



# Governing Body

341st Session, Geneva, March 2021

Institutional Section

INS

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Fourth item on the agenda

## COVID-19 and the world of work

Elements of a potential International Labour Conference (109th Session) outcome document on a global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis

### Purpose of the document

The Governing Body is invited to provide guidance on the building blocks for the International Labour Conference outcome document. Subject to its guidance, a draft outcome document will be prepared and circulated for consultation ahead of the International Labour Conference (see the draft decision in paragraph 12).

**Relevant strategic objective:** All.

**Main relevant outcome:** Work across the outcomes on issues relevant to a human-centred recovery.

**Policy implications:** Yes

**Legal implications:** None.

**Financial implications:** Potentially, subject to the decision of the Governing Body.

**Follow-up action required:** As indicated in the draft decision.

**Author unit:** Research Department (RESEARCH).

**Related documents:** [GB.340/HL/2](#); [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#).



1. At its 340th Session (October–November 2020), the Governing Body discussed a paper entitled “COVID-19 and the world of work.”<sup>1</sup> It considered how the human-centred approach articulated in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work might best be brought to bear on the extraordinary challenges that the COVID-19 crisis posed to recovery in the world of work, and proposed that the ILO’s contribution to the recovery be framed within an overarching initiative to facilitate an integrated response to the crisis.
2. Following discussion, the Governing Body requested the Director-General: (a) to develop proposals, taking into account the guidance provided by the Governing Body, for a global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is sustainable and resilient, through the accelerated and focused implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration; and (b) to organize tripartite consultations to identify possible alternatives for consideration by the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (June 2021), and with a view to presenting to the Governing Body at its 341st Session (March 2021) appropriate proposals on the content and format of such response, as well as on the process to reach a tripartite agreement.<sup>2</sup>
3. A short paper outlining possible draft elements was prepared and consultations were held with each of the tripartite constituents during the week of 11 January 2021.
4. As a result of those initial consultations, a second paper was prepared to further identify building blocks for a possible outcome document and was discussed in a tripartite consultation on 12 February 2021.
5. A wide range of issues were considered during the consultation, and drawing from that discussion this paper seeks to present revised building blocks for the outcome document for debate and guidance by the Governing Body.
6. During the consultation, there was evident convergence of views that the outcome document would need to be an inspiring action-oriented document that built on the ILO Centenary Declaration as the basis of a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that the Centenary Declaration was a carefully negotiated document and that the outcome document should be consistent with its language.
7. Several representatives expressed a preference for an outcome document that included specific proposals and identified the areas of urgent action needed for recovery in the world of work. There was clear support for the outcome document to draw attention to those most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, including women, youth and other vulnerable groups. Many made reference to the importance of occupational safety and health in recovery plans. Additional areas of emphasis included social protection, especially for the most vulnerable, the importance of skills development and addressing informality.
8. It was suggested that sustained, inclusive and resilient growth from the recovery should include strategies for all types of workers and all businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. The outcome document could address issues of work arrangements, such as telework, with appropriate access to support and training for such measures. It should include the need to take advantage of the opportunities presented by an inclusive, resilient and green recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> GB.340/HL/2.

<sup>2</sup> GB.340/HL/PV, para 78.

9. Strong support was expressed for identification of a specific menu of policy options for Member States to consider in the context of the response and recovery. It was proposed that consideration be given to framing options under the ILO's four-pillar policy framework for recovery. Many representatives emphasized that social dialogue and tripartite cooperation would be key, as well as international cooperation and solidarity in order to truly build back better.
10. It was requested that the Office engage in an interactive consultation process over the coming months and provide further information as to the possible arrangements for consideration of the outcome document at the International Labour Conference. With regard to the latter, the attention of the Governing Body is drawn to the paper before it on *Arrangements for the 109th Session of the Conference (2021)*.<sup>3</sup>
11. In view of the consultations to date, the Governing Body may wish to request the Office to prepare a draft outcome document for consultations in April–May 2021.

## ▶ Draft decision

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12. **The Governing Body provided guidance on the building blocks for a potential outcome document on a global response for a human-centred recovery as detailed in the appendix of document GB.341/INS/4, and requested the Office to prepare a draft outcome document for consultations.**

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<sup>3</sup> GB.341/INS/3/2.

