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Trade Union Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic - Part 1

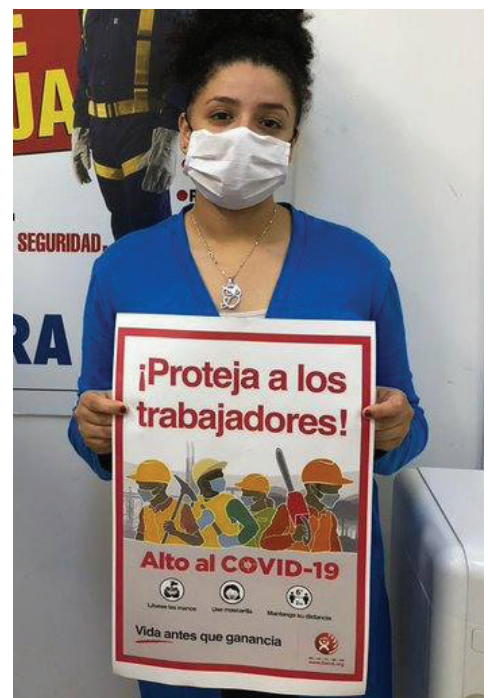
A. REGIONAL PANDEMIC SITUATIONER: IMPACT ON BWI INDUSTRIES

1. Impact on BWI industries and affected workers

At least ten countries in Latin America introduced a lockdown with strict controls on the movement of people. The timing of the lockdown and the level of flexibility differ, as well as their relative success in controlling the spread of COVID-19. Another nine countries have carried out "recommended" or "zone-specific" lockdowns.

Argentina has achieved good results in controlling the pandemic. The imposition of the quarantine was accompanied by measures to prevent hunger and protect work. In addition, the government invested in the production of medical supplies and introduced price freezes on basic items. Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez stated he was currently considering "a series of protocols for opening up economic activities". In contrast, Ecuador is experiencing the most chaotic and confrontational situation due to its already weak health system, a situation radically made worse by the current neo-liberal oriented government. On 7 May, the Mayor of Guayaquil City reported that a third of the 2.7 million inhabitants were infected. The country has now adopted a "traffic-light system" with red, yellow and green zones according to the infection curve, testing capacity, health infrastructure, the number of calls for medical attention and the level of cooperation from citizens. In this way, the government expects to be able to lift the lockdown gradually and introduce social distancing measures. The whole country was originally categorised as a red zone, which means that most of the restrictions remain in place. At a time when several countries in the world including in the Latin American region are easing their lockdown measures, on 7 May, El Salvador imposed stricter measures and will maintain them at least until 21 May. In Brazil, the lockdown varies from State to State. The construction industry has continued to operate in several cities in the country, except where companies close for a period of time, to comply with State or municipal guidelines. On 7 May, President Jair Bolsonaro announced that the construction sector and other industries would be included in the list of essential activities. As a result, these economic activities were authorised to operate despite restrictions established by States and municipalities. Nicaragua has not adopted any restrictions. In this case, President Daniel Ortega stated on radio and television that a mandatory quarantine to confront the coronavirus would "destroy the country".

The coronavirus crisis has impacted the economy of the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region in five main ways: 1. a reduction in international trade; 2. a fall in the prices of primary products; 3. an intensification of risk aversion; 4. a worsening of global financial conditions; and 5. a lower demand for tourist services and a reduction in remittances.



Know more about BWI and Affiliates' COVID-19 Responses at:
<https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/covid-19-union-response-1689>

In 2020, it is estimated that the value of LAC region exports will fall by about 15%. The greatest impacts will be in South American countries, because of the volume of primary goods and their low market prices. In turn, the value of exports from Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico will suffer from the impact of the slowdown of the U.S. economy.

Expectations for growth in the construction sector in 2020 have been reduced due to the pandemic. Previously, 3.1% global growth for the sector was expected but it has now been scaled back to about 0.5%. In order to combat the economic crisis, governments may seek to increase investment in infrastructure, benefiting from the low interest rates. However, their capacity for action may be limited in highly-indebted countries. Although forestry was not impacted by the lockdown in most countries as it is considered part of the agricultural sector, the demand for forestry products is strongly dependent on industrial activity, and production of wood products, such as furniture, was largely shut down.

Including both formal and informal workers, the BWI's trade unions represent more than 9,800,000 people in the construction sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the ILO, trade union membership density in Central America and the Caribbean is 8.9%, while in South America it is 15%.

