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COVID-19 and the world of work

Purpose of the document

This document has been prepared to support consideration by the Governing Body of how the human-centred approach articulated in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work might best be brought to bear on the extraordinary challenges of recovery that the COVID-19 crisis poses to the world of work. In view of the urgency and dimension of the current circumstances, it makes the case for framing the ILO's contribution to the recovery within an overarching initiative to facilitate an integrated response to the crisis (see the draft decision in paragraph 44).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: All. Work across the outcomes on issues relevant to a human-centred recovery.

Policy implications: Yes.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: Potentially, subject to the decision of the Governing Body.

Follow-up action required: Yes, as indicated in the draft decision.

Author unit: Research Department (RESEARCH).

Related documents: [GB.340/PFA/1](#); [GB.340/PFA/2](#); [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#).

▶ Introduction

1. The ILO's role, as framed by the [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#) (Centenary Declaration), has taken on heightened importance in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. But, as relevant as the Centenary Declaration is to the immediate issues of conditions of work and social protection, the approach it embodies is even more crucial to the challenge of moving beyond the crisis and building back better. In this perspective, there is, therefore, good reason for the Governing Body to consider how that approach might best be brought to bear on the extraordinary challenges of recovery that the pandemic poses to the world of work.
2. The Centenary Declaration has given the ILO the primary task in the years ahead of "taking into account the profound transformations in the world of work, and further developing its human-centred approach to the future of work". The current situation makes it urgent and imperative for the Governing Body to consider what the COVID-19 crisis implies for the vigorous and faithful implementation of this directive over the medium to long term. That process has, as a point of departure, the view widely expressed by ILO constituents, notably at the ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work held from 1 to 9 July 2020, that the agenda set by the Centenary Declaration is more relevant than ever in the context of the current economic and social crisis. This suggests that the Governing Body should give consideration to special efforts to enable and expedite its implementation in the task of building back better. The preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2022–23 ¹ and the proposed Strategic Plan for 2022–25 ² before the Governing Body set out the framework for ILO activity. But the scale and gravity of the unprecedented world of work crisis triggered by COVID-19 makes necessary a specific focus on the implications of the pandemic for ILO work and on how, through the implementation of the Centenary Declaration, the ILO can and must take a lead in the process of recovery with impact on a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the challenges now emerging.
3. This document begins with an overview of how the transformations that were under discussion in 2019 are themselves being transformed and made more challenging by the crisis in important respects. It then looks more specifically at how the Centenary Declaration's human-centred approach could stimulate a process of building back better and faster from the crisis in a series of areas. In view of the urgency and dimension of the current circumstances, it makes the case for framing the ILO's contribution within an overarching initiative to facilitate an integrated response to the crisis.

▶ I. COVID-19 and the Centenary Declaration

4. COVID-19 is a human-centred crisis. The pandemic poses a direct potential threat to the well-being of every individual on the planet, irrespective of geography or place in society. Its principal secondary effects – a synchronous worldwide disruption of economic

¹ GB.340/PFA/2.

² GB.340/PFA/1.

activity, employment and human security – have been similarly global in scope and human-centred in impact.

5. These economic and social impacts, and perhaps the pandemic itself, are likely to persist for several years. The world is facing a major medium- to long-term disruption in the world of work that comes on top of the secular transformations already under way, related in particular to technology, the environment, demographics and geopolitics.
6. The human-centred cooperative action articulated by the Centenary Declaration corresponds precisely to these disruptions and transformations. The world needs the ILO to fully mobilize its capabilities and constituencies to help it deliver on this approach.
7. The admonition in the ILO's Constitution that lasting peace depends on social justice reminds us that the stakes could not be higher. Social cohesion – the broad-based perception that the social and economic order are just – depends on the dignity of decent work and the opportunity for it to be created by sustainable enterprise. The broad diffusion of these through standards, technical cooperation, research and social dialogue lies at the heart of the ILO's programmes and activities.

