International Labour Organization

COVID-19: what role for workers' organisations?

▶ Recommendation No. 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience (R205)

This note prepared by the ILO's Bureau for Workers'Activities (ACTRAV) shows why the ILO Recommendation No 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience (R205) is an effective instrument for governments, employers and workers organizations to address the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The **Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205)**, which was adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2017, deals exactly with the situation that we are facing now with the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The Recommendation provides detailed guidance to constituents on actions that should be taken in the field of employment and decent work both to **prevent** and to **recover** from crisis situations, as well as to build resilience.

R205 places social dialogue, the role of Employers' and Workers' organisations, public services, education, social protection, rights at work and ILS, international cooperation – amongst others – at the centre of both preparedness and recovery.

The guidelines of the Recommendation are **based on International Labour Standards (ILS)**, but specifically tailored to crisis situations arising from conflicts and disasters.

▶ R205 deals with both conflict **and disasters**. Disasters are defined in R205 broadly as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts". Hazardous event include **biological hazards** (viruses, epidemics, etc.);

▶ It suggests overarching guiding principles and strategic approaches to respond to crisis;

- R205 has a strong social dialogue dimension and it gives an important role to social partners: **it recognises the vital role of Employers and Workers' organizations in crisis response**;

- It calls on these organizations to ensure business continuity and to assist workers to recover from the crisis through training, advice and material support. It advocates for measures to be taken through collective bargaining as well as other methods of social dialogue;

- It suggest actions for all four pillars of Decent Work: **employment**, **rights**, **social protection**, and **social dialogue** ▶ it has specific sections on each of these topics;

- It recognises the **need to respect ILS** and mentions several key ILS in its text;

- It recognises the crucial role of the **public sector**;

- it recognises the importance of **employment-intensive investment**;

- it pays special attention to population groups that have been made particularly **vulnerable** by crisis. This includes, but is not limited to, children, persons belonging to minorities, indigenous and tribal peoples, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and other persons forcibly displaced across borders;

- It has a strong **gender perspective**;

- It focusses on the role of **education and skills**;

- It insists on the need for **international cooperation**, the exchange of information, knowledge and good practices:

- It applies to **ALL workers**; its Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) references apply also to **volunteers**.

▶ This recommendation was adopted with an overwhelming majority of all – governments, employers and workers. It is an international law instrument and Governments are expected to respect its guidance: **Workers Organisations** can request that it is taken into account.

- **Workers organisations have reacted in the context of the Ebola crisis:**
  For example, Public Services International (PSI) and its affiliates launched the **Ebola response strategy**. Its objective was to "**empower unions** through research, capacity building and exchange between unions, so they can play an **active role in the decision-making processes** and advocate quality public health systems including better working conditions for healthcare workers, universal health coverage and social security systems".
  More information can be found **here.**

- **ILO work on the EBOLA crisis includes:**
  - ▶ **ILO's role and response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak**
  - ▶ **Ebola Virus Disease: Occupational Safety and Health, Joint WHO/ILO Briefing Note for Workers and Employers, 2014**
  - ▶ **Recovering from the Ebola Crisis, 2015**
  - ▶ **Recovery of the World of Work in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, 2015**

- **Workers' organisations are already reacting to the crisis situation that has arose from COVID-19**:

  Please look at webpages of workers' organisations; these are up-dated regularly. They contain, e.g. information on COVID-19, information on its impact on workers, information on measures taken by the government and tripartite bodies, hotlines for members.

  For example:

  ▶ **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC): Covid-19 News from Unions**

  ▶ **Public Services International (PSI): Guidance Briefing for Union Action**

  ▶ **International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF): Covid-19 updates**

  ▶ **IndustriALL**

  ▶ **BWI**

  ▶ **Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC): Mapping out trade union and social partners' responses**

  ▶ **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC): Trade unions and coronavirus**

  In particular, immediate action is necessary for **workers that are at the frontline**: health workers, cleaners, delivery personnel. Where there are closure of activities, action is needed for **workers in businesses that are still open** such as grocery shops, pharmacies. Similarly, action is necessary for workers in **precarious work** with no or little protection, paying special attention to the most vulnerable (short-term contract, temporary contract, zero-hours-contracts, independent work, care workers, etc.) and for workers who **lose their job** more generally.

  See for example:

  Italian Trade Unions:

  On 14 March 2020, a **Joint protocol** was signed between Government, employers and workers' organizations. This contains practical measures for the containment of the spread of Covid-19 virus in the workplace (encourage the signing of specific collective agreements with companies that are still in production. use of shared space, disinfection or work areas, etc).

  Swiss UNIA trade union:

  It has raise the alarm on the situation of many precarious workers and on the fact that many workers that are not required to stop activities are under heighten risks of contracting and spreading the virus. The secretary-general of UNIA gave an interview on national news (L'absence de protection sanitaires dans certaines branches dénoncée: interview d'Alessandro Pelizzari, secrétaire régional du syndicat UNIA Genève – in French).

  Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU):

  It provides information on its website with a national hotline. The **National Union of Mine-workers** for example, has posted a **list of requests** to respond effectively to the crisis, in collaboration with the industry and the government.

  See also:

  LabourStart: News from the world's trade unions

  MORE RESSOURCES

  ▶ **ILO ACTRAV R205 Policy Brief**

  ▶ **ILO ACTRAV R205 Workers' Guide**