Over the period 2012-2017, the construction sector represented between 7% and 8% of the economically active population in Latin American and Caribbean. However, the employment situation is not homogenous. For example, in the construction sector, Peru and Costa Rica performed positively in 2018, while Brazil had a negative balance due to the political and economic crisis of that period. The COVID-19 crisis may affect the size of the workforce, but in some cases, in the near future, the workforce could increase, especially if the sector serves as a conduit for economic recovery.

South America: In Argentina, forestry sector jobs are threatened because companies are registering a decrease in sales and customer defaults. It is estimated that logging companies reduced their sales by more than 70% in April, and only 25% maintained export levels as planned. In Chile, the construction sector did not lockdown completely, but nonetheless, according to the Chilean Chamber of Construction, employment in the sector will fall 12% in 2020 due to the effects of the crisis and 75,000 jobs will be lost. In Brazil, it is estimated that the number of workers who had their wages and hours reduced or contracts suspended as a consequence of COVID-19 crisis exceeded 7 million, or 21% of the country's total formal sector workforce.

Central America and Caribbean. In Panama, at the end of April, the government extended the lockdown for 30 days. Many companies chose to make workers take their annual leave. However, the SUNTRACS union was able to negotiate basic pay and advances on the 13th salary for workers in the construction and building materials sectors. In the Dominican Republic, almost 800,000 workers in the country had their contracts suspended under the provisions of a law that authorises 90-day suspensions in the event of disaster. The government will provide affected workers with a subsidy of about \$200 per month.

2. Pathways and social partner agreements on COVID-19 policies

A number of measures have been adopted by governments in terms of labour regulation or worker protection due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategies have varied. Some countries have extended social protection coverage, but most countries have introduced more flexible labour legislation as well as modest subsistence allowances. Below are a few examples of the different government policies and/or agreements that have been established:

Argentina. Productive Recovery Programme (REPRO): The objective of this programme is to support the income of workers in productive sectors affected by the crisis. The government provides a wage subsidy for part of the monthly salary of workers in affected companies. On 1 April, President Alberto Fernandez issued a decree banning layoffs and temporary unemployment "without justified cause and for reasons of lack or reduction of work and force majeure" for 60 days.

Brazil. The Federal government issued two Provisional Measures (MPs) as a result of the pandemic. MP 927 of 22 March 2020, made it possible to sign a written individual agreement - circumventing trade unions and reducing legally guaranteed rights - regarding items such as individual and collective vacation periods, hourly compensation and labour inspection. In addition, it even established that employment contracts could



be suspended, regardless of union intervention, for up to 4 months, without any guarantee of payment to employees. Faced with negative repercussions and union action, however, the government revoked this specific provision. After that, on 2 April, a new Provisional Measure, MP 936, was issued, allowing for an individual agreement on the proportional reduction in the working day and wages (by up to 70%), in addition to the temporary suspension of the employment contract. It also provided for the payment of an emergency benefit, funded by the government, to partially compensate for the reduction in workers' salaries.

Cuba. Wage support for vulnerable people: the elderly and people who are more vulnerable and at risk if they are infected with Covid-19 will receive 100% of their

salary during the first month they stay at home, and from the second month onwards, 60% of their salary.

Colombia. Circular 21 of 2020 extended the legal possibilities of remote working without the application of provisions on working hours, overtime or night work. The employer also has the right to reduce or extend working hours. Employers can demand a worker take advance individual or collective vacations, even if the worker has completed the working year. In addition, Resolution 803 of 2020, which deals with the temporary suspension of activities and collective dismissals, did not offer full freedom to the employer. In the case of mass dismissals, the labour judge must first determine the existence of a force majeure.

Costa Rica. When the income of a private sector company has been reduced by at least 20% in relation to the same month of the previous year as a clear consequence of the national emergency, they are permitted to introduce a reduction in the working day. The employer will determine the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that will be affected and must request authorisation from the National Inspection Board. The reduction of the working day is a temporary measure, which will be established for a period of up to three months. The salary will be reduced in proportion to the reduction of working hours, and social charges will be applied to the salary actually received. If the wage is lower than the minimum contribution established by the Costa Rican Social Security, the minimum wage must be applied.

Ecuador. The Ministerial Agreement MDT-2020-077 allows the employer to adopt the reduction, modification or suspension of the working day for emergency reasons, without terminating the employment relationship or work contract. The employee is expected to compensate for the time not worked. Once the state of emergency is suspended, the compensation will be up to three hours per day and/or up to four hours on Saturdays.

