



ILO DWT/CO-New Delhi, India

Short-term Policy Responses to COVID-19 in the World of Work

Special focus on state level and informal sector

30 March 2020

This note offers a preliminary response concerning the possible actions that could be considered during COVID-19 crises. While both big and small businesses are affected, this crisis has affected and will affect quantity of jobs, quality of employment and put already vulnerable groups of workers at further risk. The impact on especially informal economy workers including women, youth and 55+ workers, migrant and workers with disabilities need special attention. This note provides some of the short-term responses for urgent, large-scale and coordinated measures across three pillars:

- protecting and supporting jobs and incomes for workers - especially informal workers;
- protecting workers at workplace;
- protecting businesses, especially small and micro enterprises.

It also highlights some specific vulnerable groups and cross cutting issues that need to be kept in mind while planning the responses. It lays down the importance of coordinated and comprehensive response by engaging in the process of social dialogue and bringing in the voices of the marginalized and excluded groups. In times of crisis, International Labour Standards provide a strong foundation for key policy responses that focus on the crucial role of decent work in achieving a sustained and equitable recovery, limiting further increase in inequalities.

We will update this note as new data and information become available in this rapidly evolving situation.

For interviews and more information, please contact delhi@ilo.org

Consult our website for regular updates from the world of work response to the COVID-19 crisis.

- ilo.org/covid19
- ilo.org/india

Impact of pandemic

Introduction

The human dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic and related response measures reach far beyond the critical health response. All aspects of our future will be affected - economic, social and developmental, including the world of work. In these difficult times, certain groups of workers are and will be disproportionately affected by the jobs crisis, which could increase inequality. These include the 90% of workers in the informal economy that face lack of labour and social protection and have low incomes, particularly youth and older workers, women and migrants. The latter are particularly vulnerable due to the lack of protection and rights, and women tend to be over-represented in the most vulnerable segments of the informal economy, as domestic workers or home-based workers engaged in domestic and global supply chains.. The economic fabric in India constitutes of a myriad of informal micro and small enterprises that constitutes more than 90% of enterprises in the country. These enterprises are exposed to a reduction of activity or closure, leading employers, employees and own-account workers at high risk of losing their job, without income replacement solution.

In India, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)¹ for 2017-18 already reveals slow job growth in the non-agriculture sectors. Male youth unemployment rose to 18.7 per cent from 8.1 per cent in 2011-12, while for females it rose to 27.2 per cent from 13.1 per cent in 2011-12. Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, labour force participation rate for rural and for urban males decreased by nearly 3 and 2 percentage points respectively, while it decreased by about 7 percentage points for rural females and remained at the same level for urban females. However, the rising unemployment rate despite falling labour force participation in 2017-18 is a concern. High levels of informality in the economy continue to be a persistent issue. Around 90 per cent of the population is employed in the informal sector and its numbers have swelled in the organized sector in recent years as a result of globalisation and new technologies. This includes workers who are in precarious employment (such as casual, contract labour and daily wage workers in industry, construction, transport, sanitation, services, agriculture and several other sectors etc.), piece rated workers (such as home workers, artisans, craft workers, and other homebased workers), as well as self-employed or own-account workers (such as rickshaw pullers, auto and car drivers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, street-vendors, fishermen, etc.).

These workers are and will continue to bear the harsh brunt of the pandemic in coming days. The loss of livelihood and lack of disposable income/financial resources to stay at the place of work has resulted in a massive exodus of workers, trying to return to their villages from the urban and semi-urban centres where they were working. Hundreds of millions of workers are deprived of their livelihoods, including a huge proportion of women workers and youth, who tend to be concentrated in low-paid, low skilled jobs.

Fundamental Pillars

International Labour Standards

In times of crisis, International Labour Standards (ILS) provide a strong foundation for key policy responses that focus on the crucial role of decent work in achieving a sustained and equitable recovery. These standards, adopted by representatives of governments, workers' and employers' organizations, provide a human-centred approach to recovery, including by triggering policy levers that both stimulate demand and protect workers and enterprises.

¹ Annual Report: PLFS, 2017-18; available at : <http://mospi.nic.in/publication/annual-report-plfs-2017-18>

ILS also help guide **pro-active, large-scale and integrated measures, which are needed across all policy areas to make strong and sustained impacts.** [The core of ILS](#), the **Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work** aim to ensure that even during times of crisis the basic human rights in the world of work are protected. Since the crisis is evolving rapidly, careful monitoring of the direct and indirect effects of all interventions are crucial to ensure policy responses are and stay relevant.