A. The likely enduring impact of the crisis on the world of work and role of the ILO

8. The future of work is not what it was as recently as a year ago. The crisis is likely to have profound, lasting effects on it in several key respects, and these must inform the Organization's strategy to implement the Centenary Declaration going forward. They include:
 - A large overhang of crisis-related unemployment and underemployment extending significantly beyond conditions prevailing in 2019, which were already highly challenging in some regions, and acute for some demographics.
 - A further, substantial increase in human vulnerability, precarity and inequality beyond pre-crisis conditions, including for women and young people, and in large populations of informal economy workers, lower-paid providers of socially essential goods and services, and migrant labourers deprived of work and basic social services and often compelled to repatriate.
 - A marked and widespread deterioration of public finances that is likely to pose a significant additional constraint on policy responses, especially in countries already faced with fragility, natural disasters, forced displacement and limited basic infrastructure, including access to clean water and health services.
 - A significant further acceleration in the digital transformation of economic activity, including remote working arrangements that offer potential benefits but also pose additional challenges for decent work, including in respect of working conditions and protections.
 - A substantial shift in the structure of economies, as certain sectors more vulnerable to the pandemic retrench, such as small and informal enterprises or those exposed to competition from digital production and service delivery, and others expand.
 - A restructuring and possible shortening of international supply chains aimed at strengthening their resilience and continuity in response to the travel and logistics disruptions of the crisis, reinforcing the underlying environmental, technological and

political forces already pushing in this direction and posing added challenges for the future of labour-intensive industrialization in developing countries.

- As a result of these and other factors, a possible serious output gap in the world economy or significant parts thereof, retarding the pace of employment creation, poverty reduction and other aspects of sustainable development at this, the outset of the United Nations Decade of Action on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).
9. These reverberations of the crisis on the world of work are likely to be compounded by the transformations of it already under way driven by automation, changing trade patterns, demographics, migration and climate change. This combination of crisis-related and structural pressures could create a perfect storm of challenges for employment, household income and other aspects of human security in many countries over the next decade. These are the ultimate determinants of consumer and investor confidence, aggregate demand and economic growth and development. Temporary macroeconomic stimulus, while critically important, is in most cases essentially a holding action, a short-term stabilization strategy. It cannot be relied upon to durably **reverse** such a scenario. A more direct, human-centred approach to boosting the level and quality of employment as well as its wider social benefits is likely to be required in order for countries to navigate their way out of the immediate crisis and through the structural transformations of their economies in the years ahead, including with respect to climate action. Experience has shown that decisive climate action cannot be sustained if it is perceived as coming at the expense of broad socio-economic progress.
 10. This is the very approach articulated by the Centenary Declaration. The longer the pandemic lasts, the greater its disruptive force will be on the fundamental building blocks of economic and social progress the Centenary Declaration emphasizes: widely available employment, skilling opportunities, transitional support, decent working conditions and adequate social protection, with all of the contributions to productivity growth, purchasing power and other improvements in supply and demand these bring.
 11. Thus, the ILO's task of delivering on the Centenary Declaration's prime directive of "developing its human-centred approach to the future of work, which puts workers' rights and the needs, aspirations and rights of all people at the heart of economic, social and environmental policies" transcends the Organization's constituents and can benefit the whole of society. In this new era, employment and social protection are as much a macroeconomic and environmental as social justice imperative and therefore belong at the centre of national economic growth and development strategies. As such, the Organization and its mandate have become a matter of the highest political importance to government cabinets and strategic importance to corporate boards, and the Organization is called on to respond accordingly.
 12. The extent to which the ILO and its human-centred agenda succeed in assuming this central role will be determined by how well the Organization implements its mandate – that is to say, how strategically it sets priorities, how catalytically it works with partners and how dynamically it deploys its principal tools of technical cooperation and capacity-building, research, social dialogue and standards.

