they are not willing nor have the resources to change the conditions to enable youth to work. This pushes the youth to work illegally somewhere else in hazardous conditions.

We discuss business-led standards and efforts to transition youth from exploitative, hazardous, or harmful labour into safe and prosperous production as key to addressing youth unemployment, low-end jobs, and hazardous child labour.