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Matters arising out of the work of the 109th Session (2021) of the International Labour Conference

Follow-up to the resolution concerning a global call to action
for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is
inclusive, sustainable and resilient

Purpose of the document

The global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, adopted by the International Labour Conference at the first part of its 109th Session (June 2021), declares that "The ILO [...] must play a leadership role with its constituents and in the international system in advancing a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. Through focused and accelerated implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration, it will strengthen its support of Member States' recovery efforts and leverage the support of other multilateral organizations and international institutions while contributing actively to the efforts of the United Nations system to expedite delivery of the 2030 Agenda."

This document presents, for the consideration of the Governing Body, the follow-up actions that the Office could undertake to support its constituents effectively in their national recovery strategies and to strengthen international support and policy coherence to pursue a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (see the draft decision in paragraph 40).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: All.

Policy implications: Yes.

Legal implications: No.

Financial implications: See paragraph 39(g).

Follow-up action required: Yes.

Author unit: Office of the Deputy Director-General for Policy (DDG/P).

Related documents: [GB.340/POL/6](#); [GB.341/POL/4](#); [GB.341/INS/8](#); [ILC.109/Resolution I](#).

▶ Introduction

1. The [global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient](#) (global call to action), adopted by the International Labour Conference at the first part of its 109th Session (June 2021), outlines policy measures that governments and workers' and employers' organizations can adopt to strengthen their ongoing efforts to address the crisis and promote a human-centred recovery while contributing towards shaping an inclusive, sustainable and resilient post-crisis world. Building on the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019 (ILO Centenary Declaration) it calls on the ILO to use all its means of action to support the design and implementation of recovery strategies that leave no one behind, including by playing a leadership role and reinforcing cooperation with other institutions of the multilateral system.
2. Consistent with that ambition, this document presents the main strategic lines of action proposed by the Office to support constituents in giving effect to the global call to action and to increase the level and coherence of multilateral support for human-centred recovery strategies. The follow-up proposed by the Office aims to focus efforts and create synergies across the multilateral system in order to achieve maximum impact.

▶ Current global recovery context

3. The world economy has seen a sharp increase in growth in 2021, compared to the previous year. Having shrunk by 3.2 per cent in 2020, it is projected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to grow by 6 per cent in 2021 and 4.9 per cent in 2022. Nevertheless, these encouraging aggregates are accompanied by very significant differences in performance and prospects between countries and demographics, and by great risks and uncertainties. A return to pre-crisis levels of gross domestic product (GDP) is expected in 2022 for high-income countries, while the GDP of middle-income and low-income countries will still fall short of those levels, by 3.8 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively.¹ At the same time, global unemployment – which stood at 187 million in 2019 – is projected to reach 220 million in 2021 and 205 million in 2022.² The parts of the workforce that have been hit the hardest by the crisis – notably women and young people, and those working in the worst-affected sectors of economic activity – will continue to be disproportionately represented within these figures.
4. All of this is evidence of a recovery that is unequal, uncertain and fragile, rather than human-centred. On its current trajectory, the world is more likely to leave large numbers of countries and people even further behind than to move towards the goals of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). The

¹ ILO estimates based on data from the Economist Intelligence Unit, the IMF, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN).

² ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021*.

reasons for this “great divergence” of situations in the process of recovery are well recognized and increasingly addressed in international policy debate.³

5. First, the unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines means that countries face very different situations as they seek to re-open workplaces and resume economic and social activity. International action to promote the universal availability of vaccines would be a key component of policies for a human-centred recovery.
6. Second, the significant differences in domestic fiscal space and access to international financial markets that exist between countries means that some have much more scope to stimulate and support economic recovery than others. In the course of the crisis, stimulus measures have represented 16.4 per cent of GDP in high-income countries, but only 4.2 per cent and 1.7 per cent in middle-income and low-income countries respectively. While levels of public debt have gone up significantly across the globe, it is low-income countries that face the imminent threat of debt crisis, with 35 such countries already in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress. These circumstances make the international agenda on financing for development critically important in the process of recovery.
7. It should be noted that the two risk factors outlined above are generally cumulative in their impact; countries with insufficient vaccines are also those lacking the needed financial resources and vice versa. A third risk factor, which is becoming increasingly evident, seems likely to operate in a different way in and between countries. It is reflected in the obstacles being encountered in the reactivation of a number of international supply chains as economic activity resumes: semi-conductors, natural gas, food products and household appliances, as well as those related to vaccines themselves, have experienced supply shortages. It remains to be seen whether these obstacles are temporary phenomena or whether they will have longer-lasting effects in the context of the re-engineering of supply chains.
8. Similar questions are posed in respect of the way in which the measures and practices introduced during the pandemic are either reversed, modified or maintained during the recovery and beyond. This applies most obviously in respect of remote work, but extends too to patterns of consumption, changing societal preferences, and the policies and practices adopted in respect of vaccination and the workplace, all of which can contribute to the “new normal”, which although much talked about over the last 18 months, still remains an elusive concept.
9. Taken together, these considerations bring into focus the urgent imperative for concerted national and international action to accelerate the implementation of the ILO Centenary Declaration in the manner outlined in the global call to action.

