



COVID-19 Solidarity Initiative



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Rationale

1. The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic to the world of work is unprecedented. With the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimating that **305 million full-time jobs will be lost** as “global working hours in the second quarter are expected to be 10.5 per cent lower than in the last pre-crisis quarter.”
2. While the ILO Report noted that the crisis will have **medium economic output impact on construction and low-medium impact on forestry** which is clustered with agriculture and fishing, the high level of informality in these 2 sectors means a massive segment of the **573-million own account workers are vulnerable**.
3. The economic fall-out will in many ways rewire the **neo-liberal globalisation**. It will affect labour markets, supply chains, workers’ pensions, social security systems, and even corporate approaches. Some **freedoms have been lost** already under the guise of stopping the virus.
4. As the medical ripples turn into an economic tsunami, the **working class are at the receiving end** and in some countries the ‘sacrificial lambs’ to maintain national health security.
5. With members laid off during lockdowns and enhanced quarantine regimes, the pandemic has become an **‘existential threat’ for many trade unions**. Without jobs and income security, **many workers cannot sustain their membership** thus depriving many unions their lifeblood—the affiliation fees. This challenge spares no one as it impacts on unions from both the industrialised world and the Global South.
6. And this early, **‘disaster capitalism’** is now rearing its ugly head. Companies are stampeding to get their piece of the pie of the stimulus or rescue packages without commitment to better governance, workers protection and tempered stakeholders’ returns. It will not be a surprise if corporate planners will use this pandemic to implement their **restructuring and pay cuts agenda**.
7. With the threats to our industries and to our trade unions, BWI sees that we have to prepare to support both the **immediate and the medium-term needs of our weaker affiliates** that might not survive the shock of this global crisis.
8. We have to look at **trade unions (whether global or national/sectoral/local) as economic entities** similar to companies as they are also existing based on income



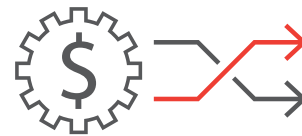
from members. With the labour market almost dried up and unemployment figures are staggering in both the so-called Global North and Global South, the **imperative for trade unions to protect their members and at the same time to continue existing** cannot be overemphasized.

9. This pandemic and the related BWI and its affiliates responses also underscores **the relevance of trade unions as the voice of workers** either in normal times, in the current instability of the global economy and in the time of rebuilding and recovery that should depart from the injustices and inequality of the dominant economic and political systems.
10. Noting also that many in the Global South are just at the beginning of the pandemic, we have to prepare for a long term instability in the global economy as the ‘musical chair of regional pandemics’ will continue to buffet the interconnected industries of the world. **BWI therefore is creating a BWI COVID-19 Solidarity Initiative.**

Resource Build-up

BWI will allocate a **seed fund of 50,000 CHF** from the existing International Solidarity Fund (ISF).

The fund will be generated further through two main sources:



Cash Generation. This will be direct cash contributions from affiliates and other solidarity support organisations (SSOs). Channels for individual contributions like Crowdfunding or other Online Donation Platforms will also be developed. Recognising that many stronger unions are also affected, BWI will expand the target contributors to other institutional and individual supporters.

