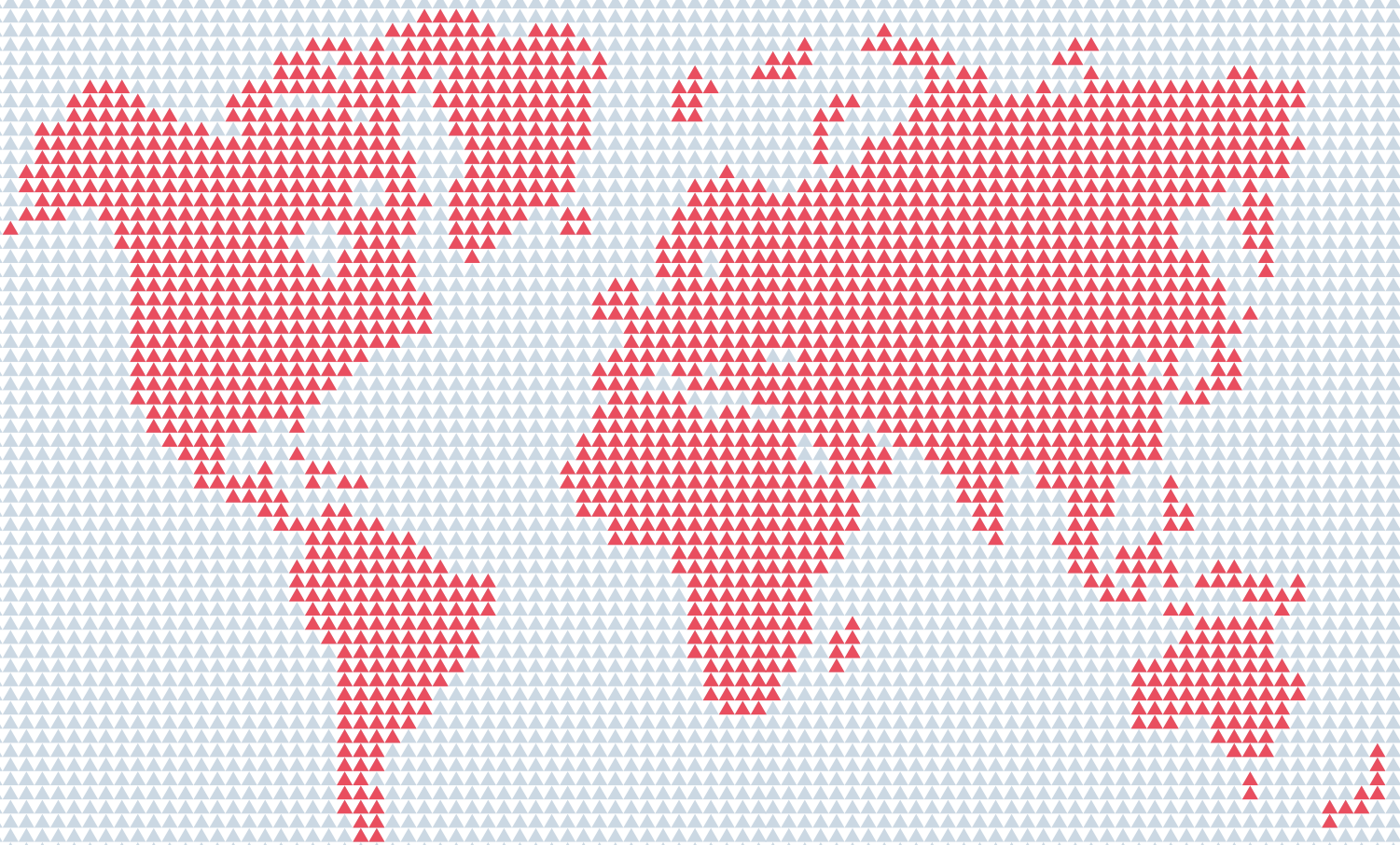# COVID-19 and Recovery: The Role of Trade Unions in Building Forward Better

Executive summary

International Journal of Labour Research

COVID-19 and Recovery: The Role of Trade Unions in Building Forward Better

Executive summary

For each article in this issue of the International Journal of Labour Research, a short summary is given followed by key findings and points of special interest to trade unions.

