



## ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and The World of Work

(1-9 July 2020)

ITUC Briefing Note

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### Building a better future of work

#### CONTEXT

The ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work takes place at a moment when the world is facing the most serious health, social and economic crisis since World War II. The pandemic has to date taken the life of over 480,000 people, while more than 9 million people have been infected. While several countries are in the process of easing lock down measures imposed to limit the propagation of the virus, many others are struggling to manage the high numbers of deaths and infections and the economic fallout.

The impact of the pandemic on employment is devastating. The ILO estimates that in the first half of 2020 working hours have declined by 10.7% relative to the last quarter of 2019, equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs.<sup>1</sup> Almost 1.6 billion informal economy workers have significantly been impacted by lockdown measures and/or are working in the hardest-hit sectors.<sup>2</sup>

The current crisis has dramatically exposed the flaws of the current model of development. Years of ill-guided austerity measures and cuts in public spending on healthcare, coupled with privatization of public services, have undermined countries' capacity to adequately tackle the crisis. Pre-crisis inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic leaving many workers unprotected and in situation of dire poverty, also disproportionately hitting black communities and indigenous peoples. Gaps in financing and coverage of social protection have left millions of workers around the world without health care or income support when they need it most.

The proliferation of precarious and informal work including in global supply chains has made millions of workers, of lot of them women and already suffering from decent work deficits, extremely vulnerable to the pandemic, due to jobs losses, lack of income support, access to health care and social protection. Whilst many businesses are repurposing and reorienting their operations, many face closure and workers across global supply chains have been laid off, millions without the hope of jobs or incomes in the coming months.

Women have been disproportionately affected by the crisis as they are over-represented in front-line sectors such as health, care and retail. Many of them are earning low wages and have poor working conditions. The closure of schools imposed by many countries has increased the burden of dealing with family responsibilities. Confinement measures have led to an increase in domestic violence against women and girls. Many young people have faced deteriorating education and training opportunities and are facing dire employment prospects.

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<sup>1</sup> ILO Monitor: Covid-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition (27 May 2020)

<sup>2</sup> ILO Monitor: Covid-19 and the world of work. Third edition (29 April 2020)

In many countries, people from ethnic minorities are also disproportionately affected by the virus, both in health and economic terms. Deeply embedded patterns of racism and discrimination are responsible for this.

The impact of the crisis on migrant workers and refugees has also been dramatic with many of them suffering from discrimination, being exposed to severe health risks in addition to racism and xenophobia, violence and homelessness.

Several countries have also seen an increase of trade union rights violations during the crisis.

### ILO Summit on Covid-19

It is in this context that the ILO decided to convene a Global Summit on Covid-19. The Summit will provide a high-profile platform for tripartite constituents to address the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular to draw on the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work<sup>3</sup> adopted by the 2019 ILO Conference to identify policy response.

The Summit is organized in two parts: five regional events (1-2 July) followed by three global events (7-9 July). All events are scheduled to allow remote participation from all time zones and will be broadcasted live with interpretation in several languages.

**Regional events** will aim to capture the region-specific issues that will inform discussions during the Global Summit and are scheduled as follows:

1 July	7h00-10h00 GMT	Arab States	9h00-12h00 CET
	12h00-15h30 GMT	Europe	14h00-17h30 CET
2 July	4h00-7h00 GMT	Asia and the Pacific	6h00-9h00 CET
	9h00-12h30 GMT	Africa	11h00-14h30 CET
	15h00-18h00 GMT	Americas	17h00-20h00 CET

**Central European Time (CET) is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)**

**The Global Summit** scheduled on 7, 8 and 9 July 2020, between 12.00 and 16.00 (CET) each day, will be structured around three events as follows:

- The **Regional Day**, on Tuesday 7 July, in a mix of live and recorded segments, will feature highlights from all five regional events, along with interviews and videos of ILO responses to COVID-19.
- **The Global Leaders' Day**, on Wednesday 8 July, will offer a global platform to the Heads of State and Government of ILO member States, prominent global employer and trade union leaders, and heads of international organizations to address, in a pre-recorded message of up to five minutes, the challenges and opportunities of the pandemic in the world of work.
- **The ILO Constituents' Day**, on Thursday 9 July, will bring together ministers, and workers' and employers' leaders from member States to reflect live on inputs from the previous events with a view to informing future ILO action to implement the Centenary Declaration for the Future of

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS\\_711674/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS_711674/lang--en/index.htm)

Work in the context of the pandemic recovery. The discussion will be guided by the following questions: (1) responses to support full and productive employment and decent work for all; (2) tackling informality and gaps in social protection; (3) spotlight on most impacted sectors of economic activity and vulnerable populations; (4) working together to build back better.

