

ITUC Global Covid-19 Survey
22– 25 June 2020
Key Findings in Commonwealth countries

Executive Summary: In the Commonwealth, employers are behaving badly and getting worse, while Governments are restricting union rights but promising to boost jobs and tackle climate change

The ITUC Global Covid-19 Survey has analysed government and employer responses to the pandemic for the past three months. The surveys have identified gaps in responses and been the foundation for international advocacy and campaigning.

The final survey in this series charts the basis for economic recovery and resilience plans, with a New Social Contract, universal social protection and democratic rights at their core.

121 trade unions from 95 countries took part in the fifth ITUC Global Covid-19 Survey between 22 - 25 June 2020. This report includes responses from 23 out of 54 Commonwealth countries (plus Zimbabwe): *Australia, Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Canada, Fiji, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Uganda, the UK and Zimbabwe.*

The survey showed that Commonwealth countries were more likely than governments generally (70% to 54%) to be partially reopening workplaces, businesses and community spaces, but less likely (9% to 17%) to be undertaking a full re-opening, suggesting that Commonwealth countries are more cautious, or less far advanced through the pandemic. At least Commonwealth countries do not include any governments unable to understand that the pandemic is a major threat to public health or the global economy!

Commonwealth countries were pretty much identical with governments around the world in providing support for workers during the pandemic, with just under two thirds in both groups doing so. But countries in Africa and the Americas were more likely not to have provided such support.

Commonwealth countries were considerably less likely on average to have provided paid sick leave, but more likely to have provided income support and slightly more likely to have provided health care and pension guarantees. But no Commonwealth countries had taken special initiatives on childcare provision, compared with 13% across the world as a whole.

Commonwealth country governments were less likely (70% to 81%) to be preparing an economic recovery plan than across the globe, but in those which were, unions were slightly more likely than on average (69% to 64%) to be involved in discussions around those plans. ***All Commonwealth countries with plans were including job creation, considerably higher than the 77% of countries globally which were doing so. And many more of those Commonwealth countries (69% to 49%) were including climate change and Just Transition in those plans.***

Alarming however, unions in 61% of Commonwealth countries (compared with 56% overall) reported that governments had brought in restrictions to human and labour rights under the guise of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was particularly common in Africa and the Americas, but only 42% of Asia-Pacific trade union movements reported such moves.

Commonwealth trade unions generally felt (57% to 43%) that their country's government had responded well to the pandemic rather than badly. This was barely different from the world as a whole.

Unlike governments, however, ***unions reported that employers in their countries were responding badly rather than well to the needs of workers affected by the virus, and in the Commonwealth this is now an overwhelming perception (74% to 26% compared with 60% to 40%.)*** What makes this all the more remarkable is that, while the response of employers appears to have worsened around the world during the course of the pandemic (from 44% doing badly in mid-March to 60% in late June), Commonwealth unions have seen the response of employers change even more: ***in our first survey, a majority of Commonwealth trade unions actually thought their employers were responding well, unlike across the world as a whole. So the perception of employer behaviour has changed radically in Commonwealth countries over the last two months.***

The survey findings in detail

1. Government Responses to Covid-19

The survey showed that Commonwealth countries were more likely than governments generally (70% to 54%) to be partially reopening workplaces, businesses and community spaces, but less likely (9% to 17%) to be undertaking a full re-opening, suggesting that Commonwealth countries are more cautious, or less far advanced through the pandemic. At least Commonwealth countries do not include any governments unable to understand that the pandemic is a major threat to public health or the global economy!

Global Findings

- Over half (54%, or 51) countries surveyed are undertaking a partial reopening of workplaces, businesses and community spaces. 17% (or 16 out of 95 countries) are undertaking a full re-opening.
- In total, almost three-quarters (71%, or 67) of countries are undertaking a partial or full re-opening.
- Just 9% (9 countries) are containing the spread of the virus with national lockdown measures such as closing schools and non-essential businesses, while 18% (17 countries) are delaying the spread of the virus with the promotion of handwashing, working from home, social distancing and border restrictions for international visitors.
- Just 2 countries (2%) said that the coronavirus is not a major threat to public health or the national economy.

Commonwealth Findings

- 70% (16) of the 23 Commonwealth countries who completed this survey are undertaking a partial re-opening. 2 countries (9%) are undertaking a full reopening.
- 3 countries (13%) are containing the spread of the virus and 2 countries (9%) are delaying the spread of the virus.
- No Commonwealth countries said that the coronavirus was not a major threat to their countries public health or national economy.