Social Dialogue and Tri-partism

Engagement between governments, and employers' and workers' organisations is particularly critical. Social dialogue provides an essential mechanism for balanced crisis management accelerated recovery, shared responsibility for actions, as well as an essential governance instrument in this time of crisis. Both tripartite and bipartite social dialogue provide critical tools for building trust and support for the measures that are needed to address the COVID-19 outbreak and its impacts. Social dialogue must be underpinned by **international labour standards**, which should form the basis for policy responses that focus on a recovery that is sustainable and equitable. The [Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 \(No. 205\)](#) emphasizes, in particular, the importance of social dialogue in responding to crises and the vital role of employers' and workers' organizations in crisis response.

It is important to activate the existing tripartite structures that can give a sustainable and formal approach to the response measures. It is also vital, especially in this time of crisis, for workers and employers' organisation to seek innovative ways to more strongly represent the voices of women, informal sector participants, and other vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Immediate Response Measures

This section lists some of the immediate short-term responses for urgent, large-scale and coordinated measures across three pillars: protecting and supporting jobs and incomes for workers - especially informal workers; protecting workers at workplace; protecting businesses, especially small and micro enterprises. The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating already existing inequalities – from catching the virus, to staying alive, to coping with its dramatic economic consequences. Policy responses must ensure that support reaches the workers and enterprises who need it most.

I. Protecting and supporting jobs and incomes for workers especially informal economy workers

Hundreds of millions of workers are deprived of their livelihoods, including a huge proportion of women workers and youth, who tend to be concentrated in low-paid, low skilled jobs or are self-employed, often as casual/daily wage or piece rated workers or as own account workers. These micro and small enterprises are exposed to a reduction of activity or closure, leading employers, employees and own-account workers at high risk of losing their jobs, or source of income, without income replacement solution. Amongst these, there is a large proportion of women workers who tend to dominate in the low-paid, low-skill sectors and tend to be over-represented in the most vulnerable segments of the informal economy, as domestic workers or home-based workers engaged in domestic and global supply chains. They are largely unorganized and are not seen as 'workers'. The sections below give an outline of the support that needs to be extended to the workers (including the self-

employed workers) as a matter of their rights and entitlements and promoting dignity and decent work.

a. Awareness generation

Awareness amongst workers, workers' organizations and worker leaders: Large-scale awareness generation on **prevention of spread of infection, need for isolation etc. related to COVID-19 infection** is essential for workers and their families. It is important that there should be consistency in messaging, with clear indication of credibility and legitimacy so that misinformation is prevented. Workers should also be made aware about their **rights and special entitlement packages that have been or are being announced for the workers and also how to access them**. Information needs to be disseminated in the language understood by workers, and ensuring that message is also received by people with disabilities (such as pamphlets in brail, or message in sign languages).

- Mass media tools - radio and TV, announcements by loudspeakers, distribution of pamphlets, mobile phone messages, community radio services, and other possible audio-video messaging services, such as WhatsApp and Viber. Such information can be developed from information provided by Government, WHO, and other medical institutions, such as AIIMS etc. Comic books are also useful as children of informal workers can read them, in case their parents cannot.
- Government can consider using community radio services, and services offered by the public and non-governmental organizations, trade unions and membership based organizations and CSOs to spread awareness, and may consider providing them with necessary financial and technical resources.
- Many technology based CSOs and organizations also have telephone and mobile phone based audio and video application based services. Such services can be used to reach out to workers and stakeholders with support of trade unions and membership based organizations. They also provide online dial-in based platforms that can enable workers to express their concerns, share information and also address any grievances.

Helpdesks and provision of one-stop service: Special helpline/helpdesks for workers as well as businesses to enable information dissemination and provision of services should be operational. It is important that helpdesk/frontline workers have adequate health protection, physical security and medical and life insurance. Ensure that stranded workers are able to reach out and be in touch with their families by providing adequate measures for communication.

