

Report I (B)

▶ **Work in the time of COVID**

Report of the Director-General

First item on the agenda

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► Preface

Because the International Labour Conference could not be held in 2020, this is my first report to it since the Centenary Session in 2019, with its historic focus on the future of work.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic that future has been changed utterly – at least in the short term. It means that the ILO must now focus its attention on the task of promoting a human-centred recovery from the unprecedented crisis that has engulfed the world of work since the Conference last convened, using the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work as its road map.

That is the task to which my report is intended to contribute. It outlines the social and economic impact of the crisis, the response to it, the lessons we have learned so far, and the challenges of building forward better in a human-centred recovery.

Annexed to my report is a draft Conference outcome document on a global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The Governing Body has decided that the adoption of such a document would contribute greatly to putting the world on a path to realize the shared objectives of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), and the ILO's historic vocation of social justice and decent work for all.

I trust that this report will assist the Government, Worker, and Employer representatives participating in this first ever virtual session of the International Labour Conference to meet that ambition.

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▶ Chapter I

A pandemic hits a world of work in change

1. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. The WHO Director-General warned then that this was not just a public health crisis, but one that would touch every sector, and that all countries would need to strike a fine balance between protecting health, minimizing economic and social disruption, and respecting human rights.
2. More than one year later, COVID-19 has taken over 3 million lives across the world, and at the time of writing the level of infections globally is near the highest recorded since the beginning of the pandemic and on a sharply rising trajectory.
3. As the WHO forewarned, the health crisis has become a global economic and social crisis that has inflicted unprecedented damage on the world of work, and for millions has spilled over into humanitarian catastrophe. Governments have indeed pursued the fine balance between health and economic and social objectives. But, despite the universal commitment to “follow the science” and the rejection of the notion that a choice must be made “between lives and livelihoods”, that balance has proven elusive. Scientific knowledge has itself evolved and societal tolerance of the constraints put in place to control the pandemic has varied between countries and over time.
4. Successive waves of infections have frustrated hopes of the type of opening of productive activity that would herald a definitive recovery from the prolonged crisis. But now, with the development and roll-out of effective vaccines, there are real prospects of overcoming the virus and exiting the world of work crisis it has provoked.
5. The fact that the world of work remains in the grip of the impact of the pandemic means that a final estimate of the economic and social damage done cannot yet be made. But we do have a clear picture of what happened in 2020.
6. The single most telling statistic is the ILO estimate that as a result of COVID-19 and the measures taken to contain it, global hours actually worked during the year fell by nearly 9 per cent by comparison with the last quarter of 2019, which is the equivalent of the loss of 255 million full-time jobs. This is a staggering number, and it shows that, with regard to jobs, the impact was four times greater than that of the financial crisis in 2008.
7. Disaggregating these numbers gives a more precise picture of what actually happened to people at work. Nearly half of the working hour losses were attributable to loss of employment: 33 million people became unemployed; while many more – 81 million – left labour markets and became inactive. The other half was the result of people working fewer hours – or no hours at all – but staying in their employment relationship.
8. Looked at from the regional perspective, the Americas stands out as the hardest hit, with working hour losses at 13.7 per cent and all others in the range of 7.7 per cent to 9.2 per cent. Similarly, these losses were particularly felt in lower-middle-income countries, where they stood at 11.3 per cent. For all other income groups they were below the global average.
9. The corollary of these severe reductions in hours worked was a very sharp fall in income from labour. Overall, without taking into account public support measures, labour income was down by 8.3 per cent in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic levels, again with the Americas

and lower-middle-income countries being the hardest hit. This represents an absolute loss of US\$3.7 trillion.

10. Underpinning these developments is a series of dynamics, all of them rooted in pre-existing labour market problems, which have combined to make the already most vulnerable and disadvantaged the particular victims of the economic and social crisis.
11. Nowhere has that been more evident than in respect of the world's 2 billion informal workers – six out of ten of the world's workforce. For many of them, there really was a choice between life and livelihood, because in the absence of government protection and support, staying away from work could mean their families going hungry. In the first month of the crisis, the global income of informal workers fell by an estimated 60 per cent, and for them the social and economic breakdown quickly became a humanitarian drama.
12. Youth, too, have suffered a devastating blow to their immediate and longer-term prospects in the world of work. Pre-pandemic, they were twice as likely as others to be unemployed. On top of that, their education and training have been badly disrupted, they have lost jobs in much greater numbers than others, and the job prospects for new entrants to the labour market are often bleak.
13. There are additional ways in which the weight of measures taken against the pandemic have fallen on the shoulders of young people. They have been called upon to make particular sacrifices to protect older generations. It is distressing that their investment in intergenerational solidarity has come at considerable personal cost. ILO survey work has revealed high levels of psychological problems and depression in the youth population. If the pandemic experience deepens feelings of disillusionment with the institutions of public life and with future work perspectives then that would certainly be one of the most dangerous social pathologies of COVID-19.
14. The impact on women in the workforce has also been severe. Long-standing gender segregation means that they are significantly over-represented in the sectors which have been hardest hit by the pandemic – such as food, accommodation and hospitality, and retail. And when schools and care facilities have had to close, it has been women who have again picked up the increased burden of unpaid work responsibility at home. While difficult to quantify, the pressures and tensions resulting from measures that limit personal freedoms have led to an upsurge in acts of domestic violence, of which women are overwhelmingly the victims. The fact that women make up 70 per cent of the 136 million health, care and social work professionals in the world adds an extra dimension. In this capacity, their skill and dedication to protecting health and saving lives have often meant working in conditions at the limit of endurance. And sometimes it has placed their own health and life at risk.
15. Other labour market demographics can be included in the list of those whom the pandemic has hit hardest. Migrant workers have on some occasions found themselves stranded as they became displaced by enterprise closure but unable to move across closed borders, and on others were the particular victims of infection because of the living accommodation available to them. The world's two million strong maritime workforce has played a critical role in keeping global supply chains moving, but as a consequence has suffered from the seizing up of crew replacement procedures as a result of anti-COVID-19 restrictions. At one point 400,000 seafarers were stranded on board vessels, some for up to 18 months, in dramatic conditions and without access to medical care. People living with disabilities are more likely to have health conditions that increase the risk of contracting COVID-19. For these more than 2 billion people, new prevention measures often added to existing

obstacles to workforce participation and aggravated further situations of exclusion and marginalization.

