Extreme weather and worker absenteeism

Mitigating productivity and economic losses

Discussion points from ILO-funded Research Paper “The impact of extreme weather on temporary work absence.”
Overview

With climate change expected to create increasingly powerful tropical cyclones in the Caribbean, more excessive rainfall will impact this highly vulnerable region. And, the effects of the hazards that it causes such as flash flooding and landslides will become more severe.

For businesses across the region, these increased risks can create damages to infrastructure and unsafe conditions that prevent their employees from reporting to the workplace.

In recent years, some studies have examined the socio-economic losses caused by extreme weather in the region, including labour markets impacts. However, the research is limited in scope and does not specifically measure the cost of employee absenteeism in times of climate-related disasters.

Without comprehensive data to support decision-making, many Caribbean employers and policymakers are unable to adequately prepare for, adapt to and recover from climate risks to prevent mounting disruptions to business operations, livelihoods and incomes.

Recent International Labour Organization (ILO)-funded research estimates that excessive rainfall associated with hurricanes and other severe weather systems impacts the odds of being absent from work depending on the place of employment.

For example, farm and shop workers, are more likely to be temporarily absent from work. In other cases, such as those working in a factory or the public sector, the probability of temporary absence is lower.

A number of factors that increase the chances of worker absence were identified in the ILO report including damaged roads, interruptions to public transportation and other unforeseen circumstances at home, while the probability of absence is lower for employers who can adapt working arrangements so that productivity continues despite extreme weather conditions and their aftermath.
In focus: Adapting Jamaica’s labour market to deal with the impact of excessive rainfall

The ILO-funded study “The impact of extreme weather on temporary work absence” reveals important implications that can help Jamaican and by extension other Caribbean employers and employees to prepare for rainfall shocks.

The research concludes with the recommendation that the country, which is prone to heavy precipitation, focus on strengthening policies to put measures in place that mitigate employees’ absence and protect productivity. These measures can include provisions for employees to work remotely where possible and if necessary, employers accept responsibility for making appropriate logistical arrangements for workers to be on site.

Recognizing the limited national data on how workers are impacted by extreme weather, the study also recommends that Jamaica’s quarterly Labour Force Survey be refined to capture more comprehensive information on the effects of different weather events. By having this data available, policymakers from government, employers’ organizations and workers’ organizations can make effective risk-informed decisions that build a more resilient labour market.
Two ways employers can minimize temporary employee absenteeism caused by extreme rainfall:

1. Undertake proactive Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and implement telework policies where possible to avoid interruption of operations and mitigate possible impacts on productivity. Read the ILO’s practical guide on teleworking [here](#).

2. Where telework is not possible, arrange for employees whose work has to take place on the work site to be present. For example, provide transportation for workers, secure accommodations and safe working conditions.
Produced by the ILO Caribbean Office through the ILO Caribbean Resilience Project

The ILO Caribbean Resilience Project is a two-year initiative that aims to strengthen the capacity of Guyana, Saint Lucia and Dominica to become more resilient (in line with ILO Recommendation 205) to climate disasters and other crises. The ILO Caribbean Resilience Project seeks to ensure that the principles embedded in the ILO “Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all” are fully adopted and implemented by the three target countries.