



Arab Employment Forum

A Jobs Pact for Recovery and Growth

Guidelines for Thematic Working Sessions, 20 October 2009

Panel 1 Decent Employment, Sustainable Growth and Recovery: Policies and Institutions

Time: 10:00-12:00

Organizational Guidelines: Each Panel will consist of a Chair, a Facilitator, and tripartite discussants representing the perspectives of governments, workers and employers. The Chair will designate one of the panelists to serve as Rapporteur, reporting back to Plenary on day 3 of the Forum. The Rapporteur will be assisted by a pre-assigned Forum note taker, who will provide the meeting minutes to the Rapporteur by end of session.

The duration of each panel is two hours. The second half of the session will be dedicated to open discussion, while the first part will be led by the panelists themselves as per the below running order of speakers:

- Chair (10 minutes): The Chair will preside over the meeting and moderate the Panel discussion. The Chair will take a few minutes to open the session and introduce panelists. The Chair will also summarize key interventions and provide a wrap-up statement at the end.
- Facilitator (10 minutes): The Facilitator (s) will present highlights of the respective background paper(s) prepared for each panel and key issues for debate. Where there are two facilitators, they will briefly address these same issues (5 minutes each).
- Tripartite constituents (10 minutes/constituent): A representative from each of the Tripartite constituents will highlight key issues of concern, bringing to the fore priorities and challenges from the perspectives of governments, workers and employers.
- Other discussants (10 minutes): Other discussants representing academia and civil society may present their own take on the issue, providing an overview of their own experiences and lessons learned.

The remaining time (approximately 1 hour) will be dedicated to an open exchange of views moderated by the Chair towards a set of Panel recommendations.

Thematic Focus: This Panel will examine ongoing and planned efforts towards placing employment and decent work objectives in the mainstream of national government policies. Current indicators and statistical systems have serious difficulties in properly capturing the impact of the economic crisis on

employment in the Arab Region. In the recent period just prior to the crisis, the Arab region witnessed a relatively strong and sustained growth, driven in large part by the oil boom and the rise in energy prices. Employment growth and labour productivity, however, have not increased as significantly as economic growth, so that the Arab region's unemployment rate remains one of the highest in the world. In particular, challenges remain with regard to youth unemployment, women's economic participation, and in some countries the informal economy.

Various Arab governments have made past attempts to reduce rising unemployment through the expansion of public sector employment, which has now become an additional constraint to job creation. This approach has had short-lived effects, with the government acting as an employer of last resort. On the other hand, concerted efforts toward job creation in the private sector, particularly through active labour market policies, have not brought about significant results, as much of these efforts remain ad hoc and are not linked to any comprehensive national employment strategies. For these aforementioned reasons, Arab economies enter the global crisis with many pre-existing challenges.

The purpose of this panel is to stimulate debate and discussion around these issues and to draw policy attention to the need to reconsider priorities, emphasizing employment as a central goal for development policies in the region. Indeed, the measures to mitigate the economic crisis presently provide an opportunity to address pre-existing employment challenges in Arab countries.

Issues for Debate:

1. What policies effectively support high growth strategies and the creation of decent work opportunities?
2. How can we best appraise and monitor the impact of the crisis on the real economy?
3. What are the prospects for increased regional integration and how could this process lead to more and better employment opportunities? How can regional cooperation support the adoption of proactive policies, initiation of key programmes and exchange of good practices?
4. What policies boost investment (domestic and FDI) in a manner that is employment-intensive and that raises productivity? What opportunities are there for public and private partnerships?
5. What targets and measures are there for improving productivity in the region?
6. What are the good practices that can facilitate the transition from an informal economy into a formal one?
7. What are the mechanisms for coordination, coherence and social dialogue?