Trade union membership dynamics amidst COVID-19: Does social dialogue matter?

Owidhi George Otieno, Dickson Onyango Wandeda, and Mohammed Mwamadzingo

Introduction

This article applies an econometric approach using data on the state of trade unions amidst COVID-19 to explain the contributions of social dialogue in increasing and enhancing trade union membership during the pandemic. The econometric result has established that social dialogue has a significant and positive impact on trade union membership. It thus recommends that, in order to increase membership, trade unions need to respond to the pandemic using all the tools of social dialogue at their disposal throughout all levels of communication.

Key findings

▶ For trade unions across all countries surveyed, social dialogue used as a means of consensus between workers and employers contributed to about a 26% increase in membership overall. Among these unions:

- 82% have experienced changes in membership resulting from COVID-19.
- 83% have adopted social dialogue as a response to the pandemic, with about 89% engaging in tripartite consultations.
- 100% reported that their respective countries adopted lockdown and restrictive measures to contain the pandemic.
- 85% have conducted various capacity-building measures during COVID-19.
- 76% have experienced a decline in their other sources of income.
- 75% have offered advisory services on work issues to their members in response to the pandemic.
- Nearly 58% reported having received support from either the ILO or other international agencies to help them in mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic.
- About 56% reported experiencing inadequate funds amidst COVID-19.
- 76% conducted virtual meetings during the pandemic.
- 65% engaged their members through virtual education.

▶ A change in membership fees has a statistically significant negative effect (decrease of 1.3%) on trade union membership.

▶ Membership registrations and recruitment through media positively influence trade union membership (probability of 51% increase if trade unions are engaged in membership registration during COVID-19).

▶ Overall, limited access to internet, inability to organize members and inability to hold meetings have negative but insignificant effects on membership.

▶ Additional services to members during COVID-19, advisory services and virtual education have positive but non-significant effect on membership.

▶ Workers' organizations need to engage in strong, influential and inclusive mechanisms of social dialogue by:

- strengthening the capacities of labour relations institutions and processes for effective social dialogue;

- engaging governments in stimulating their economies by harnessing potentials for technological progress and productivity growth towards the creation of decent working opportunities;

- engaging governments and development partners in supporting sustainable businesses, jobs and incomes by developing sustainable social protection policies and employment services that can resist shocks;

- protecting workers by developing and harnessing policies towards promotion of all the fundamental rights and freedoms of work, including for youth, women, workers with disabilities, migrant workers, gig and informal economy workers as well as for other new and emerging forms of work in the future of work; and

- embracing policies towards environmental protection, climate change and just transition, including trade union engagement in the multilateral system.

Workers' rights and human rights: Resolving historical tensions through a multi-tiered social security agenda

Shea McClanahan and Alexandra Barrantes

Introduction

COVID-19 has challenged all actors engaged with the social protection system to (re) consider their roles and responsibilities in a post-COVID world. The social protection policy and institutional infrastructure in place prior to a crisis is the main determinant of how well a system is able to offer meaningful mitigating and corrective measures. Traditionally, social security in the Global South has been divided: social insurance and social assistance (small, tax-financed and typically means-tested schemes) have been characterized as mutually exclusive systems. The crisis has made clear that a more universal and inclusive social protection system is much better prepared to address shocks.

Key findings

▶ Social insurance and social assistance have been presented as mutually exclusive options, a false choice. The development of both instruments can and should be placed under the same strategic policy framework, avoiding fragmented delivery of social protection.

▶ "Last-resort" safety nets are more complex and expensive to govern than lifecycle individual entitlements guaranteed by the right to social security and an adequate standard of living; the latter contribute to more inclusive, better governed and truly rights-based social protection systems.

