

**Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the  
Management of Electrical and Electronic Waste  
(e-waste)**Geneva  
9–11 April 2019**Points of consensus <sup>1</sup>**

The Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the management of electrical and electronic waste (e-waste),

Having met in Geneva from 9 to 11 April 2019,

Adopts this 11th day of April 2019, the ILO Centenary, the following points of consensus:

1. Increased demand for electrical and electronic equipment and devices has resulted in the rapid growth of e-waste, <sup>2</sup> which has become one of the fastest growing streams of waste in the world. Recycling and reuse rates are generally low. E-waste is expected to continue to grow at a significant rate and action should be taken by all countries to manage it better as a matter of urgency.
2. When e-waste is poorly managed, as is the case in many countries, it poses a severe threat to human health and the environment. Workers handling e-waste, their families and those living near disposal sites could be exposed to hazardous substances when no appropriate measures are taken.
3. While recognizing that e-waste represents challenges and opportunities in all countries, most work on the management of e-waste in some developing countries takes place in the informal economy in poor conditions, with limited opportunities for workers to organize and improve their livelihoods. While there is a lack of hard statistics, there are reports that in some countries a higher proportion of women than men work in particularly vulnerable situations, and that the work is sometimes carried out by children in contravention of the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).
4. E-waste differs from other streams of waste as it contains highly hazardous substances, as well as valuable materials, but also materials without current resale value. It is becoming an increasingly important resource for all economic units regardless of their size and for

<sup>1</sup> These points of consensus were adopted by the Global Dialogue Forum on 11 April 2019. In accordance with established procedures, they will be submitted to the Governing Body of the ILO at its 337th Session in October–November 2019 for its consideration.

<sup>2</sup> E-waste has been defined as any “electrical or electronic equipment that is waste, including all components, sub-assemblies and consumables that are part of the equipment at the time the equipment becomes waste”, *Technical guidelines on transboundary movements of electrical and electronic waste and used electrical and electronic equipment, in particular regarding the distinction between waste and non-waste under the Basel Convention* (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015, p. 19).

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informal workers along the e-waste value chain who recover, repair, refurbish, reuse, repurpose and recycle used electrical and electronic equipment, bring innovative services and products to the market and facilitate a transition to the circular economy.

5. With the right infrastructure, regulations, incentives, policies and processes in place to manage e-waste in ways that advance decent work and protect the environment, used electrical and electronic equipment has the potential to fuel the generation of sustainable enterprises and the creation of decent employment opportunities. This would be a significant step towards inclusive growth and decent work, more sustainable production and consumption, and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **Advancing decent work in the management of e-waste**

6. Coherent and effective laws, regulation and policies, as appropriate, that take into account international labour standards, where relevant, are key to advancing decent work in the management of e-waste. Social dialogue in all its forms is essential to engaging governments and employers' and workers' organizations in the formulation of such laws, regulations and policies, and to ensuring that they are effectively coordinated and implemented in practice. This in turn requires that freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to bargain collectively are guaranteed in law and practice.
7. The capacities of administrations engaged in ensuring decent work in e-waste management should be strengthened, and the coordination between key ministries and agencies at both the state and municipal levels should be enhanced. Strengthening the capacity of labour and environmental inspection should be an integral part of any future investment in e-waste systems. The capacity of trade unions to organize and employers' organizations to provide services, including more effective organization and convening of all relevant actors in the e-waste sector, should be enhanced.
8. The considerable risk of injuries, diseases, and death, inter alia from the absence of appropriate personal protective equipment, tools and processes that lead to the inappropriate handling of e-waste and exposure to its hazardous substances, should be addressed as a matter of urgency, including through the development of specialized equipment and processes, raising the awareness of e-waste workers about the hazards and risks that they face, and the development of inclusive learning and training tools and methodologies for e-waste workers, including those in the informal economy.
9. The high incidence of informality poses a major challenge for the enforcement of legislation, the growth of sustainable, productive and efficient enterprises, the improvement of the livelihoods and working conditions of e-waste workers, and the realization of their rights at work. The ILO's *Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)*, and *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (2015)*, provide guidance for governments and employers' and workers' organizations to help move millions of informal e-waste workers and thousands of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises into the formal economy, while ensuring that livelihoods are preserved and improved.
10. Cooperatives and other social and solidarity economy organizations and enterprises perform a key role in e-waste management in many countries. They have promoted the rights of informal workers, advocated their inclusion and recognition, and created formal and decent work opportunities.
11. The conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2007, including aspects of corporate social responsibility, should be used by governments and employers' and workers' organizations

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to foster an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises in the e-waste sector in order to harness the potential of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to create decent jobs, introduce new technologies, bring innovative business models to the market and contribute to productivity growth, thereby advancing decent work and environmental sustainability.

