



The International Labour Organization,
Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean
in collaboration with
The Government of Barbados



11TH ILO MEETING OF CARIBBEAN MINISTERS OF LABOUR

“SHAPING A BRIGHTER FUTURE OF WORK FOR THE CARIBBEAN”

Christ Church, Barbados, 14 - 15 May 2019

MEETING CONCLUSIONS

The 11th ILO Meeting of Caribbean Ministers of Labour included 17 delegations, of which ten were led by Ministers of Labour from the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean¹. The Ministers of Labour and other high-level representatives of the Ministries and Departments of Labour who attended the two-day event have considered the key issues under the Meeting theme of “**Shaping a Brighter Future of Work for the Caribbean**”.

Following discussions involving the ILO Director General, representatives of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), as well as representatives of the Caribbean Employers’ Confederation (CEC) and the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Ministers and other high-level Government representatives acknowledge the need for the region to:

Build awareness that the world of work is experiencing major transformations driven by globalization, the technological and digital revolution, global warming and climate change, and demographic shifts that are having profound impacts on the Caribbean;

Recognize inherent vulnerabilities to global economic down-turns, high unemployment, rising inequality, crime and prevalence of severe natural and man-made disasters;

Emphasize that Governments, employers, workers, and society as a whole take the human being - and the role of work in the lives of individuals and societies – as a point of departure, for identifying opportunities to improve the quality of life for workers in the future;

Utilize the Decent Work Agenda and a reinvigorated social contract as critical instruments for achieving this human-centered approach;

Recall the collective and individual commitments made to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework in the Caribbean (UN-MSDF), the policy priorities set out in the Panama Declaration for the ILO Centenary in 2018, and the Decent Work Country Programmes; and

Advance a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies.

Based on these considerations, the Ministers of Labour and other high-level representatives of the Ministries and Departments of Labour of the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean have agreed on the following conclusions under four thematic areas:

¹ Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Curacao, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands.

1. Exploring new job and decent work opportunities for the Caribbean in the digital, care, and green/blue economies

1.1 Digital Economy

- 1.1.1. Digital transformation is affecting and shaping the world of work. High internet speed and overall connectivity, a good quality education, a sound regulatory environment and a good corporate structure give the Caribbean a solid starting point to proactively foster job creation within the digital economy.
- 1.1.2. Adjusting to the changes caused by digital transformation requires new legislation, increased inter-ministerial and public-private discussions and partnerships, lifelong learning, including education curricula and skills development, as well as a cultural shift to foster creativity.
- 1.1.3. Ministries with responsibility for Labour must continue to strengthen and promote the collection, analysis and use of reliable electronic data that helps better design and fine-tune programmes aimed at fostering job creation and decent work within the digital economy.

1.2 Care Economy

- 1.2.1 The Caribbean has advantages which allow for a care service sector that fosters job creation and decent work. These advantages include its geographical location, climate, availability of a skilled and semi-skilled multilingual labour force, and the existence of tourism infrastructure.
- 1.2.2 The potential to fully realize these advantages will be impacted by the extent and quality of national and regional partnerships of Ministries of Labour with other ministries as well as care professionals and industry partners.
- 1.2.3 Actions should include the development of programmes that foster employment and create jobs; training and certification; support to small enterprises; and targeted migration programmes.
- 1.2.4 Specific attention must be paid to promoting the decent work agenda in the care economy, particularly among the most vulnerable, including domestic workers. Interventions should include the development and sharing of model legislation and sensitization campaigns.

1.3 Green/Blue Economy

- 1.3.1 There is a need for Ministries of Labour to develop a stronger knowledge-base and clearer understanding of the blue and green economies given the urgency for adequate policies to address the negative social and economic impacts of climate change on the world of work.
- 1.3.2 Through inclusive social dialogue, evidence-based policies and regulatory frameworks, the Caribbean can be well-positioned to make a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies.
- 1.3.3 This transition will allow the Caribbean to capitalize on existing green and blue initiatives such as sustainable tourism, clean and renewable energy, recycling infrastructure and sustainable agriculture which have the potential to transform the region into a “green hub”.

2. Adapting institutions of work given the new emerging forms of employment and the growing importance of digital, care and green/blue economies²

- 2.1 Three emerging forms of work were addressed: telework, platform work, and zero-hours contracts. These new forms of employment pose challenges to existing labour institutions. The most notable challenges relate to productivity and its measurement, life-long training and re-training, social protection, social security sustainability, occupational safety and health, collective bargaining and working conditions.
- 2.2 With regard to teleworking, while this form of work has great merit, the uneven access to information and communications technology (ICT) throughout the region and the lack of appropriate regulatory frameworks and relevant skills are hindering its development.
- 2.3 There are significant problems related to platform work, such as the differentiation between employer, employee and self-employed, unclear working hours, entitlements (e.g. sick leave, vacation leave, maternity/paternity leave), income insecurity and social protection.
- 2.4 The debate on zero-hours contracts is ongoing and there is no universal definition. Challenges include worker availability, quality and productivity of workforce, undermining of staff morale and trust, exclusivity clauses, income instability and limited career development.
- 2.5 Artificial intelligence (AI) is already having an impact on the Caribbean. As in the rest of the world, it is expected to intensify. It is necessary for the region to be proactive in understanding the development and challenges of AI before determining the kinds of actions needed.
- 2.6 Governments and social partners have to accelerate the responses to these changes in order to guarantee decent work for all. The special characteristics of the Caribbean call for targeted policy reforms that must be based on social dialogue and consensus.

3. Articulating a renewed social contract and exploring what can be done

- 3.1 Government and social partners should work together to strengthen social dialogue mechanisms as a critical component in achieving social justice and social cohesion in the context of the new challenges and opportunities of the future world of work.
- 3.2 Social partners should be equipped to maximize opportunities presented by technology and the digital revolution. Social dialogue must maintain its key role within these new areas.
- 3.3 The existence of a renewed social contract should not remove or reduce the existing fundamental rights of workers, nor should it deny workers a fair share of the fruits of economic progress. This calls for improving coordinating mechanisms to strengthen collaboration within and among the ministries in order to ensure coherent policy-making and effective implementation that will guarantee a fair share of the fruits of progress for all.

² Telework refers to a modality of working which involves working away from other workers and offices while maintaining virtual presence through the use of information and communication technologies. Platforms, for the purpose of these conclusions, refer to technology frameworks, commonly in the form of a website, which offer various functions that allow complex transactions between service requesters and service providers. Such functions involve matchmaking between service requesters and providers, user reviews, personalized recommendations based on user data analyses, etc.

- 3.4 Continued social dialogue geared toward a renewed social contract at the national level, economic and social councils and similar institutions also conducting social dialogue can play a key role. At the international level, the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS) can play a major role as the ILO and AICESIS renewed their cooperation agreement in October 2018.
- 3.5 Achieving a fair share of progress for all would require each country to determine the needs of the people and, through partnership with the employers' and workers' organizations, adequately address these needs through efficient quality of work and sensitivity to the needs of workers.
- 3.6 Facilitate the inclusion of the green/blue, care and digital economies in the national social dialogue agenda.
- 3.7 Collect and analyze data to facilitate evidence-based policy-making on new emerging issues i.e. green/blue, care and digital economies.

4. Supporting labour cooperation in the region

- 4.1. Decent Work Country Programmes remain relevant policy frameworks through which countries may work to achieve and report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- 4.2. The ILO remains a key partner in the advancement of the Decent Work Agenda. The ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean continues to be well placed to deliver timely and relevant information and experience to the region, and globally, through quality technical assistance, convening periodic meetings, and hosting online platforms and communities.