▶ Giving effect to the global call to action

10. The Governing Body will recall that the Programme and Budget for 2022–23 and the ILO’s Strategic Plan for 2022–25 were both explicitly framed by it to deliver on the ILO Centenary Declaration in the circumstances generated by COVID-19. The global call to action was negotiated and adopted with these same objectives in mind, and is therefore

³ See, for example, Kristalina Georgieva, “The Great Divergence: A Fork in the Road for the Global Economy”, *IMF Blog*, 24 February 2021.

a source of further guidance and momentum for the implementation of the programme of work and the Strategic Plan. It follows that giving effect to the global call to action has implications for ILO activities under all eight policy outcomes in the programme of work for the coming biennium, and for the objectives specified in the Strategic Plan. In addition, implementing it would appear to call for focused policy development in relevant areas, for the optimal mobilization and use of resources including through voluntary funding partnerships, and for new initiatives in the areas set out below.

Opportunities for policy development

- 11.** It is proposed that action be taken to enhance the Office’s research and tools on inclusive and sustainable economic development, productive employment creation and poverty reduction. This would include reinforcing the ILO’s analysis of the employment and social policy implications of accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), helping to strengthen the economic case for employment-rich investments, particularly in the digital and green economies, and for a just transition to environmental sustainability, paying due attention to the rural economy.⁴ Research on the relationship between decent work and the digital economy, including its gender-related aspects, will need to be expanded. While awaiting the outcome of the general discussion on skills and lifelong learning to be held during the second part of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference (November–December 2021), which will guide the work of the Office in the coming years, the Office can step up its work on skills gap assessments in support of productive employment creation in priority sectors and in the digital and green economies.⁵ The Office would continue investing in knowledge and analytical tools on decent work in supply chains to facilitate economic transitions and a job-rich recovery.⁶ This is likely to include specific subsectors that either are strongly affected by COVID-19 lockdowns (such as tourism and transport) or will be key for recovery (such as agriculture, construction and manufacturing).
- 12.** In addition, it is proposed that the Office develop comprehensive, innovative and integrated approaches to curb the spread of informality and accelerate the transition to the formal economy with practical action agendas at the country level.⁷ This and other actions in follow-up to the Conference discussion on inequalities and the world of work to be held during the second part of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference (November–December 2021) will be important in this context. In the light of the considerable number of references in the global call to action to productivity and resilience, the Office could further develop its approach based on promoting productivity ecosystems for decent work. The Office can provide enhanced technical advice to support business resilience and the creation of an enabling environment for innovation, productivity growth and sustainable enterprises, especially for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, recognizing the important role of sustainable enterprises as generators of quality employment and promoters of innovation and decent work.⁸

⁴ Global call to action, paras 13(a) and 14(g).

⁵ Global call to action, paras 13(a) and 14(b).

⁶ Global call to action, para. 14(d).

⁷ Global call to action, para. 14(f).

⁸ Global call to action, para. 13(a) and (b).

13. It is also proposed that the Office deepen its work on occupational safety and health (OSH), including to strengthen OSH systems, while considering priorities for informal workplaces, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and at-risk sectors. This includes addressing both existing OSH risks and new risks that have emerged in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to reduce its spread in workplaces, including vaccination.⁹
14. The Office could undertake an in-depth analysis of the new dynamics of labour markets following the pandemic.¹⁰ This would need to include the preparation and provision of evidence-based guidance on developing and implementing innovative strategies to extend social protection coverage to the diverse forms of work arrangements that have expanded during the pandemic.¹¹
15. In all of these areas, international labour standards will guide the process of evidence-based policy development and advocacy.