Awareness amongst Panchayat leaders/Scheme Workers/Health Workers: The capacities of the Panchayat leaders, scheme workers (Anganwadi, ANMS, ASHA workers etc.) and health workers should be enhanced, especially in context of the workers returning back to villages, counselling them as needed and encouraging them to self-quarantine/isolate as far as possible. Such capacity building can be done online using mobile phone or online technologies as far as possible. Adequate protective masks, sanitizers and trainings (including training to protect oneself) needs to be given to such frontline workers.

Feedback and early warning: Technology can also be used to put in place appropriate feedback mechanism on such awareness raising measures and their effectiveness, including an early warning system for any kind of rumors or misinformation or messages that can discriminate or cause exclusion of certain populations or sub-groups, verification of information coming in and mitigating any miscommunication.

b. Provision of healthcare services²

Special Clinics and health desks: The government could consider special clinics and healthcare provision for seriously ill workers, especially those returning home from other urban locations from within the states and outside the state. A preliminary screening of the workers, like temperature check, and necessary medical support, must be made possible at the workers' hot spots, railway stations and bus stations.

Quarantine centers and makeshift hospitals: The Government may consider exploring possibilities for state managed makeshift hospitals, and quarantine centres, especially near to the workers' hotspot areas, needed in the immediate timeframe needs to be explored and identified. This also includes identifying public and private buildings, which may need to be turned into quarantine areas/make shift hospitals if needed.

Reaching informal and invisible workers: It is essential for the state to take special measures to reach out to the dwellings, informal settlements, slums and high density areas where homebased workers, and other informal workers reside. Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure clean water supply, food and ration provision, sanitation, and appropriate disposal of waste.

c. Basic necessity support – shelter, drinking water and ration, essentials (sanitation, immediate health support, migrant/lockdown related challenges, helplines)

Access to shelter, food, drinking water and sanitation and other necessities: A large number of workers are aggregated at the workers' hotspots, railway and bus stations –returning from urban location to their villages. Others are stranded and confined to homes and rented accommodations. For most of the informal and unorganized workers, this usually means that several workers sharing the same space to live. Many have lost the livelihood and have no source of wages or income. Also, many of these workers were dependent on small eateries and petty shops for their needs, which are all closed. Practical solutions could include:

- Workers provided with immediate ration (including rice, wheat, sugar, pulses, cooking oil etc.) package for 1-2 months (based on state capacity, till normalcy is attained). The special package should also include other essentials like soap and detergent, which are essential for COVID-19 prevention.
- Relaxing the need for ration cards (of any type). Since this is a situation of national emergency, the government may consider additional system of ration provision based on needs/demand by the workers and their families.
- Appropriate arrangements need to be made for delivery of ration to prevent overcrowding of workers.

d. Income/wage support

The following income/wage support should be considered ***and should continue till the crises is over and normalcy is achieved.*** This should cover all workers and all trades and occupations. Some examples are listed below:

- **Support from the different Welfare Boards:** Since there is a wage/income loss, the various Welfare Boards operational in the states, including the Construction Workers Welfare Boards should consider providing immediate income support via special packages

² Following are suggestive in nature and should be discussed with appropriate medical agencies and WHO.

