

Build Better Future

BWI Declaration on COVID-19:
**Organising for Resilience
in a time of Adversity**



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Build a Better World for All

BWI Declaration on COVID-19: Organising for Resilience in a Time of Adversity

While COVID-19 has resulted in a global public health crisis of a scale never before seen in our lifetime, it has also accelerated an economic crisis that had been looming prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and both are taking place within an ongoing climate crisis that is quickly reaching catastrophic levels. Initially, occupational health and safety, job and wage protection and economic and social security has been paramount in our response to the crisis as the coronavirus



infects millions and hundreds of thousands have died. Increasingly BWI and affiliates must grapple with the realities of work during the life threatening pandemic while taking on the destructive forces of the deepest economic contraction since the Great Depression and advancing an inclusive and equitable path of recovery for jobs and industries in construction, building materials, wood and forestry sectors that contribute to a socially and ecologically sustainable future.

If the aftermath of this crisis is to be greater equality and justice and if the rights of workers, including the most vulnerable are to be recognised, the environment for workers to organise into unions needs to become more friendly. That will require action by trade unions and their allies and fundamental political changes. Recovery should not just mean more jobs, but better and safer jobs and building better societies.

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Capital should be more accountable to the public and to democratic governments, whether they are actors in financial markets or MNCs that play such a central role in global value chains. The resumption of economic growth should also mean that the risks of climate change are addressed as well as other environmental dangers. The interconnected nature and threat of the pandemic underlines the need for the recovery to be interconnected, coherent, and sustainable.

The world has become precarious and unstable in very many ways. Armed conflict produces massive flows of refugees. Extreme poverty not only destroys families and communities and boosts forced migration but also damages and makes more fragile our global community. Post-pandemic recovery needs to take their rights and needs into account.

We are at a moment of massive change. Recovery from the crisis offers opportunities for progress for workers and communities; to build a world that values workers, justice, dignity, and peace.

For BWI, the post-pandemic world means that our struggle for workers' rights, secure, safe jobs with just wages, accountability of corporations and governments will deepen and intensify. The fundamental rights and interests of workers and their trade unions are at the core of **building a better world**.

Building that better world means not only addressing the short and medium-term impacts of COVID-19 on health, the economy, and workers, but also developing responses to the underlying inequities, injustices, and dysfunctions that afflicted our planet and its people long before the pandemic hit. This Declaration charts an inclusive and equitable road to recovery for jobs and industries in construction, building materials, wood and forestry sectors that contribute to a socially and ecologically sustainable future.



“I’m not sure if we want to go back to “normal” when workers were undervalued, underpaid and deprived of their basic human rights. It’s time to lift everyone up and build a better future for all. We are builders and we know how to build better.”

Ambet Yuson
General Secretary, BWI



Making work safer by prioritising occupational health and safety.

The nature of work in building, construction, wood and forestry is inherently hazardous and BWI affiliates take health and safety very seriously. Over the years, trade unions have fought for and won internationally recognised rights of workers to a safe working environment. Occupational health and safety (OHS) rights and demands are fundamental to the response of trade unions to COVID-19 and can be applied in all countries. The responsibilities on health and safety are often defined and outlined in national laws that governments and employers must protect the right of workers to a safe and healthy working environment and inspect workplaces to ensure they comply with legal requirements as well as any new requirements put in place in response to COVID-19.



