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## Report of the Director-General

### Sixth Supplementary Report: The response of the International Labour Office to the COVID-19 pandemic

#### Purpose of the document

This document summarizes the support the International Labour Office has provided to the tripartite constituents to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (see the draft decision in paragraph 77).

**Relevant strategic objective:** All.

**Main relevant outcome:** All.

**Policy implications:** Guidance provided will be taken into account.

**Legal implications:** None.

**Financial implications:** None.

**Follow-up action required:** Yes.

**Author unit:** Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR).

**Related documents:** GB.340/PFA/2; GB.340/HL/2; GB340/PFA/1.



## ▶ Contents

	<b>Page</b>
I. Introduction .....	5
II. Major events and products .....	5
Global summit: COVID-19 and the world of work .....	5
ILO Monitor .....	5
The COVID-19 Information Hub .....	6
III. Implementation of the ILO policy framework for tackling the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic .....	6
Pillar 1: Stimulating the economy and employment.....	7
Pillar 2: Supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes .....	8
Pillar 3: Protecting workers in the workplace .....	10
Pillar 4: Relying on social dialogue for solutions .....	13
Sectoral impact and responses (all four pillars).....	15
IV. International Training Centre of the ILO, Turin.....	15
V. Joint work with the United Nations and G20.....	16
United Nations.....	16
G20 .....	16
VI. Development cooperation .....	17
VII. COVID-19 and delivery of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21 .....	18
VIII. Communication products .....	18
IX. Institutional response.....	19
Draft decision .....	20



## ▶ I. Introduction

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1. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the world of work. In addition to the threat to public health and lives, economic and social disruption threatens the livelihoods and well-being of millions. In the first nine months of 2020, the virus has taken over 1 million lives and plunged the world into a human, economic and social crisis, with a loss of working hours equivalent to almost 500 million full-time jobs.
2. ILO constituents responded swiftly to the pandemic through bold and unprecedented efforts aimed at combating the outbreak, ensuring the safety of workers and the sustainability of businesses and jobs, and revitalizing the economy in the aftermath of the immediate health emergency.
3. The ILO headquarters in Geneva went into lockdown on 16 March 2020, as was the case for most field offices. Despite very difficult circumstances, they quickly shifted gear and adapted work plans, outcomes and strategies in response to the changing needs of the tripartite constituents, including by assessing the impact of the pandemic on jobs, businesses and livelihoods, developing tools and guidance, and designing and supporting response strategies, taking into account the different needs in different countries and focusing on the most vulnerable.
4. This paper summarizes the support the Office has provided to its constituents to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and describes how human and financial resources have been utilized to accommodate requests for support. It also provides a brief account of the institutional and practical arrangements that the Office had to devise in order to ensure business continuity in its governance structure during the crisis.

## ▶ II. Major events and products

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### Global summit: COVID-19 and the world of work

5. In July 2020, the Office organized the largest ever online gathering of workers, employers and governments to consider the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was addressed by 51 heads of state or government. High-level government, employer and worker representatives from a total of 98 countries joined one of the five regional or three global sessions of the [ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the world of work](#), addressed also by the UN Secretary-General and other heads of prominent international organizations.
6. The Global Summit provided an opportunity for constituents to discuss the world of work response and hear from world leaders. The ILO's tripartite constituents were united in their unanimous call for a better future of work after the pandemic with decent work for all.

### ILO Monitor

7. To date, the Office has published six issues of the [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work](#), with information on the impact of the crisis on labour markets and estimates of lost working hours globally and in regions. Using non-traditional sources and econometric tools to bridge the gaps in data production during lockdown, the Monitors

covered such critical topics as: (i) implications for labour income and working poverty, (ii) sectors, enterprises and workers most at risk, and (iii) the impact on workers in the informal economy, young people, and women. The publication of the ILO Monitor has generated sustained coverage for the ILO in high-profile international media and strengthened the ILO's position as leader on labour market issues within the multilateral system.

## The COVID-19 Information Hub

8. The Office developed an information hub summarizing [country policy responses](#) by governments and social partners in each of the 187 Member States of the ILO. The hub is updated regularly and serves as a knowledge-sharing platform for constituents. It has been visited more than 162,211 times since it was launched on 1 April 2020, with peak traffic of around 4,000 visits per day in early May 2020.

## ▶ III. Implementation of the ILO policy framework for tackling the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

9. The ILO has structured its [key policy messages](#) for tackling the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic around four pillars. [Up-to-date international labour standards](#) continue to provide a tried-and-trusted foundation for inclusive and sustainable policy responses under all pillars when building back better.