▶ Building integrated, *multi-tiered* systems can harmonize the goals of so-called "horizontal" extension (extending entitlements to newly covered individuals and groups) with "vertical" extension (improving the comprehensiveness or adequacy of entitlements) in a way that achieves universal coverage by *design*. Multi-tiered social security systems help to resolve the historical tension between human rights and workers' rights through a clear incentive structure built on universal basic guarantees.

The role of trade unions

▶ Trade unions were already expanding services before COVID-19 to provide support to those working in the informal economy. A lifecycle and multi-tiered social security framework can help them structure their understanding of roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the overall national social protection system, enabling them to visualize how their own entitlements fit within an overall rights-based framework.

▶ Moving toward this vision, workers' organizations can pursue three potential axes of action:

- Avoid lobbying against expansion to uncovered groups: it is imperative that trade unions avoid outright opposition of reforms that introduce non-contributory benefits to those with low or no capacity to pay contributions.

- Invest in raising awareness of the rights-based principles embedded in inclusive social security systems.

- Proactively engage in coalition-based pursuit of common interests within a lifecycle framework.

Work-related injuries and diseases, and COVID-19

Jukka Takala, Sergio Iavicoli, Seong-Kyu Kang, Claudina Nogueira, Diana Gagliardi, and Jorma Rantanen

Introduction

Few workers have been unaffected by COVID-19. At all levels and across all sectors, organizations have developed policies, legislative updates, technical guidance, training materials, official statements, risk assessment tools, standard operating procedures, action frameworks and return-to-work guidelines, to assist workers and their families in coping with the pandemic. Additional responsibilities and workloads have been placed on health

practitioners and on occupational health and medicine professionals who are required to ensure the safe return of workers to their workplaces and livelihoods, as the global economy restarts to re-open. This article draws on data from various reliable sources together with experiences of COVID-19 in Italy, the Republic of Korea and South Africa to present lessons learned and suggest future action for global and regional institutions and for workers' organizations.

Key findings

▶ Workplaces are important arenas for early detection of epidemic risk and for early actions in primary prevention and management.

▶ Globally, the 1.7 billion workers in service occupations are considered as risk populations, as they may become vectors of infection towards others.

▶ Around 14 per cent of COVID-19 cases reported to the WHO are among health workers (in some countries as high as 35 per cent). However, diverse occupational groups are recognized as being at risk, not only health workers.

▶ Before COVID-19, of the 2.4 million deaths caused by work-related diseases, infectious diseases accounted for 9 per cent. In 2020, 15.99 million work-related COVID-19 non-fatal infections were estimated, but the final number is likely to be higher.

▶ Direct costs include those to stakeholders, victims, employers and society, as well as production losses. Costs in monetary terms can be calculated but do not cover indirect or intangible costs. The social value of life and health at work and beyond can only be partly measured.

▶ A major concern of many workers is the fear of job loss or loss of income; lower socio-economic workers have less access to PPE, fewer options to work from home and a higher risk of losing their jobs.

▶ COVID-19 is experienced unequally, with higher rates of infection and mortality among the most disadvantaged communities: it is not socially neutral.

▶ The prevalence and severity of the pandemic is magnified by pre-existing chronic diseases – themselves associated with social determinants of health such as housing, work conditions and access to quality healthcare.

▶ Lessons from the pandemic have emphasized the need for better prediction and preparedness, including research, human resources, hospital and material preparedness and updating of regulations for crisis management. The pandemic has highlighted the need for close trans- and multi-disciplinary collaboration between various professionals to inform better decision-making by organizations.

▶ If poorly controlled, emerging infections have the potential to cause epidemics and pandemics with a high socio-economic impact and will continue to be real threats to the world. We must remain vigilant to be ready and able to respond effectively.

The role of trade unions

▶ Competent inspectors should have the right to enter workplaces for risk identification at the earliest possible stages.

