



International  
Labour  
Organization

# ▶ A Global Trend Analysis on the Role of Trade Unions in Times of COVID-19

A Summary of Key Findings



# ▶ A Global Trend Analysis on the Role of Trade Unions in Times of COVID-19\*

A Summary of Key Findings

**International Labour Office • Geneva**

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\* Analysis carried out in 133 countries, including one territory, from March to August 2020.

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## ► Executive summary

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**The world of work is being profoundly affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Governments have launched fiscal stimulus programmes** of an unprecedented scale with a view to supporting income and jobs as well as preventing an outright collapse of the economy.

**Effective social dialogue** and cooperation between governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations have proven indispensable to designing and implementing appropriate strategies and policies to address the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis and to building inclusive societies.

**The Global Trend Analysis on the Role of Trade Unions in Times of COVID-19** first reveals the most affected categories of workers, workers in the most vulnerable situations and the sectors most hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, as seen by trade unions. It then provides a summary of trade unions' responses to the COVID-19 crisis and the progress made through tripartite or bipartite social dialogue or via bilateral interactions with governments in 133 countries, including one territory, during the period spanning March to August 2020. The document goes on to reveal whether trade unions agreed with the economic and social measures implemented by their governments, and whether workers and trade unions' rights were violated. Lastly, it provides guidance on how trade unions can reinforce resilience and help to build a "better normal".

**The findings of the Global Trend Analysis** are based on regional trend analyses of trade unions' responses to COVID-19. They reflect the information provided by national trade unions to ACTRAV Specialists in ILO field Offices, information available in the ILO COVID-19 Information Hub as well as information from other sources such as national and international trade union organizations.

### The Most Affected Workers, Workers in the Most Vulnerable Situations and the Most Affected Sectors in the View of Trade Unions

**Health and frontline workers** are the categories of workers most affected by the COVID-19 crisis worldwide. They have risked their lives for others despite reported PPE shortages. Similarly, **informal**

**economy workers** as well as **self-employed and casual workers** have been disproportionately hit due to the lack of protection and of income replacement or savings, the precariousness of their employment relationship and their exclusion from support measures. Lastly, **MSMEs** have experienced sharp decreases in demand and revenue if not the total discontinuation of their activity.

**Women, young people, migrant workers, refugees and people with disabilities** are the workers in the most vulnerable situations due primarily to the informal and precarious nature of the work performed, poor working conditions, exposure to violence and marginalization, and the lack of protection or support by public services.

**Tourism, road and maritime transportation** as well as **aviation and construction, commerce and hospitality**, and the **entertainment and manufacturing sectors** are the sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 outbreak. Companies operating in these sectors experienced a temporary suspension of operations or stoppage of economic activities, restrictions in movement and border closures, serious risk of bankruptcy, and severe downturns with negative consequences on employment, the provision of services and the availability of raw materials.

### Trade Unions' Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis

**Workers as active players in social dialogue:** 108 out of 133 countries, or 81 per cent, used social dialogue in response to the pandemic to achieve a consensus on targeted measures to protect workers and enterprises. At least **one form of social dialogue**, either tripartite, bipartite or both, was used in 100 per cent of the Arab State countries, in 88 per cent of the Asian countries followed by 84 per cent of the countries in Europe and Central Asia, in 77 per cent of the African countries, and in 76 per cent of the countries in the Americas.

**Tripartite dialogue** between governments, trade unions and employers' organizations took place in 79 out of the 133 countries (59 per cent). When trade unions participated in policy discussions, the most frequent subjects of negotiation were social protection and employment measures as well as commitments towards collaborative industrial rela-

	Africa	Americas	Arab States	Asia and Pacific	Europe and Central Asia	World
<b>Social Dialogue</b>						
At least one form of social dialogue (Tripartite and/or Bipartite Dialogue)	36/47 (77%)	19/25 (76%)	6/6 (100%)	15/17 (88%)	32/38 (84%)	81%
Tripartite Dialogue	28/47 (60%)	15/25 (60%)	2/6 (33%)	10/17 (59%)	24/38 (63%)	59%
Bipartite Dialogue	28/47 (60%)	14/25 (56%)	6/6 (100%)	12/17 (70%)	22/38 (58%)	62%
<b>Bilateral Interactions</b> (between Governments and Trade Unions)	12/47 (26%)	9/25 (36%)	3/6 (50%)	7/17 (41%)	15/38 (39%)	34%
<b>Reported Violations</b> (of Workers'/Trade Unions' Rights)	10/47 (21%)	5/25 (20%)	4/6 (67%)	6/17 (35%)	11/38 (29%)	27%

tions, and fiscal and occupational safety and health (OSH) measures.

**Bipartite dialogue between employers and trade unions** was reported in 82 out of the 133 countries (62 per cent). Employers and workers often expressed similar concerns over the adequacy of the measures adopted and the lack of necessary supplies on the market (e.g. PPE). In some cases, they submitted joint statements, proposals or requests to governments. They also implemented enhanced OSH measures or provided additional benefits to specific categories of workers. In some cases, they signed MoUs or CBAs committing to preventing collective dismissals and to strengthening employment guarantees.

**Bilateral interactions between governments and trade unions** took place in 46 out of 133 countries and one territory (34 per cent). The topics negotiated included amendments to existing legislation in light of the COVID-19 crisis, retrenchment benefits and unemployment benefits for workers who lost their jobs, income support to self-employed workers and persons in need, additional benefits for health care workers, and necessary safety and health measures for workers.

**Targeted actions of trade unions for their members / workers** included setting up emergency funds, awareness-raising campaigns, training programmes and labour market matching services, legal advice, distribution of food parcels and PPE, and in some instances the recognition of COVID-19 as an employment injury.

**Unionization** by workers' organizations has been severely affected by lockdowns and restrictive mea-

asures. As a result, while some trade unions decided to discontinue the collection of membership dues, others saw the crisis as an opportunity to raise awareness and reach out to informal economy workers, and launched successful membership campaigns. Still others developed innovative ways to organize and reach out to members, or organized humanitarian actions in order to remain relevant.

**Agreement with government COVID-19 responses:** Trade unions generally welcomed governments' COVID-19 responses and demonstrated support in ensuring workers' compliance. However, in many instances, dissatisfaction has been expressed with the implementation of social dialogue mechanisms, the lack of unions' participation in decision-making processes and the lack of clarity with regard to the measures adopted. Some unions criticized their governments for having failed to provide adequate protection to all, including workers who are normally excluded due to their employment status.

**Violations of workers and trade unions' rights** were reported by several trade unions across the regions. Most violations were reported in the Arab States (67 per cent of the countries) and in Asia and Pacific (35 per cent of the countries), followed by Europe and Central Asia (29 per cent of the countries), Africa (21 per cent of the countries), and the Americas (20 per cent of the countries). Violations mainly concerned International Labour Standards, non-compliance with labour regulations with regard to layoffs, working hours and the payment of wages, and disregard of OSH regulations.

**Trade unions' recommendations to governments and employers:** Requests from trade unions to

governments for immediate action included universal health care, extended sickness, unemployment and family benefits, cash transfers, job and income security, financial support to enterprises, compliance with OSH regulations, the provision of in-kind benefits and the recognition of COVID-19 as an employment injury. Medium/long-term recommendations included strengthening social dialogue, extending social protection coverage, making long-term investments in social and welfare services and forgiving external debts.

## Conclusions

***Trade unions should regard the crisis as a wake-up call for contributing to building forward better and advancing labour and social agendas.*** To achieve these objectives, they need to be recognized, participate in policy-making, and negotiate collective agreements promoting fundamental rights, adequate minimum wages as well as maximum work-

ing hours, health and social protection benefits for all, and safety and health at work.

***Building forward better requires global-scale responses based on effective social dialogue*** and sound industrial relations. Trade unions need to ensure that the temporary measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are a stepping-stone toward a sound recovery focusing on a medium to longer-term perspective in line with the priorities identified in the ILO's policy framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

***Trade unions' agenda for resilience and empowerment in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and recovery should aim to:*** build political will, contribute to strengthening social dialogue mechanisms, build knowledge and capacity, increase representative capacity, continue to promote workers' priorities, provide new services, expand partnerships, engage with the UN processes on sustainable development, share information and learn from previous crises.

## ► Foreword

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**2020 started with the COVID-19 pandemic, a public health emergency which has profoundly affected the world of work.** On top of the public health threat, economic and social disruptions are jeopardizing the long-term livelihoods and well-being of millions of workers and their families, further exposing and exacerbating persistent inequality, socio-economic insecurity and the uneven distribution of the benefits of economic growth in many parts of the world.

