

Just Recovery Conference 2021

A Just Recovery from Covid-19: How the Sustainable Development Goals can Guide Ireland's Recovery

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Intervention by Paola Simonetti, Deputy Director Economic and Social Policy Department at the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Intervention [10 minutes]

Crisis Impact on the world of work

- COVID-19 has triggered an extraordinary wave of destruction across the world of work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that over 250 million jobs have been destroyed and more than 1.6 billion informal workers are facing deprivation. The number of workers living in moderate or extreme poverty increased by 108 million in 2020, reversing five years of continuous progress.
- However, we know already that the world entered the crisis with a “sustainability debt”. In fact, the ITUC SDG 8 global monitor shows that the lack of adequate wages and inclusive labour markets are still major questions hindering well-being for all and employment quality. Workers’ exposure to risks, under-protection and exclusion, are global challenges. And while only wealthier countries seem to do better concerning the labour rights, the economic crisis brought along restrictions on freedoms and labour rights violations worldwide. These include international labour standard violations, non-compliance with labour regulations regarding layoffs, working hours and wage payment, and disregard of organisational health and safety regulations.
- Therefore, it does not surprise that pre-existing labour market deficiencies resulted in making those who are most vulnerable even more exposed to the impact of the crises: low-skilled workers, migrant workers, informal workers, women, and youth.
- Women got disproportionately affected. Globally, employment losses for women stand at 5 per cent, versus 3.9 per cent for men. Additionally, 90 per cent of women who lost their jobs in 2020 exited the labour force, with serious risks of long-lasting exclusion.
- It is now imperative to focus on a human-centred recovery from the unprecedented crisis that is afflicting the world of work and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are helping us in this respect, showing the path towards resilient economies and just societies. Through its targets on decent work, social protection and sustainable growth, SDG 8 plays a fundamental role in providing policy responses to the crisis. And we will see how.

The horizon: divergent recoveries and weekend employment landscape

- The response and measures taken to respond to the needs of the population during the pandemic have been very uneven, with high-income countries spending heavily on their pandemic response. Stimulus spending per capita averaged nearly \$10,000 in the developed countries, while it amounted to less than \$20 per capita in the least developed countries.
- Globally projected employment in 2021 will still fall short of its pre-crisis level and unemployment is foreseen to be high in 2022, with middle-income countries being the most affected.

- Divergent recoveries, particularly exacerbated by the absence of strong international co-operation to beat the pandemic everywhere, and a dramatically weakened employment scenario are currently the world's biggest challenges. Debt sustainability concerns are likely to push governments towards austerity, making devastating cuts in social sector spending. Austerity will inevitably weaken the speed and quality of the recovery and undermine resilience to future shocks.
- Therefore, it is crucial that policymakers prioritise both urgent and long-term recovery measures in line with the SDGs and SDG 8 in particular. These are:

Key Trade Unions demands for recovery and resilience

- **Stepping up investments in decent and climate-friendly jobs creation with just transition measures:** Millions of jobs can be created through investments in sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. To guarantee that workers and communities are not left behind, just transition measures must be negotiated with social partners, and rooted in social protection, education, training and skills development.
- **Scaling up universal social protection systems:** Although feasible options for many countries, where only political will seems to be the real determinant, this is not the case for the poorest ones. The UN Special Rapporteur's proposal on extreme poverty and human rights for the establishment of a [Global Fund for Social Protection](#) is crucial to upholding the implementation of social protection floors in this respect.
- **Upholding equality and fighting vulnerability:** Investments in quality public care services and infrastructure, the promotion of equal pay for work of equal value, and the introduction of minimum living wages with stronger collective bargaining remain the preconditions to gender equality, as well as education, skills training and life-long learning as measures for integrating young people in the labour market.
- **Financing recovery and resilience:** universal access to vaccines and treatment, increased levels of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and concessional finance will need to do the heavy lifting for the recovery and resilience needs ahead. Multilateral, regional and national development banks must systematically prioritise employment, measuring the quality and quantity of job creation.
- **Supporting inclusive governance and social dialogue:** Social dialogue and industrial relations are key in crafting equitable policies and granting greater levels of transparency, good governance and trust in institutions, within countries, but also across nations.

The world needs a new vision to refund economic and societal models, and this requires commitments from all economic, social and political forces. The SDGs and SDG 8 provide us this vision with related policies. The priorities mentioned are at the heart of trade unions demands for a **NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT** to address major deficit in the world of work and to ensure a human-centred recovery and resilience.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Head Office

Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5, Bte 1 B - 1210 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0) 2224 0211

Fax: +32 (0) 2201 5815

E-mail: info@ituc-csi.org

Web site: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>