- (at least minimum wages/month as cash transfer may be considered) to workers registered under the board till normalcy is attained.
- **Workers in NREGS work:** The state may consider revising the wages as well as provide workers at least with NREGS wages for a month as cash transfer per month or more based on the capacity and resources available with the states and till normalcy is attained.
 - **Safai karamcharis/para-health workers/waste pickers** – Such workers are taking extra risks to provide essential services to the citizens and are also servicing the homes where household members who are under quarantine or isolation. The government needs to develop a special package for such workers and provided necessary protective gear including masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectants and special training to protect themselves. This should include a special life and health insurance cover (as appropriate) and health support as need.
 - **Special Package Informal workers (casual/contract, daily wage earners, piece rate workers, own-account and homebased workers):**
 - Daily wage workers, casual and contract workers, piece rated workers (whether working in formal or informal enterprises and businesses), own-account/self employed workers (including domestic workers, home based workers, waste pickers etc.) need to be provided with immediate relief in form of cash transfer (of notified minimum wage/month at least at unskilled level - even when there is no such notified wage for a particular trade/occupation or as based on the state resources) till the normalcy is achieved. The registration/ membership in a trade union/membership based organization can be considered as valid proof of being a worker.
 - **The informal/unorganized workers as well as self-employed workers who are not registered** in any welfare scheme/welfare board/or are members of trade unions/membership based organizations need to be provided at least a month's wage in line with notified minimum wage and appropriate mechanism can be considered. Registration of workers in Jan Dhan Yojna should be considered as an identification criteria for such workers, and support can also be provided through the same.
 - **Street Vendors:** In the likelihood of the closure of street vending (as a preventive step), the government may consider providing a compensation package for the licensed street vendors (given by municipal government/institution or received any form of state training by FSSAI or accredited organizations). Other unregistered street vendors also need to be provided this support, as described above).
 - **Transport Workers:** Auto Rickshaw and Tempo goods carrier workers may be engaged in essential services on one side and on the other, may lose work because of lockdown. The government may consider providing hardship allowance to such workers (as a percentage of the minimum wage), devising an appropriate mechanism for identification and categorization of workers.
 - **Support to elderly workers and people with disabilities:** It has been seen that elderly are most affected by Corona virus. The government should ensure that the pension payments are made in advance, should reach the elderly and retired workers and consider giving special emergency package. Similarly pensions, compensations to workers who have suffered workplace injuries, and other social security pensions such as widow and disability pensions must be made available in advance and should reach the workers.
 - **Prevention of exploitation and prevention of forced/bonded labour:** Several of the informal workers are also vulnerable to the situations of forced and bonded labour (examples workers in brick kilns, agriculture, lower tiers of the supply chains including

home based workers) and should they continue to work, they should be protected from unpaid work, low paid work or delayed wages. Adequate measures need to be taken to prevent workers who may be forced to take up precarious jobs or unpaid/low paid work once the economy and businesses processes starts.

- **Protecting children from child labour and other forms of exploitation:** It is an established pattern that during crises when adults are unable to work, the incidence of child labour increases. This could particularly be precipitated in the case in the current COVID-19 crisis where a false belief prevails that children are not, or less affected by the virus. Measures should be put in place and awareness should be created to ensure that children are not used to run errands, evade curfews or made to work to substitute family income.

e. Social security and social protection

Lack of social protection leaves people vulnerable to ill-health, poverty, inequality and social exclusion throughout their lifecycle. This right to social protection is critical for overall economic and social development. It is recommended to increase public expenditure on social protection to extend social protection coverage for all. A very small percentage of workers are able to access the social security (like Employees' State Insurance (ESI), Provident Fund (PF), unemployment benefits, maternity protection, protection against death & disability (including workplace injuries) and pension. However, a large proportion of informal/unorganized workers remain excluded from these benefits. It is important that governments move towards setting up social protection floors and provide social protection to everyone.

II. Protecting workers in workplaces including frontline workers in healthcare, essential services and outreach

Investments need to be made in all health systems so that they can recruit, deploy and retain sufficient numbers of well-trained, supported and motivated health workers. The COVID-19 pandemic once again underlines the urgent need for a strong health workforce as an integral part of every resilient health system, and this is now recognized as essential foundation for the recovery of our societies and economies, and preparedness for future health emergencies. It also creates a large number of decent work opportunities.

On the immediate basis, it is important to protect the frontline workers who are providing services to the workers (including workers and volunteers of trade unions, CSOs, membership based organizations etc.), those engaged in production and transport of essential goods and services, sanitation workers and the healthcare workers. Some of these are listed below.

- **Provision of for effective occupation safety and health (OSH) and preventive measures for workers, health and safety (OSH) trainings and provision of protective gear:** Both the workers in the healthcare services, as well as those engaged in providing the essential services, including those engaged in agriculture, manufacturing, packaging, transport, home delivery need to be provided with safe and healthy working environments, special Occupational Health and Safety Training as well as special training to protect themselves and provided with the necessary protective gear. Employers and owners of these businesses have the primary responsibility to assess the OSH risks involved in the work and mitigate them at the source. This further includes providing necessary guidance to the enterprises and businesses, which are engaged in provision of these services during emergency.