▶ Detailed and practical action should be initiated to identify priorities for related risks and their prevention, and to collaboratively plan and implement activities.

▶ Special attention should be given to preparedness for potential new hazards including new global pandemics and possible occupational risks from new technologies and climate change, among others.

Towards a just transition for all: Lessons from the pandemic

Dimitris Stevis, Dunja Krause, and Edouard Morena

Introduction

This article focuses on the possibility of "just transition" in the health sector after COVID-19. Analysing just transition from two aspects, breadth and depth, the authors look at the current situation in the United States to propose four types of just transition policies – status quo, managerial reforms, structural reforms and transformative policies. The pandemic has highlighted inequalities in occupational safety and health (OSH) in the healthcare sector. Is this a technical OSH issue or is it a broader social and environmental health issue? The debate continues to divide workers, employers and administrators but it is becoming apparent that OSH is also an environmental health issue.

Key findings

▶ Transitions vary even when driven by common forces such as automation.

▶ A just health transition should not be separated from a more comprehensive eco-social transition project. It is possible for a policy to be broad to the point where it covers all people and nature affected, but also socially inegalitarian and ecologically damaging.

▶ Although the "social" sectors contribute to the unfolding ecological and climate crises, they also play an important role in mitigating and adapting to them. Green transitions in services, including specific sectors such as health, care and education, drive profound changes in energy and manufacturing.

▶ Responses to the pandemic combine limited global policies with national policies. North–South inequalities in tracking, managing and recovering from the pandemic are very pronounced, yet there is strong evidence that poorer countries can develop effective local healthcare systems.

▶ Leaving the care sector out of just transition would be leaving out a substantial and growing part of the world of labour. Privileging some over others breeds resentment and opposition.

▶ The labour force in the health sector is diverse, with many women and immigrants who are neither unionized nor organized and do not enjoy adequate occupational health and safety standards, social protections or workplace rights.

▶ There is a need for a "just transition into the future" and towards a more protected and empowered workforce, as well as "a just transition from the past" for those whose employment will be affected by technological innovations or the socialization of healthcare.

The role of trade unions

▶ Although effective social dialogue gives the weaker more voice, dialogue without the possibility of some redistribution renders voice a formality. Leaving the service sector out of the just transition strategy is to leave out some of the most vibrant and important elements of the world of labour and, consequently, to narrow and weaken the alliances necessary to achieve just transitions for all.

▶ Even amongst those who are unionized there is a need for stronger social dialogue (e.g. the debate over whether frontline personnel dealing with COVID-19 patients are more vulnerable to infection, or personnel dealing with emergency procedures).

▶ Workers' organizations must choose between sectoral and largely ad hoc transition programmes and comprehensive and proactive just transition policies. Such policies will require a great deal of initial effort but are likely to deliver more in the longer term.

Macroeconomic policies for jobs-led growth and recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, with emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa

Mohammed Mwamadzingo, Michael U. Akuupa, and Lawrence N. Kazembe

Introduction

While the outlook for the global economy is uncertain, developing countries in particular are projected to suffer substantial losses in productivity and reversed gains per capita GDP, leaving a long-lasting legacy of increased household poverty. Appropriate macroeconomic policy strategies to create employment are required as well as responses to maintain and protect livelihoods. Presenting different macroeconomic scenarios with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), this article identifies the main areas where policy support will be needed in the near term to buttress the recovery and address longer-term scars from the crisis. A

more holistic approach to employment promotion is essential and calls for employment policies which include and go beyond labour market policies.

Key findings

▶ Stringent measures to contain the spread of the virus have led to disruptions to labour supply, productivity and consumption, with consequent severe falls in economic growth, sharp rises in unemployment and falls in working hours. Teleworking, on the increase in developed economies, is not a viable answer for all.

▶ With weak fiscal positions severely constraining government support measures in many countries, ambitious reforms are needed, but many countries do not have sufficient financial, monetary and social instruments for the necessary immediate and long-term responses.

