

## **ILO Helpdesk for Business**

Update report on the expert advice service and web site  
March 2020



# **ILO PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE COMPANIES WITH EXPERT ADVICE ON THE REALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS AND THE MNE DECLARATION**

## **Update report March 2020**

Since 2009 the ILO Helpdesk for Business service has answered individual questions on the application of the principles contained in international labour standards to company operations. It is a free and confidential service open to anyone, but mainly used by companies and, to a lesser extent, workers and their representatives.

In October 2010 the Helpdesk established a dedicated website where companies, trade unions, governments and others can find information, practical tools and training opportunities and questions and answers to help them put the principles of the MNE Declaration into practice. The web site is available in English, French and Spanish, and mirror sites exist in Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai.

Every year, MULTI produces a report for the ILO Helpdesk tripartite Advisory Committee of the ILO's Governing Body. The reporting period covers the period 1 March-28 February, to allow for a comparison over the years as well as to compile cumulative totals. This report covers the period 1 March 2019-28 February 2020.

The ILO Helpdesk for Business is promoted among governments, employers and workers as part of the promotional activities of the MNE Declaration. The International Training Center of the ILO in Turin also distributes promotional materials during relevant trainings.

A promotional leaflet on the ILO Helpdesk exists in English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Myanmar, Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese and is widely distributed among constituents, enterprises and partners in development cooperation project. Some are making reference of the ILO Helpdesk on their own web site (such as the ASEAN Confederation of Employers, the Employers' Confederation of Philippines (ECOP), and the Employers' Confederation of Thailand (ECOT)). Other ILO development cooperation projects that work with companies, such as the Fair Migration Project in the Middle East (FAIRWAY), are also promoting it.

The EU-ILO-OECD [Responsible Supply Chains in Asia](#) project, covering six countries in Asia (China, Japan, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam; 2018-2020) produced a publication on "Labour Issues in CSR: Examples from the ILO Helpdesk for Businesses Q&A", which was translated into Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Myanmar language. In December 2019, the project organized a webinar with the Manager of the Helpdesk to present the service to 37 participants from employers' and business members' organizations, enterprises as well as trade unions and labour related CSOs. Furthermore, the project actively promotes the ILO Helpdesk for Business through its country-level activities for ILO constituents as well as business.

The [EU-ILO-OECD-OHCHR Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), covering nine countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru) actively promotes the Helpdesk for Business, both in relation to governments encouraging responsible business through NAPs and in relation to supporting business while conducting due diligence.

The EU-ILO-UNWOMEN [Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment at Work](#) through responsible business conduct in G7 countries, with a specific focus on the United States, Canada and Japan actively promotes the Helpdesk for Business in its activities and knowledge products.

The services and materials of the ILO Helpdesk for Business are widely made available in Pakistan, through the [More and Better Jobs through Socially Responsible Labour Practices](#) project operating in the sports goods manufacturing industry.

The Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Tokyo 2020) launched a webpage featuring its [partnership with the ILO](#). Presented as one of their major initiatives in promoting sustainability through the 2020 Games, the new webpage features the ILO Helpdesk for Business, and makes available its resource materials and tools for the Games' delivery partners (available in [English](#) and [Japanese](#)). All activities under this partnership (Sustainability Forums as well as technical products) introduce the ILO Helpdesk for Business.

Other ILO departments and programmes also promote the service, notably [NORMES](#), and the service features on the [homepage of the ILO website](#).

A number of governments have included the ILO Helpdesk for Business in their National Action Plans (NAPs) on business and human rights or related web sites, as a supporting service for businesses including in the context of due diligence (Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland). The [UN Global Compact](#) also continued to promote the service, including in the context of the [business response to covid-19](#) and the UNGC Action Platform on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains.

## ***1. Expert Advice Service of the ILO Helpdesk for Business***

### **A. Number of queries and users**

The Helpdesk has answered 1317 individual queries since its establishment in 2009. During the period March 2019 – February 2020, **the Helpdesk answered 127 receivable requests, which is a 24.5% increase over the previous reporting period (102 requests)**. This increase pushed up the annual average 9%, from 109 to 119.

This overview does not include the number of questions received following the global spread of covid-19 and its disruptions in business operations and impact on labour markets,

as this falls outside of the reporting period ending on 28 February. However, it is important to note that since 1 March 2020 the Helpdesk has already received 79 questions, for an average of 5.2 questions per week, compared to an average this reporting period of 2.3.