Peru. Emergency decree 38/2020 of April 2020 established government measures to combat the economic effects of the pandemic through the complete suspension of work (or "Suspensión Perfecta de Labores"). This refers to the temporary interruption of the worker's obligation to provide the service and the employer's obligation to pay the respective remuneration, without terminating the employment relationship. Among the consequences of this measure, Staedtler's management in Peru announced the total closure of production between May 11 and July 9, without payment of wages or benefits.

B. BWI AND ITS AFFILIATES IN ACTION

1. Employment and wage protection

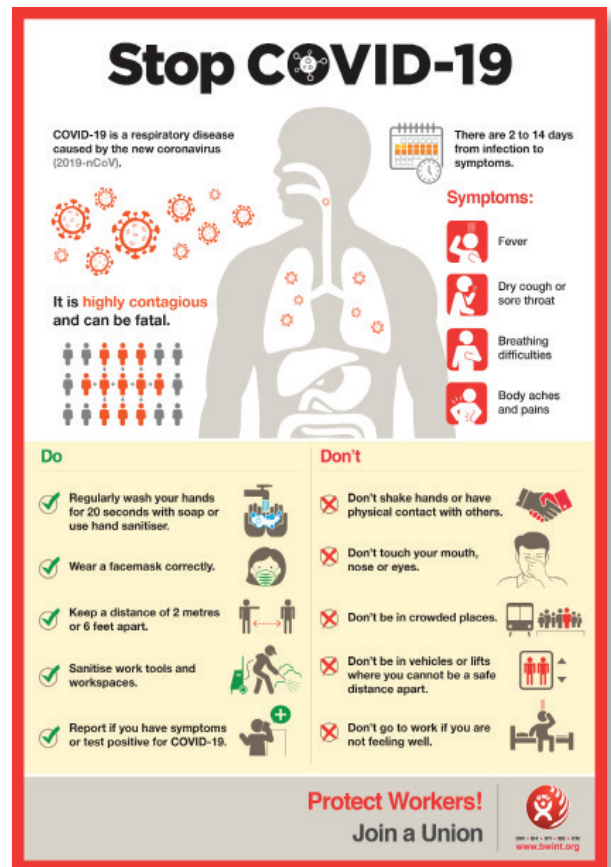
The Brazilian trade unions affiliated to the BWI mobilised their membership base and representatives in the National Congress to oppose MP 927, issued by President Jair Bolsonaro on 22 March 2020, which permitted the temporary suspension of work contracts for four months without compensation, and without consulting the unions. The following day, however, after union and parliamentary pressure, the president was forced to revoke MP927.

Peru. Workers covered by CBAs in the construction and building materials sectors in Peru have been able to protect their jobs and full wages. SITRAFAPESA, SITRACESANLO, FETRACEPPE and SUTFACAP successfully negotiated the temporary suspension of work without affecting the rights and benefits of workers as established in their CBAs.

Panama. During the past six weeks, SUNTRACS in Panama has negotiated a tripartite agreement with the Ministry of Labor and Labor Development (MITRADEL) and the Panamanian Chamber of Construction (CAPAC) to guarantee the wages of construction workers who are currently not working as a result of the quarantine imposed from 20 March. Each worker will receive paid vacations in advance, USD 80 per month from the Panama Solidarity Fund ("Plan Panamá Solidario"), food and a solidarity contribution of USD 60 per month paid directly by the union.

Honduras. SITRAINCEHSA and Cementos Argos were just beginning negotiations for the renewal of the CBA on 7 March, when the emergency began. The company has shut down, but has agreed to pay 100% of its employees' salaries. In comparison, the rest of the country has no guarantees other than government food aid, which is distributed very irregularly.

Venezuela: SUNTIMAVEN reached an agreement with the company MASISA to guarantee wages and benefits to its workers in the midst of the quarantine because of COVID-19. The agreement covers all the formal workers of the raw material processing plants located in the south of the country, as well as other factories that are part of the production chain.



2. Health and safety at the workplace

Argentina. In the Argentine construction sector, UOCRA reached an agreement with the Argentine Chamber of Construction (CAMARCO) through the tripartite "Construction Sector Coordination Body", set up by the national government. As part of the agreement, a health and safety protocol was developed to manage the COVID-19 risks to allow the continuation of work in the sector. As a result, activities in the sector began to restart slowly in some regions of the country. Each Governor or Mayor has to submit an application to have private works approved.