### Pillar 1

#### Stimulating the economy and employment

- ▶ Active fiscal policy
- ▶ Supportive monetary policy
- ▶ Lending and financial support to specific sectors, including the health sector

### Pillar 2

#### Supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes

- ▶ Extend social protection for all
- ▶ Implement employment retention measures
- ▶ Provide financial/tax and other relief for enterprises

### Pillar 3

#### Protecting workers in the workplace

- ▶ Strengthen occupational safety and health measures
- ▶ Adapt work arrangements (e.g. teleworking)
- ▶ Prevent discrimination and exclusion
- ▶ Provide access to healthcare for all
- ▶ Expand access to paid leave

### Pillar 4

#### Relying on social dialogue for solutions

- ▶ Strengthen the capacity and resilience of employers' and workers' organizations
- ▶ Strengthen the capacity of governments
- ▶ Strengthen social dialogue, collective bargaining and labour relations institutions and processes

## Pillar 1: Stimulating the economy and employment

10. Under Pillar 1, the Office has focused on assisting Member States with tools and research to better understand the devastating impact of COVID-19. This has paved the way for targeted recommendations and policy advice on how to stimulate their economies and employment.

### Policy tools and knowledge products

11. The ILO [Guidelines on Rapid Diagnostics for Assessing the Country Level Impact of COVID-19 on the Economy and Labour Market](#) were produced to assist the tripartite constituents in generating immediate, real-time information on the employment impacts of the pandemic. Using these guidelines, rapid assessments have been conducted with strong tripartite engagement in more than 47 countries, in cooperation with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and regional financial institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Inter-American Development Bank.
12. These rapid assessments were complemented by a [global survey on youth and COVID-19](#) conducted in partnership with the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, which focused on employment, skills, rights and mental health, and generated 12,000 responses from 112 countries. Ad hoc surveys, including on enterprises providing apprenticeship training, career guidance systems and skills policy development, were also undertaken. New estimates of the resources required to achieve universal social protection coverage globally showed that the financing gap has increased by approximately 30 per cent since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis.
13. Policy briefs and tools were in turn developed on national employment policies for recovery and resilience, [macroeconomic measures to help small businesses withstand COVID-19](#), youth employment, gender equality, public employment services, labour market policies and [social protection](#). The crisis has furthermore provided opportunities to build back better through social dialogue on investment and trade policies and to advocate for foreign direct investment and business practices that result in decent work and a human-centred response. The expansion of links between large and smaller firms to increase cooperation was encouraged. Public investment and procurement programmes were highlighted as key to supporting enterprises, to upgrading physical and social infrastructure, and to promoting a just transition to a green economy.

### Country-level support

14. In many countries, the above-mentioned rapid assessments focused on hard-hit groups such as migrants, informal economy workers, women and youth. In other countries, the assessments focused on the impact on employers and workers in the rural economy, tourism, textiles and clothing, and other sectors. Across all countries and sectors, they focused on topics such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), reskilling needs, and the impact on working conditions. All assessments provided targeted policy recommendations focusing on an employment-rich recovery that leaves no one behind.
15. In addition to the rapid assessments, the Office provided support to national statistic offices and other producers of official statistics. This included [guidance for data producers](#) to support countries in their efforts to maintain data collection and provide data on labour market impacts of the pandemic. The Office also provided extensive technical assistance through a series of webinars and remote technical support, which has benefited many countries in their efforts to continue the crucial flow of data.

Partnerships with the United Nations Regional Commissions and with the World Bank were established to promote coherence and avoid overlaps.

16. Drawing on existing and new labour market data and assessments, the Office supported policy development and tripartite dialogue on employment in response to the COVID-19 crisis, either through policy revisions, updates or new national employment strategies. In all countries where rapid assessments were undertaken, the findings were fed into national and United Nations response plans.
17. Policy advice and technical assistance to stimulate the economy and employment were targeted at specific countries, territories and sectors. For example, the ILO supported the Government of Uganda in designing its Urban Cash for Work programme and adapted delivery mechanisms to support vulnerable households and individuals most affected by COVID-19. Technical assistance was provided for formalization and productive recovery strategies in Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, technical assistance was provided to incorporate COVID-19 responses into the national employment strategy. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the ILO provided technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority for the development of the Ministry of Labour's social and economic COVID-19 response plan. In Lebanon, the Office provided advisory services to the Ministry of Labour, with recommendations for an effective COVID-19 response strategy, and is following up with a survey to assess the impact of the multiple crises in Lebanon, which will feed into the development of a National Employment Policy for Recovery through a tripartite consultative process. Many ILO offices promoted green jobs and just transition as part of productive recovery.
18. The Office has furthermore supported governments and social partners in enhancing their capacity to formulate and implement policies to stimulate the economy and employment. The International Training Centre of the ILO (Turin Centre) organized virtual courses on topics ranging from the promotion of youth employment in the context of COVID-19 to employment services for effective job transitions. It has also helped organize a [Massive Open Online Course \(MOOC\) on quality apprenticeships](#) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was attended by policymakers and practitioners from 125 countries. Furthermore, the Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (ILO-CINTERFOR) is being repositioned as an innovation lighthouse and will support constituents in developing the skills needed for the economic transformation and future of work.

