



Joint Statement on Employment, Skills & Women

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, April 5, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely constrained hundreds of millions of workers around the world. Not only have workers been exposed to the health risk, they have also been constrained by lockdown of geographies and widespread shutdown of businesses, including the global value chains. Women are particularly affected and also susceptible to discrimination in support measures.

We, the **B20, L20, and W20** welcome the commitment of the G20 Leaders made at the Extraordinary Summit on 26 March, “to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic and social damage from the pandemic, restore global growth, maintain market stability, and strengthen resilience”, and to “ask the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to monitor the pandemic’s impact on employment.”

We call for urgent and coordinated efforts by the G20 to contain the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce.

There is an urgent need for the G20 to take coordinated and gender-sensitive response to an unprecedented global health, social and economic crisis, even while governments enact national measures.

According to the ILO, the pandemic will impact the world of work across three key dimensions:

- 1) The quantity of jobs (both unemployment and underemployment);
- 2) The quality of work (e.g. wages and access to social protection); and
- 3) Effects on specific groups including women, who are more vulnerable to adverse labour market outcomes.

Globally, women, that make up 70% of workers in the health and social sector, are not safe from harm and discrimination, which puts them at a greater risk of COVID-19. Protecting women in frontline responders is a key to fighting the pandemic and have access to adequate health & economic benefits.

In this context, we collectively call on the G20 Leaders to urgently act on the following:

- ***Engage employers, workers, key actors from civil society at all stages of national and local response and decision-making, and include women as both decision makers and a focus of the decisions.*** Women are hit harder by

the economic impacts of the pandemic as more women work in low-paying, insecure and informal jobs. Women have been recognized during epidemics to be in prime positions at home as a worker, caregiver and educator to identify trends that will help the authorities in all its inclusiveness and diversity to make fast and quick decisions. The G20 must commit to clear legislation that eradicates all forms of gender-based discrimination and mitigates unconscious bias in taking decisions during crisis.

- ***Strengthen the access to social protection of most vulnerable group.*** Hundreds of millions of workers across all forms of employment, especially women, elderly and unskilled, are on the verge of falling back into poverty and serious debt-traps. The G20 must commit to scale up the social protection and extend it to all forms of employment. Particularly and immediately, support daily wage earners with direct cash transfers. Additionally, defer their credit payments, rents, and other forms of liabilities.
- ***Increase provision of health benefits:*** The G20 commit to guarantee provision of basic health services and urgent care, including mental health and well-being, wherever possible free public health for those excluded or insufficiently covered by current provisions. Stigmatization must be penalized and necessary provisions must be made available to affected workers.
- ***Support employers to continue wages and entitlements:*** Most employers are partially shutting down with little clarity on the timing of their revival. G20 must support them to continue wages and entitlements, financial as well as non-financial (such as paid leave and wage support) for workers that are temporarily laid-off or in part-time arrangements on a temporary basis.
- ***Provide additional support to MSMEs to reduce unemployment:*** MSMEs are the largest employers and job creators. However, they are also the most susceptible to economic shocks and most likely to shut shop. The cost of laying off and re-hiring are relatively high for them. Therefore, the G20 must commit to provide additional support to MSMEs to avoid or reduce unemployment. Measures include, but are not limited to, paying the wages and income of workers and employers of MSMEs, providing deferrals of rent, credit payments and financial liabilities and suspending legal restrictions.
- ***Encourage the adoption of flexible work arrangements:*** Most countries had to explore alternative working arrangement to counter the health impacts on people and to help contain the pandemic. Families are now responsible for the continuity of their children's education and providing care to elderly parents. In most countries, unpaid care work has traditionally been considered to be the women's responsibility. To help families share the responsibility of their children's education and elder care, we propose that employers to have flexible working hours for parents (both males and females) to dedicate the time to the educational continuity of their children and eldercare for their parents. The G20 must enforce policies that will enhance the flexible work arrangement in the workplace while maximizing income guarantees.

- ***Increase technology enablement:*** Many companies have shifted their work remotely. This emphasizes the vital role that technology can play in the response to the crisis and continuity of economic activity. The G20 must make efforts to immediately provide available technological infrastructure on a priority basis, through measures that include mandating digital entertainment services to scale-down spectrum use and address inter-country and intra-country roadblocks such as security concerns related to 5G. The G20 must ensure that the extraordinary measures adopted to harness digital data for monitoring those infected or suspected of COVID-19, are withdrawn after the crisis is overcome. Personal privacy and citizen rights on digital data must be ensured.
- ***Make digital access affordable:*** Especially for education, the G20 must leapfrog on tech-advanced education delivery systems. Education must include teaching the necessary skill base to work and interact with emerging digital technologies. Equally we need fair transition frameworks for the inevitable shift in business operations with new and increasingly integrated technologies. However, there are still many who do not have affordable and reliable access to digital tools. The G20 must bridge the digital divide by making education technologies accessible, free and universal.

Only coordinated, collaborative and urgent efforts will minimize the social and economic impact of COVID-19, and shorten the time to revive the global economy in the post-pandemic phase.