## ▶ Appendix

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### **Building blocks for an International Labour Conference outcome document: A global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis**

#### **A. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world of work**

Considering that:

- the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on humanity, underlining the interdependence of all members of society and the indivisibility of human security;
- in addition to the tragic loss of life, the pandemic has devastated the world of work, including:
  - increased unemployment and inactivity, particularly for young people and for women;
  - huge losses in labour income, and an increase in informality and precarity;
  - enterprise closures and bankruptcies, particularly in the hardest-hit sectors;
- the pandemic has struck the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in the world of work disproportionately, exposing and exacerbating pre-existing decent work deficits, increasing poverty and posing serious additional challenges to the achievement of social justice;
- the impact on the world of work, including the acceleration in remote work, will endure well beyond the pandemic itself and risks generating still greater inequalities, social injustices, and insecurities, and has profound implications for the achievement of the objectives of the ILO and of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda);
- THEREFORE a global response is required to ensure that the economic and social recovery from the crisis is as human-centered in its impact as the effects of the crisis have been.

#### **B. The ILO Centenary Declaration as the basis of a global response for a human-centred recovery**

Considering also that:

- an effective global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic requires the combined action of all governments and workers' and employers' organizations and of international organizations;
- such a response should address pre-existing world of work challenges as well as the immediate impact of the pandemic with a view to building forward better;
- business continuity, income security and solidarity are key in preventing the spread of the virus, and protect lives and livelihoods and support and build resilient economies and societies. For this, the global economy needs urgent measures and policies that reach the real economy, all workers, including the self-employed and non-permanent,

casual and informal workers, and all businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's);

- the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work provides an internationally agreed road map for action to this end, and the crisis has made acceleration of its implementation through increased emphasis and investment urgent;
- the Centenary Declaration calls for strengthening the capacities of all women and men to benefit from the opportunities of a changing world of work; strengthening the institutions of work to ensure adequate protection of all workers; and promoting resilient, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, in order to provide the conditions for a human-centered recovery based on equity, shared prosperity and environmentally friendly growth and development;
- these actions and others provide a solid foundation for efforts by Member States to strengthen simultaneously their social contracts and enabling environments for sustainable enterprises, and they are the natural and necessary complement to the urgent health measures required to protect all people from the COVID-19 virus;
- THEREFORE, sustained, increased effort and investment across these domains should be made a top priority of public policy and international cooperation.

### **C. Urgent action to advance a human-centred recovery based on implementation of the Centenary Declaration**

Member States therefore commit:

- to work, individually and collectively, for focused and accelerated implementation of the Centenary Declaration so as to build forward better from the current economic and social crisis through a human-centred recovery that advances progress on a trajectory of sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth with decent work for all;
- to employ social dialogue, tripartite cooperation and respect for international labour standards as the basis for the construction of recovery strategies;
- to address the global dimensions of the crisis through international and regional cooperation, solidarity and policy coherence, in the economic, social, environmental as well as the health domain, so that all countries are able to access the instruments and resources needed to overcome the pandemic as part of accelerated delivery of the UN 2030 Agenda and a green transition in order to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change;
- to place the aim of full and productive employment and decent work as well as the protection of working women and men, the needs of the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the pandemic and the support of enterprises, jobs and incomes at the heart of strategies for human-centred recovery and building forward better from the crisis. In this regard they will give active consideration to:

#### **1. Stimulating broad-based economic growth and employment creation**

- Maintain accommodative macroeconomic policies for full and productive employment.
- Promote global solidarity through support for developing countries experiencing crisis-related reductions in fiscal and monetary policy space or unsustainable external debt obligations.

- Provide financial support to maintain business continuity and resilience to crisis impacts, particularly for SMEs and sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, and preserve domestic and global supply chains.
- Stimulate investment in employment-intensive sectors, including sustainable infrastructure, the green economy, the health and care economy, and the digital economy.
- Provide incentives to employers to retain workers despite crisis-related reduction of business activity, including work-sharing and shorter working weeks, wage subsidies, temporary tax and social security contribution suspensions, as well as access to various business support measures conditioned on retention of workers.
- Provide public employment programmes and subsidies to sustain jobs and livelihoods through the crisis, including targeted strategies to create decent job opportunities for hard-hit or vulnerable groups such as young people, women, people with disabilities, low-paid and low-skilled workers and migrant workers.
- Implement measures to assist workers and employers in informal micro and small enterprises, alongside support for formal enterprises.

## **2. Providing broad-based support for household incomes and labour market transitions**

- Maintain income support for workers and households contending with crisis-related loss or reduction of income.
- Sustain compensation for workers for reductions in earnings through wage supplements.
- Increase investment in active labour market policies to make the necessary investments in workers' training, including in core and employability skills, to facilitate relocation or re-employment and job-search assistance, and to provide intermediation support.
- Provide targeted interventions to enable the effective integration of young people into productive employment and to reverse crisis-related increases in the levels of young people not in employment, education or training.
- Address the critical income and employment transition needs of vulnerable workers in the crisis including persons with disabilities, migrant workers, refugees, indigenous and tribal peoples, and ethnic and racial minorities.
- Ensure households can maintain access to adequate healthcare, housing, utilities, education and other social services.
- Expand access to paid sick leave and family leave, ensuring coverage in cases of quarantine and self-isolation, and developing faster benefits-delivery mechanisms.
- Adjust work processes and flexible work arrangements through measures such as teleworking, grounded on dialogue and cooperation between management and workers, with access to appropriate equipment, technical support and training for managers and teleworkers.
- Ensure gender equality in the provision of all forms of support for a human-centred recovery.