In this context, **the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work** and the **ILO's four-pillar policy framework**, as well as **the 2030 Agenda and related SDGs**, provide overarching guidance that is more relevant than ever for achieving the future that we want. These policy frameworks draw attention to the fundamental role of **social dialogue and global solidarity**, which have proven to be **key drivers in mitigating the impacts of crises both past and present**.

As **ILO Director General Guy Ryder** recently said, "In these difficult times, social dialogue has never been more important. It helps us build resilience, and when tough decisions need to be taken it helps us find legitimate, accepted outcomes."

While in some countries and regions **social dialogue has been undermined during this crisis and violations of trade union rights have increased**, in those countries where social dialogue functioned effectively, much better results have been obtained. **Social dialogue, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining**, both as fundamental rights and enabling rights, **must therefore be at the centre of any trade union action**.

This Policy Brief is primarily directed to workers and their organizations. Its main purpose is to **promote a better understanding of the pivotal role trade unions have played in COVID-19 responses worldwide**, either through tripartite and bipartite social dialogue, bilateral interactions with their governments or targeted actions carried out in support of their members and society as a whole. This brief

also **raises awareness about violations of trade union and workers' rights during the pandemic**.

As such, it aims to **facilitate the exchange of experiences and relevant information** among trade unions and workers to **strengthen their capacity to influence national policymaking** and **develop a longer-term strategy to multiply their impact** at the national and international level.

In particular, **workers' organizations will have to play a major role** in ensuring that measures taken in response to the dramatic social and economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis will support an **equitable economic recovery and build resilience to face future crises**.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a wake-up call** alerting the global community to the urgency of accelerating progress in building a "better normal". However, given the multi-faceted nature and unpredictable impacts of the crisis, it will be tempting to advance policy responses unilaterally rather than through social dialogue. Therefore, **trade unions must remain vigilant and insist on the use of social dialogue mechanisms at all relevant levels for decision making throughout the crisis and beyond**.

Trade unions can help their countries to emerge stronger from this crisis by **demanding urgent action from governments and providing new and innovative proposals to transform short-term crisis measures into systemic reforms**.

To achieve this goal, **strong, independent, knowledgeable and representative trade unions as well as greater solidarity are needed** to ensure an equitable economic recovery with decent work for all.

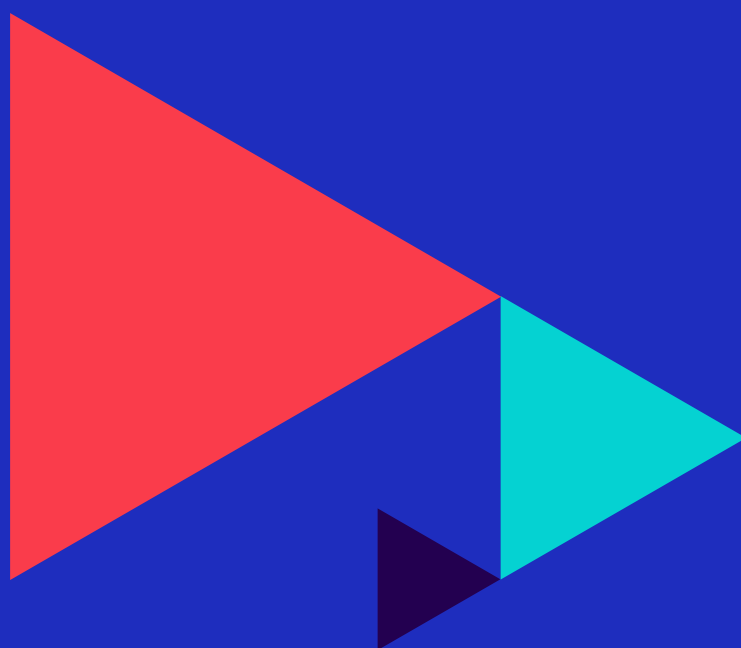
We hope you will find this brief useful for your work.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), especially Ursula Kulke, Mohammed Mwamadzingo, Ariel Castro, Greta Cartoceti and all those who contributed to the preparation and implementation of this brief.

**Maria Helena André**

Director, ILO's Bureau for Workers Activities (ACTRAV)





## ► Introduction

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Trade unions all over the world have participated in tripartite and bipartite social dialogue to influence policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Tripartite and bipartite social dialogue were used in the majority of countries to good effect in the early stages of the crisis response.<sup>1</sup> They have helped social partners to achieve consensus on targeted measures to protect workers and enterprises particularly hit by the crisis and to promote recovery. Workers' organizations have also provided tremendous support to their members and needy groups of the population to help contain the virus and reduce the negative impact of the pandemic.

This document provides an overview of the important role played by trade unions all over the world in response to the economic and social crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The document first reveals the most affected categories of workers, workers in the most vulnerable situations and the sectors most hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, as seen by trade unions.
- It provides a summary of trade unions' responses to the COVID-19 crisis in 133 countries, including one territory,<sup>2</sup> during the period spanning March to August 2020. In particular, it demonstrates the role trade unions have played in national, regional and local COVID-19 responses, through either tripartite or bipartite social dialogue and the achievements they have made via bilateral interactions with their government.

- The document further reveals the targeted actions trade unions have carried out in support of their members and society as a whole, whether they agreed with the economic and social measures implemented by their governments in response to the social and economic impact of the pandemic, and whether workers' and trade unions' rights were violated by these measures.

- Taking into account what trade unions have attained alone or together with governments and/or employers and their organizations during the COVID-19 crisis, the document also provides guidance on how trade unions can reinforce resilience and build a better normal.

The findings of this document are mainly based on regional trend analyses on trade unions' responses to COVID-19,<sup>3</sup> which reflect the information provided by national trade unions to ACTRAV Specialists in ILO field Offices, information available in the ILO COVID-19 Information Hub<sup>4</sup> as well as information from other sources, as indicated in the footnotes of this document.

The rationale for carrying out this assessment is that the world of work is being profoundly affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the threat to public health, economic and social disruptions jeopardize the long-term livelihoods and wellbeing of millions of workers and their families. According to the ILO, the global loss in labour

1 See *Peak-level social dialogue as a governance tool during the COVID-19 pandemic: Global and regional trends and policy issues*, ILO, 2020. Slight differences may be due to the different time frames covered by the documents and the different numbers of countries under consideration.

2 Regions and countries, including one territory, considered in the trend analysis:

**Africa (47 out of a total of 54 countries):** Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

**Americas (25 out of a total of 35 countries):** Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

**Arab States (6 out of a total of 12 countries, including one territory):** Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

**Asia and Pacific (17 out of a total of 36 countries):** Australia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

**Europe and Central Asia (38 out of a total of 51 countries):** Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan.

3 ILO forthcoming.

4 <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/regional-country/country-responses/lang-en/index.htm>

income during the first three quarters of 2020 amounted to USD\$3.5 trillion.<sup>5</sup>

In response to the massive labour market disruptions, governments have launched fiscal stimulus programmes of unprecedented scale with a view to supporting income and jobs as well as preventing an outright collapse of the economy. Where the mobilisation of additional resources was not possible, many governments have resorted to international solidarity, including Official Development Assistance, the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, and IMF emergency financing.<sup>6</sup>

Social partners should be part and parcel of the policy responses to the pandemic and their imple-

mentation. Effective social dialogue and cooperation between governments and employers' and workers' organizations play an important role. They have proven to be indispensable to designing and implementing appropriate strategies and policies to address the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis and to building inclusive societies. The [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#) (2019) and the ILO's four-pillar policy framework,<sup>7</sup> which contain a roadmap to cope with the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide overarching guidance that is more relevant than ever for building forward better.

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<sup>5</sup> [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition. Updated estimates and analysis](#), ILO, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that IMF emergency financing is not linked to "solidarity" but rather to conditionality, and is sometimes considered as a loan.

<sup>7</sup> [ILO Policy Brief on COVID-19. A policy framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis](#), ILO, 2020.

## ► 1. The Most Affected Workers, Workers in the Most Vulnerable Situations and the Most Affected Sectors in the View of Trade Unions

### 1.1. Most affected categories of workers

Based on the information reported by trade unions, **health and frontline workers** are the category of workers most affected by the COVID-19 crisis worldwide. They have risked their lives for others despite reported shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), heavy additional workloads and lack of adequate rest periods, low pay and lack of benefits, and stigmatization. According to the latest available data,<sup>8</sup> at least 7,000 healthcare workers are known to have died around the world after contracting COVID-19. In addition, high rates of infected health workers result in more pressure on the health system and an intensified workload for colleagues.