Areas of ILO action

Tracking the progress of human-centred recovery

16. Between March 2020 and January 2021, the ILO published seven editions of the *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*, which presented data on the impact of the pandemic on the world of work through the use of innovative “nowcasting” techniques. The Monitor attracted great attention and interest in the general media and among constituents as an important and authoritative contribution to understanding the effects of COVID-19 and a basis for developing policies to respond to them. At the same time, the ILO provided an online information hub on [country policy responses](#) for the collection and sharing of information from Member States on their policy actions in the context of the pandemic. This information hub was also well received as a valuable resource for constituents.
17. The Office will continue to produce the Monitor and to host the information hub during the recovery process, introducing additions and amendments in the light of the evolution of the recovery and related policies. For example, it would seem useful to introduce issues concerning vaccination policy and work.
18. In addition, it is proposed that the Office establish a comprehensive recovery tracking framework to monitor key labour market indicators at the national level, and to present information on what countries have been doing through a cataloguing of policy responses and comparative policy analysis. The tracking framework would: enable the Office to produce evidence-based assessments of the quantity, quality and social inclusivity of the recovery at the country level and to examine how the recovery strategies can be improved, from a human-centred perspective; and facilitate knowledge-sharing among constituents and others. The knowledge and analysis created through this process would be a further input for future editions of the Monitor.

⁹ Global call to action, para. 13(d).

¹⁰ Global call to action, paras 13(d) and 14(h).

¹¹ Global call to action, paras 13(b) and 14(c).

Tripartite dialogue for national human-centred recovery strategies

19. Whatever the global issues acting on recovery processes, each ILO Member State faces its own challenges and opportunities and will decide how to address them. Moreover, the elaboration and eventual implementation of national policymaking for human-centred recovery need to be rooted firmly in substantive tripartite dialogue at the country level in order to ensure ownership, legitimacy and practicality.
20. For these reasons, and building on the example of the national dialogues involving some 120 Member States which set in motion the ILO's Centenary Initiative for the Future of Work, it is proposed now to invite all Member States to convene national dialogues on human-centred recovery with a view to building country strategies drawing inspiration from the global call to action.¹²
21. The Office will, within the limits of its possibilities, facilitate and support these dialogue processes, but they will depend heavily on the interest and active engagement of the tripartite constituents directly concerned. Should the proposal meet with the favour of the Governing Body, the Office could trigger the convening of the national dialogues by sending an invitation and a framing issues paper to all Member States. The progress and outcome of the dialogues could be integrated into the information hub and new tracking framework referred to in the previous section, with the possibility of a synthesis document being prepared for discussion by the Governing Body at a later date. In such a scenario, it might be useful to invite a number of national constituents to share their experience directly with the Governing Body.

Financing human-centred recovery

22. The unprecedented volume of public spending in response to the COVID-19 crisis to date, the extent of future investment needs, and the highly unequal distribution of available funding have brought the issue of the financing of the recovery sharply into focus. The debate on financing predates the pandemic. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted by the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015 set out a global framework for ensuring that all financial flows are aligned with achieving the 17 SDGs in the 2030 Agenda. The ILO Centenary Declaration identifies an agenda for investment in three areas crucial to the future of work: people, and their capacities; the jobs of the future; and the institutions of work.
23. The dilemma facing Member States individually, and the international community collectively, is that at a moment when demands for financing have probably never been greater – for economic recovery and jobs, for vaccines and public health, for social protection, for climate, for education and training, for digital connectivity and for much else – its supply is likely to face severe constraints.
24. In response, in May 2020, the UN Secretary-General, together with the Prime Ministers of Canada and of Jamaica, launched the [Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond](#), with the aim of increasing finance for sustainable development and placing financing issues at the centre of the global policy agenda in the context of COVID-19 recovery and sustainable development. Subsequently, in August 2021, the Board of Governors of the IMF approved an unprecedented general allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) of US\$650 billion to foster the resilience and stability of the global economy, and to help vulnerable economies. A key policy issue at this juncture

¹² Global call to action, paras 13, 13(e) and 14(e).

is how the financing made available through this issuance of SDRs is to be channelled by their initial recipients to those countries and purposes that badly need it. That process involves significant technical complexities, but the objective could be achieved through both the existing Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust facility, which provides concessional loans to low-income countries, and other mechanisms such as a new Resilience and Sustainability Trust Fund, which is currently under discussion.