B. Building back better (and faster) from the crisis through the Centenary Declaration's human-centred approach

13. In 1969, at the 53rd Session of the International Labour Conference and on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the ILO launched the World Employment Programme. The

Programme was formulated as a response to extensive unemployment and underemployment in newly independent developing country Member States and widespread disappointment with the contribution of the prevailing, GNP-centric development paradigm to human development. The Programme proposed placing “fuller” and “productive” employment at the centre of development strategies, presenting this as a better way to simultaneously stimulate economic growth and broad social progress. Through a combination of innovative research, in-country technical cooperation and collaboration with multilateral and other development institutions, the Programme had a significant impact on development in the 1970s. Pragmatic, experience-based adjustments in its strategy over time helped the Organization to “make the transition from a purely indicative plan with ILO action confined to the purely manpower field to a programme which embodies something much more akin to direct action in the creation of employment”.³ With its emphasis on employment and basic needs, poverty reduction, informality and inequality, the Programme “contribute[d] significantly to a shift in the development discourse”⁴ towards a more holistic approach, which was sometimes referred to as “development with a human face.”

14. In other words, at a key moment in its history, the Organization mobilized a global initiative leveraging its mandate, competencies and platform to bring a more human-centred, bottom-up approach focusing on job creation and social inclusion into the heart of the economic growth and development debates and policy planning processes of the time. Half a century later, the unprecedented, synchronized disruption of employment and enterprise caused by the COVID-19 crisis suggests that the world needs the Organization to assume an analogous leadership role today, particularly in view of the inherent limitations of the primary policy response thus far, an extraordinary fiscal and monetary stimulus focused overwhelmingly in industrialized economies.
15. Nearly nine-tenths of the global fiscal response to the crisis has been in advanced countries.⁵ Even in these countries, the outlook for a continuation of this level of effort – averaging 5 per cent of gross domestic product – is uncertain at best given rapidly rising public debt levels. Moreover, less than 3 per cent of global stimulus has occurred in lower-middle-income and low-income countries, and many of these already face severe fiscal constraints, including over a trillion dollars of scheduled external debt repayments in 2020 and 2021.⁶
16. Thus, the world economy needs to find a new, or at least supplemental, engine of economic growth and development and quality employment creation. It needs this new agenda to help it diversify away from the growth and development paradigm of the past generation, with its heavy emphasis on fiscal and monetary stimulus (which has been at elevated levels for over a decade in some countries and of limited feasibility in most others), net exports (global trade has been contracting for the past two years)⁷ and cost efficiencies (companies and governments have already slashed costs and regulatory burdens extensively during the crisis). These strategies are past the point of diminishing

³ ILO, “The Development of the World Employment Programme,” WEP 3 Jacket 1 (WEP Planning), 24 February 1969, as cited in ILO, *The World Employment Programme (WEP): Past, Present and Future*, 30 May 2019.

⁴ Daniel Maul, *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy* (De Gruyter and ILO, 2019), p. 179.

⁵ ILO, *COVID 19 and the World of Work*, ILO Monitor, Fifth edition, 30 June 2020, pp. 13–14.

⁶ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *From the Great Lockdown to the Great Meltdown: Developing Country Debt in the Time of COVID-19*, April 2020, p. 7.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *International Trade Statistics: Trends In Second Quarter 2020*, 28 August 2020.

returns in both economic and social terms. And the Centenary Declaration sets out the basis of an alternative approach.