Trade unions also reported that **informal economy workers** have been severely impacted by the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> The full or partial lockdown measures implemented in many countries all over the world significantly impact these workers, as most of them cannot rely on income replacement or savings. In addition, they were often excluded by governments from extraordinary support measures because they were not registered. Not working and staying home means losing their jobs and their livelihoods.

**Self-employed workers and casual workers** make up another category that has been disproportionately exposed to the negative consequences of the pandemic given the lack of protection and the precariousness of their employment relationship. In addition, containment measures mean that for many self-employed workers, demand has all but disappeared, particularly in some industries. Depending upon the length of the crisis, this could have dramatic consequences for their livelihoods and future employment prospects.



<sup>8</sup> [Global: Amnesty Analysis Reveals over 7,000 Health Workers Have Died From COVID-19](#), Amnesty International, 3 September 2020.

<sup>9</sup> [COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Immediate Responses and Policy Challenges](#), ILO, 2020. According to the ILO, in 2020 over 2 billion workers have been earning their livelihoods in the informal economy. This is 62 per cent of all those working worldwide.

COVID-19 also has a far-reaching impact on **Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs)**, the source of income for millions of workers. The shock effects from this crisis are being borne by MSMEs and displacing their workers across the globe. Movement restrictions and the sharp decrease in demand have a disproportionate effect on MSMEs, as they depend mostly on local markets and are highly vulnerable to economic fluctuations. In addition, their limited access to funds and resources means they have fewer options in comparison to bigger companies to respond to the sudden stop of economic activity.

## 1.2. Workers in the most vulnerable situations

Trade unions throughout the regions, but especially in Latin America and Africa, have identified **women** as one group of workers in the most vulnerable situations. On average, women comprise up to 70 per cent of health care workers and the social care sector in 104 countries.<sup>10</sup> They also do three times as much unpaid care work as men. With COVID-19 and children out of school, heightened care needs among the elderly and overwhelmed health services,<sup>11</sup> unpaid care work has increased. In developing countries, about 70 per cent of women's employment is in the informal economy, which has been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, COVID-19 quarantine measures have caused a spike in domestic violence levels, with women as the main victims.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the crisis has harshly affected millions of **migrant workers**, who are often the first to be laid off but the last to gain access to testing or treatment. Like informal economy workers, migrant workers were in many instances excluded from national COVID-19 policy responses such as wage subsidies, unemployment benefits or social protection measures. Where access to COVID-19 testing or medical treatment is available, they may be reluctant to come forward due to fear of detention or deportation, especially those in an irregular situation. In some cases, travel restrictions have

trapped migrants in countries of destination with no options to return home. Mass layoffs of migrant workers during the pandemic has also had a significant impact on remittances.<sup>13</sup>

Trade unions also consider **refugees** as part of the most vulnerable groups, especially those engaged in domestic work, in construction, manufacturing and agricultural sectors. More than 80 per cent of the world's refugee population live in developing countries, many residing in overcrowded camps where social distancing or quarantine are difficult.

The impact of the pandemic on **young people** is deep and disproportionate. Young women and young people in developing countries have been particularly hard-hit. Millions are not transitioning into decent work and risk social exclusion. Young workers are overrepresented in sectors severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic like tourism, retail jobs, accommodation and food services. The lockdown measures have also taken a huge toll on education opportunities for young people due to the closure of schools, universities and TVET institutions. Although some institutions are able to provide schooling online, this opportunity is not widespread due to limited internet access in some countries. Thus, the pandemic is not only destroying their jobs and employment prospects, but also disrupting their education and training with a serious impact on their mental well-being. The disproportionate effect of the pandemic on young people has further exacerbated inequalities and risks reducing the productive potential of an entire generation.

**Persons with disabilities**, who represent 15 per cent of the world's population,<sup>14</sup> have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They face marginalization in social, economic and health terms, and public services are limited in their ability to reach them. This marginalization increases the threat posed by the COVID-19 crisis to lives and livelihoods. Persons with disabilities are also more likely to have health conditions that increase the risk of getting COVID-19. Generally, they are less able to ensure physical distancing, face accessibility

10 [Women at the Core of the Fight against COVID-19 Crisis; WHO \(2019\). Gender Equity in the Health Workforce: Analysis of 104 Countries](#), OECD, 2020.

11 Data from the [UN SG Policy Brief on "The Impact of COVID-19 on Women."](#)

12 [Issue Brief: COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls](#), UN Women, 2020.

13 According to the World Bank, remittances to low income countries and middle-income countries, where the majority of migrant workers originate, were expected to fall by 19.7 per cent to USD445 billion in 2020, representing a loss of a crucial financing lifeline for many vulnerable households. [World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History](#), WB, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>.

14 [World report on disability](#), WHO and World Bank, 2011.



barriers in obtaining relevant information, and may experience worsened social isolation and greater exposure to violence and harassment. The over-representation of persons with disabilities among the poor and in the informal economy increases their

risk of infection. Many of these risks are compounded for women and older persons with disabilities. At the same time, some recommended COVID-19 prevention measures might create new barriers for them.<sup>15</sup>

15 ILO Brief: COVID-19 and the World of Work: Ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities at all stages of the response, ILO, 2020.

### 1.3. Most affected sectors

Most trade unions consider **tourism** as one of the sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to lockdown and containment measures and a potential loss of USD850 million to USD1.1 billion international tourists, hotels, restaurants, tour operators, airlines, and cruise ships have suspended their operations indefinitely.<sup>16</sup> While the sector accounted for some 330 million jobs worldwide in 2019, equivalent to 10.3 per cent of total global employment,<sup>17</sup> it was estimated that 100 to 120 million of these jobs were at risk in 2020.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, **road and maritime transportation** as well as **aviation** are considered heavily hit sectors.

The road transport sector is essential to social and economic development and guarantees mobility across jurisdictions and countries. However, in order to curb the spread of COVID-19, many countries around the world have placed restrictions on domestic transit and/or closed border crossings for road freight transport services. In many countries, drivers are self-employed and thus fall outside the scope of labour and employment protection, which means that they are not eligible for critical social protection benefits such as disability compensation and health and unemployment insurance.<sup>19</sup> Travel and ports' restrictions have severely affected maritime transport, which moves the world's food, energy and raw materials. Similar considerations

#### Tourism



- ▶ Due to lockdown and containment measures and a potential loss of 850 million to 1.1 billion international tourists; many hotels, restaurants, tour operators, airlines and cruise ships have suspended their operations indefinitely
- ▶ 100 to 120 million jobs are at risk in the tourism sector

#### Transport



- ▶ **Road sector:** Many countries around the world have placed restrictions on domestic transit and/or closed border crossings for road freight transport services.



- ▶ **Maritime transportation:** Travel and ports' restrictions have severely affected maritime transport.



- ▶ **Civil aviation:** According to the International Civil Aviation Organization, the sector experienced a 1.8 billion passenger decrease, or 69% between January and August 2020 with airline losses of between USD 340 and 380 billion.

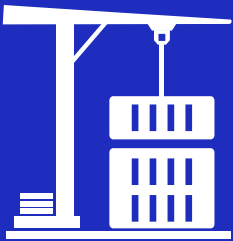
<sup>16</sup> According to the UNWTO, the loss in export revenues from tourism could be as high as USD910 billion to USD1.2 trillion. See *International Tourist Numbers Could Fall 60-80% in 2020*, UNWTO Reports, UNWTO, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> *Travel and Tourism Economic Impact Report 2019*, WTTC, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> *International Tourist Numbers Could Fall 60-80% in 2020*, UNWTO Reports, UNWTO, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> *COVID-19 and Road Transport. ILO sectoral brief*, ILO, 2020.





## ▶ Construction Sector



- ▶ Before COVID-19 struck, many construction workers were on short-term and project-based contracts. Many of those have faced reduced hours and layoffs, or lost their incomes almost immediately.
- ▶ The situation is critical for constructions workers in developing countries, where the sector is highly informal and where they are likely to lack of severance pay, unemployment and other social protection benefits.

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## ▶ Others sectors hit by COVID-19 crisis are:

 <p style="margin-top: 5px;">▶ Commerce</p>	 <p style="margin-top: 5px;">▶ Hospitality</p>
 <p style="margin-top: 5px;">▶ Entertainment</p>	 <p style="margin-top: 5px;">▶ Manufacturing</p>

apply to civil aviation, which employs 10.2 million workers worldwide and supports 65.5 million jobs in a range of interconnected sectors such as services and tourism.<sup>20</sup> According to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),<sup>21</sup> the sector experienced a 1.8 billion passenger or 69 per cent decrease from January to August 2020 with airline losses of between USD340 and USD380 billion.