Brazil. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SINTRAPAV, Paraná signed an agreement with Klabin, working in the Puma II pulp processing project, for the protection of 6,000 construction workers during the temporary suspension of work contracts. To return to their homes, the workers were entitled to transport fares, payment of wages and benefits. After a few weeks, the workers are gradually returning to work, following a strict health and safety protocol.

Bermuda. The Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU) has launched a massive information campaign to promote preventive measures against COVID-19. In a national press conference held in March, BIU urged its affiliates and the general public to abide by the government's health and safety measures. BIU expressed its readiness to negotiate with employers in the event of drastic measures imposed on long-term employment.

3. International Framework Agreements and engaging multinational companies

Union leaders of STI Químicos de São Paulo, Brazil and SUTFACAP, Peru that represent the workers of the Faber-Castell multinational monitored the work situation in the company because of the pandemic. The BWI



and the company have signed an International Framework Agreement. In Brazil, Faber-Castell has installed thermal checks on workers' temperature at the entrance of the plants to isolate those workers who have symptoms of COVID-19 and at risk groups have been granted special leave. In addition, the union has negotiated with the company other social distancing measures, such as staggering the time periods for meals, entry and exit into the company, and limiting the number of workers in the company's vehicles.

On the eve of LafargeHolcim's Annual General Meeting on 12 May 2020 in Switzerland, its workers and sub-contracted workers worldwide represented

by BWI, IndustriAll and European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), issued a joint statement to the company's shareholders. In the document, they called for the protection of jobs; the maintenance of wages and guarantees for the safety and health of the workforce throughout the world, including subcontracted workers.

4. Migrant hotspots and support for migrant workers

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the flow of financial remittances of migrant workers to their countries of origin in LAC region could be reduced by 10% to 15% in 2020 and take between 4 - 8 years to reach 2019 levels again. In Central America and Caribbean, these remittances are very important for the local economy: in the last 20 years, in Haiti they have represented more than 30% of GDP; in El Salvador and Honduras around 20%; in Jamaica, Guatemala and Nicaragua more than 10%.

The ECLAC report further indicates that in the United States, the region's main destination country for migrants, the pandemic is affecting sectors that traditionally employ these workers. This is the case for the construction sector: in 2018, 20.6% of migrants from LAC countries were employed in the construction and maintenance sector.

In South America, the Brazilian Ministry of Labour issued Technical Note No. 09/2020, which reinforces the fight against discrimination against foreign workers in the country but at the same time prohibits the active search for workers abroad. In Venezuela, thousands of Venezuelan migrants have sought to return home to their country because of the difficulties imposed by the lockdown in Colombia. Many of them worked in the construction sector and became unemployed because the projects were shutdown.

In order to help migrant workers in Argentina, mostly Bolivian nationals working in brick factories and who are not yet beneficiaries of the government family subsidy, UOLRA is negotiating to include them in the Emergency Family Income (IFE) plan. The special subsidy is 10,000 pesos (about USD 156) for 4 months. UOLRA aims to compensate the loss of income of these workers due to the temporary closure of small factories. In addition, UOLRA launched the second edition of the Brick Workers Passport ("Pasaporte Ladrillero"), a document published by the ILO, which contains useful information for migrant workers in Argentina.

5. On humanitarian actions

The Federation of Building Workers (FTCCP) in Peru is negotiating with the Chamber of Employers (CAPECO) to ensure that each informal construction worker receives a special bonus of 380 Nuevos Soles (equivalent to USD 100), which the government is offering as social assistance.

SNTC in Cuba, BWI's fraternal partner, has supported its members in the Havana water supply works, as the region is experiencing a very severe drought. Likewise, it has monitored the maintenance and services for hospitals and other care facilities for those affected by COVID19.

SUNTRACS-Panama, STICC-POA Brazil, and UOLRA-Argentina also conducted food and hygiene distribution to members and local communities.

Because of the lockdown, worldwide, there has been an increase in domestic violence and in some cases, femicides. The BWI Regional Office is shaping a campaign on this issue as studies show that it has become prevalent in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, among others. In many countries, this issue has become as urgent as the danger of COVID-19 itself.




6. On organising and member retention





BWI unions in the region have been conducting their union programmes and services depending on the scale of lockdown and the varying extent of the infection. As representative organisations, they have presented demands to governments and employers to ensure employment and wage protection as well as keep workplaces safe. Humanitarian actions by unions in Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic, Brazil and Cuba were also undertaken as a means to maintain contact with members and to keep trade unions relevant to the daily lives of members and their families. These efforts contributed to membership retention.