Changes over the surveys

Among those who have completed the five waves of the survey, there have been the following changes since the last time the survey was run:

- 1 country moved from containing the spread to delaying the spread.
- 4 countries moved from containing the spread to a partial reopening.
- 4 countries moved from delaying the spread to a partial reopening.
- 8 countries moved from a partial reopening to a full reopening

Despite a general trend to reopening among those that have completed all five waves of the survey, several countries have reimplemented lockdown measures:

- 5 countries moved from a partial reopening to delaying the spread.
- 2 countries moved from a full reopening to a partial reopening.

2. Additional Support for Workers

Commonwealth countries were pretty much identical with governments around the world in providing support for workers during the pandemic, with just under two thirds in both groups doing so. But countries in Africa and the Americas were more likely not to have provided such support.

Global Findings

- Almost two-thirds (63% or 60 countries) said unions in their country had been able to secure additional support for workers as part of government or employer responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 37% (or 35 countries) said unions had not been able to secure additional support.

Commonwealth Findings

- Just under two-thirds (61%) of Commonwealth countries (14 of 23 in this survey) said that unions in their country had been able to secure additional support for workers.
- 39% (or 9 countries) have not been able to secure additional support.

Regional Findings

	Have unions in your country secured any additional support for workers as part of government or employer responses to the Covid-19 pandemic?	
Region	Yes	No
Americas 14 countries	5 countries (36%)	9 countries (64%)
Africa 23 countries	10 countries (43%)	13 countries (57%)
Asia Pacific 19 countries	12 countries (63%)	7 countries (37%)
Europe (PERC) 39 countries	33 countries (85%)	6 countries (15%)

3. Areas of support - building a social protection floor

Those countries that indicated that additional support had been secured for workers as part of government or employer responses to the Covid-19 pandemic were asked what specific measures had been secured. The responses are included in the table below.

It shows that Commonwealth countries were considerably less likely on average to have provided paid sick leave, but more likely to have provided income support and slightly more likely to have

provided health care and pension guarantees. But no Commonwealth countries had taken special initiatives on childcare provision, compared with 13% across the world as a whole.

The percentage figure was calculated based on the number of countries (60) who said they have secured support for workers.

	Paid sick leave	Income support	Health care	Childcare	Pension guarantees
Global (60 countries)	22 countries (37%)	52 countries (87%)	19 countries (32%)	8 countries (13%)	9 countries (15%)
G20 (15 countries)	9 countries (60%)	15 countries (100%)	7 countries (47%)	3 countries (20%)	3 countries (20%)
OECD (28 countries)	12 countries (43%)	26 countries (93%)	7 countries (25%)	6 countries (21%)	2 countries (7%)
Commonwealth (14 countries)	3 countries (21%)	13 countries (93%)	5 countries (36%)	Nil.	2 countries (14%)

Global Findings based on the 60 countries where unions secured support

- 87% (52 countries) of countries are now providing income support.
- Countries are less commonly providing paid sick leave (37%, 22 countries) and healthcare (32%, 19 countries).
- Few are providing childcare (13%, 8 countries) or pension guarantees (15%, 9 countries).

Commonwealth Findings

- 93% (13 countries) of countries with worker supports secured by unions are providing income support.
- Countries are less commonly providing paid sick leave (21%, 3 countries) and healthcare (36%, 5 countries).
- Just 2 countries (14%) are providing a pension guarantee. No Commonwealth countries are providing childcare as part of union secured worker supports.

Other areas of support

Trade unions were given the option to identify other areas of support gained for workers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These included:

Reduced working hours to prevent job losses; Covid-19 declared an occupational disease; Subsidies for private employment wages; Additional parental leave; Extension of temporary unemployment Payments for food; Support for SMEs in formal and informal sectors; Rent exemptions; Direct cash payments; PPE and transport to work; Increased unemployment benefits, Sick leave and early retirement provisions; Bonus payments for health workers; Reduced hours working allowance; Deferral of taxes; Job guarantees.

4. Government economic recovery plan

Commonwealth country governments were less likely (70% to 81%) to be preparing an economic recovery plan than across the globe, but in those which were, unions were slightly more likely than on average (69% to 64%) to be involved in discussions around those plans. All Commonwealth countries with plans were including job creation, considerably higher than the 77% of countries globally which were doing so. And many more Commonwealth countries (69% to 49%) were including climate change and Just Transition in those plans.

Global Findings

- The majority (81% or 77 countries) of countries said that their government is preparing an economic recovery plan as part of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 19% (18 countries) said that their government is not preparing an economic recovery plan.