Equally affected has been the **construction** sector, including those enterprises that rely on it, which are small or medium-sized and at serious risk of bankruptcy if business does not return soon. According to the ILO, already before COVID-19 struck, many construction workers were on short-term and project-based contracts. Many of those have faced

reduced hours and layoffs, or lost their incomes almost immediately. In other cases, the construction industry has continued to operate despite unsafe conditions (e.g. Brazil, Albania, Croatia, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong and Cambodia).<sup>22</sup> The situation is particularly critical for construction workers in developing countries, where the sector is highly informal, and where they are likely to lack severance pay, unemployment and other social protection benefits.<sup>23</sup>

Lastly, the regional trend analyses highlighted that **commerce** and **hospitality**, and the **entertainment** and **manufacturing sectors**, were disproportionately hit by the COVID-19 crisis, due to severe downturns in all regions caused by travel restrictions, lockdown measures and the stoppage of economic activities.

<sup>20</sup> COVID-19 and Civil Aviation. ILO Sectoral Brief, ILO, 2020.  
<sup>21</sup> Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Civil Aviation, ICAO, 2020.  
<sup>22</sup> BWI Regional Reports on COVID-19, BWI, 2020.  
<sup>23</sup> The Construction Sector Can Help Lead the Economic Recovery – Here's How, ILO, 2020.



## ► 2. Trade Unions' Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis

The following table provides, for the world and for each region, a snapshot of the numbers/percentages of countries where either tripartite or bipartite social dialogue as well as bilateral interactions between governments and trade unions took place, and where trade unions reported violations of workers' and/or trade unions' rights during the pandemic.

### 2.1. Workers as active players in social dialogue

Social dialogue is defined by the ILO as any type of negotiation, consultation or simple exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. It can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue, or it may consist of bipartite relations only between labour and management (or trade unions and employers' organizations), with or without indirect government involvement. Social dialogue processes can be informal or institutionalised, and is often a combination of the two. It can take place at the national, regional or enterprise level, and can be inter-professional, sectoral or a combination of these.

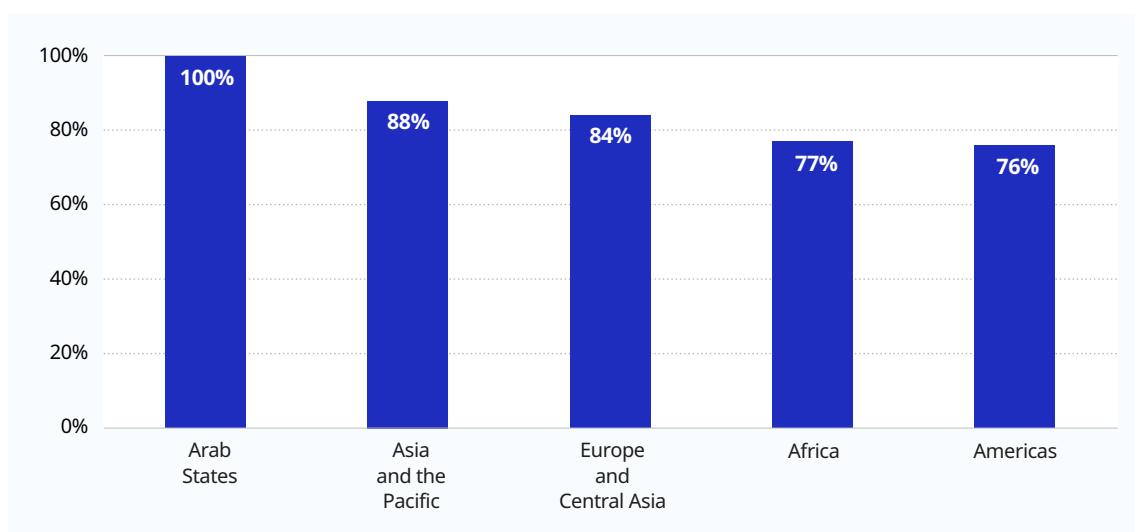
According to the information received from trade unions all over the world, a majority of countries and territories – 108 out of 133, or 81 per cent – used social dialogue, whether tripartite or bipartite, either singly or together, as part of their response to the COVID-19 crisis. While the extent of social dialogue varied considerably between countries and regions, social dialogue helped in most countries to achieve a consensus on targeted measures to protect workers and enterprises particularly hard hit by the crisis, as demonstrated below.

At least one form of social dialogue, either tripartite, bipartite or both, was used in 100 per cent of the Arab State countries, in 88 per cent of the Asian countries followed by 84 per cent of the countries in Europe and Central Asia, 77 per cent of the African countries, and 76 per cent of the countries in the Americas.







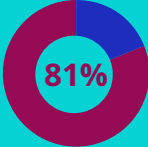
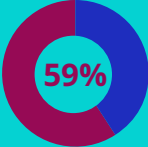
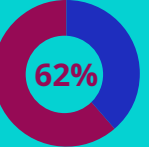
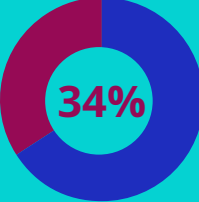
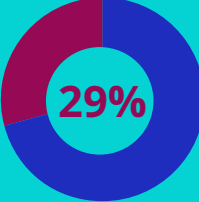
#### 2.1.1. Tripartite dialogue between governments, trade unions and employers' organizations

Among the countries considered, tripartite dialogue between governments, trade unions and employers' organizations took place in 79 out of the 133 countries under consideration (59 per cent). It was used in 63 per cent of countries in Europe and

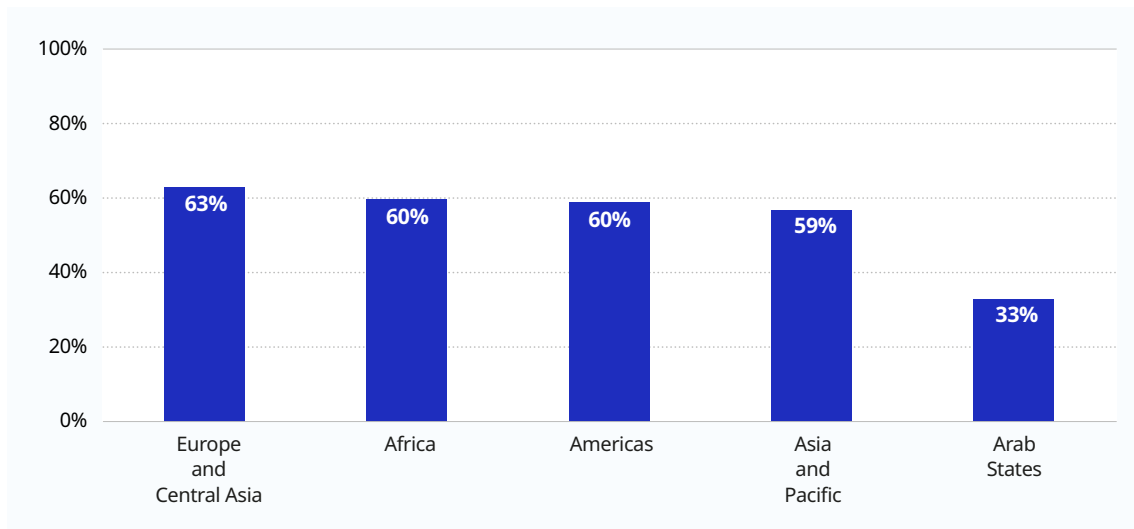
► Graph 1: Social dialogue (either tripartite or bipartite or a combination thereof)



► **Table 1:**  
**At a glance: Trade unions participation in tripartite and bipartite social dialogue and bilateral interactions with Governments, as well as reported violations of trade unions'/workers' rights**

	Social Dialogue			Bilateral Interactions	Reported Violations
	At least one form of social dialogue	Tripartite Dialogue	Bipartite Dialogue	(between Governments and Trade Unions)	(of Workers'/ Trade Unions' Rights)
 <b>Africa</b>	36/47 (77%)	28/47 (60%)	28/47 (60%)	12/47 (26%)	10/47 (21%)
 <b>Americas</b>	19/25 (76%)	15/25 (60%)	14/25 (56%)	9/25 (36%)	5/25 (20%)
 <b>Arab States</b>	6/6 (100%)	2/6 (33%)	6/6 (100%)	3/6 (50%)	4/6 (67%)
 <b>Asia and Pacific</b>	15/17 (88%)	10/17 (59%)	12/17 (70%)	7/17 (41%)	6/17 (35%)
 <b>Europe and Central Asia</b>	32/38 (84%)	24/38 (63%)	22/38 (58%)	15/38 (39%)	11/38 (29%)
 <b>World</b>	 81%	 59%	 62%	 34%	 29%

► **Graph 2: Tripartite dialogue between governments, trade unions and employers organizations**



Central Asia, in 60 per cent of the African countries, as well as in 60 per cent of countries in the Americas, in 59 per cent of the Asian and Pacific countries, and in 33 per cent of the Arab States.

