

## Geneva Peace Week 2020

Virtual panel discussion, 4 November 2020

### From Crisis to Opportunity for Sustainable Peace: Addressing interactions between health, employment and peacebuilding challenges in times of COVID-19

Key Points by Ms. Mito Tsukamoto, Chief, Development and Investment Branch, ILO

**Guiding question: can you illustrate how employment and decent work can contribute to peace in time of the pandemic?**

- I am pleased to be here in this Panel to represent the ILO, an organization that was founded as part of the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I – created on the principles of **social justice** and working towards **building universal and lasting peace**.
- The ILO has been engaged in peacebuilding since its foundation in 1919. With the adoption in 2017 of the landmark Recommendation on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience (N. 205) and the launch of the ILO's Jobs for Peace and Resilience (JPR) global flagship programme, the organization has recently reinvigorated its mandate in the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus** and fully equipped itself to contribute to more peaceful and resilient societies through the **promotion of employment and decent work**.
- The COVID-19 crisis has transformed into an **unprecedented** economic and labour market shock, impacting the supply (of goods and services) and demand (through consumption and investments).
- Prospects for the economy, but especially **the quantity and quality of employment** are deteriorating rapidly, in addition to further **widening the gap of inequality**.
- At the ILO we estimated that the pandemic has already cost the equivalent of 495 million full-time jobs. We know that under these circumstances not only are we on the edge of a **serious humanitarian crisis**, but we risk that this situation could trigger and tip over into a state where increased fragility and grievances, could lead to social unrest and increase the number of conflicts around the world.

I would like to highlight three ways in which employment and decent work can **clearly contribute to social cohesion and peace** during this pandemic.

#### 1. First, it's through well-designed and targeted employment programmes

- Special effort is needed to ensure that **excluded and vulnerable groups**, such as informal workers, women, internally and forcibly displaced persons, migrants and refugees, are included, not only in the **design of livelihood/employment programmes**, but that they are also appropriately covered by the COVID response measures, as they are often the most affected by containment and lockdown strategies.

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- Health or employment and decent work interventions will not automatically help sustain peace if programmes are not designed in such a way that they:
  - i) **address the root causes of conflict**,
  - ii) **are conflict sensitive** in design and implementation, and
  - iii) **are adapted to local realities**.
- In the absence of a conflict-sensitive approach to COVID-19, different measures and responses could have unintended consequences and risk exacerbating existing fragilities – particularly in countries already affected by conflict and violence – and may miss out on critical peacebuilding opportunities in the context of the pandemic.
- Perceptions are also important to avoid grievances. For example, **perceptions of exclusion from service delivery**; horizontal inequalities, discrimination, social protection, decent work deficits, in other words, perceptions that **may lead to resentment or a sense of injustice**.

### 2. Second, through the role of local and social partners

- It will be essential to engage national, local actors and communities from the outset when designing and implementing measures in response to COVID-19 – ensuring a human centred approach.
- Indeed, workers' groups, employers and business membership organizations (EBMOs) – also known as “social partners” – play important roles in the response to COVID-19.
- They advocate for business continuity and income security and collaborate with government authorities to ensure that occupational safety and health measures are adapted to new workplace risks, especially in essential sectors such as health care and sanitation.
- Acting individually or together, social partners bring their constituents together beyond differences, such as ethnicity and language, so they are often in a good position to bridge diverging perspectives.

### 3. And third, (don't be shortsighted) it is important to have a long-term vision

- This paper highlights rightly that while immediate measures are necessary, they should be made part of a wider, **long-term vision for recovery and resilience**, addressing the underlying factors of fragility that make society and the economy particularly vulnerable to external shocks in the first place.
- Short-term responses should help lay the foundations for the transformation of existing structural challenges in the long-term.
- And where nationally financed public employment programmes (or PEPs) are already in place, they can rapidly be scaled up by using prevailing networks, while continuing to provide livelihoods and job opportunities to the most vulnerable, building needed infrastructure, assets and services, while addressing inequality.
- Higher levels of employment **can create** a multiplier effect to further stimulate aggregate demand.

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I will end with a few examples of measures that can be taken:

- Short-term emergency public works schemes that mitigate socioeconomic impacts and support the health response by **upgrading infrastructures for primary health care** and **providing access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene**.
- **Building a large workforce, skilled in testing and contact tracing**, for example, to prevent the further spread of the disease. This would **enhance employability for a sector high in demand** at the moment.
- When the disruption of international supply chains has affected the economy, small scale firms could be supported to produce essential equipment that can no longer be imported, such as facemasks, gowns, and head coverings.
- Based on careful targeting underpinned by conflict-sensitivity considerations, such schemes could specifically hire vulnerable and excluded groups, and favour intergroup interactions in selecting participants (e.g. displaced/host communities).

**To conclude**, the limitations in fiscal space especially in these countries facing all types of fragility will require the best use of existing national and international development funds to address both the emergency, but also to develop sustainable national systems and institutions in the long-run.

- The COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a key lever to advance the localization agenda and integrate it more centrally into the broader humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
- And by doing so they will also increase trust in state authorities and strengthen social cohesion between the government, social partners and local communities, and support peacebuilding.