- 16.** The situation of working people is mirrored by the corresponding challenges faced by enterprises with the interruption or severe restriction of their activities. While these have varied significantly between sectors, the common denominator is that small and medium-sized enterprises have been the most strongly affected and, with their limited reserves, the least resilient. While the overall level of enterprise mortality remains to be seen, and will depend heavily on how long restrictions are maintained, survey results show 70 per cent of SMEs reporting severe financial difficulties, which is 50 per cent more than bigger firms.
- 17.** It may also be that enterprises that are not themselves directly subject to closure requirements nevertheless experience the secondary effects of restrictions elsewhere. For example, garment manufacturers in some countries have been subject to the interruption of orders from buyers operating on the other side of the world. Indeed, the ILO estimates that globally 96 million jobs in global supply chains have been negatively affected by falling demand for manufactured goods. As some enterprises open up again they have also been confronted by a penury of inputs, for example of semi-conductors, upstream in the supply chain.
- 18.** What stands out from this overview of the events of the last 15 months is that the pandemic, by hurting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged most, has wedged open still further the fracture lines of structural inequality and injustice which disfigure our labour markets and societies. The low paid, the unskilled, the least protected, women, the young, and migrants, have borne the brunt of the economic and social crisis. Less developed countries have suffered more than the advanced economies. The pandemic is deepening inequality, which stood already at unacceptable levels, and that is true both within and between countries. The ILO estimates that the number of workers living in moderate or extreme poverty increased by 108 million in 2020, reversing five years of continuous progress.
- 19.** The action taken to overcome the pandemic has also had very clear implications for the exercise of human rights, and more specifically the full respect of international labour standards. In its report to the Conference, the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has recalled that where restrictions are imposed for legitimate purposes they must comply with certain parameters of international law – the principles of legality, of necessity, of proportionality and of non-discrimination.
- 20.** It is of particular concern that the degradation of economic and social conditions resulting from the pandemic, rather than deliberate policy acts, will have led to increases in child labour and forced labour. Full information in this regard will be made available to the Conference in the updated global estimates to be published jointly by the ILO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).
- 21.** The consequences of the pandemic for countries suffering from conflict and fragility are particularly dangerous. There is real danger of the pandemic triggering a vicious circle in which increased vulnerability and deprivation lead to even greater instability and violence. The UN Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire is a warning of what is at stake, and what is needed to stop the worst from happening.
- 22.** While the full social and political implications of these trends are not yet apparent as the pandemic drags on, it is abundantly clear that they constitute a major setback to global development and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

23. Indeed, the broader perspectives offered by a consideration of the state of play for the whole range of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that make up the 2030 Agenda serve as a reminder that, going into the pandemic, the world was already underperforming badly in achieving the objectives that it had set for itself. That was, and is, particularly the case for Goal 8 on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
24. Against this background, the ILO's Future of Work Centenary Initiative focused in particular on the implications of three mega-drivers of change in the world of work and the transition processes that arise from them: technological change, environmental sustainability and demographic shifts. The pandemic has had implications for each one of them.
25. Most obviously, by requiring enterprises to have much greater recourse to the alternative work arrangements made possible by existing and emerging technologies, the pandemic is widely understood to have accelerated already observable processes of digitalization of work. There has been widespread experimentation and investment in remote working, and many people have experienced entirely new ways of doing their work. But this has not been a general or an even trend. The nature of their jobs, or the absence of connectivity, mean that some people simply cannot make such adjustments. For them, the only option is resilience in their existing ways of working rather than the adaptation which is open to others. And for similar reasons some enterprises and sectors – notably information and communication technologies, and financial services – have grown and prospered during the pandemic, while for others it has been a struggle for survival.
26. The significance of the pandemic for action on climate change is less clear. The brutal interruption of productive activity has logically brought some reduction in carbon emissions, but it is relatively small and, moreover, seems likely to be short-lived. Current expectations are for a rapid rebound of emission levels in 2021, just as happened in 2010, as economic activity resumes post crisis. In any case, it would be a clear mistake to interpret what happened in 2020 as a precursor or example for the just transition to carbon neutrality that is urgently needed. Rather, the massive human suffering and disruption of production that have taken place stand in counterpoint to that transition; there has been nothing “just” about it.
27. The work-related challenges that derive from the very different demographic trends in the world, with ageing populations dominating in some regions and growing youth cohorts in others, have been highlighted in correspondingly diverse ways. The closure of borders has seriously impacted the practice and management of migration, which is the most direct response to mismatches in demand and supply for labour and skills, but without materially changing the task of ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration for all. That will still have to be addressed urgently as and when human mobility resumes. In a similar way, the manner in which the pandemic has highlighted the fundamental importance of social protection to all societies adds, if they were needed, additional compelling reasons to act to ensure full, adequate and sustainable systems of protection everywhere, whatever the prevailing demographic dynamics may be.
28. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has made extraordinary demands on policymakers across the globe, as well as on employers and trade unions. It has made corresponding demands on the resources at their disposal. It has captured public attention and opinion in ways, and on a scale, without precedent, including through the new channels of communication now available. This has had consequences for the way the policy response to the pandemic has been formulated, perceived and accepted in all its dimensions – health, social and economic, and humanitarian. But, for the most part, it has not changed the

importance and urgency of the multiple imperatives that transformative change already presented for the future of work, and which were addressed impressively at the ILO, and across the international community, during our Organization's centenary.

- 29.** Some of those imperatives may have gone out of focus, but they have not gone away. They will need to be addressed as integral components of the human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, which is needed to realize the ambition of the Centenary Declaration for a future of work with social justice and decent work for all.

► Chapter II

What we have done

30. Very quickly, as the true nature and implications of the global health emergency became apparent, the international community recognized the need for a corresponding global response.
31. Two weeks after the declaration of the pandemic, the G20 leaders, meeting at an Extraordinary Summit, “committed to do whatever it takes to overcome the pandemic ... and to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic and social damage”. They went on to express their determination to “protect lives; safeguard people’s jobs and incomes; restore confidence, preserve financial stability, revive growth and recover stronger; minimize disruptions to trade and global supply chains; provide help to all countries in need of assistance; [and] coordinate on public health and financial measures”.
32. In a remarkable way, the G20 leaders’ words of March 2020 echo those of the G20 leaders meeting at the London Summit in April 2009, some six months after the Lehman Brothers’ application for bankruptcy heralded a global financial emergency. They said then that “[w]e face the greatest challenge to the world economy in modern times; a crisis ... which affects the lives of women, men, and children in every country, and which all countries must join together to resolve. A global crisis requires a global solution”.
33. The resonance between these two declarations was, and is, cause for a degree of reassurance. The achievement of the G20 in overcoming the immediate prospect of catastrophic financial collapse is well recognized. But as that existential threat receded so did the level of concerted international cooperation to deal with its economic and social aftermath. There was an early shift to austerity, and the process of recovery proved arduous, uneven, unfair and even incomplete, by the time COVID-19 struck.
34. Now, with the world still in the depths of the pandemic, it is already clear that, in financial terms, the G20 leaders were serious about doing “whatever it takes” to beat COVID-19. Recent estimates from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) show that US\$16 trillion in fiscal action was announced over a 12-month period, reflecting an unprecedented level of stimulus in times of peace.
35. With the telling caveat that some national leaders were able to do a great deal more than others by virtue of the fiscal space available to them, these actions correspond to the first of the four pillars of the ILO policy framework for tackling the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis, which has found wide acceptance among Member States. Indisputably, the expansive macroeconomic positions taken by governments around the world, with the strong encouragement of the international financial institutions, have had a crucial role in mitigating the economic and social damage wrought by the pandemic. The pandemic is not over, and the need to sustain the stimulus remains; but dramatic as the hit to the world of work has been, it would have been unimaginably worse without these efforts.
36. But the stimulus has been unevenly applied, with national governments bringing their financial means to bear predominantly for the benefit of their own economies and economic actors. That may not be surprising, but it has very serious consequences.

Advanced economies were in a position to increase spending by the equivalent of 16.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020; for emerging economies the corresponding figure was 4.2 per cent; for low-income countries it was just 1.7 per cent. Translated into absolute terms, these marked differentials are magnified further. And they bear no relation to the actual needs of people wherever they live.

