



Tripartite Arab Meeting on the Future of Work

Beirut - 3 April 2017



International
Labour
Organization

CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Office for the Arab States



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Introduction

1.1 The Future of Work Initiative

The world of work is undergoing a major process of change. In order to understand and to respond effectively to these new challenges the International Labour Organization has launched a «Future of Work Initiative» in order to be able to advance its mandate for social justice. This Initiative was adopted by ILO's constituents as one of the seven initiatives that would mark the ILO's centenary in 2019. The initiative enjoys extensive support for a far reaching process of reflection on the future of work as the centrepiece of the ILO's centenary.

In addition to national dialogues, the ILO is organizing regional tripartite meetings on the Future of Work, and will establish in 2017 a High Level Global Commission on the Future of Work. Its purpose will be to examine the output from the national and regional dialogues and other input it may consider necessary. The Commission will publish a report and recommendations over the course of 2018.

In continuation of this effort and to contribute to the global discussion on this Initiative, the Tripartite Meeting ("Meeting") on the Future of Work in the Arab States will generate multiple outcomes that contribute directly to the success of the Initiative at the global level, namely:

1. A summary report of the Meeting's dialogues and recommendations to be shared directly with the High Level Global Commission on the Future of Work Initiative ("GC"), and to feed in as the region's leading document for the Initiative at the global level.
2. Collaborating with member States and constituents to promote national dialogues on the Future of Work, and to benefit from national dialogues which have already been carried out by countries in the region and worldwide.
3. Identify areas of ILO technical assistance, based on consultation with tripartite constituents in the Meeting, which can be implemented by the ILO, through different avenues such as DWCPs, to promote the Decent Work Agenda to achieve social justice in light of the transformations impacting the world of work in the region.

1.2 Regional Background

The Initiative was launched in a time of great uncertainty and insecurity in the Arab Region, and amidst fears that the direction of change in the world of work is away from, not towards, the achievement of social justice and Decent Work for all. These fears are compounded by existing challenges in the region through multifaceted decent work deficits, weak social security and labour protection systems, lack of fundamental rights at work and weak governance of the world of work in general, on top of presence of war and conflicts.

More countries are dealing with the consequences of existing conflicts in the region through an influx of refugees, an alarming rise in extremism and terrorism threats and a continued deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the population. The people at large have been more vulnerable due to the adverse impacts, of the protracted crises, but also the inability of countries to establish sound labour markets and related governing systems. Without effective policy responses, all the factors above have profound repercussions on the future of work in the Arab States.

The Arab States is the region with the highest proportion globally of migrant workers in the labour force at over 35 per cent in Arab States. Furthermore, the region is one of the main destination regions globally of migrants at 32 million migrants in 2015. These figures highlight an ongoing reliance on migrant workers in the economy of the region. As such, transformations impacting the world of work, if not appropriately addressed and understood, may compromise the fundamental rights of migrant workers.

The Arab States are also characterized by considerable gender gaps in employment, as demonstrated by the world's lowest female labour force participation rates, while burgeoning youth unemployment remains one of the greatest economic and social challenges facing the countries in the region. Recognizing the centrality of equality measures for women's access to the labour market without discrimination and for youth in fostering stability is fundamental for the countries in the region as the youth often lack social protection and access to decent work.

Finally, the deficits in Freedom of Association and in CBAS, as well as the non-function of labour administration and inspection are a key issue that has to be targeted in discussion. To this end the meeting will also discuss the new forms of work have already started to adversely impact the traditional employee-employer relationship.

Objectives

The main objective of the Meeting is to foster tripartite dialogue, based on ILO principles, between member States and social partners. It will also benefit from the involvement of academia, UN agencies, civil society, and global and private sector leaders to:

- Gain a shared understanding of the forces and drivers that are transforming the world of work in the region, and
- Discuss and identify necessary and innovative policy options and programmes, which will help governments, employers' and workers' organizations of the region to advance their national dialogue on the future of work and prepare their economies accordingly, while, at the same time, working jointly towards achieving Decent Work and the protection of workers' rights at national and regional level.

The Meeting will aim to provide a constructive forum and suitable space for the exchange of ideas, information, and best practices that are based on a tripartite approach and dialogue, in line with the ILO standards.

Issues of Focus

The Arab Region is no exception to the transformations impacting the world of work. Given the regional political instability, and the prevalence of prolonged crises in some of member States, it becomes even more essential to continue advocating for and strengthening social dialogue among ILO's stakeholders in the region so as to gain a common understanding of the transformations that impact the world of work and to determine, collectively, policy options and programmes to address these new challenges as well as pre-existing decent work deficits.

The understanding of the transformations that impact the world of work will also enable the ILO to better serve its constituents in supporting a decent work centred recovery from the conflict and turmoil sweeping through the region, and to promote decent work and social justice as the main pillars of social cohesion that would counter some of the root causes of the current conflicts in the region.

The Meeting will centre on the core issues that will impact the future of work in the Arab States. The meeting will discuss:

1. The Future of Work and Social Justice in the Regional Context
2. A Robust Regional Economy for Improved Labour Market Outcomes
3. Boosting Women's Employment Prospects to Shape a Just Future
4. Strengthening Social Security in Arab States

A complementary document, "The Tripartite Meeting for the Future of Work in the Arab States: Issue Overview", is provided with this concept note and provides a commentary on the aforementioned issues.

Meeting Overview

5.1 Date & Location

The Arab Tripartite Meeting on the Future of Work is scheduled to take place on the 3rd of April 2017 in Beirut, Lebanon.

5.2 Structure

The Meeting will be comprised of three main panel sessions and four thematic panel discussion sessions (two at a time). The Meeting will begin with a panel session that will set out the overall thematic topics of the Meeting as well as guiding discussions, followed by a youth panel discussion. The sessions will take place in the latter half of the day of the conference. The thematic panel discussion sessions will highlight the issues and challenges faced by the thematic topic covered and will attempt to draw some conclusions on the issues identified earlier. These sessions will consist of a combination of expert presentations and panel discussion of tripartite constituents.

5.3 Participants

The conference participants, chosen in consultation with tripartite constituents, are suggested to be drawn from:

- Senior labour, economic, social, equality and planning, public officials as well as judges in charge of labour law from the following Arab States (Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen). Additional representatives from key ministries, able to influence the Future of Work Agenda and national employment and social policies, will also be invited
- Members of employers' and workers' organizations in member States.
- United Nations system agencies, regional organizations, civil society, and donor partners.
- Representatives of academic institutions covering the fields of economics, sociology, law, and politics among other fields.
- Representatives of major global and multinational private sector companies that can share experiences and provide lessons on the development of the Arab States' economies.
- Representatives of global and regional trade unions that can share experiences and provide lessons on the development of the Arab States' economies.