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(CIDI)



**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML)**

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FINAL REPORT AND RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

OF THE

XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR

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FINAL REPORT

XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR

I. Background

The Twenty-First Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) was held virtually on September 23 and 24, 2021. It should be noted that the Conference was originally planned to be held in December 2020, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. However, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and following consultations with the officers of this ministerial process, on July 28, 2020, the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) had decided to postpone it to September 2021 (CIDI/RES. 343). Subsequently, considering that the situation still did not allow for the holding of in-person meetings, on August 31, 2021, CIDI decided to hold the XXI IACML as a virtual meeting (CIDI/RES. 351).

Two preparatory meetings were held prior to the Conference: in Quito, Ecuador, on December 5, 2019, and virtually, from July 28 to 30, 2021. Additionally, the Technical Secretariat opened a Virtual Forum for consultation from May 1 to June 30, 2021, to discuss the draft Declaration and draft Plan of Action. The Government of Argentina and the Organization of American States (OAS) launched the preparations for this meeting over a year in advance.

II. Proceedings

The Conference consisted of an inaugural session, six plenary sessions, and a closing session, as described in this report. In addition, the meetings of the consultative bodies of the Conference were held.

A. Inaugural session

The inaugural session opened on September 23, at 9:30 a.m., conducted by Kim Osborne, OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development.

Minister of Labor, Employment, and Social Security of Argentina, Claudio Moroni, mentioned the lengthy preparations for this Conference and the need to adjust its content in view of the outbreak of the pandemic. He noted that the current crisis had exacerbated structural problems in the Americas, such as job insecurity and inequality, and that this called for renewed commitment to inclusive and sustainable development. He proposed three levels to reverse the trends of the crisis: the design and implementation of sound and effective public policies, and the strengthening of coordination between labor policies and economic, education, and health policies; the strengthening of forums for institutionalized social dialogue; and the strengthening of regional cooperation and integration processes. Regarding the latter, he underscored the value of solidarity, and of this Conference and its cooperation network, in addressing the existing challenges. He recognized that the Declaration to be adopted by the IACML was a relevant instrument for change that ensured a roadmap towards a more egalitarian model of society, labor, and production.

Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations of Barbados, Colin Jordan, addressed the plenary in his capacity as Chair of the IACML since 2017. He noted that although the region had suffered disproportionately the economic and social impacts of the crisis, there was now an opportunity to deal with structural challenges and build a greener, more resilient, and more inclusive recovery. He mentioned some of the policies implemented in Barbados to address the crisis, and

underscored the urgency of better training and support for job training and reskilling among the population, universal social protection, and improving environmental resilience, given the existential threat of climate change. He mentioned the importance of regional and international cooperation in dealing with the pandemic and, citing the inequality in access to vaccinations, referred to the incontestable interdependence of nations. He thanked the OAS for its support during his chairmanship of the IACML, and urged the delegations to work in collaboration to overcome the crisis and build a more resilient and sustainable world of work.

Director-General of the International Labour Organization Guy Ryder noted that this OAS ministerial was an ideal setting to address regional challenges stemming from the pandemic and reiterated the ILO's commitment to supporting this ministerial process. He considered that the pandemic "has brought the world of work to its knees" and exposed pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. He emphasized that Latin America and the Caribbean had been the region with the greatest loss of hours worked and that, although there were signs of recovery, recent data indicated that about 70% of recovered jobs consisted of informal activities. He emphasized the importance of social dialogue in finding effective solutions to the challenges of the pandemic and applauded the inclusion in the IACML of a session with workers and employers. He referred to the ILO Centenary Declaration and the relevance of its tenets in achieving an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery. He pointed to, among them, the close coordination that had to exist between labor, economic, and environmental policies. He concluded by indicating that this terrible crisis called for a global response and that only through international cooperation and partnership would a future of work with social justice and decent work be built.

OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro referred to the difficult situation in the region following the pandemic's exacerbation of structural challenges and its deepening of social and labor divisions, especially impacting women and more vulnerable populations, such as those working in the informal economy. He issued a call not to return to the pre-COVID status quo and to take advantage of this unique opportunity to rethink the social contract, move from vulnerability to resilience, and "explore a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development model." He acknowledged that implementing such an ambitious agenda called for joint efforts by governments, workers, employers, and international organizations in a true spirit of partnership, and emphasized that in the OAS, social dialogue had been strengthened at the hemispheric level, with participation by workers and employers in the General Assembly and the Summit of the Americas. He concluded by indicating that the OAS understood the fundamental role of decent and productive work in social well-being, peace, democratic governance, security, and sustainable economic development, and reiterated the commitment of the OAS to work to overcome this crisis with more just and inclusive labor markets.

Before closing the session, Secretary Kim Osborne recognized the presence of Chair of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development Ambassador Audrey Marks, and referred to the special circumstances of this IACML, this being the first time it had met virtually. She emphasized that it was understood that, for all purposes, the IACML was being held in Argentina, and indicated that should the Chair find it necessary to be absent, he would be replaced by a Vice Minister. This constituted a departure from usual practice, but it was necessary given the complexity of holding a virtual meeting. She thanked the delegations for their kind consideration.

B. First plenary session

The first plenary session opened on September 23, at 10:00 a.m.

The Chair of the XX IACML and provisional Chair of the XXI IACML, Minister of Labour of Barbados Colin Jordan, presented to the delegations for their consideration the draft agenda for the meeting (CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.2/21) and the draft schedule (CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.3/rev. 4). Both documents were adopted without amendment.

Subsequently, the meeting proceeded to the election of the Chair of the XXI IACML. Minister of Labor of Costa Rica Silvia Povedano nominated Minister of Labor, Employment, and Social Security of Argentina Claudio Moroni as Chair of the XXI IACML, underscoring his firm and timely leadership, not only in building regional consensuses, but also in the holding of this virtual ministerial. Minister of Labor of Uruguay Pablo Mieres referred to Minister Moroni's leadership and seconded Costa Rica's motion. Minister Moroni was elected by acclamation.

Minister Jordan of Barbados congratulated Minister Moroni, wished him success in his functions, and invited him to assume the chairmanship of the meeting.

Minister Moroni expressed appreciation for his election and recognized the efforts of all delegations in these difficult times. He proceeded to the ratification of the agreements reached at the Preparatory Meeting for this Conference regarding the matters addressed in Article 21 of the Rules of Procedure for Sectoral and Specialized Meetings of Ministers and/or High Authorities in the Framework of CIDI:

- i. Constitution of the Style Committee: Pursuant to Article 23 of said Rules of Procedure, it was decided that the Style Committee would be composed of the delegations of Brazil (Portuguese), Argentina (Spanish), Barbados (English), and Canada (French).
- ii. Designation of committees and working groups: It was decided that the Conference would not designate a subsidiary body since there would be no need for work to be done in parallel during the meeting.
- iii. Agreement on the deadline for the presentation of proposals. It was decided that the deadline would be September 23, at 3:00 p.m.
- iv. Duration of the meeting. It was decided that the XXI IACML would end on September 24, 2021.

Next, the Chair gave the floor to OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development Kim Osborne to present the report of the Technical Secretariat on developments since the XX IACML.

Secretary Osborne began her intervention by showing a video on the response by the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) to the pandemic, emphasizing the expansion of multisectoral partnerships, the prompt adjustment of existing projects, and the actions of the OAS specialized networks, including the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL). She invited the delegations to consult the full Report of the Secretariat to the XXI IACML (CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.9/21). Given the time considerations, she noted five achievements of the Conference and the OAS since the XX IACML in 2017: (1) great capacity to respond to unforeseen challenges; within three weeks of the declaration of the pandemic, the RIAL had launched its Portfolio of Responses by Ministries of Labor to COVID-19; (2) progress towards gender equality; since the last IACML, more actions than ever had been carried out to that end, including new studies, regional dialogues, and courses, in partnership with the Inter-American Commission of Women; (3) greater collaboration between the ministries of labor and ministries of education regarding skills

for the future and qualifications frameworks; (4) actions for better compliance with labor laws and the fundamental principles, including strengthening efforts to eliminate child labor, in partnership with the ILO; and (5) definition of regional positions and actions to be taken to build a world of work with sustainable development and social justice. She thanked the ministries that had led the IACML in this term, emphasized that cooperation and partnership were urgent and indispensable instruments in the new context, and applauded the existence for the IACML of a mechanism as valuable as the RIAL. She showed a video emphasizing the specific and tangible results achieved by the ministries through the RIAL.

The Chair expressed appreciation for the report and commended the work done. He gave the floor to the delegations for comments.

Minister of Labor of Ecuador Patricio Donoso recognized and expressed appreciation for the benefits that RIAL had brought to his country, especially in the area of youth employability, and noted that cooperation was fundamental in defining strategies with a global approach. He mentioned key topics of the meeting of IACML Working Groups, held in Quito, in 2019, including gender equality, priority attention to vulnerable groups, and the importance of a regional qualifications framework, given the growing intraregional migration.

The Head of the delegation of Mexico, Ambassador Luz Elena Baños, congratulated the Secretariat on its report and expressed appreciation for the recognition of Mexico as part of the troika. She emphasized the forums for regional and international cooperation in achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery and, in that regard, indicated that the IACML was a “major success.” Recalling that 2021 was the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor, she expressed appreciation for the support that Mexico had received from the RIAL in that connection, and reaffirmed her country’s commitment to eliminating child labor by 2025.

Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Stephen Mc Clashie considered that the RIAL was an important cooperation mechanism and that its actions were still more relevant at this time when ministries had to address emerging changes in the world of work and the impacts of the pandemic. He expressed appreciation for the support received from the RIAL and pointed to the cooperation in 2021 with Canada, which would enable robust structures to be developed to address workplace harassment and violence in Trinidad and Tobago. He commended the leadership of the OAS Labor and Employment Section in developing different initiatives for gender mainstreaming in the ministries of labor.

The delegate of Barbados, Claudette Hope-Greenidge, noted that RIAL represented tremendous benefits for both the ministries that were receiving cooperation and those providing it, and indicated two areas where collaboration through the RIAL was much needed: occupational health and safety, and changes in labor relations.

There being no further requests for the floor, the Chair declared the session closed.

C. **Second plenary session** – Institutionalized social dialogue to recover from the crisis and secure a future of work with social justice and sustainable development

For the first time in the history of the IACML, and as a means of promoting institutionalized social dialogue, members of the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE) and the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL) participated in this plenary session.

This session was declared open on September 23, at 10:45 a.m.

The Chair applauded the holding of this historic plenary session, which included workers and employers in the formal framework of the Conference. He indicated that consensus-based decisions were the basis of economic and political stability, which highlighted the political centrality of social dialogue. In that regard, he considered it fundamental to promote sound, independent, and pluralistic social organizations to ensure permanent channels for dialogue; develop national and regional forums for institutionalized social dialogue; and create effective mechanisms for tripartite negotiation. He indicated that equity, social justice, integral human development, decent work, and a just transition towards environmentally sustainable societies could only be achieved hand-in-hand with workers and employers. He concluded by thanking COSATE and CEATAL for their contributions to the preparations for the Conference and commending this historic space for social dialogue.

Chair of COSATE Marta Pujadas applauded the holding of this tripartite plenary session and trusted that this exercise would be maintained at future Conferences. She noted some of the commitments contained in the Declaration of Buenos Aires, and called for the promotion, strengthening, and expansion of the inclusive, open, transparent, and intergenerational social dialogue mentioned in this instrument. She indicated that the trade union movement considered that social dialogue was lacking in some countries of the region, and that the rights to form unions and to collective bargaining were also being violated. Therefore, she urged that, in compliance with the Plan of Action of Buenos Aires, priority be given to these matters. She urged the member states to classify COVID-19 as an occupational disease, and defended free health care, especially vaccinations against this disease. She also expressed her support for a model of universal, free, and sufficient social security. Lastly, she indicated the need for a new social contract that ended the region's prevalent profound inequalities, and reaffirmed COSATE's commitment to continue debating in the framework of the Conference to translate past and future Declarations to each country's reality.

Chair of CEATAL Daniel Funes de Rioja expressed appreciation for the inclusion of a tripartite session in this Conference, and hoped that this would continue in subsequent IACMLs, primarily owing to the need for social dialogue in coordinating recovery policies and as a mechanism for response to future crises. He noted that investment in the private sector and the creation of formal, decent, registered, and socially protected employment was the only way to achieve sustainable development and social justice, and to respond adequately to the new technological needs escalated by the pandemic. To better understand the emerging trends, all sectors had a responsibility to work together to accommodate changing societies and institutions. Therefore, he considered that a matter for urgent resolution was the gap between the new technologies and employability, in order to create the required skills and services. He also mentioned the need to strengthen competitiveness in the region with a view to improving intraregional integration and integration of the region in the world. He considered that both the road to recovery and addressing pending problems meant that the region had to be consistent in both discourse and action. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of social dialogue and the search for shared solutions and proposals adopted by everyone.

The Chair expressed appreciation for the interventions and opened the dialogue with governments, workers, and employers.

Vice Minister of Peru Edilberto Jaime Ríos referred to the National Council for Labor and Employment Promotion, a tripartite forum for building policy consensus, and the Regional Labor Councils. He indicated that these councils had enabled tripartite strategies to be developed to address different problems in the world of work, for example, the National Directive for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor, a labor committee on equality and non-discrimination, and the National

Council for Workplace Health and Safety, among others. He indicated the commitment of his government to an open and transparent social dialogue.

Vice Chair of COSATE Antonio Lisboa thanked the Government of Argentina for including social actors in a plenary session of the Conference, since he considered that an open and frank social dialogue was a necessary tool for overcoming the crisis. He expressed the labor sector's concern over the unequal distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations. He noted that while some countries had provided many people with a third dose, some countries—even in the region—had not begun to vaccinate. He indicated that vaccinations could not be treated as products that only some could access, and he considered that just distribution and the release of inputs for their production was an ethical obligation. He concluded by calling on the Conference to take up this message.

Second Vice Chair of CEATAL Brian Burkett noted that the process for overcoming the crisis had to be tripartite, marked by social dialogue and communication, with confidence at its core. He indicated that economic development and human-centered social progress had to move forward simultaneously, not consecutively. Together, not one without the other. He underscored that CEATAL, speaking for all business, was promoting, as a matter of urgency, job creation, improved production, and elimination of informal work. He indicated that the opportunity of the pandemic was to put the Americas on a sound and sustainable footing, to which end we had to work together, today, tomorrow, and the days beyond to design and implement, with the assistance of horizontal cooperation, a new world.

Deputy Vice-Chair of CEATAL Ronnie Goldberg called attention to the fragility of the progress made, owing to the pandemic, referring specifically to the deterioration in women's economic empowerment, the setbacks in eliminating child labor, and the evident weakness of institutions in the past 18 months. She noted that there was, however, room for optimism given the progress in innovation and technology, which would facilitate better reconstruction. She reiterated the importance of working together for that reconstruction through social dialogue and open and transparent consensus-building.

Second Deputy Vice-Chair of CEATAL Juan Mailhos insisted on the importance of social dialogue at this juncture, emphasizing that it was a means, not an end. He indicated that although governments had the political legitimacy, any measure adopted in the world of work also had to have social legitimacy, which was achieved by involving social actors. He underscored the importance of creating and maintaining sustainable businesses as a vehicle for overcoming the crisis. He considered that institutionalized social dialogue involved forward-looking tools that would be highly useful in anticipating and envisioning long-term solutions. He indicated that this crisis would also require regulation of new realities and new ways of working, as well as reforms. He concluded by calling for the scourge of informal work to be addressed.

Vice Chair of COSATE Joel Almeyda shared some of the main challenges faced by Honduran workers, related to precarious work conditions, high levels of poverty stemming from low wages, and poor social security coverage. To address these, he called urgently for social dialogue that recognized that workers were fundamental actors in national development and that involved them in decision-making. He called for respect for the rights to form unions and of collective bargaining, and for guaranteed access to education, noting the wide gaps the pandemic had revealed on these fronts.

COSATE representative Julio Rosales called for the promotion of strategies for social inclusion through employment, with emphasis on equal treatment for women and youth. He emphasized that the use of technologies had to promote this inclusion without further segmenting the

world of work, and without technologies constituting an element that complicated labor relations. To that end, sustainable enterprises could contribute by promoting lifelong learning. He emphasized that among world regions, inequality was greatest in ours, and that governments had to establish progressive tax systems that helped reduce inequalities, as well as institutionalized social dialogue focused on respect for labor's fundamental rights and on promoting equality.

There being no further requests for the floor, the Chair declared the session closed.

D. **Third plenary session** – The importance of the world of work to COVID-19 recovery and to the development of more resilient, sustainable, just, and inclusive societies

This session opened on September 23, at 1:45 p.m., under the chairmanship of the Secretary of Social Security of the Ministry of Labor of Argentina, Luis Bulit Goñi, given Minister Moroni had to attend to other urgent matters. Before giving the floor to the panelists, the Chair referred to the session's guiding questions on policies implemented to secure an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery, and to improve the labor inclusion of populations most impacted by the crisis.

Minister of Labor and Social Security of Uruguay Pablo Mieres presented three fundamental aspects on which his country had worked for job recovery and to prevent growing asymmetries: (1) job support measures, notable among them, unemployment benefits. The Minister emphasized that, in view of the return to normality, the safety net should gradually be withdrawn in tandem with the recovery to avoid additional social costs; (2) job promotion measures for the most vulnerable sectors, notable among them, a unanimously adopted law that granted companies benefits for hiring young people, those over age 45, and persons with disabilities, with additional benefit for hiring women; (3) job training definition measures. Here he emphasized the work Uruguay was doing to determine labor demand trends for the coming years and to adjust, based on this information, the supply of training. He noted how changes in the world of work called for the development of cross-cutting skills, management of the digital world, and incorporation of soft skills; and implied greater demand in the technology, health care, agroindustry, and education sectors, among others. Therefore, job training had to be given priority to this content and more attention paid to better coordination between education and work as a matter of urgency. He recommended directing job training efforts towards changes in labor demand in order to incorporate skills and competencies that contributed to effective reintegration in the labor market.

Minister of Labor and Social Security of Costa Rica Silvia Lara Povedano reflected on how to profit from the moment to bridge gaps and structural inequalities, noting that a human-centered economic recovery called for a labor-centered recovery. She proposed a change in paradigm where work was the starting point of economic growth policies and not the outcome, as understood in the trickle-down theory. She underscored that evidence had shown that economic growth was a necessary but insufficient condition for job creation and poverty reduction; and that, to that end, decisive public policy actions were required. She pointed to the low-growth, high-inequality trap in the region, documented by ECLAC, which showed that “the challenge is not only to grow to level the field, but above all to level the field to be able to grow.” She mentioned gender and talent gaps as major checks on growth and referred to the urgent need for productivity policies, after decades of denying their relevance. She emphasized that productivity policies were required to overcome structural limits to economic growth and to promote associational forms of production, collaboration, and innovation. She also indicated that a work-centered recovery called for the modernization and strengthening of Ministries of Labor, as well as a new social contract, which would only be possible through institutionalized social dialogue.

Minister of Labor of Trinidad and Tobago Stephen Mc Clashie referred to the differentiated impacts of the pandemic, emphasizing the negative impacts that the slump in tourism had had in the Caribbean. He mentioned that the policy responses to the pandemic called for simultaneous protection of public health and the economy, and considered that the reconstruction process offered an opportunity to diversify the economy and promote economic resilience. He noted that social protection was a vital mechanism in securing a just and inclusive recovery. He shared some of the steps taken in his country to address the pandemic in the short term, including enterprise support and social protection actions. He mentioned that this was now phase two of the recovery, based on three pillars: economic diversification and transformation, food security, and equity; and noted that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was moving forward with labor legislation reform involving tripartite consultations. He considered that although the OAS member states differed in size and language, they shared a common platform for development and were fortunate to have the opportunity to respond collectively to the current crisis and to share the goal of improving the quality of life of the workers in the Americas.

Minister of Labor of Colombia Angel Custodio Cabrera referred to his country's difficult situation in addressing the pandemic, coupled with intense social protest in April and May 2021, and mentioned steps taken and progress made. He noted that women, youth, informal workers, and the rural sector were those most impacted by the crisis. He presented four strategies comprising the crisis response policy: (1) tax incentives for companies hiring vulnerable people, such as women victims of the armed conflict, the population with disabilities, and youth, among others; (2) payroll subsidies and unemployment benefits through the Social Investment Act, which made it possible to, for example, subsidize companies for each new job created; (3) education for work: this strategy included the creation of the National Qualifications System and promotion of dual education; and (4) national, departmental, and municipal public investment, and foreign investment to lend dynamism to the labor market. He concluded by emphasizing that with these four strategies, employment was being protected, while at the same time the needs of the population were being addressed.

Minister of Labor and Social Security of Brazil Onyx Lorenzoni presented the steps taken by his government since the start of the pandemic, indicating that the results achieved in the area of job preservation confirmed that they were correct. He noted Brazil's strong social protection system, which had demonstrated its capacity during the crisis. Among social protection measures, he mentioned unemployment insurance; universal access to health care; and emergency assistance, which had been extended to over half the population, guaranteeing a minimum income. He indicated that a sustainable recovery had to include company creation incentives that provided a business-friendly environment. He mentioned measures to boost youth job market incorporation, considered a major challenge, including hiring incentives and a new program for voluntary social service in the public sector. He applauded Brazil's progress with COVID-19 vaccination, nearly 70% of the population now having received one dose; and noted the steps taken that had made it possible to protect both the income of the most vulnerable and aggregate demand. He concluded by reiterating Brazil's commitment to the integration of the Americas and the democratic principles shared with all OAS member states.

Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs of the United States Department of Labor, Thea Lee spoke about the impacts of the pandemic and her country's package of recovery measures. She emphasized that the pandemic had had disproportionate impact by race, gender, age, geography, and occupation, and had exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. She recognized that although signs of recovery were evident, more had to be done to "build back better." She outlined some elements of the recovery package, which she described as ambitious and comprehensive, including: the American Rescue Plan, which included the expansion of social protection, income

support, and financing for care systems, among others; and the dramatic expansion of apprenticeship programs to improve job opportunities for everyone. She referred to the efforts to build consensus for progress in achieving paid leave and expanding unemployment insurance, among other things. She noted some of her government's goals at the national and international levels, including: working for a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable economy; strengthening worker power and worker voice; and promoting and protecting worker rights, in regard to which she pointed to freedom of association, eliminating child labor, combating discrimination, and worker safety and health at work. She concluded by indicating that the pandemic had demonstrated the great interdependence of countries and the importance of international coordination and cooperation in achieving these goals.

Upon the conclusion of these presentations, the Chair opened the floor for interventions. The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as observer of the meeting, requested and was given the floor.

Minister of Labor and Social Economy and Second Vice President of the Government of Spain Yolanda Díaz Pérez indicated that her government concurred with the content of the Declaration and Plan of Action to be adopted at the IACML. She indicated that once this peak phase of the pandemic had been overcome, her government's priority would be to create new jobs and eliminate precarious employment. She mentioned actions being taken for youth and women, recognizing that they were the persons most impacted by the pandemic, as well as unprecedented increases in the legal minimum wage and measures to reduce the wage gap, among others. She noted that social dialogue had resulted in tens of agreements in the last year, including pioneering regulation of platform work, and indicated that this dialogue facilitated effective and durable solutions. She applauded the strengthening of relations between Spain and the governments of the Americas, and indicated that her government attached high importance to the IACML and wished to have an active presence in the working groups and the RIAL, making contributions and sharing Spain's experience of social dialogue, tripartite dialogue, and vocational and professional job training. Her government shared the objective of this Conference of achieving robust and sustainable growth with decent work and social protection for all.

The Chair thanked the Minister of Labor of Spain and again opened the floor for dialogue.

The Head of the delegation of Mexico, Ambassador Luz Elena Baños, noted that since 2019, her country had been implementing an ambitious and innovative labor and trade union reform, inspired by the principles of the right to organize, union democracy, and collective bargaining. She presented the four thematic areas of the new comprehensive labor policy: strengthening the minimum wage through a tripartite agreement; implementation of a new model of more expeditious labor justice; subcontracting reform, aimed at facilitating workers' transition from subcontractors to formal jobs of higher quality; and the "Youth Building the Future" program, which provided youth with options for quality jobs. She mentioned the pandemic's complex labor implications, especially for the most vulnerable populations, and emphasized the region's opportunity at this Conference to reach agreements on lines of action to achieve a recovery with sustainable, inclusive development, substantive equality, and enhanced well-being.

The Chair thanked all delegations, highlighting that the different initiatives implemented by the countries reflected the common aim of achieving greater inclusion and well-being in the recovery process, and declared the first day of the IACML closed.

- E. Fourth plenary session** – Better coordination of economic, education, health, and labor policies to address and overcome the effects of the crisis and achieve the future of work we want

This session opened on September 24, at 9:00 a.m., under the chairmanship of Secretary of Employment of Argentina Leonardo di Pietro, since Minister Moroni was unable to attend. This session was a continuation of the dialogue between the ministers of labor and the ministers of education, held as part of the IACML, and the Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education, both OAS specialized conferences of CIDI. Accordingly, the Chair opened the session by giving the floor to the Chair of the education ministerial forum.

Minister of Education of Antigua and Barbuda and Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE) Darryl Matthew applauded the intersectoral dialogue that had been maintained between the education and labor ministerial processes since 2015, emphasizing that the Inter-American Education Agenda, beacon of the ministries of education of the region, was based on the principles of collaboration, intersectorality, and interculturalism. In this context, he mentioned activities carried out for closer education-labor coordination, such as the Workshop on Skills for the Future, in Chile, 2019, where recommendations had been developed to address technological changes through skills development, now more urgent owing to the pandemic; and the OAS-ILO Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (CINTERFOR) partnership to work towards a regional qualification framework. He mentioned the following areas to strengthen intersectoral coordination: development of skills for the future, better coordination between education systems and job training systems; assignment of more value to technical and vocational education and training; and improved skills certification systems, among others. He noted that the good results of intersectoral coordination with labor had led the ministries of education to launch a joint agenda with the ministries of health, which expanded as a result of the pandemic. He concluded by calling for cohesive action among the sectors and expansion of the efforts made thus far.

Minister of Labor and Social Security of Chile Patricio Melero shared the steps taken by Chile to address the impacts of the pandemic in the world of work, pointing to efforts such as the Work Protection Act, the Law on the Protected Upbringing of Children, and the Telework Act, which had made it possible to maintain work contracts, extend maternity leave, and respect labor rights in teleworking, respectively. He also pointed to benefits granted, such as the Universal Family Income, to reduce the impact on household income, and bonuses for small and medium-sized businesses, among others. He indicated that for the enactment and implementation of these efforts, not only had political agreements had to be reached with the opposition, but efforts also made with social actors, and close intersectoral coordination effected, primarily with the Treasury for the release of direct transfer resources, and with the Ministry of Health to address restrictions during the quarantine period, and, subsequently, to coordinate vaccination and reopening efforts. He indicated that achieving these advances in a context of pandemic and without majorities in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate was a demonstration of democratic stability.

Minister of Labor, Employment, and Social Security of the Plurinational State of Bolivia Verónica Navia Tejada noted that the political situation in the country in 2019 and 2020 had exacerbated the challenges of the pandemic, leading to levels of unemployment of up to 11%, and of informal work of 89%. With regard to intersectoral coordination, the Government of Bolivia had installed the Social Cabinet, under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Labor, and composed of the ministries of health, education, and culture, to establish pandemic response and job recovery policies. She emphasized the regulation of telework, low interest loans to micro, small, and medium-sized businesses, renewed efforts to follow up on labor complaints stemming from the pandemic, and higher numbers of inspections focusing on identifying cases of child and forced labor. Through the Social Cabinet, coordination between the central government and municipal governments had been strengthened, primarily through employment promotion agreements and the development of vaccination strategies. She concluded by calling on international forums such as the IACML to obtain

commitments from States to take pro-worker steps with a transformative and human-centered vision, respecting democracy and the self-determination of peoples.

Minister of Labour and Social Security of Jamaica Karl Samuda noted that it was the responsibility of the region's governments to find the best combination of policies to reduce inequality, promote healthy societies, and achieve transformative educational development and sustainable growth. Therefore, the economy, the education system, the health sector, and labor were inseparable pillars supporting the agenda for recovery and decent work. He shared measures implemented in Jamaica jointly with the financial authorities, such as the CARE program, which provided resources to workers to reduce the pandemic's economic impact, and a social pension program for seniors. He emphasized that the pandemic had made more urgent the need for coordination of labor and education policies in order to develop more relevant skills for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. To that end, youth training programs had been established within social pandemic response programs. He underscored the relevance of the Labour Market Information system in this process, and that better multisectoral coordination made possible better preparation to keep up with the pace of changes and innovations. He concluded by noting the relevance of the health sector for a more dynamic and healthy labor market, and called for an inter-ministerial approach to existing challenges, and for better and more effective coordination, considering this crucial in achieving a more resilient world of work.

Upon the conclusion of the introductory presentations, the Chair opened the floor for dialogue.

Minister Melero of Chile expressed appreciation for the presentations and noted that the COVID-19 virus would be around a while longer. Therefore, he called for continued monitoring of the responses implemented and for experiences to be shared among countries. He listed four areas where it was important for experiences to continue to be shared: vaccination efforts; care standards, especially with regard to face masks and social distancing; telework systems, especially how to address aspects such as the right to disconnect and occupational health and safety; and benefits, evaluating which were to end and which to remain, and how they were evolving.

The delegate of United States, Robert Shepard, Director of the Office of International Relations at the Department of Labor, noted that coordination between education and labor policies was one of the most important policy formulation areas. This was especially true in the context of the pandemic, because throughout the world, young people were facing an uncertain future, since the transition from education to employment had been severely disrupted. He indicated that to address this situation, in the United States, training and skills development programs were being promoted for highly skilled, in demand jobs, and apprenticeship programs were being expanded for the most impacted populations, such as women and people of color. He called for the continued sharing of experiences and results.

There being no further requests for the floor, the Chair declared the session closed.

F. **Fifth plenary session** – Strengthening ministries of labor to address emerging changes in the world of work and the effects of the pandemic

This session opened on September 24, at 11:15 a.m., under the chairmanship of Secretary for Labor Inspection of Argentina Carlos Alberto Sánchez, who, in opening the session, recalled the guiding questions for the discussion. He also noted that 2021 was the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor, and called for efforts not to wane in putting a definitive end to this scourge.

Minister of Labor of the Dominican Republic Luis De Camps referred to the various initiatives implemented by his country to address the pandemic. He shared the methodology for joint work among different government areas to promote coordination among sectors and provide a coordinated response. He noted the virtual training programs in times of COVID-19, the installation of Mixed Occupational Health and Safety Committees, and certification of companies in compliance with health protocols, which enabled them to restart their operations. He mentioned steps taken to expand social security system coverage to include families of laid-off workers, and regulation of telework to mitigate disease transmission and promote labor contract continuity. With a view to reducing inequality, a dialogue had been launched with the National Congress for revitalization and modernization of the social security system. The government had also engaged in consultations for modernization of the technical-vocational education system and reduction of the skills gap in order to inject upskilled labor into the labor market while creating conditions for the private sector to create more jobs.

Minister of Labor of Ecuador Patricio Donoso considered that one of the main challenges faced by ministries of labor in handling the pandemic was how to create conditions for the most impacted sectors to recover, and for these conditions to arrive in tandem with universal and just access to vaccinations. To address this challenge, he recognized that the relationship with workers, employers, the academic community, and international organizations, and the regional dialogue with other labor ministries was one of the ministries' greatest strengths. He announced that his government was preparing an opportunities law to promote job creation, and asked that historic challenges such as child labor not be ignored. Referring to the future of work, he mentioned as major challenges the development of skills required to address technological changes, as well as gender equity, opportunities to move from informal activities to formal employment, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. In concluding, he recognized cooperation, the regional dialogue, and the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires as means to these ends.

Minister of Labour of Saint Kitts and Nevis Wendy Phipps noted the many changes the pandemic had brought to the world of work, including the growing influence of technology, remote working, the departure of women and young people from the labor market, and the number of workers who had had career changes out of necessity. She emphasized that, in addition, the pandemic had shed light on many areas where the strengthening of Ministries of Labor was now urgently required, and shared areas where the need for strengthening was urgent in her country, such as the acceleration towards critical labor reform and finalization of the National Labour Code; investment in occupational health and safety tools and training to be inclusive of COVID-19 protocols; training of inspectors, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, as health protocol workplace compliance auditors; and addressing the subject of remote working to ensure that no worker would be worse off by working from home, to include a mental health perspective. She concluded by calling for improvement in the way work was conducted in this time of adjustment.

Minister of Labor and Social Security of Honduras Olvín Villalobos noted that ministries of labor played a key part during the pandemic in safeguarding workers' rights, and called on those present to implement comprehensive occupational health and safety policies that addressed biosecurity in the workplace. He listed steps taken by his Ministry, such as the publication of sectoral biosecurity protocols with their respective manuals, including a specific manual for the informal sector; the installation of a Commission for Interinstitutional Oversight and Biosecurity Protocol Supervision, under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Labor, which carried out inspection and oversight actions, including the inspection of centers authorized to work in person during the reopening; and the digitization of services for continued provision of service to workers. Lastly, he

called for work on a comprehensive joint strategy to promote assistance by experts and the sharing of experiences with a view to steady progress by developing countries in emerging from the crisis.

Upon the conclusion of the introductory interventions, the Chair gave the floor to the Director of the OAS Department of Human Development, Education and Employment (DHDEE), Jesús Schucry Giacoman, to refer to the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL).

The Director of the DHDEE presented the curricula vitae of the Ministries of Labor in the RIAL, a document prepared by the Technical Secretariat that showed each country's history in the Network: participation in activities, the impacts there had been as a result of these activities, the funding received, and the contributions made to the voluntary fund. He explained that this document was very useful, not only so that governments could be aware of their country's history as a member of the cooperation mechanism, but also so that, with a view to the future, they could assess the potential of the RIAL and all its tools.

Upon the conclusion of the Director's intervention, the Chair gave the floor to the delegations for dialogue.

Minister of Labor, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs of Suriname Rishma Kuldipsingh explained that Suriname was facing its fourth wave of COVID-19 cases, and noted that work centers were facing high production costs and costs of caring for sick workers. She announced that a national work center vaccination policy was being prepared in accordance with ILO guidelines. Regarding regional cooperation, she called on the OAS countries to continue to learn from other countries' experiences in order to continue developing their COVID-19 response policies. She emphasized that social dialogue remained crucial, and mentioned that workers and employers in her country had recently been consulted to discuss the pandemic. Lastly, she affirmed her country's support for the Declaration and Plan of Action.

Upon the conclusion of the interventions, the President declared the session closed.

G. Sixth plenary session

This session opened on September 24, at 2:15 p.m. In accordance with the Schedule for the meeting, the Chair opened the session by establishing the working groups of the XXI IACML and election of their officers.

The Chair recalled that the formation of two working groups was an agreement reached during the Preparatory Meeting for this Conference and described in the draft Plan of Action. These working groups would consider in greater depth the topics identified in the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires, facilitate the sharing of experiences, provide relevant information and studies, and follow up on related hemispheric initiatives. The Chair submitted to the delegations for their consideration the formation of two working groups, which was adopted.

Next, the Chair gave the floor to the Director of the OAS Department of Human Development, Education and Employment, Jesús Giacoman, who reported on the candidacies received by the Technical Secretariat for the officers of the Conference, set forth in informational documents for this meeting. Since the number of candidacies received coincided exactly with the number of leadership positions for each working group, the Chair proposed the election of the following officers, who would be able to fulfill their functions directly or through representatives:

Working Group 1 officers: Minister of Labor and Social Security of Chile, Patricio Melero, as Chair; and Minister of Labour of Trinidad and Tobago, Stephen Mc Clashie, and Minister of Labor and Social Security of Costa Rica, Silvia Lara Povedano, as Vice Chairs.

Working Group 2 officers: Minister of Labor of Colombia, Ángel Custodio Cabrera, as Chair; and Minister of Labor and Labor Development of Panama, Doris Zapata Acevedo, and United States Secretary of Labor, Martin J. Walsh, as Vice Chairs.

The delegations adopted this proposal. The Chair congratulated the elected ministers and expected that, with their support and leadership, optimal guidance would be provided for the work of the Conference and its cooperation network, the RIAL. He thanked the Ministers of Labor of Canada, Costa Rica, Brazil, Ecuador, and Chile who, together with Argentina, had led the working groups in the 2017-2021 term, as well as the Minister of Mexico and the Minister of Barbados, who had advised the IACML as part of the troika.

Next, the Chair took up the establishment of the venue for the XXII IACML, expressed appreciation for the Ministry of Labor of Colombia's offer to host (document CIDI/TRABAJO/INF.1/21) and proposed accepting it. The delegations decided to meet in Colombia in 2024 for the XXII IACML, subject to CIDI's formal convocation of the meeting.

The Chair then submitted to the delegations for their consideration the Draft Declaration of Buenos Aires (document: CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.4/21) and the Draft Plan of Action of Buenos Aires (document CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.5/21), emphasizing that they were the result of months of negotiation through the Virtual Forum and a lengthy Preparatory Meeting in which nearly all OAS member states had participated. The Chair put the matter to the delegations and, there being no objections, the two draft documents were adopted.

The Chair congratulated the delegations on the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires and indicated that these documents marked the commitments and actions to be carried out in the next three years, and were a roadmap to continue the tireless work of the ministries of labor to build a more resilient world of work, with sustainable development, decent work, productive employment and social inclusion, as was the theme of this Conference. He then gave the floor to the delegations.

Minister of Labor of Colombia Angel Custodio Cabrera thanked the delegations for choosing Colombia as the future venue for the Conference. He considered this designation an honor and noted that the first IACML, in 1963, had been held in Bogotá. He expressed commitment to continue working to overcome the crisis, recover jobs, and strengthen businesses, and seek policies that promoted coordination among the goals of economic growth and generation of decent and productive work. He indicated that, in the context of the IACML, he would continue working to strengthen the RIAL. He congratulated the Government of Argentina and the OAS Secretariat for their excellent preparation and organization of this Conference.

Minister of Labor of Uruguay Pablo Mieres indicated his support for the adoption of the Declaration and noted that it was the outcome of a careful and participatory process. He considered that the Declaration traced a line to be followed in very difficult times, when it was especially relevant for ministries of labor to provide guidance for job recovery, resolution of inequities, and the creation of an integrated society, one of whose fundamental pillars was work. He congratulated Minister Moroni and wished Colombia much success, hoping that the next Conference would be in-person. He applauded the fact that despite the difficulties of holding virtual meetings, an excellent IACML had been achieved.

The Chair echoed Minister Mieres' words and thanked all ministry of labor collaborators who had worked so hard to achieve the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires through virtual meetings. He noted that this was not an easy work method and indicated that all delegations should congratulate themselves because, despite the difficulties, agreements had been reached.

Minister of Labor of Trinidad and Tobago Stephen Mc Clashie congratulated all delegations on their efforts to achieve the Declaration of Buenos Aires and indicated that his country fully supported its tenets. He indicated that the Declaration provided a roadmap to take the Ministries of Labor where they had to go to fulfill their mission. He expressed appreciation for his election as Vice Chair of IACML Working Group 1 and indicated his commitment to fulfill the Conference mandates.

There being no further requests for the floor, the Chair proceeded to the closing session.

H. Closing session

This session opened on September 24, at 3:00 p.m. The Chair announced that, with the permission of the delegations, an adjustment would be made to the program to include in the closing session remarks by the ILO Regional Director.

ILO Regional Director for Latin American and the Caribbean Vinicius Pinheiro congratulated all delegations and the OAS Secretariat on the holding of this important Conference and the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action, documents that proposed an ambitious response but one in line with the monumental challenges faced by the region. He applauded the fact that these documents were coherent and consistent with the declarations and resolutions adopted by the ILO to address the crisis. He emphasized some points of the discussions, notable among them that equal access to vaccines was a necessary condition for the recovery. He considered that job recovery had to be inclusive and central to the economic recovery; he called for priority attention to informal work and inequality and for progress to be made with unemployment insurance policies. He referred to the future of work, to which the region had been catapulted during the pandemic, recognizing the opportunities created by platform economies and the need to work on their regulation. Lastly, he emphasized that social dialogue was the most effective instrument in ensuring long-term political stability. He concluded by congratulating the Chair and the OAS and reiterating the ILO's support for this process.

The Chair of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development, Ambassador Audrey Marks, congratulated Minister Moroni and thanked all those present for an excellent Conference. She noted that the dialogue held had confirmed that the challenges were not unique to each country and that, in an increasingly interdependent world, we had to work collectively towards recovery. She considered that the Declaration of Buenos Aires was an urgent call to action and pointed to some of the commitments adopted: to step up efforts to combat informal work, poverty, and inequality; to promote enabling environments for the creation of sustainable enterprises; and to promote policies to achieve gender equality in the workplace and shared responsibility for care. She mentioned that these objectives could only be achieved through cooperation and partnerships, and considered it highly encouraging that several ministers had called for collective action; as well as the first dialogue with workers and employers in the IACML. She underscored the strength of the IACML as a forum for regional cooperation and action. She concluded by reiterating the commitment of the OAS' CIDI to continue to provide opportunities for dialogue and cooperation, with a view to results in the quest for sustainable and inclusive societies.

The Chair, Minister Claudio Moroni, thanked the delegations and emphasized that the Declaration of Buenos Aires enabled progress to be made with major regional aspirations: bridging tremendous gaps and structural inequalities; achieving labor inclusion for the populations most impacted by the crisis; reducing informal work; and business recovery, among others. He indicated that the Plan of Action accompanying the Declaration and the IACML Working Groups constituted the most appropriate instruments for realizing these aspirations. He indicated that effective institutionalized and participatory social dialogue were the means of implementing the consensuses reached, and noted that the region needed such dialogue because “recovery requires and will require everyone’s participation.” He thanked the OAS Secretariat, the lead Ministries of the IACML, COSATE, CEATAL, and all those present, and reiterated his Ministry’s commitment to the development and implementation of the Declaration and the regional agenda. He invited those present to continue working jointly to achieve a world of work characterized by inclusion, equity, social justice, decent work, and productive employment, where no one was left behind.

On September 24, 2021, at 3:30 p.m., the Chair declared the first virtual IACML closed.