37. The second and related pillar of the ILO policy framework relates to measures to support enterprises, jobs and incomes in the course of the pandemic. Sustaining otherwise viable enterprises so that they do not fall victim to the conditions imposed on them by the pandemic and measures to contain it, which are extraneous to their normal business model and prospects, is an essential part of safeguarding the integrity of societies' productive capacities. Measures to this end have included direct financial support, extended access to cheap credit, and tax and rent holidays.
38. There have been corresponding initiatives to help enterprises retain employees through wage support measures, short-time working, furloughs, technical unemployment and the like. The terminology applied varies, but the idea of maintaining the relationship between employer and employee is common to them all, and they have had effect, as evidenced by the relative levels of increase in unemployment, inactivity, and reduced working hours already quoted.
39. But, as for the macroeconomic stimulus which underpins it, this action has been concentrated mainly in the more advanced economies, both for reasons of financial sustainability and of institutional capacity. In the European Union, 35 million workers had been covered by short-time work schemes by the end of 2020. In OECD countries, 50 million were involved in them in May of that year which is ten times more than during the global financial crisis. Were corresponding figures available in other countries, it may safely be assumed that they would be of a much lower order of magnitude.
40. Moreover, limitations on the reach of these measures can be observed within as well as between countries. In times of growing diversification of work arrangements, uncertainty about employment status, or a poor fit between institutional rules and lived work realities have created the risk of significant numbers of people falling outside the scope of support measures. The self-employed, independent workers and platform workers are obvious examples, while informality presents by far the greatest challenge to delivering assistance to those in need of it.
41. These situations have led to extraordinary growth in ad hoc measures of social protection since the beginning of the pandemic. As of April 2021, the ILO had documented no less than 1,622 newly introduced measures for social protection benefiting hundreds of millions of people. These have involved extending or adjusting existing programmes or introducing new ones, including direct cash transfers and emergency relief. The scale on which such measures have been used is remarkable. But it is testimony also to the shortcomings in the adequacy and coverage of pre-existing systems of social protection.
42. The third pillar of the ILO policy framework, of obvious importance in the context of widespread circulation of a lethal virus, directly concerns the protection of the health and well-being of people at work. It is here that the "fine balance" of which the WHO Director-General spoke, between protecting health and minimizing economic and social disruption, has come into sharp focus for policymakers. The primary objective has been to prevent COVID infection at work and, by extension, to ensure that work does not contribute to the propagation of the virus in society. In practice this has led to some of the most intractable policy dilemmas of the pandemic, with the now all too familiar and repeated controversies

about the necessity and timing of closures and the reopening of workplaces. As experience with, and knowledge of, the virus has grown, initial general lockdowns have gradually given way to more specific and targeted measures. But they continue to be applied and to have a major impact on the performance of enterprises and economies.

43. For those who have continued to work, notably those considered key workers, basic preventive health protocols – use of masks, distancing, hand washing – have become an everyday part of working life. But there has nevertheless been tragic loss of life through workplace infections, often related to the inherent nature of the work performed: through close contact with infected people in the health and care sectors; in other contact sectors, such as retail and public transport, where workers are in proximity with the general public; and in sectors such as meatpacking, where specific risk factors are acute. These examples, dramatic as they are, are overshadowed by the challenges to the protection of workers in the informal sector, where the compulsion to work is greatest – subsistence – and the means and responsibilities of protection weakest, or absent entirely.
44. The situation is different when workers can be removed from the risk of infection in collective workplaces and perform, fully or partially, their activities from remote locations. The ILO has estimated that worldwide some 18 per cent of existing jobs could be done remotely, rising to 35–40 per cent in the most advanced economies. This type of adaptation depends on the nature of the tasks undertaken and access to internet connectivity.
45. The move to remote working has been the change provoked by the pandemic most widely felt and analysed in the world of work. Its effectiveness in protecting against the virus is clear, yet it brings with it its own issues in respect of the well-being of working people. While these issues may seem secondary to the hazards presented by COVID-19 itself, psychosocial and ergonomic problems, and those resulting from the absence of the usual structures of the collective workplace – relating to work intensity and working time, in-person interactions, the clear demarcation of professional and private time – have become very significant points of concern. They need to be considered alongside the equally real benefits that can go with remote work: greater choice in the organization of working time; the potential to make labour markets more inclusive; better work-life balance; and the elimination of the time and stress involved in commuting.
46. Since the latter part of 2020, when vaccination programmes began to be rolled out, the focus in terms of protection of people at work has shifted rapidly to the question of access to vaccines. Indeed, as their effectiveness becomes increasingly evident, the capacity to administer vaccines promptly and in sufficient quantities is understood to be not only the key to health protection but also the precondition for a once and for all relaunching of economic and working life.
47. In the early stages, governments have given priority to vaccinating key workers as well as the vulnerable, with health and care workers, educational staff and seafarers coming under consideration. Yet, the UN Secretary-General has had to alert the international community to the “wildly uneven and unfair” distribution of vaccines, with access heavily concentrated in a limited number of countries able to procure supplies to the exclusion of many others.
48. This is a situation described by the WHO Director-General as “morally indefensible ... epidemiologically self-defeating and clinically counterproductive”. It might also be considered as a socially reprehensible roadblock to a human-centred recovery in the world of work.
49. The final pillar of the ILO framework is to promote and encourage the use of social dialogue to identify and implement the most appropriate responses to the social and economic

impact of COVID-19. This may easily be dismissed as the all-purpose ILO response to practically any emerging issue, or even, by the most sceptical, as an obstacle to good and rapid decision-making when rapid and decisive action is required. But this is more than repetition of a well-rehearsed mantra.

- 50.** The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has brought massive uncertainty, as well as enormous material hardship, to populations around the world. It has been difficult for people to form clear and informed views about the real nature and gravity of the health emergency, and therefore about the appropriate economic and social response to it. This situation has been aggravated by the circulation of very divergent information about the issues involved. Some of that reflects genuinely held views in circumstances of imperfect scientific knowledge. But much is the result of wilful misinformation and deception.
- 51.** The joint efforts of Government, Worker and Employer representatives firstly to provide a considered and objective appreciation of the situation presented by the pandemic constitute an important contribution to constructing appropriate responses. On that basis, the policy determinations that have had to be made, and that have frequently had the most far-reaching implications, have gained in credibility, legitimacy and practicality by virtue of the tripartite contributions that have been made to them. Both where public funding is to be allocated in support of enterprises and of workers, and when painful sacrifices are required, equity and acceptance are conferred by the involvement of the social partners. And, given the variety and complexity of the workplace issues to be addressed, they can bring knowledge and experience to the task of problem-solving not available elsewhere.
- 52.** These considerations have been borne out in the action taken during the pandemic period and the results it has produced. Unsurprisingly, social dialogue has played a particular role in those countries where it is supported by strong institutions and traditions, but its potential has been recognized too in less familiar settings, and it was backed strongly by participants from all constituencies at the ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work in July 2020.
- 53.** It is important that recourse is had to social dialogue, not only in moments of acute crisis, but on a permanent basis, and that commitment to it is sustained as the pandemic drags on, and as societal pressures potentially increase, resources become more scarce, and consensus more elusive. The need is for a commitment to shared responsibility and joint action over the course of the pandemic, and indeed beyond that, into the period of recovery.

