

▶ COVID-19 impacts on SDG 8

Trade Union perspectives: preliminary findings

ILO-ACTRAV

objectives and outreach

- establish credible baseline data that will inform the ILO-ACTRAV's work on Agenda 2030 and serve as a baseline for the office's work on SDGs and COVID-19;
 - serve as the first measure of the current assessment by trade unions regarding the positive and negative impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically on SDG 8 indicators, and generally on Decent Work; and
 - draw conclusions and recommendations that will assist ACTRAV to develop appropriate and timely advice on the role of trade unions in the achievement of SDG 8 during and post-COVID-19.
- An invitation to respond to the survey was sent to 305 trade union leaders, spread over five regions;
 - Contact details gathered through TUDCN of the (ITUC) and its regional networks as well as through ACTRAV staff at HQ and field;
 - 141 participants in total including the 11 key informants; 113 were active at national level;
 - the rest were either representing the GUFs, labour support organizations, regional and sub-regional trade union organizations;
 - The survey was distributed for a period of 30 days in English, French, Russian, Arabic, and Spanish;

▶ The views per specific targets and indicators

1. Target 8.5 Full and productive employment and decent work by 2030:

- none of the trade union leaders thought that SDG target 8.5 is well on track and the desired results will be achieved. Many reiterated that the world was not on track to achieve the targets in the first place, and the situation has deteriorated further in the pandemic;

2. Indicator 8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of employees, by sex, age, occupation, and persons with disabilities: the majority of the trade union leaders believe that efforts to achieve SDG indicator 8.5.1 are moderately on track and about half of the objectives will be achieved.

- Almost half had a negative view on the progress achieved so far, believing that COVID-19 will impact measures that are currently rather not on track in a way or altogether take them off track;

3. Indicator 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age, and persons with disabilities: views slightly skewed towards the positive with a quarter of respondents believing that progress is moderately on track and about half of the objectives will be achieved during and post-COVID-19.

► The views per specific targets and indicators

4. Target 8.6 Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training by 2020: Progress towards this objective is measured through this target's only indicator, which looks at the proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training (also known as the "youth NEET rate").

➤ Half the trade union leaders' opinions slant towards the negative with many believing that progress is off track and less than half of the objectives will be achieved;

5. Target 8.7 Eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking, worst forms of child labour by 2025: This target's only indicator (8.7.1) calculates the proportion and number of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in child labour as defined by ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age) (C138), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) (C182), by sex and age.

➤ more than half of the trade union leaders' opinions are rather positive, with almost a quarter of the total believing that progress is moderately on track and that about half of the objectives will be achieved.

▶ The views per specific targets and indicators

5. Target 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers

- ▶ Two indicators are used to measure progress towards meeting this target. SDG indicator 8.8.1, which calculates fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries per 100,000 workers, by sex and migrant status, and SDG indicator 8.8.2, which looks at the level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on ILO textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status
- ▶ Results are mixed with a quarter believing that the objective is moderately on track to being met and that about half of the targets will be achieved during and post-COVID-19 and almost the other half opining that progress is altogether off-track and that the objectives will not be met during or post-COVID 19.
- ▶ The impact of the pandemic has led some workplaces to become more unsafe for workers. For example, almost a third of unionised health sector workers have reported dated OHS training and guidance information on infection prevention and control and the use of PPE;
- ▶ women in general and transport workers are at disproportionate risk at work due to increased exposure altogether and the lack of protective equipment-due to the sector's high segregation, where women are on the frontlines of the pandemic in customer-facing and cleaning roles.



Impact on Decent Work Pillars



Employment Creation

- A third of the respondents opined that COVID-19 will positively impact employment creation as the *“the crisis situation will put employment at the centre of government policies.”*
- A respondent from Africa explained: *“During the lockdown, the importance of relying on local goods was brought into sharp focus, thus promotion of local industries has become a priority.”*
- In contrast, over a quarter of the survey respondents expects employment creation to be negatively impacted...financial support has focused more on keeping big corporations afloat rather than protecting and creating jobs, particularly in the informal economy and for migrant workers.
- *“the situation prior to the pandemic was already extremely vulnerable with respect to job creation. Even with economic growth, the countries did not significantly generate jobs and those generated were mainly in services and in sectors where there is no recognition of the dependency relationship. The responses to the pandemic of most governments and many companies are not guaranteeing the stability of employment and wages for workers. On the contrary, in many ways they reproduce and consolidate pre-pandemic vulnerabilities (A respondent from the LAC region).*