- 25.** In order to advance the objectives of the global call to action, it would seem crucial that the ILO and its constituents exert their influence to the full to ensure funding on the scale required to make a reality of a human-centred recovery, inter alia by having the objectives of the global call to action included as “macro-critical factors” in the terms of reference of agreed funding mechanisms. It is in this context that the ILO has taken an active role in the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, including through its leadership of Cluster II on the social and economic response to the COVID-19 crisis, in the areas of social protection, gender, children, young people, health, education and human rights. In that capacity, the ILO worked with the UN Secretary-General to organize a high-level event on Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication on 28 September 2021, in the framework of the UN General Assembly. The Secretary-General’s policy brief for the meeting tabled a proposal for a Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection, with the aim of creating at least 400 million new jobs, primarily in the green and care economies, and extending social protection floors to about 50 per cent of people not currently covered by them.¹³ It is noted that the investments required could be generated from a combination of domestic and international resources, underlining the need for social protection and just transition to be a focus in the attribution of additional finance, including SDRs.
- 26.** The context and processes outlined above point to the need for the ILO to be active at the country level and to develop strong analytical work on employment and social policies to support its constituents in accessing funding, including in the development of UN integrated national financing frameworks, and at the international level in the unfolding Financing for Development agenda.¹⁴

Multilateral action

- 27.** The experience of the COVID-19 crisis and the requirements of a human-centred recovery from it have, at terrible human cost, made the case for strengthened multilateral action in the most compelling manner possible: the need for global responses to global challenges has never been clearer nor more widely understood. This is a promising and enabling context for the ILO to harness the cooperation of other multilateral actors, as called for in the global call to action, in support of its objectives.
- 28.** The common goals of the multilateral system have been set out since 2015 in the 2030 Agenda and reflect many of the aims of the Decent Work Agenda, the ILO Centenary Declaration and the global call to action. The imperative for coherence and common purpose between entities across the system originates in their respective constitutional responsibilities, is given substance by the programmes and agenda to which they have jointly subscribed and is amplified in an unprecedented manner by the

¹³ UN, [Secretary-General’s Policy Brief: Investing in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery](#), 28 September 2021.

¹⁴ Global call to action, paras 13(a), 14(a) and (g).

COVID-19 crisis. This implies that the case for increased and concerted multilateral action is already established, and that the challenge now is how to make it happen.

29. In his recent report *Our Common Agenda*, the UN Secretary-General places many of the issues highlighted in the global call to action at the centre of the international policy agenda, making the case for renewing global solidarity, a renewed social contract, solidarity with younger generations, protecting the global commons and delivering global public goods. Moreover, he argues for a multilateralism which is more networked, more inclusive, and more effective; “multilateralism that is more networked”, he remarks, “draws together existing institutional capacities, overcoming fragmentation to ensure all are working together towards a common goal”.
30. These are sentiments that the ILO has sought to act upon for a considerable period of time. It has systematically made explicit the relationship between its agreed policy outcomes and relevant SDG targets and has proactively developed partnerships across the system. The Governing Body will recall that, at its 341st Session (March 2021), it held an extensive discussion on enhanced multilateral cooperation in pursuit of the ILO mandate.¹⁵ As follow-up, the Office is working to build, or strengthen existing, partnerships, including in the areas of:
- economic policies for full and productive employment;
 - social protection;
 - international labour standards;
 - just transition and climate action for jobs;
 - trade and living standards;
 - skills and lifelong learning;
 - harmonization of statistics for enhanced policy coherence;
 - regional partnerships and collaboration with intergovernmental groups on employment and social issues.
31. The global call to action’s instruction to the ILO to play a role of leadership in the international system and to leverage the support of other multilateral organizations and international institutions indicates a need to intensify its efforts, particularly in areas that the COVID-19 crisis has made immediate and particularly pressing priorities.
32. In this regard, social protection stands to be of particular significance. The crisis has elevated public and political awareness of the importance of social protection as an indispensable frontline and preventive public health response as well as a measure for stabilizing household incomes and responding to crises. In contributing to the goals of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP-2030 partnership), the Office proposes to continue developing its analytical tools to calculate the cost of social protection floors, estimate financing gaps and shape country strategies to bridge them. It could, for that purpose, prepare a finite number of country-specific integrated financing scenarios in order to illustrate the feasibility of major improvements in social protection floors in developing countries.¹⁶

¹⁵ GB.341/INS/8.

¹⁶ Global call to action, paras 13(a) and 14(g).

In addition to its collaboration with the other major actors in the USP-2030 partnership, such as the World Bank, the Office could establish more formal, systematic and effective collaboration with the IMF to jointly promote adequate, sustainable and sound financing of social protection systems.¹⁷ The ILO's tripartite membership is critical in defining this framework. A number of pilot countries could be identified where the two institutions could engage in a systematic collaboration through regular exchanges and involvement in policy discussions with national counterparts, including the provision of joint recommendations.

