



WEBINAR: SDGS FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE IN ASIA-PACIFIC TRADE UNION PRIORITIES

25 FEBRUARY 09.00 AM-11.00 AM BRUSSELS

REPORT

Welcome and opening

In his opening, Mamadou Diallo, ITUC Deputy General Secretary connected the work that unions do in the realm of the SDGs to the five demands of the New Social Contract. Shoya Yoshida, ITUC-AP General Secretary, presented the context of the region in terms of progress towards the SDGs and provided some highlights on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment in the region. He stressed that the crisis is also bringing opportunities to prioritise the increase of domestic demands by increasing wages and improving living standards across the region, and to promote investments in labour protection floors, such as organisational health and safety, social protection, and living wages.

Session 1: Contributions from trade union leaders in VNRs countries on SDGs implementation and pandemic recovery: highlights and challenges

Elly Rosita Silaban, president of KSBSI Indonesia started off this session with [a presentation](#) of the status of SDG implementation, and particularly SDG 8, in the country and KSBSI's recommendations to improve it. She stressed very much the fact that much of Indonesia's response to the Covid-19 crisis prioritises business and economic recovery over the SDGs, public health and decent work elements, i.e. SDG8. Zahoor Awan, PWF Pakistan Steering Committee Chair, stressed the centrality that the ILO Centenary Declaration has for achieving SDG 8 and decent work. Finally, Pongthiti Pongsilamane, Deputy General Secretary of SERC Thailand, underlined in his [presentation](#) the fact that Thai unions are facing great difficulties in engaging in any form of dialogue with the government.

Session 2: High Level Debate: Strategies for recovery and resilience in the SDGs Decade of Action

The panel was composed of Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division at UN ESCAP, Haidy Seang Ear-Dupuy, Senior Social Development Specialist with the Asia Development Bank, Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa, ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, and Shoya Yoshida, General Secretary of ITUC-AP.

Mr Tata talked about the [strategies for recovery and resilience in the SDGs decade of action](#), which was very much centred in the role of social protection in shielding people from crises. He developed four main consideration points in this regard: (1) Asia-Pacific urgently needs to expand social protection to all workers, including informal workers. (2) Governments must actively increase their investment in social protection. (3) A positive note: the pandemic's fallout has triggered important social protection measures aimed at mitigate the impacts of the crisis. And finally (4) more needs to be done including embedding social protection in national development agendas and building universal social protection systems.

Representing the Asia Development Bank, aidy Seang Ear-Dupuy shared information about the initiatives that the Bank has taken with its member states to address the Covid-19 crisis. Each government was asked to include in their plans resilience strategies in terms of labour and sanitary protection. All in all, the Bank disbursed 20Bn USD to respond to the crisis. However, she said, the implementation of these means is not perfect and unions have an important monitoring role to play. She also acknowledged the collaboration with the ITUC in order to identify gaps in the delivery of means. This gap is very wide for social protection, thus the ADB will continue to expand its “social side of work”, such as decent jobs and quality jobs for youth. ADB’s focus for the future will be on inclusivity, especially of vulnerable groups.

Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa, ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, described the consequences of the pandemic on the region’s development potential, with 62 million jobs destroyed in the region. She presented the main responses that the ILO has delivered in collaboration with the constituency, notably the ILO pays special attention to work on safe return to work, green jobs, Just Transition, gender equality, migration and social protection. Finally, the ILO is advocating for universal access to vaccines, and for OSH measures to become a fundamental right.

Closing the panel, ITUC-AP General Secretary Shoya Yoshida acknowledged that all organisations, UNESCAP, the ILO, the ADB and trade unions were “moving towards the same direction”. He then [presented](#) how the New Social Contract’s five demands for recovery and resilience correspond with the UN General Assembly’s priorities for 2021. Finally, he concluded stressing the key role that social dialogue plays in achieving a New Social Contract for recovery and resilience.

The session was wrapped up with a short session on questions and answers which covered the role of unions in enabling informal workers organising and improving their quality of life, the increasing tendency of governments to push forward laws that are dismantling labour rights, and the ITUC AP position on vaccination and security of unionists.

All intervening union leaders agreed that informal workers are among their top priorities since a vast majority of Asia’s working people are active in the informal economy. In addition, the Covid-19 crisis has intensified this since many unionised formal workers have lost their jobs and have moved over to the informal economy. UNESCAP insisted on the role of unions in reaching out and organising the workers of the informal economy because universal social protection cannot happen in the region if informal workers are not included. The ADB called for innovative ways to protect informal workers through innovative ways of expanding social protection. For instance, a regional social protection system that takes into account the informal migratory labour flows across borders in the region. ADB also insisted on the role of trade unions in bringing people together to have a stronger negotiation power when designing the future social protection system in Asia-Pacific. Regarding workers’ rights degradation and security, the ILO expressed its concerns over the shrinking democratic space and the bad shape of social dialogue in the region. Concerning social protection, according to the ILO, Asia and the Pacific is at crossroads as the emergency measures that have been put in place now need to be taken beyond the short-term and be reinforced in a long term perspective through social dialogue. Finally, ITUC AP called on all participants to ensure that unions’ and workers’ voices are heard by governments more effectively, including in the process of planning, implementing and monitoring the implementation of the SDGs.

Session 4: Key information and updates for TUs engagement in the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

The [Asia and Pacific People’s Forum](#) will take place from 17 to 21 March 2021. It is an occasion to have unions’ interventions on target goals of this year, including SDG 8, as well as VNRs. In addition, those registering will have the possibility to contribute to the SDG 8 Fact Sheet.

Session 5: Conclusions

In his concluding words, Mamadou Diallo stressed the importance of enhancing cooperation among the UN, the ILO, the ADB and unions, because we all have a very similar plan and vision for recovery and resilience. He also insisted on the importance for unions to continue contributing to the VNRs and continue improving unions engagement in this process. For this reason, it is important to prepare our delegates to have all the information and tools needed to contribute to the events at regional level. Shoya Yoshida underlined that progress on SDGs have not been satisfying , therefore, it is very important that workers’ voice is more broadly heard in the process of achieving the SDGs.



This project is co-funded by the European Union