In most cases, ad hoc tripartite committees and/or bipartite bodies have been set up at national level to tackle the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, comprising government, employers, and workers' representatives. In some cases, existing tripartite bodies have been utilized for the same purpose.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, social partners' involvement changed from country to country. On the one hand, countries with solid industrial relations adopted a more participatory model, which allowed social partners to effectively influence the policy response to the crisis. On the other hand, trade unions operating in countries with less consolidated industrial relations or characterised by difficult conditions of constrained democracy expressed their dissatisfaction regarding social partners' insufficient involvement in decision-making processes. However, they tried to engage in dialogue and submitted proposals to their governments, making significant efforts to be heard.

### Achievements through tripartite social dialogue

When trade unions have participated in policy discussions, the most frequent subjects of negotiation have been **social protection and employment**

**measures** as well as **commitments towards collaborative industrial relations**, and **fiscal and occupational safety and health (OSH) measures**.

In the realm of social protection, employment measures and sound industrial relations, actions negotiated through tripartite social dialogue included:

- **Health care:** Allocation of additional budget resources to ensure access to health care and a more effective response to the health emergency, including free testing services for workers with cough, fever and flu-like symptoms.
- **Income protection:** Temporary job and income protection measures to support workers and employers affected by the lockdown such as: (1) enhanced short-time work schemes and unemployment benefits up to a certain percentage of the reference wage as well as the extension of unemployment benefits to those often excluded (e.g. informal economy and self-employed workers); (2) mandatory payment of wages to certain categories of suspended workers such as workers aged 60 or older, pregnant women and high-risk workers with diseases; (3) increased wages and additional benefits for health workers; (4) prohibition of layoffs; and (5) anticipation of annual leave and paid leave.
- **Sickness benefits:** Extended duration of sickness benefits from the first day of sickness.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

- ▶ **Old age, survivors and disability benefits:** Ensuring income security for those affected by the crisis and facilitating access to social protection benefits.
- ▶ **Family leave and care benefits:** Support to workers who could not telework due to care responsibilities for family members through family leave, special childcare facilities and long-term care support.
- ▶ **Social assistance:** Income support to the population in need through social assistance, cash transfers and other support to respond to the economic consequences of the pandemic.
- ▶ **Provision of in-kind benefits** (e.g. PPE) in particular to those working in frontline sectors such as health, care economy and food retail.
- ▶ **Temporary flexible working arrangements:** Encouraging remote working modalities, shift work, and providing cash payments to purchase necessary equipment (e.g. IT items, subsidies for internet costs, and various supplies).
- ▶ **Dispute resolution:** Creation of tripartite ad hoc committees to receive claims and solve collective or individual disputes arising from the violation of employment regulations and labour rights.

In some cases, social partners have participated in the design and implementation of fiscal measures such as:

- ▶ **Financial support to enterprises:** Through deferrals of social protection contributions, tax breaks and favorable loans and interest rates in order to guarantee business continuity and avoid further job losses.

Tripartite dialogue focused on the enhancement and enforcement of OSH regulations to ensure safe and healthy conditions at workplaces. These included:

- ▶ **Strengthening of existing national OSH legislation** or adoption of adequate regulations, where not yet in place.
- ▶ **Enactment of OSH protocols** based on the indications provided by the competent national authorities and on WHO Guidelines to ensure appropriate measures would be implemented and enforced with the active participation of all players involved.
- ▶ **Monitoring of compliance with OSH regulations** with the support of ministries of labour

▶ <b>List for achievements through tripartite social dialogue</b>
▶ <b>Health care</b>
▶ <b>Income protection</b>
▶ <b>Sickness benefits</b>
▶ <b>Old age, survivors and disability benefits</b>
▶ <b>Family leave and care benefits</b>
▶ <b>Social assistance</b>
▶ <b>Provision of in-kind benefits</b>
▶ <b>Temporary flexible working arrangements</b>
▶ <b>Dispute resolution</b>
▶ <b>Financial support to enterprises</b>
▶ <b>Strengthening of existing national OSH legislation</b>
▶ <b>Enactment of OSH protocols</b>
▶ <b>Monitoring of compliance with OSH regulations</b>
▶ <b>Ensuring safety and health at workplaces</b>

and labour inspectorates as well as workers’ representatives at company level.

- **Ensuring safety and health at workplaces** through employers’ commitment to provide adequate hand washing facilities and sanitizers.

### 2.1.2. Bipartite social dialogue between trade unions and employers and their organizations<sup>25</sup>

**Bipartite dialogue between trade unions and employers and their organizations** has also been a common practice during the COVID-19 pandemic in the majority of the regions. Bipartite social dialogue occurred throughout the world at national and sectoral levels, and in most instances also at company level, to ensure the implementation of safety and health measures for the protection of workers at the workplace.

Based on the data received on the countries considered, bipartite dialogue between employers and trade unions was reported in 82 out of the 133 countries under consideration (62 per cent). It was reported in all six countries under consideration in the Arab States (100 per cent), as well as in 70 per cent of the Asian and Pacific countries, in 60 per cent of the countries in Africa, in 58 per

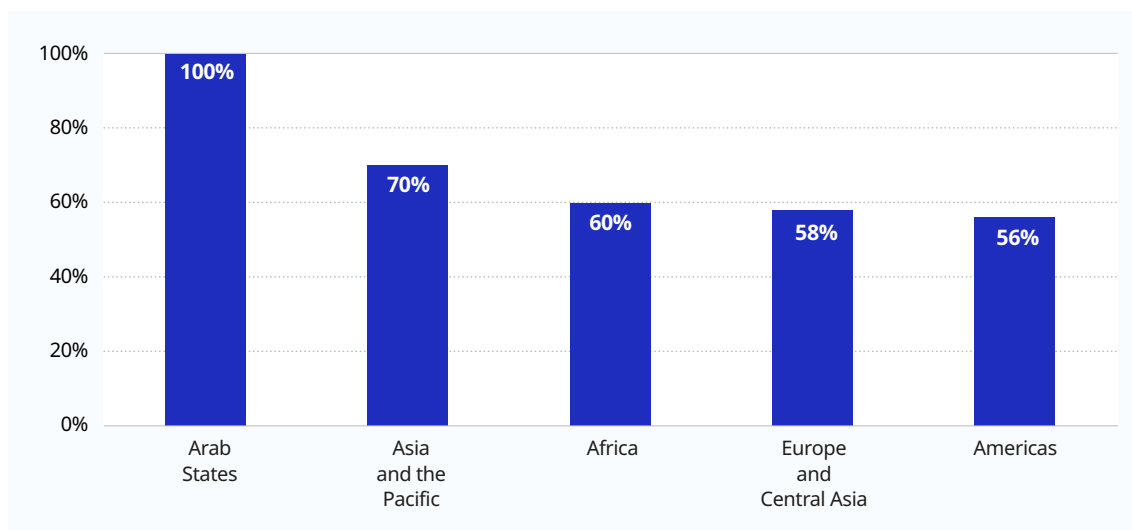
cent of the countries in Europe and Central Asia, and 56 per cent of the countries in the Americas.

In general, it is worth noting that employers and workers often expressed similar concerns when governments adopted insufficient measures in response to the crisis, or when a lack of necessary supplies on the market, such as PPE, prevented the continuation of economic activities.

In these circumstances, they joined forces to find common solutions, which included:

- **Joint statements and proposals** to lobby governments when designing policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. In some cases, these consisted of requests for implementation of social dialogue mechanisms and greater involvement of social partners in the decision-making processes.
- **Joint requests to governments** to include additional measures in stimulus packages in support of workers and employers.
- In many instances, social partners discussed and implemented **enhanced measures to ensure the safety and health of workers**. These included: (1) the temporary halt or reduction of activities in compliance with quarantine requirements; (2) the issuing of safe return to work guidelines/protocols and

► **Graph 3: Bipartite social dialogue between trade unions and employers’ organization**



<sup>25</sup> See also: *Employers and Workers Negotiating Measures to Prevent the spread of COVID-19, Protect Livelihoods and Support Recovery: A Review of Practice*. Brief, ILO, 2020.