**Table 1: Breakdown of Users by Type**

	<b>March 2019 – February 2020</b>	<b>Cumulative total</b>
<b>Workers or Trade Unions</b>	27	133
<b>Employers’ organizations</b>	0	2
<b>Governments</b>	2	77
<b>Initiatives</b>	7	25
<b>Inter-governmental</b>	3	13
<b>MNEs</b>	71	765
<b>SMEs</b>	2	23
<b>Suppliers</b>	1	14
<b>Researchers</b>	6	92
<b>NGOs</b>	3	21
<b>Unknown</b>	5	58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>1223</b>

MNEs continue to be by far the largest group of users of the Helpdesk, followed by trade unions and individual workers. Researchers were the third most important group of users this period, most of whom were graduate students doing masters or doctoral theses on some labour-related aspect of responsible business.

## **B. Regional origin of the users and scope of the queries**

Table 2 provides a breakdown of users by region. (NB: not all queries contained sufficient information to identify the region of the user) Western Europe continues to be the most frequent source of requests but the number of users from East Asia and the Middle East increased the most during this period. Growth in questions from East Asia may be linked in part to the increased promotion of the Helpdesk service as part of country-level assistance and development cooperation projects in Asia, promotional work stemming from the MoU with Tokyo 2020, as well as the availability of mirror websites in Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese. Growth in questions concerning the Middle East may be linked—at least partly—to FAIRWAY, which references the Helpdesk in various tools and resources for business.

**Table 2: Users by region**

	March 2019 – February 2020	Cumulative total
<b>Africa</b>	5	71
<b>Pacific</b>	0	16
<b>Caribbean</b>	2	19
<b>Central Asia</b>	8	60
<b>East Asia</b>	19	113
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	0	33
<b>Latin America</b>	8	108
<b>Middle East</b>	10	57
<b>North America</b>	0	52
<b>Western Europe</b>	53	528
<b>International</b>	30	216

Table 3 provides a breakdown of regions identified in the queries, if any. During this period, the bulk of specified regions pertained to either East Asia, the Middle East or Latin America. Growth in questions concerning the Middle East rose by the most, from 5 to 11 questions (120%). The majority of these questions concerned either forced labour issues in Qatar or conditions of work for migrant workers in Jordan; questions concerning the latter were in two cases linked to Better Work Jordan and participating buyers. Meanwhile, questions concerning Central Asia dropped significantly, from 12 to 7 (-42%) as well as Eastern Europe (from 4 to 0 or -100%); and to a lesser extent questions concerning Latin America, from 18 to 14 (-22%).

Global/unspecified questions continue to dominate as many questions typically concern the companies' codes of conduct or their general operating policies and how these relate to, or can be better aligned with, international labour standards and the MNE Declaration rather than addressing specific issues in their own operations or their business relationships and supply chains.

**Table 3: Regional focus of queries**

	March 2019 – February 2020	Cumulative total
<b>Africa</b>	6	114
<b>Caribbean</b>	2	27
<b>Central Asia</b>	7	121
<b>East Asia</b>	28	169
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	0	53
<b>Latin America</b>	14	121
<b>Middle East</b>	11	106
<b>North America</b>	0	13
<b>Western Europe</b>	1	74
<b>Global/unspecified</b>	58	614

### C. Sectors covered in the queries

Table 4 indicates which sectors were specified in queries. A large proportion of questions are not sector specific, as usual. Of those which identified a sector (directly or through identifying their company), there was a jump in questions concerning the electronics and textiles sectors and a drop to zero in four sectors—food dropped from 2 to 0; forestry, ITC and utilities all decreased from 1 to 0. The biggest increase concerned the health care sector (from 0 to 5 questions) due at least in part to calls for tenders on public contracts for healthcare providers which referenced the FPRW and ILO.

**Table 4: Sectors concerned**

	March 2019 – February 2020	Cumulative total
<b>Agriculture</b>	14	82
<b>Artisanal</b>	0	3
<b>Biofuels</b>	0	9
<b>Chemicals</b>	0	28
<b>Construction</b>	4	54
<b>Electronics</b>	17	62
<b>Extractives</b>	2	49
<b>Finance</b>	1	75
<b>Food</b>	0	38
<b>Forestry</b>	0	4
<b>Garments and textiles</b>	13	29
<b>Health services</b>	5	18
<b>Heavy manufacturing</b>	3	42
<b>ITC</b>	0	23
<b>Light manufacturing</b>	12	75
<b>Pharmaceuticals</b>	0	14
<b>Printing/Publishing</b>	0	4
<b>Public services</b>	5	42
<b>Retail</b>	0	30
<b>Services</b>	4	68
<b>Shipping</b>	7	42
<b>Utilities</b>	0	4
<b>Not specified</b>	40	422

### D. Issues raised in the queries

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the issues raised in the queries during this reporting period. The topic for which the highest number of queries have been received during the reporting period is once again occupational safety and health, although migrant workers, hours of work and wages, forced labour and child labour continued to be common subjects of queries. The Helpdesk also continued to receive a steady stream

of requests for statistical data on labour issues, mainly from statistical offices, public actuarial offices and private insurance companies.