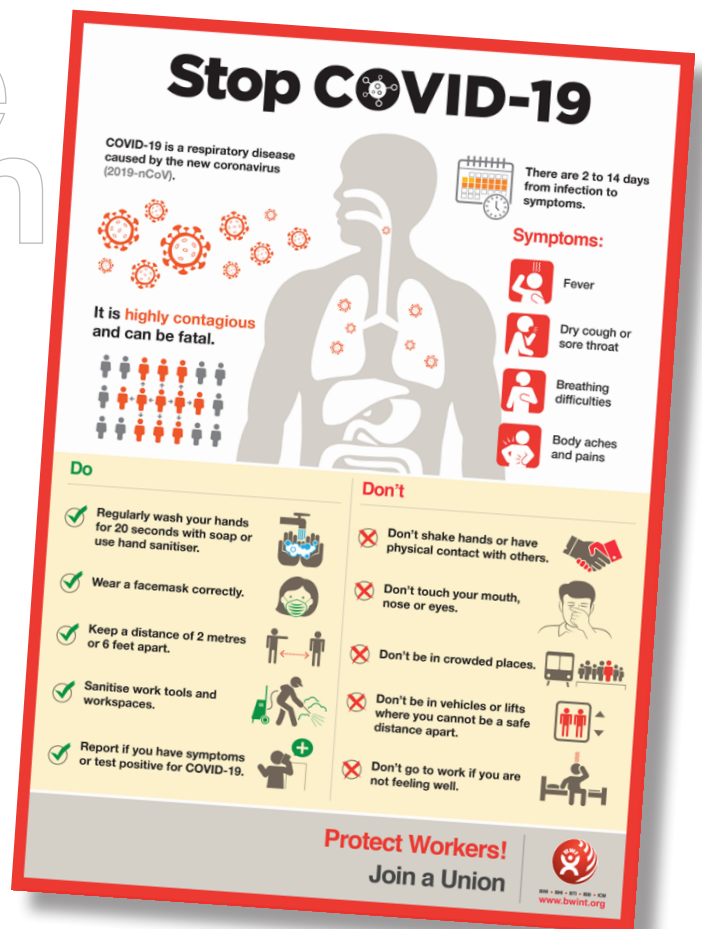
Project Funds Realignment. BWI has around 40 projects this year and the various partner SSOs have hinted funding flexibility due to the non-implementation of many activities. The Secretariat is now formulating revised proposals that will help affiliates operate in this time of crisis. These funds can be framed as **“BWI-SSO COVID-19 Solidarity Partnership”**.

Resource Utilisation

Organiser-Educators Support: With cash flow problem as one of the most immediate effect of the crisis, support for full-time organisers and educators can help the union keep in touch with its members, sustain the organisational life of the union, and sustain the affiliates representation and negotiation functions and at the same time divert its diminished resources to other fundamental needs of the union.

Capacity-Building: Developing capacities to advocate policies, negotiate with companies/ employers, and to create wide awareness about the pandemic among the workers.

Communication-Campaign Support: BWI can support some affiliates in payments of their communication needs as well as for their campaign actions. This can also be in form of awareness materials, educational publications, and social media outreach. This should help reinforce the relevance of trade unions in the world of work and in societies.



Resource Utilisation

Migrant Workers Support: Workers in labour accommodations in countries where we have organising work are in medical and employment danger. Providing food and other essentials like toiletries and medicine can be done by BWI and its affiliates.

Emergency Medical Assistance: Should there be union leaders infected by the novel coronavirus and their health care and social protection system is weak, BWI can use this fund to assist in the direct medical costs.

Humanitarian Support for BWI Sector Workers and their Families. Low income countries are affected in an unprecedented way as the high labour market informality deprived millions of incomes overnight. The wage protection, safety nets and medical provisions that we see in richer countries do not exist. In this case, trade unions can also be a channel of humanitarian relief by distributing food for their members and therefore providing as well for their families.

“Sustain the Unions” Solidarity Support.

Trade unions are economic entities too in the sense that they rely on income from members to keep operating. Many affiliates have suffered a haemorrhage of membership and unemployment rose. Solidarity support in terms of organisations-operational assistance may be required for some affiliates. Under the sub-campaign “Keep the Movement”, BWI has to generate resources for unions needing this extraordinary solidarity.

The 7 areas of funds utilisation would require specific **implementing guidelines** to make it effective, efficient and relevant to the needs of the affiliates as well as provide a process of **due diligence and qualification**.

The statutory **reporting process** will be followed but it will be complemented with near real time reporting for partners and supporters.

Alliance work and coordination with other trade unions and civil society organisations will also be explored in the interest of **efficiency and synergy**.

Additionally, BWI has to develop a **post-pandemic assistance system** that can be considered as a continuation of this fund. This paper is a work in progress towards such goal of a post-COVID-19 solidarity actions (or even trade union rescue and rebuilding plan).



BWI@Work

India: BWI CHILD LEARN schools offered as COVID-19 facilities

BWI affiliates in India have offered their CHILD LEARN school buildings as possible COVID-19 facilities to the government as part of their commitment and solidarity to help contain the spread of the pandemic.