Plan Details (Global)

Of those who said that their government (77 countries) was preparing a plan:

- 64% (49 countries) said that unions in their country were involved in discussions with the government on economic recovery plans. 36% (28 countries) said unions were not involved.
- 77% (59 countries) said that job creation is part of economic recovery plans. 23% (18 countries) said job creation was not part of plans.
- Just under half (49%, or 38 countries) said that action on climate change and Just Transition was part of economic recovery plans.

Commonwealth Findings

- 16 of the 23 (70%) Commonwealth countries who took part in this survey said that their government is preparing an economic recovery plan as part of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 30% (7 countries) said that their government is not preparing an economic recovery plan.

Plan Details (Commonwealth)

Of those who said that their government was preparing a plan:

- 69% (11 countries) said that unions in their country were involved in discussions with the government on economic recovery plans. 31% (5 countries) said unions were not involved.
- All 16 said that job creation is part of economic recovery plans.
- More than two-thirds (69%, or 11 countries) said that action on climate change and Just Transition was part of economic recovery plans.

5. Government restrictions on human and labour rights

Alarming, unions in 61% of Commonwealth countries (more than the global picture of 56% overall) reported that governments had brought in restrictions to human and labour rights under the guise of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was particularly common in Africa and the Americas, but only 42% of Asia-Pacific trade union movements reported such moves.

Global Findings

- Over half (56%, 53 countries) of countries reported that over the past few months their government had brought in restrictions to human and labour rights under the guise of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 44% (42 countries) said that their government had not tried to bring in restrictions to human or labour rights.

Commonwealth Findings

- The majority of countries (61% or 14 out of 23 countries) across the Commonwealth who took part in this survey said that their government had brought in restrictions to human or labour rights under the guise of a Covid-19 response.
- However, 39% (or 9 countries) said that their government had brought in these restrictions.

Regional Findings

	Over the past few months, has your government brought in any restrictions to human and labour rights under the guise of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic?	
Region	Yes	No
Americas 14 countries	10 countries (71%)	4 countries (29%)
Africa 23 countries	16 countries (70%)	7 countries (30%)
Asia Pacific 19 countries	8 countries (42%)	11 countries (58%)
Europe (PERC) 39 countries	19 countries (63%)	20 countries (37%)

6. Assessment of government response

Commonwealth trade unions generally felt (57% to 43%) that their country's government had responded well to the pandemic rather than badly. This was barely different from the world as a whole.

Global Findings

- 58% of countries believe that their government is responding *well* to the needs of workers affected by the virus
- 42% of countries believe that their government is responding *badly* to the needs of workers affected by the virus

More than half of countries (58%, or 55 countries) who responded to this survey believe that their government is responding *well* to the needs of workers affected by the virus.

Most (53% or 50 countries) believe their government is responding *quite well*, while just 5% (5 countries) believe their government is responding *very well*.

42% (40 countries) believe that their government is responding *badly*. This includes 30 (32%) who believe they are responding *badly* and 10 (11%) who believe they are responding *very badly*.

Commonwealth Findings

- 57% or 13 of the 23 Commonwealth countries who responded to this survey believe that their government is responding *well* to the needs of workers. This includes 10 who believe they are responding *quite well* and 3 who believe they are responding *well*.
- 43% or 10 countries believe that they are responding *badly*.

7. Assessment of employer responses

Unlike governments, however, unions reported that employers in their countries were responding badly rather than well to the needs of workers affected by the virus, and in the Commonwealth this is now an overwhelming perception (74% to 26% compared with 60% to 40%.) What makes this all the more remarkable is that, while the response of employers appears to have worsened around the world during the course of the pandemic (from 44% doing badly in mid-March to 60% in late June),

Commonwealth unions have seen the response of employers change even more: in our first survey, a majority of Commonwealth trade unions actually thought their employers were responding well, unlike across the world as a whole. So the perception of employer behaviour has changed radically in Commonwealth countries over the last two months.

Global Findings

- 60% of countries believe that employers are responding *badly* to the needs of workers affected by the virus.
- 40% believe that employers are responding *well* to the needs of workers affected by the virus.

More than half (60% or 57 countries) believe that employers are responding *badly* to the needs of workers. This includes 15 countries (or 16%) believe that employers are responding *very badly*.

40% (or 38 countries) believe that employers are responding *well*, however; this includes just 1% (1 country) who believe employers are responding *very well*.

Commonwealth Findings

- 17 of the 23 (74%) Commonwealth countries in this survey believe employers are responding badly to the needs of workers.
- 26% (6 countries) believe they are responding well.

Global - Tracking Data

- Across the countries who have completed all five waves of this survey, 60% now believe that employers in their country are responding badly to the needs of workers.