ANNEX I – RESOLUTIONS

- Declaration of Buenos Aires 2021
- Plan of Action of Buenos Aires 2021

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML)**

September 22-24, 2021
Washington, D.C., United States of America
VIRTUAL

OEA/Ser.K/XII.21.1
CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.DEC.1/21
24 September 2021
Original: Spanish

DECLARATION OF BUENOS AIRES 2021

“BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT WORLD OF WORK WITH SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT, DECENT WORK, PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT, AND SOCIAL
INCLUSION”

(Adopted at the sixth plenary session, held on September 24, 2021,
and subject to revision by the Style Committee)

1. We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation participating in the XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) of the Organization of American States (OAS), met virtually on September 22, 23 and 24, 2021, to deepen democratic processes and to advance towards building a more resilient, inclusive, sustainable, and human-centered future of work for the Americas, with decent work for all, including full, productive, and freely chosen employment, considering the health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. We note, with great concern, that in addition to a regrettable loss of human life, the pandemic has caused a historic recession with high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, considerable income losses, and increases in informality, inequality, and precariousness. It has also revealed shortcomings, structural weaknesses and large gaps within our societies.

3. We emphasize the importance of decent work for COVID-19 response and recovery, and affirm our strong commitment to protecting human rights and to advancing the four pillars of decent work: promoting employment, developing and enhancing social protection measures, promoting social dialog and tripartism; and respecting, promoting and realizing the fundamental principles and rights at work. We recall the objectives of achieving and maintaining social peace and social inclusion, the principles of regional solidarity and cooperation, emphasizing the importance of international documents, including the Charter of the Organization of American States; the Inter-American Democratic Charter; the Social Charter of the Americas; the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the International Labor Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work; the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization; Declaration of Panama of the 19th American Regional Meeting of the ILO, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work; and the ILO Resolution on a global call to action for a human-centered recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.

4. We underscore our commitment to deepening democratic processes and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for designing and implementing human-centered public policies aimed at achieving social and economic equality as our countries recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We emphasize Goal 8 regarding the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, recognizing that it is essential to combating inequality and eradicating poverty. In a similar vein and considering that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis was greater among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our societies,

especially the youth, children, and older persons, as well as among women, observance of SDGs 5, 10 and 1 is essential as these goals promote gender equality, the reduction of inequality and the end of poverty, respectively.

5. We reaffirm our goal of strengthening the role of Ministries of Labor, institutionalized social dialogue, integration processes and regional cooperation based on solidarity and the search for consensus to address the changes that have arisen in the world of work. We express our commitment to develop needed labor skills; address and regulate the prominent use of new and existing forms of work, including telework, working from home, and working through digital platforms; promote the sustainability of social security; foster sustainable enterprises; and enhance regional integration and decent work in value chains.

6. Therefore, we adopt the following recommendations to serve as a frame of reference for developing labor and employment policies that aim to achieve social, economic and employment recovery, build resilience, and address the effects of the crisis through decent work, sustainable development, and social justice for all.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORLD OF WORK TO COVID-19 RECOVERY AND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORE RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE, JUST, AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

7. We commit to redouble our efforts to promote both employment and business recovery; fight informality, labor precarization, poverty, and inequality in all its dimensions; and serve populations that have been most affected by the crisis such as women, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, persons that work in the informal economy, older persons and persons belonging to racial and ethnic minorities in the face of pre-existing inequalities that have deepened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. Thus, we will continue developing active policies and human-centered strategies aimed at promoting the creation and formalization of employment, reducing informality and labor precarization, and guided by the ideals of social justice, equity, full and productive employment and decent work, and sustainable development.

9. In coordination with relevant institutions, we will seek to strengthen our social protection systems, their soundness, fiscal solvency, sustainability and taking into account the principles of solidarity, progressive realization, social inclusion and non-discrimination in the world of work, and take steps towards: achieving universal, adequate and sustainable social protection.

10. We will redouble our efforts for an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery, the promotion of enabling environments for entrepreneurship, and the creation and development of sustainable enterprises, providing special attention to the promotion of micro and small enterprises, cooperatives and social economy enterprises. We recognize the important contribution of the actors of the world of work in economic growth, poverty reduction, sustainable development, social inclusion, decent work, and employment formalization.

11. We will deepen regional cooperation and coordination among Ministries of Labor, the actors of the world of work and civil society organizations, to answer to the challenges brought about by the crisis and achieve recovery with full and productive employment and decent work for all.

12. We recognize that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women. For this reason, we will place special emphasis on promoting policies that aim to achieve gender equality through women's labor force participation, achieving non-discrimination and the elimination of violence and harassment. We will focus on promoting co-responsibility and an equitable and fair distribution of household tasks and on developing and formalizing the care economy, as we work to achieve pay equity and promote equal opportunities in all labor spheres. In this regard, we celebrate efforts made by the IACML and the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), in partnership with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), to advance gender mainstreaming and institutionalization in our Ministries of Labor. We commit to continue promoting and deepening gender mainstreaming in labor and employment programs and policies, and ministerial structures.

13. We will strengthen national actions and international cooperation to achieve the objectives related to work, employment and development, well-being and social inclusion within the framework of the Program of Action for the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities considering the impact of the pandemic on this population and with a view to avoiding all multiple forms of discrimination along with interconnected social, economic, and other conditions, including those that may result in vulnerability and the deepening of inequality.

14. We reaffirm our commitment to formulate decent work policies aimed at the indigenous peoples of the Americas in order to address the inequalities increased by the COVID 19 crisis and the new demands of the world of work.

15. We reaffirm our commitment to achieve a greater incidence in the process of preparation for the IX Summit of the Americas, in order to adopt measures to build a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient work future of work.

BETTER COORDINATION OF ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND LABOR POLICIES TO ADDRESS AND OVERCOME THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS AND ACHIEVE THE FUTURE OF WORK WE WANT

16. We will develop and implement labor policies that, together with education, health and macroeconomic policies, can help to achieve socio-economic and employment recovery, while fostering decent work and sustainable enterprises, and encouraging social investment to achieve the inclusion in the labor market of the most vulnerable populations. We will promote investments in strategic sectors, those most affected by the crisis and those who have a strong potential to create decent work opportunities, working with other relevant ministries, where appropriate.

17. We acknowledge that, in facing the pandemic and safeguarding workers' and employers' health, we have worked more closely with Ministries of Health, and we commit to continue our efforts to strengthen our inter-institutional coordination. Within these efforts, we will work towards: updating guidance, protocols and regulations related to health emergencies; developing measures to promote mental health in the workplace; while promoting safety and health at work from a preventive approach, in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.

18. We will continue improving the interaction and coordination between labor, education and training. In this regard, we celebrate the dialogue and cooperation that we have sustained since the XVIII IACML with the Ministries of Education within the framework of the OAS, and we will continue to promote, through active public policies, the coordination between

professional training and formal education systems placing special emphasis on: technical and professional training; lifelong learning and reskilling; harmonization between training supply and labor demand; greater access to connectivity and affordability of digital technologies; the development of foundational and transferable skills including digital and socio-emotional skills relevant to changes in the world of work; the development, in accordance with national circumstances of each member state, of national and regional qualification frameworks, and the promotion of entrepreneurship.

19. We will promote the adaptation, integration, and strengthening of our public employment services to respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic and to the requirements that the transformations of the world of work present to us. According to our national realities, we will continue working to expand employment services, particularly for those in situations of greater vulnerability, by providing them with relevant job guidance, support for job transition, and counseling programs.

20. We will advance strategies aimed at promoting youth employment; at reducing unemployment and precarious youth employment; at facilitating school-to-work transition and providing technical and vocational education and training opportunities for this age group, especially for those who are in situation of greater vulnerability due to various intersectionalities, including young women, youth with disabilities, migrants, indigenous youth, as well as youth who are involuntarily not in employment, education or training.

INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL DIALOGUE TO RECOVER FROM THE CRISIS AND SECURE A FUTURE OF WORK WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

21. We recognize that social dialogue is now more important and urgent than ever in the search for consensus and solutions that allow for a sustainable economic recovery and aim to build a new and better world of work with social justice and sustainable development. We will promote, strengthen, and expand inclusive, open, transparent, and intergenerational social dialogue.

22. We consider that broad and participatory social dialogue is an important instrument to strengthen labor institutions and promote the effective realizations of fundamental principles and rights at work. It also constitutes a primary mechanism for generating trust between governments and social actors of the world of work; reaching fair, equitable, and lasting agreements; prevent and resolve conflicts; encourage responsible business conduct and strengthen sustainable enterprises. Therefore, we support and promote institutionalized social dialogue at both domestic and regional levels for building a new and better world of work.

STRENGTHENING MINISTRIES OF LABOR TO ADDRESS EMERGING CHANGES IN THE WORLD OF WORK AND THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

23. We recognize the central role that Ministries of Labor play, jointly with the institutions in charge of education, health and economic policies, to address the effects of the crisis as well as the challenges and opportunities posed by the future of work. We will continue strengthening their institutional and human capacities, and we acknowledge that cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, are essential in this effort. For this reason, we will continue to strengthen and actively participate in the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), as the IACML's cooperation arm.

24. We reaffirm our commitment to continue strengthening the role of our Ministries in reviewing, formulating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating employment and labor public policies; as well as in enforcing labor laws and advancing effective observance of fundamental principles and rights at work. We also agree on the urgent need to strengthen labor inspection due to the increase in job precariousness and informality levels caused by the pandemic and the new forms of work.

25. We will analyze, with the contribution of tripartite social dialogue, the development, design, and implementation of appropriate regulations that address the opportunities and challenges of existing and new forms of work, such as work on digital platforms, telework, work from home, and alternating between the workplace and remote work. We will promote regional cooperation in this matter, as well as in other areas related to the future of work and sustainable enterprises.

26. We join in commemorating 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor, and we will take measures aimed at eliminating child labor, as well as forced labor, and promote education and integrated social assistance policies, in order to achieve the social inclusion of children and adolescents.

27. We reaffirm that all migrants, regardless of their immigration status, should be accorded the full protection of human rights and the full observance of labor laws applicable to them, including the principles and labor rights embodied in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Thus, we commit to continue our efforts to achieve comprehensive labor migration policies.

THEREFORE, WE RESOLVE:

1. To implement a Plan of Action based on this Declaration and on the work of the XX Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) and we commit to ensure the necessary resources, in keeping with the available resources of each country.

2. To establish two working groups to continue to pursue activities and actions that will contribute to the objectives and commitments of this Declaration, as follows:

- i. Working Group 1: Integrated public policies to address the COVID-19 crisis and achieve a human-centered, inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery for a future of work with equity, social justice and decent work.
- ii. Working Group 2: Institutional strengthening of Ministries of Labor, and promoting institutionalized social dialogue to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and address emerging changes in the world of work.

3. To renew our commitment to, and support for, the work of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL).

4. To acknowledge with gratitude the contributions made by the following international organizations and specialized organs of the Organization of American States (OAS) that work unremittingly with the IACML: the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Inter-American Conference on Social Security (CISS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank (WB), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD), as well as the Inter-American

Commission of Women (CIM), the Inter-American Commission on Education (CIE), and the Commission on Migration Affairs (CAM). Accordingly, we call for continued coordination, support and regional dialogue with those organizations.

5. To recognize the importance of the active participation, as well as their contributions, inputs and support for the advancement of the IACML from workers' and employers' organizations through the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE) and the Business Technical Advisory Committee in Labor Matters (CEATAL). Therefore, we reiterate our commitment to continue to work closely with those organizations.

6. To thank and commend the Government of Barbados for its leadership and commitment in advancing inter-American dialogue on labor and employment as Chair of the XX IACML, and also the Governments of Ecuador, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Costa Rica and Canada which led the Working Groups of the XX IACML.

7. To thank the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, as Technical Secretariat of the IACML, for its contribution and support in this important hemispheric process of political dialogue and consensus-building, as well as its coordination of the RIAL.

8. To organize the XXII IACML in 2024 in Colombia.

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
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OEA/Ser.K/XII.21.1
CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.5/21 rev.1
24 September 2021
Original: Spanish

PLAN OF ACTION OF BUENOS AIRES 2021

BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT WORLD OF WORK WITH SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT, DECENT WORK, PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT, AND SOCIAL
INCLUSION

(Adopted at the sixth plenary session, held on September 24, 2021,
and subject to revision by the Style Committee)

1. We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation participating in the XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) of the Organization of American States (OAS), gathered virtually on September 22, 23 and 24, 2021, commit to carry out the following Plan of Action in order to implement the Declaration of Buenos Aires and continue advancing towards building a more resilient, inclusive, sustainable and human-centered future of work for the Americas considering the health, social, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A. ORGANIZATION

2. In order to ensure the continuity and coherence of the IACML's work, the Chair Pro Tempore of the XX IACML (Argentina) - in collaboration with the previous Chair (Barbados) and future Chair (Colombia), with the support of the OAS Executive Secretariat for Integral Development and in consultation with the representatives of the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE), and of the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL) – will be responsible for advancing the implementation of this Plan of Action and continue the collaboration with the international organizations that contribute to the Conference.

3. The IACML takes note and will continue to implement the “General Guidelines for Sectoral Ministerial Processes within the framework of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI)” (CIDI/doc.228/17), approved by the OAS General Assembly in 2017, and the “Rules of Procedure for Sectoral and Specialized Meetings of Ministers and/or High Authorities in the framework of the Inte-American Council for Integral Development” (CIDI/doc.258/18) approved by the OAS General Assembly in 2018.

B. RESOURCES

4. Member states will devote the appropriate economic, technical, and logistic resources, as available, for the execution of this Plan of Action, with the participation of COSATE and CEATAL, and favoring the use of information and communication technologies. In addition, the Chair Pro Tempore will invite the relevant international organizations to make voluntary contributions to support the activities and projects included in this Plan, as well as to facilitate the participation of the said workers' and employers' organizations.

C. WORKING GROUPS

5. The following two working groups will be set up by representatives of the ministries of labor in order to advise the IACML regarding the objectives of the Declaration of Buenos Aires. As such, the Groups will examine in greater depth the topics identified in this Plan of Action, facilitate the exchange of experiences, provide pertinent information and studies, and follow up on related hemispheric initiatives:

- i. Working Group 1: Integrated public policies to address the COVID-19 crisis and achieve a human-centered, inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery for a future of work with equity, social justice, and decent work.
- ii. Working Group 2: Institutional strengthening of Ministries of Labor, and promoting institutionalized social dialogue to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and address emerging changes in the world of work.

WORKING GROUP 1 (WG1): INTEGRATED PUBLIC POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND ACHIEVE A HUMAN-CENTERED, INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT RECOVERY FOR A FUTURE OF WORK WITH EQUITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND DECENT WORK

6. WG1 will follow up on the following topics from the Declaration of Buenos Aires:
- Future of work with equity, inclusion, social justice, decent work, and productive employment;
 - work on digital platforms, telework and new forms of employment;
 - coordination of the economy, education, health and labor to overcome the effects of the crisis;
 - equality in the labor market, elimination of all forms of employment discrimination, and labor inclusion of vulnerable populations;
 - coordination among education, professional training, and employment; qualification frameworks; and development of skills for the future;
 - training, reskilling, and public employment services to address the effects of the crisis;
 - labor market information systems and prospective analysis for the identification of emerging and dynamic sectors for employment creation;
 - enabling environments for the creation and development of sustainable enterprises, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives and social economy enterprises, among others;
 - transition from the informal to the formal economy;
 - gender equality and gender mainstreaming in labor and employment policies; and
 - combat violence and harassment in the world of work

7. Working Group 1 will facilitate analysis and exchanges of experiences and will develop recommendations to support governments in their efforts to:

- a) Deepen interaction and coordination with the Ministries of Economy and Finance and other appropriate Ministries to achieve socioeconomic and employment recovery promoting decent work, productive employment, and sustainable enterprises; combat informality and labor precarization; and build a future of work with equity and social justice.

b) Promote all forms of participative social dialogue, in particular, intersectoral and institutionalized social dialogue to address work on digital platforms, telework and work from home, in order to analyze and implement, as needed, mechanisms, legislation, and policies to advance equity and decent work, and promote the respect of rights and responsibilities of workers and employers. Generate greater knowledge, information, and statistics on these phenomena, with the aim of having informed and evidence-based policymaking.

c) In coordination with other institutions, improve professional training, upskilling and reskilling for people to transition into new economic sectors considering the decrease in employment in some sectors due to technological change, climate change, and the effects of the pandemic. This action will entail: improving the quality, relevance and inclusion of training, where appropriate; strengthen, update, and expand competency certification systems and employment services; establish training and transition paths among sectors; and deepen the use of technology to enable and expand training; among others.

d) Deepen the exchange of information, knowledge, and experiences on the identification and development of skills for the future, emphasizing on foundational and transferable skills, including digital and socio-emotional skills. Strengthen youth employment strategies as well as training for the most vulnerable populations with this approach on skills for the future.

e) Continue strengthening dialogue and cooperation among Ministries of Labor, Ministries of Education and Professional Training Institutions through the IACML and the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), with the aim of achieving better coordination between education, training, and employment policies.

f) In coordination with other institutions, strengthen and enhance the updating of labor market information systems to have reliable and timely information on the current and future needs of the labor market, as well as provide timely figures on the dynamics of the labor market with the objective of enhancing the use of data for the formulation of public policies, and provide feedback to the education and professional training strategies based on this information. Improve the capacity of information systems to generate analysis and prospective studies, use traditional and non-traditional information sources (take advantage of big data technologies), identify skills gaps and emerging sectors, and anticipate changes in the skills and competences required by the productive sector.

g) Encourage ILO-CINTERFOR, OAS and UNESCO to continue working jointly in the development of a Regional Qualifications Framework at the level of the Americas to guide the design and implementation of national qualification frameworks.

h) Contribute to the design and implementation of policies for a productive recovery that promote the creation and development of sustainable enterprises, providing special attention to the promotion of micro and small enterprises, cooperatives and enterprises of the social economy. Enhance regional integration and decent work in value chains.

i) Continue deepening the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor as a means to achieve gender equality. This involves institutional strengthening of gender units; bolstering the relationship with the mechanisms for the advancement of women; and continuing to deepen training and cooperation among Ministries in this regard through the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) and in partnership with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM).

j) Promote full participation of women in the labor market and productive activities including eliminate barriers to their effective participation such as unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities, discrimination, violence, and harassment in the workplace. Promote the incorporation of a gender approach in telework and work from home regulations and promote shared caregiving responsibilities to achieve recovery with equality.

k) Promote equal access of vulnerable persons to the labor market and full protection of their labor rights, aware that they have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Promote collaborative work among Ministries of Labor, other public institutions, and civil society organizations; inform and sensitize the general population on topics of inclusion and non-discrimination; improve access to education and training for individuals that face the greatest challenges at work; and promote the creation and strengthening of inclusive enterprises.

WORKING GROUP 2 (WG2): INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING OF MINISTRIES OF LABOR, AND PROMOTING INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL DIALOGUE TO RECOVER FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND ADDRESS EMERGING CHANGES IN THE WORLD OF WORK.

8. WG2 will follow up on the following topics of the Declaration of Buenos Aires:

- Strengthening and modernization of the Ministries of Labor to address both the emerging shifts in the world of work and the effects of the pandemic;
- enforcement of labor legislation and regulation, and effective application of fundamental principles and rights at work;
- strengthening of institutionalized social dialogue for the achievement of more just, equitable, and resilient societies;
- freedom of association and collective bargaining;
- regular, safe and orderly labor mobility;
- prevention and eradication of child labor;
- elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labor
- universal social protection for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery;
- occupational safety and health;
- Address workplace health and safety arising from the Covid-19 crisis
- strengthening the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL)

9. Working Group 2 will facilitate analysis and exchanges of experiences and will develop recommendations to support governments in their efforts to:

a) Strengthen mechanisms to facilitate institutionalized social dialogue in policy formulation for creating a fairer, more equitable, and resilient world of work.

b) Develop and implement, with the contribution of social dialogue, strategies that reinforce occupational safety and health and promote a preventive approach that includes awareness and education campaigns.

c) Develop and maintain communication and coordination mechanisms that continue to address the most pressing labor issues, such as occupational safety and health, labor inspection, and labor migration.

d) Strengthen labor inspection as one of the central institutions for safeguarding the health and safety of workers and guaranteeing compliance with labor legislation in both urban and

rural areas. Provide the appropriate training and resources to inspectors, including technological tools to facilitate and increase the effectiveness of their work, including the ability to reach the most vulnerable populations. Employ a preventive approach for labor law enforcement, through information campaigns and innovative strategies.

e) Continue to develop and promote alternative labor dispute resolution mechanisms, especially labor mediation and conciliation, as effective methods to avoid and/or resolve conflicts, achieve compliance with labor legislation, ensure respect for workers' and employers' rights, discourage recidivism of labor infractions, and prevent judicial backlogs.

f) In coordination with relevant institutions, accelerate and deepen the efforts made during the pandemic to increase both contributory and non-contributory social protection coverage and move towards universal social protection, as defined by the ILO, recognizing that it is an integral strategy to combat inequality and build fairer, more equitable, and resilient societies.

g) In coordination with other relevant Ministries and institutions and state and local authorities, continue to develop and strengthen programs and strategies to eliminate child labor. Continue to foster and strengthen dialogue and implementation of programs, in coordination with the private sector and workers', employers', and civil society organizations to guarantee value chains free of child labor and to provide accurate qualitative and quantitative information on the prevalence or risk of child labor. Periodically update the lists of hazardous occupations for children. Promote programs to strengthen the skills and labor market participation of parents of children engaged in or at risk of engaging in child labor.

h) Ensure, in conjunction with migration and consular authorities, and workers' and employers' organizations, compliance with the human and labor rights of migrant workers in the region through providing information on their labor rights, conducting and strengthening labor inspections, including targeted inspections, and campaigns focused on combating discrimination and xenophobia. Continue the development of programs aimed at the labor inclusion of migrant workers.

i) Promote the process of digital transformation of the Ministries of Labor and continue deepening the efforts made to digitize their services as an promote the process of digital transformations of the ministries of labor to improve service axis of institutional strengthening that facilitates better service to workers, workers' and employers' organizations, and the general public

j) Continue strengthening the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) as a vehicle to strengthen the human and institutional capacities of the Ministries of Labor and contribute to the recovery process and the construction of a new and better world of work.

k) Strengthening respect, in the law and in practice, of the right to organize, freedom of association of workers and employers, and collective bargaining. Exchange good practices and positive experiences to overcome the challenges that the region faces in this matter, through the RIAL.