Our demands

- ✧ There should be the universal recognition and respect for fundamental worker rights on freedom of association and the right to organise freely, on OHS, as well as the inclusion of workers and their representatives in workplace risk assessments. Joint OHS Committees in the workplace should be tasked with establishing measures to address COVID19 risks and reporting on adherence.
- ✧ The International Labour Organisation (ILO) should take urgent action to establish the right to safe and healthy work as a fundamental right and principle of the ILO, thereby giving it the status of other internationally recognised human rights.
- ✧ International institutions and governments should recognise COVID-19 as an occupational disease. Such a status would protect rights related to preventative measures to avoid becoming infected and protections if the disease is contracted as well as defining responsibilities of government and employers.
- ✧ Governments should ratify ILO Convention 167 on Safety and Health in Construction in which there are rights to preventative and protective measures including that all appropriate precautions are taken to ensure that all workplaces are safe and without risk of injury to the safety and health of workers.
- ✧ Industry specific protocols on health and safety related to COVID-19 should be developed with unions that include universal health screening and testing at workplaces during the pandemic.
- ✧ Governments should expand and strengthen their regulatory system to address COVID-19 and reinforce their labour inspectorate. Regular joint inspections should be conducted during the pandemic and unions should be able to freely access workplaces to observe conformity with health and safety requirements.
- ✧ Worker representatives together with the trade unions should be able to shut down the site if health and safety measures on COVID-19 are not implemented making the workplace unsafe. If this right is not protected, it would be an appropriate priority for the bargaining table, lobbying and campaigns.
- ✧ A worker should have the right to refuse work considered to be unsafe or that jeopardises health, particularly if the worker has concerns related to COVID-19 based on age and existing health conditions. If this right is not protected, workers that exercise this right should be defended and the issue should be prioritised in workplace negotiations and advocated for in national policy formulations.
- ✧ Health and safety issues on COVID-19 should be addressed at the workplace and accommodation of remote workers and migrant workers. New measures should be formulated to address the added vulnerabilities of migrant workers in construction and forestry that live in crowded accommodation with shared facilities, conditions that can increase the risk of spreading the disease.



“Unions need to ensure economic recovery meets our social needs for tomorrow; to climate-proof our economy and redesign our cities to protect the most vulnerable but none of this is possible without protecting our rights at work.”

Dave Noonan
National Secretary, CFMEU Australia
Deputy President, BWI

Protecting wages and securing jobs.

The ILO warns that about half of the 3.3 billion working people worldwide are in danger of losing their livelihoods impacted by the pandemic and as the economic crisis deepens. Already millions of workers have lost their jobs and the trend is set to continue, plunging millions in poverty. It has been challenging to provide wage and income protection to workers currently even where there are collective bargaining agreements in place. Most building and woodworkers in low- and middle-income countries can be characterised as precarious workers in the informal economy, on short-term contracts, as temporary agency workers, daily waged, so called 'self-employed' and are unorganised; they have no income security and are more likely to risk contracting the virus because they need to work for their survival.





Our demands

- ★ Governments and employers should put in place an infectious disease paid-leave provision; guarantee wages; and job protection to all workers at the workplace regardless of employment status, including contract workers, informal, self-employed, temporary agency workers, posted workers and day-labourers.
- ★ Employers should ensure that collective bargaining agreements are respected, concluded and enforced including the identification of threats to workers health, rights and welfare, and to develop and implement workplace responses.
- ★ Governments should take concerted and collective action through public policy on social protection unemployment benefits and employment and income support as many workers need access to alternative measures if they are unemployed.
- ★ Governments should provide support measures for those that are immediately vulnerable to poverty to include access to food, health and hygiene from the state as well as provide waged work or income support.
- ★ If productivity is negatively affected due to protective measures, workers should not be penalised. Workers deprived of work due to the pandemic should receive full salaries and benefits. Where employers are not able to provide this, government should provide the necessary resources.
- ★ Government should engage employers and unions to develop industry level strategies for economic recovery that is anchored on rights-based, green growth and sustainable industry framework. Employers should involve workers and unions in plans to address any negative impact of COVID-19.
- ★ Only companies that have demonstrated commitment to protecting workers and workers' income should be eligible for bailouts or benefit from stimulus packages or investments in economic recovery strategies.



“Not only have many unions risen to the challenge to protect workers at this difficult time but unions have also recognised the need to build solidarity amongst workers if we are to build a better world for all.”

Johan Lindholm
President of BYGGNADS, Sweden
BWI European Regional Vice President



3 Advocating for the economic, political and labour rights of migrant workers.

Migrant workers make up a significant part of the workforce in construction and forestry and are vulnerable to exploitation because they often have very little access to economic, political and basic labour rights. They are mostly unorganised without collective power to fight their exploitation and to demand fair value for their work and their fundamental human and trade union rights. Poor living and working conditions of migrant workers provide an environment for the virus to spread rapidly, making the situation more critical during the pandemic and even more so for those that are undocumented or refugees as they are without access to healthcare and social and economic support. In addition, the pandemic has disrupted migration flows, leaving thousands of workers stranded in foreign countries or forcing thousands to return home.