► Chapter III

What we have learned

54. The pandemic has imposed a programme of accelerated learning on the world. The most urgent part of that programme has been in the field of health. What is the nature of the virus, how does it work, and how can it be contained? But it does not stop there. The need to learn, and then to act on what is learned, has extended to practically all aspects of policymaking and life. This is certainly true for the world of work. So what have we found out, and what lessons can we draw from it?
55. Firstly, that the world did not see this pandemic coming, and was badly prepared for it. Scientific opinion has been warning about the dangers, or indeed inevitability, of future pandemics. But *The Global Risks Report 2020*, published by the World Economic Forum two months before the pandemic was declared, rated risks connected with infectious diseases low in terms of likelihood compared to other categories, with numerous environmental, economic and geopolitical risks figuring more prominently. Even in terms of impact, infectious diseases came in only tenth. Warning of the danger of health systems becoming unfit for purpose, the report does, however, note that “[p]rogress against pandemics is also being undermined by vaccine hesitancy and drug resistance” and that “past successes in overcoming health challenges are no guarantee of future results”.
56. This low level of attention to pandemic risk is not entirely surprising, even if perfect retrospective vision may now make it look like culpable negligence. Risk assessment is a crowded space, and while the looming dangers of environmental catastrophe, economic and financial breakdown, and even geopolitical conflict are observable and even measurable over time, that is much less so for pandemics, which are episodes that strike quickly, irregularly and without warning. Nevertheless, this absence of foresight has meant that much of the resilience in the world of work to the impact of the pandemic has had to be constructed in real time as events have unfolded through serial ad hoc interventions. Whatever assessment is made of those interventions, the lesson is that in preparation for future systemic shocks much greater resilience needs to be built into the future of work, alongside sustainability and equity.
57. Secondly, the pandemic has laid bare with unbearable brutality the realities of the multiple and growing inequalities in our societies, which, for the most part, have roots in the world of work. That stands in direct contrast to the initial appearance of equal vulnerability to infection by the virus. Moreover, and as has been noted already, COVID-19 has made these inequalities much worse, and there is a serious risk that it will set in motion dynamics that will accentuate this trend well beyond the duration of the pandemic. For the world of work, long COVID could translate into still more inequality and injustice for the foreseeable future.
58. Understanding of, and concern about, inequalities certainly did not begin with the appearance of COVID-19. Indeed, one of the Goals of the 2030 Agenda is dedicated to reducing it, meaning that there is already international consensus on the unacceptability of the pre-pandemic state of affairs. But the pandemic has brought into sharp relief what these inequalities really mean for individuals and societies. The fact that the pandemic has acted on perceptions as much as on the underlying realities does not detract from its significance.

59. It has become painfully evident that inequality is not simply about where an individual or a family stands on the spectrum of income and wealth. It is also about access to healthcare, to educational opportunities, to internet connectivity, to social protection, to decent housing, to finance, to formal work status, to justice, to basic public services, to vaccinations, and much else. Each of these factors taken in isolation says something about how people have been impacted by the crisis and how they are getting through it: Have the children got the technology to carry on their education when schools are shut? Can I get sick pay if I have to isolate? Can my family eat if I don't go out to work? Am I eligible for government support schemes?
60. Taken collectively, they indicate deep segmentation in societies. Different aspects of advantage and disadvantage tend to accumulate in such a manner that quantitative inequality becomes structural injustice, chronic denial of opportunity and of social mobility, and exclusion. Such concerns are compounded by the dynamics induced by the crisis. Not only have low-paid and other disadvantaged groups taken the brunt of loss of jobs and income, they also have less opportunity to adapt through alternative work arrangements or to find their place in the world of work opportunities that a "new normal" may generate. In the meantime, financial markets have boomed as the real economy has shrunk, to the obvious benefit of the owners of financial assets and detriment of those who depend on income from labour.
61. In these circumstances, the much quoted image of everybody being in the same COVID-19 storm, but navigating it in very different vessels, is compelling. Whatever the genuine sentiments of compassion and support unleashed by the human suffering of the pandemic, the fact that the lived experience of it effectively places individuals, even those living in close proximity, in separate realities cannot but detract from a sense of common purpose in constructing an inclusive path for recovery.
62. The lesson is that social justice is a precondition for resilience and sustainability in working life, just as much as it is for lasting peace. It is confirmation that equity must be at the heart of a human-centred recovery.
63. Thirdly, the pandemic has given the general proposition that global problems require global solutions very tangible content and persuasive meaning. Rather than an abstract principle in support of multilateralism, it has immediate and intuitive resonance as an indispensable problem-solving tool for the very real challenges that COVID-19 has brought. Opinion that might be unmoved by the case for international action to support other development objectives, is much less likely to be indifferent to multilateral action to halt the progress of a pandemic that brings danger of virus variants that could easily have an impact close to home. As the UN Secretary-General has put it "for the first time in our lifetime, the pandemic has had the effect of making all people around the world feel vulnerable at the same time, creating a strong sense of inter-connectedness ... We are seeing an overwhelming public appetite around the world for more, and more effective international cooperation".
64. Coming at a time of considerable geopolitical tension and uncertain commitment to multilateralism, such an upsurge in popular support for multilateral action would be a welcome consequence of lessons learned from the pandemic. But its significance will lie in the readiness of governments to act upon it. There are a series of pressing needs and agendas to test that political will: not just the crucial task of rapid and equitable vaccine roll-out, but also of climate action that accelerates the move to carbon neutrality; addressing the most egregious vulnerabilities revealed by COVID-19; extending connectivity; and much more.

65. These challenges have already been identified in the 2030 Agenda, and responsibility for their realization accepted by the international community, which has reiterated its commitment since the arrival of COVID-19. That responsibility will now have to be met in the unforeseen circumstances of the pandemic, indicating that two further ingredients will need to be added to the reaffirmation of political will if the Decade of Accelerated Action is to succeed in delivering the 17 SDGs.
66. The first has to do with the effectiveness of multilateral action and institutions. The multiple issues to be addressed are complex and therefore require the system to provide appropriate, technically sound, and practical methods and spaces for them to be addressed. Multilateralism has to perform at the highest levels of competence, but it also has to demonstrate its ability to operate with maximum coherence. Just as the SDGs are interrelated and complementary, so the policies needed for their achievements need to be integrated. This is the logic of the UN reform of recent years, which stresses the importance of cooperation between organizations in pursuit of shared goals. Progress has been made, not without difficulty, but a great deal more needs to be done. Coherence cannot be limited to finding better modalities for operational cooperation at programme level, to avoiding unproductive competition for funding and protagonism, or to instituting more efficient business processes, although these are all important. It needs to extend to the major strategic issues that will be of decisive importance in the process of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Of these, none are weightier than those that relate to the second ingredient – finance.
67. It is to the credit of the authors of the 2030 Agenda that they identified in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda the financial investments required for its achievement. The same sense of reality needs to be applied to the task of COVID-19 recovery. Unequal fiscal space and access to external finance have enabled and constrained the capacity of countries to cope with the impact of the pandemic to date, and will continue to determine their capacity to translate the intentions set out in multilateral agreements into action and results.
68. Current demands on finance are formidable: for vaccination and COVID-19 recovery, climate, social protection, and humanitarian relief, to cite only the most obvious. Moreover, they are made at a juncture when countries have spent at levels that exceed by several orders of magnitude the usual criteria of fiscal prudence. The option of premature resort to austerity has been resisted, but symptoms of debt distress and concerns about debt sustainability are growing. Should inflation take off and interest rates increase, they will grow further.
69. Many developing countries have already exhausted whatever fiscal space they may initially have had. No less than 36 emerging and low-income countries have had their credit ranking downgraded by rating agencies. Over half of the least developed and low-income countries are now assessed as being in, or at high risk of, debt distress according to the IMF and the World Bank. Financial flows from private sources are also under strain. Foreign direct investment fell by 12 per cent in emerging and developing countries in 2020 – much less than the 69 per cent decrease for the developed world, but dramatic nonetheless. Added to this, remittances from migrants are projected to fall by 7 per cent.
70. Countries rapidly running out of financial road face formidable challenges. This is why current discussions on finance for development are so crucial. They need to bring together the key actors, the international financial institutions, the multilateral development banks, the UN, governments and the private sector in a common understanding of how the necessary investments for the future are to be funded. The resources generated domestically, essentially through the success of enterprises in thriving economies, are of

central significance and underline the importance of an early return to sustainable growth and development nationally and internationally, and the reopening of normal trading conditions and supply chain operations. At the same time, the calls on public finance in COVID-19 responses have intensified consideration of innovative approaches to international and national tax arrangements. These too need to be part of the financing for development debate. The initiatives already taken, for example in respect of the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative and possible new IMF special drawing rights, are welcome but not sufficient if no one is to be left behind in recovery for chronic lack of funding.

