

In times of crisis, solidarity between workers and employers is paramount, says the ILO

Press release | 09 April 2020

Past crises show that workers and employers need to work together to address the impact of COVID-19, says a new joint report from the International Labour Organization's workers' and employers' groups.

GENEVA (ILO News) – Collective efforts and solidarity between Employers' and Workers' Organizations is critical to respond effectively to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world of work, according to a new International Labour Organization (ILO) report.

COVID-19 has in many parts of the world jeopardized the health and safety of millions of people, and put immense pressure on businesses, jobs, and livelihoods. In crisis settings, collaboration and dialogue between employers and business membership organizations (EBMOs) and workers' organizations can boost economic and social progress and enable accelerated recovery.

The study, *Managing Conflicts and Disasters: Exploring Collaboration between Employers' and Workers' Organizations*, highlights specific cases where joint (and sometimes spontaneous) actions taken by social partners helped to mitigate some of the worst consequences of natural and human-made disasters, speeding up recovery and strengthening resilience to cope with future crises.

"Business leaders have a vested interest in peace and stability and in being well prepared for crisis situations," explained Deborah France-Massin, Director of the ILO's Bureau for Employers Activities (ACT/EMP). "Unions, in turn, have a huge mobilization potential through their members; either to lobby for legislative and constitutional changes in favour of the workforce, or to act swiftly and effectively when humanitarian assistance is required."

ILO Recommendation No. 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience (2017) is a useful reference in this context, the report says. It provides a framework for crafting appropriate responses to address crisis situations arising from conflicts or disasters.

In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, workers and employers jointly negotiated a mechanism to ease the burden on workers temporarily laid off amid a severe economic downturn in 2002, caused by an armed conflict that effectively split the country into two. A solution to extend the period of paid temporary unemployment and other measures helped to ensure that the smallest possible number of workers was laid off, while maintaining needed working capacity. Collaboration occurred through a bipartite forum (the Commission Indépendante

Permanente de Dialogue) consisting of representatives of workers' and employers' organizations.

During this current COVID-19 crisis, bipartite social dialogue and joint social partner initiatives in response to COVID-19 have been documented across the world including in Belgium, Latvia, Morocco, Pakistan, Spain, Sweden and Uganda. Social partners are critically reinforcing and supplementing the actions of public health authorities and governments and re-confirming their role in mitigating risks and responding to situations of crisis.

“It is our hope that this report inspires social partner organizations globally on the unique and complementary role they play and can play in complex situations of disaster and conflict, as well as pandemics like COVID-19,” said Maria Helena Andre, Director of the ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV). “The ILO will continue to harness our organization’s strength - our normative mandate and tripartism – and channel our resources to support this shared agenda.”