

► Preliminary programme overview

Introduction and overarching objectives

In June 2021, the International Labour Conference adopted a [Global Call to Action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient](#). In it, Governments, workers' and employers' organizations from the ILO's 187 Member States committed to pursue 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." They directed the ILO to organize a major policy forum in cooperation with other multilateral organizations to advance this objective.

The high-level Global Forum for a Human-Centred Recovery will be held from 22 to 24 February in a virtual format, bringing together Heads of State and Government, heads of international organizations and multilateral development banks, and employers' and workers' leaders from around the world. The sessions will provide an opportunity to discuss concrete actions that strengthen the international community's response to the crisis and to the "great divergence" or widening inequality in crisis response and recovery among and within countries.

The Forum also serves to advance a more networked, inclusive, and effective form of multilateralism that, in the words of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Guterres, "draws together existing institutional capacities, overcoming fragmentation to ensure all are working together towards a common goal." In the current context, that goal must be to increase the level and coherence of the international response to the profound and profoundly unequal nature of the COVID-19 crisis's impact on people, in particular regarding their employment opportunities and incomes; workers' protection, capabilities, and just transitions; and social protections including with respect to health care.

A key issue for discussion will be the *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for a Just Transition* that the UN Secretary-General launched at the General Assembly in September 2021. The Forum will examine how to generate the investments and resources required to meet the ambition of creating at least 400 million new and decent jobs, including in the green, digital and care economy, while improving protections at work; extending social protection floors to the more than 50 per cent of global population without any access to social protection; improving protections at work; scaling up climate action for jobs to accelerate progress towards a carbon-neutral global economy; and pursuing a transformative agenda for gender equality. All participants of the Forum are invited to discuss how they will contribute to these global goals, particularly in the four mutually reinforcing areas of actions specified in the thematic sessions.

Provisional session descriptions

Opening session – 22 February, 13h00 to 14h30 CET

Advancing a human-centred recovery through strengthened multilateral and tripartite cooperation

The Global Forum will open with scene-setting remarks from the business and trade union communities. It will feature remarks from the UN Secretary-General and a number of Heads of State or Government, and the ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

Thematic session 1 – 22 February, 14h45 to 16h15 CET

Decent jobs and inclusive economic growth

The session will begin with opening presentations by Heads of State or Government, followed by an interactive panel involving the leaders of a number of international organizations that are particularly engaged in this area, together with high-level representatives of the social partners.

This session will present and discuss strengthened cooperative efforts and institutional arrangements to address the serious and ongoing impact of the COVID-19 crisis on employment, business continuity and livelihoods around the world, particularly with respect to disproportionately affected regions, sectors and hardest-hit groups such as youth, women, small businesses and informal and migrant workers. Globally, the labour market suffered unprecedented losses in working hours in 2020 and 2021 relative to pre-pandemic levels – the equivalent of 258 million and 125 million full-time jobs, respectively. Job recovery has been uneven, with much faster recovery in advanced economies than developing countries and uneven progress within countries, leaving already disadvantaged and hard-hit groups further behind and many enterprises struggling to survive.

These deepened inequalities impede economic and social recovery, the prospects for which remain weak and uncertain in 2022 and beyond. The eventual outcome will be strongly influenced by policy choices and actions. Experience from past crises shows that achieving an inclusive, job-rich recovery requires placing decent jobs at the centre of recovery efforts with strong linkages to social protection; increasing investment in areas having particular potential for job creation (such as green, digital, and care economies); and supporting business resilience and recovery during and after the crisis. There is a high risk that without concerted international support, many developing countries will face significant challenges in implementing policies to attain, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 8, “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

- **How can national and international solidarity and support be increased in sectors with particular potential to create decent jobs in sustainable ways, including the green, care and digital economies, as well as for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs); for workers' skills and transitions; and for youth, women and other disproportionately affected groups?**

Thematic session 2 – 23 February, 13h00 to 14h30 CET

Universal social protection

The session will begin with opening presentations by Heads of State or Government, followed by an interactive panel involving the leaders of a number of international organizations that are particularly engaged in this area, together with high-level representatives of the social partners.

This session will present and discuss strengthened cooperative efforts and institutional arrangements to help countries address the significant gaps in social protection comprehensiveness, adequacy and sustainability, which are exacerbating the adverse human impacts of the current crisis. Less than half of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit. To guarantee at least a basic level of social security through a nationally defined social protection floor, middle income countries would need to spend between 3.1 to 5.1 per cent of GDP. However, in low-income countries, the required amount of domestic resources amounts to an estimated 15.9 per cent of GDP, the equivalent of 45 per cent of current tax revenues. Closing the social protection floor financing gap in such countries through domestic resource mobilization alone is not realistic.

Clearly, current levels of expenditure on social protection are insufficient to close persistent coverage gaps, despite large – yet unequal – resource mobilization during the COVID-19 pandemic. For countries with limited fiscal capacities or facing increased needs due to systemic crises, additional international financing in combination with technical assistance could complement national resources and support the creation of sufficient domestic fiscal space. Greater alignment among national policy makers, social partners and bilateral and multilateral development partners could help low- and lower-middle-income countries make stronger progress in this regard. A new international financing mechanism could help low-income countries increase levels of funding devoted to social protection over time.