71. The lesson is that multilateral action is a precondition for overcoming the pandemic and for delivering credible and effective responses to multiple global challenges. It needs to have the necessary political support of governments, to operate competently and coherently, and it needs to be adequately financed.
72. Fourthly, the pandemic has demonstrated that long established policy settings and work arrangements can be modified in ways, and to an extent, that were previously unimaginable and would certainly not have been acceptable in the absence of the exigencies of the health emergency.
73. Taking the most obvious example, pre-pandemic a price tag of US\$16 trillion – the sum so far spent or allocated for COVID-19 response – for any given purpose would have been considered outlandish and impossible. Much smaller amounts have been refused or withheld even when the intention has been to apply them to meet internationally agreed objectives. The Paris Agreement to mobilize US\$100 billion annually in climate finance from 2020 to 2025 has not been met. The US\$1.2 trillion that would be required annually to provide basic social protection in all developing countries has not been forthcoming.
74. This point should not be overstated; a global pandemic is no ordinary occurrence and for good reasons demands quite exceptional efforts. Nevertheless, when future financing requirements come up for consideration, the experience with COVID-19 indicates that the resources which can and should be mobilized need to be a function of the importance of the policy objectives in question as much as of the dictates of financial prudence and orthodoxy. This does not mean a general application of the “whatever it takes” principle. But it does mean a more balanced assessment of need and possibilities.
75. Under the duress of the conditions imposed by the circulation of the COVID-19 virus, governments have imposed unprecedented limitations on individual freedom of movement and behaviour, closures of enterprise premises, and offered, where they have been able, massive support for job retention and income support schemes. These are understood to be limited in time to the duration of the pandemic. At the same time, enterprises in a position to do so have adopted remote work arrangements enabled by information and communication technologies. In this instance, the extent of the likely continuation of such arrangements into the post-pandemic period is less clear.
76. The question of whether the world of work is moving definitively to a permanent “new normal” with generalized remote work as its central feature remains the subject of active, but as yet largely theoretical, debate. The pedagogic effect of the pandemic has been to illustrate what is possible, and also what the limits are, with remote working, and to give those actually doing it the experience of what it really feels like. The outcome of all this will be apparent once COVID-19 is overcome and, instead of being compelled to adopt given ways of working, employers and workers will be able to choose between alternatives.
77. Discussions in this area will certainly be important in shaping the post-pandemic world of work, and it is a reasonable expectation that arrangements which best combine enterprise

needs, workers' preferences and societal interests will be hybrid in character. But in the broader perspective of change at work they may not turn out to be the most important. Today's perspectives may be distorted by the immediacy of the experience of adaptation to COVID-19. It should not be forgotten that options for remote working are today relevant to only a fraction of work settings, nor that other transitions, notably the one to carbon neutrality, are likely to imply much profounder transformations.

- 78.** Indeed, a further learning process has led some to the view that COVID-19 will provoke a major recasting of the integrated transnational production systems that have grown up as an increasingly prominent feature of the globalization process of recent decades. This perspective holds that the pandemic has shown today's extended and complex global supply chains to be insufficiently robust and excessively vulnerable to disruption either by deliberate acts or by unforeseen events. For some, the appropriate response to what is essentially a business model adjustment is to shorten supply chains and diversify sourcing practices. For others, approaching the question more from geopolitical considerations of national security, the consequences could potentially be much more far-reaching, reversing the direction of travel of the world economy towards deglobalization.
- 79.** The lessons of the new work experiences and policy perspectives and discourses thrown up by the pandemic are a resounding echo of the central proposition of the Future of Work Centenary Initiative and the Declaration which resulted from it. It is, quite simply, that the future of work is not predetermined, but will be the result of societal preferences and decisions of governments and employers' and workers' organizations. If anything, the pandemic has made society more acutely aware of the choices they have. They need to be exercised in the cause of building back better through a human-centred recovery from the crisis.

► Chapter IV

The road to recovery

- 80.** In recent months, the prospects for resumed economic growth have been seen to have improved markedly. The latest IMF projections for 2021 are for global growth of 6 per cent, easing to 4 per cent in 2022. These upgrades to past forecasts are the result of successful economic adaptation strategies, the additional fiscal stimulus injected by some countries and, above all, to the roll-out of vaccination programmes.
- 81.** There is apparent reason for optimism. Not only does the IMF estimate that the economic contraction in 2020 of 3.8 per cent could have been three times more severe if not for the extraordinary policy support applied. It also takes the view that “the COVID-19 recession is likely to leave smaller scars than the 2008 global financial crisis”.
- 82.** Such positivity about the world’s aggregated economic prospects can only be welcome. The road to recovery seems to be open. But any assessment of future prospects needs to be placed in the more specific, that is to say human, context. There are high levels of uncertainty and risk, mostly with regard to the future path of the pandemic. Past expectations of recovery have been dashed by new waves of infection. The existence and application of vaccines are why things should be different this time, notwithstanding concerns about effectiveness and vaccine hesitancy. Yet the fact that, at the time of writing, new COVID-19 infections are at levels unprecedented since the beginning of the pandemic is a stark reminder that the health emergency is still with us and exacting a terrible toll. For that reason alone, the path of economic recovery is perilous indeed.
- 83.** Moreover, the current situation is characterized by extreme unevenness both among and within countries. That is dramatically evident in the distribution of vaccines and therefore the capacity of countries to combat the virus. But it applies also to the trajectory of economic recovery. Contrary to the experience of the global financial crisis, it is the high-income countries and China, with the fiscal space and the vaccinations available to them, which are expected to bounce back quickest and most strongly. This is reflected by the current IMF forecast that the global loss of per capita GDP for the period 2019 to 2022 as compared to the forecasts it made prior to the pandemic will be 3 per cent. But for the advanced economies, it will be just 1 per cent, for emerging economies 4.3 per cent, and for low-income developing countries 6.5 per cent.
- 84.** In nearly all countries, including those faring relatively well, large parts of the population are suffering disproportionately – young people, women, migrants, lower-skilled workers and those in the hardest hit sectors. Thus, not only the world economy as a whole, but also many, if not most, individual societies face the prospect of a multi-speed recovery that expands existing inequalities. This poses the very real risk of a lost decade of development for some economies and a lost generation for some demographics, even in comparatively well-off economies.
- 85.** Seen this way, beyond and beneath the projections for aggregate GDP, the road to economic recovery looks decidedly less benign; even more so when one drills down to the specific realities of labour markets, which is to say the lived experience of people in these profoundly disruptive times. Labour force participation rates, for example, are projected to remain below pre-crisis levels until the end of 2022. Because 90 per cent of women who lost

their jobs in 2020 left the labour force, as did larger numbers of the youth who were disproportionately subject to employment loss, there are real dangers of them becoming the particular victims of alarming new levels of exclusion and marginalization. In the same period, productivity growth is also expected to fall to half the pre-crisis trend rate for countries at all levels of development, but with the deceleration being most pronounced in low-income and lower-middle-income economies. Combined, these trends would herald a serious stunting of the human potential of the working population in many countries and put a serious constraint on the growth potential of the global economy.