17. The ILO could provide such leadership by galvanizing a global initiative aimed at accelerating implementation of four aspects of the human-centred approach articulated by its Centenary Declaration which are particularly relevant to the challenge of building back better – and faster – from the crisis. Indeed, as recalled in the proposed Strategic Plan for 2022–25, the ILO has advocated a social and economic response to the COVID-19 crisis, including the following elements:
 - **Stimulating the economy and employment**, including by promoting sustainable enterprises in job-rich sectors with positive environmental and social externalities such as sustainable infrastructure and the care economy.
 - **Supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes** through lifelong learning and active labour market policies and practices, backed by universal social protection with a solid protection floor.
 - **Protecting workers in the workplace** through the strengthening of labour institutions such as labour inspection and collective bargaining, increases in labour productivity and the implementation of international labour standards and good practices.
 - **Relying on social dialogue for solutions**, given its proven worth in shaping effective, balanced and acceptable policy responses.
18. This human-centred approach to economic recovery and reform would create a mutually reinforcing dynamic of increased employment, wider social inclusion and more rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Specifically, greater investment in people’s capabilities and their navigation of job transitions would increase employment, worker productivity and labour force participation, stimulating additional business investment and raising the growth potential of economies. Expanded investment in sustainable enterprise and infrastructure would increase formal employment in the real economy and significantly accelerate the decoupling of economic development from natural resource depletion and environmental degradation. Better working conditions, wages and social protection would increase worker compensation, household income and consumer confidence and diffuse it more widely throughout society, boosting aggregate demand and economic growth.
19. The Centenary Declaration’s human-centred agenda is a strategy to strengthen an economy’s fundamentals – its labour productivity; level and composition of business investment; level and distribution of household income; and mitigation of risks. As such, it provides the basis for a faster, more broad-based and thus more resilient recovery from the COVID-19 crisis – and would provide a much-needed boost to realizing the 2030 Agenda.
20. Nine months into the crisis, many countries are eager to transition from their short-term stabilization measures to more fundamental and sustainable strategies. After the last global economic crisis, there was broad agreement on the need to create a stronger and more inclusive and sustainable growth and development model. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 reiterates that aspiration for a new development paradigm, committing countries to “[p]romote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.
21. These various elements of the Centenary Declaration’s human-centred approach to the future of work – its approach to prioritizing investment in people – could give the world

economy a major new growth, employment and climate impetus if placed at the centre of economic and employment strategies. Having defined this common denominator of stronger economic, social and environmental progress, the ILO could advance understanding and implementation of this approach through an intensified application of its platform, programmes and constituencies. It could consider doing so by launching a high-profile global initiative for this purpose.

▶ II. An initiative for human-centred recovery: Building back better and faster

22. The following section of the document introduces some preliminary concepts for how the Organization could give concrete form to such a global, tripartite initiative. These are aimed at extending and increasing the impact of the ILO's current activities, with a view to catalysing and enabling rapid progress in a human-centred direction. This will often require a more specific case to be made, tailored to individual countries and sectors and addressing the crucial question of resourcing. That in turn will require the Organization to make a special effort to leverage its capabilities and unique global platform, using a three-track human-centred approach, involving:
- **A human-centred approach to policy and practice:** Deepening the ILO's analysis, evidence and policy and enterprise guidance in the areas of investment in people outlined above, and projecting these widely through expanded engagement of influential actors and experts, particularly in the regions close to where government and business decisions are being made.
 - **A human-centred approach to financing and economic policy:** Addressing the crucial issue of how societies can finance a greater degree of investment in their people, and illuminating the likely macroeconomic effects of such investment with respect to productivity, employment and labour force participation, business investment, aggregate demand, growth and living standards.
 - **A human-centred approach to the multilateral system:** Working more closely with other multilateral institutions and arrangements to bring the policy advice and financial support they provide to countries into greater alignment with the Centenary Declaration's human-centred approach to advancing economic, social and environmental progress.
23. The following sections set out some concrete suggestions for preliminary consideration in respect of each of these three tracks.

A. A human-centred approach to policy and practice

24. An important question raised by the Centenary Declaration is how the ILO might advance implementation of key components of the ambitious and groundbreaking approach the Declaration has articulated, for example its calls for "universal access to comprehensive and sustainable social protection", "effective lifelong learning and quality education for all", "a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development", and "ensuring that diverse forms of work arrangements, production and business models ... provide for decent work and are conducive to full, productive and freely chosen employment". A particular challenge is how best to promote decent work in sectors in which the world of work is changing rapidly or in cases where there are issues

of particularly high cross-sector relevance, such as the digital economy, care economy and informal economy, and to do so in a gender responsive manner. Consideration should be given to how the Organization might better mobilize its full set of tools and unique global tripartite platform to accelerate the development and cross-pollination of knowledge, practice and cooperation in these cases and others of special interest or urgency.