## Pillar 2: Supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes

19. In supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes, the Office has focused on assisting constituents in their support and relief for enterprises, implementation of employment retention measures, and extension of social protection.

### Policy tools and knowledge products

20. Policy briefs and reports have been developed with a view to providing policy advice and sharing good practices. These have, inter alia, focused on [supporting enterprises](#), [supply chains](#), an [enabling environment for sustainable enterprises](#), [responsible firm-level restructuring](#), firm formalization, [green recovery](#), [business continuity](#), income support and other social protection measures.
21. Knowledge products and technical advice concerning [social protection](#) were developed on the urgent provision of income support and health protection to workers and their



families, including temporary workers, self-employed workers, those in the [informal economy](#) and [migrant workers](#). The Office promoted the important role of [unemployment protection](#) in supporting job retention and the guarantee of income security for jobseekers, as well as of child and family benefits, old-age pensions, disability benefits and social assistance. The [ILO Social Protection Monitor](#) provides an overview of more than 1,400 national social protection response measures announced in 208 countries and territories. The Office also developed a range of tools and policy advice with regard to the costing, financing and long-term sustainability of social protection schemes, including a [Rapid Social Protection Calculator](#).

22. A [global COVID-19 enterprise survey](#) with results from over 1,000 enterprises in eight countries was conducted to identify concrete firm-level responses, and a range of specific [interventions to support enterprises during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery](#) have been formulated. Emphasis has been placed on health, safety and good workplace practices to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on enterprises and workers. Two [webinars on the Impact of COVID-19 on Work-Based Learning](#) were convened together with the Global Apprenticeship Network.
23. Cooperation between governments at different levels and actors in the social and solidarity economy has been strengthened. Office recommendations [have highlighted how microfinance-related institutions, cooperatives and wider social and solidarity economy enterprises provide vital services and networks](#) which can help governments reach many small enterprises, own-account workers, and marginalized and vulnerable populations, especially in the rural and informal economies.

## Country level support

24. In Africa, with partners such as the World Bank, World Food Programme (WFP), UNDP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office has supported social protection programmes and strengthened social security systems in Cameroon, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, Zimbabwe and other countries. In Mozambique, the first phase of a new income support programme for vulnerable groups has attracted over US\$75 million. In Nigeria, the Office has supported an increase of cash transfer programme beneficiaries from 2 million to 3 million people by supporting the extension of the national social registries. Furthermore, the ILO has facilitated the development of distance learning to support the survival of SMEs in Cabo Verde, Senegal and Somalia.
25. In the Arab States, in Jordan, the Office has conducted an analysis of social protection gaps to inform the development of an ILO-Social Security Corporation Emergency Unemployment and Employment Stabilization Fund. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the ILO has contributed to the government report entitled "Examining the Social Impact of COVID-19", and supported the Government in exploring options for an unemployment insurance scheme. In Lebanon, assistance was provided for a quantitative assessment of social protection needs and gaps. In partnership with UNICEF, the Office supported the design and implementation of the National Social Support Project, providing cash transfers for vulnerable families in the crisis-hit country.
26. In Asia and the Pacific, the Office has promoted social protection as an integral component of fiscal stimulus packages to protect workers, boost aggregate demand and support socio-economic recovery. In Sri Lanka, the ILO is leading a project with funding from the UN COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust Fund on rapid and urgent support to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to protect jobs and incomes of informal economy workers. In India, business continuity planning support was offered to MSMEs

engaged in the supply chain of e-retailers and corporate houses to mitigate the risk of market disruptions. At the regional level, the ILO is co-chairing the United Nations Issue-based Coalition on Inclusion and Empowerment with UNICEF, which provides technical support to UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to help countries move towards more comprehensive and shock-responsive social protection systems.

27. In Europe and Central Asia, the Office has conducted six enterprise surveys of national employers' organizations on the impact of the pandemic on business continuity in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. In the Republic of Moldova, 90 owners and managers of SMEs have been trained on business continuity management. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office provided support in collaboration with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the UNDP to address issues related to the reorganization of local supply chains and the facilitation of access to new markets. Technical advice was furthermore provided in the Western Balkans, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on the adaptation and costing of social protection schemes and the extension of coverage. The Office has also provided technical assistance for a legislative change to extend unemployment benefit coverage in North Macedonia.
28. In Latin America and the Caribbean, interventions included support to social protection, hands-on support to SMEs in implementing new rules and measures, and the development of practical tools and guides, such as business continuity plans. The Office developed additional entrepreneurial services, including enhanced efforts to promote women entrepreneurship and responsible business practices.

### Pillar 3: Protecting workers in the workplace

29. Protecting workers in the workplace is a crucial building block for an effective and sustainable COVID-19 response and recovery. Because of the prevalence of women in front-line jobs and high-risk sectors such as health and care, the increased demands on women's unpaid care work, and reports of increasing incidents of domestic violence, the Office has paid special attention to [gender equality in its response to COVID-19](#). In this regard, the Office registered the ratifications required to bring the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), into force on 25 June 2021.