Given the time constraints of virtual sessions the speakers for the regional events, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of July will be organized through the Secretariat of the Workers' Group. No speakers are envisaged on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July.

A web platform with information on the Summit updated regularly including a concept note prepared by the Office on the event is available here below:

[https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/events/WCMS\\_747476/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/events/WCMS_747476/lang--en/index.htm)

The Summit will not be adopting conclusions but the ILO plans to take into account the guidance provided by constituents for its work ahead.

## Policy responses

In June 2019, the ILO Conference adopted the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. At a moment when economists forecast the worst economic and employment crisis since the 1929 depression, it is more urgent than ever to give effect to the call for a new social contract made in the ILO Centenary Declaration, with social justice and rights of workers at its centre.

During the regional and global debates of the Summit, workers may wish to draw on the following priorities to build an inclusive and sustainable recovery and future resilience.

### Occupation Safety and Health

All workers should be protected against all Covid-19 risks. This requires the necessary protective equipment provided to workers free of charge together with relevant hygiene and social distancing rules. Unions should be consulted on all measures put in place at workplace levels. For additional details see ILO guidance on return to work.<sup>4</sup>

COVID-19 should be classified as an occupational disease under national regulatory frameworks with an official occupational disease reporting and recording requirement, both for preventative and protective purposes, including workers' compensation.

Based on the commitment taken in the Centenary Declaration, the protection of the health and safety of workers should be recognized as a fundamental right as a matter of urgency.

The current pandemic has also shown the urgency for the ILO to adopt a new convention on biological hazards (as a follow-up to the recommendations of the Standard Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group).

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS\\_745549/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS_745549/lang--en/index.htm)

Relevant guidance should also be drawn from the ILO Guidelines on Decent Work in Public Emergency Services to guarantee decent work for health and care workers.<sup>5</sup>

Initial broad-scale lockdowns were imposed according to public health stipulations. As workplaces re-open, occupational health and safety processes and measures must come to the forefront – it is clear that workplaces are major vectors for transmission of the virus, and thus workplace health and safety is crucial to building resilience against further spread and new outbreaks. Under no circumstances should workers be required to take up work that puts them in a situation of danger.

### Universal social protection

The social and economic impact on workers and their families faced with lock-down measures, due to loss of jobs and income, must be mitigated. Measures should include conditional wage subsidies and extension of unemployment benefits, universal access to health care, paid sick leave to all workers, including casual workers, the self-employed, platform workers and workers in the informal economy including migrant workers. A Global Fund for Universal Social Protection should be urgently put in place to enable the poorest nations to respond to the pandemic and future shocks. Some US\$ 9 trillion has been pledged by governments for recovery – such a Global Fund would represent a small fraction of the total global funding.

### Labour protection floor

The crisis has exposed the weakness of current labour protection systems in many countries after decades of labour law reform, leaving millions of workers, many of them young workers, in casual and precarious jobs without employment or income protection, and also falling outside the scope of Covid19 protection and recovery packages. Many workers have faced and continue to face the unacceptable choice between continuing to work at risk to their health or falling into destitution and even starvation. Therefore, it is more urgent than ever to ensure that all workers, regardless of their contractual arrangements or employment status, enjoy fundamental workers' rights, an adequate living wage, maximum limits on working hours and safety and health at work, along with social protection.

### International labour standards

Respect for workers' rights should be placed at the core of a strategy for an inclusive and sustainable recovery recognizing the enabling nature of freedom of association and collective bargaining. States should refrain from weakening labour rights and instead be guided by ILO standards in order to develop effective policy responses to promote an equitable and inclusive recovery and achieve decent work. For further details see: ILO Standards and Covid-19.<sup>6</sup>

### Social dialogue

Social dialogue, with effective respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining, should be promoted at all levels as a key means to meet the health, social and economic challenges posed by the pandemic, both during the crisis and in the period of recovery. Consultation and involvement of trade unions, and not only business, in the development of social and economic responses to the crisis, is required to ensure packages of balanced, equitable and inclusive measures.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS\\_626551/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS_626551/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/WCMS\\_739937/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/WCMS_739937/lang--en/index.htm)

### Formalization of the informal economy

The current crisis has exposed the hardship of informal economy workers around the world. This calls for an urgent and renewed commitment to the formalization of the informal economy in order to address decent work deficits and poverty wages. At the same time, universal social and labour protection is necessary that covers informal economy workers regardless of their employment status.

### Investments in quality public services

Quality public services and the public sector should be strengthened, with massive investments to ensure universal access to healthcare, water, sanitation, food, shelter, and education and with guarantees that these systems are adequately staffed and workers' rights respected. Wages and working conditions in health care and the wider care economy should be improved, addressing persistent gender and other inequalities.

