

Pacific Tripartite High-Level Dialogue on Decent Work and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent

23-26 April 2024 | Suva

Session 4: Tackling informality and promoting access to jobs
and social protection in Pacific Island countries
25 April, 10.30-12.15

This version: 23 April 2024

Proposed speakers

► Two government representatives

- Mr Riley Mesepitu, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration, Government of Solomon Islands
- Ms Murielle Metsan Meltenoven, Commissioner of Labour, Government of Vanuatu

► One employers' representative

- Ms Michelle Macdonald, President, Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry

► One workers' representative

- Mr Anton Sekum, Assistant General Secretary, Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress

► Technical experts

- Mr Markus Ruck, Social Protection Specialist, ILO
- Mr Christian Viegelahn, Decent Work and Employment Specialist, ILO
- Mr Jun Fan, Chief of Social Policy, UNICEF
- Ms Jill Juma, Trade Adviser Melanesia Sub-region, PIFS

Moderator: Mr Markus Ruck, Social Protection Specialist, ILO

Chair: Ms Tareu Tong, Vice President, Kiribati Trade Union Congress

Background

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face unique challenges in fostering sustainable economic growth and development. One critical aspect that demands attention is the prevalence of informal employment, which impedes the region's ability to provide stable jobs and comprehensive social protection. The session "Tackling Informality and Promoting Access to Jobs and Social Protection" aims to address this issue.

Informal employment refers to work that falls outside the regulatory framework, often characterized by lack of job security, minimal access to social protection, and limited employment benefits. In PICs, a substantial portion of the workforce engages in informal activities, hindering the achievement of inclusive and resilient economies. This session seeks to delve into the root causes of informality, explore its implications, and strategize on effective measures to promote formal employment opportunities and enhance social protection mechanisms.

Issues and Challenges

1. **Limited Access to Formal Jobs:** Informal employment often arises due to a lack of formal job opportunities. The scarcity of industries and limited economic diversification in some PICs contribute to a reliance on informal sectors. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach to stimulate economic growth, attract investments, and promote entrepreneurship.
2. **Inadequate Social Protection:** Workers in informal sectors are frequently excluded from social protection mechanisms, leaving them vulnerable to economic shocks, health crises, and other unforeseen challenges. Identifying ways to extend social protection to informal workers without stifling economic activity is a critical task. This involves designing adaptable and inclusive social protection systems that accommodate the diverse needs of the Pacific Island workforce.
3. **Informal Sector Productivity and Integration:** Informal businesses often struggle to reach their full potential due to limited access to resources, skills, and markets. Exploring strategies to enhance the productivity of informal enterprises and facilitate their integration into formal economies is essential. This includes capacity-building programmes, improved market linkages, and targeted support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
4. **Regulatory Framework and Compliance:** Strengthening regulatory frameworks is paramount in curbing informality. This involves creating an environment that encourages compliance while not stifling entrepreneurial spirit. Policymakers must strike a balance between enforcing regulations to protect workers and fostering an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

Objectives

This session aims to foster constructive dialogue, exchange best practices, and formulate actionable strategies to address the challenges associated with informal employment in Pacific

Island Countries. Through collaborative discussions and knowledge sharing, the session aims to identify practical solutions and strategies to enhance access to formal employment and social protection for all segments of society.

The session is anticipated to yield tangible outcomes, including enhanced knowledge sharing, collaborative policy development, strengthened cooperation, improved inclusivity, and raised awareness. By working together, participating countries and stakeholders are better positioned to effectively address informality and advance the goal of decent job creation and social protection for all. In this regard, the following measures are key and will be discussed during the session:

1. **Identify Root Causes:** Analyze the underlying factors contributing to informality in PICs, considering economic, social, and cultural dimensions.
2. **Explore Inclusive Economic Strategies:** Discuss strategies for diversifying and strengthening the formal economy, creating more employment opportunities, and reducing reliance on informal sectors.
3. **Enhance Social Protection:** Examine ways to extend social protection to informal workers, exploring innovative approaches that cater to the unique challenges faced in the Pacific Island context.
4. **Foster Productivity and Integration:** Explore mechanisms to boost the productivity of informal enterprises and facilitate their integration into the formal economy, ensuring a more inclusive and dynamic economic landscape.
5. **Review and Strengthen Regulatory Frameworks:** Discuss the need for comprehensive regulatory frameworks that balance the protection of workers with the promotion of a conducive business environment.

Questions for discussion

- What are the main challenges faced by informal economy workers, including women and men, in accessing social protection and decent employment opportunities in the Pacific Islands?
- What measures are being taken to empower informal sector associations and ensure their sustainability to support workers effectively?
- How are gender disparities being addressed within the informal economy, and what initiatives are in place to tackle youth unemployment in the Pacific Islands?
- How can social protection be enhanced in the Pacific Islands?
- How are Pacific Island countries preparing for the future of work considering challenges posed by climate change and technological advancements, and what policies are being developed to adapt to these changes?

Detailed agenda (draft)

Moderator: Mr Markus Ruck, Social Protection Specialist, ILO

Chair: Ms Tareu Tong, Vice President, Kiribati Trade Union Congress

10.30 – 10.33

Chair opening

10.33 – 10.43

Presentation giving an introduction into the topic and setting the stage

- Mr Markus Ruck, Social Protection Specialist, ILO

10.43 - 10.53

Informality and social protection: Case study I

- Mr Riley Mesepitu, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration, Government of Solomon Islands

10.53 - 11.03

Informality and social protection: Case study II

- Ms Murielle Metsan Meltenoven, Commissioner of Labour, Government of Vanuatu

11.03 - 11.18

Comments from social partners

- Ms Michelle Macdonald, President, Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Mr Anton Sekum, Assistant General Secretary, Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress

11.18 - 11.28

How can an assessment of a social protection system be taken forward to undertake concrete policy action and implement social protection measures?

- Mr Markus Ruck, Social Protection Specialist, ILO
- Mr Jun Fan, Chief of Social Policy, UNICEF

11.28 - 11.33

The role of employment policy frameworks to enhance social protection and formalization

- Mr Christian Viegelahn, Specialist for Decent Work and Employment, ILO

11.33 - 12.07

Plenary discussion

12.07 - 12.12

Closing remarks by Ms Jill Juma, Trade Adviser Melanesia Sub-region, PIFS

12.12 – 12.15

Chair closing