### Policy tools and knowledge products

30. To help prevent and control COVID-19 at work, an [action checklist](#) was developed and issued in 20 languages. The checklist was complemented by [sector-specific guidance and tools](#) for assessing and mitigating infection risks, a policy brief and [practical guidance](#) for ensuring the safe return to work, a [manual for managing work-related psychosocial risks](#), and a [practical guide on teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond](#). Advocacy efforts around the [World Day for Safety and Health at Work](#) called on Member States to embed pandemic-related guidance in national occupational safety and health systems.<sup>1</sup> The specific role of labour inspectorates in addressing the crisis was discussed through a global and two regional [webinars](#).
31. The COVID-19 crisis has had a [significant impact on 1.6 billion informal economy workers](#), leading to a significant increase in poverty. The Office has prepared policy briefs and tools on informal employment, including for domestic workers. The Office has

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<sup>1</sup> A [global report](#) and a global webinar reaching over 13,000 viewers, and [worldwide events](#) in 30 countries.

highlighted the need for [urgent measures to improve health services](#) and to ensure [universal access to quality healthcare](#). Topical briefs have provided evidence-based knowledge on social protection response measures and policy options, including on [benefits during sick leave and quarantine](#) and extending social protection to informal economy workers <sup>2</sup> and migrant workers.

32. Timely policy guidance for the [protection of migrant workers](#) and of the [rights at work of refugees and forcibly displaced persons during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) has been made available to policymakers and constituents. Through knowledge development and advocacy, the Office has also been drawing attention to the distinct risks and vulnerabilities faced by hard-hit groups such as [persons with disabilities](#), [people living with HIV](#) and [indigenous and tribal peoples](#), many of whom are vulnerable to discrimination and disproportionately represented in the informal economy.
33. The ILO has actively worked with UN agencies, governments and social partners in the maritime industry to find solutions to maintaining shipping operations despite severe mobility limitations, and to guarantee seafarers' rights, in particular access to healthcare, to shore leave and to repatriation. The ILO advised constituents and other partners on the implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006) in this context, including by publishing an [information note on maritime labour issues and COVID-19](#).
34. In the same vein, the ILO provided advice to governments and social partners on labour standards and COVID-19 and published [answers to the most frequently asked questions](#) relating to issues addressed under all four pillars. In particular, the Office held numerous virtual technical meetings with government officials and social partners and has responded to requests from 12 Member States for support with draft labour legislation, some aimed at filling regulatory gaps in areas such as teleworking. The Office also intervened at the request of the social partners to advise governments on COVID-19-related legislative initiatives with a potentially adverse effect on fundamental principles and rights at work, labour standards or social dialogue. Taking full advantage of information and communication technologies (ICT), the Office put measures in place to mitigate the disruptive effect of the pandemic on the supervisory bodies and to ensure the continued functioning of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), the Committee on Freedom of Association and article 24 ad hoc committees through virtual meetings.
35. To mark the [World Day Against Child Labour](#), the Office organized a [high-level virtual debate on COVID-19 and child labour](#) with UNICEF. A joint ILO-UNICEF issue paper entitled [COVID-19 and child labour: A time of crisis, a time to act](#) highlights the risk of having millions more children pushed into child labour as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, which could lead to the first rise in child labour after 20 years of progress. The universal ratification of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) by all 187 Member States, was a milestone for the ILO and a timely reminder of the importance of international labour standards. In this regard, the issue paper entitled [COVID-19 and fundamental principles and rights at work](#) addresses not only the effective abolition of child labour, but also key priorities for protecting and promoting all fundamental principles and rights at work within the broader ILO COVID-19 response framework.

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<sup>2</sup> ILO, *Extending Social Protection to Informal Workers in the COVID-19 Crisis: Country Responses and Policy Considerations*, forthcoming.