D. DIRECTIVES FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE WORKING GROUPS

10. The Working Groups will be coordinated by the following Ministers of Labor, elected by this Conference, who can perform the functions assigned either directly or through a representative:

- i. Working Group 1: Ministers of Labor of Chile (Chair), Trinidad and Tobago (Vice Chair), and Costa Rica (Vice Chair).

- ii. Working Group 2: Ministers of Labor of Colombia (Chair), Panama (Vice Chair), and United States (Vice Chair).

11. Participation in the Working Groups will be open to all the member states, to COSATE and CEATAL, and to the international organizations with competence over each group's topics.

12. The IACML instructs the OAS Executive Secretariat for Integral Development to continue acting as Technical Secretariat of the IACML and its working groups, and, as such, to provide guidance to Member States to enable compliance of the mandates of the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires; prepare technical inputs; support the preparation and organization of meetings, the preparation of reports, and follow-up.

13. The Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Working Groups, together with the Troika (the current, previous and future Chairs of the IACML), and with the participation of COSATE, CEATAL and relevant international organizations, will hold a planning meeting to define a calendar of activities for the implementation of this Plan no later than February 2022, which will include at least one meeting of the Working Groups before the XXII IACML, as well as cooperation and training activities within the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL).

E. INTER-AMERICAN NETWORK FOR LABOR ADMINISTRATION (RIAL)

14. In relation to the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), the IACML determines:

- i. To renew its full support and commitment to the RIAL, recognizing that, since it was created at the XIV IACML in 2005, it has achieved significant results in strengthening the institutional and human capacities of the ministries of labor in the region.
- ii. To promote the financial sustainability of the RIAL and encourage the ministries of labor to make contributions to its Voluntary Contribution Fund, in accordance with its guidelines and subject to national capacities.
- iii. To celebrate the RIAL's rapid response to the pandemic through the publication of the Portfolio of Responses from Ministries of Labor to COVID-19 and the Repository of Guides and Protocols for deconfinement and return to work; as well as the undertaking of virtual bilateral cooperation activities, hemispheric dialogues and training activities, including the Course on gender-based violence at work, through the Educational Portal of the Americas.
- iv. To instruct the Technical Secretariat to continue coordinating the activities of the RIAL, in accordance with the priorities defined by the IACML, while working for the broader participation of its members as well as COSATE and CEATAL. It will also explore possible additional sources of funding for its operations.

15. The RIAL will pursue the following actions:

- Include new programs and ensure the ongoing update of the Portfolio of Programs, which includes initiatives on all areas of labor administration.
- Select, coordinate, follow up and evaluate the impact of technical bilateral cooperation activities;
- Continue expanding the use of information and communications technologies in its cooperation activities, including webinars, on-line discussion forums and videoconferencing, to maximize the use of resources;
- Organize technical workshops that complement the WG meetings in further analyzing specific priority areas, in partnership with other organizations; and
- Continue to publish periodically the RIAL newsletters and update its web page.

16. The Ministries of Labor agree to make efforts to promote the effective operation of the RIAL, including designating focal points to serve as links between each ministry and the Network; making technical contributions; providing regular information to the Technical Secretariat on their operations, authorities, important developments and programs; and the continued participation of their officials in RIAL activities.

ANNEX II – REPORTS PRESENTED TO THE CONFERENCE

- Final Report of Working Group 1
- Final Report of Working Group 2
- Technical Secretariat Report to the XXI IACML

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML)**

September 22-24, 2021
Washington, D.C., United States of America
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FINAL REPORT OF WORKING GROUP 1
OF THE
INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR

“INTEGRATED PUBLIC POLICIES FOR PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT
WORK WITH SOCIAL INCLUSION”

Presented by the Ministries of Ecuador (Chair of WG1), Chile and Brazil (Vice-Chairs of WG1)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Plan of Action of Bridgetown, approved by the XX IACML in December of 2018, established two Working Groups “to advise the IACML regarding the objectives of the Declaration of Bridgetown 2017. As such, the Working Groups will examine in greater depth the topics identified in this Plan of Action, facilitate exchange of experiences, provide pertinent information and studies, and follow up on related hemispheric initiatives.”

Working Group 1 is titled “Integrated public policies for productive employment and decent work with social inclusion,” and it was tasked by the Plan of Action to follow up on the Declaration of Bridgetown by addressing the following topics:

- The future of work;
- Equality in the labor market, elimination of employment discrimination, and labor inclusion for vulnerable populations;
- Promotion of decent work and full and productive employment in the context of the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Integration of labor, education, and training policies;
- Youth employment and school-to-work transition;
- Technical and professional training and public employment services to respond to the needs of the labor market;
- Labor market information systems;
- Sustainable enterprises, including micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises and other production units;
- Transition from the informal to the formal economy; and
- Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in labor and employment policies.

These topics were addressed during the 2018-2021 biennium in two meetings of Working Group 1 that took place on December 3, 2019 in Quito, Ecuador, and virtually in September 10th, 2020. The latter addressed the topics considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world of work. Similarly, a RIAL Workshop on skills for the future: Contributions from the Ministries of

Education and Labor” took place on May 16 and 17, 2019, in Santiago, Chile; and many actions were advanced to promote the mainstreaming of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor, including the update of the RIAL Study on the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries; the undertaking of hemispheric dialogues on gender, and the development of a Virtual course on Gender Violence at Work through the OAS Educational Portal of the Americas.

The WG1 meetings were attended by officials from at least 20 Ministries of Labor -it is noteworthy the presence of 27 Ministries in the virtual meeting- and representatives of the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL), the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE), and experts from international organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Ibero-American Social Security Organization (OISS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and the OAS.

The Workshop on skills for the future was a follow-up to the dialogue among Ministers of Labor and Education which has been maintained by the IACML and to the Inter-Sectoral Workshop “Youth Employment: coordination between Education and Labor in the Americas” that took place in Brasilia in 2016. It responded to both IACML and Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE) mandates, as well as to the joint Declaration of COSATE and CEATAL presented to the XX IACML. The event gathered technical officers from the Ministries of Education and/or Labor from 18 Member States, representatives from international organizations -ILO, IADB, World Bank, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Latin American Development Bank (CAF)- as well as academic institutions, representatives from workers and employers, and the private sector, including Google, Fundacion Telefonica, Nestlé and Ford. Its main outcome was the identification of lessons learned and policy recommendations that allow to strengthen the coordination between Ministries of Labor, Ministries of Education, and professional training institutions to develop the skills for the future, address the human development gap and align the education and training supply to the current and future needs of the world of work. These lessons and recommendations are included in this Report.

It is worth highlighting in this period the very active participation of the gender units or areas of the Ministries of Labor with the aim of deepening the incorporation of a gender approach in labor administrations. The first virtual dialogue, held on November 20, 2020, had the participation of 29 governments of the Americas, who discussed the main challenges that the pandemic poses to the women in the region and made recommendations. The main conclusions of the dialogues and the actions taken on gender issues are incorporated in this Report.

In this context of broad and productive debate as well as analysis and exchange of information, this report summarizes the most relevant issues discussed by Working Group 1 since the XX IACML in Bridgetown, Barbados, both in the Group’s meetings as well as in the Workshop and the activities mentioned. Section II of this document presents a summary of the topics discussed. Section III highlights the main consensus reached and the issues that require more work. Finally, section IV contains the recommendations proposed by Working Group 1 as inputs for the Plan of Action that will be adopted at the next IACML.

II. SUMMARY OF TOPICS THAT EMERGED FROM OUR DELIBERATIONS

The Working Group 1 Report to the XX IACML highlighted that between 2015 and 2017, for the first time in its history, the IACML included a reflection about the new world of work, a

product of the accelerated technological changes and, in general, of the trends of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Since 2017, this reflection has deepened with the analysis and exchange of experiences, also for the first time within the IACML, of the platform economy, the work in digital platforms and telework.

The irruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 had an impact in the deliberations of Group 1, causing new concerns around the increased inequalities, the need to address more urgently the dynamics of telework and work in digital platforms, and the urgency to provide a space to analyze and exchange the measures undertaken by the Ministries of Labor to protect employment under the new situation.

The Group 1 continued dealing with the link between education and labor, provided guidelines and complemented the recommendations of the second Inter-sectorial Workshop between Ministries of Labor and Education on “Skills for the Future”, and dedicated a session to analyze the strategies of the Ministries to promote training and reskilling, a priority that in light of the employment crisis generated by COVID-19 has gained renewed urgency.

Labor equality, the elimination of employment discrimination, and the labor inclusion of vulnerable groups were also topics of emphasis of Group 1 during this period, continuing the analysis and exchanges of previous years, but highlighting that these issues are being especially threatened due to the effects of the pandemic in the labor market.

During this period, Group 1 also focused its discussions on gender equality and the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor. The meetings of Group 1 were the space to share progress and challenges, and to provide orientations to the work of the IACML in this regard. Since the XX IACML, the Working Groups and the RIAL have undertaken more actions to support the mainstreaming of a gender approach in labor administrations than in any other period of the Conference with the update of the study on institutionalization, the holding of hemispheric dialogues on gender, the elaboration of a Manual for gender units within the Ministries, and the development of a Virtual course on gender violence at work.

III. AREAS OF CONSENSUS AND TOPICS THAT REQUIRE FURTHER WORK

1. The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented health, economic, social, and labor crisis, with massive destruction of jobs and a strong worsening of the region's inequality. It is recognized that inequality has increased due to structural conditions such as the high levels of informality, limited social protection coverage, precarious care systems, and unequal distribution of care-taking responsibilities at home, among others.
2. The governments of the region acted quickly in the face of the pandemic and in the short term developed measures to protect the health of workers and reduce contagion; protect workers' income, through unemployment insurance, cash transfers for lower income groups, or early retirement from pension funds, among others; and preserve jobs and businesses, by prohibiting dismissal, reducing working hours, and providing subsidies to companies, among other. Support for workers in the informal economy has been provided mainly through cash transfers.
3. Because the pandemic has lasted longer than initially expected, the impact on the labor market has been stronger and more persistent. States have taken measures to try to balance the opening of the economy with pandemic/infection control, which has proven to be an immense challenge.

4. The pandemic sparked an acceleration of digital transformation and prompted deep changes in the world of work. Telework, working from home and working through digital platforms increased considerably and, according to the discussions held by Working Group 1, irreversibly. That is why these phenomena should continue to be addressed as a priority both at the national and regional levels.
5. Work on digital platforms is a phenomenon that was expanding in the region prior to the pandemic but has now been accelerating. Generally, digital platforms are divided into two: web-based, whereby people can deliver services to clients in other countries and the performance of micro-tasks; and those that are location-based, that allow a service to be delivered in a given geographical area. Both face many questions regarding the labor relations and the rights and duties of the parties involved.
6. Countries are still dimensioning and understanding the phenomenon of work in digital platforms, and at the same time, they must define and undertake specific policy responses and measures to address it. This makes dialogue and exchange of experiences at the regional level on collaborative economy and work in digital platforms very pertinent and relevant.
7. The benefits and challenges of work in digital platforms were highlighted during the discussions. Among the benefits, it was mentioned that it allows job creation, job access without having to migrate, development of new skills, and flexible working hours. On the other hand, the main concerns regarding work in platforms refer to remuneration, which is usually very low; surplus labor, which affects income levels; the lack of conflict resolution mechanisms; the difficulty, in practice, in invoking rights especially when the relationship is transnational and multi-party (which happens in micro-task platforms); and the very low social protection coverage for platform workers.
8. Being a recent phenomenon, it is recognized the importance of taking measures now to guarantee equity and improve working conditions on digital platforms, which will have long term repercussions. To make informed decisions, public authorities need more and better information. It was recognized that the same platforms have valuable information and that it is important to have access to it.
9. During the discussions, some policy recommendations regarding work on digital platforms were mentioned: guarantee decent work, including ensuring social protection and occupational safety and health; and achieving more clarity and transparency in the contracts, payments, and evaluations.
10. On its part, telework and working from home, which also increased considerably during the pandemic, have been instrumental in averting further economic paralysis by allowing many individuals to continue working during the lockdown. Legislation on telework existed in some countries, while in others, the arrival of the pandemic accelerated the approval of laws and regulations.
11. Having telework legislation in place helps to democratize and universalize this work modality, since it provides both employers and workers with guarantees and assurances. However, for telework to work correctly, it also demands organizational change, and sharing of co-responsibilities for household chores, technological and connectivity conditions, among others.

12. There was acknowledgement that a major challenge with telework is that it widens gender gaps because of the unequal burden of responsibilities within the home, as well as labor and social gaps, given that it is concentrated in highly skilled jobs. The proportion of people able to telework in a country depends on several factors: that country's economic status; production and occupational structures; internet access (digital divide); and the organization of work within offices. Besides, there are conditions such as overcrowding, health problems, or family dynamics that make it very difficult for some people to telework.
13. Telework and working from home have also created the need to establish provisions on work and family life balance, as well as on the right to disconnect. There is a trend in the region on the preparation of bills, regulations and information materials to promote this balance and, in general, to promote telework.
14. Governments, employers, and workers agreed that improving the interaction and articulation between the world of work, education, and professional training is currently even more imperative. They also acknowledged that there are significant lags in education and training.
15. The development of skills, life-long learning and, in general, strategies to strengthen education, training, re-skilling, and up-skilling, are fundamental to respond to the current challenges on employment. During the intersectoral discussions held, the Ministries of Labor and Education recommended that these processes should be developed with the participation of workers, employers and academia, and under an ecosystem vision.
16. The digital transformation and the impacts of new technologies on employment demand the development of new skills or “skills for the future”. It is worth noting digital and socio-emotional skills, the latter considered even more important than technical skills and within them, empathy and the ability of “learning to learn”, stand out.
17. In this context, it is important to continue developing and strengthening labor market information systems to identify skill gaps, guide training offerings, and inform policy making. In these efforts, it is imperative to use traditional and non-traditional information sources (taking advantage of big data technologies), as well as strengthening the prospective capabilities of observatories and information systems.
18. Regarding skills development, training and reskilling, some recommendations were shared during the meetings of Working Group 1 and the intersectoral Workshop, including: strengthening apprenticeship programs; promoting closer partnerships with the private sector and workers in the definition and development of training efforts; create partnerships with online training providers; and increase economic incentives and scholarships to achieve a permanent update of knowledge.
19. National qualification frameworks and systems are considered a positive mechanism to achieve a better coordination between education, training and the labor market, and are currently being developed in several countries in the region with different levels of progress. In this context, the idea of having a Regional Qualification Framework that would serve as a regional reference for countries that are developing or planning to develop a national framework, has gained strength. This initiative, which is considered valuable and necessary given the increase in intra-regional migration, is being developed under the leadership of ILO-CINTERFOR and in partnership with the OAS and UNESCO.

20. The Ministries of Labor are giving increasing importance and taking concrete actions to guarantee labor inclusion and serve groups that face greater challenges in the labor market. Among those actions are: new legislations on preventing and combating discrimination and workplace or sexual harassment; the design and implementation of public policies to address the particular realities of different segments, including attention protocols; the strengthening of the offices or units within the Ministries in charge of this issue; advice to employers and workers, and awareness-raising and training actions on inclusion and labor rights of vulnerable populations.
21. The Plan of Action of Bridgetown considers that vulnerable groups are people with disabilities, migrants, youth, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, among others. During Working Group 1 discussions, the LGBTI+ community, people with HIV-AIDS and persons deprived of their liberty were recognized as vulnerable groups as well. It was also acknowledged that vulnerable groups vary depending on each country.
22. Regarding gender equality, the discussions showed the marked gaps that persist, despite important advances, between men and women in the labor market, including a marked gap in labor participation, overrepresentation of women in the informal economy, and high education and labor segregation with large representation of women in commerce and service sectors. These gaps place women at a greater disadvantage and have widened with the arrival of the pandemic. The increased inactivity of women and disproportionate burden of family responsibilities assumed by women during the lockdown is noteworthy.
23. Multiple training and cooperation actions on gender issues have taken place within the IACML framework in partnership with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), under one premise: gender mainstreaming and institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor are necessary tools in the road towards equality.
24. The updated study on “The institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas”, prepared by mandate of the XX IACML and after broad consultation, as well as the virtual dialogues undertaken, show that there have been important advances. The importance and need of gender mainstreaming are no longer under discussion, and gender institutionalization within the Ministries has been strengthened with the creation and consolidation of gender units. It is also acknowledged that more actions are required to change organizational culture of the Ministries to favor equality and continue promoting the strengthening of gender units, as well as cooperation among them.
25. Among the actions undertaken by the Ministries regarding gender equality issues, the following are noteworthy: the Equality Certifications or Equality Seals awarded to companies; training of inspectors and officials from different areas of the Ministry on gender equality and gender mainstreaming; evaluation of Internal Labor Regulations to incorporate a gender approach; and actions to support women’s economic empowerment, including training, intermediation, and entrepreneurship.
26. Harassment and violence against women in the workplace emerged as very worrisome issues that are gaining relevance in recent years in legislation and Ministries’ actions. In response, the Group authorized the preparation of a Virtual Course on gender violence at work for the IACML, that is being developed by the RIAL with the Inter-American Commission of Women and the Educational Portal of the Americas.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the work carried out on the various topics and so that the Member States can continue to benefit from these exchanges and discussions, Working Group 1 respectfully recommends that the Ministers of Labor take the following recommendations into consideration in preparing the Plan of Action of the next IACML:

1. Generate greater knowledge, information, and statistics on work on digital platforms, telework, and work from home, with the aim of having informed and evidence-based policymaking.
2. Promote spaces for intersectoral and social dialogue to address work on digital platforms, telework, and work from home, including the design and implementation of mechanisms, legislation, and policies to ensure equity and decent work and clearly define rights and duties for workers and employers.
3. Improve training and reskilling for people to transition into new economic sectors considering the decrease in employment in some sectors due to both technological change and the pandemic. This implies, to improve the quality, pertinence and inclusion of training; strengthen and update skills certification systems and employment services; establish training and transition paths among sectors; and deepen the use of technology to enable and expand training, among others.
4. Deepen the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences on the identification and development of skills for the future, emphasizing on digital and socio-emotional skills.
5. Continue strengthening dialogue and cooperation among Ministries of Labor and Education through the IACML and the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), with the aim of achieving a better coordination between education, training, and employment policies, and work towards a learning and skills development ecosystem.
6. Strengthen labor market information systems to have reliable and timely information on the current and future needs of the labor market and adjust education and professional training strategies based on this information. Improve the capacity of information systems to generate market intelligence, use traditional and non-traditional information sources (take advantage of big data technologies), identify skills gaps and emerging sectors, and anticipate changes in the skills and competences required by the productive sector.
7. Instruct ILO-CINTERFOR, OAS and UNESCO to continue working jointly in the development of a Regional Qualifications Framework at the level of the Americas to guide the design and implementation of national qualification frameworks.
8. Continue deepening the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor as a means to achieve gender equality. This involves improving the planning and institutional definition of gender units; strengthening the relationship with the mechanisms for the advancement of women; and continue deepening training and cooperation among Ministries in this regard through the RIAL and in partnership with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM).
9. Promote full participation of women in the labor market and productive activities, including the elimination of barriers for their effective participation, such as caregiving-related issues, violence and harassment in the workplace. Ensure the incorporation of a gender approach in

- telework and work from home regulations and promote caregiving co-responsibility to achieve a recovery with equality.
10. Ensure access of vulnerable persons and groups to the labor market in conditions of equality and with full compliance of their labor rights. To this end, promote collaborative work among Ministries of Labor, other public institutions, and civil society organizations that serve these groups; inform and sensitize the general population on topics of inclusion and non-discrimination; improve access of groups that face the greatest challenges in the world of work to education and training systems; and promote the creation and strengthening of inclusive businesses.

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
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FINAL REPORT OF WORKING GROUP 2
OF THE
INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTRIES OF LABOR (IACML)

"INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT WORKERS' AND
EMPLOYERS' RIGHTS AND FOSTER COOPERATION"

Presented by the Ministries of Labor of Argentina (Chair of WG2), Canada and Costa Rica (Vice-Chairs of WG2)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Plan of Action of Bridgetown, approved by the XX IACML in December of 2017, established two Working Groups "in order to advise the IACML regarding the objectives of the Declaration of Bridgetown. As such, the Working Groups will examine in greater depth the topics identified in this Plan of Action, facilitate exchange of experiences, provide pertinent information and studies, and follow up on related hemispheric initiatives."