Our demands

- ✧ Recognition and respect of fundamental worker rights on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining of migrant workers in all countries of destination and protect workers from exploitation by recruitment and employment agencies.
- ✧ Governments and employers should provide wage and job protection for migrant workers during the pandemic and an end to forced repatriation.
- ✧ An amnesty should be put in place in countries to suspend arrests and deportations of workers that are undocumented workers or have work permit issues, to ensure that these workers are not exposed to risk and that they are able to access healthcare.
- ✧ All people within national borders, including documented and undocumented migrants, must have access to food, healthcare, sanitation and housing to address human dignity deficits.
- ✧ Global labour market drivers during the pandemic and in the post COVID-19 future should be challenged to improve health and social outcomes for migrant workers as well as economic and political rights.
- ✧ International agencies should urgently put in place an international standard on labour camps and other accommodation for migrant workers that address health and safety as well as other human and labour rights.
- ✧ Governments should ratify ILO Convention 97 on Migration for Employment and Convention 143 on Migrant Workers to improve the access of migrant workers to rights.



“The COVID-19 pandemic has been the opening act on a crisis never experienced before. The rights of workers and their solidarity, organisation, and mobilisation in trade unions are vital to building a better, fairer, prosperous, and more democratic world.”

Dietmar Schafers
Deputy-President, BWI

4 Promoting gender mainstreaming in the response to the crisis and gender equity in the recovery as well as taking on gender based violence as a worker issue.

Women in building and construction, wood and forestry sectors are often in precarious low waged work without protections such as paid sick leave, health benefits or social protection. This is worsened by the fact that women are often primary caregivers that provide care to those that are sick and carry an extra childcare burden as many schools remained closed and through other domestic work. Many women have had to leave work to manage these added responsibilities during the pandemic or have lost their jobs as the economic crisis worsens.

Scarcity means that women are more likely to become unemployed with poorer prospects for job recovery than men, deepening existing gender inequality. Social and economic pressures no doubt contributed to the high levels of domestic violence experienced worldwide while families were isolated during lockdowns and showed how critical social support provided by the community is to keeping women safe. Trade unions and workplaces are a vital part of the community of support for women workers.





Our demands

- ★ Responses to the pandemic and the economic and climate crisis at all levels should mainstream gender and involve women in their formulations.
- ★ Women should receive equal pay and benefits and undervalued job roles that are dominated by women must be fairly remunerated to end economic discrimination.
- ★ Governments should immediately ratify ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work. Stopping gender-based violence at work and at home is part of the same problem and should be addressed through social and economic measures. Trade unions must commit to campaign on this issue.
- ★ Governments and employers should ensure access to adequate and appropriate PPE and hygiene measures that specifically consider the needs of women.
- ★ Government should ensure women that are vulnerable because of the pandemic and economic crisis receive access to healthcare and income and social support.
- ★ Governments and employers should ensure that women workers are included in skills and vocational training programmes during the crisis.
- ★ Government, employers and trade unions should address issues on mental health as well as other social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse.
- ★ Social issues will increase while young people are not in school, increasing their vulnerability, so getting children back to school is important as there is inequality in the access and use of technology that disadvantages many children from working class homes.



“There is no such thing as too much equality, if it is not working for women we have to change it. Certainly there can be no justification for the exclusion of women in rebuilding our future.”

Gail Cartmail

Assistant General Secretary, UNITE UK
Deputy President, BWI





5 Leading stewardship in forestry and its value chain.

Trade unions have worked hard towards responsible forestry, which requires attention to sustainable practices that have the lowest environmental impact and yield the greatest social and economic benefit. Forests play an important role in development, providing employment in rural areas, and in combatting climate change. However, the remoteness of forestry worksites and sometimes temporary and shifting locations as well as dangerous working conditions, increases vulnerability of workers to exploitation. These issues hamper the response of law enforcement, trade union representation and social support to workers and communities during the pandemic.

Company activities in forestry also contribute to the vulnerability of indigenous minorities living in the forest, that are extremely susceptible to the virus and have poor access to health care. Already, some parts of the forestry value chain have taken a knock with decrease in demand translating to job losses. However, the paper value chain is a vital part of supply chains for medical supplies and PPE needed during the pandemic. The contributions of forestry to addressing climate change and the sustainable development goals must be maintained through the pandemic and crisis.