### Global Supply Chains

The vulnerability of the global model of trade and production should be recognized and addressed. The crisis has exposed the enormous risks to labour rights in unregulated global supply chains where millions of workers have lost their jobs and income without access to remedy and social protection. Effective regulation is urgently needed for business to conduct mandatory due diligence along their supply chains on human rights and be held accountable where they fail to guarantee that their operations and activities do not negatively impact labour rights. Cross-border business activity must be governed by the rule of law so that future crisis do not put the rights of worker under peril.

EU-wide legislation and the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights are steps in the right direction. The time has now come for the ILO to also develop an ILO standard to ensure decent work in global supply chains with mandatory due diligence at its heart.

Support to big business and MNE's should be conditional on their proven respect for the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and ILO MNE Declaration, including with respect to their procurement policies.

Support to SMEs should be conditional on job and income security for workers.

### Pro-employment macro-economic policies

Stimulus packages are needed to address the economic, employment and social consequences of the pandemic.

There is a need for all countries to place full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work at the center of macro-economic policies alongside emergency debt relief to enable developing countries to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and facilitate an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the crisis. ILO Recommendation on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience, 2017 (No. 205) offers valuable guidance in that regard.

Massive investments are also needed in infrastructure, public health, care and education.

Industrial and sectoral policies allowing developing countries to move towards higher value-added production delivering on decent jobs and wages should be promoted.

Tax reform, including ending tax havens and ensuring that businesses and MNEs pay taxes in the countries in which their production and activities take place, promotion of progressive taxation together with taxation of the digital economy should be priorities to provide needed resources for the recovery and social development.

### Gender equality

The Covid19 has exposed the gender dimension of the crisis, with women bearing a disproportionate share of the risks both at work and at home, showing the urgency of implementing a transformative agenda for gender equality in opportunities and treatment. This must include equal pay for work of equal value, and beyond this, better wages and working conditions for work in so called feminized sectors and jobs. Ratification of the ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the world of work should be promoted as a priority alongside ratification and effective implementation of ILO Conventions on discrimination, equal pay, family responsibilities and domestic work.

### New technologies

The rapid increase in teleworking and use of new technologies, accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis, as well as platform business must be appropriately regulated to avoid precarisation of working conditions. A just transition to technological change should be promoted with social dialogue at its heart, along with privacy protections for workers.

The Centenary Declaration called on ILO members to respond to the challenges and opportunities in the world of work relating to the digital transformation of work, including platform work. The current crisis has shown that digital labour platforms will continue to expand. This is also an area where the ILO should step up its work, starting with a meeting of experts on ensuring decent work in the platform economy as recommended by the 2018 recurrent discussion on social dialogue.

### Climate action

2020 requires Governments to review their commitments (National Determined Contributions – NDCs) to reduce emissions in accordance with the Paris Climate Agreement. The response to the crisis should not be used to put the economy before climate. A just transition towards environmental sustainability needs therefore to be put at the centre of new plans for ambitious climate action. These plans should be coordinated with the urgent economic stimulus plans and workplace measures needed to protect the jobs and income of workers and their families and to stabilise the real economy.

### Policy coherence

Social justice and the fight against inequalities must be placed at the centre of responses to address the current crisis. The ILO, based on its constitutional mandate, has a critical role to play to strengthen collaboration with relevant organizations of the multilateral system to achieve this goal. In so doing, the ILO should strengthen its role in evaluating the impact that trade, economic and financial policies have on employment. Greater coordination amongst international organizations is also needed in order to ensure the investment in and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. International Financial Institutions have a key role to play in this regard by providing funds without conditionalities that deregulate labour markets, undermine public services and exacerbate inequalities.

## Conclusion

Workers should not be paying for the crisis. The response to the current crisis should be an opportunity to deliver on a human-centered approach to recovery that puts workers' rights and the needs, aspirations and rights of all people at the heart of economic, social and environmental policies.<sup>7</sup> The social and economic consequences of the pandemic have exacerbated the weaknesses of the current model of development. There is an urgent need to deliver on a new social contract and to place social justice at the heart of the global multilateral system to ensure that working people receive a just share of the wealth they contribute to create. A fundamental change of direction is needed to ensure a safe recovery with decent jobs for all in a more sustainable and inclusive economy. The ILO must play a key role in the multilateral system and in its work with constituents to ensure that social justice and decent work lie at the heart of the responses to the crisis and the recovery into a more resilient and sustainable future.

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<sup>7</sup> Centenary Declaration, Section I, D