- 86.** Taken together with the disproportionate economic and social impact of the pandemic on the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, and the unevenness and uncertainty of projected growth trajectories to the detriment of emerging and developing countries, this fall in labour market participation and productivity offers a very sombre counterpoint to the vision of a replay of “the roaring twenties” that some see ahead for the advanced economies under the impetus of continued fiscal stimulus and the pent-up demand accumulated during pandemic lockdowns. Nor should it be forgotten that last time the roaring twenties ended badly.
- 87.** The strong probability is that, without a conscious and concerted policy response to redress and correct the differential effects of the crisis on countries and demographics, the COVID-19 crisis will leave enduring deep scars on overall growth and development performance in the years ahead. The result would be still greater inequality and exclusion and badly delayed progress in the fight against poverty in the world as the lasting legacy of the pandemic. Such an outcome would be a tragic antithesis to the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda, and the diametric opposite of the vision of inclusive growth, productive employment, and decent work for all contained in Goal 8.
- 88.** Can such a disastrous failure of the 2030 Agenda be averted?
- 89.** Pope Francis has recently remarked that the global financial crisis offered the world the opportunity “to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles”, but that it was not taken and the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the “outdated criteria” of the past. The answer to the question therefore depends on our determination and capacity to take up opportunities previously overlooked or dismissed. There are some indications that the pandemic has created conditions that could prove propitious to this fundamental reset of intentions and policies.
- 90.** COVID-19 has confronted people and policymakers with a visceral threat to the fundamentals of their existence: life, livelihoods and the familiar habits of social interaction. It has been unprecedented in scale and in the human impact it has had. And, along with the fear it has provoked, it may have produced a collective awakening to the reality that humanity faces potentially existential, or at least existence-changing, challenges that simply cannot reasonably be managed by existing approaches to policy and international cooperation. Moreover, the response to the pandemic, with all its shortcomings and hardships, has demonstrated that quite different approaches are possible, and indeed necessary. In the lockdowns, work adaptation, fiscal stimuli, and vaccine development of 2020 may lie the seeds of new popular understanding and acceptance of alternatives which offer real hope of injecting the required resilience, equity and sustainability into a human-centred recovery, and putting the world on track to realize the Goals of the 2030 Agenda. That avowedly transformational Agenda may finally be backed by the transformation of public opinion that it needs to succeed.

91. This type of societal reconsideration can already be seen in changing attitudes towards the conditions of workers who, though largely among the lower paid, have played a role during the pandemic widely recognized as essential: health and care, cleaning, retail and public transport staff, for example. It is also evident in the widespread, if still under-defined, public sentiment that the existing social contract has lapsed or has been broken, and that a new one is needed. Policymakers are beginning to respond in the same vein. New deals of various types are on offer; major initiatives on taxation, on carbon pricing and on universal income guarantees are passing into the realm of active consideration. There is a major debate on the future of the global trading system and the appropriate use of financial tools. Tectonic policy plates, long immobile, do seem to be shifting.
92. But there will still be the need for much more integrated approaches to policymaking and implementation if these impulses are to take shape in a human-centred recovery. COVID-19 has shown that only through combined health, economic, social and humanitarian measures is progress possible. By the same token, the health, environmental, educational, financial, digital, labour, social and other dimensions of recovery and development cannot be addressed in isolation from each other. They have to be brought together in processes which recognize the objective complementarity of the 17 SDGs and the policies needed to advance towards them.
93. The case of action against climate change which, even in the midst of a global pandemic, stands out as the defining issue of our time, illustrates the point. With the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) on the near horizon, and with the focus and purpose that the 2015 Paris Agreement has provided, there are encouraging signs that belatedly the international community is more ready to step up its ambitions to levels commensurate with the absolute need to keep global heating below the 1.5°C rise that is the threshold of disaster. That progress, and the further progress that must follow, depends on combining: the knowledge of the causes, mechanisms and consequences of climate change that comes from the scientific community; the financing of measures of mitigation and adaptation that must come from public and private, and national and international sources; and the labour market engineering required for just transition processes that realize the decent work potential of protection of the planet, and reconcile social and environmental objectives.
94. The reality is that if any of these components is missing the overall project is likely to fail. Countries are being urged to step up their nationally determined contributions to the transition to carbon neutrality by 2050. Translating the wish to move forward towards neutrality into the capacity to actually do so requires concrete mechanisms for promoting decent jobs and shared prosperity, and access to the funds to make them operative.
95. And what holds for climate holds for all the other aspects of human-centred recovery. Viewed from the particular perspective of the ILO and its tripartite constituents, that means that the example of the Climate Action for Jobs Initiative launched by the UN Secretary-General at the 2019 session of the General Assembly as the umbrella vehicle for making just transition an integral part of the climate agenda needs to be replicated in other areas of critical significance to the recovery. And finance needs to be mobilized for them all.
96. There is an early opportunity for the potential major restoration of public confidence in, and political commitment to, multilateral action that can follow from the pandemic to be consolidated and exploited. In November, COP26 will meet in the United Kingdom at a more decisive moment than ever for the task of saving the planet. Before that, indeed soon after the current session of the International Labour Conference, the Secretary-General will publish his report entitled "Our Common Agenda", mandated by the General Assembly on

the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the UN. By taking up the issues of a social contract and a new global deal, and relating them to the tasks of recovery and the future of multilateralism, there is good reason to suppose that the Secretary-General will deliver a rallying call to all actors concerned with the common agenda of a human-centred recovery. That, naturally, includes the ILO and its constituents.

97. The question is – are we ready? Twenty-five years older than the UN, the ILO has used its own centenary to examine in depth what lies ahead of us in the construction of a brighter future of work and to distil the corresponding conclusions. So, the answer is – yes we are.
98. Self-evidently, the International Labour Conference adopted the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work in June 2019 in ignorance of the global pandemic that would be announced just nine months later; there is no recollection or evidence of the word “pandemic” appearing at any point in the proceedings of the entire Future of Work Centenary Initiative. At the time of its adoption, the Centenary Declaration was considered by ILO constituents to be a very valuable road map for action, and was confirmed as such by resolution of the UN General Assembly.
99. What is important is that that assessment has not been diminished by the advent of COVID-19 and everything it has brought with it to the world of work. Indeed, the opposite is more likely true. That is not because of any extraordinary prescience of the Declaration’s authors, but rather because the very exercise of serious tripartite global reflection on the major and long-term challenges posed by the dynamics of a world of work undergoing transformative change acted in ways similar to the pandemic itself. It focused attention on the big issues that now come to the fore in the context of human-centred recovery.
100. As its heart, the Centenary Declaration contains a call to all Member States to develop a human-centred approach to the future of work – and by extension to recovery – by investing in three areas:
 - the capacities of all people, through action to realize: gender equality; lifelong learning and quality education for all; universal access to comprehensive and sustainable social protection; and effective support for people in the transitions in their working life;
 - the institutions of work, to offer all workers adequate protection concerning: respect for their fundamental rights; an adequate minimum wage; maximum limits on working time; and safety and health at work; and
 - sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all through: macroeconomic policies that have those aims; trade, industrial and sectoral policies that promote decent work and enhance productivity; investment in infrastructure and in strategic sectors; policies and incentives that promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the creation and development of sustainable enterprises, innovation, the transition from informality to formality, and the alignment of business practices with the objectives of the Declaration; and policies for the protection of personal data and privacy, and to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the digital transformation of work, including platform work.
101. These areas of intervention provide a robust substantive policy platform for human-centred recovery. The Declaration makes clear too that its implementation depends decisively on the application of international labour standards, the involvement of employers’ and workers’ organizations, and the reinforcement of cooperation and coherence between the organizations of the multilateral system, given the strong, complex and crucial links between social, trade, financial, economic and environmental policies.