Our demands

- ★ Governments, employers and unions should ensure that forestry workers have adequate protection and information on COVID-19 and measures take into consideration the nature of work and living conditions of forestry workers.
- ★ PEFC and FSC as standard setters shall demand that workers' rights are upheld in certified companies and measures to address health and safety on COVID19 are in place.
- ★ Majority of forests are state owned, and government should maintain jobs in the sector despite the decline in demand and put in place a strategy to drive recovery that ensures job protection in the forestry value chain.
- ★ Unions should extend solidarity to unorganised and informal workers in forestry and to forest based indigenous communities to ensure that they remain safe during the pandemic and that their basic social needs are met.
- ★ International agencies should urgently put in place an international standard on labour camps which would cover forestry workers that address health and safety as well as establish other human and labour rights in the sector.



“Recovery and growth are certain but we need to demand more equitable global supply chains, a more socially and environmentally sustainable globalisation and a new social contract with fair wages and decent working conditions.”

Per-Olof Sjö
President, GS Sweden
President, BWI



Holding multinationals accountable for working conditions and jobs as well as requiring corporations to make significant contribution to recovery.

Decent work and sustainable employment have eroded with competition between construction companies forcing lowest bids on one hand, and the pursuit of profit on the other. There are also demand-driven supply chains dominated by multinationals in the wood and forestry sector that undermine the establishment of decent work and wages that provide for a reasonable life and some insulation from economic shocks. Multinationals are driven by the need for profit, entrenching exploitation of cheap labour and perpetuating informalisation through ever deeper subcontracting chains in a race to the bottom on working conditions and wages.

This erodes the possibility of inclusive economic growth for developing nations. In response to the pandemic and economic crisis, multinationals will endeavour to maintain profitability by cutting costs, which translates into job losses in the company and supply chains. Even worse, some companies will use the crisis as an opportunity to restructure and shed permanent jobs, replacing some of these with contract labour.



Our demands

- ★ MNCs should recognise and exercise their responsibility for all workers in their business and supply chains and maintain contracts with suppliers, prioritizing the rights and welfare of these workers in their response to the threats posed by COVID-19.
- ★ MNCs should engage unions on the development of their strategies to manage the impact of the pandemic and the economic crisis and engage in discussions at a global level with BWI and affiliates organising in the company.
- ★ MNCs that use tax havens, pay dividends and executive bonuses and retrench workers during the pandemic, should not receive state support nor be eligible to contract for work intended to support economic recovery.
- ★ Infrastructure development should only involve multinational companies that clearly commit to international labour standards and quality job creation throughout their own operations and subcontracting and supply chains. Multinational Companies should demonstrate leadership, global commitment and good practice in this regard.
- ★ MNCs should contribute to the development of host country construction and forestry chain domestic firms and the development of workers skills.
- ★ MNCs should not take advantage of a health crisis to justify short term actions in reducing workers' job security and income.



“While COVID-19 has become a great threat to economies, millions of workers are struggling to feed their families. In this difficult time unions have to stand together, hold companies accountable and help workers face the challenges that lie ahead.”

Abdelmonem El Gamal

President, GTUBWW

Vice President, BWI Africa and Middle East

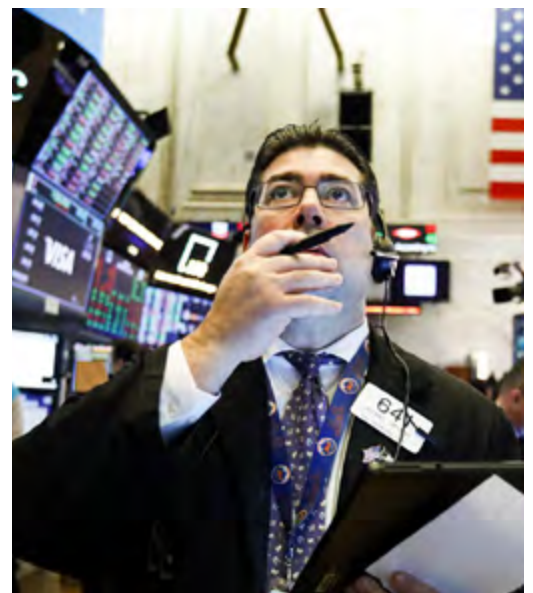


Championing global solidarity and international cooperation to address sovereign debt and global recovery.

