

Digital Conference

Covid-19 in Africa

Strengthening cooperation for an effective return to work

Tuesday 30 June 2020, 12:00-13:30 (CET, Geneva) or 10:00-11:30 (UTC, Abidjan)



Following the emergence of Covid-19 in the region, African governments quickly declared a health emergency. Safety measures have been put in place to control the spread of the virus. These measures have since had significant negative impacts on the economic activities of all African countries. According to the World Bank, economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa will drop from 2.4% in 2019 to a range between -2.1% and -5.1% in 2020, which will be the first recession in the region in 25 years. Various macro-economic factors also explain this entry into recession on the continent: fall in the GDP of the region's main trading partners, particularly China and the euro zone, fall in commodity prices and reduction in tourist activity in many countries.

The working world is deeply affected by the current crisis. Several companies have been subject to compulsory or recommended closures without having had the opportunity to ensure the continuity of their activities. According to the ILO's immediate forecast model, working hours worldwide fell in the first quarter of 2020 by around 4.5 percent (equivalent to around 130 million full-time jobs, based on a weekly duration of 48 hours) compared to the situation before the crisis (fourth quarter 2019). By the end of the second quarter of 2020, total working hours worldwide are expected to be 10.5 percent lower than the quarter before the crisis. However, the pandemic is evolving, and, with it, the measures taken by governments and businesses to deal with it. For an increasing number of companies, following a mandatory or recommended closing period, returning to work becomes the unique way to survive.

In light of the changing economic situation, assessing from a sub-regional perspective, the impact of Covid-19 on the African private sector and the effectiveness of the measures put in place by governments and companies, from the beginning of the crisis, stands out as a necessity. In addition, while the return to work becomes an obligation for many companies to survive, collective discussion on the subject also appears to be a good practice which will foster the formulation of joint responses.

The main mission of the Federation of Employers' Organization of West Africa (FOPAO) is to maintain constant liaison between its members and organize a framework for permanent cooperation between them. The federation also aims at defending the interests of its members, and organizing exchanges of legal, social, fiscal, economic, commercial and financial information. In addition, the FOPAO, works for the economic integration of its members within the framework of, among other organizations working for the development of economic and commercial exchanges, the Economic Community of West African States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

Like the FOPAO, the Union of Central African Employers (UCAE) is the main platform for the private sector in Central Africa and is the interlocutor of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa, the Economic Community of Central African States and the international partner organisations (AfDB, World Bank, European Union, UNDP, etc.) for all matters of community interest affecting or involving the private sector in Central Africa.

From the onset of the crisis in Africa, IOE has been working closely its African partners. In April 2020, two digital conferences (one for French-speaking African countries and the other for English-speaking African countries) on the theme "**Covid-19 in Africa: sharing of experiences and recommendations for the private sector**" were organized in order to quickly understand the issues and challenges the African private sector had to face and make recommendations on how to address them. In addition to a guide to work, IOE also produced, in partnership with the Society for Human Resource Management, a Return to Work Guide (May 2020). This guide enables companies to assess the situation, to put in place adequate return-to-work measures, to prepare for the post-Covid-19 effects and cope with new work realities.

Objectives

The digital conference "**Covid-19 in Africa: cooperation between sub-regional employers' organizations for better resilience and an effective return to work**" aims mainly at monitoring the impact of the crisis on the African private sector and making recommendations regarding the return to work in West and Central Africa. More specifically, it intends to:

1. Assess the impacts of social and economic measures taken by governments and regional institutions.
2. Provide examples of private sector actions in the fight against Covid-19.
3. Discuss strategies and realities related to the return to work.
4. Assess the needs of employers' organizations in West and Central Africa.
5. Identify common perspectives (IOE / FOPAO / UNIPACE) on ways to facilitate sub-regional collaborations of African employers' organisations.

AGENDA (CET, Geneva)

11:00-11:15: Opening remarks, Mr Roberto Suárez, Secretary General, IOE
Opening remarks, Mr El-Mahfoud Megateli, Vice-president Africa, IOE

11:15- 12:10: Panel discussion

12:10-12:20: Q&A

12:20-12:25: Closing remarks FOPAO/UNIPACE

12:25-12:30: Closing remarks, Mr Roberto Suárez, Secretary General, IOE
