

The Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88) Promoting recovery from the COVID-19 jobs crisis

A critical role

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing jobs crisis have highlighted the critical role of public employment services (PES) and, by extension, the ILO's Convention that supports them.

PES match workers with jobs, help employers find the workers they need, and support both sides in adapting to labour market disruptions. During the pandemic, PES have helped cushion income losses, protect existing jobs and facilitate employment in sectors still in operation during the lockdowns. PES have been at the forefront, individually or in collaboration with other labour market actors, of the implementation of job retention and enterprise support measures as well as facilitation of recruitment.

Public employment services are expected to play an even more important role as recovery gathers steam. Wider ratification of the ILO's [Employment Service Convention, 1948 \(No. 88\)](#) – which calls on governments to maintain a free nationwide PES – can help repair the social and economic damages caused by the crisis by promoting a human-centered recovery based on decent work principles.

The ILO urges member States that have not yet done so to consider ratifying and implementing Convention No. 88, an instrument that remains highly relevant in a changing world of work and provides valuable guidance for the best possible organization of national labour markets struggling to recover from the devastating impacts of the pandemic.



What is Convention No. 88?

Convention No. 88 (C88) is an international labour standard that is legally binding for countries that ratify it. To date, (April 2025), 92 countries have ratified the Convention, which was adopted by ILO's constituents (governments, employers and workers) at the International Labour Conference in 1948.

The Convention calls on governments to ensure the provision of publicly funded employment services that match people to jobs, support those wishing to make a career change, and those who want to start their own businesses.

C88 requires PES that are cost-free for their clients and open to everyone who needs support in searching for employment or in hiring workers.

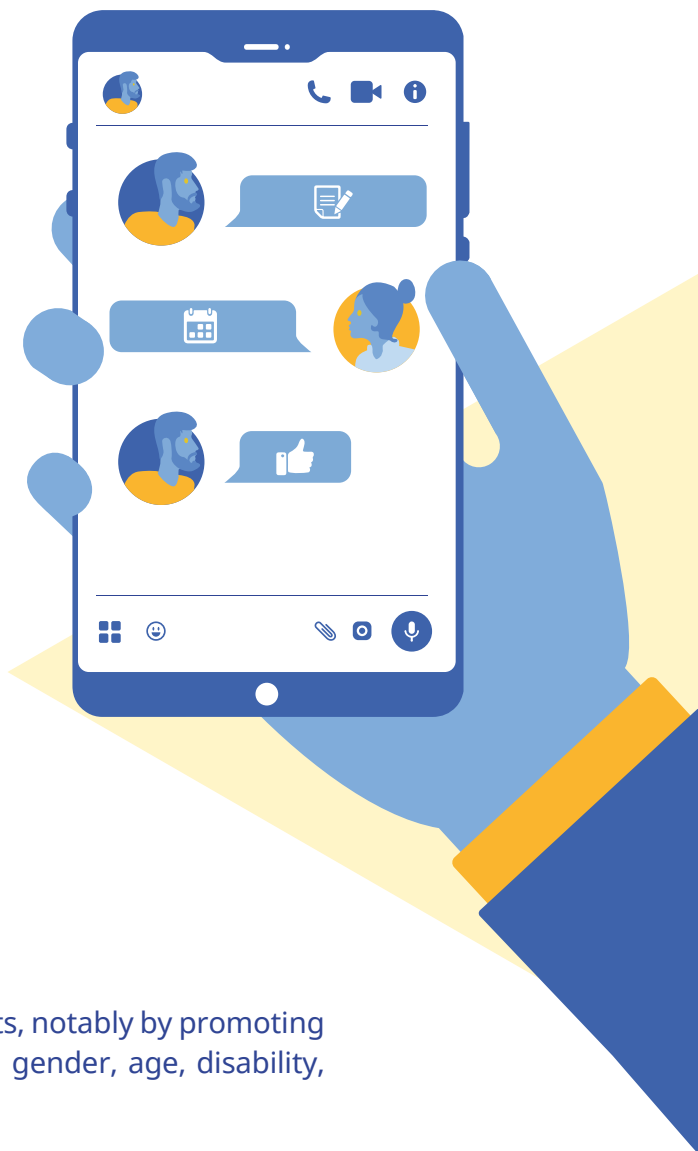
The Convention emphasizes the coordination role played by PES. It calls for cooperation with public and private bodies to ensure the best possible organisation of the labour market for the achievement and maintenance of full employment and the development and use of productive resources (Article 1).

Why ratify Convention No. 88?

Ratifying and implementing C88 and promoting PES that are well designed and implemented can enhance efficient labour market matching and labour market equality. It has the potential to benefit governments, employers, workers and society in general to respond to the very real challenges that impede access to quality jobs and self-employment by:

- ▶ enabling women and men, including those affected by crises, such as COVID-19, to access or return to work;
- ▶ assisting employers with hiring and rehiring to adjust to their business operations;
- ▶ mitigating the risk of inactivity and further job losses;
- ▶ helping workers prepare for the recovery and ensuring support to those in low-income occupations or holding fixed-term contracts, as well as youth;
- ▶ providing young workers with career guidance and job search assistance during the difficult times;
- ▶ enabling governments to ensure effective coordination of recovery plans which lead to creation of decent, full and productive employment.

Ratification helps improve the functioning of labour markets, notably by promoting the participation of groups who face challenges linked to gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity and migration status, among other factors.



What do public employment services do?