Working Group 2 is titled "Institutional strengthening to promote and protect workers' and employer's rights and foster cooperation," and was mandated by the Plan of Action of Bridgetown to follow up on the Declaration in the following areas:

- Promoting awareness of the rights of all workers, including migrant workers;
- Strengthening enforcement of labor legislation and regulations, and effective exercise of fundamental principles and rights at work;
- Strengthening of social dialogue
- Freedom of association and collective bargaining mechanisms;
- Regular, safe, and orderly labor mobility;
- Prevention and eradication of child labor;
- Social protection;
- Occupational health and safety;
- Hemispheric cooperation on labor matters; and
- Strengthening the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL).

Between 2018 and 2021, these issues were addressed in two meetings of Working Group 2, held on December 4, 2019 in Quito, Ecuador, and virtually on September 15, 2020. The latter addressed the topics considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world of work. Additionally, a RIAL Workshop on "Strategies to Improve Compliance with Labor Legislation" was held on December 6 and 7, 2018 in San José, Costa Rica.

The meetings were attended by officials from at least 20 Ministries of Labor –the presence of 27 Ministries in the virtual meeting is noteworthy-, representatives of the Business Technical

Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL), the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE), and experts from the following international organizations: the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Ibero-American Social Security Organization (OISS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and the OAS.

The RIAL Workshop on Compliance with Labor Legislation was co-organized by the OAS and the ILO, under the auspices of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security of Costa Rica, and financed by the Canadian Labor Program with resources granted to the RIAL. The workshop allowed for an active and enriching exchange among labor inspectors from 20 Ministries of Labor, as well as COSATE and CEATAL, on the initiatives they are carrying out to improve compliance with labor legislation, including strengthening inspection with innovative tools and respect for fundamental rights; alternative resolution of individual and collective conflicts; and coordination with other institutions. At the end of the event and as a result of a participatory exercise in subgroups, lessons learned, and policy recommendations were identified.

In this context of broad and productive debate, as well as analysis and exchange of experiences, this report summarizes the most relevant issues discussed by Working Group 2 since the XX IACML in Bridgetown, Barbados, both at its meetings and at the RIAL Workshop . Section II of this document presents a summary of the topics discussed; section III highlights the main consensus reached and the issues that require further work. Finally, section IV contains the recommendations proposed by Working Group 2 as inputs for the Plan of Action that will be adopted at the next IACML.

III. SUMMARY OF TOPICS THAT EMERGED FROM OUR DELIBERATIONS

Working Group 2 defined what would be its topics of emphasis at the IACML Planning Meeting in April 2018, focusing on compliance with labor legislation and fundamental principles and rights at work and emphasizing labor inspection, the strengthening of social dialogue, the eradication of child labor and attention to the growing phenomenon of labor mobility in the region. At that time, only one meeting of Working Groups was contemplated, to be held in 2019, and the holding of the XXI IACML in 2020.

At the beginning of 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IACML authorities decided to postpone the XXI IACML to 2021 and to hold an additional meeting of the Working Groups to analyze and exchange experiences on the most pressing issues for the Ministries in their response to the pandemic. These discussions reaffirmed the urgency of addressing informality, as the crisis disproportionately affected workers in this situation. Within the framework of Working Group 2, the priority issues were occupational health and safety and social protection systems, areas that revealed more clearly their weaknesses, strengths and pending challenges with the onset of the pandemic. These issues were addressed with inputs from PAHO, ILO and the ISSO, and the discussions reaffirmed the importance of revitalizing Occupational Health and Safety from a preventive approach and strengthening intersectoral coordination, as well as the need to reconfigure social security systems to increase their coverage.

Social dialogue was a central theme during this period. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance that social actors had in the design, implementation, and dissemination of the Ministries' responses to the crisis was recognized, and therefore the importance of promoting an institutionalized and cross-cutting social dialogue in the new normal was emphasized.

WG2 has been tasked with following up on the actions of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), created within the IACML to strengthen the Ministries of Labor through cooperation. The Technical Secretariat presented RIAL's activity and financial reports, and the Ministries, COSATE and CEATAL were able to make comments and recommendations, which are included in this Report, to continue strengthening this Network. Within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat developed two new RIAL products: the "Portfolio of responses from Ministries of Labor to COVID-19" and the "Repository of Guidelines and protocols for Deconfinement and Return to Work", both available online.

II. AREAS OF CONSENSUS AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER WORK

27. Social dialogue played a priority and fundamental role in the design and implementation of government responses to the economic and health crisis caused by the pandemic, through the creation of new tripartite mechanisms and the consolidation of existing ones. The need to strengthen institutionalized social dialogue for a recovery that builds fairer and more equitable societies was recognized.
28. In overcoming the crisis, States must have permanent tripartite structure to allow the debate of public policies, since social actors play a crucial role in their implementation. Cross-cutting social dialogue mechanisms are an effective tool for safeguarding workers' rights, the financial security of companies, and legitimizing the measures agreed upon.
29. The current context revitalized the debate around occupational health and safety. In the immediate response to the health crisis, governments took measures to safeguard workers' health and contain transmission of the virus, including the development of sectoral biosafety protocols and the designation of COVID-19 as an occupational illness.
30. The current reality made it clear that occupational health and safety must be addressed from all sectors. It was recognized that in the context of the pandemic, intersectoral coordination was strengthened, especially between Ministries of Labor and Health, to address critical sectors and vulnerable populations. Among the main results of this coordination are the preparation of joint guidelines and protocols both during confinement and for a healthy return to work; interagency working groups to determine critical sectors; and in some Caribbean countries, the development of joint inspections.
31. In this regard, it was agreed that the current interagency coordination is a window of opportunity for "the new normal to be a better normal" and that occupational health and safety should be addressed from a preventive approach that takes into account the social determinants of health, huge inequalities, and the fact that the region is imminently urban. Strategic alliances must be designed and implemented to advance in this direction.
32. Labor inspection is the central institution to safeguard the health and safety of workers, and the urgent need to strengthen it in the recovery stage is recognized. There is broad consensus that the greatest challenges lie in the high levels of informality, including in domestic work; the insufficient resources to guarantee an adequate number of inspectors and their training; and the absence of translation and interpretation tools, which are increasingly necessary with the increase in labor migration. All these challenges are at risk of being exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic.

33. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digitization of the services offered by the Ministries of Labor has been a clear trend in the hemisphere. Special emphasis was placed on the acceleration of existing efforts to implement the use of new technologies in labor inspection, although it was recognized that progress is uneven among countries, since there are initiatives to implement electronic case-tracking systems and even one hundred percent virtual inspections. One of the great advances in this regard has been the online complaint systems, which were especially useful in the context of the pandemic. A call was made to continue adapting and adjusting the services of the Ministries to these tools.
34. It was recognized that the heterogeneity of inspection services between rural and urban areas continues to be a major challenge. To address it, initiatives such as heat maps, geo-referencing of alerts, inspection plans focused on specific rights, as well as continuing to strengthen the use of new technologies, were highlighted.
35. There is broad consensus on strengthening the preventive role of labor inspection to complement the punitive and sanctioning role.
36. The pandemic found the region with important inequality gaps that were already urgent to address, and which now are at risk of deepening, such as income inequality, unequal access to social protection, and the deficit of decent work.
37. Prior to the pandemic, important progress had been achieved in terms of both contributory and non-contributory social protection coverage, the first one, increasing its coverage by up to 10 percentage points from 2005 to 2019, and the latter one covering 40% of the region's population. However, these advances, although significant, were not sufficient to address the needs for social protection coverage in the current situation.
38. The Ministries of Labor implemented actions to address social protection challenges, including the development of guaranteed basic income programs or social protection floors, the horizontal expansion of existing programs, the expansion or creation of unemployment insurance, the expansion of contributory or non-contributory pension system benefits, and the implementation of new programs that will improve care systems. The extension of these programs brought the opportunity for social protection benefits to reach people who had not been reached before, and the necessity to take advantage of this opportunity to move towards universal social protection in the new normal was recognized.
39. Alternative conflict resolution, especially through mediation and conciliation, continues to contribute significantly to compliance with labor legislation, while at the same time it helps to decongest the judicial system. It is recognized that the professional and personal qualities of conciliators and mediators are fundamental to the effectiveness of these processes.
40. Among the major challenges facing the region in terms of alternative conflict resolution are deficit of properly trained mediators and conciliators, the duration of these processes, the lack of spaces to carry them out with due privacy, and the incorporation of arbitration clauses in labor contracts, which restricts workers' access to alternative procedures.
41. Child labor continues to represent a complex and urgent problem for the region. Although in the years prior to the pandemic it had been reduced considerably, this rate was not sufficient, even then, to achieve SDG Target 8.7 to end child labor in all its forms by 2025. On the contrary, it would have been achieved by 2040. The pandemic exacerbated the situation, as the economic crisis and school closures put hundreds of thousands of children at risk of

- entering child labor.
42. The ILO's Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean free of Child Labor, and in particular its Child Labor Risk Identification Model, developed jointly with ECLAC, was recognized as a good practice in the hemisphere for addressing the problem with a life-cycle approach to interrupt the entry of girls and boys into child labor.
 43. There is a pronounced tendency in the region to strengthen joint strategies with local authorities to address the problem of child labor, especially through permanent mechanisms for social and intersectoral dialogue such as committees or commissions in which national authorities, subnational governments, trade unions, business chambers and civil society organizations take part. In terms of intersectoral coordination, efforts by the Ministries of Labor to achieve synergies with information and statistics agencies in order to obtain reliable statistics for designing and implementing strategies to make the fight against child labor more effective are also recognized. This represents an important challenge.
 44. Another of the most complex challenges that persist in the fight against child labor is the difficulty of guaranteeing value chains free of child labor, which is why the private sector is endorsed as a fundamental ally in efforts to eradicate this practice. The need to strengthen tripartite collaboration was endorsed, and the implementation of joint strategies between the government and the private sector, such as child labor-free business networks and child labor-free business labels, was highlighted. Given the current situation, these efforts are more urgent than ever.
 45. Labor migration in the region increased considerably during the period covered by this report. The changes in the region's migratory flows stand out, particularly the decrease in emigration to North America or Europe, the increase in intra-regional migration, especially due to the massive emigration from Venezuela, and the caravans of migrants from Central America to North America. This scenario poses unprecedented challenges for the labor inclusion of people in a situation of labor mobility.
 46. There was consensus in recognizing the positive effect of migrant workers in host communities as agents of growth and drivers of consumption. However, in the current situation, this group is in a degree of greater vulnerability, making it necessary to strengthen the design and implementation of strategies for the effective enforcement of their labor rights.
 47. Informality is one of the factors that most hinders the labor, social and economic integration of the migrant population in host communities, since the larger the informal sector, the greater the risk that the migrant population will substitute the native population in the workplace.
 48. It is imperative to move towards a regional mechanism for the recognition of skills, certification of competencies, and validation of qualifications for the adequate insertion of migrant workers into the labor market in host countries in order to advance the socioeconomic integration of the migrant population.
 49. Public employment services play a fundamental role in the effective integration of migrant workers into the labor market. There is a tendency in the region, both in host and return countries, to specialize these services specifically for the attention of the migrant population.
 50. The Portfolio of responses from Ministries of Labor to COVID-19 and the Repository of Guidelines and Protocols for Deconfinement and Return to Work, developed by the Inter-

American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) and available on its website, were recognized as useful tools that provided input and ideas on the way forward to formulate policies to respond to the crisis.

51. There is broad consensus that the current situation has given even more relevance to hemispheric cooperation on labor issues, which is why a call was made to strengthen the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) as a permanent cooperation forum to advance regional priorities in labor issues. It was emphasized that the challenges in making contributions to the RIAL's Voluntary Contribution Fund stem from budgetary and administrative obstacles, and a call was made to explore additional forms of contributions.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the work carried out on the various topics and so that the Member States can continue to benefit from these exchanges and discussions, Working Group 2 respectfully recommends that the Ministers of Labor take the following recommendations into consideration in preparing the Plan of Action of the next IACML:

1. Strengthen mechanisms and instances to achieve an institutionalized and transversal social dialogue in the process of policy formulation for the construction of a new normality that builds fairer, more equitable, and resilient societies.
2. Develop and implement, in a tripartite manner and with social dialogue, strategies that revitalize occupational health and safety management and the right to occupational health as fundamental axes of the new normality, and promote a preventive approach that includes awareness and education campaigns.
3. Consolidate and develop permanent intersectoral communication and coordination mechanisms that continue to address the most pressing labor issues in the new normal, such as occupational health and safety, labor inspection, child labor, and labor migration.
4. Strengthen labor inspection as one of the central institutions to safeguard the health and safety of workers and guarantee compliance with labor legislation in both urban and rural areas. To this end, provide the necessary training and resources to inspectors, accelerate the implementation of technological tools to streamline and make their work more effective, provide the necessary tools to address the most vulnerable populations, such as translation tools to assist territories with high rates of migrant workers, among others. Design inspection supporting programs with a preventive approach, through information campaigns and innovative strategies.
5. Continue to develop and promote alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, especially mediation and conciliation, as an effective method for achieving compliance with labor legislation, ensuring respect for workers' rights, discouraging recidivism of labor infractions, and decongesting the judicial system.
6. Accelerate and deepen the efforts made during the pandemic to increase both contributory and non-contributory social protection coverage, and move towards universal social protection, recognizing that it is an integral strategy to combat inequality and build fairer, more equitable, and resilient societies.
7. Continue the development of programs and strategies that address the problem of child labor

- from an intersectoral approach, both horizontally among the Ministries involved, as well as vertically with local authorities. Strengthen and adapt existing programs to prevent children and adolescents from entering child labor due to the pandemic. Continue and strengthen the implementation of programs with the private sector and workers' organizations to guarantee value chains free from child labor, and develop initiatives or alliances to provide accurate qualitative and quantitative information on the presence or risk of child labor in order to redirect efforts to the areas of greatest risk.
8. Ensure, in conjunction with migration authorities, workers' and employers' organizations, compliance with the rights of migrant workers in the region, through information strategies on their labor rights, the strengthening of labor inspection to provide comprehensive care to this population, the development of targeted inspections and campaigns focused on combating discrimination and xenophobia. Continue the development of programs aimed at the labor inclusion of migrant workers, including formalization strategies and the adaptation of employment services to serve them.
 9. Promote the process of digital transformation of the Ministries of Labor and continue deepening the efforts made to digitize their services as an axis of institutional strengthening that allows to better serve workers, workers' and employers' organizations, and the general public.
 10. Continue strengthening the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) and use its tools, such as virtual meetings, portfolio of programs and calls for bilateral cooperation, as a means to strengthen the human and institutional capacities of the Ministries of Labor and contribute to the recovery process and the creation of a new and better normality. To make a call for contributions to the Voluntary Contribution Fund that will allow the Network to function, as well as to explore new forms of contribution.

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REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES TO THE
XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR

INTRODUCTION

This Report, prepared by the Technical Secretariat of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML), headed by the Department of Human Development, Education and Employment of the OAS Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), presents the major results achieved in compliance with the Declaration and Plan of Action of Bridgetown, adopted at the XX IACML held in Bridgetown, Barbados in December 2017, as well as to address the crisis generated by COVID-19. The Report covers the period from December 2017 to September 2021, lists the major results achieved, and highlights some of the activities carried out. Annex 1 contains a detailed list of all the activities undertaken.

The IACML's main tools for fulfilling ministerial commitments are the Working Groups and the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), created by the Conference itself to strengthen the human and institutional capacities of the Ministries of Labor through cooperation. The Working Groups of the XX IACML and their leaders are:

- Working Group 1: "Integrated public policies for productive employment and decent work with social inclusion" - Chair: Minister of Labor of Ecuador. Vice Chairs: Ministers of Labor of Brazil and Chile.
- Working Group 2: "Institutional strengthening to promote and protect the rights and obligations of workers and employers and foster cooperation" - Chair: Minister of Labor of Argentina. Vice Chairs: Ministers of Labor of Costa Rica and Canada

The IACML process is led by the troika, currently comprised of the Ministries of Labor of Mexico, Barbados, and Argentina, and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Working Groups. It has two employers' and workers' consultative bodies: the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE) and the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL). Its cooperation Network – the RIAL – is funded by contributions of the Ministries of Labor and, during this period, had an important contribution from the Labour Program of Employment and Social Development Canada. It is also works in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other international organizations, including the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Bank (WB) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). To all of them, the Technical Secretariat expresses its deep appreciation for the results achieved and informed in this Report.

1. Contributing to the response to COVID-19 by the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) and the Working Groups

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, declared as such by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, was responded to very quickly by the governments of the region, which deployed various measures to protect workers' health and contain contagion, safeguard employment and businesses, and provide minimum income levels. The Secretariat accompanied that rapid response by launching on April 1 the "Portfolio of Responses of Ministries of Labor to COVID-19" on the web page of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), listing 69 measures. Since then, it has continuously updated this tool, which, as of September 2021, contains 491 measures.

The Ministries have recognized that this Portfolio has been extremely useful, as it has allowed them to learn about the policies implemented by their peers in the region to address the crisis, and to identify practices that could be applied in their own countries. Subsequently, when governments in other latitudes were initiating reopening processes, the Secretariat launched a set of "Guidelines and Protocols for de-confinement and return to work" on May 1, 2020, to provide the Ministries of Labor of the Americas with real-time updated information on these measures that could help shape their own efforts. This repository has also been permanently updated and to this date gathers more than 70 guidelines and protocols from around the world.

The Secretariat and the IACML process demonstrated their ability to adapt nimbly to new circumstances and the relevance of their governance strategy. Thanks to the existence of a group of legitimate and committed authorities, in May 2020, in light of the pandemic, the IACML Work Plan 2018-2020, which by then had been fully implemented, was revised. Some of the main decisions taken to tailor the Plan to the new circumstances were: to hold an additional meeting of the Working Groups to analyze the impacts of the pandemic and government responses; to conduct bilateral RIAL activities virtually; and to transform a face-to-face workshop on gender into a broader training program.

The discussions and exchange of experiences that took place within the Working Group meetings and RIAL activities during this period contributed to decision-making and helped shape policies and programs in priority areas in the context of the pandemic.

- **Telework, working from home, and work on digital platforms:** These phenomena were already expanding in the region prior to the pandemic, accelerated as a result of it, and are today irreversibly embedded in the world of work. Within the OAS/IACML framework, governments shared regulations and measures adopted, and discussed the opportunities and challenges posed by these new forms of employment, particularly in terms of gender equality. The main conclusions and recommendations arising out of these deliberations are contained in the Report of Working Group 1 to the XXI IACML and are discussed in section 2 of this report.
- **Social protection:** Like other structural weaknesses in the region, low social protection coverage made responding to the pandemic even more complex. Within the Working Groups, the Ministries of Labor analyzed this challenge pursuant to the commitment to ensure the sustainability and coverage of social security systems contained in Article 22 of the Declaration of Bridgetown and agreed on the need to move toward universal social protection. RIAL also served as a vehicle for addressing social protection issues; for example, through the first virtual cooperation, the Ministry of Labor of Argentina now has new policy alternatives to improve its social security system, after receiving technical assistance from Canada.

- **Occupational health and safety:** Measures to ensure the health and safety of workers have been central to the response to the pandemic in its various stages, from confinement to recovery. In the discussions within the IACML, the governments analyzed the approaches adopted, acknowledged that during the pandemic coordination between ministries of labor and health was strengthened, and agreed on the opportunity afforded by this greater coordination and the current situation in general for occupational health and safety to be addressed from a preventive angle. These conclusions build on the commitments of the XX IACML (Articles 9, 29, and 30 of the Declaration) to strengthen interagency coordination and promote a culture of prevention. Within the framework of the RIAL, the Ministries of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, and Mexico received technical assistance from Barbados, Panama, and Canada, respectively, to improve their occupational health and safety regulations and procedures.

The transition to virtuality made it possible to review and improve the procedures for RIAL's bilateral cooperation activities. Among the main strengths identified in this modality were the opportunity for provider institutions to lend support for a longer period of time (months), in addition to the exchange and systematization of information between virtual sessions for more strategic approaches focusing on the objectives and strengths of the countries involved.

2. Moving towards recovery with gender equality: Gender Mainstreaming in Ministries of Labor

Eliminating the gaps that persist between men and women in the world of work has been a constant concern of the IACML and even more of a priority in recent years; indeed, the XX IACML espoused gender equality as a core issue. Considering that the pandemic has disproportionately affected women and that participation and employment gaps have widened, this concern has taken on greater urgency. Therefore, since the last IACML, more actions have been taken than ever before during the Conference to contribute to gender equality. It is worth mentioning that, prior to the pandemic, the IACML Work Plan contemplated a face-to-face RIAL workshop in Argentina on gender mainstreaming, which was replaced by several actions reported below.