The Uttar Pradesh Grameen Mazdoor Sangathan (UPGMS), Hind Khet Mazdoor Panchayat (HKMP), Bhatha Mazdoor Sabha (BMS) and Indian National Building Construction and Wood Workers Federation (INBCWF) said that they have already communicated with the chief ministers of their respective states regarding the proposal.

The BWI, in partnership with Indian trade unions and partners from Denmark, Australia, Germany, Netherlands and Finland, has established the Child Labour Elimination Resource Network (CHILD LEARN), a non-profit registered company. It is part of BWI's “decent education for children, decent work of adults” campaign in the brick kiln, stone quarry and minor forestry sector. At present, there are a total of seventeen (17) BWI/union-run CHILD LEARN schools and preparatory centres for child labourers all over India. Implementing states include Bihar, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Read more: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/news-72/india-bwi-child-learn-schools-offered-as-covid-19-facilities-1787>

Overview of the BWI COVID-19 Solidarity Initiative

1. **Organiser-Educators Support:** With cash flow problem as one of the most immediate effect of the crisis, support for full-time organisers and educators can help the union keep in touch with its members, sustain the organisational life of the union, and sustain the affiliates representation and negotiation functions and at the same time divert its diminished resources to other fundamental needs of the union.
 - ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** Salary and Operational Costs like Salary, Mobile Plans and Loads, Internet Plans, Transport Expenses if still possible, for organising and site inspection, PPEs Procurement (should worksite visits are possible in non-shutdown workplaces/context), Online Language Courses, Online Skills Training (based on needs), Temperature Scanner for Worksite Inspections.
 - ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Based on capacity and medical context, each of the 4 “Global South Regions” will have 10 unions that will be supported. Thus, we will have 40 unions as receiving preliminary support.
2. **Communication-Campaign Support:** BWI can support some affiliates in payments of their communication needs as well as for their campaign actions. This can also be in form of awareness materials, educational publications, and social media outreach. This should help reinforce the relevance of trade unions in the world of work and in societies.
 - ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** Support for payment Internet Plans, Mobile Phone Plans and Data Load, Equipment like Laptops, Tablets and Smart Phones, Internet Based Video-Conferencing Plans, Internet and Social Media Expenses, External IT and Media Support, Graphics Artists Fees, Video and Other Audio-Visual Production, Printing of Material, Mailing or Courier Services, Writer-Consultants Professional Fees, Case Studies For Basic Information and Solid Empirical Evidence, Development of Training Videos, Training and Material Support for “Selfie Journalism”. Aside from health advise and safety at work, BWI also plans to have messages on gender issues and on domestic violence.
 - ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Support through the global and regional secretariats of BWI (5 Offices) and based on the capacity and country situation, 100 unions shall be targeted for preliminary support.
3. **Capacity-Building:** Developing capacities to advocate policies, negotiate with companies/ employers, and to create wide awareness about the pandemic among the workers.
 - ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** Related to Point 2 – use of information technology to mobilise people, create awareness, conduct online campaigns and hold webinars. This shall be coordinated by BWI Offices (5 Units) and some costs are already listed in Point 2 though for operational needs.
 - ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Though target groups are the unions, the cost centre will be the 5 BWI Offices.
4. **Migrant Workers Support:** Workers in labour accommodations in countries where we have organising work are in medical and employment danger. Providing food and other essentials like toiletries and medicine can be done by BWI and its affiliates.
 - ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** Food, essential medicine and toiletries costs. This shall include masks and sanitizers as well as the packaging and distribution expenses.
 - ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Migrant workers’ (both internal and external) countries or corridors where BWI has strong presence: Malaysia, Qatar, India, Nepal, Brazil, Philippines, Singapore, Panama, Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Serbia, Turkey, South Africa and Kenya. However, take note that in some settings migrants are mixed groups that will preclude us on focusing on BWI sectoral workers.

BWI@Work

Brazil and Peru: Latin American unions use IFA to secure jobs and income

Faber-Castell trade union leaders from Brazil and Peru held an online meeting to assess the situation on the ground amid the global spread of COVID-19. BWI and German multinational Faber-Castell have an International Framework Agreement (IFA).

