

## Joining forces in Latin America and the Caribbean to help minimise the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis and foster responsible and sustainable businesses

### *Joint Statement by the ILO, the OECD, the OHCHR, the REDESCA of the IACHR, the UNICEF, the UN Global Compact and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights<sup>1</sup>*

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is rapidly spreading throughout the world, triggering an unprecedented health and human crisis that not only kills and spreads human suffering, but also upends people's lives and attacks societies at their core. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the crisis will also have severe and lasting consequences on the lives of people, as well as on the region's societies and economies. ILO estimates that, in the second quarter of 2020, working hours will decline by 5.7% – which is equivalent to 14 million full-time workers in the region, compared to the pre-crisis baseline (Q4 2019).<sup>2</sup>

The major economic and financial disruption brought by the COVID-19 crisis will most likely compound the region's sluggish economic growth and pre-existing structural vulnerabilities, profoundly affecting LAC businesses, workers and other stakeholders. Factors such as the rapid decline in the economic activity of main trading partners, disruption in global value chains, drop of commodity prices, increased risk aversion of investors, reduction in labour demand notably in the tourism, manufacturing, and retail sectors, and the fall of remittances will have a deep impact on LAC business activity. In a region where more than half of the population works in the informal economy, in microenterprises, or is self-employed, and does not have access to social safety nets, this in turn will have far-reaching consequences for the livelihoods of many households. The risk for them of slipping into poverty is considerable.<sup>3</sup> The COVID-19 crisis will thus not only put an enormous strain on the public health sector in various countries, it will also seriously affect LAC peoples' rights and, in particular, their economic and social rights. Women, who are overrepresented in sectors highly impacted by the pandemic or key to tackle it, will most likely be heavily affected, together with precarious workers and most vulnerable groups, such as children, elderly, migrants, and indigenous peoples.

<sup>1</sup> The International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Special Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights (REDESCA by its initials in Spanish) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Global Compact (UN Global Compact), and the Working Group on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises (the Working Group on Business and Human Rights). The Working Group on Business and Human Rights is mandated by the Human Rights Council to promote worldwide dissemination and implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (resolutions 17/4, 26/22, and 35/7). The Working Group is composed of five independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. The experts are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organisation.

<sup>2</sup> ILO (2020), [ILO Monitor 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: COVID-19 and the world of work, Briefing note "COVID-19 causes devastating losses in working hours and employment"](#).

<sup>3</sup> OECD Development Matters (2020), [Latin America and the Caribbean in the time of COVID-19: Preventing the vulnerable from falling behind](#).

LAC States, businesses, and employers and workers' organisations have a major role to play in designing and implementing responses to deal with the COVID-19 crisis and mitigate the adverse impacts that the crisis itself and the responses to it may have on people, the environment, and society. They have started taking emergency measures to address not only the health aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, but also its immediate economic, financial and social consequences, with a special focus on the protection of jobs and employment.<sup>4</sup> Long-term policy responses will also be needed, requiring a whole-of-government approach, in dialogue with business, labour, and affected people. Placing the respect of human, labour, and children's rights, the consideration of gender issues, the protection of the environment, and the promotion of integrity and anti-corruption, at the core of these immediate and long-term responses to foster sustainable enterprises and responsible business conduct (RBC) is of paramount importance.

The ILO, the OECD, the OHCHR, the REDESCA of the IACHR, the UNICEF, the UN Global Compact and its local networks, and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (together, the Signatories) stand ready to support LAC States, businesses, employers and workers' organisations, as well as other stakeholders, in addressing the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their respective ongoing work, projects in the region, and specific initiatives and guidance related to the COVID-19 crisis, the Signatories undertake to provide them all the necessary assistance to address the crisis' economic, financial and social consequences while upholding internationally recognised standards. They will help them navigate these difficult circumstances while fostering RBC to limit the infringement of human, labour, and children's rights, place a greater focus on gender issues, protect the environment, and promote integrity and anti-corruption. Joining forces to promote such standards and enable RBC in LAC during the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent recovery will be key to protect the most vulnerable, ensure responsible and sustainable recovery, and build long-term resilient and inclusive growth.

For more information on internationally recognised RBC standards:

- [ILO Tripartite Declaration on Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy](#)
- [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#)
- [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)
- [Responsible Business - Key messages from international instruments](#)
- [UNICEF Children's Rights and Business Principles](#)
- [UN Global Compact Ten Principles](#)
- [IACHR and REDESCA's thematic report on Business and Human Rights: Inter-American Standards](#)

For more information on the Signatories' initiatives/specific guidance related to the COVID-19 crisis:

- [ILO – Portal “COVID-19 and the world of work”](#)
- [ILO – Helpdesk for business on international labour standards' section on business and COVID-19](#)
- [ILO – An employer's guide on managing your workplace during COVID-19](#)
- [ILO – Country policy responses](#)
- [OECD – Portal “Tackling coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Contributing to a global effort”](#)
- [OECD – Country Policy Tracker: key country policy responses](#)
- [OECD – COVID-19 and Responsible Business Conduct](#)
- [OECD – COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional socio-economic implications and policy priorities](#)
- [OECD – Latin America and the Caribbean in the time of COVID-19: Preventing the vulnerable from falling behind](#)
- [OHCHR – Portal “COVID-19 and its human rights dimensions”](#)
- [UN Secretary General – Policy brief on COVID-19 and human rights](#)

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<sup>4</sup> The [OECD Country Policy Tracker](#) covers and updates daily the measures announced by more than 90 countries, including 14 Latin American countries.

- [UNICEF – 7 ways employers can support working parents during the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
- [UN Global Compact – Uniting business to respond to COVID-19](#)
- [IACHR and REDESCA – Press Release No. 060/20: IACHR and REDESCA urge States to guarantee comprehensive protection for human rights and public health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [IACHR – Resolution No. 01/2020 on the pandemic and human rights in the Americas](#)

For more information on the Signatories' specific projects in LAC:

- ILO-OECD-OHCHR Joint Project “Promoting Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean” (RBCLAC Project):
  - o ILO – [www.ilo.org/ceralc](http://www.ilo.org/ceralc)
  - o OECD – <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/rbclac.htm>.
  - o OHCHR – <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/JointProjectResponsibleBusinessConduct.aspx>
- UNICEF – [Implementation of Child Rights and Business Principles in few countries of LAC](#)
- UN Global Compact – [Take Action on Human Rights](#)