**Table 5: Break down of questions by area of MNE Declaration**

AREA OF MNE DECLARATION	CATEGORY	MARCH 2019 – FEBRUARY 2020	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	Compliance with national law	2	44
	Compliance with principles of ILS	3	70
	Definitions	3	28
	Forced labour	16	97
	FPRW	3	31
	ILO approach to CSR	0	26
	ILO approach to sustainable enterprises	0	5
	ILS and productivity	0	3
	Migrant workers	18	84
	Special categories of workers	5	52
	Child labour	15	103
	Employment promotion	0	11
	Non-discrimination	8	67
	Termination of employment	9	63
	Employment Relationship	1	5
<b>SKILLS AND TRAINING</b>	Other	9	38
	Skills and training	0	12
<b>CONDITIONS OF WORK AND LIFE</b>	General	0	15
	HIV/AIDS	0	2
	Hours of work	9	72
	Housing/Food	0	15
	OSH	18	128
	Paid leave	0	11
	Privacy	1	7
	Social security	5	26
	Wages	11	78
<b>INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS</b>	Collective bargaining	2	26
	Freedom of association	0	28
	Social dialogue	0	12
<b>OTHER</b>	Helpdesk operations	0	18
	Interpretation procedure	0	3
	Requests for collaboration	0	15
	Company Union Dialogue	0	2
	Statistical information	12	57
	Miscellaneous	9	58
	MNE Declaration as an instrument	0	20
<b>MNE DECLARATION</b>			

## **II. ILO Helpdesk for Business Website**

The website in English, French and Spanish has been regularly and consistently updated with new ILO publications, news concerning activities of the existing ILO Business Networks, webinar recordings and information on the ILO training offer relevant to enterprises. Mirror sites are now available in [Chinese](#), [Japanese](#), and are regularly updated.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new section of the Helpdesk web site on [Business and COVID-19](#) was created on 6 April 2020. The new section serves as a one-stop shop for enterprises on relevant ILO COVID-19 resources, including guidance, tools, webinar announcements and recordings, as well as links to key ILO publications, databases and web pages.

### **A. General data on website visitors<sup>1</sup>**

Table 6 provides a summary of activity until the end of February 2020. **The table demonstrates a significant increase in the number of users with an increase of 65% compared to the same period last year.** A total of 730,883 users consulted the ILO Helpdesk for Business web site since its creation in 2010.

**The average number of visits per month is of 21,260 for the reporting period (March 2019 to February 2020), the highest since its creation and an increase of 67% compared to the same period last year.** The web site totals more than a million page views.

**Table 6: Helpdesk Website Activity: yearly comparisons<sup>2</sup> and total**

	<b>2011 - 2012</b>	<b>2012 – 2013</b>	<b>2013 – 2014</b>	<b>2014 - 2015</b>	<b>2015 - 2016</b>	<b>2016 – 2017</b>	<b>2017- 2018</b>
<b>Visits (average/ month)</b>	19,717 (1,643)	46,144 (3,845)	55,491 (4,624)	72,421 (6,035)	74,705 (6,225)	82,349 (6,862)	75,742 (6,311)
<b>Users</b>	16,355	40,656	48,937	66,609	67,954	75,376	67,178
<b>% of new users</b>	60%	72.5%	76%	79.65%	78,27%	80,88%	82.5%

<sup>1</sup> The data is gathered through Google Analytics for the main web site available in English, French and Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> Years are: March 2011 – February 2012, March 2012 – February 2013, March 2013 – February 2014, March 2014 – February 2015, March 2015-February 2016, March 2016- February 2017, March 2017-February 2018, March 2018-February 2019, and March 2019-February 2020. The Website was launched in October 2010 so data for 2010 are excluded.



