

**ITUC Global Covid-19 Survey**  
**25 May – 28 May 2020**  
**Key findings for Commonwealth countries**

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This survey covers 20 out of 54 Commonwealth countries, as well as Zimbabwe: *Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, Fiji, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Nigeria, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Singapore, the UK, Zambia and Zimbabwe.*

## **Introduction**

A global jobs crisis is sweeping across the world with 87% of countries globally **and 95% of Commonwealth countries** reporting that companies in their country have announced that they are laying off workers as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic. 80% of countries in Africa and 76% of countries in the Asia-Pacific have companies where workers are losing their jobs.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic we faced a convergence of crises, massive inequality was driving an age of anger with civil unrest and distrust in democracy that was already recognised as a major risk to economies and societies. And we faced the choices associated with the best and worst impacts of technology devoid of a rights base.

The global trade union movement is calling on governments to put in place recovery and resilience plans which include:

- Job protection and job creation,
- Income protection and minimum living wages,
- Occupational health and safety including global standards and provisions for safe workplaces,
- Universal Social Protection to build resilience,
- Responsible business conduct through supply chains, and
- Government accountability with social dialogue and the provision of privacy rights.

These are the foundations for the new social contract between government and societies where people and the planet are on an equal footing with the economy.

Government responses to the Covid-19 pandemic with track and trace apps are exposing the fault lines in the use of technology from the digital divide to concerns over privacy.

While governments are responding to the needs of workers well in 63% of countries, tracking data shows that 10 countries now have a more negative view of their government's responses to the pandemic.

Trade unionists in over half of the countries surveyed (58%) believe that employers are responding badly to the needs of workers affected by the virus, and tracking data shows an increase in countries where employers are responding badly. In the Commonwealth, although a majority of trade unions used to think their employers were responding well, that has fallen to 48% now.

The importance of recovery and resilience plans that are built on social dialogue with a new social contract at their centre will be a test of government and employer action in the coming months.

## **1. Government Responses to Covid-19**

The Commonwealth is further ahead than the rest of the world in re-opening after lockdowns.

- Over half (58%) of the countries surveyed are undertaking a partial reopening of workplaces, businesses and community spaces, but that rises to 71% (15 countries) among Commonwealth countries. 10% (2 countries) are undertaking a full re-opening compared with 7% of all countries.
- 21% of countries globally are containing the spread of the virus with national lockdown measures and closure of schools and non-essential businesses but only 14% of Commonwealth countries who have generally moved beyond this, with 13% of countries globally and 10% of Commonwealth countries only delaying the spread of the virus with the promotion of handwashing, working from home, social distancing and border restrictions for international visitors.
- Just 1 country (1%) said that the Coronavirus is not a major threat to public health or the national economy.

Amongst those who have completed the four waves of the survey, the following movements have occurred since the last time the survey was run:

- 2 countries moved from containing the spread to delaying the spread.
- 26 countries moved from containing the spread to a partial reopening.
- 1 country moved from delaying the spread to containing the spread.
- 7 countries moved from delaying the spread to a partial reopening.

## **2. Tracing Apps and Union Responses**

Almost half (49%) of the countries who completed this survey said that their government does or intends to use a smart phone app to track and trace people who have been exposed to Covid-19. But this falls to 43% of Commonwealth countries.

The wealthier G20 (88%) countries and OECD (75%) countries have the highest uptake of the use of track and tracing apps, while only 27% of countries in Africa and 33% of countries in the Americas have governments who intend to use a smart phone app to track and trace people who have been exposed to Covid-19. In those countries which intend to use a smartphone contact tracing app, unions in 69% of countries globally have concerns about the privacy provisions of the app and the use of personal data.

Of the 65 countries planning a partial or full re-opening:

- 25 have or intend to use a tracing app.
- 40 do *not* have or intend to use a tracing app.

Five of the nine Commonwealth countries that have or intend to use an app have concerns about its privacy provisions and the use of personal data.

### **3. Company Layoffs**

Unions have reported a leap in the number of countries where companies have announced job losses due to Covid-19, and that is even more the case in the Commonwealth.

- 87% of countries globally have reported that companies in their country have announced that they are laying off workers as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic. But 19 (95%) of the 21 Commonwealth countries who completed this survey reported that companies in their country had announced layoffs as a result of the pandemic.
- Just 13 countries (13%) – and only 2 or 5% of Commonwealth countries - said companies are not laying off workers in their country.

### **4. Assessment of government responses**

Trade unions in most (56%) countries globally believe their government is responding *quite well*, while just 7% believe their government is responding *very well*. A similar figure of 62% of Commonwealth trade unions believe their government is responding very or quite well.

37% of countries believe that their government is responding *badly*. This includes 25% who believe they are responding *badly* and 12% who believe they are responding *very badly*.

### **5. Assessment of employer responses**

58% of countries believe that employers are responding *badly* to the needs of workers affected by the virus. This includes 14 countries which believe that employers are responding *very badly*.

Only 11 of the 21 Commonwealth countries in the survey (52% - slightly less bad than in the survey as a whole) believe employers are responding badly to the needs of workers. But this compares with a majority of Commonwealth trade unionists who thought their country's employers were responding well in the first survey two months ago.

### **Details of the survey**

130 trade unions from 100 countries took part in the fourth ITUC Global Covid-19 Survey between 25 May – 28 May 2020.

Responses were received from:

- 20 out of 54 Commonwealth countries (plus Zimbabwe)
- 16 of the G20 countries
- 32 out of 37 OECD countries

Broken down into regions, we received comments from:

- 26 countries in Africa

- 15 countries in the Americas
- 19 countries in Asia Pacific
- 40 countries from the Pan European region

In this survey, six questions were asked to measure the uptake and concerns around contact tracing apps, worker layoffs due to the pandemic and assess how well or badly governments and employers are responding to the crisis.

ITUC affiliates are being asked regular survey questions to track the global response to Covid-19 and identify trends in support of international and national advocacy and campaigning. Three questions monitoring the government response and assessing how well or badly governments and employers are responding are tracking questions in each survey.