

Responding to the Economic Crisis - Coherent Policies for Growth, Employment and Decent Work in Asia and the Pacific

High-Level Regional Forum Convened by the ILO in Collaboration with the ADB and the Department of Labour and Employment of the Philippines

Manila, Philippines: 18-20 February 2009

Information Note

Introduction

The International Labour Office (ILO) in collaboration with the ADB and the Department of Labour and Employment of the Philippines is convening this High-Level Regional Forum in order to strengthen commitment to coherent national and international policies for recovery and a sustainable route towards a fair and inclusive globalization. The Forum is part of a series of similar gatherings the ILO is organizing throughout all regions. It is organized by the ILO with the support of the Government of Norway and the cooperation of the Department of Labour and Employment of the Philippines.

Leaders of governments, workers and employers associations will join with scholars and experts from international and regional organizations to build the political will, social dialogue and technical support that can create innovative policies and programmes needed to reactivate enterprises and decent jobs in the region, protect the vulnerable and those most exposed and set the foundations for a more equitable and more prosperous global economy.

The High-Level Forum will draw on the outcomes of the ILO Governing Body's Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization in November 2008, which called for comprehensive and coordinated measures to minimize the duration and depth of the current economic downturn and combat negative social consequences. The discussion in Manila will be of special importance in reinforcing the Decent Work Agenda in Asia and the Pacific. Promoting the Decent Work Agenda's four pillars - employment, social protection, fundamental principles and rights at work and social dialogue – provides a platform for an effective and balanced policy package to respond to the economic crisis.

From a global financial crisis to a global jobs crisis: Challenges for Asia and the Pacific

In coping with the current crisis, most countries in Asia and the Pacific benefit from sound financial institutions and a record of sustained growth and macroeconomic stability. Poverty however remains widespread and systems of social protection are fragile and underdeveloped. Even a slight decline in the rates of economic growth can have dramatic social repercussions, particularly among vulnerable sectors and groups.

Social distress intersects with political instabilities and tensions. A strong Asian response to the crisis is a critical component of the strategy to set the global economy on a sustainable path out of recession.

Issues to be discussed

Issues to be discussed at the Forum include:

- *How to ensure the flow of credit and stimulate demand through public and private expenditure and investment and wage measures, as appropriate, while maintaining a policy framework conducive to fiscal sustainability*
- *What mechanisms should be put in place to protect the dignity of those most exposed, with particular focus on young women and men, workers in informal or precarious employment, migrant workers and the working poor? (extension of social protection, training and retraining opportunities, and placement services, and enlarging emergency employment schemes and targeted income support)*
- *How to support productive, profitable and sustainable enterprises to maximize employment and decent work, particularly for small enterprises and cooperatives? Are there sectors that need special attention? (agriculture, garment, tourism etc.)*
- *How to ensure that fundamental principles and rights at work are not undermined? (freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation)*
- *How can the capacities within government and social partners be strengthened to engage more effectively in social dialogue in order to develop stronger policy responses and build social cohesion?*
- *How can employment and decent work objectives be mainstreamed across ministerial portfolios and among international partners to ensure that recovery is “job-rich”? What role can the ILO play in cooperation with other multilateral agencies?*
- *Which steps are needed to maintain significant development aid to low-income countries? In which areas should international and regional organizations and development banks step up their assistance?*

Structure of the meeting

The Forum first addresses the scope of the employment and labour market impacts through expert views and inputs from participants from different countries. Second, it looks at national strategies and priorities for decent work, employment and growth through a series of comparative reviews of country experiences and prospects. Third, it reviews critical policy areas - among the topics to be discussed are social transfers; employment and sectoral programmes; and coherence amongst the economic and social policies of national and international agencies. Finally, breakout group discussions will be held to facilitate active participation and the search for common issues and priorities for action.



Outcomes

The forum will provide a timely opportunity to share knowledge on the social dimension of the financial and economic crisis and to discuss the policy tools, the coordinating mechanisms and the scope of national economic and social strategies to deal with them. The main outcomes will be a set of recommendations to provide policy-makers in the region with guidance about priorities and ideas for comprehensive programmes of action at the national and regional level.