The Guatemalan National Construction and Services Union (SINCS-G) also distributed food packs to maintain a union presence and has even inaugurated its first training centre for construction workers that will operate in partnership with the University of San Carlos, Guatemala.

For its part, FETRACOM-Dominican Republic organised a series of webinars on labour rights, youth issues and migrant rights indicating their shift into digital outreach.

7. Matrix of Actions relative to the 7 BWI convergences

BWI Convergence	Summary of Actions and Outputs Relative to COVID-19 Pandemic
	Trade unions have participated in a series of actions to defend acquired rights or to combat measures to make labour legislation more flexible. The strategies have included pressure on parliamentarians and negotiations with companies and governments. Such negotiations have resulted in bipartite and tripartite agreements. Main issues addressed in these agreements are the protection of jobs, wages and benefits, respect for existing CBAs and the correct application of current crisis management legislation. In addition, unions such as SUNTRACS (Panama), FENTICOMMC (Dominican Republic) and FTCCP (Peru) have extended solidarity to informal workers in the sector, seeking to extend to them the same rights and benefits received by formal workers who were laid off or temporarily unemployed.
	Trade unions have participated in the development of occupational health and safety protocols. These actions have been most successful when companies or industry associations are open to broad social dialogue, such as in the case of UOCRA in Argentina and SINTRAPAV-PR in Brazil. In negotiations between STI Químicos of São Paulo and SUTFACAP of Peru, Faber-Castell has used temperature checks at the entrance of the plants to isolate those workers with symptoms of COVID-19 and special leave has been granted to groups at risk. In addition, Caribbean unions have been calling for safety protocols to be respected, especially the adoption of hygiene and social distancing measures.
	Young union leaders from Panama, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Curaçao and Colombia have held virtual meetings to discuss the effects of COVID-19 in their countries. In the meetings, they have exchanged information on the various measures that their governments have implemented during the pandemic regarding employment and income protection. In addition, trade unions have sought to establish trade union-linked vocational training schools, such as SINCS-G in Guatemala.

	<p>Pregnant women workers are considered a category of workers at particular risk if they are infected by COVID-19. Therefore in many countries, they were included in measures to give special paid leave to workers at risk if they were not able to carry out teleworking, for example in the Faber-Castell factories in Peru and Brazil.</p> <p>With femicide and domestic violence on the rise as a result of the lockdown measures, the BWI Regional Office is developing a regional campaign on the issue, focusing on priority countries including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.</p>
	<p>The Confederation of Forest Workers (CTF) of Chile, the Federation of MASISA Workers (FETRAMAS) and the National Federation of Industrial Trade Unions of ARAUCO (FENASID) have closely monitored the implementation of occupational health and safety (OSH) protocols at work and ensured better biosecurity measures, especially in the case of the forest industry's continuing operations. They have guaranteed no reduction in wages, even for those who were given teleworking options, during the COVID-19 lockdown.</p>
	<p>The LAC region is not involved in any Mega-Sporting Event during this reporting period.</p>
	<p>SUNTIMAVEN reached an agreement with the company MASISA to guarantee wages and benefits to its workers in the midst of the COVID-19 quarantine. The agreement covers all the formal workers of the raw material processing plants located in the south of the country, as well as other factories that are part of the production chain</p> <p>On the eve of LafargeHolcim's Annual General Meeting on 12 May 2020 in Switzerland, its workers and sub-contracted workers worldwide represented by BWI, IndustriAll and EFBWW made a joint statement to the company's shareholders. In the document, they called for the protection of jobs; the maintenance of wages and guarantees for the safety and health of the workforce throughout the world, including subcontracted workers.</p>

BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors.

BWI brings together around 334 trade unions representing around 12 million members in 130 countries. The Headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland while the Regional Offices are in Panama, Malaysia, and South Africa.

Our mission is to defend and advance workers' rights, and to improve working and living conditions in our sectors. The BWI, above all, has a rights-based approach. We believe that trade union rights are human rights and are based on equality, solidarity and democracy, and that trade unions are indispensable to good governance.

BWI goals include 1) to promote and defend human and trade union rights; 2) to increase trade union strength; 3) to promote a stable and high level of employment in our sectors; and 4) to influence policy and strengthen the capacity of institutions and tripartite structures in our sectors.

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