## Country-level support

- 36.** In Africa, the ILO has supported the development and dissemination of occupational safety and health (OSH) guidelines in countries such as Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Kenya, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania and Tunisia, as well as with the African Union. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Office has been targeting informal economy workers with awareness-raising campaigns on how the virus spreads and its health consequences. In Mauritania and Zimbabwe, the Office has supported informal businesses in converting their production lines to protect the public, support healthcare providers, and meet the need for goods and services. In Ethiopia, the ILO has supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in developing a workplace protocol in response to COVID-19. Support was provided for the development of the African Union's COVID-19 guidelines and for the harmonized approach of the Southern African Development Community to protect health workers. Work with the African Union Development Agency facilitated the establishment of the African Union Expert Advisory Group on OSH for the COVID-19 response.
- 37.** In the Arab States, the ILO has similarly supported the development of national OSH guidelines through the translation and dissemination of relevant ILO and World Health Organization (WHO) publications and virtual capacity-building programmes on improved OSH measures and labour inspection in the COVID-19 context. Along with a regional policy brief, country policy papers on COVID-19's impact on migrant workers have been prepared in Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- 38.** In Europe and Central Asia, the ILO has responded to requests from several governments regarding OSH initiatives to enable the safe resumption of economic activity and to design protection measures for the informal economy. Some 1,500 labour inspectors and other enforcement officials have been trained in the Western Balkan countries and in Ukraine.
- 39.** In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Office created a [10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19](#). The Office supported the development of OSH protocols for rural and domestic workers in Mexico and the elaboration of the national OSH strategy in Costa Rica. In Brazil, the Office supported the development of online OSH self-assessment in sectors such as construction and meatpacking. The Office furthermore worked with the UNDP, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in supporting the socio-economic integration of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and has supported legislative initiatives on teleworking in Chile and platform workers in Argentina. Furthermore, the ILO has mainstreamed the mitigation of the pandemic's adverse impacts in its work to eliminate child labour.
- 40.** The Office has implemented a number of measures to support migrant workers and refugees, including but not limited to "tripartite plus" dialogues on the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers in South Asian countries of origin, an online platform to enable the recognition of skills of returning migrants in Bangladesh, and value chain assessments to identify sectors for the integration of migrants and refugees in countries of destination and their reintegration into home labour markets. The Office has furthermore provided migrant workers with information, health kits and shelter, and assisted them with the recovery of migration expenses and unpaid wages, cash transfers and support for legal remedy. As of August 2020, ILO-supported migrant resource centres have provided support to more than 185,000 migrant workers, 39 per cent of whom are women.

## Pillar 4: Relying on social dialogue for solutions

41. Since March 2020, the Office has re-engineered large parts of its social dialogue-related action<sup>3</sup> to support the tripartite constituents in their crisis responses and to place social dialogue at the heart of policymaking, drawing on best international practice and relevant ILO standards.<sup>4</sup> Due to its cross-cutting nature, social dialogue has been part of the Office's work under the other three pillars of the ILO policy framework and its [sector-specific action](#) to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

### Policy tools and knowledge products

42. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Office has produced numerous policy briefs, guidance documents and tools on the role of social dialogue actors and institutions in addressing the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, including in OSH, social protection, labour market governance and other policy areas.<sup>5</sup> This includes briefs on the [need for social dialogue](#) and [examples of employers and workers negotiating measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, protect livelihoods and support recovery](#).
43. The Bureaux of Employers' and Workers' activities (ACT/EMP and ACTRAV) spearheaded the process of information collection on the impacts of the pandemic on business and workers and produced relevant policy and knowledge materials.
44. In terms of the work with employer constituents, previously agreed work plans were revised to provide immediate responses to the newly emerging and pressing needs of employer and business membership organizations (EMBOs) and their members to minimize the negative impact of the pandemic. Practical tools to support EMBOs in the areas of OSH, working from home, safe return to work, other workplace issues and business continuity plans were developed at a global level and then customized to meet local-level circumstances. In addition, template tools were developed to survey enterprise recovery needs and assess training needs resulting from COVID-19. The Turin Centre has helped to further develop and digitalize these tools, which have been used by employer constituents throughout all regions.
45. In addition to the data collected for the COVID-19 information hub, ACT/EMP carried out a global survey on the impact of the pandemic on EMBOs and their operations. This provided a basis for reviewing future interventions in light of the likely mid- and long-term implications of the pandemic and enterprise recovery. The focus will remain on new membership retention and service provision strategies, as well as on policy advocacy on business recovery and resilience. In addition, the information contained in the ILO information hub formed the basis for a research piece on the future role of EMBOs, which will be published at the end of 2020. Finally, webinars have been held on key policy themes to enable information and knowledge-sharing between EMBOs. [Several publications](#) were produced, including a guide for employers on COVID-19 prevention and safe return to work and a six-step COVID-19 business continuity plan.
46. ACTRAV connected with workers' organizations across the globe to collect and disseminate national trade union responses to the pandemic, including with regard to

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<sup>3</sup> Notably the Revised plan of action on social dialogue and tripartism for the period 2019–23; see [GB.335/INS/3\(Rev.\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> Such as the [Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 \(No. 205\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> ILO, "Social Dialogue on Occupational Safety and Health in the COVID-19 Context: Ensuring a Safe Return to Work – Practical Examples", Brief, 26 August 2020; ILO, "The Role of Social Dialogue in Formulating Social Protection Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis", Brief, 6 October 2020; ILO, "Social Dialogue as a Governance Tool during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Global and Regional Trends and Issues", Brief, forthcoming.



social dialogue processes, government measures and violation of workers' rights – with a focus on the most vulnerable (for example migrant workers, front-line health workers and informal economy workers). It produced [several briefs](#) on some key international labour standards and the role of the trade unions, as well as [12 videos](#) in multiple languages on the role of trade unions in addressing urgent pandemic-related issues, such as misinformation, stigma and violence at work.