<b>Countries or territories visitors are located in</b>	144	194	205	209	213	210	210
<b>Pages viewed</b>	48,031	68,364	75,821	94,791	96,984	102,819	97,905

	<b>2018 - 2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>Overall Total</b>
<b>Visits (average/ month)</b>	152,218 (12,684)	255,124 (21,260)	833,911 (7,721)
<b>Users</b>	135,706	224,332	743,103
<b>% of new users</b>	82.2%	81.9%	80.1%
<b>Countries or territories visitors are located in</b>	212	212	-
<b>Pages viewed</b>	222,013	367,447	1,270,966

## B. Geographical Distribution of users

The users were located in all five regions. The Americas remains the region where the majority of users are coming from.

	<b>2011 – 2012</b>	<b>2012 – 2013</b>	<b>2013 – 2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>
<b>Africa</b>	1,471 (7.42%)	2,512 (5.43%)	3,259 (5.86%)	3,456 (4.77%)	2,656 (4.49%)	3,416 (5.13%)	3,590 (5.29%)
<b>Americas</b>	7,128 (35.93%)	23,962 (51.79%)	33,068 (59.50%)	46,929 (64.80%)	40,748 (68.83%)	44,830 (67.31%)	44,706 (65.83%)
<b>Asia</b>	3,088 (15.57%)	5,320 (11.50%)	4,867 (8.76%)	6,284 (8.68%)	5,786 (9.77%)	5,611 (8.42 %)	6,756 (9.95%)
<b>Europe</b>	7,358 (37.09%)	12,263 (26.50%)	11,851 (21.32%)	14,325 (19.78%)	8,959 (15.13%)	11,576 (17.38%)	11,708 (17.24%)
<b>Oceania</b>	448 (2.26%)	875 (1.89%)	1,298 (2.34%)	1,123 (1.55%)	800 (1.35%)	710 (1.07%)	921 (1.36%)
<b>Unknown</b>	344 (1.73%)	1,339 (2.89%)	1,233 (2.22%)	304 (0.42%)	250 (0.42%)	458 (0.69%)	235 (0.35%)

	2018-2019	2019-2020
<b>Africa</b>	6,825 (5.03%)	12,392 (5.49%)
<b>Americas</b>	99,240 (73.07%)	173,530 (76.90%)
<b>Asia</b>	9,923 (7.31%)	12,138 (5.38%)
<b>Europe</b>	18,433 (13.57%)	25,742 (11.41%)
<b>Oceania</b>	1,240 (0.91%)	1,452 (0.64%)
<b>Unknown</b>	155 (0.11%)	410 (0.18%)

### The top 25 countries overall were:

- |                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mexico         | 14. Costa Rica         |
| 2. Colombia       | 15. Dominican Republic |
| 3. Peru           | 16. South Africa       |
| 4. Spain          | 17. Honduras           |
| 5. Argentina      | 18. Panama             |
| 6. Ecuador        | 19. United Kingdom     |
| 7. Chile          | 20. Venezuela          |
| 8. Bolivia        | 21. Philippines        |
| 9. Guatemala      | 22. Morocco            |
| 10. United States | 23. Australia          |
| 11. France        | 24. Switzerland        |
| 12. India         | 25. Malaysia           |
| 13. El Salvador   |                        |

Two of the top 25 countries<sup>3</sup> (France and Switzerland) mention the ILO Helpdesk for Business as a supporting service for businesses in their National Action Plans on business and human rights or related web sites.

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<sup>3</sup> The following countries are making reference to the ILO Helpdesk in their national action plan on Business and Human Rights : Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland

### C. Most Visited Webpages

The top 10 consulted Helpdesk Webpages were:

Web page	Page views
1. Q&A on business and freedom of association (in Spanish)	64,087
2. Q&A on business, discrimination and equality (in Spanish)	57,186
3. Q&As on business and occupational safety and health (in Spanish)	29,903
4. Business, discrimination and equality (in Spanish)	16,144
5. Q&As on business and collective bargaining (in Spanish)	11,722
6. Business and Freedom of Association (in Spanish)	9,878
7. Q&As on wages (in Spanish)	7,288
8. Business and collective bargaining (in Spanish)	7,187
9. Home page in English	6,417
10. Business and occupational safety and health (in Spanish)	5,899

### D. Site Traffic Sources

During the reporting period (March 2019 to February 2020), 92.6% of the users have accessed the Helpdesk web site through organic search via search engines, 6.5% accessed it directly (taping the URL directly in their browser or clicking on a link from their bookmarks, emails or PDF documents), which represented a slight increase of 1.5% compares to the previous reporting period. Only 0.7% were referred to the Helpdesk website from another web site and the remaining accessed it via social media or a reference in an e-mail.