52 countries have completed each of the three waves of this survey (17 -23 March, 30 March – 2 April, 20 -23 April, 25 - 28 May and 22 – 25 June). The results for these countries are listed below¹:

	Survey 1 17 – 23 March 52 countries	Survey 2 30 March – 2 April 52 countries	Survey 3 20 – 23 April 52 countries	Survey 4 25 - 28 May 52 countries	Survey 5 22 – 25 June 52 countries
Companies responding badly	23 countries (44%)	30 countries (58%)	27 countries (52%)	31 countries (60%)	31 countries (60%)
Companies responding well	29 countries (56%)	22 countries (42%)	25 countries (48%)	21 countries (40%)	21 countries (40%)

¹ Note: only data for those countries that completed each of the five waves has been included so results may differ from the global average and from previous tracking data.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrows writes:

Universal social protection – a foundation for resilience

Unions have been active in negotiating support for workers. Almost two-thirds (63% or 60 countries) said unions in their country had been able to secure additional support for workers as part of government or employer responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. This support most often takes the form of provisions of a social protection floor – including paid sick leave, income support, health care.

In addition, unions have been able to secure a range of additional measures to support workers, including additional wage support, subsidies and cash payments for food, PPE and bonus payments for frontline workers, the deferral of taxes, job guarantees and having Covid-19 declared an occupational disease.

Despite these gains for workers, the Covid-19 pandemic has brutally exposed the fault lines of the global divide between those that have universal social protection, including health and income support, and those that do not. In too many of the poorest countries, workers in both the formal and the informal sectors have faced the choice of staying at home and watching their families starve or trying to find work despite the very real risk of the coronavirus to their lives and those in their community.

The ITUC is campaigning for a Global Social Protection Fund which would need USD37.8 billion in the first five years to close the financing gaps to meet SDG 1.3 in low-income countries.

From crisis to recovery

While there has been a general trend to re-opening workplaces, business and community spaces amongst those that have completed all five waves of the survey, several countries have reimplemented lockdown measures, while others seek to once again delay the spread of the virus.

This indicates how governments have to move towards long-term planning of restarting economies while continuing to respond to the spread of the virus.

The Covid-19 health crisis is now fuelling unemployment on a scale that was unimaginable just months ago.

The challenge is to design a recovery that rebuilds the social contract between government and societies with resilient foundations to withstand further shocks. It can only succeed if people and the planet are on equal footing with economy.

The majority (81% or 77 countries) said that their government is preparing an economic recovery plan as part of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However 19% (18 countries) said that their government is not preparing an economic recovery plan.

Of those 77 countries who said that their government was preparing a plan:

- 64% (49 countries) said that unions in their country were involved in discussion with government on economic recovery plans and 36% (28 countries) said unions were not involved.
- 77% (59 countries) said that job creation is part of economic recovery plans and 23% (18 countries) said job creation was not part of plans.

- Just under half (49%, or 38 countries) said that action on climate change and Just Transition was part of economic recovery plans.

Economic recovery plans for an interdependent world will require national and global financing for recovery and resilience that can only be delivered and sustained with the rebuilding of trust in democracies and massive reform of multilateralism.

Democratic rights and freedoms under threat

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic is the great act of human solidarity the world has seen. Yet, under the cover of measures to tackle the coronavirus pandemic many countries are advancing their anti-workers'-rights agenda.

The 2020 ITUC Global Rights Index exposed the break down in the social contract that governments and employers have with working people with violations of workers' rights at a seven-year high.

Over half (46%, 53 countries) reported that over the past few months their government had brought in restrictions to human and labour rights under the guise of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Democratic rights, trust and accountability are the essential building blocks of the new economic model the world needs as it recovers from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic. A resilient global economy must be built on a New Social Contract: a new commitment to workers' rights, renewed investment in compliance and the rule of law, and a foundation of workplace democracy. These are the foundations for a future where we leave no one behind.

Sharan Burrow,
General Secretary, ITUC

Annex: the survey

Six questions were asked using an online survey platform to understand the prevalence and nature of support for workers and government economic recovery plans, and assess how well or badly governments and employers are responding to the crisis.

ITUC affiliates have been asked regular survey questions to track the global response to Covid-19 since 17 March 2020 to identify trends in support of international and national advocacy and campaigning. This is the final survey in this series. Three questions monitoring the government response and assessing how well or badly governments and employers are responding are tracking questions that have been asked in each survey over the last three months.

- 17 G20 countries, including *Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Turkey, the UK and the USA.*
- 33 out of 36 OECD countries, including *Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK, the USA.*
- 62 non-OECD countries.

Regions:

- 23 countries in Africa
- 14 countries in the Americas
- 19 countries in Asia Pacific
- 39 countries from the Pan European region of the ITUC (PERC)