25. The policy outcomes in the preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2022–23 set out the areas in which the ILO can help build the capacities of its tripartite constituents to address these challenges. To this end, and in the context of a global initiative, it could establish a limited number of platforms that combine the various tools in the ILO toolbox for the purpose of helping ILO constituents access and co-create knowledge, cross-fertilize good practice and experience in standards implementation, and expand common ground through policy dialogue. By being framed as **special vehicles of global social dialogue** that integrate the services and capabilities of the ILO – enabling constituents to better engage with each other and top experts as well as access the best of what the ILO has to offer on a multifunctional basis – such policy and practice platforms or “labs” could create more powerful worldwide networks of relevant actors and institutions and catalyse additional action and alignment on the implementation of the Centenary Declaration. Building on the positive contributions of social dialogue during the COVID-19 crisis, this effort would help to strengthen tripartism at both the global and the country levels by applying it more intensively to the most pressing current and frontier challenges identified by the Centenary Declaration. The increased agenda-shaping potential of these more open, networked platforms has the potential to attract supplemental resources from donors and foundations, catalyse additional research and action-oriented partnerships in the regions, and increase the communications and media presence of the ILO on cutting-edge topics of widespread interest.
26. In this way, the ILO could accelerate implementation of the aims of the Centenary Declaration by taking a more networked approach, leveraging its tradition of social dialogue to position itself as the leading platform for practical policy and enterprise guidance as well as experience sharing among policymakers and the social partners. The aim would be to create a stronger, self-reinforcing dynamic of cross-country learning, policy dialogue and benchmarking, best corporate practice development and partnership creation, with the involvement of other relevant international organizations, that advances improvement in public policies and corporate practices around the world.

B. A human-centred approach to financing and economic policy

27. In order for governments and enterprises to invest more in their people, they will have to mobilize the necessary financing. This is no easy task in a world in which public finances and corporate balance sheets have been strained by the recent crisis. But this is a challenge that must be engaged forthrightly for the Centenary Declaration to be implemented at scale. In particular, it will be necessary to define a clearer set of innovative financing options and understanding of the net cost and benefit to society of investments financed in these ways, in other words, their all-in macroeconomic and budgetary effects. For this reason, the ILO could develop a track of research and policy dialogue that illuminates the most promising solutions and mobilizes implementation of them in cooperation with other institutions. There are three main aspects of this challenge, each with a somewhat different financing profile and potential set of solutions, as described below.

- 28. Universal social protection** is primarily a challenge of public finance. Therefore, this subtrack should build on the ILO's existing research and advocacy on how governments can mobilize the financing for universal social protection systems through such options as broadening their tax bases, introducing and progressively expanding contributory schemes, and securing concessional international financial assistance through debt relief, very low interest-rate loans or a one-time distribution of reserves, or through a combination of these, aimed at helping to capitalize a contributory system that is phased in and becomes self-financing over time. Each of these external financing options is under discussion by the international financial institutions and finance ministers but not necessarily linked to longer-term, human-centred structural reforms such as the introduction or expansion of social protection systems. The establishment of universal social protection with a solid protection floor requires such a medium- to long-term financing plan.
- 29. Sustainable infrastructure** is a challenge of both public and private finance. Achieving the SDGs is estimated to require an additional investment of US\$2.5 trillion per year,⁸ most of which is required for sustainable infrastructure. These employment-intensive water, energy, sanitation, transport and telecommunications construction projects have huge job creation potential, but they face a large financing gap. Governments fund about 85 per cent of infrastructure; however, their finances are under increased pressure as a result of the crisis. The private sector, which has about US\$120 trillion of assets under management, allocates only 5 per cent of this amount to infrastructure and 1 per cent to developing country infrastructure. This is despite the fact that approximately 10 per cent, or US\$12 trillion, of assets under management are earning a negative yield and an additional large share is earning less than 1 per cent. This compares with the 10–15 per cent average return historically generated by infrastructure funds.⁹
- 30.** It could not be argued that this skewing of global capital away from job-rich infrastructure is justified by the risk. Average default rates on infrastructure assets have been below those on non-financial corporates, and African infrastructure credits have had lower default rates than those on European and the US infrastructure assets. This global market failure creates an enormous growth and employment opportunity cost for the world economy. A 2 per cent or 3 per cent shift in portfolio allocation by institutional investors to developing country sustainable infrastructure projects, which could be catalysed by collective risk sharing and diversification on the part of multilateral development banks, would cover this biggest of SDG financing gaps,¹⁰ creating millions of new jobs in poor countries and an appreciable increase in global growth from which advanced economies would benefit as well.
- 31.** The ILO could lend greater political urgency to the resolution of this primary impediment to the attainment of the SDGs by estimating the opportunity cost for employment and economic growth that it represents on a worldwide and country-by-country basis and engaging in technical cooperation with interested governments and multilateral development banks to help them better understand the relative employment effects of different infrastructure and industrial financing options in country SDG implementation

