

Declaration



Promoting the human and labour rights of labour and vaccination access for all, including migrants and members of their families and their participation in the post-COVID-19 recovery process made by the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade union Confederation (ITUC-Africa); International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP); International Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA); Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC); South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SARTUC), and ASEAN Trade Union Council (ASEAN-TUC)

We affirm that migration remains a historical, human and natural phenomenon, which has benefitted and continues to contribute to development and humanity;

We further assert that labour migration is a simple affirmation of the fact that jobs are at the heart of human dignity as people want to work to earn their keep, fend for loved ones and pursue their ambitions and aspirations. We continue to see how labour migrants are making tangible and positive contributions to host, transit and sending communities and economies, as well as to themselves and members of their families;

We note that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which broke out in late 2019 and the subsequent declaration of it as a global health pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020 has adversely affected the majority of the people in various degrees, but the impacts on vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees have been more profound and direr;

We also notice that COVID-19 is a direct challenge to mobility as evidenced in the instances of xenophobia attacks; discrimination; racism; hate and abuses (verbal, physical and psychological) against them and members of their families have spiked;

We affirm that the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is a global health crisis that has rapidly snowballed into a socio-economic crisis with multiple effects on people, communities, economies, work and livelihoods. The socio-economic impacts (loss of jobs, delayed/reduced/loss of incomes, livelihood, shelter, visa and contract expiration and inability to renew, lack of protective equipment, no healthcare insurance and cover,

infection by COVID-19; death, etc) are contributing to the rise of mental health crises (worries, anxiety, fear and trepidation, low morale and reduced self-esteem, depression, migraines, etc) being suffered by workers, including migrant workers;

We are concerned about the growing cases of suicide and work-related accidents being suffered by workers, especially migrant workers on account of mental health crisis and also due to the gaps in mental health care and access are contributing to the exacerbation of suicide and deaths;

We also recognised that the continuous practice in law and practice of the Kafala labour recruitment system, which perpetuates and intensify slavery-like working conditions in the Middle East and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States are contributing to the exploitation and abuse of the human and labour rights of workers. We commend the efforts and progress the State of Qatar has made and achieved in reforming the Kafala system.

We have been witnesses of the active and impressive roles and contributions that migrant workers made and are making in the fight against COVID-19. They have been visible as bus and ambulance drivers, street cleaners, doctors and nurses, laboratory assistants and scientists, as well as caregivers in homes for the elderly, domestic workers and security personnel helping to ensure compliance with the different public health measures adopted by their different host countries' government;

We salute and pay glowing tributes to the many workers, including migrant workers, male and female for their heroic and courageous sacrifices, even paying with their lives, to ensure that the coronavirus disease is contained. Thanks to them, we are now experiencing a slow but steady reduction of the rate of infections and deaths, though not unmindful of the occasional surge and spike of infection here and there;

We are saddened that the deaths suffered by workers, including migrant workers' would have been substantially reduced and, in most cases, preventable if adequate personal protective equipment were made available and improved workplaces safety and health arrangements were in place;

We recognise that the low and inadequate social protection provisions and coverage, especially in poor and developing economies and amongst migrant workers' communities contributed in part to the dire and intensification of the socio-economic effects from COVID-19;

We are excited about the fast pace in the development of vaccines to fight the disease. We are equally enthusiastic about the creation and activities of the COVAX facility by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a mean to improve vaccines access and administration, especially to poor and vulnerable economies and constituencies;

We are, however, worried that COVID-19 vaccines access is skewed against migrant workers and members of their families. COVID-19 vaccination is also, unfortunately, renewing and re-energizing the fault lines of racism and inequality with subsequent impacts on migrants relative to their race and identity;

We are equally disturbed about the growing rate of disinformation and misinformation concerning the vaccines. These surmountable actions are feeding into the skepticism and refusal to take the vaccine jabs, including among migrant communities;

We are convinced that COVID-19 just as it requires global coordination and a sense of solidarity to tackle and defeat it, also represents an opportunity to calibrate better cohesive, coordinative and collaborative efforts to advance and attain a pro-rights labour migration governance that defeats the notion of migration as a crisis;

We acknowledge and endorse the reports of the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), notably that of the Director-General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Committee on COVID-19.

From the following, therefore, we adopt this declaration with the intention to undertake the following actions as means to redress and ultimately contribute to the eradication of the issues raised –

1. Continue to advocate, in collaboration with other progressive allies, for access to vaccination for all, including migrant workers and members of their families and poor economies.
2. Continue to educate and raise awareness among migrant workers' communities on the propriety of taking the vaccine jabs and to push back against the growing fake news and controversial narratives concerning the vaccines.
3. Work with migrant workers and their associations to ensure that migrant workers know how to demand and obtain personal protective equipment and for employers to make the necessary PPE provisions readily available.
4. Work with other social partners to ensure that pre-departure orientation exercises for labour migrants include Occupational Health and Safety training and how to get medical attention when in need of one, including mental healthcare. This will be one of our actions to contribute to fair recruitment.
5. Standards are critical to the enjoyment of rights and the attainment of the decent work agenda. The MoU partners shall continue to campaign for the ratification, application and enforcement of relevant regional and international instruments such as ILO Conventions 143 Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions); C.189 Domestic Workers and C190 Violence and Harassment.

6. We shall continue to advocate for the guarantee of the exercise of Freedom of Association (FoA) rights for all workers, including migrant workers. This is because the right to freely form and choose is critical to the enjoyment of all other civil liberties.
7. Initiate and continue the collaboration with trade unions in host countries to further the organising of migrant workers.
8. Sustain and extend the campaign for the expansion of social protection provisions and access to all categories of workers, including migrant workers and all persons. This campaign will further the push to address Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs), tax havens, corruption and assets looting, including taxes on great fortunes and transnational companies, as part of the efforts to shore up resource mobilization for financing social protection mostly from poor and developing economies,
9. Advocate for the inclusion of migrant workers in the development and management of workplaces Occupational Health and Safety policies and programmes. In this connection, we shall develop and sharpen the knowledge, skills and capacities of migrant workers on how to engage in social dialogue and negotiation of OHS issues in the workplaces.
10. Remain vigilant and ready to denounce any exploitative and abusive actions that undermine the rights and wellbeing of migrants and members of their families anywhere.
11. We shall continue to campaign against the dismantling of the Kafala labour recruitment. We shall do this by insisting that governments of sending countries engage in robust and transparent Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) development process with social partners and that the BLMAs contain provisions to secure the human and labour rights of migrants. We shall also continue to advocate that other Middle East/GCC States countries reform the Kafala system in a collaborative manner that Qatar adopted.
12. Social dialogue is critical to ensuring increased/improved enjoyment of the rights of migrants as the world positions to recover from the effects of COVID-19. We shall continue to demand that Non-State Actors (trade unions and Civil Society Organisations) are given institutionalized spaces in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) just as we want to see a stocktaking of the ADD.