▶ **List for common solutions through bipartite social dialogue**

▶ **Joint statements and proposals to lobby governments**

▶ **Joint requests to governments**

▶ **Enhanced measures discussed and implemented by social partners to ensure the safety and health of workers**

▶ **Additional benefits have been granted to specific categories of workers**

▶ **Memorandums of Understanding**

▶ **Collective Bargaining Agreements**

distribution of informational material; (3) informational meetings or training workshops on COVID-19; (4) the adoption of shift work to reduce large workplace gatherings and ensure physical distancing; (5) the provision of in-kind support (e.g. PPE); (6) the sanitation of workplaces, and (7) the set-up of individual/collective transportation.

- ▶ In some cases, **additional benefits have been granted to specific categories of workers** (e.g. health workers) through sectoral agreements.
- ▶ In Kenya, social partners signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** to reaffirm the commitment to coordinated action by the relevant players, the respect of OSH regulations and the prevention of collective dismissals. In Bangladesh, a MoU in the garment sector envisaged the prohibition of layoffs.
- ▶ In Europe and Latin America, social partners (re-)negotiated **Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs)** to enhance employment guarantees (e.g. measures to secure wages/income and temporary flexible working arrangements). In some cases, the agreements stipulated the postponement of social elections

at company level or the extension of the validity of electronic meal vouchers, sports and cultural vouchers and gift vouchers for a certain period (e.g. Belgium).

- ▶ In several instances, social partners worked together to advance **industrial relations**, e.g. through the creation of working groups to resolve existing industrial relations issues. In addition, commitments towards harmonious labour relations and constructive social dialogue have been included in most of the signed collective agreements.

## 2.2 Bilateral interactions between governments and trade unions

Trade unions from several countries also reported on their bilateral interactions with their governments. Such interactions or exchanges do not constitute social dialogue as defined by the ILO. However, they may constitute preliminary steps towards tripartite social dialogue.

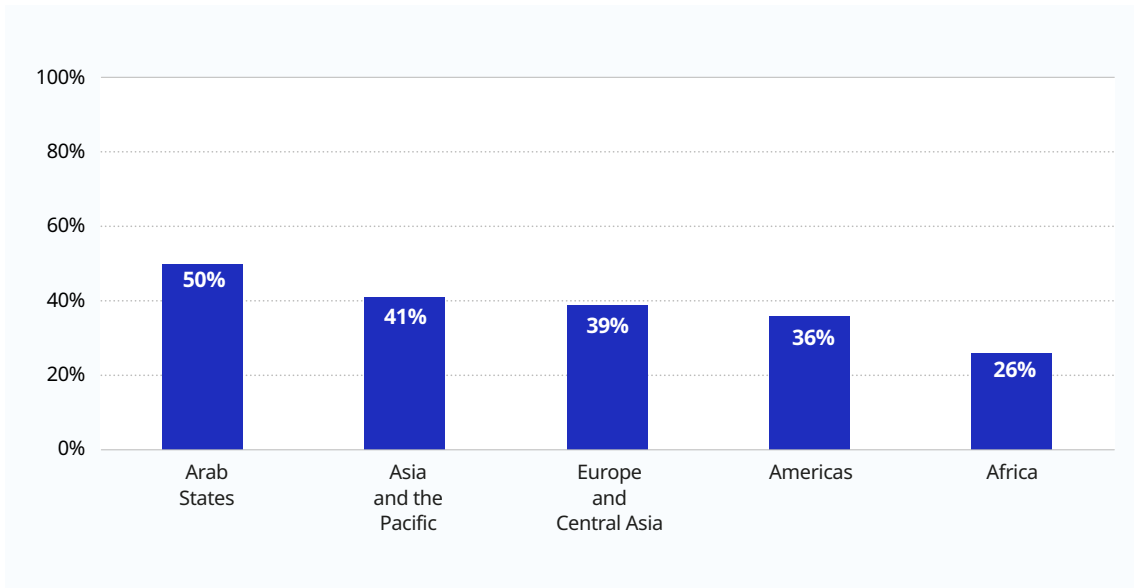
Based on the information received, bilateral interactions between governments and trade unions took place in 46 out of 133 countries and territory (24 per cent). Trade unions reported bilateral interactions with their governments in 50 per cent of the countries and territory under consideration in the Arab States, in 41 per cent of the Asian and Pacific countries, followed by 39 per cent of the European and Central Asian countries, 36 per cent of the countries of the Americas, and 26 per cent of the countries in Africa.

In many instances, bilateral interaction between governments and trade unions took place in countries where no tripartite dialogue was reported. In a few other countries, governments engaged with trade unions as a preliminary step or in addition to ongoing tripartite dialogue. In some other cases, governments engaged with trade unions and with employers' organizations separately.

Bilateral interactions between trade unions and their governments generally yielded positive outcomes for workers. The topics, which were discussed and negotiated between governments and trade unions in response to the COVID-19 crisis, concentrated on the following issues:

- ▶ Amendments to existing legislation in light of the COVID-19 crisis,

► **Graph 4: Bilateral interactions between Governments and Trade Unions**



- **Topics discussed and negotiated between governments and trade unions in response to the COVID-19 crisis**
- **Amendments to existing legislation in light of the COVID-19 crisis**
- **Retrenchment benefits and unemployment benefits for workers who lost their jobs**
- **Income support for self-employed workers and persons in need**
- **Additional benefits for health care workers**
- **Necessary safety and health measures for workers**

- Retrenchment benefits and unemployment benefits for workers who lost their jobs,
- Income support for self-employed workers and persons in need,
- Additional benefits for health care workers,
- Necessary safety and health measures for workers.

Governments further called upon trade unions to assist in the identification of the vulnerable population and to play an active role in raising awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic among workers and the population at large.

### 2.3 Targeted actions of trade unions for their members / workers

During the pandemic, trade unions have also very actively supported their members and workers at large. Despite the difficulties of organizing and the restrictions of public gatherings, trade unions managed to assist workers and their families by offering legal, in-kind and other types of support throughout the crisis.

For instance, **targeted actions by trade unions for their members/workers** included the setting up of emergency funds for affected workers or donations

to existing funds in support of workers and people in need. Trade unions also carried out awareness raising campaigns on TV and radio channels or social media to keep their members informed about the pandemic and the measures to be adopted to avoid the spread of the virus at work and at home. In some cases, they adjusted existing training programmes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic or offered labour market matching services. In addition, they provided legal advice through hotlines and online platforms where they collected claims and complaints regarding employers' abuses and non-compliance with labour regulations. In a few cases, they established ad hoc committees liaising with the ministries of labour or labour inspectorates to ensure that adequate actions were taken to address these issues. Moreover, trade unions organized field campaigns and distributed food parcels as well as PPE to workers and people in need. In some instances, provisions have been set up to support migrant workers and women given the rise of domestic and workplace violence in many countries. In several cases, trade unions also succeeded in obtaining recognition by the competent authorities of COVID-19 as an employment injury, often in the form of an occupational disease, and mostly for workers in the health sector (e.g. in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay).

- Targeted actions of trade unions for their members/workers
- Setting up of emergency funds for affected workers or donations to existing funds in support of workers and people in need
- Carrying out awareness raising campaigns
- Adjusting training programmes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Offering labour market matching services or legal services
- Providing legal advice, distributing food parcels and PPE, and in some instances obtaining the recognition of COVID-19 as an employment injury

## 2.4 Unionization

Lockdowns and restrictive measures adopted by governments to limit the spread of the virus, such as the prohibition of mass gatherings and curfews, have significantly affected the **unionization** of workers organizations and related activities. In response, some trade unions decided to discontinue the collection of membership dues (e.g. in the Arab States) to relieve their members, despite the negative impact on their budgets. Others saw the crisis as an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of trade unions among workers as well as to reach out to informal economy workers, and launched successful membership campaigns (e.g. in Norway, LO Norway reported 11,000 new members in March 2020). In Africa, the International

- How lockdowns and restrictive measures adopted by governments affected Unionization
- Some trade unions decided to discontinue the collection of membership dues to relieve their members (e.g. in the Arab States regions)
- Some trade unions saw the crisis as an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of trade unions among workers (e.g. in Norway, LO Norway reported 11,000 new members in March 2020)
- Other trade unions developed innovative ways to organize and reach out to members (e.g. case of the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers in Africa)
- Some trade unions organised humanitarian actions in order to remain relevant to their members and families (e.g. in the Dominican Republic, Panama and Peru)



Federation of Building and Wood Workers (BWI) and its affiliates have been developing innovative ways of organizing and reaching out to members. These included using new technologies such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Zoom, Teams and Skype, as well as involving young people and women in recruiting processes through the BWI Youth Organising Academy. In a few Latin American countries, where declining membership has been registered, trade unions reacted by organizing humanitarian actions in order to remain relevant to their members and respective families (e.g. in the Dominican Republic, Panama and Peru). According to the trade unions involved, these efforts contributed to membership retention.