▶ Policies that are simply growth-oriented, that have worked for developed economies, have not worked to create productive employment in SSA. Proceeding with the same policies will maintain the same poor employment outcomes in the coming decades.

▶ Addressing the fundamentals of job creation implies policies to promote:
  • employment targeting through fiscal, monetary and financial supports, encouraging industrialization and making use of ALMPs;
  • the important role of the public sector, sustainable enterprises (including the social and solidarity economy) and SMEs;
  • sectoral support, both short- and long-term;
  • job accessibility and inclusiveness; and
  • social protection

▶ Joint coordination is essential between those responsible for national development, education and training, demographic transitions, wage policies and employment laws, collective bargaining for social protection and decent jobs, economic and social policies, and labour market policies and institutions.

The role of trade unions

▶ Workers' organizations must engage further with governments and employers' organizations at every stage in the formulation and implementation of economic policies.

▶ Workers' organizations will need to champion a social contract and concerted actions by all stakeholders if the effects of the policies are to endure beyond the current crisis.

South-East Asian unions respond to the pressure of COVID-19

Michele Ford and Kristy Ward

Introduction

In protecting workers during COVID-19, trade unions in South-East Asia faced particular challenges, including hostility, unemployment and underemployment as well as the rural demographic of many workers in the region. In this article the authors examine South-East Asian unions' fight for survival during the pandemic, their engagement with governments, workplaces and members, and their opportunities and challenges post-COVID.

Key findings

▶ Unions struggled to convince governments and employers to provide workplace protection and social security for those who needed it, in some cases while experiencing a rapid decline in membership as a result of the large-scale job losses caused by COVID-19. In several countries their efforts to protect members were hindered by attempts on the part of employers – and some governments – to undermine workers' rights.

▶ South-East Asian unions' engagement with governments, workplaces and members saw some successes and some failures. Successes include those by construction sector unions in Cambodia in negotiations with the Government on coverage of informal workers; in Singapore by contributing to containing the workplace spread of COVID-19 through the introduction of new measures to protect workers during crew changes, while not burdening those who were travelling from designated low-risk countries with long periods in isolation or quarantine; and in Viet Nam where unions worked with employers to secure workers' access to protective measures such as masks, hand-washing facilities and sanitizers, often through joint management–union committees or taskforces. However, union efforts failed to stop adverse legislation passing in Indonesia, or in halting redundancies and changes to contracts in the Thai airline industry;

▶ Some unions managed to find new ways to support their members; and the pandemic has exposed areas of union operations that demand change if they are to prosper in the post-COVID-19 world.

▶ With the exception of Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia, South-East Asian countries have relatively large rural populations and informal sector workforces, and relatively low proportions of waged employees. Many also have high levels of under- and unemployment.

▶ Many countries are highly integrated into global supply chains, especially in labour-intensive manufacturing which was affected by disruptions in the form of cancelled orders and reduced availability of inputs.

▶ The impact of these disruptions was exacerbated by low levels of social protection, which made both informal sector workers and those who lost their formal sector jobs even more vulnerable to the pandemic's impact on their countries' economies.

▶ Factors playing a role in shaping union responses to COVID-19 include: high levels of informal employment in some countries with many formal sector workplaces little touched by regulatory requirements, leading to limited union coverage; whether unions can operate free from government or employer control; and whether they are reliant on international support.

The role of trade unions

▶ The pandemic has confirmed the potential of digital technologies not only for communication between union officials and members, but also for the provision of services, including consumer benefits and professional development. Due to the restrictions imposed, union members were forced to become better acquainted with digital technologies other than social media, and better equipped to use them to engage with their unions. Teachers' unions were at the forefront of this move, although adopting online teaching platforms challenged many teachers with low levels of digital literacy despite their high levels of formal education. Unions' responses to the pandemic have revealed the extent to which strategic agency can be exercised even in very challenging circumstances.