In compliance with the mandates of the IACML (Articles 23 and 24 of the Declaration, and 7.h of the Plan of Action of Bridgetown), efforts undertaken during this period were aimed at supporting the Ministries of Labor in strengthening gender mainstreaming in their operations, policies, and programs, and, over the past year, have focused in particular on gender-sensitive telework and addressing gender-based violence in the workplace. All activities have been carried out in close collaboration with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and have led to the following results:

- **Updated overview and new steps to be pursued to strengthen gender mainstreaming in Ministries of Labor:** One of the most important deliverables of the IACML in this period is the study "The Institutionalization of the Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas: Balance of a decade", which the Technical Secretariat presents to the XXI IACML. The study takes as its baseline the report presented to the XVI IACML in 2009, which conducted a first regional analysis of the situation of the Ministries in terms of gender mainstreaming. After 10 years and multiple cooperation and training activities within the framework of the OAS and other spheres, the study notes significant progress and makes recommendations aimed at continuing to strengthen gender units or areas, in the understanding that they play a key part in steering gender policy in the Ministries.

- **Greater collaboration and agenda-setting on key issues for gender equality:** During two hemispheric dialogues with the participation of more than 25 countries, specialists and officials from the Ministries of Labor discussed the challenges posed by the pandemic in terms of equality, opportunities for gender mainstreaming, and priority areas for action. The second dialogue, focused on telework and caregiving co-responsibility, resulted in the identification of concrete elements that a telework policy should have to ensure that this new form of work contributes to achieving an equitable distribution of care tasks and closing gender gaps in employment. Those dialogues have paved the way for a network of gender focal points within the RIAL/OAS. At the same time, RIAL's bilateral cooperation efforts have helped consolidate important measures for equality; for example, Costa Rica's national policy on domestic work (mostly female) has been developed using elements of the experience gained in Uruguay, the first country to ratify the ILO Convention on the subject.
- **More training on gender-based violence in the workplace:** A virtual course on gender-based violence in the workplace was designed and is being implemented in the Educational Portal of the Americas, with a view to developing skills to identify, address, and counteract this type of violence, as well as to provide participants with tools to replicate this knowledge in Ministries of Labor. In September 2021 the Course began its pilot phase with gender specialists from the Ministries of Labor.
- **New Gender Unit Manual:** At the request of the Ministries of Labor, especially in the Caribbean, RIAL/OAS is developing a Manual or ABC to strengthen already operating units and support the creation of new units within the Ministries. The Manual, currently under consultation, contains guidelines on unit objectives, functions, and activities.

3. Improving coordination between education and employment: Skills for the future and qualification frameworks

There is broad consensus among the Ministries of Labor and Education of the OAS on the need to achieve greater coordination between education and employment, recognizing that it is essential to close the skills gap, improve youth employment, take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the future of work, and, currently, achieve sustainable and inclusive economic recovery.

The IACML, in coordination with the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), has taken important steps to strengthen this intersectoral coordination. It has not only conducted intersectoral dialogues during ministerial meetings, where this commitment has been endorsed at the highest level but has also pursued valuable technical activities. Since the XX IACML and in compliance with the mandates of the Bridgetown Declaration and Plan of Action (Articles 4, 7, and 8 of the Declaration and 7.d of the Plan of Action), the Technical Secretariat has coordinated a series of actions resulting in:

- **Expanded regional analysis and cooperation on skills for the future:** Specialists from Ministries of Labor and Education of the OAS Member States, international organizations, the private sector, academic institutions, and representatives of workers and employers gathered in May 2019 in Santiago for the RIAL Workshop "Skills for the Future: Coordination between Ministries of Education and Labor", organized by the OAS with the support of ILO, through its specialized training center, CINTERFOR. During the event, a better understanding was achieved of the challenges that accelerated technological change and the transformation of the world of work are generating in education and training systems.

Trends and methodologies for developing future (technical and socio-emotional) skills were discussed, and participants analyzed experiences of joint work and/or coordination between Ministries of Labor and Education, as well as with other public and private actors, in the identification and development of the skills for the future.

- **Identification of actions and policy recommendations to improve education-work articulation and develop the skills for the future:** As a result of the wide-ranging exchange of ideas during the Workshop, government, academic and international organization specialists made recommendations: the need to rethink and orient education and training to the development of skills, adjust their content and teaching methods to facilitate the development of technical and socio-emotional skills (essential in the future of work) and be able to adjust quickly to the rapid changes in the environment; ensure that education policies and strategies to develop skills for the future are State policies, not government policies; strengthen teacher training and continuous updating in digital skills; revalue technological and technical higher education and ensure its quality; establish mechanisms to link education and job training systems in order to facilitate the transition between the two systems; incorporate an inclusion and equality approach in education and training policies and strategies; develop national and regional qualification frameworks; strengthen labor market information systems to analyze and project current and future demand for skills and to support policy decision-making and guide the provision of training.
- **New partnerships with key players in education and training in technical and digital skills:** The Technical Secretariat has strengthened its ties with institutions that provide online training and develop key technical and digital skills for the future of work. It signed agreements with the Internet Society, with which it will provide training to the Ministries of Labor and Education on Internet governance, among other topics, and with Structuralia, a firm specializing in engineering and technology training. It has also strengthened its relationship with J-Wel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), a pioneer of open education, and Coursera, one of the world's largest providers of online training.
- **Development of a Regional Qualifications Framework:** In the past five years, several countries in the region have initiated the implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in order to solve challenges relating to the quality and relevance of education and to ensure the articulation of the education system and job training, among other purposes. Therefore, the time is right to work on a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) that can serve as a benchmark at the regional level for countries that are beginning to develop their National Qualifications Frameworks or are already in the process of implementing them. The Technical Secretariat has partnered with ILO, through its specialized center for vocational training, CINTERFOR, and UNESCO, to advance towards a RQF that will serve as a meta-framework with a matrix of descriptors, levels, and principles for the usability and comparability of National Frameworks. Under the leadership of CINTERFOR/ILO, the three agencies launched the Online Course-Workshop "Moving towards a regional qualifications framework", held between July and September 2021, to build capacity in national teams on the concept and feasibility of a RQF and familiarize them with its concepts, rationale, classification, and guiding principles.
- **More cooperation to enhance youth employment strategies.** The Ministries of Labor of Ecuador, Peru, Honduras, Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, and Saint Lucia received direct and specially tailored technical assistance from Panama, Argentina, and Jamaica through RIAL to improve their youth employment strategies, including vocational training initiatives, skills certification, and employment services. The knowledge transferred

has had a real impact, resulting, for instance, in the review of programs that have enabled the placement of more than 60,000 young people in formal jobs in Ecuador and in the design of a pilot youth employment program in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Strategies for training, re-skilling and, in general, skills development and certification, are a core factor for the recovery of employment in the region following the havoc wrought by the pandemic. Their effectiveness depends to a large extent on coordination between education, labor and employment policies; as part of that effort, the IACML and RIAL will continue to promote better coordination between the Ministries of Labor and Education.

4. Strengthening social dialogue at the hemispheric level

In the Declaration of Bridgetown, the Ministers undertook to "promote institutional, open, and inclusive mechanisms and forums for social dialogue" (Article 21). Within the framework of the OAS, social dialogue continued to be reaffirmed in this period with the participation of workers (through COSATE) and employers (through CEATAL) in the OAS General Assemblies in 2018, 2019 and 2020 and the Eighth Summit of the Americas, held in Lima, Peru, in April 2018.

In addition, COSATE and CEATAL participated vigorously in all the activities carried out during the period covered by this Report, presenting their perspectives and proposals on the different topics covered. Especially noteworthy is their participation in the preparatory process leading up to the XXI IACML and their contributions to the draft Declaration and Action Plan to be approved at that ministerial meeting.

Within the framework of RIAL, one major outcome has been:

- **Greater emphasis on trade union training:** Bolstering social dialogue also requires strengthening social actors. In that connection, RIAL bilateral cooperation included, for instance, advice for Paraguay from Argentina on the structuring and implementation of training centers administered by trade union confederations, which are already in operation, while the Ministry of Labor of Peru, specifically the Secretariat of the Tripartite Council for Labor and Employment Promotion, was able to strengthen its project for leadership training schools for social dialogue based on the experience of trade union training schools in Chile.

5. Contributing to improving compliance with labor laws and fundamental principles and rights at work

The Ministries of Labor have recognized that the region has extensive and comprehensive labor legislation; however, they agree that there are significant compliance and enforcement challenges. Accordingly, the Declaration and Plan of Action of Bridgetown contain commitments and guidelines to strengthen inspection systems and effectively implement national legislation and international labor standards, in particular Articles 25 of the Declaration and Article 9. a, b, d, f, and h of the Plan of Action.

During the period covered by the Report, work with the Ministries in this area was performed through Working Groups, during various bilateral RIAL cooperation activities and, in particular, at the RIAL Workshop "Strategies to Improve Compliance with Labor Legislation" held in San José, Costa Rica in 2018 in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and with the

participation of 20 Ministries of Labor, COSATE and CEATAL. Results achieved include, in particular:

- **Identification of lessons learned and policy recommendations to improve compliance with legislation:** The discussions and exchange of experiences made it possible to identify lessons and recommendations for strengthening labor inspection, improving alternative labor dispute resolution, and coordinating actions between Ministries of Labor and other government agencies to improve compliance with legislation. Recommendations and policies for the Ministries of Labor include: Promote awareness and information campaigns on labor legislation; provide more training and define the qualifications required of personnel in charge of conciliation and mediation; formalize collaboration with other agencies; increase the use of technology in labor inspection; and carry out preventive inspections.
- **Promoting actions throughout the region to eradicate child labor:** In a milestone for RIAL, the 100th bilateral cooperation activity was carried out during this period, in which the Colombian Ministry of Labor shared its intervention model for preventing and eradicating child labor in the coffee sector with Honduras. Also, in 2019, inspectors from Mexico's Ministry of Labor received training from Argentina's Ministry of Labor to identify and prevent child labor. During 2021, designated as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor, the Technical Secretariat has partnered with the ILO - within the framework of the Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor Regional Initiative -, to jointly develop bilateral cooperation on this issue. As of the date of this report, these activities are underway, as a result of which Panama is expected to establish a Network of Businesses against child labor following technical assistance from Argentina, Costa Rica is expected to develop a business seal with the cooperation of Peru, and Guatemala is expected to improve the capacity of labor inspection to prevent, eradicate, and punish child labor, particularly in the sugar sector, following the direct assistance it is receiving from Panama.
- **Advancements toward inclusion and non-discrimination in employment:** RIAL's Working Groups and bilateral actions made it possible to address challenges and exchange strategies to improve the labor market insertion of vulnerable groups, particularly people with disabilities and migrant workers, by identifying some successful practices such as awareness-raising and sensitization actions. The discussions were in response to Article 27 of the Declaration and Article 7, f and h of the Plan of Action.

CONCLUSIONS

The XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) in 2021 finds the Americas in a very different context than the one that led to the Declaration and Plan of Action of Bridgetown, adopted during the last Conference in 2017. This report informs not only of the compliance with said documents, but also of the efforts within the IACML and its cooperation network – the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) – to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

In the past 4 years, the Conference, as a hemispheric sectoral process, has achieved important results:

- **It contributed to governments' efforts to face the crisis and achieve a fair and sustainable recovery** by enabling debate and the definition of recommendations and next steps on crucial topics in the framework of the pandemic, such as social protection,

occupational safety and health, telework, work from digital platforms, training and reskilling. This is thanks to spaces for dialogue in Working Group meetings and regional dialogue, as well as permanent cooperation among Ministries within the RIAL.

- **It advanced towards a gender-equal recovery.** Since the last IACML, more actions have been taken to contribute to gender equality than ever before during the Conference. The results are the following: An updated panorama and study, in addition to new lines of action to strengthen gender institutionalization in Ministries of Labor; greater cooperation on key topics for gender equality, including a document stating the elements required for a telework policy that contributes to an equal distribution of household duties and closing gender gaps at the workplace; an operation manual for gender units; and more training and tools to end gender-based violence at work through a Virtual Course developed alongside the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) in the Educational Portal of the Americas.
- **It increased cooperation among Ministries of Labor and Education about skills for the future and qualification frameworks.** In response to the trends related to the future of work and, currently, to the renowned importance given to training and reskilling for the recovery, the Technical Secretariat, in partnership with ILO/CINTERFOR and key actors, has increased the cooperation among Ministries of Labor and Education and their opportunities for training on skills for the future and regional qualification frameworks. In an Inter-sectoral Hemispheric Workshop of the RIAL, governments agreed on the need for reconsidering and orienting education and training to the development of skills for the future, including digital and socio-emotional skills.
- **It showed great adaptability and proved the relevance of its governance model, its Working Groups and the RIAL** in responding to emerging unexpected challenges in the world of work. In less than three weeks after the pandemic was declared, the RIAL launched its Portfolio of responses from Ministries of Labor to COVID-19, and soon after, the IACML authorities modified and extended the Work Plan to include new activities while also reformulating pending activities.
- **It further strengthened social dialogue at the hemispheric level**, with active participation from COSATE and CEATAL in all its activities and the OAS General Assembly.
- **It contributed to improving compliance with labor legislation and fundamental principles and rights at work** by facilitating regional dialogue and technical cooperation among Ministries. The resulting document after the RIAL Workshop on the subject identifies policy recommendations to reinforce labor inspections, improve alternative dispute resolution, and coordinate actions among Ministries of Labor and other government agencies to foster legislation compliance.
- **It increased cooperation to improve youth employment and eradication of child labor strategies.** Multiple actions by the RIAL enabled direct technical advice among Ministries to revise and improve youth employment strategies – including professional training and employment services initiatives – as well as actions to prevent and eradicate child labor in partnership with the ILO.
- **It established regional positions and defined actions to be taken in the region to build a world of work with sustainable development and social justice.** During Working Group meetings, bilateral cooperation and other activities by the RIAL, governments identified progress and challenges in several critical topics for the world of work, established regional

positions, and determined actions to follow, which are captured in the Draft Declaration and Draft Plan of Action of Buenos Aires, to be adopted in the XXI IACML.

The Technical Secretariat would like to give special thanks to the Ministries of Labor of Barbados – Chair of the XX IACML –, Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Costa Rica and Canada – members of the troika and Working Group authorities for this period –, whose leadership was essential to achieve these results. The Secretariat also appreciates the commitment of COSATE and CEATAL and the partnership with the ILO, PAHO, IDB and other international organizations.

The XXI IACML finds the region in one of the toughest moments in its history, after the pandemic deepened existing gaps and harshly revealed challenges to be solved, such as informality, low social protection coverage, gender inequality, youth unemployment, and inequalities between vulnerable populations in the labor market, among others. The Technical Secretariat, within the OAS General Secretariat, reaffirms its commitment to inter-American solidarity, dialogue and cooperation, which, today, are urgent and indispensable instruments to realize a more decent and fair world of work, as well as a sustainable and human-centered recovery.

ANNEX TO THE REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT
ACTIVITIES OF THE INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR
2018 - 2021

Planning Meeting of the XX IACML: Washington D.C., United States, April 26th and 27th, 2018

Virtual Meetings of the Authorities of the XX IACML:

- January 25th, 2019
- February 13th, 2020
- May 22nd, 2020 – (to take decisions considering the COVID-19 pandemic)
- January 28th, 2021

Meetings of the Working Groups within the XX IACML:

- First Meeting: Quito, Ecuador, December 3 and 4, 2019
- Second Meeting: Virtual, September 10 and 15, 2020

Workshops and seminars of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL):

- Hemispheric Workshop on Strategies to improve compliance with Labor Legislation. San José, Costa Rica, December 6 and 7, 2018
- Inter-sectoral Workshop on “Skills for the Future: Contributions from the Ministries of Education and Labor”. Santiago, Chile, May 16 and 17, 2019.
- Hemispheric Dialogue to advance the institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor. Virtual. November 28, 2020.
- Hemispheric Dialogue on Telework and caregiving co-responsibility for a gender-responsive recovery. Virtual. May 26, 2021

RIAL/OAS actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Launch of the Portfolio of Responses from Ministries of Labor to COVID-19 in the RIAL website, gathering 491 government measures as of today.
- Launch of the Repository of Guidelines and Protocols for Reopening and Return to Work in the RIAL website, gathering 70 guidelines and protocols as of today.

Dialogues of Workers and Private Sector, with interventions from COSATE and CEATAL, in the OAS General Assembly and the Summit of the Americas

- Within the 8th Summit of the Americas: Lima, Peru, April 12, 2018
- Within the XLVIII OAS General Assembly: Washington, D.C., United States, June 3-5, 2018
- Within the XLIX OAS General Assembly: Medellin, Colombia, June 26, 2019
- Within the L OAS General Assembly: Virtual, October 29, 2020

Preparatory Meetings of the XXI IACML

- First Preparatory Meeting: Quito, Ecuador, December 5, 2019
- Second Preparatory Meeting: Virtual, July 28-30, 2021

Other important activities following up on XX IACML mandates:

- Preparation, in partnership with the Inter-American Commission of Women and the Educational Portal of the Americas, the Course “Gender Violence at work” in 2021.
- Launch of the Virtual Course “Advancing towards a Regional Qualifications Framework” in partnership with ILO-Cinterfor, UNESCO and the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), in 2021
- Holding of the Webinar on “Social Dialogue with Results”, the experience of Castilla and Leon, Spain, on March 19th 2019.
- Webinars co-organized by ILO, PAHO and OAS on mental health at work, with occasion of the World Day of Occupational Safety and Health, April 2018
- Preparation and distribution of 90 virtual RIAL Newsletters from 2018 – 2021, completing 190 in RIAL history. These newsletters include news from the Ministries, activities and relevant studies.

RIAL Bilateral Cooperation Activities:

- On-site visit from Honduras to Colombia on Child Labor, August 27 – 31, 2018
- On-site visit from Ecuador to Panama on Youth Employment, August 27 - 31, 2018
- On-site visit from Barbados, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Lucia to Jamaica on Youth Employment, September 10 – 14, 2018
- Experts’ visit from Barbados to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on Occupational Safety and Health, September 10 – 14, 2018
- On-site visit from Mexico to Canada on Occupational Safety and Health, November 7 – 9, 2018
- Experts’ visit from Argentina to Peru on Professional Training and Skills Certification, November 13 – 17, 2018
- Experts’ visit from Argentina to Guatemala on Alternative Dispute Resolution, November 16 – 30, 2018
- On-site visit from Barbados to Panama on Labor Inspection, June 25 – 27, 2019
- On-site visit from Paraguay to Argentina on Trade Union Training, August 27 – 30, 2019
- On-site visit from Costa Rica to Uruguay on Domestic Work, September 9 – 12, 2019
- Experts visit from Mexico to Peru on Labor Inspection, September 10 – 11, 2019
- Experts visit from Argentina to Mexico on Child Labor, September 23 – 26, 2019
- Experts visit from Colombia to Ecuador on Labor Migration, October 16 – 17, 2019
- Experts visit from El Salvador to Argentina on Alternate Dispute Resolution, October 11 – 15, 2019
- Virtual cooperation between Argentina and Canada on Pensions System, September 29 – November 24, 2020 (three sessions)
- Virtual cooperation between Honduras and Peru on Employment services, November 2 – December 17, 2020 (two sessions)

- Virtual cooperation between Peru and Chile on Trade Union Training Schools (*on-going, two sessions undertaken on July 14 and August 27, 2021*)
- Virtual cooperation between Guatemala and Panama on Child labor (*on-going, two sessions undertaken on July 16th and August 23rd, 2021*)
- Virtual cooperation between Panama and Argentina on Business Network Against Child Labor (*on-going, one session undertaken on August 19th, 2021*)
- Virtual cooperation between Costa Rica and Peru on Good Practices on Child Labor Seal (*on-going, one session undertaken on August 30th, 2021*)
- Virtual cooperation between Trinidad and Tobago and Canada on violence and harassment in the workplace (*on-going, one session undertaken on September 13th, 2021*)

Pending RIAL Bilateral Cooperation (postponed due to the pandemic):

- On-site visit from Guatemala to Ecuador on labor inclusion of people with disabilities
- On-site visit from Panama to Chile on Labor Inspection in the mining sector
- Experts visit from Barbados to Belize on Occupational Safety and Health
- On-site visit from Bolivia to Colombia on internal management

* 16 RIAL bilateral cooperation activities were undertaken between 2018 and 2021, completing 115 since 2006 and achieving direct technical assistance among 30 Ministries of Labor in the region. 4 virtual bilateral cooperation are still ongoing, and 4 more are pending, since they were postponed due to the pandemic.

**The meetings of the Working Groups and RIAL Workshops undertaken within the XX IACML had the participation of an average of 24 countries, as well as COSATE and CEATAL and experts from ILO, PAHO, IOM, World Bank, IDB and ECLAC.

ANNEX III –DECLARATIONS OF THE CONSULTATIVE BODIES

- Joint Declaration of COSATE and TUCA to the XXI IACML
- Declaration of CEATAL to the XXI IACML

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE
MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML)**
September 22-24, 2021
Washington, D.C., United States of America
VIRTUAL

OEA/Ser.K/XII.21.1
CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.13/21
22 September 2021
Original: Spanish

COSATE/TUCA DECLARATION

JOINT DECLARATION OF THE TRADE UNION TECHNICAL ADVISORY COUNCIL (COSATE)
AND THE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF THE AMERICAS (TUCA)

AT THE XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

The trade union movement of the Americas, represented by its continental organization, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) and the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE), in a meeting held virtually in the city of Buenos Aires on September 22, 2021, adopts the Declaration below within the XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor:

We agree on the terms upheld under the call for this Conference, which has as a theme “BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT WORLD OF WORK WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, DECENT WORK, PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION,” for the pandemic has revealed, now more than ever, the structural problems in our economies and the social inequality prevailing in our continents, along with the fact that the measures taken by most of the countries to mitigate the impact of the pandemic have been insufficient.