Rights at work

- Many trade union representatives point out that labour rights are already widely violated in their countries under the veil of COVID-19, such as forcing workers into unpaid leave, reducing work hours, hindering collective bargaining and failing to protect the health and safety of workers during the pandemic.
- Almost a third of the respondents opined that the impact will be negative as governments focus on retaining jobs and supporting businesses, but in the process are willing to compromise workers' rights.
- ... “there may be interest in approving legislation that makes working hours more flexible to the detriment of current regulations.”
- On the contrary, a quarter of the respondents believe that rights at work will be impacted positively indicating that the crisis may push governments to implement policy reforms with more recognition for workers at all levels.
- However, this shall depend on the sector, as some have experienced increased recognition for workers rights whereas others remain vulnerable.
- Due to Covid, unionised workers may be more protected, but the enforcement of labour inspections has been difficult through the crisis and violations are going unreported especially for informal workers and those who are not unionised.



Social Protection

- With respect to the perceived impact of COVID-19 on this pillar of the Decent Work Agenda, 46 of the trade union leaders believe the impact will be positive.
- Examples of positive developments include Argentina where *“the government has extended social protection measures, assisting with income substitution programs for sectors and workers that have suspended activities.”*
- For example, in the Russian Federation, *“to counteract the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of workers, wages and scholarships will increase by 15 percent as of September 1, 2020, and social and insurance pensions will be increased from 15 to 50 percent.”*
- Some trade union leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa illustrate the view that impacts will be neutral... acknowledging the different efforts governments have made to support workers facing unemployment (for example, by introducing unemployment benefits and cash transfers), factors such as rampant inflation and limited budgets have curtailed the effectiveness of social protection measures.
- Moreover, *“social protection measures are largely restricted to [the] formal sector and [the] informal economy, which employs 70-80 percent of the workforce, is not covered. Measures such as social cash transfers are limited and impact especially the women remains narrow due limited budget constrained by external debt.”*



Social Dialogue

- When asked about the likely effects of COVID-19 on this pillar of decent work, over a third of trade union leaders reported expecting a positive impact... *“all sectors are aware that the crisis can only be overcome with social dialogue”, and “tripartite dialogue is advancing to overcome the COVID-19 crisis.”*
- COVID has also forced governments that have been traditionally hostile with trade unions to have an open dialogue and to work with them.
- In Indonesia through social dialogue, workers of a garment factory that was due to shut down because of a reduced number of orders, negotiated to start producing PPE to keep jobs going. In Asia, national social dialogue is generally non-existent. However, because of the
- Respondents with a negative outlook highlight the unequal footing in which many workers stand when negotiating their working conditions, where *“power is skewed in favour of the highly resourced and those they support.”*
- Likewise, *“because some of the old patterns remain unchanged in terms of the relationship of the worker with the employer and in terms of the implementation of labour laws and international standards, social dialogue will exist, but it is not effective due to the disparity of forces between employers and workers.” ... “social distancing could be used as an argument to avoid social dialogue.”*



Concluding observations

- Massive job losses experienced both in high- and low-income countries, thereby confirming the need for decent jobs as part of the recovery process and increasing the need for more campaigning for better social protection measures against unemployment;
- While not the solution for the vast majority of workers, nonetheless Covid has shown that it is crucial that policy frameworks are developed that adequately secure the Occupational Safety and Health of both workers that can work from home, and those who cannot;
- The workload of public sector workers in health and education in particular has become considerably heavier and more dangerous and this has generally not been met with adequate and responsive policy measures;
- Increased vulnerabilities of migrant, informal workers including garment and construction workers-these workers are very likely to face extreme poverty and health impacts due to the systemic decent work deficits within the sectors, reliance on low wages, which leave workers without an economic safety net when faced with reduced work or unemployment;



Next steps

- Internal review of the report, translation and printing
- Global Launch by end October 2020
- Followed by regional discussions and strategy development by end October-Nov 2020