PES are a key resource for jobseekers, for workers wanting a career change and for enterprises looking for workers. They provide workers with access to support, programmes and incentives that help them participate in the economy through decent work. PES also help anticipate and match labour market and skills-needs, supporting employers and jobseekers in adapting to change.

How do PES help?

In carrying out its services, PES work closely with social partners (workers' and employers' organizations) and other key stakeholders such as private employment agencies and civil society organizations. Workers, employers and the national economy all benefit from these services.

As a public service, PES primarily target those in the most vulnerable situations in terms of the labour market – including youth, women, older workers, people with disabilities, migrant workers, workers in the informal economy and the long-term unemployed. As such, they highlight and help correct labour market imbalances and promote equality of opportunity and treatment.

PES provide guidance and training to workers who are looking for a job or new career options or want to run their own business. They provide support in dealing with labour market transitions, relocating for work – whether within the country or abroad – and gaining new skills or work experience. They help young people prepare for their first job and those interested in becoming apprentices or trainees. PES also provide support for people facing barriers affecting their ability or opportunities to take up a job such as lack of skills, mobility challenges or constrained access to social services.

PES support employers that are looking to hire needed talent. They provide assistance to help employers respond to increasingly frequent changes in market conditions and in reskilling staff to cope with sectoral changes. PES can assist companies that want to recruit apprentices or trainees, are considering incentives to hire young people or older workers, or plan to employ people with disabilities.

National economies also benefit when governments invest in PES to increase participation in the labour market. PES are a particularly useful tool for governments during and after economic downturns and crises, serving as a reliable source of labour market information, matching jobseekers with opportunities, developing skills and encouraging transitions towards sectors and occupations with high employment potential. PES can support a sustained, job-rich recovery.

PES can support a sustained, job-rich recovery and help governments to:

- ▶ ensure everyone has the opportunity to work, facilitate insertion in the formal employment, promote decent work, and improve the speed and quality of job matching through cost-free services;
- ▶ promote fair recruitment practices and ensure transparent access to information on jobs and skills;
- ▶ encourage collaboration with relevant public and private bodies to solve skills mismatches and bottlenecks to recruitment, and improve access to decent work.

How can the ILO help?

The ILO can assist member States in improving PES and moving towards ratification. Specifically, it can help to:

- ▶ understand the scope and reach of C88, including the opportunities and obligations under the convention.
- ▶ improve the responsiveness of PES to the needs of jobseekers and employers;
- ▶ implement effective labour market programmes adapted to regional and local labour markets;
- ▶ modernize and improve PES so that they can adapt to different phases of economic cycles;
- ▶ establish regulatory frameworks and collaborative arrangements with private employment agencies, linked to national employment policies and ILO Decent Work Country Programmes;
- ▶ administer unemployment benefits linked to active support programmes;
- ▶ develop labour market information systems to collect, analyse and share information concerning the situation and evolution of the labour market;
- ▶ promote national, regional and international policy coherence in making employment central to social, economic and international development strategies.

The ILO can also provide support regarding:

Policy advice to expand decent work opportunities

- ▶ advice on policies and interventions that are effective in expanding job opportunities for all categories of workers;
- ▶ support coherence between employment policy objectives and delivery of targeted employment services and active labour market policies;
- ▶ assess how PES could extend employment services to workers and enterprises in the informal economy to help them transition to the formal economy.

Adapting to rapid change and increase responsiveness

- ▶ offer technical assistance on how to use C88 to help national-level PES address future of work challenges;
- ▶ support emergency employment services in post-crisis recovery plans following natural disasters, civil unrest, pandemics, or other disruptive events;
- ▶ assist trade unions and employer's organization to take necessary measures to benefit from PES.

Capacity building

- ▶ provide technical training on employment services, on career counselling to support the transition from school to work, and on guidelines and policies on private employment agencies;
- ▶ conduct PES assessments in member States, identifying areas in need of strengthening, and helping develop and implement projects to enhance the efficiency of PES;
- ▶ strengthen the role of PES in member States' efforts to improve the collection and dissemination of labour market information.



Some examples of good practices in countries that have ratified C88

In the **Philippines**, people using PES offices have access to digital skills workshops, where they learn how to safely search and apply online for vacancies and prepare for video interviews with potential employers.

Brazil and **Ecuador** have organized PES collaboration with public and private training providers and other partners to provide free online training and develop jobseekers' skills and employability.

In **Germany**, the PES and the Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth jointly manage a job portal that is fully dedicated to helping women who want to find jobs following career breaks.

In **Colombia**, employment counsellors work in partnership with local employers to promote green job vacancies.

Australia has launched the Jobs Hub website and a dedicated job portal for people with disabilities, to help workers affected by the pandemic return to the workforce, and employers fill positions. It offers a range of resources to help people identify jobs matching their skills and to broaden their job options.

As part of measures to cushion the impact of COVID-19, **Denmark** adopted an "upskilling instead of dismissal" strategy that provides targeted online training to avert lay-offs, and reimburses employers for the salaries of workers they continue to employ under this scheme.

Support the ratification of Convention No. 88 in your country!

The ILO's global campaign to build support for C88 is inviting ILO constituents (governments, employers' and workers' organizations) and other relevant actors to get involved, both at national and international level. Wider ratification and effective implementation of the Convention by ILO member States is crucial to support a rapid, sustainable recovery and resilient labour markets that are better prepared to attain the strategic objective of full and productive employment and decent work.