### 2.5. Agreement with government COVID-19 responses

Trade unions generally welcomed **their governments' COVID-19 responses** and demonstrated support in ensuring workers' compliance with prescribed government measures.

However, in many instances trade unions expressed their dissatisfaction with the implementation of social dialogue mechanisms and the lack of trade union participation in decision-making processes. In other cases, they denounced a lack of clarity with regard to the measures adopted (e.g. qualifying

conditions and duration of benefits, beneficiaries, service delivery modalities, etc.) and asked for further clarification.

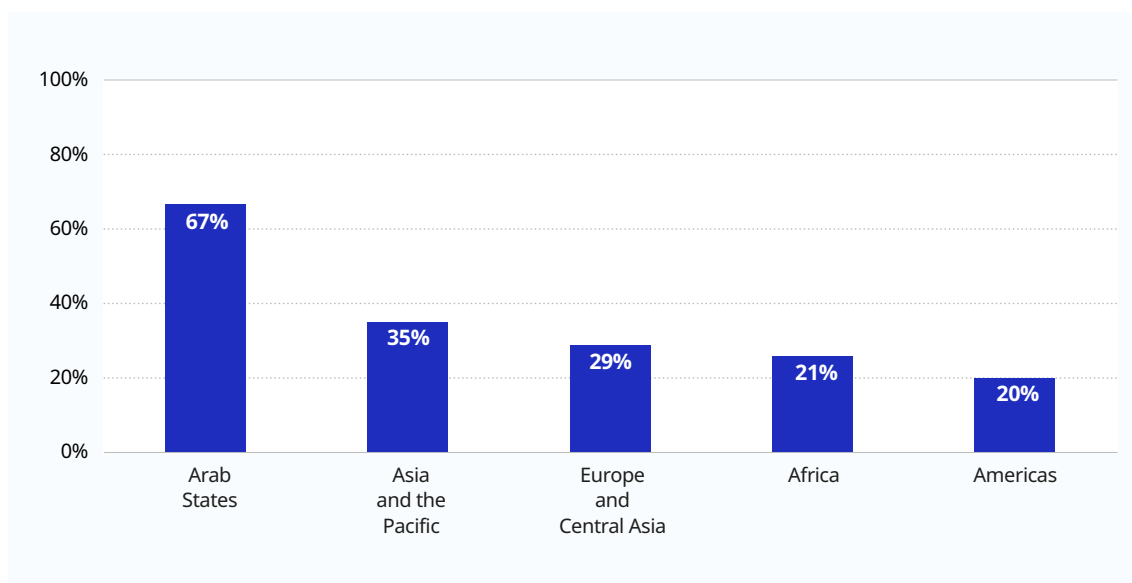
Some trade unions also criticized their governments for having failed to provide adequate protection and employment guarantees to workers, especially those who are usually not covered by social insurance and social assistance measures because of the nature of their job or their employment status.

In some cases, trade unions condemned their respective governments for using social security funds to mitigate the negative impacts of the crisis, thus compromising the funds' sustainability for years to come (e.g. Guatemala, Honduras and Malaysia).

### 2.6 Reported violations of workers' and trade unions' rights

The information received from trade unions also revealed that the crisis has exacerbated existing democratic deficiencies, with serious consequences in terms of respect of International Labour Standards (ILS) and workers' rights. In this regard, **violations of trade unions'/workers' rights during the COVID-19 crisis** have been reported by several trade unions across the regions, although to varying extent.

► Graph 5: Reported violations of workers' and trade unions' rights



## ▶ List of categories of violations

▶ **Violation of International Labour Standards and non-compliance with labour regulations with regard to layoffs**▶ **Non-compliance with labour regulations with regard to layoffs, working hours and the payment of wages**▶ **Disregard of Occupational Safety and Health requirements**

Given the number of countries considered in each region, the most violations have been reported in the Arab States (67 per cent of the countries) and in Asia and Pacific (35 per cent of the countries), followed by Europe and Central Asia (29 per cent of the countries), Africa (21 per cent of the countries), and the Americas (20 per cent of the countries).

The violations reported by trade unions included:

- ▶ **Violations of International Labour Standards** such as violation of the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, lack of implementation of social dialogue mechanisms, and social partners' exclusion from decision-making processes. In some cases, trade unions considered the restrictions on public gatherings and prohibition of industrial actions during the curfew as a violation of workers' rights in consideration of the fact that those emergency measures prevented them from organizing and carrying out collective actions, and thus from fulfilling their mandate towards their members.
- ▶ **Non-compliance with labour regulations with regard to layoffs, working hours and the payment of wages.** In many cases, trade unions reported that some employers used the crisis as an excuse to obliterate labour rights and that millions of employees have been unfairly laid off without the respect of employment guarantees and without a notice period. Moreover, workers have experienced unilaterally adopted changes in working hours, which have either been increased or reduced without their consent. Lastly, workers in many instances have been deprived of their payment of wages

due to lockdown measures and the halt or reduction of economic activities.

- ▶ **Disregard of OSH and health requirements.** In many cases, trade unions denounced the lack of preparedness of employers regarding the implementation and enforcement of OSH regulations. In a few cases, access to workplaces to carry out safety inspections has also been denied to trade unions.

## 2.7 Trade unions' recommendations to governments and employers

**Trade unions' recommendations to governments and/or employers** have been heterogeneous and generally more context-based. They highlighted the specific deficiencies or long-standing issues considered by trade unions as priorities in each country. Some of them were submitted as requests to the government for immediate action to cope with the challenges of the crisis, others represented wider or medium/long-term reform proposals.

Requests for immediate action included: (1) universal health care, (2) extended sickness, unemployment and family benefits, (3) cash transfers for those most in need, (4) job and income security through the adoption of flexible working arrangements and temporary short-time work schemes, (5) financial support to enterprises to avoid dismissals, (6) compliance with OSH regulations and provision of in-kind benefits (especially PPE and medical supplies), and (7), in a few cases, the recognition of COVID-19 as an employment injury.

Medium/long-term recommendations included: (1) the strengthening of social dialogue, (2) the enhancement of the entire social protection system to cover all categories of workers irrespective of their employment status, (3) long-term investments in social and welfare services, and (4) partial or total forgiveness of external debts. In addition, in countries where industrial relations and collective rights are constrained by democratic deficiencies, trade unions called upon the government and employers to respect collective rights and International Labour Standards. Lastly, in some countries, trade unions asked for enhanced protection for migrant workers as well as for specific categories of workers (e.g. health workers) and workers in the most vulnerable situations.

- **Requests for immediate actions**
- **1 Universal health care**
  - **2 Extended sickness, unemployment and family benefits**
  - **3 Cash transfers for those most in need**
  - **4 Job and income security through the adoption of flexible working arrangements and temporary short-time work schemes**
  - **5 Financial support to enterprises to avoid dismissals**
  - **6 Compliance with OSH regulations and provision of in-kind benefits (especially PPE and medical supplies)**
  - **7 In a few cases, the recognition of COVID-19 as an employment injury**

- **Medium/long term recommendations**
- **1 The strengthening of social dialogue**
  - **2 The enhancement of the entire social protection system to cover all categories of workers irrespective of their employment status**
  - **3 Long-term investments in social and welfare services**
  - **4 Partial or total forgiveness of external debts**

## ► 3. Conclusion

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Trade unions worldwide did and continue to do outstanding work throughout the pandemic in supporting their members and the population at large. In many instances, trade unions have developed policy proposals for influencing government action on employment retention schemes and social protection through social dialogue institutions. For instance, they managed to extend social protection coverage to those workers who are usually partially or totally excluded from coverage (e.g. informal workers, zero hour workers, and self-employed). In addition, they negotiated measures to mitigate the immediate socio-economic impact of the crisis on workers, including OSH and other measures related to working time and paid leave, through collective bargaining and bilateral agreements at various levels. Furthermore, many trade unions developed and implemented innovative strategies such as communication through social media, counselling services on OSH and psychosocial risks, and assistance to female victims of violence and harassment.<sup>26</sup>

However, the virus has not yet been defeated. While many countries have already relaxed their restrictions, others are still struggling to contain the outbreak or are facing a second wave of the pandemic. This requires further engagement from trade unions to stay relevant during and beyond the crisis.