- **Special insurance cover, hardship allowances etc.:** In these unprecedented circumstances, the workers will also require special hardship allowance and special extended health and life insurance cover.
- **Protect short-term recruits and volunteers:** To fight the pandemic, the government, trade unions, employers' organizations, membership based organizations and CSOs are seeking professional assistance from short-term recruits, volunteers, other sectors such as the military, retired health workers or medical and nursing students. Meanwhile, the trade unions, employers organizations, CSOs are also taking the help of their members and volunteers to provide emergency relief services and catering to the needs of the workers and population in general. While these measures appear encouraging, because they secure the care needed, they should be carefully implemented to ensure these workers have the same employment protection, health and safety protection as other workers. Central and state governments should consult with social partners to monitor and regulate such ad-hoc recruitments, as appropriate. As well as occupational safety and health, other terms and conditions of employment need to be addressed, such as social protection, remuneration, rest periods and working time arrangements.
- **Managing working times, workloads and rest periods:** In emergency situations, health workers are required to work under irregular and sometimes atypical conditions. In response to the outbreak many health workers are facing heavy additional workloads, long working hours and a lack of rest periods. With the shutting down of schools and public life, they also have to organize their private lives and look after dependants. There should be appropriate working time arrangements to help health workers balance health service requirements with their care responsibilities at home and their own well-being. Please see ILO guidelines on [Decent Work in Public Emergency Services](#) for more details.
- **Awareness and access to remedies (for abuse etc. as well):** The workers engaged in emergency response and provision of essential services often become the target of any anger and resentment that may be generated because of the crises. This may precipitate as verbal and physical abuse to serious life threatening situations. It is important that the frontline and healthcare workers are provided with necessary safety and security as well as channels remain open for them to raise grievance and provided necessary support. Public media should also encourage people to respect and appreciate the work being done by these workers and to keep their morale high.

III. Sustaining businesses, especially small and micro enterprises

Disruptions to production, will affect the supply chains across the world. All businesses, regardless of size, are facing serious challenges, with a real threat of significant declines in revenue, insolvencies and job losses. Sustaining business operations will be particularly difficult for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Consumers in many economies may be reluctant to purchase goods and services. Given the current environment of uncertainty and fear, enterprises are likely to delay investments, purchases of goods and the hiring of workers. The following could be considered to address the situation:

- Discussions with the associations of the private and public employers and enterprises (both operating within the state and outside the state) - to enable wage payments, ensuring paid leaves for the workers during the crises period and employment guarantee (enabling workers

to re-join the work) for the formal as well as informal workers (causal/contract/daily wage workers) engaged by them.

- At least a period of 21-30 days, should be treated as a necessary quarantine period (as applicable in case of communicable diseases), with provision of paid wages during the quarantine. This is also necessary to ensure that workers come forward for testing, if needed, without the fear of loss of jobs. This discussion should also encourage the employers to allow for teleworking arrangements, where at all feasible. [ILO guidance on telework](#) can be used.
- Nationalised and private banks should create progressive lending instruments, soft loans with moratorium preferably to ensure the expansion of affordable credit for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises & other businesses so that they can survive the crisis period, and enable special provisions that can enable the small enterprises to pay wages to regular/contract and casual workers.
- Providing provisions for delayed payment of taxes, tax discounts, duty drawback, and other financial benefits/incentives/reliefs from penalties (if any)/and higher interest rates for delayed returns of loans, allow extra time for payment of dues to enable some form of financial support needed.
- Small traders are most vulnerable during this crises period. Many of them may be already registered with the central government's pension scheme. The government may consider providing support to such traders by offering them monthly or one time relief. Further support to this group will be needed also as a mid-term support.
- Assist the small businesses to enable them to develop business continuity plans to help minimize losses due to business disruption. In medium term, support may be needed to restructure or transform their business, and provide support services and strategies to innovate, diversify markets and supply chains, improve competitiveness, innovation and productivity.

Special Focus on Vulnerable Groups

Taking effective measures for the inclusion of all workers in the response framework is essential for the promotion of equality. This is also needed to ensure that the rights and protection contained in International Labour Standards are a reality for all the workers in the times of crises. Any kind of emergency response should provide mitigation and support measures that should reach all the individuals and sub-groups within the population. However, some workers remain invisible, they are also possibly more vulnerable and at higher risk. Many of them do not perceive themselves as workers, or even when they do, they have no voice and collective strength to demand for access to services and measures. It is important that these workers are specifically included in the response measures and their access is enabled. Some of these vulnerable groups are listed below.