- 102.** The ILO has worked hard and productively to define a path forward from the crisis and the instruments of implementation which can give substance and impetus to the concept of building forward better. So what must be the next steps to activate them?

► Chapter V

ILO action

- 103.** From the onset of the pandemic, the ILO has reorganized its programmes and its methods of work to respond, rapidly and practically, to the urgent needs of its constituents. This has involved innovative analysis of the world of work consequences of COVID-19 through the seven editions of the ILO Monitor published between March 2020 and January 2021, the collection and sharing of detailed information on national action to respond to the crisis through the COVID-19 information hub, and the production of a large number of policy briefs to assist Member States in the formulation and implementation of their action. That has been the basis for the extensive work undertaken by ILO teams around the world, working with Member States to build capacities and deliver concrete responses at the country level.
- 104.** Additionally, the ILO has been at the forefront of the collective efforts of the UN system. These have included the design, development and operationalization of the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, as well as a menu of policies on financing for development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond.
- 105.** This substantive policy work has been accompanied by advocacy through participation in international discussion on COVID-19 at regional and global levels, including at the G20. As with its virtual Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work in July 2020, the ILO has convened tripartite discussion at the highest level, which has confirmed in particular the great relevance of the Centenary Declaration in the construction of a human-centred recovery.
- 106.** These contributions have been made possible by the measures taken to ensure ILO business continuity in the conditions imposed by the pandemic, including the generalized shift to remote working and virtual meetings. It has been crucial to the institutional integrity of the Organization that, following the cancellation of sessions of the Governing Body and of the International Labour Conference, in March and June 2020 respectively, two virtual meetings of the Governing Body have been successfully concluded, and the session of the Conference to which this report is submitted has been convened.
- 107.** This has allowed important decisions to be taken to adapt current and future ILO work to meeting the challenges of COVID-19. The ILO's Strategic Plan for 2022–25, adopted by the Governing Body in November 2020, has as its "overarching objective ... to apply the provisions of the Centenary Declaration for a human-centred recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic". Similarly, the draft Programme and Budget for 2022–23 presented to the current session of the Conference for approval incorporates COVID-19 response into each one of its eight policy outcomes.
- 108.** This is clear evidence that, with the guidance of its constituents, the ILO has been able to pivot in its own work and in its cooperation with other organizations to position itself as an important actor in addressing the challenges of the pandemic. But there is need to build on these initial achievements, and to project them into the challenges of the human-centred recovery. This Conference provides the opportunity to do so.

- 109.** By adopting a robust outcome document on a global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, the Government, Workers' and Employers' delegates meeting virtually in this unique global gathering of the actors of the world of work will be able to send, in the clearest terms, a message of hope and commitment setting out what they want the recovery to be, and how they are ready to work together to have it usher in the future of work that they agreed as their common objective when they adopted the Centenary Declaration two years ago. In doing this, they will also be providing further guidance to the ILO on practical ways forward in its own work. That might include renewed and strengthened national tripartite dialogues on the recovery, and reinforced institutional arrangements with others in the international system, whose cooperation is indispensable for making the recovery happen.
- 110.** The COVID-19 pandemic has been a global human catastrophe. It has cost millions of lives and even more jobs and livelihoods. It is also testing the resolve and capacity of institutions like ours to demonstrate that they can overcome adversity and, as the Declaration of Philadelphia enjoins us, act together in promotion of the common welfare. This is not the first time the ILO has faced such a test. It has never fallen short. Nor must it now.

► Appendix

Draft Conference outcome document, “A global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient”

Considering that

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is having a profound impact on humanity, underscoring the interdependence of all members of society and all countries;

In addition to the tragic loss of life, the pandemic has had devastating impacts on the world of work and has led to increased unemployment, underemployment and inactivity; losses in labour and business income; enterprise closures, supply chain disruptions and bankruptcies; informality and insecurity; and new challenges to health, safety and rights at work;

The crisis has affected the most disadvantaged and vulnerable disproportionately, particularly individuals in the informal economy and insecure work arrangements, those working in low-skilled jobs, people with disabilities and those living with HIV or AIDS, and migrants and ethnic and racial minorities, which has exacerbated pre-existing decent work deficits, increased poverty, widened inequalities and exposed digital gaps within and among countries;

Women have suffered disproportionate job and income losses, including because of their over-representation in the hardest-hit sectors, and many continue to work on the front line, sustaining care systems, economies and societies, while often also doing the majority of unpaid care work, which underscores the need for a gender-responsive recovery;

The crisis has profoundly disrupted the education, training and employment of young people, making it even harder to find a job or start a business and posing the risk of a reduced trajectory of earnings and advancement over the course of their working lives;

Without concerted action by governments and employers' and workers' organizations, these differential effects will endure well beyond the pandemic itself, with profound implications for the achievement of social justice, decent work for all and the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

Urgent and coordinated action is also needed to ensure that all people have speedy, equitable and affordable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, which are critical to curbing the growing inequality within and between countries and to restarting economies and building forward better;

The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019, with its human-centred approach for the future of work provides the foundation for a recovery from the crisis that is fully inclusive, sustainable and resilient. The Declaration offers a positive vision and practical road map for how countries can build forward better. For this reason, accelerating its implementation through increased emphasis and investment must become a top priority of public policy, enterprise actions and international cooperation;

Therefore, the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation adopts, this XX day of June of the year two thousand and twenty-one, this urgent global call to action to ensure

a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis inspired and guided by the ILO Centenary Declaration.

I. Urgent action to advance a human-centred recovery

1. We, governments and employers' and workers' organizations, commit to working individually and collectively and with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis through focused and accelerated implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration, thereby advancing progress on a trajectory of inclusive, sustainable and resilient development with decent work for all.
2. We commit to addressing the global dimensions of the crisis through enhanced international and regional cooperation, global solidarity and policy coherence across the economic, social, environmental and health domains, thereby enabling all countries to overcome the crisis and expedite progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.
3. We commit to placing the aim of full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work, the needs of the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the pandemic, and support for sustainable enterprises, jobs and incomes at the heart of strategies to build forward better from the crisis, taking into full account national circumstances and priorities, including by working to:
 - A. Inclusive economic growth and employment**
 - (a) ensure a broad-based, job-rich recovery with decent work opportunities for all through integrated national employment policy responses, including supportive and stable macroeconomic and industrial policies as well as strengthened public and private investment in sectors hit hardest by the crisis, such as hospitality, tourism, retail and transport, and those with strong potential to expand decent work opportunities, such as the care economy and sustainable infrastructure;
 - (b) promote global solidarity through support for developing countries experiencing crisis-related reductions in fiscal and monetary policy space or unsustainable external debt obligations;
 - (c) support business continuity and an enabling environment for productivity growth and sustainable enterprises, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, recognizing the crucial role of the private sector in generating strong, sustainable and inclusive economic growth;
 - (d) provide incentives to employers to retain workers despite crisis-related reduction of business activity, such as through work-sharing and shorter working weeks, wage subsidies, temporary suspensions of tax and social security contribution, and access to business support measures conditioned on retention of workers;
 - (e) prioritize action to support young workers and entrepreneurs, who are an indispensable source of dynamism, talent, creativity and innovation in the world of work and a driving force for shaping a brighter future of work;
 - (f) strengthen public and private investment in lifelong learning, including through more equitable and effective access to high-quality education and training as well

as apprenticeships, upskilling and reskilling, and through other active labour market policies and partnerships that reduce skills mismatches, gaps and shortages;