Our analysis has demonstrated that some categories of workers and some sectors have been more affected by the COVID-19 crisis than others, with slight regional differences. However, high rates of informal employment, rising inequalities in the labour market and the impact of global value chains on national economies represent a common denominator. Consequently, building forward better requires global-scale responses based on effective social dialogue and sound industrial relations.

While the findings illustrate that the response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis had to be immediate and address urgent short-term challenges, trade unions need to ensure that the temporary measures adopted are a stepping-stone toward a

sound recovery. Such recovery should focus on a medium to longer-term perspective in line with the priorities identified in the ILO's policy framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

The ILO's four-pillar policy framework<sup>27</sup> based on international labour standards provides a roadmap to cope with the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. It emphasizes social dialogue as the way forward to reach collective solutions that take into account the needs of enterprises and workers and promotes stability and public confidence. Social dialogue is in fact the most effective way to ensure not only that the achievements obtained during the pandemic are not lost, but also that trade unions will continue to participate in policy decisions. In this regard, trade unions continue to play an important role as vehicles of democracy and advocates of social justice.

Trade unions should regard the crisis as a wake-up call for contributing to building forward better and advancing labour and social agendas. To achieve these objectives, they need to be recognized, participate in policy-making, and negotiate collective agreements promoting fundamental rights, adequate minimum wages as well as maximum working hours, health and social protection benefits for all, and safety and health at work.

An important reference for tackling these challenges is provided in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019),<sup>28</sup> which sets out a human-centred approach for increasing investment in people's capabilities, in the institutions of work, and in decent jobs.

In addition, multilateralism and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide overarching guidance that is more relevant than ever for building forward better. More than anything, the crisis has revealed that even in the current challenging times, the SDGs, and in particular Goal 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, provide the most wide-ranging response guidance as they address social, economic and environmental aspects.

<sup>26</sup> ILO Policy Brief on COVID-19. Pillar 4: Relying on social dialogue for solutions, ILO, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> ILO Policy Brief on COVID-19. A policy framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis. ILO, 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-re-sponses/WCMS\\_739047/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-re-sponses/WCMS_739047/lang-en/index.htm).

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_711674.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_711674.pdf)

Given the multi-faceted nature and unpredictable impact of the crisis, there will be a temptation, and perhaps even real efforts, to advance policy responses unilaterally rather than through multi-lateral actions. Therefore, trade unions must remain vigilant and insist on the use of social dialogue mechanisms at all relevant levels for decision making throughout the crisis. Trade unions can help their countries to emerge stronger from this crisis by mobilizing their membership behind SDGs, demand urgent action from governments and provide new and innovative proposals for sustainable development from a trade union perspective.

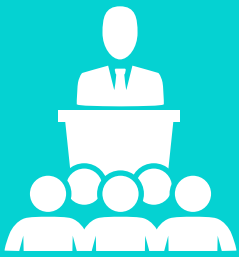
**Trade unions' agenda for resilience and empowerment in the context of COVID-19 crisis and recovery:**

- ***Build political will:*** Be proactive and promote the Decent Work Agenda by creating and advancing political will among decision-makers. This is in fact a prerequisite to ensure workers' participation in the policy-making process and to make their voice heard.
- ***Contribute to strengthening social dialogue mechanisms:*** Work towards strengthening social dialogue mechanisms and institutions, and help to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is provided so that these mechanisms and institutions can operate better during periods of crisis and beyond. This also includes participation in tripartite and bipartite bodies such as joint safety and health committees at company level to make sure that appropriate workplace policies, programmes and procedures are in place and effectively enforced.
- ***Build knowledge and capacity:*** Build up solid technical knowledge among trade union members to contribute effectively to the formulation of policies and legal frameworks and their implementation in line with international labour standards and good practices. More informed policy design improves ownership of the measures adopted (and thus trust amongst tripartite actors) as well as implementation effectiveness.
- ***Increase representative capacity:*** Be equipped with the right tools for the development and implementation of innovative strategies and services to attract, retain and represent all

workers, regardless of their vulnerability in the labour market and their employment relationship.<sup>29</sup> This includes women, young people, migrants, rural workers and workers in MSMEs, along with informal economy workers and workers in non-standard forms of employment.

- ***Continue to promote workers' priorities:*** Ensure that the needs of workers and their families, including those in the informal economy and migrant workers, are identified and properly addressed in social dialogue discussions. Social dialogue should not concern only salaried workers, but also embrace groups that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as informal economy workers and workers in MSMEs, as well as in non-standard forms of employment and migrant workers.
- ***Provide new services:*** Provide new services to members, including supplementary social benefits, advisory services and legal advice in case of collective/individual disputes, development of professional communications programmes, job networks, etc.
- ***Expand partnerships:*** In spite of legal barriers and cultural differences, trade unions need to increasingly develop their international ties, notably by participating in international forums and confederations and by increasing direct contact between trade unionists and their counterparts worldwide.
- ***Engage with the UN processes on sustainable development:*** The UN sustainable development processes offer trade unions and other ILO constituents in general the space and impetus necessary to participate in democratic and transparent multilateral decision-making. They also offer them the opportunity to demand enhanced policy coherence, improved enforcement and better accountability. As for trade unions, they can demonstrate the important role of social dialogue and social partnership for national development. Most importantly, they must ensure that countries do not lose sight of the structural impediments to national development while responding to short-term needs. SDGs offer sustainable solutions to structural

<sup>29</sup> In this regard, the trend analyses showcase initiatives which enabled trade unions to reach out to workers who would normally be non-unionized. For instance, in Georgia, the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) has launched a nation-wide awareness campaign in support of 10,000 self-employed and informally employed market vendors, who are eligible for financial support as a compensation for the lockdown, aimed at expanding their services to hard-to-organize workers and recruiting new members. While in Kenya, the BWI and its affiliates involved young people and women in recruitment processes through the BWI Youth Organising Academy.



▶ **Build political will**



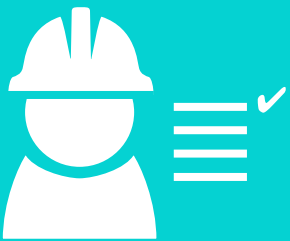
▶ **Contribute to strengthening social dialogue mechanisms**



▶ **Build knowledge and capacity**



▶ **Increase representative capacity**



▶ **Continue to promote workers' priorities**



▶ **Provide new services**



▶ **Expand partnerships**



▶ **Engage with the UN processes on sustainable development**



▶ **Share information**



▶ **Establish new alliances**



▶ **Learn from previous crises**

challenges; they are preventive in scope and multi-faceted in approach.

- **Share information:** Be informed and adequately inform trade union members. To do so, it is of utmost importance to promote information-sharing and awareness raising campaigns to inform workers about their rights. Trade unions should also utilize international solidarity in order to share information about actions taken by trade unions and workers in different countries. This will facilitate the identification of effective responses and at the same time pave the way for strengthening workers' organizations at global and regional levels.
- **Establish new alliances:** While not replacing tripartism, grass roots organizations, including NGOs and consumer groups that have the

same objectives as trade unions – in particular in complex international areas such as human rights, trade policy, environment and development – are increasingly important allies in supporting trade unions' agendas.

- **Learn from previous crises:** Learn from the recent global financial crisis and other crises, and be ready to respond to austerity measures. International experience demonstrates that governments tend to shift policy priorities from economic stimulus towards fiscal consolidation and debt reduction to respond to national budget deficits and public debt increase.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it is important that trade unions be prepared to offer alternative policy proposals on a range of socio-economic issues brought about by the pandemic but also forward-looking solutions for a better recovery and resilience.

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<sup>30</sup> Gopinath, G. *The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn since the Great Depression*, IMF Blog, (14 April 2020), <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>. The world GDP growth rate was projected to fall by 3 per cent in 2020 while global public debt has reached its highest level due to a massive fiscal response necessary to increase health capacity, to replace household income loss and to prevent large-scale bankruptcies. In light of this, there is a risk that equally sizeable austerity programmes would be decided mainly by Central Banks, Ministries of Finance and International Financial Institutions.

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