⁸ United Nations, "Press Release on Citing \$2.5 Trillion Annual Financing Gap during SDG Business Forum Event, Deputy Secretary-General Says Poverty Falling Too Slowly", 25 September 2019.

⁹ These data are drawn from Blended Finance Taskforce, *Better Finance, Better World*, Consultation paper of the Blended Finance Taskforce, 2018, pp. 48–51.

¹⁰ Blended Finance Taskforce, *Better Finance, Better World*, p. 51.

plans. Indeed, the ILO conducts such analysis through its [Employment-Intensive Investment Programme](#), which has its origins in the World Employment Programme. It could work in a similar fashion with these partners to support investment in other economic sectors having high potential to create jobs and contribute to other social objectives, including notably the care economy and educational and training services.

32. **Sustainable enterprise** is primarily a challenge of private finance and corporate governance. In particular, it is a challenge of integrating environmental, social and governance factors into core decision-making processes of institutional investors and banks, on the one hand, and company boards and management teams, on the other. These factors have become much more material to enterprise value creation in recent years. As a result, more companies both large and small are embracing the principles of so-called stakeholder or sustainable capitalism. However, the systematic integration of environmental, social and governance considerations into core capital allocation decisions and other aspects of corporate governance and management practice remains at an early stage.
33. With its strong employer constituency and mandate from the Centenary Declaration to advance sustainable enterprise as the primary engine of employment and decent work, the ILO could leverage its platform to mobilize a more widely shared and specific understanding of market opportunities that are also likely to have a major pay-off for society such as those reflected in the SDGs. The Business and Sustainable Development Commission has estimated that achieving the SDGs has the potential to generate up to US\$12 trillion of business opportunities in 60 different market segments in four sectors: food and agriculture; cities; energy and materials; and health and well-being.¹¹ As such, the SDGs represent an enormous growth opportunity for sustainable enterprise and, by extension, employment, as reflected for example in the ILO's Climate Action for Jobs initiative. A sustained effort aimed at better understanding and promoting action on business opportunities in these and other specific sectors, such as the circular economy, could help to advance the systemic shift in capital allocation that is necessary for a major expansion in the financing of sustainable enterprise.
34. These financing matters are too important to be left to the financial community. They profoundly affect the real economy and the human-centred agenda represented by the SDGs. Their resolution is crucial to the future of work, global decent job creation and climate action. A breakthrough may be more likely if they are placed in the more tangible and politically resonant context of a global jobs and social protection initiative aimed at building economic growth and employment back better – and faster – after the crisis.

C. A human-centred approach to the multilateral system

35. The issues on which the ILO has lead responsibility within the multilateral system are once again at the very top of government cabinet, corporate boardroom and trade union agendas. This creates the opportunity and the need for the Organization to assume a more central role in international policy coordination and development cooperation consistent with the Centenary Declaration's statement that "the ILO must take an important role in the multilateral system, by reinforcing its cooperation and developing institutional arrangements with other organizations to promote policy coherence in pursuit of its human-centred approach to the future of work, recognizing the strong, complex and crucial links between social, trade, financial, economic and environmental

¹¹ Business and Sustainable Development Commission, *Better Business, Better World*, 2017.

policies.” Indeed, a dedicated discussion of the implications of that specific provision of the Centenary Declaration had been anticipated for the 338th Session of the Governing Body (March 2020), which did not take place, and the matter needs to be explored further.