In Brazil, Faber-Castell has arranged thermal cameras and forehead thermometers at workplace entrances to identify and isolate workers who may be experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Time-off licences for risk groups were also granted while crowding was reduced by increasing the number of meal breaks, entry and exit points, and limiting to half the number of workers riding shuttles.

In Peru, the plant was reportedly completely shut down to comply with a nationwide lockdown. Although the union was able to secure the workers’ wages, Gumerinda Angeles, Deputy General Secretary of SUTFA-CAP Peru, said that due to a national decree that allows the suspension of employment contracts without any compensation, workers of the Peruvian subsidiary are on the alert. They asked the company not to take any action without prior dialogue and negotiations with the union.

Read more: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/news-72/latin-american-unions-use-ifa-to-secure-jobs-and-income-1783>

5. **Emergency Medical Assistance:** Should there be union leaders infected by the novel coronavirus and their health care and social protection system is weak, BWI can use this fund to assist in the direct medical costs.

- ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** Hospitalisation and other medical costs related to COVID-19.
- ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Infected union leaders at the level of national executive board (Global South Unions).

6. **Humanitarian Support for BWI Sector Workers and their Families.** Low income countries are affected in an unprecedented way as the high labour market informality deprived millions of incomes overnight. The wage protection, safety nets and medical provisions that we see in richer countries do not exist. In this case, trade unions can also be a channel of humanitarian relief by distributing food for their members and therefore providing as well for their families.

- ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** Food, essential medicine and toiletries costs. This shall include masks and sanitizers as well as the packaging and distribution expenses.
- ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Based on capacity and medical context, each of the 4 “Global South Regions” will have their 8 poorest countries of coverage supported.

7. **“Sustain the Unions” Solidarity Support.** Trade unions are economic entities too in the sense that they rely on income from members to keep operating. Many affiliates have suffered a haemorrhage of membership and unemployment rose. Solidarity support in terms of organisations-operational assistance may be required for some affiliates. Under the sub-campaign “Keep the Movement”, BWI has to generate resources for unions needing this extraordinary solidarity.

- ▶ **Specific Cost Items:** These are direct cash contribution to selected unions that are in dire need of operational funds. This can range from salary of key staff to rent and utilities as other organisational obligations.
- ▶ **Target Groups/Unions:** Based on regional leadership's assessment, a target of 10 Affiliates per Region can be supported based on the general criteria of major and long-term industry shutdowns, situation of fees collection, and strategic workers representativity.



Read more about BWI and its Affiliates actions at: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/covid-19-union-response-1689>

Belgium: Social partners in construction sector conclude agreement during pandemic

BWI Belgian affiliates welcomed an agreement reached with social partners in the construction sector last 15 April, which makes the rules of social distancing in workplaces a priority. The trade unions also said that workers will have the right to decline an employer's request to work if a worksite has one or more cases of COVID-19 or if a worker can demonstrate that she or he is part of a group at risk.

According to the agreement, non-urgent interventions and activities can still be carried out, provided that the rules of social distancing are respected. Otherwise, the work can be suspended completely or partially. In order to resume work, it will be necessary to call on the internal or external prevention service, of which the construction company is a member. In addition, these measures will have to be monitored by the Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work or by the trade union delegation. Small companies that do not have a trade union delegation will have to carry out a risk analysis and make it available to their workers.

Social partners explained that urgent interventions and activities include all work that cannot be postponed for health or safety reasons, as well as work to prevent damage or worsening of damage and work to ensure the operation of businesses, companies and services necessary to protect vital interests and the population during the crisis.

Read more: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/news-72/belgium-social-partners-in-construction-sector-conclude-agreement-during-pandemic-1774>

Mauritius: CMWEU aids unpaid and COVID-19-vulnerable workers

The Construction Workers' Union of Mauritius (CMWEU) and CTSP came to the aid of 44 unpaid and COVID-19-vulnerable Indian migrant workers employed by Swadeshi Pvt Ltd, an Indian construction company in Mauritius.

The unions said that the workers have not received their wages for the month of March despite a government commitment to shoulder half of the workers' salaries to ensure income security.