The pandemic has already demonstrated that the fate of everyone's health is dependent on global preparedness and global action. Rampant injustices were already damaging society and the economy and undermining democracy well before the pandemic. A return to "normal" in the recovery will be a failure and will be unsustainable. Survival and progress depend on effective and planned government action. The enormous challenges faced will not and cannot be met by the market alone. It requires national and international action and solidarity.

Coordinated solidarity relies upon our multilateral institutions such as the UN, the ILO, and the WHO, but these institutions, as with national governments and regional structures, rely on people and responsible leadership to achieve their objectives. The attacks on multilateral institutions have grown with increasingly nationalist approaches to the crisis. In the worst cases, this is fuelled by authoritarian regimes to entrench their power and further their agendas. However, there are also authoritarians within democracies, inside and outside of government, that are exploiting the crisis to create division and polarisation and undermine democratic governance.

After the crisis of 2008 caused by the financial sector, the working people were negatively affected as workers' rights, including collective bargaining, and public services were undermined. Now is the time for the IMF-WB to reform, to provide debt relief and an end to structural reforms and austerity measures. This will help countries to immediately redirect resources to re-building health systems, strengthening social protections, and making economies fairer and more productive.





Our demands

- ★ The IMF-WB and other international financial institutions should provide debt relief or cancel debt of highly indebted poor countries, conditional on repayments being directed to addressing health and social development deficits. Economic recovery should be directed to addressing social infrastructure and sustainable energy and transport needs.
- ★ IMF-WB should be reformed to ensure that financial coordination of a global recovery that limits the influence of private capital, allows for needed social spending, and restructures global debt across low and middle income countries in a manner that encourages the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- ★ Multilateral institutions such as the UN and its agencies, especially the ILO and the UN Environment Program (UNEP), should be strengthened to provide coordination of the global recovery planning aligned to the SDGs and fundamental labour and environmental standards. This should be achieved with greater participation of trade unions and civil society.

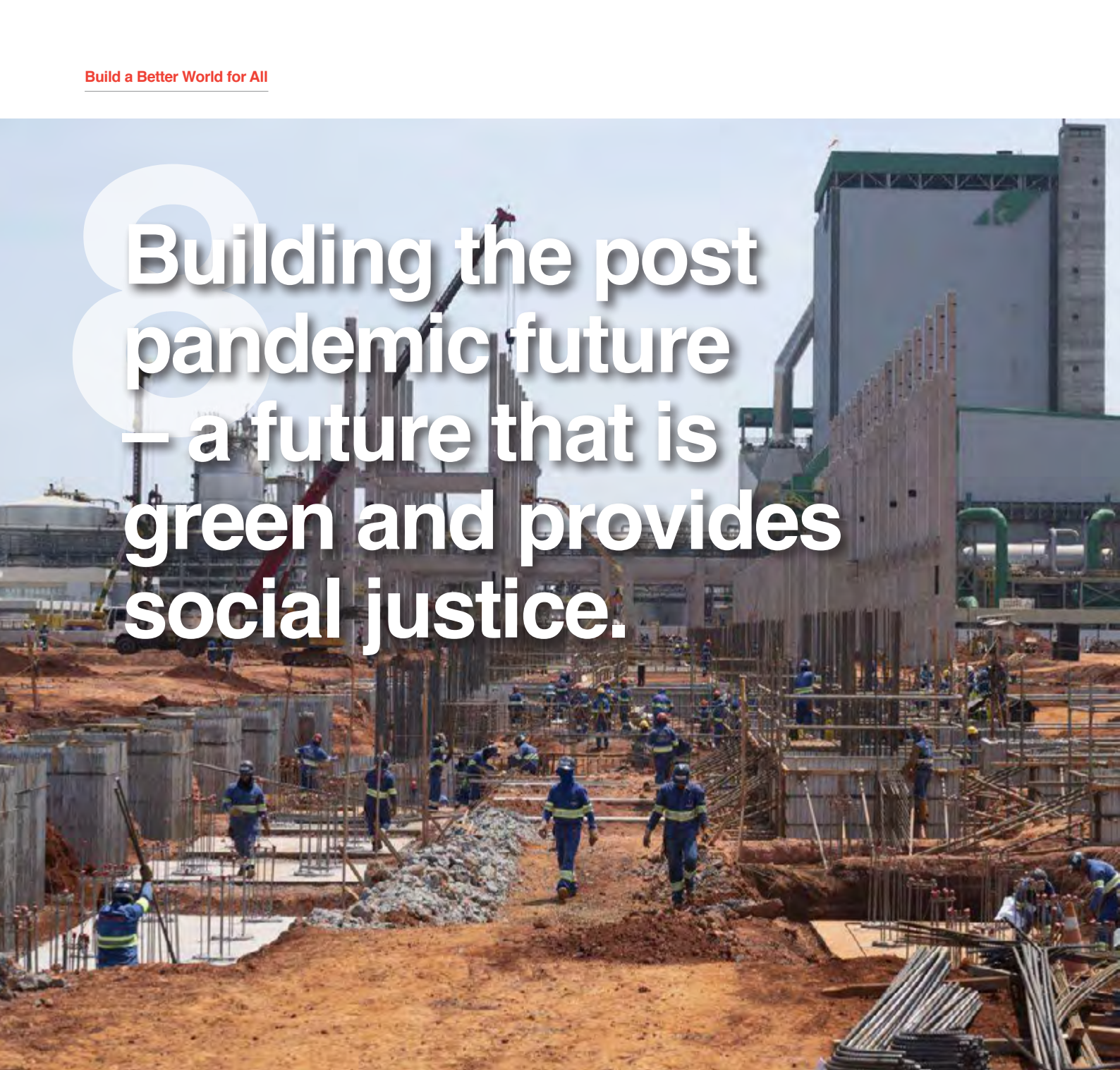
Social cohesion and progress cannot take place without a massive increase in global solidarity. As we have learned in the pandemic, it is in everybody's interest. Trade union solidarity, organisation, and mobilisation are vital to build that better, fairer, prosperous, and more democratic world.