### **3. Building forward better through stronger worker and social protection, environmental sustainability and economic resilience**

- In recognition of the essential role of the ILO's normative framework in fostering inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies and a human-centred recovery, reinforce respect for international labour standards, with particular attention to those areas where serious gaps have been revealed by the crisis.
- Promote adequate and effective protection for all workers and more resilient workplaces through investment in national and enterprise occupational safety and health systems based on a preventive approach.
- Increase investment through domestic resource mobilization and greater global solidarity to ensure universal access to social protection systems, including floors, that provide comprehensive and adequate benefits that meet people's needs independent of their employment status, including by transitioning temporary crisis measures in line with international security standards and closing gaps in recognition that such systems ensure income security and health protection, enable people to navigate life and work transitions, promote gender equality, accelerate transitions from the informal to formal economy and ensure that no one is left behind.
- Increase investment in effective skills development, lifelong learning and quality education for all.
- Increase investment in a transformative agenda for gender equality with a focus on strengthening skills, training and support, attaining a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, tackling the undervaluation of women's work including through wage transparency, enhancing working conditions in the care economy, and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, including that enabled by information and communication technologies.
- Prevent discrimination and exclusion during and after the crisis by enhancing and enforcing laws and policies on equality and non-discrimination in employment and adopting targeted and integrated policy measures to achieve equality in practice.
- Promote sustainable enterprises, including SMEs, through an enabling environment, business resilience, productivity enhancement, environmental sustainability, enterprise formalization, entrepreneurship and business development underpinned by responsible business conduct on the basis of social dialogue and international labour standards.
- Accelerate investment in the implementation of national strategies to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, including low-carbon just transition in line with the Paris Agreement.

### **4. Relying on social dialogue to shape and sustain effective solutions**

- Undertake social dialogue by governments, employers' and workers' organizations to design and implement human-centred recovery strategies, policies and programmes.
- Create an enabling environment for sound labour relations in the recovery process through legal and institutional frameworks based on international labour standards, and promoting and realizing the enabling rights of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.



- Equip labour administrations and other relevant government institutions with necessary institutional and knowledge capacity so that they can fulfil their policy functions.
- Invest in the institutions of social dialogue on conditions of work and employment to ensure protection of workers, support business continuity and design solutions tailored to the specific needs of industries, sectors and enterprises.

#### **D. The role of the ILO in the human-centred recovery**

And call on the ILO to promote, through all means at its disposal and consistent with its programme and budget and Strategic Plan the implementation of the Centenary Declaration for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and future of work, and in this context:

- to support fully the human-centred recovery strategies of its Member States including through constituent capacity-building, and evidence-based policy advice, research, statistics generation and advocacy based on the implementation of international labour standards and pursuit of social justice;
- to take a lead in building forward better by strengthening institutional arrangements with international, regional and other organizations with a view to achieving coherent action in support of human-centered recovery;
- to take all opportunities to harness the efforts of, and promote concrete cooperation with, other international organizations in support of a human-centered recovery in line with the Centenary Declaration, including through:
  - an integrated approach to the provision of technical and financial support of national human-centred recovery strategies;
  - cooperation in the design and implementation of financing strategies for the establishment and expansion of social protection systems in line with the objective of universal social protection with a solid protection floor, anchored in ILO social security standards;
  - coordination of strengthened decent work policies and international capacity-building assistance with international trade and investment policies to help ensure that the benefits of international trade and investment are widely shared;
  - analysis and promotion of the employment creation and broader decent work potential of accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including with respect to green jobs, gender equality and the reduction of inequalities, and provision of technical cooperation in support of country strategies to realize such potential;
  - examination of the macroeconomic effects of increased investment in the human-centred approach framed by the Centenary Declaration;
  - prioritization and mainstreaming of strategies to address informality, including formalization and, as a first step, reduction of decent work deficits of informal workers, in development cooperation;

- prioritization and coordination of investment in the capacity of labour institutions to translate international labour standards into national law and practice and to ensure their full implementation;
- to contribute actively to the efforts of the UN system at the national and international level to ensure delivery of the 2030 Agenda and to promote all areas of multilateral cooperation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.