Furthermore, the pandemic has proved the importance of workers’ organizations as representatives of the legitimate interest of those whose jobs, income and health have been particularly affected, and who might fall into poverty and exclusion if appropriate social protection and labor policies are not implemented. The lack of effective Social Dialogue hinders response ever further, for governments and employers’ unilateral measures only increase difficulties for working people.

For this reason, it is essential to guarantee the right to freedom of association, collective bargaining at all levels and in all sectors of activity, whether public or private, as well as the right to strike. This would allow trade union organizations to express their point of view on not only labor relations at company levels but also on general issues directly or indirectly affecting workers.

Debates on strengthening democracy, social policies, macroeconomic approaches, among other topics, demand public positioning and alternative proposals from trade unions, given the socio-political role they play and the fact that this, as already mentioned, does not stop at mere professional vindication.

Therefore, we celebrate the substantive contribution made by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights through its Advisory Opinion No. 27/21 on May 5th, since it has revealed a wide world view regarding the

rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining and strike and their relation to other rights with a gender perspective.

We thoroughly agree with the Court's opinion when it states that:

- The rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining and strike are human rights protected within the inter-American framework, which compels States to adopt procedures to guarantee them. These procedures include access to effective legal counsel against violation of trade union rights; the prevention, investigation and punishment of those responsible for these violations; and the adoption of specific measures to ensure the continued enforcement of rights.
- Respecting and guaranteeing these rights is key to defend labor rights, and fair, equal and fulfilling conditions in the workplace.
- Labor rights set the minimum level of protection for workers' rights; thus, they cannot waive their labor rights, as stated in labor law, through collective bargaining.
- Trade union autonomy does not justify measures limiting women to exercise their trade union rights within their organizations. In fact, governments are compelled to adopt positive measures leading to formal and material equality for women in their union and workplace.
- Governments have the obligation to adapt their legislations and practices to the new labor market conditions and technological advances driving those changes. For this purpose, States have to encourage the effective participation of employers' and workers' representatives in the design of labor law and policies.

These observations made by the highest body for the protection of human rights in the region provide a solid foundation for trade union organizations to play a leading role in developing policies, plans and programs for the crisis recovery.

Moreover, the region's trade union movement launched the Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA) as a political proposal to build true democracy, with social justice and respect to the full exercise of freedom of association rights; and with economically sustainable, environmentally-friendly and inclusive social development. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its social, economic and health effects, we find in PLADA a powerful instrument to take action in the region.

In this sense, the key lines of action of TUCA and COSATE, usually collaborating for these purposes at the national level and within the OAS, have as a source of inspiration the resolution adopted during the Fourth Congress of TUCA. The resolution's priority areas for action, detailed below, are deemed relevant in the context of this Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor:

- a) *Sustainable development, with social justice and decent work as the main focus for an alternative agenda for the Americas*

For TUCA and COSATE, as a key concept and program for societies, development is based on the principles of environmental, economic and social justice, gender equity and equality, democracy and

human rights. On this basis, development promotes “decent work, freedom of association, universal social protection, people’s empowerment with effective presence of governments and the implementation of public policies to regulate economic and social activities, in order to ensure people’s needs are met.”

For subscribers, sustainable development means questioning and “challenging the current economic order, the commercialization and financialization of common goods and the inequalities behind the discriminatory and patriarchal system.” For this reason, we “support a model focusing on care and sustainability, starting with a profound change in the social metabolism and a new relationship with the environment.” In this debate, gender-based and territory-based social movements must not be left aside.

We restate our commitment to the defense of Occupational Health and Social Security as Human Rights and strategic elements of Decent Work. We reject any effort for the privatization of social security in the region, since individual capitalization perpetuates and increases existing inequalities, leading retiring workers into poverty.

The pandemic has proved the relevance of public systems of health and protection, considering that countries with strong systems in the region were more able to face the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic also revealed important deficiencies for frontline workers against COVID-19, especially for health workers, caretakers (which are mostly women) and essential services and production workers.

The production and distribution of vaccines against the virus are influenced by the power of international pharmaceutical companies, even when, in most cases, scientific development and production of vaccines were boosted by public resources and government aid.

Commercialization of vaccines hinders effective access for Latin America and the Caribbean. Protected by patents, intellectual property and confidentiality clauses, pharmaceutical companies have subjected countries to outrageous conditions to grant access to immunization. In our region, this is even more serious considering our fragile health systems, which are privatized and made to reap a profit.

TUCA and COSATE reaffirm the need for free universal healthcare and access to vaccines in the context of the pandemic. We urge governments to recognize COVID-19 as an occupational disease, in order to develop the necessary regulations to protect frontline workers and essential services and production workers.

On the other hand, in a region where informality and job insecurity rates are sky-high, capitalization as a utopia for all systems becomes undeniably unsustainable. Another area to be reviewed in our labor markets is that of those groups with inconsistent work paths. Such is the case of women responsible for unshared household duties, or women being discriminated against at work, where pay gaps reduce their incomes. Social security systems based on solidarity and redistribution, contributory and non-contributory mechanisms do not take advantage of those labor market deficiencies and, therefore, constitute an instrument to reduce such inequalities.

Trade Unions in the Americas regret that governments in the region lost the opportunity to agree on coherent responses to serve public health systems, increase social protection and protect decent work in the context of the pandemic. In this scenario, we state that the Organization of American States (OAS) itself has become irrelevant in the face of these critical challenges. Much on the contrary, during

the pandemic, the OAS has helped deepen differences, promote interference and destabilize democracies in the region.

b) *The defense of democracy and freedom of association to extend our rights*

For TUCA and COSATE, the democracy issue in the region is fundamental, as it should be defended and strengthened. This is because democracy not only has a civilizing value, but also because its interruption and the attacks on freedom always have workers as their first victims (violence, torture, murders and disappearances).

Moreover, democracy enables people to extend their rights and freedoms.

We declare, as the ILO did in its inaugural act in 1919, that social justice is the foundation of permanent universal peace.

As stated during the Fourth Congress of TUCA, peace is not only the absence of conflict, but also “the product of establishing fair social and economic conditions for the majority of the population.”

We also highlight that a substantial part of the democratic mechanism in society is the democratization of the media, in order to ensure full compliance with the right to freedom of expression and enable access to a wide range of sources of information, since these are proper public goods and basic human rights to be guaranteed by the State.

c) *The protection of work transformed by new technologies (digital platforms, telework, etc.)*

The world of work is subjected to fast changes in work formats, which, in many cases, require labor legislations to be adapted in order to appropriately protect those who perform their functions in these new scenarios.

Governments should take initiative to prevent such changes from affecting negatively on working conditions and salaries. Their lack of action so far has caused people working under these new formats to be considered freelancers instead of employees under a full contract, thus evading social protection regulations and undermining job security.

We claim that labor legislation must regain its protection aspect without falling into an approach that, relying on the argument of equality between parties in a contract, deny the radical asymmetry that exists between employer and employee when setting working conditions.

d) *Facing inequalities, promoting inclusion, and gender equity and equality:*

Lastly, there is another area of agreement between the theme of this Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor and the points of view of TUCA and COSATE: the ultimate consolidation of gender equality.

We call for policies that comply with the goals set during the Congress of TUCA, aimed at achieving “greater autonomy for women, so that they can develop capacities to make free and informed decisions, in order to live their lives according to their own ambitions and wishes, in the historical context that makes that possible, and in its political, economic and physical dimensions.”

The pandemic has deepened gender inequalities, which proves that governments must double their efforts to guarantee the right to live free from all kinds of violence and discrimination. They must

overturn barriers hindering access to the world of work, placing excessive care responsibilities, widening pay gaps and limiting women participation in political, social, or other organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated violence towards historically alienated groups, such as women, youngsters, aboriginal peoples, people of African descent, and LGBTIQ+ communities. But we have also seen how criminalization of and violence towards social activists and supporters, including trade union members, has increased dangerously in the region. Countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Honduras and Guatemala continue to be the most dangerous for trade union, environmental, and other human rights activists. Impunity, no governmental action and not adopting concrete measures for the protection and defense of activism constitute the main enablers of criminalization and violence.

To conclude, we state that:

We are strong supporters of institutionalized social dialogue as a tool to achieve crisis recovery and a future world of work that includes social justice and sustainable development.

Indeed, we consider social dialogue to be an essential mechanism to create trust among governments and social actors in the world of work; reach fair, equal and long-lasting agreements; prevent and resolve conflicts; promote responsible business behavior, and strengthen sustainable businesses. But, most of all, we believe social dialogue should favor the realization of greater margins for equality among the actors in the world of work. The cost of post-pandemic reconstruction cannot be paid by workers.

We state that collective bargaining is a fundamental instrument of social dialogue, since it represents the means by which workers and entrepreneurs, while exercising their freedom of association, agree on basic working conditions and set liaison terms between representatives.

We believe governments should approach the regulation of new work formats (digital platforms and telework) in a way that considers the inequalities between the parties involved and protects those specific working conditions accordingly.

We reaffirm what was said before about the value of PLADA as a trade unions' contribution to the debate on options/models for the development of the Americas, and demand an expansion of spaces to ensure the presence of representative social actors for the region, with an agenda that includes the interests of all countries.

We also reaffirm our commitment to strengthening the relationships with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the I/A Court H.R., and with the Commissioner for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We call on the OAS to continue working to guarantee these rights, in particular those related to trade union and labor rights, freedom of association and collective bargaining, as a key to fight inequality.

We demand promoting the development and implementation of campaigns and actions against violence towards women through the ratification of Convention 190 by all countries, since the isolation caused by the pandemic worsened the risk of harassment and violence in the workplace and at home. Trade unions in the Americas will continue their duty to follow-up on the issue and influence governments to ratify this fundamental instrument.

Finally, TUCA and COSATE confirm that they will keep supporting the work of trade union organizations in each country within the region, pulling together to defend democratic rights and, in particular, the interests of the working class. With this goal in mind, the Mesas Nacionales CSA (TUCA National Roundtables) have been established in Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Guatemala as priority countries in our strategic agenda for this period.

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML)**

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VIRTUAL

OEA/Ser.K/XII.21.1

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22 September 2021

Original: Spanish

CEATAL DECLARATION

DECLARATION OF THE BUSINESS TECHNICAL
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON LABOR MATTERS (CEATAL)
TO THE XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML) OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), held on September 22 - 24, 2021, the Employers of the Americas, represented through the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL), welcome the task attributed to the XXI IACML to reflect on the current social and economic context under the overarching theme “*Building a more resilient world of work with sustainable development, decent work, productive employment, and social inclusion*”.

To contribute to the XXI IACML, CEATAL hereby presents the following Declaration:

The economic and social disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic has been severe. According to a recent International Labour Organization (ILO) publication, in 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean saw a 7 per cent contraction in economic activity; more than double that of the rest of the world combined.¹ Evidence of the devastating impact can be felt in the high level of unemployment, a significant decrease in productivity, rising levels of corporate bankruptcy, a major contraction in average income and an increase in poverty. According to Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), no fewer than two million micro and small enterprises in the region have gone out of business permanently. This drastic reduction in business activity has had an unprecedented impact on employment in the region.

It is true that nine months into 2021, growth forecasts for the current year are much more promising. Both ECLAC and other international organizations have revised upwards their growth estimates for the region, which are around 6% and are based on the effects of higher international demand and an increase in the price of goods exported from the region. Domestic consumption is again more dynamic, especially in those sectors that have been most affected since the start of the pandemic. But growth forecasts for 2022 are somewhat lower (around 3.2), and although significant, this growth will still not be enough to compensate for the sharp decline in the region's economy in 2020.

The pandemic has revealed and spotlighted an array of weaknesses and vulnerabilities in institutions, policies and processes in most of the countries of the hemisphere. At the same time, it has created opportunities for countries to “build forward better”. There is more clarity on what needs to be addressed, how this might be accomplished, and also on the important role the most representative employer organisations and sustainable enterprises played in navigating the crisis and are and will be playing in any sustainable and resilient recovery strategy.

¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/---sro-port_of_spain/documents/genericdocument/wcms_819029.pdf

Employers in the Americas are convinced that democracy and the rule of law are essential requirements for generating economic growth and social progress in the Hemisphere. They are concerned about the actual enforcement of fundamental rights and guarantees in the event of their violation in a number of countries in the Hemisphere

Employers also believe work needs to begin immediately on reaching consensus on ways to create enabling environments for sustainable enterprises in every country in the Americas and drafting productive development policies for the region that help companies avoid bankruptcy and encourage improvements in productivity, innovation, the use of technology, and the qualification and training of workers.

In this regard, CEATAL calls on the Ministers of Labour of the Americas, as a matter of priority and in coordination with other ministries and institutions and with collaboration from the OAS, the ILO, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and other relevant international organizations to:

1. **Stimulate Job Creation.** There can be no clearer immediate objective than the need to stimulate and accelerate job creation, and to ensure that strong incentives are established to support entrepreneurs, businesses and workers in their quest for employment growth. This includes targeted incentives and the dismantling of obstacles that employers of all sizes face in driving growth and employment. Workers must be given improved access to diverse forms of employment, and actively supported through training and career guidance to ensure their relevance in a fast-evolving job market. This unprecedented challenge demands an unprecedented focus by countries in the Americas to strengthen or develop relevant regulatory frameworks and reforms that will revitalize job creation and underpin labour markets that are dynamic, flexible, inclusive and relevant for the post-Covid-19 era.
2. **Kick-start a New Era of Productivity.** In reshaping the world of work, a crucial objective for countries in the Americas must be to lay a new path towards greater productivity, which has remained elusive for so many years. Productivity growth is the route to raising standards of living. A focus on productivity paves the way to a more sustainable and resilient growth trajectory. It is essential to have programmes that encourage investment, technology transfer and applied innovation. Special attention should be paid to the situation of micro, small and medium companies, which face greater challenges accessing credit but also experience the most difficulties in finding workers with the qualifications they need. Countries in the Americas should commit to reigniting growth through a focus on productivity that benefits all members of society from upgrading the education of future workers and lifelong training of existing workers, to encouraging technologies that will augment the way we live and work, and reforms that will reduce labour market inefficiencies, remove unnecessary administrative and bureaucratic obstacles, and provide safeguards that ensure healthy, productive employment and decent work opportunities. Productivity increases are very closely linked to economic growth, which in turn reinforces the employment creation effect. Enterprises with higher productivity and efficiency rates are in a better position to invest in developing workers' skills, improving employment conditions, and creating new jobs. In turn, the higher the productivity, the higher the level of wages, and the greater the capacity of enterprises to create jobs. In this regard, CEATAL welcomes the commitment of the Ministers of Labour from the Americas as stated in para 10 of the Declaration of Buenos Aires.

3. Take determined actions to address challenges occasioned by informality and look for an array of innovative solutions that include transitions from informality to formality. People employed in the informal sector have been severely affected by lockdown measures for Covid-19. Finding incentives to ensure the participation of all stakeholders in rebuilding economies and developing financially sustainable social protection systems is critical. It is also essential to improve the framework conditions for companies to ensure that economic growth and employment is created in the formal sector, enhancing the productivity of the formal sector and creating an enabling business environment. This is not only the best means to reduce poverty, but also fundamentally important for the financial sustainability of social protection systems.

Despite clear divergences between countries in the region, making the “what” and the “how” vary widely, CEATAL is convinced that its recommendations apply to all countries in the Americas.

Finding solutions to these issues and designing a sustainable and resilient future for our societies requires the contribution of all sectors of society to ensure that no one is left behind. CEATAL recognizes that one of the strengths of the Inter American Conference of Ministers of Labour of the Organization of American States is the opportunities it provides for member countries to learn from and assist each other.

To face current economic and social problems, the region needs to have a broad and authentic social dialogue, based on the paradigm of collaboration and not on a culture of confrontation, where governments, employers and workers join forces to generate wealth, employment and opportunities for all. Therefore, it is necessary to request governments to design and implement national public policies that incorporate social dialogue to promote sustainable development. Long-term sustainability comes from meaningful social dialogue, solid social agreements, where decisions-making processes involve governments, employers and workers. In this spirit, Employers acknowledge with gratitude the relevance of institutionalized dialogue with workers and employer organizations through the Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE) and CEATAL. We reiterate our commitment to cooperate towards achieving a sustainable and resilient recovery in the Americas.

CEATAL highlights and thanks the valuable and ongoing technical and political support of the International Organization of Employers (IOE) for coordinating and ensuring that the business perspective is reflected in the different activities, documents and political agreements made during the IACML.

Finally, CEATAL wants to highlight the commitment of the Employers in the hemisphere to identifying and putting into action solutions to the challenging post- Covid-19 scenario. Among others, employers are ready to help workers make informed decisions on vaccination and to educate, exchange on, and advocate for effective treatment. Employers reiterate their commitment and ask Governments to do their part in promoting equal and fair access to treatments, medicines, and vaccinations for workers, employers, and individuals in developing economies, as well as for the most vulnerable wherever they may live. They highlight the value of the CONVINCENCE² initiative towards this end.

ANNEX IV – OTHER DOCUMENTS

- Work Schedule
- List of Participants
- List of documents presented by the General Secretariat

**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS OF LABOR (IACML)**
September 22-24, 2021
Washington, D.C., United States of America
VIRTUAL

OEA/Ser.K/XII.21.1
CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.3/21 rev.5
23 September 2021
Original: Spanish

WORK SCHEDULE

(Adopted during the first plenary session held on September 23, 2021)

“Building a more resilient world of work with sustainable development, decent work, productive employment, and social inclusion”

Wednesday, September 22nd

MEETINGS OF CONSULTATIVE BODIES (COSATE AND CEATAL)

8:00 – 9:00	Platform open for connection tests
9:00 – 10:15	MEETING OF THE TRADE UNION TECHNICAL ADVISORY COUNCIL (COSATE)
10:30 – 11:45	MEETING OF THE BUSINESS TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON LABOR MATTERS (CEATAL)
12:00 – 13:00	JOINT MEETING OF COSATE AND CEATAL

Thursday, September 23rd

8:30 – 9:30	Platform open for connection tests
9:30 – 10:00	INAUGURAL SESSION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Claudio Omar Moroni, Minister of Labor, Employment and Social Security of Argentina- Colin Jordan, Minister of Labor and Social Partnership Relations of Barbados, Chair of XX IACML- Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organization- Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of the American States
10:00 – 10:30	FIRST PLENARY SESSION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Election of the Chair of the XXI IACML and ratification of agreements adopted during the Preparatory Meeting.- Report from the Technical Secretariat on the follow-up to the XX IACML, by Kim Osborne, Executive Secretary for Integral Development of the OAS- Comments from delegations
10:30 – 10:45	BREAK

10:45 – 12:30 SECOND PLENARY SESSION: Institutionalized social dialogue to recover from the crisis and secure a future of work with social justice and sustainable development

Session with the Ministers of Labor and members of COSATE and CEATAL

- Introduction by the Chair of the XXI IACML
- Remarks by the President-elect of COSATE
- Remarks by the President-elect of CEATAL
- Open dialogue between the Ministers of Labor and the members of COSATE and CEATAL

12:30 – 13:45 LUNCH BREAK

13:45 – 15:30 THIRD PLENARY SESSION: The importance of the world of work to COVID-19 recovery and to the development of more resilient, sustainable, just, and inclusive societies

Interventions to open the dialogue (8 minutes each):

- Pablo Mieres, Minister of Labor and Social Security of Uruguay
- Silvia Lara Povedano, Minister of Labor and Social Security of Costa Rica
- Stephen Mc Clashie, Minister of Labour of Trinidad and Tobago
- Angel Custodio Cabrera, Minister of Labor of Colombia
- Onyx Lorenzoni, Minister of Labor and Welfare of Brazil
- Thea Lee, Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs, United States Department of Labor

Ministerial dialogue (fifty-five minutes)

15:30 Adjournment

Friday, September 24th

9:00 – 11:00 FOURTH PLENARY SESSION: Better coordination of economic, education, health and labor policies to address and overcome the effects of the crisis and achieve the future of work we want

Intervention from the Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Education:

- Darryl Matthew, Minister of Education of Antigua and Barbuda

Interventions from Ministers of Labor (8 minutes each):

- Patricio Melero Abaroa, Minister of Labor and Social Welfare of Chile
- Verónica Patricia Navia Tejada, Minister of Labor, Employment and Social Welfare of Bolivia
- Karl Samuda, Minister of Labour and Social Security of Jamaica

Ministerial dialogue (one hour and thirty minutes)

- 11:00 – 11:15 BREAK
- 11:15 - 12:45 FIFTH PLENARY SESSION: Strengthening ministries of labor to address emerging changes in the world of work and the effects of the pandemic
- Interventions to open the dialogue (8 minutes each):
- Luis Miguel de Camps, Minister of Labor of the Dominican Republic
 - Patricio Donoso, Minister of Labor of Ecuador
 - Wendy C. Phipps, Minister of Labor of Saint Kitts and Nevis
 - Olvin Villalobos Velásquez, Minister of Labor and Social Security of Honduras
- Ministerial dialogue (one hour)
- 12:45 – 14:15 LUNCH BREAK
- 14:15 – 15:00 SIXTH PLENARY SESSION
- Establishment of the working groups of the XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) and election of their authorities
 - Establishment of the XXII IACML host country
 - Consideration and adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action of Buenos Aires
- 15:00 – 15:30 CLOSING SESSION
- Ambassador Audrey P. Marks, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the OAS and Chair of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development
 - Claudio Omar Moroni, Minister of Labor, Employment and Social Security of Argentina.