▶ Some aspects of union operations limit their capacity to safeguard their members' interests. Among these are the challenges unions face in convincing governments to consider workers when determining public policy; in maintaining membership at a time of mass job losses; and in ensuring that their internal operations and governance structures work so as to facilitate quick and effective responses to unexpected problems as well as to longer-term, more structural challenges.

Gender inequality during the pandemic: Perspectives of women workers in Latin America and the Caribbean

Maria Bastidas Aliaga

Introduction

This article seeks to inform the debate on the unequal impact of COVID-19 pandemic on men and women in the Latin America and Caribbean region (LAC). Focusing on women's working conditions, increased unpaid care work, increased violence against women and the effects of teleworking, it recommends priorities to address these issues for governments, employers and worker organizations, including contributions from women workers and trade union representatives from 13 countries.

Key findings

▶ It is estimated that another 47 million women and girls will fall into extreme poverty due to the pandemic, bringing the total up to 435 million and reversing gains that have advanced gender equality and obstructing efforts to achieve Goal 5 of the SDGs.

▶ Cultural prescriptions and role distributions have led to women and girls shouldering a heavier burden of unpaid care work than men.

▶ Women are primarily active in the sectors most economically vulnerable to the pandemic– including commerce, tourism, and hospitality, as well as healthcare institutions – but hold disproportionately fewer decision-making positions, whether in hospitals or government bodies. They are most often employed in segregated, inferior and more precarious labour markets, diminishing the economic resources they need to face the current crisis. This precariousness has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

▶ The division of labour along gender lines has increased women's exposure to the virus. Women make up a large share of the frontline workers responding to the COVID-19 health crisis, especially in healthcare and social work, but also in childcare at nurseries, adult care at nursing homes, social services, cleaning and private homes (paid domestic work), among other settings. Viral exposure is elevated in these lines of work due to the social contact they entail. Data indicate that 75 per cent of infected healthcare workers are women, many of whom say that the lack of suitable protocols and adequate personal protective equipment was responsible for their infection with the virus, which they later transmitted to family members.

▶ Many companies imposed teleworking without establishing rules or satisfactory conditions for this mode of work. As a result, actual teleworking conditions have increased workloads for women.

▶ Gender and domestic violence in the region has risen during the pandemic, while isolation has reduced the ability to obtain protection. Also increased during the pandemic is workplace violence and harassment faced by healthcare workers, the majority of whom are women.

The role of trade unions

▶ The pandemic has impacted men and women in trade unions differently, intensifying gender inequality already present in these organizations, since women trade unionists have been forced to bear greater loads in their triple roles as homemakers, workers and union members. This sometimes eroded their physical and mental health.

▶ There is a need for innovative measures directed towards achieving gender equality in trade unions, boosting the capacity to integrate new groups of workers. The Trade Union Confederation of Workers of the Americas (CSA) calls for extending coverage to workers in informal and precarious settings.

▶ Women trade unionists from various LAC countries have made various recommendations including:

- Comprehensive reform of the social security system, including domestic, informal and migrant workers in social programmes; and regulate teleworking, taking care work into account.

- Continue to inform constituencies about social and labour developments in the country, and train them in standards of biosafety with technological support.

- Continually advise and defend workers' rights in labour courts.

- Take action against gender violence and discrimination, and campaign for the ratification of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

- Ensure capacity building and empowerment for trade union members, equipping them to deal with new labour market strategies; and offer capacity-building courses on COVID-19.

- Offer guidance to employees of online businesses; form alliances with governmental and non-governmental entities to obtain more support for trade union members; and secure technical support through international cooperation.

- Support women workers by sharing expertise and advice on personal and professional matters.

- Ensure that legal support and health advice are available to network service professionals who are working outside or responsible for maintenance, customer service, or technical support for landlines and cell phones.

- Draft and adopt agreements to: (a) maintain workers at home until pandemic conditions are safe enough for a return to the workplace; and (b) establish procedures for that return.

- Identify discrimination against migrant workers, and keep going after companies that exploit them.

