



International Labour Organization



Arab Labour Organization

**Arab Employment Forum
19-21 October 2009
Hotel Metropolitan Palace - Beirut, Lebanon**

Background Note

Introduction

Since the global financial and economic crisis erupted, the ILO has identified a number of serious employment and labour market repercussions of the ensuing economic recession. Faced with the prospect of a prolonged global increase in unemployment, poverty and inequality and the continuing collapse of enterprises, the ILO constituents adopted the Global Jobs Pact in the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2009). The Global Jobs Pact was the Decent Work response to the crisis, as agreed by the ILO's tripartite constituency, and proposes actions that can be carried out immediately at both the national and international levels. The strategic objective of the Global Jobs Pact is to place employment and labour market issues, together with social protection and respect for workers' rights, at the heart of stimulus packages and other relevant national policies to confront the crisis. The use of social dialogue to define and implement policies is seen as a key consensus-building tool. The Global Jobs Pact has been receiving increasing international support through commitments in the G8 Declaration and the United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution, which both call on States to adopt the Pact as a general framework in the formulation of national policy packages specific to local situations and priorities.

Prior to the current crisis, the ILO and the ALO established a process for achieving Decent Work in the Arab region. At the 14th Asian Regional Meeting held in Busan, Korea in August 2006, tripartite delegates launched an Asian Decent Work Decade up to 2015 and committed to the achievement of specific decent work outcomes during this period, in accordance with their respective national circumstances and priorities. The Meeting also called for the ILO to "convene a regional event on growth, employment and decent work". The Asia and Pacific region held such an event in Beijing in August 2007. To follow up on these conclusions, it was proposed that a Forum should be convened for all 22 Arab States. The upcoming Arab Employment Forum will be an avenue for reinforcing the application of the Global Employment Agenda at the national level, within the framework of the Decent Work Agenda and particularly through Decent Work country programmes. It will also provide countries with strategies to move further towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The 11th African Regional Meeting, which took place in Addis Ababa in April 2007, launched the African Decent Work Decade up to 2015, where tripartite delegations committed themselves to achieve a series of targets for the development of integrated Decent Work

Country Programmes. In doing so, progress towards the achievement of agreed decent work outcomes and international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, will be accelerated.

The conclusions of the 35th Arab Labour Organization Conference in April 2009 called for greater regional cooperation in the areas of employment, human resources and social dialogue. The Conference conclusions placed emphasis on developing regional initiatives, including a unified Arab Labour Law, and creating regional mechanisms to tackle shared challenges, such as the establishment of an Arab Tripartite Forum and an Arab Labour Market Information system. The ALO has highlighted the need for greater regional cooperation and coordination with the ILO to address the financial and economic crisis. The ALO, in cooperation with the ILO, organized the Arab Forum on Development and Employment in November 2008 that resulted in the Doha Declaration, which identifies a shared set of regional priorities. The subsequent Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit (Kuwait, January 2009) ushered in the Arab Decade on Employment (2010-2020) that established clear goals for the region, such as decreasing unemployment, halving the percentage of working poor, enhancing production, promoting worker training, supporting small and medium enterprises and continuing the ratification process in the region towards full compliance with international and Arab labour standards.

The present Forum aims to build on the momentum created by these parallel processes and provide the opportunity for further in-depth discussions and deliberations on recent trends and policy responses that are being developed in key areas across the Decent Work Agenda and as a response to the crisis.

Objectives of the Forum

The overall objective of the Forum is to exchange experiences of different approaches and measures developed for responding to the global financial and economic crisis through decent work policies. It will provide a platform for senior policy-makers and high-level representatives of workers and employers from across the Arab region to:

- ✓ Exchange experiences, and identify good practices related to the various dimensions of the global financial and economic crisis including its root causes, transmission mechanisms and employment and labour market responses needed for the Arab region;
- ✓ Improve the region's preparedness to effectively participate in and shape tripartite national and international debates on policy responses to the crises;
- ✓ Stimulate regional and sub-regional initiatives to promote decent and employment-friendly strategies and programmes in the context of a crisis response;
- ✓ Identify and support recovery policies through social dialogue and respect for workers' rights;
- ✓ Make specific commitments to all decent work objectives and to review strategies for meeting existing commitments in their national contexts, including in the framework of DWCPs;
- ✓ Establish an improved knowledge base for promoting patterns of inclusive and sustainable growth which generate more and better jobs in the region; and

- ✓ Harmonize goals to ensure that regional implementation of the Global Jobs Pact remains aligned with Arab regional conclusions, namely those of the Arab Forum on Development and Employment and the Arab Economic Summit.

Structure of the Forum

The Forum will be organised around selected themes that form the basis of the Global Jobs Pact and which have particular relevance to the tripartite constituents. The ILO will prepare a background document, which will review the evidence and policies for employment creation and social protection, labour standards and workers rights of the global economic crisis on Arab Countries.

The Forum will discuss the following themes in greater detail:

- Decent employment, sustainable growth and recovery: Policies and institutions
- Promotion of sustainable enterprises for job creation and retention
- Building adequate social protection systems and protecting people
- Improving management of labour migration, employment and development
- Social dialogue and tripartism for crisis analysis and response
- Strengthening respect for international and Arab labour standards and workers' rights

The Forum is aimed at generating an open exchange of experiences and broad discussion. As such, panel presentations on the aforementioned themes will be organised around a few case studies, as a preamble to this wider dialogue on key challenges and possible approaches under each theme. The case studies will focus on presenting good practices, new perspectives and emerging policy approaches.

The Forum will conclude with a proposed action plan for the regional implementation of the Global Jobs Pact, which will place employment and labour market issues, together with social protection and respect for workers' rights and labour standards at the heart of the regional responses to the financial and economic crisis.

Participants

The composition of the Forum will include senior officials from all 22 Arab Governments, Employers' and Workers' organizations. Additional representatives from certain key ministries able to influence national employment and social policies will also be invited, in consultation with constituents, along with a number of resource persons and institutions with recognized expertise on the subject. United Nations system agencies, regional organisations and donor partners will be invited to attend as observers.

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