Migrant Workers

A huge proportion of informal/unorganized workers are also migrants- mostly seasonal and circular migrants. They are either wage or piece rated workers or are own-account/self employed workers, and most earn on day-to-day basis, as described before. Like other informal workers, they too are usually from excluded communities who are also economically disadvantaged, and usually are landless or own a small piece of land. Many migrate as families while many are also single migrants. The challenges migrants face become exacerbated in the times of crises, because of the income/wage loss as well as lack of any disposable income to support in times of crises, which makes it difficult for them to stay at the urban/ semi-urban locations without work.

Since most of these workers are informal economy workers, they remain outside the labour law protection, they lack social security and rights, and remain invisible to the system at large. They remain largely unorganized and have no voice and representation. They are also not included in the schemes for local workers and citizens in the states (except in some states) and cannot access rights and entitlements available to workers and domiciled residents of the states including subsidized rations, access to healthcare and social protection and welfare measures as well as access to justice.

In-State Coordination: A comprehensive mechanism to cater to the needs of migrants is required with the involvement of state, district and local level authorities. These should work together to enable the specific points mentioned under Section I - Protecting and supporting jobs and incomes for workers especially informal workers (please see gender as a cross cutting dimension as described in following sections).

Inter-state coordination: The states, which are major sending states for workers, and states that are receiving, must coordinate with each other, to provide special emergency provision to the workers, especially informal and unorganized workers. The National Level Mechanism for Inter-State Coordination, set-up under the Chair of Director General Labour Welfare (DGLW), Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India could play an instrumental role. The MoUs signed by the sending and receiving states and other special provisions can be activated, including some of the ones mentioned in the note. The state may consider activating the Inter-State Coordination Committee, which was set-up earlier (as part of the MoU with Andhra Pradesh) and expand its scope to include employers and workers' representatives from Odisha and labour receiving states. This can enable better coordination, collaboration and collective action.

Women Workers

Women workers tend to be predominantly in low-paid and low skilled jobs. Even when they are in regular paid employment, wage loss becomes critical challenge for them to sustain. Most women are in informal sector, working in lower tiers of the supply chains – as casual, daily wage and piece rated workers or homebased workers, domestic workers, care workers and cleaning workers. They need special protection. Many of such women workers also come from excluded and marginalized communities and many are single migrants. Their situation is most precarious. Above vulnerabilities are further exacerbated because of widowhood, or if they are single, or in case of women-headed households, or disability. This makes them particularly vulnerable due to the lack of protection and rights. This also poses as an impediment to access benefits, as and when they are announced by the government.

Workers with Disabilities

Workers with disabilities tend to get excluded from crises management and risk reduction processes or sometimes, these crises exacerbate the impact of pre-existing disabilities or in some cases also create new ones, leading to increased vulnerability. They get excluded from crises responses because of exclusionary policies or practices, lack of support to seek the response (example lack of mobility, lack of access to information), sometimes they are denied shelters or the makeshift shelters may not have reasonable accommodation for the persons with disabilities. When food and medical supplies are distributed, these workers may not get access. There may also be a challenge in providing necessary routine healthcare needed in times of crises. It has also been seen that during any crises workplace violence and harassment, discrimination, sexual harassment, and domestic violence increase. Workers with disability, especially women and girls, are at an increased risk of such violence and discrimination.

Elderly Workers

The elderly or older workers have special needs and may suffer from disabilities and one or more chronic illnesses (such as diabetes, heart problems, hypertension etc.). They also have special medical and nutritional needs. They are also more prone/are at an increased risk to catch communicable diseases, and are more prone to infections generally. It has also been seen that in times of crises, psychological toll of the crises and the leading sense of insecurity is much heightened and can also lead to anxiety, depression or loneliness. They may also be prone to poor nutrition as they may not be able to access nutritional food and the markets or food distribution at the times of crises may not reach them. Such workers may also have limited mobility and may not be able to leave the area because of multiple reasons. Special attention needs to be given in the crises period.

Cross-cutting Dimensions

Gender

Equality and non-discrimination are at the very core of the social justice mandate of the International Labour Organization (ILO). And we know that some groups of workers are more likely to face discrimination than others, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers, sex workers and women workers. Gender and patriarchy plays a significant role during crises. For example, LGBT workers may tend to get excluded from the humanitarian and response services. They may be discriminated against or denied access to services especially related to housing/shelter, income support and healthcare. Similarly, sex workers may be discriminated or tend to get excluded.