- Address situations in which, nothing having come of documents that have been drafted, statements of protest, and proposals for social dialogue, the State has only favoured business recovery, putting it before health.

- Come to the aid, and acknowledge the expertise, of domestic workers' organizations, which have acted in solidarity to provide support, including on mental health issues, food poverty, and training in online tools.

▶ With regard to women workers, immediate priorities include:

- recognition of unpaid care work, tapping into its potential to create decent work opportunities, improving working conditions, and recognizing that domestic workers are entitled to the same rights as others;

- reduction and fair distribution of unpaid care work between men and women in households, government, businesses, and the community;

- greater coverage and effectiveness of social security for women, especially domestic and informal workers;

- granting of maternity, paternity, and other parental leave; and

- promotion of fairer legislation furthering the economic empowerment of women.

Digitalize, adapt and innovate: Challenges and opportunities for trade unions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery period

Mohammed Mwamadzingo, Sylvester Kisonzo, and Naome Chakanya

Introduction

This article explores the emerging challenges for workers' organizations that intersect with national digital technology deficits and growing informalization, as well as the impact of COVID-19. Although with specific reference to Africa, these challenges are generally applicable across the globe. Digital technologies, especially virtual meetings, threaten the traditional model of industrial relations. The article suggests solutions and recommends actions, arguing that the adoption of these technologies by trade unions provides opportunities and benefits which might not otherwise be realized through physical meetings, conferences and interactions.

Key findings

▶ For developing countries in particular, there are two main challenges to online working: unaffordability and lack of connectivity:

- High costs for mobile data in developing countries driven by the lack of infrastructure, the high level of taxation in the mobile sector and low competition in the sector. In most African countries the cost of a gigabyte is more than US$1, too expensive for the majority of workers in both the formal and informal economies.

- Limited internet infrastructure and perennial power cuts in some countries also cause poor connectivity.

▶ The pandemic has further disrupted jobs and incomes at a time when workers needed to be more engaged online. Trade union officials rely more on internet connection at offices than at home, so that the closure of offices during lockdowns has limited them in effectively connecting with membership online.

▶ Working from home carries other challenges for trade union officials:

- limited space in homes leading to sub-optimal delivery and performance, with difficulty of tracking these;

- lack of business quality internet facilities, with limited smart gadgets and financial resources for the long connections needed in negotiations;

- lack of privacy and data protection, with potential exposure to hackers;

- challenges for collective bargaining negotiations: setting up meetings is mainly in the hands of employers who can mute or unmute speakers as they wish and thus control communication;

- communication misunderstandings due to less "reading" of body language and tone;
- increased difficulty of team-building and coordination;
- increased difficulty of managing workers' education and training online; and
- increased gender-based inequality (and violence) due to most home tasks including home schooling for children during lockdowns being carried out by women workers in addition to their work, and leading to loss of promotion opportunities;

▶ There are also opportunities, including increasing youth membership, reaching a wider audience, and increasing gender participation in trade union activities.

The role of trade unions

COVID-19 has made it more apparent that trade unions need to:

▶ Recognize information technology as a critical force in shaping their relevance in the future and strategically plan for higher visibility of ICT in trade union structures.

▶ Escalate their interconnectedness and solidarity, mobilizing and uniting workers around demands that challenge negativities arising from global capital operations.

▶ Ensure that provisions for digitalization and technology diffusion are integrated into collective bargaining agreements and in workplace social dialogue structures such as workers' committees and works councils.

▶ Develop their own applications (apps) and databases accessible to their membership.

▶ Develop and experiment with different virtual ways of communicating with and reaching out to new and younger potential members, the majority of whom are now online.

▶ Escalate e-campaigning and e-mobilization of membership and non-members (workers and general citizens) including workers in the informal economy, through social media and other online platforms.

▶ Take ownership of organizing and setting up of virtual meetings, particularly for collective bargaining and workers' education.

▶ Push for policies that entrench a flexible work culture where workers are encouraged to freely choose where to work.