- **How can national and international solidarity and support for the design, sustainable financing and administration of social protection systems in developing countries be expanded through increased technical assistance, institutional capacity building and catalytic financing that complements strengthened domestic resource mobilization?**

Thematic Session 3, February 23, 14h45 to 16h15 CET

Protecting workers and sustaining enterprises

The session will begin with opening presentations by Heads of State or Government, followed by an interactive panel involving the leaders of a number of international organizations that are particularly engaged in this area, together with high-level representatives of the social partners.

This session will present and discuss strengthened cooperative efforts and institutional arrangements to improve the implementation and ratification of international labour standards, notably with respect to occupational safety and health, working time and wages, gender and other forms of discrimination, and the other fundamental principles and rights at work, including through transitions to formality. It will also examine how to enhance international support for decent work opportunities through increased business continuity and productivity growth of MSMEs and other firms in sectors and geographies hit hardest by the pandemic or affected by ongoing shifts in technology, climate change or trade and investment as well as for universal global access to vaccines, as envisioned and enabled by the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The pandemic is posing new challenges with respect to safeguarding workplace safety and health, including in but not limited to frontline and other sectors critical to the functioning of economies and societies, and ensuring respect for workers' rights more generally, including in digitally-enabled remote

work arrangements which have expanded substantially during the crisis. Effective implementation of labour standards enabled by properly resourced labour ministries underpins progress on all the other policy domains covered by the Forum, as does a transformative and measurable agenda for gender equality and non-discrimination and equal treatment more broadly. Social dialogue, including collective bargaining, plays a critical role in supporting the application of such standards and finding solutions to new challenges brought by changes in the world of work; however, the pandemic has placed employer and worker organizations under increased pressure. At the same time, sectors such as tourism and hospitality, culture, aviation, and some manufacturing and personal services continue to struggle, as do many smaller firms, resulting in many workers shifting from formal to informal and often insecure employment where labour protections, tax administration and social protection are considerably weaker.

- **How can national and international solidarity and support be increased for the capacity of countries to implement worker protections in such areas as occupational safety and health, gender and other forms of discrimination, adequate wages and working time and fundamental principles and rights at work; and how can international cooperation strengthen worker and employer organizations, the continuity and productivity of small businesses and other firms, and efforts to formalize jobs and enterprises?**

Thematic session 4 – 24 February, 13h00 to 14h30 CET

Just transition

The session will begin with opening presentations by Heads of State or Government, followed by an interactive panel involving the leaders of a number of international organizations that are particularly engaged in this area, together with high-level representatives of the social partners.

This session will present and discuss strengthened cooperative efforts and institutional arrangements to support country strategies to achieve a just transition – a transition that maximizes economic and social gains from climate action, while minimizing risks of social disruption. The government, company and investment community net-zero commitments announced at the recent Glasgow Conference of the Parties (COP26) imply an increasingly significant and potentially disruptive transformation of many industries and their workforces over the next decade and beyond, including in developing countries. At the same time, global warming is contributing to increasing levels of physical damage and social dislocation in countries, whether in terms of extreme weather and natural disasters, rising sea levels and water stress, or job loss and migration.

There is compelling evidence that the ecological transition can be positive for the economy, with net gains in decent work and sustainable enterprise value creation which contribute to the advancement of social justice. The ILO estimates that a green transition through low-carbon and circular economies can generate some 100 million new jobs by 2030. However, 80 million jobs could be lost in the process. Most if not all countries are at an early stage of analyzing and planning for the implications of these shifts in public policy, corporate strategy, and environmental conditions. Many have limited resources to do so, let alone to finance the adaptations that will be required in industrial and infrastructure investment and public support for worker retraining, employment services and social protection. Policymakers will face geographical and temporal complexities and need to ensure distributive justice, give specific attention to the needs of young people, women, indigenous and tribal people, and persons with disabilities. Comprehensive policy frameworks, based on social dialogue and strong social consensus, will be indispensable to address all aspects of economic and social transformation.

- **How can national and international solidarity and support for the preparation and implementation of just transition strategies be expanded and accelerated, including with**

respect to the transition of carbon-intensive industries and their workforces and communities; the expansion of job-intensive, low-carbon sectors such as nature-based services, regenerative agriculture, renewable energy, energy efficient buildings and industrial practices, etc.; and the reshaping of enabling environment incentives and requirements, for example with respect to carbon pricing and financial regulation?

Closing session – 24 February, 14h45 to 16h15 CET

Toward a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient

After closing messages, including from Heads of State or Government, a high-level tripartite conversation moderated by Director-General Guy Ryder will take place to reflect on the proceedings of the Forum, focusing on the action needed to sustain and increase momentum on multilateral cooperation around shared goals for human centred recovery.