- 33.** In follow-up to the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, taking place in parallel to the 343rd Session of the Governing Body, the ILO will scale up the Climate Action for Jobs Initiative to support a job-rich, green and inclusive recovery, in line with a just transition towards environmentally sustainable and inclusive economies. It would step up its work by seeking to include all relevant stakeholders at the national and global levels, extending its membership to an increasing number of international agencies and to Member States in all regions. The ILO would continue to build joint initiatives and programmes with other global partners, including through the Partnership for Action in the Green Economy.
- 34.** Another area requiring particular attention relates to building support for international labour standards across the multilateral system. In this regard, the multilateral development banks are key actors, given their role in the response to the COVID-19 crisis and the scaling-up needed for realizing the SDGs in general. With a view to ensuring that national policies and development cooperation prioritize respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, the Office can continue to engage with the World Bank Group and regional multilateral development banks on developing their social safeguards and assist them with the labour issues that arise in the application of these safeguards.¹⁸
- 35.** As concerns trade and living standards, the Office is exploring the interlinkages between countries' international trade policies and domestic policies and investments that enable decent work. This includes consideration of the practical aspects of pursuing international trade and investment integration and the strengthening of investment in people's employment opportunities, skills, transitions and worker and social protections. The World Trade Organization is a particularly significant actor in this area, and the two organizations could develop a joint research agenda to support policy dialogue and guidance.¹⁹
- 36.** In addition to the above specific areas, the Office will continue to leverage its role in the G20 and G7 and with the BRICS group (composed of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa) and other regional and subregional groups, to promote the global call to action and support a process of policy dialogue on the human-centred approach among their members and the mobilization of resources for its implementation.

¹⁷ Global call to action, paras 13(c) and 14(c).

¹⁸ Global call to action, para. 14(b).

¹⁹ Global call to action, para. 14(d).

Modalities for a Multilateral Policy Forum

37. In its final paragraph, the global call to action instructs the ILO to work with other multilateral institutions to convene a major policy forum, with modalities to be determined by the Governing Body. Its aim would be to mobilize a strong and coherent global response in support of Member States' human-centred recovery strategies, including through joint initiatives and enhanced institutional arrangements among international and regional institutions.²⁰
38. The particular significance of the Forum is that it completes the range of ILO actions – programme delivery, national and regional-level interventions and partnerships with individual sister organizations – by providing an occasion for the consideration of collective multilateral initiatives, thus responding to the instruction to the ILO to play a leadership role in the international system as well as with constituents in assuring a comprehensive follow-up to the global call to action.
39. In considering the appropriate modalities of the Forum, the Governing Body will be guided by the specific aims of mobilizing a “strong and coherent global response” in support of national recovery strategies, and promoting “joint initiatives” and “enhanced institutional arrangements”. With these in mind, the following arrangements are proposed:
- (a) **Date.** The Forum would be convened in the first months of 2022.
 - (b) **Format.** The Forum would meet in a hybrid format and sessions would be convened to allow active participation across all time zones.
 - (c) **Participation.** Every effort will be made to secure the participation of the top leadership of all relevant international and regional organizations. The Forum would be open to tripartite constituents from all Member States, with interventions to be determined in close consultation and in line with established practice, allowing for statements by representatives of each group. In the event that physical presence is possible and is considered advantageous, this too would be the subject of similar consultations.
 - (d) **Programme.** The programme of the Forum should be such as to offer the opportunity to the leaders of invited organizations to make substantive presentations focusing specifically on the aims set out in the global call to action. The different groups would make their own initial presentations and react to those of the invited leaders and, to the extent possible, engage in interactive discussion with them. The Forum could subsequently engage in discussion of a number of thematic issues that are highlighted in the global call to action and which the Governing Body considers to be key to the current circumstances of the recovery. A final session should be dedicated to a discussion of next steps, and follow-up action.
 - (e) **Outcomes.** All invited leaders of organizations will be encouraged to bring to the Forum concrete proposals or commitments for joint action and enhanced institutional arrangements. The Forum may wish to react to these and consider additional options for cooperation to promote a human-centred recovery.
 - (f) **Follow-up.** The Governing Body will receive a report of the Forum, with a view to determining appropriate action in respect of the proposals arising from it.

²⁰ Global call to action, para. 15.

- (g) **Financial implications.** The cost of the Forum would be financed in the first instance from savings that might arise under Part I of the ILO's budget for 2022–23 or, failing that, through the use of the provision for unforeseen expenditure in Part II.

▶ Draft decision

40. **The Governing Body requested the Director-General to implement the follow-up actions detailed in document GB.343/INS/3/2, taking full account of the views expressed during its discussion.**