The Indian workers said that they have not been provided with any personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect themselves from COVID-19. They said that they have no money to buy toiletries, such as soap and toothpaste, for their personal hygiene. Their dormitories are also overcrowded, with no disinfectants provided to clean their living spaces. Food is also scarce, with workers eating only lentils, potatoes and rice everyday. As a response, the unions distributed hygiene packs to the workers on 17 April.

Read more: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/news-72/mauritius-cmweu-aids-unpaid-and-covid-19-vulnerable-workers-1807>



BWI@Work

USA: Painters Union calls for workers protection

Amid the conflicting policy proposals on how to respond to COVID-19, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT), representing workers in the United States and Canada, has called for congressional action to support workers impacted by the pandemic.

IUPAT, a BWI affiliate, made the call amid the differing proposals presented, which the group said do not often adequately cover the needs and concerns of working people. In the United States, IUPAT reported that there have been conflicting proposals from the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the White House, even as actions are being taken in many states and cities.

In a statement, IUPAT President Ken Rigmaiden declared: "All workers must be afforded basic human rights by their government in the face of this crisis — as opposed to just another bailout for the corporate elite. Right now, large corporations are lining up with their hands out for federal aid, while workers are losing their jobs, their health insurance, and their economic security. Our membership works in every sector of the US economy from hospitality, retail, real estate, infrastructure, to the public sector. We will fight to ensure our members, and workers across this country, are not left behind by Congress."

Read more: <https://www.bwint.org/cms/covid-19-union-response-1689/iupat-to-political-leaders-protect-workers-from-covid-19-pandemic-1679>



Turkey: YOL-IS opens facilities to health workers

The Turkish Union of Road, Construction and Building Workers (YOL-IS), responding to reports that many health workers cannot go home and rest for fear that they might infect their families with COVID-19, has made its hotels, guesthouses and other social facilities in several cities available to the frontliners.

The union has also taken steps to demand employers to implement protective measures for workers who are still at work, such as strict social distancing among workers in dining halls, locker rooms and in accommodation facilities to mitigate the risk of spreading the disease.

YOL-IS has also pushed for the reduced hours per work shifts and for paid leave for the workers that are particularly vulnerable of serious health issues should they contract the virus. Additionally, the union has demanded half occupancy in transport vehicles which requires doubling the number of transport vehicles used by workers, to comply with social distancing protocols.

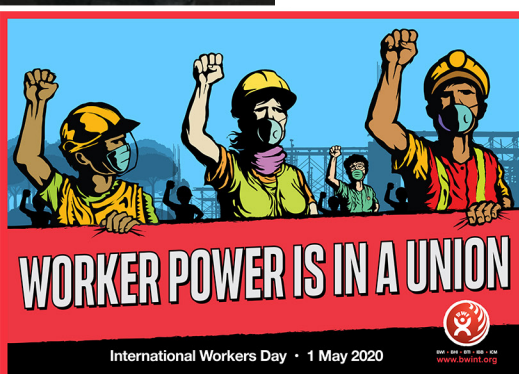
Read more: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/news-72/turkey-yol-is-opens-facilities-to-health-workers-1744>

Qatar: BWI work in time of COVID-19

Ambet Yuson, General Secretary of BWI, gives his insights in an FES interview into the migrant workers' situation in Qatar. Yuson said that BWI's work in Qatar has established the ground's organised capacity, which is now challenged with the need to provide worker representation, as construction work continues in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He elaborated that, "BWI has a cooperation agreement with Qatar's Supreme Committee on Delivery and Legacy (SDCL) and we have jointly conducted OSH (Occupational Health and Safety) inspections in stadium project sites and workers' accommodation facilities. In fact, it was during the week of our joint inspection in Qatar that the government begun rolling out measures to contain COVID-19 and we were able to ensure that workers representatives on the infrastructure sites inspected were able to raise issues and concerns of workers concerning the crisis. Employer representatives during the meetings explained the measures being undertaken to protect workers against the spread of the virus."

Read more: <https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/news-72/fes-interview-bwi-general-secretary-ambet-yuson-on-qatar-and-covid-19-1771>



BW!



We pay tribute to our sisters and brothers who have died due to poor occupational health and safety standards, including those who have succumbed to COVID-19

**We will never forget them.
We will honour our dead by fighting for the living.**

Protect Workers! Stop COVID-19



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