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24 September 2021

Original: TEXTUAL

LISTA DE PARTICIPANTES /LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

***ESTADOS MIEMBROS ANTE LA ORGANIZACIÓN DE LOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS /
MEMBER STATES TO THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES***

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Head of delegation

Darryl Matthew*
Minister of Education

Alternate Head of delegation

Maureen Payne- Hyman
Parliamentary Secretary

Representatives

Stacey Gregg-Paige
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Public Safety and Labour

Pascall Kentish
Deputy Labour Commissioner
Ministry of Public Safety and Labour

Gillian Joseph
Alternate Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the OAS

ARGENTINA

Jefa de delegación

Claudio Omar Moroni
Ministro de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Jefe de delegación suplente

Gerardo Corres
Director de Asuntos Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Representantes

Luis Built Goñi
Secretario de Seguridad Social
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Leonardo Di Petro
Secretario de Empleo
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Carlos Alberto Sánchez
Subsecretario de Fiscalización del Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Eduardo Lepore
Director Nacional de Coordinación de los Regímenes de Seguridad Social
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Juan María Conte
Director Nacional de Fiscalización del Trabajo y de la Seguridad Social
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Marcelo Domínguez
Gerente general, Superintendencia de Riesgos Laborales
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Carmen Lemos Ibarra
Directora de Normalización y Certificación en la Calidad
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Ximenza Mazorra
Directora de Encuestas Laborales
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Gastón Gaspar Acosta
Director de Empleo Asalariado
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Patricia Sáenz
Directora Nacional de Protección e Igualdad Laboral
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Maria José Olguín
Analista Técnica
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

Representatives

Ieasha Deveaux
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

BARBADOS

Head of delegation

Colin Jordan
Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

Representatives

Karen Best
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

Joy Semple
Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

Claudette Hope-Greenidge
Chief Labour Officer
Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

Wayne Sobers
Deputy Chief Labour Officer
Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

Tricia Browne
Administrative Officer I
Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations

BELIZE

Head of delegation

Oscar Requena
Minister of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government

Alternate Head of delegation

Valentino Shal
Chief Executive Officer
Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government

BOLIVIA

Jefa de delegación

Verónica Patricia Navia Tejada
Ministra de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Representantes

Victor Pedro Quispe Ticona,
Viceministro de Trabajo y Previsión Social
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Ramiro Ariel Alanoca Mamani
Director General de Asuntos Sindicales
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Yecid Adalid, Mollinedo Mejía
Jefe de Gestión Jurídica
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Arturo Alessandre
Director General de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Julio César Choque Saramani
Jefe Departamental de Trabajo Santa Cruz
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Rubén Julio Estrada Candia
Jefe Departamental de Trabajo La Paz
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

Sintia Martha Lozada Vega
Jefa Departamental de Trabajo Cochabamba
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Previsión Social

BRASIL

Chefe de Delegação

Onyx Lorenzoni
Ministro de Estado de Trabalho e Previdência

Representantes

Pablo Braga Costa Pereira,
Coordenador-Gral de Relações Internacionais
Ministerio do Trabalho e Previdência

Durval Aires de Menezes Neto
Assistente da Coordenador-Gral de Relações Internacionais
Ministerio do Trabalho e Previdência

Jackson Luiz Lima Oliveira
Primeiro Secretário
Missão Permanente do Brasil junto à Organização dos Estados Americanos

CANADA

Head of delegation

Jose Bazan
Deputy Director
Labour Program

Representatives

Rebeca Gowan
Deputy Director
Labour program

Lareine Passey
Senior Policy Analyst
Labour Program

Marijo Dumont-Labrie
Policy Analyst
Labour Program

Andres Rojas
Policy Analyst
Labour Program

CHILE

Jefe de delegación

Patricio Melero Abaroa
Ministro de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Jefe de delegación suplente

Issa Kort Garriga
Representante Permanente ante la OEA

Representantes

Felipe Aravena
Representante Alterno
Misión Permanente de Chile ante la OEA

Pedro Pablo Silva Sánchez
Jefe de Asuntos Internacionales, Subsecretaría de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Maximiliano Gilabert Luco
Oficina de Asuntos Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo Chile

COLOMBIA

Jefe de delegación

Angel Custodio Cabrera Báez
Ministro de Trabajo

Jefe de delegación alterno

Alejandro Ordoñez Maldonado
Embajador, Representante Permanente de Colombia ante la OEA

Representantes

Adriana Maldonado Ruiz
Ministra Plenipotenciaria
Misión Permanente de Colombia ante la OEA

Gloria Gaviria Ramos
Jefe de la Oficina de Cooperación y Asuntos Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo

Germán Enrique Herrera Toloza
Primer secretario de Relaciones Exteriores,
Misión Permanente de Colombia ante la OEA

Paola Andrea Tarazona Archila,
Asesora
Ministerio de Trabajo

Daniela Aragón Sallieg
Asesora
Ministerio de Trabajo

Lorena Arboleda
Asesora
Ministerio de Trabajo

Nicolás Higuera González

Tercer Secretario de Relaciones Internacionales
Misión Permanente de Colombia ante la OEA

COSTA RICA

Jefe de delegación

Silvia Lara Povedano
Ministra de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Jefe de delegación alterno

Ricardo Marín Azofeifa
Viceministro de Trabajo del Área Laboral
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Representantes

Alejandra Solano Cabalceta
Embajadora, Representante Permanente de Costa Rica - OEA

Natalia Alvarez Rojas
Viceministra de Trabajo del Área Social
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Walter Villalobos Fernández
Director Nacional de Inspección de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Adriana Quesada Hernández
Directora de Asuntos Laborales
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Marcos Tulio Solano Chacón
Director Nacional de Empleo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Marisol Bolaños Gudiño
Jefa de Asuntos Internacionales del Trabajo (a.i)
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Ana Lucía Blanco Valverde
Asesora de Asuntos Internacionales del Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Laura Raquel Pizarro Viales
Ministro Consejero
Misión de Costa Rica ante la OEA

DOMINICA

Chief of delegation

Kelvin Pacquette
Ministry of National Security and Home Affairs

ECUADOR

Jefe de delegación

Patricio Donoso
Ministro de Trabajo

Representantes

José Javier Hidalgo
Subsecretario de Empleo y Salarios
Ministerio de Trabajo

Jorge Luis Olmedo Yépez
Director de Empleo y Reconversión Laboral (E)
Ministerio de Trabajo

María Dolores Iturralde
Directora de Relaciones Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo

Daniel Guayaquil
Analista de Relaciones Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo

EL SALVADOR

Jefe de delegación

Oscar Rolando Castro
Ministro de Trabajo y Previsión Social
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Representantes

Maritza Haydeé Calderón de Ríos
Viceministra de Trabajo y Previsión Social
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Adonay De Paz

Asesor de Despacho Ministerial
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Maria Elena Solórzano
Asesora de Despacho Ministerial
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Emilia Gallegos
Directora General de Inspección del Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Mayari Merino
Directora General de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Nora del Carmen Lopez
Directora General de Previsión Social
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Sabinela Alfaro
Directora General de Empleo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Diana Contreras
Jefa de la Unidad de inteligencia del Mercado Laboral
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Karen Cardonza
Jefa de Unidad de Atención Laboral a Grupos Prioritarios
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social

GUYANA

Head of Delegation

Dhaneshwar Deonarine
Chief Labour Officer
Ministry of Labour

Representatives

Michelle Baburam
Senior Labour Officer
Ministry of Labour

HONDURAS

Jefe de delegación

Olvín Anibal Villalobos Velázquez
Secretario de Estado en el Despacho de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Jefe de delegación alterno

Cosberth Cristóbal Corrales Ramírez
Sub-Secretario de Estado en los Despachos de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Representantes

Nelson Ponce
Asesor Laboral del Ministro
Secretaría del Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Fanny Aguilar
Directora de Cooperación Externa
Secretaría del Trabajo y Seguridad Social

JAMAICA

Head of delegation

Karl Samuda
Minister of Labour and Social Security

Alternate Head of Delegation

Zavia Mayne
Minister of State
Ministry of Labour and Social Security

Representatives

Audrey P. Marks
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the OAS

Gillian Corrodus
Director, Industrial Relations & Allied Services
Ministry of Labour and Social Security

Karlene Brown
Communication and Media Advisor
Ministry of Labour and Social Security

Deon Williams
Alternate Representative of Jamaica to the OAS

MÉXICO

Jefe de delegación

Luz Elena Baños
Embajadora, Representante Permanente de México ante la OEA

Representantes

Socorro Jorge
Consejera
Misión Permanente de México ante la OEA

Mara Angelica Salazar
Directora de Asuntos Hemisféricos
Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social

NICARAGUA

Jefe de delegación

Alba Luz Torres Briones
Ministra del Trabajo

Representantes

José León Argüello Malespín
Secretario General
Ministerio del Trabajo

PANAMÁ

Jefe de delegación

Doris Zapata Acevedo
Ministra de Trabajo y Desarrollo Laboral

Representantes

Roger Alberto Tejada Brayen
Viceministro, Ministerio de Trabajo y Desarrollo Laboral

Edgar Escobar
Asesor de la Ministra
Ministerio de Trabajo y Desarrollo Laboral

Winston Iván Sanchez

Secretario General
Ministerio de Trabajo y Desarrollo Laboral

Bredio Mitre Madrid
Director de Cooperación Técnica Internacional
Ministerio de Trabajo y Desarrollo Laboral

PARAGUAY

Jefe de delegación

Carla Bacigalupo
Ministra de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Representantes

Viviana Cano
Directora General de Planificación
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Joryan Rossati
Jefe de Cooperación
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

Lilia Fratta
Técnica en Cooperación
Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

PERÚ

Jefe de delegación

Edilberto Sergio Jaime Ríos
Viceministro de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Promoción del Empleo

Representantes

Edith Bautista León
Jefa de Gabinete
Ministerio de Trabajo y Promoción del Empleo

Jesús Adalberto Baldeón Vásquez
Jefe de la Oficina de Cooperación y Asuntos internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo y Promoción del Empleo

César Arturo Neyra Villanueva
Asesor del Despacho Viceministerial de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo y Promoción del Empleo

Giuliana Ormeño
Coordinadora de Cooperación Internacional
Ministerio de Trabajo y Promoción del Empleo

Ana Gabriela Vásquez Rivasplata
Ministra Consejera
Misión Permanente de Perú ante la OEA

REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA

Jefe de delegación

Luis Miguel De Camps
Ministro de Trabajo

Jefe de delegación alterna

Sabrina De La Cruz
Viceministra de Relaciones Sindicales y Empresariales
Ministerio de Trabajo

Representantes

Mayrenis Corniel
Viceministra de Sectores vulnerables y trabajos infantiles
Ministerio de Trabajo

Marie Laure Aristy Paul
Viceministra de Políticas de Empleo
Ministerio de Trabajo

Andrés Valentín Herrera
Director General de Trabajo
Ministerio de Trabajo

Samir Santos
Director General de Empleo
Ministerio de Trabajo

Sarah Pimentel
Directora de Relaciones Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo

Katherine Rodríguez
Analista de Relaciones Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo

Ismell Castellanos
Ministerio del Trabajo

Lilia Sánchez
Misión Permanente de República Dominicana ante la OEA

Anabel Bueno
Misión Permanente de República Dominicana ante la OEA

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

Head of delegation

Wendy C. Phipps
Minister of International Trade, Industry, Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Labour

Representatives

Shernel C. James
Labour Commissioner
Ministry of International Trade, Industry, Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Labour

Astric Wyatt Archibald
Labour Officer IV
Ministry of International Trade, Industry, Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Labour

SAINT LUCIA

Head of delegation

Virginia Albert-Poyotte
Minister of Public Service, Home Affairs, Labour and Gender Affairs

Representatives

Juliatt Mallet Phillip
Minister Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Saint Lucia to the OAS

Charlotte Mangal
Ministry of Public Service, Home Affairs, Labour and Gender Affairs

Alexander Jirnell
Ministry of Public Service, Home Affairs, Labour and Gender Affairs

SURINAME

Head of delegation

Rishma N. Kuldipsingh
Minister of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Representatives

Mohamed Piroe
Deputy Director Legal and International Affairs
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Naomi Esajas-Friperon
Deputy Director Labor Market
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Rowan Noredjo
Inspector General
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Shoblina Chotkan
Head, Labor Market Development Unit
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Ashwin Orié
Regional Head Labour Inspectorate
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Merlien Adriaans Nelson
Regional Head Labour Inspectorate
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Wihltley Lodik
Head Legislation Department
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

Maisa Ooft-Wijngaarde
Acting Head international Affairs
Ministry of Labour, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Head of delegation

Stephen Mc Clashie
Minister of Labour

Alternate Head of Delegation

Natalie Willis
Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ministry of Labour

Representatives

Kevar Williams
Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ministry of Labour

Sangeeta Boondoo
Senior Legal Officer
Ministry of Labour

Shanmatee Singh-Ng Sang,
Director, Research and Planning
Ministry of Labour

Eric Poliah
Chief Manpower Officer
Ministry of Labour

Rosa-Mae Whittier
Director, International Affairs
Ministry of Labour

Omalisa Baldeo
Senior Planning Officer
Ministry of Labour

UNITED STATES

Head of Delegation

Thea Lee
Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs
International Labor Affairs Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor

Representatives

Robert Shepard
Director
Office of International Relations and Economic Research
International Labor Affairs Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor

Zhao Li
Deputy Director
Office of International Relations and Economic Research
International Labor Affairs Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor

Joan Barrett
Division Chief
Office of International Relations and Economic Research
International Labor Affairs Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor

Carolina Rizzo
Senior Advisor on Western Hemisphere Affairs
Office of International Relations and Economic Research
International Labor Affairs Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor

Karen Espino-Mitchell
International Relations Officer
Office of International Relations and Economic Research
International Labor Affairs Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor

David Thaler
Chief International Affairs Officer
Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
U.S. Department of Labor

Julianna Aynes-Neville
Alternate Representative
U.S. Permanent Mission to the OAS
U.S. Department of State

Lisa Conesa
Alternate Representative
U.S. Permanent Mission to the OAS
U.S. Department of State

Barbara Adair
Assistant Summit Coordinator
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
U.S. Department of State

URUGUAY

Jefe de delegación

Pablo Mieres
Ministro de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Representantes

Mario Aritzi
Viceministro
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Valentina Alergui
Directora General de la Secretaría
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Gerardo Cedrola
Asesor del Ministro
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Susan Weissel
Encargada de la Asesoría de Relaciones Internacionales
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social

Fernando Sotelo
Representante Alternativo Ministro
Misión Permanente de Uruguay ante la OEA

VENEZUELA

Neiza Pineda
Misión Permanente de Venezuela ante la OEA

ÓRGANOS CONSULTIVOS DE LA CONFENCIA/
CONSULTATIVE BODIES OF THE CONFERENCE

Comisión Empresarial de Asesoramiento Técnico en Asuntos Laborales /
Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labor Matters (CEATAL)

Daniel Funes de Rioja
Presidente Unión Industrial Argentina - Presidente de CEATAL

Ronnie Goldberg
United States Council for International Business

Brian, Burkett
Canadian Employers Council

Alexandre Furlan
Cámara Nacional de Industria de Brasil

Alberto Echavarria
Vicepresidente
Asociación Nacional de Industriales (ANDI) de Colombia

Juliana Manrique
Asociación Nacional de Industriales (ANDI) de Colombia

Juan Mailhos
Asesor Legal
Cámara Nacional de Comercio y Servicios de Uruguay

Pelayo Scremini
Comisión de Relaciones Laborales
Camara de Industrias de Uruguay

Octavio Carvajal
Confederación de Cámaras Industriales de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (CONCAMIN)

Lorenzo de Jesús Roel Hernández
Confederación Patronal Mexicana (COPARMEX)

Fernando Yllanes MArtiney
Confederación de Cámaras Industriales de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (CONCAMIN)

Viveca Amoros
Confederación Nacional de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas (CONFIEP) – Perú

Armando Urtecho
Consejo Hondureño de la Empresa Privada (COHEP)

Teresa Mendoza
Consejo Nacional de la Empresa Privada de Panamá

Sheena, Mayer Grandville
Barbados Employer Federation

Jorge Roig
Fedecámaras Venezuela

Laura Gimenez
Unión Industrial Argentina

Pablo Dragun
Unión Industrial Argentina

Stephanie Fingal
Employers Consultative Association Trinidad & Tobago

Wayne Chen
Jamaica Employers Federation

Maria Paz Anzorreguy
Organización Internacional de Empleadores, Coordinadora de CEATAL

Consejo Sindical de Asesoramiento Técnico /
Trade Union Technical Advisory Council (COSATE)

Marta Pujadas
Confederación General del Trabajo de Argentina
Presidenta de COSATE

Tony Moore
Barbados Workers Union (BWU)

Eulogia Familia
Confederación Nacional de la Unidad Sindical (CNUS) República Dominicana

Cathy Feingold
AFL-CIO, Estados Unidos

Joel Almendares
Central General de Trabajadores de Honduras (CGTH)

Francisco Maltes Tello
Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia

Brian Finnegan
AFL-CIO, Estados Unidos

Hugo Barreto
Confederación Sindical de las Américas

Ivan Gonzalez
Confederación Sindical de las Américas

Mónica Tepfer
Confederación General del Trabajo de Argentina

Julio Rosales
Confederación General del Trabajo de Argentina

Antonio Lisboa
Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) Brasil

AUSTRIA

Head of delegation

Guenther Salzmann
Alternate Observer

Representatives

Stefanie Herko
Congressional Liaison Officer

ESPAÑA

Jefe de delegación

Yolanda Díaz Pérez
Vicepresidenta Segunda, Ministra de Trabajo y Economía Social

Representantes

Carmen Montón
Embajadora, Observadora Permanente ante la OEA

Pilar González de Orduña
Secretaria General,
Consejería de Trabajo, Migraciones y Seguridad Social

Concepción Figuerola
Observadora Permanente Adjunta

ITALIA

Head of delegation

Simone de Santi
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OAS

ORGANISMOS REGIONALES E INTERNACIONALES /
REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

International Labour Organization (ILO)/ Organización Internacional de Trabajo (OIT)

Jefe de delegación

Guy Ryder
Director General de la OIT

Representantes

Christian Ramos
Asesor Principal de Gabinete de la OIT para América Latina y el Caribe

Vinícius Carvalho Pinheiro
Subdirector General de la OIT y Director Regional para América Latina y el Caribe

Claudia Coenjaerts
Directora Regional Adjunta de la OIT para América Latina y el Caribe

Fabio Bertranou
Director del ETD y Oficina de la OIT para el Cono Sur

Yuki Arai
Directora de la Oficina de la OIT para Argentina

Andrés Yurén
Especialista Regional para las Actividades de los Empleadores, (AC/TEMP) de la OIT para América Latina y el Caribe

Amanda Villatoro
Especialista Regional en Actividades para los Trabajadores, (ACTRAV) de la OIT para América Latina y el Caribe, oficial a cargo

Maribel Batista
Especialista en Actividades para los Trabajadores

Luis Córdova, Especialista Regional de la Oficina de la OIT para América Latina y el Caribe

Efraín Quicaña
Especialista Regional en Economía Rural de la Oficina de la OIT para América Latina y el Caribe

Patricia Roa
Oficial de Programación del ETD y Oficina OIT para el Cono Sur

Joaquín Alonso
Asistente de la Directora de la Oficina país para Argentina

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/
Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe

Claudio Aravena
Asistente de Investigación Senior

Sonia Albornoz
Consultora

Emanuel Menéndez
Asistente de Investigación

Ibero-American Organization of Social Security / Organización Iberoamericana de Seguridad Social
(OISS)

Gina Riaño
Secretaria General

International Organization for Migration / Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

Luca Dall' Oglio
Chief of Mission
Office of the IOM in Washington DC

Carolina Peña
Private Sector Liason and Partnership Development
Office of the IOM in Washington DC

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (UNESCO)
/Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Cultura, las Ciencias y la Educación

Ms. Carolina Belalcazar
Chief of Unit on Quality and Lifelong Learning

World Bank / Banco Mundial

Truman Packard
Lead Economist
Social Protection and Jobs Group

SECRETARÍA GENERAL DE LA ORGANIZACIÓN DE LOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS /
GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Luis Almagro
Secretary General

Kim Osborne
Executive Secretary for Integral Development (SEDI)

Jesús Schucry Giacoman
Director
Department of Human Development, Education and Employment, SEDI

Estela Díaz
Chief, Policies Section
Executive Office, SEDI

Maria Claudia Camacho
Chief, Labor and Employment Section
Department of Human Development, Education and Employment, SEDI

Cecilia Martins
Education Specialist
Department of Human Development, Education and Employment, SEDI

Magaly Rothe
Specialist
Department of Conferences and Meeting Management

Guillermo Calzada
Program Officer, Labor and Employment Section
Department of Human Development, Education and Employment, SEDI

LIST OF DOCUMENTS REGISTERED BY THE OAS GENERAL SECRETARIAT

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CIDI/TRABAJO/doc.2/21 rev.1 CIDTR00391	Agenda of the XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor
- Español	http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/spanish/hist_21/CIDTR00391S02.docx
- English	http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/english/hist_21/CIDTR00391E02.docx
- Français	http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/french/hist_21/CIDTR00391F02.docx
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