- 36.** The Centenary Declaration has equipped the Organization with an agenda corresponding precisely to the new direction international economic policy and development cooperation must take in order for the international system to succeed in addressing the biggest economic, social and environmental challenges of our time, prioritizing: investment in people, their productive capabilities and capacity to navigate transitions; employment opportunity in sustainable enterprise, notably through a scaling of investment in the SDGs; the institutions, standards and practices that support decent work; and universal social protection with a solid protection floor. Accordingly, the Organization should deepen and further project its fundamental and applied research in cooperation with other international economic organizations in an effort to forge a new consensus on the human-centred growth and development path framed by the Centenary Declaration and SDG 8. And it should work with them to develop a more intensive and effective response to countries seeking technical and financial support for such strategies.
- 37.** This could also be of interest to the G20 countries, Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa (the BRICS countries) and regional groupings which could find it useful to organize a process of policy dialogue and peer review among their governments on these dimensions of a human-centred agenda to build their economies back faster and better. In cooperation with other international economic organizations, the ILO could provide technical and coordination support for such a process, which could be organized in a manner similar to the policy dialogue and peer review process leaders established coming out of the financial crisis on macroeconomic spillover and financial regulatory matters. The ILO’s recent report ¹² providing a balanced framework for the cross-country benchmarking of progress on the growth and employment, social inclusion and environmental sustainability dimensions of SDG 8 could be a useful input to such a process, as well as the Organization’s engagement with other multilateral institutions and regional intergovernmental institutions.
- 38.** The ILO could further undertake a renewed effort to bring about greater system-level interaction and coherence between those organizations whose mandates make them particularly important for the realization of the objectives of the Centenary Declaration, keeping in mind its explicit reference to social, financial, economic and environmental policies in the context of reinforced cooperation and coherence. This would be distinct from and complementary to the efforts already under way through the process of United Nations reform.
- 39.** The Governing Body may take the view that such a level of innovation and ambition is justified and necessary in the light of the nature of current global challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, public perception of the current performance of the multilateral system, and the instructions handed down in the Centenary Declaration.

¹² ILO, *Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity*, Geneva, 2019.

▶ III. Conclusions

40. This document has presented the case for the ILO to launch an initiative for human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, which would enable it to harness to the fullest effect the potential of the Centenary Declaration and to take on the role of international leadership that is required of it in building back better from the social and economic crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
41. Such an initiative would not only provide the overarching organizing framework for the ILO's own activities as set out in the preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2022–23 and the proposed Strategic Plan for 2022–25 but also serve to galvanize a common effort across the multilateral system to restart the global economy and to set it on a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient long-term trajectory.
42. The coincidence between the objectives of the human-centred agenda set out in the Centenary Declaration, the massive human needs of the moment and the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda means that the initiative would have potential to mobilize and unite the efforts of national and international actors on a scale commensurate with the level of ambition required.
43. While the initiative would have to address and shape the medium- and long-term processes of societal transformation that lie ahead, it would need to be embarked upon without delay in the light of the critical conditions already prevailing in the world of work. For this reason, and because a formal decision from its highest decision-making authority would be appropriate to an initiative of this political importance, it would seem necessary to have it established by decision of the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (June 2021). Should the Governing Body wish to pursue this course of action, the initiative could be the subject of further discussion at its 341st Session (March 2021) on the basis of the views expressed at the current session and at subsequent consultations.

▶ Draft decision

44. **The Governing Body requested the Director-General:**
 - (a) **to develop further the proposals set out in document GB.340/HL/2 for a possible initiative for human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis; and**
 - (b) **to identify possible alternatives for consideration by the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (June 2021), and to present appropriate proposals in this regard to the Governing Body at its 341st Session (March 2021).**