▶ Reconstruct worker education and training to be compatible with online learning.

▶ Continue to support women's participation in online programmes and social media platforms through funding women-only webinars and other programmes that challenge patriarchal norms and systems in trade unionism.

▶ Engage governments to address the connectivity challenge.

▶ Overcome the cost constraints by a variety of means including accessing open-source solutions, non-profit pricing options, high net worth individuals, solidarity support funding and cloud-based collaboration solutions, as well as by creating a hybrid work culture, digitizing documents and business processes, and empowering the trade union workforce.

COVID-19 and Recovery: The Role of Trade Unions in Building Forward Better

▶ Social dialogue

▶ **83%** of unions have adopted social dialogue as a response to the pandemic, with about **89%** engaging in tripartite consultations.

▶ Social dialogue used as a means of consensus between workers and employers contributed to about a **26%** increase in trade union membership overall.

▶ In order to increase membership, trade unions need to respond to the pandemic using all the tools of social dialogue at their disposal throughout all levels of communication.

▶ Social protection

▶ The crisis has made clear that a more **universal** and **inclusive social protection** system is much better prepared to address shocks.

▶ A lifecycle and multi-tiered social security framework can help unions to structure their understanding of roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the overall national social protection system, enabling them to visualize how their own entitlements fit within an overall rights-based framework.

▶ Workers' organizations can pursue three potential axes of action:
– Avoid lobbying against expansion to uncovered groups: it is imperative that trade unions avoid outright opposition of reforms that introduce non-contributory benefits to those with low or no capacity to pay contributions.
– Invest in raising awareness of the rights-based principles embedded in inclusive social security systems.
– Proactively engage in coalition-based pursuit of common interests within a lifecycle framework.

▶ Work-related injuries and diseases, and COVID-19

▶ Globally, the **1.7 billion workers** in service occupations are considered as risk populations, as they may become vectors of infection towards others.

▶ Around **14 per cent of COVID-19 cases** reported to the WHO are among **health workers** (in some countries as high as 35 per cent). However, **diverse occupational groups are recognized as being at risk, not only health workers.**

▶ Unions should give **special attention to preparedness for potential new hazards** including new global pandemics and possible occupational risks from new technologies and climate change, among others.

Just transition

- Although the "social" sectors contribute to the unfolding ecological and climate crises, they also play an important role in mitigating and adapting to them. Green transitions in services, including specific sectors such as health, care and education drive profound changes in energy and manufacturing.

- Workers' organizations must choose between sectoral and largely ad hoc transition programmes and comprehensive and proactive just transition policies.

Macroeconomic policies

- With weak fiscal positions severely constraining government support measures in many countries, ambitious reforms are needed, but many countries do not have sufficient financial, monetary and social instruments for the necessary immediate and long-term responses.

- Joint coordination is essential between those responsible for national development, education and training, demographic transitions, wage policies and employment laws, collective bargaining for social protection and decent jobs, economic and social policies, as well as labour market policies and institutions.

- Workers' organizations will need to champion a new social contract and concerted actions by all stakeholders if the effects of the policies are to endure beyond the current crisis.

Gender inequality during the pandemic

- It is estimated that another 47 million women and girls will fall into extreme poverty due to the pandemic, bringing the total up to 435 million and reversing gains that have advanced gender equality and obstructing efforts to achieve Goal 5 of the SDGs.

- Cultural prescriptions and role distributions have led to women and girls shouldering a heavier burden of unpaid care work than men.

- There is a need for innovative measures directed towards achieving gender equality in trade unions, boosting the capacity to integrate new groups of workers.

Digitalization

- Digitalization brings opportunities, including increasing youth membership, reaching a wider audience and increasing gender equality in trade union activities.

- For developing countries in particular, there are two main challenges to online working: unaffordability and lack of connectivity.

- Unions must ensure that provisions for digitalization and technology diffusion are integrated into collective bargaining agreements and in workplace social dialogue structures such as workers' committees and works councils.

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