- 47.** Office materials have been disseminated through social media, e-training sessions and webinars, with innovative practices of social dialogue in response to the crisis. <sup>6</sup> ACTRAV organized over 40 webinars for trade unions operating at global, regional, subregional and national levels. The biennial [ITC-ILO Academy on Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations](#) will for the first time take place as an e-Academy, while a new module for the Industrial Relations Global Toolkit (IR Toolkit) on strengthening industrial relations in times of crisis will be used in online trainings.

### Country-level support

- 48.** Bipartite and tripartite (e-)dialogues at various levels (enterprise, sectoral, national, cross-border) were supported. National Councils for Social Dialogue and similar institutions, or ad hoc bodies tasked to design nationwide measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, protect livelihoods and support recovery, were advised. The Office contributed to enhancing or reactivating tripartite consultation mechanisms, including in Argentina, Ecuador, Panama and Zambia, as well as to strengthening labour management cooperation at the workplace in Ethiopia and Kenya, for instance. Social partners in India jointly reached out to economic units and workers in the informal economy in order to build stronger social dialogue in the informal economy, which absorbs 90 per cent of the country's labour force.
- 49.** ACT/EMP and ACTRAV furthermore reached out directly and intensively to employers' associations and workers' organizations at the national level and offered them targeted training and technical assistance. Key country-level actions comprised building the capacity of social partners to assess the impact of the pandemic on workers and enterprises, with an emphasis on vulnerable groups, and devising solutions based on tripartite engagement. Social partners were also assisted in accessing Turin Centre capacity-building resources, including through the provision of ICT infrastructure.
- 50.** Assistance to governments relating to the safe return to work included components on enhancing the role of social partners in the design and implementation of relevant policies and strategies (such as hazard mapping, risk assessment and mitigation arrangements for vulnerable groups). Tripartite webinars on the role of labour inspection systems during the pandemic complemented this action. The ILO–International Finance Corporation Better Work programme collaborated with ministries of labour and employment in its countries of operation to develop COVID-19 awareness-raising materials for factory management and workers.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, ILO Moscow webinar on [“The Role of Social Dialogue in supporting employment and advancing towards economic recovery”](#) (13 July 2020); ACTRAV/ILO Beirut webinar on [“Relying on social dialogue for solutions in the Arab States”](#) (30 July 2020); ACT/EMP, East African Employers Organisation (EAEO), the SADC Private Sector Forum (SADC PSF) on [“Developing Policy Frameworks for Recovery & Prosperity from the COVID-19 Pandemic”](#) (19 August 2020).

## Sectoral impact and responses (all four pillars)

51. The devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world of work and its differentiated and deep impacts across economic and social sectors have highlighted the importance of proactive and well-designed sectoral policies in response to the crisis. The Office has prepared a series of [17 sectoral briefs](#) that cut across all four pillars of the COVID-19 policy framework. The briefs aim to assist its constituents in assessing the impact of the pandemic in specific sectors and to highlight existing [ILO tools and instruments](#) to help sustain enterprises and protect workers.
52. The Office has furthermore developed new [sector-specific guidance and checklists to prevent and control COVID-19](#) in the agriculture, education, health services, mining, shipping, textiles, clothing, leather and footwear sectors, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the WHO. Sectoral organizations of employers and workers contributed to the preparation of these briefs and tools, which serve as a repository of good practices and lessons learned to help build back better.
53. The Office has supported efforts by constituents to develop [joint statements and calls for action](#) to protect workers and support enterprises, including [COVID-19: Action in the Global Garment Industry](#), a call to action by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and IndustriALL Global Union. The Office has facilitated regular consultations with the Special Tripartite Committee of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, which led to the [Statement of the Officers on the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#). This called for seafarers to be recognized as key workers and exemptions from any travel restrictions and special considerations to enable them to join and leave their ships and return home without impediment.

## ► IV. International Training Centre of the ILO, Turin

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54. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turin Centre has undertaken a transformation of the Centre's portfolio, with a shift from face-to-face training to online learning and capacity-building at the individual, institutional and system levels.
55. The training services offered by the Centre in direct response to COVID-19 include a distance-learning course, entitled [Supporting SMEs during COVID-19](#), which reached 2,500 participants in four languages. The Centre also supported the digitalization of the [Start and Improve Your Business](#) and Know About Business programmes, which allowed ILO partners to continue business training and education throughout the lockdown.
56. The Centre furthermore designed and delivered an [e-coaching course on social protection](#) that provided over 150 practitioners from over 50 countries with access to the most up-to-date information about effective responses to the pandemic. A new module on managing health crises and COVID-19 was added to the mobile-friendly platform on [Essentials in Occupational Safety and Health](#) for employers' and business member organizations. New online training formats for workers' representatives have been introduced, including online courses on social dialogue, OSH, violence and harassment and a [Global Workers' Digital Academy](#).
57. The capacity development services offered by the Centre in direct response to COVID-19 include a knowledge management platform entitled "A Road to Resilience: Sustaining

Business and Decent Work during COVID-19”, which was integrated into the comprehensive ILO COVID-19 response platform.