“From the calamity of those suffering under poor leadership in the crisis are stories of courage, and also of tragedy, have been amplified by millions of workers in their struggle for dignity, in their work and in their lives during this pandemic”

Mike Rose

Woodworkers Chief of Staff, IAMAW North America
Vice President, BWI North America



Building the post pandemic future – a future that is green and provides social justice.

Private sector and household spending have been reduced in response to the crisis, with a reluctance to invest while the economic future is uncertain. Governments must compensate for this with measures to stimulate demand and job creation. Prior to the pandemic, construction engaged 7.6 percent of the workforce and was a significant contributor to global GDP. Thus, it will be a key sector in the economic recovery as it is labour intensive and can absorb workers from other sectors relatively easily.

Investment in large construction projects will provide opportunities for employment and benefit to others in supply and support industries including raw materials, transport, accommodation, food and other goods and services. The type of investments provides an opportunity to address social needs such as health and housing and ecological needs to transition to low-carbon economies.



Our demands

- ★ Economic stimulus programs should include investment on infrastructure. Governments should prioritise decentralised and more labour-intensive work such as maintenance of infrastructure, housing projects, health care facilities and others to ensure a quick-start recovery and, at the same time, create decent and safe jobs.
- ★ Governments should prioritise maintenance and retrofitting of buildings and green infrastructure to reduce carbon footprints, which will be labour intensive and can be set in motion relatively quickly, while embarking on long term investments in publicly owned renewables.



- ★ Governments and IFIs should engage trade unions to ensure the social benefit of financing infrastructure projects to provide decent work and social protection to the workers.
- ★ Governments, employers and trade unions should address the digital divide in many countries that disadvantages workers and develop skills of workers through vocational training and apprenticeship so that they are able to respond to changing methods of work on sites with the increased use of technology and digitalisation.
- ★ Governments should work together with unions and employers on policies and programmes that 'build back better' for inclusive and sustainable development, addressing social infrastructure deficits while maximising social benefit by providing decent jobs, social security and pension, decent and affordable housing, access healthcare, free education, digital access and progressive taxation.



“In this crisis, we have an opportunity to redesign the world the way we want it, where everyone has dignity, a decent standard of living and a home. If we are to get there we must establish participatory democracies.”

Saúl Méndez

General Secretary, SUNTRACS Panama

Vice President, BWI Latin America and Caribbean

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Building and Wood Workers' International

Route des Acacias 54
CH-1227 Carouge GE
Switzerland

Tel.: +41 22 827 37 77

Fax: +41 22 827 37 70

Email: info@bwint.org

www.bwint.org



BWII
Building and Wood
Workers' International
www.bwint.org