



The International Labour Organization,
Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean
In collaboration with
The Government of Barbados



11TH ILO MEETING OF CARIBBEAN MINISTERS OF LABOUR

SHAPING A BRIGHTER FUTURE OF WORK FOR THE CARIBBEAN

Accra Beach Hotel and Spa, 14 – 15 May 2019

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

The world of work is seeing major transformations. These are driven by globalization, the technological and digital revolution, global warming and climate change, and demographic shifts. The Global Commission on the Future of Work published its Report in January 2019 and explores how Governments, employers, workers, and society as a whole are affected. Taking the human being - and the role of work in the lives of individuals and societies - as point of departure, the Commission identifies ‘countless opportunities to improve the quality of working lives’. In the framework of a “human centered agenda”, it categorizes these under three headings:

1. increasing investment in people’s capabilities,
2. increasing investment in institutions of work, and
3. increasing investment in decent and sustainable work.

The Commission calls for decisive action from Governments and social partners as none of these opportunities will materialize by themselves.

The Report emphasizes that, at is was a 100 years ago when the ILO was first created, – lasting peace and economic progress continues to depend on social justice. The Decent Work Agenda is a critical instrument for achieving this. The Commission calls for a reinvigoration of the social contract observing that the ILO’s Constitution remains the most ambitious global social contract in history, giving rise to many arrangements across regions and countries at all levels of development. At its heart is the process of social dialogue which promotes participation, fairness and legitimacy. The report encourages strengthened democratic space for more effective social dialogue and business models that are better aligned with a human-centered agenda.

This outlook is particularly relevant to the Caribbean where vulnerabilities to global economic down-turns, high unemployment, rising inequality and crime are compounded by the prevalence of increasingly severe natural disasters. The region’s prioritization of resilience-building spans over two decades and is reflected in numerous international agreements, including the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Samoa Pathway for SIDS countries (Samoa, 2014) and the Caribbean Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework (MSDF). Extensive resources have been committed regionally and by the international community to strengthen climate- and infrastructural resilience. The Decent Work Agenda –

through the expansion of decent work opportunities and strong labour market- and work institutions - is a critical tool for resilience.

A key message of the report is that our policy choices will shape the future we want. As the UN Reform further takes shape through stronger policy integration, it is ever more important that Future of Work considerations are well integrated in national development planning frameworks and Ministries of Labour have an important responsibility to incorporate decent work in the discourse on resilience. These preoccupations are not new to the ILO constituents. In fact, they were already well articulated in the Declaration of the 19th ILO Regional Meeting of the Americas (Panama, 2018), the Conclusions of the 10th ILO Meeting of Caribbean Labour Ministers (Jamaica, 2017).

The work of the Global Commission and its possible follow up present a renewed opportunity to pursue a coherent and integrated Decent Work Agenda and a reinvigorated Social Contract that can contribute to a brighter future for workers, families, communities, societies and economies in the Caribbean. Against this background, the 11th Meeting of Ministers of Labour of the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean will have the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES

The Meeting provides an opportunity for the Ministers to:

- assess the relevance of the Report “Work for a brighter future” of the Global Commission on the Future of Work and the framework it offers for shaping a better future for the Caribbean, including a discussion on what a ‘human-centered agenda’ means for the Caribbean;
- consider current developments in the context of the Conclusions of previous Ministerial Meetings in the Caribbean, the future Program and Budget of the ILO as well as future DWCP’s and the role of the Decent Work Agenda in future UNDAF’s;
- take part in discussions aimed at preparing the Caribbean’s contribution to the Centenary ILC in Geneva in June 2019;

Organization of the Meeting:

To consider how the recommendations of the Global Commission are relevant for the Caribbean, the 11th Caribbean Labour Ministers’ Meeting will be organized around three clusters:

1. Jobs and future work

Reducing unemployment and expanding job creation is high on the agenda. The persistent high level of un- and underemployment— especially of youth – and the growing informal economy, are key drivers for out migration, especially skilled and educated men and women.

The Report of the Global Commission specifically explores three job creation areas: the green economy, the digital economy, and the care economy. How will the Caribbean tap such new opportunities for job creation? What should be done to facilitate school –to-work and work-to-work transitions, including through social protection and active support measures? How can this lead to the creation of sustainable enterprises?

