



International
Labour
Organization

► Climate disasters and employment

Mainstreaming decent work
for effective recovery

Discussion points from ILO-funded Research
Paper “Hurricanes and their implications for
unemployment: Evidence from the Caribbean.”



► Overview

The Caribbean continues to face more frequent and more severe climate hazards, such as catastrophic hurricanes, and their increasing socio-economic devastation has heightened the urgency for public awareness and policy action.

While many post-disaster needs assessment frameworks include estimates on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) losses caused by climate crises, empirical evidence of related labour market impacts are ambiguous.

Climate events can lead to a reduction in the labour supply through the displacement of workers, migration to seek better living conditions, as well as the loss of life. However, without tangible measurements of these indicators, Caribbean countries are unable to adequately assess their effects in national and regional disaster preparedness and climate adaptation strategies.

To address the knowledge gap of how climate emergencies affect employment in the Caribbean, the region requires more research on the ability of its labour markets to resist, withstand or quickly recover from shocks. Taking this approach is crucial to evidence-based decision-making that supports the survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) economies and livelihoods.

Notwithstanding labour market vulnerabilities to climate risks, the Caribbean has long faced high and rising unemployment rates, particularly among vulnerable groups, including women and youth. Additional historical challenges include the emigration of skilled labour, low levels of productivity, inadequate labour market information and a lack of harmonization of labour legislation.

While in recent years there was some improvement, the progress has been obstructed by the slowdown in economic growth and external shocks caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

This setback combined with an undefined toll of climate emergencies calls for prioritizing research to inform policies and programmes that can quickly generate more and better jobs that are resilient to disruptions and provide decent work opportunities.

According to the ILO, decent work involves:

- opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income;
- safe and healthy workplaces;
- social protection for families;
- better prospects for personal development and social integration; and
- freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.



▶ Responding to crises through job creation

The results of a 2019 [ILO-funded study](#) have identified immediate employment-centered recovery measures as essential to effective disaster response in the Caribbean.

For example, a well-managed clean up and recovery period can be a strong driver of job creation, sustain livelihoods, reduce inequalities and close skills gaps.

By widening the scope of disaster planning to consider the implications for labour markets, countries can transform existing mechanisms such as employment creation programmes to develop post-disaster employment in order to minimize job losses and increase productivity.

Once societies are prepared to generate new jobs after a disaster, they can contribute to building worker capacity and can target vulnerable groups such as women and youth for inclusion.

By including a focus on employment creation in the context of disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and recovery, Caribbean countries will be taking a holistic approach to improving their longer-term resilience.



▶ In focus: Grenada's post-disaster training and job growth

Following Hurricane Ivan of 2004, additional capacity in Grenada's construction sector was built through training, with an emphasis on youth and women in carpentry, plumbing and masonry to improve their employment prospects since it was the only booming sector following the disaster event.

Furthermore, classes were included in the training to improve numeracy and literacy skills, to further build participants' capacity and effectiveness on the job, and even future job prospects outside of construction.

The outcome? Programme graduates were hired by the Government to work on low-income housing and to repair and refurbish community centres as well as for private construction contractors.

There have been similar initiatives in the Caribbean to support the construction sector in the post-disaster period.

According to a 2018 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, rebuilding after Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Dominica employed over 400 persons, 42 per cent of whom were women. The recovery led to the restoration of 488 buildings, 472 homes, three schools and five health care centres.



► Checklist for developing an employment-centered disaster recovery

Governments, employers' organizations, workers' organizations, social protection systems and legislation can be integrated for effective climate disaster response in the Caribbean through:



Establishing Emergency Public Employment Services.



Rapid livelihood assessments to ensure a clear understanding of the developing labour market and social protection demands.



Emergency, labour-intensive public employment programmes (debris and beach cleaning, roofing, rebuilding schools, hospitals, roads, bridges).



Skills development programmes and on-the-job training.



Employment programmes through community contracting and using environmentally-friendly methods for rehabilitating and constructing assets.



Short-term business grant funds and micro-finance initiatives.



Temporary tax credits/exemptions and a moratorium on social security payments, (un)employment insurance, severance, job sharing arrangement.



Produced by the ILO Caribbean Office through the ILO Caribbean Resilience Project.

The ILO Caribbean Resilience Project is a two-year initiative that aims to strengthen the capacity of Guyana, Saint Lucia and Dominica to become more resilient (in line with ILO Recommendation 205) to climate disasters and other crises. The ILO Caribbean Resilience Project seeks to ensure that the principles embedded in the ILO “Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all” are fully adopted and implemented by the three target countries.

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