12. There is an urgent need to raise awareness about the growing challenge of e-waste management and effectively engage all relevant stakeholders, such as governments, employers, producers, workers and consumers, to promote sustainable production and consumption, advance decent work and protect the environment during the entire life cycle of electrical and electronic equipment, in particular through e-waste recovery, reuse and recycling. There is a need for more reliable, consistent and gender disaggregated data and statistics, analysis and research about ways to effectively address decent work challenges, particularly in the informal economy. While respecting intellectual property rights, there is also a need for more information about relevant aspects of design, materials, business models, market opportunities and skills that can facilitate greater recovery, reuse, repair, refurbishment and recycling of electrical and electronic equipment in ways that advance decent work opportunities for all.

### **Recommendations for future action by the International Labour Organization and its Members**

13. Governments should increase and promote investment in waste management infrastructure and systems at all levels, as appropriate, to manage the rapidly growing flows of e-waste in ways that advance decent work. Employers should, where appropriate, find a way to effectively contribute to and promote these investments. Public-private partnerships could be a useful modality for these investments. Priority should be given to managing e-waste locally, where possible.
14. Governments have the duty to adopt, implement and enforce labour laws and regulations to ensure that the fundamental principles and rights at work and ratified international labour Conventions protect and apply to all workers engaged in the management of e-waste.
15. Governments and employers' and workers' organizations should engage, as appropriate, in all forms of effective social dialogue at all levels to advance decent work in e-waste management and support a just transition towards environmental sustainability in e-waste management. Governments, together with employers' and workers' organizations, should develop and implement coherent policies, strategies and measures to:
  - (a) collect data, generate knowledge and raise awareness on decent work in the management of e-waste, including a better understanding of the functioning of the e-waste value chain;
  - (b) promote the culture of and protect the safety and health of all e-waste workers and improve their working conditions through labour inspection and other measures;
  - (c) support the formalization of enterprises, cooperatives and workers in the informal e-waste economy;
  - (d) extend the coverage of social protection to e-waste workers and their families;
  - (e) promote cooperatives and other social and solidarity economy organizations and enterprises in the e-waste sector; and

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- (f) create an enabling environment for micro, small, medium and large enterprises that provide sustainable services and products along the e-waste value chain and that enhance productivity growth.

**16.** The Office should continue its work to:

- (a) promote the ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards relevant to the management of e-waste, as well as the respect, promotion and realization of the fundamental principles and rights at work, and build the capacity of constituents in this regard;
- (b) support member States with the collection and dissemination of data and statistics, disaggregated by gender, branch of activity and urban–rural population, as well as information on e-waste management, including on the number of workers involved, conditions of work, technology used, safety and health, gender equality and discrimination, skills, employment and productivity;
- (c) develop and share knowledge, experience and evidence-based country case studies, map good practices, including the use of equipment and processes to perform work safely, and raise awareness about decent work in e-waste management;
- (d) analyse the structure and trends in the e-waste management sector in an integrated way, including the value generated, potential for green job creation, efficiencies and productivity improvements and skills requirements in different segments of the e-waste value chain;
- (e) organize training for representatives of governments and employers' and workers' organizations to enhance their capacity to advance decent work in e-waste management;
- (f) adapt existing participatory tools on the improvement of occupational safety and health, work practices, skills and social security for use in the e-waste sector;
- (g) design and implement development cooperation programmes and projects and south–south collaboration to advance decent work in the management of e-waste; and
- (h) continue and strengthen international cooperation, collaboration and coordination with other international organizations.

**17.** The Office should undertake evidence-based research on decent work in the management of e-waste. This research is to inform possible future action of the ILO, including the possibility of convening a meeting to be decided by the Governing Body to develop guidelines or a code of practice to advance decent and sustainable work in the management of e-waste.