## ► V. Joint work with the United Nations and G20

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### United Nations

58. From the onset of the pandemic, the Office stepped up its engagement with other UN agencies considerably. The Office made significant contributions to the [UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#). The Office furthermore led the production of the UN Secretary-General’s [Policy Brief on the World of Work and COVID-19](#). It partnered with other agencies to produce a statistical perspective on [how COVID-19 is changing labour markets and the collection of labour statistics](#). The Office also contributed to the [UN Policy brief on Human Rights and COVID-19](#) and to the [Joint Statement on a disability-inclusive response to the COVID-19 crisis](#). At country level, the ILO’s national officers and decent work teams worked in UNCTs around the world to assist in the design and delivery of COVID-19 national response programmes.
59. The Office supported the establishment of the [UN COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust Fund](#), which supports low- and middle-income countries in overcoming the crisis. The Office furthermore embarked on consultative processes with the UNDP and FAO, respectively, to revise and strengthen existing cooperation frameworks with a stronger focus on the Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19. This led to the launch of a new Global Framework for Action, which sets out seven priority areas in which the ILO and UNDP will enhance sustainable development results in the world of work in the context of the pandemic. Together with the FAO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Office also prepared an information note to United Nations Resident Coordinators on the joint services they can provide to countries when responding to COVID-19.
60. The Office’s collaboration with specialized agencies of the United Nations included: (i) the development of a [practical tool to be applied in health facilities](#) to protect health personnel with the ILO–OECD–WHO [Working for Health](#) programme; (ii) inputs for the UN Secretary-General’s [Policy Brief on COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism](#); (iii) the organization of a global survey of enterprises on the impact of the pandemic on the training of workers, apprentices and interns with the Inter-Agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training; (iv) a joint statement with the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the WHO on COVID-19 and livelihoods and food security; (v) working closely with the IMO, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the WHO to prepare guidance on the prevention and control of COVID-19; and (vi) a [joint statement](#) with the IMO, UNCTAD, the IOM, the FAO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the ICAO and the UN Global Compact calling on all governments to immediately recognize seafarers as key workers and to eliminate obstacles to crew changes.

### G20

61. The Office has actively supported the [Saudi presidency of the G20](#) in responding to COVID-19. This included:



- A statement by the ILO Director-General during the Extraordinary Virtual Leaders' Summit on 26 March 2020, following which G20 Leaders [requested the ILO and the OECD to monitor the pandemic's impact on employment](#);
- Presentations of the employment impact of COVID-19 and the ILO policy framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis at the meetings of Labour and Employment Ministers; and
- Statements at the G20 Tourism Ministers Meetings and the G20 Health and Development Partnership.

## ► VI. Development cooperation

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62. The Office and its constituents developed, adjusted and repurposed the development cooperation portfolio to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Decent work teams and country offices were provided with guidance to manage the impact of lockdowns and teleworking arrangements. Contingency plans were put in place for the different projects, taking into account the specific work plans and geographic coverage. Funding partners have been supportive in agreeing to adjustments to budgets, work plans and implementation arrangements.
63. Innovative ways of delivering services were developed and implemented while ensuring the safety and health of constituents and implementing partners, as well as of ILO staff. These included the use of alternative local partners, mobile phones for carrying out surveys, e-learning platforms, and virtual technical advisory services.
64. As an example, the IPEC+ Flagship Programme was able to reorganize its activities in more than 60 countries to closely monitor the impact of COVID-19, in particular on the girl child and forced labour. The Safety + Health for All Flagship Programme has in turn raised US\$5.5 million in additional funding to assist constituents in the garment sector in various countries. [Better Works teams around the world](#) have been redeployed to offer support to factories and workers on crucial health and safety and industrial relations issues, coordinate information campaigns and training for national partners, provide policy advice, and help bring governments, employers, workers and international buyers together to develop joint responses at the national and international levels.
65. The Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (PROSPECTS) programme reorganized activities in several countries to support efforts to assess the impact of COVID-19 on refugee-hosting area economies, to inform potential redesign and engage in mitigation responses, such as emergency cash-for-work programmes. Discussions are ongoing between the partners and the donor on future repurposing on a country-by-country basis linked to national COVID-19 responses and their impact on refugee-hosting areas. Other projects anticipated and responded to changing demands for services, such as extending coverage of social protection schemes and other relief and economic assistance packages to disadvantaged groups; distributing ATM cards to Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) workers, as was done in Jordan to ensure that salary payments could continue during the lockdown; providing an opportunity for business owners and laid-off workers to be more competitive, with improved digital skills in Indonesia; and supporting small businesses to repurpose for the production of personal protective equipment in Zambia.