Similarly, women workers are either confined to homes or are in the frontline emergency response services. In both cases, they may experience increased violence, abuse, sexual harassment including domestic violence. Their household burden may be increased due to the closure of schools, and presence of everyone at home, and also because their care support services in form of care workers/or family support for the care of elderly at home will not be there. Single women, widows and women headed households tend to get more affected than the others as they may not be able to access the response system activated.

During this time, the need for counselling and support is essential. This also includes counselling on family planning, managing unwanted pregnancies and abortions, miscarriages and deliveries. Institutional deliveries may become challenging and there is a need for trained para-health and health workers to provide these services. The emergency response should reach equally to all workers.

Discrimination

It has been also seen that in times of COVID-19 crises, certain category of workers – especially healthcare workers may suffer greater discrimination as well as workers who have travel histories, or those belonging to nationalities where the pandemic has spread in large proportions. This is because of the nature of the pandemic. Apart from this, the workers who have been asked to self-isolate or quarantine themselves face discrimination. This discrimination can lead to exclusion and deny them the basic humanitarian rights available to everyone. The workers may face eviction from rented accommodation, denied essential ration and services. It is important to keep these populations in mind and specific awareness messages and positive measures need to be taken to protect these workers and families.

Access to Services and Measures, Feedback, Grievance Redressal Mechanisms and Data Collection

This section would speak about the issue of access to the services and measures taken by the government and the challenges in such access, as well as mechanism for grievance redressal. Also, suggest for a feedback/social audit mechanism to improve and also enable voices of the marginalized and excluded populations.

Enabling feedback and appropriate response

Accurate, consistent, timely and transparent information is essential not just for fighting the pandemic but also for reducing uncertainty and boosting confidence at all levels of the economy and society, including the workplace. A decline in, or lack of, confidence affects consumer spending and business investment, inducing economic slowdown and hampering recovery. For this, it is critical that social dialogue remains more active during these periods of crises.

Grievance Redressal

Governments are responding to the COVID-19 situation and taking specific measures for workers, businesses and population in general. However, because of the various policy, practices, and implementation challenges segments of workers and businesses may be left out, or many may not be able to access the announced responses and access to emergency and essential goods and services. It is important that appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms are set-up and made operational ranging from helplines, help desks, and access to concerned government departments. The grievance, its redressal needs to be recorded and lessons also drawn to make necessary changes in the access, delivery and implementation of the responses.

Similarly, the crisis will also result in instances of business closures, layoffs, and wage payment disputes amongst others. Government may need to put in mechanism for speedy delivery of work related disputes and also consider setting up special labour tribunals. The grievance, and its redressal must be rapid, fair and transparent.

Data and Statistical System

Covid-19 has the immediate impact on health and other aspects of people's livelihood, there is a growing need to measure the impact. However, the restrictions necessary to combat COVID-19 are creating a huge obstacle to normal data collection approaches and operations, exactly at the moment when there is a massive increase in demand for information. Furthermore, the situation is rapidly evolving, making normal planning impossible. At the same time, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) have a critical role to play in the crises to not only analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market, but also to measure the impacts of COVID-19 on their own statistical operations, in particular in the domain of labour statistics, mostly the operation of the national Labour Force Survey (LFS) etc. Even though there is a major challenge in maintaining continuity and quality of data and statistics, while simultaneously attempting/needing to be flexible and react to changing circumstances.

Further resources

This section would list all global products (currently a place holder): Resources:

- ilo.org/covid19
- ilo.org/india
- [COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses](#)
- [Lessons from the past: Some key learnings relevant to this crisis](#)
- [How will COVID-19 affect the world of work?](#)
- [What are the key policies that will mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the world of work?](#)
- [How have countries been responding?](#)
- [ILO Standards and COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#)
- [New guidelines to help employers support families during COVID-19](#)
- [The impact of COVID-19 on inequalities in the world of work](#)
- [ILO guidelines on Decent Work in Public Emergency Services](#)
- [Five ways to protect health workers during the COVID-19 crisis](#)
- [Joint Statement on COVID-19 by International Organisation of Employers and International Trade Union Confederation](#)
- [COVID-19: what role for workers' organizations?](#)
- [An employer's guide on managing your workplace during COVID-19](#)
- [The six-step COVID-19 business continuity plan](#)
- [Why are labour markets important?](#)

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