- (g) foster more resilient supply chains that contribute to decent work and environmental sustainability;
- (h) leverage the opportunities of just digital and ecological transitions to advance decent work, including through social dialogue and collective bargaining;
- (i) develop and implement comprehensive and integrated approaches to curb the spread of informality and accelerate the transition to the formal economy, with due attention to the creation, preservation and formalization of enterprises and decent jobs in the rural economy;

B. Protection of all workers

- (a) provide all workers with adequate protection, reinforcing respect for international labour standards and promotion of their ratification, implementation and supervision, with particular attention to areas where serious gaps have been revealed by the crisis. This includes respect for fundamental rights and principles at work; an adequate minimum wage, either statutory or negotiated; maximum limits on working time; the elimination of child and forced labour; and safety and health at work with particular attention to the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) ensure that healthcare and all other frontline workers exposed to COVID-19 and related risks have access to vaccines, personal protective equipment, training, testing and psychosocial support, and that they are adequately remunerated and protected at work, including against excessive workloads;
- (c) strengthen occupational safety and health measures by providing public institutions, private enterprises, employers, workers and their representatives with tailored practical guidance and assistance with risk management, the introduction of appropriate control and emergency preparedness measures, and measures to prevent new outbreaks or other occupational risks;
- (d) adapt teleworking and other new work arrangements to expand decent work opportunities, including through regulation, social dialogue, collective bargaining and workplace cooperation, and efforts to reduce disparities in digital access, respecting international labour standards and work-life balance;
- (e) uphold the continued relevance of the employment relationship as a means to provide certainty and legal protection to workers, while recognizing the extent of informality and the urgent need to ensure effective action to achieve the transition to formality;
- (f) implement through public policy and enterprise practice a transformative agenda for gender equality by:
 - (i) ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, supported by pay transparency;
 - (ii) expanding paid care leave policies for a more even division of labour at home;
 - (iii) promoting employment creation and lifelong learning policies that close women's skill gaps;

- (iv) investing in education, healthcare, social work and other sectors, addressing understaffing and improving working conditions;
 - (v) removing legal and other types of barriers to entry and advancement; and
 - (vi) preventing gender-based violence and harassment and protecting people from it;
- (g) execute across the public and private sectors a transformative agenda for equality, diversity and inclusion aimed at eliminating discrimination, violence and harassment on all grounds, including race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction and social origin, and with respect to migrants, indigenous and tribal peoples, and people living with HIV;

C. Universal social protection

- (a) achieve universal access to comprehensive and adequate social protection, including floors, ensuring that, at a minimum, over the life cycle, all in need have access to basic income security and to essential healthcare, recognizing the right to health as more important than ever;
- (b) enhance access to unemployment protection to ensure support for workers who have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to the pandemic and to facilitate transitions;
- (c) expand access to paid sick leave, care services, family leave and other family-friendly policies for all workers, ensuring coverage in cases of quarantine and self-isolation and developing faster delivery mechanisms for benefits;
- (d) ensure equitable and sustainable financing for social protection systems through effective domestic resource mobilization as well as greater global solidarity and coordination to ensure that no one is left behind;
- (e) reinforce the essential role of the public sector in supporting well-functioning economies and societies, recognizing in particular the important role of public health and care systems in times of a health crisis and in the prevention of future pandemics;

D. Social dialogue

- (a) build upon the role that social dialogue, both bipartite and tripartite, has played in the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries and sectors, based on respect for and the promotion and realization of the enabling rights of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- (b) promote social dialogue in particular to support delivery of the outcomes set out in this call for action, including through governments convening the tripartite partners to design and implement national recovery plans and policies addressing the need for retention and creation of decent jobs, business continuity, and investment in priority sectors and areas, both public and private, to ensure a job-rich recovery;
- (c) strengthen the capacity of public administrations and employers' and workers' organizations to participate in such dialogue as the means to develop and implement regional, national, sectoral and local human-centred recovery strategies, policies and programmes.

II. ILO leadership and support of a human-centred recovery

4. The ILO, with its mandate for social justice and decent work, must play a leadership role in the international system in advancing a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. To this end, it will strengthen its support of Member States' recovery efforts and leverage the support of other multilateral organizations and international institutions while contributing actively to the efforts of the United Nations system to expedite delivery of the 2030 Agenda.
5. In order to help governments and employers' and workers' organizations to build forward better from the crisis through focused and accelerated implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration, the ILO will use all its means of action to support the design and implementation of recovery strategies that leave no one behind. To this end, the ILO will strengthen its support of Member States' efforts to:
 - (a) create inclusive economic growth and employment, including by increasing support for the development of policies and approaches that generate employment-intensive investment, strengthen active labour market policies and boost productivity through diversification, innovation and harnessing the fullest potential of technological progress to create decent jobs and sustainable enterprises while addressing its risks and challenges and enabling broad social participation in its benefits;
 - (b) protect all workers, including by strengthening policy advice, capacity-building and technical assistance in support of:
 - (i) sound labour relations and the promotion, ratification and application of legal and institutional frameworks based on international labour standards, including fundamental principles and rights at work and with particular emphasis on occupational safety and health in the light of the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - (ii) prioritization and mainstreaming of strategies to address informality and insecure forms of work, which have been particularly affected by the crisis, including through development cooperation;
 - (c) achieve universal access to comprehensive and sustainable social protection, including floors, that ensure income security and health protection and enable people, including the self-employed and workers in the informal economy, to navigate major life and work transitions such as those precipitated by the COVID-19 crisis;
 - (d) use social dialogue to design and implement recovery strategies, strengthening employers' and workers' organizations through targeted and integrated measures, including through the International Training Centre of the ILO and regional and national training partners.
6. The ILO will strengthen cooperation with relevant multilateral and regional organizations and processes to achieve a strong and coherent global response in support of national recovery strategies, including in order to:
 - (a) align the provision of technical and financial support to maximize its beneficial impact on the most vulnerable and affected people and hardest-hit sectors;
 - (b) prioritize in national policy and development cooperation: investments in labour market institutions to translate international labour standards into national law and

- ensure their full implementation; skills development and other active labour market policies; gender equality; and financing of the business continuity of enterprises disproportionately affected by the crisis, including small and medium-sized enterprises;
- (c) assist Member States in developing and implementing financing strategies with global support for comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems in line with the objective of universal social protection, including floors, in conformity with ILO standards;
 - (d) coordinate decent work objectives and capacity-building assistance more closely with international trade and investment policies to widen the benefits of international trade and investment and promote decent work in supply chains, taking into account the strong, complex and crucial links between social, trade, financial, economic and environmental policies;
 - (e) promote fiscal and monetary policies that aim at achieving inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic growth as well as full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work, including by improving understanding of the potential beneficial macroeconomic effects of the human-centred approach set out in the ILO Centenary Declaration;
 - (f) advance research and improve data on the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals to generate decent work in order to help focus financing for development strategies on employment-intensive investments and a just transition to environmental sustainability, including in the circular economy, as an integral part of the recovery process.
7. The ILO will work with other multilateral institutions to convene a major policy forum aimed at mobilizing a strong and coherent global response in support of Member States' human-centred recovery strategies that are inclusive, sustainable and resilient, including through joint initiatives and enhanced institutional arrangements among international and regional organizations.