66. Partners also supported new development cooperation programmes to deliver cash transfer programmes, protect workers' incomes and ensure business continuity. Interventions on social dialogue, OSH policies, the provision and use of personal protective equipment, and awareness-raising campaigns for workers in the informal economy were developed to enhance future resilience to shocks. These and many other interventions supported countries in their national COVID-19 response and recovery strategies and have played a key role in shaping the United Nations socio-economic recovery strategy.

## ▶ VII. COVID-19 and delivery of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21

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67. In April 2020, the Office issued guidance to all staff on the delivery of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21 in the context of COVID-19 and instituted measures, within the commitments established in the programme and budget for the biennium, to allow for the agility, flexibility and adaptability needed to support constituents' responses to the pandemic. Country-specific strategies and global deliverables were adjusted in light of evolving demands and national circumstances in 106 Member States and territories.
68. All global products developed to deliver the policy outcomes were adapted and over one third of all the country programme outcomes planned at the start of 2020 were reviewed accordingly. Particular attention was paid to enhancing the response capacity and resilience of the social partners and social dialogue institutions, as well as for the protection of workers and enterprises.
69. Proactive measures were taken to enable ILO managers to apply available resources towards the ILO response to COVID-19. By mid-2020, approximately US\$3.6 million in savings from regular budget staff costs due to the slowing down of recruitment activities had been identified, and COVID-19-related initiatives in support of constituents, including the above-mentioned rapid assessments of the impact of the pandemic on the labour markets and OSH interventions were financed from these savings. Over 70 per cent (or some US\$13.4 million) of the resources allocated from the Regular Budget Supplementary Account were applied to address COVID-19 response strategies in 31 Member States, with a focus on employment generation, social dialogue and tripartism, sustainable enterprises, protection at work and social protection.
70. Further details regarding the implications of COVID-19 for delivery of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21 will be submitted to the Governing Body at its 341st Session (March 2021).

## ▶ VIII. Communication products

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71. With the onset of the global pandemic, the Office shifted the focus of its communication to the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work and the ILO's global response. With the sudden need to go virtual, a special effort was made to quickly develop new platforms and adapt communication to ensure that external and internal audiences had access to the information and knowledge they needed. Webinars rapidly became a major channel of communication. The necessary infrastructure, with support and training for staff, was put in place.

72. A COVID-19 portal was established on the ILO public website to organize all ILO knowledge and communication content related to the pandemic. The platform benefited from the updated and enriched web pages of departments in the Policy Portfolio that also included new means of communication, such as podcasts on crisis-related issues. Another platform gave governments and employer and worker leaders a space to share their recommendations and experience in responding to the pandemic. First person COVID-19 stories of workers and business owners served to highlight the human impact of the pandemic across sectors and regions.
73. The Office's work was guided by a global COVID-19 communication strategy to shape the ILO message narrative and ensure that the wealth of knowledge, recommendations and information produced by the Office would be made accessible to key audiences. This included the development of an effective model for the virtual promotion of the ILO Monitor and other key knowledge products. New short video summaries for new policy briefs and tools have furthermore increased engagement with knowledge content on social media.
74. Keeping staff informed and engaged has been an internal communication priority. This has been achieved through the constant update of the intranet front page (including a dedicated section for COVID-19 matters), weekly editions of the ILO INSIDE newsletter and regular messages from the Director-General to all ILO staff.

## ▶ IX. Institutional response

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75. Shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic, the Chairperson of the Governing Body, in consultation with the two Vice-Chairpersons, decided to defer the 338th Session of the Governing Body, originally scheduled for 12–26 March 2020. Since then, the Officers of the Governing Body, together with the other members of the tripartite Screening Group, have held 12 virtual meetings <sup>7</sup> to ensure that ILO governance would continue to function for as long as the Governing Body was not able to meet in person. At those meetings, the Screening Group was kept abreast of the impact of the pandemic on ILO operations and was invited to prepare the ground for the Governing Body to be in a position to make urgent and important decisions by correspondence on four occasions since March 2020. This included the deferral of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference from June 2020 to June 2021 and the development of special rules of procedure and arrangements for the primarily virtual 340th Session of the Governing Body.
76. Connectivity between the Office and its tripartite constituents, between constituents themselves and with other organizations in the multilateral system and other global actors was maintained during the lockdown and beyond. Over 250 virtual meetings (including webinars, information and training sessions, and meetings of the Employers', Workers' and Regional groups) were organized from headquarters since March 2020, and over 1,700 virtual meetings were organized from ILO external offices in the same period.

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<sup>7</sup> As of 30 September 2020.

## ► Draft decision

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- 77. The Governing Body took note of the information provided in document GB.340/INS/18/6 and requested the Director-General to:**
- (a) take into account the guidance provided in steering the Office actions and response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis; and**
  - (b) communicate further details regarding the implications of COVID-19 for delivery of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21 at its 341st Session (March 2021).**