The impact of Global warming and climate change is evident through changing weather patterns and increased natural disasters. As Governments start implementing commitments from the Paris Climate Agreement, more resources are allocated to the emerging green and blue economies. However, these transitions initially come with low productivity and profit and the required skills can be very different compared to the past. This calls for active support measures (for instance in financing, or in skills anticipation) that facilitate a just transition.

The digitized world impacts on employers, workers and the labour market in general. Virtual work and digital platforms are on the rise, distances and borders are being transcended, workplaces are no longer confined to physical presence and buildings, new – often high skilled – jobs are emerging. This can present opportunities for the Caribbean. While recognizing opportunity, the Report proposes a ‘human-in-command’ approach to artificial intelligence and to equip digital labour platforms with minimum rights and protections.

Shifting demographics are changing labour markets and a new industry is emerging in response to the needs of a “silver generation”. This includes a new form of tourism for the active elderly as well as a growing care economy to take care of those in need. The report also identifies this as an area that can help address persistent gaps in gender equality.

- *Are these opportunities valid for the Caribbean? Do we have adequate information on these areas? If yes, how can we prepare the current and new workforce to exploit these opportunities? If no what options are there for the Caribbean?*
- *What measures will be necessary if we are to introduce life-long-learning to facilitate the transitions into these new jobs? How to facilitate a joined up approach involving other Ministries and stakeholders (policies, organizational arrangements?)*
- *What will it take to advance and intensify the role of social protection as a contributor to stability in the transition process?*

2. Strong institutions of work

Weak institutions compromise and limit countries’ capacities to withstand and recover from economic and natural disaster, they are in fact a major impediment to resilience. In the rapidly changing world of work in which we see digital day laborers or care workers who work in the home, just to mention a few, it becomes even more challenging to ensure that basic protections like safety and health, wages and others are in place and respected. With this in mind, the Report sends a strong message in favor of strengthening and revitalizing the institutions of work. It defines labour laws, employment contracts, collective agreements, labour administration and employers and workers’ organizations as labour institutions and building blocks of social justice. When functioning well, these institutions help to build pathways to formalization, reduce inequality and working poverty, enhance security and protect the dignity of labour. When well designed and operational, they also help labour markets and economies to perform better.

- *How can labour institutions maintain their relevance in the changing world and help ensure that productivity and competitiveness are pursued in a manner compatible with decent work objectives?*
- *How can Ministries of Labour use the digital revolution in their favor by introducing digital tools and approaches?*
- *What changes can be envisaged in each of the discussed areas to ensure the continued safeguarding of decent work in the future?*

3. More social dialogue for a renewed social contract

National sustainability plans, programmes and strategies that lack buy-in and shared commitment of business and workers may not succeed or take root. Economic and social transition depends on engaged and incentivized private sectors working in alliance with the public sector to create the essential knowledge and skills. It also requires the leadership of worker’s representatives.

The Commission’s-Report identifies increased inequality as a major cause of rising divisions in our societies. It suggests to ‘reinvigorate the social contract that gives working people a just share of economic progress, respect for their rights and protection against risk in return for their contribution to the economy’. It reminds

that social dialogue has a key role in ensuring the continuing relevance of this contract and to manage the changes under way.

- *While the Caribbean is generally supportive of social dialogue, and mechanisms do exist, more can be done to use this tool. What has to be done concretely to renew, or reinvigorate the social contract in the Caribbean to respond to the challenges of the transformation?*
- *How do we ensure that ILO Convention No.144, and an inclusive, tripartite approach in general, is used to find sustainable solutions? How can social dialogue become the driving force to guarantee decent work for all, also during and after the transformation process?*

OTHER ELEMENTS

In addition to its focus on the above three themes related to the Report of the Global Commission, the meeting will also review other items on the agenda of the upcoming ILC and provide opportunity to shape Caribbean positions.

The meeting will take stock of past Ministerial Meetings and their Conclusions including a brief report on related support provided by the ILO to the Constituents.

The contributions from the Ministers to the three thematic areas will be summarized in a brief conclusions document which will be reviewed and adopted at the end of the meeting.